

THE ODYSSEY OF THE “ATKA” IN OPERATION AWFUL

HAIL TO THE MIGHTY SHIP “ATKA”
SING LOUD HER PRAISES IN SONG
WATCH HER GET UNDERWAY
AND SAIL DOWN THE BAY
BUT FOR GOD SAKES DON'T GO ALONG

The first part of January '52,
The “ATKA” put to sea with a motley crew.
She headed north with a nasty roll
And a hell of a pitch, god damn her soul.

Frank and his crew of merry men
Hadn't been so sick since God knows when.
But “Science must be served” came his lusty shout
And about that time the line ran out.

The BT winch, his joy and his pride,
Behaved like a nervous, flustered bride.
The brake tore loose when the ship did pitch,
And poor Frank muttered “That son-of-a-bitch”.

“Haul the fucker in and lay it on deck,
This god damn job is a pain in the neck”.
To haul it in was a lead pipe cinch,
Then someone noticed that god damn winch.

The god damned wire and the thrice accursed drum
Broke the god damn thing like god damn gum.
The son-of-a-bitch was a god damn mess,
These terms aren't mine I must confess.
I've never heard such terms before,
But Frank said they were – Yes, that and more.

Then Sullivan said, with an evil grin,
“What you gonna do now, ya got 'er in?”
Take the god damn thing and put it below,
What in the hell will I tell Hydro?

He staggered below like a man pole axed,
With the wire and the crew he was sorely taxed.

A fouled up Chief with his crew of three,
Whose sole occupation was to pursue PUSKEY.
“Ape Shit” Martin, whose goal was higher,
Just to serve seventy years and then retire.

And "Numb Nuts" Parker, bless his soul,
Who kept drag assin' around the North Pole.
Then good old "Red Ass" Felts, of whom it is said,
That he made damn sure no one pilfered his bed.

Our own little "Iodine", a likeable scamp,
Ever willing to share his seventy buck lamp.

But the ship rolled on from sun to sun
And we finally arrived at BW One.
The natives there were Air Force men
Whose time had been extended again and again.

With nothing to do but drink, by God,
Make big snow men and fish for cod.
There were damn few women and they seemed to choose
To wear dungaree pants and running shoes.

I saw one guy in a sort of a trance,
And all he could say was, "She gimme a dance".
"What a lover I am", he said with a leer,
See'in as how I only been here a year.
I don't like to brag about it but brother,
I'll bet next year she will give me another".

At the Raven's Roost we were welcomed in
By a long tall rebel with a friendly grin.
"The drinks are high, plumb two bits a shot,
Seems that likker is all we got.
Don't mind that guy beating his head on the floor,
He's just been extended for six months more".

We converged in a body on that friendly bar,
I swear it stretched from thar to thar,
The barkeeps poured with a heavy fist,
If you didn't drink up, they got plumb pissed.

Someone ordered steak, we thought it was queer
When they led through the door a god damn steer,
They cut off his horns and tail on the porch,
Then some flyboy lit up a torch.
"How do want 'er, medium rare?"
The bastard said as he applied his flare.
He scorched up the bovine, both sides with a grin,
Stuck a fork in its rump and rumbled "Dig in".

A goggled eyed sailor pulled the fork from its ass,
Made a sickly grin and said "I pass".
You bastards are tough, there is no doubt,
Gimmie my hat, I'm checking out.

We laid to theremid the snow and ice,
Out board of the SS Short Splice.
Our sister ship, the bark "EDISTO",
Hove into sight with a tale of woe.
Metcalf, Schefer, and all the gang
Mustered round, and the blues they sang.

Their god damn gear washed over the side,
In the god damn gale and god damn tide.
They only got sixty god damn drops
When the god damn shiv on the BT pops.

The god damn fish took a god damn dive,
Stuck its nose in the bottom and, man alive!
The god damn wire broke in god damn two,
A god damn trick on a hard working crew.

The only high spot for this little band
Was a night of revelry in Newfoundland.
Before they started to their first station,
They caroused with women of doubtful reputation.

They arrived alongside – Lord how they cursed,
Half sick of the sea and a terrible thirst.
Preparations were made to leave on Sunday,
Get the show on the road and back home one day.
Ole Boston is far and women are few,
A hell of a life for the Hydro crew.

The gear was rigged and we put to sea
With the good ship "EDISTO" for company.
We lashed down enough gear to patch a mile of hell
With the help of "Ape Shit" who didn't feel well.
Set up the lab – checked the god damn winch,
(Frank still can't pass it without a flinch).
The brains gathered 'round a grimy chart,
All hot to go – impatient to start.
A watch was set, we all turned to,
And hit our sacks, like good sailors do.

The 28th dawned in a cloud of spray
To find us rolling on our way.
“Numb Nuts” gave out with some obscene drivel,
Something about the god damn swivel.
The son-of-a-bitch broke like a much used rubber
And the line ran out before they could snub her.
“Numb Nuts” said “Well, kiss my ass,
To hell with this gear that's made of brass”.
“Lightning” bent on another and all went well
As we careened along from swell to swell.

When the water temperature went up
Like “pee” warm water from a pup,
Frank said “From what I have seen,
We must be in the god damn Carribean”.
But it was just a quirk of fate, you know,
That we duly noted for dear Hydro.

We stopped in the afternoon watch to see
If the god damn monster would really run free.
The Skipper came back – the Exec did too,
But it worked like a dream, I'm telling you.
We let it out about 40 miles
And hauled it back with relieved smiles.
About 1530 the ship turned right,
For “Man overboard” and cut the bight.

Of our trailing wire with fish attached,
And one more 950 fish we scratched.
The line had been out with a fouled up block,
We couldn't pull it in – it sunk like a rock.

'Round Cape Farewell we fairly flew,
The jolly boys of Doherty's crew.
Frank's worried look began to fade
As drop after perfect drop we made.
“Ape Shit” Martin once more began
To hold down his chow and walk like a man.
And “Red Ass” Felts that lovable skunk
With a bearded face like a trappist monk,
Was working the lab and trying to see,
How much H₂O there is in K₉P.

“Numb Nuts” Parker gazed with awe
At the biggest ice cubes he ever saw.
“Wire Hydro, Boss”, was his advice,
And tell them up north, “By God, thars ice”.
“Little Iodine” - ever a thoughty lad,
Rigged for himself quite a deal, by Gad.
He swiped a hammock, secured it to stays,
Fitted with a mattress, disappeared for days.
Even Chief Hornquist, the harmless lout
Was getting sober after three days out.
He arose with a groan, rubbed his bristly chin,
And pitifully queried, “Are we getting in?”

We arrived at station one just like we orter,
And were back on our way in an hour and a quarter.

The monster groaned and shrieked and howled,
But the line came in and never fouled.
Number two we got, when on our way,
Then at three heavy seas and hell to pay.

We passed it by and hit the ice,
Got four and five and were going nice.
Though our gonads shrunk into our guts,
Science was served despite frozen butts.

The crew was happy until we would stop
To drift awhile and make a drop.
Then the ship would roll, she sometimes pitches
And then we would all be son-of-a-bitches.

So we traveled on, I do declare,
“Til we came to the realm of the Polar Bear.
Its a rough ordeal, as everyone knows,
To become a member of the clan “Blue Nose”.
Our bodies were reduced to quivering meat,
But we emerged still walking, no mean feat.

“Numb Nuts” and Frank, with lordly airs,
Kept letting us know that “they had theirs”.
All except “Ape Shit”, who pleaded work
Are now “Blue Noses”, and by some strange quirk,
The god damn winch must have got the word,
For never a growl or grunt is heard
From that morphadite bastard, conceived in sin,
As we sail blithely on with Captain Flynn.

Then the good ship EDISTO's conniving crew,
Managed to foul up their starboard screw.
Orders from ServLant sent her Boston bound,
While our crew cursed with rage profound.
We still had to stay, and scuttlebutt said
We would also get the stations our sister ship fled.
But such was not so, we soon did learn,
That after overhaul she would return.

It was bum weather, sandwiches, coffee and squalls,
Cold that would shrivel a brass monkey's balls.
Rolling and rolling then rolling some more,
With a twist of her ass like a five dollar whore.
The old ship proceeded her erratic track,
From station to station, to hell and back.

The gang, whose legs were now well scarred by hatches,
Were getting like crabs, (they all slept in snatches).
On a good day, by Jesus, we'd get maybe three,
Then the weather'd close in and we would be free.
If free is the word for trying to stay
On a fast shifting bunk for just part of the day.

Our boss, "Boston Blacky", noted the stations we'd passed,
Cussed the god damned weather, slowly getting red assed.
"brother Felts", he said, "learn all that you can,
I ain't goin' north agin for any damn man.
I'll stay down in Washington and punch a time clock
Before I'll come back up here and live on horse cock.
My desk is a bastard, but god damn my soul,
A bitch it may be, but it never will roll".
He stuck his nose out a hatch, got hit with some spray,
Then dolefully intoned, "Shit, no drops today".

But we got on a station and all went well,
We let out our gear, plumb halfway to hell.
Let it cook ten minutes, then turned on the switch,
But she coughed not a fart, that son-of-a-bitch.
We thought we were through and southward would go,
But the bastardly electricians mate said, "no, no".
Replaced a burned fuse and the fucker began
To haul it back in according to plan.

So we sailed grimly on, frozen ass and nose,
Drag assin' around those frigid ice floes.
We ployed hop-scotch with those king sized ice cubes,
Capturing ice water in pretty little tubes.

The fair name of Nansen we know god damn well,
Is thought of quite fondly by the ruler of hell.
Plumb grown up men, whose only desire,
Is to dunk these damn bottles on little hunks of wire.
They haul up the bastards with water filched from below,
Then pour the stuff out. Now damned if I know
Whether this procedure makes reason or rhyme,
But there must be a better way to make overtime.

Well, that cantankerous old monster held up on the drops,
Like a dutiful wife that has been slapped on the chops.
We split up in teams, one, "Numb Nuts" and "Blacky",
Mendell Hornbaum running the winch and chewing tobaccy.
"Ape Shit" and "Red Ass" comprised the other team,
Mendell still on the winch, god damn, did he scream.
"I'm allus on watch, and it's hard to believe,
But I am the guy I allus relieve."
"I'm easy to live with, but fellers god damn,
You all know by now what a late sleeper I am".
"You get your reliefs, that's easy to see,
But look at the fucker you got relieven' me."

We couldn't go home until we were through,
So an alternate plan occurred to the crew,
"Blacky" started it by losing a rack,
Swore it was a mistake, but my aching back.
"Red Ass" saw his rack and raised a bottle,
While Mendell was trying to fuck up the throttle.
Then "Ape Shit" got into the spirit of the thing,
Threw the angle meter over, you ought to heard him sing--
You'd swear, by the Jesus, that he was innocent as hell,
Wasn't him at all – only that god damn swell.
He'd got it done, too, except right after that,
We hauled up his bottle. I swear it was flat
As a tube of used tooth paste, a horrible sight,
But they kept us hard at it all day and all night.
It figured out even, each one made a mistake,
But the biggest of all was the one I did make.
When I signed on this cruise,
It took me away from "wimmin" and "boose".

But it couldn't last forever and slowly drew near,
That great day in the morning, warm ass and cold beer.
When the Captain, whom we thought was a reasonable man,
Sez, "Bejassus, I have a new plan –
You lads have been working, you soon will have fifty,
I can see with one eye that you're pretty damn shifty.

Your pretty good lads, get along with my crew",
He beamed, "Tell ya what I'm going to do.

I wouldn't do this for just anyone,
But I'll let you get five more before we are done".
Frank mustered out, "Thanks, you're really too kind--"
But I know he had other, stronger words in his mind.
The gang, when informed of the news,
Moaned and groaned and tried to refuse.
But protocol dictated that they must proceed,
And carry out the dastardly deed.
So with muttered oaths and manner slow,
They got a station and went below.
Then at the next, the monster wheezed,
Stopped---and all hands were pleased.

They conjured up treasured visions so fond,
Of cheap physical stuff in the land far beyond.
They figured now that we'd have to go,
But the god damn snipes again said "no".
Red Jones and Hizer, damn their hides,
Stuck their ugly faces into the monster's insides.
Cussed and swore and turned a screw,
And she was running again for a sorrowful crew.
(Oh, when sinners go to hell to meet their fates,
You can bet for sure there will be electrician's mates!)

Even at the fifty-fourth they fixed it again,
But it was the last drop, so midst the rain
We rolled on, end for end like a pair of fast dice,
Couldn't get the last one so said farewell to the ice.

We headed her south, ignored "Blacky's" roar,
That we stay on a week and get "just one more".
"Ape Shit" chortled, his face all aglow,
"No, not no, but hell no".
Lets get our ass south, to hell with this noise,
And git us some "wimmin", before we start using boys.
Behind lay the ice floes, twisted wire, wet ass',
Ahead lay Mecca, cold brew and fair lass'.

Astern moaned the winds that could cut like sharp knives,
Soon we would be sleeping with our own (and other guys') wives.
Be it ever true that where 'ere you may roam,
It's a lot better Navy when your heading for home.
As we lurched ever on, though the weather was rank,
A change in appearance stole over our Frank.

He grew morose and sullen and often would stop,
To mutter to himself--"just one more drop".
We let the lad go, just kept out of his way,
As he stumbled along, 'til came the day.

When the anchor was dropped in Newport, R.I,
Something snapped inside the guy.
He made one more plea for a punt and an oar,
By God, he hadda have just one drop more.
He figured he'd scull back to that last spot,
Get the dope and go home like a scientist ought.
So they gave him a coat with long sleeves like a sack,
That kind of garment that buttons in back.

While the poor twisted mind that cracked with the strain,
Gave vent to thoughts that he shouted out plain.
"God damn it all, Chief, stop the son-of-a-bitch,
Can't this fucker do nuthin' but pitch?"
"Good Christ no! "Red Ass", I've told you before,
Put that damn bottle on, before you lower..."
"Numb Nuts", you hellion, take a check on the glass,
"Ape Shit", I should kick you right square in the ass".
"You lost the Zilchmeter--- it cost Hydro a buck,
Now, if you want overtime, you're shit-out-of-luck".
"Sol, you scoundrel, don't piss in that bottle,
We're fucked up enough, Chief, watch that throttle!"
Don't ring that damn bell, you headhunter, you!
Who in all hell took off with my shoe?"
"Yes Captain, no Captain, certainly Sir,
Five minutes to station, that monster, damn her".
"Get them isograms, thermograms, telegrams too,
Jesus, sweet Jesus, if I just had a crew!"
"We got them all fine, boss -- no trouble at all,
Take the expenses out of my paycheck and call me next fall".
Then he slipped peacefully to sleep as they bore him away,
And we shed bitter tears as we stood by sick bay.
He'd gone nuttier than hell, but we all had a notion,
That back down at Hydro that rates a promotion.
But damn it all, Frank, better men than "youze",
Have gone off their rocker on a far northern cruise.
We cussed and we raved and had lots of fun,
But seriously, Fellers, ain't you glad its done?

'Cause I know when we check in at Hades anon,
The OD, Old Satan, will waive us right on.
"Go on topside, you fugitives from Hydro,
You've been through more hell than we have here below".

“You've been so far north that there ain't any doubt,
It would take all my steam to thaw you fuckers out.
You've been north on the ATKA, my hat's off to you,
Go check out a harp, you're too rough for my crew”.

And fellers, in ending, I'd just like to add,
A hell of a fine time was had by this lad.
I join with the devil in wishing you luck,
Would I go again? Well, I don't give a ----damn.

Mendel Hornquist.