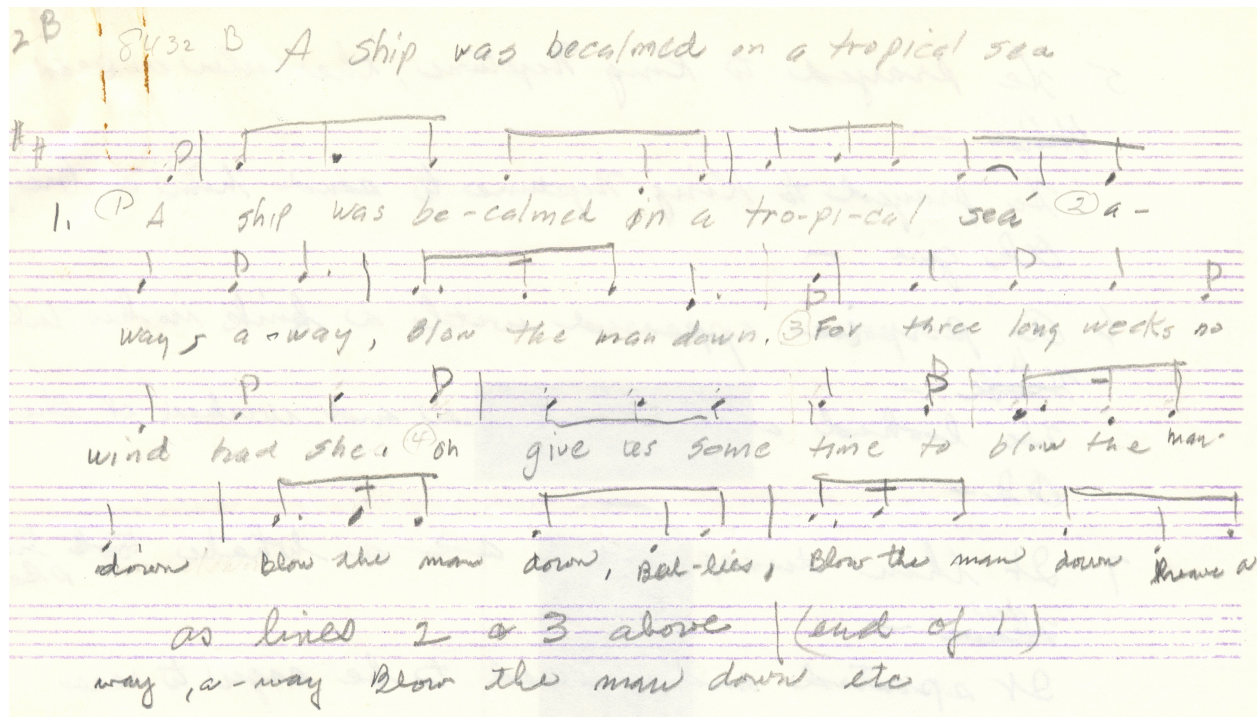


Ship was Becalmed in a Tropical Sea

As sung by
Noble Brown
11-17-1946 Millsville, WI



Verse 1.

A ship was becalmed in a tropical sea
Away, away, blow the man down.
For three long weeks no wind had she,
Oh give us some time to blow the man down.

Chorus

Blow the man down,
Heave away, away,
Blow the man down.

Verse 2.

The wheel had been lashed all the crew were
asleep,
Away, away, blow the man down.
The skippers --- watch and deck keep,
Oh give us some time to blow the man down.

Verse 3.

Her canvas hung limply from not being fed
Heave away, away, blow the man down.
Had no struggle to carry the vessel ahead
Oh give us some time to blow the man down.

Verse 4.

The skipper leaned over the poop aftertail,
Heave away, away, blow the man down.
He wished that a fair wind was filling his sail,
Oh give us some time to blow the man down.

Verse 5.

He prayed to King Neptune, the ruler of seas
Away, away, blow the man down.
He prayed to King Neptune to send him a
breeze,
Oh give us some time to blow the man down.

Verse 6.

A porpoise appeared with a knick in his tail,
Away, away, blow the man down.
He looked at the skipper and winked at the sail,
Oh give us some time to blow the man down.

Verse 7.

It then disappeared and a whale took his place,
Away, away, blow the man down.
It sported and seemed to be eager to race,
Oh give us some time to blow the man down.

Verse 8.

The flying fish soared as though offering aid,
Heave away, away, blow the man down.
The skipper believed, and was glad he had
prayed,
Oh give us some time to blow the man down.

Verse 9.

The captain could hardly his senses believe,
Heave away, away, blow the man down.
Such an answer so soon, he'd not thought to
receive,
Oh give us some time to blow the man down.

Verse 10.

But he roused and he called all the hands out
on deck,
Heave away, away, blow the man down.
For on the horizon appeared a black speck,
Oh give us some time to blow the man down.

Verse 11.

They trimmed all the yards and she sailed right
along,
Heave away, away, blow the man down.
The wind on the quarter blew steady and
strong,
Oh give us some time to blow the man down.

Verse 12.

The skipper then said with a smile on his face
Heave away, away, blow the man down.
All hands will lay off and we'll splash the
main brace.
Oh give us some time to blow the man down.

Transcription and lyrics from the Helene Stratman-Thomas Collection.

Critical Commentary

Transcription by Peters, p. 111.

HST notes:

In the Professional Papers series:

Sung by Noble B. Brown, age 61, Millville, 1946.

Mr. Brown said he learned this shanty aboard the four-mast barque Drummuir, Victoria, British Columbia, sailing from Puget Sound, Bellingham, Washington, to Plymouth, England. On one of his numerous voyages, Mr. Brown himself was becalmed three weeks on the Atlantic.

The melody of the song is the same as We will haul, we will pull.

CONVERSATION BETWEEN NOBLE B. BROWN AND H. S-THOMAS

-Mr. Brown, will you tell us how the sailors used to sing these sea shanteys on the ship?

-Yes. When the men were at work, when they were heaving on lines, one sailor, usually a man with a pair of good lungs and able vocabulary, would repeat the verses, like "A ship was becalmed in a tropical sea." Sometimes he had tune to them – sometimes he didn't. But the crew would take up the refrain like "Heave away, away, blow the man down" and they had plenty of tune to it. They would stand while the leader was repeating the verses and when they took up the refrain then they would pull to the rhythm of the tune. You seem to pull harder when you're singing this refrain. We even pulled together better. When they were walking around a windlass, and heaving up anchor sometimes it took hours and they would sing all the time. They had to keep something going to keep them interested so they would not get tired of it.

At sea, of course, in nice weather when they heaved the [...] yards up or when they were setting sail they usually sang a shanty and when they finished the skipper usually let them splice the main brace. That is, he issued a dunk of rum or grog – they called it and that’s about all.

“Learned aboard a sailing ship – was around Cape Horn three times on a sailing vessel.” Mr. Brown was becalmed 3 weeks on the Atlantic. Caught rain water for fresh water. Sailing ship not supposed to leave port without 2 years of provisions in 1908. First time rounded Cape Horn wind changed – threw them into trough of sea – shifted cargo to one side – lee rail under water. Captain and mates so scared they cried. Boatswain took charge of ship – sailors “boxed the yards,” not one man lost.

Editor’s notes:

This song is a version of “Blow the Man Down,” of which Linscott writes that “the earliest version of this song concerns the Black Ball Line, which began its maritime service in 1818” (Linscott 128).

Alternate titles/related songs: “We Will Haul, We Will Pull,” “Blow the Man Down.”

Sources:

Buck, Percy C., coll. and arr. *The Oxford Song Book*. Vol. 2. New York: Oxford University Press, H. Milford, 1916-27. “Blow the man down”

Doerflinger, William Main, collector. *Shantymen and Shantyboys: Songs of the Sailor and Lumberman*. New York: Macmillan, 1951. “Blow the man down,” several versions.

Hugill, Stan. *Songs of the Sea: The Tales and Tunes of Sailors and Sailing Ships*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1977. “Blow the man down”

Linscott, Eloise Hubbard, collector and editor. *Folk Songs of Old New England*. New York: Macmillan Co., 1939. “Blow the man down,” different words.

Peters, Harry B., ed. *Folk Songs out of Wisconsin: An Illustrated Compendium of Words and Music*. Madison, WI: The State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1977.

K.G.