

Men Behind The Guns

Words & Music:
Phil Ochs & John Rooney

Dm C Dm F
Let's drink a toast to the admiral, and here's to the captain bold,
Am Dm F C
And glory more for the commodore, when the deeds of might are told.

Dm C Dm F
They stand to the deck with the battle's wreck, When the great shells roar and pound,
Am Dm F C
And never they fear when the foe is near to lay their orders down.

CHORUS:

F Dm
But off with your hats and three times three
F C
For every sailor's son,
Dm C
For the men below who fight the foe,
F C
The men behind the guns:
Am Dm
Oh, the men behind the guns.

Their hearts a-pounding heavy when
They swing to port once more --
With never enough of the greenback stuff,
They start for the leave ashore.

And you'd think perhaps the blue-blouse chaps
Had better clothes to wear,
For the uniforms of officers
Could hardly be compared:

Warriors bold with straps of gold
That dazzle like the sun
Outshine the common sailor boys,
The lads who serve the guns:
Oh, the men behind the guns.

Say not a word till the shot is heard
That tells the fight is on,
And the angry sound of another round
That says there must be (God? gone??)

Over the deep and the deadly sweep,
The fire and the bursting shell,
Where the very air is a mad despair,
The throes of a living hell.

But down and deep in a mighty ship
Unseen by the midday sun
You'll find the boys who make the noise,
The lads who serve the guns:
Oh, the men behind the guns.

And well they know the cyclone blow
Loose from the cannon's steel.
The know the hull of the enemy ship
Will quiver with the peal.

And the decks will rock with the lightning shock
and shake with the great recoil
while the sea grows red with the blood of the dead
and swallows up her spoil.

But not until the final ship
has made her final run
can we give their rest to the very best:
to the lads who serve the guns --
oh, the men behind the guns.

Let's drink a toast to the admiral,
and here's to the captain bold,
and glory more for the commodore,
when the deeds of might are told.

They stand to the deck with the battle's wreck,
when the great shells roar and pound,
and never they fear when the foe is near
to lay their orders down--

But off with your hats and three times three
for every sailor's son,
for the men below who fight the foe,
the men behind the guns:
oh, the man behind the gun.

Notes:

Lee Burwasser found the original poem (poem #42), and also provides these details:

LC has three holdings under "Rooney, John Jerome, 1866-1934." The Collected Poems, presumably including "Men Behind the Guns," was published in 1938: 137 pages of text, 21 of front matter, including "A glance at the life of John Jerome Rooney" (p. ix-xv). Literary manuscripts, 1900-1934 is summarised as "Autograph drafts (1900-1934) of the poems of John Jerome Rooney," and the biographical note says "Poet, jurist, and lawyer." Rare Book and Special Collections has what seems to be a pamphlet or handbill with "Men Behind the Guns," and the notes quote from the author's forward "First published in The New York sun (morning edition, May 18, 1898)".

Chords supplied by John Dachik.
Last modified 10 Aug 99 by trent