

## Dead Reckoning

Dead rec- kon- ing, all that's left to me now is dead rec- kon- ing, Though I've  
mas- tered the seas and the fresh liv- ing breeze, all that's  
left to me now is dead rec- kon- ing. I was fif- teen when first I went  
off to sea, and in for- ty one years un- der sail, I've seen  
loss- es and cri- ses and tra- ged- ies, and a way of life fal- ter and fail.

*(Chorus)*

*Dead reckoning,  
All that's left to me now is dead reckoning  
Though I've mastered the seas  
And the fresh living breeze,  
All that's left to me now is dead reckoning.*

I was fifteen when first I went off to sea,  
And in forty-one years under sail,  
I've seen losses and crises and tragedies,  
And a way of life falter and fail.  
*(Chorus)*

I sailed once round the world as a deckhand,  
I sailed twice round the world as first mate,  
And for thirty-odd years I've been Master here,  
Of my crew and my ship and my fate.  
*(Chorus)*

Saw a crewman who fell from the main yard arm,  
Stiff and numb from the sleet and the cold,  
Saw a crewman who died from the poisoning  
Of some venomous booze he'd been sold.  
*(Chorus)*

Met a crewman of mine by the railway bridge,  
In his new bosun's jacket so fine,  
And he signed me aboard of this smoking hulk  
To sail round the world one last time  
*(Chorus)*

Now I'm polishing brasses and sweeping dust,  
On a steamer that goes where it will,  
And instead of Cape Horn we've got Panama,  
So who needs an old sea captain's skill?  
*(Chorus)*

And instead of white canvas above us now,  
There's a plume of black smoke to be seen  
Oh I wish I had died with the men I knew,  
While the sky and the seas were still clean  
*(Chorus)*



Based on a story left by Dick Sullivan, last of the Swansea Cape Horners, regarding his final voyage. Steam had replaced sail and the Panama Canal had opened, so there was no longer any call for the skills needed to take a sailing ship round Cape Horn. Dick was bosun on a steamer, and had to sign on an old captain he had rounded the Horn with, and find him odd jobs sweeping and polishing, as it was the only way the man could get back to sea. *Dead reckoning* is of course an old navigational technique, but here it also refers to the old seadog looking back over men and skills lost forever. The railway bridge near Swansea docks was an unofficial picking up point for casual labour.