Admiral Hopwood’s “Laws of the Navy” was first published in a British periodical on 23 July, 1898. Well known throughout the Navy, it has appeared in the United States Naval Academy’s “Reef Points” for a number of years. Note that one of the laws is very important… maybe important enough to remember word for word.

Now these are the laws of the Navy,
Unwritten and varied they be;
And he that is wise will observe them,
Going down in his ship to the sea;

As naught may outrun the destroyer,
Even so with the law and its grip,
For the strength of the ship is the Service,
And the strength of the Service the ship.

Take heed what ye say of your seniors,
Be your words spoken softly or plain,
Lest a bird of the air tell the matter,
And so ye shall hear it again.

If ye labour from morn until even’
And meet with reproof for your toil,
It is well - that the guns be humbled -
The compressor must check the recoil.

On the strength of one link of the cable
Dependeth the might of the chain.
Who knows when thou mayest be tested?
So live that thou bearest the strain!

When the ship that is tired returneth,
With the signs of the sea showing plain,
Men place her in dock for a season,
And her speed she reneweth again.

So shall thou, lest perchance thou grow weary
In the uttermost parts of the sea,
Pray for leave, for the good of the Service,
As much and as oft as may be.

Count not upon certain promotion,
But rather to gain it aspire;
Though the sight-line end on the target,
There cometh, perchance, a miss-fire.
If ye win through an Arctic ice floe,
   Unmentioned at home in the press,
Heed it not - no man seeth the piston,
   But it driveth the ship none-the-less.

Can’st follow the track of the dolphin
   Or tell where the sea swallows roam;
Where leviathan taketh his pastime,
   What ocean he calleth his home?

Even so with the words of thy seniors,
   And the orders those words shall convey.
Every law is as naught beside this one -
   “Thou shalt not criticize, but obey!”

Saith the wise, “How may I know their purpose?”
   Then acts without wherefore or why
Stays the fool but one moment to question,
   And the chance of his life passeth by.

Do they growl? It is well: be thou silent,
   So that work goeth forward amain;
Lo, the gun throws her shot to a hair’s breadth
   And shouteth, yet none shall complain.

Do they growl and the work be retarded?
   It is ill, speak, whatever their rank;
The half-loaded gun also shouteth,
   But can she pierce armour with blank?

Doth the funnels make war with the paintwork?
   Do the decks to the cannon complain?
Nay - they know that some soap and a scraper
   Unites them as brothers again.

So ye, being Heads of Departments,
   Do your growl with a smile on your lips,
Lest ye strive and in anger be parted,
   And lessen the might of your ship.

Dost think, in a moment of anger,
   ‘Tis well with thy seniors to fight?
They prosper, who burn in the morning,
   The letters they wrote overnight.

For some there be, shelved and forgotten,
   With nothing to thank for their fate,
Save that (on a half-sheet of foolscap,)
   Which a fool “Had the Honour to state - -.”
Dost deem that thy vessel needs gilding,  
And the dockyard forbear to supply? 
Place thy hand in thy pocket and gild her,  
There be those who have risen thereby.

If the fairway be crowded with shipping  
Beating homeward the harbour to win,  
It is meet that, lest any should suffer,  
The steamers pass cautiously in.

So thou, when thou nearest promotion,  
And the peak that is gilded is nigh,  
Give heed to thy words and thine actions,  
Lest others be wearied thereby.

It is ill for the winners to worry.  
Take thy fate as it comes with a smile,  
And when thou art safe in the harbour,  
They will envy, but may not revile.

Uncharted the rocks that surround thee,  
Take heed that the channels thou learn,  
Lest thy name serve to buoy for another  
That shoal, the Courts-Martial Return.

Though Armour, the belt that protects her,  
The ship bears the scar on her side  
It is well if the court acquit thee,  
It were best hadst thou never been tried.

Now these are the laws of the Navy,  
Unwritten and varied they be;  
And he that is wise will observe them,  
Going down in his ship to the sea.

As the wave rises clear to the hawse pipe,  
Washes aft, and is lost in the wake,  
So shall ye drop astern, all unheeded,  
Such time as the law ye forsake.

Now these are the laws of the Navy,  
And many and mighty are they,  
But the hull and the deck and the keel  
And the truck of the law is - OBEY!