

THE HENRYVILLE SAGA  
A POEM BY Mark Hmurovich

'Twas the summer of '55, or '4, or '3,  
But it doesn't matter much, you see.  
For whatever this God forsaken country had,  
Every year it turned out bad.

The hills, for instance, were solid green,  
Covered with poison ivy that seemed  
Like hair on a sheep-dog's back—  
Long, thick, tangled, and 'tis a fact,  
That in the tops of trees were found  
P.I. vines so big and round  
Two men on cross-cuts took all day  
To cut one through, and that ain't hay.  
It sure does seem that this stuff grew  
Better than any trees we knew.

Between these vines greenbriar was found,  
Running and twisting along the ground  
Like barbed wire set up in rows,  
To tear at us, and at our cloths,  
To trip us up when we went fast,  
And to make us fall with an awful crash  
That raised an unholy din,  
Of breaking branches and clanging tin,  
As one of us rolled down the hill,  
Shouting curses with a will.

Ticks and chiggers did abound,  
Many on each plant we found,  
Waiting to catch a ride  
On some passer-by's tender hide.  
Then to burrow under skin,  
And, when most solidly in,  
To suck blood, and lay eggs,  
In sweaty chests and hairy legs,  
And start a persons skin to itchin'  
Sand thereby cause a lot of bitchin.

So many insects around here flew,  
Among them gnats, horseflies, and hornets, too,  
That when Mrs. Hann wanted stew  
For her hungry motley crew  
She'd just swing a kettle through the air,  
And slap on a lid with great care.  
Then to the oven with the pot,  
And served to us piping hot  
Fragrant, viscous, insect stew  
Southern cooking's finest brew.

As long as we are alive,  
We won't forget section 35.  
It is said that God created all the land,  
But I think that the devil got out of hand  
And with C.I. Miller, and old Don Bline,  
Conspired to fix the place up fine.

The specifications were as follows;  
High steep ridges, and deep steep hollows,  
Following in rapid succession,  
To create a general state of depression.  
Mixed in were numerous other banes,  
Such as sudden droughts and tropical rains,  
That changed the soil to dust or mud,  
And promoted fungus growth and the creeping crud.

But it was in Henryville one day,  
That men arrived in great array.  
Some were big and some were small,  
Some were short and some were tall,  
Some were young and some were old,  
And some were sly and some were bold.  
But none were very smart, you see,  
Or never at this camp would they be.

They gathered around and talked awhile.  
Then hit the sack in great style.  
To sway-baked bunks in run-down shacks,  
Were vermon played, and bats were racked  
On the ceiling in rows of two,  
'Brown, black, and red of hue.

There men lay and slept all night,  
While cockroaches crawled around in fright  
Over bodies that prostrate lay,  
Until the start of the first day.

Then at six A.M. an awful sound  
From the hills did rebound.  
'Twas Charlie and his blasted bell.  
May he forever roast in hell.  
To breakfast then, through gray slush.  
What the hell here, fried mush?

The day before had been sunny;  
'Twas now so wet it wasn't funny.  
Then down the trail through the rain,  
Mark that point! Stretch that chain!  
Mind don't get your paper wet,  
Because blurred lines you will regret.

Five days it rained; we got soaked through,  
Got colds, flu, pneumonia, too.  
And when our D.M.D. was done,  
The cut-off line was lots of fun.  
Hacking through the dismal swamp,  
What else could a fellow want?

Then Don Bline, who was feeling fine  
'Til we rubbed his rear with turpentine,  
Said, "Today, boys, I'm being kind,  
So let's go on the random line."  
One mile straight through, a snap.  
But where the hell's section 35 at?

The sun came out first time in days,  
And by noon there was a haze  
Of dust arising from the ground;  
Already two inches deep we found.  
Here's section 35 at last!  
Oh my God, what a blast!  
Country like a camel's back,  
Shooting thirty feet at a crack.  
All the trees are right in line,

Off-setting sure takes a lot of time.  
So sharpen up the hatchets, boys.  
We're going to have to make some noise,  
If we're going to finish the line on time,  
And settle up with Old Don Bline.

Chunk, chunk, the hatchet sound.  
We chop until the tree is down.  
Then we glance up the hill.  
Don Bline is there watching, calm and still,  
So we didn't do too damn fine,  
On that lousy random line.

But with surveying we're not yet through.  
We've got contour maps, and the plane table, too.  
Wasn't ever a hard earned rest due  
To Old Don Bline's motley crew?

Now here it comes, the hardest test.  
To shoot Polaris and do our best.  
To get it in three minutes flat,  
We need the eyes of a cat.  
For it's dark at night, you see,  
In the woods of this country.  
We rant and rave, cuss and fuss,  
The bugs are all a-bothering us.  
Where the hell is that star?  
It surely didn't travel far,  
Oh well, I almost made it.  
I think I'll just estimate it,  
'Cause I got to get some sleep tonight.  
This night-work I cannot fight.

Finally comes the final test,  
On it again we do our best.  
We look at the questions and try to think,  
And into the room comes an awful stink.  
Smoke arising from our heads  
Smells like burning U.S. Keds.  
But Old Don Bline's still feeling fine,  
'Cause the questions right down the line  
Cannot be answered. It's a crime!

But at least surveying is over here  
No more Don Blin do we have to fear

Dan DenUyl's class, which is next,  
Should give no real rough test,  
So men who in their college training  
Have learned to B.S. and are resting  
Among the best in the All-American game,  
Organized clutch-butt by another name.

A typical day goes as follows,  
We walk up the hills and down the hollows,  
We follow Dan and observe the flora,  
And when we think we can stand no more  
This useless waste of human brain  
And bodies tiring with the strain,  
Dan stops and turns and says with poise,  
"Get out the pencils and paper boys,  
And write upon the subject clear,  
Of what the hell has happened here."

We look around and start to write,  
About why no reproduction is in sight.  
We write and when we are through,  
Dan says to his motley crew,  
"No one has it right, I fear.  
It seems that back about ten year,  
The elk were penned in here eating,  
And the little trees really took a beating."

Any class led by Charlie Miller  
Should prove to be a real killer  
Of time, energy, and individual thought.  
'Cause by an ex-gyrine we are now caught.  
The brain-washing is soon in motion,  
And any rational, civilized notion  
Is quickly suppressed and thrown away.  
Enthusiasm is the word of the day!

The compass traverse is an outstanding case.  
We start out on an all day chase,  
A big rain has the rivers high,

And where do our bearings lie?  
Through water swift and deep.  
We traverse the danger without a peep.  
Some end up, however, in the wrong position,  
But no thought is given to our sad condition.  
“Do it again” says Charlie with vim,  
And we struggle back to obey his whim.  
We finish, however, in the same damn place,  
The explanation is simple for this sad case.  
Someone copied the bearing wrong,  
We’re going to kill him before too long.

Mensuration takes four weeks,  
And, the time sure does seem to creep.  
Cruising timber, a big operation,  
With more P.I. and heat prostration,  
And machetes chopping a lot of vine  
Takes up all the remaining time.

So with this camp we are now done  
And while it hasn’t all been a lot of fun,  
We do remember with a lot of glee  
The time when four of us, we  
Stole Charlie’s bell and threw the clapper  
Deep down into the smelliest crapper,  
And painted on a foul slogan  
To leave as a parting token.  
One fact we learned of value,  
That I am now going to tell you  
“In desperatum, non-bastatorum, non-carborundum.”  
Which means, when things get rough,  
And cause you to frown,  
Don’t let the bastards wear you down.



(The Bell, Henryville, IN 1959, FNR Archives, accession no. - FNR.1959.PRI)

Fond memories are also found,  
Of the taverns in Scottsburg town,  
And the square-dance parties in the mess hall.  
Where with potent punch, we had a ball.  
Many times we went a-boatin',  
Many times we came home floatin'.  
Many girls remembers us well,  
They said we could all go to hell.  
Though others may come to take our place,  
I'm sure these memories they will never erase.

-- Farewell, Dear Henryville --

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