

MEDIA FOR MARITIME: JONATHAN ATKIN

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2975 Decatur Ave #4E
Bronx, NY 10458

T 212-828-1832

jonathan@shipshooter.com

www.shipshooter.com

On Centennial of Titanic's loss, reflections from a 1980's QE2 Sailing

With all the massive activities related to the TITANIC's 100th anniversary of her demise: cruise ship transits in NYC, Southampton & Halifax, 3-D films, TV programs and museum exhibits at NYC's South Street Seaport Museum and the Noble Maritime Museum, today being Friday the 13th, I must recount a trip in the late 1980's, sailing aboard Cunard Line QE2 on assignment for the New York Times Travel section.

With the kind permission of Capt. Paul Wright I launched from the "helicopter deck" a giant industrial kite, carrying cameras, on a separately attached radio controlled platform suspended below. (The "Helo" deck also served as the ritual site of the afternoon hot bouillon). The point was to do a "poor man's" aerial photo of the QE2 while at sea. A successful launch of the kite and camera platform was reported to the bridge.

Capt Wright, intoned on the Public Address system ship-wide "If you are wondering what a kite is doing launched from the Helo deck, it is Jonathan Atkin, New York Times, photographing the ship...never been done before on the QE2." After I launched and reeled the kite in several times, changing film rolls, I asked permission to leave the helicopter deck and fly the kite from the bridge. Capt. Wright said, sure, come on up.

As I lashed the kite braking mechanism to an eye bolt welded to the bridge, I released the kite...letting it fly 300 feet up before attaching the camera rig to the parabolic curve of the kite cord. At that point, the wind freshened to about 30 knots. The kite began to rapidly and uncontrollably unreel from its drum. The leather brakes on the drum were smoking; flames burst from the brakes...the kite wouldn't come down much less stop its madness and at that point, I stepped in, the brakes on the kite apparatus gave way; the gyrating wood winding handle went flying, fracturing my wrist...the kite ripped asunder, fortunately without cameras, never to be seen again.

Immediately, I was whisked from the bridge wing, to the ship's hospital way below, where the good doctor took x-rays, set my wrist, applied a plastic heat molded cast and gave me innocuous pain killers. (Though I remember Boodles Gin as more effective that night.) I mentioned to the Doctor, as it was formal night, I would not be able to tie my tuxedo tie; **resorting to a clip-on.** The good doctor replied, somewhat indignantly,

"Mr. Atkin, you have had an unfortunate trauma today. We will send a steward to your stateroom and have your tie properly done. After all, kind sir, we have standards on the "QE2." And there will be no "clip-ons" aboard the "Q."

It was Friday the 13th in the Bermuda Triangle!

respectfully, Jonathan.

Post Script: Photos from the first launch of the kite subsequently ran in the Travel Section of the New York Times. Arriving back in NYC, my NYU Medical center doctor pronounced the medical procedures received aboard the QE2 for my wrist fracture were not only first rate, but there was nothing further he would or should do. I healed completely. Today I must say, I prefer helicopters. A lot safer.