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Navy cruise books are similar to school yearbooks in that photos of the all the individuals aboard the cruise, which means everybody from the Seaman Recruit to the Fleet Admiral has a place in the yearbooks. These cruise books are often produced by the Morale, Welfare and Recreation department or the Public Affairs staff “ or both “ typically for every deployment of six months or more.

The Navy cruise books show both formal poses and candid shots of the people on board the cruise deployment. The travels of the ship including ports of call are also described albeit only those with non-classified status are placed on the cruise books for obvious reasons. It should be noted that these cruise books are usually not funded by the federal government or by the military although the Navy does collect these publications for posterity and historical purposes. The question then is: How did Navy cruise books began?

Naval Log Books: The Beginning

It can be safely surmised that cruise books for seamen and their ships started when men learned to write down their observations, adventures and discoveries on the high seas. Ancient poems like the Odyssey can be called cruise books in a sense since these contained details of the sailors’™ travels.

The modern incarnation of Navy cruise books, however, can be traced to the invention of the naval logbooks in the 15th century. These logbooks were used for several purposes including but not limited to the documentation of trade routes and navigation hazards as well as the on-land and on-seas discoveries made by the fleet. The logbooks of Christopher Columbus detailing the voyages of the Santa Maria are the most famous examples of the genre.

These naval logbooks were often closely-guarded documents because of the highly valuable information contained in their pages. For example, the spice trade routes were considered almost-priceless information at a time when spices were worth their weight in gold.

Formal Naval Logbooks: The Evolution

The Navy Cruise Books continued to evolve until the mid-17th century when the British admiralty issued formal commands on the matter. Said commands were issued in the Naval Instructions of 1731, a part of which read as follows:

“The Captain is, from the time of his going on board to keep a Journal, and to be careful to note therein all Occurrences, viz. Place where the Ship is at Noon: changes of Wind and Weather; Salutes, with the Reasons thereof; Remarks on Unknown Places; and in general, every Circumstance that concerns the Ship, her Stores, and Provisions.”

It should be noted that naval logbooks were and are still considered official government documents, unlike Navy cruise books. From these naval logbooks arose the modern-day Cruise Books for the men and women aboard the ships during their deployment. It should be noted that these cruise books were very popular during World War II when sailors wanted a memorabilia of their time on board the ships while their families back home wanted a way to keep in touch with the goings-on.

In the U.S. Navy, the first Navy cruise books were used as unofficial souvenirs for the crew; these were produced, funded and distributed by the crew members. The pages of the cruise books contained photos as well as dedications and stories.

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