



Mess Night Traditions

Charles J. Gibowicz

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This book is about the military Sea Service Mess Night, the Sea Services consisting of the Navy, Marines and Coast Guard. Mess Nights are traditional, time-honored events going back to at least the 18th Century. Formal military dining has historically been a way to communicate, to celebrate special events and a way to promote unity and camaraderie. The Mess Night, although a military formation and a formal event, is also a great deal of fun. Some of today's protocol and script is not exactly matching the past. Today's Mess Night is a bit more regimented and programmed but basically reflects all that was included in the old days and also reflects some of procedures used during the days of sail. This book is written because there are no books on Mess Nights, this is a first. Like many Sea Service customs and traditions, this custom has been handed down from generation to generation unwritten. Scripts and instructions were not necessary as Mess dinners were common. The British Navy can claim a continuous, unbroken tradition and they are basically the providers of the American tradition. They host Mess dinners much more frequently than the Americans do and the entire Navy traditionally celebrates the anniversary of the Battle of Trafalgar. Americans have no set celebration and also have fewer Mess Nights. Many officers are not even aware of Mess Nights. This is because of several factors covered in the book. Hopefully, this book will stimulate greater interest in this important event. As the alcohol rule for ships rule has been loosened, it is particularly hopeful that shipboard Mess Nights can again become an event. It would be most appropriate to celebrate the event for which the ship is named or to begin the tradition of celebrating Navy Day or other famous event such as those listed in this book.

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