

Prince Henry the Navigator Award

Although not a national award, the Prince Henry the Navigator Award is presented annually by most Districts for educational performance by a squadron, with emphasis on celestial navigation achievement.

In the early 15th century Prince Henry started a school of navigation in Sagres, Portugal to advance the science of navigation. Prince Henry, like other European mariners, wanted to find an alternative to the passage to the lucrative trade in the Orient. The obvious passage was through the Mediterranean, but hostile Islamic powers and the equally hostile Venetian empire made it difficult to follow this route. So, Henry proposed to go south around Africa to reach the Orient. A minor problem however was that in those days the coast of Africa had not been charted and no one knew how far south the African continent extended. Unlike other navigators of the day, such as the Vikings and Spaniards that basically sailed east and west, the Portuguese needed to sail south if they were to round the tip of Africa. To do this they needed to be able to find their position through Celestial Navigation. As a result, much advancement in Celestial Navigation took place. Henry began to send Portuguese sailors south to chart the coast of Africa. These sailors came back to Portugal and increased the data base at the Prince Henry School of Navigation. Henry did not live long enough to see his dream accomplished. He died in 1468 and the Portuguese did not reach the tip of Africa until 1488.

In the early 1960s the government of Portugal, at the embassy in Washington D.C., discussed creating an award in honor of Prince Henry the Navigator commemorating the 500th year of his death. In 1965, P/R/C James D. Paris, SN, then commander of District 4, was approached by the Portuguese agency in New York. Ultimately the Portuguese government awarded an alabaster replica of Prince Henry to each of the Districts of United States Power Squadrons®.



After presenting the Award to District 4, Commander Jose Cabral, representing the Portuguese government, accompanied Jim to present the award to 20 United States Power Squadrons® districts at their conferences. The deed of gift gave each district the authority to establish its own criteria for earning the award.

In 1965, P/R/C Paris led an expedition of 65 members and their wives to the Prince Henry School of Navigation in Sagres, Portugal. While there, the government made P/R/C Paris a commander in the order of Prince Henry the Navigator. The secretary of the Navy placed a gold cross with a colorful ribbon around his neck. For many years, he entertained the winners of the previous year's award at a luncheon at the Portuguese Embassy in Washington, DC. In 1985 he led another group of 200 United States Power Squadrons® members to the Portuguese School of Navigation where they were received by the President of Portugal. Jim was presented with a swallow-tailed Ensign® for his meritorious service to United States Power Squadrons®.

Photo Courtesy of D28
Excerpt from Sandusky PS "Lookout" 3/95.
Information obtained from an interview with
P/R/C James D. Paris, SN in 1998 by P/C Michael J. Frigano SN

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