

CHAPTER 8

Dining-In

The Dining-In is a formal dinner function for members of an organization or unit. It provides an occasion for officers to meet socially at a formal military function. It is also accepted as an excellent means for bidding farewell to departing officers while welcoming new ones. Finally, the occasion provides an opportunity to recognize both individual and unit achievements.

The custom of Dining-In is a very old tradition in England but is not exclusively military. It is believed that Dining-In began as a custom in the monasteries, was adopted by the early universities, and later spread to military units when the officers' mess was established.

The primary elements are a formal setting, the camaraderie of the members, a fine dinner, traditional toasts to the President and military services, martial music and the attendance of honored guests.

Officers of the Mess

There are two officers of the mess. The President is normally the senior officer although he/she may delegate another to assume the function. The President presides over the mess throughout the evening. The Vice President is appointed by the President and is normally the junior member of the mess. He/she is affectionately referred to as "Mr. Vice/Madame Vice," and is the key figure in planning for the dining-in. During the dining-in itself, the Vice discreetly quiets any disturbance, announces or seconds toasts as directed by the President, and prepares a list of offenders and offenses for the President. The list may be handed to the President or read aloud, as directed at the time specified by the President.

GUESTS

There are two types of guests, official and personal. The former are those hosted by the mess and are usually senior in rank to the President, such as distinguished civilian, a prominent foreign national, a senior official of the U.S. Government or distinguished representative of the other armed services. Personal guests, invited with the permission of the President, are junior in rank to the President. Official guests are guests of the mess as a whole; their expenses are shared. The expenses of personal guests are paid by the one who invited them. This includes bar expenses.

Mess officers should arrive at least 10 minutes before the hour of invitation in order to meet and talk with the guests of honor and get acquainted with others. Officers do not leave until the guests have departed unless they have been excused beforehand for a good reason.

PROCEDURE

Cocktail Hour

Preceding the dinner there is an open-bar cocktail hour, which lasts for approximately 45 minutes. Each member of the mess should arrive 5 minutes before opening time. It is customary

for each officer to greet the President of the mess and later to aid the President in entertaining the guests.

Call to Dinner

The signal for dinner will be the playing of "Officers Call," followed by appropriate marching music. After "Officers Call," as soon as the music starts, all officers not seated at the head table should dispose of their drinks, proceed to the dining area, locate their places and stand quietly behind their chairs. Seating will normally be done by rank, and a diagram should be posted in the cocktail area for viewing prior to the call to dinner.

Those individuals seated at the head table will remain in the cocktail area until all others have reached the dining room. The President indicates that dinner is to be served and heads of the line which will march into the dining room. The honored guest will be on the President's right, followed by the remaining officers in order of seniority. Just prior to entering, the President will instruct the bandleader to proceed with the ceremony. An appropriate march is played as the President leads the members of the head table to their places. As soon as the last officer to be seated has stopped and turned to face his/her place setting, the band will cease playing and prepare to play appropriate dinner music.

No one may take his/her place at the table after the head table has entered without first requesting the permission of the President. Conversely, one may not leave without the permission of the President.

Grace

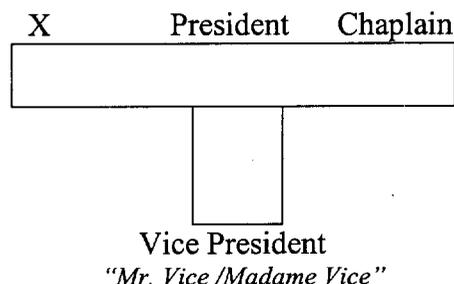
As soon as the music has stopped, the President will rap for attention and announce "*Gentlemen/Ladies, the grace.*" The Chaplain will then say grace. Upon its completion, all officers will be seated at the sound of the gavel.

Gavel

The gavel will be used by the President to signal the members. Three resounding raps requires the attention of the members whether standing or seated. Two raps causes the members to rise standing in place, and one is the signal for the members to take their seats.

Seating Arrangements

The President of the Mess sits at the center of the head table with the guest of honor on his/her right. The Chaplain will normally sit to the far left of the President. The remaining guests at the head table are seated according to protocol. The table at which Mr. Vice/Madame Vice will be seated should be at the opposite end of the banquet hall so that he/she and the President will face one another when speaking.



X= Guest of Honor

Table Setting

A formal place setting is used for mess night. Certain ground rules for the use of silverware and glassware simplify the procedure. A lay plate is in the center, partially covered by a neatly folded napkin on top of which lies the place card. To its left, working from the outside toward the plate, will be the forks in the order of use – fish, meat, and salad, the latter properly being after the main course. To the right working from the outside toward the plate, will be the spoons in order of use – soup, and tea. Then the knives – meat and salad. Above the knives will be the crystal. Again working from outside towards the center (or right to left), in the order of use – white wine glass, red wine glass, champagne, claret glass for port and a goblet for water.

After each course, all used silverware and glassware will be removed. The dessert implements are normally found on the dessert plate when served. If not, they will be the innermost utensils of their kind. Butter plates are not used in formal settings.

Ashtrays and cigarette containers will be conspicuously absent.

The formal dinner consists of six courses: appetizer, soup, fish, entrée, salad and dessert.

Wines

Appropriate dinner wines will be served. White wines are generally served with fish and fowl, red wines with blood meats. Champagne may be used anytime. White and sparkling wines are served chilled. Red wine is served at room temperature. Port, in keeping with tradition, will be served after dinner for toasting.

Should an officer not desire wine, he/she should put his/her place card over the glass or inform the steward that he/she does not wish wine. The glass should not be turned upside down as a means of indicating that wine is not desired. However, glasses should be charged with port for the toasts and at least raised to the lips. If toasts are proposed prior to dinner, they are drunk with the white entrée wine.

At the end of a course that calls for wine, the waiter will properly remove the glass. One should not stop him/her, even though the glass may be full.

Toasting wine, presented after the conclusion of the meal will be placed on the table. Members of the mess serve the toasting wine themselves. When serving the toasting wine, members should always pass from left to right.

Dining-In Toasts

A toast is the traditional and formal way of honoring a country, organization or institution. Formal toasts are never drunk to individual persons by name.

Following dessert and coffee, Mr. Vice/Madame Vice will announce to the President: *"The wine is ready to pass, Sir/Ma'am."* At about the same time that the port wine is placed on the table, the ashtrays will be placed. One should not drink the port, nor smoke. The important thing to remember when passing port is that the bottle must never rest on the table until the last glass at the individual table is charged, and that each glass is charged whether the member drinks or not. As the bottles are emptied, the member having an empty bottle will raise it to indicate that a replacement is needed. When a bottle has reached the end of the table and the last glass is charged, it may be set down.

When all glasses are charged, the President will rise and call for a toast to the Commander-in-Chief of the United States (when foreign guests are present, their head of state is

toasted first). At the sound of the gavel, Mr. Vice/Madame Vice seconds this by rising and addressing the mess, saying, "*Gentlemen/Ladies, the Commander-in-Chief of the United States.*" Each member and guest then stands, repeats in unison the toast (e.g., "*The Commander-in-Chief of the United States*"), sips the drink, and remains standing. The band then plays the National Anthem. At the conclusion of the music, members and guests are again seated.

Immediately after the first toast, the President will call for the smoking lamp to be lighted. Mr. Vice/Madame Vice will present a lighted ceremonial lamp to the President who in turn will offer the light to honored guests. After the lamp has passed the President, he/she will announce, "*The smoking lamp is lighted.*" Smoking may now commence throughout the mess. Cigars will be distributed to each table with the port. With the current trend being that of a smoke-free environment, many clubs are non-smoking facilities. The tradition of the smoking lamp looks like it has seen its final days. Check with the President to find out if one is desired or will be omitted from the event entirely.

Thereafter, the President may either personally call for specific formal toasts or may recognize a member of the mess to do so. If the President calls for a toast, Mr. Vice/Madame Vice will second it. If a member of the mess is recognized for the purpose of proposing a toast, the President will second it. Do not "bottoms-up" your drink on each toast. "Bottoms-up" is expected only on the last toast to the U.S. Navy, the last of the evening. Do not be caught in the position of having an uncharged glass!

Toasts will be drunk in the following order:

- The Commander-in-Chief (Loyalty Toast)
- The Joint Chiefs of Staff
- The United States Marine Corps
- The Chief of Naval Operations
- Our Ships at Sea
- Missing Comrades
- Informal Toasts
- The United States Navy (Traditional Toast)

After the initial formal toasts, the President will introduce the Guest of Honor, who will address the mess. Following this address, informal toasts will be received from members of the mess. During this period, any member of the mess who wishes to initiate a toast will stand and address the President. On being recognized, the member will briefly present his/her justification for desiring such a toast, ending with the words of the proposed toast. Inspired wit and subtle sarcasm are much appreciated in these toasts. If the President deems the toast justified, he/she will direct Mr. Vice/Madam Vice to second the toast in the same manner as in the formal toast.

When in the judgment of the President the informal toasting has sufficed, he/she will rap thrice with the gavel and commence the business of the mess by asking Mr. Vice/Madam Vice to read the list of offenders who have violated the customs and traditions of the mess. The President assesses fines and suitable payments as necessary.

The President will then, without rising, call for a toast to the U.S. Navy. He/she will stand while Mr. Vice/Madame Vice seconds the toast. Before seconding, Mr. Vice/Madame Vice proceeds to the head table and fills each glass starting from honored guest and ending with the President. The President then fills Mr. Vice/Madame Vice's glass, who faces the mess and

seconds the toast. All present rise, responding in unison, "The United States Navy," drain the entire glass and remain standing while "Anchors Aweigh" is played.

Following the toast to the U.S. Navy, the President will invite those present to join him/her at the bar. Attendees should remain at their places until the head table has left the mess. The bar will be open for purchase of refreshments and members and their guests will be free to congregate. Attendees should not depart until the President and all official guests have departed.

Despite its formality and ritual, Dining-In is intended to be an enjoyable and enriching experience. Those who have attended previous Mess Nights have found them to be so, and it is hoped this tradition will continue.

Dining-In Violations of the Mess

1. Untimely arrival at proceedings.
2. Smoking at table prior to the lighting of the smoking lamp.
3. Hagglng over date of rank.
4. Inverted cummerbund.
5. Loud and obtrusive remarks in a foreign language or in English.
6. Improper toasting procedure.
7. Leaving the dining area without permission from the President.
8. Carrying cocktails into the dining room.
9. Foul language.
10. Wearing clip-on bow tie at an obvious list.
11. Being caught with an uncharged glass.
12. Rising to applaud particularly witty, succinct, sarcastic or relevant toasts, unless following the example of the President.
13. Commencing a course before the President.
14. Placing a bet or wager.
15. Telling an off-color or unrefined story.
16. Discussing issues of a controversial nature.
17. Failure to laugh at any joke rendered by an honored guest or the President.
18. Improper attire.

POW/MIA TABLE

The small table at the front of the mess has been placed there to honor our POW/MIAs. The items on the table represent various aspects of the courageous men and women still missing. The table can be set for one or four – Army, Navy, Marine Corps, Air Force -- with or without hats.

The table is smaller than the others symbolizing the frailty of one prisoner alone against their oppressors.

The white tablecloth represents the purity of their response to our country's call to arms.

The empty chair depicts an unknown face, representing no specific Soldier, Sailor, Marine or Airman, but all who are not here with us.

The table is round to show that our concern for them is never ending.

The Bible represents faith in a higher power and the pledge to our country, founded as one nation under God.

The black napkin stands for the emptiness these warriors have left in the hearts of their families and friends.

The single red rose reminds us of their families and loved ones; and the red ribbon represents the love of our country, which inspired them to answer the nation's call.

The yellow candle and its yellow ribbon symbolize the everlasting hope for a joyous reunion with those yet unaccounted for.

The slices of lemon on the bread plate reminds us of their bitter fate.

The salt upon the bread plate represents the tears of their families.

The wine glass turned upside down reminds us that our distinguished comrades cannot be with us to drink a toast or join in the festivities this evening.