



HEADQUARTERS
3rd BATTALION, 19th BRIGADE
TEXAS STATE GUARD
9314 Jack Finney Blvd.
Greenville, TX 75402



"GO FOR BROKE"

28 October 2002

SUBJECT: History of Dining Out

The formal military dinner known as the "Dining Out" or as "Mess Night" is a tradition that has long been observed by our military services. Although its origin is not clear, formal feasts to honor military victories, individual, and unit achievements have been customary from pre-Christian Roman legions to King Arthur's knights in the sixth century. The custom of the Dining Out is not exclusively military. The tradition as we know it today is rooted in England where it was a custom of monasteries. It was later adopted by the early universities and spread to the Dining Out by the military, where feasts became more formalized. British soldiers introduced the custom in colonial America, where it was borrowed by George Washington's Continental Army. These dinners have become traditional in all branches of the armed forces.

Dining Out represents the most formal aspects of the military social life. The basic idea is to enjoy yourself and the company of your fellow soldiers. Furthermore, the Dining Out provides an opportunity to recognize individual and unit achievements. The Dining Out, therefore, is very effective in building high morale and esprit de corps.

The uniform is usually the mess dress for soldiers. The Class A and Dress Blue uniforms are also appropriate. Females are authorized to wear long dinner dresses or evening clothes. Male civilians should wear appropriate black tie dinner dress.

The following are the principal officials of the Dining Out. The president, referred to as Mr. President, is the center figure of the Dining Out. The president is charged with the responsibility of setting the date and place of the event, introducing the principal speaker and honored guests, proposing the first toast, ensuring the rules of protocol are observed, and closing the ceremony. The vice president, referred to as Mr. Vice, is a junior officer usually possessing wit and ability to speak. He assists the president by performing duties prescribed by the president. Members must be prepared to follow instructions given by either the president or vice president. This official starts the cocktail party by opening the lounge, sound the dinner chimes to summon the members and guests into the dining room, keeps the party moving, and is the last person to leave.

The sequence of events is as follows. Each member of the mess should arrive in the cocktail lounge within 10 minutes of opening time. Members should never arrive after the senior honored guest. The cocktail period usually lasts between 30 and 60 minutes. This time is intended to allow members to assemble before dinner, and to meet the guests. Background music is appropriate. It should be soft martial, classical, or semi-classical; either recorded or live.

At the end of the cocktail period, Mr. Vice sounds the dinner chime and directs the mess to proceed to the dining room. Officers and guests assigned to the head table remain in the lounge or assemble in an anteroom. All others should proceed in an orderly fashion to their assigned seats and stand quietly behind their chairs. By tradition, drinks and lighted smoking materials are never taken into the dining room. When the mess is assembled, those assigned to the head table enter, with the honored guest on the commander's right, followed by the next senior officer with the next senior official, and so forth. Once



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the head table is in place, ruffles and flourishes are sounded as appropriate to the senior member. During the playing of ruffles and flourishes, all members of the mess should stand at attention.

Immediately following the sounding of ruffles and flourishes, Mr. President raps the gavel once to call the mess to order. The president should then direct the color guard to post the colors. The color guard marches into the dining room and posts the colors. If the colors are in place, or there is no color guard, the Anthems are played or sung immediately following the president's call to order. The manner in which the colors are posted, and the playing of the Anthems can set the tone for the entire evening. A darkened room with a spotlight on the flag as it is carried into the room, and a soloist singing the Anthems with no background music can be a dramatic and moving event for all participants. Drama can also be taken too far, so keep it simple. Following the Anthems, the color guard departs the room. Since protocol does not require that the colors, once posted, must be retired, some commanders elect to dismiss the color guard at this time. After the color guard departs, the president asks the chaplain or an appointed member of the mess to deliver the invocation. After the invocation, the members of the mess and guests remain standing as the next order of business is toasting.

The custom of toasting is universal. It is believed that this custom came into wide acceptance after the effects of poisons were discovered. When two persons, who might be antagonists, drank from the same source at the same instance and suffered no ill effects, a degree of mutual trust or rapport was established. With this foundation laid, discussions could continue on a more cordial basis. Today, toasting is simple courtesy to the person honored. It is not necessary to drain the glass at the completion of each toast or even to sip the wine; a mere touch of the glass to the lips satisfies the ceremonial requirements. Toasts should be proposed in sequence and at intervals during the program of the evening. The president proposes the first toast; Mr. Vice proposes all other prepared toasts. Toasts should be made by the following order:

1. President: "I propose a toast to our country and the flag that represents it..."

Response: To the colors

2. President: "I propose a toast to The President of the United States."

Response: To the President

3. Toasts to the Secretary of Defense, Secretary of the Navy, Chief of Naval Operations, Commandant of the Marine Corps, and any local flag officers are then proposed. All these toasts are proposed to Mr. Vice by members of the mess (usually arranged ahead of time.)

Besides setting the tone for the evening, the president's remarks provide the opportunity to officially welcome guests. After the head table is introduced, the president should personally introduce the remaining guests. When all guests have been recognized, Mr. Vice proposes a toast to the guests. Members of the mess stand, guests remain seated. The response to this and all future toasts is "Hear, Hear!"

At this time the president calls for the meal. All members of the mess get their meals. Before partaking in the meal, all members wait for the president to sample the meal. The president eats a bite, and then declares "I find this food acceptable." (This goes back in time to when you couldn't be sure the food you purchased was fresh and edible.) Dinner service then begins.

Rules of the Mess



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The following is a list of rules under which the mess will be conducted. They are designed to conform to tradition and promote levity. Violators of these rules are subject to the wrath and mischievousness of Mr. Vice. All assigned penalties will be carried out before the membership.

1. Thou shalt arrive within 10 minutes of the appointed hour.
2. Thou shalt make every effort to meet all guests.
3. Thou shalt move to the mess when thee hears the chimes and remain standing until seated by the President.
4. Thou shalt not bring cocktails or lighted smoking material into the mess.
5. Thou shalt smoke only when the smoking lamp is lit.
6. Thou shalt not leave the mess whilst convened. Military protocol over-rides all calls of nature.
7. Thou shalt participate in all toast unless thyself or thy group is honored with a toast.
8. Thou shalt ensure that thy glass is always charged when toasting.
9. Thou shalt keep toasts and comments within the limits of good taste and mutual respect. Degrading or insulting remarks will be frowned upon by the membership. However, good natured needling is ENCOURAGED.
10. Thou shalt not murder the Queen’s English.
11. Thou shalt not discuss work.
12. Thou shalt always use the proper toasting procedure.
13. Thou shalt fall into disrepute with thy peers if the pleats of thy cummerbund are not properly faced.
14. Thou shalt also be painfully regarded if thy clip-on bow tie rides at an obvious list. Thou shalt be forgiven, however, if thee also ride a comparable list.
15. Thou shalt consume thy meal in a manner becoming gentlepersons.
16. Thou shalt not laugh at ridiculously funny comments unless the President first shows approval by laughing.
17. Thou shalt express thy approval by tapping thy spoon on the table. Clapping of thy hands will not be tolerated.
18. Thou shalt not question the decisions of the President.
19. When the mess adjourns, thou shalt rise and wait for the President and guests to leave.
20. Thou shalt enjoy thyself to thy fullest.

Recess

At the time scheduled for recess, the president raps the gavel three times to gain attention. When the mess is silent, the president raps twice and announces a short recess so the dishes may be cleared and dessert served. Members stand by their places until the head table departs. Everyone then proceeds to the cocktail lounge where the bars have reopened.

Reconvening the Mess

At the end of the recess, Mr. Vice sounds the chime and directs everyone to proceed to the dining room. Traditionally, lighted smoking materials and drinks should not be brought into the dining room following the recess. When members reach their places they stand directly behind their chairs. The president then leads the head table party into the dining room. The president then seats the mess with one rap of the gavel. Coffee and tea are immediately served and dessert is eaten. When this course is completed, the president again lights the smoking lamp. (These days, smoking lamps are rarely permitted.)

The president would then introduce the guest speaker and the guest speaker would then give his/her speech.



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Closing the Mess

After the toast to the guest speaker, the president should recognize those who organized the Dining Out and thank Mr. Vice. If desired, the colors may then be retired by the color guard. The president encourages everyone to stay and enjoy themselves (of post-dinner entertainment is planned), and the adjourns the mess with two raps of the gavel. Traditionally, Mr. Vice is the last member to leave the Dining Out.

Rules of Protocol

1. Punctuality is mandatory. Each member should arrive at the bar no later than 10 minutes after the opening time to meet the guests before dinner. At the scheduled time or when the chimes are sounded for dinner, the members enter the dining room and stand at attention behind their chair at their appointed place at the banquet table. Drinks are not carried to the dining room.
2. The guests and president of the mess are the last to enter the dining room. The president formally calls the mess to order and continues according to the agenda. The president's welcoming remarks set the tone for the formal part of the agenda. Following a recess, the president introduces the guest of honor.
3. Smoking. From the time you enter the dining room until the "smoking lamp" is lit by the president, smoking is not permitted. The president usually lights the smoking lamp after most members have finished the main course.
4. Each time the mess is adjourned or reassembled, the members stand until the persons at the head table have left the room or are seated.
5. Once the mess is open, members are not to leave the table or return without permission.

A Final Word

A Dining Out is designed so that members of an organization can have a good time together as a unit. Various forms of skits or entertainment may also be included to add to the evening. The decorations, ceremony, humor, and wit should be done in such a manner as to make the evening a memorable event.

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**ROBERT K. BREVELLE
2LT, 3/19 MP, TXSG
Commanding**