



The Naval Mess Dinner

The Naval Mess Dinner is an important function and steeped in tradition. The mess dinner can be considered a special or ceremonial occasion, carried on from the days when officers dined formally every evening.

The President and Vice-President

The Mess President is normally the President of the dinner. There is no rank at a Mess Dinner, so the President presides over all diners regardless of rank, seniority or classification. During the dinner the President may discipline any diner for misbehaviour.

Service

- Mess guests are served before the President and other guests before their hosts. The President should not delay starting a course, since other diners should wait to follow his lead.
- No diner shall leave the table without permission. If a diner has been granted permission to sit down late, or to return to the table, he continues with the course then being served, unless he has the President's permission to eat the course he missed.
- Each steward carries not more than two plates at a time. They will serve and remove with their left hand from the left side. However, wine and other beverages are always served and removed from a diner's right.

Table Manners

- Diners should sit up straight at the table with their hands on their lap when not using table utensils. Elbows should never touch the table.
- Traditionally diners who have officially been on a ship which navigated Cape Horn or the Cape of Good Hope may place one elbow on the table. In a rare occasion where a diner has crossed both Capes he/she may place both elbows on the table.
- The table napkin should be laid across the lap and not tucked into the tunic. At the end of the meal, the napkin should be laid on the table so that it can be taken away by the stewards as the table is cleared.
- When the soup course is served, the soup should be taken from the side of the spoon. A knife is never lifted to the mouth, or used for cutting bread or rolls. Bread shall be broken with the hands. The fork should be held in the left hand for the meat, and may be transferred to the right hand for vegetables. After the main course is finished the knife and fork are placed side by side on the plate to indicate that the plate may be removed.

Grace

If there is no chaplain present, the President would normally say Grace, however the duty could be assigned to any member at the dinner. Although the person saying Grace may use his/her own wording, the prayer normally used by Presidents and other diners is traditionally "For what we are about to receive, thank God." Or "For what we are about to receive, we give thanks".

Rules of Order

The tap of the President's gavel for "Grace" signals that the dinner has officially begun. Between that time and the "Loyal Toast" the following rules apply.

Without the President's permission, no one may:

- Come in and sit down at the table;
- Leave the table;
- Return to the table;
- Read (except the menu or the musical programme);
- Write; or

If a diner is near enough to the President to ask his permission regarding any item listed above, he does so; if he is too far away, he sends a steward to the President with the request. When he is coming to the table late, or is returning having left it, he always asks the President's permission.

Diners are not allowed to:

- Address each other by rank. Mr, Miss or Mrs is used only.
- Commence a course before the President;
- Utter an oath or use foul language;
- Place a bet or wager;
- Discuss political or other controversial subjects;
- Talk "shop", also meaning that they are not to conduct normal work business while seated at the dinner;
- Speak in a foreign language (except when foreign guests are present);
- Tell "off colour" stories;
- Mention a specific sum of money; or
- Propose a toast ("Cheers" or similar remarks or raising the glass as in greeting constitutes a toast).

Whenever the President or Vice-President taps the table there must be silence until he has finished speaking.

Discipline

- Misbehaviour or breaking the rules of order generally results in disciplinary action. The President has three options: order the culprit to leave the mess; fine him an appropriate number of drinks; or warn him.
- The punishment will usually fit the crime. A diner is ordered to leave for a serious offence such as gross rudeness. For other offences, more light-hearted in nature, the offender is given a chance to exonerate himself by the use of his wits. For example: recite a poem, sing a familiar tune, or dance a jig.
- It is permissible for any diner to call the President's attention to a misdemeanour, but wise is the man who first obtains the President's permission to do so since without such permission, he himself may be fined.

Passing the Port

- When the last course has been finished, the stewards clear the table of everything except the table decorations, sweep up all the crumbs and remove the napkins. If Port glasses are part of the original table setting, the port glasses should remain on the table.
- Decanters of port, stoppers in, are placed before the President and each Vice-President. These decanters will be passed to all diners.
- Once the decanters are in place, the senior steward reports to the President: "The wine is ready to pass, Mr President"
- The President then unstoppers the decanters in front of him, as do the Vice-Presidents with decanters. The President passes his decanter to the left, and other officers do the same without serving themselves.
- The port is passed by sliding the decanters along the table, reducing the risk of dropping them or spilling their contents. They may be raised from the table to pour. The practice of never lifting the decanters, even to pour, is an exaggeration of the passing method. There is absolutely no necessity to hold your glass below the edge of the table then tilt the decanter to pour while its base remains firmly on the table. The decanter can be picked up to pour in a normal fashion as long as it is placed back down and then remains touching the table as it is slid to the next diner on the table.
- In civilian toasts, if you do not have wine, your glass is filled with water. In the Navy, however, toasts are never made with water, as superstition says that the person toasted will die by drowning.
- When the decanter arrives back at the President, or Vice-President, he/she should serve himself and then wait for the passing of the port to be completed on other tables. When the port passing has been completed the President should stoppers the decanter in front of him and the others should do the same.
- No diner should touch their port until the "loyal toast" has been proposed.

The Loyal Toast

- The health of Her Majesty the Queen is honoured while diners remain seated in the wardrooms of HMC ships and designated naval establishments, except:
- When a band is present, and "God Save the Queen" is played;
- When foreign guests, other than foreign exchange officers, are present; and
- When Her Majesty the Queen, or another member of the Royal Family is present (unless they have specifically expressed a wish that those in attendance remain seated.)
- The privilege accorded to the Navy of remaining seated while drinking the Sovereign's health is long-standing but obscure in its origin. There are several popular beliefs about these origins. One is that King Charles II when on board the Royal Charles humped his head on rising to reply to the toast and that King William IV, Lord High Admiral, did the same as he stood up during a dinner on one of HM ships. Another is that King George IV, while dining on board one of HM ships said, as the officers rose to drink the King's health "Gentlemen, pray be seated, your loyalty is above suspicion."

- The host or President of the Mess Committee (PMC) shall call for the loyal toast by addressing the vice-president in English or French and the vice-president shall propose the toast in the other language.
- The loyal toast shall be – "[Ladies and] Gentlemen, The Queen of Canada".
- Naval officers never clink glasses when they make a toast. The sound is reputed to be too much like the solemn toll of the ship's bell as the body of a sailor was committed to the deep. Thus, it is assumed that the clinking sound will herald the death of a sailor.

The Toast of the Day

Once the "Loyal Toast" has been proposed the formalities of the dinner are considered ended.

At this point, the President will call upon a member (usually the most Junior diner present) to propose the Toast of the Day. There is a different toast for each day of the week, and getting them confused is dealt with strictly! In fact, the President has the right to ask for any Toast of the Day regardless of the day on which the dinner is being held. Most recently the toasts were changed to better reflect the current "Navy". The "current toasts" listed in the blue column are the toasts that are authorized for use in today's navy.

Day of the Week	Current Toast	Traditional Toast
Monday	OUR SHIPS	OUR SHIP AT SEA
Tuesday	OUR SAILORS	OUR MEN
Wednesday	OURSELVES	OURSELVES
Thursday	OUR NAVY	A BLOODY WAR OR A SICKLY SEASON
Friday	OUR NATION	A WILLING FOE AND SEA ROOM
Saturday	OUR FAMILIES	WIVES AND SWEETHEARTS reply: MAY THEY NEVER MEET
Sunday	ABSENT FRIENDS	ABSENT FRIENDS

Ref: www.readyayeready.com