

Chapter 12

Mess Night

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## Chapter 12

### Mess Night

#### 1. General

a. It has long been an established custom of the officers and/or noncommissioned officers of a military organization to dine together periodically. A mess night is a formal dinner in mess by all members, or by the officers and noncommissioned officers of a particular post or unit. It is sometimes called a "Guest Night" or a "Dining-in" and less commonly as a "Formal Mess Dinner" or "Band Night." The mess night is a formal stag dinner where spouses and dates do not attend. The object of a mess night may vary from a wish to foster good comradeship among fellow Marines, to celebrate the anniversary of significant events in a unit's history, to "dine-out" members being detached, or to honor guests from another unit, service or country.

b. The procedures for a mess night outlined in this chapter are to be used as a guide. Commanders may modify these procedures to accommodate local requirements and restrictions. In addition to the information contained in this chapter, additional guidance concerning invitations, seating and protocol may be found in enclosure 3, appendix D, in Oretta D. Swartz's, "*Service Etiquette the Marine Officer's Guide*," fourth edition, and, "*Handbook for Marine Noncommissioned Officers*," published by the Naval Institute Press.

2. Schedule of Events. Drawing upon our history and traditions, the following general routine is a standard guideline for Mess Nights, subject to modification as required.

a. Key personnel arrive and supervise last minute preparations.

b. Members of the mess arrive, the bar is opened and the cocktail hour begins. This is normally 45 minutes before dinner.

c. Guest of honor arrives and is met by the escort.

d. Fifteen minutes prior to dinner, "*First Call*" or "*Dinner Chimes*" is sounded. At this time, all present will finish their drinks, make final head calls (since no one will be excused from the dining room during the dinner without permission from the Mess President), and begin assembling for the march on. No drinks or tobacco are to be carried into the dining area.

e. Five minutes prior to dinner, "*Officers Call*" is sounded ("*First Sergeant's Call*" is sounded at an enlisted mess). All members form in the order they are to be seated. The official party, who occupies the head table, is the last unit to form and enter the mess. At this time, the smoking lamp is out.

f. At the appointed time, the drum and trumpet detail plays "*Sea Soldiers*" as the members of the mess march on. Members of the mess march smartly to their assigned seats and remain standing while the entire mess assembles. The official party enters smartly and moves to their assigned position at the head table as "*Semper Fidelis*" is played. When the head table is occupied, the music ceases. All hands remain standing for the

grace.

g. Grace is offered. Either a chaplain, President of the Mess, or Mr./Madam Vice does this.

h. Dinner is served, after the last of the wine and soup is removed, "Parade the Beef."

i. "Shed a Tear." It is optional at the end of the meal to allow a break.

j. Port is served and the smoking lamp lighted. It is customary at this time to open the floor to fining although this may be omitted or done at a different time.

k. Mess President remarks.

l. Introduction of guests and remarks by the guest of honor.

m. Toasting.

n. Secure from the dining room and move to the bar.

o. After dinner activities.

3. Sequence. This sequence of events is a summation of the night activities, a "refresher" outline for what takes place at a mess night. Times are given for the events prior to and after the meal. Events during the meal are not regulated by time. The following is an example of a mess night sequence.

a. The President and Mr./Madam Vice have verified that all arrangements have been made and are standing by to begin the cocktail hour.

b. Members of the mess begin arriving prior to the guests. Cash bar provided. Members are reminded to consult the seating chart.

c. H Hour-60 Minutes. Cocktail hour begins and guests begin arriving. Guest of honor arrives. All are met by Mr./Madam Vice and introduced to the mess president and members of the mess.

d. H Hour-15 Minutes. "*First Call*" or "*Dinner Chimes*" is sounded. All present finish drinks, make final head calls, and begin assembling for the march on.

e. H Hour-5 Minutes. Assemble. "*Officer's Call*" or "*First Sergeant's Call*" is sounded. All members assemble [to include any guests] in the order they are to be seated and stand by for the march on. The head table forms last and enters separately.

f. H-Hour. March on. Mr./Madam Vice commands "**Forward, MARCH.**" As the members step off, "*Sea Soldiers*" is played. Members and guests march to their place and stand behind their chairs. Once all are in place and the music stops, Mr./Madam President commands "**Forward, MARCH**" for the head table. As the head table steps off, "*Semper Fidelis*" plays. Once the head table is in place, the music stops and all remain standing.

g. Mr./Madam Vice: **"Mr./Madam President, all members of the mess and guests are present."**

h. Mr./Madam President: **"Chaplain, offer the grace."** (Note if a chaplain is not present then either Mr./Madam President or Mr./Madam Vice may offer grace.)

i. Mr./Madam President: **Raps the gavel once** and states **"Please be seated."** The members will wait until the head table is seated and then sit. Appetizer is served (e.g., shrimp cocktail, salad), and after the last of the soup bowls and glasses are removed, the next course will start. Members will not begin eating each course until after the President and guest start.

j. The President stands, **raps the gavel three times** and states **"Mr./Madam Vice, bring forth the beef."**

k. Mr./Madam Vice: **"Chief Steward, the beef."** At this time, the music "*Roast Beef of Old England*" is played. Mr./Madam Vice accompanies the chief steward to the head table, is handed a small portion of beef and passes it to the President who tastes it.

l. Mr./Madam President: **"I find this beef tasty and declare it fit for human consumption. Please serve the members of the mess."** The beef is removed to the galley for serving. The music "*Roast Beef of Old England*" is played as the beef is removed. The dinner continues until after dessert is finished.

Note: If the mess night is to include fining, the floor may be opened to fining once the main course is served, or as an option once the smoking lamp is lighted. The President will close the floor for fining whenever the Marine deems fit.

m. After dessert is finished and while the servers are clearing the table, it is optional to allow the members of the mess a short break and make head calls.

n. Mr./Madam Vice: After dinner, stands and requests **"Mr./Madam President, I suggest we shed a tear for Lord Admiral Nelson."**

o. Mr./Madam President: **Raps the gavel twice** (mess stands). **"The mess will adjourn for a 15-minute break."** The official party departs followed by all others. Do not return until called.

p. During the break, Mr./Madam Vice will ensure that coffee, cigars, ashtrays, matches, and wine for toasting is placed on the tables.

q. After 15 minutes and on cue from Mr./Madam Vice, the music "*First Call*" is played. All members and guests return and stand behind their seats. Once all members and guests have returned to their chairs, the head table will march in.

r. Mr./Madam Vice: **"Mr./Madam President, all members and guests of the mess are present."** or **"Mr./Madam President, all members and guests of the mess are not present. Name the offenders."**

s. Mr./Madam President: **Raps gavel once. "Please be seated." Raps gavel three times. "Mr./Madam Vice, the smoking lamp."** After Mr./Madam

Vice has brought forth the smoking lamp and lighted the cigars of Mr./Madam President, the President announces **"Ladies and Gentlemen, the smoking lamp is lighted."**

t. Mr./Madam President: **Raps gavel three times.** "Mr./Madam Vice bring forth the wine for toasting."

u. Mr./Madam Vice: **"Chief Steward, the wine."** Mr./Madam Vice accompanies the chief steward and pores the wine for the guest of honor and Mr./Madam President. When all glasses are charged, Mr./Madam Vice stands and announces **"Mr./Madam President, all glasses are charged,"** and remains standing.

v. Mr./Madam President: Stands and **raps gavel three times.** Takes wine glass in right hand and announces **"Mr./Madam Vice, a toast to the Commander and Chief, the President of the United States."** If foreign guests are present, then the first toast is given to the head of state of that guest and any others in order of seniority. The senior foreign guest would then toast the President of the United States. Appropriate music is played for all foreign heads of state and the *"National Anthem"* played after toasting the President of the United States.

w. Mr./Madam President: Stands and **raps gavel three times**, moves to podium. At this point, Mr./Madam President makes opening remarks followed by the introduction of the guests of the mess. Once the guests are introduced, Mr./Madam President introduces the guest of honor.

(1) **"Ladies and Gentlemen, it is my personal pleasure and professional privilege to introduce our guest of honor, \_\_\_\_\_."**

(2) Remarks by guest of honor.

(3) Presentation of memento to guest of honor.

x. Mr./Madam President: Stands and **raps gavel three times.** **"The floor is now open for toasting."** At this time, official, traditional and personal toasts are made per enclosure 3, appendix D, paragraph 7 and local custom. At most mess nights, the toasts are prearranged to include the loyalty toast, the traditional toast, and the toast to our fallen comrades and a toast to Country and Corps. The toasts are given in the following manner; each Marine selected for a particular toast will stand with glass in right hand, faces Mr./Madam Vice, and states:

(1) **"Mr./Madam Vice, (Mr./Madam Vice stands), A toast to the Continental Marines who fought for freedom and liberty."** Mr./Madam Vice will state, **"Ladies and Gentlemen, a toast** (all members stand with wine glasses in right hand), **to the Continental Marines."** All members raise their glasses, repeat in unison the words of Mr./Madam Vice, **"To the Continental Marines"** drink a portion of their wine, and resume their seats. This sequence is followed for each toast.

(2) **"Mr./Madam Vice, A toast to the Marines of the 19th century who fought from the halls of Montezuma to the shores of Tripoli."** Mr./Madam Vice: **"Ladies and Gentlemen, A toast to the Marines of the 19th century."**  
Mess: **"To the Marines of the 19th century."**

(3) **"Mr./Madam Vice, A toast to the Marines of World War I who**

fought from the Argonne Forest to Belleau Wood." Mr./Madam Vice: "Ladies and Gentlemen, A toast to the Marines of World War I." Mess: "To the Marines of World War I."

(4) "Mr./Madam Vice, A toast to the Marines who fought in the Island campaigns of World War II, where uncommon valor was a common virtue." Mr./Madam Vice: "Ladies and Gentlemen, A toast to the Marines of World War II." Mess: "To the Marines of World War II."

(5) "Mr./Madam Vice, A toast to the Marines who fought in Korea from Inchon to the Chosin Reservoir." Mr./Madam Vice: "Ladies and Gentlemen, A toast to the Marines who fought in Korea." Mess: "To the Marines who fought in Korea."

(6) "Mr./Madam Vice, A toast to the Marines who fought for freedom in Vietnam." Mr./Madam Vice: "Ladies and Gentlemen, A toast to the Marines who fought in Vietnam." Mess: "To the Marines who fought in Vietnam."

(7) "Mr./Madam Vice, A toast to the Marines who fought oppression in Lebanon and Grenada." Mr./Madam Vice: "Ladies and Gentlemen, A toast to the Marines who fought oppression in Lebanon and Grenada." Mess: "To the Marines of Lebanon and Grenada."

(8) "Mr./Madam Vice, A toast to the Marines who fought for Kuwait liberty in Southwest Asia." Mr./Madam Vice: "Ladies and Gentlemen, A toast to the Marines of Desert Shield and Desert Storm." Mess: "To the Marines of Desert Shield and Desert Storm."

(9) "Mr./Madam Vice, A toast to the Marines who fought in Operation Enduring Freedom." Mr./Madam Vice: "Ladies and Gentlemen, A toast to the Marines of Operation Enduring Freedom." Mess: "To the Marines of Operation Enduring Freedom."

(10) "Mr./Madam Vice, A toast to the Marines who fought in Operation Iraqi Freedom." Mr./Madam Vice: "Ladies and Gentlemen, A toast to the Marines of Operation Iraqi Freedom." Mess: "To the Marines of Operation Iraqi Freedom."

(11) "Mr./Madam Vice, A toast to our comrades in arms, the United States Navy Corpsmen." Mr./Madam Vice: "Ladies and Gentlemen, A toast to our comrades in arms, the United States Navy Corpsmen." Mess: "To Navy Corpsmen."

Note: This toast may be omitted if the toast to the United States Navy is done during the official toasts.

(12) "Mr./Madam Vice, A toast to the Marines currently deployed on the forward edge of our Nation's defense." Mr./Madam Vice: "Ladies and Gentlemen, A toast to Marines currently deployed." Mess: "To Marines currently deployed."

(13) In place of the above toasts, the procedures outlined in enclosure 3, appendix D, paragraph 7; paragraph 7.g.(8) can be used. During the above sequence, the appropriate toasts to other services will be inserted as directed by the President of the Mess.

(14) Mr./Madam Vice: "I too have a toast; as you entered this banquet hall, you should have noticed that before us tonight stands an empty chair and a single lone table draped in black, signifying all of our fallen comrades who are not with us this evening, because they have given the full measure of devotion to our Country and to our beloved Corps. The single lighted candle reminds us of the flame of eternal life. That the memory of our fallen comrades will be with us always. The Purple Heart Medal displayed to reflect the shedding of blood and the ebb of life in battle. The identification tags, blank, yet they could bear the name of any of us here tonight. The dinner setting, inverted, they break bread with us in spirit only. Ladies and Gentlemen, a toast, To our fallen comrades." Mess: "To our fallen comrades." "TAPS" is played.

y. At this time, the President can make appropriate remarks concerning business of the mess to include hail and farewell of members, recent promotions, etc.

z. Mr./Madam President: "Mr./Madam Vice, bring forth the rum punch." Mr./Madam Vice uses the same procedures as for wine and remains standing throughout.

aa. Mr./Madam Vice: After all glasses are charged states "Mr./Madam President, all glasses are charged."

ab. Mr./Madam President: "In 1776, one of the first recruiting posters ordered recruits upon enlistment, take courage then, seize the fortune that awaits you, repair to the Marine rendezvous, where in a flowing bowl of punch, and three times three you shall drink (pause), long live the United States and success to the Marines. Mr./Madam Vice, a toast to the country and Corps."

ac. Mr./Madam Vice: "Ladies and Gentlemen, a toast, long live the United States and success to the Marines." Mess: All repeat, glasses are emptied and inverted. "Marine's Hymn" is played. It is more appropriate at this time to have the mess sing all three versus of the Marine's Hymn.

ad. Mr./Madam Vice: Ensures those who prepared and served the meal are present and standing behind Mr./Madam Vice's table.

ae. Mr./Madam President: *Raps gavel three times.* "Ladies and Gentlemen, join me in a round of applause for the staff who have prepared and served the meal and drinks in honor of our mess this evening and which we have enjoyed." (Leads applause.)

af. Mr./Madam President: *Raps gavel three times.* "Ladies and Gentlemen, join me at the bar." Members remain standing until the head table has departed.