

THE NAVAL MESS DINNER:

The following points describe the ultimate in a naval mess dinner. Most can only be achieved with a large staff, an experienced and cooperative dining room manager and C.O., AND lots of funds! But that is not usually possible for League Corps, N.A.C, and Reserve Divisions. Thus you adapt these traditions to suit. Many items can be omitted where impractical. You have to take what you can get.

But a well run mess dinner, like any formal dinner but with a naval flavour, even on a modest scale, is both a pleasure to organise and fun to attend. Most importantly, for you readers, it shows the guests that you know what you are doing!

Most of these "notes" come from a series prepared by the late CDR Frederick E. Grubb, RCN, for guidance of cadets at HMCS **Royal Roads** in about 1949. Both of the authors have been Mess Presidents, often under the watchful eyes of long-standing experienced Senior Officers! This is tradition, not a bible.

THE MESS DINNER: this differs from "dining in the mess" or even "Guest Nights" which are less formal, or any informal meal eaten in the mess or wardroom. A **Mess Dinner** is organised, announced in advance, runs smoothly, meets certain standards of dress, service and behaviour, and is a naval tradition of long standing. If these criteria are not met, then it really isn't a "Mess Dinner", is it?

It derived from the old sailing ship days, when the ships were often in distant waters for months, even years, and a dinner at least along these lines provided a change of pace and civility for the band of officers from the horrendous conditions they normally endured. A touch of normality!

1. While usually considered to be a dinner in the Wardroom Mess, in more recent times mess dinners are quite acceptably held in and by the Chiefs & P.O.'s mess, the Men's or OR's Mess and so on. It is no longer just a Wardroom event.

2. A date is set, and it is expected that most, if not all, members of the mess should attend. Those that cannot, due to outside unavoidable commitments, should ask to be excused by the Mess President. It is both impolite and impolitic just to not "sign up".

3. The Mess President may assign another member to "run" the dinner - i.e., make all the arrangements, even sign contracts. But he is in charge, and usually presides, unless serious events prevent this. In which case the President should assign another senior person to preside. However, it is also a custom for other senior members to act as president for dinners, in rotation. The Mess Committee decides.

4. The President may be male or female. In these descriptions, the term "he" may be taken to imply "she" as well in every case. No offence or slight intended.

5. The dinner is advised as: "19:15 for 20:00" That is, drinks will be available from 7:15, and dinner is sharp at 8 p.m.

THE SPACE: if possible, there should be a dining room, an ante-room, cloak rooms for coats for both ladies and gentlemen, and nearby toilets for both. But if it is a large and major event,

it could also be held on the Drill Deck, in a hotel ballroom, a restaurant or other venue. It is the way it is run and the appearance that makes it a **Mess Dinner**.

1. The dining room should be large enough for the numbers expected. Crowding of chairs prevents proper service, and makes it look disorganised. If necessary, limit the number of those attending, warning potentials in advance.

2. Tables may be set as a **U** or an **E** or even with an extra "leg" or legs in the middle. The whole of the top bar is considered "Head Table." Round tables "for 8" should not be used if possible, although if setting up in a hotel this might have to be accepted, establishing a separate head table. In this case it is probably easier to just have it as a less rigid "dinner", following some of these rules.

3. It is traditional that polished mahogany or other elegant wood tables be used, bare and without table cloths. However, these days that is rather unlikely! Take what you can get if not, although place mats, even decorative card stock ones with naval scenes or motifs, are desirable. White tablecloths, although navy blue could be interesting. Not patterned. All should be set, glasses included, except for the port glasses and the coffee cups (those are brought in later) before guests are seated. It is acceptable to place the first course - fruit cup, small salad or whatever - at the places just before the members come in and are seated. Not too long before, or it wilts. A separate server plate under the salad is desirable.

3. The ante-room is for gathering beforehand and for pre-dinner drinks. It is not usual to just stand around the dining tables. Thus it need not be right next door. I.e., if dinner is in the Chief & P.O.'s Mess, the OR's/Cadet's mess could be used as the ante-room, with their committee's permission.

4. If there is a band (and many feel there should not be, as it inhibits easy conversation, but it is usual), it should be seated just outside the ante-room and play (somewhat quietly so as not to prevent conversation) appropriate music during the pre-dinner period. Hard rock or country and western is not considered to be "appropriate", but neither is a series of just marches. Six to eight musicians is the usual, and drums are omitted. The band may continue to play off and on during dinner, but not so loudly as to detract from conversation... difficult to control, usually. If possible the band during dinner should be somewhat outside the actual dining room. The pre-dinner time and dinner itself should not be a frustrating shouting match. Nowadays a little taped music, quietly played is acceptable if there is no band.

SEATING:

1. The Mess President, or whoever is chairing the dinner, sits in the centre of the head table. Always arrange for an odd number in total, so he is in the centre.

2. The Guest Of Honour, if there is one, sits on his right. Otherwise the senior guest or person attending. I.e., the Captain, a visiting foreign officer, or other V.I.P. If there are two such personages, the other sits on the President's left. If it is the Captain on the right, then his wife (or her husband!) would sit on the left, or the wife of the Guest of Honour (and *vice versa*).

3. The other head table guests are seated alternately, men and women, with wives sitting on the other side of the President from husbands or *vice versa*. This is a delicate matter, trying to put shy, retiring people next to those who will engage them in conversation, but not seating antagonists next to each other. E.g., not the Israeli Ambassador next to that of Lebanon, or a news writer who has just excoriated an attending politician next to him!

4. If available, the Chaplain should sit at the right end of the head table (to the President's right.)

5. Senior invited guests should sit at the head table, unless there are too many. In which case, the next choice is on the right, and then the left, of the Vice Presidents. Explain to them that this in itself is a compliment and recognition.

6. Don't go for too large a head table. Let interesting people, even visitors, sit among the members and educate them.

7. Dinner Vice Presidents are assigned to the far ends of the legs, at least the outer ones. During the dinner, they are referred to as "Mr. Vice" and the speaker looks toward the person he wishes to react. The Vices can be any member of the mess, and it is a good opportunity to give juniors a chance to exercise a little authority. But seniority is sometimes desirable, for he must maintain order at his table. No matter what rank, the President for the dinner and the Vice Presidents are in complete charge. Since the head table is considered toward the 'bow', the right-hand 'leg,' from its perspective, is the Port leg

8. General seating can be by placē card, if possible. Again alternating men and women, departments (never put all the Weapons Department or all the Pay Bobs together!), and quiet types next to the more gregarious. The idea is to generate a pleasant and free-flowing conversation during dinner. Members may quietly ask the person arranging this to seat them next to a particularly desirable person, or "Certainly not next to Lt. ABC." However, it is not necessarily appreciated when senior or older guests are mixed in with young and new mess members... they don't know them usually, and it makes for a difficult evening, not enjoyed by either. On the other hand, it is a good idea to seat guests - older, veterans, strangers - next to interesting ship's company personnel for their enlightenment. It is quite acceptable to seat wives and husbands, boy friends and girl friends next each other. Certainly old friends should sit near each other. Be flexible; ask, if necessary.

9. If place cards are used, a full seating plan should be provided in the ante-room or hallway, to avoid delays later. Announcing this at the reception will speed up seating.

10. If a member or guest has a food restriction, a different coloured place-card is helpful for the serving stewards.

11. Don't crowd the chairs. It makes for poor service, awkward to sit or stand. Better to restrict numbers a bit.

12. If there are vacant spaces due to unexpected absentees, the diners should move from the centre of their table toward the head table or toward the Vice. The idea is to spread out a bit (and have the stewards remove the abandoned place). Ensure there are not empty seats at the head table or beside the Vice's places.

13. If place cards are not used, the Mess members should be aware of the above considerations. Otherwise departments and age groups will crowd together - undesirable. The Vices can guide this on entering if need be.

DRESS :

This has become somewhat more relaxed in recent years as the cost of formal mess dress has risen to unachievable heights. The traditional choice, if possible, for officers is mess dress with miniatures (or miniature ribbons), black or, in summer, white jackets. For civilians, dinner jacket with miniatures (only - never full sized medals). While white tie and tails used to be expected, this is not the case now. For ladies, either a long evening dress or a conservative cocktail or dinner dress. For Chiefs, P.O.s and O.R.s, best uniform, with gold badges, etc. However, it is now more acceptable for civilian men to wear a dark suit - blue or black - even a naval blazer (conservative), white shirt, and a "quiet" tie. And summer equivalents. Ladies may thus wear an afternoon dress. Sports coats and suits of loud checks are out. Ladies' slacks will depend on quality, for there are very acceptable slacks designed only for evening wear. Aim at evening gowns and use that as a standard, without requiring guests go and buy them. For officers, a best uniform with a white dress shirt, (stiff/pleated front if possible) and bow tie (referred to originally as "Wings and strings") is acceptable. Pre-made-up black ties are not really acceptable. In some messes discovery of one will entail a drink given to the discoverer. If you are good enough to hold a commission or be President of a mess, you can learn to tie a bow tie! The reference to dress on an invitation often reads: "Mess kit or black tie preferred." The dress acceptable must be given on the invitation.

OPERATIONS :

1. The Officer of the Day and Petty Officers are to be there well ahead of anticipated first guests if the dinner is to be held aboard the "ship." Same for the President, to check the details. It is usually acceptable for the OOD to attend the dinner; however he/she should sit near the door, and keep an eye on it for signals, if required.

2. The Bar :

a. In the ante-room, have a selection of some drinks poured in advance if possible. A good senior bar steward will be able to estimate the initial demand. This avoids long embarrassing waits.

b. While beer is now acceptable, it must only be served in a glass. In the Navy, dark rum is preferred to white, but the latter should be available. Cocktails may be served, but this slows things and is complicated, unless you have a skilled bar staff. Sherry and white wine must be available, as well as water, ginger ale and a juice for non-drinkers. Local liquor laws must be observed, and provisions made for soft drinks for anyone under age.

c. If possible, where there are senior or foreign guests, have stewards circulate and ask what is wanted, serving drinks on small trays, silver or silver plate if available, and the stewards in white jackets. This, of course, would be hard to achieve in a restaurant. In a hotel, ask the manager - shows you know what you're doing! Especially for the senior invited guests and the Mess President. Otherwise guests can go up to a bar or table. To

avoid long line-ups, have several locations, pre-poured drinks.

d. Another option is to only offer sherry or champagne and serve it to all, again with a soft drink option. This may be included in the cost of the dinner.

e. If a cash bar is required, set up a bar "tab" for invited guests, and assign junior members or a steward to keep an eye on their drinks, getting more if required. This attention should be continued after the dinner as well. Same for the Captain, if present. These guests' drinks are charged to the Mess as a whole.

f. Aim at time for two drinks, not more.

g. Hors d'oeuvres are not usually served. After all, you are going in to a sumptuous mess dinner. However, something light may be offered to offset the drinks at the end of a busy working day. They should never be messy ones ... simple drier snacks

h. Alcoholic drinks must never be offered or served to minors, or their guests. Ask surreptitiously, if necessary.

3. Entry:

a. At exactly the time called for dinner, the senior steward quietly announces to the President that "Dinner is served, Sir". The President then announces that dinner is served to the assemblage.

b. Normally the President enters first, accompanied by the Guest(s) of Honour. But see h. below. The President indicates to the Guests of Honour where they should sit.

c. Mess members must be told in advance that when this is announced, they should listen for it and move quickly and orderly into the dining room, unobtrusively allowing the head table guests to precede. The members should know where they will sit, or move in an orderly fashion to a place.

d. All drinks are left behind. You'll get more inside.

e. All stand behind their chairs, until the President and the Guests of Honour are seated. To allow this to happen expeditiously, the President should sit as soon as practical.

f. If a band is present, it should play "Braganza" or other march as guests enter. "Hearts of Oak" is not really appropriate.

g. As the members arrive, the President sits, and all others follow and also sit.

h. If the Guest of Honour is the Queen, the Governor General or Lieutenant Governor, they enter with the President last, after the other head table guests and the members have found their places. Then all sit.

i. It has been known, if the dinner is not an extremely formal or serious one attended by senior politicians or Royal representatives, for a Bos'n to sound the pipe "Hands to dinner." This is an interesting touch for civilians, but only if very well done. No announcement is made - just the pipe.

j. All are seated. Silence reigns.

4. The Dinner:

a. The senior steward speaks quietly to the President: "Ladies and gentlemen are seated, Chaplain present (or 'Not present') Sir."

b. The Mess President then raps the table for silence, looks to the Chaplain, or to a member designated in advance, at the right end of the table and says only "Chaplain (or Mr. ABC) grace, please." But the President may himself elect to say Grace,

especially if in Greek, to the amazement of his members! All remain seated.

c. The grace should be simple, not prolonged; nor is it an opportunity for the chaplain to exhort his parishioners. It may, however, be in Latin or Greek, or appropriate to the times and events taking place. The naval grace is not, in fact, "Thank God" which is considered by some to be flippant, and only accepted at Guest Nights and for use in the Sub's Gunroom. The most usual is: "For what we are about to receive, thank God, Amen." If the Chaplain says the Grace, members respond politely "Amen", out of courtesy to the cloth.

d. There is to be no smoking of any sort from the time of entering the dining room until after the port is passed, toasts rendered, and permission is given. With current smoking regulations in Messes, restaurants and almost all other locations, this is no longer a factor.

e. NO ONE starts eating until the President does so. Thus he should at least take a bite as soon as practical of the first course, as a signal to all who are anxiously waiting.

f. While the first course, often a light salad, should be served after the members are seated, (by a large and efficient group of stewards!), this is usually a problem, and it may be placed in each place before hand. (See 5.a. below)

g. From the time the President raps for silence, these rules apply:

i. no one may come in and sit, leave or return to the table without the President's permission; if he does arrive, he eats the course then being served. Too bad if he missed one! If the Duty Officer is called, he must ask the President's permission, or send a nearby steward to ask on his behalf. The same with reading an incoming signal - permission is required;

ii. no one may read, except the menu, or write anything;

iii. no second helpings!

iv. no one may start any course before the President;

v. no: a. coarse language.

b. talking controversial politics or religion, about which many have strong views, which could lead to argument and heated words!

c. talking "shop" about one's daily duties. But general Service or Cadet Corps discussion is allowed, as is discussion of work outside one's department.

d. talk in a foreign language, unless guests of that language are present, although occasional words are allowed, such as *kriegsmarine* or *carpe diem*. French is not a "foreign language!"

Again, all this derives from sailing ship days, when the members were in close proximity for months on end, and these rules encouraged wider topics for conversation.

vi. Notorious women's names should not be mentioned, unless she is a celebrity. The President's decision on this controversial rule is final!

vii. You may not place any bet or offer a wager, or mention a specific sum of money.

viii. You may not propose a toast until the Loyal and other formal toasts are completed.

h. If the President raps for silence, all must keep silent until he has spoken.

5. The Food and Wine:

This is very variable, depending on where the dinner is held, galley facilities, stewards available, what you want to set as a cost, etc. The following gives in general terms the whole possibility, but some of the intermediate dishes may be omitted. A Mess Dinner is a chance for the galley staff and chefs/cooks to shine, although the food itself is not the primary reason for the function.

- a. A small salad. Greens to be cut fine enough to be eaten with just the salad fork. Or a fruit cup, garnished.
- b. Soup - any type, preferably not too "hearty" - you have yet to face an excellent dinner.
- c. A small plate of smoked salmon or similar on lettuce, or slightly decorated.
- d. A "Remove", in theory to cleanse the palate. Usually a serving of sherbet, in a cocktail glass or small bowl, in little balls - not just a big scoop of ice cream! It doesn't matter if it melts while being awaited.
- e. Dinner: meat and veg., although fish may be served, or at least a few plates should be available for vegetarians and non-meat eaters. It is best if the staff are advised of this in advance and their dish served unobtrusively. One clever idea is to have specially coloured place cards for such diners, and for those with serious allergies. When planning, bear in mind that a large hearty dinner is not the aim, and if guests are elderly, certainly not appreciated. Smaller beautifully prepared and cooked dinners are best.
- f. Dessert. Decorative, if possible, but anything from apple pie with cheese to decorated custard and sauce, *crème brulé*, or ice cream with fruit.
- g. Coffee. Tea is not usually offered. Sugar should be in bowls, loose, not those handy little paper packet with advertising on them, although sugar-free packets may be passed if requested. But see 6.a. and 7.f. below. Then, after the loyal toast and other formal ones, and served with the coffee, the following can be provided:
- h. A cheese tray, with grapes, with something of a selection.
- i. Candy in dishes; mints in particular may be offered.
- j. **WINES** will depend on funds available, the ages of the diners and knowledge of the organisers!
 - i. A light white wine first, with the salad; refilled not more than once, with the soup, or another variety.
 - ii. A fuller bodied red with the main course. White may be offered as well, but this causes problems and delays. If fish is served as the main course, then a fuller white or even a rosé may be served.
 - iii. Wine is not often offered with the dessert, but may be, and a fuller, sweeter white, if so.
- k. For the toasts and post dinner, a good quality port is always served. For those under age, it is a nice touch to make available a dark fruit juice, such as grape; otherwise water. (see 6 g. below)

6. Service:

- a. Head table first, then all others. Mess guests are

- served first, then the President. Try for speed, silence and efficiency, especially if there is a large group.
- b. After dessert, everything should be removed from the table - glasses, dishes, unused cutlery, the place mats, if they were used - except table decorations, candles, etc. Crumbs should be removed by the stewards. The senior steward reports to the President, "Table is cleared, Sir."
 - c. Grace after meal may be said, if desired. Usually: "For what we have received, thank God." Usually by someone other than he who gave grace to begin.
 - d. Port glasses, only, are placed in front of everyone, and decanters of port placed in front of the President and Vice Presidents, stoppers in. If the group is not too large, one decanter in front of each. For larger groups, two decanters may be used. Senior steward reports to the President: "The wine is ready to pass, Sir."
 - e. The President removes his decanter stoppers, as do the Vice Presidents. He does not help himself, but passes the decanter or decanters to his left. Same for Vices.
 - f. All diners help themselves and pass the decanters on to the left. If two are passed and both arrive at a member at the same time, pass on the first and pour from the second. Keep decanters at least one space apart. Move them as quickly as possible. Pay attention!
 - g. No diner need take wine or port, but if refused the first time, he may not take some in later rounds.
 - h. Drinking a toast in water is controversial. It is said that if so, the subject will die by drowning. But the story is told that King George VI directed that "The custom established by my father was to be continued, in that any officer wishing not to take wine may toast me in water." No factual evidence has been located, (per Admirals H.F. Pullen and P.D. Budge). It is customary for such a member to ask the President's permission quietly in advance, and be served a glass of water or fruit drink by the stewards. This can take a bit of organising ahead of time.
 - i. For those under age, gingerale may be unobtrusively substituted.
 - j. Contrary to popular custom, the decanter may indeed be lifted from the table to pour, or if there is a cloth, to move it easily to the next member. It is very bad form and looks ridiculous to struggle to pour from a decanter into a glass held below the edge of the table or other subterfuge. It is simply the custom to keep the decanter on or close to the table when passing it, as if the ship were rolling somewhat. The decanters should be passed outboard (toward the centre of the table) of any glasses or cups in front of members, except they should have been removed anyway.
 - k. Decanters are passed until they reach their beginning point. If there is a gap at the tables, stewards should pass them along. On return, the President and Vices help themselves. Then the senior steward reports to the President "The wine has been passed, Sir." He and the others then re-stopper all their decanters.

7. The Toasts:

- a. If the band is not present, and there are no foreign guests

at all, the President raps for silence, then says "Mr. Vice, The Queen." The Vice President responds, "Ladies and gentlemen, The Queen." The President may direct that he respond "The Queen of Canada", although this hardly seems necessary. The Loyal Toast may also be given in French, or both French and English. The members respond simply "The Queen" in the language in which it was offered, although sometimes it is added "God bless her". Glasses should never be touched or "clinked", an abysmal habit, indicating a sailor will die. One simply raises the glass a few inches and sips from it.

- b. In naval messes, the health if Her Majesty is usually honoured seated, by members and their guests. This goes back at least to William IV, and possibly to Charles II, who hit his head when returning to England in HMS *Royal Charles* when standing to respond. It has been confirmed by all subsequent monarchs. Apart from c. below, if the Loyal Toast is drunk seated, all following toasts are drunk seated.

But there are these exceptions:

- c. If a band is present, the toast is always given standing, at the President's request and in this order:
- i. The President: "Mr. Vice, The Queen" - either Vice.
 - ii. The Vice nods to the bandmaster, the band plays the Royal anthem ('God Save The Queen'), and often, but not always, the Canadian national anthem, 'O Canada,' in that order.
 - iii. On completion, the Vice President responds: "Ladies and gentlemen, The Queen."
 - iv. The toast is drunk, and all resume their seats.
(Note: it has been accepted in some circles for this toast to be drunk seated even when a band plays. This is to be deplored. One always stands for "The Queen" when played by a band, orchestra or otherwise. There have been comments that only in actual sea-going ships should the toast be drunk seated. We are One Navy, so this too is deplored (per Admirals Pullen and Budge.)
- d. If foreign guests are present, particularly if they are guests of honour or officially representing their country or Service, their heads of state are to be honoured by a toast, in the order below. (If there are one or two foreign officers present by chance or serving in the unit, it is not required that their head of state be so acknowledged. This should be discussed by the Mess President beforehand) It is inappropriate to add to the toast more than the titles of the heads of state as such: I.e: "The President of the United States and King Ibn Saud of Saudi Arabia"
- e. All these toasts, and the Loyal Toast, are always given standing.
- f. The senior Canadian first proposes the health of the head of state (Sovereign or President) to which the visitor belongs. If there is more than one country represented officially, he proposes a collective toast, naming the heads of state in order of the seniority of the guest present. If a band is present and capable, the foreign anthem(s) may be played, although abbreviated versions should not be played unless agreed upon by the

- representative in advance.
- g. The senior foreign representative present (and he/she need not be a serving naval officer) then responds with the Loyal Toast to the Queen.
 - h. These toasts may be in English, or if appropriate, in French, or even in the language of the senior guest.
 - i. After these toasts, guests are seated, if they stood.
 - j. It is usually polite if there are many non-naval members present, i.e., Army or Air Force, even if the dinner is being run as a naval dinner, for the President to order that the Loyal toast be honoured standing, in consideration for them. This is up to him.

8. Following The Official Toasts:

- a. Coffee cups are then brought to each place, coffee passed, the cheese trays and candy dishes placed.
- b. At this point in earlier days cigars and cigarettes may be passed, although this is probably no longer permitted.
- c. Other toasts as appropriate may then be requested, by any mess member. Toasts to events or anniversaries, such as Trafalgar, Battle of the Atlantic, the Glorious 1st of June, etc. are drunk in silence, that is with no response.
- d. The toast, if given, to Lord Nelson, has until 2005 always been "To the immortal memory" only. However in that 200th year, the Queen directed that RADML Pascoe's original toast at the first official Trafalgar Dinner be "To the immortal memory of Lord Nelson and those that fell with him." This is a nice historical touch. A few words of explanation in advance are not amiss. This toast is responded to by members with "The immortal memory" only.
- e. The decanters may now be unstopped and passed, as before.
- f. It is customary for the President to ask a junior member to give the naval Toast of the Day, but it is only fair and avoids general embarrassment to warn that person in advance. This he does, even with a brief, preferably humorous (in the eyes of the guests!) introduction: these toasts have been:
 - Monday: Our ships (at sea)
 - Tuesday: Our men and women
 - Wednesday: Ourselves (as no one is likely to concern themselves with our welfare)
 - Thursday: A bloody war or a sickly season *
 - Friday: A willing foe and sea room *
 - Saturday: Sweethearts and wives (presumably, in this enlightened age, this can be expanded to "Sweethearts, husbands and wives!")
 - Sunday: Absent friends.

In the RCN some new official toasts to modernize those above considered too "quaint" (*) have been promulgated.

Their use may be directed by the President.

- g. At this point, the rules are relaxed somewhat. Members may leave with the President's permission, except those in charge of the wine decanters, when they must arrange a nearby member to be responsible. The decanters should be un-stoppered for good if not done earlier, and passed again. They are finally removed at the President's order to the senior steward.

Operational Notes:

1. During the dinner, members may be disciplined for infractions or misbehaviour, at the will of the President.
 - i. He may caution the culprit, fine him (not mentioning "buying a drink" or any money.. the usual is to say "Mr. X will grant Mr. A something of his pleasure after dinner"), or order the culprit to leave the mess. The President may enlarge on the fine, awarding drinks to members on either side of the culprit, even to himself, or more!
 - ii. Infractions may be for not following the rules in 4.g.above, placing elbows on the table, raucous conversation or other disturbing actions.
 - iii. Fines imposed on a guest are paid by his/her host!
 - iv. The President and Vices are not exempt, although caution should be observed!
 - v. Ranks are not used at a Mess Dinner. 'Mister' or 'Miss' are the only terms used.
2. Fines may be "something of his choice," in port or in liqueurs as the President elects.
3. If a band was present, the President should offer the bandmaster a glass of port (a large one!) A chair is brought by a steward and placed just beside the President's, who thanks the bandmaster, may introduce him to major guests at the head table, and has a yarn. If by chance the band is a Scottish one, the glass is of malt scotch of course.
4. It is an old sailor's superstition that a glass which rings (that is, makes a sound when tapped by a utensil) tolls the death of a sailor. Thus it should be avoided (by wrapping a finger around one of the glasses) or stopped promptly!

GENERAL:

1. A proper Mess Dinner is not a "bun fest" or an opportunity for rowdy behaviour - just the opposite. It is a pleasant supper occasion for ladies and gentlemen in a naval atmosphere.
2. Guests and visitors are the responsibility of all members of the mess, who should ensure that before, during and after the dinner they are attended unobtrusively, not left "to fend for themselves," yet not swamped with attention. The President may properly assign members to look after specific visitors.
3. If the Mess President is the X.O., a male, and is married, by custom his wife is the *de facto* hostess, and will ensure visitors and new and junior officers or members are made to feel welcome and a part of the dinner. If the President is a lady, then to some extent presumably this responsibility falls on her as well, or on another senior lady at her request. It is a new point in "the new model Navy" yet to be established!
4. It has become the custom, after the dinner is well under way, for members to point out to the president the short-comings or failures of manners of fellow members.
 - a. This should be done very sparingly. Don't become tiresome or disruptive.
 - b. If a fault is found, one stands, and addresses the President, or, if his eye is not caught, the nearest Vice President to have him catch the President's attention.
 - c. Politeness (and shock to one's sensibilities!) is the key.

"Mr. President, I much regret to inform you that Mr. ABC has shocked the members at this table by having his (sigh!) elbows on the table!" (Caution: If the offender has been around the Horn, old custom says he is allowed to have an elbow on the table.)

Or: "Mr. President, I'm afraid I must draw your attention to Mr. XYZ who has distressed me by offering a wager to Mr. MNO on the subject of his next promotion date!"

- d. Ranks are never used. At a mess dinner, we are all of a company, as Drake said. But 'Sir' used by a junior is wise.
- e. The President will conduct any interrogation he feels warranted, may even warn the questioner, and assess any fine, at his sole discretion. Don't be surprised if he awards himself or someone not involved at all with the resultant drink(s)!
5. The dinner ends with an announcement by the President, and a final rap by him on the table. Any fines that were levied are then redeemed. Head table guests should leave first for the anteroom, but if they are standing about talking to others, it is not necessary to wait for them more than a moment.
6. The President must be sure to congratulate and thank the chief steward, and comment particularly on services that were well handled. As much depends on him - or her - as on the President himself.
7. Any bills or accounts that are due should be paid promptly. The location, if it was fully satisfactory, should be complimented by prompt payment of their expenses.

I Chronicles, Ch. 19, v. 13 refers
(King James version)

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