

15 May 69

All Members

PROCEDURE
MESS DINNERS

General

1. A seating diagram will be displayed in the Ante-room and it is the member's responsibility to ensure that he knows where he is to be seated at the table.
2. Members will assemble for pre-dinner sherry in the ante-room 30 mins prior to the laid down time for dinner.
3. A Dining President is appointed by the Mess President, and he is responsible for the service of the meal, the wines and the observance of the traditional procedures.
4. A Dining Vice-President is appointed by the Mess President to assist the Dining President.

Guests

5. All guests are greeted by the Dining President assisted by the Dining Vice-President. They should then be introduced to the Mess President, provided with refreshments and then introduced to the members nominated to "look after" them.
6. The members "looking after" the guests are to ensure that the guests are introduced to all the other members present. Guests are not to be left unaccompanied or in want of refreshments, and at the appropriate time are escorted to their places at the table.

Moving Into Dinner

7. A 5-minute warning will be given by the Dining Vice-President to allow members and guests to visit the latrine before moving into dinner.
8. At the appropriate time the Dining President will advise the Mess President that members and guests are ready.
9. With the approval of the Mess President, the Dining President will lead the way into the dining room. He is followed by the Mess President who is accompanied by the Guest of Honour or senior guest. Other members escorting guests follow the Mess President, the remainder enter thereafter without delay.
10. The Dining Vice-President, who must ensure that everyone moves in quickly, should be the last to enter.
11. In the dining room, members and guests will go to their assigned places, however, no one will sit until the Dining President does so.
12. At this point Grace will be said. The Dining President will remain standing behind his chair until the Dining Vice-President is in position. He will then call upon the Dining Vice-President to say Grace; i.e. "For what we are about to receive - Thank God". At the conclusion of Grace the Dining President will take his seat, all other follow suit.

The Dinner

13. Dinner is served in a clockwise direction, the stewards begin serving the Dining President and the Dining Vice-President simultaneously and carry on serving in a clockwise direction. The number of starting points for service will depend upon the number of stewards.

14. Common courtesy demands that members and guests do not begin until the Dining President has started, therefore the Dining President must begin to eat as soon as possible after he is served. This will ensure that the course is eaten with the minimum of delay.

15. The serving of each course does not begin until the preceding course has been finished by all and the plates, etc, have been cleared.

16. After the last course is finished, the table is cleared, except for the port glasses, centrepiece trophies and floral arrangements, if any.

Wines

17. For each course that has a wine, the wine is served in the same manner as the dinner. It is not normal for orders to be taken, however, water should be available for those who prefer not to drink wine.

Smoking

18. Smoking is not permitted during the dinner. The Dining President will give permission to smoke at an appropriate time, normally after the Loyal Toast.

Port

19. When the table has been cleared after the last course, decanters of port are placed on the table in front of the Dining President and the Dining Vice-President.

20. Following the Dining President those with decanters in front of them remove the stoppers, place them on the table and pour a little port in their own glasses. The decanter is then passed to the next person on the left who fills his glass and passes the decanter to the left. When the decanter reaches each of the original officers he completes the filling of his glass and places the decanter on the table in front of him.

21. There is no special mystique about passing the decanter. Any practical and courteous method may be used which reduces the time for passing and ensures that no decanter is left unnoticed during conversation.

22. As the decanters pass around the table, stewards follow, to replace emptied decanters or to serve water to those who do not wish to drink port.

The Toast

23. All glasses being changed, it is the custom for the Loyal Toast to be given.

24. The Dining President, remaining seated, calls the table to order by saying "Mr Vice".

25. The Dining Vice-President, now in charge of the proceedings, will rise and say "Gentlemen!" This indicates to the assembly that they will now rise. Glasses remain on the table.

26. When all have risen and silence reigns, the Dining Vice-President proposes the Loyal Toast. "THE QUEEN!" All present will repeat "THE QUEEN!" raise their glasses from the table, drink to the toast and resume their seats, following the lead of the Dining Vice-President.

After The Toast

27. After any toast it is customary for cigars and cigarettes to be placed on the table by the stewards.
28. Members and guests do not smoke until the Dining President gives permission to do so, by inviting those next to him to smoke if they wish.
29. The Dining President will, at an appropriate time, circulate the port again using the same procedures as before. Members having decanters in front of them will follow the lead given.
30. Subsequent rounds of port are at the discretion of the Dining President, who indicates when the circulation of port has finished by replacing the stopper in the decanter before him. The other decanters are then stoppered also.

Leaving the Table

31. Members and guests do not leave the table before the second round of port without permission from the Dining President and this should be sought only in exceptional circumstances. Anyone so leaving the table must return.
32. The Dining President should be sensitive to the wishes of the members and guests and when he is satisfied that they are ready to leave he should rise. It is customary for all to rise and for those wishing to leave to follow the Dining President from the Dining room.
33. The Dining Vice-President will then assume the place and duties of the Dining President until those remaining are ready to leave. Their departure should not be unduly delayed though the port may be circulated again.

In The Ante-Room

34. On their return to the ante-room, it is the responsibility of all members to ensure that the guests are entertained and that no one is neglected at any time. Members should not leave the Mess until the last official guests have departed.

Conclusion

35. The Mess Dinner is traditional. The essentially simple procedures which have become established heighten the enjoyment of the meal and impart a graciousness to the occasion not often found elsewhere.



E. MORRIS
WO1
PMC