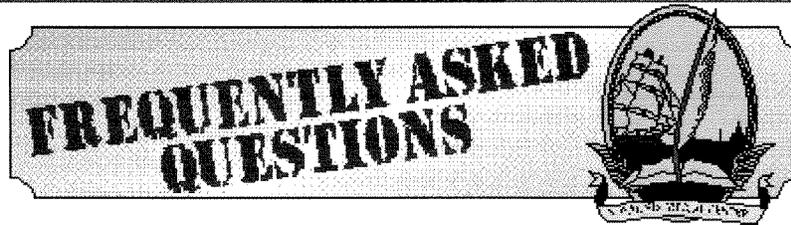


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Dining In/Dining Out: A Navy Tradition

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Origins

Since the beginning of organized society, there has been a military establishment. Today, our sophisticated multi-service military observes many customs, traditions, and procedures traceable to the earliest of warriors. The dining-in as a military tradition has its roots in the shadow of antiquity. The pre-Christ Roman Legions probably began the dining-in tradition. Roman military commanders frequently held great banquets to honor individuals and units. These gatherings were victory celebrations during which past feats were remembered and the booty of recent conquests was paraded. The second century Viking War Lords stylized the format of the victory feast. "These celebrations saw all clan members present with the exception of the lookout, or watch. Feats of strength and skill were performed to entertain the members and guests. The leader took his place at the head of the board, with all others to his right and left in descending order of rank."

From the northlands, the custom was transplanted to the British Islands. In the sixth century, King Arthur and his Knights of the Round Table surely practiced a form of dining-in. One author suggests that in sixth century England the tradition spread to the nonmilitary society. "Its roots are embedded in the old monasteries where monks, who followed a most rigid regimen, had their form of dining-in as an integral form of monastic life." As educators, the clergy spread the custom to the academies and universities. The British officer corps comprised of those graduated from the centers of learning then carried the tradition to military units. The dining-in became increasingly formalized after the first officers' mess was established.

A British Tradition

Until 1776, America was a British colony. Accordingly, early American customs and traditions were British in origin; the military was no exception. British Army and Navy units deployed to the wilderness of America, brought with them the social customs and traditions of their services including the formal military dinner referred to as guest night. The purpose of which was to gather "for an evening of good food, drinking, fellowship, and honoring the feats of individuals and organizations." In establishing an independent nation, including social borrowed much of the military structure of their adversary America's founders customs. The popularity and growth of the tradition in the United States parallels its popularity and growth in Great Britain and the Commonwealth nations.

Growth of the Dining-in Tradition

British Naval, land and air units are still active enthusiasts of the dining-in. In fact, many units reportedly hold at least one such function monthly. Some British messes still call the occasion guest night while others refer to it as dining-in night or band night. Regardless of what the present day custom may be called, the ceremony and protocol which have evolved have remained remarkably similar throughout the British armed forces. Today, the British dining-in rules and customs are also closely observed by the armed forces of the Commonwealth countries, particularly Canada and Australia.

As previously mentioned, the United States dining-in tradition was borrowed from the English by George Washington's continentals. Despite the colonists aversion to anything suggesting Redcoat, continental naval and army officers must have fully realized the value of these occasions in the promotion of pride of service, high morale, and loyalty. Over the past 200 years, the dining-in tradition was relatively slow in becoming widely accepted by United States military officers. Nevertheless, it is a popular tradition today, though it goes by several names. Both the United States Navy and Air Force call this social affair the dining-in. The Marine Corps and the Coast Guard refer to it as mess night and the Army calls it regimental dinner.

Roots of the United States Navy Tradition

Formal dinners in wardrooms afloat and messes are among the finest traditions of military institutions. The history of the Navy and Marine Corps is replete with examples of such occasions. The tradition of formal dinners in the Navy and Marine Corps differs slightly. The Corps' most notable early mess nights were held in Washington, D.C., while the Navy functions were in wardrooms of ships anchored in foreign ports. The Navy Department Historian, Gordon Bowen-Hassell, suggests that due to the arduous nature and length of the cruises during the 1800's, the crews virtually disbanded upon final arrival in the United States. This, coupled with the fact that the officer corps didn't socialize as we do today, helped confine the formal dinners to the wardrooms of deployed vessels.

The practice of formal dining-ins in ships was usually reserved for entertaining foreign officers and officials during port calls. In 1820, while conducting joint operations with some British ships, the officers of the *USS Cyane* had many exchanges of on-board dinners with their British counterparts. Clearly, the British introduced the formal ritualistic tradition of guest night to American Naval officers during such occasions. In 1853, Commodore Perry entertained dignitaries from the Lew Chew Islands aboard his flagship, *Susquehanna*. The evening may not have been the formal dining-in style we know today but full military courtesies were rendered to the guests including Marine escorts and a three gun salute. These famous dinner parties were enhanced by the musical talents of the Marine Corps band. Admiral "Fighting" Bob Evans, in his autobiography, tells a story of a series of formal dinners in 1867, with the British in Hong Kong. Again, we can speculate that the ritualistic guest night procedure was followed by the British and the United States Naval officers reciprocated with an equally structured formal dinner.

In all instances of on-board entertaining, toasting with wine was very much a part of the formal dinner. Dr. John T. Bonner [Jr.] in an article ["Sober Reflections on a Mess Night,"] for [US Naval Institute] *Proceedings* [vol. 99, no.11 (Nov. 1973): 51-55], states that "toasting, which forms an integral part of mess nights, traces its antecedents back for probably half a millennium." The loyal toast or the royal toast was the British custom of drinking to the reigning monarch. Since its inception in the days of Elizabeth I, the loyal toast has always been drunk in British messes ashore and afloat. Americans transposed King to President and, until 1914, when Navy Secretary Josephus Daniels banned alcohol in United States Navy vessels, U.S. Naval officers practiced loyal toasting both ashore and afloat. The days of the wine mess in the wardroom abruptly ended and with it the formal on-board dinners in the guest

night tradition. The center of Naval social life shifted from the wardroom to the officers' club.

Since 1914, the dining-in tradition has been kept alive in officers messes ashore. The Marine Corps has served as the keeper of custom during the post-Daniels years. While not deployed in ships, the United States Marine Corps officers kept the mess night tradition alive. One author suggests that had the Marine Corps not had "foreign service on land, the mess night, or formal dinner might have disappeared for the Marines as well."

Despite attempts to keep it alive at sea, without wine the tradition became dormant in the Navy. We, in the Naval service, can thank the Marines for preserving the time-honored custom of dining-in. As the Naval officers afloat were privileged to share guest night functions with the British, the deployed Marine forces of this century were entertained by the Royal Marines. These exchanges of custom and tradition most certainly enhanced the traditional Marine Corps mess night. In 1927, in Shanghai, Marines dined with the 2nd Battalion Scots Guards, in 1930 with the Royal Ulster Rifles, in 1946 with the Royal Marines in Portsmouth. As anyone who has had the pleasure to serve with the British knows, they are most anxious to entertain and are unquestionably most hospitable hosts. Today, the Marine Corps has a very structured British style mess night. Fortunately, the Navy shares most of that Marine Corps tradition.

Despite the obstacles of the twentieth century, the tradition of dining-in has not died out. Veterans of old days remember and revive the tradition at every opportunity. They recognize the important role these occasions play in preserving the traditions of Naval service.

The Evolution of Navy Dining-in Policies

One should not get the impression that Mr. Daniels destroyed the social life of the Naval Officer Corps. In 1914 when he banned alcohol in ships, the world was at war; social life onboard fighting ships was not part of a wartime routine. After the Armistice of 1918, the United States went into a post-war disarmament program followed by the great depression, and social activities took a back seat to the task of survival in difficult times. The depression was preempted by World War II and social activity for sea-going men was limited to well-earned liberty. Korea followed before the Navy got fully involved in post-war reorganization. Fifty years of conflict and economic chaos coupled with the famous Secretary of the Navy prohibition stunted the growth of the dining-in as a Naval tradition.

Through semiofficial literature, the evolution of the mess night can be traced even during its dormant years. In 1939, Vice Admiral Lovette (then a Lieutenant Commander) published his third edition of *Naval Customs, Traditions and Usage*, which included as an appendix, Admiralty Fleet Order 202/27, a synopsis of the British rules of toasting at official dinners when foreign officers are present. The inclusion of this document in a United States Navy guide is without explanation, implying that the Admiralty rules in this area were also American Naval custom. Interestingly, this appendix was not included in the first (1934) or second (1935) editions of Admiral Lovette's work. Seemingly, the Navy, as well as the country itself, was just beginning to feel socially well--a feeling interrupted by the events of December 7, 1941.

Literary mention of the dining-in does not reappear until 1954. That year, the Commandant of the Marine Corps, General Shepherd, having been one of the Marine officers hosted by the Royal Marines at Portsmouth, urged Colonel Heintz to include a section on mess night in his book, *The Marine Officers Guide*. According to Major Bartlett's "Reflections on a New Tradition, The Marine Corps Mess Night," "the first mess night in the form we recognize today was held at Marine barracks, 'Eighth and Eye' in late summer of 1954." During the following year, a series of Marine Corps mess nights were held in Washington and Quantico. In 1956, Colonel Heintz's *Marine Officers Guide* was published. Section 2403

of that Naval Institute publication devotes five full pages to mess night procedures. Taking a cue from the Marines, Admiral Lovette revised his fourth edition (1959) of *Naval Customs and Traditions* by including a new appendix D. Again, the Admiral relied on the British tradition, noting that Navies of the Commonwealth "maintain consistently the highest formal officer mess standards of the maritime countries." His appendix entitled "Dining in the Royal Canadian Naval Mess," cites specific rules of the mess while discussing the proper grace to be said and protocol for toasting. If we combine the Marine Corps evolved tradition as described by Colonel Heintz with the Anglicized formal procedures presented by Admiral Lovette, we have what emerged in the bicentennial years as the dining-in.

In November of 1964, the Chief of Naval Operations Naval History Division prepared an article on the mess night for the BUPERS Mess Newsletter. The article was aimed at Commissioned Officers Mess Managers and provided a synopsis of the Navy dining-in. This was the first official mention of the event. A renaissance of the dining-in can be linked to the 200th birthday of both the country and the Navy. During the bicentennial, officials were reviving virtually every traditional event to celebrate the occasion. The Chief of Naval Information (CHINFO) prepared a pamphlet entitled "How to Conduct a Dining-In." The guide was published as an article in the March 1975 issue of *U.S. Navy Medicine*. This is a most important document because it describes the basic format of the Navy dining-in.

OPNAVINST 1710.7, *Department of the Navy Social Usage and Protocol Handbook* has an entire chapter, Chapter 8 devoted to the Dining-In ceremony that discusses officers of the mess, guests, and procedures, such as cocktail hour, call to dinner, grace, seating arrangement and table setting. More information is available at Table 06 at <http://neds.nebt.daps.mil/Directives/dirindex.html>

Source: US Navy. *Dining In: A Tradition, How to Conduct a Dining In*. (Montgomery AL: Maxwell Air Force Base, 1982), 3-7.

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