



# *16th Annual*

*Working Together with the Community*

## CIVIC-MILITARY MESS DINNER



WEDNESDAY, 29 MAY, 2024



# *A warm welcome to our guests*

The purpose of this pamphlet is to define the sequence of events, the customs and the traditions observed when dining in a Naval Mess, whether ashore or aboard an HMC Ship. Naval Traditions remain one of the prime ingredients in the esprit-de-corps of the Navy. Hence, it is appropriate that mess dinners being held in Naval Messes be conducted in accordance with Naval Customs.

The Mess Dinner is a special ceremonial occasion, carried on from the days when Officers dined formally every evening. The traditions and ceremonies observed during the dinner have evolved over time, but the basic rules of conduct observed are those of other ladies and gentlemen in a polite society. The sequence of events and the customs and traditions observed when dining at a Mess Dinner are outlined in this booklet.

## TERMINOLOGY

**Mess dinner** is a formal function, once known as *dining-in-the-mess* or *dining-in*, and is open to all members of the mess.

**President** is head of the dinner. It is usually the Mess President, although any officer may be called upon for this role. They are in charge of the proceedings regardless of rank, seniority or classification. During the dinner, they levy fines/warnings or take any other action deemed necessary to maintain discipline.

**Vice-President** assists the President. There may be more than one and they are subordinate to the President during the dinner, whatever their relative rank and seniority, but they can warn the President of any infractions of the rules.

**Naval mess dress** accurately describes the original purpose of this form of naval uniform, for it was designed to wear in the mess. In the more formal days, civilians dressed in evening dress to dine in their homes, and their naval counterparts dined in mess dress every evening.

## **GUESTS**

Frequently, guests are invited to attend mess dinners. Guests attending the dinner are the guests of the mess and it is the responsibility of all mess members to ensure that all guests are hosted and entertained throughout the evening.

## **SEATING ARRANGEMENTS**

The seating plan is prepared as directed by the Mess President - usually delegated to a member of the mess committee. All diners should look over the seating plan in advance. Seating plan is usually posted near the dining room, to ensure that the diners know where they are seated.

The President sits at the head table in the centre.

The Vice-President sits farthest away from the President. The Guest of Honour sits to the immediate right of the President and the next highest ranking officer, sits to his/her immediate left.

## **ARRIVAL**

Dinner is normally served at a time designated by the Mess President. Invitations will usually indicate a 30 minute period prior to serving dinner allowing for a social gathering and late arrivals. This pre-dinner time allows diners to review the seating plan and share conversations with friends.



## ENTRY

Five minutes prior to dinner the Senior Steward will report to the President, *Dinner is served Mr./Madam President*. He/she and his/her guest(s) will then lead the way into the dining room. No one is permitted to precede the President.

## TABLE SERVICE

The table service encountered at a formal Naval mess dinner is both impressive and attractive.

## COMMENCEMENT\*

When everyone is seated, the Senior Steward reports to the President, *Diners seated Mr./Madam President*. The President raps the gavel for silence and a chaplain, if in attendance, will say grace.

## ORDER OF SERVING

Since the very first Mess Dinner in the Royal Canadian Navy, naval cooks and stewards take great pride in providing efficient, quiet and unobtrusive service. Guests are never rushed in eating and there are never any long waits between courses. When the last course has been eaten, the stewards clear the table decorations and remove the napkins.

*\*Please remain standing until head table sits.*

## PASSING THE PORT

When the table is cleared, the Senior Steward reports to the President, *Table cleared Mr./Madam President*. The President raps the gavel for silence and thanks is given. The port is then placed on the table. At a large table, the President and Vice-President(s) have decanters placed in front of them. At a small table, all the decanters are placed before the President. When all the decanters are placed on the table, the Senior Steward reports to the President, *The port is ready to pass, Mr./Madam President*.

The President then unstops all decanters before him/her, as do other diners with decanters. He/she passes the decanter to his/her left, and other diners do the same.\*

When the Port has been passed and all decanters have reached their destination, the senior steward reports to the President, *The port has been passed, Mr./Madam President*. The President then stoppers the decanters before him and others do the same.

*\*No one may drink his/her port until the health of the Sovereign has been honoured. It is not necessary to take wine or Port if you do not wish to. Simply place your hand over your glass when approached by the steward.*

# THE LOYAL TOAST

Toasting is a means of expressing good will toward others on a social occasion. It originated with the English custom of flavouring wine with a piece of browned and spiced toast. Today we honour individuals and/or institutions by raising our glasses in a salute while expressing good wishes and drinking to that salute.

The privilege accorded to the Commonwealth Navies, including the Royal Canadian Navy, of remaining seated while drinking the Sovereign's health is of long standing but obscure in origin.

The President raps the gavel for silence and says, *Mr./Madam Vice, the Queen* or *Mr./Madam Vice la Reine*, after which the Vice-President responds (*Ladies and*) *Gentlemen, the Queen* or (*Mesdames et*) *Monsieurs, La Reine du Canada*. Either the direction or the Toast is given in French. The President determines the sequence in advance.

All diners raise their glasses and repeat *The Queen or La Reine du Canada*. Those with wine drink and those without wine do not drink. When a band is in attendance, it plays *God Save The Queen*.

The health of the Sovereign shall be honoured while seated in Naval messes whether ashore or afloat even when the National anthem is played.

The first toast shall always be proposed in English and, if applicable, shall be repeated in French or the language of the visitors. The National Anthems should be played as an accompaniment whenever a band is present. When the National Anthem of another nation is played in accompaniment to a toast, an abbreviated version shall not be used unless it has been ascertained in advance that this is in accordance with the custom of the country concerned.

## TOAST OF THE DAY

- Monday - Our ships
- Tuesday - Our sailors
- Wednesday- Ourselves
- Thursday - Our Navy
- Friday - Our Nation
- Saturday - Our families
- Sunday - Absent friends

## COMPLIMENTS

*(Senior Steward, Chief Cook & Staff, Bandmaster)*

It is customary for the President to invite the Senior Steward and Chief Cook to join him/her in a glass of port after the toasts have been drunk. Chairs are placed beside the President when the invitation is issued. At this time, the President shall also ask the staff to come forward and he/she shall thank them for their service.



If the Band is in attendance at dinner, it is also customary for the President to invite the Bandmaster to join him/her in a glass of port after the toasts have been drunk. A chair is placed beside the President for the Bandmaster when the invitation is issued.

## **AUTHORIZED MARCHES**

In accordance with Canadian Armed Forces Regulations, authorized marches shall be played in the proper order of precedence.

## **REMOVAL OF WINE**

The President may order the wine removed after the toasts are drunk, but it is the custom to pass the decanters at least one more time. After the decanters are passed the second time, the stoppers are left off until the wine is finally removed upon the President's order.

## **ADJOURNMENT**

The President may suggest to the Guest-of-honour and others at the head table that they adjourn for coffee and liqueurs. When the President rises, the diners stand and remain standing until he/she has left the room.

## NOTES AND SPECIAL RULES OF ORDER

Whenever the President or Vice-President summons attention, there must be silence until he/she is finished speaking. This also applies when a diner is speaking; one person speaking at a time will ensure a very enjoyable evening.

Dinner commences as soon as the President raps the gavel for grace. No one may enter and seat themselves at the table or leave the table without the President's permission.

During dinner a diner may seek permission to address all present, bringing to the attention of the entire mess, topics of timely interest. Such addresses shall not offend or insult, but shall be presented in good fun and taste. The traditional practice of chiding or poking good-natured fun at messmates is encouraged. This is a form of self-generated fun and entertainment during dinner, which serves to enhance camaraderie and esprit-de-corps while remembering the spirited formality of the occasion.

If a diner wishes to address the President: he/she shall stand and face the Vice-President; the Vice-President raps his/her gavel for silence and recognizes the member; the member addresses the Vice-President; in turn the Vice-President stands and faces the President; the President raps his/her gavel for silence and acknowledges the Vice-President and/or the member; the President administers his/her final ruling.

Traditionally, once the diners have sat down they may not leave until given permission as a whole by the Mess President. This usually happens after the last course and prior to the speeches. This will ensure all diners may listen to the speeches without any undue discomfort.

Diners who must leave the table for an important reason at some point in the evening should inform the President prior to being seated to obtain permission. When that time arrives, the diner shall inform the Vice-President and then the President accordingly. These situations are the exception and not the norm.

The history of our Canadian Armed Forces over the years gives confirmation that custom and tradition make a strong contribution to the building of high morale and a sense of purpose by fostering that pride in the Service and in themselves that has so often inspired Canadians to press on in adversity and win through to victory.

*We hope that you truly  
enjoy this long standing  
military tradition.*



## THE ROYAL CANADIAN NAVY - A BRIEF HISTORY

Canada has had an official navy since May 4, 1910. It came to be as a result of the passage of the Naval Services Act by the Government of Canada. The first ship commissioned, HMCS *Rainbow* was purchased from Great Britain. She was commissioned August 4, 1910.

Canada's naval contribution during World War I was generally limited to coastal patrols, as the Navy had no vessels capable of carrying out blue water operations and no funds for a ship building program.

Between the First and Second World Wars the Navy had few ships, but was able to create shore establishments across Canada. Through these establishments and the Naval Reserve program, all Canadians became very aware of the Royal Canadian Navy, (RCN). This resulted in a supply of trained volunteers when naval expansion finally occurred. Two new destroyers ordered from Great Britain were delivered in 1930. Commissioned as HMCS *Saguenay* and HMCS *Skeena*, they were the first vessels built specifically for the RCN. From 1937 - 1938 four more destroyers were received from Great Britain, HMCS *Fraser*, *St. Laurent*, *Restigouche* and *Ottawa*.

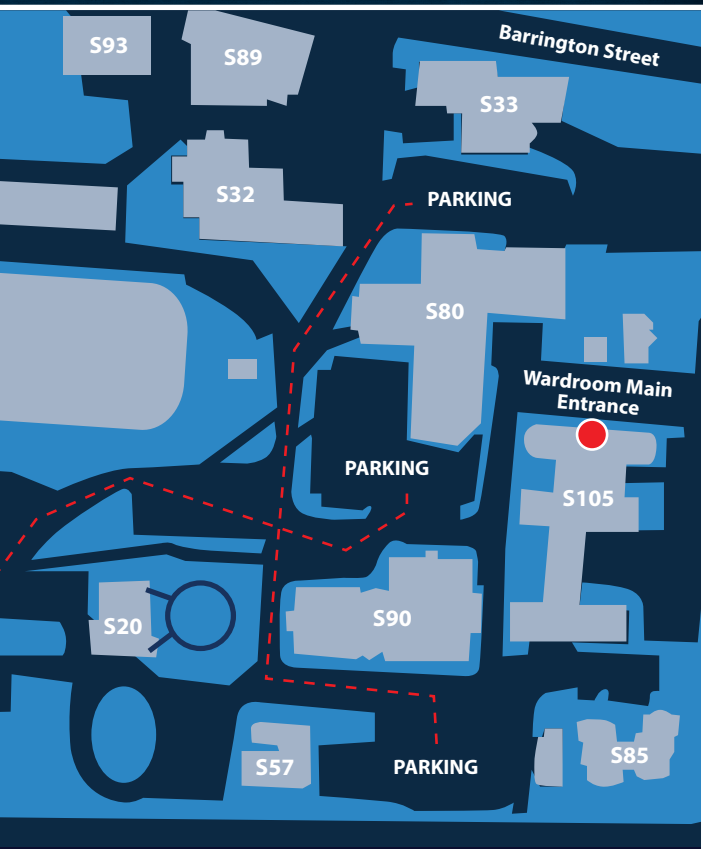


From 1939 - 1945, the RCN grew from six destroyers to the third largest navy in the world. Bridging the Atlantic was the key to strategic supply, and it was in maintaining the Atlantic lifeline that Canadian naval and air personnel played a vital role. When the war ended the RCN had a proud fleet of 373 active ships and over 110,000 volunteer members including 6,500 women, who at the time served with the Women's Royal Canadian Naval Services.

Since the 1950's, the role of the RCN has evolved. Today, our navy is far more complex and more closely tied to national interest overseas. Canada is an active participant in the collective crisis management activities undertaken under the authority of the United Nations and Canada is still a member of NATO, and commits naval forces to alliance formations on a regular basis. Today, the Royal Canadian Navy and the integral maritime air forces are designed with the necessary flexibility to meet all the challenges to our national security and overseas interest and are able to work easily with navies of other countries in pursuit of world stability and peace.

In 2010, The Royal Canadian Navy celebrated 100 years as Canada's senior service by tradition. The great men and women of our Maritime Forces have truly earned a reputation as **proud, proven and professional**.







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