

A MARINE CORPS MESS NIGHT

By

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We few, we happy few, we band of brothers;
For he today that sheds his blood
with me
shall be my brother.

Henry V, IV, iii

Foreword

This study of a popular and time-honored military and naval social custom is long overdue. Much has changed since mess night devotees such as General Lemuel C. Shepherd, Jr.; Brigadier General Robert H. Williams; Colonel Angus M. "Tiny" Fraser; and Colonel Robert D. Heintz, Jr., formalized and institutionalized the custom of formal dinners. With widely different social perspectives, and the changes that accompanying them, Marine Corps mess nights have become increasingly dissimilar. Almost two decades ago, the author of this study challenged a new generation of Marines to codify this enjoyable and important tradition. While his earlier treatment appeared in the pages of the Marine Corps Gazette, no one appeared willing to undertake such a project.

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co-author (with Colonel Joseph H. Alexander) of Sea Soldiers in the Cold War: Amphibious Warfare in the Age of the Superpowers, 1945-1991 (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1994); and co-author (with Dirk Anthony Ballendorf) of Pete Ellis: An Amphibious Warfare Prophet, 1880-1923 (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1996).

His essays and book reviews have appeared in a variety of professional and scholarly journals. Two of his essays, both from the U.S. Naval Institute Proceedings, won the 1981 and 1987 Colonel Robert D. Heinl, Jr. awards: "Ouster of a Commandant" in November 1980, and "Old Gimlet Eye" in November 1986. The award is presented by the Marine Corps Historical Foundation for what that body adjudges to be the previous year's best published article pertinent to Marine Corps history. Lieutenant Colonel Bartlett lives, researches and writes on Vashon Island, Washington.

Introduction

Except for the annual celebration of the Marine Corps Birthday, no social function associated with the smaller of America's naval services is more enjoyed, admired and imitated than the mess night. Early in 1977, the headquarters of the III Marine Amphibious Force on Okinawa organized a mess night to honor its popular commanding general, Major General Joseph Koler, Jr., on the occasion of his detachment. Planners eschewed any notions of turning the evening's merriment into one of Bacchanalian revelry, and instead pursued a program to highlight our rich martial traditions. Appropriate reference was made during the evening to the history of the other armed services, and thus the assembled Marines paid deference to the senior officers of the Army, Navy and Air Force in attendance. Used to such affairs, most of the Leathernecks who participated remained nonplussed if not bemused by the lack of post-dinner high jinks and the heavy weight of so many senior officers. But one participant, the commanding general of Kadena Air Force Base, departed the evening visibly moved by what he had witnessed. The following day, General Koler's aide-de-camp received a telephone call from his counterpart at Kadena: "Driving home from your mess night last night, the general remarked 'that was the best affair I've ever attended; you call the Marines and find out how it's done—and we're going to have one just like it.'"

Most Marines likely shared the Air Force general's sentiments following their first mess night; I know I did. By the time I entered The Basic School (TBS) in 1963, a mess night for each class had become an institution. We even had a class on the subject, and I recall our company executive officer's wry admonishments concerning such taboos as

as loosening one's tight collar or imbibing to the point of passing out at the dinner table. He devoted several minutes to explain the requirement for bladder control and the planning that accompanied it. We learned that the bugle call "last call for the head" just prior to marching into dinner was perhaps the most important musical accompaniment. Whatever else we might have learned from the company executive officer's class on mess nights, the requirement to remain at the table once dinner had begun appeared absolute.

The post band played and we marched into dinner adhering rigidly to custom and tradition. Our presence seemed to indicate formal initiation into the ranks of such icons as John Quick, Dan Dailey, Smedley Butler, John Lejeune and Chesty Puller. Just as the company executive officer explained, we ate and drank our way through a multi-course dinner conforming strictly to custom and tradition. Stewards filled our wine glasses when appropriate, and the serving and removal of courses evolved with the panache of a sunset parade at "Eighth and Eye." When we uttered that last toast, "to the Corps," all the aches and pains of the endless days and nights in the field, the bruises and sore muscles from the obstacle course and the drudgery of classroom lectures melted away. No veteran of Belleau Wood, Saipan, or Frozen Chosin could have been more proud to be a Marine. The evening reached its climax for many of us as we joined our seniors at the bar, snifters of brandy in hand. Some of our instructors had served in both World War II and the Korean War. Like a mess night should be, it was an evening to remember.

In the years following my own Marine Corps career, the institution

of the mess night (or a Dining In or similar affair at which spouses attend) waxed and waned. Perhaps the exigencies of the Vietnam War precluded serious attention to formalized eating and drinking. I recall a rather formal dinner at An Hoa in late 1968, held to honor the departure of the regimental commander. But except for a token glass of fizzy wine and a slight improvement over the rations usually offered each evening, nothing appeared to suggest a mess night. Between Vietnam tours, I served with the Marine detachment in a heavy cruiser. While the Navy conducts mealtimes in the wardroom with far more rigidity and ceremony than the other services, nothing I witnessed during that tour even remotely resembled a mess night or a formal dinner.

By the 1970s, the institution of the mess night began to creep back into our professional and social lexicon. Marines, it appeared, wanted to dress up and "eat and drink by the numbers," all the while reminding themselves of the hallowed traditions, customs and rich history of their Corps. Sometimes, the conduct of such affairs became excessively spirituous or bordered on the insubordinate. A friend reported the officers of one battalion in our regiment conducted a "mess night in the field" during maneuvers. Like those of us with the 5th Marines at An Hoa a decade before, these officers had their token cup of sparkling wine and a plate of whatever the battalion field mess was serving for supper. As the chilly desert wind blew sand across the improvised table, the officers of this unit conducted the affair with considerable sang-froid without the regimental commander ever knowing of it! A contemporary reported that, following a mess night held on Okinawa in the immediate post-Vietnam era, an outraged battalion

commander held a mess night every night for a week following the unprofessional and ungentlemanly conduct of his officers at the original gathering; apparently by evening number seven, they "got it right."

Almost two decades after my first mess night, I attended my last. Ironically, it was held at TBS, but much, if not everything, had changed. The young lieutenants appeared to have been primed, not with instruction on the rich tradition they were about to witness, but with admonitions concerning the potential lethality (figuratively and professionally) of alcohol abuse. The base band of my days as a young officer had disappeared; only a bugler and a drummer appeared. The latter summoned us to dinner with a short selection; perhaps it was "officers' call," "adjutant's call," or some such. The young officers appeared not nearly as excited as my class, long since retired, and seemed to view the affair as simply another evolution in their passage through TBS. One young officer informed me that his platoon, through the gentle beguilement of the platoon commander, had vowed to rise at 4:00 A.M. the following morning for an "extra" running of the Physical Fitness Test (PFT). Arugha!

The menu reflected a parsimonious adherence to custom and tradition, and a rigid adequacy of food and drink. The soup course had disappeared over the years, while the fish course remained only as a small seafood cocktail drowning in catsup. A traditional prime rib came as overcooked roast beef, and the lone drummer made his only appearance of the evening to escort the token meat course to the president of the mess for approval. Stewards served a salad next, groaning under a heavy layer of bleu dressing, followed by coffee and dessert—a gooey

slice of cheese cake smothered with syrupy, cherry sauce. Cigars appeared and the president of the mess lit the smoking lamp; however, ashtrays had not been provided. It didn't seem to matter because most of the young officers snuffed out their cigars into the uneaten cheese cake after a few token puffs. I observed more than one lieutenant bring out his container of chewing tobacco—arugha!

A musical accompaniment to the dinner came from the TBS Chorus, the drummer and bugler of the mess intoned: "gentlemen, please join me at the bar." It proved to be the shortest gathering recorded at any mess night. The guest of honor had not even departed when a sizeable portion of the lieutenants—presumably those earmarked to take the PFT before sunrise the following morning—disappeared. Those officers and guests remaining quaffed their brandy or diet soda and departed. Sadly, the young officers of this TBS class had not attended a mess night.

A variety of stimuli have provoked the preparation of this study, not the least of which are the disappointing mess night witnessed that evening at TBS. As the primary organizer of the mess night in Okinawa, previously mentioned, I received the advice and encouragement of any number of staff officers in our headquarters. These helpful inputs usually came accompanied with the loan of a dog-eared pamphlet, adorned with a unit's crest, that were provided as souvenirs at earlier mess nights. As I read them over, the historian in me became increasingly challenged: the narratives appeared to have been copied from the same source. Even the errors in grammar continued faithfully from pamphlet to pamphlet! Constant reference to the origins of our tradition of the

mess night to "Eighth and Eye" intrigued me. I vowed to research and write on the subject.

A subsequent tour in the Washington, D.C. area allowed me to pursue this goal. Finding little or nothing on the subject at the Marine Corps Historical Center, except for the dreary and plagiarized materials that I already read, I was advised to telephone Colonel Robert D. Heinl, Jr.: "He knows everything about the subject," was the sage advice. As predicted, the eminence gris of Marine Corps history steered me in the correct direction. He advised I ignore the claims our mess night tradition originated at "Eighth and Eye." An article in the *Washington Evening Star*, appearing on the occasion of the demolition of the old Center House in 1908, prompted later readers to suggest that perhaps something like mess nights occurred there. But a careful reading of the oft-cited piece makes no such claim:

Tales are told of nights of revelry, when the wine flowed and souls of great men, freed from the cares of state, allowed their wit and spirit to soar unhampered while gracing the officers' mess beneath the beams of the old house. The rafters which once rang with the laughter of Presidents now lie in grim disorder...

Most important, Colonel Heinl suggested I contact General Lemuel C. Shepherd, Jr. Following that lead about the British mess nights in China, I corresponded with Lieutenant General Victor H. Krulak and read Brigadier General Robert C. Williams' charming memoir. Finally, Colonel Heinl recalled mention of affairs vaguely similar to a mess night at the turn of this century in the personal papers of senior officers, maintained at the Marine Corps Research Center. The stimulus for such an inquiry had languished for a decade or more, clues had been provided by the Marine Corps' most eminent historian and it appeared as if I had

appeared as if I had to accept my own challenge. In response to my essay on mess nights, appearing in the *Marine Corps Gazette* in 1979, General Shepherd commented: "I trust your article will influence commanding officers to revive the Marine Corps mess night, so much enjoyed by their predecessors and of value in promoting comradeship among officers on a post or organization."

Origins of the Marine Corps Mess Night

The Marine Corps officers' introduction to anything resembling today's mess night came through service at sea. Until 1914, wine messes were part of the wardrooms of the ships of the fleet. When that great prohibitionist moralizer, Josephus Daniels, took up the portfolio of Secretary of the Navy in 1913, he argued that officers should not be granted a privilege denied enlisted Sailors and Marines. While the rum ration (later changed to whiskey in 1806) had been a tradition of the Age of Sail, the practice ended in the American Navy in 1862. During the tenure of Secretary John D. Long (1897-1902), the Department of the Navy even prohibited the sale of alcohol to enlisted men at stations ashore. But alcohol continued to be available to officers in their wardroom messes, a privilege that affronted Daniels' egalitarian principles. When no one took the indefatigable and determined Daniels seriously on the matter, he suggested that alcohol and drunkenness prevailed among the officers of the fleet and seriously impaired its efficiency. Daniels grew fond of relating the tale of a young officer who never drank before entering the Navy, where his messmates taught him a fondness for the loathsome habit. Predictably, the young man became a drunkard, and Daniels vowed to end what a later generation would surely call substance abuse.

Now, the specious argument of the Secretary of the Navy found acceptance and received Presidential approval. Thus, the infamous General Order No. 99 prohibiting the consumption of alcoholic beverages aboard the ships of the U.S. Navy came into being and remains in effect to this day. Throughout the fleet in 1914, however, officers expressed outrage. In the battleship Washington, Captain Edward W. Eberle hosted

a riotous dinner for his officers, each course of which came doused heavy with some form of an alcoholic beverage. Wardrooms throughout the fleet in 1914 witnessed a variety of "going dry" commemorations, liberally punctuated with witty soliloquies that demeaned the character of the pompous Secretary of the Navy. Sailors and enlisted Marines alike expressed umbrage upon learning that alcoholic beverages were no longer available to them at canteens ashore. Daniels had become increasingly convinced that most disciplinary problems in the naval services resulted from excessive consumption of alcohol.

Prior to Daniels's meddling, formal dinners—probably resembling something like a mess night—occurred infrequently in various wardrooms. Major General George Barnett recalled such an affair while serving in the San Francisco in 1897. Barnett had just reported aboard, having caught up with the cruiser in the harbor of Smyrna, and found the evening's entertainment most enjoyable. Perhaps concluding that the new commanding officer of the ship's Marine Detachment thought the elaborate dinner a regular occurrence, a Navy officer admonished Barnett: "We don't do this every night, you know!" Colonel Heintz remembered something like a mess night (but without alcoholic beverages) while serving in the battleship Idaho as a midshipman in 1936; a fife and drum section marched through "officers' country" playing "The Roast Beef of Old England" to summon the officers to dinner.

Ashore, Marine Corps officers came together in formal dinners at times. 2ndLt Earl H. "Pete" Ellis recalled a farewell dinner for a group of officers departing Cavite during his first tour in the Philippines in 1902. He estimated that more than 50 officers from both

the sea services attended, captured Chinese banners taken during the Boxer Rebellion decorated the dining room and a Filipino orchestra played a mixture of Spanish love songs and American ragtime melodies. The gathering extended long into the evening as Ellis and the other officers toasted the Marine Corps, the departing officers, and the gallant dead of Samar and Tientsin. Following a similar, celebratory dinner a couple of years before in the islands, Smedley D. Butler—obviously in his cups—serenaded the nearby jungle foliage for the remainder of the night; a future CMC, Ben H. Fuller, thought the spectacle so outrageous that he recorded the incident for his personal papers, labeling it "Butler's Bawl."

Even after four decades, General Holland M. Smith remembered the conduct of the officers' mess in nearby Olongapo and Colonel Lincoln Karmany's strict compliance to the social niceties of the mess. Senior captains ruled the mess in that halcyon era of tropical campaigning and "a captain in those days was only one step removed from a king," Smith recalled. "The only time lieutenants were allowed to open their mouths [at dinner] was to put food in." No stranger in the quest for hedonistic pleasures—he discarded his first wife for a younger model, an act that affronted genteel naval circles of the era—it was Karmany who supposedly muttered, "There may be a few good men who don't drink, but they've got to prove it!"

Formal dinners, or anything resembling today's mess night might have disappeared altogether given the egalitarian moralizing of Secretary Daniels and the tide of temperance that followed in the 1920s. The Secretary of the Navy extended his unpopular dictum to stations ashore, even into the quarters of the officers.

Shocked and dismayed by the ukase, the socialite wife of the CMC outmaneuvered Daniels with authorization to use liquor in cooking. At the historic home of the Commandants, Mrs. George Barnett—a doyenne of Washington society, well known for her sparkling "repartees spirituelles" at the expense of pretentious politicians—served the Secretary of the Navy and the other guests a dinner they would not likely forget. Grapefruit came first, laced with at least the alcohol content of two cocktails. Soup consisted mostly of sherry, while the terrapin arrived floating in Madeira. Traditional roast beef was followed by rum sherbet, and a salad of champagne frappe. Brandied peaches ended the repast. As Mrs. Barnett recalled the evening in her memoirs, the Senator on her left declined a second helping of dessert with a grave response: "Madam, I just couldn't eat another drop!"

Formal dinners, consisting of several courses and accompanied by a variety of alcoholic beverages, all but disappeared from Marine Corps circles in the 1920s. John A. Lejeune refused to emulate the lavish social scene of his predecessor, and formal dinners at "Eighth and Eye" became somewhat infrequent and subdued affairs. One disappointed observer, the daughter of Major General Wendell C. Neville, noted tartly that: "The Lejeunes, you know, they never entertained." By that era, Lejeune had become a teetotaler and his good friend, Smedley D. Butler, a military prohibitionist. The latter officer once served on detached service with the City of Philadelphia as its Commissioner of Public Safety, and undertook a determined program to rid the municipality of vice and demon rum. Later, while at Quantico, Butler threatened to put the tiny municipality adjoining the base "off-limits"

unless the city fathers eliminated the bootleggers selling alcohol to his troops. The combination of these temperance attitudes served to dampen any enthusiasm for formal dinners as most observers, like Mrs. Barrett a decade before, could not imagine formal dining without aperitifs and wines.

The introduction to a formal dinner, faintly resembling anything like the Marine Corps mess night, came about through association with British officers in China. While serving as the adjutant of the 4th Marines in Shanghai in 1927, Captain Lemuel C. Shepherd, Jr., coached the regiment's swimming team. His counterpart in the Second Battalion Scots Guards invited young Shepherd and his commanding officer, Colonel Henry C. Davis, to a guest night hosted by the officers' mess of this famous regiment.

General Shepherd remembered an impressive evening. The mess silver sparkled in the light of the handsome candelabra arraigned on a polished table laden with fine crystal and china. During the dinner, the battalion's pipe major played several traditional highland ballads to the tune of his own wailing on the bagpipes, and a guardsman danced. Although the attending officers drank to the health of King George V with a glass of fine Port, the battalion commander—the President of the Mess—invited the pipe major to join him in a glass of whiskey after the performance. The final toast of the evening was to their famous regiment and its raising by King Charles II in 1662. Both Marines left visibly impressed. The following morning, Colonel Davis summoned his adjutant and instructed him to arrange a similar gathering hosted by the 4th Marines, and to invite the officers of the Scots Guards.

Exchanges such as recalled by General Shepherd continued as the 4th Marines served in China. The Marines received the musical instruments to accompany a successful mess night, a gift from the American Troop and American Company of the Shanghai Volunteer Corps. Sterling Fessenden, the chairman of the Shanghai Municipal Council, apparently orchestrated the donation in 1927, and the grateful Marines dubbed their new musical group "The Fessenden Fifes." The bandsman of the Green Howards, another British Army regiment in Shanghai, taught the Marine musicians to play the instruments (one base drum, eight side drums, ten fifes and two piccolos). Doubtless the new martial music added an appropriate and enjoyable accompaniment to any mess night hosted by the Marines. But apparently the tradition waned for a while during the 1930s, at least as hosted by the 4th Marines.

Both Lieutenant General Victor H. Krulak and Brigadier General Robert H. Williams attended guest nights in the officers' messes of British battalions during their tours in China. General Williams retained images of memorable evenings as guests of the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders and the Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers, but failed to mention any such gathering hosted by the 4th Marines. He recalled that while the other officers of the regiment and their guests drank a fine Port after dinner, the colonel and pipe major drank glasses of Scotch whisky—which they downed with a gulp after exchanging a personal toast to the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders. General Krulak remembered a guest night hosted by the Royal Ulster Rifles:

It was severely formal—marching in by twos, printed menus, three wines, great formality in the areas of introduction of the meat, toasts, recognition of guests, cook, etc.; prohibition against leaving the table or smoking until

after the toasts. Once they had left the table, however, the group came completely apart—rough games, furniture destruction, mayhem.

Although the exigencies of World War II set aside further participation with our British cousins, General Shepherd and other "China Marines" never forgot the comradeship and pride fostered by the institution of the mess night. While commanding the 6th Marine Division in training for the invasion of Okinawa, General Shepherd held several mess nights. Following the war, Marine Corps officers serving in the United Kingdom brought home warm memories of the institution fostered by the British officers' mess. Then-Colonel Williams attended the Joint Services Staff College, Chesham and several subsequently as an instructor at the School of Combined Operation, Framington. He returned home an unabashed Anglophile, earning the sobriquet "British Bob" among friends and fellow officers. Colonel Robert D. Heinl, Jr., shared William's love for fostering history and tradition in the British military style. In the fall of 1953, General Shepherd visited the 3rd Marines at their camp at Mount Fuji, Japan. Colonel Williams commanded the regiment, and he entertained the CMC with a mess night conducted in strict compliance with the British tradition. A mess night as a traditional social gathering became codified during the commandancy of General Shepherd (1952-1956).

When General Shepherd asked Colonel Heinl to write a guide for Marine Corps officers, he suggested a section be included on the tradition of the mess night. Probably the first mess night in the form we know today occurred at "Eighth and Eye" in the late summer of 1954. The commanding officer of the barracks, then-Colonel Williams, served as the president of the mess; General Shepherd was the guest of

honor. The new tradition flourished and gained in popularity thereafter. In the fall of 1955, General Shepherd held a CMC's mess night in his quarters to formally introduce General Randolph McC. Pate to the officers of the barracks. Then, just before he left office, a group of general officers honored General Shepherd at a mess night at Quantico. The Secretary of the Navy, Chief of Naval Operations, and personal friends of General Shepherd attended as well. Colonel Heint supervised the memorable event, held at Harry Lee Hall.

Brigadier General Williams' essay, "Mess Night," appeared in the pages of the Marine Corps Gazette. Except for minor variations, however, the format for this exceptional event remains wedded to a scenario gleaned from our British cousins. Even the popular tradition of the parading of the beef or main course for approval by the President of the Mess is found in the rich martial traditions of British military lore. The band of the Royal Berkshires always paraded the main course to the thumping of a Russian drum captured during the Crimean War. In more modern times, every young officer received instructions on how to "tell meat." As orderly officer, suitably attired in patrol dress and wearing a sword, he inspected the cookhouse to ensure the meat served to enlisted messes was not spoiled. Thus, the tradition of the Vice President of the Mess as orderly officer, wearing his sword at dinner, emerged as a tradition in some officers' messes in the British Army.

The British Tradition

Drawn from the aristocracy or upper middle classes, the British officer of the 19th Century would find no achievement in living in squalor while in the field. A gentleman lived as comfortably as circumstances allowed, and the most comfortable way to live in the field was to establish an officers' mess—a view that survived well into World War II. Field Marshall Bernard Montgomery expressed disgust at the state of the headquarters mess when he assumed command of the troubled Eighth Army in North Africa in 1942. The new commanding general, normally Spartan and disinclined to partake liberally of mess life, did not advocate conspicuous luxury; instead, he merely suggested no reason to undergo unnecessary privation: "Let us all be as comfortable as possible," he advised his staff.

An officer's mess as a distinct part of a garrison or depot originated with the Royal Artillery at Woolwich in 1783. From that date until World War II altered the social stratification of the British officer corps, it served as the cornerstone of the military social institution. The mess functioned as the home of bachelor officers; unlike today, most junior officers remained single for obvious economic reasons. Regulations precluded payment of a marriage allowance until age thirty, and in most regiments young officers reached that age before putting up their captain's pips. Junior officers, especially, spent most of their evenings in the mess—their home—and to dine out or "warn out" more than once a week invited a rebuke from the senior subaltern. In any event, a junior officer with little or no private means could hardly afford to spend his leisure time

elsewhere. Field Marshall Montgomery, for example, began his army career earning nine pounds a month—his mess dues cost him thirteen pounds!

Dinner in a British mess was the evening meal of an English gentleman. Instead of dinner jackets, officers wore mess kit, an outfit appearing first as a uniform with the gunners in the 19th century. For a time after the Crimean War, the short jacket and tight trousers (overalls) became the liberty uniform for enlisted ranks. Four or five times a week, a battalion's officers sat down to such formal dinners. It was, in effect, a formation, and all bachelor officers were expected to attend. Those who arrived early—and no one arrived late could have a glass of sherry or a pink gin. The signal for dinner might be chimes or simply the mess corporal announcing "gentlemen, dinner is served." The commanding officer, or more likely the senior dining member—probably a bachelor major—entered the dining room first, followed by the other officers in strict order of seniority.

Servants served a typical English meal of several courses, and wine was not necessarily part of the dinner. As Guy Crouchback, British novelist Evelyn Waugh's amusing character in Sword of Honor, learned rather quickly. In his first night in the mess as a second lieutenant, he made the social gaff of ordering a glass of claret; the senior subaltern rebuked him with a jocular "Hullo! Blood? Is it someone's birthday?" Conversation during dinner dwelled on the pleasant and topical; professional topics, "shop," and references to ladies were taboo. In some regiments, the senior subaltern or senior dining officer

enforced such rules by levying small fines. At the end of the dinner, the senior dining member simply got up and left the room. The other officers followed and spent the remainder of the evening reading, playing cards or billiards, or returned to their rooms. Some officers, if they could afford it, might have a glass of Port or a snifter of brandy; most could not, however. Conscientious commanding officers scrutinized their officers' monthly wine bills to curtail excessive drinking, and anyone imbibing to excess would find himself "seeing" the colonel in his office.

Life in an officers' mess was the epitome of the world of gentlemen, and seniors expected juniors to conform. Even the Nazi threat provided no excuse. One young officer recalled a special parade for newly-joined officers soon after joining a Highland regiment in 1939. The adjutant, proud of his distinguished regiment, summoned the young officers to the mess one afternoon. He explained the colonel had been shocked to observe many of his officers displaying ignorance as to what utensils and glasses to use at dinner. Instructing his captive and bemused audience to take notes, the impeccable adjutant ate and drank his way through a token dinner.

As often as once a week, but more likely less often, each mess held a guest night. All members of the mess attended, including the battalion or regimental commander and the married officers. Guests sometimes appeared, and the mess as a whole bore the cost of a guest of honor while individual mess members paid the cost of their guests. The unit band played the regimental march and a bugler or piper sounded the mess call. Several wines appeared throughout dinner. Following dinner,

Port—and sometimes snuff—went 'round. The officers drank the loyal toast to the reigning monarch according to custom; in some regiments, royal dispensation allowed them to remain seated for the toast; in others, everyone rose and a certain number of heel taps might follow the toasts. No one was allowed to smoke until after the "loyal toast" to the reigning monarch.

Toasting or the raising of glasses in tribute to someone or an institution as a measure of respect, is a social custom more than a millennium old. The appellation "to toast" came about through the English custom of flavoring wines with spiced toast, as apparently wines transported from the continent often spoiled enroute to the British Isles. Cookbooks as early as the 15th Century referred to the habit. Early in the 18th Century, an aristocrat obviously in his cups referred to a certain lady whose very countenance supposedly enhanced his being like "spiced toast." The social custom took hold, and diners took pains to compose the wittiest and briefest toasts. General Shepherd remembered attending a formal dinner in France in 1917, hosted by the 115th Battalion Chasseurs Alpine. At the conclusion of dinner, the battalion commander rose to propose a toast "to the best fighters, the best drinkers, and the best lovers in France—the Chasseurs Alpine."

Unlike Americans, Britains responded to each toast by draining their glasses and sometimes throwing them over the left shoulder "so that no lesser toast might be drunk." Toasts were always drunk with Port wine, and in "bumpers." This unusual name for a wine glass had its origins from the continental custom of always toasting the Pope first,

"au bon Pere," which in its convoluted form became simply "bumper." In the Book of Navy Songs (Naval Institute Press, 1955), a doggerel proclaims most proudly:

Make it a bumper, comrades,
And each one standing here
Can whisper soft above his glass
The name he holds most dear.

The choice of toasting with Port wine has its origin's more in politics than in gastronomy. After 1703, to drink French wines donated a show of favoritism to the enemy on the continent. Wine from Portugal, usually Port, meant to embrace the beverage of an ally as a poem by Swift declares:

Be sometime to your country true
Have ever the public good in view,
Bravely despise Champagne at Court
And choose to dine at home with Port.

Perhaps the most strictly controlled of all wines, government officials mandate the location of the vines and its maturation. The grapes are shipped downriver to the seaport which gives its names to the libation, "Oporto," where barefoot workers mash the grapes according to a 1,500-year-old custom. A vintage Port is held in wood for 22 to 30 months, then bottled. As it matures, a heavy sediment appears on the bottom of each bottle, thus the requirement to decant it prior to serving. After fermentation, inspectors release a minimum of one third of the vintage to which approximately 20 percent alcohol in the form of brandy has been added—and the vintage passes to the open market for sale. The beverage gained in popularity such that by 1762, every Royal Navy ship bound for the West Indies contained at least one "pipe" of Port or 56 dozen bottles for the enjoyment of the officers' mess. In the 18th and

19th Centuries, it was a common custom for the aristocracy to "lay aside a mess. In the eighteenth and nineteenth century, it was a common custom for the aristocracy to "lay aside a pipe of port" for each male member of the progeny.

After dinner, some members of the mess night engage in games such as "cock fighting" or "Moriarity, where are you?" More likely, the officers played bridge or billiards as on any other night. The evening bears no resemblance to a drunken party, in most instances. Many junior officers spent their evening stifling yawns while hoping that the colonel would go home so they could go to bed! Those so inclined might enjoy another glass of Port or perhaps a snifter of brandy. In later years, when guest nights occurred less frequently, such evenings became increasingly boisterous and drunken.

A guest last night in a British officer's mess—circa 1930s, is what approximates the mess night tradition adopted so faithfully by the Marine Corps—at least what Brigadier General Robert H. "British Bob" Williams prescribed for readers of the Marine Corps Gazette in June 1955, and Colonel Angus M. "Tiny" Fraser wrote for the same journal in June 1957. In the years since these and other essays have appeared in print, the tradition has suffered decline from either professional disinterest, an absence of social morays, or ignorance. Moreover, the social and gender practices of the Marine Corps have changed radically. Finally, consumption of alcohol is down considerably from the heights of bygone years. A new generation of Marines must come to grips with these and other changes, while still perpetuating one of the Corps' most enjoyable traditions.

AN INNOVATIVE MESS NIGHT

Scenario: a mess night arranged by Headquarters, 6th Marines and held at the Officers' Club, Camp Lejeune, North Carolina. Company guidons line the wall of the dining hall, while the colors of the regiment and its three battalions are arranged behind the head table along with the flags of the United States and the United Kingdom (a Royal Marine officer, serving an exchange tour with the regiment, is present). The anteroom is decorated with enlarged photographs of the colorful history of the regiment, and with captured weaponry brought home from Operations Desert Storm.

1800: the officers of the regiment are all in the anteroom, and those desiring refreshments have them in hand.

1805: the commanding officer of the regiment arrives.

1810: the guests of the mess arrive; sponsors greet them and see to their liquid refreshments.

1815: the guest of honor arrives, to be greeted by both the President of the Mess (commanding officer) and the Vice President of the Mess (adjutant, who wears a Sam Browne belt and sword as a symbol of his office for the evening). The Vice President of the Mess sees to the liquid refreshments for both the guest of honor and the President of the Mess.

1900: a steward sounds "six bells." Those officers and guests desiring to avail themselves of the bathroom facilities do so before the beginning of the dinner.

1910: a bugler sounds "adjutants' call" and the band plays "Sea Soldiers." The members of the mess and guests, less those seated at the head table, proceed into the dining room, find their seats and stand behind their chairs. The band strikes up "Stars and Stripes Forever." and those seated at the head table proceed into the dining room and position themselves behind their assigned chair.

The Vice President of the Mess is seated at the extreme right and farthest from the head table. The remaining officers are seated according to ascending seniority toward the head table. At the head table, the President of the Mess sits in the center with the guest of honor on his or her right. The next senior officer sits to the left of the President of the Mess, and then by seniority the remaining officers alternate from the right of the guest of honor to the left of the President of the Mess. No matter his or her rank, the chaplain is always seated at the head table.

Vice President of the Mess: "Sir, all officers present."

President of the Mess: "Seats."

President of the Mess: "Grace."

Chaplain: offers a brief, non-sectarian grace.

Stewards: pour the water.

Stewards: serve a small plate with a spring roll on it (cha gio). This Vietnamese hors d'oeuvre is to remind everyone that after the Marines landed in 1965, their primary mission was to root out the Viet Cong infrastructure in the rural areas.

Stewards: remove the small plate.

Stewards: serve bowl of Hanoi beef soup (Pho Bo Ha Noi). This favorite of Vietnamese from the north is to remind everyone that when the 3rd Marine Division redeployed from Southern I Corps to Quang Tri Province astride the Demilitarized Zone, it faced the trained regulars of the North Vietnamese Army or NVA.

Stewards: remove the soup bowl and spoon.

Stewards: serve a small plate with shrimp tempura on it and pour a chilled white wine. *This course is to remind diners of the War in the Pacific.*

Stewards: remove the small plate and wine glass.

President of the Mess: "Parade the main course."

To the accompaniment of a fife and drum, a steward brings a plate with a token piece of the main course to the President of the Mess who pronounces "I proclaim this meal fit for human consumption" or "I commend this meal to the enjoyment of the mess." The steward retreats from the dining room to an additional musical accompaniment.

Stewards: remove the main course and white wine glass.

Stewards: serve a salad of fresh fruit. *This course reminds diners of Marine Corps deployments to the Caribbean between the Spanish-American War and World War Two.*

Stewards: remove the salad plate.

Stewards: serve a dessert of French pastry and Camembert. *Reminds diners of the Marine Corps' service in France during World War I.* Coffee is poured.

Stewards: remove the dessert plate.

Stewards: place the Port decanters on the table, and everyone charges their glass. The President of the Mess pours for the guest of honor, and then passes the decanter to the left. When it reaches the end of the head table, a steward retrieves it and places it at the extreme right of the head table where it continues to be passed to the left until everyone has a charged glass. At the other tables, decanters of Port are passed counterclockwise.

President of the Mess: "Mister Vice, Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II."

Vice President of the Mess: "Ladies and Gentlemen, Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II."

Officers and guests stand

Band: plays "God Save the Queen."

Officers: "Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II." Everyone takes a sip of Port.

Royal Marine Officer: "Mister President, the President of the United States."

President of the Mess: "Mister Vice, the President of the United States."

Vice President of the Mess: "Ladies and Gentlemen, the President of the United States."

Officers and guests stand

Band: plays "The Star-Spangled Banner."

Officers: "The President of the United States." Everyone takes a sip of Port. Officers and guests may continue to enjoy their Port, and the decanters are passed around the tables.

At this juncture, toasts must be rendered to each branch of the U.S. Armed Forces, if a member of that branch is present; each toast is followed by the appropriate song of that branch.

Stewards remove the Port decanters and glasses, and replace them with decanters of Fortitudine punch and punch glasses. The procedure is the same as for the serving of the Port, described above.

Lieutenant Jones: "Sir, permission to address the mess."

President of the Mess: "Granted."

Lieutenant Jones: "In 1917, the 6th Marines deployed to France and became one of the four infantry regiments in the Second Division, American Expeditionary Forces. In the next year and a half, it participated in four campaigns: Chateau-Thierry, Soissons, St. Mihiel, and Meuse-Argonne. Members of the regiment earned three Medals of Honor; one out of every two Marines suffered wounds.

President of the Mess: "Mister Vice, the regiment."

Vice President of the Mess: "Ladies and Gentlemen, the 6th Marines."

Officers and guests stand

Band: plays six bars of "Mademoiselle from Armentieres."

Members of the mess: "The 6th Marines" followed by a sip of punch.

Captain Smith: "Request permission to address the mess."

President of the Mess: "Granted."

Captain Smith: "In 1942, the 2d Division deployed from Camp Elliott to New Zealand. During the next three years, it participated in amphibious operations in the Solomons, Gilberts, Marshalls, and Okinawa."

President of the Mess: "Mister Vice, the 2d Division."

Officers and guests stand

Vice President of the Mess: "Ladies and Gentlemen, the 2d Division."

Band: plays six bars from "Victory at Sea."

Members of the mess: "The 2d Division," followed by a sip of punch.
Officers and guests may finish their cup of punch, if desired.

Stewards: remove carafes and punch glasses.

Mister Vice: approaches the head table with a steward pushing a serving cart; on it is a punch bowl and sufficient glasses. He serves the guest of honor first, then the others seated at the head table, and finally the President of the Mess. The punch served this time is "1775 Rum Punch."

Stewards: serve punch glasses and carafes of punch. Officers pass the carafes around the table counterclockwise.

President of the Mess: "Mister Vice, the United States Marines."

Vice President of the Mess: "Gentlemen, long live the United States and success to the Marines."

Officers and guests stand

Band: plays "The Marine Corps Hymn;" at the completion of the music, officers and guests respond with "the Marines" and drink the punch all at once.

President of the Mess: "Ladies and Gentlemen, the mess will adjourn for ten minutes."

Bugler: Sounds "officer's call," and everyone returns to the dining room.

Stewards: serve brandy and coffee.

The mess committee elected to forego the ritual cigar because the facility is a "no smoking" building, as are most government buildings.

President of the Mess: introduces the guest of honor.

Guest of Honor: remarks.

President of the Mess: "Ladies and Gentlemen, please join me at the bar."

Dining In

Scenario: this gathering was hosted by the students of the Marine Corps Command and Staff College. The Dining In Committee elected as the outset to plan an affair modeled on the British tradition of the Guest Night, and thus more like what had emerged as a Marine Corps tradition in the mid-1950s. The committee considered the number of foreign officers likely to attend as it planned the traditional toasts, the presence of spouses (of both sexes), and the increasing concern for alcohol abuse and driving while intoxicated.

Forty-five days to the Dining In, written invitations (in a pleasing style of calligraphy) were sent to: guest of honor; Commanding General, Marine Corps Combat Development Command; and Commanding General, Marine Corps University. These recipients, and their spouses, were determined to be the guests of the mess. The invitations used the phrase "the honor of your presence."

Thirty days prior to the Dining In, similar invitations (except that "the honor of your presence" was replaced with "your presence") were sent to the faculty and staff of the Marine Corps University, and to each member of the current class of the Marine Corps Command and Staff College. Each of these recipients was presumed to be a paying participant in the affair.

One member of the committee received the task to collate the responses to the invitations (R.S.V.P. or *repondez s'il vous plait* appears on the invitations at the lower left corner, along with a name and telephone number; at the lower right of the invitation, the uniform or civilian dress is specified—it always indicates "orders and decorations") to provide the committee with a final list of attendees. This same committee member prepared the seating chart for display in the anteroom, and supervised the placement of the seating cards on the tables.

Another member of the committee undertook the task to provide suitable decorations for both the anteroom and dining room. To this end, she coordinated with the Marine Corps Historical Center for the loan of a wide assortment of memorabilia.

A third member of the committee arranged for the loan of flags representing each of the foreign officers expected to attend, and a copy of each nation's anthem for the director of the post band.

Two members of the committee volunteered to consult with the manager of the officers' club, prepare a dinner menu, and offer it to the committee for its approval. The committee asked the menu adhere rigidly to custom and tradition. A prime rib of beef was the unanimous choice for the main entrée.

A final member of the committee supervised the stocking of the anteroom bar; specifically, the committee provided the following guidelines:

--the usual alcoholic beverages should be available, including beers and ales.

--non alcoholic wines and beers should also be available.

--soft drinks, including diet and decaffeinate brands, must be included.

--the post-dinner refreshments must be all non-alcoholic or containing only small amounts of alcohol.

The committee made arrangements for fresh Dungeness crab to be flown in from Puget Sound, and a group of spouses volunteered to clean the seafood and prepare the meat for Crab Imperial.

On the morning of the dining in, the committee met at the officers' club to review final preparations. At that time, the decoration of the anteroom and the dining room was completed. The place cards were checked against the seating diagram. Flags were placed behind the head table. The leader of the band, the drummer, and the fifer appeared for a briefing of duties, and to rehearse. A bandsman received instruction on the ringing of the ship's bell.

The Vice President of the Mess checked the token place setting provided by the head steward. At the left of the plate (which is removed just after the serving of the first course) are the forks: seafood, salad, dinner, and dessert in that order from left to right. At the right of the plate are the dinner knife, teaspoon, and soup spoon arranged also from left to right. A butter knife appears on the right of the bread plate, which is located at the upper left of the place setting. Glassware is arraigned beginning from the top of the setting to the right in a semicircle: water glass, port goblet, claret glass, white wine goblet, and sherry glass.

1800: The members of the mess, and their spouses, arrive at the officers club.

1815: The guest of honor, and his spouse; and the guests of the mess, and their spouses arrive to be greeted by the president and vice president of the mess.

1815-1900: Members of the mess, spouses, and guests partake of refreshments and meet the guest of honor and the guests of the mess.

1900: A bandsman rings "six bells" with a ship's bell to indicate 7:00 P.M. or 1900. This signal alerts everyone that dinner begins in 15 minutes.

1915: The band strikes up "Sea Soldiers" and everyone—less those to be seated at the head table—enters the dining room. Each diner escorts the lady seated to the right into the dining room. Then, the band plays "Stars and Stripes Forever" as a signal for those officers, guests, and ladies to be seated at the head table to enter the dining room.

President of the Mess: "Chaplain, please say 'grace.'"

Chaplain: offers a brief, non-sectarian grace.

Men seat the lady to their immediate right.

Stewards serve a cold soup, gazpacho, with a glass of sherry.

Stewards remove the previous course and sherry glass, and serve a seafood cocktail of Dungeness Crab Imperial with a chilled glass of Schloss Johannisberger '92.

Stewards remove the previous course and wine glass, and serve a salad of mixed greens with a low-calorie, low-fat vinaigrette dressing.

President of the Mess: "Parade the beef!"

A steward appears with a token slice of prime rib on a plate, with a knife and fork; accompanied by a drummer and fifer playing "The Roast Beef of Old England" the party marches up the center of the dining room. The steward carries the plate around the head table and serves it to the President of the Mess, who says: "I pronounce this beef fit for human consumption and commend it to the enjoyment of the mess and our guests." The steward retrieves the plate and utensils, rejoins the fifer and drummer, and the three of them march out of the dining room to another chorus of "The Roast Beef of Old England."

The members of the mess enjoy the main course:

- prime rib of beef, medium-rare
- roast new potatoes with margarine and fresh-cut parsley
- Yorkshire pudding
- green beans almandine
- freshly baked bread

It is served with a Cabernet Sauvignon (Shafer Hillside Select, Stags Leap District, California 1991) at room temperature (60 degrees). Stewards refill glasses as required.

Stewards remove the dinner plate, bread plate, utensils used for the main course and wine glass.

Stewards serve a small dessert, a specialty of the club, called "chocolate decadence" (a chocolate mousse). The dessert is accompanied by coffee; the place cards have been marked so those desiring caffeine-free coffee will be served accordingly.

President of the Mess: "The mess will adjourn for 15 minutes."

Bugler: sounds "officers' call." Everyone returns to the dining room; when the head table is seated, the other diners take their seats.

During the brief intermission, a decanter of Port has been placed on each table. The Mess Night Committee selected Croft Porto 1991 after tasting several imported and domestic varieties. The President of the Mess pours the guest of honor on his right and passes the decanter to his left; the decanter continues to the end of the head table as each diner pours for himself. At the end of the table, a steward retrieves the decanter and places it at the opposite end of the head table. There, it continues to the right as diners pour for themselves. The President of the Mess serves himself last.

President of the Mess: "Mister Vice, His Majesty Rama IX of Thailand." *For this toast, and all others, everyone stands.*

Vice President of the Mess: "Ladies and Gentlemen, his Majesty Rama IX of Thailand." The band plays the anthem of Thailand, everyone says "His Majesty Rama IX of Thailand," takes a sip of Port, and sits down.

Senior foreign officer (from Thailand): "Ladies and Gentlemen, the President of the United States."

Vice President of the Mess: "Ladies and Gentlemen, the President of the United States." The band plays the National Anthem. Everyone says, "The President of the United States," takes a sip of Port, and sits down.

President of the Mess: "Mister Vice" and then by turn runs through the list of heads of state for each foreign officer president, in descending order by the rank of the officer. A toast is proposed in every case, followed by the response of the Vice President of the Mess. An anthem is played in its entirety, also, for every toast.

President of the Mess: "Mister Vice, the U.S. Army."

Vice President of the Mess: "Ladies and Gentlemen, the U.S. Army."

Band plays "The Army Goes Rolling Along." Everyone says "The U.S. Army," takes sip of Port, and sits down.

President of the Mess: "Mister Vice, the U.S. Navy."

Vice President of the Mess: "Ladies and Gentlemen, the U.S. Navy."

Band plays "Anchors Aweigh." Everyone says "The U.S. Navy," takes a sip of Port, and sits down.

President of the Mess: "Mister Vice, the U.S. Air Force."

Vice President of the Mess: "Ladies and Gentlemen, the U.S. Air Force."

Band plays "The Air Force Song." Everyone says "The U.S. Air Force," takes a sip of Port, and sits down.

Stewards remove the port glasses and decanters.

The Vice President of the Mess moves to the head table. A steward follows with a carafe of Fortitudine Punch, and the Vice President

of the Mess serves everyone at the head table beginning with the guest of honor first and the President of the Mess last. Meanwhile, carafes are being passed, counterclockwise, around the other tables as everyone fills a punch glass. Those eschewing alcohol merely pass the carafe to the next person, and respond to the next toast with the water goblet.

President of the Mess: "Mister Vice, the Corps."

Vice president of the Mess: "Long life to the United States and Success to the Marines." The band plays the "Marine Corps Hymn" and then everyone says "The Marines" and drinks the cup of punch (all of it).

President of the Mess: "The mess will adjourn for 15 minutes."

Bugler sounds "officer's call," and everyone returns to the dining room.

Stewards serve brandy and coffee.

The mess committee elected to forego the ritual cigar because the facility is a "no smoking" building, and because of the presence of the ladies.

President of the Mess: introduces the guest of honor.

Guest of Honor: delivers brief remarks.

President of the Mess: "Ladies and gentlemen, please join me at the bar."

Members of the mess and guests adjourn to the anteroom for post-dinner refreshments. A variety of after-dinner beverages, both alcoholic and non-alcoholic, were available as well as coffee. No one should leave until the guest of honor has departed for the evening.

PUNCH RECIPES1775 RUM PUNCH

This traditional beverage was supposedly served to potential Marine Corps recruits at Tun Tavern, Philadelphia, during the American Revolution.

one part dark Jamaican rum
four parts lime juice
maple sugar and grenadine to taste
pour over cracked ice in a glass punch bowl

FORTITUDINE PUNCH

Fortitudine was the motto of the Marine Corps during the early 19th Century; it means strength, fortitude, or even guts. Early Marines received rations of rum, at sea or ashore, but often the amount doled out was diluted with water to avoid drunkenness. Marines of the era preferred instead to dilute the distilled spirit with sugar and fruit as a rum punch.

one-half gallon of dark rum
one pint of peach brandy
two twelve-ounce cans of frozen lemonade concentrate
two quart bottles of club soda
two quart bottles of ginger ale
pour over cracked ice in a glass punch bowl; garnished with the slices of one orange, one lemon, and two limes

MULLED WINE PUNCH

Mix 1 quart orange juice with ½ cup of white sugar and ½ cup of brown sugar. In a cheesecloth bag, place ½ stick of cinnamon, 6 whole cloves, and 6 whole allspices. Heat to boiling and reduce heat; allow to simmer for five minutes. Remove the spice bag and add a fifth of Port. Served hot in mugs.

Non-alcoholic beverage recipesHOT BUTTERED CRANBERRY CIDER

This nonalcoholic alternative is a suitable after-dinner libation, especially during chilly weather. In a saucepan combine:

1/3 cup margarine
½ cup honey
2 tsp. ground coriander

and heat over low heat until blended thoroughly.

In a large pan heat: 48 ounces cranberry juice, 4 cups cider, 1 sliced orange, and 1 stick cinnamon; allow to simmer for about 5 minutes. Serve in 6-ounce mugs with 2 tsp. of honey butter.

STRAWBERRY DAIQUIRI PUNCH

Diners eschewing alcohol might prefer this libation, especially after dinner.

Mix: 2 ten-ounce cans of frozen daiquiri mix with 2 cups orange juice and 1 liter of ginger ale.

Process: 2-sixteen ounce packages of frozen strawberries.

Pour: the mix and strawberry slush over cracked ice into a punch bowl; stir in the ginger ale.

These nonalcoholic aperitifs are pleasing alternatives for the pre-dinner cocktail hour.

NON-ALCOHOLIC KIR

Stir: 2 tbs. Raspberry or red currant syrup into 6 oz. of chilled nonalcoholic white wine.

ORANGE FRAPPE

Combine: 4 cups orange juice, juice of one lemon, 1 large banana, 6 frozen strawberries, $\frac{1}{4}$ cup of whipping cream, and 6 ice cubes.

Process in a blender and serve.

FESTIVE SPICED CIDER

In a cheesecloth bag, place: 14 sticks cinnamon, 8 whole cloves, and 1 teaspoon whole allspice. In a saucepan, combine 3 quarts cider with $\frac{1}{2}$ cup sugar; add the spice bag and simmer for ten minutes. Cut an orange into 6 slices and cut each slice in half. Place one piece of orange into a cup, fill with cider, and sprinkle with nutmeg.

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