

MESS ETIQUETTE - WING FORMAL FUNCTIONS

1. INTRODUCTION

- a. You will find in every profession that certain rules and regulations have been introduced, but at the same time there will exist certain unwritten 'rules' and a certain accepted code of conduct. The RAF and indeed ATC is no exception in this respect and much of our way of life is additionally enhanced by traditions and customs of which we may be justly proud.
- b. The procedures for a dining-in-night, or guest night were mostly formulated for the proper conduct of the evening in Army messes and Royal Navy wardrooms long before the formation of the RAF.
- c. The dining-in-night or guest night serves two main purposes:
 - i. *It enables all adult Staff and Cadet Warrant Officers of the Wing serving or retired to dine together in a convivial atmosphere.*
 - ii. *Provide an opportunity for personal and guests to be formally entertained by the Wing.*
- d. It is customary for adult uniformed members retiring from the Corps after long and dutiful service to be 'dined out', and on these occasions they attend as guests of the mess.

2. ARRIVAL

- a. Please arrange to arrive early and greet the PMC, or the senior officer present if the PMC has not arrived. It is also courteous to say " Good evening Sir " to OC Wing. Your guests should also be introduced. If you arrive after dinner has begun, a discreet entrance and a word of apology to the PMC later in the evening would be appropriate.
- b. Don't forget to attend to the needs of nature before going into dinner and avoid drinking too many 'long' drinks. You should not leave the table (except in an emergency and with the PMC's permission) until after the speeches. The PMC at his discretion may allow a short adjournment to "ease springs", **but never before the Loyal Toast.**

3. DINNER

- a. On entering the dining room, stand behind your chair until the PMC/OC Wing and guests have taken their places and grace said.
- b. There should be no smoking in the dining room until the PMC indicates permission to do so, which will be after the Loyal toast.
- c. Uniform or civilian jackets should not be removed during the course of the meal or during the course of the evening.
- d. Good manners and behaviour are naturally expected throughout the meal, but there are additional customary procedures which must also be observed.

*i. The meal will usually consist of 3/4 courses. Diners should **not start eating** until the PMC has started. Waiters will usually wait until everyone has finished eating before clearing a course and returning with the next one. Obviously it is not in good taste to devour food quickly, but conversely the proceedings should not be lengthened by eating too slowly*

ii. Wing silver or trophies displayed on dining tables must not be touched during the meal.

iii. At some dinners wine is provided, at others purchased by guests. If wine is provided with the meal it is not an excuse to drink as much as you can just because you are paying for it!

*iv. The port at the end of the meal is passed in a clockwise direction starting and finishing with the PMC. The decanters are passed from hand to hand, **not touching the table**, each diner charging their glass. The decanters are always taken and given in the right hand. Those not wanting port should leave their glasses unfilled and pass the decanter on to the left. Their glass may then be filled with water. **The port glasses provided must be used - not wine or any other glass.** It is inappropriate to toast Her Majesty with anything other than port, Madeira or water. Beer, wine and fruit juices are not to be used.*

4. SPEECHES

a. There are usually no more than two speeches at a Wing Dinner, the usual format being OC Wing proposing the toast to "The Guests" with the senior guest "Responding", and a brief final summation by the PMC. It is considered highly discourteous to whisper, shuffle uncomfortably or display a general lack of interest in the speeches, no matter how they may be coming across.

5. AFTERMATH

a. The dinners are intended so that everyone present has an extremely enjoyable evening, and it is normal to retire to the bar for a few drinks following the formalities. It is courteous to say goodnight to the PMC and OC Wing before leaving the function for the night.

Remember that it is an RAF custom - dearly bought - that a late night and an enjoyable one is no excuse for the morning after; the later a dinner ends, the more demanding an officer or SNCO is of their dress, appearance and punctuality 'on parade' the next morning, particularly so if in the presence of Cadets.

6. CONCLUSION

a. The procedures for formal dinners will vary from Station to Station, Wing to Wing etc, however the procedures outlined in this guideline follow the normal traditional pattern wherever possible. Junior members of the Wing are advised to follow the example of a more experienced colleague to become familiar with them. Never be afraid to contact the PMC for advice on matters concerning the dinners, and above all **have an enjoyable, pleasant evening.**

THE INTERESTS OF THE YOUNG MEN AND WOMEN IN OUR CHARGE ARE BETTER SERVED IF THE ADULT STAFF OF THE ORGANISATION ARE ABLE TO MIX AND SOCIALISE IN A FRIENDLY CONVIVIAL ATMOSPHERE.