

CHAPTER 4

Organizing a Dining In and Dining Out

Formal dinners in the company of military fellows are among the oldest of Service traditions. No family members or “non-official” guests are invited to a Dining In. If the function includes personal, nonbusiness guests or family members, it is termed a Dining Out (see last section). A guest speaker, if invited, should be distinguished or outstanding in his or her field so that the speech is the highlight of the evening. Any *official* guests—U.S. civil servants, military leaders, officials of civic or philanthropic organizations, prominent foreign nationals, persons of renown—are guests of the members as a whole; their expenses are shared. Invite civic leaders occasionally as a good way to enhance relations with civilian neighbors.

AT EASE KEY POINTS

- ✧ Prepare a relevant toast and justification for it.
- ✧ Arrive punctually. Greet president, guest of honor, others.
- ✧ Wait for president before sitting, eating, or drinking.
- ✧ Request permission to report an offense or propose a toast.
- ✧ Do not rest decanters on table until everyone’s glass is charged.

Seasoned participants delight in the order of events and in introducing neophytes to the atmosphere of dignity, protocol, and esprit de corps of a Dining In. Conversation is general during dinner, with members showing off their best dining styles (read Chapter 16: Place Settings, Table Manners, and Serving Styles) to avoid fines themselves while delivering flamboyant or impertinent reports of their peers’ minor transgressions in civility, bearing, or table manners. Permission to toast or report misbehavior must always be sought from the presiding officer (the president) or his or her designate (the vice president), or the informer himself risks a penalty. Some gregarious individuals deliberately violate rules so they wi’

be singled out for fines or penalties, practicing witty and imaginative justification rebuttals (which will probably only earn more censure). The in-jokes that result are amusing and build camaraderie.

Formal toasts are an important part of a Dining In and always honor guests and the chain of command. Toasts begin with the president's welcome and continue at dessert or the separate port wine course. It is better to schedule the majority of toasts after food has been consumed, as toasts may be many in number. Provide underage or non-drinking participants with a nonalcoholic beverage so that they may also drink toasts.

By first asking permission of the president, anyone may leave after the meal if important duties the following day preclude a late evening. "Duty" is an accepted excuse for not following the prevailing etiquette practice of waiting for the ranking person to depart a social event before taking leave. The senior officer is usually not inclined to depart quickly anyway, but to stay on and enjoy the ingenuity and comradeship of a Dining In. Even if the president or guest of honor departs early, the evening usually continues with singing, parlor games, feats of skill, or dancing.

PREPARATION

The commanding officer of the unit (or a designate) is president of a Dining In or Dining Out and chooses its purpose or main focus. He or she selects which optional ceremonies to include (too many will actually detract from an evening's success), limiting the formal program to no more than two and a half hours, especially if informal entertainment will follow.

The president decides the date, time, and location for the evening, arranges for a guest speaker and the chaplain (as desired), decides which office staff (officer, enlisted, and civilian personnel inclusive) to invite, appoints various committees, and selects the vice president (always a military junior, though not necessarily the lowest ranking). The president ensures that protocol is observed throughout the evening and is the final arbiter for violations and toasts, but may delegate those duties to the vice president, as desired.

The vice president is also a key player for the occasion, making reservations, arranging for the color guard and musicians (or recorded music), coordinating all committees, and directing activities during the event. A printed program will add a professional touch and aid in keeping time. It also serves as a souvenir of the occasion. Program agendas normally include the toasts and proper responses, biographical sketches and photos of the guest speaker and commander, the menu, the "Rules" (see Member Points of Order below), the words to the Service song