

Welcome to the 7th Annual Newport Beach Mess Night with the 1st Battalion 1st Marines.

We are thrilled to have you here tonight and honored that you have chosen to share this special night with us, and our Marines. The 1st Battalion, 1st Marines is one of the most decorated and distinguished infantry battalions in the Marine Corps. Returning from a 13th Marine Expeditionary Unit deployment in September 2011, they have made significant personnel changes and are readying themselves to deploy this fall to Afghanistan. Thank you Marines!

Let me share with you a little bit of History of this special night.

The practice of Mess Night is thought to have formally begun in 16th-century England, in monasteries and universities; though some records indicate that militaries have held formal dinners as far back as the Roman Legions. The Vikings held formal ceremonies to honor and celebrate battles, fallen comrades as well as heroes who distinguished themselves in combat.

During the 18th century, the British Army incorporated the practice of formal dining into their regimental mess system. The Americans, taking many of their traditions from the British military, first held mess nights in the 18th and 19th century, but the tradition waned after the Civil War. During World War II, the custom was revived in the U.S. military and the tradition was restored.

Mess Night is a formal military ceremony for members of a company or unit, which includes a dinner, drinking, and other events to foster camaraderie and esprit de corps.

Mess Night follows established protocols. Cocktail hour, marching in the head table, prayer by the Battalion Chaplain, tasting of the meat by the “President of the Mess”, toasting and levying of fines. The night concludes with more drinks and cigars on the patio.

Portions of the event tend to become quite humorous in nature, while others remain somber. Etiquette requires a diner to know what is appropriate at any given time....and I am here to help you with that.

So let me speak specifically about the good cause of raising funds for our 1/1 Marines and their families combined with the tradition of fines.

When the time comes during the Mess Night Sequence of Events the President of the Mess hits the gavel and announces, “the floor is now open for fines” we encourage you to stand up, and share with us a mess night rule that was broken by an individual in the Mess. Are there stories you would like to share about them that may have brought discredit upon the mess, any member of the mess, or to our beloved Corps?

As an example: Dr Ruby Arnold was caught double fisting drinks, (holding more than one drink at a time), which is against mess rules and this infraction is countered by a fine levied by the accuser to the accused, then paid to the Vice President of the Mess immediately by himself or his entire table because they allowed such an act to occur.

Always remember the proper way to address the Mess:

Stand and face Mr. Vice:

“Mr Vice, “state your name” request permission to address members of the mess”

The following are considered "Violations of the Mess" – just a few as an example:

- untimely arrival at proceedings
- haggling over date of rank
- improper wear of uniform
- foul language
- discussion on a controversial topic (politics, religion, and women are commonly forbidden topics)
- toasting with an uncharged (empty) glass
- rising to applaud particularly witty, succinct, sarcastic, or relevant toasts, unless following the example of the President
- leaving the dining room without permission from the President of the Mess
- carrying cocktails into the dining area before the conclusion of dinner
- haggling over penalties or fines imposed
- drawing a sword except in ceremony

In addition to visiting the bowl of grog and paying fines, violators may be sentenced to sing songs, tell jokes, do pushups, or perform menial tasks to entertain the mess. In most cases, when a violator has been identified, he or she is given the opportunity to provide a rebuttal or defense for the violation, which rarely results in the violator being excused for the offense, and usually only results in a substantial fine.

Members of the mess may also be singled out for some good-natured ribbing and teasing.

Where do the fines go? To the Newport Beach 1st Battalion 1st Marines Foundation, who's mission is to provide community and financial support to the men and families of the 1st Battalion, 1st Marines both during overseas deployments and when training for the next deployment.

For the residents of this community to express their gratitude and appreciation to those who move to the sound of the guns to defend our Country's ideals and interests, in such a personal way, goes way beyond making some sort of political statement, and the Marines know it.

These Marines will face many challenges and difficulties as they fight for our freedom and ready themselves for their upcoming deployment. Their individual futures remain uncertain, but one thing they know is that they can count on our continued support. Your thoughts and prayers for their safety and your generous support for their families at home will allow them to fully focus on their assigned combat missions.

So please enjoy the night, say hello to your Marines at your table, and immerse yourself in this great Marine Corps tradition we call “Mess Night”.

Thank you and Semper Fidelis.