

Chapter 7 – The Military Mess

1. A mess is the home of living-in personnel, the club for all mess members, and the centre of a military member's social life in the unit. There is no civilian equivalent to a military mess and mess customs are often foreign to new members. This chapter outlines basic mess customs but each mess has unique customs that must be learned by new members each time they are posted.

MESS ORGANIZATION

2. Most installations have three military messes: the Junior Ranks' Mess, the Warrant Officers' and Sergeants' Mess, and the Officers' Mess. Messes are organized by rank to allow each peer group to socialize without feeling inhibited by superiors or subordinates. All serving Canadian Forces members must belong to the appropriate mess and pay mess dues. Retired members, civilians who work at local defence installations, and prominent members of the local community are also often associate members of the mess.

3. The Junior Ranks' Mess has a very relaxed atmosphere while the Warrant Officers' and Sergeants' Mess and the Officers' Mess are more formal. The club areas in most messes have pool tables, arcade games, a bar, and a television. There is also usually a quiet area to read or study, an area to hold dances, and a room suitable for guest speakers or meetings. Most messes have areas that may be rented out to members for private functions such as weddings. Members who use the mess during these parties should avoid any activity that may interfere with the private function.

4. The Mess Committee is headed by the President of the Mess Committee (PMC). The committee exists to co-ordinate all aspects of mess life including: setting mess policy, organizing social activities, renovating the mess, updating the bylaws, purchasing new games and equipment, and scheduling bartending duties. Within the mess committee, there is a PMC, Vice PMC, secretary, treasurer, and several specialist sub-committees. There are usually sub-committees for entertainment, housing, and sports activities, but there may be others as detailed in the constitution and bylaws of each mess. Any member may volunteer to join the mess committee; however, elections are usually held for key appointments. CME members are often appointed to the Mess Housing Committee due to their engineering expertise. All members pay monthly dues to fund mess activities and all members have a voice in how the funds are spent. General Mess Meetings are held as required and attendance is compulsory for all regular members. Updates by the various mess sub-committees are given at these meetings and decisions are made by a general vote.

MESS CUSTOMS AND RULES

5. Members of the CME most always share a mess with other branches and units, thus, there are no unique CME mess customs. Every mess is unique and members must respect the particular customs of each mess and enjoy the individual atmosphere of every establishment. When posted to a new location, members should take the opportunity to read the mess constitution and by-laws and become acquainted with any unusual customs. It is every member's responsibility to become familiar with, and observe, the rules and customs of each mess. Minor infractions of mess rules and etiquette may cause embarrassment to the member and the unit while serious infractions may result in the member being barred from the mess.

6. Those who have served at many units fondly remember the messes at every Base or Wing. Each mess is decorated with mementoes given as gifts from local and visiting units. Retiring members or groups of members often donate to the mess on occasion. Most messes give departing members a gift at their mugging-out. Such gifts are usually unique to the area or to the mess and their purpose is to serve as a reminder of that posting.

GUESTS

7. The mess was established to provide recreation and amenities for its members, therefore, spouses and guests should only attend the mess in the company of the member. However, the membership should ensure that spouses of members absent on duty are invited to appropriate functions. When guests are invited to the mess, it is proper for the hosting member to escort them at all times and to introduce them to other members. The hosting member is completely responsible for the dress, deportment and conduct of any guests, and all guests should be made aware of the mess rules prior to attending a function.

8. Unless specifically invited by the President of the Mess Committee, personnel will attend only the mess designated for their rank. Unnecessary restrictions may be imposed on mess members when superiors or subordinates are present at the mess. When spouses belong to different messes, service couples must request permission from their respective PMCs to escort their spouses to mess functions, even if the function is mixed. This applies to both the superior and the junior member of a service couple.

DRESS

9. Take pride in your appearance whether in uniform or in civilian clothing. To be treated as a professional, dress like one. Clothing should be clean, neat and suitable for the function. Casual does not mean unkempt. Upon arrival at a new unit, become familiar with mess regulations for both military and civilian attire. Exaggerated and extreme styles are usually not appropriate in the mess and should not be worn.

10. Mess regulations concerning dress are very explicit and must be followed at all times. See [Chapter 9](#) for an explanation of the different categories of dress. Some areas of the mess may have different dress regulations, for instance, relaxed dress may be allowed in the games and television areas while jacket and tie are required in the dining room. Work clothes should not normally be worn for the evening meal. If a member must work after dinner, and compliance is impossible, it is good manners to apologize to the PMC or to the senior member present.

11. It is proper to politely inform any inappropriately dressed member of the regulations. The member would be more embarrassed if the PMC or a senior mess member noticed and commented on the transgression. If a guest is not suitably attired, the hosting member should be informed, as it is the host's responsibility to ensure that a guest complies with all rules.

PERSONAL CONDUCT AND ETIQUETTE

12. Members may bring either credit or discredit to themselves and their unit by their conduct at the mess. Remember that the mess is the home of all members and behave accordingly. Traditionally, religion, politics and other controversial subjects are avoided. If a disagreement occurs, it is polite to acknowledge the difference of opinion and to discretely change the subject. Verbal and physical altercations are not appropriate in the mess and should be avoided at all times. Disruptive members will be asked to leave and may be denied mess privileges.

13. Strive to interact cordially with all members. Although some may feel more at ease with certain members, mingling is encouraged at all mess functions. Visitors should be given preferential treatment and all members should strive to make them feel welcome. Make an effort to chat with all visitors to make them feel at ease and offer them a beverage. Assume the duty of host readily, as the mess is judged by the way that its guests are received.

14. Members should rise when senior officers, NCOs, or distinguished guests enter the mess. Doing so shows the manners and standard of discipline of the members. Superiors should always be shown the proper respect, but junior members should not be afraid to converse with superiors. When talking with senior members, speak naturally and with respect, but avoid excessive familiarity. The guidelines for addressing non-commissioned members, as described in [Chapter 5](#), continue to apply even in the close relationship of the mess.

15. The senior member of the Mess is normally allowed the courtesy of preferential service at the bar. All other members are served in the order that they arrive at the bar. Should the bartender make a mistake in the order of service, it is common courtesy to indicate the next member to be served. Drinking and conversing in the immediate area of the bar should be avoided as it inhibits good service.

16. The consumption of alcoholic beverages is common in most messes. All members should drink responsibly and remain conscious of their conduct at all times. Members should not encourage others to drink in excess nor shall they press alcohol upon members who choose not to drink. Canadian Forces policy bans all forms of drinking games or activities that may compel members to drink more than is sensible. Local liquor licensing laws also apply to all messes and underage members shall not be served alcohol. As always, it is the bar steward's prerogative to refuse service to an individual if they are underage or if they have had too much to drink. Members should watch out for colleagues who have over-indulged and ensure that a suitable means of transportation home is obtained for them.

17. Each mess has smoking regulations posted in the building and in the bylaws and smoking is usually only permitted in specified areas of the mess. Even when smoking is permitted, it is polite to ask permission to smoke and important to ensure that others in the vicinity are comfortable.

SPOUSES' CLUBS

18. Most messes have welcomed the formation of a Spouses' Club, the precursor to which was the Wives' Club. Because many couples both work outside the home and there are often many demands on free time, the Spouses' Clubs are not as well attended as they once were. The club allows members to meet and provide mutual support in time of need, especially for those living off base. Perhaps the greatest advantage of the club is that spouses who make acquaintances at the club are more at ease and find greater enjoyment at mess sponsored social events. Members of the Spouses' Club may also choose to involve themselves in fundraising for the mess or local units, as well as help with local charities. Spouses of Engineer officers and warrant officers are encouraged to take an interest in the families of the personnel under their spouse's command and are expected to help support both the unit and the mess.

RELATIONSHIP WITH MESS STAFF

19. The mess manager is a full-time, paid staff member, who is responsible for administration and the day-to-day running of the mess. Mess dues and bar tabs are paid to the mess manager and the mess manager is responsible for all the mess staff. The staff is present to assist members and to make time spent at the mess more enjoyable. It is the duty of each member to help the staff keep the mess in order. Staff members are not servants and should be treated with courtesy and respect. Do not find fault with, or make complaints directly to, the mess staff. Inform the mess manager, or your representative on the mess committee, of any problem. Suggestion books are often placed in the mess and may be used for constructive suggestions to help the mess committee improve service.

TRADITIONAL MESS FUNCTIONS

20. Coffee Break. Morning coffee break not only promotes camaraderie but is also an excellent opportunity to conduct wide-ranging business on an informal basis. Held each morning, usually around 1000 hrs, all members should attempt to attend daily. If units are far away from the mess, members should attend coffee break at least once a week. Either the PMC or the unit commanding officer usually chooses a common day of the week for distant units to attend.

21. TGIF/Happy Hour. TGIF stands for *“Thank God, it’s Friday!”* The tradition began with the Air Force, but has become a tri-service custom. This small celebration is common at many messes and is held immediately after business hours or at lunch on Fridays. The event encourages members to socialize and unwind with peers prior to the weekend rush of family commitments. Messes open the bar and often put on a free meal for members and guests during this event.

22. Promotion Parties. It is customary for personnel to sponsor a party upon promotion. When two or more members of the same mess are promoted, it is acceptable to sponsor a combined party. Guests should include the promoted member’s immediate co-workers, special associates, and friends. The promotion party is not just an occasion for free drinks or food, but an opportunity for the promoted member to thank peers for their support and friendship. It is also an occasion for others to recognize the promoted member’s achievements, to recognize the new rank formally, and offer congratulations. It is traditional for the newly promoted member to purchase drinks for all the guests; however, the expense incurred for the function should not exceed the net increase in salary for one month.

23. Mugging-Out. Most messes hold mugging-out parties for departing members. Immediate superiors toast the departing members and the speeches are generally light-hearted, containing amusing anecdotes about the member’s experiences while at the unit. The mess and the unit may then present a gift to the departing member. It is usually appropriate for departing members’ spouses to attend the function but this might be confirmed with the PMC as customs may differ from mess to mess. Spouses are frequently invited forward when the member accepts the gift to symbolize the fact that the spouse is there to support the member, throughout all postings.

24. Bosses Night. Junior Ranks’ Messes often hold Bosses Night parties. These functions provide an opportunity for junior ranks to invite superiors to socialize at their mess. The format is generally that of a cocktail party and all guests are expected to leave at the end of the designated time. A mess member must invite senior NCMs and officers to the function personally; it is not permitted to attend the function without a host.