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HISTORY OF DINING IN

The custom of Dining In has its beginnings in the shadows of antiquity. Some authorities contend that the custom began in the monasteries of early England and was later taken up by Oxford and Cambridge Universities. From there it spread to military units. Other authorities maintain that the practice originated among the Saxon nobles of 10th Century England and the custom is more than a thousand years old. Earlier history recounts similar functions of Knights of the Round Table, Knights of Malta, Wassail Toasts of the Vikings, as well as those of early European monasteries.

Origin of the present customs probably arose in the British Army where the dinner is still held regularly, and is prescribed in the Queen's Regulations. There, traditions have been established within the various regiments. In India one broke the wine glasses after toasting the sovereign; two regiments drink the royal toast seated since they are descended from marine units where members bumped their heads on deck beams if they stood up; and another passes around a fine solid silver trophy filled with champagne from which everyone drinks. The trophy was captured from the personal baggage of Joseph Bonaparte at the Battle of Victoria in 1813. It is a fine piece of silver but its obvious normal place was under Joseph's bed.

The practice of Dining In ceremonies by United States Army units apparently originated with Washington's Continentals who, despite their aversion to anything that suggested "Redcoats", fully realized the value of these occasions in the promotion of pride of service, high morale, and loyalty. While such colorful customs never were established in the U S Army, European customs were generally followed.

In the "Old Days" (prior to World War I) the Officers' Mess flourished, particularly at the turn of the twentieth century. Small posts across the country developed rigid rules of formal dining. The meal was opened by the arrival of the senior officer. Everyone present wore dress blues, or in the summer, whites. During the 1920's and 1930's, no officer would have thought of entering the Army-Navy Club in Manila in the evening unless he wore mess jacket or whites. If an officer appeared late, a formal apology was expected of him before he took his seat. In those days the formal military dinner was strictly a man's world. If women were present it was only in an emergency, and even then they were accommodated in a side room.

It is recognized that the Dining In is an occasion where ceremony, tradition, and good fellowship play an important part in the life of the Army officer. It provides an occasion for officers to meet socially, enjoy a ritual military meal, hear speakers of distinction, discuss subjects of military or national importance and honor those in their midst who have achieved notable accomplishments.