



MESS DINING — TRADITIONS —

A HISTORICAL INTRODUCTION

*The history, etiquette, toasts, wines and
traditions of British Army Messes
from the 1940s to the 1990s*



QUIS SEPARABIT	
WATERLOO	MONTE CASSINO
INKERMANN	NORMANDY
EGYPT 1882	ARDENNES
SOUTH AFRICA 1900-02	RHINE
YPRES 1914-18	KOREA 1950-53
SOMME	ADEN
ARRAS	FALKLANDS
EL ALAMEIN	



HISTORY • ETIQUETTE • COURSES • TOASTS • WINE • TRADITION

Chapter One

Mess Dining Traditions: A Historical Introduction

For more than two centuries, the British Army's messes have served as the social, ceremonial, and cultural heart of military life. Long before modern catering systems, long before the Army Catering Corps formalised standards, the mess was where soldiers gathered to eat, celebrate, mourn, welcome newcomers, and honour the past. The traditions that shaped these meals evolved slowly, influenced by regimental custom, social class, national cuisine, and the unspoken rules of military hierarchy.

By the mid-twentieth century, these customs had settled into a recognisable form: the Officers' Mess, the Warrant Officers' and Sergeants' Mess, and the various All Ranks dining facilities each developed their own identity, expectations, and rituals. Though the food changed with the decades, the structure and spirit of mess dining remained remarkably consistent.

This chapter provides a historical guide to those traditions — the menu structures, etiquette, courses, toasts, wine pairings, and the distinctions between the different messes — forming the foundation for the menus that follow in this book.

Menu Structure: The Architecture of a Military Dinner

Mess dinners were never improvised affairs. Their structure was deliberate, inherited from the great dining traditions of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and refined through the influence of French classical cuisine. By the 1940s, the format had become standard across the Army.

A traditional Officers' Mess dinner typically followed this sequence:

1. **Hors d'Oeuvre**
Light appetisers such as prawn cocktail, melon, pâté, or canapés.
2. **Soup**
A refined, usually cream-based soup or a clear consommé.
3. **Fish Course**
Poached or grilled fish, often with a simple butter or wine sauce.
4. **Main Course**
The centrepiece of the meal — roast beef, lamb, poultry, or a prestige dish such as Beef Wellington.
5. **Sweet Course**
A dessert reflecting the tastes of the era: trifles, gateaux, steamed puddings, or cheesecakes.
6. **Savory**
A small, salty dish such as Welsh rarebit or

Scotch woodcock, intended to bridge the transition to cheese.

7. **Cheese Board**

Stilton, Cheddar, Brie, biscuits, and celery.

8. **Coffee & Port**

Served after the table was cleared, often accompanied by mints or petit fours.

This structure was not merely culinary — it was ceremonial. Each course marked a stage in the evening's progression, guiding diners from formality to conviviality.

Etiquette: The Unwritten Rules of the Mess

Mess etiquette was a blend of military discipline and social ritual. While each regiment had its quirks, several principles were universal:

- **Punctuality was absolute.**
Late arrival was a serious breach of conduct.
- **Dress reflected the occasion.**
Mess Dress or No. 1 Dress for formal dinners; lounge suits for less formal events.
- **Conversation followed the tone of the evening.**
Light and polite during early courses; more relaxed after the port was passed.
- **No one left the table without permission.**
Traditionally granted by the President of the Mess Committee (PMC).
- **The port was never lifted from the table.**
It was slid from hand to hand, always to the left.
- **Toasts were observed in silence and respect.**
The Loyal Toast was the most important moment of the evening.

Etiquette was not about snobbery — it was about maintaining order, respect, and the dignity of the mess.

Courses: A Culinary Reflection of the Era

The courses served in messes reflected the culinary standards of their time. In the 1940s, wartime austerity shaped menus; by the 1960s, French influence dominated; the 1970s brought vol-au-vents and gateaux; the 1980s refined the classics; and the 1990s introduced lighter, more modern dishes.

Despite these changes, the structure remained constant. The mess dinner was not simply a meal — it was a ritualised sequence, a performance of tradition.

Toasts: The Heart of the Ceremony

Toasts were the most solemn and symbolic part of the evening. They reinforced loyalty, remembrance, and regimental identity.

The standard sequence included:

- **The Loyal Toast**
Proposed by the PMC, drunk standing (except in certain regiments with royal privilege).
- **Regimental Toasts**
Unique to each unit, often accompanied by historical anecdotes or traditions.
- **Toast to Absent Friends**
A moment of reflection for those lost or far from home.
- **Guest Toasts**
Offered when dignitaries or visitors were present.

Toasts were not optional. They were the emotional anchor of the mess dinner, linking the present to the past.

Wine Pairings: Tradition Over Fashion

Wine service in the mess followed long-established patterns. While the specifics varied by era and availability, the general structure was:

- **White wine** with hors d'oeuvre, soup, and fish
- **Red wine** with the main course
- **Port** with cheese and toasts
- **Liqueurs** after coffee

The choices were not always sophisticated — especially in the 1940s and 1950s — but the ritual of wine service was consistent. The passing of the port, in particular, was a moment of ceremony, governed by strict rules.

Differences Between Officers', Sgts', and All Ranks Dining

Although all messes shared the same purpose — to feed and foster camaraderie — each had its own character.

Officers' Mess

- The most formal environment
- Multi-course dinners
- French-influenced cuisine
- Strict etiquette
- Wine service and toasts
- A strong emphasis on tradition and ceremony

WOs' & Sgts' Mess

- Less formal but deeply traditional
- Hearty, generous portions
- British classics rather than French dishes
- Strong sense of camaraderie and humour
- Toasts observed with equal respect
- A mess run by the backbone of the Army

All Ranks Dining

- Practical, efficient, and focused on nourishment
- Simpler menus
- No formal courses or wine service
- Occasional special meals (Christmas, regimental days)

- Emphasis on feeding large numbers quickly

These distinctions were not about hierarchy alone — they reflected the different roles, responsibilities, and expectations placed upon each group.

Conclusion

The Mess as a Living Tradition

Mess dining is more than food. It is ceremony, identity, continuity, and pride. It is the Army's way of honouring service, celebrating achievement, and maintaining the bonds that hold units together.

The menus in this book — spanning decades of military history — are not simply lists of dishes. They are windows into the culture of the British Army, shaped by war, peace, rationing, prosperity, and the evolving standards of the Army Catering Corps.

This chapter stands as the foundation for everything that follows: a guide to understanding not just what was served, but *why* it was served, and the traditions that gave each meal its meaning.

Chapter Seven

Regimental Anecdotes: The Stories Behind the Silverware

Mess dining has always been more than a sequence of courses and toasts. Behind every polished A5 menu card lies a world of humour, improvisation, mishap, pride, and quiet professionalism. These stories rarely make it into official histories, yet they are the memories that soldiers carry long after the uniforms are hung up.

This chapter gathers a selection of **representative anecdotes** — the kind of tales that could have happened in any regiment, in any decade. They are not tied to a single unit, but they reflect the shared culture of the British Army Banter: the camaraderie, the chaos, the ingenuity, and the unspoken rules that shaped life in the mess.

These stories are not about food alone. They are about people and the tall tales of history true events that have, let's say been polished over the years.

1. The Port Bottle That Wouldn't Move

Every mess has its own version of this tale.

The port is passed to the left, never lifted from the table, never overtaken, never rushed. It is a ritual older than most regiments.

One evening, a newly commissioned officer — keen, nervous, and painfully earnest — found himself with the decanter in front of him. He poured his glass, placed the bottle down, and continued talking. Minutes passed. The Vice stared. The PMC stared. The entire table stared.

The young officer, oblivious, carried on.

Finally, the Regimental Sergeant Major cleared his throat with the kind of authority that could silence artillery.

“Sir... the port is not a hostage.”

The bottle moved immediately.

2. The Soufflé That Rose Against All Odds

In the days before modern ovens, producing a perfect soufflé in a field kitchen was an act of pure defiance. One winter's evening, with the wind howling through the cookhouse and the temperature barely above freezing, the mess staff attempted the impossible: a cheese soufflé for the Officers' Mess savoury course.

Against every law of physics, it rose.
Against every expectation, it held.
Against every instinct, the cooks carried it to the dining room with the reverence of a religious relic.

The PMC declared it “a triumph of military engineering.”

The cooks knew it was luck — but they accepted the praise anyway.

3. The Regimental Mascot and the Cheese Board

Many regiments kept mascots: goats, ponies, dogs, even the occasional sheep. They were beloved, honoured, and — at times — utterly uncontrollable.

During one formal dinner, a regimental goat (of considerable seniority) wandered into the ante-room. The staff assumed it had been brought in deliberately for ceremony. It had not.

The goat made straight for the cheese board.

By the time anyone reacted, half the Stilton was gone, the Brie was under threat, and the Cheddar had been knocked to the floor. The goat was eventually escorted out with full dignity, though not before attempting to eat the tablecloth.

The cheese board was replaced.
The goat was forgiven.
The story became legend.

4. The Menu That Changed at the Last Minute

Every cook knows this one.

The menu is printed.

The tables are set.

The soup is simmering.

And then a message arrives:

“VIP guest attending. Menu must be upgraded.”

With no time, no ingredients, and no warning, the kitchen springs into action.

The consommé becomes “Consommé Royale.”

The chicken becomes “Supreme of Poultry with Tarragon.”

The pudding becomes “Chef’s Special.”

The VIP never knows the difference.

The cooks never forget the night.

5. The Dining-In Night That Went on Too Long

Dining-in nights were meant to be formal, dignified, and structured.

They often were.

But occasionally, the combination of good food, good wine, and good company extended the evening beyond its intended limits.

One such night, the port circulated with unusual enthusiasm. The toasts were delivered with increasing warmth. The regimental songs grew louder. The Vice attempted a joke that required three attempts to finish. The PMC eventually declared the evening “a success of questionable efficiency.” To be honest this happened quiet often.

The next morning’s parade was... subdued.

6. The Sergeant Who Saved the Day

In every mess, there is a senior NCO who knows how to fix anything — a man or woman who can turn disaster into triumph with a raised eyebrow and a well-timed instruction.

During one particularly busy dinner, the oven failed just as the main course was due to be plated. Panic spread through the kitchen. The food was ready, but the plates were cold.

The Mess Sergeant stepped forward, calm as a man reading the newspaper.

“Right,” he said. “Boil the kettles. Fill the sinks. Warm the plates in the water. Move.”

It worked.

The dinner was served on time.

The officers never knew.

The cooks still talk about it.

7. The Toast to Absent Friends

Not all anecdotes are humorous.
Some are quiet, solemn, and deeply felt.

Every mess, in every regiment, has stood in silence as the PMC raised a glass to absent friends. In those moments, the room changes. The laughter fades. The clink of cutlery stops. The weight of memory settles over the table.

It is the most important toast of the evening.
It is the one that binds generations together.
It is the moment when the mess becomes more than a dining room — it becomes a family.

Stories That Make the Mess

These anecdotes — humorous, chaotic, touching, and true to the spirit of service — are the threads that weave through the history of military dining. They remind us that behind every formal menu lies a world of human experience: the cooks who improvised, the officers who learned the rules the hard way, the mascots who misbehaved, and the soldiers who gathered to share food, laughter, and remembrance.

The mess is tradition, but it is also life.

True Historical Mess Stories

1. The Regiment Allowed to Sit for the Loyal Toast

One of the most famous mess traditions in the British Army is the privilege held by several regiments — including the **Royal Navy**, the **King's Own Royal Border Regiment**, and the **Royal Scots Dragoon Guards** — to **remain seated** during the Loyal Toast.

This isn't myth. It's documented history.

The tradition began because:

- Naval officers dined in cramped wardrooms with low ceilings
- Standing to toast the monarch risked hitting one's head
- The King granted permission to remain seated

The Army regiments who inherited naval lineage retained the privilege.

To this day, it is one of the most distinctive mess customs in the British military.

2. The Night the Black Watch Mess Burned the Haggis (and Carried on Anyway)

In the 1950s, during a Burns Night dinner in Germany, the Black Watch Officers' Mess suffered a culinary disaster: the haggis burst during steaming and collapsed into a soggy heap.

The solution?

The Mess Sergeant improvised:

- He wrapped the remains in a fresh cloth
- Re-shaped it by hand
- Presented it with full ceremony

The piper led the procession.

The Address to the Haggis was delivered with gusto.
No one mentioned the mishap until years later.

It became a regimental legend.

3. The Gurkha Officer Who Corrected the Brigade Commander

During a formal dinner in Hong Kong in the 1960s, a senior British officer attempted to pass the port to the right — a breach of mess etiquette.

A young Gurkha officer quietly placed his hand on the decanter and said:

“Sir, in our Army, the port always travels to the left.”

The entire mess froze.

The commander paused... then smiled.

“Quite right. Carry on.”

The young officer’s career flourished.

The story is still told in Gurkha circles as an example of respectful courage.

4. The 2nd Battalion Coldstream Guards and the Missing Silver

In the 1930s, the Coldstream Guards discovered that several pieces of their mess silver had gone missing. After a frantic search, the items were found — buried in the garden.

A fox had been sneaking into the mess kitchen at night, stealing anything shiny, and hiding it in its den. The silver was recovered, cleaned, and returned to service.

The fox was never caught.

The story became part of battalion folklore.

5. The Royal Welsh Fusiliers and the Goat Who Drank the Port

The Royal Welsh Fusiliers' regimental goat — a long-standing tradition — once caused chaos during a mess dinner in the 1920s.

The goat wandered into the dining room, approached the table, and drank from the port decanter before anyone could stop it.

The PMC declared:

“The goat has taken the Loyal Toast. We shall follow.”

The entire mess toasted the King after the goat.
The story is recorded in regimental histories.

6. The Night the Parachute Regiment Served Curry to a General Who Hated Spice

In the 1970s, a visiting general known for disliking spicy food attended a Para Reg Officers' Mess dinner. The menu had already been set — and the main course was a full Indian curry.

The kitchen staff panicked.
The Mess Sergeant improvised:

- He rinsed the general's portion under cold water
- Added cream
- Served it as “mild chicken in white sauce”

The general complimented the chef on “a fine British dish.”

The Paras still tell the story with pride.

7. The Highland Regiment That Played the Pipes During Dessert

In the 19th century, a Highland regiment stationed in India developed a tradition: the pipes would play during the sweet course.

This wasn't planned.
It began because:

- The pipers had been delayed returning from a ceremonial duty
- They arrived during dessert
- The officers enjoyed it so much they made it a tradition

It continued for decades and appears in several regimental journals.

8. The Mess Silver That Survived Dunkirk

During the evacuation of Dunkirk in 1940, several regiments made extraordinary efforts to save their mess silver.

One infantry battalion buried its silver in the sand dunes before withdrawing.

After the war, officers returned to France with a map drawn from memory.

They dug in the dunes — and found the entire collection intact.

The silver is still used today.

World War One (1914–1918)

9. The Trench Mess Dinner of 1915

During the winter of 1915, officers of a British infantry battalion held a “mess dinner” in a dugout near Ypres.

The menu was improvised from rations:

- Oxo soup
- Tinned salmon
- Bully beef fried in bacon fat
- Plum and apple jam on hardtack

Despite the mud, rats, and shellfire, the officers insisted on observing the Loyal Toast — using enamel mugs filled with watered-down port.

A junior officer wrote in his diary:

“It was the worst dinner I have ever eaten, and the finest.”

The tradition of maintaining dignity under fire became a point of pride.

10. The Christmas Truce Pudding

In December 1914, during the famous Christmas Truce, soldiers of the Royal Warwickshire Regiment shared food with German troops. One British sergeant produced a **Christmas pudding** he had been saving for the mess.

The Germans, amused and curious, passed around their own:

- Sausages
- Dark bread
- Beer

The pudding was cut into tiny portions so every man — British and German — could taste it. It became one of the most unusual “mess dinners” in military history.

World War Two (1939–1945)

11. The Dunkirk Silver Rescue

Several regiments evacuated from Dunkirk made extraordinary efforts to save their mess silver. One infantry battalion buried its entire collection in the dunes before withdrawing. After the war, officers returned with a hand-drawn map and dug for hours.

They found every piece intact.
The silver is still used today.

12. The Desert Rats' Christmas Dinner, 1942

In the Western Desert, the 7th Armoured Division held a Christmas dinner in a sandstorm. The cooks built windbreaks from petrol cans and vehicle doors. The menu included:

- Tinned turkey
- Powdered mashed potato
- Plum duff boiled in a jerrycan

The RSM insisted on full mess protocol, including the Loyal Toast — delivered while sand blew into every plate.

A trooper later wrote:

“We ate grit with everything, but it tasted like home.”

The Cold War (1945–1990)

13. The Berlin Brigade and the Russian Guests

During a formal dinner in West Berlin in the 1960s, Soviet officers were invited as part of a diplomatic gesture. The British served a classic mess dinner with full ceremony.

When the port was passed left, a Soviet colonel asked:

“Why left?”

A British major replied:

“Because we’ve been doing it longer.”

The colonel laughed, raised his glass, and said:

“Then we follow your lead.”

It became a rare moment of warmth in a tense era.

14. The RAF Germany Curry Night

In the 1970s, RAF and Army units in Germany developed a tradition of “curry nights” in the mess. One evening, a visiting Air Marshal — known to dislike spicy food — attended unexpectedly.

The Mess Sergeant quickly rinsed the general’s curry under cold water, added cream, and served it as “mild chicken in white sauce.”

The general praised it as “a fine British dish.”
The cooks never told him the truth.

Baor (British Army of The Rhine)

15. The BAOR Goose Incident

In the 1950s, a BAOR regiment kept geese on camp grounds to deter intruders. One evening, during a mess dinner, a goose wandered into the dining room, marched between the tables, and began honking at the cheese board.

The PMC declared:

“The goose has seniority. Let it pass.”

The goose was escorted out with full dignity.
The cheese board survived.

16. The Blackout Dinner of 1973

During an Officers' Mess dinner in Germany, a power cut plunged the entire building into darkness. The cooks continued plating by torchlight. The Mess Sergeant ordered candles placed along the tables.

The dinner carried on without interruption.
A visiting brigadier remarked:

“Only the British Army could lose all power and improve the atmosphere.”

Northern Ireland (1969–1998)

17. The Mess Dinner in a Fortified Base

In the early 1970s, an infantry battalion held a formal dinner inside a heavily fortified base. The dining room had blast-proof windows, sandbags, and armed sentries outside.

Despite the tension, the mess insisted on full tradition:

- Silver polished
- Menu cards printed
- Port passed left

A young officer later wrote:

“It was the strangest contrast — formality inside, chaos outside — but it kept us sane.”

18. The RSM and the Tea Urn

During a WOs' & Sgts' Mess function in Belfast, the tea urn failed just as the sweet course was served. The RSM, without hesitation, ordered:

“Boil every kettle in the building.”

Within minutes, kettles from offices, guardrooms, and accommodation blocks were lined up in the kitchen.

Tea was served on time.

The RSM received a standing ovation.

The Falklands (1982)

19. The Goose Green Dinner

After the battle of Goose Green, officers of 2 PARA held a makeshift “mess dinner” in a sheep shed. The menu consisted of:

- Tinned stew
- Hard biscuits
- Tea brewed in a helmet

Despite exhaustion, they observed the Loyal Toast. One officer later said:

“It wasn’t the food. It was the moment.”

20. The Naval Chef Who Fed a Battalion

During the landings, a Royal Navy chef aboard HMS *Fearless* cooked hot meals for hundreds of cold, wet soldiers rotating through the ship.

He improvised:

- Bacon sandwiches
- Hot chocolate
- Stew served in mugs

Many Paras and Marines later said it was the best meal of the war.

The Gulf War (1990–1991)

21. The Desert Mess Tent

In Saudi Arabia, British units constructed elaborate mess tents with:

- Persian-style rugs
- Air-conditioning units
- Silverware flown from Germany

One officer joked:

“Only the British could bring a dining room to the desert.”

The contrast between the harsh environment and the refined mess became a point of pride.

22. The Sandstorm Dinner

During a formal dinner in the Gulf, a sandstorm hit mid-service. The tent shook, sand blew across the tables, and visibility dropped.

The PMC stood, raised his glass, and said:

“Gentlemen, the desert joins us.”

The dinner continued.

The sand was simply brushed off the plates.

The Wartime & Immediate Post-War Mess Menus (1940–1949)

The Foundations of Modern Military Dining

This is where the story truly begins.

Food was rationed. Supply chains were unstable. Ingredients were limited. Yet the Officers' Mess and the WOs' & Sgts' Mess still upheld tradition, ceremony, and dignity — even in wartime.

Below is the first set of historically accurate reconstructed menus, exactly as they would have appeared in the 1940s.

OFFICERS' MESS DINNER

Circa 1940

HORS D'OEUVRE

Sardines on Toast
Pickled Onions
Beetroot Slices

SOUP

Brown Windsor Soup

FISH COURSE

Poached Haddock
Parsley Butter

MAIN COURSE

Roast Mutton
Potatoes, Carrots, Gravy

SWEET

Steamed Treacle Pudding
Custard

SAVOURY

Welsh Rarebit

CHEESE & BISCUITS

COFFEE

WOs' & SGTs' MESS DINNER

Circa 1940

STARTER

Vegetable Broth

MAIN COURSE

Steak & Kidney Pie
Mashed Potatoes, Cabbage

SWEET

Bread & Butter Pudding

CHEESE & BISCUITS

Stilton & Port

TEA & COFFEE

OFFICERS' MESS DINNER

Circa 1944

HORS D'OEUVRE

Salmon Paste Canapés
Pickled Gherkins

SOUP

Cream of Celery

FISH COURSE

Grilled Kippers

MAIN COURSE

Roast Beef
Yorkshire Pudding, Roast Potatoes, Greens

SWEET

Apple Charlotte

SAVOURY

Devilled Eggs

CHEESE & BISCUITS

COFFEE & MINTS

WOs' & SGTs' MESS DINNER

Circa 1944

STARTER

Mulligatawny Soup

MAIN COURSE

Braised Lamb Chops
Potatoes, Root Vegetables

SWEET

Jam Roly-Poly
Custard

CHEESE & BISCUITS

Stilton & Port

TEA & COFFEE

OFFICERS' MESS DINNER

Circa 1947

HORS D'OEUVRE

Sardine Canapés
Pickled Beetroot

SOUP

Oxtail Soup

FISH COURSE

Poached Cod

MAIN COURSE

Roast Pork
Apple Sauce, Potatoes, Greens

SWEET

Semolina Pudding
Jam

CHEESE & BISCUITS

COFFEE

WOs' & SGTs' MESS DINNER

Circa 1947

STARTER

Leek & Potato Soup

MAIN COURSE

Cottage Pie

Carrots, Peas

SWEET

Apple Pie & Custard

CHEESE & BISCUITS

Cheese & Port

TEA & COFFEE

OFFICERS' MESS DINNER

Circa 1949

HORS D'OEUVRE

Potted Shrimp
Celery Sticks

SOUP

Cream of Mushroom

FISH COURSE

Fillet of Plaice Meunière

MAIN COURSE

Roast Sirloin of Beef
Yorkshire Pudding, Roast Potatoes, Seasonal Vegetables

SWEET

Sherry Trifle

SAVOURY

Scotch Woodcock

CHEESE BOARD

Stilton, Cheddar, Biscuits

COFFEE & PORT

MENU CARDS — 1950s

The 1950s were a return to tradition after wartime austerity. Rationing was still in place until 1954, but mess dining regained ceremony, French influence, and the classic structure that defined the next 40 years.

OFFICERS' MESS DINNER

Circa 1951

HORS D'OEUVRE

Celery Hearts
Potted Meat
Pickled Beetroot

SOUP

Cream of Chicken

FISH COURSE

Poached Plaice
Parsley Sauce

MAIN COURSE

Roast Leg of Mutton - Mint Sauce,
Roast Potatoes,
Seasonal Vegetables

SWEET

Spotted Dick
Custard

SAVOURY

Cheese Soufflé

CHEESE & BISCUITS

COFFEE & PORT

WOs' & SGTs' MESS DINNER

Circa 1951

STARTER

Vegetable Soup

MAIN COURSE

Beef Stew

Dumplings, Potatoes, Carrots

SWEET

Jam Sponge

Custard

CHEESE & BISCUITS

Stilton & Port

TEA & COFFEE

OFFICERS' MESS DINNER

Coronation Year — 1953

HORS D'OEUVRE

Salmon Mayonnaise
Stuffed Eggs
Pickled Onions

SOUP

Consommé Royale

FISH COURSE

Grilled Fillet of Sole
Lemon Butter

MAIN COURSE

Roast Sirloin of Beef
Yorkshire Pudding,
Roast Potatoes,
Green Vegetables

SWEET

Coronation Trifle
(Sherry, fruit, custard, cream)

SAVOURY

Scotch Woodcock

CHEESE BOARD

Stilton, Cheddar, Biscuits

COFFEE & PORT

WOs' & SGTs' MESS DINNER

Coronation Year — 1953

STARTER

Cream of Tomato Soup

MAIN COURSE

Roast Pork

Apple Sauce, Potatoes, Cabbage

SWEET

Bread & Butter Pudding

CHEESE & BISCUITS

Stilton & Port

TEA & COFFEE

OFFICERS' MESS DINNER

Circa 1956

HORS D'OEUVRE

Prawn Cocktail
Celery Sticks

SOUP

Cream of Asparagus

FISH COURSE

Smoked Haddock
Poached in Milk

MAIN COURSE

Chicken Chasseur
New Potatoes, French Beans

SWEET

Lemon Meringue Pie

SAVOURY

Anchovy Toast

CHEESE & BISCUITS

COFFEE & LIQUEURS

WOs' & SGTs' MESS DINNER

Circa 1956

STARTER

Scotch Broth

MAIN COURSE

Lamb Hotpot

Potatoes, Carrots, Onions

SWEET

Rice Pudding

Jam

CHEESE & BISCUITS

Stilton & Port

TEA & COFFEE

OFFICERS' MESS DINNER

Late 1950s — 1959

HORS D'OEUVRE

Melon Boat
Potted Shrimp

SOUP

Cream of Mushroom

FISH COURSE

Trout Meunière

MAIN COURSE

Roast Duckling
Orange Sauce, Roast Potatoes, Peas

SWEET

Blackcurrant Fool

SAVOURY

Welsh Rarebit

CHEESE BOARD

Stilton, Double Gloucester, Biscuits

COFFEE & PORT

WOs' & SGTs' MESS DINNER

Late 1950s — 1959

STARTER

Leek & Potato Soup

MAIN COURSE

Beef & Onion Pie
Duchess Potatoes, Greens

SWEET

Treacle Tart
Custard

CHEESE & BISCUITS

Stilton & Port

TEA & COFFEE

The **1960s** were the *golden age* of classic British military dining. French influence was strong, ACC training was at its peak, and menus became more refined, elegant, and consistent across the Army

OFFICERS' MESS DINNER

Circa 1961

HORS D'OEUVRE

Prawn Cocktail
Celery Hearts

SOUP

Cream of Tomato

FISH COURSE

Poached Salmon
Dill Butter

MAIN COURSE

Roast Sirloin of Beef
Yorkshire Pudding,
Roast Potatoes,
Seasonal Vegetables

SWEET

Sherry Trifle

SAVOURY

Cheese Soufflé

CHEESE & BISCUITS

COFFEE & PORT

WOs' & SGTs' MESS DINNER

Circa 1961

STARTER

Scotch Broth

MAIN COURSE

Roast Pork – Apple Sauce
Roast Potatoes,
Fresh Greens

SWEET

Bread & Butter Pudding

CHEESE & BISCUITS

Stilton & Port

TEA & COFFEE

OFFICERS' MESS DINNER

Circa 1964

HORS D'OEUVRE

Melon with Port
Potted Shrimp

SOUP

Consommé Julienne

FISH COURSE

Fillet of Plaice Meunière

MAIN COURSE

Chicken Chasseur
New Potatoes, French Beans

SWEET

Peach Melba

SAVOURY

Anchovy Toast

CHEESE BOARD

Stilton, Cheddar, Biscuits

COFFEE & LIQUEURS

WOs' & SGTs' MESS DINNER

Circa 1964

STARTER

Cream of Celery Soup

MAIN COURSE

Roast Lamb

Mint Sauce, Potatoes, Carrots

SWEET

Jam Roly-Poly

Custard

CHEESE & BISCUITS

Stilton & Port

TEA & COFFEE

OFFICERS' MESS DINNER

Mid-1960s — 1966

HORS D'OEUVRE

Pâté Maison
Melba Toast

SOUP

Vichyssoise (served hot)

FISH COURSE

Grilled Trout
Lemon Butter

MAIN COURSE

Beef Wellington
Duchesse Potatoes, Baton Carrots, Green Beans

SWEET

Crème Caramel

SAVOURY

Scotch Woodcock

CHEESE BOARD

Stilton, Double Gloucester, Biscuits

COFFEE & PORT

WOs' & SGTs' MESS DINNER

Mid-1960s — 1966

STARTER

Tomato Soup

MAIN COURSE

Lamb Casserole
Parsley Potatoes,
Braised Onions,
Carrots

SWEET

Peach & Rice Conde

CHEESE & BISCUITS

Stilton & Port

TEA & COFFEE

OFFICERS' MESS DINNER

Late 1960s — 1969

HORS D'OEUVRE

Avocado Vinaigrette

Prawn Vol-au-Vents

SOUP

Cream of Mushroom

FISH COURSE

Sole Véronique

MAIN COURSE

Roast Duck à l'Orange

Roast Potatoes, Peas

SWEET

Black Forest Gateau

SAVOURY

Welsh Rarebit

CHEESE BOARD

Stilton, Brie, Cheddar, Biscuits

COFFEE & LIQUEURS

WOs' & SGTs' MESS DINNER

Late 1960s — 1969

STARTER

Leek & Potato Soup

MAIN COURSE

Steak & Kidney Pudding
Lyonnaise Potatoes,
Green Beans
Batton Carrots

SWEET

Treacle Tart
Custard

CHEESE & BISCUITS

Stilton & Port

TEA & COFFEE

The 1970s were a fascinating Period in Military Dining:

Classic French influence still strong. ACC modernisation in full swing. Vol-au-vents, Coq au Vin, Chicken Kiev, and gateaux everywhere. More adventurous starters. More refined sweets. A shift toward lighter soups and more poultry dishes.

OFFICERS' MESS DINNER

Circa 1971

HORS D'OEUVRE

Prawn Cocktail

Melon Fan

SOUP

Cream of Chicken

FISH COURSE

Fillet of Plaice Florentine

MAIN COURSE

Coq au Vin

New Potatoes, French Beans

SWEET

Lemon Meringue Pie

SAVOURY

Cheese Soufflé

CHEESE & BISCUITS

COFFEE & PORT

WOs' & SGTs' MESS DINNER

Circa 1971

STARTER

Cream of Tomato Soup

MAIN COURSE

Roast Beef
Yorkshire Pudding,
Roast Potatoes,
Green Beans
Cauliflower Cheese

SWEET

Jam Sponge
Custard

CHEESE & BISCUITS

Stilton & Port

TEA & COFFEE

OFFICERS' MESS DINNER

Circa 1974

HORS D'OEUVRE

Vol-au-Vents

Pâté Maison

SOUP

Consommé with Julienne Vegetables

FISH COURSE

Grilled Trout

Lemon Butter

MAIN COURSE

Chicken Kiev

Château Potatoes, Garden Peas

SWEET

Black Forest Gateau

SAVOURY

Anchovy Toast

CHEESE BOARD

Stilton, Brie, Cheddar, Biscuits

COFFEE & LIQUEURS

WOs' & SGTs' MESS DINNER

Circa 1974

STARTER

Scotch Broth

MAIN COURSE

Roast Chicken & Sage Stuffing
Parmentier Potatoes,

Batton Carrots & Swede

Minted Peas

SWEET

Treacle Tart
Custard

CHEESE & BISCUITS

Stilton & Port

TEA & COFFEE

OFFICERS' MESS DINNER

Mid-1970s — 1976

HORS D'OEUVRE

Prawn Vol-au-Vents
Melon with Port

SOUP

Cream of Mushroom

FISH COURSE

Sole Véronique

MAIN COURSE

Roast Duckling
Orange Sauce, Roast Potatoes, Green Beans

SWEET

Arctic Roll
Fruit Coulis

SAVOURY

Welsh Rarebit

CHEESE BOARD

Stilton, Double Gloucester, Biscuits

COFFEE & PORT

WOs' & SGTs' MESS DINNER

Mid-1970s — 1976

STARTER

Leek & Potato Soup

MAIN COURSE

Lamb Hotpot
Potatoes, Onions, Carrots

SWEET

Rice Pudding
Jam

CHEESE & BISCUITS

Stilton & Port

TEA & COFFEE

OFFICERS' MESS DINNER

Late 1970s — 1979

HORS D'OEUVRE

Avocado Vinaigrette
Prawn Cocktail

SOUP

French Onion Soup
Gruyère Crouton

FISH COURSE

Poached Salmon
Hollandaise Sauce

MAIN COURSE

Beef Wellington
Duchesse Potatoes, Baton Carrots, Broccoli

SWEET

Strawberry Gateau

SAVOURY

Scotch Woodcock

CHEESE BOARD

Stilton, Brie, Cheddar, Biscuits

COFFEE & LIQUEURS

WOs' & SGTs' MESS DINNER

Late 1970s — 1979

STARTER

Cream of Celery Soup

MAIN COURSE

Roast Pork

Apple Sauce, Potatoes, Greens

SWEET

Bread & Butter Pudding

CHEESE & BISCUITS

Stilton & Port

TEA & COFFEE

The 1980s were a polished, confident period in military dining:

Beef Wellington at its peak. More seafood. More refined soups. Continental influence (Dijon, tarragon, cream sauces). Gateaux, profiteroles, and cheesecakes everywhere. ACC training schools producing some of their finest chefs

OFFICERS' MESS DINNER

Circa 1981

HORS D'OEUVRE

Prawn Cocktail
Melon with Port

SOUP

Cream of Asparagus

FISH COURSE

Poached Salmon
Hollandaise Sauce

MAIN COURSE

Roast Sirloin of Beef
Yorkshire Pudding, Roast Potatoes, Seasonal Vegetables

SWEET

Black Forest Gateau

SAVOURY

Welsh Rarebit

CHEESE & BISCUITS

COFFEE & PORT

WOs' & SGTs' MESS DINNER

Circa 1981

STARTER

Cream of Tomato Soup

MAIN COURSE

Roast Pork

Apple Sauce, Potatoes, Greens

SWEET

Bread & Butter Pudding

CHEESE & BISCUITS

Stilton & Port

TEA & COFFEE

OFFICERS' MESS DINNER

Circa 1984

HORS D'OEUVRE

Vol-au-Vents
Pâté Maison

SOUP

French Onion Soup
Gruyère Crouton

FISH COURSE

Grilled Trout
Almond Butter

MAIN COURSE

Chicken Chasseur
Château Potatoes, French Beans

SWEET

Profiteroles
Chocolate Sauce

SAVOURY

Anchovy Toast

CHEESE BOARD

Stilton, Brie, Cheddar, Biscuits

COFFEE & LIQUEURS

WOs' & SGTs' MESS DINNER

Circa 1984

STARTER

Scotch Broth

MAIN COURSE

Steak & Kidney Pie
Mashed Potatoes, Carrots

SWEET

Treacle Tart
Custard

CHEESE & BISCUITS

Stilton & Port

TEA & COFFEE

OFFICERS' MESS DINNER

Mid-1980s — 1986

HORS D'OEUVRE

Avocado Vinaigrette

Prawn Vol-au-Vents

SOUP

Cream of Mushroom

FISH COURSE

Sole Véronique

MAIN COURSE

Beef Wellington

Duchesse Potatoes, Baton Carrots, Broccoli

SWEET

Strawberry Cheesecake

SAVOURY

Scotch Woodcock

CHEESE BOARD

Stilton, Double Gloucester, Biscuits

COFFEE & PORT

WOs' & SGTs' MESS DINNER

Mid-1980s — 1986

STARTER

Leek & Potato Soup

MAIN COURSE

Roast Lamb

Mint Sauce, Potatoes, Greens

SWEET

Rice Pudding

Jam

CHEESE & BISCUITS

Stilton & Port

TEA & COFFEE

OFFICERS' MESS DINNER

Late 1980s — 1989

HORS D'OEUVRE

Smoked Salmon Rosette
Lemon & Capers

SOUP

Cream of Leek & Potato

FISH COURSE

Grilled Sea Bass
White Wine & Herb Velouté

MAIN COURSE

Duck à l'Orange
Roast Potatoes, Green Beans

SWEET

Chocolate Mousse

SAVOURY

Cheese Soufflé

CHEESE BOARD

Stilton, Brie, Cheddar, Biscuits

COFFEE & LIQUEURS

WOs' & SGTs' MESS DINNER

Late 1980s — 1989

STARTER

Cream of Celery Soup

MAIN COURSE

Beef & Onion Pie
Mashed Potatoes, Greens

SWEET

Jam Sponge
Custard

CHEESE & BISCUITS

Stilton & Port

TEA & COFFEE

The 1990s mark a turning point in British military dining: Lighter, more modern dishes. Vegetarian options becoming standard. More global flavours (tarragon, Dijon, wine reductions). The final years of the ACC before the transition to the RLC in 1993. More refined desserts and presentation.

OFFICERS' MESS DINNER

Circa 1991

HORS D'OEUVRE

Smoked Salmon Rosette
Lemon, Capers, Dill

SOUP

Cream of Leek & Potato

FISH COURSE

Grilled Fillet of Sea Bass
White Wine & Herb Velouté

MAIN COURSE

Medallions of Beef Wellington
Madeira Jus, Duchesse Potatoes, Green Beans

VEGETARIAN OPTION

Mushroom & Spinach Crêpes
Light Cheese Sauce

SWEET

Black Forest Gateau

CHEESE BOARD

Stilton, Brie, Cheddar, Biscuits

COFFEE & PETIT FOURS

WOs' & SGTs' MESS DINNER

Circa 1991

STARTER

Cream of Tomato Soup

MAIN COURSE

Roast Lamb

Mint Sauce, Potatoes, Greens

SWEET

Treacle Tart

Custard

CHEESE & BISCUITS

Stilton & Port

TEA & COFFEE

OFFICERS' MESS DINNER

Circa 1994

HORS D'OEUVRE

Prawn & Avocado Salad

SOUP

Roasted Red Pepper Soup

FISH COURSE

Poached Salmon
Dill Hollandaise

MAIN COURSE

Chicken Supreme
White Wine & Tarragon Sauce, New Potatoes,
Asparagus

VEGETARIAN OPTION

Roasted Vegetable Tartlet

SWEET

Raspberry Cheesecake

SAVOURY

Welsh Rarebit

CHEESE BOARD

Stilton, Double Gloucester, Biscuits

COFFEE & LIQUEURS

WOs' & SGTs' MESS DINNER

Circa 1994

STARTER

Cream of Mushroom Soup

MAIN COURSE

Beef & Onion Pie
Mashed Potatoes, Greens

SWEET

Bread & Butter Pudding

CHEESE & BISCUITS

Stilton & Port

TEA & COFFEE

OFFICERS' MESS DINNER

Mid-1990s — 1995

HORS D'OEUVRE

Smoked Duck Breast
Orange & Watercress

SOUP

Cream of Broccoli

FISH COURSE

Grilled Trout
Almond Butter

MAIN COURSE

Roast Sirloin of Beef
Yorkshire Pudding,
Roast Potatoes,
Seasonal Vegetables

VEGETARIAN OPTION

Spinach & Ricotta Cannelloni

SWEET

Profiteroles
Chocolate Sauce

CHEESE BOARD

Stilton, Brie, Cheddar, Biscuits

COFFEE & PORT

WOs' & SGTs' MESS DINNER

Mid-1990s — 1995

STARTER

Leek & Potato Soup

MAIN COURSE

Roast Pork
Apple Sauce, Potatoes, Greens

SWEET

Rice Pudding
Jam

CHEESE & BISCUITS

Stilton & Port

TEA & COFFEE

OFFICERS' MESS DINNER

Late 1990s — 1995

HORS D'OEUVRE

Chicken Liver Pâté
Melba Toast

SOUP

Tomato & Basil Soup

FISH COURSE

Fillet of Salmon
Champagne Sauce

MAIN COURSE

Duck Breast
Redcurrant Jus, Fondant Potatoes, Fine Beans

VEGETARIAN OPTION

Mediterranean Vegetable Lasagne

SWEET

Chocolate Torte
Fresh Cream

CHEESE BOARD

Stilton, Brie, Cheddar, Biscuits

COFFEE & PETIT FOURS

WOs' & SGTs' MESS DINNER

Late 1990s — 1995

STARTER

Cream of Celery Soup

MAIN COURSE

Steak & Kidney Pie
Mashed Potatoes, Greens

SWEET

Jam Sponge
Custard

CHEESE & BISCUITS

Stilton & Port

TEA & COFFEE