



CHANGE-OF-WATCH

**CUSTOMS
AND
PROTOCOL**

**FOR
AUXILIARY DIVISIONS**

Change-of-Watch Customs and Protocol

INTRODUCTION

When planning a Change-of-Watch (C.O.W.), members of the Coast Guard Auxiliary can find helpful information in several publications; *The Auxiliary Manual*, COMDINST M16790.1 (series), *Auxiliary Program Guide to Courtesy and Protocol*, DOC #P001F, July 1999, U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary, Department of Training, *Division Procedures Guide*, COMDTPUB P16791.3 (series) and the *Auxiliary Operations Policy Manual*, COMDINST M16798.3 (series), to name a few. However, all four publications combined do not have the answers to many questions that arise regarding the proper conduct of a Division C.O.W. This publication attempts to provide that guidance in a short, easy-to-follow guide.

The sole purpose of this document is to assist units in planning and executing their C.O.W. so that it results in a successful event. This guide is just that – a guide, to be utilized as the unit sees fit.

WHY A CHANGE-OF-WATCH?

The purpose of an Auxiliary Change-of-Watch is to install the newly elected officers and to recognize the accomplishments and service of the outgoing officers. The annual Change-of-Watch is often the only formal gathering of Division and Flotilla members during the year.

The ceremony itself is patterned after the Coast Guard's formal, time honored Change-of-Command ceremony. When done successfully, the C.O.W. can have an energizing effect on the incoming officers, give the outgoing officers a sense of accomplishment and appreciation, and give everyone else a positive impression of your unit. However, when the C.O.W. is done without the proper planning, or when it lacks basic courtesy and protocol, people will leave with a negative impression of the unit, and especially its leadership, regardless of the things the unit did right during the previous year.

PLANNING

All successful C.O.W.s are preceded by good planning. Since most suitable restaurants/catering halls are booked many months in advance, a C.O.W. Committee needs to be established as early in the year as possible.

C.O.W. COMMITTEE

Some divisions like to rotate the C.O.W. committee among the flotillas, others keep the same committee members each year, and some select the committee members from volunteers each year. A combination of these methods is probably the best. Your chances of success will be increased if the committee is:

- Made up of at least one member who was intimately involved in the previous C.O.W.,
- Rotated to a new flotilla each year &/or having several different flotillas represented in the decision making of the committee and,
- All volunteers who are willing to do the work needed.

Change-of-Watch Customs and Protocol

MASTER OF CEREMONIES

The Master of Ceremonies should be selected by the C.O.W. Committee, based primarily on the person's comfort level with public speaking. It is also helpful if this person is knowledgeable with Coast Guard ranks and Auxiliary titles. It could be the committee chair, but often is not.

LOCATION

Some of the best efforts go to naught if you find out too late that a noisy wedding reception is going on in the room next to yours, the rooms separated only by a thin folding wall. The dignity of your event is surely spoiled if the Bunny Hop is going on during your pledge to the flag or invocation. Try to find a hall where yours is the only event going on at the time.

Even if the facility has no policy regarding smoking, it should be prohibited in the room where your event is taking place.

CONTRACT

The authorization to sign a C.O.W. contract is given only to the Division Captain (DCP), and cannot be extended to committee members. The committee members can scout out locations, make preliminary negotiations and discuss prices. Once the facility has been selected, the contract must be approved by the District Legal Officer (DSO-LP) before it can be signed by the Division Captain and given to the facility. **There are no exceptions to this requirement.**

INVITATIONS

Usually, the Division Board decides upon the number of and identity of those who are to be invited as guests of the division. This list is subject to change each year depending on the finances of the unit, but the number of guests usually doesn't change too much from year to year. If you are inviting someone as a guest of the division, you should always include their spouse in the invitation. It is best for flotillas to wait until the division list of guests has been finalized, then the flotillas should be free to invite any guests of their choice.

As soon as the date has been selected for your C.O.W., the Division and District elected officers should be notified. This can be done informally; the purpose is to permit them to avoid making conflicting plans for that date. District officers in particular have very busy schedules during the typical C.O.W. season, and the more advance notice you can give them, the better the chance they will be able to attend your function.

Once the details of the affair have been decided upon, the formal invitations should be mailed to your "honored guests". This invitation should be in the form of a letter signed by the unit leader or the Chair of the C.O.W. Committee. **Enclosure #1 is a sample invitation.** Specific information regarding the event should be included within the letter, unless it is specified on the registration form itself. If you will be using a reservation form, do not include the prices in the form you'll be sending to those you do not expect to pay – guests of the unit.

Change-of-Watch Customs and Protocol

RESERVATION FORM

All prospective attendees should receive a registration form at least two months in advance of the event. The form should include all details of the event, including cost, time, location and uniform required – including the fact that “appropriate civilian attire” is also acceptable. There have been too many times when prospective attendees did not attend solely because they did not have the required uniform, and were not aware that civilian attire was acceptable. Always specify “Please respond by ***Date*** to: and list the name and address of the person to receive the reservations. **NOTE:** If your form has a “tear-off” that is to be filled out and returned, make sure that important information needed by the attendee, such as uniform, location, time, etc. is not on the part of the form they are asked to return to you.

TIMING

The optimal time to hold your C.O.W. depends on the date of your elections and the expected weather in your area. It is not necessary to wait until after 1 January to hold the event. In actuality, the committee will need some time after the conclusion of division and flotilla elections to compile the names of the incoming officers for inclusion in the printed program – if there is one.

You should allow approximately four hours for the event. Normally, the formal activities are preceded by a cocktail hour. Even if no liquor will be served, this informal time is important to the success of the affair. This is the time that people who have not seen each other for some time have an opportunity to mingle. In addition, this is the time that visiting dignitaries can be introduced to the local members, and the only time they’ll have to mingle with others. **NOTE:** It is important to have someone assigned to accompany the VIPs, to prevent them from being cornered by a well meaning member who might monopolize their time, leaving others with no opportunity to meet them.

At the conclusion of the cocktail hour, the Master of Ceremonies should welcome everyone to the C.O.W., announce the Flag Salute, then the Invocation and then ask everyone to take their seats. At this time, the honored guests should be introduced to the group.

It is preferable to have the meal served at this time, and wait till the meal has been concluded to resume the official portion of the C.O.W. However, it is perfectly acceptable to continue with the ceremonies and then eat if the restaurant/hall cannot accommodate the affair any other way. Remember to announce the ceremony about 5-10 minutes in advance to give individuals time to visit the facilities or conclude other business before it starts.

The dinner will take about an hour, the C.O.W. ceremony another 1-1 ½ hours, leaving ½ hour for people to say their goodbyes before the hall need to be cleared.

Obviously, if there is to be dancing after the conclusion of the ceremony, the time frame would be adjusted to accommodate the music.

Change-of-Watch Customs and Protocol

HAT TABLE / AWARDS TABLE

A small table should be available as people enter the dining area where Combination Caps can be placed. It costs nothing, yet adds a nice touch to the C.O.W. Another table should be placed near the podium to hold awards, gifts, etc.

GREETERS

Greeters should be stationed near the door to welcome attendees and to ensure everyone knows at which table they will be sitting.

PLACE CARDS

Whenever seats are assigned, place cards are required. The greeters should advise attendees of their table number, and the place card should be easily readable for guests to find their seats. Place cards can be written or typed, but should be legible and utilize proper titles.

FLAGS / BANNERS

Your unit will need to bring an Auxiliary Ensign and flag stand. Most catering halls have an American flag; however you should not rely on its acceptability. If you intend to utilize theirs, the committee must inspect it beforehand to make sure it's not smaller than the Auxiliary Ensign you'll bring.

The American flag should be placed behind and to the right of podium or head table, in other words, on the left of the audience. All other flags, including the Auxiliary ensign, should be placed on the left of the podium, to the audience's right.

If your unit has a banner, it can be hung at the entrance to the room, hung behind the podium, draped over the awards table, or draped over the hat table, wherever it would look best.

PROGRAM

A printed program is not necessary, but does add a nice touch to the occasion. If you have a printed program, keep it small enough that it doesn't take up too much room on the dinner table. A folded 8 1/2x11 cardstock program is the most popular, but rolled up parchment type paper tied with a ribbon, or some other design can be used if your affair is on the fancy side.

SEATING

Table seating should always be assigned by the committee. It is optional whether you want to assign seats or just assign tables. For the "honors" table(s), this option should be discussed with the unit leaders beforehand, as the leaders may wish to decide who will be seated with whom.

If a flotilla invites someone as their non-paying guest, it is appropriate to seat that person with the flotilla, regardless of their "rank".

Change-of-Watch Customs and Protocol

HEAD TABLE

Your seating arrangements will be much easier if you do not have a head table. In fact, most VIPs prefer seating at regular tables, where they're not "on display", and can meet new people. One or more regular tables can be set aside as "honors" tables, usually those situated closest to the center front of the room.

COAST GUARD PERSONNEL

When the District Commander or Chief of Staff is not present (the presence of either is extremely rare at a Division C.O.W.), the Director of Auxiliary, regardless of rank, should be recognized as the direct representative of the District Commander. Thus, the Diraux should be accorded a seating position and speaking order recognizing that precedence, even though a higher ranking officer, such as a Group Commander may be present. It is important to refer to all Coast Guard personnel by their proper rank and title.

INTRODUCTIONS

Because it may be difficult to "rank" the importance of your guests, i.e. does a Vice Commodore get introduced before a Commander who is a CG Group Ops officer?, you may wish to make the introductions by service, i.e. "From the United States Coast Guard", "From the Fifth Northern Auxiliary District", "and Some Very Good Friends of our Division" (neighboring DCP, VCP, etc.) It is important that proper titles be used when introducing your honored guests. Coast Guard personnel should be introduced by their proper rank, i.e. "Senior Chief Bosuns Mate, Joseph T. Jones", not "Chief Jones", and Auxiliary Commodores (anyone eligible to wear one or more stars on their collar – with or without a Past Officer Device), should be referred to as "Commodore Smith". Other members of the Auxiliary, including Rear-Commodores and Vice Commodores are addressed as Mr., Mrs., or MS as appropriate, i.e. "Mrs. Bonita Allen, Vice Commodore, Fifth Northern District".

MUSIC / COLOR GUARD

Few division C.O.W.s include a band (or recorded military march type music) and a Color Guard, however they are certainly appropriate – if done well. If used, both should be thoroughly rehearsed in advance, so that the music can be heard at an acceptable level throughout the hall, and that the Color Guard knows the proper steps in their procedure. If you have a band, you will most likely incorporate the National Anthem into the ceremony. When in uniform and indoors, it is appropriate to stand at attention during the anthem, and the passing of colors, with your hands at your side.

FLAG SALUTE

When the pledge of allegiance is given, everyone, whether in uniform or not, should stand and place their right hand over their heart. (This assumes you're indoors and not under cover, i.e. not wearing a hat at the time).

INVOCATION

An invocation is not required, but if it is given, it should always be non-denominational.

Change-of-Watch Customs and Protocol

INSTALLATION OF OFFICERS

Although there is no “official” order for this portion of the ceremony, a time-tested order is as follows:

- Begin by having one of the VIPs read the Prologue for all new officers, then
- Another VIP calls up the incoming DCP and VCP and swears them in, then
- Another VIP calls up the FCs and VFCs and swears them in, then
- The new DCP swears in the incoming Division staff, assisted by the new VCP who hands out their Certificates of Appointment.

SPEAKING ORDER / PRESENTATION OF AWARDS

In order to keep speeches to a reasonable length of time, only the most senior officers of each unit should be asked to speak, i.e. Diraux, DCO, Group Commander, Station Commander, DCP. Other officers such as the VCO, RCO, and Station Exec can be utilized during the pledge to the flag, the invocation, awards and/or installation of officers, if desired. If you do not have Coast Guard facilities in your area, you may wish to ask the RCO and VCO to speak also. The number of speakers is not set in stone, but should be controlled for the sake of your audience. The speakers should be notified that they’ll be asked to speak, and be advised how much time has been allotted to them in the program.

Speakers should be called up in order of rank or office, from lowest to highest. A suggested order would be as follows,

- The Station Commander comes up to say a few words and present the SAR award,
- The Group Commander comes up to say a few words, and present a Group award, if any,
- The District Commodore comes up to say a few words and present an award to the Auxiliarist of the Year, and lastly,
- The Diraux comes up to say a few words and present any Coxswain, Auxop or Coast Guard awards as may be appropriate.

UNIFORM

Service Dress Blue, Alpha is the most common uniform for a C.O.W., since the only difference between it and the Bravo uniform is the wearing of a white shirt instead of a blue one. If there is room on the registration form, it is suggested that you specify exactly what Service Dress Blue, Alpha is : **For Men** – C.G. Blue Service Coat and trousers, white shirt, C.G. Blue necktie, ribbons, breast devices and name tag. **For Women** – C.G. Blue Service Coat and skirt, white dress shirt, black tie, ribbons, breast devices and name tag.

REMARKS BY GUESTS

In the interest of time, dignitaries can be asked to make their remarks upon the conclusion of their portion of the awards ceremony, when they are already at the podium. As an alternative, the remarks can be held until the conclusion of the awards, and the dignitaries are then called up again. Whichever method you decide upon, it is incumbent that your speakers be advised of the selected method before they are called up. In addition, there

Change-of-Watch Customs and Protocol

may be occasions when you want to give time to someone that was not involved in the official program to make brief remarks to those in attendance.

RAFFLE 50/50

If 50/50 tickets will be sold at the event, they should be sold only during cocktails, dinner and during breaks. Tickets should never be sold during the ceremonies or speeches. Keep the drawing short.

CLOSING REMARKS

This is the opportunity for the outgoing DCP to thank the C.O.W. committee for their work, and to say a short farewell. Certificates of Appreciation &/or small mementoes can be given to the staff at this time, however, as tempting as it may be, the DCP should not try to thank every individual by name that helped the division during the term of office. A private note is a more appropriate way to express your appreciation to specific individuals.

You may wish to close the remarks by thanking everyone for attending and wishing them a safe journey home.

POSTSCRIPT

At the very next division meeting, the C.O.W. Committee should make a report on the pros and cons of the event. Feedback should be solicited from the division board and staff and considered when planning the next year's affair. A "C.O.W. Folder" should be established and two copies should be maintained – one passed from DCP to DCP, the other from C.O.W. Chair to the next C.O.W. Chair. Included in the folder should be remarks from previous affairs, copies of invitations and programs, a list of previous honored guests, and possibly this document. The utilization of this folder will help ensure that your C.O.W. will be better each succeeding year.

END

Change-of-Watch Customs and Protocol

Enclosure # 1

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION
UNITED STATES COAST GUARD AUXILIARY

Address,
Phone #
(and fax # & e-mail address, if available)
of the person extending the invitation

DATE

COMO John Q. Public, DCO (D #)
Street
City & State

SAMPLE INVITATION TO NON-PAYING GUEST

Dear Commodore,

The officers and members of Coast Guard Auxiliary Division 16 are pleased to extend an invitation to you and Mrs. Public to attend, as our guests, our annual Change-of-Watch luncheon on Sunday, 5 December ****.

The luncheon will be held at the Crystal Point Yacht Club, Route 70 and River Road, Point Pleasant, NJ. Details and uniform information are enclosed. For your convenience in responding, we have enclosed a pre-addressed envelope for your dinner reservations.

We sincerely hope you will be able to join us for this occasion.

Very truly yours,

Harriet Q. Jones
Division Captain

Enclosure : Reservation Form/Reply Envelope
Cc: Chairman, Div 16 C.O.W. Committee