

## Protocol Matters

By Joe Hellner, Yacht Clubs of Maryland

Recently, Commodore Darryl Discher of Sue Haven Yacht Club wrote in to ask, "When the ranking officers line up to greet a commodore at their ball what is the proper form of greeting. It seems that some clubs think that the shaking of the Commodore's hand is required after the salute." I assume Darryl is referring to the part of the Commodores Ball ceremony where the ranking officers salute the Flag with hand-over-heart (when uncovered) and then salute the Immediate Past Commodore.

Shaking hands and other forms of personal interaction like hugging are actually violations of protocol and disruptions of the formal ceremony. The time for shaking hands, hugs, chatting, etc is the receiving line, which is also when the guests meet the Commodore and 1st Mate.

What sometimes happens during the ceremony is people will spontaneously make a heartfelt personal gesture, such as shaking hands, to the Immediate Past Commodore and 1st Mate because of good times shared and for a job well done. This is OK because friendship and goodwill are an important part of yacht clubs and boating and a major reason for holding the Commodores Ball. However, such gestures should never be expected or demanded and persons doing them should keep it brief because they are disrupting the ceremony.

It is unwise for a club to require personal gestures in a ceremony. Personal gestures not freely given are a sham, fool no one, and tend to work against club harmony.

Although some clubs have done this, the Commodore should never take the salutes from the ranking officers because:

1. The Commodores Ball represents and celebrates the Change of Watch. That is why so many ceremonies have a swearing in even if the officers have been previously sworn in to conduct club business for the new club year. That means, symbolically at least, the outgoing Commodore is still the Commodore and the official senior representative of the Club. The new Commodore "takes over" when sworn or, if there is no swearing in as part of the ceremony, when the gavel and flag are handed over. Therefore at introductions, the Immediate Past Commodore still represents the Club for the final time.
2. Receiving salutes is a final duty and special honor for the outgoing Commodore, performed in front of members and guests to celebrate and give thanks to the person for years of good service to the Club, especially the final year as leader of the Club.
3. The position of highest honor is to be introduced last. The guest of honor at any affair is introduced last.
4. The Commodore has already greeted all the ranking officers in the receiving line. There is no need to greet them twice.

Overall it is good to remember the introduction ceremony is about rendering honors, not greeting. The ranking officers perform the duty and privilege of rendering honors on behalf of their home club or organization by saluting the host club. The people involved in such ceremonies are the club at that moment, not private individuals. For example, at Sue Haven's Ball or Opening, it is Belvedere Yacht Club saluting Sue Haven Yacht Club, regardless of who might be giving or accepting the salutes. Past Commodores, the Queen of the Chesapeake and escort, and other individual VIPs, when introduced, are saluting (i.e. rendering honors to) the club not the person.