# *Chapter 3 – Customs of the CME*

1. 'Customs of the Service' have been called the 'unwritten law of the Forces.' But, just as the English "common law" has become part of the written laws, so also have many of these military customs been written into regulations. Some aspects of Customs of the Service change in order to keep up with societal changes, some out-of-date customs are retained for sentimental reasons, while yet others serve as an historical link with the past and their observance adds colour and interest to the military profession. Notwithstanding that some customs will change with the times, we must understand the origins of the current practices before advocating innovation. See Chapter 5 for a fuller dealing with Customs of the Service.

2. Since the Canadian Forces and the Canadian Military Engineers are relatively young, the CME have inherited many of its customs and traditions from the Royal Engineers, with some dating back to ancient times. Flags and unit marches, for example, have been essential to fighting forces for centuries. Originally pennants allowed the commanding officer to see where each unit was located on the battlefield and to make decisions on the next manoeuvre. Music was played to keep spirits up on long marches and was also an important battle signal. These tunes and pennants have evolved into the regimental and CME marches and colours that every member is familiar with today. Such military traditions are very important to all corps and branches of the service. Those that are unique to the CME are described in this chapter.

## SAPPERS

3. The term "*sapper*" has been associated with engineers for many generations. The origin of this term lies in the French word "*sape,*" meaning undermine and in the Middle French word "sap" that was a spade or hoe. The dictionary defines a 'sap' as a trench that is prolonged by digging away the earth from within the trench itself.

4. In medieval times, when armies laid siege to a fortification, one of the common methods of breaching the defences was to dig a trench, or "*sap,*" up to the base of the castle wall. A tunnel would then be dug under, or into, the wall. Prior to the introduction of explosives, a breach of the defensive wall would be accomplished by replacing blocks of stone with wooden supports. The supports would then be burned causing a portion of the wall to collapse. In the French Army, digging a trench under fire was known as "*driving a sap*" and the men who did this were known as "*sapeurs.*" Thus, the term "*sappers*" became associated with engineers. After the discovery of gunpowder, an explosive 'mine' was used to breach the wall. This task was, of course, also the responsibility of the engineers.

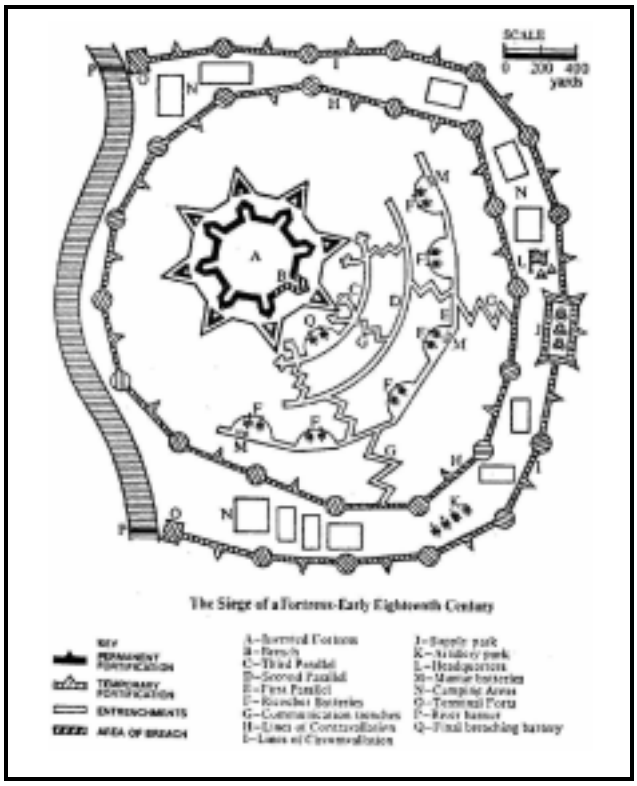


**Figure 3-1 "Driving a Sap"**

5. In 1813, the Royal Engineers officially adopted the title Royal Sappers and Miners and, in 1856, the rank of the common soldier was changed from private to sapper. The CME has continued to use this designation and, just as privates in the artillery are referred to as *"gunners,"* field engineers of the rank of private are referred to as *"Sappers."* A sapper should always be addressed as Sapper Smith, not Private Smith. The term may also be used to refer to a group of engineers who are not necessarily of the rank of private: for example, "here come the sappers to breach the minefield." All ranks in field engineer units traditionally referred to themselves as sappers because other trades in the unit were first trained as Field Engineers. Today, it is primarily combat engineers that are referred to as sappers.

## THE MOTTO

6. The CME motto *Ubique* is Latin and means *"everywhere."* It is pronounced in three syllables, *"you-bee-quay,"* with emphasis on the second syllable. This motto is of significance to the CME since no notable campaign throughout history has been waged without the participation of engineers. Engineers not only ensure the mobility of a force by clearing obstacles and building bridges, they also provide the infrastructure and utilities required to sustain a force, provide firefighting and crash rescue services, and produce the geographical information essential to every mission. The engineer is indeed everywhere, but Engineers do not have specific battle honours to acknowledge their outstanding contribution to many campaigns and operations. In the Canadian Forces, only Armoured and Infantry units have battle honours so the motto *Ubique* was chosen for Engineers to reflect that the engineer is requisite in all operations.

7. In 1931, His Majesty King George V granted the Royal Canadian Engineers the motto *Ubique*. The Canadian Military Engineers have subsequently inherited this motto and it is included on the CME Badge. On 11 May 1994, the Chief of Defence Staff approved that the motto *Ubique* be confirmed as an honorary distinction to *"take the place of all past and future battle honours and distinctions gained in the field"* and be preserved for this use. This honour is shared with the Artillery.

## CME FLAG

8. On 8 April 1976, the Chief of Defence Staff approved the flag depicted in Figure 3-2 for use by all CME units. The CME flag is royal blue and brick red, that perpetuates the Engineer colours of the former single services and which colours are also commonly used by engineers internationally. The CME flag, like those of other branches and formations, is of the 'camp flag' category and is used to identify the headquarters or location of a unit. This category of flag is descendant of the former army corps flags that were used to mark the physical location of a unit. Such flags may be used to mark headquarters and to encompass bounds, on a parade square or in barracks. They may also be flown, if appropriate, at such locations as saluting bases.

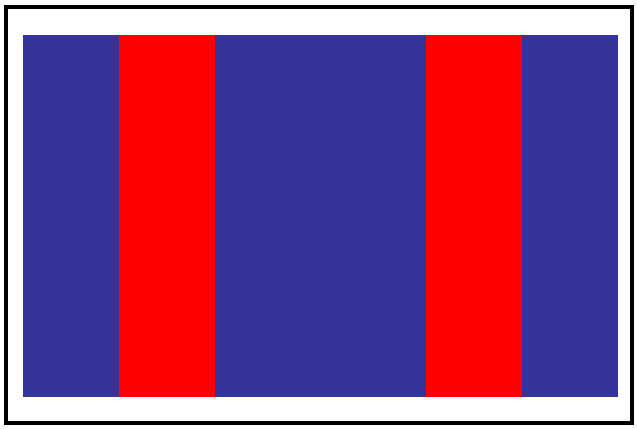

**Figure 3-2 CME Flag**

9. Unlike Air Force operational flying squadrons, Navy combatant formations and some infantry and armoured units, Engineer units do not have 'colours' and the CME flag should not be paraded in the manner accorded colours. The CME flag should shall not be presented, it should not be lowered or dipped as a means of paying salute or compliment, compliments should not be paid, nor should it be draped over a casket.

10. The CME flag shall be treated with the same respect given the national flag, with each new flag being dedicated at an appropriate ceremony. The flag shall be raised, lowered, and folded in accordance with procedures laid out in the Canadian Forces drill manual. The flag shall not be used inappropriately or in any manner that may be construed as disrespectful; for example, it should not be used as a table covering during presentations and other ceremonies. It is not generally the custom for Engineers to salute the CME flag although unit customs may vary.

11. Traditionally, Engineer flags or pennants are not emblazoned due to the ubiquitous nature of the Engineers. The Branch Advisor is the authority for determining when the flag may be emblazoned. A unit crest, such as the Canadian Forces Fire Academy's emblem, may be approved as an emblazonment and, in most other instances, permission may be granted to add a single numeral as a unit identifier. Where confusion between units exists, additional letters may be added for clarity. Sub-units or construction engineering sections will use the CME flag without emblazonment. When emblazonment is approved, the numerals, lettering or crest will appear in the upper left corner of the flag and will be no higher than 1/6$^{th}$ the breadth of the flag. Battle honours are not given to Engineer units and shall not be added to the flag as such honours are adequately referenced by our use of the motto "UBIQUE."

## PENNANTS

12. Vehicle pennants are a smaller form of camp flag. Pennants may be flown for the Colonel Commandant and unit COs from a staff mounted on the right front fender of a vehicle. This pennant is flown only when the person signified is in the vehicle and at all other times it is removed or hooded. Pennants are also commonly used on unit military vehicles for ceremonial purposes. These pennants may bear unit or sub-unit position identifiers and are normally mounted on the vehicle antenna. An Engineer vehicle pennant is shown at Figure 3-3. The dimensions of the pennant should be 18 cm high by 40 cm long. The red bands are 6 cm wide and the blue bands are 9 cm wide.

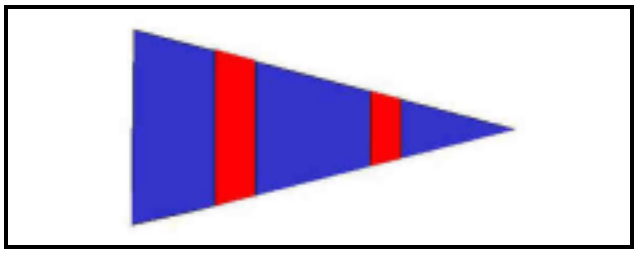

**Figure 3-3 CME Vehicle Pennant**

13. Parade square pennants are also a form of camp flag and are used during parades in accordance with the drill manual. These pennants are generally miniature Engineer flags that are available from the CME Kit Shop.

## THE CME BADGE

14. The CME has chosen the beaver as the focal point of its badge, shown in Figure 3-4. As the symbol of Canada, the beaver is known for its perseverance and skill in building, making it an appropriate symbol for the Engineers. The beaver has long been used as an Engineer emblem, appearing on the badges of the Non-Permanent Force Canadian Engineers of 1903 and the Royal Canadian Air Force Construction and Maintenance Units during the Second World War. The current design is based on the standard Canadian Forces crest, defined by an oval wreath of gold maple leaves topped with the royal crown. The CME badge has a right-facing (when viewed from the position of the wearer) gold beaver on a circular field of brick red centred in the wreath. A royal blue band runs around the circle inscribed with the words "*Engineers - Génie - Canada*" in gold. On a royal blue banner below the beaver is the motto "*Ubique.*" This version was approved in October 1976. The history of the CME badge is shown in Figure 3-5. The badge has changed to include the insignia or crown of the reigning monarch of the time but the beaver has remained a constant theme. Engineers in the Royal Canadian Navy and Royal Canadian Air Force did not have an unique hat badge but wore that of the Service. Those badges are depicted in Figure 3-6.


**Figure 3-4 CME Badge**

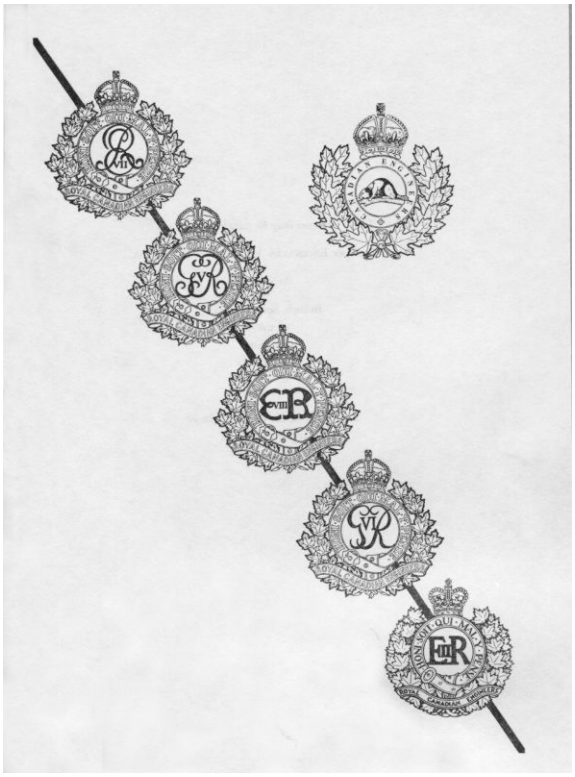

**Figure 3-5 History of RCE and CME Badges**

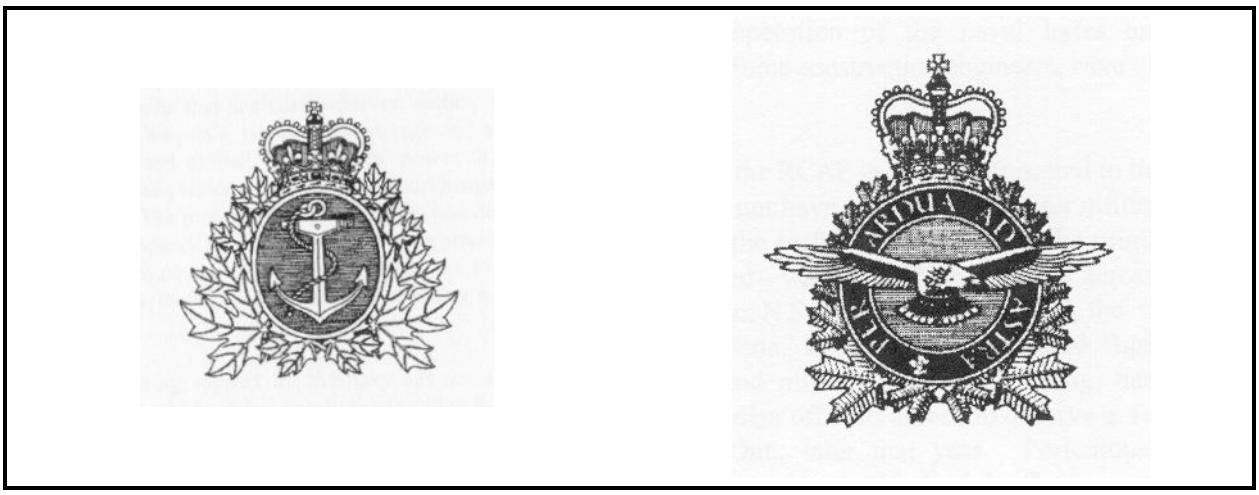

**Figure 3-6 RCN and RCAF Badges**

15. The CME badge is used on unit signs and letterhead and it may be displayed in messes or drill halls. There are few limitations to its use, provided it is done tastefully and with the respect deserving of a branch badge. If in doubt of the appropriateness of an intended use, the advice of the CME Adjutant should be sought. The CME hat badge is the same as the CME badge and instructions on wearing the hat badge are given in Chapter 6.

## THE CME BIRTHDAY

16. The CME was not simply created, it has evolved over the last century, and the CME birthday reflects two significant events. The Engineers existed in the form of militia even prior to Confederation, however, 1 July 1903, when the Regular component of the corps was authorized under the designation Canadian Engineer Corps, is considered the birth date of the CME. The birthday is not celebrated on this date, but is celebrated on or about 29 April, recognizing 29 April 1936 when the Corps of Royal Canadian Engineers was approved and the Permanent and Non-Permanent Engineers were united under one badge. The birthday is celebrated in a number of different ways, including unit mess dinners, weekend reunions and sporting competitions.

## HOME OF THE CME

17. In the immediate post-Second World War period, the Canadian Army re-established its peacetime posture and all Corps were identified with a "*Home Station*" for long-term planning. In the case of the Royal Canadian Engineers, Camp Chilliwack was the logical choice as the "*Home*" of the Military Engineers since it housed three Engineer units – the Royal Canadian School of Military Engineering, 23rd Field Squadron and No. 11 Engineer Stores and Equipment Company – as well as an Engineer Services and Works Detachment. The camp was also under Engineer command. Completion of the All Sappers' Cenotaph commemorating fallen Engineers at Vedder Crossing literally spiked down Camp Chilliwack as the "*Home of the Engineers.*" For more than five decades, from 1946 to 1997, Camp Chilliwack and later CFB Chilliwack, housed a variety of Engineer units and was the "*Home of the Engineers*" and the focal point and meeting place for Engineers from across the country.

18. With the move of 1 Combat Engineer Regiment to Edmonton, Canadian Forces School of Military Engineering to Camp Gagetown and the closure of CFB Chilliwack in 1997, there was a requirement to determine a new "home." Accordingly, in its November 2002 deliberations, CME Council formally declared the Canadian Forces School of Military Engineers to be a 'place' rather than a 'location.' Thus, the "Home of the Canadian Military Engineers" is now located at Canadian Forces Base Gagetown, New Brunswick.

## THE ENGINEER MARCH

19. *Wings* is the official march of the CME. In 1869, in response to the demands of the Commandant of the Royal Engineer Establishment and the Band Committee, the Royal Engineer Bandmaster, William Newstead, proposed a new Royal Engineer quick-march. Newstead arranged the march using two tunes: the first melody, of unknown origin, was *The Path across the Hills*, while the second was *Flügel! Flügel!* and had been published many years before by a Bavarian, Friedrich Rückert. The song was subsequently translated by Percy Boyd, Esq., RE, under the title *Wings*. The words we use today were composed by Ellen Dickson, daughter of an artillery brigadier, who published a song *Wings* in 1861 using the pseudonym Dolores.

20. The Corps accepted this new march for use on parades around 1870. However, in 1889, the Commander-in-Chief noted, with disapproval, that the Corps march was not the one to which the Royal Engineers were entitled by tradition. He considered *Wings* frivolous and un-military and decreed that it be banned. Some years later, in May 1902, Lieutenant-General Viscount Kitchener of Khartoum, the Army Commander visited Chatham, where he had been a Royal Engineer subaltern in 1871, and well remembered marching past to *Wings*. Dismayed to find it no longer used, he learned there was a strong demand among members of the Corps for it to be officially re-instated. Lord Kitchener discussed the matter with the War Office and under the authority of the Adjutant-General, in a letter dated 14 October 1902, *Wings* was re-instated as the official march of the Royal Engineers. The music *Wings*, scored for military band, was published in 1903 and William Newstead's arrangement of the Royal Engineers quick-march regained its rightful place on the parade ground.

21. *Wings* was also chosen as the march of the Royal Canadian Engineers because of the close affiliation with the Royal Engineers and it was subsequently adopted by the CME. The words, rarely used, and the musical score are at Annex A. Although no longer an official march, *Hurrah for the CRE* is sung or played by the band at social functions, mess dinners and other gatherings where appropriate. See Annex B for the words and music.

## THE ENGINEER GREETING

22. The CME greeting or toast is "Chimo" - pronounced *Chee-mo* (with emphasis on the first syllable). This expression is also often used as a closing on correspondence between Engineers. The word Chimo is derived from the Inuktitut greeting: "saimo" (saimu) that means "hello," "goodbye," "peace be with you," and similar sentiments. This salutation was used in the Ungava region of Northern Quebec and shares the same derivation as Fort Chimo (today Kuujjuaq) on Ungava Bay in northern Quebec. The current spelling and pronunciation is based on a Caucasian adaptation of the native language.

23. This greeting was introduced to the CME during the turmoil of Unification to provide the stability of a common symbolism. It was derived from the northern culture at a time when the CME was involved in the development of Canada's North. The friendly connotation of the word is reflective of the CME as Engineers are renowned for lending a friendly and helpful hand to the local population at home and on peacekeeping and humanitarian missions.

## THE ENGINEER PRAYER

24. The Engineer Prayer has its origin in a Regimental Prayer written for 2 Field Engineer Regiment in the early 1970s by the Padre, Major Hugh Macdonald. The prayer reflects the critical wartime role of the engineers and the relationship between sappers, mission, and country. Prayer is a sacred communication between individual and deity; therefore, the Engineer Prayer need not be repeated by rote, but may be modified depending upon the occasion.

> The Engineer Prayer: *Almighty God, we pray thee to bless the Canadian Military Engineers. May our bridges always stand, and our charges never fail, our members be ever loyal, and our officers worthy of their loyalty. May we work diligently in all our purposes and be skilled in our trades; steadfast for Queen and Country everywhere. Amen.*

## THE FIREMAN'S PRAYER

25. The Fireman's Prayer is of unknown origin but is widely used among civilian and military firefighters.

*When I am called to duty, God,*
*Whenever flames may rage;*
*Give me strength to save some life,*
*Whatever be its age.*

*Help me embrace a little child*
*Before it is too late*
*Or save an older person*
*From the horror of that fate.*

*Enable me to be alert*
*And hear the weakest shout,*
*And quickly and efficiently*
*To put the fire out.*

*I want to fill my calling*
*And to give the best in me*
*To guard my every neighbour*
*And protect his property.*

*And if, according to my fate,*
*I am to lose my life,*
*Please bless with your protecting*
*My children and my wife.*

*- Author Unknown*

## SALUTE TO THE ENGINEERS

26. The author of this poem has often been indicated as "Author Unknown," "Anonymous" or, on occasion, Rudyard Kipling. The attribution to Rudyard Kipling is incorrect and likely an erroneous association with his poem "Sappers" that contains similar tributes to the Military Engineer. Research has confirmed that the poem was written by Corporal Claude Albert Radley of the 18th Field Company RCE in Canada when he was England during the period 1941-44.

### SALUTE TO THE ENGINEERS

Now the Lord of the Realms has glorified the Charge of the Light Brigade,
And the thin red line of infantry, when will it's glory fade?
There are robust rhymes of the British Tars and classic Musketeers,
But I shall sing till your eardrums ring of the muddy old Engineers.

Now it's all very well to fly through the air, or humour a heavy gun,
Or ride in tanks through the ranks of the broken and shattered Hun.
And it's nice to think when a U-boat sinks, of the glory that outlives years,
But whoever heard of a vaunting work for the muddy old Engineers?

Now you must not feel as you read this rhyme that a Sapper's a jealous knave,
That he joined the ranks for a vote of thanks or in search of a hero's grave.
No, your mechanized is all right and your Tommy has darned few peers,
But where in Hell would the lot of them be if it weren't for the Engineers?

Oh they look like tramps but they build your camps and sometimes lead the advance.
And they sweat red blood to bridge the flood, to give you a fighting chance.
But who stays behind when it gets too hot, to blow up the roads in the rear?
Just tell your wife that you owe your life to the muddy old Engineers!

No fancy crest is pinned on his chest; if you read what his hat badge says,
Why "Honi Soit Qui Mal Y Pense", is a queersome sort of phrase.
But their modest claim to immortal fame has probably reached your ears,
The first to arrive, and the last to leave, are the Glorious Engineers.

## SAINT BARBARA

27. The CME has no patron saint but Engineers often participate in artillery celebrations honouring St. Barbara, the patron saint of the artillery. St. Barbara's feast day, frequently but incorrectly called her birthday, is 4 December.

28. Saint. Barbara lived around 300 AD and was the only daughter of the wealthy heathen named Dioscorus. Legend has it that her father confined her in a tower to keep her from the influences of Christianity and so that no man could demand her in marriage. While in the tower, she accepted the Christian faith against the will of her father. The officials decreed that she be tortured for her faith and put to death by beheading by her father, himself. As she was about to be beheaded, she prayed that all who might invoke her aid should be granted their request. A tempest arose at the moment she was killed and, amid the thunder and lightning, her father was consumed by fire.

29. Due to the events surrounding her death, St. Barbara has been associated with lightning. When gunpowder made its appearance in the Western world, St Barbara was invoked for aid against accidents resulting from explosions and she is often the patron saint of gunners, miners, and others who work with explosives. At one time, her image was placed on arsenals and the magazine of a French warship is still called *Sainte-Barbe*.

## SAINT FLORIAN

30. Saint Florian is regarded as the protector of firefighters because of his courage and reputed resistance to fire. Florian joined the Roman army as a youth and, through hard work and determination, he advanced through the ranks to high rank and occupied a high administrative post in Noricum in the 4th century. A Christian, he refused to carry out emperor Diocletian's orders to persecute the Christians in his area of responsibility. For this refusal, his superiors had him whipped, yet he stood steadfast in his beliefs. Still refusing orders to persecute all Christians in the area, he was sentenced to death by fire.

31. Standing on the funeral pyre, Florian is reputed to have challenged the Roman soldiers to light the fire, saying "If you do, I will climb to heaven on the flames." Apprehensive to these words, instead of burning Florian, he was twice scourged, half-flayed alive, set on fire, and finally thrown into a river with a stone around his neck. For his courage, St. Florian is regarded as a protector of firefighters in many countries and is commemorated in the Roman Martyrology on 4 May.

## CME GATHERINGS

32. CME Reunions are a means of fostering esprit de corps are held each year on the weekend closest to 29 April, the date set-aside for celebrating the CME birthday. Although there is no standard format, these weekend-long reunions may include all-ranks dances, mess dinners, parades, and sports days. Serving and retired Engineers in the area are usually invited to attend some or all of the events. Various sporting events are also held annually and include hockey, curling, and golf. Examples are the Pigspiel (Curling), CME Golf Tournament, and the Beaverspiel (Curling). These tournaments are generally played for fun and Engineers who have never curled or golfed are welcomed to the event. The Beaver Cup Hockey Tournament, however, is taken quite seriously and unit teams are usually chosen carefully to compete for the coveted trophy.

## THE ORDER OF THE PUKKA SAPPER

33. Adoption of the Hindi term *pukka* – meaning *"genuine, of good quality, reliable"* – into English usage has its origin in the days of British rule in India. To recognize individuals outside the CME who demonstrate these sterling qualities and who have given outstanding service to the Engineers, the highest honour the CME can bestow upon an outsider is induction into the Order of the Pukka Sapper. The sponsoring unit should treat inducted Pukka Sappers as members of the extended CME Family.

34. The origin of the ritual is uncertain, but the myth perpetuated is that an ancient Sapper, being involved in digging a well, was so dedicated to the task that he remained at the work site for the meal break. He consumed his lunch and beer while hanging, inverted, from a cross-brace. The initiation ritual normally takes place in a mess or equivalent institution. The senior Engineer present invites the initiate to join the fellowship, describes the initiate's contribution to the Engineers, and explains the significance of the ritual to those assembled. This having been done, a demonstration may be given of how to consume a drink while in an inverted vertical position. While originally requiring the consumption of an alcoholic drink, Canadian Forces policies require that there be no coercion on any occasion that would encourage the consumption or immoderate use of alcoholic beverages. The initiate selects the drink of choice and, if necessary, is assisted in achieving the headstand. After consuming the drink, the Pukka Sapper is presented with a scroll signed by the inductor and the senior Engineer present. The ritual is no longer practised unless the inductee wishes to perform the feat. The current practice is to forego the headstand and to simply present the scroll to the Pukka Sapper at a small ceremony. The CME Adjutant controls the scrolls and all scrolls are numbered and registered for historical record.

# *Annex A – "Wings"*

**"WINGS"**

Where the shot and the shell are falling,
And the bugles are a-calling,
Where the smoke and smell of powder is on the wind;
And the sharper rifle rattle,
Shows the forefront of the battle,
A squad or two of Sappers you will find.

Be it bridging or pontooning,
Be it survey or ballooning,
A path through swamps or obstacles to clear;
Then the man they will all beckon,
And the man on whom they'll reckon,
As serving in the Royal Engineers.

*Everywhere* our motto where our country needs'
As the Sapper watchword not by words but deeds.
First when bugle summon;
Last to leave in war
Is the proud tradition
Of our glorious Corps.

Wings to bear me over mountain and vale away;
Wings to bathe my spirit in morning's sunny ray.
Wings that I may hover at morn above the sea;
Wings through life to bear me, and death triumphantly.

Wings like youth's fleet moments which swiftly o'er me passed;
Wings like my early visions, too bright, too fair to last.
Wings that I might recall them, the loved, the lost, the dead;
Wings that I might fly after the past, long vanished.

Wings to lift me upwards, soaring with eagle flight;
Wings to waft me heav'nward to bask in realms of light.
Wings to be no more wearied, lulled in eternal rest;
Wings to be sweetly folded where faith and love are blessed.

*Note: A copy of the sound track of "Wings" played by the former RCE Band is available from the CME Adjutant.*

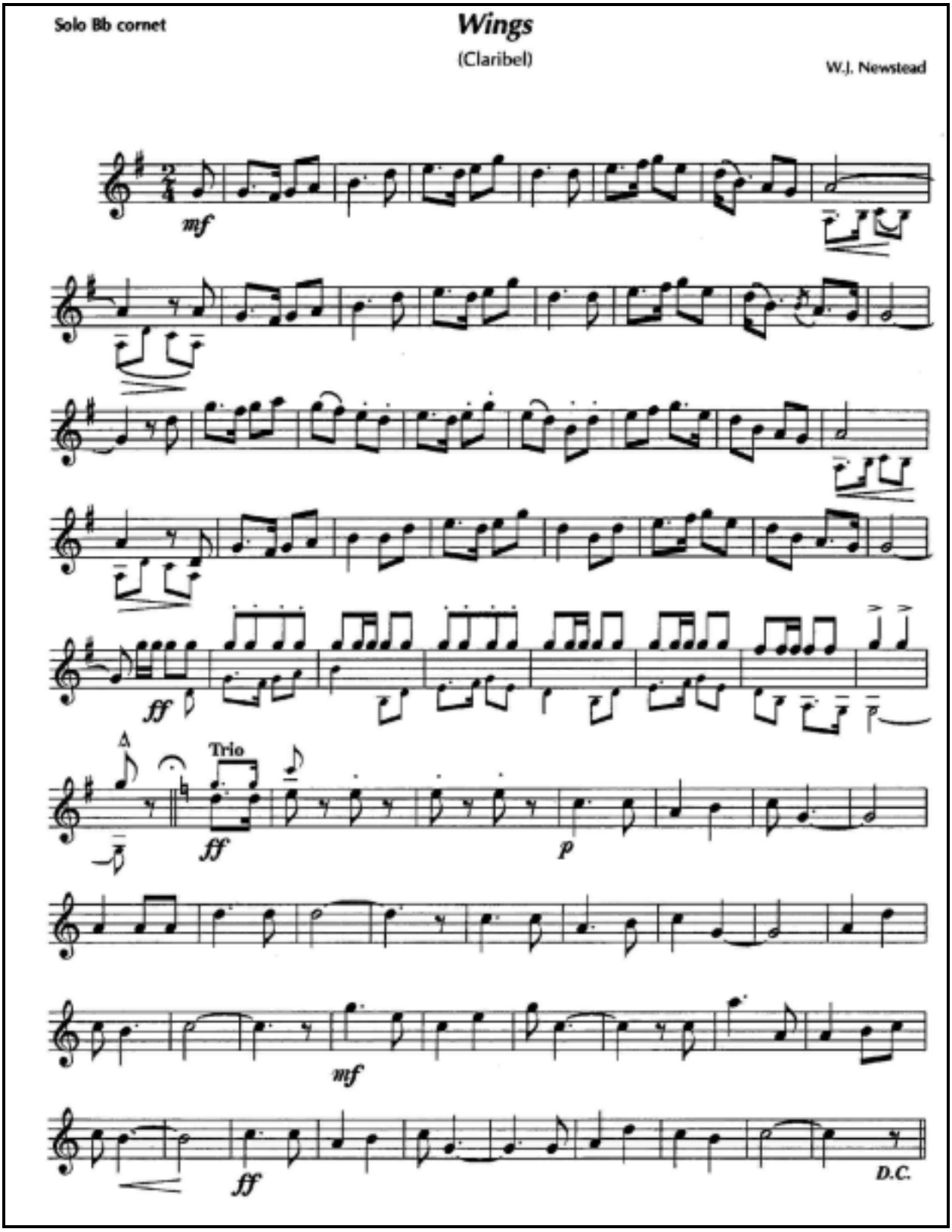


**Figure 3-7 WINGS**

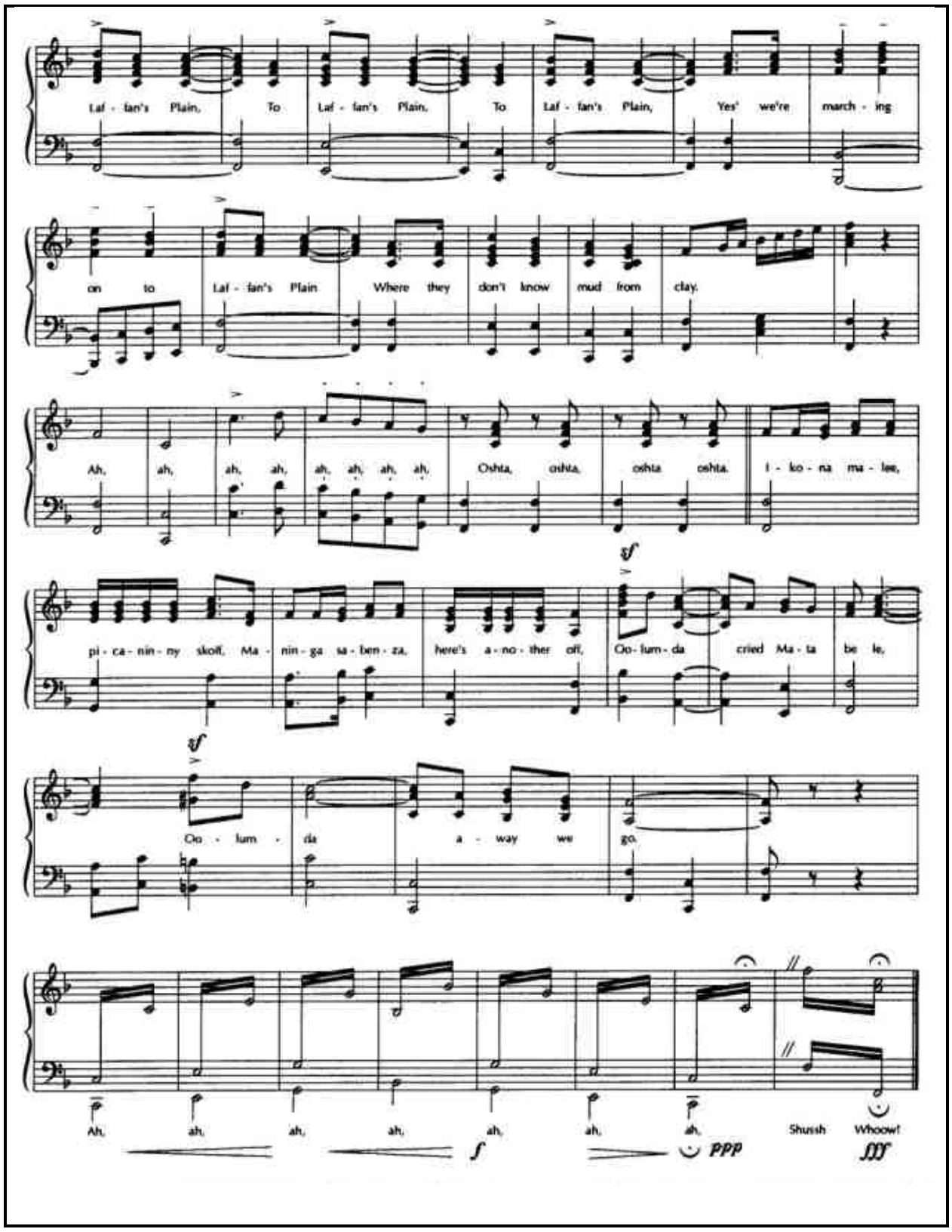


**Figure 3-7 WINGS**

## *Annex B – "Hurrah for the CRE"*

"Hurrah for the CRE" has been adopted by sappers throughout the British Commonwealth, although the Royal Engineers sing it more exuberantly. When the band strikes up, all form a long chain with their hands on the shoulders of those in front of them. The chain winds around the room singing lustily. The closing "*Ah, ah, ah . . .* " starts from a fairly high note and gradually descends. At each "*Ah,*" the chain sinks down a little until the singers are on their heels. When down on the heels, there is a dead silence, then a whispered "*Shuush.*" A second silence follows, then a loud shout of "*Whoow!*" and everyone jumps up.

**"HURRAH FOR THE CRE"**

Good morning, Mr. Stevens and Windy Notchy Knight,
Hurrah for the CRE.
We're working very hard down at Upnor Hard,
Hurrah for the CRE.
You make fast, I make fast, make fast the dinghy,
Make fast the dinghy, make fast the dinghy,
You make fast, I make fast, make fast the dinghy,
Make fast the dinghy pontoon.
For we're marching on to Laffan's Plain,
To Laffan's, to Laffan's Plain,
Yes we're marching on to Laffan's Plain,
Where they don't know mud from clay.
*Ah, ah, ah, ah, ah, ah, ah, ah,*
*Oshta, oshta, oshta, oshta.*
*I-kona ma-lee, picaninny skoff,*
*Ma-ninga sabenza*, here's another off.
*Oolum-da*, cried Matabele,
*Oolum-da*, away we go.
*Ah, ah, ah, ah, ah, ah, ah,*
*Shuush ..... Whoow*!

Explanations of some elements of the song (source unknown) are:

a. "Mr. Stevens" was a civilian attached to the Royal Engineers at the time.

b. "Windy Notchy Knight" was a nickname for a lanky and knobby-kneed Engineer.

c. "Upnor Hard" was the Bridging Site at SME Chatham.

d. "Laffan's Plain" in Aldershot, England, was very muddy and this area was levelled by the Engineers over a period of years to earn their special rates of pay. The work was planned and carried out under Colonel H.D. Laffan, RE.

e. "*Oshta, Ikona malee picaninny skoff maniga sabenza*" is the Matabele way of saying "I am fed up and glad to be leaving." The Matabele tribe provided many labourers for the Royal Engineers in South Africa.

*Note: A copy of the sound track of "Hurrah for the CRE" played by the RE Band is available from the CME Adjutant.*

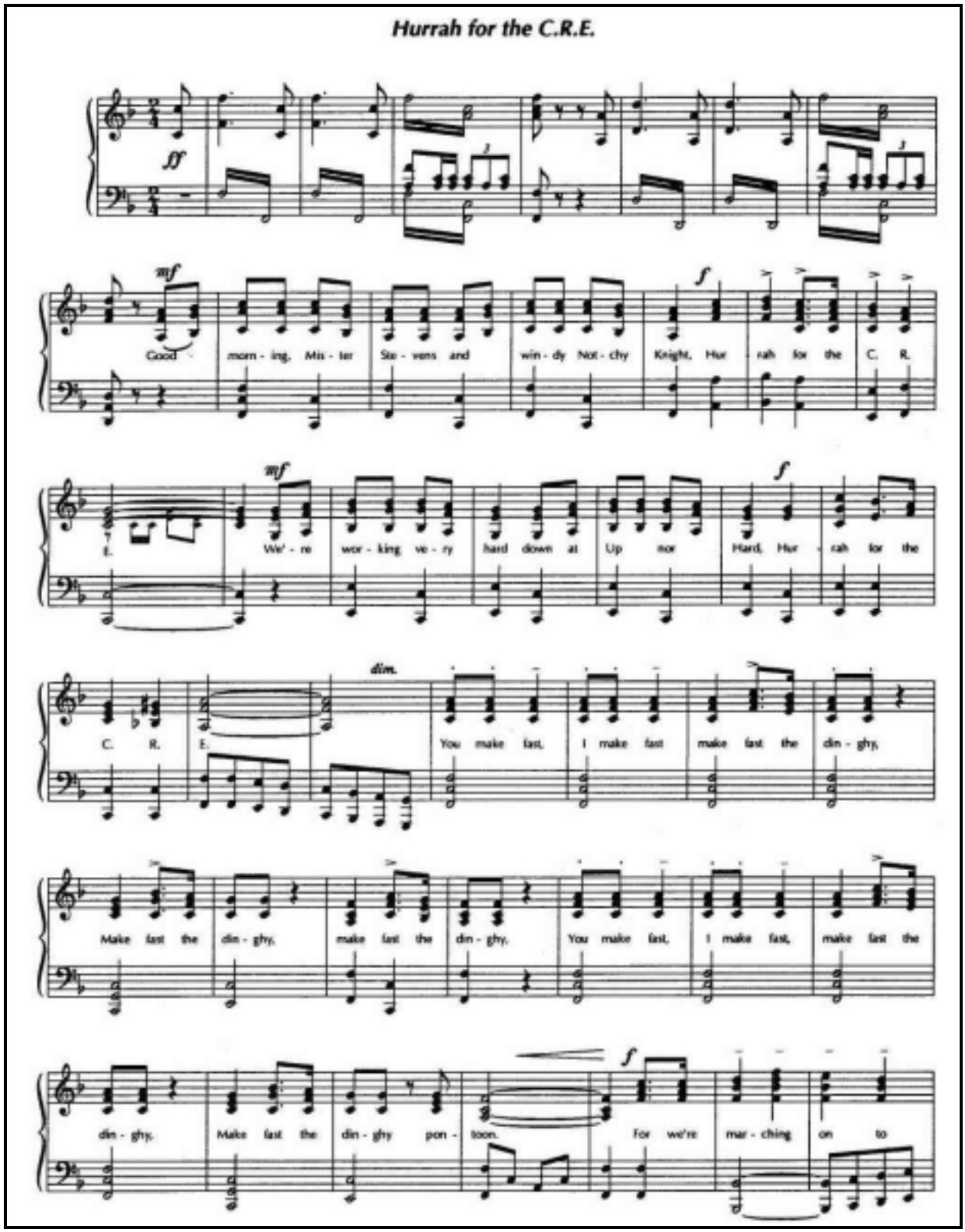


**Figure 3-8 Hurrah for the CRE**

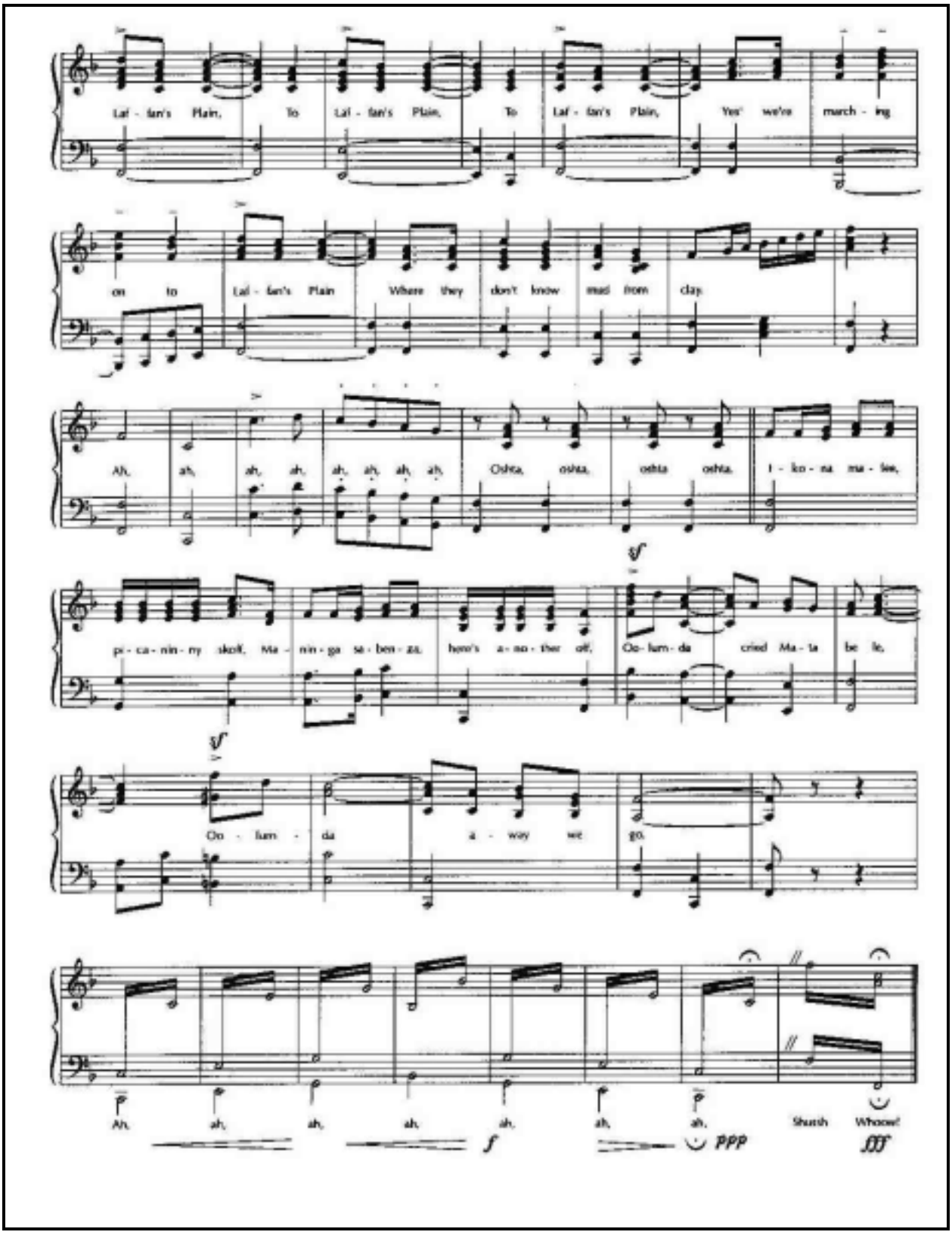


**Figure 3-8 Hurrah for the CRE**