

## ***Chapter 10 – Social Functions***

1. Engineers have certain obligations regarding mess activities and will be called upon to organize and attend a great variety of social functions during their careers. The following paragraphs provide guidance on the majority of social functions likely to be encountered.

### **FUNDING A FUNCTION**

2. Most functions must be self-supporting and the cost of non-paying guests must be a consideration of planning. Official guests, such as senior members of a foreign service or civilian dignitaries, may sometimes be entertained on behalf of the Department of National Defence. Official entertainment funds to cover the costs of these guests must be requested from higher headquarters prior to planning an event. Members who are being honoured at a function are also traditionally non-paying guests and the cost of these meals is generally absorbed in the price charged to paying guests or is paid by unit funds. When organizing any social function, a complete and auditable record of all income and expenses is essential. For those engineers who are assigned to organize a function, a planning checklist is at [Annex A](#) to this chapter.

### **CME MESS DINNER**

3. The mess dinner is a long-standing military tradition. It affords an opportunity for superiors and juniors to meet on a formal but friendly occasion, while the traditional formality of the dinner fosters a refined fraternity that may be lacking at other functions. A commanding officer or the Senior Serving Engineer, for example, may sponsor mess dinners to honour members who are retiring or to celebrate the CME birthday. Mess dinners may also be scheduled concurrently with exercises in the field, working groups or conferences, or to extend CME hospitality to visitors or dignitaries.

4. Organization. The mess dinner sponsor appoints an OPI who is responsible for overall co-ordination and all administrative arrangements. This includes the seating plan, musical program, menu and wine selection, after dinner activities and financial statements.

5. President of the Mess Committee (PMC). If the PMC of the mess is not present, an acting PMC is appointed by the sponsor for that occasion only. The acting PMC, in turn, selects an acting vice PMC (V/PMC) who is normally the most junior member attending the dinner. The V/PMC is responsible for: ensuring that unauthorized changes are not made to the seating plan; checking the mess after members and guests move into the dining room; indicating to the PMC that all diners are present, responding to the loyal toast; and supervising the dining room after those at the head table have departed.

6. Guests. Normally all Engineers in the area, serving or retired, are invited. As directed by the sponsor, invitations may also be extended to CME personnel serving outside the region, civilians employed within the CME Family, and members of local CME associations. A mess dinner is normally announced in routine orders, by memo and by personal invitation. Invitations are normally only issued to guests of honour and should be written in bilingual format. As with all social functions, invitations should be issued at the earliest possible time. See [Chapter 9](#) for more information on formal invitations.

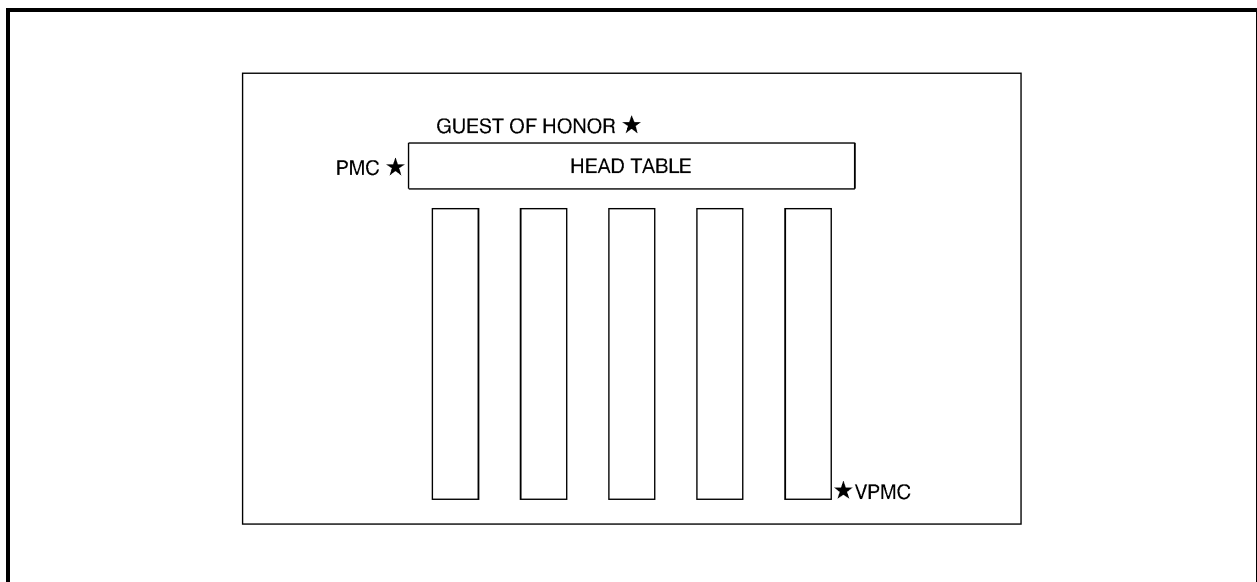
7. Attendance. Much of military life is governed by customs of the service. These largely unwritten rules are as effective and binding as if they were written, and the conventions surrounding mess dinners are a good example. Compulsory attendance is a custom of the service and part of the commitment of a CME member. Spouses and personal guests are never invited to mess dinners. Mixed dinners, that are covered later in this chapter, are a similar function that spouses and guests may attend.

8. Dress. Dress should be stated on the invitation. For serving personnel, mess dress is described at Annex B to Chapter 5. Permission for Reserve Force and retired members to wear uniform should be obtained, in accordance with QR&O 17.06, prior to the invitations being issued. For civilians, dress is usually black tie.

9. Assembly. Members should arrive and assemble in the lounge by the time specified, usually one-half hour before dinner is served. For example, if the invitation states 1900 hrs for 1930 hrs, all diners should arrive by 1900 hrs. The guest of honour normally arrives shortly after 1900 hrs and dinner is served at 1930 hrs. It is common courtesy to acknowledge the arrival of the guest of honour, or a senior member, by coming to attention. If the arrival of senior guests should be unnoticed by some, the PMC should attract attention by calling "*Ladies and Gentlemen*." Members arriving after the guest of honour are expected to make their apologies to the PMC.

10. This pre-dinner gathering allows members to socialize, have a drink, and entertain guests prior to dinner. Members should use this assembly time to check the seating plan and seek out any guest who may be seated to the member's right. The guest should be treated as the member's personal guest. If it is the guest's first mess dinner, the member should explain the customs and procedures to be followed. This is also the time when any speeches and presentations are made to retiring members since there are generally no speeches during or after CME mess dinners.

11. Seating Plan. The organizer is responsible for drawing up the seating plan, in accordance with the guidelines given in [Chapter 9](#). Members may not change the seating plan that is normally posted near the entrance to the dining room. The only seating arrangement specific to mess dinners is that the PMC is seated at the far right of the head table, and that the V/PMC is seated at the lower left corner of the grouping. See Figure 10-1 as an example of a common table layout. While the E-shaped table layout is traditional, circular tables may be employed at facilities where only these tables are available.



**Figure 10-1 Mess Dinner Seating Plan**

12. Pre-Dinner Calls. The bugler or piper sounds "*Quarter Call*" 15 minutes before dinner and "*Assemble*" at five minutes before. These calls permit personnel to prepare themselves for a lengthy meal. Tradition dictates that diners do not leave the table without prior permission from the PMC, thus, diners often visit the washrooms during the pre-dinner calls.

13. Commencement. At the appointed time, the band or piper plays *Roast Beef of Old England* and the PMC escorts the senior guest of honour into the dining room. The sponsoring members escort the next senior guests of honour in succession. Other members and guests then follow the head table. Members should escort any guest seated on their right into the dining room and ensure that the guest is entertained until departure. Usually members enter the dining room by seniority but this is not rigidly followed. A junior member standing near the doorway need not hang back waiting for all senior members to enter. Carrying a drink into the dining room is never permitted since wine will be served with dinner.

14. Members and guests should stand behind their chairs until the PMC calls upon a chaplain or a designated member to say grace. Either the Engineer Prayer or a simple grace, such as *"For what we are about to receive, thank God."* is appropriate. Afterwards, diners should seat themselves by pulling their chairs to the right and moving to the left side of the chair to sit.

15. Mess Dinner Etiquette. Since a mess dinner is a formal function, protocol dictates that members conduct themselves as befits the occasion. It is considered poor manners to engage in discussion of controversial subjects, act boisterously, spontaneously propose toasts, or talk after the PMC has called for attention or rapped for order.

16. Passing the Port. At the conclusion of the meal, all china, glasses (excepting those used for toasts), table decorations, napkins, etc., are removed from the table and the port decanters placed thereon. Guests who do not wish to drink port should retain a glass of water for the toasts. The senior steward reports to the PMC: *"The port is ready to be passed, Sir/Ma'am."* The PMC removes the stopper, pours a partial glass, samples it as one would wine before serving it, and passes the decanter to the left (or 'port' side). In accordance with Canadian Forces custom, the port decanter should never touch the table during this ceremony. Except for the sampling of the port by the PMC, port glasses are not touched until the loyal toast. All diners charge their own glasses and then pass the port decanter to the left. When the decanters have been passed to all diners, the senior steward reports to the PMC: *"The port has been passed, Sir/Ma'am."* The PMC then stoppers the decanter and the V/PMC, who follows the lead of the PMC in all respects, follows suit.

17. The Loyal Toast. The Loyal Toast is always the first toast. After the port has been passed, the PMC raps for silence, rises and, addressing the V/PMC, says, *"Mr/Madam Vice, the Queen of Canada"*. The V/PMC may be addressed in French in the following manner, *"Monsieur/Madame le/la Vice President(e), à la santé de la Reine du Canada,"* The V/PMC then rises and, addressing the diners, says *"Ladies and Gentlemen, The Queen"* or *"Mesdames et Messieurs, la Reine"* If the PMC addresses the V/PMC in English, the V/PMC replies in French, and vice-versa. At mess dinners of units in which the Sovereign personally holds an honorary appointment, the address to the vice-president may include that appointment. At a CME mess dinner the toast may be changed to, *"The Queen, our Colonel in Chief."* or *"La Reine notre Colonel en Chef."* When a representative of a country that is a member of the Commonwealth of Nations is present, the loyal toast shall be made to *"The Queen, Head of the Commonwealth."* or *"La Reine, Chef du Commonwealth."* Diners should then stand at attention, with their glasses on the table, while the first six bars of *God Save the Queen* are played. Then, raising their glasses, they say *"The Queen"* or *"La Reine"* and immediately drink to her health.

18. Other Toasts. If an official representative from a foreign state is present, a toast should be made to the head of state. When more than one country is represented, the national anthems are generally played in alphabetical order. Where there are a large number of official foreign guests, it is acceptable to toast *"The Heads of State here represented."* This should be confirmed with the local protocol officer to avoid embarrassment. At a CME mess dinner, the PMC then invites the senior CME member present to make a toast to the CME. The person making the toast rises and may briefly address the diners, after which all present are invited to rise and join in the toast. If a band is present, all guests rise for the opening bars of *Wings*, after which all diners raise their glasses, exclaim *"Chimo!"* and drink to the CME.

19. Marches. The band then plays the authorized marches of the diners' regiments or branches. When all members are Engineers, *Wings* is played in its entirety during the toast to the CME instead of only the opening bars and no other marches are played. The order of playing regimental marches is laid out in *A-AD-200-000/AG-000 The Honours, Flags and Heritage Structure of the Canadian Forces*. When members of foreign armed forces are attending, an appropriate march or musical selection should be played. If these guests do not have a specific service, corps, or branch song, playing their national anthem may be fitting.

20. All CME members should stand when *Wings* is played. Normally one does not stand for other marches except regimental marches of units in which one has served. For example, CME members who re-mustered from the Van Doos may stand for *Vive la Canadienne* and CME members serving in Air Command may stand for *The RCAF March Past*. The march of the Chaplain Branch is *Onward Christian Soldiers*. In most messes, members do not stand for this march but may sing along at the chorus in order to show their respect for the Chaplain Branch and the Church.

21. Following the Toasts. Diners seat themselves following the toasts and conversation may resume. Coffee is served and liqueurs offered. If a piper played at the dinner, the senior officer may toast the piper with the customary "*Quaich (kwex).*" Although the toast is traditionally made with straight scotch whisky, either party may choose another beverage, including water. The senior member may also invite the bandmaster and the chef to attend the head table for a drink in appreciation of their services. The mess manager places a chair between the senior officer and senior guest for the bandmaster. After approximately 10 minutes, the bandmaster asks permission to retire and the chef is brought forward in the same manner. Whether these procedures are followed, the PMC will arrange to extend the diners' appreciation to the band and mess staff sometime during the evening.

22. Speeches. Normally no speeches are made at CME mess dinners, however, at mess dinners sponsored by other branches the guest of honour may be invited to speak. When addressing the assembly, one always addresses the PMC, followed by the most senior members present (by name), followed by, "*members, ladies, and gentlemen.*"

23. Departing the Dining Room. The senior member indicates dinner is officially over by standing until noticed by all diners. It is customary for other members to stand until all guests at the head table have left the room. The PMC accompanies official guests to the lounge while the V/PMC remains until all guests have left the dining room.

24. After Dinner. Following dinner, members retire to the lounge where they may purchase drinks at the bar. This is the most relaxed part of the evening, affording an opportunity for all personnel to become better acquainted. A post-dinner program of entertainment or games is often organized. Members should not leave the mess before the senior officer and the senior guests. If members must leave early, they should first pay their respects to the PMC.

## **MIXED FORMAL DINNERS**

25. Functions with members' guests or spouses in attendance are considered "*mixed.*" Although dress is usually mess dress for a formal dinner, these are not mess dinners and are not required to follow that format. Most messes choose to follow the format of a mess dinner although some of the traditions, such as playing of the regimental marches, may be omitted.

## **FORMAL BALLS**

26. Guests at a formal ball are expected to arrive in time to pass through the receiving line that usually includes the hosts, guests of honour and their spouses. For etiquette related to receiving lines see the section on formal introductions, in [Chapter 9](#). Prior to dinner, the seating plan should be checked and seats located. Guests should stand behind their seats while the head table files in, and be seated after grace. When dinner is buffet style, guests should wait until the head table is served before proceeding to the buffet line. It is polite to mingle and dance with numerous partners after the dinner and, as always, it is a member's responsibility to make guests feel comfortable.

## **DANCES**

27. The mess committee generally sponsors dances that provide an informal opportunity to relax and mix with friends. The format is very relaxed, with no guests of honour or speeches, and dress often varies according to the theme (e.g., hard-times, Oktoberfest, St. Valentine's).

## **COCKTAIL PARTIES**

28. Dress for cocktail parties is usually service dress or jacket and tie. Receiving lines are customary and guests should arrive at the time stated on the invitation. These parties are generally held in late afternoon or early evening and their main purpose is for people to become acquainted. Those attending are expected to circulate and meet as many people as possible, carry on conversation, and be attentive listeners. Unless infirm or pregnant, one should not sit during a cocktail party. *Hors d'oeuvres* and sandwiches are usually served and should be accepted only in small quantities at a time.

## **GARDEN PARTIES**

29. Garden parties are essentially cocktail parties held outdoors. These functions generally last only a few hours and guests should depart at the designated time. When planning a garden party, an indoor area should be available in case of inclement weather and care should be taken to avoid soft ground that is difficult to stand on when wearing high heels.

## **OPEN HOUSE**

30. This function is precisely what it implies: the host and hostess will be pleased to receive guests during the time period stated on the invitation. Arriving punctually at the stated time is not necessary but all should arrive by the halfway mark as early arrivals may begin to take their leave by then. It is accepted that guests do not necessarily remain for the full duration of an open house but that they stay for a few hours and then depart. As for all parties, guests should leave by the time stated on the invitation.

## **JUNIOR RANKS CHRISTMAS DINNER**

31. Just prior to Christmas, a Junior Ranks Christmas Dinner is held in many locations. These are often unit functions, with the dinner served at the junior ranks mess or dining hall at lunchtime. The event is over by early afternoon. The dress is usually service dress for this semi-formal dinner. Officers and senior NCOs serve a traditional turkey dinner to the junior ranks and, in good spirit, the junior ranks attempt to embarrass their superiors by having them sing Christmas carols and perform other silly pranks. The dinner is usually compulsory.

## **BASE/WING CHRISTMAS PARTIES**

32. These functions provide an opportunity for all personnel (military and civilian) to share a meal and a good time together. Special consideration should be given to those members who cannot attend due to their being on a duty from which they cannot be absent.

## **AT HOME**

33. Another traditional Christmas function is the "*At Home*." This function is generally alternately hosted by the Officers' Mess and the Warrant Officers' and Sergeants' Mess. The function is a cocktail party held on an afternoon prior to Christmas; the dress is service dress. The members of the hosting mess form a receiving line at their mess to greet the members of the other mess who generally arrive en masse. As with all mixed rank functions, the guests must leave at the appointed time, allowing mess members the freedom of their own mess.

## **NEW YEAR'S DAY LEVEE**

34. This affair was historically a reception of male visitors by the sovereign, or the sovereign's representative, upon rising from bed. The tradition has been carried on in Canada, primarily by the military and by the Governor General and Lieutenant Governors, as a "*meet-and-greet*" or cocktail party. All engineers are expected to attend even if on leave or only visiting the area. If attending a levee in an area for the first time, the local practice should be confirmed, since variances in custom are common. If so identified, levees may be mixed. Dress is always service dress and it is no longer acceptable to arrive in mess dress, straight from the New Year's Eve Ball.

## **THE MILITARY WEDDING**

35. A military wedding is simply military participation in a religious or civil marriage ceremony. There is no set procedure and the couple must decide upon the degree of military participation they wish. Although permission to marry is no longer required, it is good etiquette to inform the commanding officer of an impending marriage.

36. Dress. Serving personnel may choose to wear uniforms. For a daytime ceremony, the wedding party usually wears full service dress with or without swords. For evening weddings or receptions, the wedding party may choose to wear either service dress or mess dress. The bride and groom may also choose to have guests wear uniform, in which case the invitation should clearly state the dress.

37. Swords. Only those who may wear swords as part of their uniform should do so. Swords may be worn throughout the ceremony or only for an arch of swords. Drawn swords are not permitted inside a Christian institution and the traditions for other religions should be determined in advance and respected. An arch of swords is often formed at the church entrance as a special honour at the end of the ceremony. Although the drill manual indicates an edge downward position, it is customary to twist the wrist so the blade is flat with the edge away from the couple. Other military guests may line the church exit and bestow courtesy salutes.

38. Transportation. With the approval of the Commanding Officer, units sometimes provide special transportation for the couple after the ceremony. For Engineers, this may be a dump truck or piece of heavy equipment such as a low-bed, with appropriate cleaning, carpeting and seating.

## ***Annex A – Function Planning Checklist***

1. Preparation. The preparation for a mess dinner or similar event should begin at least one month in advance of the function, although the facilities may need to be arranged farther in advance, depending upon availability. The points in the following list have been placed in chronological order so that the list may be used as a checklist for event planning. Select as appropriate to the function.

- a. Determine official title of function, date and time;
- b. Book facilities, band, disc jockey, piper, bar staff, serving staff and caterer, as required;
- c. Apply for hospitality funds for foreign guests or guests from industry;
- d. Determine the guest list and whether a guest is an *“invited guest”* (non-paying) or an *“invited-to-attend guest”* (paying guest).
- e. Keep a detailed budget and arrange billing of paying guests;
- f. Review authority for Reserve Force and retired members to wear uniform (QR&O 17.06);
- g. Send out invitations and advertisements early and specify dress, time, location and cost as appropriate;
- h. Order gifts and engraving and determine who will pass plaques and gifts to the presenter;
- i. Arrange for hosts to look after dignitaries, regarding arrival in town, briefing, transport, drinks, etc.;
- j. Designate a junior member as Vice President of the Mess Committee;
- k. Arrange for the padre or a designated member to say grace;
- l. Arrange coat-check, parking and a shuttle bus service as required;
- m. Arrange for a photographer, podium and microphone for presentations;
- n. Arrange after dinner program;
- o. Select a menu, wines and liqueurs;
- p. Review the program, toasts and regimental marches (check for proper order of marches, and ensure that the appropriate marches for all guests will be played) ;
- q. Print menus, seating plan cards and program cards;
- r. Prepare cue cards for the host and PMC (include program, order of regimental marches, background for each official guest);

- s. Prepare the seating plan, place cards, and table decorations (guidelines — wives across from husbands; guests, associate members, ladies not at the ends of tables; group retired members together; and blend senior members throughout); and,
  - t. Prepare thank-you letters.
2. At the Function. The OPI's tasks are not complete once the event starts. It is the OPI's responsibility to ensure that the event runs smoothly and to resolve any problems. The OPI should arrive early on the day of the event to:
- a. Arrange receiving line and announcer;
  - b. Make final arrangements with the band regarding marches and dinner music;
  - c. Arrange for speeches (public address system, podium);
  - d. Double check arrangements with the kitchen and serving staff;
  - e. Invite the piper, bandmaster and chef for drinks at the appropriate time;
  - f. Visit kitchen staff after dinner and authorize a round of drinks for them if justified;
  - g. Make sure that the entire event runs on time and discreetly advise key personnel when it is their turn in the program; and
  - h. Pay caterer, bar manager, mess manager, band, disc jockey, or other entertainment.