



## *The Overy Papers*

### **Number 25 - Freemasonry at War**

Fraternal Greetings Brethren

I would like to acknowledge "Freemasonry and WW 1" by David P. Hullinger and "Freemasonry and the Holocaust" by Bro Shawn M. Gory in the preparing of this paper.

War brings out the worst in mankind and also sometimes, the best.

As a Freemason it often brings our personal feelings into conflict and often we are sorely tried in keeping our minds on our Masonic Beliefs and the all important Landmarks.

This is not just when two close nations go to war or even in times when a country is at war with itself when cultures and religions bring civil strife between Nations.

For my first example I use the Civil War in the USA when two cultures clashed and after four years of war left 618,000 dead.

Despite the bitter feelings between the two sides Freemasonry did shine through on many occasions.

One example was two friends who were both taking part in the famous Pickett's Charge at Gettysburg.

One was Confederate General Lew Armistead who started the Confederate advance by yelling "give them cold steel" as he headed for the enemy.

Many men fell during the charge including General Lew Armistead and as he lay there he was heard to cry "help me as the widow's son".

Suddenly some of the men of the 69<sup>th</sup> Pennsylvania Regiment of the Union Army rose up and came to help General Lew Armistead.

A physician Union Captain, Henry H. Bingham who also was a Mason, was brought to assist him. General Lew Armistead inquired about his friend and Masonic Brother Union General Winfield Hancock.

He was told that he had also been wounded in the charge that day. As he realized his wounds were bad he asked Captain, Henry Bingham to give his Masonic watch and personal papers to his friend and Brother General Hancock.

Two days later on the 5<sup>th</sup> July 1863 General Armistead died of his wounds in a Union hospital on Spangler Farm.

This incident that occurred at Gettysburg is only one of many incidents in history where one Mason has come to the aid of another and it inspired the Masonic "Friend to Friend" Monument at Gettysburg. This sculpture shows Captain Henry Bingham, rendering aid to General Armistead. It shows the handing over of his watch and personal effects to be given to his friend, Union General Hancock.



Masonic Memorial at Gettysburg

The final act in that war was three days after the Confederate Army had surrendered to the Union General John B. Gordon. The Confederate army were marching towards the Union troops who were standing in formation waiting for the Confederate Army to stack their arms and fold their flags.

Suddenly The Union General ordered his troops to assume the position of "honour answering honour." This was followed immediately, by the Confederate troops who snapped to attention and returned the honour.

It was the first act to heal the wounds of a nation. That command of "honor answering honor" was ordered by a Freemason.

**The First World War** caused a different set of problems for Freemasonry.

The War in Europe caught Freemasonry by surprise. In 1913, an entente cordiale existed between the Masons of England and Germany and Lord Ampthill, Pro Grand Master of England, visited the German Grand Lodges at Berlin and he was elected honorary Grand Master of the German Grand Lodges.

The foreign correspondent for the Grand Lodge of Canada, reported in early July 1914:

We are entering upon a time when peace among English speaking peoples is to be the dominant note of our centennial celebrations. We cannot doubt that Masonry will be a potent factor in teaching the world that war among civilized peoples is unnecessary.

Two weeks later on the 28 July the "English speaking" people were at war with the "Civilized Peoples".

By 1915, the Grand Lodge of England had told all brethren of German, Austrian, and Hungarian birth they were no longer welcome at any Masonic meetings under English jurisdiction."

The German Masons countered this by saying International Masonry is dead, and will remain dead. So let us be Freemasons and work in our own way and all seven German grand lodges severed ties with those of the enemy.

In 1914, four-fifths of the world's Freemasons lived in the United States and the country was divided because of a large pro-German sentiment in the United States. Many had families, with whom they kept in touch, had many relatives serving in the armies of those nations.

Then on April 6 1917 the United States entered the War and their tune changed. Suddenly to be a German in America was unpopular. Anyone or anything with a German name was "fair game for abuse," even though most German-Americans were loyal to the United States.

The fighting ended at 11 A. M. (European Time) November 11, 1918 and Masonic writers fantasized a role for Freemasonry in the peace that was to follow the War. But with the animosity that existed among the grand lodges of all nations, how could Freemasonry have had any influence on the peace?

It was suggested that if all the Masons of the world could have got together on this, the War could have been prevented.

If that was the case the Catholic Church, with a larger membership and a Pope, could have prevented the War.

Freemasonry was no more able to prevent the War than it was to start it.

### **And then there was the Second World War.**

Under the Nazi regime German Freemasons desperately tried to hang on to Freemasonry as best they could, but to no avail. Eventually, the Freemasons were rounded up and taken to concentration camps where between eighty thousand and two hundred thousand Freemasons were murdered.

In Great Britain the retaliation against their German and Italian population started again just like in the First World War.

In Canada the Japanese were rounded up and sent to camps losing their property and even their Canadian rights.

I don't know the full story but I know the Canadian Government has apologized for their actions so there must be some who realized that what happened was wrong.

One ray of light of Freemasonry was in June 1933, when at a secret meeting, Grand Master Leo Muffelmann and some of his close companions decided to move the

Symbolic Grand Lodge of Germany to Palestine. The Symbolic Grand Lodge of Germany in Exile was constituted on November 17, 1933, when British authorities gave the needed permission."

By the start of the war every single Masonic Lodge had been shut down and in the concentration camps the Freemasons had to wear inverted red triangles on their shirts to identify them as such.



There is even undisputed proof of at least two Masonic Lodges operating within concentrations camps. Even in the face of murder and genocide Freemasonry carried on because of the strong will and desire of its Members to maintain the Order, and its cherished principles.

Sadly, we do not know just how many Freemason Lodges were in operation "under cover" in concentration camps because of the basic fact that absolute secrecy literally meant the difference between life and death for their members.

### **So now we come to today**

Our world, once more, has another set of problems to face. Today the fighting is worldwide and we could almost say the Third World War is with us. This time it is caused by radicals who would die rather than let us live in peace in our civilization.

This group of people has declared war on all who do not believe in their view of their Religion. They even attack their own countrymen and this has caused many to take their families to safety.

Our country has taken in many of these refugees who fled the persecution of their own countrymen and are therefore suspect in the eyes of many.

So where should we stand as freemasons?

I am not going to preach on any policy, but as a person who has lived and fought in Yemen, Bahrain and Kuwait and read the Koran from cover to cover, I probably have a slightly different outlook than most.

Plus I do have some Muslims who I count as my friends for example my Doctor, my landlord, my friendly next door neighbour and my granddaughter in law.

I also came to Canada in 1981 as an immigrant arriving in Montreal and met an anti-British attitude and when I approached a Freemason who my Grand Lodge had provided as a contact, he told me he was not interested in helping all the Brits who keep coming over here and he refused to help me.

We are a strong brotherhood, bound by mystic ties that are stronger than earthly persecution. For you my brethren, I hope this persecution is a call for us to look for higher deeds and nobler purposes.

If any person wants to become a member of our craft we should show an example and if he passes the requirements of the 6 stages of initiation we should be happy to welcome him into our Fraternity.

We must set an example of our Fraternity to the world and show that no matter what problems are thrown at the Masonic fraternity, we always find a way to rise above it, and not only survive, but thrive.

So I ask you this, are you content with your Lodge continuing to honour our Masonic obligations and landmarks, so, that when the next crisis comes along, and be assured it will come, and someone like me stands up to mention how we acted, would we be proud of what he says?

I feel we must honour our world by creating the fraternity and world that our departed Brothers dreamed of, and often died for. I honestly believe Freemasonry will always live on, but it is up to us, the Brethren of today, to make sure we are as strong as our departed Brothers were in their time.

Thank you and whatever I say may we continue in peace and harmony.

Bro. Bill Overy

Member of the Education Committee of the Grand Lodge of British Columbia and Yukon.