

WW1 and Freemasonry.

Freemasonry and the military have enjoyed close ties since the seventeenth Century, with members of the Army and the Navy enjoying that privilege. In fact the expansion of the 'craft' beyond Britain is a direct result of the movements of the Army. The first meetings held in New Zealand were held in the centres where shipping could moor. Later the discovery of Gold brought more men from overseas with their association with the Order. From these beginnings Freemasonry reached its peak in the 1920's as a direct result of World War 1.

When men responded to the call to arms in 1914, there were inevitably Freemasons amongst the ranks of men. More followed as the various drafts of reinforcements were trained and then transported overseas. All that was missing was the ability to practice and to talk with other men with similar views.

New Zealand military personnel created two Masonic Associations in two theatres of war with 'branches' in other areas. The earlier Association was formed in England and France with its base in England. About July 1918 a list was created and published denoting the various branches of The Association. This list was published on Aug 1st 1918 and listed twenty-two sites including Sinai and Palestine as part of the Association. This in fact this was not the case, as at meetings held on 3rd and 8th. Aug. 1918 the Sinai & Palestine Group voted not to join the English Association. With that decision in mind the meeting in the Dome of the Rock went ahead.

Two men in particular James Neil McCarroll and William Meldrum were both members of the NZ Mounted Rifles Brigade, both were Commanders of their respective Squadrons. The Auckland Mounted Rifles and Wellington Mounted Rifles.

James was a Master Mason, William a Past Master and P.G.Swd.B. They found other like minded men in their mess room and thought to hold a meeting and see what happens. The meeting occurred on 6th May 1917 at Tel el Fara with eight members from eight different lodges present.

It was very quickly decided to try and hold a meeting of Freemasons in the Shrine of the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem. What was needed to bring this event to completion?

1st Jerusalem was in Turkish hands and under their Army's control.

2nd How were they to get the necessary Masonic equipment?

3rd Who was in charge of the Shrine?

4th Who was going to make the necessary approaches?

The group was fortunate enough to have a senior officer both as a member and with the ability to move about the area with little impediment. None but Brigadier General William Meldrum Commander of the New Zealand Mounted Rifles Brigade.

Jerusalem informally surrendered on the 9th December 1917. General 'Bull' Allenby formally accepted the surrender on the 11th December 1917. One of his comments during the surrender process was that all of the Holy Places were to have guards placed over them. Where ever possible Muslim places had Muslim Guards.

The Mosque of Omar and the surrounding area had Moslem Guards both Officers and Soldier assigned to it. New orders had been issued that "Without the permission of the Military Governor and the Moslem in Charge of the Mosque. No non Moslem was to pass the cordon.

It is known that William was a visitor about this time to the Military Governor; Colonel. Ronald Storrs. There is also a suspicion that the Governor may have been a Freemason as he was Oriental Secretary to Lord Kitchener, but this was never confirmed. The inference to be drawn from this, that because of this supposed link there was the opportunity to meet with the Man in charge of the Shrine. Here also it has

been inferred that this man was also a Freemason. Because if not for that association; why did he allow Christians access into the Shrine and allow them to remain inside for approximately 15 minutes?

The cars:- The Army Command had at least seven Ford motor cars at its disposal. Meldrum had exclusive use of the vehicles for that visit as he was Brigadier-General and Commander of the NZ Brigade at the time.

The group apparently drove to the Jaffa Gate parked the cars and walked to Hotel St. David buying the necessary equipment on the way. The group had lunch at the Hotel which Meldrum paid for; for the entire group. They walked to the shrine and met the Moslem Cleric in charge and entered the Shrine. A little later the keeper got nervous as others wished to enter. And the presentation of "baksheesh" allowed the meeting to come to a close.

The group exited the cavern and assembled where a photograph was taken of the complete group. They then retraced their steps back to the cars and returned to camp. Within a couple of days they resumed hostilities with the Turks nearby.

Elements of the event were soon written down and sent home to NZ, appearing in a range of Newspapers of the day with essentially the same story. It made National Geographic Magazine and the London Evening Mail Newspaper. These accounts are the only source of information on what happened on that day.

There have been short accounts published about the event in local Masonic papers both in New Zealand and Australia. The booklet researched and put together by Eli Minoff and Keith Stockley^[1] is the only major research paper written so far. Some of the men wrote home, as well as to members of their own lodges giving some details of the meeting.

The NZ Mounted Brigade was stationed near Jericho in the Jordan Valley. How to get from Jericho to Jerusalem to hold the meeting? As there was no constitution from any jurisdiction how could they form a 'lodge' inside the cavern?

Some correspondents mixed the two associations together to claim the honour of the holding that particular meeting, this is not true. The Brigadier surely must have had made arrangements for the gavels to have been carved beforehand as well as arranging for the supply of the other items to be purchased. The men also purchased the wooden hammers and sounding boards. Not to be confused with the white marble gavels bought as souvenirs locally. The Arab traders had a reputation of dishonesty. It is my thoughts that he must have put the fear of someone into those men to provide the necessary equipment to be picked on the appointed day, at the appointed time. There must have been the appointed drivers to the cars who would have remained to guard the vehicles?

The first general meeting of the fledgling Association was held on the 27th May 1917 again at Tel el Fara there were thirty six brethren representing 34 Lodges assembled. The Association was officially formed at this meeting. A draft constitution was approved and a Secretary elected. Both of these meetings were apparently held within a short distance of King Solomon's Temple.

Fraternal Greetings were sent to Brethren in NZ and also to Brethren in France.

A further meeting of the Executive was held on the 4th April 1918 at 3pm, the purpose of the meeting was to make arrangements to hold a meeting at or in the Temple at 2.30pm on the 6th April 1918. The record shows that the meeting was held on the 6th April 1918 in the cavern under the Sacred Rock within the Mosque of Omar. A total 31 men from twenty-seven Lodges were represented.

Those holding office for the meeting were :

W.M. Brig. Genl. W. Meldrum P.M.

S.W. Lt. Col. J.N. McCarroll
J.W. Tpr. G.R. Lovelock P.M.
S.D. Tpr. B. Anderson J.W.
J.D. L/Cpl. J. W. H. Thomson
I.G. Tpr. G.R. Mansford.
O.G. L/Cpl. C. Tate
Chaplain: Capt. Rev. J. D. Mc. Wilson

The Lodge was duly constituted and opened in the first degree. The meeting lasted for 15 minutes.

A further meeting of the Executive was held on 3rd August 1918. During the meeting it was approved that a suitable jewel be struck. This jewel was to be worn, only by members of the Association.

The First annual meeting held 8th August 1918 resolved among other things "That a Masonic Emblem symbolic of the Association be struck. And that the matter of the character of the jewel be left to the new Executive."

At another meeting held 13th August 1918 "After considerable discussion it was resolved that three designs be made and submitted to the next meeting of the executive. Another meeting of the Executive held on the sports ground at Richon Le Zion on the 17th November 1918 resolved "That the jewel of the association be a compass and square enclosed by Fern Leaf, with a suitable inscription and the date 6th April 1918 on the back." Fifty copies were to be ordered.

There were no further meetings of the Association due to the dispersal of its members. The papers relating to the Association ended up in the hands of W.B. Pte. C.E. Howell. Some of the papers were later published in the Proceedings of the Masters and Past Masters Lodge 130 in 1928. Written up by Bro. Capt. Dr. G. H. Robertson, NZ Medical Corps. a member of the France Association.

The other Association formed earlier in England and was located in various areas. The Hornchurch Convalescent Hospital Group of Freemasons was the model used to set up the Sinai and Palestine Masonic Association.

Lt. Col. George Barclay NZE set up meeting of interested Freemasons somewhere in France within the sound of the guns, on the 21 June 1917. There were 75 men present at that meeting

From those small beginnings arose a group of some 1700 men enrolled as members of the Association. The Association is still working in New Zealand and is restricted to men who have served overseas in a military capacity.

The branches referred to earlier; were based in London, Hornchurch, Brokenhurst, Christchurch, Walton on Thames, Sling, Codford, Torquay, Stevenage, Eweshot Camp Aldershot, Brockton Camp, all in military establishments. Meetings were usually in the YMCA premises.

The Branches in France were:- N.Z. Stationary Hospital, N.Z. Railway Operating Section, N.Z. Tunnelling Coy, XXII Corps HQ. Another Branch was apparently set up in Mesopotamia. Finally in New Zealand at:- Featherston Camp and Trentham Camp.

On the return journey to New Zealand Masonic meetings were carried out on the troopships by the Freemasons on board, where they were sometimes joined by the Masonic members of the ships crews.

Comments were made in N.Z. Masonic Newspapers^[2] of the day about the sudden influx of men about to go overseas with the military, and questioned the reason why? The reason for the question was of course the prospect of the men being killed in action. In which case the Masonic organization, would have had no choice but to look after the widow, and orphans caused by the death of the men. These men, with very little experience in the Masonic fraternity and therefore little financial input, were a

burden on the organisation. Special collections were organised in all of the New Zealand Constitution lodges for this side of the organization.

In 1919, the jewel of this Association was manufactured by George Kenning and Son and was offered for sale in several grades. Metal Gilt, Silver Gilt and Gold 9^{ct}, 15^{ct}, and 18^{ct}. The cost of each jewel was Metal Gilt £0.15.0., 9ct Gold £5.0.0., 15ct. Gold £5. 10.0., 18ct. Gold £7. 10. 0. Previous to 1919 it was manufactured in an extra grade Silver Gilt and sold for £1.1.0. The Silver Gilt grade was discontinued by Nov. 1920.

Difficulties in supplies and costs of distributing the jewel appears to have been one of the reasons for the change to another manufacturer in New Zealand, Moller and Co of Dunedin were appointed to manufacture the Jewel. There was a lot of interest to obtain rights to copy and sell the jewel to their Masonic customers. But the Association took steps to try and copyright the jewel to prevent others from manufacturing and selling the jewel to all and sundry.

The Executive of the Association at the A.G.M held in Wellington in 1919 were:

President; R.W. Bro. Col G. Barclay.
Vice President; V.W. Bro. Col. J. J. Esson. Later Grand Master.
Vice President; W.B. Major W. G.Wray.
General Secretary; Bro. Rev. Major A. Hardie.

The list of members who purchased the jewel totalled some 400 out of a membership of approximately 1800 men. The cost of the jewel to members in 1917 were:- Metal Gilt 15s, Silver Gilt 22s., 9ct Gold 91s., 15ct. Gold 121s.,and 18ct. Gold 141s., (20s., = £1.0.0. s= shillings.)

While there is information available on the detail of the jewels paid for and collected. It is not appropriate to record this information in this venue for security reasons.

The lodge the men attended in civilian times is not recorded in the original records. It is apparent that this particular information was recorded on the actual membership forms which so far have not been located. Branches of the association were setup in the main centres in New Zealand. One of the Branches devolved to form the Services Lodge in Dunedin about 1921. Today there is only one location of the Organization with the Secretary living in Levin. Meetings are occasionally held in RSA's locally.

Any freemason visiting a lodge will occasionally see the jewels of both the 1st and 2nd NZEF Association's. The rarer jewel is that issued by the Sinai and Palestine Group. A mother of Pearl shell carved and engraved.

The France association jewel always has the name and register number engraved on the reverse of the jewel, whereas the Sinai and Palestine has only the date 6th April 1918. The 2nd NZEF jewel struck in 1939-45 is plain. There are various series of the jewel indicating what I am not at all sure. But it is possible this refers to the state of the manufacturer and his supply of metals to make the jewels.

The ribbons used to hang the jewels are:

- 1st NZEF the ribband of the Medaille Militaire by permission of the French Government about 500 in total issued.
- 2nd NZEF the ribband of the Order of the Nile This Association was based mainly at Maadi Camp and Cairo and later moving to Italy near the end of the conflict. More than 1000 jewels were distributed without any inscription on the reverse.^[3]
- The Sinai and Palestine never had a formal ribbon.

I have evidence of two brothers both returned servicemen wearing the jewel. The elder brother Lt. Col James McCarroll AMR, on a simple chain. His younger brother, Capt. Thomas McCarroll, MGS, on the ribband and hanger of the British Victory Medal. There was no ribband specified in the original decision to manufacture the Jewel. There were 50 jewels ordered and issued.

These are the Jewels that are held sometimes held on display within the Lodge Buildings. They also appear for sale on Internet Sales sites occasionally and sell very rapidly. I am aware of only one of the Shell Jewels for sale in the last 4 years and 2 of the 1917 Jewels for sale in the same period.



N.Z.E.F. in France M.A.



2nd NZEF MA 1939-45



NZEF in Sinai & Palestine 6th April 1918

I have been actively searching for the location and details of the Jewels that are held by Lodges and or local museums holding Freemason materials.

If you, respected reader, are aware of either of the World War One Jewels. I would appreciate any information on who to make contact with to obtain further information>I can be contacted by email xtr110796@xtra.co.nz or southcol@xtra.co.nz

G. Sylvester R.H. Apr 2017 Greymouth. Member of The Advance Mawhera Lodge No.61