

THE RIFLE & THE APRON



Presented at The Beaches Lodge No. 473
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By Brother Lieutenant Joseph F. Curry





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I would like to explore some of the history of Military Lodges in Canada in what I have titled:

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Section 21 of the Lodge Resource Manual, published by our Grand Lodge, states the following:

"Military lodges were active in the spread of Freemasonry throughout both the United States and Canada. A number of military lodges were warranted by the Grand Lodges of Ireland, Scotland and England, the first being warranted by the Grand Lodge of Ireland in 1732. Military lodges, however, were strictly cautioned not to interfere with the Masonic jurisdiction of any country in which they were stationed. Military lodges contributed to the remarkable extension of the Order in the overseas possessions to which the soldiers were sent. Without them, Freemasonry would probably have developed at a much slower pace or not survived at all. "Travelling Warrants" are almost synonymous with the organization of military lodges, and were so called because the lodges which acted under them were permitted to travel from place to place with the regiments to which they were issued. Such warranted lodges were primarily responsible for spreading Freemasonry in North America."¹

Given this historical context from Grand Lodge, and my own participation in a modern military lodge, I thought the brethren here assembled may benefit from a further explanation of the military lodges that have helped shape masonry in Canada.

The United Grand Lodge of England's Board of General Purposes made this statement when the two remaining military lodges of that jurisdiction exchanged their warrants in the 1960s: "the spread of the Craft overseas was largely due to the enthusiasm and pertinacity of the members of the Military Lodges who carried with them the seeds of Freemasonry to many distant garrison towns and cantonments, where stationary Lodges were subsequently established and still flourish."²

What fitting words to describe the outstanding the work of these outstanding brothers who have blazed a trail for us - with a rifle and an apron.

¹ Grand Lodge A.F. & A.M. of Canada in the Province of Ontario. (2009). *Lodge Resources Manual*. Hamilton.

² Author unknown. Published in MASONIC LIGHT; Huntingdon, Quebec; February, A.M. 5952; Vol.V, No.6.





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Masonry was indeed spread across the surface of the earth by military lodges, and a number of books and numerous articles have been written documenting this incredibly rich history. In this discussion I will restrict the focus to the history that would be of more particular interest to Canadian Masons.

The first recorded Warrant for a military lodge was issued to the First British Foot Regiment by the Grand Lodge of Ireland in 1732,³ just 15 years after the establishment of the first Grand Lodge in England in 1717. This was the first Warrant for a “moveable Lodge”, or one that was not restricted to one location.

These early military lodges were formed by issuing a Warrant to the Commanding Officer of a Regiment, and membership was initially restricted to officers of the regiment. Jurisdiction was a matter of concern, and so a military lodge would only initiate local residents in a town if there was not already a regular lodge established.⁴

The lodge furniture, ornaments, jewels etc. were limited to what could fit into one chest in order to be transportable as the Regiment deployed to various campaigns.

In the United States of America, the first Lodge of this kind of which we have any record was one to which the Warrant was granted by the Grand Lodge of Massachusetts, in 1738, to one Abraham Savage, to be used in the “expedition against Canada”.⁵

A lodge may have met at Annapolis Royal, Nova Scotia in the years 1721-23,⁶ however the first record of a lodge being established in what is now Canada was in the year 1738. Major Erasmus James Philipps had been initiated in Massachusetts and later established Annapolis Royal Lodge, denominated number 5 on the roll of St John’s Grand Lodge of Massachusetts. When Major Philipps visited the Lodge in Boston in April, 1739, he was referred to as the “Grand Master of Nova Scotia”.⁷

³ James M. Pollard. The Military and Freemasonry. *Virginia Masonic Herald*. April 1989.

⁴ R.W. Bro. Col. George Barclay. (1933) The Soldier and Freemasonry. *Selected Papers*. Vol. 1.

⁵ Albert G. Mackey (1878). Military Lodges. *Encyclopedia of Freemasonry*. Retrieved December 30, 2012. from <http://encyclopediaoffreemasonry.com/m/military-lodges/>

⁶ Melvin M. Johnson. (1924). *The Beginnings of Freemasonry in America* (pp. 51, 81), New York: George H. Doran Company.

⁷ Author: Unknown. Sinclair Inn Museum: First Canadian Masonic Lodge. Retrieved December 30, 2012 from the Annapolis Heritage Society website:
<http://www.annapolisheritagesociety.com/museums/sinclair-masonic.html>





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A military lodge was also evidently operating at the Fortress of Louisbourg, perhaps as early as 1746. In 1758, a British officer of the 43rd Foot stationed at Louisbourg recorded the following in his diary: "When the calendar does not furnish us with a loyal excuse for assembling in the evening, we have recourse to a Freemasons Lodge, where we work so hard that it is inconceivable to think what a quantity of business of great importance is transacted in a very short time."⁸

Masonry spread from these first military lodges in Nova Scotia to Newfoundland, New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island.

In 1752, the Grand Lodge of Ireland issued a Warrant for a Lodge to be attached to the 46th Regiment. This Lodge was designated the Lodge of the Social and Military Virtues, No. 227. In 1812 or 1813 the Regiment went to Australia and was stationed at the convict settlement of Botany Bay, where the city of Sydney now stands. Before they left, having initiated a number of local residents, a new lodge was formed which now appears on the roll of the Grand Lodge of New South Wales as the Lodge of Antiquity, No. 1, being the oldest lodge on the Australian continent.⁹

The 46th Regiment later served in Canada. When the regiment was ordered home, so many of the men took a discharge to stay and settle in Canada, that, they were permitted to retain the Warrant and continue the work of the lodge in Canada. The Lodge still works at Montreal, and is known today as the Lodge of Antiquity, No. 1, on the Roll of the Grand Lodge of Quebec. This old Military Lodge was one of the most famous and probably has a greater record than any other of the Military Lodges. Its Masonic Chest was twice captured by the enemy, but, upon its contents becoming known, it was on each occasion returned under a flag of truce and with all the honors of war.^{10, 11},

Major-General James Wolfe, a Freemason,¹² led the battle on the Plains of Abraham for the City of Quebec in 1759. The first joint meeting of the Lodges in the garrison at Quebec City was held later that same year on November 28th,¹³ which "was as soon as Convenient after the Surrender of this place to His Britannic Majesty's Arms"

⁸ James R. Case (1965). American Masonic Roots in British Military Lodges. *Canadian Masonic Research Association*, 41st Meeting.

⁹ R.W. Bro. Col. George Barclay (1933). The Soldier and Freemasonry. *Selected Papers*. Vol. 1.

¹⁰ R.W. Bro. Col. George Barclay (1933). The Soldier and Freemasonry. *Selected Papers*. Vol. 1.

¹¹ James M. Pollard. The Military and Freemasonry. *Virginia Masonic Herald*. April 1989.

¹² R.W. Bro. Col. George Barclay (1933). The Soldier and Freemasonry. *Selected Papers*. Vol. 1.

¹³ A. J. B. Milborne. History of the Grand Lodge of Quebec. Retrieved December 30, 2012 from the Grand Lodge of Quebec website at: <http://www.glquebec.org/history.shtml>





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as recorded by Sergeant James Thompson of the 78th Regiment. The several lodges in garrison also celebrated St. John's Day together on December 27th of that year.

It is no small wonder that these brethren were able to meet under such conditions. Over five hundred houses had been destroyed during the three months' bombardment leading up to the fall of Quebec City. There was little food and no fuel, and scurvy was rampant among the soldiers. A muster of the Fraser's Highlanders taken early in 1760 showed that out of a total strength of 894, 580 were in Hospital.¹⁴

Thomas Dunkerly, a commissioned gunner, had the authority to grant warrants from the Premier Grand Lodge and was responsible for establishing lodges on board HMS Vanguard in 1760. In the same year, under this mandate, he installed the first Provincial Grand Master of Canada at Quebec.¹⁵

I must make an honourable mention here, as Prince Edward, who now has a maritime Province as his namesake, was then a Colonel in the Army when he was appointed the Provincial Grand Master of Lower Canada in 1792.

The apron followed the rifle further west to Upper Canada and what is now Ontario.

The Kings 8th Regiment was stationed at Fort Niagara from 1773 – 1785, and it was their military lodge that was the predecessor of all others in Ontario. In 1782, St. John's Lodge of Friendship No. 2, was warranted for civilian masons to correspond with the military lodge. This would indicate that the 8th Regiment did not initiate civilians into their lodge.

The first Provincial Grand Lodge of Upper Canada was formed in 1792 with William Jarvis as Provincial Grand Master. The original charter of St. John's Lodge of Friendship No. 2 is displayed on the walls of the lodge room at Niagara-on-the-Lake on the very spot where the original Masonic Hall in Upper Canada was situated.¹⁶

¹⁴ A. J. B. Milborne. History of the Grand Lodge of Quebec. Retrieved December 30, 2012 from the Grand Lodge of Quebec website at: <http://www.glquebec.org/history.shtml>

¹⁵ VWBro Brig P R Sharpe. A Short History of the Armed Forces and Masonry. Retrieved December 30, 2012 from The Circuit of Service Lodges website at: <http://www.militarymasons.co.uk/History2.html>

¹⁶ Author: Unknown. A Short History of Niagara Lodge. Retrieved December 30, 2012 from the Niagara Lodge A.F. & A.M. No. 2 website at: [http://www.niagaramasons.com/Lodges/Niagara/\(Niagara%20History.htm](http://www.niagaramasons.com/Lodges/Niagara/(Niagara%20History.htm)





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Captain John P. Clement served in the 8th Foot during the war of 1812-14. During a battle fought on July 5, 1814 Capt. Clement observed an Indian warrior about to kill an American prisoner, who gave a Masonic sign. Bro. Clement, observing the sign, rescued his brother Mason, and took him to a farmhouse where he was cared for until well enough to be sent to his home in New York State. Some months later, as fate would have it, Bro. Clement was taken prisoner and incarcerated in New York. His jailer proved to be the very man Bro. Clement had saved. This brother arranged his transfer back to Canada the following day.¹⁷

Another incident worthy of note occurred during the burning and looting of Niagara-on-the-Lake during the war of 1812-14, which demonstrates that Masonic bonds of fraternity were recognized even between enemies. The Americans were looting a house when they discovered a chest containing regalia and lodge furnishings. An American officer, recognizing the contents, directed that the house be protected.¹⁸

Still in the Niagara region, Brother Thomas Ingersoll was an active Mason who kept a tavern at Queenston, where his daughter Laura also worked. Lodge meetings were regularly held in one of the tavern's private rooms. One night, after a Lodge meeting, Laura's father brought home a young, newly made Mason named James Secord, and introduced him to his daughter. They were immediately attracted to each other, married, and eventually set up their own home in Queenston. James served as a Sergeant in the Lincoln Militia and was wounded in the battle at Queenston Heights. When Laura Secord discovered the American plan to launch a surprise attack, she drove her cow to pasture through the American lines to deceive the sentries. She then abandoned the cow and started out through the bush towards the Beaver Dams. She travelled 20 miles through the bush and swamp to warn Lieutenant James Fitz Gibbon, who happened to be a Freemason. Brother Gibbon immediately placed his Green Tigers on alert and notified the Iroquois. As a result they were able to mount a coordinated surprise attack and force the surrender of Colonel Boerstler and his entire force.

Before completing this tale, let me point out that notable chiefs such as Joseph Brant of the Mohawk Nation of the Six Nations Confederacy, along with their principal warriors, were Freemasons. When Joseph Brant died in 1807, his son John Brant and

¹⁷ Author: Unknown. A Short History of Niagara Lodge. Retrieved December 30, 2012 from the Niagara Lodge A.F. & A.M. No. 2 website at:

[http://www.niagaramasons.com/Lodges/Niagara/\(Niagara%20History.htm](http://www.niagaramasons.com/Lodges/Niagara/(Niagara%20History.htm)

¹⁸ Author: Unknown. A Short History of Niagara Lodge. Retrieved December 30, 2012 from the Niagara Lodge A.F. & A.M. No. 2 website at:

[http://www.niagaramasons.com/Lodges/Niagara/\(Niagara%20History.htm](http://www.niagaramasons.com/Lodges/Niagara/(Niagara%20History.htm)





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his adopted son John Norton both became war chiefs of the Mohawks and continued Joseph's tradition of Freemasonry among the Iroquois.

While negotiating the surrender of Colonel Boerstler, Lieutenant Gibbon became aware somehow that the Colonel and his second in command were also Masons, and assured them of his Masonic protection as prisoners of war. He would also have been able to inform the Americans that the Iroquois warriors present included many Masons, who would respect the concept of protecting a Brother in Distress. This promise of Masonic protection helps explain why the Americans would eventually surrender their entire force of 700 soldiers to Gibbon and his 40 men.¹⁹

Before I leave the War of 1812, there is another little known tale that must be repeated.

In the summer of 1814, American General Duncan McArthur with an Army of some 750 men under his command, conducted a raid into what is now Southern Ontario.

By November, he had advanced as far as Waterford, a prosperous village in Norfolk County on the Nanticoke Creek, that based much of its economy on Brother Morris Sovoreen's water powered grist mill. When the news reached Waterford that the Americans were close by, Brother Sovoreen, assisted by Brother William Schuyler and his other men, began to hide bags of flour, to keep them out of the hands of the enemy. General McArthur's forces entered the village, quickly set fire to Sovoreen's mill and then moved on. They paused for a rest break just outside of the village, but were puzzled to see that there was no smoke coming from the mill. An American officer with six soldiers went back into Waterford to see why the mill was not burning. They caught Brothers Sovoreen and Schuyler with buckets in hand, extinguishing the fire with water from the mill pond. The American officer was so outraged that he ordered his men to hang Brothers Sovoreen and Schuyler, from a huge oak tree near the mill. Ropes were quickly produced, and a noose was placed around the neck of each man. When General McArthur rode in to see for himself what was happening, Brother Sovoreen, in desperation, made a Masonic sign of distress. Brother General McArthur recognized the sign. The General called out to his very surprised officer, "let them boys down, I'll spare their lives." The men were released, but their mill was destroyed.²⁰

¹⁹ VW Bro Daniel J. Glenney (2012), Laura Secord Surrounded by Freemasons. Retrieved December 30, 2012 from the Algoma District Masonic Website at: <http://www.algomadistrict.ca/Laura%20Secord.htm>

²⁰ V. W. Bro. Daniel J Glenney (2010), Freemasonry in Upper Canada in the War of 1812. Retrieved December 30, 2012 from the Templum Fidelis Lodge website at: <http://www.templumfidelis.com/wp-content/uploads/2008/06/Freemasonry-in-Upper-Canada-in-The-War-of-1812.pdf>





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Inside the Waterford Masonic Temple there are two pillars, each with a strong rope wound around it. Legend has it these are the very ropes from which Brothers Soverein and Schuyler were nearly hanged.

The first Military Lodge from our Grand Jurisdiction was organized during the Louis Riel rebellion. Brother Lieutenant Alexander W. Kippen of the Canadian Intelligence Corps (a precursor to the Intelligence Branch that I currently serve in) was killed in action on May 12, 1885 at the Battle of Batoche, Saskatchewan (then part of the Northwest Territories), which put an end to the Louis Riel-led North-West Rebellion. Historical accounts indicate that he was on the front line of a charge by the Royal Grenadiers, 100 yards from the Métis rifle pits, when a bullet struck him in the head. A beautiful monument in his honour at Elmwood bears the inscription: "Erected to his memory by his fellow citizens, Masonic brethren, and comrades in arms."

The lodge military lodge was denominated 'Winnipeg Lodge' under dispensation, first meeting on 10 December, 1870, and later changed the name to "Prince Rupert's Lodge," receiving their charter under that name from the Grand Lodge of Canada numbered 240 on the Grand Register. The Worshipful Master was R. Stewart Patterson, Chaplain to the forces, the Senior Warden was Lieutenant William N. Kennedy, and the Junior Warden was Sergeant Major Mathew Coyne.²¹ Following the end of the conflict several brethren decided to stay and settle and they continued the work of the lodge.

Our jurisdiction would not deploy another military lodge until Canada Lodge, Under Dispensation went to Kandahar, Afghanistan in 2010.

Masonry spread from Ontario to Manitoba with this military lodge, and from there on to Saskatchewan and Alberta.²²

The rifle would finally take the apron full circle – back to Europe from whence it came. I speak of that dark period of human history: World Wars I and II,

²¹ Myron Lusk (1974), The History and Development of Freemasonry in Canada. Retrieved December 30, 2012 from the Grand Lodge of Manitoba website at: <http://www.glmb.ca/interesting-news-about-freemasonry-in-canada.html>

²² Myron Lusk (1974), The History and Development of Freemasonry in Canada. Retrieved December 30, 2012 from the Grand Lodge of Manitoba website at: <http://www.glmb.ca/interesting-news-about-freemasonry-in-canada.html>





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In World War I a Masonic lodge was established at Le Havre, France. Le Havre de Grâce No. 4 was warranted under the “Grande Loge Nationale Indépendante et Régulier pour la France et les Colonies Françaises.” Seventy Masons were listed as founding members, representing Mother Lodges in England, Scotland, Ireland, Canada, Australia, India, Malta, Gibraltar, South Africa, and the United States.

At the ceremony of consecration, on October 31, 1916, the following words were spoken by the Chaplain: “Surrounded as we are with an atmosphere charged with so much disruption, disunion, and discord, with lowering clouds of hate and strife, through which at present there appears to be but a faint light penetrating – a light which we hope is indicative of the future blaze of joy and happiness – we launch this ship of Peace and Harmony.”

Carleton Lodge No. 465 in Carp, Ontario eventually acquired the furnishings from Loge le Havre, where they are still in use today.²³

At one point during World War I, four of the top Generals of the Canadian Army, the Minister of Militia and Defense, and the Prime Minister were all Masons. Several Canadians gained prominence during the War. This included Brother and Captain Roy Brown from St. John’s Lodge in Carleton Place, the Canadian pilot in the Royal Flying Corp that shot down the Red Baron. At least 6 Canadians who were Masons, or who became Masons on their return home, were awarded the Victoria Cross.²⁴

During World War II the Nazis actively persecuted Masons in Germany and in the occupied countries of Europe. Masonic Lodges and Temples were destroyed, their senior officers were sent to concentration camps, and the Order was driven underground to survive. Nazi officers plundered Masonic Lodges to collect Masonic regalia and jewels as war trophies. Along with many of his Masonic Brethren, the Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of the Netherlands perished in a concentration camp. Masons in fascist Spain and Italy suffered a similar persecution. Spanish Freemasons were imprisoned for the perceived crime of being a Mason, especially if one had been the Master of a Lodge.

In spite of the fierce anti - Masonic sentiment of the Nazis, there were still some individual German soldiers for whom Masonic beliefs were important. There is a legend from the War that may well be true. A Canadian pilot had been shot down and became

²³ V W Bro D Glenney. Canadian Freemasonry in Two World Wars. Delivered in a speech at Southampton, Ontario on May 31, 2011.

²⁴ V W Bro D Glenney. Canadian Freemasonry in Two World Wars. Delivered in a speech at Southampton, Ontario on May 31, 2011.





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a prisoner of War of the enemy. Along with the rest of his crew, he was boarding a bus to be taken to a prisoner of war camp. The German military driver saw the Canadian pilot's Masonic ring, and whispered, "quick, give me your ring." The Canadian, as one would expect, bluntly refused, whereupon the German said, "you don't understand, the SS are here, and if they see your Masonic ring, they will shoot you." The guard then instructed the pilot to look for men wearing a tiny flower, the blue "forget me not." This was the symbol being used by underground Masonic Lodges in Germany and in the occupied countries.

I was presented with a little blue "forget me not pin" by Brother Christian Giles, now our WM, before I deployed to Afghanistan. I wore it on my combat uniform when I went out on patrols in remembrance of those brothers before me who carried this symbol of masonry with their rifle.

I took my rifle to Afghanistan – and I also took my apron.

Since the Canadian Forces deployed to Afghanistan in 2001, several of our successive Grand Masters wanted to send a military lodge to serve our troops, but it wasn't until 9 years into the war that Most Worshipful Brother Raymond S. J. Daniels was able to grant Dispensation for a moveable lodge to meet under the Charter of Trent Lodge No. 38, and designated Canada Lodge.

You will recall that the warrants or charters for the very first moveable lodge were granted to the Colonel of the Regiment rather than to the brothers of a specific geographic area (such as a town). The nature of deployments are different now than they were in 1732. Regiments don't deploy for the duration of the war now, we are rotated through on 6 – 8 month deployments.

VW Brother Rick Fulford was recruited to run the military lodge and the Dispensation for Canada Lodge is in his name. He is a civilian NATO contractor and has been working in Kandahar for a number of years now. The Dispensation will expire when the Canadian Forces leave Afghanistan in 2014.

Canada Lodge is the only AF&AM moveable military lodge anywhere in the world today. So it is that a lodge from our jurisdiction has become known around the world as masons from over 30 Grand Jurisdiction have been members, served as officers, been initiated – passed – and raised, even sat in the East in Canada Lodge.

I've related a number of anecdotes from historical military lodges tonight, and so I think it best to finish with one from Canada Lodge in Kandahar.





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Some of the brothers who attended the lodge went through great lengths to attend. There were Filipino brethren who worked as electrical engineers on Camp Hero (an Afgnan National Army base next to KAF). At first they had passes to get on base and they travelled in a pick-up truck (with no armour), risking attack by the Taliban as they travelled unprotected to attend lodge on the base. At one point their passes expired and while they were waiting for them to be renewed, an Australian brother, the always affable Brother Sergeant Major Alex Mearns, smuggled them on and off base to attend lodge. He recounted to me – with some humour – how they came close to being discovered one time. Before completing this story I must impress upon you how much the Aghan people appreciate water. Being a very arid country, bottled drinking water which NATO soldiers consume daily is rather valued by the locals. It was late one night after lodge and they were returning to Camp Hero. Brother Mearns covered our Pilipino brothers in the back of his SUV. As they approached the gate the Afghan guard (who normally waved him through because he knew him) indicated he would like to search the back of the vehicle. Being quick on his feet (as he is), our brother dismounted. He opened the rear hatch and took out a case of bottled water which he tossed at the guard (knowing he would catch it and not let it go). The guard stood calling to him to stop – clutching the case of water. “You’re welcome mate! Any time.” he called back as he sped through the gate. These were the brethren I had the privilege of knowing and sitting in lodge with.

Based on my experiences in Afghanistan, I am convinced that whenever and wherever the Canadian Forces are deployed, Canada Lodge must be deployed with them. The business of war does not provide for reprieves. We work long hours 7 days a week. On our minds from the time we awake until the time we lay our heads (and many times it does not leave us then), is the real and present danger of death and dying, of killing or being killed, of carrying our fallen on their last journey home and working harder the next day to ensure he was the last to fall. The lodge provided a healthy reprieve from this. Whether it was attending lodge and sitting in peace and harmony with the brethren, or stealing 5 minutes over lunch to commit some ritual work to memory. It was meditative, it was therapeutic, and it was exactly what this soldier needed.

I am certain that this is an experience I have in common with my brothers in arms and in the Craft from ancient times. It is undoubtedly this “healthy reprieve” that fortified and sustained them through the valley of the shadow of death.

In an early email home I wrote of Canada Lodge that we hoped “to create a place of civility in an otherwise very uncivil place.” This is exactly what it became for me. Away





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from the insanity of war we sat behind tyled door, men of mixed creed and religion in peace and harmony. Outside the door of the lodge was the dark chaos of war; inside the door of the lodge was order, civility, and light.

That, my brothers, is what happens when the apron goes with the rifle.

~ THE END ~

