

Copyright of this publication is vested in The Hawke's Bay Research Lodge and the author, and anyone wishing to reproduce it in full or in part should first obtain permission from the Lodge Secretary.

**HAWKE'S BAY RESEARCH LODGE No 305**  
**Consecrated 1933**

**TRANSACTIONS**  
**NOVEMBER 2021**

**DISCLAIMER**

**The opinions expressed in these papers are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of the lodge or its members.**

**REPRODUCTION of PAPERS**

**Papers printed in these Transactions can be reproduced in other Masonic publications with our permission but we request that the author of any paper used is acknowledged.**

# WBro Dr Jack Dowds

## ANZMRC Visiting Lecturer Tour September 2021

### An Irishman, Two Frenchmen, and a Masonic Conspiracy – Who'd have thought it?

---

This story commences with the birth in Ireland of one of Britain's most famous soldiers, and statesmen, the Duke of Wellington. He was a Freemason initiated into Trim Lodge No. 494 in Ireland as were his father and brother. He was not an active Freemason. His membership lasted five years and he never progressed beyond the first degree but the fact that he was a member of the Craft would be a significant factor in events that occurred in the aftermath of his most famous military victory at Waterloo. The tale that unfolds involves Napoleon Bonaparte and one of his Marshals, Michel Ney. It is a fascinating story that involves famous battles, betrayals and it is wreathed in mystery. There are those who believe the story is true and those who are of the alternative opinion. But before we get the heart of the matter, we need to look at the backgrounds of those involved. So first, a history lesson!

Arthur Wesley (Yes, that is correct! The name was changed by his older brother of which more later.) was born in Dublin on 1 May 1769. There is some doubt that his date of birth was 1 May and some early biographers such as Ernest Marsh Lloyd writing in the Dictionary of National Biography give the date as being 29 April. The variation between the dates appears to be accounted for by the fact that the parish church record gives the earlier date in the baptismal entry. It is not inconceivable that the baptismal entry is an error on behalf of the cleric who made the entry. Regardless, the family were clear that the date was 1 May, and this is the consensus of opinion among historians and biographers.

The name change from Wesley to Wellesley is another peculiar and interesting phenomenon which occurred when he was an adult. The evidence for this is in the military records which show that in his early military career when he was a major in the 33rd Regiment (1793) his name was Arthur Wesley. Moving forward to the Peninsular War in 1808 the name has changed to Wellesley. The reason for the change has two elements: The first being that the family were part of the Anglo-Irish ascendancy and were therefore of aristocratic stock and were accordingly keen to disassociate themselves from the other famous Wesleys, John and Charles, who founded the Methodist church. The second reason is more convoluted and requires more explanation.

Ireland has been the object of invasions since time immemorial. The people of Ireland have been described as being of the Milesian race, a name given to them because they are said to be descended from Milesius of Spain whose sons were said to have invaded and settled in Ireland around one thousand years BC. When the Milesians invaded Ireland, it was occupied by two groups known as the Firbolg and the Tuatha De Danann. The story of the Milesian invasion is related by Seumas MacManus in his book *The Story of the Irish Race*.<sup>1</sup> The Milesians became the dominant tribal group in Ireland but all three had one thing in common – they were all of the Celtic family. Another notable invasion that had profound consequences for Ireland occurred in AD 795. Robert Kee in his book *Ireland – A History* (1981) describes the shock that was about to befall the Irish world as follows:

---

<sup>1</sup> S. MacManus, *The Story of The Irish Race*. (Chartwell Books, 2018).

The first of thousands of long beautifully curving, high-prowed open boats filled with fierce and terrible strange warriors from beyond the seas beached on Lambay Island off the Dublin coast. It was the Norsemen's invasion of Ireland. Known as 'Danes' in Irish popular history, they came mainly from Norway. They came slaughtering, burning and ransacking their way into Irish history, terrorizing and looting Gaelic homestead and monastery alike. More than a century later an Irish chronicler was still writing of *'immense floods and countless sea-vomiting of ships and fleets so that there was not a harbour or land port in the whole of Munster without floods of Danes and pirates...'*(p.27).<sup>2</sup>

The City of Dublin was established by these Norwegian invaders. The invasions of the Norsemen overwhelmed the Irish who had no organised resistance to them. It is true that the Irish High King, Brian Boru, at the Battle of Clontarf defeated a force comprised mainly of Norsemen but which also included troops from Leinster and other 'kingdoms' of Ireland but this had little effect on the inevitable incursion of the invaders. In time the Norsemen were absorbed into Irish life and became 'New Irish'.

A further shock was to befall Ireland at Baginbun on the Tipperary coast when a party of Normans landed in 1169. The term 'Norman' is a derivation of 'Norseman' and there is no doubt that the Normans were originally of Scandinavian extraction. These invaders were by now English and were under the command of the Earl of Pembroke, known as Strongbow. Robert Kee (1981) writes:

*What a bridgehead into Irish history it was to prove. Eight centuries of conflict were to flow from it – a conflict that is still not over.*

Ironically, the Normans did not come as uninvited invaders but had been asked to come to Ireland by the King of Leinster, Dermot MacMurrough, who was having a dispute with his own High King and asked for the assistance of the Earl of Pembroke. If ever there was a case of 'be careful what you wish for' this must surely be it! The English came and they never went home! The invaders, although nominally under the command of the Earl of Pembroke, and also nominally owing allegiance to the King of England, Henry II, were in reality driven by self-interest and were keen to gain land and other wealth in Ireland. They had within them the embryonic origins of the Anglo-Irish ascendancy which would eventually lead to Arthur Wesley, First Duke of Wellington, and the change of his family name to Wellesley.

As a consequence of the influx of the invaders who came to Ireland in the twelfth century with Strongbow a number of aristocratic Anglo-Norman families established themselves as lords and landowners. Many of these invaders had their origins in France and bore Norman-French names. This is where the names of Irish families beginning with the prefix 'Fitz' or 'de' as in 'Fitzwilliam' or 'de Burgh' originate. It would be true to say that some of them assimilated with the Irish through association and marriage. Such assimilation did not please the powers that be in England and there were several attempts to end the process. Kee states that:

One of the early Irish Parliaments, held at Kilkenny in 1366, tried to legislate against the wearing of Irish clothes and Irish hair-styles, and the use of the Irish language and Irish laws, by what were referred to as *"the English born in Ireland"*. (p.30). This proved to have little effect and Kee states that:

*Royal government shrank increasingly to a beleaguered, ineffectual thing, enclosed within a self-isolating defensive frontier of a few hundred square miles round Dublin known as the Pale.* (p.30)

---

<sup>2</sup> R. McKee, *Ireland – A History* (Book Club Associates, 1981).

The expression 'the Pale' is the origin of the saying 'beyond the pale', which is still used to describe behaviour which is deemed to be outside the bounds of acceptable behaviour. Among the Anglo-Normans who arrived in the twelfth century was a family with the surname '*de Welleslegh*'. With the passage of time the name mutated into the Irish Gaelic name, '*Uaisleigh*' and the English name, Wesley. The last surviving member of the aristocratic Wesley family was Garrett Wesley who died in 1728. At the time of his death the family had been in Ireland for five-hundred years and Garrett Wesley did not want the family name to die out. Garrett was a substantially wealthy man and in writing his will he included a clause that required the beneficiary of the will, his cousin Richard Colley and all his heirs to adopt the surname Wesley. Richard Colley agreed to the name change and became Richard Wesley.

As time progressed the now Richard Wesley was given a peerage and became Baron Mornington. His son who had the forename Garrett in honour of his illustrious uncle became a famous composer in his day and was awarded the additional titles of the Earl of Mornington and Viscount Wesley. Garrett's eldest son, Richard, succeeded him as the Earl of Mornington in 1781 and in 1797 he was appointed Governor-General of India. He already had a seat in the Irish Parliament but was also given a peerage in Britain which entitled him to sit in the British House of Lords. The title of this peerage was Baron Wellesley.

The full title of Richard Wesley's peerage was Baron Wellesley of Wellesley in Somerset. The family seat so to speak was the small village of Wellesley which is located south of the town of Wells. Wellesley was the current English spelling of the name and that is how Baron Mornington got the name for his British peerage. Richard Wesley, Baron Mornington and now Baron Wellesley was, of course the older brother of Arthur Wesley. It appears that at the time of Richard receiving the British peerage, Baron Wellesley, the rest of the family collectively decided to change their names from Wesley to Wellesley as they considered it the correct spelling of their name by now taking the view that Wesley was an error by an earlier generation. Arthur Wesley, now a colonel in the British Army, officially became Arthur Wellesley in March 1798. (Source, Internet site Quora, Stephen Tempest, 8 September 2019). An alternative view is that the family was very conscious of its social status and the 'new' spelling was more in keeping with their status. Yet another suggestion which has sometimes been given and to which I alluded at the beginning of this paper is that the family wished to distance themselves from the founders of Methodism which is a breakaway branch of Anglicanism.

John and Charles Wesley were the founders of the Methodist movement which originated as a revivalist movement within the eighteenth-century Church of England and became a separate denomination after John Wesley's death. The aristocratic Wesley's were firmly Anglican and were known to be disdainful of the 'enthusiasts' of Methodism. The Duke of Wellington is also known to have complained about the few Methodists amongst his soldiers who held prayer meetings as he thought this subverted discipline. There is a certain irony with Wellington holding this view since he allowed Catholic soldiers in his army to attend their own services. He was also instrumental as Prime Minister of the United Kingdom in introducing Catholic Emancipation in Ireland. At this point it is pertinent to refer to Wellington's role in Catholic emancipation before moving on to consider the Battle of Waterloo and how Freemasonry may have had some involvement in the aftermath of the famous battle.

In researching this paper, I came across the following question: Given that the Duke of Wellington brought about Catholic Emancipation, why aren't the Irish proud of him? This is a complex question and the answer to it is similarly convoluted. Undoubtedly the Duke of Wellington when he became Prime Minister in 1828 did steer the Catholic Relief Act of 1829 through the House of Lords with Sir Robert Peel doing the same thing with the House of Commons. Wellington was also

responsible for getting the Royal assent for the Act, King George IV being strongly opposed to it. On the other hand, Wellington was not an early proponent of the concept of Catholic Emancipation and came to it rather late in the piece. The real driver for emancipation was Daniel O'Connell, known in Ireland as the Great Liberator. O'Connell as it turns out was also a Freemason. It was O'Connell who did 'the heavy lifting' for Catholic Emancipation to quote an answer given by Muiris MacCartaine on the website Quora (September 2019). As an aside, it is an error to think that O'Connell in a literal sense 'liberated' the Irish from English domination. He did however play a significant role in liberating them from the pervasive feeling of irrelevancy in the affairs of government in their own country. O'Connell was the organiser of the first non-violent political movement and came to be called 'The Uncrowned King of Ireland'. The influence of a non-violent approach was to have a profound effect outside of Ireland and was an influence on many other similar movements in the twentieth century, including the US Civil Rights Movement.

Wellington was an imperialist, but he was also a pragmatist who feared that the situation in Ireland following O'Connell's landslide victory at a by-election would escalate and perhaps even permeate the social order in England. Interestingly, although O'Connell had an outstanding victory in the by-election, he could not take his seat as Catholics at the time were not allowed to sit in Parliament. It needs to be borne in mind that at this time there was much political upheaval in Europe. It was not very much earlier that the French Revolution occurred; an event that was most definitely not lost on the Irish. In order to get the Bill through Wellington, a Tory, had to enlist the help of the Whigs. He also had to threaten the King that his failure to give the Royal Assent would force him to resign.

Such was the feeling against Catholic Emancipation that the Earl of Winchilsea accused the Duke of 'an insidious design for the infringement of our liberties and the introduction of Popery into every department of the State'.<sup>3</sup> The Duke was outraged and challenged Winchilsea to a duel. Both men duly turned up to Battersea Fields and went through the motions of a duel. The Duke fired first, and his shot went wide to the right. Winchilsea had already planned to miss and discharged his pistol into the air. Honour was saved and Winchilsea wrote an appropriate apology to Wellington. There is some uncertainty as to whether Wellington did mean to miss. He was a notoriously bad shot and some reports claimed that he had aimed to kill. For the more pedantic reader I can attest that the act of deliberately missing in a duel is known as a 'delope'. Hopefully, you will never need to consider whether or not to opt for this approach!

As well as being a pragmatist Wellington was an Irishman if the definition of such is having been born in Ireland. Being born in Ireland and having lived there long enough to win the Irish Parliamentary seat of Trim he was well-placed to comprehend the feelings of the native Irish in regard to political representation. However, he never considered himself to be Irish and nor would any of his extended family. The Wellesley's firmly considered themselves to be English. This is confirmed by his biographer Lawrence James who stated that:

Neither he nor his kin ever considered themselves Irish... The Anglo-Irish aristocracy had nothing in common with the indigenous Gaelic-speaking and Catholic Irish whom they despised and distrusted.<sup>4</sup>

Another commentator, Ronan McGreevy wrote in the Irish Times that: '*Wellington was from Ireland but he was not of Ireland.*'

It is commonly quoted that Wellington had at some time uttered the memorable phrase: '*Just because you are born in a stable does not make you a horse.*'<sup>5</sup> Wellington never said these words.

---

<sup>3</sup> R. Holmes, *Wellington: the iron duke*, 1st edition, Harper Collins Publishers, London, 2003.

<sup>4</sup> L. James, *The iron duke: a military biography of wellington*, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, London, 1992.

<sup>5</sup> R. McGreevy, *Wellington won the battle of waterloo 200 years ago-but irish rejected his legacy*, Irish Times, Retrieved June 18, 2015.

They were said about him by Daniel O'Connell. (McGreevy). Nevertheless, he was conscious of his high status within British society and was no friend to the country of his birth. It should be born in mind that Ireland at the time was part of Britain and as such was described by George Bernard Shaw in a play of the same name as John Bull's Other Island. To consider himself as Irish would have placed Wellington in an invidious position because he himself had said:

*...being Irish meant by definition being disloyal to the Crown. "Show me an Irishman and I'll show you a man whose anxious wish is to see his country independent of Great Britain." ( McGreevy).*

Wellington was well-aware that there were Protestants like himself in Ireland and many others of a lower social class. He viewed Irish Protestants as the 'English Garrison'. His military view of the country was that the best way to look at it was as an enemy country.

Although he held the native Irish in low esteem, he was glad enough to have them in his regiments. For most of the 1700s Catholics were not allowed to serve in the British army but by the time of the Peninsular War forty percent of those serving were Irish, while at Waterloo the percentage of Irish serving was thirty percent. Wellington did acknowledge the importance of the Irish soldiers in his army when he told the House of Lords in 1828 that it is to the Irish soldiers that:

*We all owe our proud pre-eminence in our military careers.<sup>6</sup>*

It was not only the Irish that were held in low esteem by Wellington. He did not spare others who served in the ranks. He is said after the Battle of Victoria to have described his soldiers as 'the scum of the earth.' He was however known to care for his men's welfare and sought to minimise casualties. His men were very loyal to him perhaps in return.

Wellington is rightly credited with being the person who brought about the demise of Napoleon at the Battle of Waterloo. However, it should be remembered that he was at the head of a coalition known as the Seventh Coalition. This was British led and consisted of units from the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, Hanover, Brunswick, and Nassau. There was also a Prussian army under the command of Field Marshal von Blücher. The Prussian army played a major role in the victory of the Allied forces at Waterloo although popular history has been less than magnanimous in acknowledging their contribution.

There has been much controversy and historical discussion around the role of the Prussians at Waterloo and their role was diminished by the British, particularly since the beginning of the First World War in 1914. This is attributable to the general antagonism of the British towards the Germans at this time. It is sobering to remember that Britain and Germany were not always enemies and indeed Germans sat on the British throne. Wellington himself was more generous and was always happy to acknowledge the contribution of the Prussians at Waterloo.

The antagonist at Waterloo was of course Napoleon Bonaparte, Commander of the French forces, and Emperor of France. Napoleon is often referred to as the 'Little Corporal' and although it is true that this appellation attached to him it was not because he was ever a corporal. The nickname came about because of his alleged camaraderie with his troops and his tendency to get involved with troops in setting-up the field artillery as he was a trained artillery officer. Napoleon was not born into a poor working-class family but was descended, on his father's side, from a minor Tuscan noble family named Buonapartes and on his mother's side from a minor Genoese noble family, the Ramolinos. The family emigrated to Corsica in the 16th Century and considered themselves to be Italian. Coincidentally, Napoleon was born in the same year that the Republic of Genoa ceded Corsica to France after 500 years of Genoese rule and 14 years of being independent. His parents were active in the fight against the French and they wished to keep Corsica as an independent state.

---

<sup>6</sup> McGreevy. Op. cit.

Ironically, his father, Carlo Buonaparte, became the Corsican representative to the Court of Louise XVI in 1777.

It is said that history is written by the winners and while there is perhaps some truth in this statement it is undoubtedly true in how Napoleon is remembered in the collective memory of the British. The popular perception of Napoleon is that of a short, megalomaniac. His image is usually portrayed standing with his right-hand pushed into his waistcoat. This image is derived from a painting by Jacques-Louis David in 1812. The pejorative term used by both professional and amateur psychologists '*Napoleon complex*' was created by the psychologist David Adler in 1908 and is used to describe short people who display aggressive domineering behaviour supposedly to compensate for lack of physical stature. He was, in fact, a military genius whose battle strategies are still studied in military academies.

The historian, Andrew Roberts, argues that Napoleon's wars were essentially defensive. During his reigns there were seven successive coalition campaigns against him.<sup>7</sup> Following the French Revolution there was, within the monarchies of Europe, a worry that the existing social order would be overthrown. This concern was inspired by the French Revolution that espoused the idea of *Liberté, Egalité and Fraternité*. Wellington, for example, was no democrat and the battles in which he participated were fought to maintain the existing social order. The philosophy to which Wellington and the other members of the governing classes of Europe at the time subscribed was that everyone should know their place and that the social order was pre-ordained. This philosophy is succinctly captured by the popular hymn, *All Things Bright and Beautiful*, the third verse of which reads:

*The rich man in his castle. The poor man at his gate.  
God made them high and lowly, And ordered their estate.*

This view that everyone's place was preordained by God also served to reinforce the view that monarchs ruled by divine right. The French Revolution was predicated on the opposite view and Napoleon's reign had its foundation in this egalitarian philosophy.

There is no reliable documented proof that Napoleon had been initiated into a lodge but there is a reasonably high probability that he was indeed a Freemason. There is no doubt, however, that many of the French soldiers were Freemasons, some belonging to the Lodge "Perfect Union" which was a travelling military lodge. Napoleon's campaigns took him into Egypt and the French soldiers brought their Freemasonry with them. They established the Lodge 'Isis' in Cairo and there is a belief in some quarters that Napoleon was initiated into this Lodge. Other historians are of the opinion that Napoleon was initiated into "Philadelphie" Lodge which was another travelling military Lodge meeting in Malta at the time when he took the island from the Knights Hospitaller.

A peculiar story circulated shortly after the Battle of the Pyramids to the effect that Napoleon insisted on entering the Great Pyramid which was the tomb of a Pharaoh. He was adamant that he would do this alone, and he did so leaving his guards behind. Having briefly entered the pyramid he is alleged to have returned visibly shaken and refused to discuss what he had seen. The rumour circulated that while he was in the Pharaoh's chamber, he had a revelation of his destiny. It is said that the incident remained with him and on his deathbed when it was mentioned to him, he replied to the effect that '*Even if I told you, you would not believe me.*' This story may or may not be true, but it is one of the myths that attach to Napoleon.

---

<sup>7</sup> A. Roberts, *Napoleon: a life*. (Penguin Books, London, 2014).

The Masonic ritual known as the 'Rite of Memphis' was created by ex-soldiers who had served in Napoleon's Egyptian campaign.<sup>8</sup> The objective of the rite was to restore the hermetic and esoteric symbols of Egypt. There is no doubt that the Egyptian campaign had a scientific purpose as well as militaristic. It was during this campaign that the Rosetta Stone was discovered the translation of which opened the door for the translation of ancient Egyptian Hieroglyphics. Following the Egyptian campaign Napoleon seized power on 9 November, 1799 and Freemasonry flourished in France with the number of Lodges increasing from 300 to 1,220. The Rite of Adoption was also established which allowed women to participate in Freemasonry. Napoleon's wife Josephine was adopted into Freemasonry which provides further support for the view that Napoleon himself was a Freemason.<sup>9</sup> His connection with Freemasonry was such that during his reign as Emperor he appointed his brothers to high Masonic office. Louis as Deputy Grand Master, Joseph was made Grand Master of the Grand Orient de France. Another brother, Lucien, was a member of the same order. It is impossible to know beyond doubt if Napoleon was a Freemason but it is known that many of his soldiers and most of his Marshals were in the Craft. It is to the story of one of his Marshals that we must now turn.

Marshal Michel Ney, 1st Duke of Elchingen and 1st Prince of Moskva was one of the original eighteen Marshals of the empire created by Napoleon. He was nicknamed *Le Brave des Braves* (The Bravest of the Brave) by Napoleon and *Le Rougeaud* (red-faced or ruddy) by his men. Marshal Ney's rise to prominence in the French Army was rapid; having entered into the ranks he quickly became a sergeant-major and progressed to the highest level. Coming from a lower social class was not without its problems and he was subjected to various humiliations by other officers as he rose through the ranks. His wife was also subjected to slights and snubs from the spouses of the other higher-born military officers. Nevertheless, the principles of the French revolution: *Liberté, Egalité and Fraternité* prevailed and Ney rose to the highest rank within Napoleon's army. The rank of Marshal was a prestigious rank and Ney was an outstanding soldier.

Born in the town of Sarrelouis on the French-German Border Michel Ney was bi-lingual. Sarrelouis was a French-speaking enclave in the predominately German-speaking part of Lorraine. The town was annexed by the Prussians as part of the Treaty of Paris in 1815 following Napoleon's defeat by the Coalition forces. Ney was educated at the Collège des Augustins and he trained as a notary before becoming a civil servant overseeing mines and forges. For a man of Ney's disposition this period as a civil servant was tedious and eventually he enlisted in the Colonel-General Hussar Regiment in 1787 rising rapidly through the ranks. A courageous combatant always keen to get into the thick of a fight he was thrown from his horse during a battle and became a prisoner-of-war. He was subsequently exchanged for an Austrian prisoner.<sup>10</sup>

Ney must have taken great satisfaction with his rise to the uppermost heights within Napoleon's army because he had been prevented from joining the officer class under the Bourbon Monarchy of Louis XVI. At this time, to be an officer in the French army it was a prerequisite that the candidate be of noble blood and, being the son of a master barrel-cooper and a former washerwoman, Ney had little hope of being elevated into the corps of commissioned officers. However, he was eventually commissioned in October 1792 and he continued to move through the officer ranks becoming a Général de Division in March of that year. He was further promoted by Napoleon when he created the original eighteen Marshals of France. This was a recognition of his military abilities and he was

---

<sup>8</sup> Was Napoleon a Freemason. Retrieved from:  
<https://www.universalfreemasonry.org/en/stories/napoleon-freemason>

<sup>9</sup> M.K. Oginski, Belarusian Masonic Lodge, *Napoleon the freemason emperor*. Retrieved from: <https://oginski.by/en/napoleon-imperator-masonov/> Retrieved November 11, 2020.

<sup>10</sup> Marshal Michel Ney. Retrieved from:  
<https://www.frenchempire.net/biographies/ney/> Retrieved November 13, 2020.



an extremely popular officer with the serving soldiers. During his service he was wounded in the thigh and wrist and these wounds would prove to be of importance in the story that was to follow his alleged stage-managed execution and re-emergence in America. Following Napoleon's defeat, the restored Bourbon monarchy allowed him to retain his rank of Marshal and made him a peer. Following Napoleon's return from Elba and eventual defeat at Waterloo this was revoked when he was sentenced to death for the crime of high treason by Louis XVIII.

Strangely, although Ney was one of Napoleon's best Marshals and his role was instrumental in nearly all of Napoleon's victories, his fame was cemented not in a victorious battle but in an ignominious retreat. He commanded the rear-guard when the French retreated from Moscow in 1812 and he was called the last Frenchman on Russian soil. During the retreat Ney and his forces were cut off from the main French forces but through Ney's bravery and determination they managed to re-join the main force. It was because of this that Napoleon called him the bravest of the brave. In March of 1813 Napoleon bestowed on him the title of *Prince de la Moskowa*.

During the campaigns of 1813 Ney was wounded several times. Time however was running out for Napoleon and at Fontainebleau in 1814 the French Marshals demanded Napoleon's abdication. Ney, as the Marshals' spokesman, told Napoleon that the army would not march on Paris. Napoleon is said to have replied: 'the army will obey me' to which Ney responded, 'the army will obey its chiefs.' The Battle of Paris was fought on 30-31 March 1814 and following his defeat Napoleon abdicated and left for his first exile on the Island of Elba. He arrived in Elba at Portoferraio on 4 May 1814 remained there for just over nine months before escaping on a ship on 26 February 1815. He landed at Golfe-Juan between Cannes and Antibes on 1 March 1815 and made his way to Paris arriving on 20 March 1815. Having arrived he re-established himself as Emperor.

Napoleon's second period as Emperor became known as 'The Hundred Days' which was a rough approximation of his time in power. The Battle of Waterloo which was fought on 18 June 1815 proved to be the finish for both Napoleon and Ney. During the afternoon of the battle Ney ordered a cavalry charge in which the French cavalry overran the Coalition's cannons. The Coalition's infantry forces had formed the infamous 'British Square' formations and Ney's cavalry could not penetrate them. Ney was heavily criticised for this failure and some commentators promulgate the view that it cost Napoleon the battle. Wellington himself, although not commenting on this specific action by Ney, did state that Waterloo was a close-fought battle. Amongst the consequences of Napoleon's defeat there are two of relevance to this story. The first of these consequences is that he was again exiled, this time to the South Atlantic on the Isle of St Helena. The second consequence was that Ney was branded as a traitor by Louis XVIII. Subsequently there was a Court-martial and Ney was sentenced to death by firing squad. It is from this point that the story, perhaps the legend or myth, of a Masonic conspiracy to save the life of Marshal Ney enters the narrative.

Having been court-martialled and found innocent by a military tribunal Ney was retried by the Bourbons, found guilty and sentenced to death on 6 December 1815. The alleged execution took place in Paris near the Luxembourg Gardens. It was not universally well-received in France as many regarded Ney as a national hero and there was a definite risk of a riot in Paris. There is no doubt that Ney was led out to face a firing squad armed with muskets. The pertinent question is 'did he actually die'? He refused a blindfold and addressed the firing squad saying: 'I have fought a hundred battles for France and not one against her.' He then struck his breast with his right fist and said, 'Soldiers, Fire', which was the order to the firing squad to fire their muskets. The firing squad duly complied with the order and Ney fell forward. The command given by striking the breast may seem both courageous and a little unusual. There is however another interpretation and this is where the conspiracy begins a journey that terminates in Northern Carolina, USA.

As a child I remember reading the story of Marshal Ney's execution. The story ended by stating that he did not die. The striking of the breast was prearranged so that he had a bladder of red liquid concealed in his shirt which was burst when he hit it while giving the command to fire. This was to me a Boy's Own story of 'daring-do' of a type that was the stock-in-trade of many boys' books in the 1950's. I thought nothing more of it until well into adulthood when I came across an image of an oil painting of Marshal Ney's execution by the French artist Jean-Léon Gérôme. The significant observation when looking at this painting is that Ney's body is depicted lying face-down. The painting, which is in the Graves Art Gallery in Sheffield, England was painted in 1868 which is a considerable time after the actual event. In showing Ney's body lying face-down it corresponds with the reports that were written at the time of the event.

Is there something strange about this image? Well, yes there is! If someone was executed by a firing squad of twelve muskets it would be almost impossible to imagine that they would fall forward. The force of twelve musket balls fired at short-range would ensure that the body of the victim would fall backwards.<sup>11</sup> The official report records that all twelve shots met their mark. This report was provided to the King who accepted it as a true report of the execution. If this was the only irregularity with the execution it might be possible to dismiss the position of the body post-mortem as being unusual but not inexplicable. However, there were a significant number of other irregularities which when taken in combination make a very convincing case for the proposition that Ney's execution was staged and that he did, in fact, survive. For example, it was usual during an execution by firing squad for the officer commanding the affair to deliver the *coup de grâce* by firing a pistol shot into the head of the victim. This was not done in Ney's case. The plot then thickens as the body was quickly taken to a hospital where it apparently lay all day until six o'clock the following morning when it was clandestinely taken to the cemetery. Curiously, Ney's wife was not present when the body was taken to the cemetery. A story circulated that another body was put in the casket and buried while Ney was spirited out of France by agents still loyal to Napoleon.<sup>12</sup> The question arises as to how this alleged subterfuge to fool the French King and save the life of Marshal Ney came about? There is no doubt that Ney could have saved his own life at an earlier stage if he had not been so headstrong. Having been born in Sarrelouis which by the time of Waterloo was under Prussian rule he could have claimed the protection of international law. He refused to do this and during the trial he rose to his feet and said '*Je suis Français et je restarai Français*' which translates as 'I am French and I will remain French.'

Ney's wife Louise is reported by some sources to have approached the Duke of Wellington prior to the court-martial to ask him to intervene with the King of France to save the Marshal's life. Both Ney and Wellington were Freemasons, albeit Wellington's participation in Freemasonry was as an Entered Apprentice and it was a long time ago. There was also a possibility that Napoleon was a Freemason.

Regardless, of whether or not Napoleon was a Freemason many of his officers and soldiers were. There would have been little difficulty in drafting in support from fellow Freemasons to assist with the subterfuge. On the evening of 2 December, a few days before the scheduled execution of 'The bravest of the brave' the King was hosting a dinner party. The conversation at the dinner party would inevitably have been focussed around the forthcoming execution. The dinner party was in full swing when a carriage pulled up outside the palace. From the carriage emerged the Duke of Wellington who walked confidently into the palace accompanied by an aide. He would have

---

<sup>11</sup> T.W. Gregory, *Peter Stuart Ney Freemason, Marshal of Napoleon*. Retrieved from: <http://www.wcl760.com/docs/library/Peter%20Stuart%20Ney%20-%20Gregory.pdf>  
Retrieved November 13, 2020.

Did famed French marshal end his days as NC schoolmaster? Retrieved from:

<sup>12</sup> <https://southcarolina1670.wordpress.com/2014/12/09/did-famed-french-marshal-end-his-days-as-nc-schoolmaster/>. Retrieved 13 November, 2020

countenanced no hinderance from the King's guards. The King, on seeing Wellington's approach, turned his back and commenced a conversation with guests. Wellington conversed for a brief period with the Comte d'Artois after which he left the palace fuming.<sup>13</sup>

Gregory suggests that Wellington was trying to intervene to prevent a riot between Ultra-Loyalists and Republicans in respect of Ney's sentence of death. Whether or not this was his motivation the situation from this point becomes much more cryptic. Leggett Blythe in his book 'Marshal Ney: A Dual Life' and Dr Edward J. Smoot in his book 'Marshal Ney before and after Execution' (qtd. in Gregory) are firm in their views that Wellington did indeed intervene and saved Ney's life. It served the interests of diplomacy better by ensuring that Ney's rescue was done clandestinely as the King's honour and dignity would have been preserved by this subterfuge. So, Ney was spirited away with the connivance of Wellington and other Freemasons and that, one would think, would bring the matter smoothly to a conclusion. Alas not! As is the case in all good conspiracies a further wrinkle develops in the fabric of the story.

Marshal Ney is said to have been shipped to America aboard a vessel named *Lagonier* and on January, 1816 a red-haired Frenchman, called Peter Stuart Ney, disembarked from a ship at Charleston, South Carolina.<sup>14</sup> The forenames of this newcomer look innocuous at first glance but the fact of the matter is that Marshal Michel Ney's father was named Peter while a name within his mother's family was Stuart, his mother having Scottish ancestry. Southern Carolina had a French-speaking community although the French settlers did not make a significant cultural impact on the area. Ney resided there for a few years but some French settlers had said they recognised him so he left and relocated to North Carolina where he took up a position as a schoolmaster. He was well-respected as a schoolmaster and was known to put his young charges on parade first thing in the morning in a military fashion. He was also an excellent swordsman having on one occasion been asked by his students to engage in a friendly sword fight with an itinerant fencing master. Ney expertly defeated the visiting fencing-master who is reported as saying to the pupils as he left words to the effect that they did not need him as they already had an excellent teacher. A more famous story refers to a time when he was teaching at Abbeyville in Virginia. He was in the habit of going to the yard of the church where he would watch the local militia drill. He demonstrated swordsmanship to the young officers and was said to do this to a superior level to that of their own officers. On one occasion he had an officer's sword in his hands when he decided to inform him that a good sword should be capable of being bent double. His effort to demonstrate this feature of a good sword had an unfortunate outcome and the sword snapped. The owner of the sword was enraged and wanted to fight with Ney who picked up a stick and told the angry soldier to find another sword and come back and he would use the stick to teach him a lesson in good manners. The officer, perhaps wisely, erred on the side of caution and withdrew.

There is also another element of the influence of Freemasonry in this part of story. It is not specific to Ney but it does explain why it may have been relatively easy for Frenchmen who had served with Napoleon, particularly those who were Freemasons, to find refuge in America. Following the French defeat at Waterloo Louis XVIII had a list of traitors. At the top of this list was Marshal Michel Ney. While the arrests and trials were underway it was necessary to send a negotiator to Vienna to negotiate the peace treaty. The King sent Charles Talleyrand Perigord. Talleyrand was briefly an Ambassador and Minister of Foreign Affairs before the hostility of the Bourbon nobles caused him to be pressured into resigning.

Talleyrand was a Freemason who was a member of the Nine Sisters Lodge in Paris. At this point it will be no surprise to learn that the membership of the Nine Sisters Lodge included many of

---

<sup>13</sup> Gregory (op. cit.)

<sup>14</sup> Gregory (op. cit.)

Napoleon's generals and, most significantly, Marshal Ney. Talleyrand was also a friend of the Duke of Wellington. In the aftermath of Waterloo there was significant concern for the safety of some French Officers and their immediate families. Talleyrand made a secret visit to England the overt mission of which was to mend the relationship between England and France. There was a more covert reason for the mission and that was to establish an escape route and a safe harbour in Quebec for French officers and their families. The diplomatic tensions of the time made this too difficult and King George IV could not be persuaded to cooperate. This presented a problem for Talleyrand who briefly returned to France before setting sail again for North America.

Fortunately, the French had friends in high places in America. Talleyrand took the opportunity to visit the grave of the first American Ambassador to France, Benjamin Franklin. Franklin had been well-liked and extremely well-treated during nine years in France. He was a Freemason and a member of St. John's Lodge in Philadelphia. During his time in France he was also active with the Nine Sisters Lodge in Paris. Talleyrand invoked Masonic influence and effectively called in the debt that was owed to French Masons and St John's Lodge facilitated the entry to America of French officers into Baltimore and Philadelphia. Once in America many of them moved to the French-speaking regions of South Carolina and Louisiana. Marshal Ney (now Peter Stuart Ney) in moving to North Carolina probably did so because of his better-known image and was seeking a more anonymous and quieter life than may have been available in the southern part of the State.

Ney may have had some character flaws which got him into trouble in France. Being hot-headed was certainly one of them. Unfortunately, he had another flaw that he brought to America with him – he sometimes tended to drink too much! While under the influence of alcohol he would inform those in his vicinity that he was the famous Marshal Ney of France. Gregory (ibid) reports that a clergyman, the Rev. R.A. Wood of Statesville in 1840 said that:

*Ney had but one vice, occasionally drinking to excess, but his general conduct was so pure, when sober or drunk, and was always absolutely consistent.*

Gregory further relates that another clergyman, Rev. Basil Jones of South Carolina stated that Ney had told him that he fell by 'concerted arrangement, *'the Ancient Fraternity* aiding his escape [italics added]. A bladder of red dye was smuggled into his cell as he awaited execution and was broken against his chest as he brought down his right hand with the order "fire!" The muskets were loaded with blanks, and *Ney fell forward as they fired.*' [italics added].

Ney is also reported to have been an active Rosicrucian and is alleged to have funded from his private resources the building of a Rosicrucian Temple in Paris. As was the case with Freemasonry there were Rosicrucians on both side during the campaign. Ney is alleged to have associated with Freemasons in America but there is no record of his attendance at a particular lodge. C.W. Allison in his book, *Ney, The Great French Soldier* (qtd. in Gregory), states that Peter Stuart Ney visited a number of Rosicrucian premises in Pennsylvania.

Another compelling story of Peter Ney's claim to be Marshal Ney is that he was in the habit of going to the school where he taught early in the mornings so that he could get some time to read the newspaper. On one occasion in 1821 while reading the paper he passed out. He was found by the students arriving for class. Ney was taken home by a pupil and on the way home he told the students that he had read in the paper that the Emperor Napoleon had died on 5 May 1821 on St. Helena. That same evening Ney attempted suicide by slitting his throat.<sup>15</sup> The family with which he boarded found him and called a doctor who saved Ney. Ney later spoke to a Mr John Rogers and

---

<sup>15</sup> C.E. Macartney and G. Dorrance. *The Bonapartes in America, Chapter XI Marshal Ney and North Carolina*, (Dorrance and Company, Philadelphia, 1939). Retrieved from:

[http://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Gazetteer/Places/America/United\\_States/\\_Topics/history/\\_Texts/MnDBIA/11\\*.html](http://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Gazetteer/Places/America/United_States/_Topics/history/_Texts/MnDBIA/11*.html)  
Retrieved November 13, 2020.

told him that he had harboured a desire to return to France but with the death of Napoleon this hope had been shattered.

Gregory, referencing the newspaper *The St. Louis Republic* provides an interesting report. A Mr George Melody of St Louis on a visit to Paris in 1891 met with King Louis Philipp. Melody had previously entertained the King when he visited St. Louis. Feeling that he knew the King sufficiently well he asked him if Ney had really been executed. The King's reply was that he was among the most recognised Freemasons in Europe and that Melody was as well known in Freemasonry in America. He then confirmed that Ney held a position in Freemasonry as high as either of them and he added that another man may have filled the grave intended for Ney.

Peter Ney died at the age of 77 years old and on his deathbed his doctor asked if he was really the famous French Marshal. Raising himself up in the bed Ney pronounced 'By all that is holy, I am Marshal Ney of France.'<sup>16</sup> His last words were ' Bessi res is dead; the Old Guard is dead, now, please let me die'. His grave is in Cleveland, North Carolina in the churchyard of Third Creek Presbyterian Church. The inscription on the tombstone reads: '*In memory of Peter Stuart Ney, a native of France and soldier of the French Revolution under Napoleon Bonaparte.*' A small French flag flutters gently in the breeze. There is another tomb in the famous Pere La Chaise Cemetery in Paris inscribed as the final resting place of Marshal Ney.

People who knew Peter Ney in America are reported to have affirmed that he carried severe scarring which was unpleasant to see. These scars were attributed to old shrapnel and gunshot wounds. The wounds that were mentioned earlier as being present on Marshal Ney's thighs and wrist were said to be amongst the scars on Peter Stuart Ney thereby supporting his claim to be Marshal Ney. Some years after his burial his body was exhumed and a cast taken of his skull which was examined by a doctor who declared that it displayed evidence of scarring by bullets and sword cuts.

Finally, the tale told here is woven around the lives of three famous men whose lives intersected on the battlefields of the Napoleonic Wars. It describes how Freemasonry played a part in the lives of all three and the *d nouement* describes the involvement of Freemason's in the possible subsequent clandestine rescue and exile to a newly created independent country, America, of one of them. Like all good conspiracy stories, it is unlikely that anyone will ever be able to prove the veracity of the story of Michel Ney, Marshal of France and his 'resurrection' in America as Peter Stuart Ney, Schoolmaster. I have presented the evidence as I have found it and I leave it to the audience to decide whether or not to believe the tale.

---

<sup>16</sup> T.W. Gregory (op. cit).