

## **The ANZAC Legend - The True Spirit of Masonry**

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### **Wor. Preceptor and Brethren**

Tonight this lecture is to be based on the quality and determination of Freemasons in the face of adversity and in particular the Brothers who were part of the legend of the Anzacs and to **try** to relate it to modern day Masons.

When deciding on the subject, my thought was to expand on the research I had begun while preparing a speech for Anzac Day earlier this year. I had decided for that speech, I wanted something different from the usual military based information. Anzac Day has been celebrated for 89 years in every City and Town in Australia and New Zealand and indeed many cities throughout the World. Many speeches have been made and most of the material, even that used in Masonic Circles, has had the same basic foundation.

It goes without saying, the courage, determination, bravery, independent spirit, comradeship and fortitude of our Masonic Brethren during this campaign are well documented.

I must at this point take the opportunity of acknowledging the help of Bro Alan Wakeham for his assistance in the supply of some of the material.

I became so intrigued by this spirit I began to expand my research, determined to find more information about the exploits and determination of our Brothers to practice their Masonry and display their Masonic values during the First World War.

I spent hours on the internet, many phone calls to the Librarians of the U.G.L. of Queensland, NSW and Vic. looking for information from their respective Libraries. It soon became apparent very little was ever recorded, or more particularly, documented. I spoke to some very interesting and knowledgeable gentlemen but they were unable to source any recorded information relating directly to Masonic meeting or gatherings during the first Anzac campaign.

The only recorded information on any meetings came from the Library of the United Grand Lodge of Queensland and although it isn't from the first Anzacs, it reflects the feelings I expected to find. It is in the form of a letter written by Bro. S. J. Fisk. It reflects his love of freemasonry and his determination to continue to practice the craft no matter what the circumstances, to seek and find like-minded individuals so that fraternal fellowship was not lost, even for a short period of time, and I quote:-

*"I joined the Lodge in 1915, my Mother Lodge being the Southern Cross No, 1315 E.C. (Southern Cross was consecrated in 1870 and is now No. 18 on the roll of the U.G.L.Q. – Ed.)*

*Our Lodge room is one of the finest it has been my privilege to sit in. It is situated in Neil St Toowoomba. The colour scheme is very harmonious, and the furniture beautifully finished.*

*On enlisting I was ordered to camp in Brisbane. On arriving there, being practically a stranger, I joined the Masons Club, which was then situated in King and King's buildings, and really made the club my home. Amongst the members of the club, I meet several soldiers, three of whom were to eventually sail to England with me.*

*I left Brisbane on May 15th 1916, and after a tedious journey of 36 hours arrived in Sydney, and marched straight aboard the good ship "Demosthenes". When we got aboard I was allotted a cabin with another Sergeant. He was not a Mason but has since been made one in Scotland. Amongst the other sergeants were two club members, who soon found their way to my cabin. On the second day at sea, the first Masonic meeting was held in my cabin, four being present; by the next Sunday we had collected seventeen. After that we had to find a larger room, and got permission to use the orderly room. We had two meetings there, the number at the first being thirty, amongst whom were 2 Past Masters. The room was properly Tyled, and all present were either tested or vouched for. The padre gave us a short address and others gave short speeches.*

*It was decided at this meeting to present the Purser, who was a craftsman, with an illuminated address. It was also resolved to have a souvenir card printed, and sent to all Grand Lodges. I was detailed to obtain particulars of all Masons aboard, and arrange with the printer, Everything was fixed up with the exception*

*of a block of the square and compasses. This difficulty was surmounted by Bro. F. Gill, who cut a very good block, and a very nice souvenir card was given to all masons on board.*

*At the last meeting which was held about a week before we arrived in England, we mustered about sixty, amongst whom were all ranks, both military ( colonel to private) and Masonic (past master to entered apprentice) eleven constitutions being represented. The illuminated address, which was beautifully drawn up on parchment and signed by all masons on board, was presented to the Purser.*

*When we arrived in England, we went into camp on Salisbury Plain but owing to many Lodges being closed down during the war and the distance we were from town, I was not able to do any visiting. Eventually we got to France and I first saw actual warfare at Armentieres. In course of time I obtained Paris Leave and one of my enquiries was for a Masonic Club. Being a stranger I went to "Cooks" and was directed by a counter clerk to see the manager, who proved to be the sitting Master of Lodge St. Georges, No 3 , French-Colonial constitution.( St. Georges Lodge No.3 of the French National Grand Lodge still meets in Paris-Neuilly - Ed.) He invited me to his Lodge, which was meeting next evening at Montmartre, where they were working an Initiation. The work was in English I was told that the constitution was only just getting under way, and the reason it was that the Grand Orient was not recognised by the Grand Lodge of England; consequently Englishmen were at a disadvantage when visiting Paris and vice versa.*

*I met a number of Englishmen at the Lodge, several of whom were members of the "Imperial Club" of which they made me an honorary Member. I must say they did everything in their power to give me a good time. Whilst in Paris, I met one of our distinguished brethren quite accidentally. I was sitting in the writing room of the Army and Navy Leave Club, which had recently been open, when a Major came in and asked me what I thought of the place, and the treatment given to soldiers. We had a chat for a few minutes when a lady entered and started calling him "Your Highness" so I pricked up my ears and enquired who he was. He proved to be Prince Arthur of Connaught, so just to say Australia was there, I signed alongside of him.*

*After about 3 months after, I went into hospital, and was sent to 'Blighty' for a long spell, in fact it was nearly my last trip. I met many Masons among my fellow sufferers with whom I had many yarns over our Masonic adventures. Whilst convalescing, I was able to do a little visiting and my first was to an Installation at my father's lodge Sunbury No 1733 E. C. of which he is looked upon as "the father". (Sunbury Lodge, formed in 1877, still meets at the Masonic Hall at Staines in Middlesex - Ed.) This was the first time we had sat in Lodge together. Needless to say I was given a great welcome, even though it was under war conditions. Owing to lighting restrictions they tyled at 5.00 pm as all places of amusement etc had to close by 10 pm. The working was beautiful and impressive and as the DC was my old school master I was used to following his directions. One thing that struck me as very fitting and solemn, and which I afterwards learnt was the rule throughout all Lodges in England, was at 9 00 pm no matter what business was on, the Master called the Lodge to order and stood in silence for 2 minutes for "our fallen brethren"*

*My next experience was at a Masonic service held at Richmond, Surrey, in aid of the local hospital. This was and is so far the grandest ceremony I have taken part in. About 500 were present representing nearly every constitution in the world, made up from the troops and munitions workers of all nations. A very impressive sermon was preached by the Bishop of Birmingham who had only returned from the front a few days earlier. The Volume of the Sacred Law was carried in the procession by "Lewis's" . Wives and Daughters of Masons were allowed in the chapel by ticket only. The procession from the dressing room to the church, which was only a short distance, was carried out in correct Masonic order of precedence and was very imposing. I am very pleased to say that the Grand Masonic Virtue "charity" was carried out splendidly and the local hospital benefited to the extent of 250 pounds.*

*My next visit was to the United Service Lodge at Portland whilst waiting for a ship back to Australia. A striking feature of the lodge room was the pillars and furniture were carved from Portland stone and showed great operative Masonic skills. (United Service Lodge No. 3473 E.C., consecrated in 1910, still meets at Shaftesbury Hall, Victoria Square, Portland - Ed) It was a member of this lodge that first broached the subject of holding a meeting on board on the way back to Australia. This was managed under the leadership of our Padre Archdeacon Richards who was a very fine man and an embodiment of all Masonic virtues. Arrangements were made to have a meeting in the saloon, every man being tested before his name was included on the list. The Ship's Captain and O.C. troops both gave permission for the meeting, and a notice was posted to that effect that the use of the saloon had been granted for the use of Freemasons at 8.00 pm. However, an exception was taken by some of the officers to the meeting in the Saloon, it was decided to use the Pursers office, where the Padre gave an address on Masonry and some useful hints on going back to civilian life.*

*The sermons at the weekly services were very stirring and full of appeal to the boys to fight the battle in civilian life as clean as they had fought in France and elsewhere; through them all ran Masonic teachings. If ever a man tried to live up to the Masonic principles, it was Archdeacon Richards of Tasmania.*

*I arrived back in Australia and was sent into hospital at once, where I remained for 10 months. I found that the club had been moved to much better rooms and had greatly improved during my 3 year absence"*

That is the end of the Quotation from the letter.

It is evident from this letter, he was a dedicated freemason and went out of his way to continue his masonry and in doing so was able to assist other brothers to do the same. I assume, taking note of the statement that his fellow sergeant later became a freemason, he also spent part of his time in quest of new members.

I am sure many other brothers had similar experiences but they seem to have been lost to annals of time. This determination to keep the Masonic tradition alive in all circumstances is further enhanced in the second great campaign. Again stories similar to that of Bro Fisk seem to have been lost or the recordings have been well hidden. The next recorded information comes from our near neighbours and was recorded in much detail in a book I am sure you are all familiar with, and that is 'MiNG', the history of Masonry in NG. The love of the Craft and determination to continue its presence is reflected in this book and is as strong as that expressed by Bro. Fisk.

Brethren, we are at the cross roads of our survival, we cannot let the dedication of our past Brothers be lost. All of our rectitude and perseverance must be called upon to turn the tide in member numbers. Our Attitude to fellow Brethren must be paramount at all times. More emphasis needs to be placed on the social sector of our Lodges. The workings at our meetings are essential to our craft and very significant to our new members, but it must not end there. The bonding of our lodges socially will go a long way towards the retention of our membership. The relationship that was formed with our New Zealand brothers is still continuing today, I attended the Grand Installation this year for M W Bro John Menzies and there was over 50 N.Z. Freemasons including their wives present. It was wonderful to see that the relationship between our countries is still thriving.

Brethren, we cannot let the Masonic determination of our Anzac brothers be lost.

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