

FOUR “SHORT TALKS”

By BRO. PHILLIP W. WEISS

Historian

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

“Short Talk,” September 28, 1999 – page 1

“Short Talk,” November 23, 1999 – page 6

“Short Talk,” November 9, 2003 – page 10

“Short Talk,” January 14, 2004 – page 19

This book is a collection of four “short talks” on a variety of historical topics of interest presented by Brother Phillip W. Weiss, Historian, Arcana Lodge Number 246, F. & A. M. These presentations took place during regularly scheduled meetings on the dates noted. The September 28, 1999 “short talk” recounts certain notable events in the history of Arcana Lodge. The November 23, 1999 “short talk” commemorates the Lodge’s transition from the Third to Seventh Manhattan District. The November 9, 2003 “short talk” discusses Freemasonry in time of war and under adverse circumstances. The January 14, 2004 “short talk” is about Masonic activities in prisoners-of-war camps.

TEXT OF AN ADDRESS
BY BROTHER PHILLIP W. WEISS, HISTORIAN
ARCANA LODGE NO. 246,
September 28, 1999

Thank you Worshipful Master.

There are three histories that tell the story of Arcana Lodge. The first history, written by W.: Samuel W. Phillips, covers the years 1852 to 1952; the second history, written by R.: W.: George Tanz, covers the years 1952 to 1962; and the third history, written by R.: W.: Stanley Aronowitz, covers the years 1962 to 1977. These three histories, each well written, were published in the journal commemorating the celebration of the 125th anniversary of Arcana Lodge. That celebration took place on April 23, 1977.

Since its founding in January, 1852 by nine brothers, the history of Arcana Lodge has been marked by many wonderful and notable events, each exemplifying Arcana's commitment to the Masonic principles of charity and fraternity. I will mention four such events, each quoted from the historical sources previously discussed.

"Our Seventy-fifth Anniversary was fittingly celebrated with a Dinner and Dance on March 27, 1927, at the Hotel Pennsylvania. W.: Jacob O. Solow, the Master, welcomed a distinguished number of guests and members of the Lodge and their ladies. The Grand Master, Past Grand

Masters and many who have since graced our Grand East, were present. To commemorate this auspicious occasion, the Lodge presented to R.: W.: Charles H. Johnson, Senior Grand Warden, with a \$1,000 bond as Arcana's gift to the Third District Tuberculosis Fund, which is held in trust by the Grand Lodge. More than 1,000 were in attendance."

"The year 1952 brought to our East W.: Mac Rauch of whom a partial history is recorded in our 100th Anniversary Journal of March 8, 1952.

"It is impossible to enumerate the many projects inaugurated by this talented Brother. The crowning glory of his Stewardship was the Centennial Celebration of our Lodge on March 8, 1952, at the Astor Hotel, where Arcana entertained over 600 guests including members of the Grand Lodge. A check for \$1,000 was presented to the then Grand Master, Richard A. Rowlands, for the Brotherhood Fund."

"While the records elicit an average year of activities in 1955, the writer is impelled to sing the praises of W.: Sam Weiss for his utter humility and deep devotion to Arcana Lodge. In March of his year he was stricken with a serious ailment. Unmindful of his own illness, his only concern was 'MY LODGE, when it needs me most I am unable to render my services.' But the Lodge did not fail him – upon his return to the East he was received with wild acclaim."

"The notice for the communication for May 26th, 1959 [with W.: Philip Margolin as Master], bespoke no great events scheduled. Early in the evening, however, it was announced that R.: W.: Eugene S. Muller, District

Deputy Grand Master of the Third Manhattan District, under the escort of W.: George Tanz, sought admission. On his reception, he made the long sought dramatic announcement that the Grand Master had appointed our own W.: George Tanz to be District Deputy Grand Master of the Third Manhattan District for the years 1959 – 1960, the first time in Arcana's then 107th year of activity that our Lodge was thus honored. It would be difficult to describe the events immediately following: The usual decorum maintained by the Master was beyond his control. The applause was deafening: shouts of 'bravo,' 'bravo' were heard, and brother after brother sought the floor to express their gratification. They were unanimous in their praise, and their predictions that he would discharge his duties as District Deputy with grace and dignity, were prophetic."

Arcana's devotion to those brothers who served in the Armed Forces of the United States deserves special mention. On January 21, 1921, with W.: Sol S. Schatzberg as Master, "the Lodge appropriated a sum in excess of \$4,500.00 to the Soldiers and Sailors Memorial Hospital at Utica, New York, to furnish a room which bears the name of 'Arcana Lodge, No. 246, Free & Accepted Masons.'" W.: Samuel W. Phillips wrote: "We are proud of our war record. During the [first] 100 years of our existence our country was engaged in five distinct wars – the Civil War, the Spanish-American War, World Wars I and II, and the Korean Conflict. In each of these wars our Lodge can boast of members who actually served in these conflicts with honor and distinction. During World War II, in addition, the members

of our Lodge raised many thousands of dollars to support all war work and carry out the programs of the Grand Lodge. We took care of the needs of our 200 of our brothers, their sons and daughters in the Armed Forces, including wounded soldiers and prisoners of war. One brother, Seymour Morton Schatzberg, enlisted in the Royal Air Force, before our country became actively involved in World War II, and made the Supreme Sacrifice that we may live in a free world.” During World War I, the members of Arcana Lodge, led by the Master, W.: Max Herzka, did “their bit in looking after the needs of members and sons of members in the Armed Forces.” “In 1919 a Victory Banquet and Dance was given in honor of the men who served during [World War I].” In celebration of the end of World War II, Arcana gave a second Victory Dinner and Dance on April 27, 1946 at the Hotel Astor. At this event “there were over 200 honored guests of the Lodge which included all the heroes of World War II and their ladies.” Arcana’s 1,800th Communication took place on V. E. Day.

Finally, let me say a few words about the men who served as Master of Arcana Lodge. Between 1852 and 1977, ninety-seven brothers governed the Lodge. W.: Charles A. Peck was Arcana’s first Master. W.: John T. Logan, a veteran of the Civil War, served as Master a record six times. W.: Louis J. Belloni, Jr. and W.: William A. Glover served as Master four times. Through the dedication, knowledge, strength, selflessness, and goodwill, these great men of Arcana successfully met the challenge of leadership and earned for themselves a special place of honor in the history of Arcana Lodge.

TEXT OF AN ADDRESS
BY BROTHER PHILLIP W. WEISS, HISTORIAN,
ARCANA LODGE NO. 246,
November 23, 1999

Thank you Worshipful Master.

I've been asked to give a talk about the Doric Room, which Arcana Lodge will soon be leaving. I don't know exactly how long Arcana has occupied this room, but I know that it's been for quite a long time. But no matter how long Arcana has been in this room, the fact is that when we leave it, we'll be taking with us a lot of memories.

But what is more important than where this lodge has met is what this lodge has accomplished over the years. On September 28th of this year I recounted a number of events that exemplified Arcana's commitment to the Masonic principles of charity and fraternity. Quoting from the same historical sources I cited in my September 28th talk, I will now recount four more outstanding events in the history of Arcana Lodge, each one further evidence of Arcana's commitment to Masonic excellence, hospitality and goodwill.

"Abraham Lincoln's Birthday was celebrated in the Lodge Room on February 11, 1941. The Master, W.: Alfred H. Bishara, provided a fine program. An overwhelming turnout witnessed the proceedings. Square

and Compass Post, No. 585, American Legion, under the command of John J. Fogelman and Samuel G. Pennamacoor, P. C. and Adjutant, surpassed their promises and were accompanied by a splendid delegation. The Gettysburg Address was delivered by our own W.: Charles S. M. First and Brother Rabbi Charles J. Abeles spoke on Lincoln 'The Statesman.' Credit was due to 'Al' for his genius in stirring interest in the membership."

"W.: George M. Weiner was Master in 1948. His administration was noted by an 'Event of Events.' Brother 'Papa Paul Stone' raised his five sons and four sons-in-law on March 23, 1948. The Lodge Room was filled and all present were spellbound throughout the entire performance,"

"W.: Stanley Aronowitz served as Master in 1964.

"March 24th [1964] marked New Jersey Night and the conferring of the Master Masons degree before a full lodge room. W.: Michael Woolf presided in the East with fellow 'Jerseyites' assisting. The Fellowcraft Team under the direction of R.: W.: George Tanz, portrayed the 2nd section in full costume. In all 35 Brothers took part in the degree work."

"W.: Arnold Gray ruled the Lodge for the year of 1973.

"Our lodge room was full and the feeling even warmer than usual on May 22nd [1973]. The occasion, an Honor Night for our genial Secretary, W.: Sam Weiss. A well-attended dinner at the Masonic Club preceded the meeting. During the program the speakers vied with one another in laudatory remarks for our Secretary. He was presented with gifts from the Lodge by R.: W.: Mac Rauch and Brother Nick Salvatore."

Brothers, the history of Arcana Lodge can be best described in one word: magnificent.

Many great Masons have presided over this lodge. Some of them are legends. Worshipful Masters such as Charles A. Peck, John T. Logan, James A. Kelly, Isaac Van Benschoten, William T. Gieselberg, Sol Schatzberg, Ben Chassid, Milton Kern, George Tanz, Phil Tanz, Stanley Aronowitz, Samuel Phillips, Mac Rauch, Phil Margolin, Marvin Kerr, Sam Weiss, Julie Levere, Arnold Gray, and Brent Blacksbury are but a few of the almost endless cavalcade of remarkable Masons who have graced the East over the years. Under their outstanding leadership Arcana Lodge maintained the highest standards of Masonic excellence and created for itself a place in Masonic history that is worthy of honor and respect.

But this list of Arcana notables does not stop with these illustrious men. Arcana's tradition of Masonic excellence has succeeded in producing a new corps of preeminent Masons such as Worshipfuls Arthur Klansky, Ed Zwillick, Bob Schorr, Steve Kastner, Bob Phillips, and last but not least, Seth Zolot. These brothers are proof of Arcana's continued success. Through the efforts of these great leaders – these great Masons – as well as through the efforts of all the brothers who have been active in this lodge, Arcana Lodge has not only survived, but has thrived and approaches the 21st century brimming with confidence.

The identity of Arcana Lodge is not shaped by the room where we meet. Rather, the identity of Arcana Lodge is shaped by a sublime ideal –

that of Speculative Masonry – which is firmly rooted in that most important and profound of Masonic Landmarks – the Holy Bible. It is Speculative Masonry based on the teachings of the Holy Bible that gives this lodge its life and gives this lodge its purpose – which is, in the words of the Grand Lodge of the State of New York, to make good men better. For the past 148 years Arcana Lodge has performed that task admirably. With the help of the Great Architect of the Universe, Arcana Lodge will continue this tradition of Masonic excellence and will remain what we all know it to be – a truly wonderful lodge.

Thank you.

TEXT OF AN ADDRESS
BY BROTHER PHILLIP W. WEISS, HISTORIAN
ARCANA LODGE NO. 246
NOVEMBER 9, 2003

Recently, our Worshipful Master, Brother Vinnie Scandole, asked me to give a presentation based upon historical information contained in three Masonic pamphlets: Adventures in Masonry – Three Entertainments,¹ Masonic Membership of the General Officers of the Continental Army² and Masonry Under Two Flags.³ In accordance with the Worshipful Master's request, I now offer this presentation.

Freemasonry transcends political, religious, sectarian and racial barriers that historically have divided men. Nowhere in history was this fact more self evident than in the Civil War. In that conflict, Americans fought Americans, leaving a legacy of destruction and death that continues to amaze us to this day. Huge battles occurred in places such as Gettysburg and Antietam, where thousands of men suffered and died in a wave of military violence that almost destroyed this nation. Even the President of the United States, Abraham Lincoln, did not escape the violence of the war and through his death became the most celebrated and commemorated martyr to the cause of freedom. Yet, miraculously, despite all the bloodshed and vindictiveness that the war unleashed, our country

¹ Masonic Service Association, Silver Springs, MD (first printing in 1934).

² Author: Brother Ronald E. Heaton, Charity Lodge No. 190, Norristown, PA.

³ Author: Wor. Allen E. Roberts, Past Master, Babcock Lodge No. 322, Highland Springs, VA.

persevered, healed its wounds, and grew and prospered.

Prior to the war, Freemasonry remained steadfast in its belief in avoiding violence and settling sectional differences through peaceful means. In the years immediately preceding the conflict, Freemasons in Congress, such as Henry Clay, Thomas Benton, Stephen Douglas and John Crittenden, advocated compromise and President James Buchanan, a Past Master of a Pennsylvania lodge, pleaded for understanding, a plea that fell on deaf ears as proven by subsequent events. For Freemasons, war was a scourge to be avoided and which could only lead to disaster. The Grand Master of Massachusetts, Dr. Winslow Lewis, wrote a letter to the Grand Master of Virginia, asking: "Is it too late to avert this calamity? Have we not an institution which binds us together not only as fellow citizens but as Brothers, and as Brothers can we lacerate those pledges, the foundation of our Faith and Practice?"

Paradoxically, when war did begin, Freemasons, on both sides of the conflict, answered the call to arms. In Masonry Under Two Flags, Wor. Allen E. Roberts writes that "close to four hundred generals on both sides of the conflict were Masons ... Masons made up about eleven percent of the armed forces of both the United and Confederate States." Yet even within the context of the war, Freemasons did not forsake their convictions. In January 1862, the Vermont Grand Lodge Committee on Foreign Correspondence declared: "Let us rigidly live up to the requirements of justice, but do not let us fling away the mantle of charity." The Grand

Master of South Carolina, pleaded to help brother Masons “in darkness or light; in health and sickness; in wealth or want; in peril or safety; in prison; escape or freedom; in charity or evil-mindedness; armed or unarmed; friend or seeming foe.” It must be remembered that these appeals took place during a time of war when such comments could be misinterpreted as signs of cowardice, disloyalty or treason. Indeed, for Freemasons, the war posed the ultimate test of their faith in everything they were taught. Imagine, Brothers, for a moment, the dilemma that confronted every Freemason who was faced with the possibility of having to fight, and if necessary kill, a fellow Freemason, in the field of battle. The Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of Connecticut, Alvan P. Hyde, lamented: “The terrible civil war is still raging, desolating our country, and causing Brothers of different jurisdictions to meet each other in battle array.”

Despite the bitterness, anger and divisiveness associated with the war, Freemasons time and again treated each other in a Brotherly manner consistent with the fraternal bonds and fundamental tenets of the Craft. In the Battle of Spottsylvania, Corporal Simpson was wounded and recognized as a Mason “by a rebel officer who directed his men to fill his canteen, and placed him in a comfortable position ... from which position, a few hours afterwards,” he was recovered. On June 13, 1863, the ancient funeral rites of Masonry were held for Lt. Comdr. John E. Hart, a member of St. George’s Lodge No. 6, New York. The acting Master was William R. Leake, Senior Warden of Feliciana Lodge No. 31, Louisiana. He was also a

captain in the Confederate army. When informed of the request for a Masonic funeral for his enemy, Leake stated: "As a Mason I know it to be my duty to accord Masonic burial to the remains of a Brother Mason, without taking into account the nature of his relations to the outer world." On August 21, 1863, guerillas under Quantrell ransacked the buildings at Lawrence, Kansas. Jacob Saqui told the Grand Lodge in Kansas that the invaders made the village "a ruin, red with blood of her unoffending citizens; and among the victims were a number of our brothers and fellows." The Lodges in Kansas sent aid to Lawrence, and did so wholeheartedly, even though many in the southern portion of the state had suffered in the same manner. By coming to the relief of fellow Freemasons in distress, even if they were foes, Freemasons demonstrated their deep and abiding commitment to their sacred obligation.

The Civil War was not the first conflict in American history in which Freemasons played a prominent role. Freemasons also played a central role in the American war for independence. In Masonic Membership of the General Officers of the Continental Army, Brother Ronald E. Heaton lists thirty-three generals of the Continental Army who were members of the Fraternity. The most famous of these military commanders was, of course, George Washington, who was the Commanding General of the Continental Army and later elected first President of the United States. Brother Washington's illustrious life is so well known that it requires no further recapitulation, but suffice it to say that in addition to his responsibilities

as General of the Army, Brother Washington was also Grand Master of the United States. As such, Freemasonry was a central feature of his life, a fact which became evident on September 18, 1783, when Brother Washington, performing in his capacity as Master Mason, laid the cornerstone of the Capitol of the United States, with full Masonic ceremonies, in concert with the Grand Lodge of Maryland, several lodges under its jurisdiction, and Lodge No. 22, from Alexandria, Virginia. Other Revolutionary War generals who were Freemasons included Marquis de Lafayette, Baron von Steuben, and Benedict Arnold. Although a deserter, Brother Arnold for a time fought valiantly for the cause of liberty.

As builders of men and of nations, Freemasons understand and appreciate the importance of the liberal arts and sciences, one of which is music, that art which affects the passions by sound and uplifts the spirit of man. In Songs of Masonry, Masonic ideals are extolled through a form of musical expression called rhyme. Here is an excerpt:

A Brother recites:

“Father’s Lodge had caught the gleaming of the great Masonic past;
Thinking, toiling, daring, dreaming, they were builders to the last,
Quiet men, not rich nor clever, with the tools they found at hand
Building for the great forever – first a village, then a land.”

To which the Master of Ceremonies gives this response:

“It is a great heritage we have! Freemasonry has played an important part in the building of this nation. Many thousands of humble little ‘Father Lodges’ have born the heat and burden of the day, aided in extending the empire, helped to win the west, fostered loyalty and patriotism, comforted these ‘quiet men, not rich nor clever’... We are the sons of the pioneers who carried Masonry into far places, and by Masonry were heartened. Their heritage of glory is ours ... let us keep their torches burning.”

Building a village, building a land, building a nation. The message is clear. Freemasonry’s purpose is to build, to create, to improve, to make better, just as Brother George Washington did when he helped found this nation and as Freemasons did when they fought to preserve this nation during the Civil War. They performed not with pretentious displays of pomp, or to gain notoriety, or for monetary compensation, but as quiet men, not rich nor clever, who, guided by their Masonic beliefs in Truth, Charity and Brotherly Love, established a record of service and left a legacy of achievement which is ours to emulate and treasure for all time.

Now before I close, I wish to recount an event in history, which is an example of Masonic fortitude in the face of adversity. There are times when being a Freemason means becoming a target of bigotry and hate. Florence, Italy, is a city known for its magnificent cultural artifacts and beautiful scenery. But it was also a place where Freemasons were

mercilessly persecuted. In 1925, Benito Mussolini abolished all so-called “secret” societies and declared that Masonry must be destroyed.

Remarkably, Mussolini issued this directive in a country where two of its greatest patriots, Guiseppe Garibaldi and Guiseppe Mazzini, had been Grand Masters. On October 8, 1925, The New York Times reported: “The Freemasons were molested and some of them were obliged to leave Florence because of the threats made against them by the local Fascist press. About fifty persons were very badly beaten and shops owned by Freemasons or men suspected of being connected with the craft were sacked.

“The Florentine Fascist Directory published a manifesto giving orders to the Fascisti to cease from all reprisals, but without effect, and the campaign against the Freemasons continued vigorously, culminating in a violent outbreak Saturday night.

“On that night a member of the local Fascisti Directory and a senior officer in the militia, Cavaliere Lupporini, attended by another Fascist, Signor Gambacciani, called at the house of Cavaliere Bandinelli, a Florentine accountant, aged 60, in the Via Del Arlento. From him Signor Lupporini demanded with threats the full list of the local Freemasons, which he believed to be in his house. Signor Bandinelli refused to surrender the list, whereupon Signor Lupporini struck him violently in the face.”

Imagine, Brothers, what Signor Bandinelli, utterly defenseless, must

have felt in the face of such relentless and mindless terror. But let me continue.

“On this Signor Benciolini, who happened to be in the house, drew a revolver and killed Signor Lupporini, and wounded Signor Gampacciani.

“The corpse was carried to a hospital by a group of Fascisti, who were waiting outside of the house, and a signal immediately was given for reprisals.

“Senior Benciolini, who was in hiding, was discovered, dragged into the street and killed. The furniture in the house was burned and the fire spread to the whole building.

“Firemen were kept back by armed Fascisti and the fire was allowed to destroy the house.

“Offices of many professional men, particularly lawyers supposed to be Freemasons or members of the Opposition, suffered the same fate.”

Fortunately for us, we live a country where we have a constitutionally protected right to assemble and practice our craft. But in Fascist Italy in 1925, Freemasons had no such rights, and if they did have such rights, they certainly weren't enforced. The only thing they could depend on was the strength of their convictions. Signor Bandinelli could have surrendered the list of Freemasons demanded of him by the Fascist bullies, and thereby could have possibly avoided being slapped in the face or having his house burnt or having his friend dragged into the street and killed for defending himself, but instead he remained steadfast in his sacred Masonic obligation

to conceal and never reveal secrets nor betray his fellow Brothers, and as a result brought honor to himself and to all Freemasons throughout the world. In a poem entitled "Symbols," Brother Lewis Alexander McConnell of Colorado wrote:

We speak of light on subjects which
No tangible appearance hold
By thoughts or actions that enrich
Our minds as Nature's truth unfold;
So light a symbol thus becomes
For truth and wisdom's lessons gained,
While by its glow, appears the sums
Of life's experience explained.⁴

Thank you.

⁴ *The Builder Magazine*, August 1919,
http://www.phoenixmasonry.org/the_builder_1919_august.htm.

TEXT OF AN ADDRESS
BY BROTHER PHILLIP W. WEISS, HISTORIAN
ARCANA LODGE NO. 246
JANUARY 14, 2004

Recently, Worshipful Master, Brother Vinnie Scandole, asked me to give a presentation based upon an article entitled Craftsmen In Captivity – Masonic Activities of Prisoners of War by Brother A. R. Hewitt. ¹

The prisoner of war experience has been the subject of several major motion pictures. I will briefly mention six of these movies. *The Purple Heart*, directed by Lewis Milestone and starring Dana Andrews, Richard Conte and Sam Levene, is about eight American POWs in World War Two who are put on trial by the Japanese for alleged war crimes; *The Bridge on the River Kwai*, directed by David Lean and starring Alec Guinness, William Holden and Jack Hawkins, is about British POWs forced to build a bridge for the Japanese; *Stalag 17*, directed by Billy Wilder and starring William Holden, Peter Graves and Otto Preminger, is about an American POW accused of being an informer; *King Rat*, directed by Bryan Forbes and starring George Segal, Tom Courtenay and James Fox, is about Allied POWs struggling to survive in a Japanese POW camp; *Empire of the Sun*, directed by Steven Spielberg and starring Christian Bale, John Malkovich and Joe Pantoliano, is about a young boy learning how to survive under

¹ A. R. Hewitt, Craftsmen In Captivity – Masonic Activities of Prisoners-Of-War, <http://www.freemasons-freemasonry.com/prisoner.html>.

Japanese captivity; and *Three Came Home*, directed by Jean Negulesco and starring Claudette Colbert, Patric Knowles and Sessue Hayakawa, is about the experiences of an American writer while imprisoned in a Japanese internment camp. All six movies have certain features in common. Each effectively dramatizes the harrowing plight of the soldiers and civilians who were held in captivity as prisoners of war, and convey the uncertainty and terror associated with being incarcerated by a merciless enemy whose sole aim was to extort information from their prisoners and to cow them into total submission through intimidation, humiliation and outright physical abuse.

One might suggest that these stories were mere figments of some Hollywood screenwriter's imagination. However, nothing could be further from the truth. These motion pictures were based on events that actually occurred. During World War Two, POWs were tortured, humiliated and killed – by the hundreds of thousands. In Barbarossa – The Russian-German Conflict, 1941-1945, Alan Clarke writes:

Besides the direct infliction of violence the Germans virtually sentenced to death all prisoners who fell into their hands in the autumn and winter battles by stripping them of their magnificent greatcoats and astrakhan hats. Huddled together in “cages,” often without shelter, much less heating, hundreds of thousands literally froze to death.²

Clarke also writes that

Recorded deaths in prisoner-of-war camps and compounds totaled 1,981,000. In addition to this there is the sinister heading of “Exterminations; Not accounted for; Deaths and disappearance in transit,”

² Alan Clarke, Barbarossa – The Russian – German Conflict, 1941-45 (William Morrow and Company, New York, 1965), page 206.

with the horrifying total of 1,308,000. When these figures are augmented by the very large (but unverifiable) totals of men who were simply done to death on the spot where they surrendered, without ever passing through the prison cages, the new dimension of hatred and barbarism that the Eastern campaign was generating can be appreciated.³

The same enemy who had no qualms over killing Russian POWs by the thousands also held in captivity thousands of Allied POWs, such as the approximately 8,939 Allied airmen imprisoned at Stalag Luft 1 in Barth, Germany, all of whom could have been immediately executed at the slightest whim of their captors.⁴ Indeed, the Nazis and the Japanese militarists had proven time and again, in places such as Nanking, Bataan, and Auschwitz, that they were capable of killing without restraint, without provocation, without remorse, and on a scale that would later shock the entire world. Thus, like their Russian POW counterparts, the Allied POWs' survival was far from guaranteed. Brother A. R. Hewitt writes:

Prisoners in the two world wars enjoyed no parole; on the contrary, their incarceration was rigid. Their accommodation was overcrowded, frequently squalid and with few amenities. Particularly in the second world war they suffered many privations and often cruelty and torture, especially at the hands of the Japanese. Many died as a result of ill-treatment and lack of food.⁵

In POW camps throughout Europe, Freemasonry provided many brother prisoners of war with the mutual support that enabled them to better cope with the ordeal of their confinement. When brother POWs recognized each other as Masons, they organized meetings and performed Masonic work. Lodges were established in no less than fourteen camps in

³ Ibid., page 207.

⁴ Stalag Luft I, <http://www.merkki.com/>

⁵ Hewitt, "Introduction."

Germany, Austria and elsewhere in Europe. For instance, In the Mährisch Trubau (Czechoslovakia) and Brunswick (Germany) POW camps, meetings were held on a regular basis. At the Brunswick camp, the “working tools were made from wood stripped from sleeping bunks and tea chests, the chisel being fashioned out of a piece of reinforcing rod from a bombed building and rubbed, for many hours, on a stone. These tools were small enough to be instantly concealed in the pocket should a meeting be interrupted by a guard.” At Tittmonig (near Salzburg) camp, brother POWs formed a “lodge of instruction.” Two past masters prepared the ritual from memory and wrote it down. It is now in the Leicester Provincial Museum. At Stalag 383 in Hohenfels, brethren formed a group they called the International Group, consisting ultimately of 23 brethren of the English Constitution, two Irish, 29 Scottish, 24 from four Australian Constitutions and four others. Meetings, at which there was an average attendance of 60, were held monthly on Saturday evenings in a former stable. It must be kept in mind that these lodges were organized under the most primitive conditions and performed their Masonic work under the constant threat of being discovered.⁶

Masonic Lodges continued to operate in the Far East too. In Singapore, W.: Bro. Baldwyn Lowick, Deputy District Grand Master of the Eastern Archipelago, intimated that Lodges should continue to hold meetings. Altogether, Bro. Lowick granted no less than 42 dispensations to hold regular meetings, and to hold them without regalia, exhibited

⁶ Ibid., “Part II – Second World War – Europe.”

warrants or lodge furniture. The texts of the dispensations and the lists of those issued are set out in The Pentagram of 1947. Maintaining secrecy was the main problem. A committee of brethren met to consider the matter, and it was decided to hold meetings in a dispensary, a room about the size of a prison cell. The Pentagram of 1947 reports:

Here, in a lodge room, surrounded by shelves bearing drugs, medical books, balances and all the evidence of the medical art, the first meetings of the Lodges were held. Ventilation was adequate for two or three persons; most inadequate for 20 Lodge members. All familiar signs were lacking except, of course, the V.S.L. Lodge furniture there was none. Voices were hushed. Outside the door stood a tyler more vigilant than ever before, and supported by a string of assistant tylers picketed at intervals ... each in possession of a preconcerted signal to give warning of Japanese Cowans and intruders.⁷

Bro. Hewitt writes that subsequent meetings were held in another dispensary and later in the camp library. One meeting was held in a cell measuring 13 feet by 7 feet. Meetings continued fairly regularly until the “ill-omened Double Tenth,” 1943. After that date the camp languished under a harsh and vigilant Gestapo-like supervision for many months and it was impossible to risk the holding of meetings. Freemasonry then went underground and, to quote the Pentagram, “It lived in the hearts of the members of the Craft.” In the Changi POW Camp in Singapore, Lt. Gen. A. E. Percival, the British Commander, agreed to permit Freemasons to hold meetings. Gen. Percival is quoted as saying that the project

Supplied yet another means of preventing the deterioration of character and morale which began

⁷Ibid., “Part III: Second World War – Far East, ‘Singapore – Changi Gaol (Civilians)’”

to show itself in some parts of the large camp, at any rate, in the early stages [and] anything which will assist in the preservation of the discipline for which, I believe, your Craft is universally noted, will undoubtedly prove valuable to me in the enormous difficulties I see already arising.⁸

Meetings were subject to the following conditions:

1. There should be no discussion of political or military matters.
2. That all discussion of the conditions of prisoners of war in the camp were prohibited.
3. That reasonable precautions usually observed by Freemasons should be adopted and maintained, to prevent surprise interruption of a meeting.
4. That the President of the Association or other authorized officer should be responsible to the Commander for the fulfillment of these conditions.⁹

The inaugural meeting was attended by 47 brethren from 11 Constitutions. Membership rapidly increased and later meetings saw attendance of members and visitors numbering 116, 149, 169 and 133. The brethren met fairly regularly, but one meeting “had to be cancelled owing to the uncertain circumstances then prevailing.” Minutes were first prepared in duplicate, one copy being intended for Grand Lodge. The subscription was provisionally fixed at 10 cents per month (later reduced to 5 cents) and the Treasurer regularly reported on the state of the funds. On one occasion it was decided that no subscriptions should be payable to brethren for periods of stay in hospital or “up country,” a phrase which meant that they were not coming back. Charity was not forgotten. When the supply of drugs gave out, Brother Hewitt writes, the suffering of those

⁸ Ibid., “Singapore – Changi Camp (P. O. W.)”.

⁹ Ibid.

in the hospital went unrelieved and the brethren did as much as possible for them all, Masons and non-Masons alike. By May 1944, due to the reorganization of the Changi camp and the consequent move and segregation of officers and men and of the hospital, meetings had to be suspended, as to have continued could have led to discovery, which would have meant unnecessary suffering and possibly the sacrifice of their lives.¹⁰

Nevertheless, in the Changi camp there were unofficial gatherings of brethren who continued various forms of Masonic activities while giving little thought to the dangers. Copies of the ritual were made, but the mere possession of the ritual involved the risk of death. These activities caused W. Bro. H. W. Wylie, the president of the association in the camp that granted the authority to hold meetings, grave anxiety.¹¹

The situation for the brethren in World War Two contrasted sharply with the Masonic experiences of the brothers who were POWs in previous wars. During the French and Indian War, 1756-63, and the Napoleonic wars, French POWs imprisoned in England formed no fewer than 44 lodges. These lodges were legally constituted, met in the normal way, made Masons, and their members visited English lodges who in turn attended the French lodges.¹² In Holland during World War One, British POWs founded “Gastvrijheld” Lodge which was given the number 113 on the roll of the Grand Orient. Brother Hewitt writes that

It led a very full and active Masonic life, meeting at least monthly. These regular meetings, together

¹⁰ **Ibid.**

¹¹ **Ibid.**

¹² **Ibid.**, “Introduction.”

with emergencies, totaled 55 during its three-and-a-half years' sojourn at Gronigen. There were initiated no fewer than 64 candidates, usually two at a time, who were, of course, duly passed and raised, so that every meeting, there was much work to be done.¹³

And In 1918, brethren imprisoned in Yozgat, Turkey founded a “lodge of instruction”, named Cappadocia. This lodge met on alternate Fridays and held a total of 12 meetings. At these meetings the opening and closing ceremonies in the three degrees, as well as the initiation, were rehearsed or addresses on Freemasonry were delivered. This lodge also collected sums of money which was passed to the camp Chaplin for the benefit of the many starving Armenian women and children in the locality.¹⁴

Under the Nazi German and Imperial Japanese regimes, such open displays of Masonic business would have been impossible, not only because of the nature of the activities, which in and of themselves would have attracted unwanted attention, but also because of the fundamental nature of Freemasonry which symbolized everything that the enemy despised, opposed and wanted to destroy. Accordingly, any brother caught practicing the Craft ran the risk of losing his life. But despite that risk, Freemasonry continued to be practiced in POW camps throughout the world. Such dedication and devotion to the Craft is not only compelling proof of Freemasonry's strength under conditions of extreme adversity, but is a testimony to the fortitude and courage of each and every brother POW who chose to practice the Craft and of their unswerving faith in the principles of Freemasonry which guided their actions and helped

¹³ Ibid., “Germany – Part 1: First World War, ‘Holland.’”

¹⁴ Ibid., “Turkey.”

them to survive.

