

TWENTY-SEVEN MEN AND A FREEMASON

December 10, 2011

Worshipful Master, distinguished head table guests and Brethren, at the Masonic Association of Frontenac District on May 26th 2011, I had the distinct pleasure of requesting M. W. Bro. Mumby speak on the topic of Recognizing a Mason.

His address influenced me with six words “no reward” and “word is his bond”.

W. M., Brethren, I'd like to speak tonight of something different: of a man, of a Brother, of an event, of an adventure gone wrong, of that Brother's walk with his G.A.O.T.U., and finally of a Brother who was, quote “resolute in the hour of danger”.

Think back to when you were a young boy. Think of the time when, in the darkness of your room, or venturing down a dark hall or alley, that you sensed the presence of another being. You might look under your bed just to make sure no one was there, or you'd glance behind you in that alley to ensure all was safe.

Brethren, I had that feeling most recently on September 4, 2007 just before 11:00 p.m. in the N.W.T. after paddling the Nahanni River for 14 hours, but I'm not going to speak on that encounter.

Adults may retain some of this behaviour. To ward off the sense of the presence of another being they may engage in unusual behaviour. Suddenly

dogs that are normally banished from the living quarters of the home are welcomed in when a spouse is away on a trip. People who are alone occupy the silence of the night by humming, whistling, talking aloud, watching television, or playing music.

This unseen presence is frequently experienced by normal, healthy, people. Under certain conditions it can be compounded exponentially in extreme conditions.

Enough for that now, I'll come back to it.

Freemasonry has been very much alive in the makers and shakers of society. These prominent men influenced society directly. Consider the Freemasons behind such names as: General James Wolfe, General Louis-Joseph de Montcalm, Joseph Brant, Sir John MacDonal, and many of the Fathers of Confederation.

These leaders joined Freemasonry because Freemasonry was involved in shaping a better society and they were able to separate politics and religion from their civic calling.

One such leader was born on February 15, 1874 and passed to the Grand Lodge Above on January 5, 1922. He was not a Canadian, but born in Ireland and moved with his family to England. He was a very religious man and a Freemason, initiated into Navy Lodge No. 2612 (United Grand Lodge of England) on July 9, 1901. He attended Guild of Freedom Lodge No. 3525 in 1911 where he was passed to the second degree on November 2, and was raised to the degree

of Master Mason on May 30, 1913.

Sir Ernest Henry Shackleton was knighted in 1909. He didn't, however receive his knighthood for what I am about to share with you. He didn't even succeed in his destination but was sidetracked. He did, I believe, achieve something far greater.

My interest in Bro. Shackleton was created by personally visiting the location his ship Endurance was destined for as it left London on August 1, 1914.

I departed Ushuaia, the southernmost city of the world, circumnavigated Cape Horn, then crossed the Drake Passage.

Bro. Shackleton's destination was the Weddell Sea, South Georgia Islands, Deception Island and eventually Elephant Island, Antarctica - "extreme conditions."

This address was further enhanced through my interest in John Geiger's account from which I have relied for some critical information.

On November 5, The Endurance arrived at the whaling station of Grytoiken, South Georgia Islands, the last outpost of civilization en route to Antarctica and she departed on December 5. Almost immediately, the Endurance was beset by pack ice and immobilized and began drifting in the ice.

After being carried in the ice for nearly 10 months, the ship was abandoned on October 27, 1915. Shackleton wrote, "She was doomed . . . I ordered the hands out on the floe." Now 28 men stood a hundred meters off, with provisions and supplies piled high, as the ice cracked beneath their feet. They were 1600

kilometers and a vast ocean from the nearest human settlement. Shackleton gathered the crew and said quietly and without emotion. "Ships and stores have gone - so now we'll go home."

The retreating crew picked their way for 5 months across the rotting ice, dragging 3 small life boats. Some of the men were overwhelmed by their fate, were not normal, some wanted to commit suicide and Shackleton had to force them to live.

On April 9, 1916, 15 months after the ship became trapped, the men launched their small boats to escape from the ice. Huddled in the boats, with their health and spirit reduced they were tormented by the surging seas, salt from sea spray reddened their eyes, bloodied their lips and their faces etched with the pallor of death. Many suffered dysentery, temperatures dipped well below freezing with constant rain and snow squalls. They spent three nights in the boats and Shackleton felt all the men couldn't survive a fourth. Then they saw the rugged cliffs of Elephant Island, a desolate outcrop off the Antarctic Peninsula and they literally staggered ashore.

I personally witnessed these rocky cliffs covered in snow and ice and buffeted by those fiercely frigid Antarctic waves.

Frank Hurley, the expedition photographer, wrote, quote "Many suffered from the temporary aberration, walking aimlessly about, others shivering as with palsy.

With no possible rescue, Shackleton decided to take 5 men with him in one

small boat and risk the extreme perils of the ocean south of Cape Horn, as he wrote, quote "The most tempestuous area of water in the world." His goal was the whaling station of South Georgia, more than eleven hundred kilometers away.

Francis 'Frank' Wild remained in charge of the 21 other men. As the six men departed, Frank Wild led the twenty-one remaining souls in three hearty cheer and watched the boat get smaller and smaller in the distance.

The six men endured gales, snow squalls, and heavy seas for seventeen days. Most were sick, soaked, and chilled to the bone. On the third day, they showed frostbite; their feet and legs assumed a "dead-white colour and lost surface feeling." One keg of drinking water was lost, and the absence of adequate fluid left them severely dehydrated. They were reduced to a small amount of blackish water per day. The ice grew so thick on the boat that they were in danger of capsizing and had to take turns chopping it off with a carpenter's adze.

In an astonishing feat of navigation by Captain Frank Worsley, they reached South Georgia in the midst of a hurricane. They fought the storm for nine hours before finally making landfall and not being dashed on the rocks. Sleep deprived, their mouths dry and tongues swollen from thirst, they were also in a state approaching starvation. They fell down into pools of fresh running water and lapped it up like wild beasts.

The journey was not over!

They were at the opposite end of the island from their destination, the

whaling station. Due to severe weather and treacherous coastline, Shackleton opted to cross overland, some 38 kilometers never penetrated before which would take them over two mountain ranges, more than a dozen peaks exceeding two thousand meters high and surrounded by ice fields and vast glaciers. Severe weather forced them to sit and wait. They used the time to recover from the boat journey, drank fresh water, and ate tender meat of albatross chicks.

On May 19, 1916, Shackleton, Frank Worsley and Tom Crean left McNeish in charge of the others and the boat. They had virtually none of the equipment needed for climbing, except 15 meters of rope and that carpenter's adze for an ice axe. As expressed by Shackleton, quote "22 men were waiting for the RELIEF that we alone could secure for them."

They marched in moonlight and in fog. They had slender rations and went virtually without sleep. They confronted the Trident, a giant ridge, and were twice rebuffed since the descent was impossible. Finally, they stood on an ice ridge uncertain of the other side but opted to jump into the unknown. Worsley later said, "I was never so scared in my life than for the first thirty seconds. The speed was terrific." They tested fate and survived shooting down 275 meters in the fog in a couple of minutes.

They walked all day, then through the night in absolute darkness until the full moon rose. They reached Fortuna Bay but realized it was not their destination. At 5 a.m., on May 20, exhausted and cold, one now suffering from frostbite, they

stopped to rest. With no tent, their clothes in tatters, they put their arms around each other for warmth. Within seconds two were asleep. Shackleton realizing the danger of hypothermia, awoke them within 5 minutes, telling them they'd slept for half an hour.

They trekked on. At 6:30 a.m., Shackleton thought he heard a steam whistle then they all heard it within half an hour. They marched on reaching a ridge. They shambled into the whaling station, barely recognizable as civilized men. Their beards were long, hair matted, faces black and clothes filthy rags. The people recoiled in fear. A foreman, eventually, took them to the house of the manager, whom Shackleton knew. Shackleton asked, "Don't you know me?" as the manager stared at the hairy, offensive smelly visitor, he responded, "I am Shackleton."

From the whaling station, Worsley sailed to the south of South Georgia Island to pick up the three men left behind.

Shackleton borrowed the ship, Southern Skey, and sailed for Elephant Island to rescue his men. The pack ice prevented passage, and the ship returned. Two subsequent rescue attempts, aboard the Institute Pesca No.1 in June and the Emma in July, were also stopped by pack ice.

After four and a half months of waiting on Elephant Island, one of the stranded men spotted a ship on August 30, 1916. The ship, Yelcho, a tug boat borrowed and led by Shackleton from Punta Arenas, Chile, broke through the ice surrounding the island, finally rescuing all the men who set out on the original

expedition.

Shackleton admitted frequently that he was no mountaineer. He later noted, how he, Worsley, and Crean managed to cross South Georgia is an everlasting puzzle to me.

Shackleton paraphrased Robert Service, quote "We had pierced the veneer of outside things. We had suffered, staved, and triumphed, grovelled down yet grasped at glory, grown bigger in the bigness of the whole. We had seen God in His splendours, heard the text that Nature renders. We had reached the naked soul of man."

Shackleton regarded the journey from Elephant Island to the whaling station on South Georgia as the supreme event of his life. On an earlier expedition he came within 156 km. of the South Pole and earned a knighthood, on this one he failed to achieve any polar prize.

Brethren, I believe, Shackleton had attained something far greater! He had led others to overcome seemingly insurmountable obstacles in order to survive.

Shackleton took great pains to write his account of the journey all the while cautioning, quote "There is much that can never be told."

Shackleton tried to come to terms with it. Leonard Tripp a friend and confidant said of Shackleton, "I watched him, and his whole face seemed to swell - you know what a big face he had." With tears in his eyes, Shackleton then said, quote "Tripp, you don't know what I've been through and I am going through it all

again, and I can't do it." He walked out of the room as if he intended to go away, lit a cigarette, but then he returned. This happened on several occasions. Tripp recalled, "You could see the man was suffering, and then he came to this mention of the fourth man."

Shackleton, reciting Keats, explained his struggle.

One feels, quote "the dearth of human words, the roughness of mental speech, in trying to describe intangible things, but a record of our journey would be incomplete without reference to a subject very near to our hearts."

He revealed in the narrative that he had a pervasive sense, during the last and worst of his struggles, that something out of the ordinary had accompanied them.

Bro. Shackleton wrote, quote "When I look back at those days I have no doubt that Providence guided us, not only across those snow-fields, but across the snow-white sea that separated Elephant Island from our landing place on South Georgia. I know that during that long racking march of thirty-six hours over the unnamed mountains and glaciers of South Georgia it seemed to me often that we were four, not three."

Shackleton said nothing of his feelings to the others but three weeks later Worsley offered, "Boss, I had a curious feeling on the march that there was another person with us." Crean later confessed to the same sensation. Each of the three men, independent of the others, felt they had been in company with another being.

Apparently Shackleton withheld this unseen companion for some time but it was on a paper labelled "note" in his original manuscript. He may have regretted revealing ever so deeply a personal feeling to be made public as on occasion he appeared embarrassed. He did, however, allude to it in public lectures as one person recalled. "You could hear a pin drop when Sir Ernest spoke of his consciousness of a Divine Companion in his journeyings."

Was the presence on South Georgia the guiding protective hand of the Divine Companion or the Son of God?

Historians surmise that it was some form of shared hallucination, that the total was enough to cloud their consciousness. Or, quote "this was probably a hallucination due to their common dehydration." Shackleton's biographer, Roland Huntford, wrote, "They were suffering from dehydration and that was pushing them over into the half world where physical and mental phenomena meet . . . Delusion hovered in the air. Shadows seemed like ghosts. They imagined unseen companions by their side."

A writer, Harold Begbie, asked Shackleton, "In your book you speak of a Fourth Presence."

He nodded his head.

"Do you care to speak about that?"

At once he was restless and ill at ease.

"No " he said. "None of us cares to speak about that. There are some things which never can be spoken of. Almost to hint about them comes

perilously near to sacrilege. This experience was eminently one of those things."

Bro. Shackleton returned to South Georgia on January 4, 1922. His crew included eight of the men from the Endurance including Worsley. Along the coast of South Georgia they were quote "like a pair of excitable kids."

Shackleton wrote in his journal. "It is a strange and curious place. In the darkening twilight I saw a lone star hover gem-like above the bay." In the early hours of January 5, 1922, Shackleton, just forty-seven years old, suffered a fatal heart attack. He was laid to rest in the whaler's cemetery at Grytoiken on South Georgia, the place where he had been touched by Providence, a Divine Companion.

Brethren, through this account we have been shown how Brother Shackleton, a very religious man, upheld the Masonic principles we so willingly try to uphold in our daily lives here at home. Just consider how those principles apply half a world away and in extreme circumstances as these men walked with their Divine Companion, their G.A.O.T.U.

Bro. Shackleton,"The man who, without courting applause, is loved by all noble-minded men, respected by his superiors, and revered by his subordinates; the man who never proclaims what he has done, will do, but where need is, will lay hold with dispassionate courage, circumspect resolution, untiring exertion, and a rare power of mind, and who will not cease until he has accomplished his work, but who then, without pretention, will retire into the multitude, because he did the good act, not for himself, but for the cause of good."

Brethren, we may not be explorers of an ice covered continent, marooned in pack ice for 10 months or arduously trod the unknown. But we are a part of a Brotherhood professing Brotherly Love, Relief, and Truth. We do not expect a reward, but we can, in our own way, reach out in Love, Relief and Truth, particularly at this time of year, in our home, in our community, in our country and if our reach is granted by the G.A.O.T.U., in the world.

So "If you, my brethren, meet such a man, you will see the personification of brotherly love, relief, and truth; and you will have found the ideal of a Freemason."

Finally, Brethren we return from where we began: a man had walked with his G.A.O.T.U., "no reward", and "his word is his bond", Quote "Ship and stores have gone and now we'll go home."

I thank you for the pleasure of having the opportunity of assembling with you this evening and in sharing the richness of your Masonic Fellowship at Templum Fidelis No.746.

December 10, 2011

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D.D.G.M. Frontenac District

