

**Evolution of Military and Military Lodges and the Globalization of  
Freemasonry - To the Mid 1700s**

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The best way to start to frame this is to first state that my initial interest in the topic of the connection of our Fraternity to the military was when I was in US Army ROTC in college. I happened to see the movie *The Man Who Would Be King*. This is a terrific movie with Sean Connery and Michael Caine, based on a short story by Brother Rudyard Kipling, a noted member of our Craft. It is about two discharged British Army Sergeants and Freemasons, who seek fame and fortune in the “stans”. At that time, this meant the entire Indian Asian sub-continent, which included India and Pakistan and was then known as Hindustan. In this adventure, our two Brothers (who are Freemasons in real life) eventually determine that Alexander the Great was a Freemason. This is a “must-see” movie for all of us.

As a side note, elements of this movie have influenced me to the present day particularly prior to my retirement from the USG, which included both military and civilian service, during which I was able to take many trips to the American war theaters. During this time, with a little advanced research, I spent the little spare time I had, looking for abandoned or broken-down masonic lodges. My term for this is Expeditionary Freemasonry.

What I am going to cover in this paper is the start-up and evolution of the military and military masonic lodges coupled with a little bit of British, Scottish, and Irish military history as it directly relates, and an important amount of the economic and

political aspect. In a nutshell, the result was the globalization of Freemasonry, led by merchants, soldiers and officers, and colonial administrators. What I am not going to get into is much of the general history or allegorical history of our Craft or Moderns versus Ancients, as we all either know it or have heard it a thousand times and may in fact even be weary of it.

Let me start first with the economic or merchant aspect. Three words can describe the economic aspect and the globalization of Freemasonry. East India Company (EIC). The EIC was a British trading company originally established to focus on trade and secure this trade in the East Indies and later the Indian sub-continent. The EIC received a Royal Charter from Queen Elizabeth on 31 December 1600. They even had their own private army. The EIC military officers were recognized as commissioned military officers who generally wore British Army uniforms and led foreign conscripted troops. EIC commissioned officers could not wear their uniform in England proper; however, there was some back and forth movement of officers between commissioned ranks of the EIC and the British Army. They did frequently work in conjunction with and in coordination with regular British Army units if they were in the same or nearby areas. Evolving through the 1700s with 1800 being the height of the EIC and its rule in India, had an army of about 260,000 which was twice the size of the standing British Army. If the British Navy at that time “ruled the waves”, then the EIC most certainly ruled the land. Adventure-prone young men

looking for foreign adventure could be in the navy, the army, or the EIC, which also had their own maritime component.

The political aspect of this topic is not the discussion of politics, which is prohibited and has always been prohibited in lodges of our Craft. It is a fact that the fourth Grand Master of Masons (1721-1723) in what was then called the Premier Grand Lodge of England was John Montagu, 2<sup>nd</sup> Duke of Montagu and of course of English nobility. Since that time, English noblemen or royalty have always been the Grand Master of Masons in the Grand Lodge of England. The prevailing thought was that a royal or noble “patron” would significantly raise the positive and political influence and public profile of the craft in England and around the globe.

For consistency, I will refer to the United Grand Lodge of England or UGLE as it is called today, when referring to the post-1717 period and the Grand Lodge of England or GLE when referring to the period before 1717, rather than the various names it has had in previous times. Chronologically, there was also the Grand Lodge of Ireland in 1729, the Grand Lodge of Pennsylvania in 1732, and the Grand Lodge of Scotland in 1736.

As you may know or recall that prior to the formation of the United Grand Lodge of England in 1717, there were generally no masonic charters, no regularly elected officers, and no regular lodges as we know them today. Seventeenth-century lodges were very informal and were attended by any freemasons who happened to be in the area. Since they often had no permanent officers, the oldest master in attendance assumed the east. No dues were paid, and no dues cards were issued. Voluntary contributions from those present were solicited to pay for food and drink consumed

at the meeting. Freemasons met whenever and wherever they desired, frequently in taverns, and had no lodge buildings as such. Initially, few if any records or minutes were kept.

Though the timeframe for this presentation is the period prior to the mid-1700s, it is worth noting that the very first record of the making of a military man being made a mason was in Scotland. A David Ramsey who was a soldier of fortune and who had been a commissioned captain and later a commissioned colonel having led one of the Scottish Regiments was made a mason in the Lodge of Edinburgh in 1637. It appears the next military man to be made a mason, also in Scotland was Alexander Hamilton, General of the Artillery and Master of the Ordinance and Ammunition, was admitted as a fellow and master of the craft on May 20<sup>th</sup>, 1640. Later that same General Hamilton and certain masters and others from the Lodge of Edinburgh met at Newcastle, England, and admitted the Rt. Hon. Robert Moray, General Quartermaster of the Army of Scotland, on May 20<sup>th</sup>, 1641. Lastly, the first record of a military man being made a mason in an English Lodge was when Elias Ashmole noted in his diary that he and Colonel Henry Mainwaring had been initiated into a non-operative Lodge of Masons on March 11, 1682.

After the creation of the United Grand Lodge of England, military lodges were established which moved about from place to place with the regiment. Freemasons were deemed to be respectable where military lodges were concerned. The consent of the commanding officer of the regiment had to be obtained before a military lodge could be formed, and he could order the closure of the lodge. It was for the commanding officer to decide who could be admitted to the lodge, and in the eighteenth century, few commanding officers allowed other ranks to

join; they thought that it would be contrary to good military discipline to allow fraternization in the lodge between officers and NCO's. As it turned out that the concept of the mixing of ranks within the lodge was contrary to military discipline, it turned out to be not the case in practice. Once inside a regimental lodge, where all external advantages of rank or station were laid aside, the more thoughtful type of soldier found a refuge from the hardships and monotony of soldiering. Officer, NCO, and men, meeting on the same level bred mutual respect, devoid of servility, which was invaluable in welding each unit into a well-tempered weapon.

Freemasonry's close association with the British Army contributed more than any other factor to the brotherhood's global spread. The Grand Lodge initially instituted a rule that civilians could not join a military lodge because they wanted local inhabitants to be initiated in their own fixed lodges. This rule was eventually waived in practice and many regimental lodges invited the local gentry to join. Regimental lodges not only served the needs of soldiers and officers but also eventually opened their doors to civilians and often helped them establish permanent lodges in distant parts of the empire. Our brotherhood benefited from its association with the army and the EIC, but it was also sensitive to local conditions, geopolitical shifts, and the exigencies of war.

The first purely military lodge we know of was established in Gibraltar in 1728, which was a stationary lodge. Importantly, forward-leaning innovation and leadership on the part of the Irish Grand Lodge were crucial to freemasonry's success. To facilitate the spread of freemasonry abroad, Irish authorities adapted their system of issuing warrants. The term "warrant" as used in masonic documents from the 1720s,

referred only to the permission of the grandmaster or grand lodge to constitute a new lodge.

To see the early commercial or merchant aspect with a military connection, it is documented that in 1729, Bro. Captain Ralph Farrwinter, an Officer of the EIC was appointed Provisional Grand Master for East India in Bengal by the UGLE. Then a year later, he warranted the first Indian lodge on the Indian subcontinent, East India Arms No. 72, which was constituted in 1730 by officials of the EIC based in Fort William, Bengal, Calcutta, India. The coat of arms of the lodge was adopted and modified from the EIC coat of arms.

Around 1731, Irish freemasons went a step further by issuing an actual document that indicated a lodge had received grand lodge permission to operate. Warrants were designed to be the visible authority for the existence of a lodge and eventually, lodges were required to display their warrant in order to constitute themselves and hold meetings. Famously and well known is that the first "traveling" or "ambulatory" warrant was issued by the GL of Ireland in 1732 to the First British Foot (infantry) Regiment, the Royal Scots.

By 1734, four others had been issued, again by the GL of Ireland. In 1743, the GL of Scotland adopted this practice and issued a warrant to the 55<sup>th</sup> British Foot (infantry) Regiment. By 1755, the total number of Military Lodges was 29. In that same year, the GL of England issued its first military warrant to the 57<sup>th</sup> British Foot (infantry) Regiment. The British Royal Navy also had 3 lodges all warranted to ships: the HMS Vanguard in 1760, the HMS Prince, and the HMS Canceaux in 1762.

Before I leave the British side of the issue, I want to note the movements of just one British regiment moving around the globe

somewhat illustrating how the spread of our craft would easily take place. The 20<sup>th</sup> British Foot (infantry) Regiment was warranted as Minden Lodge No. 63 in 1748, from the GL of Ireland. It was granted to Lord George Sackville, Colonel as the first Master; and to Lieutenant-Colonel the Hon. Edward Cornwallis and Captain Millburne. It remained in England for 8 years after being warranted and before being posted overseas. For the next 100 years, the unit moved and was stationed in Germany, Ireland, Italy, Portugal, America, France, Sicily, Holland, Malta, Spain, West Indies, Egypt, Gibraltar, and 25 years in India. Freemasons in the British military helped plant permanent Lodges in the civilian populations in the colonies of all types.

Another example of how military lodges served as the primary example for spreading Freemasonry was an Irish military lodge founded by the GL of Ireland in 1752. This lodge was named The Lodge of Social and Military Virtues No. 227. The members of this lodge had been Freemasons in the British 46<sup>th</sup> Foot (infantry) Regiment. This lodge was active in Halifax, Nova Scotia in 1757 and later in the West Indies in 1762.

So, to emphasize the pattern that is evolving; that of British global exploration for resources through trade, subsequent colonization, with the establishment of the formalized trading outposts of the EIC. This was coupled initially with the regular British army and navy expeditionary security support, and the EIC foreign military units led by British officers and senior NCOs. Integrated into this was our craft which was a proper and permanent part of any British regiment, naval ship or component, or EIC location or outpost.

By the early 1700s, our craft had become an integral part of the stabilization and good governance of colonial administrations,

military units, and the EIC trading enterprise. The plan was the same for the American colonies, to have an “American Company” following the above path for resources and expansive colonization for England.

Moving across the ocean, and for historical record and context of some non-military masonic history, we have some information on the following: an inscribed stone dated 1601 from Goat Island, Nova Scotia, ambiguous Plymouth county records from 1654, and a Reverend Edward Peterson’s connection to a Rhode Island lodge in 1658. As we will always continue to search for old masonic records, we have almost nothing for the next 40 years.

From the civilian aspect, the first record of a Freemason in North America was Jonathan Belcher, who was born in Boston in 1681. He was initiated into an “occasional lodge” while traveling in Europe in 1704 and on his return to Boston in 1705 became in fact, the most senior documented freemason in America. Further, the first documented lodge meeting in the western hemisphere was held at King’s Chapel, Boston in 1720. Returning to the military theme, the earliest traveling warrant issued in the United States was in 1738 by the GL of Massachusetts to a combined civilian and military expedition to Canada.

A few years later in 1746, the Irish Grand Lodge warranted the first military lodge in the American colonies, which operated in Colonel Harward’s 1<sup>st</sup> Bn, East Lancashire Foot (Infantry) Regiment, while it was stationed in Louisbourg, Nova Scotia.

In 1749, Edward Cornwallis, previously mentioned (who helped open the lodge in the 20<sup>th</sup> Foot) sailed to North America with 1,140 settlers who were safely landed in Nova Scotia, of which Province he became the founder and first Governor. Cornwallis,

the gallant officer that he was known as, and with his zeal for masonry stepped up again and accepted the Mastership of a new Lodge shortly after his arrival in Halifax. A Provincial warrant was received in July 1749; and on the same evening Captain Lord Colville, and several naval gentlemen, were entered apprentices in this lodge. In 1760 Cornwallis became a Lieutenant-General, and eight years later for the third time became the founder of a new lodge. Another Freemason, Alexander, 4<sup>th</sup> Lord Colville, who had been initiated by the then Colonel Cornwallis in 1749, became master the following year at the 2<sup>nd</sup> Lodge in Boston. It is documented that Colville attended every meeting of the Provincial Grand Lodge, until his appointment as Deputy Grand Master of North America in 1752.

The first military Lodge warrant issued in the American colonies was issued by Jeremy Gridley, Provincial Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of England in Boston, to his actual brother, Brother Richard Gridley on May 13<sup>th</sup>, 1756 for a lodge in the 28<sup>th</sup> British (infantry) Foot Regiment. From that start, other warrants were issued in the colonies. In 1756, a warrant was issued to Colonel Ingersol for a military lodge for the expedition against Crown Point (a French-held fort on Lake Champlain, NY). In both instances, the warrants were general in nature and considered deputations.

To return to the topic of regimental movements with lodges and civilian members, it is interesting to note that when a regiment departed an area, civilians who participated in the military lodge would continue working and eventually receive their own warrant. An example to cite is Irish lodge No. 74 (in the Second Bn Royal) which was active in Albany, New York in the 1750s. The lodge initiated several townsmen into the craft. When the regiment was transferred in 1759, the lodge informed

Irish authorities that it had decided to copy its warrant in order to set up a new lodge. Specifically, they said our body is very numerous by the addition of many new members, merchants, and inhabitants of the City of Albany, they have earnestly requested and besought us to enable them to hold a Lodge during our absence from them. Of course, copying a warrant was highly irregular, to say the least, but the GL of Ireland nonetheless authorized the Provincial Grand Master of New York to grant the lodge its own warrant.

As I wind this down, I want to comment on the authorities being the mechanism that we issue warrants from; and as we know, it is from that, we conduct all manner of masonic business. The authorities for the time period of this paper are identified from four sources: the stationary warrants of British military units in the UK; traveling warrants of British military units in the UK and the globe; traveling warrants issued by the GL of Ireland and the GL of Scotland; and traveling and stationary warrants issued in the colonies by American grand lodges.

So, by now you get the general picture of all the moving parts of the globalization of our Craft. Moving to closure here, I have tried to illustrate and explain the globalization of our Craft in the early period of the first half of the 1700s, which for the most part is particularly devoid of specific documentary evidence and records. I have tried to do this through the military, political and economic aspects coupled with the extremely complicated and confusing issue of masonic authorities with stationary and traveling warrants.

For this paper, I consulted 6 hardbound masonic books and 17 masonic papers, documents, and Wikipedia from 1866 to 2018.

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