

# THE RED SEA INCIDENT



*(The following is a verbatim copy of a document previously issued by the American Canadian Grand Lodge, AF&AM, under the jurisdiction of the Grand Lodge of Germany.)*

## **PREFACE**

In January 1987 the undersigned received an unsolicited manuscript from Brother James C. Krohn, a member of Red Sea Lodge No. 919 under this jurisdiction. The following story constitutes Jim's personal recollection of the shocking and infamous raid on that Lodge. As Jim put it in the letter he sent along with his manuscript, "accuracy and portrayal is as best as the frail human memory will allow. The events, names and places are true."

This month marks the tenth anniversary of the shocking raid on Red Sea Lodge, and it is appropriate that the story of that shameful incident be made available to our membership at this time. We are indebted to Brother Jim Krohn for his personal account, and hope it may serve as a reminder to all brethren that freedom of assembly and association is something one should never take for granted.

In some ways, it should also serve as a reminder to every concerned Mason of the fact that wide-spread ignorance of the aims and purposes of Freemasonry is still very much evident even in our free societies. To preserve those human values so eminently espoused by this ancient and honorable fraternity, education not only of our membership, but the general public as well, will be indispensable. We owe it to ourselves, and to future generations of Freemasons.

Frankfurt/Main  
October 1987

Jess Minton-PGM Grand Secretary  
American Canadian Grand Lodge, AF&AM

# **ONE BATON - A MEMORY**

by

**Bro. James Krohn**

**Red Sea Lodge No. 919, District 9, ACGL**

## **PROLOGUE**

In January, 1977, aboard a Grumman Gulfstream II, was an elderly Saudi Arabian, “old” Prince Mohammed. Too old to be militant, yet a staunch fundamentalist, he was still a viable and potent force within Saudi Arabian society and the Arab world. A senior advisor to the King, he held with the old ways of retaining his power as long as possible, and defending his classic ways in the religion of Islam. Staring idly about the interior of the sleek, elegant business jet, although he knew his trip would be measured in terms of hours rather than days or weeks, he was still unable to fully comprehend the impact of this type of travel through the high, blue skies.

His idle thoughts were interrupted by a polite greeting from the onboard Arab aircraft mechanic, “Essalaam alaikum.” Snapping back to reality, the old man’s response was automatic, emerging from an age of conditioned response, “Wah alaikum essalaam.”

An exchange of pleasantries and small talk then passed between the respected elder and the younger man who, in his way, was attempting to establish early influence for his adult role in Arab life. Topic succeeded topic until the conversation led to the aims and plans of the old prince.

His likes and dislikes long ingrained, and speaking with his accustomed air of authority, the old man announced to the young mechanic that within the Western community there were three groups he intended to do something about: the several Christian sects openly practicing their religion within his Islamic domain; the bootleggers engaged in the distilling of drinking alcohol, which they called “sedik” or “sid” for short; and the Freemasons.

**October 4th, 1977**

It was another sweltering hot *Tuesday* afternoon when, after work, the two-tone Chevy came to a stop under the dusty carport. The driver, an engineer for Saudi Arabian Airlines, gingerly grasped the hot ignition key to turn off the engine. Other thoughts were pushed aside as he concentrated on that day of the week. "It's Lodge night tonight.", he thought, and again it was time to clean up and prepare for the monthly stated communication. Looking forward to the meeting, little did he realize the drastic impact that plans made earlier in the year would have on his life within a few hours.

After showering and finishing his own dinner, the American Brother settled back to watch his three sons mix play with their meal. Reflecting pleasantly on the fact that later this evening he was to be installed as the new Senior Steward of Red Sea Lodge No. 919 of Jiddah, Saudi Arabia, he smiled as his wife announced there were fresh sweet-rolls to go with the freshly brewed coffee for the meeting. She playfully inquired if going "up the line" would mean bringing more than coffee and rolls to the Masonic meetings.

As the sun set, and the dark of night descended, the coffee and rolls were carefully eased into the sedan. Having had a chance to cool, the car was now painless to get into, and after moving the Chevy out of the dusty driveway, he began the slow drive north to the Medina Road. Richly steeped in history and tradition, it was one of the main roads traveled by Moslem pilgrims during their Haj. At the junction with Medina Road, he turned left, heading west, when he suddenly recalled there would be 3rd degree work that evening. Spotting a bush at the side of the road, he eased the vehicle over to the side, stepped out to cut off a sprig, and sliding back into the car to resume his drive, tossed the leafy branch on the seat next to him.

Two blocks west of a truck-garage building, he slowed down to be certain he didn't miss the trail leading off into the darkness. He smiled as he passed the second little sign showing a cane and two balls, remembering his impression of George Freygang, the Master, as being slightly exuberant in his Masonic fervor.

(Earlier that year the Brothers of Red Sea Lodge had considerable reason to be concerned when the orthodox Arab League in Cairo openly branded several groups as being Zionist, pro-Israeli, and imperialist. Notable among those groups cited were Rotary International and Freemasonry.)

Now off the pavement, the '77 Chevy was eased over the sandy trail, dipping and rising with each irregularity in the rough road surface and causing the headlight beams to bounce eerily up and down. As he approached the building, he counted seven cars parked outside. They were obviously driven by Westerners, because the cars were lined up neatly, in a row.

Easing his car carefully to a stop to avoid any coffee spills, he failed to notice several vehicles parked a short distance away in the sand, opposite the building he was about to enter.

The recently constructed lodge had been consecrated in a public ceremony. Open to the public on that occasion, many in the Western masonic community attended, including one woman, the new Senior Steward's wife. Red Sea Lodge occupied a large room on the upper story of a spacious villa owned by Heinz Blaufelder, one of the Lodge's Entered Apprentices. The villa also contained the owner's family quarters as well as a large art gallery for his additional income.

The first trip up the stairs by the Steward was through a corridor lined with exquisite oil paintings, leading to the outer room of the Lodge. There, with the heavy, hot coffee maker causing him to stoop a bit, the Steward was greeted with laughter and playful jeers by the assembled Master Masons already holding hot cups of coffee, who questioned the timeliness and intent of late arrivals. Playfully retaliating with joshing and kidding, the Steward returned to his car for the freshly baked sweet-rolls. The men talked and shouted as more members arrived, and Masons shook hands and congratulated the new officers as the election results were passed about.

Soon, a sharp rap was heard, followed by the call, "Brethren, be clothed!" Setting aside their cups and fumbling with apron strings, the proud Masons entered their shiny new Lodge. The opening of the

Lodge proceeded without delay with the Master leading the gathered Masons. At the outer door, the Tiler, out of sight, held his post. Then, suddenly, without warning, sounds were heard resembling some type of scuffle. Armed Arabs, carrying revolvers, had thrown aside the Tiler, Kenny Schmidt. Seated to the right of the new Senior Steward, Al Shipley, the Worshipful Master-elect, leaning forward as the Arabs came bursting through the door, exclaimed "Uh-oh." In front of the menacing intruders, the Master, George Freygang, silently stepped from the East and closed the open volume on the altar.

In a heavy accent, and waving his handgun, one Arab shouted "Stand up!", "Hands up!". With the barrel of his weapon pointing at them, the startled, surprised Americans rose silently to their feet, raising their hands and arms with uncertainty into the air. The apron-clad Masons were then subjected to a body-search by excited, agitated Saudi Security personnel. Too numbed to move, the Masons stood still as white-robed figures searched about the room. Officers were demanded to surrender their sashes and emblems. These were cast into a heap near the altar by the Arabs. Moslem eyes casting about the room apparently could not detect what they were looking for, as an air of subtle frustration seemed to permeate the room. The Master-elect leaned over to whisper to the Senior Steward, "They can't find any women, weapons or booze...", explaining what he presumed was apparently frustrating the raiders in this tense situation. And then, everyone's wallet and other pocket items were seized by the Arabs.

Apparently satisfied that none of the assembled Westerners were armed or a threat, the Arabs eventually allowed everyone to sit, while they continued to mill about, weapons at the ready.

Then, one of the Saudis, bearing an armful of paper, re-entered the room. Handing a stapled sheaf of papers to each Mason present, he shouted "Answer questions!". He repeated his command as he passed out long forms; cheap quality 8x14 paper, containing poorly written and barely readable questions asking for specific details on Masonry and its organizational structure, its communications, and its headquarters. The landlord and one of his laborers had been roughly forced to join the group, and a frantic lady, apparently shopping for

art, approached hysteria in claiming to the secret police that she was not a part of the assembled group, and she was eventually allowed to leave. After a couple of hours the initial shock and tension was somewhat relieved, and the questionnaires were collected by the Saudis.

Pressing on to the next stage of the armed intrusion, secret police set about the room, opening drawers and cabinets, and dumping the contents about the altar. Flags of the United States, Canada, West Germany and Saudi Arabia were unceremoniously thrown on the floor, and upon seeing this, the Senior Steward stepped across the room to address a young Arab. "Hey fella! You just threw the Saudi flag on the floor!" Startled, the young Arab replied in perfect American English, "Oh, my gosh!", and hastily restored the banners to an upright position.

Relaxed but ever alert, the Arabs then permitted the Masons to step out into the outer room for smoking and coffee. Standing at the door, expressionless and watching everyone carefully, was a silent security man.

After approximately three hours had passed, everyone wondered what would be done next. The leader of the secret police's raiding party decided there was no threat for now and that all the rank-and-file members could leave. Not to leave, but to be held in custody were: George Freygang, the Master; Jesse France, the Treasurer; Joe Bays, the Secretary; Heinz Blaufelder, EA; and the Arab groundskeeper employed by Blaufelder. They were all placed under arrest and held in a locked room at a building occupied by the Saudi Arabian Secret Police. Approximately 11' x 11', the room was clean, furnished with new beds and bedding and cooled by new air conditioners. The room was to be their home for the next thirty days. (Within twenty-four hours of the raid, all the wire services and networks had carried the news of this infamous act.)

Individually and as a group, the four Masons were subjected over and over again to a never-ending interrogation concerning their Masonic activities. An officer with the rank of major was in charge and conducted the lengthy, detailed investigation. And all of the materials seized during

the raid on the Masonic Lodge were gathered and pored over in fine detail.

Later on, George Freygang related that the documentation in possession of the secret police before the infamous raid convinced him that the Saudi Security had “..copies of everything” (George’s own words) that had been generated by many of the Masons, including a number of phone conversations.

During this tense period of extreme uncertainty for all the Masons in the area, few things were seen or heard. But approximately two weeks later, the wallets and the personal effects taken during the raid were quietly returned to their owners. The Saudis weren’t certain of Al Shipley’s whereabouts at the time, and gave his wallet to the Senior Steward for delivery to him.

Apparently trying to cover themselves, (..name deleted-Ed.) Aircraft Services Company inadvertently entered into the foray by prematurely firing Freygang, France and Bays. Their worried wives questioned this move, and an important Saudi prince, hearing of this action later was clearly fuming in anger. But unfortunately his anger was too late to change things; the homes of George Freygang, Jesse France and Joe Bays had been searched and anything masonic was confiscated, and this costly and short- sighted move had by that time resulted in much of the employees’ household effects having been sold without the approval or permission of the owners. Company management worked long and hard to try to squeeze out from under that serious move, but the damage had been done. At the end of a long, long thirty days of internment, four pale Masons then emerged silently into the sunlight, and nervous and worried Brethren about the community breathed a small sigh of relief - but not one Mason felt this would be the last of this ordeal, and each silently braced himself for more to come. There was no relaxation or confidence.

George Freygang spoke with the Senior Steward, and related to him how his almost-lavish home had been completely stripped of everything masonic. But despite his ordeal, he spoke in almost amusing terms as he described his long internment, stating that the

treatment he and the others received had been firm, but civil. While Brothers France and Bays had borne up well under the pressure and strain of interrogation, Blaufelder reportedly evidenced signs of anxiety attacks, crying repeatedly. His companions wondered if he would be cracking under the strain. The Arab groundskeeper had been released within a short time, they having satisfied themselves that he was not part of the organization. Freygang also related that the questioning had been minute, and involved every conceivable detail that appeared suspect to the Saudis.

As one example, some of the words in the ritual were represented by little asterisks. The major had questioned this. What was the meaning of the six-pointed star? Was it perhaps Jewish or Israeli? Was that something connected to Zionism? (This writer wonders what the reaction would have been had some typesetter back in New York elected to use a five-pointed asterisk; would the questioning have been more animated?) At the termination of the month-long interrogation, the major, satisfied there was no threat to his religion or his nation, surprised George Freygang by asking him, of all things, how one could become a Mason!

Already aware that George Freygang was also a member of the Shrine, the Saudi Secret Police surprised the membership by asking if they could again provide security for the next Shrine- sponsored 4th of July celebration! Oh, the irony and paradox of the Middle East! To the misinformed Arabs, Shriners meant good and generous; but the Freemasons were suspect! If they only knew!

Some time later, Blaufelder and the Senior Steward spoke more than once about the shock and the sickening effect of the entire affair. The expatriate German, while trying hard to retain composure, would visibly tremble as the topic was explored. One day, he quietly and nervously asked if the Senior Steward would come to his villa to pick up the forgotten coffeemaker. The Coffeemaker! Of course!

To drive out to the villa was a trip filled with some concern; fear of the unknown. The villa interior was still filled with flowers. The paintings for sale still lined the corridor. But the once Masonic Lodge was now

used as an art workroom, filled with large tables and silk-screen equipment. Now, staring sadly at the spot where the altar had been, anger and hurt swelling-up within him, the Steward wondered what had happened to it. “Dammit!”, he thought, “They got every bit of it, including the three Great Lights!”

“I have something you should keep...”, Blaufelder almost whispered through his thick German accent. Retrieving a slender metal rod from under a stack of prints, he handed it to the Steward who, surprised, exclaimed “The baton!” Examining it and rolling it gently in his hand he stood as if transfixed, silently visualizing Brother Joe Bays sporting that baton under his arm with an air of dignified authority as he escorted people about the open Lodge room. Wrapped in memory, he thought he could hear the words and the gavel raps of the Worshipful Master and the Wardens, as faint echoes - as ghosts that refuse to die.

Turning to leave, the Steward saw a tall, frail lady standing silently in the doorway, staring at him with a cold, unwavering look. Neither spoke. Stepping out into the bright sunshine, he grinned happily and said, “No, they didn’t get everything. I’ve got one baton; a memory.”

## **EPILOGUE**

“Sediki” is Arabic, roughly translated meaning ‘friendly’ or ‘friend’. One Elmo Everett of Razorback, Arkansas is reputed to have originated the use of the word as a reference to ethyl alcohol.

Al Shipley, now retired and living in Burbank, California, was employed by a large construction company during his stay in Saudi.

George Freygang was employed by a well-known aircraft company. Deported from Saudi Arabia soon after the incident, he lived for a time in Greece and Spain before returning to the States, where he now lives in Port Charlotte, Florida.

Jesse France demitted to a California Lodge in late 1986, and is presumed to be still residing in California.

Joe Bays' present whereabouts is unknown, although he did contact the Grand Lodge at one time after leaving Saudi Arabia.

Bro. Blaufelder's present whereabouts is unknown, he having made no attempt to contact the Grand Lodge or progress further since 1977.

Jim Krohn, the author and the Senior Steward in this story, has been residing in Longmont, Colorado, where he has been putting his talents to work in various masonic organizations. We hope he concurs with the editing and slight rewrite done in preparing his personal story of the raid on Red Sea Lodge for publication by the ACGL.

Attempts to contact many of the members of the Lodge have been futile, as all of the records were confiscated and duplicate address files had not been provided to the Grand Lodge office. Many personally contacted the Grand Lodge to ensure their continued good standing, and each receives monthly mail from the Grand Lodge.

One last word: the baton and other items recovered from Red Sea Lodge were presented to the ACGL in 1990 by VWBro. Peter Jackson, PDDGM of District 9, Saudi Arabia.



The Noble Ninth District

is

Arabian Lodge No. 882

Nejma Lodge No. 897

Red Sea Lodge No. 919

Milo Lodge No. 928

Pyramid Lodge of Research No. 962