

Butler Lodge Short Takes Volume IV

Michael C. Lee

Butler Lodge No. 254

April 1, 2015

*A compilation of Masonic articles courtesy of Butler Lodge No. 254 in Butler, Missouri.
Publication dates are approximate.*

Top Gun Mason: Eddie Rickenbacker

Edward Vernon Rickenbacker was a fighter pilot, race car driver, businessman, and Freemason. He was America's top fighter Ace in World War I, with a total of twenty-six aerial victories.

Rickenbacker was born on October 8, 1890, in Columbus, Ohio, and developed an early interest in internal-combustion engines and automobiles. By 1917, he was one of the top three race car drivers in the country. He had enlisted in the army just before America's entry into World War I, and was initially assigned as a driver to the staff of General John J. "Black Jack" Pershing, another Freemason. With the help of Colonel William Mitchell, Rickenbacker became a fighter pilot, and was appointed to the 94th Aero Pursuit Squadron. He became a fighter ace five times over, accumulating a total of twenty-six aerial victories, receiving the Distinguished Service Cross, Medal of Merit, Legion of Honor (French), Croix de Guerre (French) and the

Congressional Medal of Honor. He published a book on his war exploits, *Fighting the Flying Circus*, in 1919.

After the war, Rickenbacker worked for Cadillac Motor Car Company and began a career in the American aviation industry in 1932. He worked for American Airways, North American Aviation, and Eastern Air Lines, eventually becoming the president, general manager, and director of Eastern. He retired as president in 1959, and as Chairman of the Board four years later, in 1963.

Rickenbacker became a Freemason on April 17th, 1922, being elevated to Master Mason on June 26th of the same year. He was a member of Kilwinning Lodge No. 297 in Detroit, Michigan; Palestine Chapter No. 159 of Royal Arch Masons (York Rite); Detroit Commandery No. 1 (Knights Templar); the Detroit Scottish Rite (eventually receiving the 33rd degree); and a member of Moslem Shrine Temple. In 1942, he received the Distinguished Achievement Medal from the Grand Lodge of New York.

Rickenbacker died suddenly on July 23, 1973, in Zurich, Switzerland, and is buried in Columbus, Ohio. His eulogy was given by fellow Freemason and Medal of Honor recipient, Jimmy Doolittle.

A Real-Life Captain America: Audie Murphy

Before American sniper Chris Kyle's story hit the big screen, there was Audie Murphy, who was arguably the greatest soldier in American history. Mostly remembered now for his acting career, Murphy's claim to fame began with his service during World War II, where he became the most decorated soldier of the war; he won every single medal for valor including the Congressional Medal of Honor. In many ways, Murphy resembles the fictitious Steve Rogers, better known as Captain America of the Avengers. At 5'5", he was considered too small to be a soldier. When he was seventeen, he had his sister forge a birth certificate in order for him to enlist in the Army. During the war he participated in nine different Army campaigns, winning two Presidential Unit Citations, three Purple Hearts, two Bronze Stars, a Legion of Merit, two Silver Stars, a Distinguished Service Cross, and the Congressional Medal of Honor.

Murphy's Medal of Honor citation was for "Conspicuous Gallantry and Intrepidity Involving Risk of Life Above and Beyond the Call of Duty In Action With the Enemy" in 1945, when he single-handedly mounted the .50 caliber machine gun on a destroyed American tank destroyer and held off a German advance for more than an hour, killing or wounding at least fifty German soldiers before running out of ammunition. Despite being wounded, he led his men in a counter offensive. He ended the war as a First Lieutenant.

Murphy's actions were highlighted in a Life Magazine article which generated a great interest in his story. His autobiography *To Hell and Back* was

published in 1949, which opened the door to a successful acting career. Murphy starred in over fifty films (mostly Westerns), and also appeared as himself in the 1955 biopic of the same name.

Murphy suffered from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (known then as "shellshock"), and was plagued by severe nightmares and bouts of depression. He was reported to have slept with a loaded gun under his pillow.

Murphy became a Freemason on February 14, 1955, at North Hollywood Lodge No. 542. He joined the Scottish Rite at the Valley of Dallas, receiving his 32nd degree on November 14th, 1957. He became a Shriner on November 15, 1957 at the Hella Temple, Dallas. He became a Knight Commander of the Court of Honor (KCCH) on December 11, 1965. He was posthumously awarded the 33rd degree, the highest honor bestowed by the Scottish Rite, shortly after his death in a small plane crash in 1971. He is buried at Arlington National Cemetery.

What National Treasure Got Wrong

Most of us have seen the 2004 Jon Turteltaub movie *National Treasure*, starring Sean Bean, Jon Voight, Christopher Plummer, Harvey Keitel, and some guy named Nicolas Cage. For those of you who have not seen it, the movie begins with Christopher Plummer telling his grandson a long, exciting tale of the deeds and conquests of the Knights Templar – a real life military order of monks who were active between the tenth and twelfth century. The story recounts how the Templars transferred great wealth down through the centuries as they transformed into the Freemasons, eventually moving the treasure to the Americas where the founders (who were also Freemasons) hid it away in New York City, and hired Harvey Keitel to protect it.

It's an intriguing story – and a very good movie. Some of the story holds true; the Templars did acquire a great amount of wealth, and some of the Founding Fathers were Freemasons. However, that is where history and the movie part ways. It is almost universally accepted that the Knights Templar and the Freemasons have no historic connection. The Knights Templar (The Poor Fellow-Soldiers of Christ and of the Temple of Solomon) were utterly wiped out in 1312 on the orders of Pope Clement V, who was encouraged by King Philip IV of France – who was heavily in debt to the Templars. Their vast wealth was transferred to the Knights Hospitallers, a rival group of the day. The Freemasons were not officially established for another four centuries in 1717; details, however, never stopped a good story.

Most historians attribute the Freemason/Knights Templar story to a Scottish-born French Mason named Chevalier Ramsay, who in 1737 suggested a historical link between the Templars and the Masons, suggesting that the Templars had passed down secret knowledge to the Masons. Although Ramsay provided no documentation or other evidence to back up his claim, this story quickly spread and the legend was born. Freemasons themselves liked the story, and by 1779 there were Knights Templar lodges in Europe which eventually developed in the Knights Templar order of the York Rite, still active today. The Knights Templar is the third and final body of the York Rite and the only body that requires members to be Christian. They organize themselves into Commanderies and are best known for their uniform and elaborate drill teams which participate in parades, drill competitions, and other public exhibitions.