



THE MASONIC HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF NEW SOUTH WALES

PAPER No. 108

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DATE: 24 May 2004.

**Bro. FRANCIS EDWARD De GROOT and
Bro. Lieut.-Col. ERIC CAMPBELL, DSO, VD.**

It has recently been reported that the sword used by Francis de Groot to cut the ribbon at the opening of the Sydney Harbour Bridge on 19th March 1932 has been located in Ireland. It is in the possession of his nephew, Frank de Groot, and the National Museum of Australia will try to return it to Australia.

The finding of the sword recalls the famous or infamous incident when the NSW Premier John Thomas Lang was scheduled to cut a ceremonial ribbon to open the Sydney Harbour Bridge on that day in 1932.

Francis de Groot was a member of an organisation called The New Guard which was formed as a result of a meeting at the Imperial Service Club on 16th February 1931. This meeting was convened by Lieutenant Colonel Eric Campbell, a Sydney solicitor and eight prominent Sydney businessmen, including Eric Campbell, were present. The object of the meeting was to *"consider the formation of a selected body of loyal citizens that would be capable of handling any disruption of law and order or the breakdown of essential services that may well be brought about as a logical consequence of the State Government's economic policy and projected legislation."*

It was decided that the meeting form itself into an organising committee (with power to add to its number provided any new member was unanimously approved) to ensure the above ideals. The results were :

The New Guard stands for:

1. Unswerving loyalty to the throne.
2. All for the British Empire.
3. Sane and Honourable Government throughout Australia.
4. Suppression of any disloyal and immoral elements in Government, Industrial and Social circles.
5. Maintenance of the full liberty of the individual.

The rise of the New Guard was closely interrelated with three factors: the depression, the political situation and the influence of war service on returned servicemen.

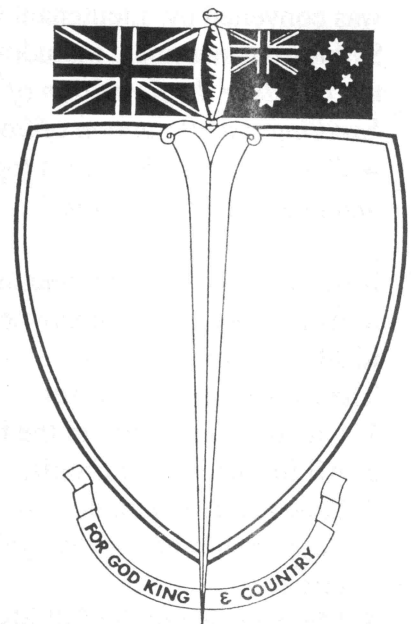
It was estimated that during 1931 and 1932 60,000 men passed through its ranks with a small number of women, largely in an auxiliary capacity, also being involved. Eric Campbell was a very capable organiser with military training and the New Guard was well organised along military lines into localities with local commanders having the ability to make people available when needed.

The need for a bridge to span Sydney Harbour had been recognised from the very early days of the colony. F. H. Greenway in 1815 made the first proposal and periodically more pressure was brought to bear until the tender of Dorman, Long and Co. was accepted in 1924. In 1888 Sir Henry Parkes had won an election on the slogan:

“Now who will stand at my right hand
And build the bridge with me”

Before the construction of the Harbour Bridge motorists on the North Shore face long delays waiting for ferries or undertaking the long and hazardous journey five bridges, (five bridges! where were they?).

As the time for opening the bridge approached the New Guard held a meeting in Chatswood Town Hall and objected strongly to Jack Lang opening the bridge, stating that the Governor, Governor-general or a member of the Royal Family should perform the opening. The Premier held fast and Eric Campbell came up with three alternative schemes. Then along came de Groot with a plan which satisfied Eric Campbell. Francis de Groot was a zone B Commander in the city which met in Hunter Street. He had only been out from his native Ireland for a few years previously and had risen to the rank of Captain in the Xth Hussars. He was a manufacturer of period furniture and an authority on antiques and objets d'art. He refitted the retailer David Jones, was an associate of Sir Samuel Hordern and had made a ceremonial chair for the Governor-general, Sir Isaac Isaacs.



New Guard Badge

Lieutenant-Colonel Eric Campbell, D.S.O., V.D. (1933)

De Groot suggested that an officer in uniform and on a horse would pass unnoticed. But who would it be? As de Groot was virtually unknown he offered to play the part and it was agreed that he was the best person for the job. Great caution was necessary in searching for a horse until Eric Campbell's wife found a suitable mount owned by a Miss Reichard of Pymble.

At 5.00a.m on the day of the opening of the Bridge Campbell's gardener, Gregory, with an old saddle and bridle rode the horse down to the tram shed near Benelong Point to meet de Groot. Wearing an old uniform belonging to Eric Campbell de Groot then set off to perform his exciting act. He made his way up to Government House, where the Light Horse Guard was forming up, keeping out of the way. He followed discreetly behind as the Guard moved off. There was almost a problem in Bridge Street when his "not young" horse slipped on a greasy surface and almost came down but de Groot kept it on its feet but before he could join the Guard they turned right into George Street so the horse was trotted smartly to catch up despite slippery conditions and old age. The instructions were to keep as close to the Guard as possible and endeavour to be inconspicuous as the mistakes in de Groot's appearance would have been very obvious if not lost in a crowd of Guardsmen. The horse had a thin neck, poddy gut, goose rump and was light boned, nothing like a charger class horse as were the Escort Horses. It even had a scraggy mane and tail! De Groot's uniform was all wrong as well and the riding gear did not fit at all with Guard's gear, with among other things no ring to hang the sword's frog, so de Groot just simply stuck it in his Sam Browne belt. In fact when nearing the bridge a policeman held up the traffic and signalled him on.

When de Groot arrived at the spot where the ribbon was to be cut he took up a position with over an hour to wait. At one stage a policeman bumped against de Groot's stirrup, looked up, saluted and said, "Sorry, Sir".



Captain De Groot cutting the Ribbon
Opening of Sydney Harbour Bridge, 19 March 1932.

As the Premier prepared to cut the ribbon de Groot dashed from his spot, cut the ribbon with a sword, and declared "*in the name of the loyal and decent citizens of New South Wales I declare this bridge open.*" The ribbon was then rejoined and the Premier performed the ceremonial cutting.

Frank de Groot was then dragged from the saddle by police led by Superintendent McKay, later to be Commissioner. He fell to the roadway and allegedly called out, "you can't touch me, I am a Commonwealth Officer" "So am I" replied the police officer. De Groot was questioned by the police and later taken to the Reception House and charged with being a person suspected of being insane but after a medical examination he was released and charged with damaging government property, to wit one ribbon etc. He was later discharged on bail of Ten Pounds provided by Eric Campbell. A few days later de Groot appeared in court, was found guilty of offensive behaviour and damaging one ribbon and was fined Five Pounds with Four Pounds costs. De Groot later sued for wrongful arrest and reached an out-of-court settlement. His confiscated sword was also returned.

What of "the Horse"? Apparently an embarrassed police officer stood around holding him before he was taken to the Mounted Police Barracks and after an interval of being well fed and well groomed he was returned to Pymble glossy and contented.

Following the defeat of the Lang Government in 1932 the New Guard faded away.

De Groot later returned to Ireland and died there in 1969. Andrew Moore, Professor of History, at the University of Western Sydney, on a recent trip to Ireland was approached by Frank de Groot, a nephew of Francis Edward de Groot, with the sword offering it for sale. As explained above a valuation is being sought by the National Museum of Australia. It seems an earlier offer was made by the operators of the Bridge Climb but was rejected by Frank de Groot.

Francis Edward de Groot, a manufacturer, was initiated in Lodge Army and Navy, No. 517, on 11th September 1940, passed on 9th October 1940 and called off on 22nd September 1956. No date of raising is recorded.

Eric Campbell, a solicitor, was initiated in Lodge Booree, No. 335, on 24th October 1921, passed on 28th November 1921 and raised on 27th March 1922.

Ref: The Rallying Point, Campbell, Eric
SMH of various dates
Who's Who in Australia