

The life of General Pamplona

A presentation by
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Introduction and early life

Manoel Ignácio Martins Pamplona Corte Real (1762-1832) belongs to a group of historical personalities about whom relatively little is known. Rui Moura showed in his presentation that the image of General Pamplona is influenced by the ideal of a romantic hero which, as far as can be judged from historical sources, is far from the reality.

Nevertheless, his place in Portuguese history certainly deserves greater attention, because he played a relevant role in the troubled period between the end of the Old Regime and the beginning of the Liberal Regime in the 1820s and 1830s. He was Prime Minister and also minister for several other portfolios, including Minister of War, under D. João VI; a member of the Constituent Cortes, Portugal's first effective Parliament (1821-1822), and he was elevated to the status of Count of Subserra. He was also Portugal's Ambassador to Madrid.

Rui Moura considered that Pamplona led an adventurous and captivating life. Before his impressive, but often contradictory, political career, he served in the Portuguese, Russian and French armies, achieving the rank of General in both Portugal and France. He was also a writer, translator, and publicist of his own works; a naturalised French citizen; and a French nobleman, having been given the title of Baron de Pamplona by Louis XVIII.

From parish records Pamplona was born in Angra do Heroísmo on Terceira in the Azores in 1762, although other sources suggest 1760, which appears more likely. There has always been doubt about his age as he apparently tried to pass himself off as being younger in order to enhance his promotion prospects in France, with some French documents suggesting he was born in 1766 or even 1769. As a child he was sent to the Royal College of Nobles in Lisbon, an educational establishment set up by the Marquis of Pombal for young aristocrats. But when he arrived there, he found it closed for reorganization and went instead to the Royal College of Mafra.

At Mafra he developed a taste for reading and writing. Fellow students were the son of D. Maria I, Prince D. José, who would die at a young age, Prince D. João – the future King, and D. Francisco José Maria de Brito, nephew of the Bishop of Beja, who would go on to be the Portuguese Ambassador in Paris and Madrid and play an important role in Pamplona's life. Pamplona then moved to the Faculty of Mathematics at the University of Coimbra. After Coimbra he decided to adopt a military career, enlisting in the *Cavalaria de Castelo Branco* at a relatively advanced age for the times, being appointed an Ensign in 1786.

A troubled military career

Pamplona served successively in the Portuguese Army (178?-1788), in the Russian Army (1788-1793), in the Allied Army against the French Republic (1793), again in the Portuguese Army (1793-1807), in Napoleon's Army (1807-1814) and later in the French Army of Louis XVIII (1814-1817). He and his contemporary, Gomes Freire de Andrade, were the only two Portuguese officers to join the Imperial Russian Army to fight against the Ottoman Empire. He excelled in the 1788 campaign at Ochakov (now in Ukraine), but it was during this time that he learnt of the death of Prince D. José which, for Pamplona, was a catastrophe. *I just lost a beloved Prince and the only true protector I had on earth.*

On returning to Western Europe he joined the British, Austrian and Hanoverian Coalition Army under the command of the Duke of York, which defeated the French Republicans at Valenciennes, as revolutionary France had declared war against the Habsburg monarchy in 1792. He returned to Lisbon in 1793, where he was later transferred to the Almeida Regiment in 1796, rising to the rank of Brigadier in 1802. In 1806

he married D. Isabel de Roxas e Lemos who was a widow. This was a morganatic marriage; his wife had a considerable fortune as a descendant of the Lords of Trofa, including the *Quinta de Subserra*, near Vila Franca de Xira. They had no children, although he did adopt his wife's daughter by her previous marriage.

In 1807, during the First Invasion of Portugal by Napoleon's troops, Pamplona changed sides, and was the third-in-command of the Portuguese Legion of 8,500, which was formed in 1807 by Junot to fight for Napoleon. Indeed, it was Pamplona, in the absence of his commanders, who presented the Legion to Napoleon in Bayonne in 1808. The Portuguese Legion was mainly used by Napoleon as reinforcements, rather than front line troops. Some of the soldiers fled to England to form the Loyal Lusitania Regiment in 1809, and returned to Portugal to fight the French under Wellington's command, while those who remained loyal to Napoleon took part in the sieges of Zaragoza.

Pamplona then accompanied Massena in the Third (and final) Invasion of Portugal in 1810. Although he subsequently protested that this was done under duress, several other officers had, as noted, chosen to defect. Pamplona organised intelligence gathering about the opposing forces, using a network of spies, a role of which Wellington was fully aware. He played an important role in the taking of Almeida and during the occupation of Coimbra he was in charge of controlling looting by the French troops, an almost impossible task, as they were following the bad example set by their commander Marshal Ney. As a graduate of Coimbra University, Pamplona did, however, succeed in protecting its fine buildings and its contents, which was to stand in his favour later on. Who knows how much of the wonderful library might still be there for us to see if he had he not taken a stand?

On 16 March, 1811, Pamplona and his wife, who had accompanied him with the French, were condemned to death, together with other senior Portuguese officers. Special treatment was to be reserved for Pamplona who was to have his hands cut off while alive and was then to be garroted. His ashes were to be thrown in the sea. However, in the end, only João Mascarenhas Neto, who had led the capture of Coimbra in 1810, was executed, at Caís de Sodr  on 1 March, 1811.

After the withdrawal of the French from Portugal Pamplona had little to do and he pleaded with Napoleon to be allowed to visit Paris and to be promoted to General. Rui Moura describes a communication addressed to Napoleon as "pompous, servile and obsequious", inconsistent with the style usually used at that time. In the Spring of 1812 one of his wishes was finally granted, when he was given command of a combat brigade in the Second Army Corps. This Corps succeeded in occupying Polotsk, now in Belarus, and Pamplona was appointed Governor of the city. His ambition and lobbying now came to fruition, as he was awarded the *L gion d'honneur*.

With the abdication of Napoleon in April, 1814 and his subsequent exile to Elba, the position of Pamplona changed again. Together with other Portuguese Legion members who were in France, he was ordered to report to Marshal Beresford, who was in Bayonne. This would have meant certain death. However, several French generals pleaded for their Portuguese colleagues, who were finally allowed to stay in France. On 1 March, 1815, Napoleon returned from Elba, starting the Hundred Days that would eventually lead to the Battle of Waterloo. Pamplona then left the country with his wife and adopted daughter for London, where he applied through the Portuguese Embassy to obtain permission to return to Lisbon, but this was denied. Then, in another high-risk move, he headed to Belgium in 1815, to offer his support to Louis XVIII, who appointed him military commander of the *C te D'Or D partement*, based in Dijon, despite his advanced age, and in February, 1817 was made *Baron de Pamplona*. In 1817, funds for his position in Dijon ran out and he was retired on a pension of 4,000 francs per year, having failed in his efforts to be promoted to Lieutenant General.

Unable to return to Portugal, he lived in Pantin, near Paris, and took French nationality, probably in order to secure his pension. There he devoted himself to writing and publishing, and to obtaining amnesty from the Portuguese government. Some of his books, which, of course, always portrayed him in a favourable light, made their way to the court of D. Jo o VI in Rio de Janeiro and were well received.

Politician and diplomat

Following the Liberal Revolt that began in Porto in August, 1820 and the election of the Constituent Cortes (Sovereign Assembly), which met at the beginning of 1821, a proposal was put to the Constituent Cortes to give a general amnesty to all those with cases similar to that of Pamplona. This was approved and signed by the Regency on 9 February of the same year. Anticipating this outcome, Pamplona and his family had already left Paris, and were waiting close to the border in Badajoz by the beginning of February. Once he obtained a copy of the signed Amnesty Decree, he crossed the border to Elvas and asked the military commander there for a military escort to his property at Vila Franca de Xira, the *Quinta de Subserra*.

His political career then developed rapidly. On 3 July, 1821, he was part of the reception committee at the Terreiro do Paço (Praça do Comércio) which welcomed back D. João VI on his return from Brazil. From 24 September to 25 October he served as Minister of War for D. João VI, and between October, 1821 and October, 1822 he represented some of the islands of the Azores in the Constituent Cortes. In April, 1822 he finally received from Louis XVIII the promotion he had been hoping for, becoming an honorary Lieutenant General. The only setback was that he failed to get re-elected by the Azores in November, 1822.

In disrespect to the King, D. João VI, Pamplona became the right-hand man of D. Miguel during the anti-Liberalist counter-revolution of 1823, known as the Vilafrancada, which began on 27 May, 1823 in Vila Franca de Xira, close to Pamplona's home. Miguel declared his support for an absolutist monarchy and called on Pamplona to join him and his cause and overthrow the new parliamentary system. However Pamplona remained loyal to the King and advised the prince to obey his father's summons to go to Lisbon. The King himself marched on Vila Franca where he received the submission of his son and of the troops under the instructions of Pamplona, allowing Miguel to return to Lisbon. At the same time, D. João VI decided to abolish the 1822 Constitution and dismiss the Cortes. To widespread astonishment, Pamplona was rewarded with the title of Count of Subserra, and he became Prime Minister of the first government of the Joanino Regime on 1 June, 1823.

In April, 1824, the failed *Absolutist* April Revolt, or *Abrilada* led by the D. Miguel against his father resulted in D. Miguel's exile to Vienna. There was no place Pamplona in the new government and he was appointed Ambassador to London, a position he never took up. Instead he went to Madrid as Ambassador, however opposition from the sister of D. João VI in the Spanish court made his position untenable and he soon left, returning with his family to his house in France.

In March, 1826, he lost his protector when D. João VI died, leading to the return of D. Miguel as Regent to Queen Maria II. Nevertheless, Pamplona risked return to Portugal in April, 1827 and presented his support to D. Miguel. This had little effect, as he was arrested on 14 June, 1828. Always accompanied by his wife, he was first held at the *Forte de São Lourenço do Bugio* in the middle of the Tagus, before being transferred successively to the *Torre de Belém*, the *Fortaleza de São Julião da Barra*, and, finally, to the *Forte Nossa Senhora da Graça* at Elvas, where he died on 16 October, 1832.

Conclusions

General Rui Moura concluded his presentation by noting that there is no doubt that Pamplona had a life full of adventure during an extraordinary period of transition, with a tendency to change loyalty to suit his own ambitions. He was not exempt from controversy and contradictions. That he served with Napoleon should not be interpreted as support for the ideas of the French Revolution and having participated, as a deputy, in the drafting of the Constitution of 1822, and having died in the dungeons by order of D. Miguel, does not mean that he was a supporter of Liberal ideas. Certain texts state that Pamplona was a Liberal. General Rui Moura left it to his listeners to decide.

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Prepared by Andrew Shepherd and Mark Crathorne, based on Rui Moura's presentation to the British Historical Society of Portugal's Annual Lunch, 2020 and his publication "O Liberalismo e os Militares em Portugal" Actas do XXVII Colóquio de História Militar, 11-15 November, 2019.