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## RANALD MacDONELL

died 30th January 1847

by Malcolm Howe

It appears that to date nothing has been found on record concerning the origins, early life and career of this Scots officer who lost his life in Portugal in the Legitimist cause leading the troops of the deposed King Dom Miguel.

According to Rose Macaulay in "*They went to Portugal*" ( Penguin Books edition 1985 pages 334/5) where she describes him as "*of Glengarry*", he was a Roman Catholic Highlander who had fought with the Spanish Army during the Peninsular War. At the beginning of 1823, he was captured by the Portuguese who had seized a pirate ship on which Macdonell had embarked from Cadiz. Imprisoned in the Castle of St. George, Lisbon, he met the liberal Saldanha, who was a political prisoner also incarcerated there. They made friends and Saldanha gave Macdonell money on his release to pay for his passage home. They met again in Paris in 1832, when Dom Miguel reigned in Portugal and again Saldanha, a political exile, gave a broke Macdonell the money for his fare to Scotland.

In 1833 civil war waged in Portugal between the invading liberal forces led by Dom Pedro, the deposed Emperor of Brazil and the Portuguese Army of the King, Dom Miguel I, his younger brother. Saldanha returned as a general leading the liberal troops and Dom Miguel eventually lost Lisbon. The King dispensed with the services of the French General Bourmont, who was in charge of his army. On the recommendation of Wellington, no less, Dom Miguel appointed Macdonell in Bourmont's place. Macdonell landed at São Martinho in September 1833, arriving in the "*Lord of the Isles*" with a Captain Elliot and several French and Scots officers. He was faced by his old friend Saldanha from the

opposing camp. Macdonell successfully executed a brilliant retreat to Santarém to establish a base but still failed to recover Lisbon. The senior Portuguese officers in Dom Miguel's army conspired against him and a Portuguese General, Póvoas, was appointed to replace him on the 20th December. Macdonell then went to Spain to join the supporters of Don Carlos, during the 1st Carlist War. Dom Miguel lost the war in Portugal and went into exile on 1st June 1834, leaving behind many loyal supporters for the Legitimist cause.

In 1846 there was a popular uprising, which started in the north, against the Portuguese Government of Cabral. The women of the Minho had been incensed by the imposition of restrictions that prevented the burial of their beloved ones in their local church. Led by a legendary figure, called "*Maria da Fonte*" they fought the authorities with pistols and knives. Miguel's supporters seized the opportunity and Macdonell came back to Portugal on 6th August, heading some 3000 guerrilla troops, issuing a proclamation in November 1846 to restore Miguel who then was living in exile in London. The leaders of Dom Miguel's cause referred to their important and high ranking supporters by nicknames, to avoid identification. Macdonell was called "*Adrião = Adrian*" and had a reputation for excessive drinking. His forces were defeated after a four hour battle at Braga on the 20th December and the victors only took one prisoner, a major, having slaughtered another 139 without quarter. They also captured Macdonell's baggage, money and papers, whilst he fled to Guimarães and Amarante. Moving on towards Vila Real, he was suddenly surprised near Vila Pouca de Aguiar on the 30th January 1847 by a cavalry picket, led by a sergeant. Macdonell said he wished to surrender his sword to the commander.

The sergeant, contemplating loot, replied with a sword thrust saying he was in charge, to which Macdonell responded with a shot. Meanwhile, one of the soldiers cut him down, in the back.

No drawing or painting of Macdonell seems to have survived but he was described by Miguel Pereira Negrão, who accompanied him, as "*an old man, a beautiful rich looking person, tall and large, without being fat or heavy, with white hair, a little bald, clean-shaven, with snow white side burns, that stood out in front of his cheeks, he had good deportment like Wellington.*"

His spy glass and ivory folding ruler for map measurements were in the collection of the Count D'Alvellos in 1936. The Portuguese translated his Christian name to "Reinaldo" spelling the English as "Reynold".

The British Army Lists from 1833 to 1840 cite several officers named Ranald MacDonald/Macdonell; General Sir James Macdonell of Glengarry, who died in 1857 had fought at Waterloo and was equerry to the Dowager Queen Adelaide, consort of William IV. Although Ranald Macdonell was described as "*of Glengarry*" by Rose Macaulay, he is not clearly identified in their family pedigree in Burke's Landed Gentry. However there is listed without any detail or dates one Ranald Macdonell, second son of Alexander Macdonell the 3rd of Culachie and of Kyttrie. Alexander's eldest son Allan fought in the 1745 Rising, emigrated to America, died at Quebec in 1792 and would have been considerably older than the Ranald who died in 1847.

The '*Grande Enciclopedia Portuguesa*' states that Macdonell was buried in the Chapel of Santo Amaro, Sabroso, near Pedras Salgadas. The Blue Guide to Portugal notes that "*After 8 Km (ie travelling south from Chaves) we pass (r) Sabrosa (sic) where a small ruined chapel*

*commemorates General Ronald Macdonald (or Macdonnell) a reactionary Scot who met his death here in 1847 during a skirmish.” However the ‘Guia de Portugal’ 5th Volume July 1969 edition for Tras-os-Montes, Tome I page 359, gives the following details “it was near to Sabroso in the tapada of Ervedoiros, with only five accompanying guerrilla officers, that the soldiers of the patrol, without command and blinded by the possible money that they would find in the baggage of the guerrilla chief, cut him down, likewise the Colonel de Baião who was found at his side. The other four on horseback succeeded in escaping. The body of the Scottish General was interred in the Hermitage of Santo António of Sabroso (16th Century) that one finds on the the left of the settlement”.*

A visit to Sabroso on 10th June 1999, *Dia de Cambes*, was made with the aim of locating Macdonell’s grave. The village lies to the west of the modern main road from Chaves to Vila Pouca de Aguiar. Several inhabitants were consulted and none of them, although they had resided at Sabroso from birth, had any knowledge of Macdonell or his grave. The church looks modern and Saint Amaro is featured in tiles on the outside wall. I was assured there was no memorial within relating to Macdonell’s internment nor in the neighbouring cemetery. As to any ruined chapel, there were only the remains of a ‘*capelinha*’ in the front garden of a villager. However this had been dedicated to Our Lady whose statue still graces the ruins. Mercifully, there survives a wayside shrine, an ‘*alminha*’ on the left of the lower main street passing south to north. The traces of paintings of saints on the inside of the shrine can be clearly seen, including Saint Anthony of Lisbon and the Archangel Michael. Could this shrine have commemorated Macdonell, a fervent *Miguelista*?

The building behind is the private residence of a judge and appears to have been reconstructed. The largest scale published map records a site named ‘*Ta pado*’ (sic) located in a pine wood two kilometres north-east of Sabroso. The place name is an archaic alternative for ‘*tapada*’. Could this be the site where Macdonell was slaughtered? None of the inhabitants of Sabroso, who were asked, knew of the location of the ‘*tapada dos Ervedoiros*’. It is the only modern place name near Sabroso that might correspond to the ‘*parkland of the Herb growers*’.



**The Alminha at Sabroso**

The wayside shrine at Sabroso with traces of paintings of St Anthony of Lisbon and the Archangel Michael; the tartan tribute was placed there on *Dia de Camões* 1999.

Extensive enquiries regarding Ranald Macdonell's origins have been made in Scotland with Clan Donald Society and the archivist of Clanranald without avail. It seems sad that any record of the beginning and end of the life of this colourful adventurer, who played such a leading part in the Portuguese political struggles in the 19th Century, should have disappeared. No one at Sabroso had any difficulty understanding his surname but nowadays they all thought it referred to something to eat!



Proclamação

The proclamation issued in the north of Portugal in 1846 by 'Reinaldo' Macdonell calling for the restoration of D.Miguel I; the guerrilla leader's spy glass and map ruler.

The descendants of Dom Pedro reigned in Portugal until 1910 when the republic was implemented and the last King, Dom Manuel II, went into exile. When Manuel died in Twickenham in 1932 there were no descendants of this branch and the succession reverted to Dom Miguel's progeny who returned to live in Portugal in 1953. The head of the Portuguese Royal Family today is His Royal Highness Dom Duarte, the Duke of Braganza. He is the great grandson of the King Dom Miguel I and is greatly respected in Portugal, particularly by the descendants of the Portuguese who were Dom Miguel's adherents, who nobly served his cause, some losing their lives, like Ranald Macdonell.

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Malcolm Howe is a member of the Society who has contributed various articles in the past. He has recently published a book – *The Braganza Story* – which can be obtained through the Society.