



## Angus Macleod of Gravir - Soldier in the Peninsular War (1808-14)

The Earl of Seaforth misjudged the situation and supported the losing side in the Jacobite Rebellion of 1745. The result was that his estates and his title were forfeited and he was in disgrace with the British Crown. Subsequently as a favour the Crown restored the Seaforth Estates and the title in 1771, and in order to demonstrate his gratitude to the Crown, Seaforth proposed to raise the 78<sup>th</sup> Seaforth Regiment from among the tenants on his Highland and Islands estates.

During the Napoleonic Wars the Seaforth Lewis landlord raised battalion after battalion of young men on his estates by sending his hated agents to the villages to pounce on unsuspecting young men and forcibly enlist them in the Army against their will. There are many accounts and oral tradition of such events in Lewis.

One such Lewis person was Angus Macleod, 12 Gravir (1785-1874) who, after being forced into the Army fought in the Peninsular War in Spain, Portugal and France during the years round about 1810, until the French Army was driven out of the Iberian Peninsula at the point of the bayonet by the British Army, under the leadership of the heroic Irishman, Arthur Wellesley, who subsequently became the Duke of Wellington, known as the 'Iron Duke'. Subsequently the Duke of Wellington inflicted final defeat on Napoleon at Waterloo who was banished to St. Helena, and peace was restored in Europe for the subsequent 40 years.

We are indebted to Angus Maclennan, grandson of Angus Macleod, 12 Gravir for the story of his grandfather Angus Macleod in one of the battles during the Peninsular War with Napoleon. Angus Maclennan was the son of Bess, the youngest daughter of Angus Macleod, 12 Gravir, and her husband Murdo Maclennan who was evicted from Lemreway and settled for a while at 20 Crossbost. Bess and Murdo married in 1852 and they emigrated to Quebec in 1862, and eventually took a farm on the Salmon River near the township of Linwick. At least their first two children were born in Lewis.

He tells us that Angus Macleod, 12 Gravir, was a fine looking man, six feet tall, dark hair, dark eyes and Gaelic speaking. His pal in the army was another Lewis man by the name of Kenneth Murray, who, being a few years older than Angus, had spent some time at sea in the Merchant Navy before joining the army. Kenneth acquired various skills during his travels including boxing and other sports as well as his natural ability as a comedian.

Being well and favourably known among the sailors Kenneth was introduced to a Scot who kept an alehouse in a French port and he was engaged as an entertainer to teach his patrons the sports and pastimes of Scotland. He soon learned to speak French like a native and his boss held him in great esteem as he proved to be a good asset to his business over a period of years.

When therefore Kenneth gave up his work in France and joined the British Army, his superiors were quick to realise the potential value of a dark haired fluent French speaking man as a scout to spy out the opposition and strength of the French forces.

Kenneth was therefore sent out on many assignments dressed up for the part in the costume of the French peasants and he was very successful at that work. Particularly after the French Army lost several battles in Spain and they fought a long rearguard action right across Spain and on to French territory, hotly pursued by the Iron Duke.

Some time after reaching French territory the French Army halted their retreat and made a show as if to fight. Wellington suspected that the French had received reinforcements and that he was being lured into a trap, so once more scouts were sent out. Among them was our man Kenneth Macleod who operated always on his own, but on this occasion he felt that a good pal would be an advantage, so he chose his good friend Angus Macleod from Gravir, a big dark haired man like himself. These brave men knew very well that if they were caught it would be torture and sure death for them, but they did not falter.

Garbed in the costume of the French peasants they worked their way through the French lines under cover of darkness, and found the French Army in a worse plight than they had expected. The four major battles of Vittorio, Valladolid, Sarragosa and Salamanca which they had fought in Spain, had thinned their ranks and reinforcements had not arrived. The rearguard was spread out with great show, but it was nothing but a thin screen and they were hard put for a rest, hence the so-called stand they made. The fortunes of war had truly gone against them at least.

With this and other valuable information the men hurried back with all possible speed, travelling in fields in daylight and on the road at night, and sleeping in barns and haystacks during the day. They subsisted on what they were able to get. One night on their return journey they were following the less travelled of two roads leading back to the lines, and were almost there when they heard the tramp of horse's feet ahead of them. Immediately the two men struck across the fields to the other road, but the same unpleasant sound greeted their ears there, more horsemen! Daylight was close at hand.

They spotted a haystack in a farmer's barnyard and back there they went, got into the haystack at the first rays of the morning. Feeling secure and the odour of the hay being sweet, they soon slept. They were so close to the British lines that they heard the bugle calling the soldiers, so near and yet so far. Once again as they woke they heard the unwelcome sound of horses' feet and they peeped through the hay only to see a troop of several horsemen approaching the haystack. The horsemen secured a rope round the haystack and tied their horses to the rope. One man was left in charge and the rest went into the farmer's house.

The hay must have tasted sweet because the horses soon made inroads into it and before long the men could feel the haystack begin to rock. Something must be done quickly they thought, because if the haystack fell it would be disastrous. Kenneth whispered his plan to his pal Angus, and watching his chance leapt squarely down on top of the unlucky Frenchman crushing him to the ground. They quickly bound and gagged him, then they took a fine horse and made for the road, but they came to a fence and Kenneth jumped down to effect an opening. When they had taken the horses through the hole Kenneth told Angus to beat it while he built something of a barricade to check anyone who might pursue them. Kenneth was pleased to see Angus galloping off to get the report to their Commander, but before he had finished barricading the hole in the fence, he realised that some horsemen were bearing down on him. They had come through a gate the men had not known about.

Kenneth went to mount his horse but something went wrong and he was thrown to the ground. Springing to his feet he made for a small patch of timber (trees) close by, but one of the Frenchmen, seeing his plight took after him, sword in hand, and although Kenneth was a fast runner the horse was faster and soon overtook him a few yards from the woods. The Frenchman made a swipe at Kenneth to cut off his head, but Kenneth ducked his head and turned quickly as a hare before a hound. The Frenchman in turning too quickly caused his horse to stumble. It fell and broke its neck, pinning the rider's leg under him.

The fortunes of war are at times fickle; a minute earlier the Scotsman was close to decapitation, but now the Frenchman, a fine looking young officer, was at the Scotsman's mercy. Mercy the young man asked for, and mercy he received. Kenneth in his good natured way, smiling asked him in clear French if he was hurt and then dragged him clear off his fallen animal. Then he handed him his sword and started for the woods. The Frenchman told him it would be useless for him to try and escape. 'Your best plan,' he said, 'would be to surrender to me and everything possible will be done for you tonight'.

Kenneth felt that Angus had got away safely and if he had, it was absolutely certain that the Iron Duke would come to his rescue quickly, so he thanked his late enemy and by that time a host of Frenchmen were seen coming towards him. As Kenneth was approaching the shelter of the woods, the young French officer wished him luck and warned him not to let on that he could speak French. A mob of people was soon at hand but Kenneth kept them off until two Cavalry Officers came, and he then surrendered to the Captain in command.

He was questioned but he divulged nothing. They took him back to the farm while the mob was clamouring for his life. The French Captain told the mob that military ethics would stand. There was but for one way to dispose of a spy, and that was to be shot at sunrise.

To appease the wrath of the mob, the Captain tied a rope round Kenneth's chest and hitched it to the saddle of his horse and away they went round the field. Kenneth kept his feet for a while but again the horse proved superior and poor Kenneth was dragged along, to the joy of the mob.

When they let him loose he came up smiling because he saved himself to some extent by hanging on to the rope with his strong hands. He promptly saluted the crowd and like a flash turned several handsprings and performed some of his sea antics and then he rolled like a cartwheel on his hands and feet through the thickest part of the crowd. It seems that Kenneth understood well the love of the French for the spectacular, and that group of French people were all of a sudden turned from enemies to friends.

They gave him food and he heard many remarks in his praise. Some even thought that he ought not to be shot but kept in prison for the duration of the war. When the Captain started away with him, he began throwing kisses to the girls, to the amazement of them all. So intense was the feeling for him that some of the women even wept.

In the meantime the Iron Duke was busy. Upon receiving the report from Angus Macleod he quickly decided what to do. Taking the main portion of his troops that outnumbered the French, he went along the enemy's flank and when he arrived at about the centre, he gave the order, 'Strike through with all your ferocity and vigour'.

The order was carried out so quickly and fiercely that the French Army was cut in two. The remaining portion of his troops attacked the rear of the French Army, which soon surrendered, and our heroic Kenneth Murray was rescued in time.

In due course Angus Macleod Gravir was discharged from the British Army and he married and had a family of four girls as follows:

Angus Macleod	1785 -1874	
Christina Macleod	1788 -1858	Daughter of J. Macleod and Ishbel Kennedy, Cromore
Ishbel	1815	Mrs J. Nicolson, 32 Gravir
Effie	1820	Mrs J. Nicolson, 9 Lemreway/12 Gravir
Christina	1831-1910	Mrs M. Macmillan, 3 Gravir
Betty or Bess	1833-1902	Mrs Murdo Macleennan, Quebec, Canada

Bess and Murdo Macleennan died in 1902 only six days apart.

Bess took her mother's spinning wheel to Canada and it was passed down to her eldest daughter Catherine and so forth in the family. Angus Macleod, 12 Gravir originally bought the spinning wheel for his bride when they were married after the end of the Napoleonic Wars.

Murdo Macleennan and Bess Macleod's family were as follows:

Murdo Macleennan	1821-1902	
Bess Macleod	1833-1902	Daughter of Angus Macleod 12 Gravir
Catherine	1855-1930	Married Harry Reid
John Angus	1860-1938	?
Christine	?	
Alex	?	
Isabella	?	Married Donald Mackay
Marie	?	Married Michael Quinn
Murdo	?	
Annie	?	

Although Angus Macleod (1785-1874) was well into his 70's when his daughter Bess and family emigrated to Canada he accompanied them and spent the last part of his active life in Canada.

Mrs Atack, 631 Los Rubies, Green Valley, Arizona 95614, one of the Canadian descendants visited her relations in Lewis in 1988 and we exchanged information on this ceilidh house story.

[ends]

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