

CAMERON

Source: The Scottish Highlands, Highland Clans and Highland Regiments, Volume II (of 2) by Sir John Scott Keltie

Camerons—Macleans of Dowart, Lochbuy, Coll, Ardgour, Torloisk, Kinlochaline, Ardtornish, Drimnin, Tapul, Scallasdale, Muck, Borrera, Treshinish, Pennycross—Macnaughton—Mackenricks—Macknights—Macnayers—Macbraynes—Maceols—Siol O'Cain—Munroes—Macmillans.

Another clan belonging to the district comprehended under the old Maormordom of Moray, is that of the Camerons or clan Chameron. According to John Major,[202] the clan Cameron and the clan Chattan had a common origin, and for a certain time followed one chief; but for this statement there appears to be no foundation. Allan, surnamed MacOchtry, or the son of Uchtred, is mentioned by tradition as the chief of the Camerons in the reign of Robert II.; and, according to the same authority, the clan Cameron and the clan Chattan were the two hostile tribes between whose champions, thirty against thirty, was[218] fought the celebrated combat at Perth, in the year 1396, before King Robert III. with his nobility and court. The Camerons, says a manuscript history of the clan, have an old tradition amongst them that they were originally descended from a younger son of the royal family of Denmark, who assisted at the restoration of Fergus II. in 404; and that their progenitor was called Cameron from his crooked nose, a name which was afterwards adopted by his descendants. "But it is more probable," adds the chronicler, "that they are the aborigines of the ancient Scots or Caledonians that first planted the country;" a statement which proves that the writer of the history understood neither the meaning of the language he employed, nor the subject in regard to which he pronounced an opinion.

As far back as can distinctly be traced, this tribe had its seat in Lochaber, and appears to have been first connected with the house of Isla in the reign of Robert Bruce, from whom, as formerly stated, Angus Og received a grant of Lochaber. Their more modern possessions of Lochiel and Locharkaig,[203] situated upon the western side of the Lochy, were originally granted by the Lord of the Isles to the founder of the clan Ranald, from whose descendants they passed to the Camerons. This clan originally consisted of three septs,—the Camerons or MacMartins of Letterfinlay, the Camerons or MacGillonies of Strone, and the Camerons or MacSorlies of Glennevis; and from the genealogy of one of these septs, which is to be found in the manuscript of 1450, it has been inferred that the Lochiel family belonged to the second, or Camerons of Strone, and that being thus the oldest cadets, they assumed the title of Captain of the clan Cameron.[204] Mr Skene conjectures that, after the victory at Perth, the MacMartins, or oldest branch, adhered to the successful party, whilst the great body of the clan, headed by the Lochiel family, declared themselves independent; and that in this way the latter were placed in that position which they have ever since retained. But however this may be, Donald Dhu, who was probably the grandson of Allan MacOchtry, headed the clan at the battle of Harlaw, in 1411, and afterwards united with the captain of the clan Chattan in supporting James I. when that king was employed in reducing to obedience Alexander, Lord of the Isles. Yet these rival clans, though agreed in this matter, continued to pursue their private quarrels without intermission; and the same year in which they deserted the Lord of the Isles, and joined the royal banner, viz. 1429, a desperate encounter took place, in which both suffered severely, more especially the Camerons. Donald Dhu, however, was present with the royal forces at the battle of Inverlochy, in the year 1431, where victory declared in favour of the Islanders, under Donald Balloch; and immediately afterwards his lands were ravaged by the victorious chief, in revenge for his desertion of the Lord of the Isles, and he was himself obliged to retire to Ireland, whilst the rest of the clan were glad to take refuge in the inaccessible fastnesses of the mountains. It is probably from this Donald Dhu that the Camerons derived their patronymic appellation of MacDhonnail Duibh, otherwise MacConnel Dui, "son of Black Donald."

But their misfortunes did not terminate here. The Lord of the Isles, on his return from captivity, resolved to humble a clan which he conceived had so basely deserted him; and with this view, he bestowed the lands of the Camerons on John Garbh Maclean of Coll, who had remained faithful to him in every vicissitude of fortune. This grant, however, did not prove effectual. The clan Cameron, being the actual occupants of the soil, offered a sturdy resistance to the intruder; John Maclean, the second laird of Coll, who had held the estate for some time by force, was at length slain by them in Lochaber; and Allan, the son of Donald Dhu, having acknowledged himself a vassal of the Lord of Lochalsh, received in return a promise of support against all who pretended to dispute his right, and was thus enabled to acquire the estates of Locharkaig and Lochiel, from the latter of which his descendants have taken their territorial denomination. By a lady of the family of Keppoch, this Allan, who was surnamed MacCoilduy, had a son, named Ewen, who was captain of the clan[219] Cameron in 1493, and afterwards became a chief of mark and distinction. Allan, however, was the most renowned of all the chiefs of the Camerons, excepting, perhaps, his descendant Sir Ewen. He had the character of being one of the bravest leaders of his time, and he is stated to have made no less than thirty-five expeditions into the territories of

his enemies. But his life was too adventurous to last long. In the thirty-second year of his age he was slain in one of the numerous conflicts with the Mackintoshes, and was succeeded by his son Ewen, who acquired almost the whole estates which had belonged to the chief of clan Ranald; and to the lands of Lochiel, Glenluy, and Locharkaig, added those of Glennevis, Mamore, and others in Lochaber. After the forfeiture of the last Lord of the Isles, he also obtained a feudal title to all his possessions, as well those which he had inherited from his father, as those which he had wrested from the neighbouring clans; and from this period the Camerons were enabled to assume that station among the Highland tribes which they have ever since maintained.

The Camerons having, as already stated, acquired nearly all the lands of the clan Ranald, Ewen Allanson, who was then at their head, supported John Moydertach, in his usurpation of the chiefship, and thus brought upon himself the resentment of the Earl of Huntly, who was at that time all-powerful in the north. Huntly, assisted by Fraser of Lovat, marched to dispossess the usurper by force, and when their object was effected they retired, each taking a different route. Profiting by this imprudence, the Camerons and Macdonalds pursued Lovat, against whom their vengeance was chiefly directed, and having overtaken him near Kinloch-lochy, they attacked and slew him, together with his son and about three hundred of his clan. Huntly, on learning the defeat and death of his ally, immediately returned to Lochaber, and with the assistance of William Mackintosh, captain of the clan Chattan, seized Ewen Allanson of Lochiel, captain of the clan Cameron, and Ranald Macdonald Glas of Keppoch, whom he carried to the castle of Ruthven in Badenoch. Here they were detained for some time in prison; but being soon afterwards removed to Elgin, they were there tried for high treason, and being found guilty by a jury of landed gentlemen, were beheaded, whilst several of their followers, who had been apprehended along with them, were hanged. This event, which took place in the year 1546, appears to have had a salutary effect in disposing the turbulent Highlanders to submission, the decapitation of a chief being an act of energy for which they were by no means prepared.

The subsequent history of the clan Chameron, until we come to the time of Sir Ewen, the hero of the race, is only diversified by the feuds in which they were engaged with other clans, particularly the Mackintoshes, and by those incidents peculiar to the times and the state of society in the Highlands. Towards the end of Queen Mary's reign, a violent dispute having broken out amongst the clan themselves, the chief, Donald Dhu, patronymically styled Macdonald Mhic Ewen, was murdered by some of his own kinsmen; and, during the minority of his successor, the Mackintoshes, taking advantage of the dissensions which prevailed in the clan, invaded their territories, and forced the grand-uncles of the young chief, who ruled in his name, to conclude a treaty respecting the disputed lands of Glenluy and Locharkaig. But this arrangement being resented by the clan, proved ineffectual; no surrender was made of the lands in question; and the inheritance of the chief was preserved undiminished by the patriotic devotion of his clansmen. Early in 1621, Allan Cameron of Lochiel, and his son John, were outlawed for not appearing to give security for their future obedience, and a commission was issued to Lord Gordon against him and his clan; but this commission was not rigorously acted on, and served rather to protect Lochiel against the interference of Mackintosh and others, who were very much disposed to push matters to extremity against the clan Chameron. The following year, however, Lochiel was induced to submit his disputes with the family of Mackintosh to the decision of mutual friends; and by these arbitrators, the lands of Glenluy and Locharkaig were adjudged to belong to Mackintosh, who, however, was ordained to pay[220] certain sums of money by way of compensation to Lochiel. But, as usually happens in similar cases, this decision satisfied neither party. Lochiel, however, pretended to acquiesce, but delayed the completion of the transaction in such a way that the dispute was not finally settled until the time of his grandson, the celebrated Sir Ewen Cameron. About the year 1664, the latter, having made a satisfactory arrangement of the long-standing feud with the Mackintoshes, was at length left in undisputed possession of the lands of Glenluy and Locharkaig; and, with some trifling exceptions, the various branches of the Camerons still enjoy their ancient inheritances. The family of Lochiel, like many others, was constrained to hold its lands of the Marquis of Argyll and his successors.

Sir Ewen Cameron, commonly called Ewan Dhu of Lochiel, was a chief alike distinguished for his chivalrous character, his intrepid loyalty, his undaunted courage, and the ability as well as heroism with which he conducted himself in circumstances of uncommon difficulty and peril. This remarkable man was born in the year 1629, and educated at Inverary Castle, under the guardianship of his kinsman the Marquis of Argyll, who, having taken charge of him in his tenth year, endeavoured to instil into his mind the political principles of the Covenanters and the Puritans, and to induce the boy to attach himself to that party. But the spirit of the youthful chief was not attuned by nature to receive the impressions of a morose fanaticism. At the age of eighteen, he broke loose from Argyll, with the declared intention of joining the Marquis of Montrose, a hero more congenial to his own character. He was too late, however, to be of service to that brave but unfortunate leader, whose reverses had commenced before Cameron left Inverary. But though the royal cause seemed lost he was not disheartened, and having kept his men in arms, completely protected his estate from the incursions of Cromwell's troops. In the year 1652, he joined the Earl of Glencairn, who had raised the royal standard in the Highlands, and greatly distinguished himself in a series of encounters with General Lilburne, Colonel Morgan, and others. In a sharp skirmish which took place between Glencairn and Lilburne, at Braemar, Lochiel, intrusted with the defence of a pass, maintained it gallantly until the royal army had retired, when Lilburne, making a detour, attacked him in flank. Lochiel kept his ground for some time; until at last finding himself unable to repel the enemy, who now brought up an additional force against him, he retreated

slowly up the hill showing a front to the assailants, who durst not continue to follow him, the ground being steep and covered with snow. This vigorous stand saved Glencairn's army, which was, at that time, in a disorganised state; owing principally to the conflicting pretensions of a number of independent chiefs and gentlemen, who, in their anxiety to command, forgot the duty of obedience. Lochiel, however, kept clear of these cabals, and stationing himself at the outposts, harassed the enemy with continual skirmishes, in which he was commonly successful. How his services were appreciated by Glencairn we learn from a letter of Charles II. to Lochiel, dated at Chantilly, the 3d of November, 1653, in which the exiled king says, "We are informed by the Earl of Glencairn with what courage, success, and affection to us, you have behaved yourself in this time of trial, when the honour and liberty of your country are at stake; and therefore we cannot but express our hearty sense of this your courage, and return you our thanks for the same." The letter concludes with an assurance that "we are ready, as soon as we are able, signally to reward your service, and to repair the losses you shall undergo for our service."

Acting in the same loyal spirit, Lochiel kept his men constantly on the alert, and ready to move wherever their service might be required. In 1654, he joined Glencairn with a strong body, to oppose Generals Monk and Morgan, who had marched into the Highlands. Lochiel being opposed to Morgan, a brave and enterprising officer, was often hard pressed, and sometimes nearly overpowered; but his courage and presence of mind, which never forsook him, enabled the intrepid chief to extricate himself from all difficulties. Monk tried several times to negotiate, and made the most favourable proposals to Lochiel on the part of Cromwell; but these were uniformly rejected with contempt. At length, finding it equally [221] impossible to subdue or to treat with him, Monk established a garrison at Inverlochy, raising a small fort, as a temporary defence against the musketry, swords, and arrows of the Highlanders. Details as to the tactics of Lochiel, as well as a portrait of the brave chief, will be found at p. 296 of vol. i.

General Middleton, who had been unsuccessful in a skirmish with General Morgan, invited Lochiel to come to his assistance. Upwards of 300 Camerons were immediately assembled, and he marched to join Middleton, who had retreated to Braemar. In this expedition, Lochiel had several encounters with Morgan; and, notwithstanding all the ability and enterprise of the latter, the judgment and promptitude with which the chief availed himself of the accidents of the ground, the activity of his men, and the consequent celerity of their movements, gave him a decided advantage in this *guerre de chicane*. With trifling loss to himself, he slew a considerable number of the enemy, who were often attacked both in flank and rear when they had no suspicion that an enemy was within many miles of them. An instance of this occurred at Lochgarry in August 1653, when Lochiel, in passing northwards, was joined by about sixty or seventy Athole-men, who went to accompany him through the hills. Anxious to revenge the defeat which his friends had, a short time previously, sustained upon the same spot, he planned and executed a surprise of two regiments of Cromwell's troops, which, on their way southward, had encamped upon the plain of Dainaspidal; and although it would have been the height of folly to risk a mere handful of men, however brave, in close combat with so superior a force, yet he killed a number of the enemy, carried off several who had got entangled in the morass of Lochgarry, and completely effected the object of the enterprise.

But all his exertions proved unavailing. Middleton, being destitute of money and provisions, was at length obliged to submit, and the war was thus ended, excepting with Lochiel himself, who, firm in his allegiance, still held out, and continued to resist the encroachments of the garrison quartered in his neighbourhood. He surprised and cut off a foraging party, which, under the pretence of hunting, had set out to make a sweep of his cattle and goats; and he succeeded in making prisoners of a number of Scotch and English officers, with their attendants, who had been sent to survey the estates of several loyalists in Argyleshire, with the intention of building forts there to keep down the king's friends. This last affair was planned with great skill, and, like almost all his enterprises, proved completely successful. But the termination of his resistance was now approaching. He treated his prisoners with the greatest kindness, and this brought on an intimacy, which ultimately led to a proposal of negotiation. Lochiel was naturally enough very anxious for an honourable treaty. His country was impoverished and his people were nearly ruined; the cause which he had so long and bravely supported seemed desperate; and all prospect of relief or assistance had by this time completely vanished. Yet the gallant chief resisted several attempts to induce him to yield, protesting that, rather than disarm himself and his clan, abjure his king, and take the oaths to an usurper, he would live as an outlaw, without regard to the consequences. To this it was answered, that, if he only evinced an inclination to submit, no oath would be required, and that he should have his own terms. Accordingly, General Monk, then commander-in-chief in Scotland, drew up certain conditions which he sent to Lochiel, and which, with some slight alterations, the latter accepted and returned by one of the prisoners lately taken, whom he released upon parole. And proudly might he accept the terms offered to him. No oath was required of Lochiel to Cromwell, but his word of honour to live in peace. He and his clan were allowed to keep their arms as before the war broke out, they behaving peaceably. Reparation was to be made to Lochiel for the wood cut by the garrison of Inverlochy. A full indemnity was granted for all acts of depredation, and crimes committed by his men. Reparation was to be made to his tenants for all the losses they had sustained from the troops. All tithes, cess, and public burdens which had not been paid, were to be remitted. This was in June 1654.

Lochiel with his brave Camerons lived in peace till the Restoration, and during the two succeeding reigns he remained in

tranquil[222] possession of his property. But in 1689, he joined the standard of King James, which had been raised by Viscount Dundee. General Mackay had, by orders of King William, offered him a title and a considerable sum of money, apparently on the condition of his remaining neutral. The offer, however, was rejected with disdain; and at the battle of Killiecrankie, Sir Ewen had a conspicuous share in the success of the day. Before the battle, he spoke to each of his men, individually, and took their promise that they would conquer or die. At the commencement of the action, when General Mackay's army raised a kind of shout, Lochiel exclaimed, "Gentlemen, the day is our own; I am the oldest commander in the army, and I have always observed something ominous or fatal in such a dull, heavy, feeble noise as that which the enemy has just made in their shout." These words spread like wildfire through the ranks of the Highlanders. Electrified by the prognostication of the veteran chief, they rushed like furies on the enemy, and in half an hour the battle was finished. But Viscount Dundee had fallen early in the fight, and Lochiel, disgusted with the incapacity of Colonel Cannon, who succeeded him, retired to Lochaber, leaving the command of his men to his eldest son.[205] This heroic and chivalrous chief survived till the year 1719, when he died at the age of ninety, leaving a name distinguished for bravery, honour, consistency, and disinterested devotion to the cause which he so long and ably supported.[206]

The character of Sir Ewen Cameron was worthily upheld by his grandson, the "gentle Lochiel," though with less auspicious fortune. The share which that gallant chief had in the ill-fated insurrection of 1745–1746 has already been fully told, and his conduct throughout was such as to gain him the esteem and admiration of all.[207] The estates of Lochiel were of course included in the numerous forfeitures which followed the suppression of the insurrection; however, Charles Cameron, son of the Lochiel of the '45, was allowed to return to Britain, and lent his influence to the raising of the Lochiel men for the service of government. His son, Donald, was restored to his estates under the general act of amnesty of 1784. The eldest son of the latter, also named Donald, born 25th September 1796, obtained a commission in the Guards in 1814, and fought at Waterloo. He retired from the army in 1832, and died 14th December 1858, leaving two sons and four daughters. His eldest son, Donald, succeeded as chief of the clan Cameron.

The family of Cameron of Fassifern, in Argyleshire, possesses a baronetcy of the United Kingdom, conferred in 1817 on Ewen Cameron of Fassifern, the father of Colonel John Cameron, of the 92d Highlanders, slain at the battle of Quatre Bras,[208] 16th June 1815, while bravely leading on his men, for that officer's distinguished military services; at the same time, two Highlanders were added as supporters to his armorial bearings, and several heraldic distinctions indicating the particular services of Colonel Cameron. On the death of Sir Ewen in 1828, his second son, Sir Duncan, succeeded to the baronetcy.