The Napoleon Series

Spanish Royal Decrees concerning the 1808 Dos Mayo Madrid Massacre

By Christopher Coffey

After the French invaded Spain in early 1808 under the pretense of sending troops to Portugal, King Charles 4th, and his senior counsel Godoy planned to escape. Charles 4th’s son, Ferdinand 7th, aided by loyalists surrounded them in the City of Aranjuez and forced King Charles 4th to abdicate the throne to Ferdinand 7th. A few days after Napoleon persuaded Ferdinand 7th and Charles 4th to come to Bayonne, France to work out their differences peacefully. To their surprise Napoleon told Ferdinand 7th to abdicate the throne to him. Meanwhile the Spanish People were unhappy with the Kidnapping their king, Ferdinand the 7th, and his father, Charles 4th, had started protesting in Madrid. Napoleon had requested Ferdinand 7th’s sister, Maria Paula, be brought to Bayonne, France as leverage against Ferdinand 7th to force him to abdicate. This was the straw that broke the camel’s back. The protesting became a riot. Marshal Murat, who was in charge in Madrid ordered French Imperial Guard troops to disperse the crowd. The plan backfired when the crowd became enraged and a melee ensued. French troops fired upon the crowd with many fatalities. This caused a major escalation of the Peninsular War and spurred guerilla action by the Spanish. Francisco Goya, A renowned Spanish painter years later painted the scene on canvas, which is still kept in the Prado Museum in Spain. What many people did not know is that this critical incident became a memorial and inspiration for Spaniards.

On 30 May 1811, the Cadiz Cortez and Counsel of Regency, liberal bodies who were governing Spain in the absence of her king, signed a Royal Decree in his name, making Dos Mayo an official holiday in Spain.

On 4 May 1814 at the end of the war and after his release, King Ferdinand 7th, returned and abolished the original Royal Decree with all the other decrees the liberals created. On 18 April 1815, King Ferdinand issued a Royal Decree stating mourning attire for the King’s court in remembrance of Dos May among other atrocities that occurred during the war. On 9 October 1817, King Ferdinand 7th issued a Royal Decree for an eternal holiday for the victims of Dos May.

Dos Mayo is still celebrated today in Spain.

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The Royal Decree of 1810 (from the Author's Collection)
A translation of the Royal Decree of 1810

To be communicated acting on its own motion

FOURTH SEAL, YEAR ONE-
THOUSAND, EIGHT- HUNDRED
AND TEN

Valid for the year one-thousand eight-hundred and eleven.

King Ferdinand VII

And in his absence and captivity, the Council of Regency of Spain and the Indies, temporarily authorized by the General and Extraordinary Courts. My Real Order was presented with communication on the seventh day of this month by Don José Antonio de Larrumbide, Acting Secretary of the Office of Grace and Justice to my Council of the Indies, the Decree of the Courts of the second day of the said month, as follows = The General and Extraordinary Courts, deeply moved by the sad and glorious memories of every good Patrician, the least that can do is to bring back the memory of this day, and wanting that as long as in the two worlds there is one single village of free Spaniards, the songs of gratitude and compassion resound for the memory of the first Martyrs of national freedom, thus they decree that in the Main Churches of every town the Anniversary Mass is solemnly held hereinafter for the victims killed in Madrid on May 2, of the year one-thousand eight-hundred and eight, Ceremony that shall be attended by the
Main Authorities, and there shall be a parade of military troops, a military salutes and according to the circumstances of the town, they shall provide to add greater pomp to this very patriotic act, as well as religious ceremony, so in this manner it is enshrined forever the said remarkable event, and in order to perpetually rise to heaven our ardent wishes for the repose of their souls, may their constant memory act as stimulation for the brave, breath for the weak, shame for the insensitive and eternal confrontation for the infamous, which, closing their ears to the cries of the Homeland, strive in vain to see it attached to the oppression of the tyrant. Will all this be understood by the Council of Regency and shall it ensure its compliance, printing, publishing and circulating it = Vicente Cano Manuel, President = Miguel Antonio de Zumalacarregui, Deputy Secretary. = Pedro Aparici y Ortiz, Deputy Secretary. = Signed in Cadiz on the second day of May of the year one-thousand eight-hundred and eleven. = Sent to the Council of Regency. And for the duly and proper implementation and enforcement of the previous Decree, the Council of Regency orders and commands all the Courts, Justices, Heads, Governors and other civilian authorities and military and ecclesiastical of any class and dignity to observe this decree, and make others observe it, fulfilling and executing it, in all its parts. =Pedro de Agar, President. = Gabriel Ciscar. = In Cadiz on the third day of May of the year one-thousand eight-hundred and eleven. =To Don José Antonio de Larrumbide = Published this decree on the referred to Council of the Indies, which agreed with its compliance: thus, in consequence, it is sent to my Viceroy, Presidents, Audiences, Governors, Mayors and Capital Cities and I plea and commission to the Most Reverent Archbishops
and Reverend Bishops and Deacons and Councils of the Metropolitan Churches and Cathedrals of those domains of mine, to observe, comply and implement, and enforce its observation, compliance and implementation of the inserted Sovereign Resolution, because it is my will. Signed in Cadiz on the third day of May of the year eight-thousand and eleven.

*I, the King*

Pedro de Agar  
President

By order of the King, my Lord  
Joseph de Alday  
*(Secretary)*

So in the Realms of the Indies and Philippine Islands this Decree of the Courts is observed; decree which orders the celebration at the Main Churches of all the towns of the Monarchy, an Anniversary Mass every second of May.
Por el Virrey que fue del Padre Procesis de la Concordia se me hizo presente en carta de veinte y dos de Mayo de mil ochocientos quince la carta escrita sobre si de hechos celebrados el aniversario que decretaban las Cortes en favor de las postreras víctimas de la felicidad española, sacrificadas en Madrid el dos de Mayo de mil ochocientos ocho, respecto de que en conformidad de mi Real bula de catorce de Mayo de mil ochocientos ochenta era mala e insignificante la facilidad con que se había dispensado la esquilada fúrnica, y última, mandaron los dichos mi Real Audientes, celebró suspender la justa mi Real resolución. Con este mismo se había presentado que por mi Real orden de diez y ocho de Abril de mil ochocientos quince tuvo a bien mandar, entre otras cosas, que en el citado día do

de Mayo se viera la Corte de justo en el debido de dolor por la muerte de tantos ilustres vínculos sacrificados en esta benéfica villa por la justicia más pura y acertada amor a mi Real Persona y a mi Real Familia y que en todas las iglesias de ella se celebre con la solemnidad correspondiente un oficio y misa por el eterno descanso de sus almas. Y habiéndose visto en mi Consejo de las Indias, con lo que expusimos mi Fisjal, y consultándose sobre ello en tres de junio de este año, se vino en similitud, como por la presente mi Real cédula amén, el decreto de las Cortes de dos de Mayo de mil ochocientos ochenta, en que prescribieron los términos en que se debía celebrar el referido aniversario, y al tiempo impuso he heimtizado que en todas las iglesias Catedrales de ambas Américas, sus islas adyacentes y de Filipinas, se celebró en lo incidental en dicha día igual fiesta religiosa que se dispusiera para Madrid. En su consecuencia mandó a mis Víreyes y Gobernadores Vice-Patronos, y ruego y encargo a los M. RR. Arzobispos y R.R. Obispos de aquellos mismos, cumplan y ejecuten, y buena próxima efectuar la expresada mi Real

determinación que así es mi voluntad. Fecha en Palacio el diez de junio de mil ochocientos diez y siete.
Translation of the Royal Decree of 1817

To be communicated acting on its own motion

FOURTH SEAL, YEAR ONE
THOUSAND EIGHT-HUNDRED AND
SEVENTEEN

THE KING

The Viceroy, Marquis de la Concordia, who served in Peru, informed to me through a letter dated on the twenty-second day of May of the year one-thousand eight-hundred and fifteen the doubt that emerged on whether the anniversary decreed by the Courts in remembrance of the first victims of Spanish fidelity, killed in Madrid on May 2 of the year one-thousand eight-hundred and eight shall be celebrated, as according to my Royal Decree of May 4 of the year one-thousand eight-hundred and fourteen it was nullified and illegitimate the authority with which such Decree was ordered the said function; whereby, with previous vote on the issue by my Royal Audience, it resolved to suspend it, pending my Royal Decision. To solve the said issue, I have considered that through my Royal Order dated on the eighteenth day of April of the year one-thousand eight-hundred and fifteen I ordered, among other issues, that the said day, the second day of the Month of May the Court shall dress in mourning attire, to express the sorrow for the death of so many illustrious victims sacrificed in this heroic town for the purest loyalty and pure love to my Royal Person and my Royal Family; and that in all churches I order to be celebrated with appropriate solemnity an Office and Mass for the repose of their souls. And having seen this in my Council of the Indies, as it has been exposed by my Prosecutor and having I been
consulted about it on the third day of June of this year, I have come to the decision of abolishing and annulling the decree of the Courts of the second day of May of the year where I prescribed the terms in which the referred anniversary was to be celebrated, and at the same time, I have decided that in all of the Cathedral Churches of both Americas, its adjacent islands and the Philippines, hereinafter in the same day there shall be celebrated similar religious function that the one ordered for Madrid. Consequently I order to my Viceroyys and Governors, Vice-Patrons, and I plea and request to the Very Reverend Archbishops and Reverend Bishops of those my domains, to fulfill and implement and to make others fulfill and Implement the said Real Determination: since it is my will. Dated at the Palace on the ninth day of October of the year one-thousand and seventeen.

_I, the King_

By order of the King, our Lord
Esteban Varea
_(Secretary)_

So in all the Cathedral Churches of my Realms of the Indies and Philippine Islands a Ceremony and Mass is celebrated for the eternal response of the illustrious victims who died due to their fidelity, and were sacrificed in Madrid on the second day of May of the year one thousand eight-hundred and eight.

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