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The banner, shown courtesy of the Schwind Collection to Pēteris Cedrinš, is the personal banner of prince Avalov, commander of the West Volunteer Army (Западная добровольческая армия), a White Russian anti-Bolshevik and pro-German force created by Germany Gen. von der Goltz in August 1919 merging the rest of German Freikorps in the Baltic States and some Russian POWs with the Special Russian Corps raised in November 1918 by Gen. Graf Fëdor Arturovič Keller and by Cossack Gen. Pavel Bermond, later Prince Avalov, both Knights of the Russian Branch of the Sovereign Order of Saint John of Jerusalem (SOSJJ). The Corps lent allegiance to Kolchak's white government and later to a Latvian puppet government supported by Berlin, and fought against both the Bolshevik and the Latvian democratic government supported by the Entente, being disbanded in December 1919. The Banner front shows the imperial coat of arms. On the reverse, the Black Maltese Cross with Crown of Thorns memorializes General Graf Keller, murdered by the Bolsheviks

<http://www.theknightsofsaintjohn.com/History-After-Malta.htm>;

<http://www.vexillographia.ru/russia/beloe.htm>;

<http://lettonica.blogspot.com/2007/11/bear-slayers-day.html> (Pēteris Cedrinš, *Bear Slayer's Day*, 11 November 2007). Cedrinš posted the image of the Flag's recto on wikipedia commons.

Primo Leggero Napoletano. A Regimental History (1806-1815),

by ADAM WALCZAK

ABSTRACT. This article concerns the history, organisation and service of the 1st Neapolitan Light Infantry Regiment (*1^o Reggimento d'Infanteria Leggera*), a light infantry regiment in the service of the Napoleonic Kingdom of Naples (1806-1815) during the Napoleonic Wars and its subsidiary conflicts. Formed at the beginning of Joseph Bonaparte's reign by the newly emplaced French administration of Naples, the regiment's formation came with the initiative of relegating costly counter-guerilla operations to local forces in the place of French regiments. With the advent of various conflicts across the Napoleonic empire – namely, popular revolts in Spain and the Tyrol – the regiment found itself sent as part of the Neapolitan military contingent to the *Grande Armée*. In the wider context of military operations, the regiment played no small part in the effective suppression of guerillas, growing to become one of the more capable regiments of the Neapolitan army. By the end of 1811, the regiment would find itself reformed within the Kingdom and would serve its final – and most glorious – campaign under the sceptre of Joachim Murat, being singlehandedly responsible for turning the Austrian flank at the Panaro in 1815. The regiment would be one of the few units that ended the 1815 campaign with its reputation enhanced.

KEYWORDS. ARMY OF THE KINGDOM OF NAPLES; ARMED FORCES, NAPOLEONIC ITALY; NAPOLEONIC KINGDOM OF NAPLES (1806-1815); LIGHT INFANTRY; NAPOLEONIC WARS; GUERRILLA WARFARE (1799-1815).

1

ORIGINS OF THE REGIMENT

Having conquered the Bourbon Kingdom of Naples, the newly emplaced French administration, under the nominal control of Joseph Bonaparte, immediately set to establish a base for the future armed forces of the Neapolitan state. The leading elements of the French *Armée de Naples* entered the city of Naples triumphantly on 14th February 1806 and thus be-

gan shaping the first elements of the infant Kingdom's administration. Immediately, Joseph and his entourage set themselves into a flurry of actions; among these, the establishment of units of indigenous troops to serve under the new Kingdom's banners.¹ The concept of forming local units had already been contemplated by the French prior to the invasion; on 19th January Napoleon had instructed Joseph to form a "Neapolitan Legion" composed of men who were willing to attach themselves to the Imperial cause.² Upon the capture of Naples, this order would be reciprocated through the instant formation of a regiment of light infantry, four companies of artillery and one company of sappers, all recruited from Bourbon prisoners-of-war from the captured garrisons of Capua and Naples. Capua, in particular, had been surrendered on the 13th along with its garrison of three regular battalions – some 2,500 men in all. These men presented ample opportunity for the formation of new regiments; nevertheless, the majority were recruits who were deemed useless and sent home, with the remainder being organised into a single battalion of infantry. This would form the hard base of the 1st Light Infantry Regiment, which was formally established with the decree of 18th February as a regiment "under the same organisation and pay as the French regiments of the same arm".³

Its formation was entrusted to Vincenzo Pignatelli-Strongoli, a veteran cavalry officer of noble Neapolitan birth. Pignatelli had served in the Parthenopean Republic's National Guard in 1799, fighting against the *Sanfedisti* and narrowly escaping execution after the fall of the Republic; he subsequently enrolled in the Italian Legion along with his brother Francesco and then joined the Cisalpine Republic's cavalry. He would find himself fighting in the *Armée de Naples* in 1806 as a Lieutenant-Colonel commanding the Italian *Napoleone* Dragoons.⁴ The choice of picking him as the first commander of the Neapolitan troops was obvious; Pignatelli's experience in commanding, coupled with his personal con-

1 J. RAMBAUD, *Naples sous Joseph Bonaparte, 1806-1808*, France, Plon-Nourrit et Cie, 1911, p. 283 ; R.M. JOHNSTON, *The Napoleonic Empire in Southern Italy and the Rise of the Secret Societies*, United Kingdom, Macmillan and Company, limited, 1904, Vol. I, p. 161.

2 *Correspondance de Napoléon Ier: 1 juillet 1805-3 février 1806*. France, Imprimerie Impériale, 1862, p.665.

3 D. VACCA, *Collezione Delle Leggi e De 'Decreti Reali Del Regno Delle Due Sicilie*, Napoli, Stamperia Reale, 1806.

4 G. CECI, "Dalle memorie del generale V. P. di Strongoli", *Archivio storico per le province napoletane*, Volume VII, 1921, pp. 61-170.



Fig.1. General Francesco Pignatelli, 7th Duke of Strongoli

nection to the Kingdom made him the ideal pick for the 1st Light's commander.

Despite being a cavalry officer throughout his career, Vincenzo Pignatelli proved to be the driving factor behind establishing the hard base for the 1st Light Regiment – drilling the men into proper soldiers. The regiment itself would expand to two battalions during this time.⁵ Significantly, the 1st Light would be com-

⁵ The second battalion was formed from a captured Bourbon battalion of *cacciatori* on 19th February.

posed of almost purely Neapolitan nationals and ex-Bourbon soldiers, with few foreigners serving in its ranks – In fact, Joseph had explicitly written to Pignatelli ordering all officers of the regiment to be Neapolitans. Nevertheless, of the initial 23 officers, at least four were foreigners; later that year the regiment would be joined by a certain *Capobattaglione* François-Gaspard de La Nougarède, a French noble who had served as a leader in the Vendée revolt. On May 20th, having successfully fulfilled the task of organising the regiment, Vincenzo Pignatelli was transferred to command the 1st Neapolitan Horse Chasseurs, a command fitting his combat experience; in his stead came his cousin Andrea Pignatelli-Cerchiara, brother of the Minister of the Navy. Alongside the new colonel came the experienced Salvatore di Beaumont, a Bourbon officer who had previously commanded the 5th Volunteer Chasseurs of Abruzzo (1798) and the Royal Calabrian Regiment (1800-1806). On June 18th, the post of Major was given to Pietro Federico Edoardo Chiarizia, an officer of dubious quality who would be cashiered an astounding three times during his career in Naples, but nonetheless would achieve the rank of Adjutant General in 1813. That same year, the third battalion of the regiment was raised. With these new additions, the regiment was complete in its formation.⁶

Trial By Fire: The Siege of Gaeta & the Brigandage in Calabria

In July 1806, the Siege of Gaeta was in full swing. Since late February the French troops had made little progress against the determined Bourbon defenders, who responded to the French bombardment with equal ferocity from their own guns. On June 28th, the attacking force was joined by Marshal Masséna himself, who immediately upon reviewing the siege works requested further reinforcements from the capital. Joseph responded to this plea by deploying to the siege works the 1st Horse Chasseurs and 500 “picked” men of the 1st Light.⁷ The battalion joined the camp at Gaeta on July 1st, joined three days later by the remainder of the regiment. On July 3rd, Joseph wrote to Masséna to “not to show distrust to the battalion of the 1st Neapolitan [Light] Regiment”, imploring him

6 N. CORTIÈSE, “*Corpi e scuole militari dal 1806 al 1815*”, *Rassegna Storica Napoletana*, Napoli, A. Miccoli, 1933, p.40; P. CROCIANI, V. ILARI, G. BOERI, *Storia militare del Regno Murattiano*, “Fanteria e Cavalleria (1806-1815)”, Roma, Widerholdt Frères, 2007, Vol. II, pp. 99-100; RAMBAUD, *Naples*, cit., pp. 283-284.

7 J. RAMBAUD, *Lettres inédites ou éparses de Joseph Bonaparte à Naples (1806-1808)*, Paris, Plon-Nourrit, 1911, p. 83.

that the colonel was a “man of honour who counts on the soldiers he has chosen”. It would be reported in the local papers that the 1st Light was thus the first Neapolitan regiment to have the honour of going to battle.⁸ Despite this, the regiment saw little action. By this point of the siege there was little the Bourbon defenders could do; with three breaches in the fortress walls, their commander incapacitated by wounds, and food and ammunition stocks running dangerously low, the fortress garrison preferred to surrender under the condition of safe passage to Sicily, rather than face the final assault on the breaches. Thus, on July 18th, the white flag was raised over Gaeta. The regiment, now numbering 63 officers and 1.102 men, was immediately transferred to Salerno to begin combat operations against local insurgents.⁹

Following the fall of Gaeta, the larger part of the *Armée de Naples* was freed up for operations against the brigands in Calabria. Earlier in July, the French corps in Calabria under General Jean Louis Ebénézer Reynier had been defeated by a British expeditionary force under General Stuart at Maida. While only a minor victory, Maida was the tipping point for the rebellion – having proven that the French could be defeated, the Anglo-Bourbon allies were able to entice a significant portion of the populace to revolt. As local French garrisons were massacred, Reynier was forced to retreat and fortify himself at Cassano, with all communications with the capital cut.¹⁰

The French response to this urgent threat came in the form of Marshal Masséna’s corps of over 10.000 French and allied troops, which assembled in its entirety at Salerno on July 19th. An additional 6.000 men under Joseph and *Général de division* Jean Maximilien Lamarque were assembled in reserve further north. The 1st Light’s effective strength at this time was 1.343 men and 63 officers, split between two different formations: in GdD General Gaspard Amédée Gardanne’s division, with one battalion commanded by Pignatelli-Cerchiara himself, and a further 800 men deployed with Lamarque in reserve.¹¹

8 *Monitore Napolitano*, 1st July 1806.

9 V. ILARI, P. CROCIANI, G. BOERI, *La Difesa di Gaeta nel 1806*, pp. 23-28.

10 M. FINLEY, “Prelude to Spain: The Calabrian Insurrection, 1806-1807.” *Military Affairs*, Vol. 40, no. 2, 1976, pp. 84–87; V. ILARI, P. CROCIANI, G. BOERI, *Le Due Sicilie nelle guerre napoleoniche (1800-1814)*, Roma, USSME, 2007, Vol. II, pp. 447-448.

11 ILARI, CROCIANI, BOERI, *Le Due Sicilie*, pp.459; G. GERTHOFFER, *Historique du 52e régiment d’infanterie*, France, Berger-Levrault, 1890, pp. 78-79.

Immediately following the commencement of operations, Masséna detached Gardanne's troops to support a strong column of 1,500 men commanded by General Julien Augustin Joseph Mermet, which had been deployed to the Cilento, on Masséna's right flank. For this operation, the 1st Light's 1st Battalion was attached to Mermet's command. The objective of this manoeuvre was to clear the region and advance to take Policastro and Sapri, both bases of operations for the insurgent band of Rocco Stoduti – a renowned Bourbon militant who had gained fame in 1799.¹² On the 1st of August Mermet arrived at the gates of Vallo della Lucania, which fell bloodlessly; having executed two local brigand chiefs, the column proceeded on the 3rd, where Mermet detached Capobattaglione Vincenzo de Gentile of the Corsican Legion with 400 men to take Laurino, while the rest proceeded to Roccagloriosa. The latter town had been the centre of brigand activity in the Cilento during the 1799 revolt; its approaches were heavily wooded and dominated by formidable stone walls and a castle built during the Middle Ages.¹³ It was defended by 700 or so men under the command of Stoduti himself, who desperately fought to deter the French from approaching the town. Nevertheless, the determined Imperial troops pressed on, their attack spearheaded by two companies of Corsicans – enraged after discovering the bodies of their captured comrades mutilated by Stoduti's band. The action itself was directed by Colonel François Marie Dufour of the French 6th Line Regiment, who successfully dislodged the brigands from the city walls and took its fortified Capuchin convent. Losses were high: some 200 or so brigands fell at the cost of 21 Imperial troops.¹⁴ The town was subsequently sacked and set aflame. Following this, the column proceeded to Torraca and Sapri, linking with Gardanne on the 5th. The 1st Light would then find itself deployed at Laurino (6th April) and Lagonegro (10th).

The regiment remained stationed in the region until September when Masséna was recalled to the *Grande Armée* for the campaign in Poland, and Reynier reassumed command. At this stage of the revolt, the French were facing a stalemate

12 ILARI, CROCIANI, BOERI, *Le Due Sicilie*, pp. 459-461; G. MALLAMACI, *Torraca: Storia di un borgo del Cilento*, Italy, Edizioni Univ. Romane, 2009, pp. 65-67; F. BARRA, *Il brigantaggio del decennio francese (1806-1815): studi e ricerche*, Italy, Plectica, 2003, Vol. II, pp. 46-48.

13 MALLAMACI, *cit.*, p.74-75; F. BARRA, *Cronache del brigantaggio meridionale, 1806-1815*. Italy, Società editrice meridionale, 1981, p. 278.

14 J. MÉJÉCAZE, *Historique du 6e régiment d'infanterie*. France, H. Charles-Lavauzelle, 1891, pp. 52-53; ILARI, CROCIANI, BOERI, *Le Due Sicilie*, p. 460.

coming from the continual ferrying of Bourbon troops from Sicily to Naples by the British Royal Navy. Due to the overwhelming British naval supremacy in the region, strategically important points like Maratea, Capri, Scilla and the island of Dino were continually exploited as landing grounds for brigands and reinforcements from Sicily; this made the French position untenable unless these points could be conquered. Two such missions were undertaken by the 1st Light on September 25th and October 5th with the objective of taking the island of Dino, but to no avail: both times the presence of the Bourbon frigate *Minerva* and five gunboats deterred any attempt to approach the island.¹⁵

On the 29th of September, a Sicilian boat landed a considerable band of insurgents near Sapri which, together with some locals, occupied Torraca and entrenched themselves, 900 brigands in all. The *Monitore Napolitano* newspaper reported on 3rd October that on September 29th Pignatelli-Cerchiara with several companies of the 1st Light had attacked and promptly dislodged the insurgents in Torraca after a lively battle, capturing the town and turning it into a “horrific slaughter”. Here, Pignatelli decisively demonstrated to the population – and his superiors – that he had truly forsaken his Bourbon past. As the routed insurgents attempted to make their escape back to their original landing point, they were caught up by the invigorated light infantrymen and massacred in view of the Sicilian boat waiting offshore.¹⁶ Unfortunately, the Anglo-Bourbons would repeat their attempts in the region a month later, with greater success: on October 16th the regiment was defeated and sent reeling by a new insurgent band that disembarked at Sapri, and a further 94 men were captured at Torraca – promptly reenlisting in the Bourbon service. The regiment would hurriedly pull back to Largonero and find itself surrounded; it held out under Pignatelli-Cerchiara until late November when it was relieved by troops under Lamarque. On 1st December, François-Gaspard de La Nougarède was appointed in command of the battalion stationed in Sapri (now retaken from the insurgents). The experienced ex-Vendéen would command his men – some 500 in all – in operations covering the approaches to Maratea, which would fall on December 10th.¹⁷ Another operation

15 ILARI, CROCIANI, BOERI, *Le Due Sicilie*, p. 499.

16 *Monitore Napolitano*, 3rd October 1806; ILARI, CROCIANI, BOERI, *Le Due Sicilie*, pp. 499-500; ILARI, CROCIANI, BOERI, *Storia Militare del Regno*, cit., p. 107.

17 N. CORTESE, “L’Esercito Napolitano nelle Guerre Napoleoniche,” *Archivio storico per le province napoletane*, Italy, Ed. Detken & Rocholl e F. Giannini, 1926, Vol. 51, p. 254 ; E.

of note occurred in November when the 1st Light's voltigeur company stationed in Capua took part in the arduous operation to capture Fra Diavolo (nickname of Michele Pezza, the most famous brigand chief of the Calabrian insurgency), which would end in resounding success after an exhausting running battle with his band through the Apennines.¹⁸ Thus, the first and most intense stage of the regiment's service in the brigandage would come to an end. With active combat operations becoming less frequent, the regiment would find itself employed further in sedentary pacification missions within the region.

Finally, in the spring of 1807, the regiment would find itself transferred from Basilicata and the Cilento to Abruzzo, a rugged region on the Adriatic coastline that had served as a formidable hideout for several brigand bands during the recent revolt.¹⁹ The 1st Light's 2nd Battalion would find itself stationed at Chieti; from here, given the relative tranquillity of the military situation, it was inspected by General Louis Partouneaux, who declared the regiment "mauvais", including the officer corps; the colonel himself was "always talking about the honour of the regiment", yet allowing "all the stupidities imaginable to occur". The general would report how the regiment's bad conduct and excesses on the population multiply the enemies of the government, yet its "inconceivable" cowardice makes it "the laughing stock of the brigands", who infiltrate the region through a passage the regiment had neglected to guard.²⁰ This report, dated 21st July 1807, would be soon followed by yet another bitter complaint, this time by General Christophe Antoine Merlin, commander of the province. Merlin would brand the entire regiment "miserable plunderers", a hive of scoundrels and thieves where "everyone steals, and everyone complains", and where "the major [Chiarizia] is even worse than the colonel."²¹ To add insult to injury, Merlin would follow his complains by requesting the entire regiment – some 1,400 men – to be replaced by a single French or Corsican battalion!²² Such eloquent acid-tongued remarks

GACHOT, *La Troisième Campagne d'Italie, 1805-1806*. Paris, Plon-Nourrit, 1911, pp. 253-254.

18 B. AMANTE, *Fra Diavolo e il suo tempo (1796-1806)*. Italy, Attività bibliografica editoriale, 1904, p. 345; G. AMATO, *Panteon dei martiri della libertà italiana*. Italy, n.p., 1851, p. 329.

19 ILARI, CROCIANI, BOERI, *Fanteria e Cavalleria*, p. 123.

20 RAMBAUD, *Naples*, cit., p. 283; ILARI, CROCIANI, BOERI, *Fanteria e Cavalleria*, cit., p. 123.

21 Lieutenant-Colonel Delfico and La Nougarède were the only ones exempted from these remarks and were both praised.

22 Ibid. p. 283.



Fig. 2. Flag of 1st Neapolitan Light Infantry under King Joseph (Author's Own Work)

were quickly picked up by the administration in Naples, which promptly recalled the regiment to Capua in November. Here, the regiment was reorganised; the incompetent Chiarizia would be replaced by Louis-François Boy, an experienced officer who had previously been Major in the 2nd Line, on November 15th.²³ On March 14th, 1808, General Edme Aimé Lucotte formally demanded the substitution of Pignatelli-Cerchiara as colonel of the regiment; on 5th May, he would be replaced by Nicolas-Philippe Guye, ex-Major of the Corsican Legion who became one of Joseph's most trusted aides in Spain. Guye had successfully com-

²³ N. CORTESE, *L'Esercito Napoletano*, cit., p. 211; CORTESE, *Corpi e Scuole*, cit., p. 41.

manded the Corsicans in operations against the brigands in 1806/7 and had been promoted to the General Staff. He would later serve as Governor of Guadalajara province in 1811 upon his transfer to Spain and become immortalised in a portrait by Francisco Goya.²⁴ Unfortunately, Guye would only command the regiment for less than three weeks, as he was destined to part for Spain with Joseph's entourage. On May 23rd the colonelcy of the 1st Light officially went to Major Boy, arguably the man whose guiding hand would gain the regiment its greatest laurels on the bloody fields of Spain.

The Capture of Capri

In the summer of 1808, with the event of Napoleon exiling the Spanish Bourbon dynasty from their throne, the Kingdom of Spain was gifted to Joseph Bonaparte, in exchange for Joachim Murat becoming the new king of Naples. On 6th September, Murat, clad in his uniform of a French *Maréchal* and mounted on a magnificent horse, would triumphantly enter Naples. He was already famed across Europe as a “modern knight” for his astounding exploits at the head of the French cavalry; his entry and ascension as King were welcomed enthusiastically by the populace.²⁵ On 27th September, the 1st Light was reviewed by the new king together with the 1st Chasseurs; they would also take part in the huge military parade on 2nd October.²⁶

Upon ascending to the throne, Murat immediately made plans to undertake one of the most daring naval operations of the Napoleonic period – the (re)capture of Capri. The island, sitting just 16 nautical miles from the capital, can be seen with the naked eye from the Royal Palace of Naples; thus, the presence of the British garrison stationed there since 1806 was an insult to the military prestige of the Kingdom. For Murat, this was unacceptable; steps were immediately taken for a rapid reconquest of the island. The French had attempted to capture the island in March 1807 but had failed due to adverse weather conditions. For

24 G. SIX, *Dictionnaire Biographique des Généraux & Amiraux Français de la Révolution et de l'Empire (1792-1814)*, Paris, Librairie historique et nobiliaire, 1934, T. I. ; CORTESE, *Corpi e Scuole*, cit., p.41-42.

25 J. ABBOTT, *History of Joseph Bonaparte: King of Naples and of Italy*, United States, Harper & Brothers, 1869, p. 131; CECI, *Memorie*, Vol. VII, p. 61.

26 ILARI, CROCIANI, BOERI, *Fanteria e Cavalleria*, cit., p.123.

the new king, recapturing Capri was an opportunity to prove to both his subjects and the Emperor that he was better than his predecessor.²⁷

For this difficult enterprise, Murat assembled the *élite* companies of 12 picked regiments: the 10e, 20e, 52e and 102e de ligne, the Isembourg regiment, the 1er Suisse, the 3rd Italian Line, the Corsican Legion, the Neapolitan Royal Guard, the Real African Regiment, and lastly the 1st and 2nd Neapolitan Light Infantry regiments.²⁸ The six companies of the 1st Light, led by La Nougarède, would be reviewed on October 2nd by Murat along with the rest of the invasion force on the Riviera di Chiaia. In all, the Franco-Neapolitans numbered some 1.974 men which would increase to 2.363 with successive reinforcements, including 100 artillerymen and engineers with four guns, all commanded by Lamarque.²⁹ These had assembled at Naples under the pretext of a grand parade in honour of the new queen, Caroline Bonaparte, to placate British suspicions; the naval force was likewise kept modest, with only a frigate (*Cerere*), a corvette (*Fama*), thirty gunboats and ten feluccas. Opposing them on the island of Capri were some 1,800 men under the command of Lieutenant-Colonel Hudson Lowe, composed of the Royal Corsican Rangers (Lowe's own regiment), the Royal Malta Regiment, the Royal Marines, and some artillerymen and engineers.³⁰ They would be supported by numerous gun emplacements, redoubts, the Royal Navy, and most significantly, the island's formidable geography, which constrained any attack to face rugged cliffs. For the Franco-Neapolitans, this operation would be one of the most daring and demanding of the campaign: nevertheless, Lamarque would declare to Murat prior to the assault, "We'll get killed, every last one of us – or we'll take the island."³¹

27 D. DE TAVEL, *Calabria During a Military Residence of Three Years*, United Kingdom, Evingham Wilson, 1832, p. 210; E. TUCCI, "La Presa di Capri", Centro Documentale dell'Isola di Capri, pp.2-5;

E. SIMION, P. PIERI, "La Presa di Capri", *Rivista di Cultura Marinara*, Ministero della Marina, 1930, Vol. VIII, pp. 7-14.

28 The Neapolitan Royal Guard would contribute men of the Guard Grenadier regiment to this operation.

29 ILARI, CROCIANI, BOERI, *Le Due Sicilie*, p. 573, E. TUCCI, "La Presa di Capri", cit., p. 10, P. MORILLON, "Capri, Octobre 1808: Opération amphibie et "commandos" de l'Empereur", *napoleon-series.org* online.

30 MORILLON, *Capri*; N. GIACCHI, *Napoli Durante Il Decennio Francese (1806-1815)*, *Rassegna Storica del Risorgimento*, 1930, Vol. VIII, p. 63.

31 A. DUMAS, *Speronare*, Paris, Dumont, 1843, Vol. I.

The assault was launched on October 4th from the ports of Naples and Salerno. The plan of attack dictated that the main attack would land on the rocky coast west of Cape Carena, personally led by Lamarque, while two diversionary attacks would be directed against Marina Grande and Marina Piccola. The 1st Light would form part of the column assigned to take the latter position, under the command of General Pierre-François Mont-Serraz. The diversions had their intended effect: despite the main landing force having to delay their attack until nightfall due to stiff resistance, the attacks on the two Marinas prevented Lowe from reinforcing the Maltese defenders facing Lamarque. On the 5th, as the French made further progress, the British attempted to hold out on the plateau of Anacapri; they were dislodged after a furious bayonet charge in the moonlight, leaving 500 Maltese prisoners in the hands of the French. During the confusion, in which the 1st Light took part, a single patrol of the regiment under the command of an Abruzzian sergeant named Loreto Antico managed to intercept and surround Major Hamill, commander of the Royal Maltese Regiment, together with some of his men, as he attempted to retreat. Hamill was promptly shot and killed by Antico; later reprimanded by Lamarque, the sergeant claimed to have had in vain ordered Hamill to surrender three times, to which the British officer had responded with aggression. Supported by the testimony of another soldier, the sergeant would be decorated for his actions after the end of operations.³²

Following this, the town of Anacapri would fall; the next day the town of Capri itself was besieged, where the remaining British forces were holed up. The siege would last until the 17th, and Lowe would depart with his troops to Sicily on the 22nd. Upon returning to Naples, the invasion force would be showered with decorations and praise; in his report to Murat, Lamarque singled out the 1st Light, writing “the detachment of the 1st Neapolitan [Light] Regiment, commanded by La Nougarède, has conducted itself brilliantly” and named three officers and two sergeants (including Antico) for distinguished conduct.³³ With the decree of 10th November, three men of the regiment were awarded the Cross of the Royal Order of the Two Sicilies: Captain Audeven, and Sergeants Foria and Antico.³⁴

32 ILARI, CROCIANI, BOERI, *Fanteria e Cavalleria*, cit., pp. 123-124.

33 E. SIMION, P. PIERI, *La Presa di Capri*, cit., pp. 140/141.

34 *Monitore Napolitano*, 18th November 1808

SERVICE UNDER THE IMPERIAL EAGLES

Following the events of the capture of Capri, Murat ordered on October 26th the chasseurs of the 1st Light to garrison the islands of Ischia and Procida, keeping the elite companies (now numbering 188 men) in Naples. The regiment enjoyed a few quiet months stationed on the idyllic archipelago. On 30th December 1808, Captain Francesco Saverio Pompei, the distinguished commander of the Corsican troops sent to Capri, was transferred to the 1st Light with the rank of Capobattaglione. The effective strength of the regiment on 1st January 1809 was 1.407 (including 92 officers) which increased to 1.618 two weeks later thanks to the transfer of new recruits from the 2nd Horse Chasseurs. The two battalions of the regiment were then sent back to the mainland in April, leaving on Ischia 250 recruits of the depot battalion commanded by La Nougarède.³⁵ As fate would have it, on June 22nd a British squadron would present itself before the archipelago, with obvious intentions to take it; the invasion force disembarked at the town of Lacco and rapidly overcame all resistance, with the remaining Neapolitan troops pulling back to the island's Aragonese Castle. This formidable obstacle proved enough to keep the British in check, who preferred to bombard it with their ships than risk a land assault. Murat would write to the Emperor on June 30th that "it [the Castle] is a rock against which cannonballs do nothing and which will only surrender when it no longer has either food or ammunition; it can hold for three months." The King could not be farther from the truth – that same day Major de La Nougarède signed the capitulation of the castle. La Nougarède would report following his capture, "In the council held at the castle of Ischia, I was the only one of the opinions to continue to defend myself. This is how a rock that could be defended forever was shamefully surrendered." The Major went on to report how immediately following the capitulation, the men of the depot began going over to the enemy.³⁶

35 ILARI, CROCIANI, BOERI, *Fanteria e Cavalleria*, cit., pp. 125.

36 J.N. MURAT, *Lettres et documents pour servir à l'histoire de Joachim Murat, 1767-1815*, France, Plon-Nourrit, 1913, pp. 354-355; G. D'ASCIA, *Storia dell'Isola d'Ischia*, Napoli, Stab. Tip. G. Argenio, 1867, p. 223; S. ROGERS, *Historical Record Of The Eighty-first Regiment*, Gibraltar, Twenty-Eighth Regimental Press, 1872 p. 95; M. PARASCAN-DOLO, *Procida dalle origini ai tempi nostri*, Benevento, De Martini, 1893, p. 300.

Despite this serious loss, the regiment would gain a valuable addition in September with the incorporation of 540 men of Sciarpa's Mountain Chasseurs into the regiment's third battalion. Sciarpa, whose real name was Gerardo Curcio di Polla, was another key figure of the 1799 Revolt: as a brigand and guerilla leader he managed to completely expel the Republicans from the Vallo di Diano singlehandedly. In 1806, he would betray the Bourbon cause and go over to the French, gaining a royal pardon and the command of eight companies of volunteer chasseurs, forming the unit known as Sciarpa's Mountain Chasseurs. Pignatelli-Strongoli would report in 1807 that the unit was composed purely of brigands and assassins, who nonetheless served well – given they were well-fed and paid. These men were linked with convalescents and new recruits to form the 3rd Battalion of the 1st Light Regiment, with Sciarpa gaining the rank of Capobattaglione.³⁷ Meanwhile, on August 22nd, Murat ordered the remainder of the regiment under Colonel Boy to form two complete “war battalions” of 1,200 men in total and march to relieve the 3rd Line stationed in Rome. On 2nd September this order was countermanded, with the regiment instead being ordered to hasten to the Pyrenees Mountains through L'Aquila and Bologna – with the inevitable objective of joining the Neapolitan troops in Spain.³⁸ For the regiment, this would be their first foreign campaign, one that would scar the regiment forever.

The first foreign mission: Tyrol 1809

Arriving in Bologna alongside the 1st Horse Chasseurs, the regiment found itself delayed due to an unforeseen circumstance: the Tyrolean rebellion. Since early 1809 the entire region had been in open revolt against their French overlords, led by the charismatic Andreas Hofer. Multiple victories had been scored by the insurgents; despite this, the French triumph over the Austrians in the Danube Valley had isolated the insurgency, gradually eliminating it as a major threat to the Empire.³⁹ Nevertheless, when the 1st Light found itself crossing Northern Italy, it was compelled to rapidly march to the aid of General Luigi Gaspare Pey-

37 A. MASSAFRA, *Patrioti e Insorgenti in Provincia: Il 1799 in Terra di Bari e Basilicata*, Bari, Edipuglia, 2002, p. 102.

38 ILARI, CROCIANI, BOERI, *Fanteria e Cavalleria*, cit., p. 126.

39 J. GILL, *With Eagles to Glory: Napoleon and His German Allies in the 1809 Campaign*, United Kingdom, Greenhill Books, 1992, pp. 319-482.



Fig. 3. Cacciatori di Scarpa and di Montagna by Henri Boisselier (Vinkhujzen Collection, MYPL)

ri, who found himself besieged in Trento by a considerable force of insurgents. On October 10th, the 1st Light's *élite* companies were thrown to Peyri's aid as the besieged general launched a breakout operation with the 5e and 81e de Ligne and the 3rd Italian Line regiment; this was met with considerable success, and the insurgents were pushed back beyond the town of Lavis.⁴⁰ Together with the 1st Chasseurs, the 1st Light outflanked the main insurgent body and sent them reeling, having taken their positions with the bayonet. Following this one battalion of the regiment remained attached to General Jean-Baptiste Dominique Rusca's force, which raided the Val Passiria and occupied Merano. By this point, the insurgency had crumbled, and the Neapolitan troops proceeded on their march to the Spanish theatre. In his report to the Neapolitan minister of war, General Antoine Digonet would recommend Capobattaglione Pompei, Captain Basset, Adjutant-Major Brigante, Lieutenant Rapoli, Sous-Lieutenants Nobile, Antoglietti and Avignone, Sergeant-Major Maddalena, Sergeant Denitis and Voltigeur Griscoli, "all of them having performed wonders of valour"; he added that General Rusca had commended the two Neapolitan regiments for their actions, both of which had "covered themselves with glory, rivalling both in ardour and in courage the French regiments".⁴¹

The entry to Spain: January 1810

Following the successful closure of operations in the Tyrol, both the 1st Light and the 1st Horse Chasseurs proceeded from Trento on 2nd December to Turin and then Susa, arriving on the 31st with a total effective strength of 1.428 men (1.073+355) and 317 horses.⁴² These two units immediately crossed the border and hastened to Figueras, which they would reach on February 12th, 1810, having carried out some minor skirmishes with Catalan guerillas.⁴³ Their arrival brought

40 CORTESE, *L'Esercito Napoletano*, cit., pp.243-244; E. DE ROSSI, "Il generale Peyri nell'Alto Adige", *Archivio per l'Alto Adige*, 1909, Vol. IV, pp. 124-40

41 CORTESE, *L'Esercito Napoletano*, cit., pp.246-247; ILARI, CROCIANI, BOERI, *Fanteria e Cavalleria*, cit., p.126.

42 ILARI, CROCIANI, BOERI, *Fanteria e Cavalleria*, cit., p.178.

43 During the march, the regiment would be forced to cross the Pyrenees without proper winter clothing; furthermore, the entire officer corps was forced to sell their watches to obtain food for the regiment, as according to a letter by Murat to Napoleon. [MURAT, *Lettres et documents pour servir à l'histoire de Joachim Murat, 1767-1815*, cit., p.543].

the total number of Neapolitan regiments in Spain to five (1st and 2nd Line, 1st Light, 1st and 2nd Horse Chasseurs), which would subsequently be reinforced wholly by numerous convoys of recruits from the Kingdom and grouped into an all-Neapolitan division under the command of General Francesco Pignatelli-Strongoli, the brother of the 1st Light's old commander Vincenzo. Immediately upon arrival, the 1st Light and 1st Horse Chasseurs were formed into a brigade under the command of General Giuseppe Scarlata Zenardi, and promptly assigned to General Jean-Antoine Verdier's division of Marshal Pierre Augereau's corps for duty escorting convoys to and from Barcelona. Assigned to the vanguard of the column, the 1st Light completed its first combat assignment with major success, flushing out an insurgent force occupying the road to Barcelona at St. Celoni on the 16th. On the way back, the brigade encountered another force of insurgents – this time, close to 1.200 men strong – blocking the approaches to the town of Mataró.⁴⁴ Zenardi launched against them the 1st Light and a squadron of the 1st Chasseurs, ordering to clear the road, which was done admirably: the Neapolitans “pursued the enemy with their swords in their backs for two hours, turning their position and sending them into a rout”, at the cost of two killed and twelve wounded. Captains Navarra and Villamatta were commended for their bravery in this action by Zenardi and recommended for the Royal Order of the Two Sicilies.⁴⁵ Re-entering Figueras, the regiment would conduct an identical operation between April 4th and 13th, this time without incident.

With the Neapolitan division now fully united, it was assigned to guard the Girona road and defend the coast. The 1st Light was deployed in the Ampurdán in various garrisons around Figueres during this time, aiding in the escorting of convoys; the situation remained stagnant until May when the French command in Catalonia decided to act against the Medes Islands. This small rocky outcrop, lying just a mile off the coast, presented an annoying obstacle to French convoys taking the coastal road from Rosas, as they were forced to run the gauntlet of the islands' fort guns. Given his mission of protecting the convoys passing through the region, Pignatelli gathered his division on May 4th and reached Cape L'Estartit (the closest point on the mainland to the islands) on the 6th. After setting up batteries on the coast to pound the island fortifications, Pignatelli selected 600

44 CORTESE, *L'Esercito Napoletano*, cit., p.215.

45 *Ibid*, p. 216.



Fig. 4 a) Officers of the 1° leggero in 1806 by Quinto Cenni. (Vinkhuzen Collection, MYPL)

picked men from the three infantry regiments in his division to carry out the assault; on the night of the 9th, Capobattaglione Pompei landed 150 men on the closest island, followed by 150 others under Scudieri, Pignatelli's ADC. These were reinforced soon after by two 16-pounder guns and a number of sappers.

As the action progressed and the Neapolitans awaited more boats to ferry men onto the second island, which contained the fort itself, two officers of the 1st Light – Lieutenants Guillotti and Dell'Uva – noticed two usable boats parked on the beach of the second island, under the fort's guns. Despite the heavy fire coming from the fort, two corporals of the 1st Light

launched themselves into the water and swam across, seizing the two boats and bringing them back to the officers unharmed. Immediately after, a small detachment (numbering nine men) boarded the boats and rowed across, landing under the fort's walls unseen; the surprise of discovering the enemy already disembarked on the second island served enough to compel the fortress commander, a Walloon officer named Agustín Cailleaux, to surrender. The fort yielded some 5 guns, 300 cannonballs, 6.000 pounds of gunpowder and numerous stores of cartridges, which could have been used to hold out much longer; luckily for the Neapolitans, the bravery of the 1st Light's detachment ensured this did not occur. All nine men of the detachment (Lieutenants Guillotti e Dell'Uva, Sergeant Ma-

lor Loreto Antico,⁴⁶ Corporal Silvestrone and privates Santini, Milone, De Blasio, Nelli e Donatilli) were promoted by a rank; the two swimmers would be awarded the Royal Order of the Two Sicilies, as would both officers.⁴⁷

Campaign against Tarragona

On May 31st, the 1st Light Regiment numbered 1.076 men stationed in Figueras, of which 780 were fit for combat.⁴⁸ The following two months would be spent in complete tranquillity, still stationed around Figueras; only on August 2nd did the campaigning rebegin, as the division was ordered to cover the French forces blockading Tarragona. On the 4th the regiment moved to Girona and then proceeded with the division



Fig. 4 b) Tête de Colonne of the 1^o leggero by Quinto Cenni. (Vinkhujzen Collection, MYPL)

to Reus. On August 25th Macdonald's corps set out again, with the objective of linking up with Suchet's force destined for the Siege of Tortosa; the Neapolitans were given the honour of leading the vanguard of the corps, and thus conducted several reconnaissances around Valls, which cost the regiment two men killed and one wounded. The 1st Light would continually serve as the most advanced

46 This was the very same man who had shot Major Hamill during the attack on Anacapri on October 5th, 1808. He would be promoted to Sous-Lieutenant following this action.

47 ILARI, CROCIANI, BOERI, *Fanteria e Cavalleria*, cit., pp. 191-192; CORTESE, *L'Esercito*, p.217; *Monitore Napolitano*, 6th June 1810; J. FERRER, *El ampurdán durante la guerra de la independencia*, Spain, F. Bertran, 1885, p. 44; J. TORENO, *Historia del levantamiento, guerra y revolución de España*. Spain, Akrón, 2008, p. 297.

48 V. ILARI, P. CROCIANI, *Le Truppe napoletane in Spagna (1809-13)*, Italy, Soldiershop Publishing, 2015, p.60.

unit of the corps – a circumstance that made them the first to fall into a Spanish ambush near El Pla.⁴⁹ The Spanish were nevertheless brushed aside. Macdonald, furious at the constant plundering and lack of discipline among the Neapolitans, decided to arrest Pignatelli on the 27th.

The command of the division went to Colonel Boy, the senior French officer in the division. Pignatelli would be reinstated soon after, but the damage had been done already: his popularity among the troops had fallen irreversibly, and his relationship with the Marshal was irreparably broken. Allegedly, during one heated exchange, Macdonald outright stated to Pignatelli: “You don’t know how to lead your division”.⁵⁰ Such developments could only mean further embarrassment for the Neapolitans.

The next few months were spent deployed behind Suchet’s *Armée d’Aragon*, ensuring the safe passage of various supply convoys through the region around Lérida and along the Ebro. The operations here largely kept the 1st Light engaged in escorting duties, although it did participate on 16th September in the taking of the fortified tower of L’Espanyol. The regiment was not involved in the fiasco of the 17th, which saw an entire battalion of the 2nd Line captured, nor the Neapolitan victory on October 9th; somehow, one sapper of the 1st Light named Merola was present at the latter, being singled out for the Order of the Two Sicilies.⁵¹ The regiment continued these duties until the end of the year; in November Pignatelli was replaced as divisional commander by General Gratien Ferrier, ex-Colonel of the Grenadiers of the Royal Guard. The “division”, now numbering some 4.675 men, 1.646 of which were effectively present, was hence decreased to brigade size; it was grouped into General Claude-Antoine Compère’s division. The brigade was formed with the first battalions and squadrons of every regiment, with the rest being ordered to be repatriated to the Kingdom; among these would be Colonel Boy, who would leave the regiment in April. Hence, on 31st January, the brigade numbered some 3.333 effectives, and the 1st Light would find itself under the interim command of Capobattaglione Pompei.⁵²

49 ILARI, CROCIANI, BOERI, *Fanteria e Cavalleria*, cit., p. 195.

50 G. PEPE, V. DOUGLAS, *Dal Molise alla Catalogna. Gabriele Pepe e le sue esperienze nella guerra del Francès*. Campobasso, Editrice AGR, 2009, p.211

51 Colonel Boy would name Merola “the most valorous man of the regiment”.

52 ILARI, CROCIANI, BOERI, *Fanteria e Cavalleria*, cit., p.200, CORTESE, *L’Esercito*, p.216-218.



Fig. 6. Porte-Aigle of the 1^o leggero by Quinto Cenni. The flag here is inaccurately depicted as blue and red. (Vinkhuizen Collection, NYPL)

The final stages of the campaign – 1811

While the remainder of the brigade remained engaged in operations around Suchet's *Armée d'Aragon*, an unexpected disaster befell the Franco-Neapolitans on the night of April 9th, 1811. The formidable fortress of Figueres, serving as the depot of the entire Neapolitan brigade – and a place of rest for convalescent soldiers – would be taken in a daring *coup de main* by the insurgents of Francisco Rovira, an intrepid Spanish guerilla; the Spaniards would infiltrate the fort thanks to the treachery of an officer and two servants of unknown origin. As a result, the regiment lost three officers and a large number of hospitalized rankers, the largest single loss the regiment had suffered in Spain. Figueres would be retaken by the French later that year. That same month, the regiment would be engaged in one of its bloodiest operations of the campaign, at the fortified village of Calatayud. The village would find itself besieged on 24th July by a force of at least three thousand Spanish irregulars, with just two Neapolitan battalions defending; immediately upon receiving the news, Ferrier hastened to relieve the defenders with four *élite* companies of the 1st Light, 2nd Line and 1st Vistula regiments but found himself hopelessly outnumbered. Surrounded, wounded and low on ammunition, Ferrier inexplicably led his men into a death trap; the last resort was to break through the encirclement and seek shelter within the fortified Convent of La Merced within the city. After a desperate bayonet charge, this was achieved, and Ferrier holed himself in, together with a reinforced detachment led by Pompei. Luckily, the Spanish would withdraw from the city later that day, seeing no gain in holding the town without reinforcements. Ferrer had narrowly escaped a total disaster – at the cost of 10 dead, 45 wounded and several captured. Five officers of the 1st Light would distinguish themselves during this action: Captains Dupuis and Galloni, Lieutenant Giardini, and Sous-Lieutenants Avignone and Maddalena.⁵³

Thus came an end to the last major action of the 1st Light Regiment in Spain; Ferrier's brigade would also be involved in the capture of Oropesa in October 1811. The Neapolitans would also be present at the Siege of Valencia, albeit in an auxiliary role. By this point, the 1st Light's strength was at 416 men, only 359 of which were present under arms. The rest of the brigade was in a similar state, and hence on the 14th of October, the 1st Light was grouped alongside the 1st

53 CORTESE, *L'Esercito*, p.230; ILARI, CROCIANI, BOERI, *Fanteria e Cavalleria*, cit., pp.205-206.

and 2nd Line regiments into the provisional 8th Line Regiment, by decree of the King.⁵⁴ With this development, the Spanish campaign would come to an end for the 1st Light Infantry Regiment; it would be totally rebuilt within the Kingdom, and serve its remaining days solely on the Apennine Peninsula.

3

THE FINAL YEARS: 1812-1815

At the commencement of 1811, the depot of the 1st Light was expanded to 1.124 men, while the two battalions in Spain numbered 921. When the two battalions on campaign were merged into one following the reduction of Pignatelli's division, Colonel Boy and the cadre of the 1st Battalion were repatriated back to the Kingdom, with the objective of reforming the regiment – almost from scratch. With the decree of 7th July 1811, the regiment was expanded to four battalions; the old 3rd Battalion was split into the new 2nd and 3rd, and the 4th was raised from conscripts and officers returning from the Spanish theatre. When the 1st Battalion in Spain became part of the new 8th Line Infantry Regiment, the 2nd, 3rd and 4th Battalions became the 1st, 2nd and 3rd. In all, the regiment numbered some 4.598 effectives on 1st January 1812, although a huge portion of these were inexperienced recruits. The situation grew worse when the regiment's beloved colonel, Louis-François Boy, would be promoted to Adjutant-General and transferred to become commandant of the garrison of Capri in February 1812. He would later become a General of Brigade in 1813.⁵⁵ In his stead came an Italian officer, one of high noble birth: Alessandro de Medici di Ottajano.⁵⁶

A member of the prodigious Medici family, Alessandro would command the regiment for two years until March 1814. The regiment would see no serious combat under him; initially destined to take part in the Russian Campaign, the regiment was replaced by the Foot Velites of the Royal Guard and remained

54 CORTESE, *Corpi e Scuole*, cit., p.40; ILARI, CROCIANI, BOERI, *Fanteria e Cavalleria*, cit., pp. 208-213; CORTESE, *L'Esercito*, p.235.

55 CORTESE, *L'Esercito*, p.211.

56 CORTESE, *Corpi e Scuole*, p.55-56; ILARI, CROCIANI, BOERI, *Fanteria e Cavalleria*, cit., p.247.

home. This move, although detrimental to the regiment's glory, probably saved it from destruction; the unit was thus able to spend two years of relative peace as a wholly formed regiment. On 20th February, King Murat declared the formation of a fourth light infantry regiment at Capua under Colonel Chiarizia – the same man who had ruined two regiments prior in his career – and also incorporated the Royal Corsican Regiment into the light infantry corps itself.⁵⁷ Thus, the regiments were renumbered; the Corsicans became the new 1st Light, and Medici's regiment became the new 2nd Light, and so forth.

The year was spent with relative tranquillity, except on 26th February 1813, when the entire company of Captain Miraconda, numbering 143 men, was captured on Ponza by the British. Ponza, another tiny yet strategically significant rock in the Mediterranean, was under the nominal command of a French Captain named Jean-Baptiste Dumont; Miraconda commanded the island's only infantry force. On February 23rd two British warships – the *Thames* (32) and the *Furieuse* (38), under the command of Captain Charles Napier, approached the island's bay. On the 26th the weather allowed both sides to begin firing; the island's coastal guns scored a few hits on the ships, but nonetheless were unable to prevent Napier from landing Lieutenant-Colonel John Coffin's 2nd Battalion, 10th Foot; the defenders, now holed inside the *Papa* Fortress, the island's largest fortification, surrendered before facing the attack.⁵⁸ The surrender agreement allowed the garrison to march out with the honours of war and was signed by Miraconda and Dupont.⁵⁹ For his exploit, Napier would adopt the title *Count of Ponza*.

Despite another embarrassing loss at the hands of the British, the regiment in mid-1813 had 2.825 effectives, including 79 officers. The 2nd Light would be assigned to the 1st Territorial Division and stationed at Mola di Gaeta, with the 3rd Battalion at Castellone and the Depot at Naples. The regiment would remain in Campania until political developments in 1813 mobilised the entire army to march north; for the 2nd Light, a new campaign would begin once more.⁶⁰

57 This latter action occurred with decree N.1629 of February 1813.

58 *The Annual Register; Or a View of the History, Politics, and Literature, for the year 1813*. London, Baldwin, Cradock and Joy, 1823, pp. 107-108; E. NAPIER, *The life and correspondence of admiral sir Charles Napier*, London, Hurst and Blackett, 1862, pp. 63-64, G. TIRCOLI, *Monografia per le isole del Gruppo Ponziano*, Napoli, St. S. Marcellino, 1855.

59 *Royal Military Panorama, or Officer's Companion for April 1813*, London, Cuthell and Martin, 1813, p.659

60 ILARI, CROCIANI, BOERI, *Fanteria e Cavalleria*, cit., pp. 249-250.



Fig. 6. Porte-Aigle of the 1° leggero by Quinto Cenni. The flag here is inaccurately depicted as blue and red. (Vinkhuzen Collection, NYPL)



Fig. 7. Flag of the 1st Neapolitan Light under Murat. (Author's Own Work)

The 1814 Campaign for Northern Italy

In 1813, following the disastrous events of the Invasion of Russia and the subsequent campaign in Germany, Murat would promptly defect to the side of the coalition – abandoning the French and alienating an immense portion of his army, which was heavily composed of French nationals. A treaty of alliance was signed between Naples and Austria on 11th January 1814, promising Neapolitan military support against the Franco-Italians in Northern Italy.⁶¹ Thus, on 1st February

61 JOHNSTON, *The Napoleonic Empire*, cit., pp. 255-280, M. ZANNONI, *La Battaglia del Taro*,

1814, the 2nd Light found itself grouped into General Guglielmo Pepe's brigade of General Michele Carrascosa's 1st Division, alongside the 1st Line Infantry Regiment, with a total effective strength of 2.039 men. These units would be stationed in Ancona; with the commencement of the campaign, the 2nd Battalion would move to Modena on the 29th. On March 1st, Medici was replaced as colonel by an officer with significantly more experience in handling combat troops – the Sicilian officer Luigi Verdinois, previously colonel of the Royal Corsican Regiment. Before meeting the enemy, however, the entire brigade was stopped by Pepe, who singled out the French officers of the brigade and asked to know whether they would serve against their own countrymen. Of the 47 officers called, most resigned; thus, the regiment was deprived of several talented officers.⁶²

Shortly after the brigade advanced towards Parma, which on the 2nd of March saw a heated engagement between the French and the Austro-Neapolitans, which forced the brigade to retreat behind the Enza. On March 7th, the regiment took part in the engagement at Reggio Emilia; while one battalion stormed the city and engaged in an energetic urban fight, the other forded the Rodano together with a battalion of the 1st Line and clashed with the Italian 1st and 7th Line regiments, both also veterans of Spain. Several days later, on the 13th, the brigade forded the Taro River, losing a few men to the rough current, then dislodging the Italian 1st Line from Fidenza. A battalion of the 2nd Light would be forced to form square during this action to repulse a counterattack by the French 19th Horse Chasseurs, gaining the praises of Carrascosa and Pepe.⁶³ With this action, the campaign would actively end for the 2nd Light.

1815, the final campaign

The following year, Murat would undertake that well-known enterprise that defined the final year of his career, and his legacy in Italy: the Neapolitan War of 1815. By this point, the regiment was still 2.263 men strong; when the cam-

13-15 Aprile 1814, Parma, Silva Editore, 2007, pp. 1-21.

62 G. PEPE, *Memoirs of General Pèpè*, London, Bentley, 1846, Vol. I, p. 235

63 M. ZANNONI, *La Battaglia del Taro*, cit., pp. 154-156, PEPE, *Memoirs*, cit., pp. 353-356; G. NAFZIGER, M. GIOANNINI, *The Defense of the Napoleonic Kingdom of Northern Italy, 1813-1814*, Westport, Praeger, 2002, pp. 197-219; ILARI, CROCIANI, BOERI, *Fanteria e Cavalleria*, cit., pp. 249-250.

paign began on March 15th, the regiment was still grouped in the same brigade (Pepe's) of the 1st Division under Carrascosa. The regiment's fate would thence be strictly linked to this formation; together with Pepe, the regiment's two battalions commenced the campaign victoriously by pushing out the Austrians from Cesena, who held the city with a small mixed detachment of infantry and *Prinz Regent* hussars. According to Pepe, the regiment advanced so rapidly through the town, that the Austrians "threw themselves from the walls to avoid being made prisoners".⁶⁴ The regiment would be one of the first to enter Bologna on April 2nd, victoriously parading through the streets; the day after, it would take part in the most glorious day of the regiment's history.

On April 4th the entire Murattian Army (minus the two Guard divisions in Tuscany) advanced to seize Modena. The Panaro river crossings leading to the city were here defended by the Austrian General Friedrich Bianchi, at the head of some 12,000 men (according to Pepe), with the Austrian centre being formed up opposite the Sant' Ambrogio bridge, which was fortified. Here Carrascosa and Murat decided to dislodge the Austrians by forcing the bridge outright. The 2nd Light's four élite companies would be engaged with the main force pushing the bridge – they fought "under the King's eyes with conspicuous bravery", but nevertheless the main attack was unable to make headway against the determined Austrian defenders. In the heat of the battle, Murat ordered Pepe – with the two battalions of the 2nd, minus the elite companies – to ford the river at Spilimberto.

Despite being heavily outnumbered, and absorbing a galling fire from the other bank, Pepe inflamed the hearts of the regiment with a fiery speech and then ordered them to charge. The regiment "plunged unhesitatingly into the river", fording it, and led by Verdinois and Pepe the entire regiment pushed across the other bank into Austrian General Joseph Steffanini's troops, wounding the general and forcing his superior force to retreat. With this manoeuvre, the Austrian line was compromised; and the battle was won for the Neapolitans.⁶⁵

Following this battle, the regiment would find itself engaged at Carpi (April 10th), Cesenatico (23rd)⁶⁶ and Scapezzano (May 1st). It would miss the decisive

64 PEPE, *Memoirs*, cit., Vol. 2, p. 40

65 PEPE, *Memoirs*, cit., Vol.2 ; A. LUMBROSO, *La Campagne de Murat en 1815*, Paris, Carnet Historique, 1899

66 Here, the regiment would suffer a sharp defeat the hands of a mixed force of Austrian Ty-



Fig. 8. Carabiniere, Lt. of Carabiniers, Lt of Voltigeurs, and Cornet of the 1° leggero.
(Vinkhujzen Collection, NYPL)

battle of Tolentino, along with the rest of the division. The regiment's final engagement would be at Castel del Sangro, a minor Neapolitan victory; however, by this point, the Murattian cause was lost. The few remaining survivors of the campaign would gather at Capua on May 20th where the armistice was signed, and the regiment would find itself disbanded. Thus came an end to the history of a brave regiment – one of the best of the Neapolitan Army, whose soldiers would gain more laurels under the Murattian banners than almost any other regiment.⁶⁷ While the majority of the Neapolitan troops suffered a reputation as poorly disciplined brigands, the 1st Light would continually prove that it was a fighting force capable of effectively carrying out its orders, even in the riskiest situations - as at Capri, Medes and Panaro.

rolean jaegers and *Toscana* dragoons, under the leadership of Peter von Pirquet.

⁶⁷ Verdinois would continue serving the Bourbons and would join the rebels under General Pepe in the 1821 revolts.

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