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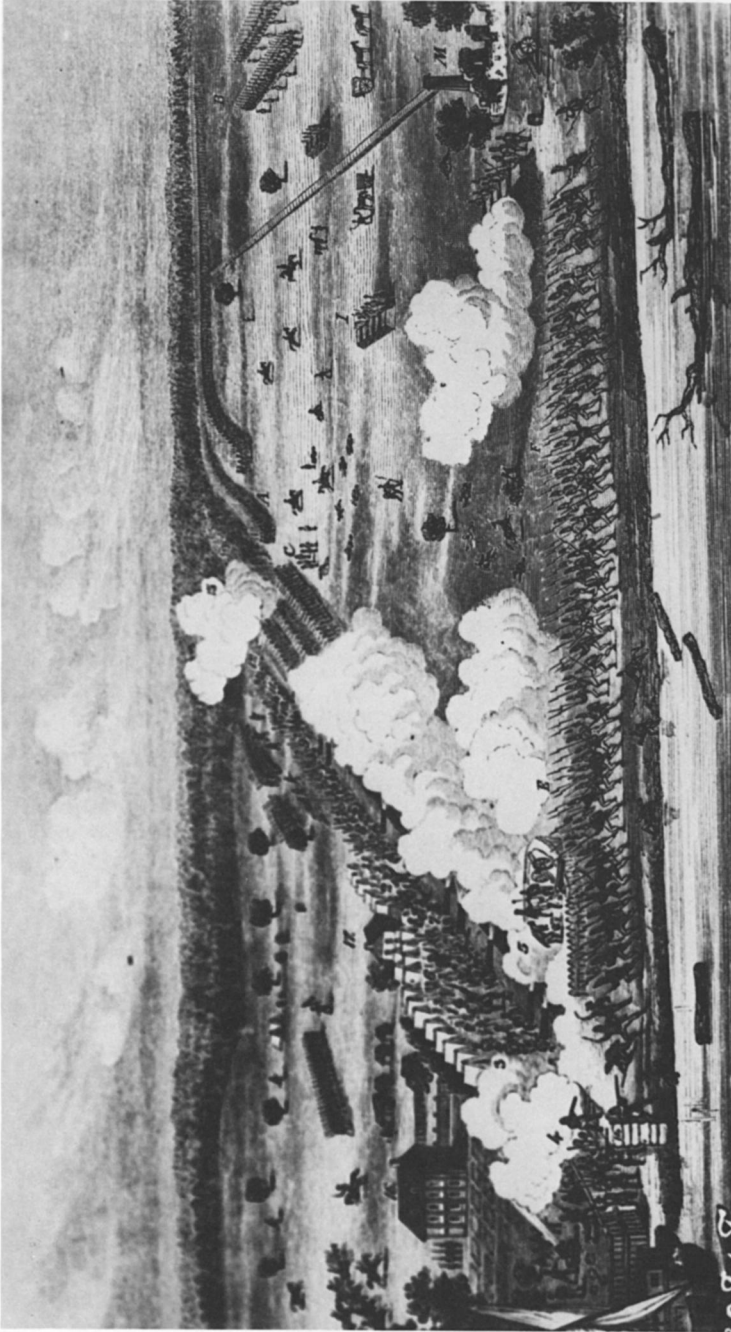
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**Birds eye view of the Battle of New Orleans, La., January 8, 1815.
From a sketch by Latour, Jackson's Chief Engineer.**
(Courtesy of the Author)

Italians and the War of 1812

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La patria di un uomo coraggioso è ovunque sceglie di vivere.
(A brave man's country is wherever he chooses to settle.)

Some Italian contributions to early America are well known. The great navigators, such as Cristoforo Colombo, Giovanni Caboto, Giovanni da Verrazzano, and Amerigo Vespucci, are discussed in most American schools. Informed historians are also familiar with important Italian explorers, such as Fra Marco da Nizza, Father Eusebio Chino, and Enrico Tonti.¹ The roles played by a number of Italians in the American Revolution have also been investigated.² However, a gap exists in the literature concerning Italians and Italian Americans who participated in the War of 1812. This paper represents pioneering work, since no previous studies have focused upon this topic.

Italian-American Relations Prior to 1816

Prior to the historic diplomatic mission of William Pinkney to the Kingdom of Two Sicilies in 1816, there were only low-level formal contacts between American and Italian officials. Ralph Izard in 1777 was appointed by Congress as the Commissioner to Tuscany,

but since he never reached his post it cannot be considered a diplomatic mission. Nor can Philip Mazzei's mission to the Grand Duke of Tuscany during the American Revolution (1779-1783) be viewed as having a diplomatic character. Until Pinkney's appointment, the United States had been represented in the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies by a consul in Naples (1796), Palermo (1805) and Messina (1805).³

By 1806 Napoleon, then emperor, had annexed large portions of Italy, including Rome, Piedmont, and Venetian possessions in Dalmatia, to France; deeded Naples to his brother-in-law Marshall Joachim Murat; and created the Kingdom of Italy in northern and central Italy, naming himself its king. On July 1, 1809, the minister of foreign affairs of Naples addressed to Mr. Frederick Degan, the United States consul there, an official invitation to all American vessels, provided with proper papers and certificates of origin, to repair to the Neapolitan ports. Such vessels accordingly entered the port. Shortly afterwards, however, to carry out Napoleon's orders, Murat issued decrees that allowed his forces to confiscate the American ships. He then sold their cargoes for the benefit of the government and used the vessels for public service.⁴

In 1814, Italy and the United States were faced with a similar dilemma. Foreign troops occupied parts of both nations. In the summer of that year, France was in control over much of Italy, while Britain tightened its blockade on the United States and sent thousands of veteran troops released from European service to Canada. Then British forces invaded the area of Chesapeake Bay, captured Washington, and burned the White House and Capitol. They also attempted to invade New England and New York by way of Lake Champlain, but lost a decisive naval victory near Plattsburgh in September.

American and British envoys signed the Treaty of Ghent on Christmas Eve, 1814. But the Battle of New Orleans, led by General Andrew Jackson, was fought after the signing of the peace treaty because of slow communication regarding the end of the war. The battle concluded on January 8, 1815, with a stunning victory for the United States. Five months later, on June 9, the Congress of Vienna more or less restored the pre-Napoleonic *status quo* in Italy. Austria, receiving Lombardy and Venetia, held a paramount position but could not long suppress the Italian nationalist movement for unification. Americans and Italians were both able to rid their countries of foreign troops, and thereby establish their independence.

Examples of Italian Combatants

It is impossible to determine the number of native Italians who fought for America in the War of 1812 or what their motives were. Anglicization of Italian names could have taken place by translations, dropping of final vowels, analogical changes, gallicization, decompounding forms, and phonetic respellings. Many Anglo-American colonists could have knowingly or unwittingly sought to conform Italian names to English linguistic patterns, spelling, or individual names with which they happened to be acquainted. Some immigrants may have deliberately changed their names or tolerated modifications as a concession to their new environment. Nevertheless, there is documented evidence that men from Italy fought on the side of the United States in the War of 1812. The National Archives and Records Service, of the General Services Administration, reports that on the subject of "Italians in the War of 1812 . . . it is likely that our records include service records for . . . soldiers with Italian surnames."⁵ Examples of Italian combatants who fought for America are Captain Joseph Lametti, Private John Francisco, and the Italian privateer captains, Louis Chighizola and Vincent Gambio.

Joseph Lametti was born at Modena, Italy, about 1774. He came to America in the early 1790s and married Margaret Cannon on April 2, 1795. Lametti received a commission in the New York Militia as a second lieutenant in the 9th New York Artillery, Battalion of Sea Fencibles. He was promoted to first lieutenant and served in Captain John Marston's company, under the command of Major John Bleecker. Promoted to captain, Lametti saw service in the First Battalion of the 9th Regiment, the 40th New York Regiment, and the 17th Kentucky Regiment. During the War, Lametti helped to defend New York City and its harbor and served two tours of federal service. In his second tour, from September 2 to December 2, 1814, Lametti was in the division led by Major General Ebenezer Stevens. Lametti died in New York City on May 8, 1848. On February 22, 1930, an official bronze soldier's grave marker was placed on his tomb in the old Saint Patrick's Churchyard.⁶ Another Italian, Private John Francisco, also served in the U. S. Army. He was captured by the British and held prisoner.⁷

Italian privateers, such as Captain Louis Chighizola of Genoa,⁸ and Captain Vincent Gambio, were in the American line at the Battle of New Orleans. Gambio commanded a schooner named the

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Philanthrope.⁹ In 1813, the British tried several times to invade Baratavia. But the Baratarians were better gunners and drove them back. In August, Gambio and other privateers attacked an English convoy in the neighborhood of Barbados. During the battle they captured two English ships, which they sailed to Grande Terre.¹⁰

On January 1, 1815, some 5,300 British troops, unaware of the Peace Treaty signed at Ghent, attacked American entrenchments near New Orleans. Gambio, Chighizola, and other Italian Baratarians fought to help give the British a resounding defeat.¹¹ Captain Gambio received passport orders from General Andrew Jackson's headquarters to take men and two guns to Cherniere Caminada for its defense. The passport was signed by Edward Livingston, Jackson's chief aid.¹² Italian seamen also participated in the war. Former U. S. President Theodore Roosevelt, in his book *The Naval War of 1812*, wrote about "the Portuguese and Italians, of whom some were to be found serving under the union-jack, and others under the stars and stripes."¹³ Given the close relationship between Italy and France of that time, it should not be surprising that Italian names can be found among the rosters of the Canadian Voltigeurs Regiments of Light Infantry. For example, Michel(e) Campagna served in Captain J. B. Duchesnay's company from June 25 to July 24, 1812.¹⁴

Examples of Italian-American Combatants

In one of his classic books, titled *Four Centuries of Italian-American History*, the eminent scholar Giovanni Schiavo demonstrates that by 1776 there were thousands of people of Italian origin living in the American colonies. Maryland and Virginia contained large numbers of them. Some of their offspring probably fought in the War of 1812. For example, Private Henry Modena and Lieutenant Lawrence Taliaferro (Tagliaferro) are most likely descendants of early Italian settlers, for their family names can be found in all standard genealogical textbooks of Italian surnames.¹⁵ Wagner and Andrus (1969) have conducted research that proves that the Italian ancestors of the Taliaferro patriots settled in England in the sixteenth century and that their descendants later moved to America.¹⁶

Lieutenant Taliaferro was born at Whitehall, King County, Virginia, on February 28, 1794. On August 5, 1812, he enlisted in a volunteer company of light infantry. He saw action on several fronts and was promoted to first lieutenant. At the end of the war, Talia-

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ferro retained his rank and served with the 3rd Regiment at many frontier posts.¹⁷ Private Modena was born in Virginia in 1792. During the war he fought with the Virginia Militia.¹⁸ Another American soldier with an Italian surname who served in the military during this period was Private Francis Como of New Hampshire.¹⁹

The Battle of New Orleans

It has already been demonstrated that some Italians fought with the American forces at the Battle of New Orleans. There could have been many of them. Lyle Saxon shows that in 1812 the streets of the city were crowded with men of many nations, including Frenchmen, Spaniards, and Italians.²⁰ There were also many Italians among the Baratarians.²¹

The war was in its third year before Louisiana became the theater of operations. On September 3, 1814, a British sloop ran aground off Grand Terre. Jean Lafitte and other Baratarians boarded the ship. Lafitte seized a proclamation to the citizens of Louisiana from the British Commander, Colonel Edward Nicholls. The statement appealed directly to several ethnic groups for help. It read in part: "Natives of Louisiana! On you the first call is made to assist in liberating . . . your paternal soil. Spaniards, Frenchmen, Italians, and British, . . . on you I call to aid me in this just cause. The American usurpation in this country must be abolished, and the lawful owners of the soil put in possession."²² Nicholls must have believed that the number of potential Italian combatants living in Louisiana was large enough to appeal to them as a group.

Italian privateers and citizens of Louisiana, along with other Baratarians and residents of the territory, ignored the British plea. Instead, they contributed to the security of the United States by joining on the side of the Americans. When the battle was over, the British had suffered more than 2,000 casualties; the Americans only 71. The list of the Louisiana Genealogical and Historical Society, of Louisiana soldiers in the War of 1812, contains scores of soldiers with Italian surnames.²³ A few examples include:

- Private Joseph Antonio, Second Battalion (Peire's),
Louisiana Volunteers.
- Private Joseph Carpentero, Second Battalion
(Peire's), Louisiana Volunteers.

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Musician Caponi, Plauche's Battalion, Louisiana Militia.

Private Joseph Colombi, De Clouet's Regiment, Louisiana Militia.

Private Louis Ferrara, Sergeant Hog's Detachment, Louisiana Volunteers.

Musician Antonio Francesco, Second Battalion (Peire's), Louisiana Volunteers.

Private Amed(e) Reggio, Third Regiment (de La Ronde's), Louisiana Militia.²⁴

Conclusion

This paper represents original research on the subject of Italians and the War of 1812, since no previous work has even been published on this topic. The strength and dedication of many Italians contributed to the American success in the war. This is especially true of the Battle of New Orleans. Had Italian Baratarians, and Italian citizens of New Orleans, heeded the plea of Colonel Nicholls and fought with the British, the American victory there might have been more costly in terms of expenditures and casualties.

Judging from the evidence uncovered, no single Italian played a crucial role during the war. But there is a saying in Italian: "Molti ciottoli fanno una montagna" (Many pebbles make a mountain). The combined efforts of Italian privateers, Italian volunteers, and Italian-American soldiers must have been of some significance. Like the Unknown Soldier of World War I, most of the Italians and Italian Americans who participated "rest in honored glory . . . known but to God." Still, a few names are known to us, as representatives of those Italians who fought and died for the American cause.

NOTES

1. For an excellent discussion of the early Italian contributions to American civilization consult: Giovanni Schiavo, *The Italians in America Before the Civil War* (New York: Vigo, 1934); Schiavo, *The Italians in America Before the Revolution* (New York: Vigo, 1976).

2. For a discussion of the Italian contributions to the American Revolution consult: *Italian Americana*, vol. 3, no. 1, Autumn 1976, 1-17.

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3. U. S. Department of State, Bureau of Public Affairs, Personal Records of the Department of State, Washington, D.C.
4. Howard R. Marraro, "William Pinkney's Mission to the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies, 1816," *Maryland Historical Magazine*, vol. 43, no. 4, December 4, 1948, 235-237; Rev. Christopher Perotta, *The Claims of the United States against the Kingdom of Naples* (Washington, D.C.: Belvedere Press, 1926).
5. Letter from Stuart L. Butler, Navy and Old Army Branch, Military Archives Division, National Archives and Records Service, General Services Administration, Washington, D.C., April 4, 1979.
6. H. H. Noble, Registrar General of the Society of the War of 1812; Military Services Records (NNCC), National Archives, GSA, Washington, D.C.
7. Mrs. Henry James Carr, Index to Certified Copy of List of American Prisoners of War, 1812-1815, as Recorded in General Entry Book, Ottawa, Canada. Published by the National Society of U. S. Daughters of 1812, Washington, D.C., 1924, p. 9.
8. United States District Court of Louisiana, Case no. 816.
9. Jane Lucas de Grummond. *The Baratarians and the Battle of New Orleans*. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1961), p. 10.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 22.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 105.
12. United States District Court of Louisiana, Cases no. 817 and no. 844.
13. Theodore Roosevelt. *The Naval War of 1812* (New York: Haskell House, 1882), p. 35.
14. Canadian Voltigeurs Regiments of Light Infantry on the Adjutant's Roll to 24th July, 1812. Capt. J. B. Duchesnay's Company, 25 June-24 July, William Wood, *Select British Documents of the Canadian War of 1812*, vol. 2 (Toronto: The Champlain Society, 1923), p. 365.
15. For example, Joseph G. Fucilla, *Our Italian Surnames* (Evanston, Ill.: Chandlers, 1949).
16. Sir Anthony Wagner and F. S. Andrus, "The Origin of the Family of Taliaferro," *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*, 77, 1969, 22-25.
17. *Dictionary of American Biography*, vol. 9, part 1, 1964, p. 283.
18. 1812 Ancestor Index 1892-1970, National Society United States Daughters of 1812, compiled and edited by Eleanor Stevens Galvin, Registrar National 1967-1973 (Norcross, Georgia: Harper, 1970), p. 359.
19. Letter from the Secretary of War, Transmitting a Report of the Names, Rank and Line of Every person placed on a pension list, in pursuance of the Act of 18th March, 1818. January 20, 1820 (Washington, D.C.: Gales and Seaton, 1820), pp. 269, 55, 382.

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20. Lyle Saxon, *Lafitte the Pirate* (New York: Appleton-Century, 1939), p. 7.

21. *Ibid.*, pp. 90, 184.

22. Major Arsene Lacarriere Latour, *Historical Memoir*. Appendix No. 3, vii-viii. This proclamation has been quoted by many authors. The original is in Biblioteca Parsoniana: La.-Am. Mss, No. 1023.

23. In order to distinguish among Italian, Spanish, and French surnames, the author consulted more than two dozen standard genealogical texts. Whenever the origin of a family name was in doubt (e.g., Joseph Barbara, Sp. It., Louis Franco, Sp. It.), it was not included. Among the books consulted, four of the most useful include: Richard D. Woods and Grace Alvarez-Altman, *Spanish Surnames in the Southwestern United States: A Dictionary* (Boston: G. K. Hall, 1978); N. E. Dionne, *Les Canadiens-Français Origine Des Familles* (Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Company, 1969); Elsdon C. Smith, *New Dictionary of American Family Names* (New York: Harper & Row, 1973); Fucilla, *Our Italian Surnames*, op. cit.

24. Marion John Bennet Pierson, *Louisiana Soldiers in the War of 1812* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana Genealogical and Historical Society, 1963), pp. 3, 21, 22, 28, 45, 47, 100.