Lazare Ponticelli, the last French «poilu» (infantry soldier) of the First World War, died in 2008. After fighting in France with the Garibaldi Legion in 1914 and 1915, he went on to join the Italian Alpini troops with whom he served between 1915 and 1918. Ponticelli, like thousands of his transalpine comrades, vacillated between two histories and two countries, France and Italy. After the war had ended, he returned to France in 1920 where he made a fortune, obtaining his naturalisation in 1939 before joining the Resistance. He died on 12 March 2008 at the age of 110, at his home in Kremlin-Bicêtre. He was buried in the cemetery of Ivry-sur-Seine.²

The Garibaldi Legion, officially created on 5 November 1914 as the Fourth Régiment de Marche of the First Regiment of the French Foreign Legion,³ was terminated on 5 March 1915.⁴ It lasted only four months, yet it gave birth to a myth that still persists today.⁵ The history of this Regiment revived the Garibaldi myth and, more broadly speaking, Garibalδism. Giuseppe Garibaldi was born in Nice in 1807 and died in Caprera, a small island not far from Sardinia in 1882. He was one of the protagonists of Italian unification between 1848 and 1870, and had contributed to wars of liberation in Brazil and Uruguay between 1835 and 1848. He was known as the «hero of the two worlds» (l’eroe dei due mondi). His reputation was international, for

1 I would like to thank Mr. Anastasios Zografos, who translated this article from French into English, and Mrs Theodora Savva Christofi who reviewed the translation.
3 Ministerial dispatch n° 770 C/1, Bordeaux, 5.11.1914, Service Historique de la Défense-Département Armée de Terre (SHD-DAT), 6 N 21.
4 Minister of War to the General Commander of the 15th region, Paris, 5.3.1915, SHD-DAT, 6 N 21.
different people he embodied the «condottiere», the liberator of oppressed nations, the defender of humanist and republican ideals, such as liberté, égalité, fraternité, justice, anti-clerical secularism and democracy. This set of values, which was attributed to the hero, animated the movement called Garibaldism. Late-nineteenth century French republicans made Garibaldi one of their heroes. In 1870/1871, Garibaldi fought alongside the French against the Prussians, led the Army of the Vosges and did his share in the rescue of the town of Dijon in early January 1871. This military bravery made him one of the heroes of the bourgeoning Republic, and his prestige was still alive in 1914. At this point, his descendents and other volunteers went to France to defend the Republic that was menaced by the Central Powers. This article, at the junction of military, political and cultural history, is about these early First World War volunteers, whose ideological commitment was uncommon during this war and whose military actions were not commensurate with the «traces» they left in history.

The few battles in which they were involved in 1914 and 1915 gave birth to a myth, at times unrelated to the facts, thanks to the media as well as political and propaganda activities on both sides of the Alps. This article explores how and why this Garibaldian military adventure (ultimately minor in the grander picture of the war) led to such a myth that enabled France and Italy to come closer, and which survived the vicissitudes of time.

1. A Difficult Identification: The Sources and Their Limitations

The identification of the Garibaldian volunteers in France is not straightforward. The spelling of the surnames varies between different sources. The Contrôle nominatif of the Regiment, kept at the office of historical information of the Foreign Legion at Aubagne near Marseille, is a first-hand source but has the disadvantage of being badly written. The names and surnames are Gallicised and do not give any indication of the soldiers’ service numbers. On the other hand, in the book he published in 1933, Ricciotti Garibaldi Jr. sometimes used different spellings, choosing to write the names of the volunteers in Italian. It is not unusual to find Italian names that were misspelled by the authorities of the Legion who did not give much thought to the real identities of the volunteers. The situation becomes even more complex when Italian names and surnames are Gallicised with a patronymic inversion. Then again, some of the Italian patronymics were literally translated into French. Some legionnaires were also registered using fake identities because this was tolerated by the Legion.

The geographic origins and the ages of the soldiers are also problematic. The sources do not indicate any date, place of birth or line of descent. Furthermore, it is

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8 R. Garibaldi Jr., I fratelli Garibaldi dalle Argonne all’intervento, Milan 1933, 241.
impossible to identify the occupation and the social origin of the Garibaldians because
the documents remain «silent» on this point as well. However, family and home
addresses of the Garibaldian volunteers were kept in the local archives of Vaucluse
(771 family addresses to be used in case of an emergency and 1034 home addresses
on March 19159), representing 32.7 per cent and 43.9 per cent of the Garibaldi
Legion respectively. The memoirs of the veterans,10 articles published in the French
and Italian press of that time, and reports written by French and Italian regional pre-
flects provide a few details about the social origins of some of the volunteers who are
often the most famous. From these various sources, it is quite possible to reconstruct
the action of the Italian volunteers in France during the First World War.

2. Origins, Formation and Motivations
The enlistment of the Garibaldians appears at first as a family matter repeating the
enlistments of the Garibaldians during the nineteenth century. The head of the fam-
ily launched a declaration, the children responded and other volunteers joined the
family. This had been the case in 1848, 1859 and 1866, when Giuseppe Garibaldi
appealed for volunteers to fight against Austria, or in 1862 and 1867, when he,
together with his sons, gathered further volunteers to try, unsuccessfully, to conquer
Rome. Again, at the turn of the century, Garibaldi’s son, Ricciotti, issued a procla-
man on behalf of Greece, raising considerable enthusiasm of his own sons and of
thousands of volunteers who joined forces with the Greeks in Thessaly (1897) and
later in Epirus (1912) against the Ottomans. On 6 August 1914, Ricciotti Garibaldi,
much like his father, Giuseppe, had done on 7 September 1870, offered his services
to the French Republic, sending a telegram to the Italian press and to the French
government where he called on other volunteers to join him. Six (out of seven) of
Ricciotti’s sons followed his example. Peppino and Ricciotti Jr. were in New York.
Bruno, who had a sugar cane plantation in Cuba, joined them. The three brothers
sailed for France via the United Kingdom. In France, they met Sante, who arrived
from Egypt, and Costante and Ezio, the youngest, who came from Rome.

Their arrival in France in August and September 1914 aroused the enthusiasm
of many Italians. Meanwhile, 20,000 foreigners answered the call in favour of
France that was launched in the press by Blaise Cendrars and Ricciotto Canudo since
2 August. In Paris, they spontaneously marched through the streets, by country of
origin. They were permitted to join the French army some three weeks later, on
21 August 1914. At this point, the situation was tense indeed. The French armies

9 État des compagnies, légion garibaldienne, con-
trôle nominatif, dépôt d’Avignon, Regional ar-
chives of Vaucluse (ADV), R 513.
10 See, among others, Garibaldi Jr., I fratelli Garib-
aldi; C. Marabini, Les Garibaldiens de l’Argonne,
Paris 1917, 336; G. Chiosteri, «Diario di un garib-
aldino dell’Argonne (dalle lettere alla fidanzata)»,
in: E. Fussi Chiosteri / V. Parmentola, Diario
garibaldino ed altri scritti e discorsi, Milan 1965,
XII-347; X. Derfner, Les mémoires d’un légionnaire
retreated in front of the German enemy. France intended to lead a national liberation war to serve the ideals of republican democracy against «Germanic barbarism». In this way, the support of foreigners (mostly Republicans, socialists and radicals) from around the world became opportune. The Italian contingent was the largest. According to the numbers published in the press on 1 January 1915, they numbered 4913 against 3393 Russians, 1467 Swiss, 1462 Belgians, 1369 Austro-Hungarians, 1072 Germans, 969 Spanish, 592 Turks, 541 Luxembourgers, 379 English, 300 Greeks, 200 North and South Americans and 11,854 of various nationalities, including about 10,000 from Alsace-Lorraine. But the French authorities refused to create autonomous foreign units. The memory of the inefficiency of the Army of the Vosges formed by Garibaldi’s volunteers in 1870/1871 and, above all, the desire to control these foreigners made French military and political leaders eschew autonomous foreign units.

Thus, the only way for those who wished to fight for France was to enlist in the Légion Étrangère. It had been created in 1831 to welcome foreigners finding themselves in analogous circumstances. Thus, 2354 volunteers (almost all Italians) joined the Fourth Régiment de Marche of the First Regiment of the French Foreign Legion. Named the Legion of Garibaldi, it comprised three battalions in Nîmes and Montélimar, and also a depot at the «Palais des Papes» in Avignon: 54 per cent of the volunteers already resided in France, living in the regions of Marseille and Nice, Lyon and Paris, where most Italian immigrants lived; 43 per cent came from Italy, especially the industrial and urban northern regions such as Piedmont and Lombardy, and from central Italy (mainly Tuscany and Emilia-Romagna). Very few of them came from the South. The remaining 3 per cent lived elsewhere, in the United States, Switzerland, North Africa, Egypt, the United Kingdom and the Netherlands. One volunteer came from Eritrea.

The social origin of the volunteers varied according to the country of origin. Generally, the Garibaldians from France worked in mines, factories and shops or, like Augustin Grosso, were construction labourers or newsvendors in Paris like Lazare Ponticelli. There were also intellectuals and artists who resided in the capital and who replied to the call of the Garibaldis, like Alberto Cappabianca. They joined the legion so that they could integrate more effectively into French society. In contrast with these volunteers, the social background of those who came from Italy was generally higher and their ideological convictions were stronger. Some of them were Garibaldi veterans of the French (1870) and Greek (1897, 1912) campaigns. Others held positions of responsibility, such as Head of the Italian Red Cross Alessandro Mari, an orthopaedist who was born in Florence but resided in Rome. Also notable were engi-

neers, chemists (such as the 40-year-old Piedmontese Alessandro Lurgo) and a former officer of the Italian Army (namely Cavalry Captain Gino Finzi from Mantova). A few of the volunteers from Italy were artists, novelists, poets, painters and sculptors (such as Alberto Cappabianca, who would later design and build the monument to the memory of Italian volunteers in Paris Père-Lachaise cemetery). Others were journalists (Camillo Marabini, Lamberto Duranti and Ernesto Re), lawyers (Arnaldo Belli-Apolloni, who would serve as a nurse), teachers or union activists (Casimiro Paci, the secretary of the National Federation of Tobacco Workers Union), anarchists and republicans (Ottavio Pedrini and Libero Tancredi). Then, there were also some romantic adventurers motivated by nationalism, such as the young Kurt Suckert (later known as Curzio Malaparte), who decided on impulse at the age of sixteen to leave for France. Last but not least, the volunteers included adventurers of all ilks, mercenaries and dropout soldiers.

The volunteers’ motivations were very diverse. Most of them were filled with what they perceived as the Garibaldian ideal, based on sacrificial engagement on behalf of oppressed peoples. Some volunteers considered themselves as the heirs of the soldiers of the Army of the Vosges who fought in 1870/1871 in order to defend the French Republic. Others worshipped the Garibaldi family. Sometimes, to live in a street named Garibaldi in Nice, the native town of the hero, was enough to explain the enlistment in Garibaldi’s Legion. For yet another group of volunteers, Latin solidarity was a valid reason to join the Garibaldians. For Mazzinians and Radical Freemasons, the love of revolutionary France – republican, anticlerical and the birthplace of human rights – was a strong and genuine motivation; for others, the love of France was accompanied by concomitant hatred of Germany. In fact, the frontline re-enacted the ancient and symbolic border separating Latin civilisation from «German barbarism». For a few immigrants, who saw their French-born sons enlisting, the impulse of joining the Foreign Legion was loud and clear. Family ties and societal solidarity also played a role. Fraternities and workers who were part of the same work groups went to battle together. This political and historical voluntarism was seen by volunteers as a regenerating factor in a liberal Italy whose political values seemed moribund. Not surprisingly, these Italian volunteers were first and foremost nationalists. In the end, the Garibaldians from France enlisted for reasons of integration into the host nation; the Garibaldians from Italy did so more for ideological reasons.

The formation of the Garibaldi legion was not easy. In fact, it was not until the miracle of the Marne, early in September 1914, that the French authorities accepted the creation of a Garibaldian unit and even then with considerable caution. The
French were in fact afraid of pushing Italy towards the side of Germany. On the other hand, many Italians, following their government’s declaration of neutrality on 2 August 1914, were afraid of being dragged into a war they did not want.18

Hence, the French authorities took measures to reassure Rome. They forbade the soldiers from wearing the traditional Garibaldian red shirt and from setting up a distinct unit. They refused to appoint Peppino as general (like he had been in Mexico) and only granted him the rank of lieutenant-colonel. The volunteers were forced to join a unit of the Foreign Legion created especially for them: the Fourth Régiment de Marche of the First Foreign Regiment.19 Because of these restrictions, almost all of the Mazzinians returned to Italy. At the same time, the French did not want to restrain a movement that had intrinsic political value on the other side of the Alps. So they allowed half of the military officers to be Italians (a unique case in the history of the Foreign Legion) and the command to be divided between Peppino and a French Colonel. Finally, the volunteers could wear the red shirt but only under the uniform jacket that had to be buttoned up to the neck!20

In the early days of the war, the situation was very difficult for the Garibaldians.21 Italian officers, who did not necessarily speak French, had to give orders in French to Italian volunteers who did not always understand the language and spoke using different dialects. Moreover, the relations between Italians from France and those from Italy were not without tensions. Not to mention that instructors of the Foreign Legion proved to be unfriendly and racist. On 25 October 1914, the socialist journal Avanti! stated: «[...] from the Caporal or Sergeant Instructor [who] reproached [the volunteers] using phrases such as: «dirty macaroni, did you enlist to eat bread? [...]»».22

The Garibaldians behaved in a disobedient and undisciplined way. These volunteers had enlisted to fight and not to do military exercises, which they considered mind-numbing. At the camp of Mailly, in December 1914, they preferred to poach and hunt or to visit Paris for a few days. They ended up forming a community with their own language that included Italian-French words such as «lapino», which related to the French word «lapin» (rabbit) – Italianised, but it was far from the Italian word «coniglio» (ditto).23 The reception given to Peppino Garibaldi was another
source of contention. Born in Australia in 1869, he became a revolutionary, in line with his family tradition. He fought alongside his father Ricciotti in Greece in 1897 and wanted to continue with the Boers in South Africa in 1901, though his father induced him to switch sides and join the British Army instead. He eventually arrived in Mexico in 1910 where he fought with the revolutionaries for two years. He returned to Greece in 1912. In the French Army milieu, Peppino’s past was despised or not taken seriously. His rank of General of the Mexican army, for example, was not recognised by the French army. He was also seen as a nuisance due to his tendency to put himself forward, making sharp and clumsy statements in the French press, and combining political speeches with military commands. However, the Legion’s losses on the front and the international context created a myth that soon eclipsed any shortcomings and criticisms.

3. The Construction of a Myth

The war that the Garibaldian volunteers encountered was very different from the one in 1870/1871. They did not win battles or take an enemy flag, as was the case in Dijon in January 1871. On the contrary, the conflict since the Miracle of Marne (6–11 September 1914) and the Battle of the «Course à la mer» (October – November 1914) had changed its nature. From the North Sea to Vosges, the war became a war of holding positions, trench warfare, and a war of attrition, murderous and without glory. In this new situation, Argonne, located between Champagne (Marne) and Verdun (Meuse), hinged between the Fourth and Fifth French Armies acquired an unexpected importance, even if it was always a site of secondary operations in a hostile environment: the forest was impenetrable with constant humidity and omnipresent mud. The French and German trenches were entangled, sometimes just a few meters away. From October to December 1914, the Germans attacked in that area causing heavy losses to the French troops and threatening to break through. The French command had to send reinforcements urgently needed. The Garibaldi Legion was ordered without any preparation to move to Argonne in the sector of Bois de Bolante, Four-de-Paris and Haute Chevauchée on 12 December 1914. By 24 December, it had settled in its new position.

The ordeal by fire arrived quickly, on three occasions – 26 December 1914, 5 January 1915 and 8–9 January 1915. The number of deaths showed the determination of the Legion during the battles. According to the sources, the number of men killed, missing and injured during the three battles in Argonne was in fact particularly high: between 566 (93 killed, 136 missing and 337 injured) and 590 (97 killed, 141 missing, 352 injured), meaning one third of the soldiers enlisted, half of the non-commissioned officers and 41 per cent of the officers.²⁴ Many died next to the German

²⁴ *Journal de Marche et Opérations (JMO)* of the 4th Regiment, BIHLE et JMO of the three battalions of the 4th Regiment, SHD-DAT, 6 N 861.
trenches, decimated by machine guns during the attacks. Still, these losses were comparable to those of many other French units. For instance, from 17 to 20 September 1914, the 152nd Infantry Regiment lost 600 men during three failed attempts to conquer Mount Spitzemberg in the region of the Vosges. The 76th Infantry Regiment, despatched to Argonne, lost 80 men from December 1914 to February 1915, which roughly corresponded to the number of Garibaldians killed in that time span. Still, Italian volunteers seemed to be unprepared to face the violence of the battlefield and of modern warfare. Without adequate preparation, they were decimated in less than two weeks and in no more than three assaults. Like some of their compatriots, they felt that the French had sacrificed them. The fact that two of Garibaldi’s grandsons perished in battle, Bruno on 26 December 1914 and Costante on 5 January 1915, corroborated such ideas.

Garibaldi’s Legion was transferred to the rear on 10 January 1915, before leaving on 7 February for Bar-sur-Aube in Champagne and after that for Avignon where its storage was located in the «Palais des Papes». It was there that the Garibaldians heard about their dismissal, ordered by the French Minister of War on 5 March 1915.

The dissolution of the Fourth Régiment de Marche angered many Italians. Officially, the decision was made because the regiment was drained. Unofficially, the government wished to get rid of undisciplined volunteers and, most of all, of Peppino, who seemed to have become less and less controllable, as demonstrated by various interviews he gave. Ex-War Minister Adolphe Messimy voiced concern about the troops’ morale. General Servière, Commander of the 15th région militaire (South-East France) described the morale of the troops as being very low. The prefect of the region of Vaucluse informed the Ministry of the Interior about concerns for the security of Avignon’s civilian population. As a matter of fact, the state of demoralisation was such that the officers had lost control over their men. In Avignon, some volunteers sold their military equipment to local Italians. Two Garibaldians, according to the daybook of the police officers, shot at one another at 5 o’clock in the evening at «l’Horloge» Square in the centre of the city. The men amused themselves by unloading their guns from the top of the ramparts of the Palais des Papes on the roofs of houses in the city. This behaviour fed an anti-Garibaldian sentiment as well as anti-Italian xenophobia deeply rooted in the minds of the French officers and the civilian authorities.

The conditions of the termination of their service were so harsh and brutal that, in March 1915, only 180 volunteers agreed to remain in the Légion Etrangère in France.

27 «Lo scioglimento della legione garibaldina, Parigi, 8», Avanti!, 9.3.1915, on the first page.
28 Telegram of the General Servière to the Ministry of War, Marseille, 14.3.1915, SHD-DAT, 5 N 67; Daily reports of police agents, 16.3.1915, ADV, 11 M 90; additional document, 240.
Only 23 remained by September 1915. Italians from Italy without money returned to their home country, whereas Italian immigrants went back to their families in France, at least for a little while. Those who could be mobilised would eventually serve under the Regio Esercito when Italy entered the war in May 1915. Some of them refused to serve, and to this day it is not possible to know their exact number. However, we know that French authorities collaborated with their Italian counterparts. Lazare Ponticelli, a young immigrant who had joined the Garibaldians and had been dismissed like everybody else in March 1915, would be forced to cross the Italian frontier by two French gendarmes and eventually joined the Alpini troops.

So, the history of the Garibaldi Legion came to an end. But soon the dead, the injured and the veterans of Argonne were transformed into Garibaldian heroes. Now they became, often unwillingly, pawns of the media and political manipulation for the purposes of national propaganda in the service of reconciliation between France and Italy. The process of producing a myth was carried out by using political, ideological and commemorative symbolism, associating the two countries and fundamentally mobilising the figure of the hero Garibaldi.

Except for a couple of pro-Austrian newspapers, which accused the Garibaldians of threatening Italian neutrality, all the big Italian and French dailies, from the socialists to the nationalists through to the radical Republicans, the Catholics, the liberals and the conservatives paid tribute to the Italian volunteers who fought and died for France. For fifteen days, from 29 December 1914 to mid-January 1915, the major Italian newspapers devoted to these volunteers many more articles than during the five preceding months, from August to December 1914. A similar picture emerged in France, in newspapers such as *L’Humanité, La Guerre Sociale, Le Petit Journal* and even *L’Action française* of Charles Maurras.

The Garibaldians, particularly in Benito Mussolini’s journal, *Il Popolo d’Italia*, were in fact turned into the worthy heirs of the great hero Giuseppe Garibaldi, the noble descendants of the ancient Romans or even the vanguards of an Italian army that would join the Allies. In France, the revolutionary and patriotic newspaper, *La Guerre Sociale*, published on 6 January 1915 an epic poem by the songwriter and antimilitarist Gaston Brunswick, called «Montehus», in which he imitated his revolutionary song, *Gloire au 17e*, dedicating the words to Bruno Garibaldi, killed in action for the Republic and, to a certain extent, for the revolution:
Hello, honour to you,
Oh noble son of Italy!
Hello, honour to you,
You who die for our Homeland!
Hello, glory and honour,
To your heroic action!
May your death unite our hearts!
Honour in the name of the Republic!  

Even Charles Maurras, who had consistently been an anti-Italian and an anti-Garibaldian, paid a deep and honest tribute to Bruno and Costante Garibaldi, who had died for France, in *L’Action française* on 5 January 1915.  

Some members of the French working class were also touched by the Garibaldis’ courage. For instance, on 12 February 1915, an elementary school student in the small village of Vosges wrote a free composition on the subject «What do you know about Garibaldi?»: «The Garibaldi family has always fought for the triumph of liberty. [...] Today still, Germany dreams to impose its tyranny on Europe. [...] The Garibaldis found themselves in their role again. [...] Two of the Garibaldis die [sic], the other keep [sic] fighting courageously. [...] Nowhere in the whole of humanity can a family as glorious as the Garibaldis be found. The name of Garibaldi is synonymous with liberty’s defenders.» Of course, this testimony cannot claim to be an expression of a general nature but it was symptomatic of a kind of popular admiration towards the Garibaldi family, as it existed at the time.

The French military and political authorities (the «Generalissimo» Joseph Joffre, President of the French Republic Raymond Poincaré and Minister of War Alexandre Millerand who replaced Adolphe Messimy on 26 August 1914) exploited this popularity. While the war and the armed forces got stuck, they understood the tactical and strategic value of pushing Italy to join the war. Signs foretelling Italy’s entry into the war on the Allies’ side were in fact carefully noted. On 14 January 1915, Paul Deschanel, President of the Chamber of Deputies, pronounced words that elicited applause from all the deputies: «Here are, beyond the borders, some new sympathies helping us daily [to] remain to the end without excitement, as well as without arrogance. A famous Italian fought for France in 1870; his two grandsons just died for France.»

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35 Drawn from an exercise book which C. Tarantola, from Docelles, very generously passed to the author.
37 Government publication, report on parliamentary debates in the Chamber of Deputies, 14.1.1915, 2nd session, t. 1, 8.
The military authorities, for their part, also sought to utilise the Garibaldians, decorating, promoting and paying tribute to them. The courage of the Italians was mentioned in dispatches. Lieutenant Duranti was said to have been «killed rushing over [sic] the enemy», shouting: «Go ahead, sons of Italy, it is noble to die for France.» Costante Garibaldi was killed «gloriously as the Head of his section, [...] showing to the Italian volunteers that the worthy do not know to lie». Second Lieutenant Cristini proved to be «worthy of an ancient Roman, although wounded, he continued to encourage his men and fought to the death». Altogether, from the 51 officers whose traces are to be found in the archives, 40 were decorated, mentioned in dispatches or promoted.

In the hope of establishing a connection between the two nations, French authorities also authorised the transfer of the mortal remains of Bruno and Costante Garibaldi from Argonne to Rome. During the journey, manifestations in both French and Italian train stations led to cries: «Down with Germany! Down with Austria! War! War!» In Rome, the funerals of Bruno and Costante, on 6 and 12 January 1915 respectively, allowed the exaltation of Franco-Italian friendship and the necessity of joining the war on the side of the Allies for avenging them.38

South of the Alps, while the majority of Italians (i.e. Catholics, Socialists and Giolitti’s supporters) preferred neutrality, an active minority coming from varied political backgrounds, was forming an interventionist front: nationalists, conservatives, radical republicans, anarchist union activists and anarchists, revolutionary socialists, Garibaldians and also members of the ruling elite such as the King himself, the President of the Council Antonio Salandra and the Minister of the Foreign Affairs, Sidney Sonnino.39 Once they got back following their dismissal, the veterans of Argonne and the dead became objects of the interventionists’ propaganda. Their return was marked by an hour of glory, organised by local Garibaldians associations, irredentist associations such as Trento e Trieste, and by republican circles.40 Exposed to the public during the huge manifestations of the interventionists (those on 31 March 1915 in Milan with Benito Mussolini or on 5 May 1915 in Quarto with the poet Gabriele D’Annunzio41), they became celebrities. The socialists and the Catholic neutralists, on their side, did not stop to denounce «their dangerous and manipulative imposture».42 However, on
26 April 1915, Italy signed a secret agreement in London that led to its entry to the war and included, amongst other clauses, the transfer of Trento, Trieste and Dalmatia to Italy. The name of Garibaldi became synonymous with war, and was taken up by the interventionists, particularly during the «glorious days of May» (from 13 to 20 May 1915), which announced the start of the battles against the Austro-Hungarian Empire on 24 May.

After the intervention, some of the Garibaldians of Argonne fought in Italy. They were called up like many other millions of Italians or enlisted as volunteers in the brigade of the Alps, the unit created by Giuseppe Garibaldi in 1859, in which his grandsons enlisted. But in 1918, a lot of them ended up again in France because the brigade of the Alps was assigned to the Second Corps of the Italian army, which received the order to leave for France. Peppino Garibaldi became Colonel-Brigadier in command of the Brigade of the Alps; his two brothers, Ricciotti Jr. and Sante, and other veterans of Argonne (such as Kurt Suckert) ended up in Champagne where they «covered» themselves with glory during the combat in Bligny, near Reims, between 15 and 18 July 1918, before taking part in the victorious counterattack that ended in Rocroi on 11 November. The courage and sacrifice of the Italians was widely recognised. Peppino Garibaldi was decorated with the Officer Cross of the French Legion of Honour on 26 August 1918 and was celebrated on 14 January 1919 by General Albrici in command of the Second Italian Army Corps. These honours conferred recognition also to the other veterans of Argonne.

4. Post-War Memory

After the war, the Garibaldian legacy of Argonne did not fall into oblivion on both sides of the Alps and has lasted until today. Veteran associations, quickly created in the aftermath of the war, devoutly kept alive the memory of the fighting in Argonne. On 17 February 1917, the Union des garibaldiens survivants de l’Argonne et des volontaires italiens en France was established. Later, on 21 April 1926, following Sante Garibaldi’s initiative, the Amicale des Anciens officiers du régiment garibaldien de 1914 was founded. On both sides of the Alps, official ceremonies (such as on 24 May 1921 at Les Invalides, in Paris, and on 22 November 1921 in Monte Tomba in Italy, where the French fought in December 1917) enabled the association of the Garibaldians of Argonne with the Italian combatants who died for France and the French soldiers who died for Italy. Bruno and Costante became figures of heroism honoured in Paris in 1917 and in Nice in 1927, during ceremonies in which medals were pinned to statues of Garibaldi in the two cities. The mortal remains of the Garibaldians were...
also buried in the cemetery of Bligny, next to Italian soldiers who died in France, and a commemorative plaque was placed in the entry of the cemetery in the 1920s with the inscription in Italian: «Bolante, Courte Chaussée, Ravin des Meurissons. Qui composti sono gli ossi degli anticipatori [sic] dell’Argonne. Francesi e Italiani, ubidite al comando garibaldino.» («Bolante, Courte Chaussée, Ravin des Meurissons – the mixed bones of the vanguards of Argonne. French and Italians, obey to the Garibaldian Command.») Two monuments were raised in the memory of the Garibaldians of Argonne; the first in 1932 in «La Chalade», where they fought in 1914 and 1915, and the second in 1934 in the cemetery of «Le Père-Lachaise» in Paris, in the presence of the highest French and Italian authorities, in particular the Fascists.46

The rise of Mussolini to power provoked in Italy a schism within the Garibaldian «movement». Some veterans joined the Fascists, who tried to present a mixture of the red and the black shirts. Mussolini presented himself as the heir of Garibaldi thanks to the support of one of the grandsons, Ezio, and other veterans such as Camillo Marabini, who became the Head of the Union des garibaldiens survivants de l’Argonne et des volontaires italiens en France. The latter oversaw the commemoration of the battles of 1914–1915 at Bligny, at the cemetery of Père-Lachaise and at La Chalade. Others embraced the cause of anti-fascism in the 1920s led by Ricciotti Jr; but, in October 1926, they were disgraced when it became known that Ricciotti Jr. was actually an agent of the black shirts for discrediting anti-fascists circles in France.47 It was only during the Spanish Civil War (1936–1939) and following the Rome-Berlin Axis that another grandson, Sante, picked up the torch of the anti-fascist fight from 1937.48 Answering the Rosselli brothers’ appeal, «Today in Spain, tomorrow in Italy», to lead an anti-fascist war in Spain and to prepare a war of liberation against Mussolini in Italy, some Italians joined the International Brigades in 1936. Their battalion was named after Garibaldi and fought in the 11th and later in the 12th International Brigade. It contributed to the victory of Guadalajara in March 1937, where Italian black shirts fought against anti-fascist Italians. This new wave of Garibaldians would become the heralds of the hopes of liberals, communists and socialists of all ilks. In these circumstances Sante Garibaldi revived a tradition of left-wing Garibaldism in France; some 30 Argonne veterans, all hostile to Mussolini, supported him. In June 1937, he set up an anti-Fascist association called the Fédération Française des Garibaldiens de l’Argonne and connected with Italian émigré associations and movements, such as the Italian League for the Rights of Man, the Union Popu-


47 L. Salvatorelli / G. Mira, Storia d’Italia nel periodo fascista, Torino 1964, 591–592. Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, CPC, Italy, Garibaldi’s family, nr. 388. Regional archives of Alps-Mari-
times, 4 M 1598.

48 «Procès-verbal du 1er congrès de la Fédération française des garibaldiens de l’Argonne, combattants dans les Armées françaises et sympathisants garibaldiens», Archivio Centrale dello Stato, G 1, box 318, file 1193.
laire Italienne (an Italian Communist Party organ), the movement of the two Rosselli brothers, *Giustizia & Libertà* as well as members of the Italian Socialist Party. This movement slowly grew in 1938 by the inclusion of Garibaldians who came from Spain. When the Second World War started in 1939, Sante offered his services to France, as his family had previously done in 1914. Camillo Marabini, still leading the association of Argonne’s Garibaldians, did the same, even though he was much closer to the Fascists. In 1939, Sante on the one hand and Marabini on the other had organised two legions of Garibaldi volunteers but without much success. These two legions lasted only a few weeks because of the open hostility of the French government, fearful of seeing Mussolini entering the conflict alongside the Nazis. Not surprisingly, during the occupation Marabini would side with Mussolini and Pétain, whereas Sante eventually sided with the resistance. Deported to Dachau during the Second World War, he died in France in 1946, after his return.

The echo of the action of the Garibaldians of Argonne continued to live in popular memory, particularly when, after the war, these volunteers became objects of history evoked during the commemorations organised by the French Garibaldian associations.49 Les Garibaldiens were re-founded in Paris in 1952 (with a department in Toulouse); they associated the memory of the Garibaldians of Argonne (every year on 11 November, a member of the association stood as a guard in a red shirt next to the Père-Lachaise monument) with the memory of resistance fighters and the soldiers of the Second World War, in the name of a leftist, internationalist, pacifist and anti-fascist Garibaldism.50 They shared the concerns and political visions of active Italian Garibaldian associations, such as the Associazione Nazionale Veterani e Reduci Garibaldini under the presidency of Annita Garibaldi-Jallet. Born in France, Annita was Sante’s daughter and Giuseppe Garibaldi’s great-granddaughter.

At the time of their deaths, some veterans preferred to be buried in Italy such as Alessandro Vicarelly, who was buried in the cemetery of Trespiano in 1946, in the patch of the Garibaldians. Others chose France, such as Lazare Ponticelli with whom this article begun. His death was marked by a public memorial at Les Invalides on 17 March 2008. The event was attended by then French President, Nicolas Sarkozy, and former President, Jacques Chirac, as well as prominent civil and military French and Italian authorities. It was deemed necessary to honour the memory of this French and Italian soldier without offending the national sensibility of one or the other nation. Also, his coffin was ported by French legionnaires in front of an Alpini

49 *Nice-Matin*, editions of the 10 and 11.1.1965 marking the 50th anniversary of the battle in Argonne, celebrated in Nice and Menton, in the presence of the veterans of Argonne and the resistance fighters and former soldiers of the Second World War.

The Garibaldian Volunteers in France during the First World War
detachment of the Italian army. His funeral oration turned him into «a born-Italian, [and a] French by preference». Through Lazare Ponticelli, the memory of all the victims of the Great War was also honoured, in the name of universal peace and in the name of the fraternity between the nations.

But beyond that, Argonne became a high place of Garibaldian sacrifice, even if this episode of the First World War was secondary, limited in time, in space and in the number of troops involved. In fact, media instrumentalisation, symbolic politicisation and multi-layered commemoration converged to transform these Garibaldian volunteers into new heroes, whose ideological and symbolic dimension prevailed over their military importance and connected them to the myth of Garibaldi. This transformation was uncommon in the history of the First World War and was probably why their memory, at the crossroads of France and Italy, resisted the ravages of time and of political and ideological changes.

This article traces the history of some 2300 Italian volunteers who formed part of the Garibaldi Legion, which was incorporated into the French Foreign Legion, from November 1914 to March 1915. Led by Peppino Garibaldi, Giuseppe Garibaldi’s grandson, the Legion consisted of Italian immigrants who lived in France as well as artists, political activists and others who came from Italy. The article examines the diverse motivations that prompted these volunteers to enlist. It also assesses the wartime conduct of the Legion, which was decimated by German troops in Argonne in December 1914 and January 1915. Finally, the article illustrates how, once their military role ended, the memory of these Garibaldian volunteers was used to serve various propagandistic and political purposes. In spring 1915, the fallen volunteers and the veterans were used by interventionists to urge neutral Italy to join the war on the Allies’ side. During the interwar period, their memory was exploited by both fascists and the anti-fascists.

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ABSTRACT