

1st Neapolitan Line Infantry Regiment “Re”

By Adam Walczak

The 1st Line Infantry Regiment (In Italian: *1o Reggimento d'Infanteria di Linea*) was one of the line infantry regiments of the Kingdom of Naples. Formed during Joseph I's reign, it was the first line infantry regiment raised in the Neapolitan Army and served in a variety of theatres against a multitude of different foes. Although well-led and equipped, the regiment gained a reputation for the low quality of its rankers; most were drafted from prisons or forcibly conscripted. It saw its final demise at the Siege of Ancona in 1815, after which the kingdom fell, and the army was disbanded.

It was given the title “Re” or *King's Own* in 1811 for its distinguished service in the War in Spain.

Formation and Origins

The 1st Line was constituted with the decree of 13th June 1806. Auguste-Julien Bigarré, a French Major in the 4e Ligne, was assigned as its colonel by King Joseph, who had been Bigarré's own colonel before becoming King of Naples. A professional soldier, Bigarré had fought in the French Army since 1791 and was an officer of the Legion d'Honneur prior to his appointment in Naples. At Austerlitz, his battalion's standard-bearer was killed, and the standard was taken, although the battalion's bravery in battle earned it a second one. The Frenchman joined the 1st Line's garrison at Capua in early-1807 and found the “regiment” in an appalling state; scarcely five hundred men under arms, poorly equipped and wearing terrible quality uniforms.



Throwing himself into fixing his new unit, the energetic new colonel remarkably managed to bring the rag-tag band of soldiers into a regiment of three well-trained and equipped battalions by March 1807. They paraded before their King for the first time on March 19th (Joseph's name day) and earned considerable praise from the King and his dignitaries for their unit cohesion and fine appearance.

Other than Bigarré, the regiment's senior staff included Major Guillaume Alexandre Thomas Pégot, another Frenchman who had served in the Austerlitz campaign, and a multitude of experienced Neapolitan officers taken from the old regime's army. Among them were the three battalion chiefs Angelo d'Ambrosio, Luigi d'Aquino, and Michele Carrascosa, all who would become generals in the future.

Overall, the regiment was organised among the lines of a typical French regiment: three battalions of six companies. Each battalion had four fusilier (centre) companies, a grenadier (shock) company, and a voltigeur (skirmisher) company. There was also an additional depot

battalion that contained three companies, which served the purpose of training new recruits to be later sent to the war battalions. At the time of the regiment's march to Northern Italy in 1807, the regiment numbered some 1,800 men across all battalions.

In the summer of 1807, the entire regiment set off from the garrison at Capua to Bergamo. The 1st Battalion set out on 25th July, the 2nd and 3rd Battalions following on the 28th and 31st. The regiment arrived at Bergamo on 13th September.

The 1st Line then received orders to march to France on 4th November, to prepare for the upcoming campaign against the Spanish. The regiment was reduced to two "war" battalions, supplemented with many men from the 2nd Line Regiment, and then marched out to the Spanish frontier. On their way there they were reviewed by Napoleon himself, who declared himself "*très content*" with the appearance and discipline of the regiment.

On the journey to Perpignan, Bigarré transferred command to Capobattaglione Carrascosa, who then relinquished command to Colonel Pégot (now promoted). Both Bigarré and Carrascosa helped re-raise the 2nd Line Regiment that year.

Spanish Campaign of 1808-13

The 1st Line was grouped into General Giuseppe Lechi's Italian division alongside an Italian regiment under Col. Foresti, that by late January was redesignated as the 2nd Division of General Guillaume Philibert Duhesme's "*Observatory Corps of the Eastern Pyrenees*". Alongside the 1st Line, the 2nd Neapolitan Chasseurs were also in the Corps, but in General de Brigade Schwartz's cavalry brigade. In total, the Neapolitans of Duhesme's 12,000-strong corps were almost 2,500 in number.

The Corps received orders from the Emperor to march into Spain on 1st February 1808. The 2nd Division hence reached Barcelona on the 13th, and on the 3rd of March the Italians and Neapolitans launched a surprise attack from the inside of the city, seizing the formidable Barcelona citadel without firing a shot. The fortress of Montjuich also fell bloodlessly on the same day.

From then on began a period of almost constant warfare for the 1st Line. The regiment participated in the First Battle of El Bruch on June 6th (suffering a bloody repulse) and in Duhesme's march southeast on the 13th. The Neapolitans helped sack the town of Mataró, taking 6 standards from the Spanish, and then participated in the First Siege of Girona. In this action the 1st Line under D'Ambrosio was thrown against the city walls in an escalade and was the first unit to reach the crest of the wall; however, they were thrown back with heavy losses as Spanish



Figure 1: The 1st Line's officer corps was well-trained and motivated.

reinforcements arrived. The expedition returned to Barcelona on the 24th. Neapolitan losses amounted to around 60 in this action.



Figure 2: The tête de colonne of the 1st Line.

On the 30th the Neapolitans were employed in turning the enemy left flank at San Andrés, resulting in the rout of a considerable force of miqueletes and Spanish regular troops. They set the village of Martorell to the torch soon after, during the pursuit. Several weeks later the first battalion under D'Ambrosio set out again with Duhesme's column on their second attempt at taking Girona; the battalion was viciously ambushed on the 17th near Campany and took almost 150 casualties. Meanwhile, the Italians left in Barcelona found themselves besieged, which forced Duhesme to abandon his plans and return. During all this, the 4th company of the 1st Line under Captain Schmerberg was forced to surrender the castle of Montgat on the 2nd of August to the British after a murderous bombardment. The Siege of Barcelona followed. The Neapolitans took part in numerous sorties, taking near 100 casualties in

several days' fighting. The 24th of November saw them sally out and rout four Spanish battalions outside Sants; Captain Pepe of the 5th Fusiliers asserted in his memoirs that this was the first time the regiment had fought with such bravery and determination. The siege was lifted on December 17th with the arrival of St. Cyr's army of succour. Total casualties for the 1st Line in Barcelona were around 500 killed and wounded.

The following months saw the 1st and 2nd Line reunited and brigaded together at the Third Siege of Girona. Together, they took part in two costly assaults on the walls, which both were repulsed. The 1st began the siege with some 593 men and officers, and ended it with only 143 men at arms, making Girona one of the costliest battles yet for the Neapolitans. Both line regiments were hence withdrawn, the 1st going to Figueras. With the departure of Pégot, the command passed on August 28th to D'Aquino. The two (now massively understrength) battalions of the 1st were now commanded by Battalion Chiefs Cellentani and Palma respectively.

The following year the Neapolitans were massively reinforced as Murat sent more of his troops to Spain. On 1st January 1810 the 1st Line had an effective strength of 1,322. The arrival of many Neapolitan reinforcements meant the Murattian troops were grouped into an all-Neapolitan division under General de Division Pignatelli-Strongoli. The 1st was singled out for praise for its fine appearance; soon the entire division set out to capture the Medas Islands (one of the few French amphibious actions of the war), which ended in a resounding success. On June 16th, a solemn ceremony was held in Castelló for the blessing of the newly received flags of the 1st Line. The regiment then joined the division in guarding the supply route of Suchet's army along

the Ebro; in the skirmishes there, the 1st particularly distinguished themselves in routing 600 regulars of the Spanish “*Saboya*” Regiment and capturing its colonel. Soon, Pégot was repatriated to Naples along with some other senior officers of the division, and the Neapolitans were grouped into the 2nd Brigade of Compère’s Division, under General Ferrier. They participated in the capture of Oropesa (a fortified coastal town) and in the Siege of Valencia, in which the 1st Line saw no combat action.

Unfortunately, the war had taken its toll on the Neapolitan troops and Murat soon realised the futility of sending more men to the Spanish meatgrinder; hence, the 1st Battalion of the 1st Light Regiment alongside the remnants of the 1st and 2nd Line were incorporated into a new provisional regiment, designated the 8th Line. The command of this unit was given to Guglielmo Pepe, a capable and experienced officer; he and his regiment would serve in Spain until the dark days of 1814. The few remaining diehards of the 1st would finally return to Italy in June 1814, and finally see their King after seven years. The commander of this last detachment, Battalion Chief Staiti, had been in Spain since the very start.

Reorganisation

On 8th December 1810 the regiment was granted the title **Re**, or *King’s Own*. When Pégot returned from Spain the regiment was formed into four battalions, by raising from scratch two battalions of conscripts within the Kingdom (the other two still being on campaign). On 14th October 1811, when the 1st Line’s battalion in Spain was merged into the 8th Line, a third battalion was raised in the Kingdom; therefore, the old second and third battalions became the first and second, while the third was formed from conscripts. Part of the new NCOs came from the Velites of the Guard.

In 1812 Pégot was promoted to General of Brigade and the command went to Luigi Nicola de Majo, a rich aristocrat, then on 20th February 1814 Pasquale Paoletta (already a Major in the 1st) was gazetted as the regiment’s colonel.

1814 Campaign in Northern Italy

The 1st Line did not participate in the Russian or German Campaigns of 1812-13, instead remaining in the Kingdom until eventually the entire armed forces was called to fight in Northern Italy against the Franco-Italians.



Figure 3: A grenadier of the 1st Line regiment in 1814.

When Murat switched sides in 1814, the Neapolitan Army was already mobilised; in December 1813 it was in Rosaroll's brigade of Carrascosa's Division at a strength of two battalions. However, with the addition of new units to the army, the command of the brigade was given to Guglielmo Pepe and the 1st Line was brigaded with the 2nd Light Infantry Regiment. The brigade marched as the vanguard of the army; it was one of the few Neapolitan units engaged in the combat at Reggio Emilia on March 7th, being ordered to flank left of the French positions there; the brigade contributed heavily to beating back opposing General Filippo Severoli's division. One of the brigade's cannons allegedly wounded Severoli's leg, which had to be amputated on the field.

The 1st Line also took part in the battle of the Taro on the 13th of April, where it lost an insignificant number of men to drowning as it crossed the river. Following this skirmish the 1st saw no more action in the campaign, as the news of the fall of Paris reached both sides.

Neapolitan War

When the Neapolitan War broke out in March 1815, the 1st was still stationed in Ancona and brigaded in the 1st Brigade (Pepe) of the 1st Division under Carrascosa, at a strength of three battalions. This division was particularly combat-worthy, always marching as the vanguard of the army; Pepe's brigade especially received praise from the King for its admirable condition. At the outbreak of hostilities, the division filed off towards Rimini via Senigallia and Pesaro which the Austrians abandoned without a shot. The next day the 1st Brigade was engaged at Cesena, where the Austrians organised a hasty defence, and were forced to pull back - this became known as the first true engagement of the Neapolitan war. Following the Austrian withdrawal, Murat entered Bologna on the 2nd of April, to the cheers of its inhabitants.

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 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 and flanking the Austrian right with Pepe's brigade at Spilimberto. It is unclear how the 1st Line was engaged here; apparently, four companies of the regiment fired upon the Austrians at the bridge, but Pepe's memoirs fail to mention the presence of the 1st's three battalions during the attack on Spilimberto, which was carried out with Colonel Verdinois's 2nd Light Regiment. Nevertheless, Pepe's troops

successfully forced the Austrians out of Spilimberto and forced them to retreat, leaving Modena in Neapolitan hands. This action hence brought the first Neapolitan success of the war.

Next, on the 6th, Murat was repulsed at Occhiobello, a combat in which the 1st Division did not take part. On the 8th, Pepe's brigade alongside a squadron of cavalry and a battalion of the 5th Line occupied Capri and fortified themselves there, where they were attacked by a superior column of Austrians on the 10th. The Austrian attack initially forced the Neapolitans inside the town, until the 1st Line's 1st battalion positioned alongside two guns on the town walls checked the enemy advance. Pressed again by superior numbers and receiving news of Murat's withdrawal, Pepe decided upon retreating out of the town through the Modena Gate to prevent being cut off by largely superior forces. The brigade crossed the bridge over the Secchia later that day; losses had been great for both sides, but the 1st left the fighting with only a dozen or so casualties.

The brigade hence filed off towards Modena and re-joined the rest of the army. Murat repositioned his three brigades on the right bank of the Panaro, with the 1st Line's two battalions being positioned on the ford at Spilimberto. On the 15th the Austrians attacked this position; Colonel Paoella, for whatever reason, had ordered the regiment to be at ease during the day and hence made them lay their weapons near the riverbank, resulting in the entire regiment having to run the gauntlet of Austrian fire to retrieve their muskets. The already demoralised regiment then fled at the sight of Austrian cavalry fording the river, losing several prisoners. Pepe attributed this costly failure to the regimental officers' hatred of Paoella, which had most likely remained inactive during the debacle to witness their Colonel's disgrace.

Paoella, a Corsican by birth, had been appointed solely due to him being a favourite of the King; he was hence arrested by Pepe on the 16th and replaced by Major Astuti, a capable officer who had served in Spain. The general then addressed the regiment, declaring that *"only by blood could such a shameful stain be effaced from their reputation"*, and that tomorrow they would have their opportunity to redeem themselves before the eyes of the army.

The next day the brigade repositioned itself on the right bank of the Reno River, with the 1st Battalion of the 1st Line being the only unit on the far side of the river. Attacked repeatedly, the battalion held firm against both infantry and cavalry attacks, but at the cost of some fifty casualties. Pepe then brought up the remaining two battalions and positioned the entire regiment at the mouth of the bridge, closing its gate and declining the regiment the chance to recross it; here, he declared, the regiment would make its stand.

The Austrians then attacked in great force, initially using several columns of infantry supported by artillery; these were unable to dislodge the 1st Line's trenches and barricades in the streets leading to the bridge. Repulsed thrice, the Austrians then attempted to charge the bridge with a number of Hungarian hussars, but the steady fire of the 1st repulsed them and forced them to retreat. After three hours the Neapolitans still held their ground and having inflicted upwards of 200 casualties on the Austrians at the cost of 50, the division pulled back unmolested to Imola, ending the first stage of the war. For this action, Pepe was promoted to aide-de-camp of the King

and the Order of Two Sicilies was given to Major Astuti, while the 1st Line's honour was redeemed.

Following the combat at Imola on April 16th, the entire army proceeded in a retrograde movement towards Macerata, with the two Guard Divisions in Tuscany recalled to join the main army. Pepe's reinforced brigade alongside some cavalry occupied Pesaro on the 25th, where a small skirmish was fought with Austrian cavalry; a platoon of Hungarian Hussars was captured there. On the 28th the 1st Division moved to Senigallia, where it was confronted by Neipperg's Corps of some 16,000 men; here, badly outnumbered by the Austrians, Carrascosa decided to pull back, leaving Pepe's brigade isolated and in danger of being surrounded at Scappezzano. Fortunately, Pepe's strong positions along the road to Ancona (his line of retreat) allowed the brigade to escape from the pincer movement enacted by the Austrians upon its position. The 1st Line hence withdrew with Pepe at their head and reached Ancona on the 2nd of May closely pursued by the Austrians.

This last battle forced the 1st Division aside and hence did not allow it to take part in the Battle of Tolentino; when news of the disaster on May 3rd reached the division, its morale dropped considerably. The 1st became part of the garrison of the fortress of Ancona while the rest of the Army retreated in haste, and soon a considerable Austrian force besieged the city. The garrison, consisting of some 5,000 men under General Montemajor, sallied out three times during the month-long siege, with little success. On May 28th two emissaries arrived from Naples, proclaiming the Kingdom's fall to Montemajor, and promising mercy from the new King Ferdinand I if the garrison surrendered immediately. After more negotiation, the garrison was allowed to leave without their weapons on the 1st of June, and then marched to Naples or dispersed themselves in the country.

Thus came the end of the 1st Line, a regiment that never saw service outside of the Napoleonic Wars; however, several of its officers would go on to serve in the Bourbon Army and take up prominent positions in the Kingdom in the later years of the 19th Century. The regiment's legacy as one of the most successful Neapolitan regiments would remain for many decades after.

Uniform

Like all Neapolitan regiments, the 1st Line's uniform was almost completely modelled on the standard French uniform. The regiment's distinctions were in light blue, as noted in the table below:

1806-1811 Uniform

Detail	Description
Headgear	French style bicorne for all companies; pompom colour based on company (Green, Blue, Orange, Violet respectively) Grenadiers also equipped with French-style bearskins with red chords, plume and back patch, bearing a single yellow grenade insignia patch
Neckstock	Black
Coat	White, French cut, no cuff flaps, light blue facings Collar light blue with white piping Lapels light blue Pockets diagonal; white with light blue piping Cuffs light blue with white piping, two brass buttons Coattails long; white with light blue piping, grenade/bugle insignia for grenadiers and voltigeurs respectively
Epaulettes	Fusiliers white shoulder-straps piped light blue Grenadiers red fringe epaulettes Voltigeurs green fringe epaulettes
Waistcoat	White; 9 equally spaced brass golden buttons, cuffs and collar light blue
Breeches	White
Gaiters	Black
Equipment	Bandoliers White; one for Fusiliers and Voltigeurs, two for Grenadiers Waistbelt n/a Cartridge Box Black, Insignia N/A Fatigue Cap White with light blue lining; light blue company insignia for elite companies Footgear regular French infantry cowhide shoes, 36-40 nails depending on size

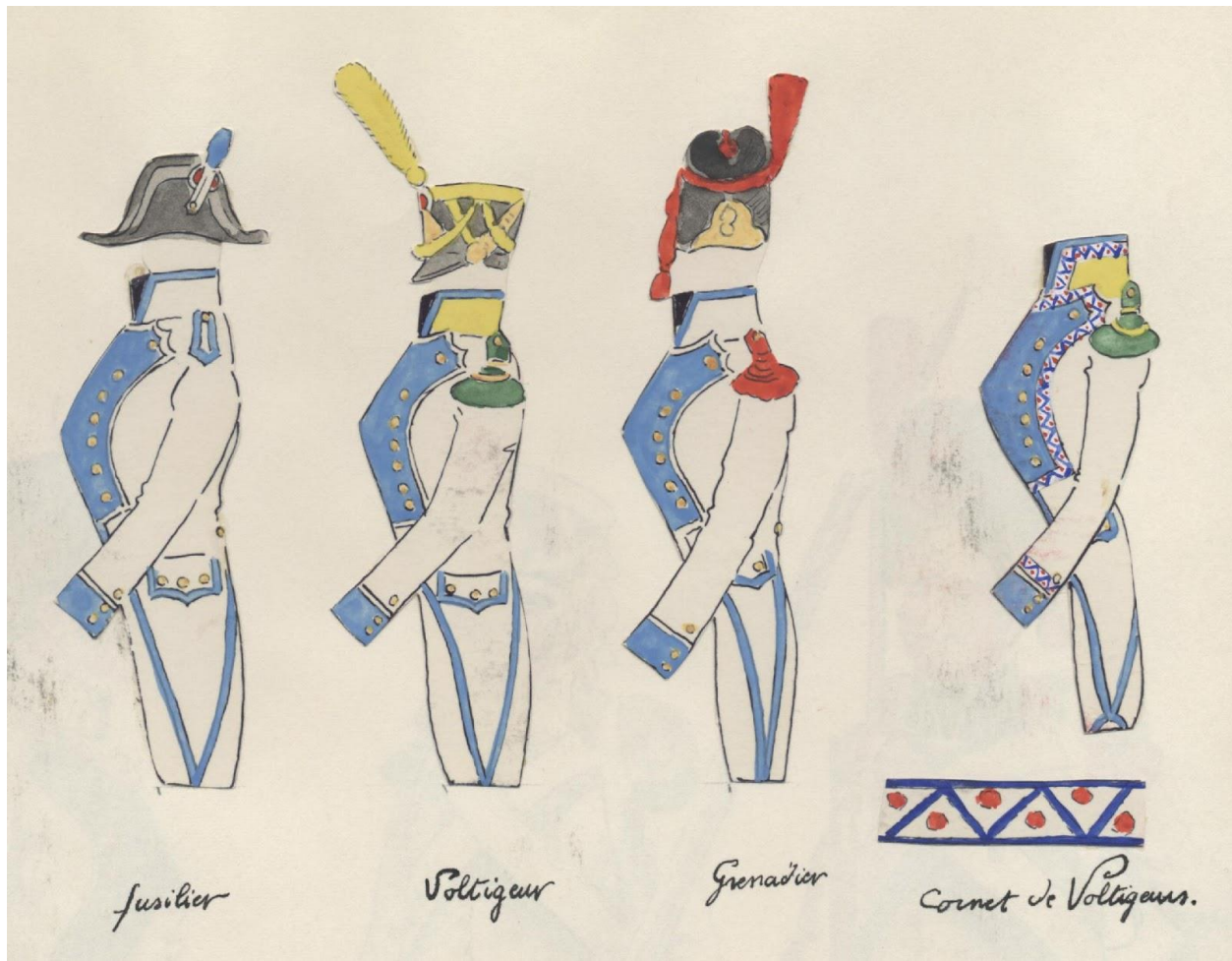


Figure 4: Uniforms and headgear of the 1st Line in 1806-1811. From left to right: Fusilier, Voltigeur, Grenadier and Voltigeur Cornet (bugler).

Surprisingly, Bigarré mentions ordering shakos for the regiment when he first purchased new uniforms for it in 1806 – this could be a fault of memory as the Frenchman only wrote his memoirs several years after the end of the Napoleonic Wars.

1811 Uniform

In 1811 the new uniform regulations were implemented in Murat's Army, uniforming the 1st Regiment as follows:

Detail	Description
Headgear	Fusiliers French style black felt shako with brass plate bearing regimental number (1) or royal cypher, pompom colour based on company (Green, Blue, Orange, Violet respectively) Grenadiers French style black felt shako with brass plate bearing a grenade, red pompom Bearskins (as mentioned above) also in use Voltigeurs French style black felt shako with brass plate bearing grenade over a horn with regimental number (1), green pompom
Neckstock	Black
Coat	White, French cut, cuff flaps, light blue facings, two rows of 7 buttons Collar light blue with white piping Lapels light blue Pockets white with light blue piping Cuffs pointed, light blue with white piping, two brass buttons Coattails short; white with light blue piping, grenade/bugle insignia for grenadiers and voltigeurs respectively
Epaulettes	Fusiliers white shoulder-straps piped light blue Grenadiers red fringe epaulettes Voltigeurs green fringe epaulettes
Waistcoat	White; 9 equally spaced brass golden buttons, cuffs and collar light blue
Breeches	White
Gaiters	Black
Equipment	Bandoliers White; one for Fusiliers and Voltigeurs, two for Grenadiers Waistbelt n/a Cartridge Box Black, Insignia N/A Fatigue Cap White with light blue lining; light blue company insignia for elite companies Footgear regular French infantry cowhide shoes, 36-40 nails depending on size



Figure 5: Uniforms of the 1st Line in 1813. From the left: Fusilier Officer, Voltigeur, and Sapper.

Colours

According to the 1806 regulations, the 1st Line was supposed to have one red and black standard of the French pattern, identical to that of the 1st Light Regiment (other than in the inscription) per battalion.

It is unclear whether the regiment received its standards from Joseph before setting out to Spain, although it is clear that in June 1810 the regiment received its new blue, white and amaranth flags while in Catalonia. They escaped capture when Figueras fell to the guerrillas in April 1811

(the wife of the 1st Line's quartermaster hid it on her), however probably were left in the regimental depot in the 1814 and 1815 Campaigns in Italy.

1806-Pattern *Drapeau*:

- Field: white
- Corners in White and Red
- Golden lacing with regimental number
- Obverse (right): Inscription "Giuseppe Napoleone/Re Delle Due Sicilie/Al 1mo Reggimento/D'Infanteria/Di Linea" written in gold
- Reverse (left): Lesser arms of the Kingdom of Naples under Joseph

In 1810 a new flag design was decreed, although this was only actually issued to the regiments on 15th February 1811. The new flags consisted of a white and amaranth checkerboard square on a light blue background, alongside a gold inscription on the obverse and the Kingdom's lesser arms on the reverse. The 1st Line was issued one such flag per battalion, and probably took these on campaign in 1814 and 15 (as depicted in Raffet's *Carlo Filangieri and Murat at the Panaro* painting).

1810-Pattern *Drapeau*:

- Field: blue
- Red and Amaranth checkerboard surrounding
- Obverse (right): Green laurel/holly wreath topped with "GN" and crown; inscription "Al/REGGto/D'Infanteria/1o Di Linea"
- Reverse (left): Shield of the lesser arms of the Kingdom of Naples under Joachim Murat alongside two mermaids, a royal crown of five hoops and the Order of Two Sicilies.

List of Colonels

Date Appointed	Name
2nd February 1807	Auguste-Julien Bigarré
16th November 1807	Guillaume Alexandre Thomas Pégot
1st February 1812	Luigi Nicola de Majo
20th February 1814	Pasquale Paoletta

References

- *Archivio storico per le province napoletane: Volume 51*. Italy, Ed. Detken & Rocholl e F. Giannini, 1926.
- Bigarré, Général Baron Auguste. *Mémoires Du Général Bigarré, Aide De Camp Du Roi Joseph*. N.p., Wagram Press, 2014.
- Brandani, Massimo, and Crociani, Piero. *L'Esercito Napoletano 1806/15: Fanteria di Linea*. Italy, Editrice Militare Italiana, 1987.
- *Campagne des Autrichiens contre Murat en 1815*. Austria, A. Wahlen et comp., 1821.
- Cortese, Nino. Corpi e scuole militari dell'esercito napoletano dal 1806 al 1815. *Rassegna storica napoletana*, 1933, n.4, pp. 19-57
- Colletta, Pietro. *Storia della campagna d'Italia del 1815: Opera postuma di Pietro Colletta*. Italy, Gianini e Fiore, 1847.
- Colletta, Pietro. *Storia del reame di Napoli dal 1734 sino al 1825*. N.p., Tipografia e libreria Elvetica, 1834.
- Courcelles, Jean-Baptiste-Pierre Jullien de. *Dictionnaire Historique Et Biographique Des Généraux Français, Depuis Le Onzième Siècle Jusqu'En 1820: Tome 11*. France, Bertrand-Arthus, 1823.
- D'Ambrosio, Angelo. *La Campagne de Murat En 1815: Précis Militaire Et Politique de la Campagne de Joachim Murat En Italie Contre Les Autrichiens*. Volume 1. France, A. Lumbroso, 1899.
- Fernandez, Claudio, and Cristini, Luca Stefano. *L'esercito del regno di Napoli, 1806-15*. Italy, Soldiershop, 2014.
- Gioannini, Marco, and Nafziger, George F.. *The Defense of the Napoleonic Kingdom of Northern Italy, 1813-1814*. United Kingdom, Praeger, 2002.
- Ilari, Virgilio, and Crociani, Piero. *Le Truppe napoletane in Spagna (1809-13): I cinque reggimenti napoletani dell'Armée d'Espagne (1808-13)*. Italy, Soldiershop Publishing, 2015.
- Oman, Charles William Chadwick. *A History of the Peninsular War*, Volume 1. United Kingdom, Clarendon Press, 1995.
- Pepe, Gabriele. *Dal Molise alla Catalogna. G.P. e le sue esperienze nella 'Guerra del Francès'*. Testi inediti e lettere, I-II, a cura di V. Scotti Douglas. Campobasso, 2009.
- Pepe, Guglielmo. *Memoirs of General Pèpé: Comprising the Principal Military and Political Events of Modern Italy*. Volumes 1 - 2. United Kingdom, R. Bentley, 1846.

- Smith, Digby. *Murat's Army: The Army of the Kingdom of Naples 1806-1815*. United Kingdom, Helion, Limited, 2018.