"DR. STRANGEBREED, OR HOW I STOPPED WORRYING AND LEARNED TO LOVE LAFFITE"

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One climbs a mountain or swims a sea because they are there. A Laffite fan or aficionado does the same thing. And what a bunch of Laffites we have!

Bernardo Laffite was a soldier in the militia stationed at the Spanish Fort Carlos III of Arkansas in July, 1780. Elias Laffite was a corporal-first-class in the Pointe Coupee Militia from January 1, 1800. Ah, but the creme de la creme of the noble Laffite line just has to be our swashbuckling hero, Jean Laffite.

But which one? In the Mexican Archives, Seccion de Historia, Vol. 502, folios 151-252, there is a fascinating collection (or expediente) of documents concerning the role of Jean Lafita in the struggle between Mexico and Spain for the former's independence, 1810-1821. It was a story which has intrigued countless people from time immemorial. In 1940, Charles Ransdell Jr. told us "Why Jean Lafitte (sic) Became a Pirate." James Edward Parkin thought Jean Lafitte (sic) was good enough for a master's thesis at SMU in 1951. We are told, also that "The Pirate House" between Waveland and Bay St. Louis, Miss., was a fine old southern plantation with wide verandas, dormer windows, and wrought iron all built in 1802. "The world famous Jean Laffite, born of a French father and a Spanish Jewess mother, supposedly had a secret tunnel from this place to transfer his loot to his boats," in nostalgic treks "Along the Old Spanish Trail."

But fun-time really comes when we look at the remarkable source on French troops who helped the U.S. win its independence, Les combattants francais de la guerre americaine, 1778-1783 (Paris, 1903). Are you Laffite fans braced for this one?

Jean Laffite, born in Aurignac, near Saint-Sever in 1755, joined on July 12, 1775, and was killed in action aboard the Tonnant on October 19, 1779. (p.310)

Jean Laffite was born in Beaumarchais, Gascony, in 1746, and joined the military on June 18, 1777. (p.275)

Jean Laffite was born at Marpats, Gascony, in 1744, enlisted on April 21, 1773, discharged on September 8, 1783. (p.247)

Jean Laffite, dit La Grenade, was born in Carcassonne in 1747 and enlisted October 21, 1766. He was killed in action on June 18, 1784 at Uzes. (p.244)

Will the real Jean Lafitte stand up? Maybe he is the lieutenant in the second company of New Orleans Militia, as established by the Spanish Governor Alexander O'Reilly, on February 12, 1770. If we look through the New Orleans Cabildo records we see both Juan and Jean, Lafita and Laffite, respectively, cadet and later lieutenant of militia and merchant (Ah, Hai) who posted a $1,000 bond and supplied gold and silver to currency-barren New Orleans during the Spanish dominion.

And there, my friends and fellow-aficionados, lies the secret in why I am Dr. Strangebreed, alias Sir Jack, how I stopped worrying about who the real Jean Laffite was, or why the new museum in lower Louisiana uses the wrong spelling. I dream the impossible dream: I shall capture the true Jean Laffite in legend and lore, will revive him and make his name a watchword of American Folklore!

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