



# The Per Niente



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**(Biagio) Max Corvo, Sicilian American intelligence operations help Allies win World War II.**



Max Corvo's official OSS Service identification card

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The account of the role Italian Americans played during World War II is still unfolding. While we know much of the story, a great deal of the historical record is either little known or only now emerging. This is the case of Max Corvo (1920-1994) and an extraordinary group of Sicilian Americans from Middletown, Connecticut. Corvo, born in 1920 in eastern Sicily, which was the background of many in Middletown, was the son of an anti-Fascist journalist who fled Sicily to settle in Connecticut where he founded the Middletown Bollettino. By helping his father publish the Italian-language paper, he acquired extensive knowledge of political issues as well as the acquaintance of many anti-Fascist activists on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean. Soon after he joined the Army as a private in 1942, Corvo developed an ingenious plan to engage Sicilian Americans who were familiar with the Sicilian language, colloquiums, and characteristics, and who had relatives in Sicily, to gather intelligence. This information would then be transmitted to the military as it planned the invasion of Sicily and the Italian mainland. A relatively simple plan, it was simultaneously bold and promising. As an indication of his resourcefulness Corvo, although then only a army private, was able to gain a hearing from high administrators in the O.S.S. military intelligence apparatus then being spawned by Gen. William (Wild Bill) Donovan. By spring 1943 it became apparent to the Allies that "Husky" -a plan for the invasion of Sicily might be in jeopardy because it lacked Italian or Sicilian-speaking personnel and had failed to make close contact with significant Italian resistance organization. Corvo, in charge of the OSS Italian Section recruited Italian-Americans for special intelligence operations including infiltrating Sicily and the Italian mainland to ascertain valuable information regarding German military strength and specific location of enemy installations. Among those Corvo recruited from Middletown was Frank J. Tarallo, son of Sicilian immigrants who was to play the leading role in the Ventotene and

Lipari Island Missions. Tarallo and a small number of mostly Italian Americans undertook the dangerous assignments of contending with superior German forces that controlled the islands where thousands of prisoners were incarcerated. The exciting drama of their liberation attracted the attention of famed writer John Steinbeck who, in writing about the episode, sadly omitted the critical role that Tarallo and the other Italian Americans played. Other Italian Americans that Corvo recruited from Middletown and nearby areas were Emilio Q. Daddario, former Middletown mayor, future member of Congress, and candidate for governor of Connecticut, Sebastian Passinisi, Louis Fiorillo, Samuel Frolino, and Vincent Scamporini. These were among the unsung heroes the Italian American community produced.

Source: The National Italian American Foundation: Milestones

