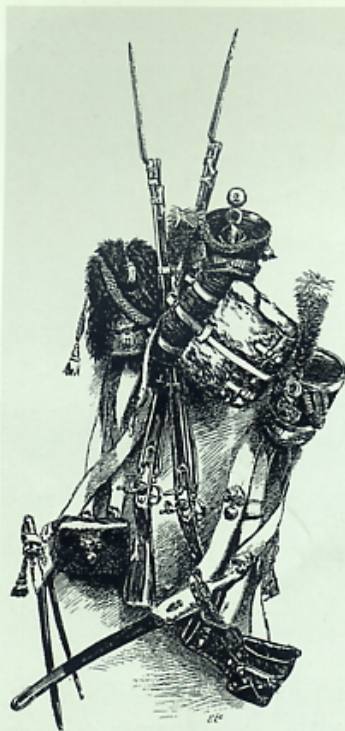


N THE AGE OF NAPOLEON

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THE AGE OF NAPOLEON

This issue could have been sub-titled *Rum, Bum and Concertina*, if George Melly hadn't already used it for his autobiography. I have wanted to include some naval topics for a little while, so I am quite pleased with this crop.

In case you missed it in the newspapers, Napoleonic enthusiasts are now recognised. Yes, the new edition of Chambers Dictionary includes trainspotters, with a definition of *obsessed by trivia*. I think this is a scurrilous slur: trying to paint regimental numbers on the buttons of 15mm figures is accuracy, not obsession. Obsession is a perfume by Calvin Klein.

Keep on rocking,

Richard

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Austrian infantry of a 'German' regiment.

TERRIBLY OBSCURE BATTLES OF THE AGE OF NAPOLEON



The Battle of Loano

23rd Nov. 1795

By Simone Mambriani,

In the summer of 1995, strange news swept the Western Ligurian Riviera in Italy. One quiet morning in September, men dressed in threadbare uniforms of the French Revolutionary Armies of the last decade of the 18th Century had taken the Doria Palace, the sixteenth century Town Hall of Loano, by storm. Then, at bayonet point, the Austrian defenders of the historic building were forced into the Town Square together with a substantial number of municipal employees and, for good measure, the mayor and an administrator!

This colourful episode announced the beginning of the bi-centenary celebrations of the Battle of Loano, which took place on the 23 November 1795.

Comparatively little known and overlooked, it is the first on the list of many French victories engraved on the Arch of Triumph in Paris. This Battle is of notable importance to the history of the Napoleonic era. Although Buonaparte (at that time Napoleon still used the original Italian diction for his name) was not present on the battlefield, he gave decisive strategic planning to the cycle of operations that culminated in the Battle of Loano. Following this victory, in the Spring Napoleon himself led what is remembered in history as "The First Campaign of Italy".



Austrian gunners



A French revolutionary infantryman



Austrian gunfire



Austrian infantry of a 'German' regiment (after 1806 uniforms)



The Austrian infantrymen of an 'Hungarian' regiment are loading.



The fire of the French revolutionary troops.



The Austrian line is firing.



French revolutionary troops are going on.



French cuirassier and chasseurs (Empire uniforms).



A French revolutionary cavalryman.



Infantrymen of the Piedmontese Light Troops Legion.



French revolutionary troops are attacking.

At the end of the 18 Century, each frontier of the Republic that had arisen from the Revolution constituted a front. The Italian frontier was no exception. Because of the nature of its geophysical terrain and the relatively little importance given to Piedmont as an adversary, the operations languished and the French Ministry of War considered them of secondary importance. By chance, at the beginning of 1794, the ambitious General Buonaparte was assigned as Artillery Inspector of the Army of Italy.

The assignment was ill-suited to produce battlefield laurels. Napoleon, in order to impose his own operational ideas, knew how to play on the insecurity that the political leadership had instilled in its generals.

Dismissals, imprisonment and the guillotine were often the lot of unsuccessful commanders. He first gained the support of the political commissars Cristoforo Saliceti and Augustin Robespierre (the brother of Maximilien Robespierre). Then he succeeded in persuading General Pierre Dumerbion, the Commander of the Armée d'Italie, to accept his scheme of a diversion on the strong positions of the Piedmontese in Saorgio, against which French attacks had failed for two years. In the meantime, the main effort would be developed on the coast in the direction of Savona.

About two weeks later General André Masséna reached Loano and, at the beginning of May 1794, he took the mountain passes which gave access to the Pianura padana, the plain of the River Po. Napoleon had wanted the campaign to continue, but his peremptory suggestions went against Minister Lazare Carnot's intentions. Carnot was convinced that it was not worthwhile sacrificing forces on the Italian front which could affect the one on the Rhine. Buonaparte's view was that the war against Austria had to be won, but by forcing that country to withdraw from the Rhine in order to plug the gap in Italy.

Napoleon's viewpoint was one of grand strategy, ranging far and wide over broad horizons. In the meantime the General was sent to Genoa to occupy himself with less important administrative matters - a poor assignment for his ambitions. It was above all risky in that it coincided with the coup d'état of 9 Thermidor - 27 July 1794. Buonaparte was imprisoned and had to find inexhaustible excuses to avoid the worst.

Waiting for clarification of Napoleon's personal affairs, the Armée d'Italie was champing at the bit. The General's worries were justified: Austria was beginning to worry about the Italian front and had decided to reinforce it. Not only this but Austria and Piedmont were collaborating, an arrangement that until then had meant little more than verbal co-operation. During this pause in circumstances, whilst discussing strategy, a sugges-

tion made by Napoleon was accepted. This was that to hold the front it would be necessary that Savona remained French. The Armée could then penetrate along the River Bormida in such a way as to divide the Piedmontese and the Austrians, thereby threatening to surround the latter.

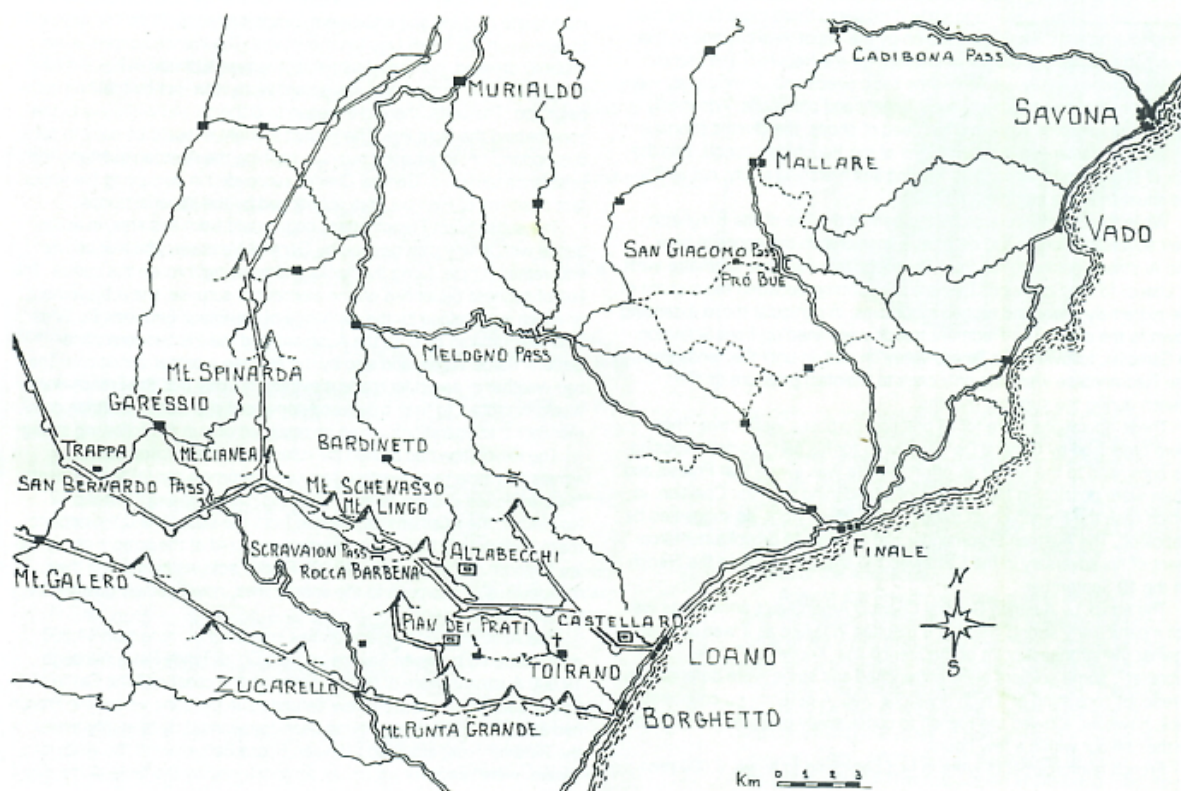
A swift campaign which began on the 19 September was unexpectedly highly successful. By the 24th, however, General Dumerbion considered that his exhausted forces had to establish more secure positions by falling back a considerable distance and setting up a new front line.

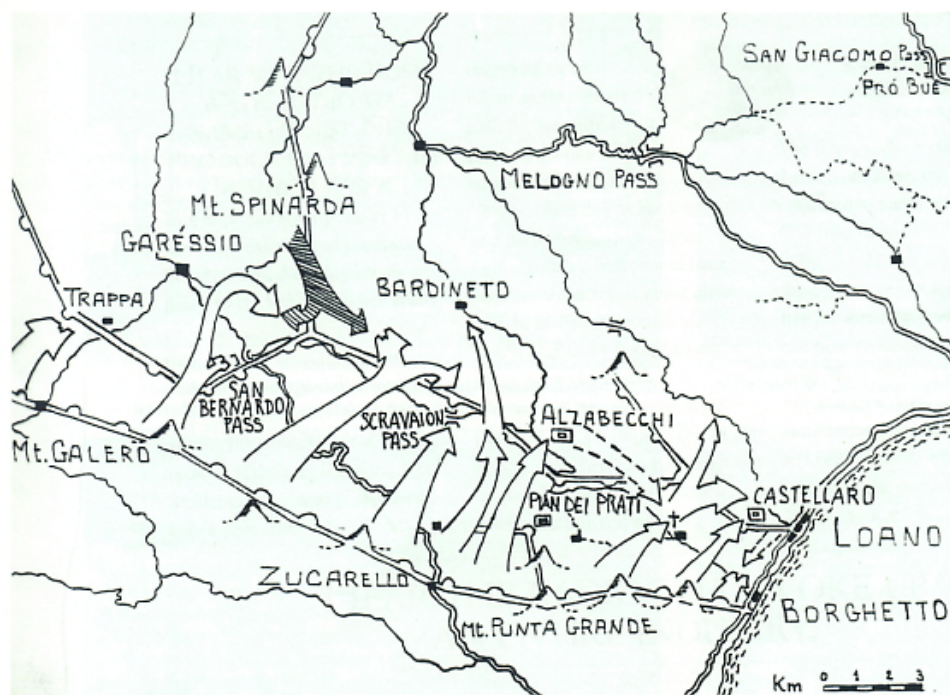
The oscillations in the fortune of Napoleon corresponded closely with the operations on the Italian front. Involved in one of the periodic expulsions of supernumerary officials and then overwhelmed by the flaring up of his pride, only in the summer of 1795 did Napoleon return to the situation in Italy. In fact, following the offensive taken by the Austrians on 29 June, General François Christophe Kellerman, the new Commander of the Armée d'Italie, had been driven back to Loano. The Bureau Topographique (more or less the French General Staff) recalled Buonaparte because of his accurate knowledge of the front.

He had just completed detailed reports on the subject when he found himself yet again in an awkward situation on the 15 September. The difficulties Buonaparte experienced in his career came to an end on 5 October - 13 Vendémiaire. This was the day he fired on those demonstrating in front of the Tuilleries. It was also the day of the French, who were about to attain a victory, advanced in Italy.

Napoleon strongly advised the withdrawal of the troops from the Rhine and the Pyrenees in favour of the Italian front, in order to recover the lost positions and to finally divide the Austrian troops from those of Piedmont. Buonaparte's point of view was accepted, but put into practice over too long a period of time. Operations came to a standstill when serious conflicts arose between the rapacious Austrian Commander in Chief, General Baron De Wins, who was mainly involved in the plunder of Liguria, and his Piedmontese equivalent Lieutenant-general Baron Michelangelo Alessandro Marchini Colli. Colli was also supported by notables from Genoa, but even though the French were also affected by the delays, these proved advantageous in their case.

The lull in operations gave Kellerman the opportunity to reorganise his own troops now positioned on the Borghetto line. Based on a mountainous rampart, it started from Loano, and cut across the Maritime Alps to join in the defence of the River Tanaro. The rugged terrain of the Western Ligurian mountains heavily restricted the lines of communica-





tion whilst at the same time it proved effective as an excellent defence. In addition the Piedmontese and Austrian troops, although well drilled, were disoriented because their training did not include mountain combat. It was too static and tied to defensive tactics.

The French were not affected by such limitations. Their demi-brigades (the term "regiment" was abolished during the Revolution because it had strong ties to traditional noble connections) had not been so strictly drilled and therefore were not particularly preoccupied by tactical principles. This was actually to their advantage since it rendered them more flexible than other detachments. They were led on by the impetuous courage of their young officers, who were full of idealism for the Republic. The French armies travelled lightly with only their basic needs and consequently were not encumbered with excessive equipment and provisions. Admittedly, the men themselves were in great need of shoes, the chronic shortage of which characterised the campaigns of the Republican period. This lack of shoes would affect their fighting and marching ability, not unlike the situation in the summer of 1795.

While the French were protected behind the line of the Borghetto, their adversaries organised defensive positions on the opposite bank. The Austrians positions ran from Borghetto (situated one kilometre west of Loano) to the Scravaion. This is a pass cutting between the summit of the extremely sheer and rugged mountains, in particular those extending down to the coast. The Piedmont troops were lined up from Scravaion to Garéssio, following the Tanaro Valley on and on until the Tenda Pass. The Piedmontese were the only ones to maintain pressure on the French during the summer months.

These operations were for all practical purposes ineffective. They were organised by General De Wins, who for his part avoided exposing his command to the risk of an offensive. He was aware that Prussia and Spain were possibly in the process of abandoning the First Coalition, in which case the French could troops to the Italian front, as suggested by Napoleon. The Austrian Commander had no wish to provoke reinforcement of his adversary in the Castelvechio area by attacking the French on the 19 September.

The attack by Austrian General Count D'Argenteau's army corps was not a particularly strong one, but it resulted in failure as it was directed against the strongest point of the French line. Known as "Little Gibraltar", some soldiers were entrenched and some were defended by a redoubt consisting of a high dry-stone wall. A determined counter-attack, however, allowed the French to conclusively overturn the situation in their favour within a few hours.

French reinforcements were in fact beginning to arrive. 6,000 men

came from the Rhine and 10,000 from Spain, but the final addition to the Armée d'Italie was only 12,000 men - the difference being caused by strategic consumption. With them on 21 September arrived General Barthélemy Schérer who replaced Kellerman, transferred to Armée des Alpes. The new commander suggested that it was not possible to carry out the plan that had been decided upon in August by the Committee of Public Safety, based upon Napoleon's first thoughts. He proposed an attack on the village of Ceva, intended to separate the two coalition armies, followed by the recapture of Vado, near the city of Savona. It was too ambitious an objective for the Armée d'Italie which, although having reached the strength of 33,000 men, was still outnumbered by the 30,000 Austrians and 12,000 Piedmontese.

The plan was therefore reshuffled by Schérer and Masséna, although preserving the intention of dividing the Piedmontese from the Austrians. Now the main body of the French army would attack

the troops of Colli at Garéssio and Mount Spinarda, outflanking the Imperials in the Scravaion Pass which acted as the hinge between the two armies. At the same time the remainder of the Armée d'Italie would fix the Austrians with a demonstration between the pass and the coast.

The movements behind the French lines did not escape the Piedmontese commander. He took all the precautions he could, but both his plans and also those of Schérer were nullified by the abundant snow-fall of the 15 November. The conditions of intense cold, coupled with inadequate clothing and equipment, made it impossible for the any units to remain on the harsh Ligurian mountains: The French soldiers were shabbily dressed, but their Austrian colleagues suffered in equal measure since their clothes and equipment were worn-out by the long campaign too. The units, therefore, began to disperse and withdraw to the zone behind the front line. The French thought it would be easy to seize this opportunity to advance but, approaching the Austrian quarters, the resistance stiffened. General Charlet succeeded in occupying the important positions of Pian dei Prati abandoned by the Imperial troops.

The subsequent French attack began right from this area, in accordance with a new plan devised by General Masséna. The manoeuvre was rather simple: fixing the flanks and breaking through the centre. The key of success depended on the element of surprise, the achievement of which was helped by the exchange of command between De Wins, who was disliked by both the Austrians and the Piedmontese, and General Baron Wallis, and also by the adverse weather conditions. The bad weather in particular made it extremely likely that the French units would withdraw to their billets and convinced the elderly Austrian commanders that operations would be resumed only in the following spring.

The Revolution had broken the rules traditionally followed by the armies and inclement weather had now become a part of the elements to be exploited in order to attain success. During the night of the 22 November, the Austrians descended from the summit and the ridge to make their way to the winter quarters prepared at the bottom of the valley. Without disturbance the 25,000 French soldiers completed their manoeuvres of approach to the enemy lines, now sparsely guarded by depleted detachments.

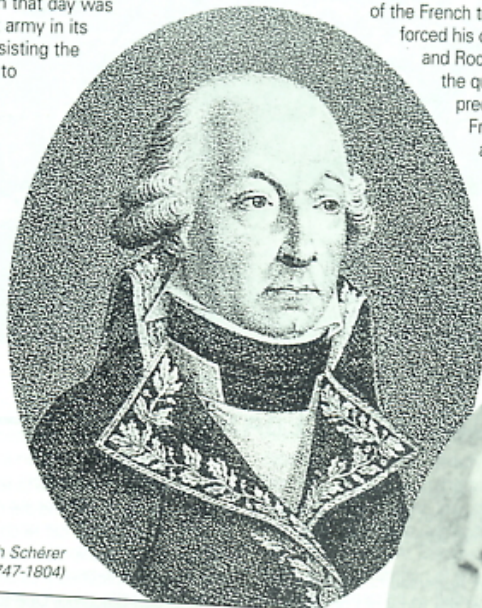
The Austrian-Piedmontese armies consisted of more than 44,000 men scattered between Savona and the Col di Tenda Pass. Although 19,000 Austrians were drawn up between the coast and the Castle of Rocca Barbena, there were few defenders in the zone where the French had attacked. In contrast, having been forewarned by their informers, the Piedmontese, arranged between Rocca Barbena and the valley of Tanaro, were ready for action, as demonstrated by the facts of the day

of the 23rd. For the whole day their sector held off the right flank of the French, commanded by General Philibert Sérurier, which concluded with both adversaries still occupying their original positions.

The French attacks began early. One, conducted by General Miollis, was directed to the Valley of Tanaro, west of Garéssio. The other, led by Sérurier, was aimed at the San Bernardo Pass to cut the road to Rocca Barbena. By mid-morning the French found themselves in great difficulty in both directions, whilst the Piedmontese manoeuvred their units and cleverly exploited the hard terrain to fire incessantly upon the enemy with their muskets and cannons. The fact that Sérurier had already begun to withdraw at midday, without losing touch of the enemy, should not be taken as an indication that this attack of the future Marshal was a weak one. The task entrusted to him that day was carried out, namely to detain the Piedmont army in its proper positions. This prevented it from assisting the Imperial troops who were being subjected to greater pressures by Masséna.

In fact Masséna, who was in charge of more than 13,000 men, launched an attack before sunrise against the hinge between the Piedmontese line and that of the Austrians. On the left, Division General Amédée Laharpe initiated two attacks. The one commanded by General St. Hilaire against the Scravaion Pass was stopped by Austrian and Piedmontese troops who were strongly entrenched within the pass. The other column was directed instead to the Piedmontese positions in the upper valley of the Neva, a swift flowing mountain stream, with the intention of distracting the attention of the defenders. At the same time a strong contingent infiltrated, unseen, to outflank the defence line which united the Lingo and bric Schenasso mountains.

Barthélemy Louis Joseph Schérer
(1747-1804)



This position was taken at about 07.00. The French General Pijon divided his forces instructing one column to outflank the Piedmontese who were engaged in a skirmish with the diversionary attack ordered by Masséna. The other column, meanwhile, converged on the Scravaion Pass reaching the rear of the Coalition units facing St. Hilaire. At 10.00 the main part of the Piedmontese was driven back towards the North, to the slopes of Mount Ciane. They were now cut-off from the troops of Austrian General D'Argenteau, in spite of the vigorous counter-attack led later by Baron Colli, who in the meantime succeeded in reorganising his own forces.

On the right of Masséna, the fighting had a less favourable beginning. In fact, at about 06.00 D'Argenteau, becoming aware of the movements of the French troops led by General Charlet, immediately reinforced his own lines between the Saddle of the Alzabecchi and Rocca Barbena. The Austrians here demonstrated the quality of their own training and the orderly and precise fire of their line began to mow down the French columns. When General Charlet was among the victims the revolutionary troops hesitated but, with immediately Masséna took command of Charlet's troops and also committed the reserve units of General Bizanet. Despite the Imperial troops solidly holding Rocca Barbena, they could not resist the blow when they were attacked by Masséna and consequently began to withdraw.



Philibert Sérurier (1742-1819)

ORDERS OF BATTLE FOR LOANO

FRENCH ARMY -Armée d'Italie- commanded by Général de division Barthélemy Louis Joseph Schérer, with a total strength in the front line of 25,392 divided into:

Left Wing: Général de division Philibert Sérurier;
Généraux de brigade: Guillaume, Miollis, Pelletier (16 Infantry battalions; strength 5,115)

Centre: Général de division André Masséna;
Généraux de division: Charlet, Laharpe
Généraux de brigade: Bizanet, Cervoni, Menard, Pijon, St. Hilaire
(45 Infantry battalions; strength 13,276)

Right Wing: Général de division Pierre François Charles Augereau;
Généraux de brigade: Bannel, Dommartin, Victor (28 Infantry battalions; strength 6,961)

AUSTRO-PIEDMONTESE ARMY, commanded by General Baron De Wyna (replaced in 22 November 1795 by General Baron Wallis), divided into:

Austrian Army:

-Army of Lombardy, General Baron Wallis: 22,936 inf./1,629 cav.
-Argenteau Brigade, General Count d'Argenteau: 3,000 inf.
-Neapolitan cavalry: 1,200 cav.

25,936 inf./2,829 cav.

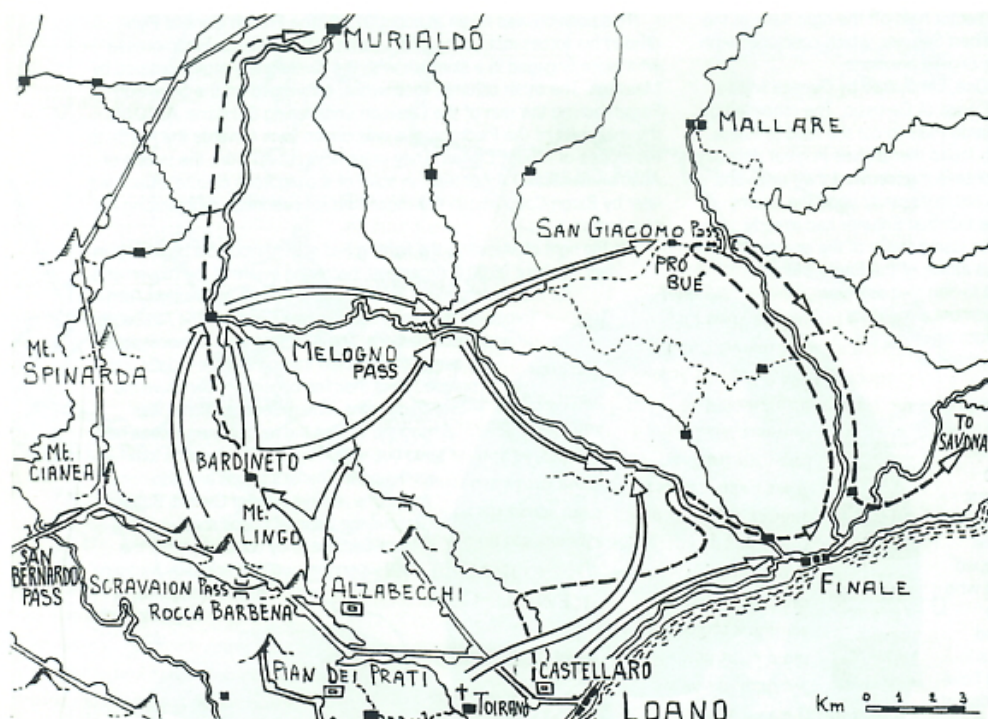
(from Loano to Scravaion Pass there were 18,945 inf./347 cav.)

Piedmontese Corps, Lieutenant-general Baron Colli:
17,900 inf./2,100 cav.

Total strength (in the front line and in the zone behind the front):
43,836 inf./4,929 cav.

In defence, the Austrians' commander of the sector, General Liptay, reorganised his troops in the valley near the centre of the village of Bardineto. Immediately, however, his positions appeared threatened by the convergence of the French vanguards. Laharpe's, led by General Pijon, descended from the Scravaion Pass and Masséna's, under General Jean-Baptiste Cervoni, came from the Saddle of the Alzabecchi.

Against the French columns spread on the roads and the ridges, D'Argenteau had an available fighting force of not more than 2,000 men, now lacking in supplies and ammunition. The Austrian General found it practically impossible to reorganise the front. The only possibility he had of holding the French back was to withdraw along the valley of Bormida to the village of Calizzano. Then, since he was threatened by the Republican column that had arrived at Melogno Pass, to



that of Murialdo, about 30 kilometres north of the positions held that morning. Not only was the Imperial centre routed, but towards evening the flank of General Wallis was also left exposed, with the remnant of the Army of Lombardy scattered along the coast.

On the 22, General Pierre François Charles Augereau had concentrated his 7,000 armed men against the balance of the Army of Lombardy, estimated at about 13,000 men. At 06.00 on the 23rd the French line initiated its attack. Augereau used only two of his four brigades. That of General Bannel attacked Toirano, and that of General Rusca, Boissano. Both efforts were successful and the Austrians were driven back beyond the gorge made by the Varatella, between the houses of Toirano. General Bannel, wounded in the course of action, was replaced by Colonel Jean Lannes. A rising star from the revolutionary armies, he now had the opportunity to show the courage and tactical ability that characterised his career. The Imperials were compelled to barricade themselves in the nearby Charterhouse. Colonel Lannes, ignoring this garrison, continued his impetuous advance on the cliffs above Loano, destroying the strongpoints of the line of defence and those units routed by Masséna who were withdrawing to the coast.

Nearer the sea, General Rusca was advancing, supported by the reserve of General Dommartin. The latter was at last involved in the fighting around the Charterhouse of Toirano, from which Austrian General Ternyey had led an attempted sally. Having forced back the demi-brigade left by Lannes to besiege him, he could have succeeded in escaping had he not been impeded in his withdrawal towards Loano by hospital personnel and wounded soldiers of a republican field infirmary. At this point Dommartin intervened driving the Imperials back to the Charterhouse and then by cannon shots forcing them to surrender.

The brigade of General Claude-Victor Perrin "Victor" held the extreme right of the French front. He developed his own action against Loano with the support of about ten small gun-boats who, tacking near the coastline, created a disturbance without actually inflicting any real damage to the Austrian defence. The republican troops attacked on favourable ground for cavalry, so that two squadrons of Austrian Uhlands and a regiment of Neapolitan Dragoons succeeded in driving back Victor's attacks three times. The cavalry action, although contained by French light infantry fire, galvanised the Imperial regiment surrounded on nearby Mount Castellaro. In the afternoon they succeeded in forcing their way through the besieging Republicans and joined with the Austrian defenders of the fortress of Loano. They were heedless of the fact that they would have to pay the high price of many lives.

More or less all the French line was marching forward, but the prudent Schérer did not yet have a clear view of the situation. By mid-afternoon, therefore, he stopped the troops that he was able to reach, instructing them to hold their positions. This convinced Wallis that, after a night of reorganisation, the Imperial units would be able to counter-attack. The Austrian commander then learned of the fall of the Charterhouse of Toirano and of D'Argenteau's disaster. At that moment D'Argenteau was rapidly withdrawing without worrying about keeping the way of escape open for the Army of Lombardy.

During the night, amid the pouring rain that had started during the afternoon, Wallis withdrew in a disorderly manner towards the village of Finale. The French columns, in spite of their confusion, were impetuously advancing. Masséna found himself in a suitable position to give a coup de grace to the Austrians. However, with his exhausted troops and a ratio

of more than three to one to his disadvantage, he considered it expedient to await reinforcements and the new day before resuming action.

The Austrian retreat re-commenced the morning of the 24th. Like D'Argenteau, Wallis also sought to reach the valley of Bormida and he therefore despatched a strong vanguard to guarantee possession of the Pass of San Giacomo. Due to the lack of aggressiveness of General Pittoni, its commander, and Masséna's impetus, assisted by Laharpe and Charlet, the Austrians were prevented from reaching the pass. The French attack routed the Austrians, driving them back towards the sea, all the time losing men and materials. Wallis' routed troops were running towards Savona, on the only remaining coast road.

The shortage of French provisions and supplies, and the exhaustion of their units permitted the Allied armies to reorganise themselves. On the 25th the Imperials withdrew to Savona and Vado, where they burned depots, and then resumed their retreat towards the Pass of Cadibona. The troops of Generals Pittoni and Rukavina performed an effective rear-guard action because the exhausted French were unable to develop a strong attack. The survivors of the Austrian units arrived at their base in Acqui on the 29 November.

For his part General Colli, who for all of the 24th remained without news of Wallis, began to reorganise his own lines. He recalled troops from the valleys that extended towards Tenda Pass, certain that the heavy snowfall had impeded French movement in that area. Ignoring his own disastrous state, Colli even considered a counterattack. Once he appreciated the situation on the 25th the Piedmontese commander created a flank defence in the valley of Tanaro, parallel to the withdrawal of D'Argenteau along the Bormida valley.

The intention of Colli to hold his own position was soon revealed as an illusion. During the night of 27/28 November, Schérer, convinced that he was unable to pursue the Austrians further, despatched strong contingents against the Piedmontese. By mid-morning of the 28th, Miollis had taken the positions that had been uselessly attacked on the 23rd and had driven his men to outflank the left of the Tanaro. At that point the Piedmontese, threatened by encirclement, abandoned Mount Cianea, San Bernardo Pass and the village of Garéssio to retreat to Mount Spinarda. The positions were immediately occupied by the right flank of the pursuing French, but the most dangerous push came from the troops on the road from Garéssio leading to Ceva, resolutely led by Sérurier. In the end Ceva became the mainstay of the line of defence that Colli was forced to form, and which would become the stage of the battles of the following spring. The 29 November was the day that concluded operations. The Austrians had repaired to Acqui,

the Piedmontese were lined up in secure positions and the French had exhausted their energies and resources necessary to feed a further offensive.

At Loano between the 23 and 29 November (2/8 Frimaire, according to the calendar of the Revolution) 1795, General Schérer achieved a noteworthy success. This is confirmed by the figures: 5,500 Imperials dead, wounded and imprisoned; 500 French dead, 800 wounded and 400 imprisoned, a ratio decidedly favourable to the latter, especially if one considers that they were attacking. In addition, the Austrians lost their Ligurian depots, as well as 48 guns and 100 caissons, which represented practically the whole artillery-park of the Army of Lombardy. This loss resulted in fatal consequences for the Imperials during the following spring's campaign against Napoleon.

It was Napoleon, however, who bitterly criticised Schérer for not exploiting Masséna's victory. After Loano, thundered Napoleon, it was necessary to pursue the Piedmontese preventing them from forming a new line in the area of Ceva. This would have forced Victor Amadeus III of Savoy, King of Piedmont, to make a treaty with France, and would have isolated the Austrians in Italy. The young general protested so much that in the end he was given the command of the Armée d'Italie and thus the responsibility of realising his own ideas. For his part, Schérer remained of the opinion that the condition of the troops did not allow for a further effort and he continued to urge the despatch of reinforcements and supplies. In the end, as his requests were not satisfied, Schérer resigned leaving the Armée d'Italie to face a hard winter in the mountains between Liguria and Piedmont. Augereau was given the credit for maintaining cohesion of the units in the cold and left practically without supplies.

From the Battle of Loano it became evident that the heavy line formation, applied without any flexibility by the elderly Austrian commanders, was becoming altogether insufficient to contain the dynamic tactics of the French. The demi-brigades were quickly evolving their own tactics, passing from the disorderly mass of the first revolutionary armies to very manoeuvrable and flexible units. Without doubt, this result was accredited to the ability and decision of the officers who were emerging from the tough selection of the revolutionary wars.

If the cycle of operations of 1794/1795 appears to be constantly influenced by the will of Napoleon, one must not forget the determined action of men who rapidly found themselves collaborating with Buonaparte and whose glory and fame grew alongside his own. Of the twenty-six Marshals who were nominated by Napoleon, the following were at Loano: Masséna, Sérurier, Augereau and Victor with the rank of general, Lannes and Suchet were colonels; whilst Kellerman and Berthier, also generals, were indirectly involved.

It is certainly significant that such a large number of men destined to be successful were in that battle. Not to be overlooked are other less fortunate commanders of great value who distinguished themselves at Loano. Among these was General Charlet who was killed on the 23 during the arduous encounters of the Alzabecchi, his colleagues Bannel and Laharpe who fell in the campaign of 1796 and also Joubert, who was killed in the Battle of Novi in the summer of 1799.

Visiting the locations of the battle of the 23rd to 29 November 1795, is not an easy matter because of the steep nature of the terrain on which they occurred. In addition, the contradictory reports of some writers have created uncertainties that have only recently been clarified by careful research conducted by local members of the Napoleonic Association of Italy.

The difficult mountain road from Loano to Garéssio leads to the locations of some of the encounters. It passes through a landscape that is as



French troops attack Austrian fortified positions on the Mount Castellaro, near Loano.

much severe as it is rich in splendid views, in which interest in history overlaps with natural beauty. A few kilometres outside Loano, one sees the remains of the Charterhouse. The church with its white walls and caved-in roof survives in a state of abandonment on the road, within the boundary of Toirano, ascending to the Saddle of the Alzabecchi and leading to Bardineto. At Bardineto, where the troops of D'Argenteau withdrew in the afternoon of the 23, there are some battery positions which are often accepted as being from the Napoleonic era. They are, however, part of a nineteenth century firing range of the Piedmontese artillery.

Following the valley of Bormida in the direction of Erli, one reaches the Scraiva Pass. Here, immediately at the back of the maintenance worker's house, one finds the remains of four Austrian artillery positions, and two Piedmontese. Other positions, less easily accessible, remain on the ridge of the mountains of Lingo, Schenasso and Subanco, cut by the Scraiva Pass. A few kilometres from the pass, on an abutment jutting out from the side of the Neva valley, rises Rocca Barbena. This is a small and ancient village with houses clinging around the ramparts of an imposing castle.

The winding road follows the ascent to the San Bernardo Pass, dominated on the right by Mount Cianea, on which there are traces of trenches. To reach these positions one needs to abandon the car, without attempting to use the prohibited road of the Forest Warden. The same applies if one wishes to see the most interesting works of Mount Spinarda where, in addition to the trenches, there is a redoubt notable for the height of its dry stone walls. It was constructed by the French and was repeatedly lost and retaken by them.

More commitment, however, is required if one includes in the itinerary an interesting excursion on foot. Leave from Cape Santo Spirito, by the sea near Borghetto, ascend Mount Croce and then head for the mountains of Monte Acuto, Poggio Grande and Rocca Grande. Next to the sanctuary of Our Lady of Balestrino, one finds the stronghold called "Little Gibraltar", which some historians have incorrectly located elsewhere, although nineteenth century sources clearly demonstrate its placing in this area. At last one reaches Pian dei Prati, beautifully positioned under the landscaped outline, where one can observe most of the front and also nearby the remaining traces of trenches and encampments.

Farther to the East, above Finale, ascending from Fegolino for the road from San Giacomo to the Melogno Pass, one passes Pro Bué, where the Austrians abandoned their artillery. All across the vast area where the battle was fought there are various fortifications. They, like the fortress blocking the road from Toirano to the sea, are of slightly more recent construction, being built during the French/Piedmontese crisis of 1800. This was when the more important Apennines passes became fortified, with particular reference to those used by the French precisely in 1795.