

A Day with Two Emperors and a King

BY ROBERT SHACKLETON

The following is a personal narrative of the battle of Solferino as told by a survivor, Giovanni Bettini, at his home in Italy, to the author. The battle of Solferino was fought on June 24, 1859, between the Austrians, under Emperor Francis Joseph, and the allied French and Sardinians, under Emperor Napoleon the Third and King Victor Emmanuel. Napoleon the Third and Victor Emmanuel united to drive Austria from northern Italy. The campaign, of which the principal battles were Magenta (June 4) and Solferino, was a brief one. The battle-field of Solferino is a little south of Lago di Garda. The railway that runs from Milan to Venice is the one across which the Italians alternately advanced and retreated during the battle. The Austrians numbered 189,648 men, with 752 guns, and the French and Italians 173,603 men, with 522 guns. The Austrians lost 21,737, and the Allies 17,191. Solferino decided the campaign, and by treaty the Austrians retired from Lombardy, but still held the city and province of Venice.

"I T was thus that we fought them. *Dall' alba fino alla sera!* From morning until night it was that we fought them; from the break of day until after the sun had gone down.

"We had camped at Lonato, which is at the southern side of the Lake of Garda, and it was a pleasant, open country, with somewhat of mulberry trees and vineyards and somewhat of little fields of wheat. And to the northward were the mountains that rose by the lake, and to the southward were the rising hills, among which, we knew, were many thousands of Austrians—many tens of thousands.

"We had lain down pleasantly in our tents, for we were tired from the march, and had eaten a pleasant supper; but at two o'clock in the morning—the morning of the 24th of June, in the year 1859—we were wakened, and we all rose up, and we struck our tents, and were given soup, and then we marched away in the darkness, and we thought we were to march to the Austrians, and we were not sorry.

"It was slowly that daylight came;

it is slowly that daylight comes when you march through the darkness. It comes very faintly at first, and you see men and horses like shadows marching, and only slowly it grows brighter, and it is long before you see the sun.

"And the roads were full of our soldiers, as we went on through the level country, with its mulberry trees and its vineyards and its little canals of irrigation, toward the barer hills where we knew the Austrians had camped.

"There was not alone our Italian army of many thousands, but a great French army of many thousands, and we, the French and the Italians, were going against a great army of the Austrians of many thousands.

"I, Giovanni Bettini, was of the Eleventh Regiment, of the Brigade Casale, of the Fifth Division, and the general of our division was General Cuchiari, and our hearts were strong, for we knew that our King, Victor Emmanuel, was somewhere with the army and in command.

"And while there was still but a faint light of the morning, and as we marched up a sloping piece of land, there rose up many Tyrolese in front of us—we knew them by their hats with the cocks' feathers stuck up behind,—and they fired fast at us—*bum! bum! bum!*—and we fired at them, and we fixed bayonets, and we ran up the sloping piece of land, and the Tyrolese flew away.

"That was the beginning of our battle, and although this was but a skirmish, it was a very bitter skirmish, and on both sides there were men that were struck down.

"We halted. And a Tyrolese, lying on the ground, cried out: 'I am dying. Give me to drink.' Whereat my companion stooped to offer him a flask, and as he stooped the Tyrolese struck savage at him with his bayonet, but my companion jumped back and it missed him, and he said, 'You Tyrolese, you said you wanted a drink before you died, and now you shall die without the drink.' And he stuck his bayonet through him as a boy would stick a pin through a fly.

"The fighting soon began again, and it was very fierce. It was soon that we came to know that we were to capture a little village and the hills about the village. The village it was named San Martino, and there were walled barns and gardens, and the Austrians were very strong there.

"We, the Italian soldiers, we always call that day the battle of San Martino, but the French, they call it the battle of Solferino, because they fought to take the village of Solferino, on our right, just as we fought to take that San Martino.

"It was many times that we tried to take the hill ground around that village. We had many regiments and we had cavalry and we had great guns, and again and again we fired, and then again we would run at them with the bayonet.

"All the time they, too, were firing, and shells were falling and bursting, and bullets and cannon balls were striking down our men.

"There were times when their cavalry rode hard at us. They would come with a great gallop and a rush, and out of the smoke we would see them coming, the horsemen with a great shout and a waving of their swords.

"But this did not hurt us so much as the bullets and the shells, for our cannon would shoot at them, and we of the infantry would form quick in double rank in squares—we had good officers, we—and our front rank would stand or kneel, according as the horses looked little or big, and we would hold out our bayonets, so!—and that was a sharp fence for horses to gallop against; and while the front rank held out their bayonets the men of the second rank were firing very fast. So always the cavalry flew away.

"The bursting of the shells was very bad. Sometimes all of us close by would be thrown down and be covered with mud and earth, but most of us would jump up again, not wounded; but always there were some who would not jump up again, because they were wounded or dead.

"At the beginning of a battle a soldier feels afraid. At the beginning of this battle I felt afraid, and I know that other men felt afraid, though it was not our first battle, and we knew what it was to be under fire.

"So it was that, at the beginning, we commended ourselves; we felt like death; but soon that passed away, and we thought no more of death, but only of the killing of the Austrians.

"All around me men were killed. There were heads and arms blown off, and men flew into pieces like the smashing of a jug. But we did not care, we. We thought nothing of it. I do not know that we even knew we saw such things, but some of them come to me as I sit with you and talk of that long day. We did not notice; and we did not think that at any moment we too might have our heads blown off or be smashed into little pieces like the breaking of a jug.

"That village, it was a place that was very hard to get. We would get the high ground there, and then those Austrians would come at us again with more men with bayonets and more horses and a great firing of guns; and though we would fight and fight we would be pushed back again.

"All the time there was a great thundering of noise; an incredible noise; and the smoke was so that you could not see far except when the wind blew it a little. A great noise and a great smoke

and the bursting of shells, and now we would be running at the Austrians and now the Austrians would be running at us.

"Once, when we had been pushed back, we marched a little toward the Lake of Garda, and rallied there and rested there for a little while, and to every man was given brandy, and our officers led us again, very brave, and again we took the hill.

"Each time we took that hill with the bayonet; and when you strike with the bayonet it is the same as what makes a madman.

"It was a very fierce fight, and it was so that it went on for hours.

"Our leader was our King, Victor Emmanuel, and the leader of the French, who led their great army, was their Emperor, Napoleon, and the leader of the Austrians was their Emperor, too.

"While we waited once more, driven back from that hill, and panting and wild, and waiting again for

the command to run at the Austrians, our King came galloping up to us, and behind him came officers.

"A little man in height was our King, but he was broad and stout, and he was a quick rider, and he rode a strong gray horse.

"We all knew it was our King, and we shouted, loud and glad, '*Viva il Re!*' I looked hard at him, knowing that he was the King, and I saw that he had great mustaches, long and curled, and his cap was gray, with a stripe, and on his shoulders was a cape coat of bluish gray that flew back when he galloped. And when they put up a statue of him,

on a horse, in Bologna (for I lived in Bologna many years, though now I live here in this little Lombardy village looking over toward Milan, which I know is across this plain)—when they put him on horseback in that statue I said, 'Yes, that is our King, and that is just as

he looked when he galloped up to us after we had again been driven back from San Martino.'

"He reined in his horse, and he looked at us, and he called out in a loud, strong voice, a voice that was *sonora*:

"'My children! We must all die or we must take San Martino!'

"I was close to him. I, and I could hear him, and even the men who could not hear him knew what he meant when he pointed to the hill.

"It was not in good Italian that he spoke to us, but in the dialect of Savoy, for you know he was a man of Savoy. And it pleased

us, and we all shouted: 'Savoy! Savoy! Savoy!'

"Again, now, we ran at that hill with our bayonets fixed. They were flat and long, those bayonets, and very sharp. I remember them well! And some of our officers ran on ahead of the bayonets, but most of them ran at one side, and a very few there were who ran close behind. But there was no one, either of officers or men, who wanted to run away.

"That was a very fierce charge that we made. It was a terrible thing when we came hand to hand with the Austrians again. Our colonel fell dead. Our color-bearer fell. He was shot in the breast,



GIOVANNI BETTINI
Veteran of Solferino

and he gave a great cry and fell dead, but another man took the flag and ran on with it in the front.

"In such a charge it is that a man can never feel fear. I do not think it is possible to feel fear. You have no time to think of such a thing when you are close to the Austrians and see them aiming at you, while their eyes are blazing very fierce, like the eyes of cats that are angry.

"We fought for a flag of the Austrians; we tore at them and at their flag. They pulled and struck and we pulled and struck, and it was very fierce, with much noise and shouting. And after a long time we had to go down that hill again, but we took the Austrian flag with us, though it was torn into little strips and rags. And we said to each other, 'We are driven back again, but we have killed very many and we have this flag.'

"I think that perhaps it was about two o'clock when we charged for the King, but in such fighting you do not know of time. It is only that sometimes, when you are gasping and resting, you look up, if there is not too much smoke, and you see if the sun is high or low.

"It was after this that we thought the battle was lost. We had so often run up that hill and fought the Austrians, and always we had been driven back, for always the Austrians would come against us in greater numbers. So we thought the battle was lost.

"Then we heard great firing again on our right, and we knew that the French were still fighting, and so we thought we must go on and fight too.

"Sometimes we charged against artillery, and it was very hard, for those Austrians they fired the cannon till we came close, close, and men fell all around me.

"Once when we rushed over the big guns and killed the men who still fought with us, we turned the guns to fire on the Austrians as they flew away, but they had driven bits of steel into the touch-holes, and so we could not fire them. They were of a courage, those Austrians.

"Only once in all that battle did I think much of what I saw or heard, and that was when there was the so terrible screaming of a captain who had his foot shot off. He twisted and turned as he

cried out, he, and it was a very bad sound. But it is just as it chances. I saw many men who were hurt worse than that captain, and many who were blown into little bits, but I did not trouble about them. It is just if it chances so.

"And it is not often that the wounded men try to trouble you while you are fighting. If they cry out, it is to say: 'Get at those Austrians!' '*Viva Italia!*' 'On, on!' or words like that. It is when the fighting is over that they cry so sad.

"It is very often that a man does not know that he is hurt. I remember that once there was a man near me with a great hole in his forehead, but he ran right on with us with his bayonet, and I thought, 'He will fall dead.' But after that I saw him no more, for there was always the fighting.

"Myself, I was wounded, but it was a little wound, and it did not stop me. It was a bayonet stroke, and—yes, I will tell you, though you may not think me a hero for it.

"For the stroke came not from the enemy, but from one of my own regiment, running behind me, and he shouted in my ear, 'Let us kill those Austrians!' And he was very excited, he, as he ran, and so it was that the point of his bayonet ran into me. In all of that great fighting I had no other wound than that so little one.

"Most of the time we could not hear our officers, for the noise was very great, but we were trained to know that the drums and the cornets sounded our orders; and when they sounded for a charge we were always glad and fierce, for it made a courage in us, so that we would run harder at the enemy.

"Again we got together on that lower ground, regiments and regiments of us. Yes; there were still very many of us. We looked at the hill and we looked at each other, and all along our lines ran the cry of '*Alla riscossa!*' Yes; we wanted to attack once more and have revenge. '*Alla riscossa!*' we cried. And again we ran at that hill and fought.

"I do not know how time passed. You cannot think of time. You can only think that still there is light enough to see those Austrians.

"It began to grow dark: a terrible

dark. I thought night had come, for there was a great blackness, and it was a terrible blackness. But it was not night. It was still the afternoon. It was a storm, and never have I seen such a storm.

"The blackness and the wind and the so drenching rain— Ah!

"We were fighting, close fighting, when the great blackness and the wind and the rain came upon us, and we still fought, for we were very angry and fierce, and the Austrians they were very angry and fierce.

"The storm and the blackness, they made of us a great mixing. Yes; it was a very great tangling, for all lines were lost, and I know that sometimes Austrians struck at Austrians, and sometimes Italians struck at Italians, for we were in a very great mixing, and very fierce in the blackness of that storm.

"That storm, it helped us very much, for the great wind was at our backs and it drove with the rain right into the faces of our enemies, and it much confused and troubled them. Perhaps we would not have won had not that storm come and helped us, for the Austrians were very brave, and there were so many of them.

"It was a terrible fighting, a terrible stabbing, in that darkness.

"At last they gave way before us and went off, very slow and angry, and after that they no more took that hill from us.

"It was many prisoners that we took there, and one that I took was a gunner by his cannon. And afterwards he said: 'You have saved my life. I am glad to be a prisoner.'

"So for a time the noise of the battle ceased, and we listened and could not hear the *boom! boom! boom!* from where we knew the French and their Emperor had been fighting. So we said to each other: 'It is well. We have won a great battle here, and the French too have won.' For the French were very quick soldiers, eager to make charge and to fight; and when there was silence there we knew it was because they too had won.

"Early in the morning we had seen a balloon, high up, and we had said, 'The French are wise; they are high up there, spying out where it is best to make their attack.'

"Afterwards, it was told among the soldiers that the Emperor of Austria, when he saw that his army was beaten, flew away very fast on his horse, riding right over his dead. I do not know. I did not see him. And there are many things that you hear around your camp fires, and it is not always that they are so.

"We still stood on guard, though night had now come, and it was dark with a great blackness from night and clouds.

"It was well that we stood on guard and that our officers were wise, for out of the blackness there came another charge against us with many men. There were flashes from guns from a long, long line, and then those Austrians were upon us, and no man could think of anything but the enemy right in front of him.

"But this time they were not to send us down that hill. We fought them, very fierce, and they went away, and the battle was ended.

"We were told to lie down and sleep. So we lay down where we were, among the dead and the wounded, among the Italians and the Austrians.

"And we slept. Yes; we were tired; for we had fought hard for all that long, long day, and on that hill that at last we had gained we slept, and we gave no heed to the dead men or the wounded.

"The wounded, they made very great cries, and there were men sent to go among them with lights. Some were surgeons and some were men to carry them to the field hospitals. But the most of us, we lay there and slept, and we were very tired, and we knew that with the morning there might be another fight.

"No; the dead and the wounded they did not trouble us, for a soldier must not think of such things, and so we slept on the ground among them.

"We were cold, and we shivered, for although it was June there was a chill wind from the mountains, following the great storm, and the ground was soggy with rain, and every man was very, very wet, and those who could get bunches of straw or hay were very glad.

"As morning came, and the music sounded, I woke with a sudden fear, for right above me was the arm of an Aus-

trian, raised to strike me. I jumped up quick. But it was only a dead man, and it was that way that he had died, while his arm was raised to strike, and his face it was still very fierce, and I had rolled under his arm as I slept.

"We were called together by the cornets and the drums and were formed in lines. And I looked at my bayonet and saw that it was covered with blood.

"Brigades and regiments, they were all in a mixing, and many men they did not know where their officers were or their comrades, but music was played all over the battle-ground—drums and cornets and the bands of the regiments—partly for the victory and partly to get the men together. And the officers were very sharp and quick, and it was not long before we were all orderliness.

"Very many men of my regiment were killed. Yes; we had suffered much. But that is part of a soldier's duty. He shoots and he kills, and perhaps while he is

thinking only of that he is himself shot and killed. *Ecco!* A man must die.

"We marched from the hill into that village of San Martino. We broke ranks, and we went into houses, and in many rooms there was much blood, and some said, 'They killed Italians here,' but others said, 'No; it is the blood from their wounded.' And there were many dead men there. And in corners, hiding away, were wounded who could only crawl, for they feared we would kill them.

"There was no food in the houses, but we went into the cellars. We went into the cellars, for we knew that it was in the cellars that the pleasant peasants of that pleasant land kept their wine, in casks and in great bottles.

"But there was no wine. No! Of the good wine there was nothing. For the Austrians!—they had drunk all they could before flying away, and then they had broken the casks and the great bottles, and the good, good wine it was lost."

Slumber Song

BY RHODA HERO DUNN

SLEEP, little son: the light fades in the west;
The robin drowns on his downy nest;
The bee, his store of golden honey made,
Drones sleepy, and in the soothing shade
Of dim sweet lily-cups lies down to rest.

You wore a cap gay as the robin's breast;
You were as busy as the lily's guest;
So now while they are in their cradles swayed
Sleep, little Son.

Sleep, little Son! Sweet lily petals pressed
About still wings for sleepy bees are best.
For sleepy birds a shady nested glade.
But sleepy little ones to sleep are laid
In mother's arms, where songs soft sleep suggest.
Sleep, little Son.