

# THE BATTLE OF SOLFERINO

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A great battle has been fought, and a great victory has been won; but another battle may be fought again to-morrow, and another victory still more complete may be gained. But at present all I have to tell you is of what took place to-day.

Marshal McMahon's corps left Castiglione this morning at 4 AM, without expecting to be attacked, but before it had marched more than three miles on the Mantua road it was fired upon by the Austrian's advance on the left of the high road. The corps kept up a waiting fight until it was supported by Marshal Baraguay d'Hilliers, who brought the 1<sup>st</sup> corps from between Lenato and Castiglione to its assistance. The fight began on the road, and then diverged to the left, and the village of Solferino was attacked by the French.

At this time General Niel, with the 4<sup>th</sup> corps, at some distance, waiting for the approach of Marshal Canrobert, who had got very far on the right toward Mantua, but leaving a very great distance between them. The cavalry of the Guard then came up, and had to hold a distance of nearly two miles between Marshal McMahon and General Niel, covering the marshal's corps, but itself without artillery. The division consisted of two regiments of Cuirassiers of the Guard forming the first brigade, the Laneers of the Guard and Dragoons de l'Imperatrice the second brigade, and the Chasseurs and Guides forming the light brigade, which, commanded by Gen. Cassagnolles, made a brilliant charge, directed in person by Gen. Maurice, who commanded the whole. The Chasseurs de France also made a great charge, commanded by Gen. Goudin de Villene. This part of the battle took place on the plain in front of Castiglione, the field of battle beginning seven miles in advance of the town.

In the meantime the battle raged on the heights between the Austrians and the Turcos, Voltigeurs of the Guard, Grenadiers and Artillery of the Guard. The Turcos suffered immensely through their usual impetuosity; they lost their colonel, mortally wounded, as likewise many of their officer. The artillery of the Guard there lost a very great portion of their officers, as they engaged at half-rifle shot, and the Tyrolese sharpshooters, who are very good, picked off the officers at their guns; for this reason their loss was very severe.

The whole cavalry and artillery of the Guard had not even had their coffee when they went into action. So little was a general affair expected that the officers of the Grenadiers and Voltigeurs were looking for quarters for the day when the staff officer rode into Castiglione, and ordered them forward at once.

General Maurice had been remaining with his division of cavalry as a reserve at Castenedolo, not expecting to be called so soon, nor did Marshal McMahon's officers when they marched at three o'clock in the morning; but at four firing began to be hard at slow intervals, which continued for some time, and at half past six the Guard arrived at Castiglione and was immediately pushed on, as I have before mentioned. Being on foot I had no chance of reaching a good place near the field of battle in time to be able to distinguish the different manoeuvres; I therefore mounted the steeple of the church, from which I saw the fighting going on slowly in the plain.

A cloud of dust, which grew thicker as it approached, at last showed a column of Austrian cavalry and artillery coming from Volta; but Marshal Baraguay d'Hilliers' corps made a detour from within three miles of Lonato, which is easily seen from Castiglione, where he was encamped, and attacked the Austrians on the heights, the artillery of the Guard coming up into line at full gallop.

General Maurice's division was marching slowly from Montechiaro, when a colonel of the staff brought them up in a hurry to fill up the gap before mentioned. Marshal McMahon's corps then made a movement to the left, and supported Marshal Baraguay d'Hilliers and the first corps.

Gen. Devaux's brigade of the 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>d</sup> rgts. of Chasseurs d'Afrique, made a charge into a dense wood—a most successful and brilliant charge. They greatly distinguished themselves.

The Emperor is constantly under fire. A Cente-Garde behind him had his epaulette carried away by a ball.

The Emperor is passing the night at Solferino, a village in advance, and all the cavalry bivouac on the field of battle.

The firing of the Austrian artillery slackened perceptibly about six, and I could see that along the line, which must have extended some miles from the extreme points, the Austrians were falling back; but they fought well, and with great resolution. The Sardinians are pushing on from Louato, and are trying to get up to Peschiera in time to cut off the Austrians before they cross the Mincio, near that fortress, as they originally intended. At present it is not known how the thing will end; The battle was continued till dark; the last shots were fired about nine.

I walked for three or four miles along the road to Mantau, and met about 400 Austrian prisoners coming in.—The greater part of them were Italians, who cried “Vive la France” as they marched along. There were some Hungarians who seemed to feel acutely their position. The people of Castiglione have behaved most disgracefully. Most of the houses were shut up, and the inhabitants said they had nothing when asked for refreshments and wine.

The French behaved with the greatest moderation, and took every refusal as if it were a fact that there was such a general want of the necessaries of life; but it is a disgrace to the place that many wounded and tired soldiers, who had gone into the action in the morning, having eaten nothing, should be refused at night even a loaf of bread, as was very often the case. The French artillery at long range beat the Austrians and soon silenced their pieces, but when they came nearer the Tyrolese picked off the officers, who were easily distinguished. One regiment, I think the 74<sup>th</sup> of the line, has been cut all to pieces. There were many superior officers killed and wounded.

The beginning and foundation of the Austrian movement today has been an attempt to cut off Marshal M'Mahon's corps, they having defected the gap, between it and the next to it. I am told the Austrians fought better and displayed more judgment in their operations than they have ever shown before since the campaign has opened. They retreated slowly, and kept up the firing until it was quite dark; but unless they were intercepted by the Sardinians, there was nothing like a rout.