

Marignano 1515

The Battle & The Commanders

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Cover: The Battle of Marignano from a painting at the Landesmuseum, Zurich

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George Moraitis

*“Hence Trivulzio, a General who had seen so many events, protested that this was a battle not of men but of giants, and that of eighteen battles in which he had been present, every one of them, in comparison of this, was but a battle of little children”*¹

*“...nor has so proud and grim a battle been fought these two thousand years”*²

In 1515, Francis I undertook a successful campaign to assert his somewhat tenuous dynastic claim over the Duchy of Milan. The roots of the French dynastic claims over the Duchy of Milan dated back to the marriage of Valentina Visconti, the daughter of Milan's first Duke; Giangalleazzo Visconti to the Duke of Orleans. The terms of the marriage contract providing that if the male line of succession of the Visconti should expire, the Duchy of Milan should pass to the Duke of Orleans. In 1447, Duke Filippo Maria Visconti died without male issue, Milan promptly declared herself a republic and chaos ensued. To stabilise Milan, Fillippo's 14-year-old daughter Bianca, married the condottiere Francesco Sforza in 1450, and he was declared Duke. As Francesco had support from the other Italian states there were few who challenged his accession, and whilst the Emperor protested that only he could formally endorse the feudal investiture, only the Dukes of Orleans were inclined to contest the matter. Thus it was that the Dukes of Orleans maintained that they were, by right of inheritance, the true heirs of the Duchy.

To complicate matters, in 1498, Lodovico Sforza, obtained formal investiture of the Duchy from the Emperor Maximillian,³ notwithstanding that the late Duke Giangalleazzo Sforza's son had inherited a better claim.

In 1498, the succession of the Duke of Orleans to the throne of France changed Milanese fortunes. The newly crowned Louis XII was determined to gain control of Milan. Forming an alliance with Venice, Louis conquered Milan, holding it until the Swiss forced the French out in 1512, and defeated the French at Novarra in 1513.

Notwithstanding, the expulsion of the French from Milan, the ageing Louis remained determined to recover Milan; he maintained the alliance with Venice, concluded an alliance with Ferdinand of Aragon on December 1st 1513, and in

¹ Guicciardini, *History of Italy*, Book 6, p. 357. Translation by A.P. Goddard 1963.

² Francis I, in a letter to his mother.

³ Maximillian was offered 20,000 ducats and the hand of Lodovico's daughter in connection with the granting of the feudal investiture. The circumstances surrounding the death of Giangalleazzo Sforza aroused suspicion that Lodovico had had his nephew poisoned.

The Swiss and their Milanese allies retreated to Milan, many of the Swiss demanded payment from Maximilian, which he could not afford to pay and so the bulk of the Swiss army retreated. Milan was under the control of the French, although the castle remained in the hands of Maximilian. Within two days the Swiss had retreated from the Duchy of Milan, and the Duchy was in French hands.

The defeat suffered by the Swiss marked the last occasion in which the Swiss campaigned as a nation. On November 21st 1516, despite opposition from Zwingli and other leaders of the Reformation, the cantons signed the Perpetual Peace with France. On 21st May 1521, the peace was formalised in the Treaty of Alliance. Of course, Swiss mercenaries would continue to provide effective infantry for France until the French Revolution.

The victory so alarmed the Pope, that in December he concluded the Treaty of Bologna under which he restored Parma, Piacenza, Modena and Reggio to the staunch French ally - the Duke of Ferrara. Venice, for her part in the French victory, was listed in the Treaty of Noyon of 1516 with Charles I of Spain. In this way, Venice, through a circuitous route, had the town of Verona restored to her together with those territories, which she had lost during the war of the League of Cambrai of 1509.

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The Venetians

Bartolomeo d'Alviano 1455 – 1515, Captain-General of Venice

Born in Rocca d'Alviano, Umbria in 1455, a relative of the Orsini family of Roman barons, whose lands occupied a strategic significance, and who tended to alternate between serving and fighting the Pope, while feuding with their rivals the Colonna's.⁴⁴ Bartolomeo served as Condottieri in the armies of the Duke of Calabria but defected along with the Orsini clan to the French during Charles VIII's expedition in 1494 to conquer Naples.



In the wake of the French withdrawal, Pope Alexander VI declared war on the Orsini family and raised an army led by his illegitimate son, the Duke of Gandia. D'Alviano led the defence of Bracciano, where he won renown for his courage and leadership. He defeated a force of 400 cavalry in the service of the Pope, who were transporting artillery for the Duke of Gandia's army, successfully repulsed a papal offensive against the walls of Bracciano and drove the Papal forces from the city walls after they had planted their standard. He led a sortie thereafter, in which he routed the artillery guards and captured some of the enemy artillery. The siege was raised and the Papal army defeated at the battle of Soriano. For his efforts in fighting the church he was outlawed by Pope Alexander VI in a Papal Bull dated June 1, 1497. He was later amongst the suspects in

the murder of the Duke of Gandia, along with the Dukes brother, Cesare Borgia.

In 1498, he accompanied Piero d' Medici on his abortive campaign to recover Florence with the aid of his allies. He was accompanied by 600 cavalry and 400 picked infantry, but the campaign was unsuccessful and they were forced to withdraw. He entered Milanese employ briefly, before accepting a condotta to serve Venice in 1498. He was dispatched by Venice to aid Venice's allies the

⁴⁴ Bartolomeo's wife was Bartolommea Orsini, the sister of Virginio Orsini.

The French

Francis d'Angoulême 1494 – 1547

Comte 1496, Duc de Valois 1506, King of France 1515 as Francis I, Born September 12 1494 in Cognac to Louise of Savoy and Charles d'Angoulême. Following the death of his father in 1496, Francis was subsequently raised by his devoted mother and sister.



Created by Louis XII Captain of a 100 lances of the King's Ordinance. He gained his first military experience in Spain in 1512 alongside Bourbon, the Duke of Longueville and Odet de Foix. In 1513 he saw action in Picardy against the armies of Henry VIII. At the battle of Guindegatte he was caught without his armour and forced to flee. He was crowned king of France in 1515 and led the French army to victory at Marignano. His first and last personal military success.

In 1520, he met Henry VIII at the famous Field of the Cloth of Gold, in order to form an alliance. Despite the show of goodwill, which included an impromptu wrestling contest between the two kings (according to Floranges, Francis I managed to throw Henry to the ground), the two sides could not reach an agreement, and Henry allied with Charles V.

Following the death of Maximilian, Francis attempted to gain the title of Holy Roman Emperor, loosing out to Charles V. In 1524, he rode to the relief of Marseilles. Then he attempted to recover Milan and besieged Pavia. In February 1525, he commanded the French, to their worst defeat since Agincourt. He was captured and taken to Madrid. He spent several months in captivity, while negotiating a peace treaty with Charles V. As his health deteriorated, Francis agreed to the terms of the treaty, which recognised Charles as Duke of Burgundy, provided for the restitution of Bourbon's lands and conceded French dynastic claims, and signed it on January 14 1526. On February 19, he was released from imprisonment and then proceeded to violate every provision of the treaty.

Francis signs the Treaty of Cognac with Venice and Pope Clement VII, and received from Clement V an absolution of his obligations under the treaty of

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