



Napoleon in Italy

Campaign Historical Background and Objectives List

Piedmont Campaign

Bonaparte took command of the Army of Italy on March 27, 1796 (it numbered 45,000 men for field operations). Two armies confronted Bonaparte on the western edge of the plain of Lombardy: 25,000 Piedmontese under general Colli and 35,000 Austrians under general Beaulieu, but relations between the allies were poor, and their forces were separated. The French marched north from the coast into the gap between the opposing armies, and on April 12 gained victory at Montenotte (La Harpe and Massena had 9000 men, Argenteau only 6000, the Austrians lost 2500 men). Now Bonaparte's main force marched against the Piedmontese army, while Massena (8,500 men) covered his eastern flank. On April 14 Massena took Dego (4000 prisoners and 19 guns captured), but on the next day fresh Austrian troops (Vukassovich, 5000 men) surprised him, and Massena lost all of his artillery. Bonaparte quickly returned with La Harpe's division (8000 men) and recaptured Dego, securing his back again. On April 16 Augereau assaulted Colli's main force (13,000 men) at Ceva, but was defeated. On the next day Augereau renewed attack with Serurier (the French had 24,000 men), but Colli skilfully retired to Mondovi. The French took this strong position on April 21. So complete was the demoralisation of the Piedmontese army that the French prepared to march on Torino, but King Victor Amadeus capitulated, and by the armistice of Cherasco Piedmont withdrew from the war (April 28). Beaulieu fell back behind the River Po to defend Lombardy and Milano.

Major Objectives: Mantova (500), Nice (500), Torino (500)

Lodi Campaign

Rather than attack the Austrian head-on at Valenza, Napoleon planned outflank the Austrian position by marching down the Po to cross Beaulieu's lines of communications. Two divisions were to mount diversionary operations appearing to presage a crossing at Valenza and Sale, while Dallemagne with the elite infantry (grenadiers and carabinieri) and the cavalry marched to Piacenza to establish a bridgehead, followed by the remainder of the army (7 May). After the successful French crossing Beaulieu ordered a retreat toward Lodi and Crema behind Adda River. On 10 May at Lodi Bonaparte defeated the Austrian rear guard (general Sebottendorf, 9600 men). Austrians retreated in good order, leaving 150 killed, 1700 prisoners and 16 guns (French lost 400 men). After the battle Bonaparte

nicknamed "le petit caporal" (little corporal). Beaulieu withdrew to the line of the River Mincio, leaving only small garrison in Milan (capitulated on 30 June).

Major Objectives: Mantova (500), Milano (500), Nice (500),

Mincio Campaign

The Austrians (19,000 men) endeavored to guard all possible crossings over the Mincio, and had a strong defensive position with Lake Garda on their right and the fortress of Mantova on their left. Bonaparte (28,000 men) advanced on a broad front in three columns: Massena on the left, Augereau in the center, and Serurier on the right. On May 30 the French stormed across the Mincio at Borghetto, and the separated Austrian forces retreated. Beaulieu fell back along the eastern shore of the Lake Garda, while one part of Austrians cut off from the main force withdrew to Mantova. This fort became the focal point of the Italian Campaign (Mantova was protected by 12,000 men and 300 guns).

Major Objectives: Mantova (500), Nice (500), Verona (300)

Castiglione Campaign

The Habsburgs sent general Wurmser with 25,000 hardened veterans from Germany to reinforce the scattered Austrian troops in Italy and to relieve Mantova. The Austrians advanced in three main groups. On the July 25, Gen. Quasdanovich (17,000 men) set out from Trento and marched west of Lake Garda. Wurmser (24,000 men) marched down the Adige River, and on the left wing Meszaros (5,000 men), following the Brenta River valley, reached Bassano. If successful in joining forces south of Lake Garda, the Austrians would have outnumbered the French about three-to-two, a commanding superiority. Napoleon concluded that the siege of Mantova would have to be abandoned. Although this meant leaving the precious siege guns to their destruction, it gave the French the freedom to unite their forces, and bring their full weight to bear against each Austrian wing. First Bonaparte had repulsed Quasdanovich at Lonato (August 3), while Augereau held up Wurmser around Castiglione. The Austrians fell back north, and the French turned against Wurmser. On August 5, Napoleon (30,000 men) defeated the Austrians (25,000 men) at Castiglione. Wurmser lost 2000 men, 1000 prisoners and 20 guns, the French had 1500 casualties.

Wurmser left 15,000 men in Mantova, and retreated to Trento.

Major Objectives: Mantova (500), Nice (500), Trento (500), Verona (300)

Wurmser's ordeal

Wurmser was preparing an offensive shifting east to Bassano (20,000 men), while Davidovich stayed to defend Trento (15,000). He hoped to both threaten French lines of communication and relieve Mantova. Bonaparte moved north with 34,000 men, leaving only 8,000 men to invest Mantua. On September 3 Vaubois and Massena attacked the Austrian advanced guard (Vukassovich) at Roveredo, and next day Bonaparte defeated the Davidovich corps. The Austrians lost 3000 men and 25 guns, the French only 750 men.

After the victory Napoleon learned of Wurmser's move, and set off in pursuit with Massena and

Augereau, leaving Vaubois to block Davidovich in Tyrol. The French caught up the Austrians at Bassano (September 8), and defeated them (the Austrian lost 600 men, 2000 prisoners, 30 guns), the French loss was very low (400 men), because the enemy separated because of the march was able to field only 7,000 men. 3000 Austrian fell back to Udine, Wurmser himself with 12,000 men went to Mantova. The Austrians attempted to secure the surrounding countryside of Mantova, but on September 13-15 Bonaparte gained a victory at La Favorita, and Wurmser retired into the city (the Austrians lost 4000 men).

Major Objectives: Mantova (500), Nice (500), Trento (500), Verona (300)

Arcole Campaign

Late in October 1796, the Austrians were completing arrangements for their third offensive. The Austrians advanced in two main groups: the new commander in chief, general Alvintzy (28,000 men) crossed the Piave, and marched to Bassano and Verona, Davidovich (18,000 men) attacked general Vaubois (10,000 men) in the Adige Valley. Bonaparte decided to deal with Davidovich as a preliminary to concentrate against the main Austrian force, but Vaubois was beaten on November 6. The French main force at Verona was in a very dangerous position between the two Austrian columns, and only 9,000 men blocked the Mantova garrison (20,000 men). Bonaparte sent general Joubert (5000 men) to reinforce Vaubois, while two divisions (Massena and Augereau) marched against Alvintzy. On November 12, 13,000 French soldiers attacked Alvintzy's advance-guard at Caldiero, but the Austrians repulsed them (the attackers suffered 2000 casualties).

Bonaparte adopted a new plan to regain the initiative. He crossed the Adige on November 15 with 18,000 men, leaving only 3,000 men in Verona, and took up a defensive position, threatening the Austrian rear communications to Vicenza. The Battle of Arcole lasted three days (November 15-17), and cost 4,500 French and 7,000 Austrian casualties. Ultimately, Alvintzy was driven back and Davidovich prudently withdrew to Tyrol.

Major Objectives: Mantova (500), Nice (500), Trento (500), Verona (300)

Rivoli Campaign

In January 1797, the Austrians launched a final offensive to relieve Mantova. Again Alvintzy moved south with three main groups, but this time he shifted his weight to the western flank: the main body (28,000 men) under his personal command descended the Adige Valley from Trento, while the remainders, under Bajalich (5,000 men) and Provera (9,000 men), attacked from the east against Verona and Legnago. Bonaparte's primary concern was to attack Alvintzy before the latter could concentrate. The Joubert division (10,000 men) held a strong defensive position on a plateau at Rivoli, and Bonaparte with divisions of Massena (7,000 men) and Rey (4,000 men) went to join him, while Serurier's division was warned to guard against any attempt by Wurmser to break out of Mantua, and the Augereau division was the reserve on the Adige line.

In the Battle of Rivoli (January 14) 23,000 French defeated an attack of 28,000 Austrians. The next day Joubert and Rey led a successful pursuit of Alvintzy and destroyed him, while Bonaparte with Massena marched against Provera. At Rivoli the French lost 5,000 men, the Austrian 14,000. Provera fought its way as far as La Favorita before being crushed by the French superior force, and capitulated on January

16 (5000 Austrian prisoners). Wurmser attempted to break out from Mantova to join him, but was repulsed.

Alvintzy's defeat effectively dashed all hopes of Mantova being relieved. Wurmser with 16,000 Austrians surrendered on February 2, 1797.

Major Objectives: Mantova (500), Nice (500), Trento (500), Verona (300)

Full Campaign

Major Objectives: Bolzano (500), Genova (500), Mantova (500), Milano (500), Nice (500), Torino (500)