

Campaign

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Fornovo 1495

France's Bloody Fighting Retreat



David Nicolle • Illustrated by Richard Hook

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The Marketing Manager, Osprey Direct UK,
PO Box 140, Wellingborough, Northants,
NN8 4ZA, United Kingdom.
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The Marketing Manager, Osprey Direct USA,
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Dedication

For Frederick Nicolle and all the boys of Loughborough Grammar School,
founded in the year of Fornovo.

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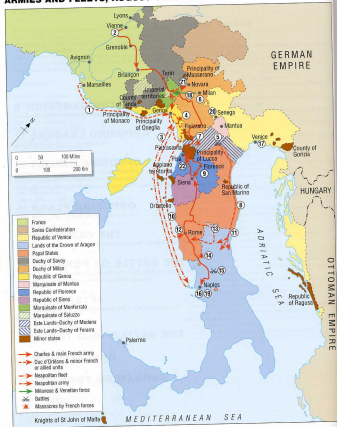
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ARMIES AND FLEETS, AUGUST 1494-20 JUNE 1495



ORIGINS OF THE CAMPAIGN

By the late 15th century France was the most powerful state in western Europe. Having defeated England in the Hundred Years War, it was now pushing hard against its eastern neighbours. Furthermore, the French kings had inherited a claim to the kingdom of Naples, the largest state in Italy. This was the essentially medieval and dynastic background to King Charles VIII's extraordinary invasion of Italy in 1494. But Charles was also a dreamer who saw himself as the crusader who would roll back the ever-spreading tide of Ottoman Turkish conquest — and a military base in southern Italy was a good place to start from.

The Italian peninsula was fragmented into several states, though the concept of Italy as a nation did exist. Among these little states Milan was traditionally a friend of France. So was Florence. Venice was preoccupied with the Ottoman threat to its overseas empire, and the Papacy was concerned about the growing power of Naples, as were several other Italian states. Naples itself feared the French claim to its crown and was also on the verge of war with Milan.

A military equilibrium had, however, been achieved since the Peace of Lodi in 1454 and the Italian states had set a limit to the size of their armies — though only Florence stuck to it. At the same time there was a growing feeling of Italian identity *vis-à-vis* peoples from beyond the Alps. Although the relative stability seen in Italy resulted from a military stalemate and economic exhaustion, Italy was neither isolated nor militarily backward. Its fleets controlled the surrounding seas and the threat of Ottoman Turkish invasion seemed far more immediate than some military adventure by a youthful French king.

THE FRENCH INVASION

The French invasion of Italy in 1494 was so easy that the rashness of the original project seemed justified. To begin with the French were opposed by only three Italian states, Florence, the Papacy, and Naples, while Milan was an ally of France. Venice, with its powerful fleet, huge wealth and effective army, remained neutral. Operations began when a French advance force entered the north-western Italian city of Asti in March 1494, while a Milanese army faced a Papal-Neapolitan army based at Faenza in the Romagna commanded by Nicolò Orsini, Count of

MAP KEY

- 1 August 1494 French fleet under the Duc d'Orléans sails from Marseilles to Genoa.
- 20 August 1494 Charles VIII and main French army leaves Vienna.
- 2 Neapolitan-Aragonese fleet occupies Rapallo.
- 1 September 1494 Rapallo falls to French and allies; massacre of Neapolitan-Aragonese by Swiss.
- 1 October 1494 Neapolitan-Aragonese and Papal army concentrated in Romagna clashes with Neapolitan-Aragonese near Bologna.
- 21 October 1494 Ludovico Sforza becomes Duke of Milan.
- 1 late October 1494 French massacre prisoners and inhabitants of Fivizzano.
- November 1494 Neapolitan-Aragonese withdraw south to the Marches; Pope sends Papal troops in defence of Rome.
- 17 November 1494 Charles VIII enters Florence.
- 10 December 1494 Prospero and Federico Colonna seize Otranto and proclaim for French; small French force lands south of Rome covered by Colonna in Otranto.
- 1 December 1494 Neapolitan-Aragonese forces withdraw to Neapolitan frontier.
- 28 December 1494 Charles VIII enters Rome.
- 15 January 1495 small French-Savoy forces seize Peschiera and Fabrizio Colonna invades Neapolitan Abruzzi; other columns take Narni, Terni, Monte Rotondo.
- 4 Feb. 1495 French capture Monte San Giovanni; massacre male population.
- 15 February 1494; French defeat Neapolitan-Aragonese in Volturno valley.
- 23 Feb. 1495; Charles VIII enters Rome.
- 11 March 1495; anti-French League of Venice signed.
- April-May 1495; Milanese-Venetian force threatens Duc d'Orléans in Asti.
- 20 May 1495; Charles VIII leaves Naples.
- 26 May 1495; League forces assemble at Orvieto.
- 13-14 June 1495; French force under Duc d'Orléans captures Roncole.
- 26 June 1495; Charles VIII reaches Pisa.

Pitigliano. The joint Franco-Milanese force included 800 infantry crossbowmen, 500 mounted crossbowmen, 200 Scots and 300 Swiss mercenaries, 300 Milanese troops, plus an additional 2,000 infantry and 1,200 heavy cavalry around Ferrara. In August a French fleet under Louis, Duc d'Orléans, elder cousin of King Charles, sailed from Marseilles to Milanese-ruled Genoa. Towards the end of that month Charles himself left the Rhône valley at the head of a powerful army heading for Turin.

As these French forces gathered, so did their enemies. A Neapolitan-Aragonese fleet seized Rapallo, east of Genoa, but within a few days the Duc d'Orléans' fleet attacked Rapallo from the sea, while his troops, with a Milanese contingent, attacked from the land. The Aragonese defenders were rapidly overwhelmed, their efforts to surrender were ignored and the garrison was massacred by Swiss mercenaries who had little interest in the chivalric code still powerful in both Italy and Spain. A series of such massacres would mark the progress of the French army's march south through Italy. As Charles' army crossed the Alps, Savoy surrendered without resistance, as did the tiny states of Saluzzo and Monferrato. Charles and Louis now joined forces at Asti, which thereafter remained the main French base in northern Italy.

The French thrust southwards started in October when Charles' main army headed for Pavia, while a much smaller force remained in Asti under the Duc d'Orléans. The alliance of Italian states had expected the French to march down the easier eastern side of the peninsula and so this was where they had concentrated their defences. To the west the



Italian noble family of Ferrara, painting by Baldassare Estense, c.1480. The costume of the Italian nobility differed considerably from that of neighbouring France or Germany. (Alte Pinakothek, Munich)



'Charles VII's son, the Dauphin, visiting the Castle of Marcosais', in *Le Triumphe de Marcoussis*, an illustrated manuscript made around 1403. The Dauphin is protected by a unit of heavily-armed mounted guardsmen on the right of the picture. (Private collection)

Front and rear views of an Italian armour, made in the Missaglia workshops of Milan around 1450. The Missaglia family of armourers were the most famous of the 15th century and pictorial sources show that such armours continued to be used for at least another 50 years. (Scott Collection no. 38-006a, Glasgow Museums and Art Galleries)



'Charles VII of France with his guard of Scottish archers,' from *The Adoration of the Magi*, a miniature painting by Jean Fouquet, French, c.1450. This elite Royal guard unit continued to serve Charles VII's grandson, Charles VIII, and was present at the battle of Fornovo. (Musée Condé, Chantilly)

weaker Florentine army relied on formidable castles to block the Apennine passes, but in the event, this was the route the French would take. Even as the campaign got under way, important changes were taking place in Milan, where the sickly young Duke Galeazzo died, poisoned, some said, by his uncle Ludovico Il Moro, who now became duke after having, in reality, held the reins of power, for several years.

Meanwhile the small French and Milanese army in Romagna overwhelmed Mondrano; once again the garrison was massacred. The main force under Charles totalled 1,500 French heavy cavalry men-at-arms, 4,000 Swiss infantry, 3,000 infantry crossbowmen and planned to join an advance guard from Romagna in Tuscany. The French fleet, meanwhile, brought the heavy artillery to La Spezia, where a force of Swiss mercenary infantry joined it as an escort. This was clearly a well-planned invasion, though the behaviour of its troops was less impressive.

Late in October the French sacked the little town of Fivizzano, massacred the inhabitants, and then looted Lunigiana. A Florentine relief force was defeated and the Florentine government surrendered several castles and towns, including the port of Livorno. Outflanked by the Florentine collapse, the Neapolitan-Papal army withdrew to the Marches, where Niccolò Orsini tried to establish a defence along the Tiber and Nera rivers while the Pope recalled his troops to defend Rome. Charles moved on to Lucca and Pisa, and entered Florence on 17 November. On 2 December he reached Siena. Two of the Pope's most powerful generals, Prospero and Fabrizio Colonna, now deserted the Papal cause and seized Ostia, where a substantial French force soon landed with the



bulk of Charles' heavy artillery. As the French main force advanced through Viterbo, Nepes, and Bracciano, Pope Alexander VI decided to come to terms with the invaders. Outflanked once again, Niccolò Orsini withdrew to the Neapolitan border and tried to establish another defence line along the Liri and Volturno rivers.

On 30 December Charles VIII entered Rome in triumph, but by now the ease with which the French had marched through Italy was worrying Venice and Milan. In December the Venetians put their army on a war footing and planned to enlist 3,000 additional men-at-arms. On 21 January 1495 King Alfonso of Naples abdicated in favour of his son Ferrantino. A week later the French army moved towards the Neapolitan frontier, a small Franco-Italian force under the Colonna brothers having already invaded the mountainous Abruzzi region. Once again the main Neapolitan army was outflanked. On 9 February the French used their famous heavy siege artillery for the first time against the little fortress of

ABOVE 'Battle of Anghien,' on a Florentine cassone or painted chest of the mid-15th century. Here the armies of Florence and Venice under Francesco Sforza defeated a Milanese force under Niccolò Piccinino. (National Gallery of Ireland, no. 178, Dublin)

BELOW Effigy of Gian Antonio, son of the famous condottiere Gattamelata and himself a condottiere in Venetian service. He is shown in the armour of c.1475. (Author's photograph — Cathedral of San Antonio, Padua)



RIGHT 'Siege of Château de Giverville' in the *Missive de Charles Martel*, a French manuscript of c.1470. The largest pans and mortars were almost only used in siege warfare, but the French artillery train also included large numbers of lighter field artillery, some of which still used multi-barrelled forms of weapon. (Cod. 8., 170a, Bibliothèque Royale, Brussels)



ABOVE Incomplete armour in German or French style, second half of the 15th century. Some of the protections for the right hand, arm and shoulder are missing. (Musée de la Porte de Hal, Brussels)

Monte San Giovanni — and massacred the entire male population when it fell. Part of the Neapolitan army was also defeated in the Volturno valley. Two loyal Neapolitan generals, Virginio Orsini and Niccolò Orsini, now retreated to Nola, where they were later captured, while a third general, Gian Giacomo Trivulzio, offered his services to the French. Four days later Charles VIII entered Naples itself.

Northern Italy's Response

While Charles VIII and his entourage enjoyed their triumph in the Villa Poggio Reale, Venice confirmed its *condotta*, or military contract, with Francesco Gonzaga, the young Duke of Mantua, and agreed to pay Francesco 44,000 golden ducats to raise an army. Meanwhile, Charles was squandering what support he had among the anti-Aragonese feudal families in Naples. A terrible and entirely new sickness also spread through the occupying army and the citizens of Naples. Known as the 'French Disease' by the Italians, and the 'Mal de Naples' by the French, this new horror was, in fact, syphilis which had been brought back from the newly — discovered Americas by Spanish sailors.

Ludovico Sforza of Milan was soon sounding out the possibility of an anti-French alliance and the response was so encouraging that only Florence and the partially French states of north-western Italy declined to join. On 31 March the League of Venice was signed by Milan, Venice, the Pope, Spain and even Maximilian, the uncrowned Emperor of Germany. The League of Venice even hoped to include King Henry VII of England, though this also never happened. At first the French were astonished by this turn of events, Venice and France having long been friends, while Milan had been an ally during Charles' invasion. Now, however, the fear of French domination outweighed such considerations.

OPPOSING LEADERS

THE FRENCH

King Charles VIII, who ruled from 1483 to 1498, came to the throne at the age of 13; he was a short lad with long spindly legs, an oversized head, bulgy eyes, a big flat mouth, a long hooked nose and had a reputation for being mentally backward. In 1492 he took over the reins of power but still had his head in the clouds of medieval romance and chivalry. The weak-minded king saw himself as the new 'Emperor of the East'. But his campaign in Italy was a disaster and three years later Charles died, probably from a brain haemorrhage, after hitting his head on a low door while on his way to play tennis.

Relatively little is known about the secondary French commanders at the battle of Fornovo. For example, Pierre de Rohan, Seigneur de Gié, came from a famous French family who had fought their kings' wars for many years. He himself had been Marshal of France since at least 1475 and had taken part in several negotiations as well as wars. During the Italian campaign of 1494-95 de Gié sometimes, but not invariably, commanded the vanguard.

Jean de Foix, Vicomte de Narbonne, came from an even more famous military family, though he was not one of its most successful members and his son, Gaston IV, Comte de Foix, would play a far more prominent role in subsequent Italian Wars. In fact, the chronicler Philippe de Commines recalls Jean de Foix's quarrel over tactics with Marshal de Gié as his most notable contribution to the battle of Fornovo.

Louis II, Seigneur de la Trémoille, was a more successful military



'King Charles VIII of France,' a small panel painting by an unknown artist found in the hard binding of a later book. (Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris)



'Charles VIII' visiting the Castle of Marcoussis,' in *Le Tenier de Marcoussis*, an illustrated manuscript made around 1493. The young king and his retainers wear a style of clothes that could also be seen in England and to some extent also in Germany, but which differed considerably from those worn south of the Alps. (Private collection)



ABOVE A portrait of Louis de la Trémoille attributed to the famous Italian Renaissance painter Benedetto Bonifazi Ghirlandajo, but probably by one of his assistants. (Musée Condé, Chantilly)

BELOW 'Francesco Gonzaga, Duke of Mantua,' on the *Melence della Vittoria* by Andrea Mantegna, a large picture commissioned by Francesco Gonzaga to commemorate the battle of Fornovo. (Louvre, Paris)



leader, his ancestors having been closely linked with St Joan of Arc. Louis II de la Trémoille was 35 years old in 1495, a skilful organiser, and above all a commander who recognised the importance of the new mobile field artillery. As King Charles' chamberlain his main role was to remain near the king, but his actions before and during the battle of Fornovo won de la Trémoille the title of 'Le Chevalier sans reproche'.

There were several leading Italian soldiers in the French army at Fornovo, including Gian Giacomo Trivulzio, one of the most respected and experienced condottieri. He was a member of a famous Milanese family which had supported the Guelph (pro-Papacy) faction against the Ghibelline (pro-Emperor) since the 11th or 12th century. Though he hated the Ghibelline Ludovico Sforza, he served him for a while but left for Naples in 1488. There Trivulzio transferred his services to Charles VIII and agreed to raise 100 heavily armoured men-at-arms for 10,000 ducats a year. Gian Giacomo Trivulzio's attitude to warfare was both modern and typical of Renaissance Italy. When the French King asked him what was needed to wage war he replied: 'Money, more money, always money.'

THE LEAGUE OF VENICE

Renaissance Italy produced many colourful military leaders. The 29-year-old Duke of Mantua, Francesco Gonzaga IV, was, for example, described as short, pop-eyed, snub-nosed and exceptionally brave, and was regarded as the finest knight in Italy. The Gonzaga family ruled Mantua from 1528 to 1707, but this was a small, poor and vulnerable state whose rulers traditionally hired themselves out as professional condottieri, military leaders to richer neighbours. Francesco Gonzaga was also fortunate in marrying Isabella d'Este, widely considered the most famous of all Renaissance ladies, who virtually ruled Mantua while her husband was off fighting other people's wars. Nevertheless, Francesco was still inexperienced when the Venetians first offered him a condotta, or contract, in 1489. Since Nicolò Orsini had been captured by the French, and Gian Giacomo Trivulzio had entered French service, the Venetian Senate rather reluctantly appointed Gonzaga commander, though not yet Captain General, in 1495, on condition that he have his more experienced uncle Ridolfo Gonzaga by his side.

Ridolfo Gonzaga was a younger son and so had to seek his fortune outside Mantua. He took part in the Franco-Burgundian wars, learning much of French military ways; he liked the French, whom he fought with great reluctance. Ridolfo was, however, a quarrelsome individual who had no compunction about executing his own wife for adultery.



'Giovanni II Bentivoglio, lord of Bologna,' on the Pala Bentivoglio, a wall-painting by Lorenzo Costa the Elder, a 16th-century artist of the Ferrara school. (Cappella Bentivoglio, church of San Giacomo Maggiore, Bologna)

The San Severinos were an influential Neapolitan family, many of whom were exiled by King Ferrante. They then sent three leaders to the League of Venice armies: Gianfrancesco, Count of Calazzo, his flamboyant younger brother Galeazzo, and the less famous Gaspare. Gianfrancesco, Count of Calazzo, commanded the Milanese cavalry in 1494 before leading the right division at Fornovo. Galeazzo di San Severino was the handsome son-in-law of Ludovico Sforza and it was Ludovico's decision to place Galeazzo in command of the Milanese army which led the more experienced Trivulzio to enter Neapolitan service. Galeazzo was also considered the best joustier in Italy, several of his jousting costumes being designed by Leonardo da Vinci. Although Galeazzo was a fine soldier he was a useless general. Gaspare di San Severino earned himself the title of 'Il Fracassa' (the boaster), suggesting that he too was not a particularly successful condottiere.

Of the other leaders at Fornovo, Antonio da Montefeltro may have been there as a condottieri leader because his half-brother, Duke Guidobaldo of Urbino, was ill with gout. Giovanni Bentivoglio was there as de facto, though not de jure, ruler of Bologna. Though renowned for his passionate interest in tournaments, his sole concern was to preserve his own tenuous rule over Bologna. Giovanni Bentivoglio was, however, excommunicated and driven out by the warlike Pope Julius II in 1506.

In complete contrast to these professional condottieri, Luca Pisani came from a leading family of Venetian bankers. As such the Pisanis played a leading role in financing Venetian armies and in 1484 Luca was first elected as a proveditore, or controller, of a large infantry force. His success made him one of the senior Venetian proveditori in 1495.



THE FRENCH ARMY

The development of permanent professional armies was one of the most significant military developments in 15th century Europe. By the late 15th century large kingdoms like France and Spain were on virtually the same economic level as the more advanced Italian states - and this spelled the death-knell for the independence of Italy, except for Venice whose great wealth enabled her to survive for another three centuries.

The army which Charles VIII led into Italy was the creation of his immediate predecessors who had made France the strongest military power in western Europe. Unlike earlier medieval French armies, all military units or companies answered directly to the king, each company being regularly inspected by the Constable of France. Most such companies were billeted in towns, where they imposed a considerable financial burden. Another novelty was the inclusion professional infantry for the first time. Support services included bakers, tailors, seamstresses, farriers and armourers, while tents and wagons were made to order in many different centres.

Military attitudes, however, had changed little, although the chivalric code was shifting away from an old emphasis on individual prowess towards an ideal of service to a secular lord. A new attitude of victory at all costs was already challenging the medieval concern for gentlemanly behaviour. Consequently some late-15th century French military leaders found common cause with mercenaries from regions such as Switzerland, where the chivalric code had never taken root.

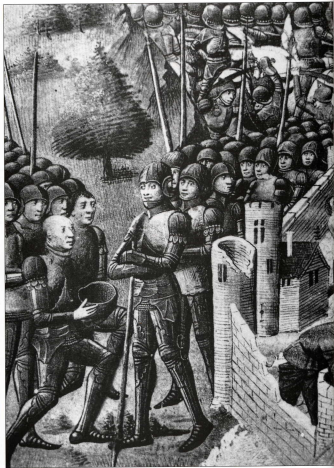
Heavily armoured cavalry men-at-arms were still the main striking power of the French army, such troops being recruited from the feudal élite. They trained in the medieval manner, disdaining the increasingly important infantry and generally regarding firearms with horror. At the same time these French men-at-arms were regarded as the best heavy cavalry in Europe.

Their companies were, theoretically, subdivided into 100 lances, each lance ideally consisting of six men: the man-at-arms, his squire, two archers, and two pages, though only the man-at-arms and archers were usually expected to fight. A company was normally led by a captain assisted by a lieutenant, a standard-bearer, and several other officers. The captain was given one livre or pound for each lance in his company, the lances also receiving an allowance of food, fuel, and horse-feed.

According to an anonymous manuscript entitled 'Du Costume Militaire des Français en 1446', the men-at-arms 'when they go to war, are commonly decked in entire white harness [full plate armour]. That is to say close cuirass, vambraces, large guard-braces [for shoulders and



'St Maurice,' on the Tennessee state-piece; a statue of the warrior saint in full armour and a heraldic tabard such as those worn by the best-equipped French men-at-arms heavy cavalry in the second half of the 15th century. (Aix-en-Provence Cathedral)





LEFT 'Herolds and poursuivants d'armes announce a tournament,' in the *Livre des Tournois* of King René of Anjou, a French manuscript of 1460-65. Herolds and trumpeters played a major role in warfare as well as in tournaments. Herolds acted as messengers, being regarded as neutral go-betweens protected from harm by either side. (Ms. 2892-2893, Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris)



ABOVE French armour, supposedly dated 1461, for a heavy cavalry man-at-arms. (Musée de l'Armée, Paris)

OPPOSITE 'Coin and the City of God,' in a French manuscript of around 1400. It is worth noting that even the leading figures in this illustration wear open-fronted sallets rather than any heavier form of helmet, while the rest of their armour is of the complete plate type. (Ms. 1, 165, Bibliothèque Municipale, Nancy)

upper arms], leg-harness, gauntlets, sallet with visor [probably meaning a form of armet protecting the entire head] and a small bevor which covers only the chin.' French men-at-arms were also distinguished by their especially heavy lances and maces, and lacked the leather horse-armor widely used in Italy. Compared to this élite there were very few light cavalry in the French army, such troops only being seen as useful for reconnaissance.

The prestige of infantry had risen considerably by the late 15th century. Nevertheless recruiting sufficient numbers of good-quality foot soldiers remained a problem in a country which had little tradition of infantry warfare. As a result the French government relied on taxes for money to hire mercenaries, mostly raised and led by professional captains. Each regional or foreign group of infantry had its own administrative support service, each company being placed under one of four regional Captain Generals. They included archers, crossbowmen and spearmen; the latter were often called pikemen, though as yet few had trained in the true Swiss pike tactics. The best indigenous French foot soldiers included Gascon light infantry and crossbowmen from the Dauphiné in the far south-east of France. The Swiss were the infantry *dieu*, having ousted the English longbowmen from this position, but foreign mercenaries also included Germans from the Rhine region, who fought with pikes, halberds, crossbows and handguns, Scottish infantry archers and Genoese crossbowmen.

French and mercenary infantry normally fought in close formation and were only lightly armoured, as 'Du Costume Militaire des Français en 1466' stated: 'the archers wear leg-armor, sallets, heavy jerks lined with linen, or brigandines [a scale-lined jerkin], bow in hand and quiver at side ... There is also a manner of folk armed solely in habergeons [a short form of mail shirt], sallets, gauntlets and leg-armor who are wont to carry in their hand a sort of dart which has a broad head and is called an *eo-tongue* [a sort of staff weapon].'

The crossbow was by now an extremely powerful weapon, often with a steel bow. Mounted crossbowmen were also numerous, and armed with relatively light composite crossbows. But whereas mounted crossbowmen could use their weapons on horseback, the mounted archers normally could not, and they should be categorised as mounted infantry.

The French artillery is generally considered to have been the most

advanced of the day. It consisted of five bands or trains based in different parts of the kingdom, each having an array of large and small cannon. Those who operated these artillery bands formed a separate corps within the army, often drawn from traditional families of expert gunners. The artillery taken to Italy in 1494 was commanded by Guyot de Lorniers, who died at the battle of Fornovo. The command structure of each French artillery train included a captain of the gun-carriages, a treasurer, a guard for the saltpetre, sulphur and lead, another guard for the loading equipment, a captain of mines and approaches, a guard of unspecified 'light artillery engines,' plus six finance and administrative officers. Other personnel included gunners, assistant gunners, loaders, firers, carpenters, masons, drivers, miners, smiths, wheelwrights, and pioneers.

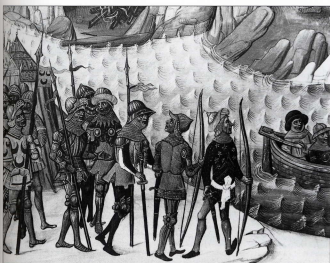
The big guns were drawn by teams of horses, rather than the oxen still used in Italy, which made them more mobile. Above all, the French made great use of mobile field artillery, which, unlike the heavier siege guns, could be fired from their carriages. French siege artillery was noted for its greater use of iron rather than stone cannon-balls, but the huge cannon fashionable in the first half of the 15th century had largely been abandoned. Guns could now achieve substantial ranges, though they were usually fired from a shorter distance. Large bronze cannon shot balls the size of a man's head, whereas smaller culverins and falcons shot balls the size of oranges. All these cannon had recently invented trunnions, perhaps first mentioned in the archives of Lille in 1465, which enabled gun-barrels to be elevated or lowered much more easily than before. Small cannon were mounted on two-wheeled carriages, the larger on four, though the rear wheels, often carrying ammunition boxes, were detached when firing. Improvements in the consistency of gunpowder and a greater use of metal cannon balls similarly led to the abandonment of earlier forms of loading, where a large tampon or wooden plug had been used to contain the expansion of the gases when



Statue of Francesco Sforza by Alberto Maffei da Carrara, a little-known sculptor of the late 15th century. (Inv. E-II-30, Musei Civici, Vicenza)



Front and side views of an armour in 'Gothic' or German style, but made for export by the Italian Mosoglio workshop in Milan in the later 15th century. (J. Koch photograph) Städtische Museum, Württemberg)



Foot soldiers in an illustration from the *Chroniques de Malinault* by Jacques de Guise, late-15th century, French. The archers and the man with a pole-arm are less heavily armoured than those with spears who may, in fact, be dismounted men-at-arms. (Ms. 8242, t. 48v, Bibliothèque Royale, Brussels)

a gun was fired, tampon and bullet then popping out of the barrel like a champagne cork.

French Tactics, Arms and Armour

In France the heavy lance remained the most important as well as the most symbolic of a man-at-arm's weapons. The sword was now a substantial thrusting as well as cutting weapon and, perhaps as a result, the 15th century saw the writing of many elaborate fencing manuals. French infantry tactics attempted to mirror those of the Swiss, who fought in close ranks called *zischen*. Italian accounts of the battle of Fornovo describe enemy infantry, probably Swiss, consisting of a front rank of pikemen, then a rank armed with a partizan or halberd, another rank of men with small shields, and finally crossbowmen and hand-gunners. An élite was also armed with two-handed swords as long as an Italian infantry spear.

The 15th century saw the emergence of distinctive fashions in armour, most obviously those of Italy and of Germany, which dominated the export market in high-quality military equipment; the main French manufacturing centres were Paris, Tours and Lyons. Prior to the mid-15th century French armour seems to have been heavier than that of Italy or Germany, but as Milanese influence spread, so the armour grew lighter. In 1490 King Louis XI permitted, or more accurately encouraged, armourers from Milan and Savoy to come and work in

invitation to a shooting contest, a woodcut made in Cologne in 1501, probably one of the first such 'broadsheets' for public announcements made by the workshop of Johann Kolhoff the Younger. The gun on the right is the latest form of matchlock arquebus as used throughout much of Europe. (B-10,820, National Gallery of Art, Washington D.C.)



An armour in 'Gothic' or German style, made in southern Germany or Austria around 1400. The German style of armour was characterized by a greater degree of decoration than the strictly functional though beautiful Italian fashion. (Bayerisches Armeemuseum, Ingolstadt)



France. The metal used in western armour also varied in thickness according to where it was used; the fronts of helmets averaged around 3 mm thickness, breastplates 2 mm, arm and leg defences 1 mm. A mid-15th-century English description of what a gentleman needed to fight in war would also have applied to a French man-at-arms. According to Johan Hill, armourer to King Henry VI, this consisted of: 'A pair of hose of corde without vampeys and cut at knees and lined with linnen cloth. A pair of red leather shoes laced and fretted underneath with whipcord, lined with linnen, to which sabatons [foot armour] are fastened under the foot in two places. A petycote without sleeves and dosiblet [over the petycote] to waist with straight sleeves, collar, and certain eyelets on the sleeves for the vambrace and rerebrace [arm defences].' When it came to putting on the armour Johan Hill wrote: 'First put on the sabatons, close cuisses with voydours [gussets] of plate or mail and a close breech [pants] of mail [only when fighting on foot] with five steel buckles and fine leather straps. Then fasten all the arming points. Then attach a pair of close gussets. Then a pair of [breast and back] plates of twenty pounds weight. Then a pair of rerebraces with two forlocks in front and three forlocks behind. Then a pair of vaunt bras [vambraces] closed with voydours of mail and fretted. Then a pair of gloves [gauntlets]. Then a bascinet. Finally the [heraklic] coat-armour over this.' The old bascinet form of helmet was discarded in late 15th-century France, being replaced by an armet or sallet. The arming dosiblet had also replaced the full mail hauberk worn over a padded aketon. It was again padded, but only included relatively small pieces of mail to protect the few remaining vulnerable gaps in full plate armour which was in turn now known as 'white armour' or 'white harness'.

The most common form of infantry defence was the fabric-covered brigandine lined with overlapping metal scales, or its cheaper equivalent the jack. It was light and so effective many cavalrymen preferred the brigandine to white harness. In addition many infantry added light forms of hardened leather, quilted or scale-lined arm protections. The tendency towards lighter armour also applied to helmets. The sallet, for example, gave better vision and ventilation, and could be worn with a rigid throat-covering bevor. Sallets and their more enclosed version, the barbute, came from Italy in the mid-15th century, but a long-tailed form of sallet giving greater protection to the neck may then have been developed in France or Franco-German Burgundy. Infantry weapons were made in many parts of France, the greatest number of manufacturers being con-



centrated in Paris, Amiens and Rouen. They were also remarkably cheap.

The Size of French Forces

Much more information exists for the forces of the later 15th century than about earlier medieval armies, though it is often contradictory. The army which invaded Italy in 1494 was probably the largest raised in France for six centuries. An Italian observer named Belgiojoso sent two reports to the Duke of Milan in late March 1494, stating that the army assembling in Lyons included 2,000 Italian-style lances (6,000 combatants), 1,610 French-style lances (6,440 combatants), 4,800 Swiss infantry, 200 Scottish infantry, 4,800 crossbowmen, of whom 500 were mounted, plus 8,300 other foot soldiers — a total of 30,540 men. Another Italian intelligence report said that there were 600 men in the Royal Guard, 1,600 lances of six men each, 6,000 Swiss infantry, 6,000 French infantry, of whom half were from Gascony, plus field and siege artillery. A French source claims an even higher total of no less than 100,000 fighting men: 10,000 heavy cavalry, 6,200 archers, 8,000 crossbowmen, 8,000 Breton spearsarmed infantry, 8,000 gunners, 200 artillery officers, 1,200 guns, 8,000 artillery horses, and vast support services.

The senior heavy cavalry officers appear to have been Robert d'Arenberg from Liège, a German knight named Besegge, and the Burgundian, Louis de Zander. In addition the French invasion force had a tiny number of light cavalry *généralistes*, skirmishers, and reconnaissance hoemen equipped in the Spanish manner. The Swiss infantry marched in three bands or regiments, the pikemen commanded by Captain Studer, the halberdmen by an officer from Basel named Schuster. Around 2,000 handgunners of unclear origin marched behind Henri de Wysesen from Holland. Lower-quality infantry included 24,000 French archers generally called *larrons* or brigands and 12,000 Breton and Gascon crossbowmen under the overall command of Engelbert, Duke of Clèves, who also had 1,000 cavalry men-at-arms. A further 10,000 men may have sailed with the French fleet under the Duc d'Orléans, making a total invasion force of over 40,000 troops. A further 8,000

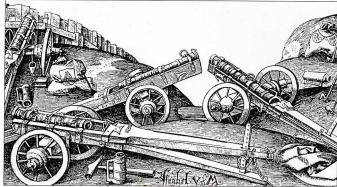


15th-century cannon ranged in size from huge pieces that could only be used in prolonged siege warfare, to lighter artillery suitable for use in the field.

TOP LEFT Mons Meg, the biggest and perhaps most famous late medieval 'great gun' made at Mons in Flanders in 1448. The travelling carriage is a modern, though probably quite accurate, reconstruction. (Author's photograph; Edinburgh Castle)

TOP RIGHT Duile Griot, a slightly smaller 'great gun' made at roughly the same time as Mons Meg, and in the same area. (Author's photograph; Gand)

BOTTOM RIGHT Bronze barrel of a small cannon, probably for use in both siege and field operations. It is almost certainly one of those sent by the Venetians to their Muslim ally, Hassan the Amir of Karaman, around 1470. (Author's photograph; Historical Museum, Karaman)



Print from a copperplate engraving by Israel von Mecklen, c.1490-95, showing several views of a type of medium-sized cart used in the late 15th century. (Germanisches Nationalmuseum, Nuremberg)

Italian cavalry and 6,000 to 8,000 infantry were subsequently added while Charles was marching to Naples.

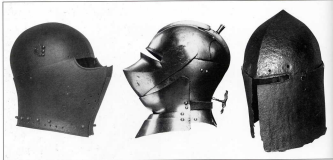
THE ITALIAN ARMIES

Italian troops and governments were fully aware of technological and other military developments north of the Alps and in the Balkans. They had shown considerable interest in new weaponry as well as contributing to such advances, particularly Milan and Venice. Italy also had plenty of experience of recent foreign invasions, though not on the scale of Charles VIII's expedition, while Italian professional mercenaries took part in wars in the Iberian Peninsula, France, Burgundy, Germany, Hungary, the Balkans, and the near and Middle East.

Similarly, the idea that Italy's internal 15th century wars were virtually 'blood-free' was a myth developed during the 16th century, partly to explain the failure of Italian armies to preserve Italy's independence during the early 16th century. Closer studies show that casualty rates in 15th-century Italian warfare were comparable to those seen elsewhere in western Europe and the soldiers involved fought just as hard as their colleagues in other countries.

The second half of the 15th century saw the emergence of permanent military establishments in various parts of Italy, though on a smaller scale than in France. Of these, the Venetian army was probably the strongest and certainly the best organised. That of Milan consisted of the Duke's own professional household cavalry, plus conscript infantry. The army of Naples was the largest, but its morale and leadership had been undermined by civil war and its organisation was archaic. The Florentine army had long been neglected, while that of the Papal States had also declined in recent years. In fact, the demands of warfare dem-





inated the financial structures of all Italian states, their military expenditure being proportionately much greater than that seen in larger states like France or England.

Another characteristic of this period were the efforts by several governments to offer permanent *condotta* (contracts) to leading commanders. These *condottieri* commanders tended to come from 13 or so traditional families, mostly minor urban aristocracy, while their troops mostly came from poorer areas of Italy. Unlike the aristocratic men-at-arms of France, a large proportion of Italian men-at-arms were professional heavy cavalrymen of humble birth. A large proportion of light cavalry came from abroad, most notably the *stradiotti* from the Venetian colonial empire.

The Venetian government was particularly conscious of the difficulty of controlling an army from a distance, habitually giving maximum flex-

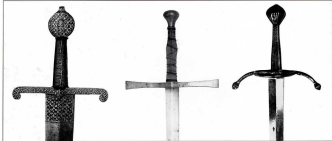
TOP LEFT The skull and side-piece on a 15th-century armet, a form of helmet which gave greater protection than an open sallet, but which also limited visibility and ventilation. A separate visor would normally be attached to the hinges on the sides of the skull, though such armets do sometimes appear to have been worn without visors. (HM Tower of London) CENTRE A complete armet showing the movable visor, a reinforcing piece on the front of the skull and a bevor or wrapper on the front of the neck. (HM Tower of London) RIGHT A barbute helmet, a form of sallet which almost covers the wearer's face. (Author's photograph; Inv. 11271, Askeri Müze, Istanbul)



LEFT 'Assault on a fortified town,' in the *Chroniques de Hainaut* by Jacques de Guise, late-15th century, French. (Ms. 9242, 5291, Bibliothèque Royale, Brussels)

Sienee army defeats the Florentines at the battle of Poggio a Caiano by the Sienee artist Giovanni di Cristoforo and Francesco d'Andrea, a wall-painting made in 1499. [Author's photograph; Sala del Mapamondo, Palazzo Pubblico, Siena]





Heavy 'swords of war' of the type used by armoured horsemen.

LEFT The Parade Sword of the Constable of France, one of the most senior commanders in the French military hierarchy, late 15th century. (Musée de l'Armée, Paris) CENTRE War sword of King Ferdinand of Castile and Aragon, late 15th century. (Real Armería, Palacio Real, Madrid)

RIGHT Italian sword of the mid-15th century. Though lighter than the other two examples, it remains a business-like and relatively undecorated weapon. (Private collection)

ability to its commanders in the field. Returning Venetian provveditori or military commissioners would then be invited to join in the Senate's discussions. In fact the organisation of late 15th-century small Italian armies was very effective; these being remarkably similar to the administrative structures of Byzantium and Middle Eastern Islamic armies. Heavy cavalry men-at-arms could be mobilised very quickly, though the mobilisation of large infantry forces took much longer. Here the wealth of Venice, which enabled the Republic to mobilise faster than her rivals, clearly worried other Italian states.

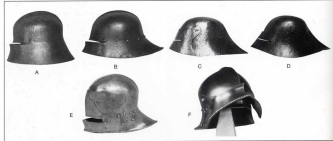
The Italians may have been aware of the latest technological changes, but they were old-fashioned when it came to certain attitudes. This certainly influenced individual behaviour in battle, many of the élite still seeing the battlefield as a place to win individual fame. The writer Luigi da Porto, for example, maintained that it was better to take part in a fight involving hundreds rather than thousands, 'because in a small number everybody's prowess can be seen'. Baldassare Castiglione's famous book on the ways of courtly life, *Il Cortegiano* (*The Courtier*), gave the following advice: 'where the courtier is in a skirmish, or assault, or battle upon the land, or in such other places of enterprise, he ought to work the matter wisely in separating himself from the multitude, and undertake notable and bold feats which he has to do, with as few companions as he can, and in the sight of noblemen that are of the highest estimation in the camp. And especially in the presence and before the very eyes of his king.' Castiglione similarly urged a young knight not to get killed or maimed before he could win fame, and above all not to die in a sordid manner.

Great efforts were also made to glorify a military career and encourage recruitment through military pageants. By the late 15th century such *giostre* could be immensely elaborate and expensive affairs. In 1490 Alfonso d'Este and the Bentivoglio family invited knights from all over Italy and beyond to a great *giostre*; one team under Count Niccolò Rangano consisted of no less than six squadrons of knights dressed as Turks, Hungarians, Germans, Italians, French and Moors.

The internal organisation of Italian armies often differed from that of the French army. Most obviously the Italian lance only consisted of three men: the man-at-arms himself, a lightly armed sergeant and one

OPPOSITE 'Totila mounting his horse,' one of a series of wall-paintings illustrating the Life of St Benedict by Giovanni Antonio del Bazzi, known as 'Sodoma', made around 1508. (Cloisters of the Monastery of Monte Oliveto Maggiore, near Siena)





A-D South German-style one-piece sallets of a type used by both French and northern Italian soldiers during the second half of the 15th century. (HM Tower of London) C-D South German-style sallets with hinged visors, again used by both French and northern Italian soldiers during the second half of the 15th century. (HM Tower of London) E-F late 15th-century northern Italian sallets with hinged visors. (HM Tower of London and the Historisches Museum, Basel)

page or mounted servant and lacked the mounted infantry element seen north of the Alps. In 1494, however, the Venetian cavalry lance was officially increased to five men. In practice the light cavalry element in the Italian lance probably formed a separate unit in battle, probably closely associated with light cavalry *stradiotti* of Balkan origin.

The *stradiotti* were light cavalry who had no real parallel in the French army. Their name came from the Greek *stradiotai*, meaning soldiers, and many of those who initially entered Venetian service were *ex-Byzantine* troops of Greek origin, the first being recruited in 1464, during war against the advancing Ottoman Turks in Greece. The first Venetian *stradiotti* to appear on the Italian mainland were recorded in 1482, at which time the new post of *provveditore* of the *stradiotti* was created. In the late 15th century, the majority of these *stradiotti* seem to have come from the Albanian, Slav and Vlach or Rumanian-speaking communities of the western Balkans. Fearless, effective and cheap, they were recruited from close kinship groups and had a very strong loyalty to their own leaders, many of whom were from the feudal aristocracy of the western Balkans.

Carvings of Dalmatian soldiers equipped in Italian style over the door of a medieval private house on the Croatian coast; made by Jurja the Dalmatian, c.1441-1475. (Author's photographs; No. 18, Jurja Barakovec Street, Šibenik)



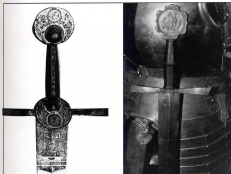
Little is known of the internal organisation of Venetian *stradiotti*, but they were probably divided into groups of three to five men; precisely the same system being seen among Christian *voyvoda* Balkan auxiliary cavalry recruited by the Ottoman Turks from communities similar to the *stradioti*. In 1495 Venice also enlisted 500 *zagadari* armed with light spears. Some scholars have identified these mysterious troops as infantry *stradioti*, but in fact the Venetian *zagadari* are likely to have been the same as the Ottoman *lagators*: relatively heavily armoured Christian auxiliary cavalry or élite *voyvods*. So perhaps the *zagadari* were better equipped *stradioti* or the leaders of *stradioti* units.

The arms and armour of the *stradioti* have been widely misunderstood, and while it was clearly lighter than that of a western man-at-arms, the *stradioti* were not necessarily unarmoured. Philippe de Commines, who fought at Fornovo, wrote that they were similar to Spanish light cavalry 'à la jinete', and looked like Turks except for their lack of a turban. Venetian sources indicate that some *stradioti* were armed with bows, though their most common weapons were light spears which could also be thrown, and light swords, used with a small form of helmet called a *cappelletto* de Albanese and small shields, which often appear rectangular in the pictorial sources. The most common form of *stradioti* armour was quilted, as seen in many parts of eastern Europe, but the élite had small cuirasses. Here it is worth noting that the Greek *stradioti* who accompanied the Byzantine Emperor John VIII to Italy in 1487-89 were regarded as an armoured élite compared with the much lighter *lanzarari* who are thought to have been based upon the Catalan *jinete* cavalry who entered Byzantine service during the 14th century.

The development of infantry forces in 15th-century Italy was similar to that in France, except that foot soldiers were more closely linked to the elaborate field fortifications central to Italian tactics. Many states had permanent infantry units known as *provisionari*, paid monthly and organised in a similar way to the *lanze spezzate* heavy cavalry under per-



'St Florian', on a painting of The Madonna and Child made in 1488 by Francesco and Bernardino Zagarelli, both known as 'Il Coltrone'. (Bresca Gallery, Milan)



LEFT A *stocco alla stradiotta* sword of a style that was probably developed in the overseas provinces of the Venetian colonial empire or in neighbouring regions of the western Balkans in the 15th century. (Bargello Museum, Florence) RIGHT Italian sword of around 1500. (Private collection)



St Ursula Cycle, series of wall-paintings by Vittore Carpaccio, made in 1493. (Accademia, Venice)

LEFT 'The Pilgrims arrive at Cologno'. Carpaccio's exceptional concern for everyday details of arms, armour, ships and architecture as well as clothing makes the St Ursula Cycle a remarkable record of life in late 15th-century Venice.

BELOW 'Martyrdom of the Pilgrims'. Most of the soldiers are dressed as Italian infantry, though with the extravagant costumes favoured in Venice. Much of their arms and armour looks distinctly eastern European, Balkan or even eastern Mediterranean.



manent contract. In wartime larger numbers of *provisionati* were enlisted by *condotta* and were backed up by local militias.

Provisionati and contract infantry were raised and led by recognised captains, some of whom formed an élite infantry officer corps. On campaign they operated almost as autonomous units, including *lancieri* (spearmen), *balestrieri* (crossbowmen), *arceati* (ordinary archers based upon English longbowmen), *picchieri* (pikemen reflecting Swiss influence), old-fashioned *targhieri* (bearers of large shields or mantlets to protect the crossbowmen), and *rotularii* (light assault infantry distinguished by small round shields). The characteristic Italian *roncone* version of the bill proved inadequate against the latest full plate cavalry armour and was gradually replaced by the heavier Swiss-style halberd.

Though mounted crossbowmen were included in the French army, they played a more significant role in Italian armies. Mounted hand-gunners rarely used their weapons from horseback but were becoming popular as bodyguards. Ordinary *schiopettari* hand-gunners had been known in Italy for over a hundred years and by the time of the French invasion they were increasingly used in open battle. One of the most illuminating Italian descriptions of the new hand-gun was written by Pope Pius II in 1461: 'The *scopetum* is a weapon invented in Germany in our time. It is of iron or copper as long as a man, as thick as the fist, almost entirely hollow. Powder made from charcoal of the fig or willow mixed with sulphur and nitre is poured into it, then a small ball of lead the size of a filbert [nut] is inserted in the front end. The fire is applied through a small hole in the back part and this explodes the powder with such force that it shoots out the ball like a clap of thunder — No armour can withstand the force of this engine.' According to Francesco di Giorgio Martini, writing around 1490, the Italian *cerbotana* shot a lead ball weighing 1-1.5 kg, had an iron barrel averaging 3 m long with a calibre around 5 cms — in other words an infantry support weapon. Francesco di Giorgio Martini described the arquebus as a much lighter infantry gun shooting a bullet weighing less than 200 grams.

Venice had a very advanced cannon-making industry which was put under the command of its own specialist *provetidore* in the 1480s.



Drawing of young soldier on horseback by Bernardino di Sella, known as Pintoricchio, late 15th-century. (Musée du Louvre, Paris)



Late 15th or early 16th century brimmed *chapel-de-far* or 'war hat'; probably German. (HM Tower of London)



Martyrdom of an unknown Saint, a wall-painting made in 1474. This primitive painting was made by Vincent of Kastav, a local artist, in the Istrian peninsula. (Author's photograph; Church of St Mary, Boran, Croatia)

Scene from the Life of St Benedict by Luca Signorelli in 1497. The light cavalrymen in the background wear broad-brimmed chapel-de-fer helmets, breast and back-plates, but no other protection for their arms. The foot soldiers in the foreground are largely unarmoured. (Cloisters of the Monastery of Monte Oliveto Maggiore, near Siena)

Whereas Italian heavy siege artillery was still hauled by oxen or buffaloes, Venetian experts were experimenting with more mobile gun carriages at Verona in the early 1490s in an attempt to update their artillery. Nevertheless Venetian and Milanese artillery trains were less highly organised, less mobile and less effective than those of France by the time Charles VIII invaded. Above all the larger Italian siege guns still relied on stone balls. Once again Francesco di Giorgio Martini provides highly detailed information for Italian artillery around 1490. A large bombard fired a stone ball of around 150 kg; a mortar a stone ball of 100-150 kg; an ordinary bombard a stone ball of 25 kg; a courtauld a stone ball of 30-50 kg; a passovolante an iron or lead ball of 5-7.5 kilograms; a basilisk a bronze or iron ball of 10 kg; an espingarde a stone of 5-7.5 kilograms. It is also interesting to note that the other military writer of this period,



Orso degli Orsini, recommended Italian artillerymen to use smaller calibre bombards and to shoot only one ball at a time as the French did, rather than three loaded on top of each other as was done in Italy.

Italian Tactics, Arms and Armour

Traditional Italian *condottieri* warfare has been described as the system of least effort, but such a statement can be very misleading. Italian strategy aimed primarily at economic targets, accepting prolonged sieges of attrition with minor territorial gains, rather than attempting to wipe out an enemy army. Closer study shows that Italian military leaders were fully aware of mountain warfare and the use of natural obstacles, whether mountains or lowland waterways and marshes. Italian tactics placed considerable reliance on field fortification, artillery and infantry which, of course, demanded the organisation of large forces of non-combatant labourers. But Italian field fortifications did more than protect a baggage train; they served as mobile bases in the wars of manoeuvre.

These tactics also introduced a new form of light infantry to both defend and attack field fortifications — assault infantry of a type not yet seen elsewhere in western Europe. The book on military affairs written by Orso degli Orsini for the King of Naples in 1477 was based on his experiences in Venetian service and described the role of assault infantry in defence-counterattack tactics around field fortifications. They were armed with swords and small shields, short spears, javelins or staff weapons, being supported by handgunners and crossbowmen. When fighting in open battle, Italian infantry normally included large numbers of crossbowmen wearing light armour backed up by a smaller number of more heavily armoured spearmen. All infantry were trained to act in close co-operation with friendly cavalry and to attack enemy horsemen rather than foot soldiers. They would also engage the enemy in relatively open order, avoiding frontal assaults but moving fast and attempting to hit the enemy's flanks.

Compared with their infantry, Italian men-at-arms continued to use old-fashioned cavalry tactics consisting of repeated frontal charges by relatively small formations, again operating from field-fortifications. According to Diomeda Carafa writing in 1478-9, each such charge was preceded by an advance guard of light cavalry skirmishers, then came the most heavily armoured men-at-arms, and finally the lighter men-at-arms. Venice played a leading role in developing true light cavalry tactics as a result of her experiences in the Balkans. The Turks had, of course, already raided deeply into the Venetian-ruled Friuli region of north-eastern Italy several times, and here mixed forces of heavy and light cavalry, plus mounted crossbowmen, had proved their worth. In addition the *stradiotti* had shown their skill in counter-raiding, forming advance and rearguards, harassing the foe and in naval landings, an area in which Venice had excelled for centuries. In combat the *stradiotti* operated in a manner identical to their Byzantine predecessors and Muslim-Turkish enemies: repeatedly charging and withdrawing, then counterattacking a foe who had become disorganised. Another feature that distinguished a *stradiot* charge was the speed and apparent recklessness with which it was delivered.

Not surprisingly, the Italian Renaissance saw a great deal of theoretical writing on the art of fortification and siege warfare. Nevertheless,



TOP A simple low-quality 16th-century Italian barboto or sallet with deep sides made of three pieces of riveted iron. (Author's photograph; Askari Mızra, Istanbul) CENTRE In complete contrast this highly decorated late 15th-century Italian barboto was made in Milan or Venice. (U. Koch photograph; Bayerisches Nationalmuseum, Munich)

BOTTOM The fluted surface of this Italian sallet from c. 1500 also gave additional strength. (Author's photograph; inv. 14677, Askari Mızra, Istanbul)



A distinctive style of art developed in 15th-century Bosnia, associated with the Bogomil community at a time when Bosnia became an important independent regional power. Carved tombs, such as this mid-15th-century example from Donja Zgosa, often illustrate light cavalry warriors equipped in a local variation of Italian arms and armour. (Author's photograph; Archaeological Museum, Sarajevo)

defence remained dominant, despite an increasing use of cannon and more recently explosive mines. In fact there seems to have been greater advances in the temporary fortifications erected by besiegers than in the design of the fixed fortifications they were attacking. As late medieval walls were thickened and lowered in the face of the new artillery threat, the external moats could sometimes not be seen by the defenders, so *fausse-braye*, or low outer walls of masonry, timber or earth were often added ahead of the moat. New fortifications generally relied on rounded rather than angled towers to provide glancing surface against cannonballs, while the bases of towers and walls were strongly flared outwards for the same reason; crenements were sometimes included to permit counter-battery fire.

Since northern Italy was a major manufacturing centre for arms and armour, the equipment of Italian troops was generally good. Basic techniques were also becoming more advanced. Plate armour had previously been made of soft iron, worked hot at a temperature of over 500° C, but now there was an increasing use of mild steel. Three main types of helmets were used: the fully enclosed armet consisting of a series of overlapping hinged or buckled plates, the more or less open-faced sallet; and the *barbata* form of sallet giving greater protection against archery and possibly originating in the Balkans or the Venetian colonial empire. The old-fashioned brimmed *cappelletto* 'war hat' was no longer popular in Italy, but may have been used by Balkan *stradiotti*.

Articulated metal horse armour also appeared around 1470-80, though hardened leather horse-armor was still more characteristic of Italian heavy cavalry. There even seem to have been experiments with articulated leg armour for horses in Austria in the same period.



Statue of St. Bernardino, French 1480-1475. (Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York)

The Size of League Forces

The League of Venice assembled a very large army, outnumbering the French by three to one at the battle of Fornovo. In addition, other League forces watched the French in Novara and continued to garrison important places like Genoa. The League army commanded by Francesco Gonzaga just prior to the battle of Fornovo may have numbered around 30,000 troops. During the final review before the French arrived, the Venetian contingent numbered 2,800 men-at-arms, over 8,000 other mounted troops the majority of whom were probably crossbowmen, 150 Italian light cavalry, 800 *stradiotti*, 600 of whom were led by the provveditore Piero Daudo, and between 14,000 and 15,000 foot soldiers. The Milanese contingent numbered 1,500, while the Bolognese were even fewer. In fact the bulk of the Milanese army was still watching Novara, along with 676 *stradiotti* under another Venetian provveditore, Bernardo Costantini.

Medical Services

In contrast to the amazing strides made in the arts and several sciences during the first two centuries of the Italian Renaissance, medicine was still remarkably primitive. Nevertheless, advances were being made and by the late 15th century the Venetian army, and perhaps others in Italy, had a medical service in which doctors were paid around 15 ducats a month, a substantial sum, while humble barber-surgeons received six ducats. Some of the finest doctors also accompanied the armies, though less for the benefit of injured soldiers than for the chance to learn about living anatomy at a time when the dissection of corpses could be frowned upon.

It is also interesting to note that modern research has shown how longbow arrows, and even ordinary crossbow bolts, rarely caused fatal wounds to a man wearing plate armour. Practical experiments with 30 kg draw-weight arrows show no penetration of 3 mm thick plate armour at a 6° angle of attack. Arrows would penetrate 11 mm through a 2 mm thick plate at the same angle, and 52 mm through 1mm plates. At 20° an arrow penetrated 1mm plate to a depth of 42 mm, failing to penetrate even 1 mm plate at 40° angle of attack. Given that the thinner plate was normally used for limbs and extremities during the 15th century, the longbow was clearly no longer an effective killing weapon.

OPPOSING PLANS

THE FRENCH

King Charles' original intention after leaving Naples was to get his army back to France safely. The troops, including part of the valuable artillery, would go overland, the lost from southern Italy by sea, while garrisons were to be left in various parts of the Kingdom of Naples. Charles also probably intended to march via Parma in Milanese territory. He and his advisers were, of course, aware that the League of Venice was assembling an army to threaten their march. This force was expected to be waiting near Pontremoli, but many French commanders doubted whether the League army was large or effective enough to bar their way.

The apparently surprising French crossing of the higher Cisa Pass (1039 metres) towards Berceeto rather than over a lower pass (max. 918 metres) directly to Borgo Val di Taro surely resulted from knowledge that the lord of Berceeto and all the local castles was prepared to support the French. The French decision to cross the River Taro at Fornovo and continue down the western side of the river was obviously influenced by the presence of the League's powerfully fortified position at Giarola, since the road along the western bank was far inferior to that on the eastern. French tactics in the subsequent battle completely misjudged the League's intentions, though this is hardly surprising since their enemies' tactics were highly unusual from the French perspective. They expected any enemy attack to be launched against their front, and so their vanguard was made very strong. Some historians have suggested that it was Trivulzio who advised the French to leave their huge French baggage almost undefended to lure the Venetian *stradiotti* away from their duty. But this sounds too much like wisdom after the event.

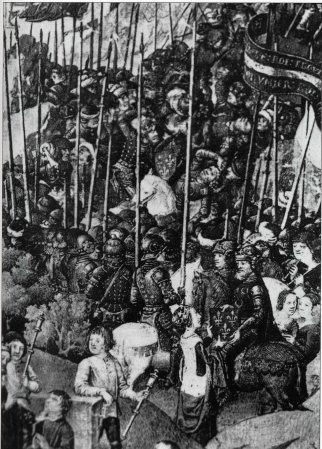
THE LEAGUE ARMY

The true intentions of the League commanders remain a matter of debate, contemporary sources having been coloured by the course of events. Their main problem was to anticipate which route the main French army would take. The naval-minded Venetians expected Charles to follow the coast, some thought he would aim for Modena and threaten both Venice and Milan, while others thought he would retrace his original steps via Pontremoli directly into the Duchy of Milan at Parma. Even after the French army reached Pontremoli there were doubts about their next move, several League commanders expecting them to go via Borgo Val di Taro and Piacenza to Novara, where the Duc d'Orléans was already besieged by other League forces. There was also a



ABOVE *Massacre of the Innocents*, a wall-painting by Matteo di Giovanni of Siena in 1481. Here the artist manages to combine a superbly detailed illustration of the back of an armoured soldier with the despair of innocent victims. (Church of Sant'Agostino, Siena)

RIGHT 'Clévis becomes leader of the Franks,' in the Prologue to the History of Clévis, a late 16th-century French manuscript. A majority of late 16th-century French cavalry would probably have been protected in this way. (Ms. 1, 12, Bibliothèque Municipale, Milan)



RIGHT Martyrdom of Santa Margherita, a 15th-century wall-painting. The hills and mountains of north-western Italy were closely linked to the mixed French-Italian states of Savoy and Provence. (Sanstaurio, Crea-Messanagio)



The cinquades, or sword with a blade 'five fingers wide,' was another characteristic Italian light cavalry and infantry weapon. **TOP** The broad blade of a cinquades lent itself to decoration and most surviving examples seem to be decorated to some extent. (Private collection) **BELOW** The cinquades of Cesare Borgia, made in Ferrara in 1495-96, is a highly decorated but nevertheless sturdy sword. (Fondazione Costantini, Rome)



possibility that the French vanguard, under the Marshal de Gié and Trivulzio would attempt to raise a rebellion in Parma.

By adopting a position in the Taro valley, the main League army could block or threaten both such moves. Sradolotti would harass the enemy in the mountains, castle garrisons in and around Berretto would threaten the French flank as the latter marched down the Taro valley, while Gonzaga's fortified camp at Giarola and heavy artillery on the neighbouring hills would block the main road to Parma. Francesco Gonzaga commanded what he himself described in a letter to his wife as 'the finest and most powerful army seen in Italy for a long time.' His correspondence also shows that Gonzaga believed that the French were strong in infantry and field artillery, but inferior in the heavy cavalry on which Italian condottieri armies traditionally relied.

Venetian war-gains are well documented, though they may not have been the same as those of the Milanese or Bolognese. The idea that



Charles' army could be destroyed would have been regarded as wildly optimistic by the Venetians, and probably also by the Milanese. In fact letters from the Venetian Senate to its *provveditori* instructed them to deliver a shock to the French, but above all to keep their forces intact. One letter from the Senate, dated 26 June, urged these *provveditori* to make any final military decisions themselves: 'You must, in the name of the Holy Spirit, carry out what is decided, and agree among yourselves without waiting for further orders or mandates from us.'

The actual League battle-plan at Fornovo, drawn up by Francesco Gonzaga's uncle Ridolfo, was to avoid a major clash with the powerful French vanguard. This would be diverted by a feint attack while a powerful blow against the right flank of the French centre and rear probably hoped to kill or capture King Charles VIII himself. Powerful reserves would be thrown in when needed, but only on the specific orders of Ridolfo Gonzaga himself. These precautions suggest that Ridolfo was concerned about discipline amongst the diverse units within the League army, and about the culture of personal glory which too often encouraged subordinate commanders to charge the enemy before they were supposed to.

'An army breaking camp after a siege,' in the *Histoire de Charles VIII*, a French manuscript of c. 1470. This illustration shows a heavy siege bombard torn of cannon being hauled away on its transport carriage. Another two gun barrels and their separate breach chambers lie abandoned on the ground. (Cod. 5, 180, Bibliothèque Royale, Brussels)

THE CAMPAIGN

THE RETREAT FROM NAPLES

King Charles was extremely angry at the news of the formation of the League of Venice; he remained in Naples, however, in the vain hope that the Pope would recognise his claim to the Neapolitan throne and to collect the taxes due at the end of the month. Meanwhile, Duke Ludovico Sforza put Galeazzo di San Severino in charge of a Milanese force which marched against the Duc d'Orléans in Asti. In the event this army only imposed a loose blockade on Asti before being forced to retire when Orléans received reinforcements from France.

On 20 May Charles finally left Naples with 970 lancers, 200 men-at-arms from his own guard, other household troops, Trivulzio's cavalry company and 5,780 infantry, including a few Scottish guards and around 3,000 Swiss. In addition there were the artillery and a large number of non-combatants. He left behind around 4,700 troops under the Comte de Montpensier, and the day Charles marched north, King Ferrantino crossed from Sicily to Calabria to begin his campaign of reconquest.

The Pope was nervous as Charles approached Rome and so moved to Orvieto on 27 May, but in fact the French troops behaved well during the three days they occupied the holy city. Philippe de Commines brought news of the large army the Venetians were already assembling. Several French commanders feared that Maximilian of Germany would trap the French at Asti, but Commines confirmed that there was, as yet, little danger of an Imperial army crossing the Alps. Charles proclaimed that he merely wanted to return home peacefully, but trust had collapsed and negotiations came to nothing as the Pope urged all Italian states to resist the French.

Charles had hoped to find the Duc d'Orléans with 8,000 men at Pontremoli. At this stage the main obstacle to the French retreat was thought to be Milan, the Venetians being seen only as a naval threat. But at Siena the king learned that the Duc

The village of Seniga, on the Oglio, is now a quiet agricultural backwater though the river still marks the boundary between Brescia and Cremona. In the late 15th century this was the frontier between the rival Republic of Venice and Duchy of Milan. (Author's photograph)





It is hard to imagine that the medieval streets of Pontremoli, nestling amid chestnut-covered foothills, ran with blood as the drunken Swiss mercenaries in Charles VIII's army massacred the town's inhabitants. The old centre can be reached by the narrow-arched Cressa bridge through a gate which still forms part of someone's house. (Author's photograph)

d'Orléans had seized the Milanese city of Novara with 3,000 cavalry and 4,000 infantry, rather than coming south to join Charles' force. Orléans' sudden coup did not lead to a general revolt against Ludovico Sforza, as had been expected; instead it resulted in greater anti-French feeling across northern Italy. Worse still it frightened Venice into a decision to fight more actively.

Charles now decided to avoid the humiliation of retreating through supposedly allied Florence and went directly to Pisa. There, however, he came face to face with the contradictions French policy had created. Florence had agreed to let the French control Pisa, but only until the Neapolitan invasion was over. The Pisans wanted their ancient independence returned, and had enjoyed those months free from Florentine oppression, even expelling Florentine garrisons from several parts of the old Pisan Republic. While most leading French commanders favoured returning Pisa to Florence, since the Florentines were among their few remaining allies, most of the junior ranks were sympathetic to Pisa. Some commanders just wanted to get back to France as quickly as possible; Trivulzio urged an immediate invasion of Milan to overthrow Duke Ludovico Sforza; others preferred an attack on Milanese-ruled Genoa to seize its fleet.

Into the maelstrom of conflicting opinions the Pisans threw a piece of theatre guaranteed to influence the romantic and somewhat weak-minded French king. During a feast attended by the leading Frenchmen, Charles sat between the two most beautiful Pisan ladies. Suddenly several daughters of the leading citizens entered the hall and threw themselves at Charles' feet begging him not to return their city to Florentine oppression; French knights and squires joined in, urging freedom for

Pisa. It worked and next day French garrisons were sent to defend the citadel of Pisa, Livorno, and other strategic points. As a result Charles' small army was further reduced.

Charles' next stop was Sarzana, where he agreed to an invasion of Genoa, having been assured that the Genoese would rise up in favour of the French. The expedition consisted of 500 cavalry and 2,000 crossbowmen under Philip of Savoie, Comte de Bresse, supported by the little French fleet commanded by the Sire de Miolans. Together they took control of most of the Levante coast — but saw no rising in Genoa.

As a result a significant proportion of the remaining men-at-arms consisted of Italian mercenary companies led by Gian Giacomo Trivulzio, the experienced 72-year-old Florentine condottiere Francesco Serco, and Camillo Vitelli. Trivulzio was the most important and also had some infantry under his command when he negotiated the surrender of the little Milanese town of Pontremoli. Here he had declared the young Francesco Sforza to be the legitimate Duke and issued a manifesto which proclaimed Ludovico a usurper. Trivulzio's position was, however, immediately undermined when several hundred Swiss infantry ran amok, slaughtering, burning and looting in Pontremoli, and the situation was worsened when survivors spread the news in Parma. The fires also destroyed huge quantities of the food needed as the French prepared to cross the forested Apennine mountains.

Not surprisingly the Swiss were out of favour with Charles the following morning, and were volunteered to haul the artillery over the mountains. This was necessary as the tiny French fleet under de Miolans had just been destroyed outside Rapallo by a mixed Genoese and Venetian squadron. The four French transport ships and two fighting galleys were overwhelmed; booty from Naples valued at 100,000 gold ducats, many heavy guns, de Miolans himself and the bulk of his men all fell into enemy hands, while four captured banners were sent to Duke Ludovico. Charles either had to abandon his remaining guns — a significant humiliation — or somehow get them back to France overland.

THE LEAGUE ASSEMBLES

In March 1495 Francesco Gonzaga had been in his splendid villa at Marmirolo when the Venetians summoned him to take command of their contribution to the League army. The army gathered at the village of Seniga, on the River Oglio, which formed the frontier between Venice and Milan. The small Milanese force would be commanded by Gianfrancesco di San Severino, Count of Calzasso, while the even smaller

THE LADIES OF PISA

When the prettiest ladies of Pisa knelt before Charles VIII, begging him not to give their city back to the money-grabbing Florentines, the romantic young French King could hardly refuse. Most of the younger knights in Charles' army supported the ladies. But wiser, older heads like the Marshal de Gié and Archbishop Briçonnet knew that this meant that the French would lose the support of the powerful city-state of Florence. The French army would also have to leave some troops behind, to help the Pisans resist Florentine reconquest. Worse still, the French still had a long way to march before they reached their own country. (Richard Heek)





Storm on the Sea of Galilee
15th-century alabaster carving
by Giovanni Antonio Amadeo
from the Monastery of San
Salvatore. Late 15th-century
Mediterranean ships were fer-
ocious fighting vessels; even
cumbersome transports, like the
example in this carving, had
fighting tops full of javelins,
shields and other weapons.
(Author's photograph; Castle
Museum, Paris)

OPPOSITE 'The French assault
the castle of Genoa in 1507,' in
the *Chronique de Jean d'Aurien*, a
French manuscript of the early
16th century. Not surprisingly,
perhaps, French manuscript
artists chose to celebrate the
successful crushing of a
Genoese revolt in 1507 rather
than the disastrous 'side-show'
which nearly brought cata-
strophes upon Charles VIII's army
in 1495. (Ms. Fr. 5091,
Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris)

Bolognese contingent would be led by Giovanni Bentivoglio. Meanwhile the size of French booty from Naples caused great excitement among League troops.

Venice had already lent up to 2,000 soldiers to Duke Ludovico. These included *stradiotti* under their provveditore Bernardino Contarini. In April Venetian mobilisation plans were increased to no less than 15,000 cavalry and 24,000 foot soldiers. Existing heavy cavalry companies would be increased by 25 per cent and several new contracts signed with mercenary captains. But not all were to join the League army at Senigo.

Those commanders who assembled at Senigo included several who had fought for Venice in the 1480s: Marco da Martinengo, Gianfrancesco da Gambara, and Luigi Avogadro who were noblemen from Brescia, and Bernardino Fortebraccio, Taddeo della Motella and officers of the Colloreschi *lanze spezzate*. One unit of Venetian mounted crossbowmen was led by Giovanni Greco da San Vitale, a highly experienced infantry officer; a second by Somirino Benzoni. Venetian infantry came from various parts of the Republic, including 800 from the mountainous Bergamo area, 1,000 frontiersmen from Friuli under the *condottiere* Niccolò

Savogna of Udine, 1,000 German mercenary hand-gunners and pikemen, and 1,000 feudal levies from Verona and Vicenza under Paris di Lodrone.

Less is known about the Milanese, except that an élite force of men-at-arms from the traditional Ghibelline political faction opposed the Guelphs represented by Trivulzio in the French camp. They were led by Bernardino Visconti. The reluctant Bolognese contingent now numbered 1,200 cavalry and 2,000 infantry; a tiny and even more reluctant unit was also sent from Ferrara by Duke Ercole d'Este, and placed under Francesco Gonzaga's command.

THE ADVANCE TO FORNOVO

While the French in Naples won a victory over the Aragonese at Seminara in June, even this could not halt the steady decline of French fortunes in southern Italy. A few days later, League troops under Galeazzo di San Severino and Bernardino Contarini moved against the French in Novara but, being inferior in numbers of men-at-arms (although superior in light cavalry), they could only impose a blockade. Francesco Gonzaga assumed command of the main army on 21 June and led it across the Po River at Cremona towards Parma. On the 27th it moved up the Taro Valley to the monastery of Girola, where League commanders decided to erect a fortified base camp with steep hills protecting one flank and the river the other. The nearby farms and villas of



Ozzano and Poppiano were also garrisoned, and some men were probably sent to watch the minor road through Medesano.

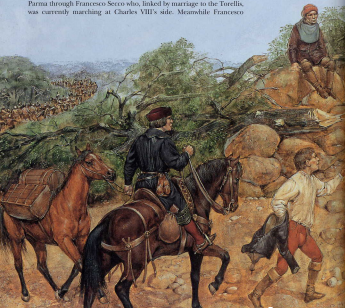
A trap appeared to be closing around Charles and the French army. Pontremoli, south of the mountains, was a Milanese possession, so Gonzaga left its defence to the Count of Calzoso. In fact Calzoso was heading towards Pontremoli when he heard that its garrison was negotiating with Trivulzio and the French. Not receiving any reinforcements from Gonzaga, he turned back to Formoso. Meanwhile Gonzaga's men had completed their fortified encampment, with heavy artillery set up on the slopes above Gaiano to cover the main road to Parma. The hills were also patrolled by *stradiotti*. While this was taking place the smaller League army reached Lumellongo near French-held Novara.

The French had not, of course, been inactive. Immediately after the surrender of Pontremoli, Marshal de Gié and Trivulzio crossed the mountains with a small advance force of 160 men-at-arms and 800 infantry, not to occupy the pass but almost certainly to negotiate the surrender of several castles by the local lord, Bertrando Rossi. Trivulzio also seems to have been negotiating with the powerful Torelli family in Parma through Francesco Secco who, linked by marriage to the Torelli, was currently marching at Charles VIII's side. Meanwhile Francesco

THE FRENCH ARTILLERY CROSSING THE CIGA PASS

The French fleet had been destroyed by the Genoese, so King Charles had to either abandon his heavy guns or somehow take them home over the mountains. The Ciga Pass was not particularly high but was steep and rugged. Fortunately for the French army, it had many Swiss mercenaries in its ranks: men who were not only experts in mountainous terrain but were keen to regain the King's good

favour after their drunken massacre of Italian civilians at Pontremoli. Louis de Trévouille was put in charge of the whole operation, working alongside the ordinary soldiers until he was 'black with dust and sweat'. Every other man in the army, be they ordinary soldiers or knights, had to carry a cannon-ball, a barrel of powder, a sack of smaller cannon-balls or some other piece of equipment. (Richard Hook)



Gonzaga, his uncle Rodolfo Gonzaga and the Count of Caluso rode south and, seeing the French advance guard, sent a force of stradiotti to watch them. As Trivulzio presumably negotiated with Rossi, de Gié rode ahead on reconnaissance with 40 men-at-arms but was ambushed by the stradiotti near Fornovo on 1 July. The French were routed and driven back towards a unit of German infantry, the latter's gunfire killing a stradiott's horses. A French man-at-arms named Leboeuf was killed in this skirmish, along with three or four German foot soldiers, their heads being taken back to the League camp by stradiotti who got a gold ducat for each head. A German officer was also wounded and captured by the stradiotti, but under interrogation back at Giarola he apparently convinced the League commanders that the French were much stronger than they were. De Gié retreated back to Terenzo, where he and

The Cisa Pass links the plains of Lombardy to the Mediterranean coast. Though it only reaches a height of 1039 metres, it is steep, rugged and covered in dense forest. **RIGHT** The old road still snakes up the steep southern side of the Cisa Pass from Pontremoli, barely visible through the distant haze. (Author's photograph) **BELOW** The northern slopes of the Cisa Pass follow a gentler gradient down into the valley of the River Taro. (Author's photograph)



Trivulzio sent Charles urgent appeals for reinforcements. For its part the League army was cheered by this success over a much feared foe and staged a religious celebration. Unfortunately the skirmish also seems to have made Francesco Gonzaga over-confident and no efforts were made to drive the French from Terenzo.

When the main French force left the Magra valley outside Pontremoli on 3 July they did not head straight for Borgo Val di Taro, as expected, but crossed the higher Cisa Pass towards Bertrando Rossi's town of Berteto. The narrow mountain path had to be widened and smoothed so that the Swiss could haul the artillery across not one, but two mountain crests which rose to 973 and 1039 metres respectively. In addition to field guns the artillery train now included 16 heavy cannon brought by sea to La Spezia before the French fleet was destroyed. From Pontremoli to the higher summit the route is still very steep and wooded. From the top of the Cisa Pass the terrain is a broken plateau as far as Cassio, with meadows and villages. In fact, it looks like much of the western Balkans where many Venetian stradiotti were recruited. The road itself tends to follow hilltops and ridges, often with steep drops on both sides. From Cassio to Terenzo there is a steep descent down heavily wooded hillsides. From Terenzo the air grows warmer and more humid; the countryside consists of fields and orchards, though the road still follows many steep gradients.

This the sweating Swiss infantry had to cross. They harnessed themselves to guns which would normally have been pulled by 35 horses, hauling the pieces up the slopes and then, even more dangerously, lowering them down the far side. Every man in the army carried a cannonball, keg of powder or some piece of equipment. Jean de la Grange, commander of the French artillery, was in overall command, but the real inspiration seems to have been Louis de la Trémoille, who shared the men's work, danger and sweat, promising ten ecus to anyone who reached the summit before him.

On 3 July Charles reached Berteto, where the gates had been left open by Bertrando Rossi who also handed over the castles of Rocca Lanzana, Rocca Predabaltia, Corniana, and Rocca Maria. Not surprisingly the League leaders at Giarola were horrified by this defection, particularly as the hills above Giarola also formed part of Rossi's domain. But worse was to come when, on 5 July, Rossi's garrison handed over the castle of Carona, overlooking Fornovo itself. Fornovo lay at the junction of roads from Piacenza and Parma to the coast, and without Carona it was indefensible. All Gonzaga could do was strengthen his remaining outposts at Oppiano and Galiano. During the afternoon the French vanguard reached the hamlet of Ricco where a narrow stream marked the new front line. Meanwhile the French rearguard was still in Fornovo, where the Swiss found a large amount of wine, several men drinking themselves to death in the cellars.

Tentative negotiations with League commanders began as the French set up camp between Ricco and Fornovo, continually harassed by stradiotti. At one point a party of 50 French or Italian light cavalry under Gian Giacomo Trivulzio clashed with these stradiotti and were again defeated; the stradiotti returned to the League camp outside Giarola with a French flag, some captured horses and prisoners, plus the heads of slain enemies. These minor successes, and the fact that the French



Soldier in a startzyrbal scene, a Byzantine wall-painting of the second half of the 16th-century. Several 'modern' or realistic elements of costume, arms and armour are included. (Author's photograph; Pantarossa Church, Mistras, Greece)

PRELUDE TO FORNOVO, 21 JUNE - 5 JULY 1495



seemed so keen to negotiate, encouraged Francesco Gonzaga to write to the Venetian Senate stating that, if the League stood firm, the French would retreat up the valley to Borgo Val di Taro and then either back across the mountains or dispersing towards Piacenza and Tortona.

French plans may, in fact, have been undecided. Some urged a retreat to Pisa but Trivulzio argued in favour of pressing on and he won the argument. That night there was a great storm with heavy rain in the mountains and the valley. Raids by the *stradiotti* also led to several alarms and as a result the French were extremely tired when morning came. The king also had little sleep; the Cardinal of St Mark came to his tent to suggest that the army march past the League encampment and loose off some cannon to avoid a full-scale battle, but Philippe de Commines maintained that it would be impossible for two great armies to disengage without a clash. The League commanders also held council, one of the provveditore arguing in favour of letting the French pass rather than confronting the most powerful state in western Europe. Ridolfo Gonzaga agreed, but the Count of Caluso wanted to defend Milanese territory. Francesco Gonzaga also feared that the Duchy of Milan would fragment if the French were allowed through.

THE BATTLE OF FORNOVO

The morning of 6 July 1495 dawned overcast, but the air was cool and the rain had stopped as the League forces took up their positions to prevent a French march against Parma. The advance guard under Raimondo Farnese consisted of 700 infantry and 3,000 mostly light cavalry. The 400 men-at-arms of the main vanguard was led by Francesco Gonzaga himself, with Ricolfo Gonzaga by his side. Next came a division of 500 men-at-arms under Bernardino di Montone, consisting of the companies of Gian Giacomo Piccinino, Alessandro d'Este, Guido Martinengo, Antonio Scarampi, Guidone di Bigno, Galeazzo da Coreggio, Giorgio Strozzi and other nobles. A third division under the Count of Cotazzo included Milanese men-at-arms and soldiers from Parma. A fourth division under Bentivoglio consisted of his own men-at-

arms plus light cavalry from Bologna. A fifth division under Italiano da Carpi included his own men-at-arms with 200 additional cavalry under Gilberto da Carpi, who had arrived two days earlier. The League camp at Girola was defended by Venetian troops under Carlo di Melita.

CROSSING OF THE TARO

Nearly there were several fords across the Taro opposite Girola, at Oppiano, between Oppiano and Gualticeo, at Ozzano, and at Fornovo. The river itself is subject to very sudden rises following rain in the mountains. Its bed is stony with many deeper pools which are hard to see when the water is high. Its banks vary, but are often steep and muddy as well as topped with a thick belt of thorny bushes and trees. On both sides of the river there are flat fields, in several areas wet and almost marshy, while beyond these rise the steep slopes of the surrounding foothills.

Around dawn the French leaders decided to follow Trivulzio's advice to press on — though down the western rather than the eastern side of the river. Charles VIII breakfasted, put on his armour and mounted his great black horse, Savoy. The army attended a religious service and began moving back to cross the Taro at Fornovo. Its formation expected any attack to be made upon the vanguard. Charles himself is said to have been

'Admiral Louis Malet de Graville prepares to go hunting,' in *Le Sirey de Montcaumon*, a French manuscript of c.1470. De Graville is said to have been very much against the French invasion of Italy in 1494; nevertheless, he played his part and appears to have been present at the battle of Fornovo. (Private collection)





The battlefield of Fornovo as seen from the hillside above the village of Galena.

TOP LEFT Looking west-south-west towards Fornovo, which is hidden in the heat-haze. The old main route runs diagonally towards the centre of the picture from the village of Gosseno lying just beyond the most distant line of trees. The River Taro lies on the far side of the fields on the right. (Author's photograph)

TOP RIGHT Looking west-north-west over the village of Galena towards the church and ford at Opplano. A narrow light streak marks the stony bed of the River Taro. (Author's photograph)

BOTTOM LEFT Looking due north across the old Fornovo-Ferrara road towards the hamlet of Gianola. The fortified camp established by the League army was probably near an isolated tree at the edge of a farm known as La Campagna. Author's photograph)

turned into a decisive leader by the prospect of battle — though only temporarily. Over his armour he wore a white and violet tunic embroidered with gold Crosses of Jerusalem, white and violet plumes springing from his helmet. One of the King's captains reportedly said: 'Sire I have often heard you say that your great desire was to take part in a fine big battle. Behold, your wish is fulfilled!' Others in the French army were less sanguine about their prospects and Charles again sent Philippe de Commines to negotiate safe passage.

Commines thought this might be taken as a sign of weakness, which it was. Trevisan told de Commines' herald to go to the devil, but Pisani agreed to see his message. The League commanders then took council, which gave the French time to cross the river. Their reply made few concessions: it stated that they would sell the French food if the latter laid down their arms, handed back Novara, and returned Papal lands seized in the south. The French retorted that if necessary King Charles' army would cut its way home with its swords, to which the Venetians quietly replied that not all Italians were cowards, nor were their military virtues entirely dead. Charles was infuriated by this answer. Commines was, in fact, still between the lines when a brief artillery duel erupted, but by then the French were already crossing the river to march north once again. The Swiss infantry also set fire to a castle overlooking Fornovo, probably Carona.

The French now numbered, at most, 900 men-at-arms, 2,500 Swiss infantry, 7,000 other infantry and around 1,500 servants. Their artillery was said to have only 14 heavy siege guns, perhaps indicating that two were abandoned on the Cisa Pass. But the French artillery still included at least 28 lighter field guns allocated to the vanguard which was commanded by Marshal de Gié and Gian Giacomo Trivulzio. The powerful French vanguard consisted of 3,000 infantry, including 300 dismounted archers and 200 crossbowmen of the Royal Guard, the Swiss under Antoine de Bessey the bailli of Dijon, the Germans under Engelbert of Cleves and a large number of Gascon crossbowmen. They marched close behind de Gié's 270 French men-at-arms, Trivulzio's 80 Italians and some mounted crossbowmen, the Swiss being in a close-packed square formation. A few field guns appear to have preceded these infantry, but the bulk of the 1,000 strong artillery corps marched in column to cover the vanguard's right flank.

The central division of the French army was probably commanded by Jean de Foix. It totalled 1,750 men, including up to 600 men-at-arms and mounted crossbowmen in two companies of noblemen and two of ordinary knights, plus Scottish archers of the Royal Guard. Charles himself rode a short distance ahead with a small bodyguard consisting of Mathieu de Bourbon and seven young knights known for their prowess: Piennes, Bonneval, Archiac, Genoilhac, Fraxinelle, Baraze, and Bourdillon.

The French rearguard marched slightly to the right of the central division. It was led by Louis de la Trémoille and Monsieur de Guise, though some sources suggest that it, rather than the centre, was under de Foix. The rearguard consisted of around 300 men-at-arms and over 1,000 low-quality infantry perhaps stiffened by 100 Scottish Guard archers.

The baggage train was under a certain Captain Odet. He, however, found it impossible to impose discipline on the camp followers. One survivor of the subsequent débâcle described the situation: 'One wanted to march, another to stay still. One wanted to eat, another to drink. Some wanted to feed and water their horses, others to hurry to the place which was said to have been set aside for the King's quarters, whereby they threw themselves into growing confusion.'

Someone in the League army reportedly said it was: 'As nice a day for a battle as could possibly be desired,' and they had good reason to feel

The ford across the River Tera at Copiano is still dominated by a large farm and an apparently Baroque church. A track on the right of this picture dips down from the fields to the edge of the river. (Author's photograph)



BATTLE OF FORNOVO

6 July 1495, dawn to midday, viewed from the north showing initial deployments, the French crossing of the Taro and the Italian reaction. All times given are approximate

FRANCESCO GONZAGA

PHASE 2 Right division infantry (approx. 2,000) advance to Giarda ford

PHASE 2 Right division cavalry reserve (approx. 190 Bolognese man-at-arms) under Borzognio and Polonicci remain on the east bank to support Galeas

PHASE 2 Surprised by the French crossing the river the League commanders hold a council of war at which a new plan is adopted. League forces begin moving by midday. League right division cavalry (approx. 400 Milanese man-at-arms) under the Count of Casazza advances to the ford at Giarda to make a rear attack on the French rearguard

PHASE 2 Some other League light cavalry units and striated join the left and central cavalry divisions

PHASE 1 As Philippe de Comynes returns from unsuccessful negotiations with the League commanders a brief artillery duel breaks out

PHASE 1 & 2 Approximately 5,000 League light cavalry and striated under Francesco Ferrares are pursuing the army, having spent the night of 5-6 July harassing the French positions. Many of these troops cross the Taro close behind the French, probably in a bid to cut the main road ahead of the French baggage train at the Giarda stream

PHASE 1 As De Comynes returns the French Army is already crossing the Taro river to continue its march north down the west side of the river. The Swiss infantry set fire to a saddle overlooking Fornovo, probably Carone

PHASE 2 Left division cavalry reserves (245 man-at-arms) of the DR and New Colonnese (less separate regiments) under Battista de' Gorgi move to support left division cavalry

PHASE 2 Left division cavalry (282 able Venetian man-at-arms), commanded by Fortebraccio di Monteno, with Bianca di Martignio probably leading a force of Venetian light cavalry, advance to Guastello ford

PHASE 2 Substantial force of League infantry including 4,000 of the best Swedish foot and 1,000 of Gonzaga's Milanese infantry under Piero Sforzino move to cross the river in support of the left and central divisions

PHASE 2 Central division cavalry reserves (approx. 427 man-at-arms) under Antonio di Montebello move to support Gonzaga's attack on the French

PHASE 2 Central division (approx. 482 man-at-arms, 600 mounted crossbowmen or light cavalry and many of Gonzaga's household) under Francesco Gonzaga advances to Diaplana ford to attack the French central division

CHARLES VII

FRENCH ARMY

- A French encampment and field artillery, night of 3-6 July
- B French rearguard in Fornovo
- C French garrison at Casazza

LEAGUE FORCES

- 1 League heavy artillery on the hillside overlooking the road to Parma (exact location's uncertain)
- 2 Probable initial positions of League mobile artillery
- 3 Fortified League encampment
- 4 League advance guard and striated light cavalry
- 5 Probable initial position of League main vanguard
- 6 Probable initial position of League central division
- 7 Probable initial position of League rearguard



The bed of the Taro is broad and the river itself divides into several channels, particularly when the water-level is low, in several places, as here where the Oggiano ford originally stood, the banks are thickly overgrown. (Author's photograph)

confident. Though much of the Venetian infantry and most of the heavy artillery had yet to reach Giarola, the League army already greatly outnumbered the French. But the stradiotti were still few, since some of Duodo's men appear to have been in the Romagna, while Contarini's company was watching Novara. On the other hand, a new unit was being raised by Capitano Grimani, though few had yet reached the camp. The Milanese contingent may also have risen to 2,000 infantry.

THE COUNCIL OF WAR

Nevertheless the League commanders seem to have been surprised by the French move across the Taro, and so held an immediate council of war where they adopted a new plan drawn up by Rinaldo Gonzaga under which the army was divided into nine sections, as far as possible reflecting their existing positions, and changed front by turning to face the river. The Count of Caizzo with the main body of 400 Milanese men-at-arms supported by 2,000 infantry now formed the right wing. It would cross the river ahead of the French vanguard to make a feint attack and thus draw this, the largest French division, away from the French centre.



A smaller force of around 180 Bolognese men-at-arms under Bentivoglio and Galeazzo Pallavicini would remain on the east bank to support Calza. The central division under Francesco Gonzaga would attack directly across the river, aiming for the relatively weak French centre. It consisted of Francesco Gonzaga's own 492 men-at-arms and up to 600 mounted crossbowmen or light cavalry, as well as many members of his household, including his uncle Rodolfo Gonzaga, Ranuccio Farnese and Count Alosio Avogadro. A large cavalry reserve would follow up Gonzaga's men attack if needed, this being led by Antonio di Monnefelro, with 487 men-at-arms under Count Gianfrancesco Gambarà, Luigi Avogadro and Soncino Benzoni. The left wing of 352 elite Venetian men-at-arms was commanded by Forzebaccio di Montone, with Marco di Martinego probably leading a force of Venetian light cavalry. They were supported by a cavalry reserve under Italiano da Carpi, consisting of the 245 men-at-arms of the Old Colleoneschi and New Colleoneschi lance spezzate regiments commanded by Taddeo della Motella and Alessandro Colleoni. Between the League's centre and left was a substantial force of infantry which would cross the river in support of these cavalry divisions. It included 4,000 of the best Venetian foot soldiers and 1,000 of Gonzaga's Mantuan infantry under Piero Schiavo.

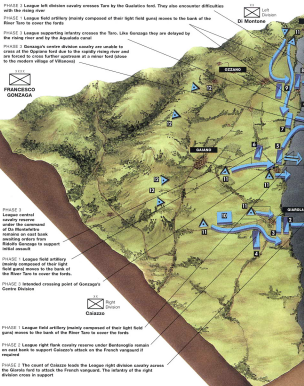
The boldest and most dramatic stroke was to be delivered by a rapid force of 600 *stradioti*, including 300 of Duodo's regiment and a similar number under Alessio Boccacuto, plus 200 other light cavalry, 600 mounted crossbowmen and perhaps some light infantry. They would follow the French across the Taro, then strike their left side from the hills between Felegara and Medesano.

On what was now the League's right flank their fortified encampment was defended by a 305 men-at-arms under Count Carlo da Pian di Melita and Tallan de Pij, with 1,000 largely Friulani infantry under Niccolò Savorgna and 4,000 non-combatants. Most of the lighter field guns had been moved down to the river bank near Glarola, but the heavy cannon probably remained in the hills, perhaps guarded by the 1,000 infantry

ABOVE The bed of the Taro from the west bank looking towards Glarola; this is the point where Gianfrancesco San Severino and the League army's right division crossed the river to attack the French vanguard. In this picture the river is very low. (Author's photograph)

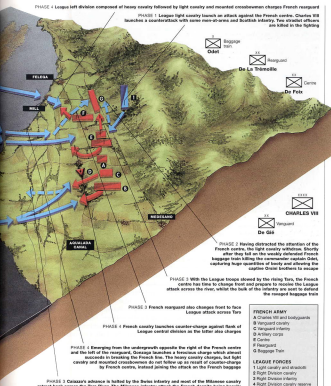


The dense undergrowth on the west bank of the Taro between Felegara and Medesano consists of relatively small but closely spaced trees, tangled undergrowth and high grass. (Author's photograph)

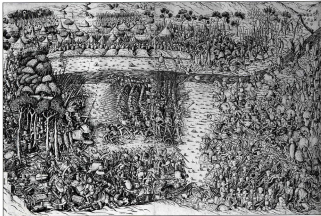


BATTLE OF FORNOVO

6 July 1495, early afternoon, viewed from the north-east showing the main League attacks on the French army. The movement of League troops across the Taro is increasingly hampered by the rapidly rising river



- FRENCH ARMY**
- A Charles VII and bodyguards
 - B Vanguard cavalry
 - C Vanguard infantry
 - D Artillery corps
 - E Centre
 - F Rearguard
 - G Baggage Train
- LEAGUE FORCES**
- 1 Light cavalry and dragoons
 - 2 Right Division cavalry
 - 3 Right Division infantry
 - 4 Right Division cavalry reserve
 - 5 Central Division
 - 6 Central Division cavalry reserve
 - 7 League infantry
 - 8 Left Division cavalry
 - 9 Left Division cavalry reserve
 - 10 Fortified encampment
 - 11 Field artillery
 - 12 Heavy artillery



The Battle of Fornovo; engraving made by an unknown German artist within a year or so of the battle itself. The print includes a remarkable amount of detail, much of which is confirmed in the written sources, while other aspects are likely to have been based on the otherwise unrecorded recollections of men who took part — perhaps Swiss mercenaries judging by the heroic role of the Swiss at the very centre of the picture. (No. II-20,218, National Gallery of Art, Washington D.C.)

under Jean Matteo, who remained 'near the hills' while a further 1,000 remained at 'Gorlino' — perhaps meaning Gaiano.

THE LEAGUE ATTACKS

The League army did not attempt to attack until around midday, perhaps needing this time to redeploy their troops. The flanking force, consisting largely of *stradiotti* did, however, overtake the slow-moving French rear and baggage train by riding through the foothills. When the French vanguard was almost parallel with Girola the battle began with a shot from one of the League's larger cannon. This was probably a signal meant to be heard by the League divisions, now widely spread out, including the flank attack in the hills beyond the French army. According to French sources, a French shot soon destroyed the large League gun and killed its gunner, though in reality such accurate shooting was unlikely at such a range. Firing continued for a quarter of an hour, after which the guns were largely masked by the forward movement of their own troops.

The first direct contact between opposing forces seems to have been when the League flanking attack swooped down to attack the French centre — presumably when they heard the gun. Charles sent some men-at-arms and Scottish infantry against this attack and in the fighting which followed two *stradioti* officers were killed. Their men retreated, but they had already fulfilled their task of diverting the French centre's attention away from the vanguard. Precisely when this flanking attack turned upon



he French baggage is unclear, but is unlikely to have been immediate. Once under attack, the baggage train seemed unable to defend itself, Captain Odet was killed, huge quantities of booty were captured and the two captive Orsini brothers escaped.

Meanwhile the Count of Calizzo crossed the river and attacked the French vanguard. His men-at-arms were stopped by the Swiss infantry and most of the Milanese cavalry then recrossed the Taro to their starting positions. Some, however, remained on the west bank and would reappear later in the battle. Those infantry who had crossed in close support of Calizzo's cavalry now found themselves facing a counter-attack by the fearsome Swiss phalanx. Many were from the Bologna contingent, unwilling participants even at the start, and they fled after a brief struggle. Milanese infantry, though now seriously outnumbered, attacked the French, while a small unit of German mercenaries attacked the field artillery. Both were driven back with heavy loss, the survivors retreating across the river. Some fled to Parma, others across the mountains towards Reggio nell'Emilia, but the majority re-formed around the Giarda camp.

Looking towards the village of Felogano from just above the road which leads up the Dordona Valley. The Venetian *stradiotti* light cavalry rode along these foothills in an effort to outflank the French army as it marched along a road which ran through Felogano itself. (Author's photograph)

GONZAGA'S DIVISION ATTACKS

The League centre and left advanced at the same time, but the main attack by Francesco Gonzaga's division was disrupted because the River Taro was now rising rapidly as a result of the night's storm. In fact the centre had to cross further upstream than intended. It is worth noting



that the fords were sited where the boulder-strewn river bed was narrowest. This made sense at low water, but at high water these would have been precisely the places where the constricted river ran deepest. Consequently the centre and left both emerged from the undergrowth which lined the river at similar points facing the French rearguard and the gap between this and the French centre.

Gonzaga's plan envisaged a normal heavy cavalry charge, followed by light cavalry and mounted crossbowmen taking advantage of any breaks in the enemy formation. The infantry would then attack any broken formations of enemy horse. The fact that the first wave of men-at-arms was outnumbered should not have mattered, as reserves could be summoned rapidly. But things did not go according to plan. The time it took for these units to cross the swollen river enabled the French centre and rearguard to change front and await the frontal assault. Francesco Gonzaga also found himself opposite the left of the French centre rather than the King's position. Nevertheless, he led his men in a ferocious charge which almost succeeded in breaking the French line, while, on the left, Foetebraccio charged the French rearguard, doing so before their infantry support had formed up. In fact this infantry had also been

FRANCESCO GONZAGA'S DIVISION ATTACKS ACROSS THE RIVER TARO

Francesco Gonzaga's decision to attack the French army in its flank, across the river Taro, was a daring and imaginative stroke. But the weather was deteriorating; there had been rain in the mountains during the previous night and the river was rising fast. As a result some divisions



of the Italian League army could not cross where planned, and had to attack at a slightly different angle, while the infantry were even more disrupted. The Italian attack still caught King Charles by surprise, but was delayed just enough for the French to change front and meet Gonzaga's charge in a bloody hand-to-hand fight. (Richard Hook)

obstructed by the rising water and by the Aqualada Canal, which powered a water-mill near Felgara.

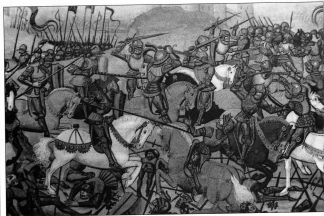
Two companies of men-at-arms on the extreme right of Gonzaga's division were now struck in the flank by part of the French central division. The struggle dissolved into a mêlée in which Charles VIII took part, having his helmet damaged. A few metres away Mathieu de Bourbon, a close but illegitimate relative of the king, was captured — perhaps having been mistaken for the king himself. During this savage struggle Ricolfo Gonzaga was killed, thus depriving Francesco Gonzaga of the one man authorised to summon the reserves. The League's chain of command was shattered. Francesco's own direct involvement in the fighting would also be criticised because, it was said, he "behaved rather as a common soldier than as a general". A Mantuan soldier who fought by his side subsequently told Francesco's wife Isabella d'Este how he saw him have three horses killed beneath him and his sword break. "Since the days of Hector of Troy," the man wrote, "no one ever fought as he did. I believe he killed ten men with his own hands. And I think you must have said some Psalms for him, for indeed it is a miracle that he is alive and unhurt."

Looking from the elevated hillside immediately overlooking the road from Foligno to Medesano, due west towards Galano. The fields in the middle distance saw the fiercest fighting during the battle of Fornovo.
(Author's photograph)



'Battle outside Bordeaux,' in the *Histoire de Charles Martel*, a French manuscript of c.1473. The ideals of such knightly combat still dominated the self-image of the French military elite. (Cod. B, 153, Bibliothèque Royale, Brussels)

Outnumbered, suffering serious casualties and finding that their lances were more fragile than those used by their French opponents, the League's men-at-arms retained their discipline. But the same could not be said of the mounted crossbowmen who were supposed to support them. It was these men, rather than the Balkan and Greek *stradioti*, who later got most of the blame, and who first galloped off to pillage the French baggage which had probably become visible as the French centre charged across their front to hit Gomezaga's flank.





By now the rain had returned and, as a French participant recalled, the weather 'never stopped blowing, raining, lightning and thundering, as though all the devils of hell were loose upon the field'. As the men-at-arms of Gonzaga's and Forzebraccio's divisions gave ground, some fled to the river while some of Forzebraccio's men also appear to have attacked the French baggage train. Most, however, regrouped around a mill; presumably the one fed by the Aqualada Canal, and, though greatly outnumbered, charged the French again — only to be driven back. After this some League units retreated towards the ford at Fornovo while most made an orderly withdrawal across the Gaslatice ford.

While this was going on the men-at-arms of the French centre had reached the river and turned upstream. The left flank, where Philippe de Comynes rode, found itself crossing what he described as 'fields of pebbles' — the water-worn stones of the river bank — which were extremely tiring for their horses. During this pursuit only one of de Comynes group was killed; a badly armed man named Julian Bourgeois who was struck by an unseen Italian horseman. At this point the French suddenly remembered that Charles VIII had been left with only his immediate retinue at the site of the first cavalry clash. But their return was once again hindered by 'fields of stones', their horses were blown and the men-at-arms had to replace their shattered war lances with lighter *bourdonnasses* normally used in jousting.

For the French men-at-arms the *mêlée* had been a success. For their opponents it had been a disaster; not because they had been routed from the field, but because two different military cultures had resulted

Looking from the outskirts of Medesano, across the northern part of the battlefield towards Gianola and the hills on the far side of the Taro. Here Charles VIII and the vanguard of the French army sought refuge after the battle. (Author's photograph)

PHASE 2 League central division slowly regroups near mill to launch a second charge against the French centre and rearguard, but are broken off and return across the Taro

PHASE 4 The League light cavalry, and stragglers, leave the pillaged French baggage train, probably accompanied by the mounted crossbowmen of the League central division. They move to halt the Guastalla ford and return across the Taro in the late afternoon

PHASE 3 League centre reserves under Ruffinello move to reinforce defences of the Garcia ford near the League's fortified encampment

PHASE 4 League artillery bombards the French vanguard from an extreme range fearing a French counterattack across the Taro against their fortified camp at Gianola

PHASE 1 Broken infantry of League right division returns to fortified camp on east bank of the Taro at Gianola, some five across Scodogna stream towards Parma

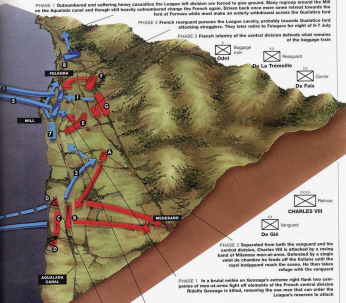
PHASE 1 The bulk of the League right division cavalry return across the River Taro and re-form on the east bank, but some elements remain on the west bank

BATTLE OF FORNOVO

6 July 1495, late afternoon, viewed from the north-east showing the French counterattacks and the retreat of the League forces. The death of Ruffino Gonzaga prevents the League's reserves from being ordered forward



XXI Right Division
Gaiazzo



PHASE 1 Outnumbered and suffering heavy casualties the League left division are forced to give ground. Many regroup around the Mill on the Aquilada canal and though still heavily outnumbered charge the French again. Driven back once more some retreat towards the ford at Fornovo while most make an orderly withdrawal across the Guastalla ford

PHASE 2 French rearguard pursues the League cavalry, probably towards Guastalla ford attacking stragglers. They later retire to Ferrara for night of 6-7 July

PHASE 3 French infantry of the central division defends what remains of the baggage train

PHASE 2 Separated from both the vanguard and the central division, Charles VIII is attacked by a rising band of Milanese men-at-arms. Defended by a single vallet de chambre he leads off the Italians until the royal bodyguard reach the scene. He then takes refuge with the vanguard

PHASE 1 In a brutal melee on Gonzaga's extreme right flank two companies of men-at-arms light off elements of the French central division Ruffino Gonzaga is killed, removing the one man that can order the League's reserves to attack

PHASE 3 French central division cavalry pursues the League cavalry and infantry towards Guastalla ford. Having reached the river the men-at-arms enter the Castagnon turn upstream along the river. Many League men-at-arms, are slaughtered as they attempt to surrender. French cavalry remain in Felerra for the night of 6-7 July

PHASE 4 French vanguard infantry and cavalry plus artillery form up opposite Gianola. Exhausted, overextended and having a second attack across the river by League forces they miss the opportunity to attack the weakened French centre. French artillery engages in a duel with League artillery and subsequently retire to Miasano early evening. Charles VIII spends night of 6-7 July in Miasano. With the majority of their baggage now gone the French have to spend the night without cover and food.

XXII Baggage Train
Odete

XXIII Rearguard
De La Trésaille

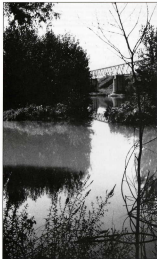
XXIV Centre
De Pois

XXV Charles VIII
Platner

XXVI Vanguard
De Gâs

- LEAGUE FORCES**
- 1 Light cavalry and stragglers
 - 2 Right Division cavalry
 - 3 Right Division infantry
 - 4 Right Division cavalry reserves
 - 5 Central Division
 - 6 Central Division cavalry reserves
 - 7 League infantry
 - 8 Left Division cavalry
 - 9 Left Division cavalry reserves
 - 10 Fortified encampment
 - 11 Field artillery
 - 12 Heavy artillery

- FRENCH ARMY**
- A Charles VIII and bodyguards
 - B Vanguard cavalry
 - C Vanguard infantry
 - D Artillery corps
 - E Centre
 - F Rearguard
 - G Baggage train



LEFT The River Trebbia just west of Piacenza, where it is crossed by the old Roman road. Here an ancient bridge had long since disappeared and the French army allowed itself to become divided when the river suddenly rose. (Author's photograph)

BELOW Countryside near Novara. Rice cultivation was introduced to northern Italy from the Middle East in the 10th century. Such cultivation in low-lying and previously fever-ridden swamps was made possible by new drainage schemes such as that carried out near Novara during the reign of the Sforza dynasty of Milan. Imposing and resisting a full-scale summer siege in this territory led to its own particular problems of hygiene and disease. (Author's photograph)

in a massacre. During the initial charge, counter-charge and *mêlée* many men had been knocked from their horses and as the League divisions withdrew, their unhorsed comrades remained on the field. The popular idea that a fully armoured man was unable to rise or remount is a myth, but he would have been winded if not injured, and his horse was probably out of reach. Under such circumstances an Italian man-at-arms normally accepted the fact that he would be captured and have to pay a stiff ransom. The French servants, infantry archers and other support personnel were not, however, interested in ransoms. In fact no League prisoners were taken and a horrifying number of Italian men-at-arms were butchered as they tried to surrender. According to Philippe de





LEFT AND BELOW (INSET) 'Sacked town,' in the *Chroniques de Meuseux* by Jacques de Gales, a French manuscript of the late 15th century. The charred timbers of towers and houses stand exposed while wisps of smoke still rise and mutilated bodies litter the streets. (Ms. 9242, f.20, Bibliothèque Royale, Brussels)



Commines, who witnessed the slaughter, it often took three or four Frenchmen using axes, blocks of wood and daggers thrust through narrow visor slits to kill one Italian, the latter's armour being so effective.

The League's supporting infantry had found themselves virtually isolated as they belatedly emerged from the river bank, and as a result they would suffer heavily. Many units withdrew almost at once, making their way back across the Taro. Several were probably attacked by French men-at-arms as they did so, Philippe de Commines's unit dispersing one such formation in dense undergrowth near the river. Before de Commines' comrades could pursue, someone shouted, 'Remember Guinegate!' a recent defeat which resulted from the French themselves pillaging the enemy's baggage. Another unit of 500 Venetian infantry under Gerolamo Genova Viniziano was similarly cut off, losing two-thirds of its number before escaping.

Because the League reserves never received a message to cross the river, those troops actually engaging the French were themselves outnumbered despite the League's overall numerical superiority. The only



reserves to move appear to have been those under Montefeltro, who joined Bentivoglio's division in covering the Count of Caiazzo's withdrawal and, in so doing, perhaps inhibited the French vanguard from launching a counterattack across the Taro. De Gié's decision not to attack the League camp would subsequently be criticised, but at the time the confusion around Giarola was not known to de Gié, whose primary concern was to regain contact with the French centre and rearguard.

CHARLES VIII IS ATTACKED

Around this time a small group of Milanese men-at-arms from the Count of Caiazzo's division suddenly came upon Charles VIII and his bodyguards. The Italians may, in fact, have been looking for the king in an attempt to capture him. The king was some way from his seven bodyguards, attended only by a single valet de chambre named Antoine des Ambus, described as 'a small man, poorly armed'. Perhaps Charles had to answer a call of nature following the excitement of battle when the small group of Milanese men-at-arms suddenly appeared, recognised the king and attacked him. Fortunately Antoine des Ambus, though ill-armed, was loyal, and Charles' horse, Sasso, was calm and well trained. As a result Charles and Antoine frused off the Italians until the royal bodyguard rushed to the scene. After that narrow escape, King Charles took refuge with Marshal de Gié's vanguard.

A CLOSE SHAVE FOR KING CHARLES

After the French heavy cavalry charged Gonzaga's division, Charles VIII was left on his own with just one attendant, a valet-de-chambre named Antoine des Ambus who was described as 'a small man, poorly armed'. Suddenly a squad of Milanese knights, apparently retreating from a clash at the northern end of the battlefield, appeared. They tried to capture the King, who hurriedly remounted his black horse, Sasso, and defended himself with his sword despite the fact that his helmet had already been damaged and would not close. After a few tense minutes Charles' bodyguard galloped up to drive off the Italians.

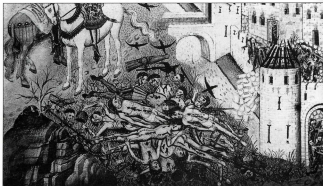


AFTERMATH

By the late afternoon the armies had disengaged. The League commanders met to discuss the situation and, fearing that the enemy still intended to march on Parma, remained in their positions. On the other side of the river Charles and his commanders met at Medesano to discuss their next move. Trivulzio and the other Italian condottieri urged a prompt counterattack in the belief that Ludovico Sforza's hold over Milan would collapse, but the French pointed out that their army was tired, a large part of the enemy force had not yet been engaged, night was falling and the river was still rising. Nor was there any sign that the League considered itself beaten. The French were, in fact, in considerable disorder, the army being divided between the villages of Felegara and Medesano. The latter only had one well and it was soon fouled by men and animals.

That night Charles' German mercenaries stood guard for a fee of 300 ecus, beating their drums to keep up morale. A 19-year-old page named Pierre du Terrail, the Seigneur de Bayard, was also knighted by King Charles for fighting with particular distinction. Pierre du Terrail had been a page to the Duke of Savoy since the age of 13 before transferring to Charles VIII. He would play a leading role in later French invasions of Italy before dying of wounds in 1524 and entering French military

'Corpses after a battle', in the *Chroniques de Nerval* by Jacques de Guise. It was normal to strip and despoil the enemy dead while the cutting power of many medieval weapons left covered limbs and heads on all sides. The carrion crows would also soon arrive. (Ms. 9242, f.20, Bibliothèque Royale, Brussels)





Trumpeters at the Betrothal of Clarisse and Renaud de Montauban; French manuscript of the second half of the 16th century. Both sides proclaimed victory at the battle of Fornovo, though the campaign as a whole was a defeat for the French. (Ms. Fr. 5073, Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal, Paris)

legend as the 'Chevalier sans peur et sans reproche'.

Having lost so much of their baggage, most of the French spent the night without tents, dry clothes or food. The dead and wounded remained largely unattended on the battlefield, as the French lacked the medical services seen in some Italian armies. In the League camp there was considerable excitement about the volume and value of the booty captured from the French baggage train. The *stradiotti* themselves had aimed for the King's baggage, bringing back up to 35 of the most heavily laden mules and horses as well as numerous chests dropped by the French servants as they fled. The total was said to value 180,000 gold ducats and included the King's jewelled ceremonial sword and helmet, two royal banners, several royal tents, the contents of the Royal Chapel, Charles' personal prayer book and his

reliquary. Even more personal was Charles' book of pornographic pictures seen and described by Alessandro Benedetti, a Venetian doctor in the League camp. Some regarded it as an account of the King's amorous conquests, others as a collection of business cards from Italy's leading prostitutes.

THE RETREAT TO ASTI

A truce was agreed on the morning of the 7th to collect the wounded and bury the dead while Philippe de Commines restarted negotiations. In the League camp Francesco Gonzaga assured de Commines that the captured Mathieu de Bourbon was being well treated and asked that his uncle Ridolfo be treated the same. Here the French representative had to point out that the French had no prisoners and that Ridolfo was dead. The following night King Charles decided to make a dash for Asti, but suggested that de Commines remain behind to continue negotiations, to which de Commines replied that he would not be the last in the saddle when the army moved off. Meanwhile, Niccolò Orsini, having fought his way to freedom during the battle of Fornovo, now offered his services to the Venetian *provveditori*.

In fact the League army had suffered far higher losses than the French, though the precise figures are confused. One French official report stated that they had lost only 25 dead, with five taken prisoner, whereas the League had lost 35,000 men. The Venetian *stradiot* *provveditore*, Piero Duodo, wrote to the Senate on 7 July claiming that the French lost 2,500 dead, 900 prisoners, and many more wounded, with the League losing only 500 dead. Both these hugely optimistic estimates were made in the excitement which followed the battle. Real losses were approximately 1,200 on the French side and 2,000 on the League's, including around 400 men-at-arms, most of whom were slaughtered after being unhorsed. More detailed evidence indicates that 300 of Gonzaga's cavalry division had been killed, as well as Ranuccio



ABOVE 'St Louis helps bury the Crusader dead after their defeat at Mansura', in the *Livre des faits de Monseigneur Saint Louis*, a manuscript made for King Charles VIII around 1466. The stench of a battlefield, particularly one in a hot climate such as that of Italy in summer, is again graphically shown in this miniature. The way in which the mutilated dead are gathered into great sacks before burial is, however, rarely portrayed with such brutal realism. (Ms. Fr. 2029, f.49v, Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris)

French. But no doubt when your men cleared up the field they found it difficult to be sure of the nationality of naked and bloody corpses.' The Gonzaga family suffered particularly heavy losses. In addition to Ridolfo Gonzaga, over half of Francesco's family companions had fallen, including Angelo Maffei known as 'the pillar of our army', Giovanni Maria da Gonzaga, Teofilo Colenuccio the famous cosartier, Bernardino da Signo, Galeazzo da Coreggio, Alessandro d'Este, Guido Martinengo, Giacomo Piccinino, Antonio Scarampi, Guido di Bagno and Giorgio Arcozi, three of these being Francesco's own cousins. In total the League army had lost 12 cavalry captains and four infantry captains. Among those who survived was Bernardino da Montone, who was found the following day terribly wounded and lying among the dead.

French losses included some 60 men-at-arms, 140 light cavalry, about 200 archers of the Royal Guard, and 800 other infantry, including many Gascon crossbowmen and personnel from the baggage train. Those specifically named include Julien Bourgeois, Captain of the Royal Guard, who was killed along with nine Scottish archers when the baggage was ransacked, the commander of the mounted crossbowmen, several senior officers under the Marshal of France, plus ten other officers. Guyot de Louviers, commander of artillery, was also killed, as was the 72-year-old Italian condottiere Francesco Secco. In addition to Mathieu de Bourbon, the king's chaplain and two young sons of leading French noblemen had been captured.

During the night of 7-8 July the French army assembled around Medesano. At dawn the signal trumpets sounded a change of guard as if

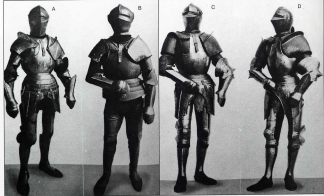


**THE STRADIOTTI
CAPTURE THE FRENCH
BAGGAGE TRAIN**

A large force of Venetian light cavalry, including Balkan stradiotti, swept around the rear of the French army to attack its left flank. But having done this, and having lost several leading officers, they attacked and looted the French baggage train. This caused the French great loss, some senior men being captured and King Charles losing his private collection of erotic art — much to the amusement of the men who found it. Their attention was diverted they took no further part in the battle. This may not have altered the final outcome, but it did mean that the French spent the following night in the open without bedding, tents or dry clothes.

no movement was intended, but in fact the French moved rapidly over the hill behind Medesano, along country tracks and through woods, getting lost several times before they reached the old Roman road near Fidenza (Borgo San Donnino) around midday. The German and Swiss infantry were prohibited from pillaging Fidenza as the army moved on to spend the night outside Florenzuola.

The League commanders were expecting negotiations and seemed unaware of the French retreat. Not until mid-afternoon was a small force of 200 Milanese light cavalry and Venetian stradiotti under Gaspare di San Severino ('Il Fracassa') able to cross the swollen river and follow the French. Francesco Gonzaga is normally thought to have remained with the main army, but a letter written on the night of the 10th-11th was sent from 'Turin Raze' — almost certainly modern Torrassa — which suggests that he was riding with San Severino. 'Il Fracassa' occupied Piacenza late on the 9th, the night that the French allowed themselves to be split by the rising River Trebbia just beyond Piacenza. The main force had reached the west bank but the artillery and its rearguard of 200 men-at-arms and the Swiss infantry were still on the east when the river, like



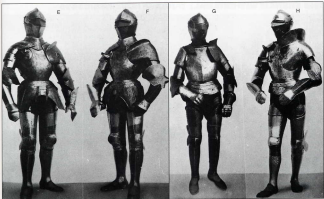
the Taro before it, suddenly rose following rain in the mountains. Some sources suggest that 'Il Fracasso' now received reinforcements, these perhaps being led by Francesco Gonzaga himself. As dawn rose, the French stretched ropes across the river and hauled their cannon to safety while the infantry used their trestle-mounted guns to ward off hovering *stradiotti* looking to harass them further.

On the 10th the main League force finally broke camp at Giarola to follow the French. They marched towards San Giorgio near Pavia from where they could watch French movements in Asti and Novara. That same day the small French garrison at Rapallo on the coast, isolated since the destruction of the French fleet, was overwhelmed by a combined Milanese and Genoese force. More booty from Naples, including many ancient statues, was captured, while part of the garrison did manage to escape over the mountains under the command of Philippe de Bresse.

Back in Parma King Charles' ceremonial helmet was taken in solemn procession to the cathedral as a votive gift in thanks for what was still seen as the League's victory at Fornovo; the rest of the French king's ceremonial and personal possessions were taken to Crema. Ordinary booty had already been divided among the troops, some *stradiotti* quickly deserting when they got their share and heading for the Adriatic coast in hope of finding ships and buying their passage home. Six were later arrested at Rimini, one in possession of King Charles' gold seal.

The League's most notable captive, Mathieu de Bourbon, was sent to Mantua Castle, where was given rooms once used by Giovanni Maria da Gonzaga, who had been killed at Fornovo. Bernardino Fortebraccio who commanded the League's left wing had been wounded 12 times but, after doctors removed several pieces of broken bone from his skull,

The armour preserved for many centuries in the Franciscan Monastery of Santa Maria dello Grazie include the finest single collection of 16th-century Italian armour. They were traditionally said to have been placed in the Sanctuary, situated approx-



mately eight kilometres west of Mantua, following the battle of Marignano in 1515; but in fact most date from up to half a century earlier. A-G: Mid-16th century armours. H: Late-15th/early 16th-century armour. (Palazzo Ducale, Mantua)

made a complete recovery and was walking around Venice within a few weeks. Niccolò Orsini offered ten gold coins for a religious ceremony in gratitude for his escape and there were huge public celebrations with music and fireworks when news of the battle reached Venice — Formoso was apparently still regarded as a victory.

The French, however, were more concerned to reach Asti and the security of friendly territory. On the night of the 10th they camped near Castel San Giovanni while the inhabitants passed food over the walls. On the 11th they were at Ponte Carone, but the following day 'Il Fracassa' and his shadowing force overtook King Charles to occupy Tortona. That night the French arrived, but again the two forces avoided a clash. 'Il Fracassa' even sent Charles a message regretting his inability to offer the King suitable accommodation. On the 15th the French reached Capriata d'Orba, a town which belonged to Gian Giacomo Trivulzio. On the 14th they made camp in open country south of Alessandria and the following night reached friendly territory at Nizza. On 16 July Charles finally linked up with the French garrison at Asti. His troops had marched over 200 kilometres in eight days with little food and even less drinkable water. The journey had been, according to Philippe de Comynes, 'the roughest I ever made in the course of my life, and I had some trying times with Duke Charles of Burgundy'.

Immediately Charles reached Asti, a knight named Philippe de la Coudre arrived with news of the serious situation in Novara, which had been blockaded since 1 July by the troops of Galeazzo di San Severino and Bernardino Cantarini, based at nearby Lumellogno. Costarini's *stradiotti* proved particularly effective in stopping most supplies reaching the French garrison, but the League force was not large enough to impose a proper siege. This required the main League army,

THE FRENCH WITHDRAWAL, 7 JULY-7 NOVEMBER 1495



but the *stradiotti* were angry at the way their *provveditore*, Piero Duodo, was being treated for the attack on the French baggage which, Francesco Gonzaga maintained, threw away the chance of a decisive victory.

THE SIEGE OF NOVARA

Once reassured that the main French force intended to remain in Asti, the League forces joined the existing blockade on the 17th. They established a new camp closer to Novara's walls at Casalaglio and drove the French outposts from Casalaglio, Borgo Verelli and Cameriano. Within two days the city was surrounded. The League troops then began diverting the water which powered Novara's mills and, on the 20th, destroyed those mills outside the city. A week later the Venetian Senate promoted Gonzaga to the rank of Captain General of Venice's armies, clearly satisfied with his performance so far. His young wife was not so happy and wrote: 'I pray and entreat you to be very careful and not to expose yourself [to danger] as I am sure you discharge your office best and most efficiently by giving orders to others rather than fighting yourself.'

Niccolò Orsini also joined the siege of Novara and would remain in Venetian service for another 14 years. There was, however, a considerable division of opinion among the leaders. Ludovico Sforza wanted to starve the French out and so avoid damage to his city, while the

ancient heroes Estore dressed in red, and Dario dressed in white.

That same day the troops besieging Novara 45 kilometres away, launched a major offensive, capturing most of the suburbs. The League commanders clearly felt that they had to bring matters to a head, and indeed the main French army moved from Asti to Turin only two days later. On 26 August the besiegers learned that a large French supply column with 1,500 troops under Monsieur de Coligny and Monsieur La Police would attempt a breakthrough. Instead it was ambushed, the escort defeated and the supplies captured. Just over a week afterwards the besiegers captured a monastery outside a city gate, Niccolò Orsini being wounded during this fierce fighting.

The last exit from Novara was now closed, but news also came that the French army was at last moving to nearby Verceili. The situation appeared to be nearing a climax but in reality both sides wanted to end the conflict. Winter was approaching and once snow closed the passes, communications with France would be almost impossible. Rumours that the king was too busy trying to seduce Anna Solara, daughter of the lord of Chieri, to save Novara were probably a myth. Nevertheless the king's attitude was undermining the morale of a French army already riven with sickness and acutely short of money.

Then the unexpected death of the Marquis of Monferrato provided an opportunity for the two sides to make contact. When Francesco Gonzaga's representative brought his master's condolences to the French, Philippe de Commines discreetly mentioned that Charles was interested in peace but felt that he, as the greatest king in Europe, could not make the first step. Nevertheless, de Commines agreed to broach the subject with Gonzaga and the Venetians on 7 September. It was a good moment. The French knew that the Novara garrison was at its last gasp, whereas the League knew that large numbers of Swiss mercenaries were about to reach the French army.

Official negotiations began between French-held Borgo Verceili and League-held Cameriano a week later. They continued for several days and, despite at least one serious outburst of temper, a final formal session was agreed for the 24th with the senior leaders present. The question of French use of Genoa as a naval base still nearly caused a breakdown, with Duke Ludovico Sforza declaring: 'I was not the cause of this invasion, nor is the fault mine if he [King Charles] has lost it [Genoa]. I am not willing to surrender the Citadel. If you will be honest, so will I. If you want peace, so do I. If you want war, then I want war — and so do all in this camp.' But in reality Ludovico was determined to make peace, even if it meant a separate deal excluding the Venetians, and so he agreed to allow the French to use Genoa's dockyards but not control the port. Milan would also remain neutral in the continuing struggle in Naples. Ludovico would pardon all Milanese subjects who had sided with the invaders, and release the men and the guns captured at Rapallo, while the French agreed to evacuate Novara. This

Relief carving of St George and the Dragon in the Campo San Zofora, Venice. It was made in 1406, the year after the battle of Fornovo and several years before the French army returned in greater and far more devastating numbers. (Author's photograph)





'Clovis, King of the Franks, defeating the Germans and Romans,' frontispiece of *The Song of Histories*, a French woodcut print by Pierre le Rouge, Paris 1488. The artist appears to have attempted to make Clovis look like Charles VIII, who was king when this woodcut was made. (Bibliothèque Municipale, Milan)

was a ticklish point of honour; the French, being prepared to give Novara back to its own citizens but not directly to the Duke of Milan.

That same day the starving garrison staggered out of Novara. Of the original 7,000 only 3,000 had survived, and of these only 600 were still fit for service. Many more died at the roadside as they struggled towards the first French outpost at Borgo Vercelli. Hundreds of others died, perhaps from overeating or overdrinking when they got there. Philippe de Comynes found 50 soldiers in a state of collapse at the last League outpost of Cameriano, and bought them soup at the cost of one *eca*.

THE RETURN TO FRANCE

Two days after the evacuation of Novara, Mathieu de Bourbon was also released in exchange for Count Ferragoso da Campofregoso. At the same time no less than 20,000 Swiss mercenary volunteers finally reached the French army at Vercelli. Unfortunately they were no longer required and there was no money to pay them. Not surprisingly the volunteers were upset and almost mutinous, though their presence did encourage Ludovico Sforza to conclude negotiations promptly on 9 October. The Peace of Vercelli concluded Charles VIII's adventure in Italy. It also left Venice free to help King

Ferrantino against the French in Naples. In fact, King Ferrantino had appeared off the coast of Naples on 6 July, the very day of the battle of Formico, prompting a rising against the French throughout much of the kingdom. Charles did send a senior courtier to Nice to raise a new fleet, but this failed too, and the French position in southern Italy gradually collapsed. The viceroy, Gilbert, Count of Montpensier, and large numbers of troops died from the 'mal de Naples' (syphilis) or malaria in 1497 and the last French garrison surrendered at Taranto in January 1497.

Meanwhile, Charles had forbidden the Duc d'Orléans to lead the new Swiss mercenaries against Milan and on 10 October the French moved towards Susa at the foot of the Maritime Alps. On the 25th they crossed the Monginevro Pass, just ahead of the winter snows, and on 7 November King Charles and his army were back at their starting point of Lyons.

RECKONING

Most military historians have condemned the League's strategy as too defensive in the light of French numerical inferiority, and Gonzaga's tactics as too complex at a time when forces of different allegiance were

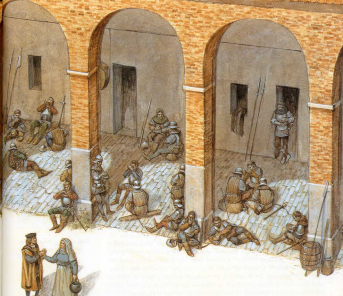


not accustomed to co-operating on the battlefield. But this judgement is contradictory, since the League's overall strategy was cautious and defensive primarily because of the difficulties of combining several armies and waraims.

French generalship was more limited in scope. The entire invasion was over-ambitious and politically inept, though the strategy was daring and successful. But at Fornovo the French leaders misread the League army's intentions and allowed themselves to be struck in the flank. This attack, however, failed because the river crossing proved to be more difficult than expected and because Francesco Gonzaga's fragile communications collapsed with the death of Ridolfo Gonzaga. It also seems clear that in terms of battlefield effectiveness, the French men-at-arms and Swiss infantry were superior to their Italian opposite numbers, particularly in their ruthlessness. In contrast it is equally clear that the League's Balkan *stradiotti* were the most effective light cavalry during the campaign.

The question of who really won the battle of Fornovo is still debated. The French always claimed victory while most Italian writers now claim

THE RETREAT FROM NOVARA
Both sides claimed to have won the battle of Fornovo, which was, in fact, a draw. But there was no doubt about who won the campaign, or the bitter siege of Novara which ended it. When the depleted, disease-ridden French garrison finally abandoned Novara they made their painful way to the village of Casertina near the front line between the



Two armies. Here one of King Charles' 'booby' men, Philip de Coneseyes, feasted around fifty starving and sick French soldiers resting in a foreyard, so he paid the forer's wife to make them soup or stew. Philip de Coneseyes' journal is, in fact, one of the most important and detailed accounts of the entire Italian campaign. (Richard Hook)

ILLUSTRATION BY TERRY

no more than a draw. Interest in the battle has, however, obscured the fact that the campaign resulted in a French defeat which, unlike the Italian Wars of the early 16th century, was inflicted by the armies of the Italian states alone.

At the time, however, the Italians thought they had also won the battle: the French 'ran away' across the mountains to Asti, Parma was 'saved', and huge booty had fallen into the League's hands. But even on the day after the battle there were those like the Venetian army paymaster, Daniel Vendramino, who wrote that the French 'had not suffered the defeat which we expected and desired'. Even Francesco Gonzaga admitted to his wife that it had been a close run thing, and complained that 'The chief cause of the disorder was the disobedience of the *stradiotti* who gave themselves up to plunder, and in the hour of danger not one of them appeared. By the grace of God we and this army have been saved, but many fled without being pursued by anyone, including most of the foot soldiers so that few of these remain. These things have caused me the greatest sorrow I have ever known, and if by ill luck our enemies had turned upon us we should have been utterly destroyed.' A fortnight

later the wounded Bernardino Fortebraccio addressed the Venetian Senate, saying: 'I must say this, for I cannot keep it back. We could have defeated this army, or even a still larger one, if our people had attended to the battle and not to the baggage train.'

Francesco Gonzaga put particular blame upon Piero Duodo, one of the *stradiotti proveddatori*. He replied by stating that the tactic of sending his men on such an extended flanking attack left them beyond direct control and that in any case the *stradiotti* fought very well. In fact the Venetian Senate handed Duodo's command over to Contarini during the siege of Novara, though Duodo was put in command of another *stradiotti* regiment in 1499.

Aftermath

As the years passed, and Italy fell under the domination of foreigners, the battle of Fornovo came to be seen as much more significant than it really was. Paolo Giovio, writing in the 1550s, maintained that was at Fornovo that 'Italy lost her ancient military renown. Foreign nations, which had been in awe of us until a short while before, began to regard us with a shameful contempt, and to the deplorable results of this unfortunate battle are to be attributed the miseries which have since come upon us in the enslavement of Italy.'

But that lay in the future. On 12 July Gonzaga told another writer that, 'by this feat of arms we not only recovered the honour of Italy but also the liberty of all'. Towards the end of July he had victory medals minted, with the mottoes '*ob resitutam italiae libertatem*' on one side and '*universae italiae liberator*' on the other. He also commissioned a special chapel to be built in Mantua, the Chiesetta della Vittoria, to contain a large painting by Andrea Mantegna called the Madonna della Vittoria, in which Gonzaga himself appeared. Meanwhile the French were equally convinced that they had won the battle of Fornovo by escaping relatively unscathed from a numerically superior foe. They found the painting by Mantegna particularly irritating and in 1797 a later French invasion took it back to Paris on the grounds that they were the true victors of Fornovo. It still hangs in the Musée du Louvre.

Whether or not the League army really won at Fornovo, or merely encouraged the retreating French on their way, the Venetian Senate was sufficiently satisfied to give Francesco Gonzaga a lump sum of 10,000 ducats, plus 1,000 for his wife and a further 10,000 ducats for compensation for those in his company who had been killed. The Venetian Republic's reputation for tight-fistedness seems unjustified as Venice had a long tradition of giving pensions to the families of those killed or injured in its service — even those of ordinary soldiers. After Fornovo a large sum was set aside for this purpose. The family of Ridolfo Gonzaga got a pension of 1,000 ducats a year and a dowry of 1,600 for Ridolfo's daughter. A special pension was also voted for the family of Giovanni Maria di Gonzaga, whose son was only ten months old when his father was killed. Command of 400 cavalry was offered to the sons of Ranuccio Farnese, this being their first military contract and one son, Vincenzo Corso was promised a *condotta* when he grew up. Francesco Bernardi and Carlo Strozzi inherited the smaller companies of their late brothers. The family of the dead constable Giovanni Blanco was given a house in the citadel of Verona with a pension of 6 ducats a month. Those who had



Carving of a knight, late 15th-century, Italian (Loggia del Marconi, Ancona)

distinguished themselves and survived were similarly rewarded. Bernardino Fortebraccio had the size of his company doubled and was given a personal allowance of 500 ducats a year. The provveditore Bernardo Contarini continued to lead Venetian *stradiotti* for several years and Niccolò da Nona, a less senior captain of *stradiotti*, had the size of his company increased.

France gained nothing from King Charles' invasion and had actually lost a great deal in relations to its neighbours Spain, the German Empire and even England. The events of 1494-95 had, however, shown the weakness of a fragmented Italy and other more effective invasions would follow. In purely military terms, the campaign demonstrated the full power of a mobile, state-owned artillery train. Swiss infantry tactics still proved to be more effective than other European infantry traditions, including the light infantry of Italy and Spain — at least until the later adopted much larger

numbers of hand-guns in the early 16th century. Heavily armoured lance-armed cavalry continued to dominate the battlefield and would only be challenged when the light cavalry similarly adopted firearms.

The Italians' lack of the ruthlessness compared to that shown by their enemies was also soon seen as a weakness, and considerable efforts would be made to introduce 'barbarian' savagery to Italian armies. It says something for the Italian character that such efforts never really worked. The Italian Wars which followed the 1494-95 invasion were no longer the *belle guerre* of previous decades, but were struggles for survival in which winning at all costs in the shortest possible time came to be seen as the military ideal.

THE BATTLEFIELD TODAY

Italy is not only one of the most beautiful countries, but also one of the easiest in which to travel off the beaten track. Not that there is much need to leave the road to see places associated with the French retreat from Italy in 1495. Mountains dominate communications throughout most of the country and the main roads are essentially the same as they were at the end of the 15th century. Public transport is extremely good, particularly the railway system, which still serves minor towns and even villages, while the country bus service gets everywhere. Nevertheless, a car is more practical when studying the relatively large-scale movements of armies involved in the Fornovo campaign.

Charles' retreat took him through many of the most historical and today most tourist-oriented cities in Italy. The siege of Novara, however, took place in an often neglected corner of the country. The battle of Fornovo itself was fought in a region which, though lying on one of the most important routes from the Lombard plain to the Mediterranean coast, is largely ignored by foreign visitors who dash through on the Parma to La Spezia autostrada. The slopes above the Taro valley and at the Cisa Pass are, however, popular with Italian holidaymakers seeking cooler air and quiet in the hills. There are, for example, registered campsites at Berreto and Borgo Val di Taro. The Agritourist system of renting cottages or farmhouses provides a very interesting alternative. Several possibilities exist at Borgo Val di Taro, Calestano, Fornovo and closer to Parma. There are, of course, hotels of various grades in Fornovo, Berreto and Pontremoli as well as the neighbouring cities.



ABOVE 'Foundation of Reno,' in the *Compendium Historiarum*, a French manuscript, late 15th-century. The labourers and other support personnel who accompanied all medieval and renaissance armies are only given passing mentions in the chronicles. (Ms. Fr. 79, 1204v, Bibliothèque de la Ville, Geneva)



LEFT St George; wall-painting by Vettor Carpaccio, Venetian, start of the 16th century. (Author's photograph; Church of San Giorgio degli Schiavoni, Venice)

FIGURE Late 15th- and early 16th-century German and Italian armours; part of a large collection assembled by the eccentric English antiquarian Frederick Stibbert in the 19th century. Each armour is worn by a lifelike wooden figure sold to represent one of the collector's many boyfriends. (Museum Stibbert, Florence)



BELOW The little town of Camogli lies on the western side of the Punta Chiappa peninsula, the town of Rapallo lying ten kilometres away on the eastern side. But Camogli retains more of the atmosphere and appearance of a small late 15th-century Genoese port. (Author's photograph)

The battlefield of Fornovo has probably changed little in 500 years, except for the notable presence of a modern autostrada motorway cutting right across the middle. Fornovo and the nearby villages have grown considerably and agriculture in the valley floor has been substantially mechanised. The course of the River Taro may have changed slightly, though only the position of the main channel within the broader river bed. A possible exception concerns the lost village of Gualtice, which stood near the church and farm of Ozzano, but was swept away by floods many years ago. Such floods may also have eroded the bank near Felegara, destroying the water mill mentioned in the historical sources. The



RIGHT 'Coeur reads an inscription which Delaine sleeps,' from *Le Coeur d'Amour épris* by René of Anjou; French manuscript of c.1470. (Mo. 2097, Nationalbibliothek, Vienna)



ABOVE 'San Liberale', on a painting of the Madonna with Saints by Lorenzo Lotto, early 16th century. Military saints seem to have been an increasingly popular subject at a time when Venice was embroiled in the destructive Italian Wars. (Author's photograph; Church of San Cristina at Quinto, near Treviso)



remaining disused and barely visible Canale della Sibone opposite Oppiano and Giarola may be the remains of the 15th-century Aquilada Canal.

Fords across this part of the Taro are no longer used, and in fact when the river is low there is little difficulty walking across almost anywhere. Old maps either indicate, or suggest by the presence of footpaths, the existence of fords at Giarola, Oppiano, from a point between Oppiano and Ozzano, at Ozzano itself, and close to the existing road and railway bridges at Fornovo. Apart from tracks leading to the riverbank now used by fishermen and sunbathers in summer, little evidence remains of these fords except at Oppiano, where an overgrown footpath continues from the end of the existing road, over the lip of the river bank and down to the water's edge.

A similar situation can be seen on the other side of the river where the main part of the battle was fought. The only problem here is getting from the old road, which hugs the adjacent foothills, across the railway and the autostrada to the river. Several minor access roads cross the former, but it can be more difficult finding the one (or perhaps more) which go through tunnels beneath the autostrada. On both sides of the Taro, the final hundred or so metres to the river consist of unmetalled bumpy tracks which are, however, still passable by car — at least in dry weather.

CHRONOLOGY

1494

- August 1494** - The Duc d'Orléans brings a fleet from Marseilles to Genoa.
- 23 August 1494** - Charles VIII and French army leaves Vienna; begin march via Susa to Turin.
- Early September 1494** - Neapolitan-Aragonese force occupies Rapallo; fleet withdrawn, garrison remains.
- 5 September 1494** - French fleet attacks Neapolitan-Aragonese garrison in Rapallo by sea, Italian allies of French attack overland; garrison massacred, Charles VIII enters Turin with large French army; later links up with the Duc d'Orléans in Asti.
- 7 October 1494** - Charles VIII and French army leaves Asti; Duc d'Orléans remains.
- Mid-October 1494** - Clash between Milanese-French and Neapolitan-Papal armies near Bologna.
- 21 October 1494** - Ludovico Sforza becomes Duke of Milan.
- Late October 1494** - Charles VIII links up with Baili of Dijon who is bringing Swiss troops overland from Genoa, and French heavy artillery arriving by sea at La Spezzia; sack and massacre Florentine Fivizzano; loot Florentine Lunigiana; defeat Florentine reinforcements.
- 30 October 1494** - Florence surrenders six towns and castles to French.
- November 1494** - Neapolitan-Aragonese in Romagna withdraw south to the Marches; Pope recalls troops to defend Rome.
- 17 November 1494** - Charles VIII enters Florence.
- December 1494** - Prospero and Fabrizio Colonna desert Papal cause and seize Ostia; French seaborne force lands south of Rome; Neapolitan-Aragonese army in Marches withdraws to Neapolitan frontier.
- 30 December 1494** - Charles enters Rome.

1495

- 21 January 1495** - Aragonese King Alfonso of Naples abdicates, Ferrantino becomes king.
- January 1495** - French advance force invades Abruzzi region.
- 31 January 1495** - French column pillages Montelortino.
- 9 February 1495** - French capture Monte San Giovanni and slaughter male population.
- February 1495** - French defeat Neapolitan-Aragonese army in Voltumo valley.
- 22-23 February 1495** - Charles enters Naples; King Ferrantino flees to Ischia.
- 31 March 1495** - Several Italian states sign anti-French League of Venice.
- 29 May 1495** - Charles VIII and bulk of French army begin retreat from Naples.
- Early June 1495** - League of Venice forces assembly at Senega.
- 13-14 June 1495** - The Duc d'Orléans captures Novara from Duchy of Milan.
- 15 June 1495** - Francesco Gonzaga takes command of League forces.
- 20 June 1495** - Charles VIII reaches Pias.
- 22 June 1495** - League main army crosses Po River.
- Late June 1495** - Minor League force marches against French-held Novara; French column sent against Genoa from Sarzana supported by French fleet which was defeated by Genoaese; French garrison remains in Rapallo; Swiss mercenaries in French army massacre population of Pontremoli.
- 27 June 1495** - League main force assembles near Giarda.
- End of June 1495** - French advance guard cross Cisa Pass; Trivulzio proclaims campaign to overthrow Duke Ludovico of Milan.
- 1 July 1495** - Small League force blockades Novara; League main force completes fortified camp at Giarda; French advance guard defeated outside Fornovo.
- 3-4 July 1495** - Main French army crosses Cisa Pass, takes control of several local castles, joins advance guard at Terenzo.
- 6 July 1495** - French take control of Fornovo; negotiations start between French and League commanders; French reconnaissance force defeated.
- 6 July 1495** - Battle of Fornovo.
- 8 July 1495** - French retreat towards Asti.
- Night 8-10 July 1495** - French army divided by River Trébica; League cavalry driven off.
- 10 July 1495** - French at Rapallo defeated, part of garrison escaping across mountains; League main force leaves Galano.
- 16 July 1495** - League main force reaches San Giorgio di Lomellina; French main force reaches Asti.
- 17 July 1495** - League main force joins siege of Novara.
- 19-20 July 1495** - League forces divert Novara's water supplies.
- 27 July 1495** - Francesco Gonzaga promoted to Captain General of Venetian armies.
- 16 August 1495** - League forces capture Novara suburbs.
- 17 August 1495** - French main army moves to Turin.
- Night 26/27 August 1495** - League forces defeat French relief column outside Novara.
- 4 September 1495** - French garrison withdraws within old city of Novara.
- Early September 1495** - French main force moves to Vercelli.
- 13 September 1495** - Negotiations start between French and League representatives.
- 24 September 1495** - French garrison evacuates Novara.
- 6-10 October 1495** - Duke Ludovico of Milan makes peace with French; French start assembling at Susa.
- 23-28 October 1495** - French army crosses Montginevro Pass to Grenoble.
- 7 November 1495** - French army reaches Lyons.

WARGAMING FORNOVO

As with any battle, there are various factors to take into consideration when re-fighting Fornovo. The rules you choose to use will have a major effect on every other aspect of the game. The figure scale is also an important consideration. The scale you choose and the size of the engagement may well be determined by the number and type of figures at your disposal. The interests of your companions may also have an influence on whether you opt to adhere strictly to the historical course of events or include possible variations and 'what if' scenarios.

The rules used will normally determine the figure scale and thus the number of figures deployed. The Wargames Research Group's *De Bellis Renationis* are particularly suitable for re-creating this particular battle. They have their weaknesses but when considering Fornovo they save a considerable amount of tinkering because their mechanisms automatically cover aspects of the battle that were important. For example, the player initiative point system. Commanders in close combat need to use more points to move the same number of figures. Hence when Gonzaga plunges into the combat, he probably hasn't enough points left to move his infantry across the river to support him. This inbuilt feature saves you having to add battle specific rules to your house set.

With regard to which figure scale to use, for this battle 25 mm and 15 mm are all much of a muchness. 15 mm is potentially cheaper, 25 mm is potentially prettier. With 2 mm, 6 mm or 10 mm figures you do have a chance of looking at a much wider picture. With these scales it may be interesting to consider starting the game with the French deciding whether to cross the Taro or not. The smaller figures effectively give you a larger ground scale and this scenario allows you to take advantage of this. If you decide upon this option then I'd suggest a degree of hidden movement for the first few moves. This means that the French do get a chance to bluff. The League forces have to decide whether to throw troops across the river ahead of the French only to have the French not cross the river themselves. While this can give a very interesting game it won't really be the Battle of Fornovo.

The choice of which set of rules to use will also have a bearing on the number of figures required to re-fight the battle. *De Bellis Renationis* (DBR) has a relatively simple figure scale. Figures are permanently mounted on card bases with a 40mm frontage. Hence a base can represent almost any

'St. Louis lands at Damietta,' in the *Livre des faits de Monseigneur Saint Louis*. The saintly king is portrayed in entirety in gilded armour, riding an armoured horse and attended by armed retainers. (Ms. Fr. 2829, f.36v, Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris)



number of troops. A base of close order infantry such as pikemen represents about 100 men. A Base of Men-at-Arms, light horse or skirmishing infantry represents about 50 men. You can pack about 250 rabble onto a Base of horse. The prime consideration is whether you have enough figures available for the scale you choose. For example, the French have somewhere in the region of 4,000 skirmishing crossbowmen. At 50 men to a base you will need eighty bases (160 figures) of loose order skirmishing crossbowmen. If you work at half the normal scale it should bring the numbers within the reach of more people. However, if you have the figures don't be afraid to double all the numbers. If you do decide to double up the size of the armies you will find you are fighting a very different battle. This is because the French automatically get all their troops on the side of the river where the action is. The League forces still have to cross at the same choke points. They cannot get men into action any faster however many bases they are given. As a rule of thumb the more figures you play with, the larger the French advantage.

THE FRENCH ARMY

Let us now look at the Participants. First the French. Their order of battle is detailed below I will use DBR terms as these tend to be a lingua franca in the hobby.

You will see I have made the Swiss stronger than their numbers would really warrant. Pikes need to be used in large units. Also the Swiss were very effective and by artificially increasing their strength we help model this. The Men-at-Arms are also 'too strong' but one base is the Commander and his personal following.

Here again we have to make educated guesses. The French infantry

Advanced Guard

2,500 Swiss

14 bases of Elite Pikes (Pike (S))
plus 2 bases of Halberdiers (Bladed (F))

300 (Dismounted Archers)
200 Guard crossbowmen
350 Mixed Men at Arms
Mounted crossbows
(number unknown)
Artillery

These two / would amalgamate to produce two
bases of Close order Crossbows (Bows (C))
4 Bases of Knights in full armour (Lances (S))
2 bases light horse (LH (F))
2 heavy guns, 1 light gun, Artillery (S)

The Centre

The King

The Army's commander who fights as one
base of Lances (S)
2 bases of Knights in full armour Lances (S)
3 bases of Light Horse (LH (F))
12 bases of crossbow-armed
Skirmishing Infantry (Sk (C))

350 Men-at-Arms
350 Mounted Crossbowmen
1,150 Infantry

The Rear

300 Men-at-Arms
3,000 French Infantry

3 bases of Lances (S), one of which is the commander
Perhaps allied with 100 Scottish Archers.
15 bases of Skirmishing Crossbowmen (Sk (C))
2 bases French Pikemen (Pike (S))

of the period were predominantly skirmishing crossbowmen, so this is reflected in their numbers.

All we know of the infantry in the rearguard is that there were at least 1,000 poor quality infantry. As there were 7,000 infantry in the army and we can place about 4,000 elsewhere this leaves 3,000 trailing along at the back with the baggage train.

It is not clear how many of these infantry were actually present. Poor quality infantry somehow tend to miss decisive battles. As the French army had been retreating through rough country I suspect that thirty bases of skirmishing crossbowmen grossly overestimates their military potential. I would compromise on a weaker force with a little variety, after all the French did have a few poor-quality native pikemen.

The Baggage

This poorly organised rabble is best shown by using whatever wagons and carts you have accompanied by three or four bases of Horde (O). These represent the 1,500 servants and some of the 3,000 infantry who were unavoidably detained when the rearguard was forming up.

For French organisation I would give them four commands. The Advanced guard, Centre and Rear including the baggage are obvious enough. The fourth is as a result of our experience fighting battles of the period. We have come to the conclusion that in French armies the Swiss should be a command entirely on their own. Not only that but they will always use their points to attack with all speed. This we find produces very authentic tactics as the Swiss hurtle forwards, normally obscuring any supporting artillery, accompanied by the French Men at Arms who are the only ones able to keep up. The rest of the army is reduced to supporting the assault with polite applause.

THE LEAGUE

Italian infantry are even more difficult to pin down to troop types than French. Again it depends upon just what you have. I would suggest a majority of close order crossbowmen (Bows (O)) and lesser numbers of skirmishing crossbowmen (Sk (O)), sword and buckler men (Blades (F)) and a very few inferior local pikemen (Pike (O)).

Other infantry (number unknown) depends what figures you have. Numbers are irrelevant as you will never get them across the river and even crossbowmen don't have the range to do much damage on the other side. We actually played the game without them, but if you do have suitable figures put another twenty plus bases in.

Organising the League force is quite straightforward. We made the Right Wing, the Camp and the Heavy Guns all one command. The Flanking force was also a separate command. The Centre and Left were obviously the remaining two commands, the only discussion being over allocating the cavalry reserve and infantry. It was left up to the player appointed League commander to decide just how the additional troops were shared between centre and left.

With regard to the terrain, the main problem is getting across the river. Certainly it doesn't seem that anyone had trouble with the fords earlier in the engagement but problems were encountered later. When

The Right

600 Men-at-Arms
2000 Infantry

6 bases of Lancers (C), one of whom is the commander.
I'd suggest 4 Pike (C) for the German
6 bases of close order Crossbows (Bow (C))

The Camp

300 Men-at-Arms
1,000 Infantry

3 bases of Lancers (C)
5 bases of close order Crossbows (Bows (C))

The Heavy Cannon

Two bases of Heavy guns, (Artillery (C))
5 bases of close order Crossbows (Bows (C))

The Centre

500 Men-at-Arms
600 Mounted Crossbowmen

5 bases of Lancers (C), one of whom is the commander.
6 bases of Light Horse (LH (F))

Cavalry reserve

500 Men-at-Arms

5 bases of Lancers (C)

The Left

500 Men-at-Arms

6 bases of Lancers (C), one of whom is the commander

The Infantry Between Centre and Left

4,000 of the Best Venetian

Perhaps 5 bases Arquebusers (Shot (S))
10 bases close order Crossbows (Bows (C))
5 bases *Sword and Buckler* men (Blacks (F))
5 bases of close order Crossbows (Bows (C))

1,000 Mantuan

The Flanking force

600 Stradiots
600 Mounted crossbowmen
200 Other Light cavalry

6 bases Light Horse (C), one of whom is the commander.
6 bases of Light Horse (LH (F))
2 bases of Light Horse (LH (C))

using DBR I'd call the river 'tricky' for the first five moves and 'dangerous' from then on. For other rules this means that until move 6 you can cross a ford without problems, and after this roll a d6 for each base as it crosses. The first base in a column to attempt the crossing needs a 5 or better, those following just need a 2 or better. Failure to make the dice roll means that the ford is no longer practicable. For game purposes you can only cross the river at a ford.

The field of pebbles doesn't seem to have had a demonstrable effect on the battle. Both sides, cavalry were potentially equally affected and there are no examples of infantry using this terrain to keep cavalry at bay. We ending up ignoring the pebbles, as if included they could have had a disproportionate effect on the game.

The weather was dreadful with heavy rain. It would have made the use of gunpowder weapons difficult. Roll a d6 every move. If you roll a one then it begins raining and whilst you can still fire cannon, arquebuses are waterlogged. Keep on rolling every move, if you roll another one then even cannon can no longer fire.

The League flanking force took careful handling. We felt that Stradiots wouldn't be too bothered by the terrain. It might be rough



Cronaca di Paratore, S. 243.
'Entry of the Swiss into Naples in 1485', made around the time of the event. All the main elements in a typical Swiss mercenary force of this period are shown: flag-bearer, drummer, pike men, crossbowmen and hand-gunners.
(The Pierpont Morgan Library, New York, N.001, f.150)

country to the French but surely not to a Balkan light cavalryman so we didn't penalise them for fighting in the hills. The other light cavalry we did allow the rules to handicap. We also ran into one problem with DBZ. The light cavalry didn't spontaneously wander off to loot the baggage! Something had to be done about that so we introduced the following rule which will work under any rule set. Any base of light cavalry which is not in contact with either a friendly or enemy base and can see the baggage will take a free move towards it.

So far we have just looked at trying to reflight Fornovo. However, what about a few 'what if' scenarios. One that immediately springs to mind is what if the League forces had crossed the river ahead of the French and deployed to await their arrival. You could merely place the entire League army on the opposite bank. However, the French players could legitimately not cross the Taro. This would lead to the battle being fought in reverse with the League forces trying to fight their way back across the fords. Even if the French play ball the League forces would be so compressed in the narrow gap between river and hills that the Swiss and French Men-at-Arms might well go through them like a hot knife through butter.

A more interesting variant would be half the League forces placed across the river. You then have the French player trying to smash his way through with Men-at-Arms and the Swiss whilst the rearguard attempt to block off the fords.

When we tried this battle we surprised ourselves by just how close it was. Getting players to act historically wasn't difficult, the victory conditions did it all for us. The French must get their army and baggage off the table heading north, the League must stop them. For an Italian alliance the League was virtually free of backstabbing so we never tried to encourage it. Just give the players their figures and tell them their victory conditions. The rest is up to them.

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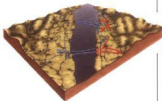
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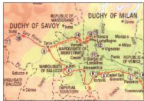
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