

Battle of Lonato

The **Battle of Lonato** was fought on 3 and 4 August 1796 between the French Army of Italy under General Napoleon Bonaparte and a corps-sized Austrian column led by Lieutenant General Peter Quasdanovich. A week of hard-fought actions that began on 29 July and ended on 4 August resulted in the retreat of Quasdanovich's badly mauled force. The elimination of Quasdanovich's threat allowed Bonaparte to concentrate against and defeat the main Austrian army at the Battle of Castiglione on 5 August. Lonato del Garda is located near the SP 668 highway and the Brescia-Padua section of Autostrada A4 to the southwest of Lake Garda.

On 29 July, the Austrians advanced out of the Alps to capture the towns of Gavardo and Salò on the west side of Lake Garda. The Austrians followed up this success by surprising and seizing the French base at Brescia on 30 July. An Austrian brigade captured Lonato del Garda on the 31st but was ejected from the town by a French counterattack after tough fighting. Also on the 31st, a French division briefly recaptured Salò, rescued a small band of compatriots, and fell back. This series of combats and other battles east of Lake Garda compelled Bonaparte to raise the **siege of Mantua**.

Leaving only one division to observe the main Austrian army to the east, Bonaparte assembled overwhelming force and recaptured Brescia on 1 August. Quasdanovich regrouped around Gavardo on 2 August, while ordering an attack by several columns for the next day. On 3 August, one of the Austrian columns defeated a French brigade and captured Lonato for the second time. However, the French also attacked that day, capturing Salò and nearly taking Gavardo. With most of the Austrian forces placed on the defensive, Bonaparte massed against the solitary brigade in Lonato and crushed it. This disaster caused Quasdanovich to order a retreat on 4 August. In a final calamity, one withdrawing Austrian column was cut off and captured.

Background

At the end of July an Austrian army set out from Trento with the purpose of relieving the besieged fortress of Mantua. While the main army under Field Marshal Dagobert von Wurmser drove south down the upper Adige River valley to the east of Lake Garda, the Right Column under Quasdanovich struck on the west side of Lake Garda. This 18,000-strong corps consisted of four mixed (cavalry and infantry) brigades led by General-Majors Peter Karl Ott von Bätorkéz, Heinrich XV, Prince of Reuss-Plauen, Joseph Ocskay von Ocsko, and Johann Rudolf von Spörck.^[1] The Right Column also included two advanced guards, led by Obersts (colonels) Franz Joseph, Marquis de Lusignan and Johann von Klenau.

Bonaparte did not believe that major Austrian forces were capable of operating in the mountains west of Lake Garda.^[2] Consequently, only General of Division Pierre François Sauret's 4,500-man division defended the area, with garrisons in Salò on the western shore of the lake, Gavardo on the Chiese River west of Salò, and Desenzano del Garda at the southwestern corner of the lake. The French held Brescia with only three companies of infantry.

Operations

See *Castiglione 1796 Campaign Order of Battle* for a detailed list of French and Austrian units.

West of Lake Garda

On 29 July, Ott's brigade attacked Salò while Ocskay's brigade moved against Gavardo. General of Brigade Jean-Baptiste Dominique Rusca was warned by a village curate of Austrian descent, but chose to disregard the information. Consequently, the Austrians took Sauret's division by surprise. The French general withdrew to Desenzano after a stiff fight in which 500 Frenchmen and two cannons were captured. At Salò, General of Brigade Jean Joseph Guieu and 400 men took refuge in the Palazzo Martinengo where they were blockaded by Ocskay's soldiers.^[3]

Receiving a report that Brescia lay open to attack, Klenau advanced in the night with two squadrons of the Wurmser Hussar Regiment # 30, one battalion of DeVins Infantry Regiment (IR) # 37, and one company of the *Mahony Jägers*. The next morning, under cover of fog, he seized the city in a coup de main. The Austrians captured 600–700 able-bodied soldiers plus 2,000 more in the hospital. Among the prisoners were Colonels Jean Lannes, Joachim Murat and François Étienne de Kellermann. Quasdanovich soon arrived at Brescia with the brigades of Reuss and Spörck.^[4] At the same time, Ott's brigade advanced south from Salò and Gavardo to reach Ponte San Marco, where the Brescia-Verona highway crosses the Chiese just west of Lonato. Ocskay's troops besieged the French soldiers trapped in Salò. That night, Bonaparte determined to give up the siege of Mantua and concentrate his main strength against Quasdanovich while subsidiary forces held Wurmser at bay.^[5]

"First" Battle of Lonato

On 31 July Ott's brigade advanced to San Marco advanced to the east on Lonato. The Austrian general led two battalions of the *Kheul* Infantry Regiment Nr. 10, four companies of the *Johann Jellaic* Infantry Regiment Nr. 53, two companies of the *Licaner Grenz* Infantry Regiment Nr. 60, and one squadron of the *Erdödy* Hussar Regiment Nr. 11. The initial attack flushed part of General of Division Hyacinthe François Joseph Despinoy's division out of Lonato. As the Hussars chased the fugitives to the east, they were repulsed by two waiting French artillery batteries. General of Division André Masséna with General of Brigade

Battle of Lonato
Part of the Italian campaign of 1796–1797 in the War of the First Coalition



General Bonaparte at the battle of Lonato

Date	3–4 August 1796
Location	Lonato del Garda, present-day Italy 45°27′40″N 10°29′04″E
Result	French victory
Belligerents	
 France	 Austria
Commanders and leaders	
 Napoleon Bonaparte	 Peter Quasdanovich
 André Masséna	 Dagobert von Wurmser
Strength	
20,000	15,000
Casualties and losses	
2,000 casualties	5,000 casualties 23 guns



Location within Alps

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