

*Born 7/4/1807*

*He fought for the freedom of his fellow men*

## Garibaldi the Liberator

By

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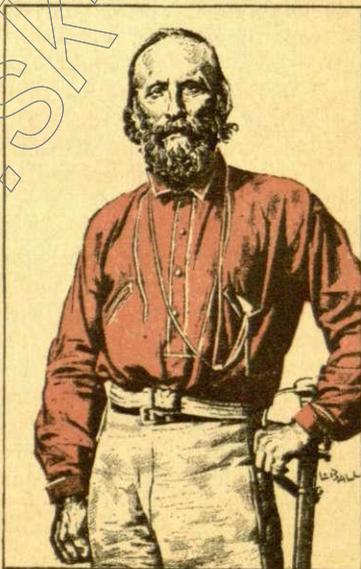
**A**NYONE will fight for his own liberty, but your true hero is the man who sets others free. To Italians "the Liberator" is Giuseppe Garibaldi, who fought for freedom not only in the Old World but in the New. Born on the Fourth of July, 1807, he liked to hold up to the disunited states of Italy, as a glorious example, the United States of America. With a smile as warm as the sun of Sicily and a voice that in battle rang clarion as Caruso's, he was the very personification of his beautiful country, which, until he came to its rescue, did not yet exist as a nation.

For Italy then was partitioned among the great powers and their puppets. Across the rich northern plains from Venice to Milan lay the mailed hand of

the Austrian Empire. The Papal States, heavily policed, stretched tight across the "leg" of the Italian peninsula, like a blood-stopping tourniquet. The foot, or southern Italy, and the island of Sicily were ruled by "King Bomba," so called because he blew up his subjects with bombs. Everywhere spies, police raids, imprisonments without war-

rant or trial, firing squads. Only in the half-free Kingdom of Sardinia (the island plus the northwestern mainland next to France) was there a native Italian king.

In the early years of the last century Italian patriots fought hit or miss. The man who was to lead them was still a young sailor knocking around the ports of the Mediterranean, growing tough in body, skilled of



*Read. Dig '54, June*

Work on condition that it become a museum. It was acquired by the Order of Sons of Italy in 1915.

hand, his friendly face getting ruddier with weather, his blue eyes keener with scanning the sea. Whispers came to him of an underground movement called "Young Italy" led by the exiled patriot Mazzini. One dark night in Marseilles he sought out this Mazzini, a frail, burning intellectual dedicated to the dream of a free, united Italy under a republic. From him Garibaldi learned more about the *Risorgimento*, the upsurging movement for liberation.

The young sailor was assigned a part in Mazzini's plot to drive the King of Sardinia from his throne. He was to join the Sardinian Navy and with his confederates seize a ship and bomb the fortifications of Genoa. But before the moment to strike, it all fell through, owing to Mazzini's bad timing. Garibaldi escaped arrest only by fleeing over the frontier to France. There in a newspaper he read that a court-martial had sentenced him to death.

That is how Garibaldi, at 29 a man without a country, came to try his luck in the New World. In Rio de Janeiro he secured an old bark of 20 tons, made her seaworthy for coastwise sailing and christened her the *Mazzini*. Two revolutions were then flourishing in the south of Brazil. The states of Santa Catarina and Rio Grande do Sul had declared their independence of the Portuguese Emperor, and to these phantom republics the exile offered his services. He suffered shipwreck, bullet

wounds, even torture, but his only real successes were gained when he stopped Brazilian merchant ships and seized their cargos and crews.

One day, scanning the shore with his spyglass, Captain Garibaldi beheld a girl so beautiful that he ordered his gig forthwith. The navy, he suddenly decided, needed supplies. The first person he encountered was Senhor Ribeiro, a rope merchant, who invited his customer to his house. The girl who brought the coffee that in hospitable Brazil precedes business was his daughter, Anita, the girl seen in the spyglass. Eighteen, her figure tautened by horsemanship, her oval, olive face framed in blue-black hair, her black eyes sparkling and speaking, she proved on this closer look to be for Garibaldi the one woman in the world. The merchant waved her away to the back of the house. But she had looked in the deep eyes of this blond bearded buccaneer, and heard him murmur in Italian, "You should be mine!"

Then and there Garibaldi asked her father for her hand; he was refused, and Anita was locked in her room, with her brothers set to guard her. They must have sided with her, though, for the lovers managed to carry on a correspondence. One night when a gig from the little rebel navy touched at the beach Anita was waiting. When she stepped aboard she left the shores of safety forever.

Soon after, Garibaldi's fleeing vessels were shelled by three Brazilian

warships; concussion knocked Anita senseless atop a pile of dead men. As soon as she came to, she was bandaging the wounded with strips torn from her skirts, and later when the gunner at her side was blown to bits she manned the gun, loading, aiming, firing at her captain's command. That was their honeymoon.

When this revolution collapsed, Garibaldi with his followers escaped inland to the wilderness pampas. There the little party used the ruins of an abandoned plantation for shelter, and here Anita bore her first child. Three months later they fled through mountainous jungle until they reached sanctuary within the borders of the republic of Uruguay.

The little family settled in the capital, Montevideo, but peace could never bring prosperity to Giuseppe Garibaldi. Engineer, teacher, ship broker, importer of macaroni — he tried his best but always he failed; his life long he never had a head for business. There seemed no place in a workaday world for Garibaldi's gifts. Then in 1843 Uruguay was invaded by the dictator Rosas of Argentina.

Five years later the Argentine army was still stalled outside Montevideo. Rosas blamed none so bitterly as a band of demons in red shirts. Greatly outnumbered, they had twice defeated him in open battle. These "Red Shirts" called themselves the Italian Legion, unpaid volunteers roused by Garibaldi to the defense of the country

that sheltered them. Casting about for uniforms, they had come on a lot of red linen damaged by fire in a warehouse. Anita and the other Italian wives cut and stitched. And a red shirt was forever after the battle dress of Garibaldi and all who followed him.

Their exploits assured the freedom of Uruguay and rang out over the world. To the leader there came, by way of a hint as well as an honor, a sword from the Young Italy Society. Fingering its gleaming edge, Garibaldi must have remembered how on the slopes of his homeland the olive trees turn silver when the wind blows, and how between the hills the Mediterranean glitters.

So in 1848 Garibaldi stepped on Italian soil once more, 60 Red Shirts at his back, the sentence of death still on his head. But he was met by cheering crowds, and a cordial summons from the King of Sardinia, who was threatened by the Austrian Emperor. When the king refused to give a commission to so plebeian an adventurer, Garibaldi led his Red Shirts independently against the Austrians. And when the king's regulars were defeated near Milan and Sardinia sued for peace, Garibaldi's only question was, "Where do we fight next?"

The answer came from the heart of Italy — Rome. There the people had risen; the Pope had fled to the protection of "King Bomba" of Naples. By popular acclaim, after

1800 years of oblivion, the once-glorious Roman Republic was revived. Against it were ranked not only the Austrian Empire, the Pope, "King Bomba" and meddling Spain but now France, too. For Louis Napoleon suddenly landed 10,000 crack troops on the coast near Rome and sent them marching upon the Eternal City.

To its defense rode Garibaldi, his Red Shirts behind him, after them the *Bersaglieri*, mostly in their teens, smartly uniformed in dark blue with cocks' tails glinting in their hats. Then civilian volunteers, workmen in their smocks, peasants from the fields, shopkeepers, old men, boys. Marching in their midst was Father Ugo Bassi, the red-shirted friar who preached rebellion from the very steps of the churches. On they swept, through the streets of Rome, an army that swelled like a river in angry flood.

This "riffraff," as the enemy scornfully called it, of some 2000 was assigned to the defense of the Janiculum Hill, the most perilous salient outside the city walls. On April 30 Garibaldi beheld 7000 glittering French bayonets advancing. In a bold dash he led his men to take up forward positions among the roses and pines of the surrounding villa gardens. From noon till dark the "Battle of the Roses" raged; then a white and shaken French general sued for an armistice.

Now from the south came troops of "King Bomba." Garibaldi was sent out to delay them. Instead

he drove them back into Neapolitan territory, where the people rose in such response to him that the whole southern half of Italy might have been liberated then and there had not "the Liberator" been summarily recalled and rebuked for having "attacked without permission."

Now the French again trained their siege guns on the Janiculum Hill. And again the Garibaldians were ordered to its defense — but held back by the irresolute "brass" until the French had taken impregnable positions. For a month the Italians fought off waves of attack, under constant shelling. In the midst of this, Garibaldi saw at the door of his headquarters Anita, whom he had thought safe at his mother's house in Nice. Pregnant though she was, she had come to stand at his side, ready to die there.

It is peaceful now on the Janiculum, with the blackbirds fluting in the pines and the sunlight tranquil on walls once battered by French guns and spattered with Italian blood. But here died the nobles' sons, the peasants, the clerks, the workmen; here the Red Shirts lost almost every officer of the old Montevideo days. Republican Rome surrendered. But not Garibaldi. He swore he would fight on, from the hills. So on Rome's last day of freedom he rode through her streets, Anita pale on a black horse beside him. Four thousand followed them, all in the red shirts that marked

the wearer for an outlaw's death — or for glory.

That retreat across Italy remains a national epic. Some 65,000 troops were spread in a net to catch these patriots without a country. Zigzagging through the wild Apennine mountains, Garibaldi led his men through the meshes. He seemed to be everywhere at once, and thus inspired rumors of vast forces under his command. The truth was that his following diminished, for hope, too, dwindled. As blazing July closed, only 1500 desperate men stood with their leader before the gates of San Marino.

This tiny republic had for centuries offered all political refugees sanctuary. Garibaldi claimed it now for his starving and exhausted followers. He himself did not tarry, nor did Anita or a handful of other die-hards. Escaping through enemy lines, they crossed the Rubicon where once Caesar had and reached the coast near the mouths of the river Po. Just a little farther now and they could sail for Venice.

But all that last day Anita had been delirious with malaria, begging piteously for water under the August sun. Garibaldi carried her thus to the waiting boats, but soon the Austrians were pushing out from shore to intercept them. Garibaldi's ship escaped briefly, only to be driven ashore, where he carried his dying love through the dusk into the sonorous pine groves. Distantly he could hear the baying of bloodhounds, and sometimes a shot

and a scream as the Garibaldians were tracked down. In the night, in a last long breath, Anita escaped forever. They laid her in a grave in the dune sands.

So it was over, the world thought, the bright dream of a free and united Italy. Unnoticed was the Italian candlemaker living on Staten Island, New York, or, later, the merchant seaman who went ashore at Lima or Canton, Manila or Boston. But the throne of Sardinia had passed to the young Victor Emmanuel II, a true liberal, and through the grapevine of political exile word came to Garibaldi that the new king would permit him to return. So in 1855 the wanderer bought a farm on the stony islet of Caprera, off Sardinia, and there the lonely man lived quietly.

But throughout Italy hope, long suppressed, was quickening like a drumbeat. The prime minister appointed by Sardinia's young king was Count Cavour, shrewd, paunchy, nearsighted and a devoted monarchist. Having got Louis Napoleon, Emperor of France, to go over to Italy's side in a new war with Austria, Cavour called Garibaldi from his rocky solitude. When Garibaldi talked with Cavour he saw that Italians would more willingly unite under a working monarchy than for the abstract idea of a republic yet to be created. Thereafter Garibaldi served the crown, and through it his country.

But the lovely south still lay in chains. There "Bomba's" son

Francis, now King of the Two Sicilies, had filled the prisons with patriots. Cavour and Victor Emmanuel dared not lift a finger; open intervention might ignite the powder kegs of Europe. To the Liberator they gave surreptitious encouragement — and no help at all. Garibaldi must find his own ships, raise his own volunteers. If he failed, he must suffer for it alone; if he won, the victory must pass to his king.

By stealth he recruited his force — men with hot hearts and clear heads. They numbered just 1000 — “The Thousand” Italy calls them still. Boldly they landed on the west coast of Sicily; up into that brilliant sky went fluttering the green, white and red flag of Italian freedom.

The Sicilian people rallied. They cut telegraph lines, overpowered sentries, interrupted supplies, to the confusion of King Francis's army, and so led The Thousand by hidden trails toward their objective, Palermo. But in the wild mountains they were suddenly intercepted by 4000 well-drilled royal troops. Battling fiercely uphill, Garibaldi saw his men fall wounded all over the desperate slope around him, even his young son Menotti, the boy in Anita bore on the pampas. “General, what do we do?” rang out the cry all over that murderous hill. Came Garibaldi's answer: “Here either we make Italy, or we die!” His men

heard it, the world heard it. Leaping forward with drawn sword, Garibaldi led the charge that sent a vastly superior force flying in panic.

Another army was rushed into the field to meet him. Leaving his campfires burning as decoy, Garibaldi stole around behind the foe and swept into Palermo; in three days of street fighting he captured a city defended by 20,000 troops. Then he crossed the Strait of Messina and, marching north, rolled up King Francis's kingdom like a carpet, driving an army of 100,000 before him like so many cattle down the road to market.

All Italy was afire with excitement, none so agitated as Cavour. The greatest Italian conqueror since Julius Caesar, with the populace hysterical in hero worship, Garibaldi must surely intend — thought Cavour — to set himself up as master of the new nation. But when Naples lay within Garibaldi's grasp he held off the moment of surrender until Victor Emmanuel could arrive. On November 7, 1860, the first King of Italy, with Garibaldi beside him, rode into Naples in triumph.

Generously the young monarch poured out offers of a title, a castle before the Liberator. Garibaldi, his eyes twinkling, refused every gift. To serve Italy was its own reward.

He went back to his rocky farm on Caprera, taking with him nothing but a few bags of seed corn. But the harvest of Garibaldi's sowing was a free and united people.

