

HUMANITIES INSTITUTE
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Viva L'Italia (*Garibaldi*) 1961

Roberto Rossellini

OVERVIEW

Commissioned by the Italian government to celebrate the centenary of Garibaldi's famous 'Expedition of the Thousand,' Rossellini's film was always going to glorify the historical figure and present a sanitised version of his movement. In the main, however, the film faithfully follows the historical record, although the omission of the Piedmont army's role in the famous victory at Volturno is a serious distortion of fact. The historical Garibaldi was undoubtedly a great political and military leader, but perhaps not so flawless as the cinematic character. Still, the film is notable for its panoramic and epic perspective (comparisons to *Lawrence of Arabia* are not misjudged), as well as its convincing battle scenes. The film was premiered at a gala event in Rome, with the president of Italy in the audience, and was a reasonably good box-office earner. 'Of all my films,' Rossellini said, 'I'm proudest of *Viva L'Italia*.'

SYNOPSIS

The story follows Garibaldi's campaign of 1860-1861, beginning in Sicily and crossing to the Italian mainland, where his men won famous victories, especially at Volturno near Naples. Before going to the mainland, Garibaldi faces a major decision: whether to obey King Emmanuel's wish that he does not cross the straits or to continue his campaign. He does cross but only after promising the king that when his victories are won, he will surrender all control to him. A second crucial decision is whether or not to risk civil war by taking the battle on to Rome. Again, he plunges ahead, but then he is told by Emmanuel that he should retire to the reserves and that the king's army will do the rest of the fighting. Saddened, Garibaldi retires to an island but vows that he will return and march on Rome.

MAIN CHARACTERS

Giuseppe Garibaldi	The leader of the revolution.
Nino Bixio	Bixio is a trusted officer and advisor.
Giuseppe Bandi	Bandi is another key advisor and officer.
Rosa	Rosa is a young woman who sacrifices her life in order to assist Garibaldi's men.
Menotti Garibaldi	Menotti is Garibaldi's son.
Major Sforza	Sforza commands an army that Garibaldi defeats.

STORY

History The film opens with a rousing rendition of a freedom song from the wars of Italian unification in the mid-19th century. Then, the historical and geographical context is explained, using map graphics. In 1860, Italy was divided into eight separate states. The Kingdom of Sardinia, with King Vittorio Emmanuel, comprised the island of Sardinia and much of northern Italy. The rest of the northeast, including Venice, was under the control of the Austrians. Most of central Italy, including Rome, belonged to the Papal state of the Vatican, supported by the French. The rest of the country, to the south, known as the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies, with its capital at Naples, was ruled by the Bourbons of France.

Revolt In April 1860, a small band of revolutionaries gather at dawn in Palermo, Sicily, to await the start of the war to unify the whole of Italy. Hiding in a monastery basement, they are told that the building is surrounded by soldiers. What to do? They decide they must ring the bell in the tower to announce the beginning of the revolt to their comrades in other towns. When the bell is rung and the revolutionary flag unfurled in the tower, the small band charges outside only to be driven back inside by the gunfire from the soldiers. Those who are not killed in that skirmish are lined up and executed in a public square.

To Sicily In the northern town of Genoa, Garibaldi tells Bandi (an officer in the royalist army who defected) that he's sending him to Tuscany to raise support for the revolt. When told he will get no money or arms for this assignment, Bandi protests, but Garibaldi says that 'sticks alone will be enough if the people are committed to the cause.' Listening is Bixio, who condemns the Tuscans and

leaves in a huff. Bandi says he must return to barracks or else he'll be arrested. Garibaldi then changes his mind and says he'll take him with him to Palermo, where the revolution has already begun.

Call to arms In the morning, Garibaldi is told that King Emmanuel, who had pledged to support Garibaldi with men and arms, has changed his mind. His emissary arrives to tell Garibaldi that rifles will be provided but no men. A coded telegram arrives with the bad news that the revolt in Palermo has been crushed. Soon, a second telegram comes with the news that the revolt is still alive in the Sicilian countryside. Garibaldi decides to embark by boat for Sicily the following day. In the early hours, he gives an impassioned speech to his men: 'Fellow Italians, Sicilians are fighting the enemies of Italy. It's your duty to help them with words, gold, money, weapons and actions.'

Landing in Sicily Newspapers across Europe announce the landing of Garibaldi's men in Sicily, where troops loyal to the French-controlled government defend the island against the guerrillas. Major Sforza is given command of the battalion sent against Garibaldi. As the generals plot their strategy against the rebels, people in the countryside are caught stealing flour from a mill in order to prevent it falling into the hands of the royalist army.

Battle Garibaldi leads his men to a crossroads on the way to Palermo. When local people do not join them, as expected, he says they must inspire support by fighting hard. From a hill, he watches the disciplined enemy take up positions on another hill. Told that the enemy position will be difficult to take because it's too steep, he points out that the terrain will also prevent the enemy from using artillery, which is their only advantage over the rebels. Blessed by a priest, Garibaldi's men attack and, at first, overwhelm Sforza's men but are driven back by reinforcements. They regroup and, led by Garibaldi himself, storm the hill. With support from local men, they defeat the royalists and celebrate their victory by singing 'Viva L'Italia.' But there are many bodies to bury.

Aftermath Garibaldi is greeted as a hero by local people and visits wounded enemy soldiers in a church, where he praises them for their bravery. Some of his men visit the nearby ancient Roman temple at Segesto and marvel at its magnificence. 'How could such wonderful people be reduced to slavery?' they wonder.

To Palermo As Garibaldi advances, the retreating royalist troops ravage the villages on their path. Palermo is reported to have forty thousand troops, but Garibaldi tricks them into thinking he is dispersing into the mountains when, in fact, he is preparing to attack. Entering the city gates, his men are cheered by the local people but attacked with canons by the royalists. Fighting street-by-street and using barricades built from furniture given by the citizens, Garibaldi occupies part of the city.

Truce Royalist negotiators visit Garibaldi, who greets them warmly and listens to their entreaties to end the suffering. Garibaldi says he is prepared for a truce and asks to hear their conditions. He agrees to restore water to the castle, where the royalists are holed up, to allow doctors to treat the wounded and to exchange prisoners. But then, he demands the royalists withdraw from the city. The negotiators agree.

A difficult decision Having taken Palermo, Garibaldi captures more towns and is ready to cross the few miles of water to the mainland, en route to Naples. But there are rumours of plots designed to undermine the revolution. An emissary conveys King Emmanuel's wishes that Garibaldi should not cross the straits. He also mentions the considerable forces of the army that would fight him. Garibaldi says that he respects the king but knows that he is surrounded by bad advisors. He tells the emissary that he will send an answer to the king.

Father and son When the emissary leaves, Garibaldi's son, Menotti, begs his father to cross the straits. Garibaldi mentions the large army on the other side and that France has asked England to use its navy to block them from sailing. Garibaldi is torn: he wants to sail but he doesn't want to lead his men into a massacre. He reads to his son a letter he has written saying that he must cross the straits but that he will surrender his authority to king when his campaign is victorious.

Crossing the straits At the same time, he sends a single man across the straits, who nearly dies in the attempt. Fortunately, he is found half-drowned on the shore by Rosa, who gets him a disguise and leads him to her father. The father gathers a group of local people and mutinous royalist soldiers who agree to help Garibaldi when he lands. After the men depart, police arrest Rosa's father. Having overheard the conspirators' plan, Rosa decides to take her father's place and draws soldiers' fire on the seafront as a signal to Garibaldi's men in boats. She is killed, but the rebels disembark and

overwhelm the soldiers.

Victories At the same time, Garibaldi launches a surprise attack at a different location and wins another important battle. As his army advances towards Naples, they are hailed as heroes and celebrated with music. Garibaldi encourages defeated royalist soldiers to join him as comrades, but most want to go home. He also forces them to return the animals they stole from local people. The king of Naples leaves his palace and withdraws to a nearby town in order to spare the city from bloodshed. Garibaldi's men enter the city amid celebrations from its citizens.

Problems The unification of Italy is one giant step closer, but a problem arises when the Piedmont army marches south and stands between Garibaldi and Rome. Piedmont is technically an ally but hesitates to fight against France because the French army protects the Pope in Rome. If no agreement is reached, there will be civil war. In addition, the Austrians and other European leaders plot to eliminate Garibaldi from the political map. Another complication is the arrival of Mazzini, the political architect of unification. He urges Garibaldi to take Rome and to fight the Piedmont army if he hopes to unify the country. Again, Garibaldi does not want to risk a civil war.

Battle of Volturno The royalist army of Naples regroups and reinforces itself at Volturno, but Garibaldi's men, despite being outnumbered, achieve a famous victory. However, Piedmont still blocks Garibaldi's path to Rome and final unification. His officers are keen to attack and march on to Rome, but Garibaldi counsels patience. 'We will get to Rome, but we will take our time. It's not possible now.'

King Emmanuel He issues a proclamation to all Italy saying that he is stepping aside and recognises King Emmanuel as the ruler of the territory he has conquered. Garibaldi the dictator meets Emmanuel the king at a prearranged location in the countryside. 'Everything I did,' Garibaldi says, 'was in your name. Today, I hand over to you the power over millions of Italians.' Garibaldi formally announces Emmanuel as the king of united Italy.

Relegated Refusing Garibaldi's request to send his army against the king of Naples, Emmanuel says his own army is fresher and better prepared. Garibaldi now retires from active soldiering and takes a humble meal from peasant. 'We have to put ourselves in the reserves,' he mumbles with resignation.

Final words Garibaldi sails to the island of Caprera, near Sardinia. Facing a cheering crowd on shore, he says, 'We will meet again. In Rome.'

THEMES

1. Politics: nationalism The headline theme of this historical docu-drama is the nationalist movement led by Garibaldi (and Mazzini). It focuses on the campaign of 1860-61, when he led a small army (the 'expedition of one thousand') that conquered Sicily and most of Italy on behalf of King Emmanuel of Sardinia, leading to the declaration of a united Italy. With a title 'Long Live Italy,' and accompanied by the singing of several patriotic songs from the period, the film is an unabashed glorification of Garibaldi, his men and their patriotism. The first and last shots show the Italian national flag waving in the air to the music of the national anthem. Italy's nationalist movement, which followed the revolutions in America and France and influenced later ones in Russia and China, is today a source of great pride, not dissimilar to the American revolution for Americans. While faithfully representing the complex political factionalism within Italian nationalism, the film centres on the heroic stature of Garibaldi, who repeatedly speaks of 'Italy' and 'united Italy,' which were new ideas at the time. Those ideas grew out of a broad cultural movement called 'Rising Again' (*risorgimento*) in the early part of the nineteenth century in opposition to foreign domination. It celebrated the rich cultural heritage of Italians. For example, in the film, Garibaldi and his men consider their movement to be a resurrection of the ancient Roman Empire. And that is why the film ends with Garibaldi promising that he will return to active soldiering 'in Rome.' Significantly, when Mussolini took Rome in the 1930s, he said he was completing Garibaldi's campaign. A few years after completing this project, Rossellini directed *General Della Rovere*, which examined a different variety of Italian nationalism, the fascist movement of the 1930s and 1940s. *Viva L'Italia*, however, remains his monument to Italy.

2. Politics: leadership The second theme of the film is its portrayal of Garibaldi and his leadership of the nationalist movement. By the 1960s, when the film was commissioned, Garibaldi had acquired the status of a saint in Italian culture. Without tarnishing that reputation, Rossellini set out to 'humanize' the god-like figure, so we see him in mundane settings, in bed, in his night clothes, sitting

on the ground, smoking a cigar, peeling oranges, putting on his glasses and so on. This 'warts-and-all' portrait did not please everyone, although it arguably ended up creating another kind of mythic figure: the man of the people. What is undeniable is the leadership skills that Rossellini's Garibaldi possesses. Several key scenes show him in discussion with his officers regarding military strategy. Always, he is calm but resolute, patient but passionate. He is a dictator and was widely referred to as such, even by himself, but he also listens to his associates, including his young son. Equally important, he leads his troops on the battlefield, suffers with them, rejoices with them and eats with them. Another aspect of his leadership is that he temporarily sacrifices his personal ambition (taking Rome) for the greater good of the movement. Another leader might have had a rush of blood and marched on the capital. Garibaldi is not a king, but through his style of leadership he earns the loyalty of his men and the wider population.

3. Loyalty Loyalty is a third theme found in this epic film. By their very nature, radical political movements and wars of liberation require intense commitment to a cause. And given the complexities of the political jigsaw that was Italy in the mid-nineteenth century, any assertion of loyalty was likely to be a betrayal, as well. These fault lines play a large role in the story told in the film. To unify Italy, Garibaldi must not only drive out the foreign powers but, at the same time, create alliances with the rulers of the various parts of Italy--in Naples, in Turin, in Venice and in Rome. For example, just after Garibaldi wins a great victory, his campaign is jeopardised by the arrival of the Piedmont army, who have a different agenda. Another kind of loyalty-cum-betrayal is present in the conspirators who help Garibaldi at various points of the story. They are the citizens of Naples, for example, who turn against their ruler and give their support to the new man. In addition, betrayal is represented by the royalist troops who defect to Garibaldi's army. More personalised examples of loyalty are shown in Garibaldi's handing over his command to King Emmanuel, in whose name he had begun his military campaign. Finally, a broad question of loyalty arises in connection with the Catholic church. Because the Pope was protected by French troops, many people considered Garibaldi's movement to be a betrayal of religion.

CHARACTER ANALYSIS

Garibaldi Garibaldi is a gregarious, cheerful man, with a rich mane of hair and thick beard. He is thoughtful and courageous in equal measure. A man of the people, he never speaks down to his men. While not highly educated, as a passionate freedom fighter, he is given to poetic statements about tyranny and justice. In dealing with his enemies, he is never angry or vengeful, believing that hate and envy are useless emotions. His men and those whom he liberated from foreign rule treat him almost like a god.

Magnanimous One of Garibaldi's outstanding qualities is his magnanimity. That charitable streak in his character is vividly illustrated in a scene, when he visits a church in which the enemy soldiers lie wounded and waiting for treatment. The local priest asks Garibaldi to take pity on them, and the victorious Garibaldi says 'Why ask? They are men like us. They are Italians, our brothers.' He goes inside and sees the suffering. He ruffles the hair of one man and then addresses them all. 'Brave fellows. You fought well.' It is a time, right after a decisive victory, when other leaders might have gloated or even sought revenge. But not Garibaldi, whose patriotism toward all Italians makes him warm-hearted even to his weakened enemies. This scene in the hospital is perhaps even more important than battle scene in revealing the character of the man who unified Italy.

Modest Generous toward his enemies, he is also modest among his friends. That side of his character is on display in the scene that follows the one in the church just described. After speaking to the wounded men inside, he goes outside, where he is cheered wildly by the local population. Men and women crowd around him and kiss his hands. But he withdraws and says, 'Look what tyranny has reduced you to [servile behaviour].' When the enthusiastic crowd continues to salute him, he says, 'I'm just a man who eats and drinks like you.' Then he says, 'Let's kiss like this' and kisses the cheeks of the people, in the local fashion. It is a brief scene, but it encapsulates the way Garibaldi behaved among ordinary men and women, who loved him in return.

Statesman Though modest, Garibaldi also behaved like a statesman when the occasion required him to do so. One good example occurs after his first major victory over the royalist army near Naples. He is sitting on his bed, peeling an orange, when the negotiators from the King of Naples arrive. Those two gentlemen are resplendent in their officer uniforms, while Garibaldi looks casual in his faded red shirt and baggy trousers. Garibaldi extends a hand of welcome and ushers them into comfortable chairs, while he remains standing. Everyone is polite, bowing and smiling. They all

agree that bloodshed should be avoided, and the negotiators say they want a truce that is honourable. Garibaldi asks for their conditions, to which he agrees. Next, he offers his guests a slice of orange before revealing his own condition: that prisoners taken in far-away Sicily must be released. Then he demands that the royalists vacate Naples, immediately. The negotiators are beaten and they agree. Here, we see how Garibaldi wields the weapons of hospitality and soothes his guests by agreeing to their terms before hitting back with his more far-reaching conditions. He is a skilful statesman, as well as a brave soldier.

Regretful The film ends with a partial victory for Garibaldi. He has conquered most of southern and central Italy, but he halts his march to Rome in order to avoid a civil war. Next, he hands over his territory to King Emmanuel at a meeting that is considered one of the most important events in Italian history. Garibaldi hails Emmanuel as 'King of Italy,' the first time such a monarch existed. He then asks to have the honour of fighting the next battle, but the king shocks him by saying that his men will now be in the 'reserves' because his own army is better equipped to fight the enemy. As he watches the king's well-disciplined army ride by, there is no doubt that the king is correct. Saddened, Garibaldi has a meal of bread and cheese in a nearby peasant's shack. Sitting down with a forlorn look on his face, he says, very slowly, 'They told me, that we have to place ourselves with the reserves.' It is the only moment when we see Garibaldi lose his confidence and optimism. It is a glimpse of the man behind the heroic image, and the film is richer for it.

Bandi Bandi, a young and handsome man, is an officer in one of the royalist armies who defects to Garibaldi's movement. Although he has a speaking part in only two or three scenes, he is one of the men upon whom Garibaldi relies for advice. The historical Giuseppe Bandi wrote a famous memoir of the war, which is the main textual basis for Rossellini's film.

Cautious Bandi is young yet cautious, or perhaps not reckless. We see this quality in him during a conversation with Garibaldi at the beginning of the film, when the leader takes the momentous decision to attack Sicily. Just before he announces that decision, though, Garibaldi has told Bandi that he must lead an attack on a town in Tuscany. It is a risky plan, and Garibaldi admits that he cannot give Bandi any extra money or arms. 'If people are committed to the cause, even sticks will be enough,' Garibaldi says in his typical grandiose way. 'Maybe for waving it in front of an orchestra,' quips Bandi. Then, in a change of plan, Garibaldi announces that he will take Bandi with him to Sicily. Bandi's caution has impressed Garibaldi as a man who can be trusted with a dangerous mission.

Menotti Menotti is Garibaldi's son. Only twenty years old at the time of the events in the film, he is nevertheless an important character because he has special access to the leader. And although he has a speaking part in only one scene, it is critical to the story as a whole and sheds lights not only on his character but on his father's, as well.

Fearless Having conquered Sicily, Garibaldi is at a crossroads because King Emmanuel has asked him to not to cross the straits and carry his war onto the mainland. Menotti and other officers watch when the king's emissary goes into private conference with Garibaldi and then leaves. They are ready to cross the straits and fear that Garibaldi does not agree. Urged on by his comrades, Menotti goes into to see his father and learn what decision he has taken. Politely, he tells his father that the men are impatient to cross the sea. 'It's only a few miles,' he says, as if his father didn't know. His father also points out that the coast is heavily fortified, but Menotti says, 'Yes, that's why we have to move quickly.' Again, the father says he doesn't want a 'massacre,' and again the son declares that the men are 'ready for anything.' While Menotti shows respect for his father, he also symbolises the fighting spirit of the men who are not prepared to wait for circumstances to be favourable. Like them, he is fearless.

Rosa Rosa is a young woman, who lives in Calabria, southern Italy. She is the daughter of a leading man in the local conspiracy to overthrow the government. In her only significant scene, she says nothing but her action paves the way for Garibaldi's invasion of the mainland, which is the crucial event in the film.

Courageous After Rosa finds a young man washed up on the shore, she knows he is a Garibaldian and tells her father. Later, she listens as her father and the young man meet in secret to plan how to assist the landing of Garibaldi's men on the mainland. And when her father is arrested, she knows what she must do. She deliberately goes out after the curfew, attracting attention and then gunfire. The shooting alerts Garibaldi's men, who are just off shore in boats, and is the signal for them to attack. The attack is successful, but Rosa lies dead on the ground.



(A poster at the time of the film's release)



(Garibaldi and an officer after a victory)



(A battle scene)



(Garibaldi and Bandi)