



# Volunteer Voice

Solferino Edition, July 2018

## A Long Line of Red Crossers by Linzi Brown, Vicenza Station



*Eager Red Cross Volunteers gather for the "Fiaccolata" (torch-lit walk) of Solferino Castiglione della Stiviere, Italy*

Every summer, the International Federation of the Red Cross & Red Crescent Societies hold an annual Fiaccolata (torch-lit walk) in Solferino, Italy. Solferino is approximately one hour from Vicenza and a little over two hours to Aviano. The walk is held to commemorate the events that led to the founding of the International Committee of the Red Cross and the Geneva Convention. I have taken part in the Fiaccolata for the past five years, and each time it is a moving and enjoyable experience.

In 1859, during the battle of Solferino, a Swiss business-man named Henri Dunant witnessed wounded soldiers being left for dead without any aid. Upset by this, he organized all the women and young girls in the nearby town of Castiglione to transport the wounded down to the base camp to receive medical care. As a result of this experience, Dunant began the process of founding the International Committee of the Red Cross and the Geneva Convention. To commemorate these events, the ICRC organizes a week long series of events. A camp is built that houses Red Crossers from all over the world. Ideas are shared, stories are told, and friendships are built. The week ends with the Fiaccolata. It begins at dusk, in the Piazza Solferino, high on a hill overlooking some of the most beautiful countryside in Italy. Everyone carries a long red torch like candle throughout the walk. The 15 kilometer route follows the same route taken by the women carrying the soldiers wounded at the Battle of Solferino in 1859. This year, there were nearly 10,000 participants from the Red Cross and Red Crescent movements representing 60

countries.

The atmosphere is always so pleasant, full of life and comradery. Participants really feel like part of an international brotherhood. 'Swag' or Red cross items are traded with each other. I have received Italian, German, and UK Red Cross t-shirts and patches. Everyone is so excited to get American Red Cross items, and in turn, I am always excited to get it from other countries. As you walk along the gently rolling hills of the area and chat with Red Cross Family from around the world you are so moved by the glow of the torches and the warmth and kindness of others. Locals from the small villages along the route display Red Cross flags and come out to wave, hug and cheer on the walkers. It is a true spirit of community. Another reason to experience Solferino is to see the ICRC museum in the city of Castiglione where the walk concludes. Built in 1959 in the center of the city, this museum contains documents, surgical instruments, litters, camp equipment and features exhibits about many recent actions Red Cross & Red Crescent societies have taken part in to provide humanitarian relief. Visitors can also read in detail the account of the battle of Solferino and Henri Dunant's initiatives in founding the ICRC. The museum is open from 0900-1200 and 1500-1700, Monday-Saturday. The cost entrance with a guided tour is 6 Euros.

Everyone involved with the Red Cross or Red Crescent movements should experience this event and visit the ICRC museum. Not only is it a really fun way to spend the day in a lovely Italian town but, a way to connect to your fellow Red Cross/Red Crescent family. As you are walking the streets and thinking of those who sacrificed and helped their fellow man you can't help but feel the good that came from the tragedy of the Battle of Solferino. You realize that you are part of a long line of humanitarians that serve those in need. You are living proof of Henri Dunant's vision.

For more information, visit the official Solferino 2018 website: <https://www.crit.it/en/solferino2018>.



## The Greatest of Gifts by Chris Spalding, Volunteer Partner Europe

I have been part of some pretty remarkable experiences in my life. World-shaping, humanizing, dehumanizing, intimate, global, outrageous, precious, important, and life altering events. I was still not prepared for how deeply effected I'd be by Solferino and the Fiaccolata. To be among thousands of selfless humanitarians from 60 different countries and share an historic occasion left me electrified. Walking shoulder to shoulder with people who have not only given of themselves but have received aid and support in troubled times was immensely moving. Standing in the place where Henry Dunant so bravely and adamantly inserted his values and regard for human life 159 years ago was inspiring. Feeling the love, respect, devotion, courage, determination, and warmth from total strangers who are become family nearly crushed my heart with joy.

When asked if I could attend Solferino on the division's behalf I immediately said yes. I made sure I had red sneakers and good socks. I really HATE socks but Dee Swanier insisted. Good call Dee! I gathered up lots of Red Cross swag to share with others, made sure I had a walking buddy in Heather Conkle from Vicenza, and signed up for the walk on the website. Packed my bags, listened to Dee & Michelle Bailey's advice on everything to see and do and then went. I then hitched a ride on Vicenza station's bus. Riding the bus with fellow European Division Red Crossers from Vicenza and Aviano was like going on an awesome school field trip. Arriving in Solferino we had a little hiccup with location

and I was so excited to hop out and use my German to ask the Deutsches Rotes Kreuz for help. It didn't help but it was fun being misplaced together and talking about their annual 1,000 person BBQ they host at Castiglione every year. Driving into the town of Solferino you see Red Cross/Red Crescent flags. Hung from every house, shop, barn, fence and most vehicles. The town was buzzing because of the swarms of people. The Battle of Solferino Museum is in the center of the village. There is a statue of Henry Dunant outside of it.

We wanted to go to the ICRC museum in Castiglione and tried to call a cab...I am still laughing at what a ridiculous idea that was in the middle of pandemonium. We ended up stopping one of hundreds of Red Cross vehicles in the area and asked them for a ride to the museum 12 kilometers away. The couple that picked us up was hilarious, charming and worried that the onions they ate for lunch were offending us. We exchanged, mints and gum for a patch. It was an exchange like no other. The couple was so honored to have ARC members in their vehicle. When we arrived at the museum it was absolutely heaving with Red Cross and Red Crescent Society members. We were greeted so warmly when we stepped out of the car. Everyone wanted to chat with American Red Crossers. "You are the best at disaster response." "You helped my family in a war zone." "You are so generous with your knowledge and training." "I want to go to Washington DC to see your headquarters." "Can I hug you?" The sheer comradery was fuel to make it through the 15 kilometer

walk later that night. The museum is filled with so many telling artifacts and bits of the ICRC story. We shared a guided tour with an incredible woman name Fatiha Hamza, a senior communications officer for the IFRC, who was joined by her son and niece. Fatiha was so kind and drove us back the 12 kilometers to the Solferino Piazza, the starting point for the walk. We shared dinner with the folks from Vicenza and Aviano and about a thousand other Red Crossers. In the middle of dinner I heard, "Chris Spalding?" It was Sabrina Rush from Gail McGovern's office at NHQ. What a brilliant treat.



Three local residents show their appreciation and gratitude for the Red Cross & Red Crescent volunteers.



Chris Spalding with Red Crossers from Bosnia Herzegovina in the courtyard of the ICRC Museum, Castiglione, Italy



ICRC Museum, Castiglione, Italy

### The ICRC Museum

For more information on the ICRC Museum, visit their website, or better yet, visit their museum!

Via Garibaldi 50  
46043 Castiglione delle Stiviere (Mantova)  
Italia Tel. 0376 638505  
<https://www.micr.it>  
<https://www.info@micr.it>

To read their beautiful booklet, Tutti Fratelli, please visit: [http://www.micr.it/pdf/utti\\_fratelli\\_inglese.pdf](http://www.micr.it/pdf/utti_fratelli_inglese.pdf)



Red Cross Volunteers gather to celebrate comradery in Italy

## The Greatest of Gifts by Chris Spalding (cont.)

We all gathered at the large gate inside the Piazza and listened to the IFRC President, Mr. Francesco Rocca welcome all. The youth read the 7 Fundamental Principles of the Red Cross & Red Crescent Societies. Confetti burst into the air, a band played, torches started to be lit and slowly the masses started moving out of the large archway and down the road toward Castiglione.

It was glowing flames for as far as the eye could see. Like a road paved with light and hope. The mood was jovial and loud! There were clowns, boom boxes, singing, cheering, disco balls, chanting and chatting. All of the people from the villages we passed through were standing alongside the road cheering us on and thanking the legions of givers. I have included a photo of these three spectacular Italian ladies looking down from their

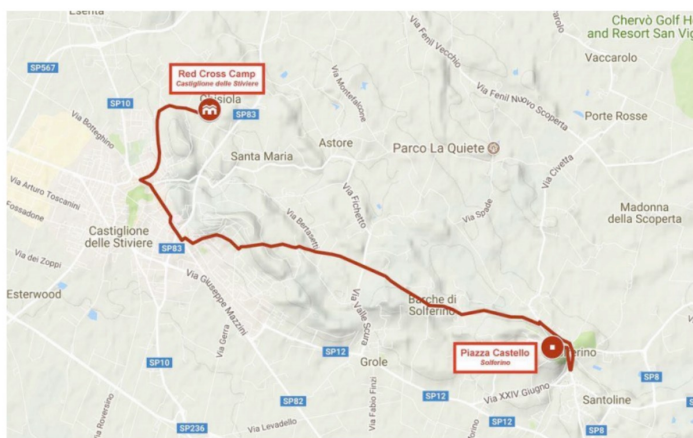
balcony across the road from the Battle of Solferino Museum to offer their approval and gratitude. Fatiha joined Heather and I at the start of the walk and made the entire journey with us. The walk was especially long this year as they ended it on the other side of Castiglione in the Red Cross camp and not the center of town.

When we arrived there was a DJ, pizza, beverages and of course, t-shirt sales. I bought a t-shirt that now hangs in my office; such a meaningful thought for our times. Even though we were tired and nearly 4 hours had passed since we departed the archway, we were thrilled to walk into the frenzy. I started the day with an idea that I would meet some folks, hear some stories, take a history lesson and gain some global perspective on our

far reaching organization. I did all those things. But when I passed through the control gates at the end with Linzi, Heather and Fatiha by my side I realized, every day I am privileged to be part of such an immeasurably important team. I must work hard to make sure I am ready when called, that I am worthy of my teammates and our mission. I must ensure I give all I can and encourage others to do the same. My wish is that next year we have 100 American Red Crossers attend the annual event. Start saving now. Plan your trip. Read this issue to know what to expect. Leaving with the feeling that I, we, ARC are not alone and that what we do is so much bigger than we imagine. All that the day gave should be motivation enough to attend. I hope to see you in 2019. I will be the one in the Red Cross shirt.



Participants of Solferino 2018 walked the same route where Henry Dunant was inspired to start the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC). In addition to being a celebration, the event offered training opportunities and a chance to bond with fellow volunteers. Solferino 2019 will be on June 22, 2019. Why not pencil the Fiaccolata into your calendar now?



The path of the "Fiaccolata"

<https://www.cri.it/20-06-2018-solferino-2018-domani-la-grande-fiaccolata-migliaia-di-voluntari-in-festa>