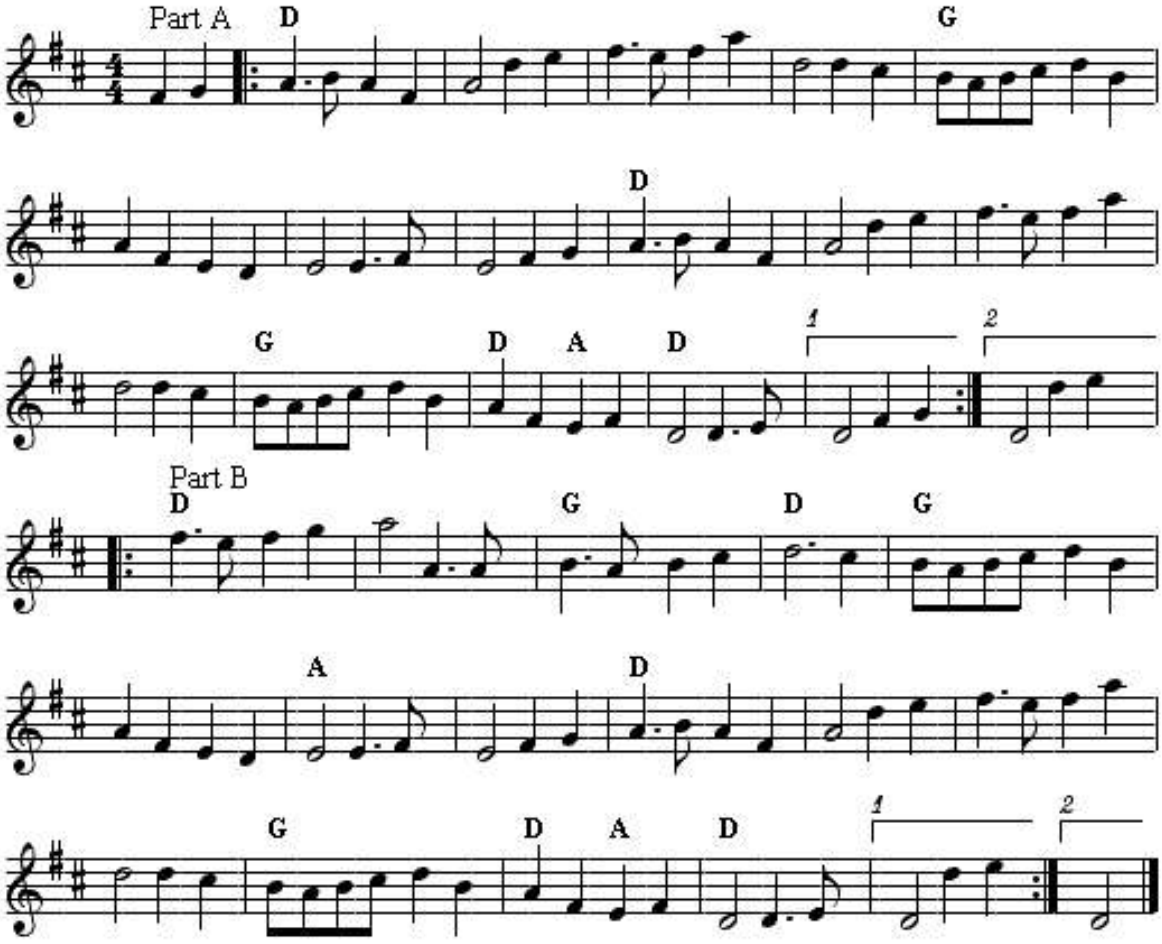
Bonaparte Crossing the Rhine



"Bonaparte Crossing the Rhine", also known as "Napoleon Crossing the Rhine", "Battle Call Of The Fianna", "The Star Of Columbia", "Sweet Killaloe", "Bonaparte's Retreat", "Bruce's March", "Caledonian March", "Freemason's March", "Ranahan's March", "Sherman's March (to the Sea)", "The Star of Bethlehem" or "St. Patrick's March" is an old-time march in cut time or 4/4 D Major. It is played in standard or ADae fiddle tunings. The parts are played AB (Barnes), AAB (Phillips/1995) and AABB (most versions).

The first part of the tune shows up in several melodies from Ireland, Scotland and England; these variants include the Irish "Centenary March" and "*An Comhra Donn*" and the Scottish "Caledonian March" (printed by George Willig in Philadelphia in 1837 and Elias Howe in his Musician's Companion of 1842). Barry Callaghan (2007) says the core tune was current as a military march in the Peninsular War and probably earlier, although he cites no source for this assertion. However, the tune has melodic similarity to an English hornpipe (possibly a march) called "Durham Rangers" and "Sherwood Rangers".

Samuel Bayard (1944) was familiar with "Bonaparte Crossing the Rhine" as a common march tune in his primary collecting area of western Pennsylvania and one which circulated under a variety of names including (in Fayette County) "Bruce's March" and (in Greene County) "The Star of Bethlehem." A Pennsylvania bandmaster gave Bayard the name "Ranahan's March" which he said commemorated a local bandmaster. As with several of the other 'Bonaparte'-titled tunes it is sometimes confused with similar names; for example, Bayard once heard it played by a New Jersey fiddler who gave it the ubiquitous name "Bonaparte's Retreat".

Fiddler Mack Snodderly played a slow, dirge-like version of the tune and called it "Dying on the Field of Battle/Died on the Field of Battle."

The Greene County title (i.e., "Star of Bethlehem") suggests that the air may formerly have been sung to a once popular religious piece of the same name.

A version of this tune is used for the shape-note hymn "Family Bible".

It was printed in Barnes' English Country Dance Tunes, vol. 2 (2005) (appears as "The First of October", the name of a country dance by Phillippe Callens set to the tune), Bayard's Hill Country Tunes (1944), Brody's Fiddler's Fakebook (1983), O'Neill's The Dance Music of Ireland (1907), Slater's Clawhammer Banjo Solos (1979), Callaghan's Hardcore English (2007), Phillips' Traditional American Fiddle Tunes, vol. 2 (1995) and Silberberg's Tunes I Learned at Tractor Tavern (2002).

It was recorded by John McCutcheon on How Can I Keep From Singing? (1975), The Fuzzy Mountain String Band on Summer Oaks and Porch (1973).