



THE “DESPERADOS”

“Guido Keller told me that he had just formed a company to guard the Commander, a company that he called ‘*La Disperata*’. Many soldiers who had come from Italy to volunteer were **without papers** and had not been accepted by the Command. Instead of leaving they were camped out in the town’s big shipyards. When he went to see what they were doing there, Keller found some of them **naked** diving from the prows of the moored ships, others attempting to manoeuvre the old locomotives that used to run between Fiume and Budapest, and others perched up on cranes, singing. He found them to be **high-spirited and jolly**, and he gathered them for inspection: they were all proud, handsome men, and he declared that they were **the finest soldiers in Fiume**. He mustered these soldiers, known to all as the ‘*desperados*’ in view of their situation, and offered them to the Commander as personal guards. This move **scandalized** superior officials, but the Commander accepted the offer. With the creation of this company, Keller began to put his ideas for a **new military order** into practice. These new soldiers spent most of the day swimming or rowing, or singing and marching through the city, **bare-chested and dressed in shorts**. They were not obliged to stay in the barracks, [...] and in the evening they frequented a deserted area called *La torretta*, where they split into two groups and did battle with real **hand grenades**, often leading to injury.

[...] The presence of a number of **morally dubious elements** did not sully the company’s reputation, but rather gave it the **crepuscular flavour** of a group despised by the wise and the mediocre, and this was its greatest source of pride”.¹

“One day a journalist from the *Morning Post* wrote about how scandalized an English colonel, as stiff as a dummy, would be to see a regiment of legionnaires on parade; to which the caustic Kochnitzky replied: **‘Fortunately Gabriele D’Annunzio is not an English colonel’**. Yet Kochnitzky himself wore an impeccable black jacket, which jarred among the garish, variously coloured uniforms in circulation, many of them an earthy khaki hue, having been fashioned from thousands of English curtain lengths found in the city. Some wore wide patterned ties, others a crew neck. Some went about wearing the Arditi fez, while others preferred long flowing hair which they brushed back”.²

“One day [Gabriele D’Annunzio] saw the Arditi setting off for the hills, two by two, hand in hand, and he pointed them out saying: ‘Look at my soldiers, heading off in pairs like **Pericles’s men**’. [...] In the spring every day he went for a walk with a different unit, and would come back singing with the soldiers, who had sprigs of **flowers stuck in the barrels** of their muskets ...”³

D’ANNUNZIO PUTS COUNCILS IN CHARGE

Replaces High Fiume Army
Commanders With Younger
Officers.

CALLS IT DEMOCRATIZATION.

All Councilors Have Equal Rank,
but All Decisions Are Sub-
ject to His Veto.

The New York Times
New York, 29 November 1920.

1. Giovanni Comisso, *Le mie stagioni*, Milano, Longanesi, 1963.

Source: http://www.oblique.it/manifesto_keller.html

2. Federico Augusto Perini-Bembo, *D’Annunzio e Fiume per l’ordine nuovo. Prodromi momenti e conseguenze nazionali ed internazionali della “marcia di Ronchi”*, Firenze, Carlo Cya, 1944, pp. 126-127.

3. Giovanni Comisso, *Le mie stagioni*, Edizioni di Treviso – Libreria Canova, 1951, pp. 77-78.

Source: http://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Utente:Justinianus_da_Perugia/Storia_dell'Italia_antica