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A RELATIONSHIP OF TRUST: THE CARABINIERI HISTORICAL ARCHIVE AND THE CITIZENS

Abstract:

The paper focuses the attention on the relationship built between the Carabinieri historical office (nowadays the Direction of historical and documentary assets) and the citizens. In 2000, when the Carabinieri historical office officially became responsible for the Carabinieri historical archives, it started to build strong connections with the citizens. In the first phase, the main task was to support the Carabinieri General Headquarters and the Carabinieri units to study and discover their own history. In the second phase, since 2013 the relationship with the citizens changed thanks to two elements: the historical office webpage and the extensive use of emails together with the possibility to come to the reading room. After 20 years and some reorganisations, the Carabinieri personnel built a strong trusted relationship thanks to the effort to provide concrete answers to the users supporting their requests.

The paper reflects on some numbers related to the customer satisfaction collected for the last few years.

Keywords: *Pandemic, Carabinieri, Military Archives, Trusteeship, Cultural Heritage.*

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INTRODUCTION

The idea to create an historical office within the Carabinieri was strictly related to the internal needs instead of the process to support citizens in their research. However along the winding and difficult path of life, the Carabinieri historical office (nowadays the Direction of historical and documentary assets) received new and more interesting tasks. One of those is to support the requests coming from the citizens regarding the Carabinieri history.

THERE WAS NO INFORMATION. AN HISTORICAL ARCHIVE FOR INTERNAL NEEDS

According to the book published in 2017 on this topic, the Carabinieri historical office was put in place in 1965 as a section of the Operations Office (Carbone, 2017). At that time the idea of the Carabinieri Commanding General was simply and clear: the Institution needed to have a specialised but small group of people able to study the history of Carabinieri and to support the Commanding General decision and the requests coming from the Carabinieri General Headquarters, from the higher echelons of the hierarchy and from the Carabinieri units. So there was no idea to have a front-office point to answer to the citizens and researchers.

We can say that this mandate was modified more or less at the end of the Eighties. In 1987 when a first document underlined the decision to rebuild the disbanded historical office for internal needs. In the same document, the officer said that they received between 10 and 15 requests for information from civilians outside the Institution on annual base and then that the office (and the archives) were not open to the public (Carbone, 2017, pp. 388–389).

Only in mid-Nineties another historical office Chief, Major Marco Ricotti, was able to move forward trying to align the activities of the Carabinieri historical office to the same level of what Army, Navy and Air Force historical offices did at the time; a key element was opening the doors to the researchers and in general to the public (Carbone, 2017: 391). In reality the situation was different. According to the Defence Ministry regulation, there were only three historical offices (Army, Navy, Air Force) with the Carabinieri Office considered as a minor element in the Armed Forces organisation. The activities were really limited and the results were poor.

A NEW WAVE OF ACTIONS: FOURTH ARMED FORCE

Only in 2000, when the Italian Carabinieri became another (the fourth) Armed Force within the Defence Ministry the recognition arrived with the law 31 March 2000, n. 78, providing a new discipline of the Carabinieri organisation². In 2003, the Carabinieri historical office Chief has been admitted in the Italian Commission of Military History at the same level of the other historical offices Chiefs (Giannone, 2006, pp. 51–55)³.

2 Law 31 March 2000, n. 78 with the title «Delega al Governo in materia di riordino dell'Arma dei carabinieri, del Corpo forestale dello Stato, del Corpo della Guardia di finanza e della Polizia di Stato. Norme in materia di coordinamento delle Forze di polizia» and legislative decree 5 October 2000, n. 297, «Norme in materia di riordino dell'Arma dei Carabinieri, a norma dell'articolo 1 della legge 31 marzo 2000, n. 78»; a new discipline of the Carabinieri organisation was decided with the legislation.

3 The Italian Commission of Military History (C.I.S.M.) has been created with the decree of the Defence Ministry n. 1120 on 21 November 1986, after the Italian Section of the International Commission of Military History since 1950. With the law-decree 95/2012, art. 12 comma 20, converted into law, with modifications, with art.1, comma 1, L. 7 August 2012, n.135, all the activities have been transferred from the CISM to the Defence General Staff historical office.

With this new admission, the Carabinieri office chief started to attend all the meetings and congresses with a new attitude presenting the studies and the papers written under his responsibility.

The congress named "Archivi, biblioteche, musei militari: lo stato attuale, le funzioni sociali, gli sviluppi" held in 2005 in Rome on military museums, libraries and archives created the right environment to launch some reflections in the archives field within the Defence Ministry. The following year the acts were published.

During the congress, the paper on the Carabinieri historical office proposed to enlarge the infrastructure, realising a reading room non present at the moment (Carbone, 2005, pp. 81). So, the congress helped a lot with the effort of the Carabinieri Corps to develop its own strategy in the field of the Historical Archives. So, the first observation regards the space organisation of the office. There was no place for a reading room. As the office had been conceived at the time and up to 2006 there was no need to have a space dedicated to the public. That office at that time was not open to the public because the Carabinieri hierarchy decided to keep the Museum open to the public with full access to the papers collected in the Museum Archival miscellanea (Carbone, 2017, pp. 390–392). In this regard, once again, something started changing. From the mid-Nineties, major Ricotti pushed for a different approach trying to put the Carabinieri historical office on the same level of the other offices (Army, Navy and Air Force). As a consequence, receiving researchers in physical presence was really difficult and stressful with the need to reserve an empty desk in a space not organised to receive persons (Barbonetti, 2009, pp. 51–54). The commitment of the Office Chiefs had a long term effect thanks to the congress held in 2005 who gave guidance and directions to maintain more open the Institution to the public. So a logistic effort gave some results. In 2012 the historical office moved in Rome from the Carabinieri General Headquarters in the Parioli neighborhood to a new location in the "Cap. MOVIM Orlando De Tommaso" Barracks close to the Vatican State, in one of the most important tourist areas of Rome. With the relocation a comfortable reading room was opened to the public, welcoming researchers and citizens who needed to have access to Carabinieri historical documents (Carbone, 2013, pp. 85).

ACADEMIA COLLABORATION AND TRUSTEESHIP

On the same track, the historical office started working closely with the Academia. Some activities launched from 2008 opened a honest and fruitful cooperation between the Carabinieri Archives and the Archival Science Chair of the Sapienza University. In this regard, between 2008 and 2009 it was possible organise three different seminars on the main topics of the moment connected with the archives: the first one was dedicated to the military archives reviews of the moment like the *Bollettino d'archivio* of the Navy, of the Army and of the Guardia di Finanza looking at the old reviews published by the Armed Forces not strictly related to the archives, then a second seminar was organised on the transfers of archival funds in line with the celebration of the 40th anniversary of the first congress of military history and of the 10th anniversary of the legislative decree n. 490/1999 "consolidated text on environmental and cultural heritage" and then a third one was reserved in the military personnel archives in the Central State Archives and military archives. The book published in 2013 named "Archivistica militare" gave another opportunity to show to the scientific audience and to professional younger generations the commitment of the military archives and specifically of the Carabinieri historical office in building the relationship between citizens and the Institution.

Other collaborations with the University in the archival field led the Carabinieri to publish two other books: one connected with the history of the Carabinieri Archives (Carbone, 2017) and a second one on the forestry administration as a consequence of the embedding the state forestry corps (Greco, 2017)⁴. A new book on archives is going to be published by the end of the year as a genuine relationship between the Academic world and the Carabinieri Direction of historical and documentary assets (previously historical office) who can offer good fruits (Annaloro, 2021). Again with the same Chair a workshop for students has been organised in 2016 and 2017, offering them the opportunity to describe at a very basic level the files of an archival fond.

We should consider the agreement initially signed in 2016 by the Carabinieri historical office and the Italian Centro Nazionale delle Ricerche – Istituto di Informatica e Telematica (IIT) (see the IIT website in reference) to build and validate a Thesaurus as a specific tool to support the description of the archives and the research of citizens.

THE RELATIONSHIP WITH THE CITIZENS: IN PRESENCE AND REMOTE

As anticipated, before the long term project launched after the congress in 2005, the possibility to reach the historical office was very limited. There was no point of contact on the internet website, no email address or postal address. So, only few persons could be able to open the doors of the Carabinieri archives: the internal audience like the Commanding General, the Carabinieri General Headquarters Staff, the Carabinieri personnel, some researchers and historians who met the Office Chief during congresses, conferences and seminars, retired personnel who needed to do some researches on his ancestors or the units they belonged. It was more practical to be in contact with the historical office through the telephone and then sending an email requesting for information. But this solution was really homemade and not professional.

Anyway, as you can see the accessibility was very limited and the results really poor.

In this regard, it is very important to mention the historical office presence on the internet. Following the same path of the previous Office Chiefs, the new bosses continued to implement the action to keep the historical office in line with the other Armed Forces entities and with the current situation. So, in August 2013, finally the Carabinieri historical office had its web page in the Carabinieri internet website (Carbone, 2013, pp. 85).

With the webpage, the regulation to have regular access to the reading room and to request research by remote were launched.

If we have a look on the dedicated webpage, there are two possibility to access to the consultation of the documents as reported below: in presence and remote (by mail, email or via PEC, certified electronic mail⁵).

Having a look on the Carabinieri historical office webpage there is a lot of information on the research open to the public.

First of all, it is important to underline the effort to clarify which is the mission and the archives received and communicated. There is a clear explanation of the location of the Office considering the city of Rome and the public transport possibilities and then a small paragraph is reserved to clarify that the research is free of charge and open to the public both in presence or at distance (via mail, email and PEC).

4 The embedding of the Forestry Corps in the Carabinieri has been realized according to the legislative decree n. 177/2016 and the law n. 124/2015.

5 For the Italian regulation, the PEC (posta elettronica certificata / certified electronic mail or certified mail) has the same value as a recorded delivery letter.

A second point is related to the regulation to have full access to the reading room. The dispositions covered all the standard rules to follow when user come in an archive like the use of personal camera or electronic device according to the current Italian legislation, the file also state how to access the reading room, rules and regulations, opening times to the public and rules for distribution of archival files and more. The user has a clear picture of the rules and obligations to follow having access to the documents consultation giving him rights and duties when inside the reading room.

together with the regulation there are some attached documents. Those attachments help the citizen to prepare him/herself before coming to the reading room.

Finally, it is possible to download the request form for consultation (remote); after filling it the citizen can send directly to the functional mailbox starting the process to check the presence of data regarding the request and possibly answering to the questions like, just to give few examples, the search for ancestors, writing a booklet on the history of local Carabinieri station and personnel, looking for information on war period and the deployment of Carabinieri units worldwide.

PROVIDING NUMBERS (2012/2021)

The possibility to have a comfortable reading room, a well organised remote service and new spaces guaranteed a crystal clear improvement of the archives communication activities.

In this paper it is important to provide some useful numbers to understand the management of change realised in such a long period.

If we consider 2012 as a starting point with the moving from the original location to the new one in a more central neighborhood, we can see that only 13 persons came to the historical office remaining there for about 21 hours, moving 65 boxes. Each researcher attended the reading room for less than 2 hours moving 5 boxes each.

With the publication of the historical office webpage on the internet, the numbers changed a lot.

In 2013, the reading room was attended by 80 persons for about 224 hours, moving roughly 400 boxes. It is important to know that all the people came for about 250 working days on 302.

How can you consider those numbers? It is clear that every person joined the office for more than one working day. Considering an average of more than 3 working days a week but if we look at the hours spent in the reading room every citizen spent less than 50 minutes each day. More generally, it is clear that some researchers came and after a short period of time left the building but others spent a lot of time on many boxes considering an average number of 5 boxes each person.

We should consider a working day all the days from Monday to Friday, when the reading room is open to the public from 08.30 to 13.30 (5 hours a day).

The year after, 2014 was the year of the bicentenary anniversary of the foundation of the Carabinieri Corps, 110 persons attended the reading room for 251 days and in total 399 hours, moving 550 boxes. Following the same reasoning, each person came an average of 2 days and a few hours, spending less than 4 hours each day. We could assume that more people came at the same time increasing the support offered by the Carabinieri personnel but limiting the number of boxes to a similar amount than previously.

Moving to 2015 the numbers decreased a little bit to 81 persons with 301 hours in the reading room for 302 working days. the number of boxes moved is an average of about 4/5 each researcher.

In 2016, the Office received 127 researchers in presence for about 635 hours moving roughly 500 boxes. The following year (2017), 180 persons did research in the Carabinieri historical archives for about 900 hours, moving 720 boxes. In this last year, each person spent an average of 5 hours in the reading room.

A light decrease of persons is the main element for 2018 when 141 researchers came to the reading room. Each user remained there for more than 6 hours (846 in total), moving 564 boxes, with an average of 4 boxes each. The numbers decreased a lot in 2019; only 44 persons did some research in presence attending the Carabinieri historical office for 6 hours each, moving quite 4 boxes and half. In 2020 the pandemic erupted and all the activities in presence were suspended for the lockdown declared by the Italian government in March. 14 persons crossed the door of the office remaining for an average of 6 hours each and moving 70 boxes, id est 5 each.

For the 2021, as a partial element, we should consider that little by little all the activities in presence resumed with the vaccination of the population. So, currently full access to the reading room is still possible according to the current legislation. Till last October 27 users came to the reading room for a total amount of 169 hours, more than 6 hours each, asking for quite 7 boxes each person.

Figure 1: Numbers related to the physical access of the users to the reading room from 2012 to 2021. For more information, please see the paragraph Providing numbers (2012-2021)

Carabinieri historical archives reading room access										
Reading room attendance	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Users number	13	80	110	81	127	180	141	44	14	27
Reading room presence (in hours)	21	224	399	301	635	900	846	264	84	169
Number of boxes moved (about)	65	400	550	405	500	720	564	195	70	185

If we have a look on the requests from remote, we can consider as follow (Carbone, 2017, pp. 411, only for the years 2014/2016):

- in 2014, the 200 anniversary of the Carabinieri foundation, 560 requests were answered with different means (the same used by the requestor); 39 were related to historical events in general; 22 answers were focused on uniforms, equipment and transport, 235 were dedicated to Carabinieri personnel research; 161 requests can be classified as various, 32 dedicated to barracks, streets, parks naming and finally 71 asked for support to writing or publishing books, exhibitions, seminars and congresses. On about 251 working days, 2,23 requests arrived each day.
- in 2015, 517 answers were sent to the citizens; 15 were related to historical events in general; 15 answers were focused on uniforms, equipment and transport, 237 were dedicated to Carabinieri personnel research; 153 requests can be classified as various, 25 dedicated to barracks, streets, parks naming and finally 72 asked for support to writing or publishing books, exhibitions, seminars and congresses. For 2015, we can considered an average of 2 requests each working day;
- in 2016, 527 answers were sent to the citizens; 17 were related to historical events in general; 23 answers were focused on uniforms, equipment and transport, 247 were dedicated to Carabinieri personnel research; 159 requests can be classified as various, 43 dedicated to barracks, streets, parks naming and finally 38 asked for support to writing or publishing books, exhibitions, seminars and congresses. The requests arrived with an average of 2,09 each working day;

Regarding the years 2017 (401), 2018 (416), 2019 (305), 2020 (319), 2021 as of 30 June (207) there are no more precise data related to the different types of requests. In this situation we can consider that the pandemic didn't change the behaviour of citizens asking for remote information.

CONCLUSIONS

In a long term period perspective, the Carabinieri are able to fulfill the mission to provide support to the citizens building trusteeship thanks to the effort to open the archives and to provide as much as possible information for the users.

It is clear the commitment of the historical office Chief and later the Director of historical and documentary assets to support the needs of people who asked for information. Furthermore, the historical and documentary assets personnel develop a very appreciated reference service in order to help persons less aware of the complexity of the research in different archives of different institutions.

The statistics above are clear signs of improvement of the relationship between Carabinieri and the citizens where the historical office / direction of historical and documentary assets represents its front office.

The archives are at disposal of the entire community with the aim to support the research and to offer the best service possible for the needs of the people. It is important to underline one point: the persons who ask for information or ask to come to the reading room mostly are not specialists and generally speaking they do not have any experience in conducting research in the archives. The main responsibility of the Direction is providing support and help to those persons considering them as citizens with needs.

In a long term view it is possible to appreciate all the actions done by the Carabinieri to be close to the citizens helping them according to the main mission as a law enforcement agency with military status.

Open-mindedness represents the key element to satisfy the demands and needs of citizens. In essence, the Carabinieri remain at the service of the community also in the field of archival research.

Many things have been done since 1965 but the road is still long and winding and the work demanding.

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