

"It was on December 7th 2012, one of the last days of autumn, when I decided to write this book..." Why is a Carabinieri officer on the shelves of a bookstore? To be sure he writes about the Arm of the Carabinieri but, though the author tells us, he doesn't write in the solemn style typical of historical hagiographic treatises. Brigadier General Giuseppe Governale is a passionate writer and instinctively follows the golden rule - write about what you know. As the son, husband and father of a Carabiniere, Governale is well placed to recount Carabinieri life. As profound connoisseur of history and current affairs expert he opens the doors in a world with which most people are either unfamiliar or else have forgotten: a world where people live for ideals. Or better, still a world where people spend their lives trying to turn ideals into reality. And makes us participants in that world rather than spectators. Governale is a consummate weaver of relations. In fact, he involves many figures in his the book: De Rita, Gentile, Magris, Riotta, Romano and

Zavoli. All authoritative figures who have provided a lofty, noble interpretation of the Arm. However, the most moving, amusing and sincere pages are those where he lets his inner voice speak and narrate events which, even if he didn't personally experience them, are the life force and daily nourishment of this man-commander. More than just a feeling, this almost unconscious approach is crystal-clear when he answers one of our questions: although two hundred years separate the two newsworthy events, he cites them as proof of the same *caring approach* adopted by the Carabinieri. Reading this interview is like fresh air and conscious optimism. It's comforting to know there's someone who is still unafraid to pronounce State, nation, service, loyalty, sacrifice, duty, ideal, history and tradition. Today many people talk of the credibility of institutions, but the term has come to mean something we think is improper. Credibility has become the ability a person has -especially a politician, a government or an institution- to

inspire trust, appear credible and appreciated. It almost reads like the description of a barker or, at the very least, of a storyteller. Instead institutions must be above reproach; but how? Through their actions and deeds. Only then we will give them the credit and *trust* they require to ask each and every one of us to make sacrifices in difficult times, even without expecting an immediate return.

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PS. I'll say this up front. There is an obvious and very serious conflict of interest in this issue. Family reasons to begin with, and *those who know me know what I mean*. The second even more serious reason is that Salvatore Governale, working here at Telos, is none other than the remarkable son of an equally remarkable father.

GOVERNALE

MAKING IDEALS COME TO LIFE

“For so many communities, the syllogism State-Carabinieri-Nation was and is a fact”

Telos: Choosing to write a book is a very definite and *anything but predictable* choice. Your book is an extremely detailed account of the history of the Carabinieri, but it's also more than that. It reflects the pride and joy that comes from being a Carabiniere. What prompted you to embark on this undertaking?

Giuseppe Governale: Primarily to make my own small contribution to the celebrations for the Bicentennial of the establishment of the Arm of the Carabinieri (July 1814 in Turin). I knew no books had been written by an *insider* describing in simple and non-hagiographic terms the role played by the Carabinieri during the last 200 years when the Arm grew and developed along with the country and the Italians, but was above all present and active during its difficult and sometimes darkest hours.

I remember three distinct episodes: July 25, 1943 after the session of the Fascist Grand Council when the King decided to have Mussolini arrested and in confidence asked the Carabinieri to execute the order; the gesture by Salvo D'Acquisto who humbly but firmly took the nation on his shoulders, so to speak, and although he was innocent sacrificed himself by saying he was responsible for the alleged attack against the Nazis, saving the lives of twenty-two civilian hostages in his district; finally, the institutional crisis after the referendum on June 2, 1946 when the Italians had to decide between the monarchy and a republic.

It was a very sensitive moment and any reckless actions might have sparked a civil war. However, after the results were published the transition to a Republic went smoothly thanks to the very restrained behaviour by Umberto, who decided to go into exile in Portugal, and the loyalty to *popular sovereignty* by the oldest police corps. It's true that many Carabinieri were in two minds as to whether or not to renew their oath, but the Commander General promptly sent the right message to all the units: "Carabinieri, sons of the people at the service of the people."

It mustn't have been easy to prepare the text and also step into the shoes of a writer (with *epaulets sown onto the skin*, to cite a phrase by one of the Arm's heroes). Tell us about this difficult but exciting journey which ultimately led to the publication of your book.

You're right, it wasn't easy especially for me because I'd never written anything academic, but my enthusiasm helped me overcome these difficulties. I can, however, take credit for convincing many authoritative writers such as Sergio Zavoli, Sergio Romano, Claudio Magris, Gianni Riotta,



Giuseppe Governale, Brigadier General of the Arm of the Carabinieri, is the Commander of the Legione Sicilia. Born in Palermo, he left Sicily in 1978 aged 19 to attend the Military Academy in Modena. He graduated in Law and in Political Sciences and for his almost 37 years of service in the Carabinieri he has been a commanding officer and in the commandant's staff in different cities in Italy: Naples, Livorno, Milan, Rome, Modena and Catania. In July 2013 he returned to Palermo as Commander of the roughly 9000 Carabinieri stationed on the island. He has worked in the Legislation and Personnel Offices of the Carabinieri High Command and as Legal Advisor to the Operational Commander in Chief of the Armed Forces in several international missions. A football enthusiast (he supports the Palermo football club) and dog lover (he has a bulldog and a dachshund), he enjoys reading poetry and historical books. In November 2014 his book "*Accanto agli Italiani: Carabinieri e nazione, due secoli di fedeltà e servizio*" was published by Mondadori. Proceeds are devolved entirely to the Charity Association in favour of Orphans of the Carabinieri. Married to Maria Lena, daughter of a Carabinieri officer, he has three children, Salvatore, Alessandro and Cristina.

Emilio Gentile and Giuseppe De Rita to unreservedly contribute to the book by describing their impressions of the Italians' opinion of the Carabinieri, today and in the past. I also managed to persuade six families of Carabinieri decorated with the Gold Medal of Military Valour to give their own simple but touching account of the sacrifice made by their loved ones. I think this is another interesting part of the book.

"The Carabinieri's station is like a GP's studio". "The heart of the Carabinieri is the station, not the High Command". The Carabinieri are always very close to the Italians; perhaps it's one of the secrets of their success. This is reflected in the book, especially in the title. It's a difficult job, but certainly very enriching. Based on your own experience could give us an example, something that makes this ideal come to life?

With pleasure. The very simple but tangible episode I'll tell you about will allow me to make a comparison with an event that happened many years ago. I've described it in the chapter entitled "The Origins". On June 5, 1832, the "Gazzetta Piemontese" reported an event that had taken place two years earlier. It involved an English gentleman Edward Rudolph. In short, Sir Edward and his family were travelling across the Moncenisio when they were caught in a snowstorm and found themselves in great difficulty.

The Carabiniere Cirpiano Gabencel came to the rescue and took the unlucky family to safety. However he refused to accept "a sum of 1000 Francs, or at least a watch" since "honour was more important than money (...) he was not in need of anything and his wages were enough to live on". If it hadn't been for the newspaper article no-one would have known about it because when Gabencel went back to his barracks he reported the incident but failed to mention the noble gesture testifying to his moral qualities.

The second episode took place on January 2 this year. Like the events in 1832, we only found out about it when the newspaper "Giornale di Sicilia" reported it on January 5, 2015. A tourist couple was visiting the island of Vulcano and wanted to tour the island, but cars weren't available for hire during the festive winter season. Things weren't looking too rosy, but the Commander of the Post didn't think twice before lending them his own car free of charge so they could go on their outing. Two small but important episodes that prove how our Carabinieri *care for* the community.

You have been the Commander of the *Legione Carabinieri Sicilia* since July 2013. You yourself have said that Sicily requires a "subtle, complex and emergency-oriented" service where being a point of reference for citizens and institutions takes on a whole different meaning. Can you elaborate further?

The Carabinieri have been in Sicily since July 1860, eight months before the proclamation of the Kingdom of Italy. We were a very important presence and for so many communities, the syllogism State-Carabinieri-Nation was and is a fact. On many occasions the Carabinieri have acted as a link between the *occupying forces* (from Piedmont) and a civil society as heterogeneous as it is complex and opaque, one where it is difficult to enforce legality. The unique and very special mentality that the Carabinieri have tried to convey and disseminate could perhaps be summarised by a phrase written anonymously in September 1982 close to the spot where General Dalla Chiesa was killed: "Here dies the hope of honest Palermitans". However that hope has flourished once again thanks to countless Carabinieri who, inspired by their general and the sacrifice of many of their comrades, continue to fight diffuse illegality and made it their *raison d'être*.