

# **Manual for the 30<sup>th</sup> Blackshirt Legion**



**Second World War  
Italian Reenactment Group**

**2022**

# **Table of Contents**

Constitution of the Legion

Enlisted Uniform Guide

Enlisted Uniform Notes

Men's Appearance & Grooming

Military Equipment

Weaponry & Armaments

Fasci Femminili

Regulations for Special Awards

Ranks & Structure

# Constitution of the Legion

Be it understood that the living history reenactment organization, the 30<sup>th</sup> Blackshirt Legion, is hereafter known as "the legion." At reenactments, it may also be known as the "30<sup>th</sup> Blackshirt Battalion", or "Gruppo Montebello", all of which are understood to be the same thing, just specified to be best in line with a given venue.

The legion is a volunteer organization of individuals dedicated to studying and portraying the life and times of the Italian soldier during this period of history.

Members of the legion agree to adhere to the Constitution, rules, and regulations of the Legion and receive an annual membership card on renewal of their membership.

The legion does not espouse, condone, or advocate an authoritarian ideology, and condemns those which would undermine the free expression of the individual and their constitutional rights. The group exists strictly for the purposes of furthering the study of the Italian military experience as well as the state and society of Italy in the years leading up to and including the Second World War, and fellowship. No one may be affiliated with the legion who has a felony background, is legally disbarred from the use of firearms in any state, or is a member of an extremist organization, or openly espouses the views thereof.

The ubiquity of blackshirts means that the uniform is flexible and largely universal, allowing a convenient and historically accurate appearance to fit most historical scenarios an Italian presence would be appropriate.

One person will be fundamentally responsible for the operations of the legion. Unless otherwise specified on a case-by-case basis, at a reenactment event the senior ranking officer or legionary will be that individual. Everyone, however, is empowered and entrusted to maintain the health and safety of themselves and their comrades. The commander will be obeyed unless instructions present a hazard to the health and safety of others or violate the rules and regulations of the place where said instructions were given. No one will be admonished or penalized for refusing an instruction in those circumstances.

Members who join will do so portraying common rank and file soldiers by default unless by special dispensation. Since rank equates to real responsibility, promotions will be authorized by the commanding officer, ratified by the members. NCOs will be appointed based on competence, seniority, dedication, and numerical need.

Members of the legion are responsible for the acquisition, maintenance, and storage of their own clothing and equipment.

Should any member seek legal action or judgment against the legion, its members, or components, and judgment not be found against the legion, its members, and/or its components, said member shall be liable for any and all court and attorney fees incurred.

# Enlisted Uniform Guide

GIUBBA\* M1940 - Grey-green (grigioverde) wool 3-button tunic with black double-flame collar mostrine and white metal fasces pins with blades facing "outwards". The giubba has pleated patch pockets on the chest and lower body as well as a wool belt which is worn when not wearing the leather equipment. Ribbons, if any, are worn over the wearer's left chest pocket. Rank chevrons, if any, are worn on the upper sleeves.

PANTALONI\* M1935 or M1940 - Grigioverde wool, baggy breeches-style tied or secured just below the knee. High waisted, worn with a canvas, double-ring waistbelt. Rank and file may wear a 5/8" matte black stripe down the outer seams for an early or pre-war look. Long trousers may not be worn with the uniform.

FASCE MOLLETTIERE\* M1929 - Known otherwise as "puttees," these grigioverde wool wraps are wound from the top of the ankle boot to below the knee. For pre/early-war & dress occasions, black puttees may be worn.

SCARPONI\* M1912 - Italian army boots, dyed black. These feature a distinctive crescent "cap." (If unavailable, British ammo boots an acceptable substitute.)

CAMICIA\* M1933 - Black cotton shirt, pull-over style, with spear point collar. In colder weather, a simple knit black turtleneck may be worn or the grey flannel M1939 shirt.

CRAVATA\* - Black wool or cotton tie worn with the shirt. Enlisted ranks may omit the tie for "tacticals."

FEZ\* - Black wool fez in the style of the bersaglieri worn by rank and file.

GIACCA DI FATICA M1935 - Tough grey "salt and pepper" jacket of canvas for fatigue duties, closed by three buttons down the front. It has two lower pockets. Worn with rank chevrons, if any, on the upper sleeves. May have white metal fasces pins on the collar, but no badges or ribbons.

PANTALONI DI FATICA - Fatigue-duty breeches made of the same material as the jacket.

CAPPOTTO M1937 - Single-breasted greatcoat with 4 hidden buttons. Pocket flaps are found at the waistline and built-in chest pockets. Enlisted men to wear white metal fasces pins on the collar. Rank chevrons, if any, worn on the upper sleeves. No ribbons or badges.

BERRETTO A BUSTA "BUSTINA" M1934 - Worn only by Blackshirt NCOs and officers. Rank and file wore the fez. Grigioverde wool like the Royal Army, the NCO bustina would have a black embroidered badge on the front flap.

*\*Essential kit*

# Enlisted Uniform Notes

GRADI – Rank chevrons for the MVSN in WW2 were worn on the upper sleeve. One large red and one small red stripe was Camicia Nera Scelta. One large red and two small red stripes was Vice Capo Squadra. One large silver and one small silver stripe was Capo Squadra. One large silver and two small silver stripes was Primo Capo Squadra. See the table at the end of this manual for further clarification on the rank structure of the MVSN.

FASCE MOLLETTIERE – The puttees may require some practice to put on correctly. If they are of the banana-shape type, the “bend” should be positioned on the calf as the cloth is wound upwards. Wind downwards as the bend turns, then up again, tying off below the knee and blousing the pantaloni.

PASSANTI PER CINTURA – There should be two fabric belt loops sewn on either side of the tunic. The cloth belt is passed through these loops and buttoned shut in front. When the leather equipment is worn, the cloth belt is removed, and the leather belt is passed through the belt loops instead.

FREGI – Even though the 30th Blackshirt Battalion became one of the three M Battalions that made up Gruppo Battaglioni “M” “Montebello” sent to the eastern front, this unit did not actually physically receive the red M mostrine pins, as per photographic evidence. Therefore, the regular white metal MVSN fasces pins are always appropriate for the unit.

FEZ – The proper way to wear the fez is in the style of the bersaglieri—worn toward the back of the head, folded downwards. The black tassel can either hang freely or on the shoulder. The fez should not be worn vertically on the head like a brimless bowler hat. If worn correctly, the fez will stay in place. Some fezzes had small combs sewn into their interior to better grip the hair, but this was not an official practice.

SWISS CONVERSIONS – Given the availability of correctly-made reproduction Italian uniforms, whenever possible, these should be preferred over older Swiss-converted uniforms.

BAD REPROS – Be careful what you purchase. For example, MVSN mostrine with yellow thread fasces as seen on eBay are wrong and forbidden. Items put up for sale are frequently mislabeled by the vendor. When in doubt, ask.

# Men's Appearance & Grooming

**FACIAL HAIR** - Unlike many other countries, Italy allowed its servicemen to have facial hair if they so wished. The majority would shave and have no facial hair at all, as there is a sanitary benefit to it, but mustaches and beards were quite common. The "Balbo" style of beard, which is a kind of goatee, was also popular. If the gas mask was to be worn, a good seal was required for it to be of any use. Therefore, if one does have a beard, the cheeks must be clear.

**HAIR** - Hairstyles must be of a 1930s/40s-appropriate style. There was more variation within Italian servicemen than one might expect, but they had to have a neat, clean, military appearance. A popular style of the time was to have the hair longer on the top and very short on the sides. Hair must not touch the collar and be away from the ears at minimum.

**IN GENERAL** - To maintain an authentic appearance, all modern and inappropriate intrusions must be avoided. These include earrings, modern wristwatches (period ones are fine), cell phones, unorthodox hair, etc. If it wasn't right for the time, it's not right for our purposes. When in doubt, ask!

**DISPOSITION** - To the best of your ability, adopt a martial air in your bearing and demeanor while wearing the uniform. The convinced Italian soldiers believed they were rebuilding the Roman Empire. The less convinced at the very least were proud of their unit affiliation and their service to the nation. While Italy is not always thought of as a country with a strong martial pedigree, this perception could not be farther from the truth. When wearing the uniform, you are representing the WW2 soldiers and interpreting their experiences. Be conscious of what your body language says.

**UNIFORM ORDERS** - The uniform to be worn for a given event will be dictated by the nature of the event itself, communicated by the commanding officer. Blackshirts may be ordered to wear the fatigue uniform, wear the greatcoat in cold weather, or possibly perform duties in shirtsleeves. More rarely, they may be ordered to wear the black puttees and black helmet for some particular dress occasion. As said before, when in doubt, ask.

# Military Equipment

In general, the military equipment issued to the Milizia was the same as the Royal Army infantry with the addition of the combat knife.

GIBERNE\* - Dual ammunition pouches in grey-green leather worn on the waistbelt, connected to leather neck strap. Only one such pouch is worn, centered over the stomach.

CINTURA\* - Grigioverde leather waistbelt with double-prong steel buckle.

BORRACCIA\* - Aluminum water bottle with grey-green wool cover and khaki cotton strap.

BAIONETTA\* - Bayonet for appropriate rifle carried on grey-green leather frog worn on the left side of the waistbelt.

SACCO\* PER MASCHERA ANTIGAS – Khaki-colored canvas gas mask bag, either M33 square version or M35 cylindrical. Useful for storing items in if you do not actually have a gas mask.

BORSA TATTICA – Khaki cotton canvas tactical knapsack in which to store essential personal effects, mess tin, toiletries, clothes, etc. The borsa tattica usually carries the camouflage shelter/poncho, aluminum tent poles, and stakes underneath. It may also carry a rolled blanket over the top and sides.

TELO MIMETICO M1929 – Waterproof (usually) camouflage patterned shelter half or, if it has a buttoned flap in the center, rain poncho. These can be buttoned together to form larger canvas sections, used up to the early 1990s.

SACCO PER ARMI A PIEDI M1939 – Often hard to find, this is a larger backpack in which the borsa tattica is carried. The sacco is for marching order, less of a tactical nature when a smaller pack is more convenient. All the man's possessions would be carried in the sacco.

GAVETTA – Aluminum mess tin. Wartime mess tins have two loops on the exterior, omitted in postwar versions.

ELMETTO\* M1933 – Steel helmet painted grigioverde which may have a black MVSN stencil. The helmet is secured with a leather chin strap—postwar helmets have canvas chin straps which must be replaced. Helmets came in sizes 55-61. For special dress occasions or very early war events, the black-painted helmet had a yellow MVSN stencil.

*\*Essential kit*

# Weaponry & Armaments

MOSCHETTO (or FUCILE) CARCANO – Various 6.5mm Carcano rifle models were used in WW2, such as the M1891, M1938, and M1941 rifles, and the M1891 and M1891-38 cavalry carbines. The cavalry carbine with its integrated folding bayonet seems to have been preferred by Blackshirts for its portability. A highly accurate weapon, the Carcano is a six-shot bolt action rifle whose rounds are carried in a brass or steel clip. Blanks can be had from Joe Swanson's Motion Picture Blanks.

PUGNALE DI COMBATTIMENTO M1938 – Unlike regular infantry, Blackshirts were issued a combat dagger. Believed to be patterned off an earlier Austrian design, the dagger is worn on the wearer's left side on the leather belt. An earlier model, the M1935, was still seen among older Blackshirts in WW2.

BOMBA A MANO – Inert or harmless replicas (obviously). Some Italian grenades were the OTO 1935, SRCM 1935, and Breda 1935. These anti-personnel grenades were often called "Red Devils" because of their painted color scheme.

MOSCHETTO AUTOMATICO BERETTA M1938 – Listed here for reference purposes. The famous "MAB" Italian 9mm sub-machine gun was, prior to the end of 1943, used primarily by paratroopers, special assault forces, or by officers and senior NCOs. Rank and file Blackshirts would not be issued the MAB in the context of our impression.

PISTOLA BERETTA M1934 – Also listed here for reference purposes, a small semi-automatic service pistol, the Beretta 34 was carried by officers, warrant officers, and certain specialist troops. This had a 7+1 detachable magazine, .380 ACP caliber. The M1935 was identical except designed to fire .320 ACP.



# Fasci Femminili

The "Fasci Femminili" was the women's section of the PNF from 1919-1945. It incorporated all Party organizations for women and girls.

According to authors Perry Willson, Christine Fauré, and Jennifer Linda Monti:

Its purpose was to instruct women in their role according to fascist ideology. The FF met some hostility from male members of the party. When it was formally created in 1920, having then informally existed since 1919, it was almost unique, since other Italian political parties did not include women... It was reorganized to become a voluntary mass organization in 1929. In practice, the majority of their work was charitable and social work, which was used to instruct women in the ideology of the party and to give the party good publicity. During the 1920s, the women active within the Fascist Party were mostly educated, middle-class women. Girls were included by the creation of youth groups for girls, separated by age class, such as the Piccole Italiane (for girls age 8-12) and the Giovani Italiane (13-18). In 1925, the section Opera Nazionale Maternità ed Infanzia (OMNI) was created to support married mothers and children, which was essentially a charity organization managed by the FF-women. The Massaie Rurali (MR) was founded in 1933 and the Sezione Operaie e Lavoranti a Domicilio (Section for Female Laborers and Home-workers or SOLD) in 1937, both intended to include rural and urban working-class women respectively within the PNF. The FF had 750,000 members in 1939. All these groups were formally sections of the FF.

As with the men, to maintain the authenticity of the group, women should strive for a 1930s/40s appearance to the best of their ability. This means to emulate the hairstyles and accessories as appropriate for the era. Modern intrusions must be avoided.

## F.F. Uniform

SAHARIANA – A ladies' cut version of the sahariana jacket in black wool or white cotton depending on the season. The sahariana had a gold M worn over the left chest pocket. A system of stars and lines indicated the position the wearer held in her "fasci". The shoulder straps had a pair of fasces embroidered or as attached metal pins.

CAMICIA – White shirt, paired with a black tie.

GONNA – Black or white skirt, just below the knee or to mid-calf length.

CAPPELLO – Typically hats were black or white ladies' fedoras or military-style envelope caps.

SCARPE – Shoes were black, though of no set style, generally rather practical.

# Regulations for Special Awards

To recognize and encourage members of the legion, the following regulations are set forward on awards for members of the 30<sup>th</sup> Blackshirt Legion. No other awards of any kind are authorized. Awards are voluntary, given by the Legion.

**Ardito Patch:** indicates that the wearer had been an Ardito or special assault trooper. *Wearer has prior WW2 reenactment experience.*

**1915-1918 War Ribbon and/or Inter-Allied Victory Medal:** given to Italian Great War veterans. *Wearer is at least 40 years old with 2 years of membership and has participated in a WWI battle event or public interpretive event as an Italian.*

**Spanish Civil War Ribbon:** given to those who served in Spain. *Wearer has attended a Spanish Civil War event as an Italian, not necessarily as 30<sup>th</sup> Blackshirt Legion.*

**Volunteer for Spain Ribbon:** given to those who volunteered to serve in Spain. *Wearer has attended 2 or more Spanish Civil War events as an Italian, not necessarily as 30<sup>th</sup> Blackshirt Legion.*

**Abyssinia Ribbon:** given to those who served in the Italian conquest of Ethiopia. *Wearer has 5 years of dedicated membership and attended at least 5 WW2 battle events.*

**MVIN 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Ribbon:** given to those who served in the MVSN for a decade. *Wearer has 10 or more years of dedicated membership and one other ribbon.*

**War Merit Cross Ribbon:** given to those who were injured in action after a year's service in contact with the enemy or were promoted for merit or accomplished a minor but notable valorous action. *Wearer has participated in at least 4 public interpretive events which are not battles and have already earned either the Abyssinia or Spanish Civil War ribbon.*

**CRI Red Cross Ribbon:** worn to recognize achievements by volunteer medical staff. *Wearer has provided first aid or treatment to someone at an event above minor cuts and scrapes. Available to Fasci Femminili members as well.*

**Red Wound Stripe:** worn on the right upper arm for those injured "in the national cause." *Wearer has successfully given a presentation about Italy in WW2 to a school, civic group, or other non-reenactment-related lecture-style venue.*

**Order of the Crown of Italy Ribbon:** established as the "national" order by the monarchy, the OCI was the third-lowest order and awarded to military and civilians alike in recognition of meritorious achievements. *Wearer is an officer and has earned either the Spanish or Abyssinian ribbons, the War Merit Cross, as well as to the 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary.*

# MVSN Ranks & Structure

It should be noted that the Italian rank system does not perfectly correlate with Anglo-American ranks.

Italian Rank	English Translation	Approx. Correlation
Camicia Nera	Black Shirt	Private
Camicia Nera Scelta	Chosen Black Shirt	Lance Corporal
Vice Capo Squadra	Vice Squad Leader	Corporal
Capo Squadra	Squad Leader	Lance Sergeant
Primo Capo Squadra	First Squad Leader	Sergeant
Aiutante	Adjutant	Staff Sergeant
Aiutante Capo	Adjutant Leader	Master Sergeant
Aiutante Primo	First Adjutant	Warrant Officer
Aspirante	Officer Cadet	Acting 2 <sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant
Sotto Capo Manipolo	Sub Maniple Leader	2 <sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant
Capo Manipolo	Maniple Leader	1 <sup>st</sup> Lieutenant
Centurione	Centurion	Captain
Primo Centurione	First Centurion	Senior Captain
Seniore	Senior	Major
Primo Seniore	First Senior	Lieutenant Colonel
Console	Consul	Colonel
Console Generale	Consul General	Brigadier General
Luogotenente Generale	Lieutenant General	Major General
Luogotenente Generale, Capo di Stato Maggiore	Lieutenant General, Chief of Staff	Lieutenant General
Comandante Generale	Commandant General	General
Primo Caporale d'Onore	First Corporal of Honor (Mussolini)	Field Marshal

**Royal Army Ranks:** Soldato/Soldato Scelto/Caporale/Caporale Maggiore/Sergente/Sergente Maggiore/Maresciallo/Maresciallo Capo/Maresciallo Maggiore/Aiutante di Battaglia/Aspirante/Sotto Tenente/Tenente/Primo Tenente/Capitano/Primo Capitano/Maggiore/Tenente Colonnello/Colonnello/Generale di Brigata/Generale di Divisione/Generale di Corpo Armata/Generale d'Armata/Maresciallo d'Italia/Primo Maresciallo dell'Impero (the King & il Duce).

MVSN Term with its Leader	Approx. Correlations
Squadra (Capo Squadra)	Squad / Squadra / Squad
Manipolo (Capo Manipolo)	Maniple / Plotone / Platoon
Centuria (Centurione)	Century / Compagnia / Company
Coorte (Seniore)	Cohort / Battaglione / Battalion
Legione (Console)	Legion / Reggimento / Regiment
Gruppo (Console Generale)	Group / Brigata / Brigade
Raggruppamento (Luogotenente Generale)	Grouping / Divisione / Division