



From the Dustbin of History: the Bordello

by Mauro de Vita

Some while ago someone on The Gamers list server asked about any special rule regarding the 10th Army mobile bordello unit in DAK. Apart from a couple humorous answers, the topic wasn't discussed further. So I think it's time to let you know how that sort of "unit" was organized and utilized. The following information is from an article published by *Giorgio Rochat Storia Militare*, an Italian military history magazine. His sources were some documents from the historical office of the Army.

The documents recovered regard some tens of requests to the Italian military commands to open new bordelli (the official name was "Case di tolleranza") in Cyrenacia between March and October 1942, following the Italo-German advances toward Egypt. Anyway, similar organizations were present in every area where the presence of Italian troops was significant and stable; there were such areas throughout the whole 1940-1943 period.

A document issued 28 June 1942 by the Gebelic Command, commanded by General Piatti Dal Pozzo, subdivides the bordelli of Barce into five distinct classes.

Class	Customers and staff	Cost per "operation"
1st	reserved for officers and state employees European "professionals"	50 Lire
2nd	officers, NCOs, soldiers, and civilians European "professionals"	40 Lire: officers and civilians 35 Lire: NCOs 30 Lire: soldiers
3rd	officers, NCOs, soldiers, and civilians European "professionals"	35 Lire: officers and civilians 25 Lire: NCOs 20 Lire: soldiers
4th	officers, NCOs, soldiers, and civilians Moslem "professionals"	15-25 Lire
5th	Libyans Moslem "professionals"	12 Lire

The bordelli of 1st, 2nd, and 3rd class were furnished with European "professionals." All the bordelli except 5th class were reserved for European customers.

Eight bordelli operated in Barce; their hours were:

9:00 AM to 12:00 PM, 3:00 PM to 8:00 PM, 9:00 PM to 12:00 PM for Europeans.

9:00 AM to 12:00 PM and 2:00 PM to 7:00 PM for the Libyans.

The document was very clear about the "rules of engagement." It said:

1. If the bordello was reserved for Europeans, except if it was for officers only, it had to reserve a waiting room for NCOs during the day and another one for the officers during the evening.

2. Officers could pass the night in the bordelli reserved for them, as could civilians in all bordelli with European "professionals." The cost of the night was not fixed, but to be decided between the client and the tenutaria (madam).

3. The superior officers could keep for the night, at their homes, professionals coming from the bordelli reserved for officers, but the professionals could not leave the bordello before 12:00 pm. The cost of the night was not fixed, but to be decided between the client and the tenutaria.

4. Use of a condom was mandatory. It was to be furnished by the tenutaria and was included in the price of the "operation."

Such a complex organization was possible only in areas far from the front lines. In the immediate rear areas it was possible to have a less complicated "unit." For example, on 2 March 1942, General Zingales, commander of the CAM Corps, asked for the organization of a "light unit" at Berta, able to sustain the needs of at least 1,500 men.

The "commanding officer" of every bordello was the "tenutaria" or "metressa" (the woman in charge of everything inside the "unit"). She recruited the professionals and asked for a license to set up a "unit" in a particular location. The police granted the license, after consulting with the local commanders of the armed forces.

After the concession of the license, the armed forces had to furnish the rooms and the transport facilities, while the tenutaria had to furnish the outfits. The sanitary checks were very strict. In case of a lack of medical personnel, the bordello was immediately closed. The Carabinieri had to furnish the security detachment.

Generally, every bordello was organized with a tenutaria (a woman in her 40s), two or three "professionals" (women in their 20s or 30s), and a cook.

Police control of the professionals was very strict. On 28 May 1942, a professional of Barce was sent back to Italy because she left the bordello without permission to go to the house of her lover. At the end of September 1942, a tenutaria and one of her professionals avoided being sent back to Italy after leaving Mersa Matruh for two days without permission because they were able to prove they were flown to Siwa, by the Regia Aeronautica, to resolve the "problems" of the local garrison.

The garrison.

The presiding command was no exception in the field. (No, you are not going to see any bordello unit in Ariete!) On 22 September 1942, a superior officer of the Ariete asked for at least two professionals willing to "serve" in the immediate rear area of the division. On 26 September, the divisional chief of staff asked the presiding command for a license to set up a bordello for the needs of the Ariete. In fact, the Ariete's officers in Barce managed to recruit two professionals in Barce. Now you can understand the reason for the high ARs of the Ariete in DAK!

The presiding command gave his permission on 7 October. On 10 October the chief of staff of the Ariete granted transport facilities, rooms (well, tents), medical assistance, and a security detachment. On 13 October the two professionals had to pass a medical check. The confirmation of their "aptitude" arrived on 17 October.

Unfortunately, Monty and the battle of El Alamein were very near, and the Ariete's men were not going to enjoy that kind of unit for long. ✨