The experience of AFBIS in the field of publicize and divulgate the History.
The Florentine Association of Scale Battles-AFBIS and the 113ème Regiment
d'infanterie de ligne.
(Paolo Coturri-Daniele Vergari)

The extent of this brief relation it is not an autocelebration, but only to partecipate a way our Association run as a meeting between the passion for the history and the teaching and the moving the people to the interest for the history. An original way including and testing different languages to spreading the knowledge of history. The AFBIS(Associazione Fiorentina Battaglie in Scala) fu fondata nel 1973 from a little group of students passionate to modelling airplanes, tanks and model soldiers and to play wargames and boardgames, with a double object: the “ludic” one- the game as aggregation- and the “cultural” one- to promote and spread the interest to the history by way the historic modelling and the war simulation.

At the beginning of ’70 the cultural spaces for this approach were minimal, but in Florence there was a certain substrate favourable to the collaboration with shops and museums.

The Association, once cured and stabilized the play element- which is to- now an integrant mover- entered upon a series of collaborations with the Florentine museums, the Stibbert among others, noted for its very important arms and armour collection. In that Museum in 1982 was mounted a exposition, with a 200-pages text volume intitled “Arms and engaged (assoldati) in Tuscany 1260-1364”, where model soldiers and dioramas matched original research and the display on the medieval armies in Tuscany. From that year the AFBIS and its members were involved in a serie of public activities: in 1989, 700 years from the battle of Campaldino, with models and diorama of the battle (now at Poppi museum), in 1992 with the reconstruction of the battle of Scannagallo, to arrive to the more recent collaborations, from 1996, with the Memory Yard, for the exibition on Napoleon in Egypt with the dioramas of the battles of Aboukir and the Pyramids one (now in the Villa Napoleonica di San Martino-Isola d'Elba), for the exibition on the battle of Kadesh (2002, now in the Museo Archeologico of Florence) to mention only someone.

In the same period the AFBIS collaborated with the Florentine Rai section, with specific projects of the University, with the Florentine or Regional municipality (1998, L'arte della guerra nell'età della Francigena), with the Military Geographic Institute and the SDIAF with the making of a diorama of the 1848 Curtatone and Montanara battle (2008).

The way and approach of the AFBIS brought a natural evolution with the collaboration with the near Museum of Military and Civil historic model in Calenzano, opened some years ago in the medieval castle of the Tuscan town. In this occasion the Association contributed to the preparation, to the teaching percourse and to lend
models. The percourse use the historical figure, the dioramas and original or reconstructed objects to explain, to render clear, principally to the guided tours for the school, not only the military history, but the relation with the society of the time, the dress, the uniform, the people, etc.; the other side of the teaching is about the history of model toy soldiers, the to-day “state of art” and the necessary manuality. The dioramas bring in light the organisations and tactics. A member teacher has brought this experience in his class, where 30 girls and boys, through model soldiers and low level wargames, approached history of dress, society and war (!) in a playful way.

The teaching experience and “vocation” needed knowledge and a specialized library, and as student or young workers we put together purse money and bought books in common. From the first nucleus of 40 books (from Funcken to Pieri and Luraghi) now we have a library of more than 4,000 volumes on history and uniformology, for a great part in French, English and Spanish language, with works of value and often rare or unique in Tuscany or Italy. To this we must join 150 periodicals, from le Carnet de la Sabretache to The Arquebusier, from The Slingshot to all the military models and wargame magazines published in Italy. The hard kernel of the library, entitled “The good Swej soldier”, is a collection of 1,100 volumes on the First World War and 600 volumes on the Napoleonic Wars, but there are books from Ancient Egypt to the English Civil War to the two Iraq wars. The library is open also to the public with the catalogue on the internet base of municipal libraries. There is moreover the large availability of the libraries, often highly specialized, of the older member, maybe 30,000 more volumes and “a lot” of periodicals.

From the beginning the AFBIS put to work to publish “something” in a time where there was only the well deserved Storia Illustrata. So we published a Bollettino dell'AFBIS, a fanzine, but after that, true illustrated magazines (Modellismo Militare, Modelli Militari, Archeologia navale e ricostruttiva), the nurses of Italian historical modellers and wargamers.

And, at last, the historical reconstruction by the way of the reenactment, the scale 1:1!

Some time after the foundation of the AFBIS also in Siena was created an homologous Association. The founders of the two groups in the years nurtured and matured in an independent way, through “touristic” experiences (Waterloo, Borodino, Leipzig) the idea to bring to life a Group of historical reconstitution. In a casual meeting at a great model exhibition of the AFBIS in the great spaces of the Istituto degli Innocenti di Firenze in 1994, came natural the idea to reconstitute the 113ème Regiment d'Infanterie de ligne, the name given in May 1808, at Perpignano, en route for the Catalogne, to the Tuscan Light Regiment, in the wake of the annexion of the ex-Etruria Kingdom to the French Empire.

Naturally they chose for the first “engagement” the 18 June 1995 at Waterloo. In some months, as old uniformologists and wargamers, we contacted the few Italian groups of Napoleonic reenactment, we bought arms and equipments, found tailors for the first uniforms and obtained the arms permission (only few had served in the army!). Myself dig a true furrow between Commissariats, Questura and Prefettura (involved Public Offices) to interpret the uncertain regles of the time. At the end of the
bureaucratic work I allow myself a goliardic remark:”And now we must try a way for the artillery.....”.

On the 17th of june 1995 un sous-lieutenant,9 voltigeurs(3 from Friuli-Udine,3 from Florence,3 from Siena) and a (Sardinian) cantiniére were at Waterloo,on a sidewalk,a little perplexed,to see Russians defiling,when we had the first lucky stroke:we were noted from a true historian,prof.Oleg Sokolov (decorated with the(true)Legion d'Honneur by Hollande),in French general uniform,who,soon made out we were able to shoot,had in the pocket an original copy of the Reglement...of 1791,but absolutely no practice,made us an appointment on the next morning at 6 o'clock,in the gymnasium of Lasnes,townlet in the Belgian country.That day we had the baptism of fire deployed as voltigeurs ad fired about 20 shot each,paying only the first and last bruising. The second stroke of luck was the friendship with the President of Black Power Society Lombardo-Veneta,Enrico Tettamanti(1° Rgt.Leggero Italico) and the beginning of the recalls of the Bicentenary of Italian Campaigns,from Loano(1995) to Marengo(2000).A serie of events which brought to North Italy reenactors from all Europe and let us to be appreciated and to establish strong bonds of collaboration and friendship with groups by tens.

In the following years the 113ème grew in numbers and experience and now is one of best European unit of French infantry;after more than 120 events attended(including a Guard at the Tomb of Napoleon),two years ago, at the Bicentenary of Waterloo,we were posted,proudly,in te first line,at the center,with 45 members,mostly Tuscans and Venetians.

From the beginnings we were a group of friends and we kept this spirit for more than twenty years:we never had scissions or fight for “power”,alas frequent in other groups. The maintan of the regiment was entirely from our purse,from Albuhera to Malojaroslavets(only here with the help of prof.gen.Sokolov!).

This has been briefly the history of the recipient. Now I'll talk about the contained.

From the first we put mind,as honest 40-50-years old,near all with an university degree in the pocket,to the aim we had pursued in the model and wargamer associations from were we came,and still are active members:the spreading with every medium of the history,non only the military one. Therefore non only battles,but also historical teaching campments,open to the public and to the schools,presence on the territory with lessons in the schools(and university), exhibitions,meetings and parécipations to cultural events,the last one month ago,at Poggibonsi,with prof.Cardini and prof.Barbero.In the second week-end of June the voltigeurs of the 113ème are at Marengo,while the greatest part of the Regiment will be the Guard(in Revolutionary uniforms) at Palazzo Vecchio di Firenze for the meeting of gen.Bonaparte with Ferdinand III,and at Poggio Imperiale,for a court dress ball,with people from all Europe.

I will end with an important point:at a certain time we transformed ourselves in (dilectant)historians and we began to make archival research and to write books and booklets on Tuscany in the years of the Wars of the Revolution and the Empire,on the history of the 113ème,on the levy,on the S.Helen Medaille,on the local history of the period. In this moment some of ours are working on the registers of the Regiment,put
on line by the SHD in Vincennes, while a veteran (77-years) is working on the levy of Campi Bisenzio. Some members partecipate also to other groups, particularly medieval, 1600, American Civil War and First World War. I think to have given an idea of the immense spaces offered by the reenactment if made seriously.

Contacts:
113ème
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http://opac.comune.fi.it/easyweb/w2001/ link to the AFBIS Library