

SUMMARY

MEMORIAL MEDAL OF THE RIJEKA EXPEDITION
(Medaglia commemorativa della spedizione di Fiume)

The Croatian Sabor (parliament) broke off state links with the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy on 29 October 1918. On that day the Croatian National Council in Rijeka received the order from Zagreb to take over rule in the city. Dr Rikard Lenac (1869-1943) was appointed Governor of Rijeka, but this did not resolve the situation. The newly-created State of Slovenes, Croats and Serbs, founded on 29 October 1918, could not defend Croatia's rule in Rijeka. Conflict broke out between Croatia and Italy, and to prevent it the Joint Allied Command was established on 3 November 1918. The regular Italian army was also part of the international forces, and this showed itself decisive for the further fate of the city. On 16 November 1918, units of the Italian army broke into the Governor's Palace, evicted Dr Rikard Lenac from it, took over Rijeka and occupied Sušak.

A serious dispute broke out among the Allies because of Rijeka, and the situation in the city was at boiling point because in the spring of 1919 almost twenty thousand armed Italians were stationed there, and also several battalions of British, French and American soldiers. Under international pressure, the Italian National Council was disbanded and the members of the Rijeka Legion were banished from the city. On 27 August 1919, the First Regiment of Sardinian Grenadiers also had to leave Rijeka. This military unit was transferred to Ronchi near Trieste. After that representatives of the Italian community in Rijeka invited the Italian poet – the soldier Gabriele d'Annunzio to conquer Rijeka and to annex it to Italy. Under d'Annunzio's leadership, in the night of 12 September 1919 a well-armed column, composed of lorries, cars, armoured vehicles, tanks and about two and a half thousand soldiers, started off from the Italian town of Ronchi and entered Rijeka without difficulties.

The borders between the Kingdom of Italy and the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes were laid down in the Treaty of Rapallo of 12 November 1920. This Treaty also established the Free State of Rijeka (Fiume). The world powers, the USA, France and Great Britain, recognized the newly-created state. Italy got more than it had expected by the Treaty of Rapallo, so Rome decided to remove d'Annunzio from Rijeka. Gabriele d'Annunzio, who was ruling Rijeka, did not want to recognize the Treaty but proclaimed a state of war and invited the Italian citizens of Rijeka to resist. His resistance was broken after five days of engagement by the regular army of the Kingdom of Italy (24-28 December 1920), during which damage was done to the city. This event entered history under the name of *Natale di Sangue* (Bloody Christmas) or *Le cinque giorni di Fiume* (The Five Days of Rijeka). Defeated and humiliated, d'Annunzio was evicted from the city on 18 January 1921.

The Memorial Medal of the Rijeka Expedition (*Medaglia commemorativa della spedizione di Fiume*) was founded by Gabriele d'Annunzio as commander of the self-proclaimed Italian Regency of Karnaro (*Reggenza Italiana del Quarnero*). At the beginning the medal was called *Medaglia commemorativa della Marcia di Ronchi* (Memorial Medal of the March from Ronchi).