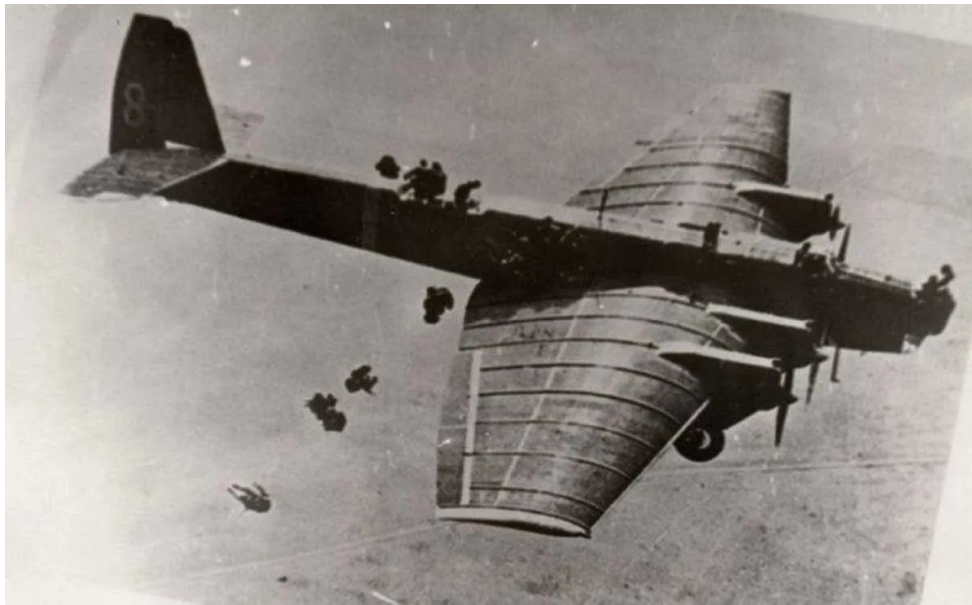




August 2, 1930, twelve men from the sky: thus were born the Soviet airborne troops, the precursors of the VDV

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On August 2, 1930, in the skies near Voronezh, twelve men parachuted during an exercise of the Moscow Military District Air Force.

It was not simply a sporting demonstration. After reaching the ground, the small unit was to regroup, retrieve weapons and equipment, and carry out a tactical mission.

That jump is traditionally considered the birth of the Soviet airborne troops, destined to become the famous **VDV**, the “winged infantry” of the Soviet Union and, later, of the Russian Federation.



The pioneers of Soviet military parachuting photographed in Voronezh on July 28, 1930. A few days later, on August 2, twelve men were air-dropped during a tactical exercise: the date is considered the birth of the VDV.

The precedent of Alessandro Tandura and the experiments that preceded Voronezh

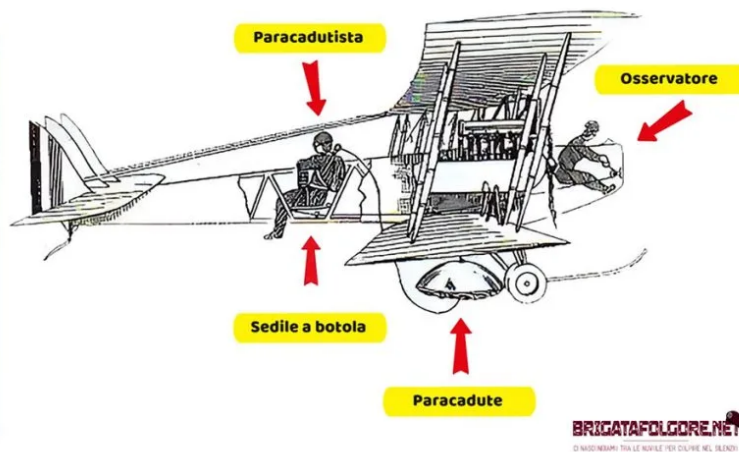
Twelve years before the Soviet experiment in Voronezh, an Italian soldier had already demonstrated the operational possibilities of the parachute.

On the night of August 8-9, 1918, Lieutenant of the Arditi **Alessandro Tandura** was dropped from a Savoia-Pomilio aircraft beyond the Austro-Hungarian lines, in the occupied territory of Vittorio Veneto. The mission did not involve an airborne assault, but a clandestine reconnaissance activity, information gathering, and liaison with the local population. Tandura is therefore remembered as **the first soldier in the world to be air-dropped in a real war action.**

In the last months of the conflict, other countries also began to consider the offensive use of the parachute. In the United States, General Billy Mitchell developed a project to air-drop infantry units behind German lines, but the end of the war prevented it from becoming a real operation. In the 1920s, individual tests and technical experiments continued, aimed at improving materials and training.

The Soviet experiment of August 2, 1930, marked a further step: no longer a single soldier infiltrated beyond the front, but a small armed unit launched from the sky with a common tactical task to perform once on the ground.

Savoia-Pomilio SP.4



Alessandro Tandura, officer of the Arditi and pioneer of military parachuting. On the night of August 8-9, 1918, he was air-dropped beyond the Austro-Hungarian lines for a reconnaissance and liaison mission, becoming the first soldier in the world employed with a parachute in a war action.

The birth of the combat unit

The Soviet parachute jump tests had begun a few days earlier. On July 26, 1930, at the airport of the 11th Air Brigade in Voronezh, some aviators began to perform individual jumps under the direction of **Leonid Minov**, one of the pioneers of Soviet military parachuting.

After about a week of training, the commands decided to move from the single man's jump to the use of an entire team. On August 2, twelve soldiers were air-dropped, divided into small groups, along with the necessary equipment to operate once on the ground.

The real novelty was not just in having men descend from an airplane. The goal was to demonstrate that an armed unit could be quickly transported beyond an obstacle or behind a hypothetical adversary, regroup after landing, and carry out a combat task.

It was the fundamental principle on which all future airborne forces would be built.



Soviet paratroopers prepare to jump from the wings of a Tupolev TB-3 bomber during an exercise in the 1930s. The Soviet Union was among the first countries to experiment with the large-scale use of airborne troops.

The Soviet Union understands the potential of air-dropping

The Voronezh experiment convinced the leaders of the Red Army that the parachute could become an operational tool and not just a means of rescue for aircraft crews.

In the following years, the Soviet Union accelerated the development of units, techniques, and equipment intended for airborne operations. Systems were studied to drop not only soldiers but also machine guns, light cannons, motorcycles, ammunition, and logistical materials.

From 1933, the airborne component began to appear regularly in the large maneuvers of the Red Army. During the exercises of the mid-1930s, thousands of men were employed in operations behind the simulated enemy lines.

The USSR thus became one of the first countries to imagine the large-scale use of airborne troops, integrating them into the doctrine of the so-called **deep battle**.

Their task was to overcome the front, occupy bridges and airports, disrupt communications, hit command posts, and hinder the arrival of enemy reserves.



Soviet paratroopers prepare to jump from the wing of an aircraft during early experiments in the 1930s. During that period, the Red Army rapidly developed techniques, units, and equipment intended for airborne operations.

From the first brigades to large airborne corps

The jump of the twelve men quickly gave rise to increasingly larger formations.

In the early 1930s, the first detachments and subsequently the first airborne brigades were created. On the eve of the German invasion in 1941, the Red Army already had several airborne corps, theoretically capable of conducting operations with thousands of men.

World War II, however, also highlighted the limitations of these formations. The lack of air superiority, the scarcity of transport aircraft, and the difficulties in supplying isolated units made large parachute operations extremely complex.

The Soviets continued to employ airborne units, often transforming them into elite infantry and using them in the most difficult sectors of the front.



Red Army paratroopers in the 1930s.

The birth of modern VDV

In the post-war period, the Soviet airborne troops were reorganized and transformed into an autonomous force, highly mobile and ready to intervene quickly even at great distances.

The **Vozdushno-desantnye vojska**, abbreviated as VDV, became one of the most prestigious military instruments of the Soviet Union. They received air-droppable armored vehicles, dedicated artillery, and their own command structure.

Their image was associated with the blue beret, the striped shirt, and the motto **“None but us.”**

Over the decades, Soviet airborne units were employed in numerous operations, including the intervention in Afghanistan that began in 1979. After the dissolution of the USSR, a significant part of the VDV units and traditions passed to the Russian Federation.



Russian VDV paratroopers during the Zapad 2025 exercise

August 2, Airborne Troops Day

Even today, August 2 is celebrated in Russia as the **Airborne Troops Day**.

The anniversary does not commemorate the formal establishment of a division or an independent command, which occurred through a longer process, but that first tactical experiment of 1930 that demonstrated the possibility of inserting an armed unit from the sky and employing it immediately on the ground.

Twelve men were enough to open a new era.

From that experiment began the long development of the Soviet airborne troops, which later became the VDV.