Heroes Through Time: the 185th RRAO "Folgore" Celebrates 80 Years Since Operation Herring and 25th Anniversary of Its Foundation

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The “Carlo Pisacane” barracks in Livorno was the setting for a dual and heartfelt celebration: the 80th anniversary of Operation Herring and the 25th anniversary of the re-establishment of the 185th Paratroopers Reconnaissance Target Acquisition Regiment “Folgore”, known as RRAO. Two anniversaries intertwined in a narrative of courage, military excellence, and historical memory, elements that define the deep identity of this elite unit of the Italian Army.

Numerous military and civilian authorities attended the ceremony, including the honorable Paola Chiesa, head of the Defense Commission of Fratelli d’Italia, Brigadier General Marco Manzone, Commander of COMFOSE, Major General Alessandro Grassano from the Defense General Staff, and Major General Maurizio Fronda, Commander of the “Acqui” Division.

Enhancing the event was the inauguration of the new “Sala Ricordi”, a museum space within the barracks that houses historical testimonies of the regiment and an evocative sculpture by artist Stefano Bressani depicting a Target Acquirer. During the ceremony, in collaboration with Poste Italiane, the official commemorative stamp issued to celebrate the 25 years of the RRAO was also presented: a recognition that seals the historical and operational value of a unit that, since 2018, has been formally included in the Italian Special Forces units.

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Operation Herring: Legacy of an Italian Epic

Operation Herring, remembered as the only allied military airdrop carried out on Italian territory during World War II, represents a central episode in the history of the unit. From April 20 to 23, 1945, 226 Italian paratroopers belonging to the Reconnaissance Squadron “Folgore” – called “Squadron F” – and the Centuria Nembo were dropped behind German lines south of the Po River.

The mission, commanded by Captain Carlo Francesco Gay, then not even thirty years old, had the strategic objective of disrupting enemy forces and slowing their retreat to facilitate the final breakthrough of the Gothic Line by the Allies. The Italian soldiers, some of whom were very young, operated with courage and determination, paying a high price in terms of lives but earning the respect of the allies and a medal for military valor.

Today, the moral and professional legacy of those paratroopers survives in the values and preparation of the RRAO operators, who proudly and responsibly carry on their legacy.

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RRAO: Operational Present, Future of Excellence

In his commemorative speech, **Colonel Marco Margutti**, commander of the regiment, emphasized how the deeds of Squadron F are not just a memory to be honored, but a living testimony of the spirit of sacrifice, altruism, and love for the Homeland. “I wanted to summarize the history of the squadron and all the recognitions because they are the testimony of how altruism, the spirit of sacrifice, and love for our Homeland were the primary values of the men in uniform of that time and that, with their commitment and their stories, contributed to the construction of our unity, to what is today the Republic,” declared the Colonel.

A special thought was also given to the personnel currently deployed in foreign operational theaters, engaged in increasingly complex missions in an unstable geopolitical framework, and to their families, who silently share their burdens and values.

The celebrations, marked by the honor guard, the laying of commemorative wreaths, and moments of collective reflection, also represented an opportunity to strengthen the bond between the Armed Forces and the citizenry, between memory and action. The men and women of the 185th RRAO today embody that continuity between past and present, between the epic of Italian soldiers of World War II and the modern operational needs of contemporary special missions.

The 25th anniversary of the regiment's re-establishment is not just a chronological date, but the tangible sign of a military project that has been able to evolve, maintaining its founding values:

honor, discipline, technical preparation, and historical identity.

The event in Livorno thus testified how the 185th RRAO is not just an operational unit, but a symbol of the Italian Army's ability to combine memory and modernity, tradition and innovation. With an eye to the future, but feet firmly planted in its history, the Target Acquirers continue to represent the excellence of a Nation that, when it knows how to recognize and honor its heroes, also finds its most authentic strength.

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