



Naples, Military Parachutist Badge No. 1 awarded to the A.N.P.d'I. Section: it belonged to Parachutist Sergeant Renato Capponi

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A 1949 document bears serial number 1 of the military parachutist qualification certificate issued to Sergeant Renato Capponi, who earned the qualification at the Scuola di Paracadutismo di Tarquinia on October 17, 1941. The discovery was announced by Vincenzo Palumbo, president of the ANPd'I Section of Naples.

The story began almost by chance, outside the door of the Naples Section of the Associazione Nazionale Paracadutisti d'Italia.

Paratrooper **Vincenzo Palumbo**, president of the ANPd'I Section of Naples and coordinator of the "Reduci - Battaglia del Pastificio" group and promoter of numerous initiatives linked to the airborne community, recounted the story on Facebook. Last Saturday, as he was about to close the office, a woman arrived intending to donate a memento that had belonged to her father to

the Association.

«My father was a paratrooper with Folgore and fought in the El Alamein campaign. He was from Naples, and I would like to donate his beret to the Naples Section», the woman said, according to Palumbo.

Her father was **Sergeant Renato Capponi**. Along with the beret, the family had kept several documents from his military service.

Among them was one that immediately drew attention: the card of the **Ministero della Difesa - Esercito, Centro di Paracadutismo**, on the back of which appears the unmistakable wording:

“PARACHUTIST QUALIFICATION NO. 1”.



Military parachutist qualification certificate No. 1 issued to Sergeant Renato Capponi. Photo: Vincenzo Palumbo / Capponi family archive.

The qualification earned at Tarquinia in 1941

The document makes it possible to distinguish between two dates, both essential to correctly reconstruct the story.

Capponi earned his parachutist qualification on **October 17, 1941**, at the **Scuola di Paracadutismo di Tarquinia**, one of the places where Italian military parachuting was born and developed during World War II.

The date shown at the bottom of the card is instead **April 1, 1949**. It is the date on which the numbered document was issued after the war.

The card also bears a particularly significant signature: that of **Lieutenant Colonel Paratrooper Giuseppe Izzo**, in his capacity as commander of the Centro di Paracadutismo.

Izzo had commanded the **V Battaglione paracadutisti** on the El Alamein front, where he was seriously wounded in October 1942 during fighting in the southern sector of the Folgore deployment. In 1945, he would go on to command the II Battaglione paracadutisti "Nembo" at Case Grizzano, an action for which he was awarded the Medaglia d'Oro al Valor Militare.



The parachutist qualification was earned on 17 October 1941 at the Scuola di Paracadutismo di Tarquinia; the numbered card was issued on 1° April 1949 and bears the signature of Ten. Col. par. Giuseppe Izzo, commander of the Centro di Paracadutismo. Photo: Vincenzo Palumbo / Capponi family archive.

What that number 1 really means

The number printed on the certificate, however, requires an important historical clarification.

“No. 1” does not mean that Renato Capponi was the first Italian serviceman to earn the parachutist qualification.

Italian military parachuting had already been active for years: the first military school was established at Castel Benito, Libya, in 1938, while the Scuola di Tarquinia was established in 1939 and trained thousands of men during the war.

During the war, the qualification was normally recorded through unit administrative records, particularly in **Ordini Permanenti**, and then entered into service records. Numerous

documented cases exist: for example, parachutist Raffaele Argenziano's qualification, earned in December 1941, was recorded under Ordine Permanente No. 860 of the Scuola di Tarquinia.

The sequential numbering of paper certificates instead dates to the postwar reorganization of military parachuting. The assignment of numbers did not retrospectively reconstruct the chronological order in which parachutists earned their qualifications during the war.

In other words, number 1 identifies **the first certificate in the new numbered series**, not the "first Italian parachutist."

È an essential distinction that does not diminish the document's historical value: **on the contrary, it makes it possible to place it correctly in the period when the Italian Army was rebuilding the Specialità after the war.**

The postwar Centro di Paracadutismo

The Centro's chronology also helps explain the document.

According to the Italian Army's official account, the **Centro di Paracadutismo was established in Rome on 1° January 1947**. In 1949, it was redesignated the **Centro Militare di Paracadutismo**, while its move to Viterbo did not take place until **13 March 1950**. The Centro would later move to Pisa in 1957.

Capponi's card, dated 1° April 1949 and still simply headed "Centro di Paracadutismo," therefore belongs precisely to this transitional phase.

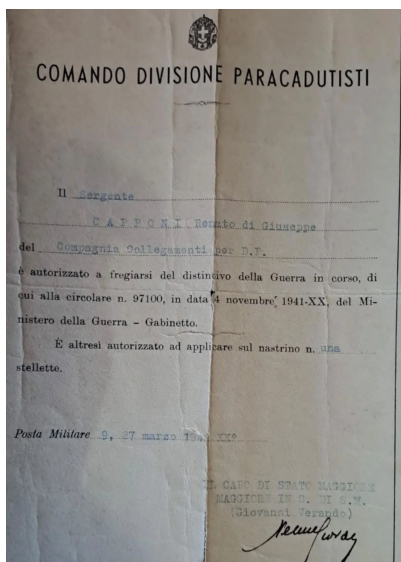
Renato Capponi's documents

The photographs made available by the family make it possible to reconstruct other stages of the sergeant's military life.

Among the preserved documents is material relating to the **4° Reggimento Genio Scuola - Battaglione Scuola Allievi Sottufficiali**, for the 1937-38 academic year, as well as a discharge paper and subsequent documentation from the wartime period.



Of particular significance is a certificate issued to the **Comando Divisione Paracadutisti**, in which Sergeant **Capponi Renato di Giuseppe**, assigned to the **Compagnia Collegamenti per D.T.**, is authorized to wear the current war badge with a star. The document is dated **March 27, 1943**.



Document from the Comando Divisione Paracadutisti, dated March 27, 1943, authorizing Sergeant Renato Capponi of the Compagnia Collegamenti to wear the current war badge and affix a star to its ribbon. Photo: Vincenzo Palumbo / Capponi family archive.

According to what his daughter told Palumbo, Capponi had fought with Folgore paratroopers at **El Alamein**.

The documentation that has now resurfaced therefore offers not only a qualification certificate with an unusual number, but also a small collection spanning an important part of Italian military history between the 1930s, the war, and the postwar rebuilding of the specialty.

The beret will be kept by the Naples ANPd'I Section

It all began with the daughter's wish to donate to the Section the **maroon beret that had belonged to her father**, now preserved together with the parachutist insignia and a photograph of Renato Capponi.

The beret is, of course, not the one used by Capponi during the war: the maroon beret became part of the tradition of Italian Paratroopers in 1967. It nevertheless remains a personal memento of great value, **having belonged to a man who earned his qualification at Tarquinia in 1941 and fought with Folgore during World War II**.

«Before my eyes was not simply an old document», Palumbo wrote, recalling the moment he saw number 1.

The president of the Naples Section announced that the beret and the memory of Sergeant Capponi will be preserved at the ANPd'I headquarters.

The discovery thus has a dual value: familial, because it stems from a daughter's decision to entrust her father's memories to today's Paratroopers; and historical, because it brings to light the **numbered No. 1 qualification certificate of the postwar series**, issued to a man who had already earned the qualification at Tarquinia eight years earlier.

As Palumbo wrote:

«Memory is not preserved only in books. Sometimes it comes to our door, entrusted to the hands of a daughter who has chosen to give it to us».



The beret belonging to Sergeant Renato Capponi, with the paratrooper badge and a photograph of him. The relic will be kept at the ANPd'I Section in Naples. Photo: Vincenzo Palumbo / Capponi family archive.