



The Changing Wind, Paratroopers at the Top

Published on 12/03/2024

When I enlisted in the Folgore in 1999, there was a saying circulating in the corridors of the cold barracks of the Bandini barracks in Siena: "A Paratrooper Officer will never make a career. It's impossible to see a maroon beret at the top of the armed forces".

They spoke of Gen. C.A. Franco Angioni, who in the mid-'90s became the National Director of Armaments and almost got appointed as Chief of SME, or of his peer Franco Monticone, who was on a fast track to the top of the armed forces before the Lady Golpe affair swept away an extraordinary career (the judicial outcome was clear and saw the General's accusers convicted of slander).

In the current context, however, the Italian Army is facing a historic milestone with the appointment of **General of the Army Corps Paratrooper Carmine Masiello** as Chief of Staff of the Army.

Masiello's appointment marks a turning point in the approach and strategic vision of the Italian Armed Forces, highlighting the growing importance attributed to the experiences and skills developed within the paratrooper units.

The Commander with a capital “C” and the courage of Hon. Guido Crosetto

General Masiello embodies the virtues and experience acquired over a career that calling prestigious might even seem “an understatement”.

Today, the Dean of Paratroopers, **163rd** Course of the Military Academy of Modena, we have spoken extensively about him (and we will not tire of doing so). His rise begins in the ranks of the [185th Paratrooper Artillery Regiment Folgore](#), later becoming [RRAO "Folgore"](#) where he was one of the main architects of the transformation that took place at the beginning of the century. It continues, of course, with the leadership of the same [Paratrooper Brigade "Folgore"](#).

These key roles, combined with experience as Deputy Director General of the Department of Information for Security and Deputy Chief of Defense Staff, outline a professional profile of exceptional value, where decision-making skills and strategic vision merge with top-notch operational experience.

It was by no means certain that he would be chosen as Chief of SME, in a context, the political one, that often tends to favor less operational figures. The case of the missed appointment of General Bertolini in the past is the emblematic example.

However, the [Minister of Defense Guido Crosetto](#) has shown remarkable determination, standing out clearly from his predecessors.

We could call it an act of audacity, rare and significant, that marked a deviation from a consolidated trend, demonstrating a willingness to value skills and operational capability even in roles of high, indeed, very high responsibility.

His decision stands as a break from what has traditionally happened, revealing a vision more attentive to professional qualities and field experience, which have often been underestimated in the past.

The Super Generals

Not just Commander Masiello.

Today, numerous Paratrooper Officers hold prominent roles both within the Italian Army and in NATO, highlighting the recognition of their skills and value in contexts of national and international relevance.

A trend that underscores not only the excellence of the training and experience gained but also the strategic importance that such Commanders assume in critical operational and decision-making areas.

Their impact in key positions reflects the trust in their dynamic approach, determination, and ability to tackle complex challenges, significantly contributing to the leadership and effectiveness of military operations and international missions.

A “heavy” name with the maroon beret is undoubtedly that of **General of the Army Corps Paratrooper Giovanni Maria Iannucci**, current [Chief of Staff of the Minister of Defense](#).

Iannucci brings with him a wealth of remarkable experiences.

His training begins with the prestigious Military Academy of Modena where he completes the **166th** Course "Dignity". His operational career starts in 1988 when he is assigned to the 185th Paratrooper Artillery Group, which later becomes a Regiment, marking his first contact with the world of paratroopers.

His experience is further enriched when he participates in the [Operation IBIS in Somalia](#), a commitment that sees him confronting extremely complex operational scenarios. Upon his return, he assumes command of the Cadet Officers Company of the 176th Course at the [Military Academy of Modena](#), contributing to the training of future generations of Officers.

General Iannucci's career continues with assignments of increasing responsibility: after attending the Staff Course at the War School of Civitavecchia and the Senior Staff Course of the Argentine Army, he holds key roles within the Paratroopers Brigade "Folgore" and in various strategic offices of the Army General Staff.

He commands the Target Acquisition Group of the 185th RRAO and leads Task Force "Victor" in Iraq, demonstrating remarkable leadership skills in operational contexts.

Between 2004 and 2008, he served as Head of the General Staff Section at the General Office of the Chief of Staff of the Army. Subsequently, promoted to the rank of Colonel, he served in Germany in the United Kingdom's Rapid Reaction Corps (ARRC-UK) from 2008 to 2010, then returned to Italy to assume command of the 185th RRAO Regiment. In 2012, he was appointed Head of Division J3 (Operations) at the Joint Operational Command (COVI).

In the following years, General Iannucci continues to distinguish himself in various national and international assignments, including the role of Deputy DCOS Operations at the ISAF Command in Afghanistan and the position, in 2015, of [Commander of the Paratroopers Brigade "Folgore"](#). His career reaches another peak when he assumes leadership of the NATO Mission IRAQ and subsequently becomes Commander of the Southern Operational Forces.

Finally, in 2023, he is appointed Chief of Staff of the Minister of Defense, a role that testifies to the trust and recognition of his skills.

In addition to his military capabilities, General Iannucci boasts a solid academic background, with degrees in Economics and Commerce and Strategic Sciences, enriched by a Master's in Strategic-Military International Studies. His linguistic proficiency in English and Spanish and the numerous decorations received confirm his stature as one of the most respected and capable Officers of the Italian Army.

Also within the Armed Forces, we have another prominent figure from the airborne troops:

General of the Army Corps Paratrooper Stefano Mannino.

He begins his journey at the Military Academy of Modena with the **167th** Course "Fermenza" in 1985 to specialize in Artillery in Turin. In 1990, with the rank of Lieutenant, he is assigned to the Paratroopers Brigade "Folgore", where he continuously serves for almost 20 years fulfilling the required command and staff assignments.

Initially in the 185th Paratrooper Field Artillery Group, subsequently in the 185th Paratrooper Artillery Regiment, then in the 185th Paratrooper Reconnaissance and Target Acquisition Regiment, and finally at the General Staff of the Brigade Command.

His operational experiences abroad, including assignments in Somalia, Bosnia, Kosovo, Afghanistan, and Iraq, reflect his commitment to international operations and military cooperation, consolidating his profile as a leader.

Mannino has deepened his training at prestigious institutions, such as the NATO Defense College, and has held high-level positions in the General Staff, managing training, operations, and transformation plans.

His role as Military Attaché in the United Kingdom, Commander of the [Army Special Forces \(COMFOSE\)](#), of the Military Academy of Modena, and especially as Head of the Information and Security Department of the Defense General Staff, the top body of this sector, demonstrate a varied career rich in responsibilities, as well as an uncommon capacity for adaptation and versatility.

His degrees in Strategic Sciences and Political Sciences and his fluent knowledge of English and Portuguese are indicative of his dedication to continuous learning and excellence, which, combined with the numerous decorations and honors received, including the Bronze Cross of Merit of the Army and the Commendation of the Order of Merit of the Italian Republic, celebrate his professional integrity in the service of the country.

His recent appointment as Commander of the Command for Training and [Army Application School of Turin](#) and his promotion to General of the Army Corps in July 2023 represent the culmination of an extraordinary career.

Outstanding Even in NATO

We cannot fail to mention the number 1 of NATO in Italy: **General of the Army Corps Paratrooper Lorenzo D'Addario.**

Current Commander of the [NATO Rapid Deployable Corps - Italy \(NRDC-ITA\)](#), D'Addario began his military career by entering the [Nunziatella Military School](#) in 1980 and subsequently joining the **165th** Course of the Military Academy of Modena. After completing his training, he joined the Paratroopers Brigade "Folgore" in 1988, where he took on crucial roles such as Platoon and Paratrooper Company Commander, participating in significant international missions like Provide Comfort in Iraq and the United Nations Operation in Somalia II.

Throughout his career, he has gained extensive experience in both operational and staff assignments, serving in various capacities at the NATO Rapid Deployable Corps - Italy and other NATO structures in the United Kingdom and the United States. He has also held important positions at the Defense General Staff, the Joint Operational Command, and the Army General

Staff.

His command of the 5th Paratrooper Battalion "El Alamein" and the [186th Paratrooper Regiment "Folgore"](#) was particularly distinguished during the deployment in Afghanistan as part of the [ISAF mission](#), demonstrating his leadership skills and commitment in critical operational contexts.

He culminated his career with the Folgore, commanding the Brigade between 2013 and 2015.

Subsequently, as the 23rd Commander of KFOR, he further consolidated his international experience. Since May 18, 2022, General D'Addario has taken command of the NRDC-ITA, the impressive NATO multinational structure based in Solbiate Olona, Varese, which integrates personnel from 19 allied countries.

His role at the helm of the NRDC-ITA not only testifies to the trust and recognition of his abilities by the alliance but also strengthens Italy's role in the context of European and transatlantic collective defense.

Also in the NATO context, we recall **General of the Army Corps Paratrooper Commando Nicola Zanelli**, with an extraordinary career first in the airborne troops, then in the special forces, distinguishing himself in the most demanding and strategic contexts at both national and international levels.

After graduating from the **164th** Course of the Military Academy, he joined, in 1987, the [187th Paratrooper Regiment "Folgore"](#) where he commanded, during Operation IBIS in Somalia, the historic 5th Company. He then quickly moved, as a commando, to the [9th Assault Regiment "Col Moschin"](#), starting his career in the special forces, gaining significant experiences in Europe, Africa, and the Middle East.

As a Major, he served as an exchange officer in the 3rd Division of the British Army, taking part in 2003 in the "Telic 1" mission in Iraq. Returning to Italy, he was appointed Deputy Chief of Operations of the Joint Special Forces Operations Command (COFS). Between 2006 and 2008, he commanded the 9th Paratrooper Assault Regiment "Col Moschin", then served as the Italian military attaché in London in 2009.

Promoted to Brigadier General, he was, in 2013, the first Commander of the Army Special Forces Command (COMFOSE), then continued his extraordinary career as a Major General in 2016, as

Commander of the COFS (Joint Special Forces Operations Command). As a General of the Army Corps, in December 2020 he was appointed Deputy Commander of the NATO Resolute Support operation in Afghanistan, a position he held until July 2021. He is currently the Deputy Commander NATO at the Allied Land Command (LANDCOM) in Izmir, Turkey.

The Paratrooper General at the Service of the Guardia di Finanza

Curious, yet extremely prestigious is the role of **Major General Paratrooper Massimo Mingiardi**, now military advisor to the General Commander of the [Guardia di Finanza](#).

Coming from the **164th** course of the Military Academy of Modena, known for his exceptional skills as both a military and civilian paratrooper, having accumulated over 500 high-altitude jumps, his military career has been characterized by numerous Command positions.

Mingiardi has held all operational positions in the airborne troops: Commander in 1993 of the XIII Paratrooper Company in Somalia during Operation IBIS, he later led the 5th Paratrooper Battalion "El Alamein" and the [183rd Paratrooper Regiment "Nembo"](#).

His professional path led him to the position of "Aquila 1", Commander of the Paratrooper Brigade "Folgore", between 2010 and 2012 and Commander, between 2016 and 2019, of the historic Infantry School of Cesano. He also holds numerous prestigious Command and Staff roles within the Army General Staff.

In his current role as a military consultant at the General Command of the Guardia di Finanza, he provides his military expertise to facilitate synergy and coordination between the Guardia di Finanza and the Italian Army, ensuring that the military aspects of the corps are managed with the utmost professionalism and competence. His role represents a crucial bridge between the two institutions.

The Predestined

Someone we will undoubtedly hear about in the future is **Paratrooper Division General Rodolfo Sganga**.

Originally from Varese, Sganga has had a meteoric career marked by remarkable achievements. An officer from the **169th** Course of the Military Academy of Modena, he was initially assigned

to the ["Serenissima" lagoon regiment](#) where he served as a platoon commander of scouts.

He later became a Company Commander at the Military Academy and a rifle company commander at the 183rd Paratrooper Regiment "Nembo". As a Lieutenant Colonel, he took command of the 2nd Paratrooper Battalion "Tarquinia", for which he was awarded the [Silver Medal for Army Valor in Afghanistan, for the events of July 25, 2009, in Bala Baluk](#).

Between 2012 and 2014, he took command of the 187th Paratrooper Regiment "Folgore", bringing his experience and strategic vision to one of the most prestigious regiments of the Italian Army.

His expertise was not limited to operational roles: as a staff officer, he held the position of head of the operations room of the Land Operational Forces Command (Comfoter) and the Army General Staff (SME).

His international commitment is evidenced by his participation in no less than five (!) tours of duty in Afghanistan, which further strengthened his experience in complex operational contexts. His academic background is equally impressive, with degrees in Strategic Sciences and Political Sciences, as well as four master's degrees.

From 2014 to 2017, General Sganga represented Italy as a military attaché at the embassy in Washington D.C., strengthening bilateral relations in a fundamentally important international context. From 2017 to 2019, he commanded the Paratrooper Brigade "Folgore", confirming his leadership ability in one of the most significant and challenging roles, that of Aquila 1.

Today, as [Director of the III Department of the General Secretariat of Defense / D.N.A.](#), dedicated to Industrial Policy and International Relations, General Sganga applies his vast experience and strategic vision to development and cooperation in the defense sector, confirming his commitment to serving the country.

Between Past and Present

The 171st and 172nd Courses of the Military Academy of Modena have been the bridge between the past and the present, "producing" top-notch Paratrooper Officers.

An absolutely prestigious position is held by **Paratrooper Division General Giuseppe Bertoncello** of the 171st course. Among his most significant command positions, he is

remembered for leading the 187th Paratrooper Regiment "Folgore" as a Colonel and the "Aosta" Brigade as a Brigadier General.

Bertoncello recently assumed the position of Head of the General Office for Defense Innovation, directly under the Deputy Chief of Defense Staff. A crucial role in a department that aims at innovation and strategic development of the armed forces, through an approach to military operations that goes beyond traditional domains - land, sea, air - integrating the new Cyber and Space domains with a consequent extension of the battlefield (Multidomain approach).

From the same course, the 171st, **Paratrooper Brigadier General Mariano Bianchi**. An officer with significant experience in airborne troops, having commanded, in the mid-nineties, the Air Supply Company at the Military Parachuting School (SMIPAR), then the 2nd Paratrooper Battalion "Tarquinia", and subsequently the 183rd Paratrooper Regiment "Nembo".

Since 2020, General Bianchi has held the prestigious position of Deputy Chief of Staff for Force Preparation of the Land Operational Forces Command (COMFOTER), responsible for planning and implementing the preparation and training activities of the Italian Army units.

Moving on to the 172nd Course, we have a name that is already making waves in the halls of the General Staff, a sort of other predestined: **Brigadier General Paratrooper Roberto Vergori**.

Like General Sganga, we are talking about one of the men destined to make a significant impact on the future of the armed forces.

Born in Lecce on September 28, 1971, he began his journey at the Military Academy of Modena in 1990, attending the 172nd course, completing his training at the School of Application in Turin. Since then, he has served in various command positions within the Italian Army, demonstrating exceptional leadership and unparalleled dedication.

Among his previous assignments, he commanded the 2nd Paratrooper Battalion "Tarquinia" of the 187th Paratrooper Regiment "Folgore", leading the preparation phase as a maneuver unit of the Joint Rapid Reaction Force (JRRF).

He was also Commander of the Joint Task Force "Taormina 1" during the "G7", held in TAORMINA and Head of Division J3 (Operations) of the COVI (Joint Operational Command).

As a Colonel, he served as Commander of the 5th Infantry Regiment "Aosta" and, promoted to Brigadier General, he was, from 2021 to 2023, Commander of the Paratrooper Brigade Folgore.

During his career, General Vergori actively participated in out-of-area operations in places like Kosovo, Afghanistan, Lebanon, and Libya, acquiring a wide range of skills in the field of airborne troops.

Today he is [Chief of the General Office of the new Chief of SME](#), essentially the “shadow man” of Commander Carmine Masiello.

Also from the 172nd, we cannot fail to mention another peer of General Vergori: **Brigadier General Paratrooper Giuseppe Scuderi**.

Born in Ischia on March 29, 1971, Scuderi began his military career in the 200th course of the Nunziatella Military School, then graduated as an officer at the Military Academy of Modena (among the top of the course) and continued his studies at the School of Application in Turin.

He joined the Paratrooper Brigade as a Platoon Commander in 1994 at the 186th Paratrooper Regiment "Folgore" where he commanded between the late 90s and early 2000s, first the Heavy Mortar Company “Vampiri”, then the glorious XV Company “Diavoli Neri”.

In 2012 he took command, still in Siena, of the 5th Battalion “El Alamein” and in 2017, as a Colonel, he was Commander of the 187th Par. Rgt. “Folgore” in Livorno.

In 2022, Scuderi was promoted to the rank of Brigadier General and currently serves as Commander of the [Support Brigade of the NATO Rapid Deployable Corps Command in Solbiate Olona](#).

A look to the future, the young Paratrooper Generals

The 174th Course of the Military Academy of Modena boasts as many as four (!) Paratrooper Officers promoted to the rank of Brigadier General.

An exceptional and rare event, especially in light of law 244/2012 (known as the Di Paola law) which imposed a more selective criterion for promotions, numerically limiting, up to halving, access to the rank of Brigadier General for candidate Colonels.

Consequently, the simultaneous rise of these four Paratrooper Officers highlights their exceptional capabilities.

Four “young” Brigadier Generals who represent the present and are ready, indeed, very ready for the future of the armed forces: the current “Aquila 1”, **Brigadier General Paratrooper Massimiliano Mongillo** and his peers, the current Commander of the Army Special Operations Forces Command (COMFOSE) **Brigadier General Paratrooper Acquisitore Andrea Vicari**, the current Deputy Commander of the NATO KFOR mission **Brigadier General Paratrooper Federico Bernacca** and **Brigadier General Paratrooper Nicola Mandolesi**, since July 2023 Commander of the Pozzuolo del Friuli Brigade.

Mongillo's leadership was particularly highlighted during his commands of the 5th Battalion "El Alamein" between 2017 and 2017 and the 183rd Paratrooper Regiment "Nembo" in 2018, culminating in his appointment as General in 2023 and the subsequent assumption of the role of Commander of the Paratrooper Brigade "Folgore".

Brigadier General Paratrooper Federico Bernacca, another “big shot” of the new generation of Paratrooper Officers, took command of the 5th Battalion "El Alamein" in July 2014, maintaining it until the same month of 2015. Subsequently, from 2019 to 2021, with the rank of Colonel, he held the role of Commander of the 186th Paratrooper Regiment Folgore.

The role of [Deputy Commander of the NATO KFOR mission](#), succeeding Hungarian General Jozsef Szpisják, underscores the importance of his experience and leadership in international contexts.

Brigadier General Paratrooper Andrea Vicari boasts, despite his young age, a remarkable experience in airborne troops and special forces: Paratrooper Artilleryman at the 185th Regiment, he witnessed the entire transformation of the unit until it became the RAO Regiment. He was its Commander in 2018 and was then appointed, in September 2023, the 5th Commander of COMFOSE.

He was instead Commander, as Lt. Col. of the 3rd Battalion Grizzano (part of the 183rd Rgt. Par. Nembo), then, as a Colonel, of the historic 187th Paratrooper Regiment “Folgore”, Brigadier General Paratrooper Nicola Mandolesi.

The recent appointment of General Mandolesi as Commander of the Pozzuolo del Friuli Brigade, a unit that includes highly prestigious departments, including the Lagunari of the “Serenissima” Regiment, reflects the desire to spread the experience and skills acquired in the airborne troops, promoting a holistic approach within the armed forces.

Conclusions

The current landscape sees numerous Paratrooper Officers in top and highly prestigious positions, highlighting the value attributed to their experiences both nationally and internationally.

General C.A. Masiello, along with other distinguished officers such as Generals C.A. Iannucci, Mannino, D'Addario, Zanelli, and all others mentioned in the article, demonstrates that the dynamic approach and determination typical of paratrooper units are, today, qualities appreciated and sought after for roles of high responsibility.

It is unclear whether this evolution is the result of changed dynamics on the international scene; what is certain, however, is that the armed forces are currently led by Officers of extraordinary ability and competence.

The leadership of these Commanders, with their deep understanding of operational and strategic dynamics, will be fundamental in effectively guiding the future and the challenges that the Army and NATO will face in the near future.

14.03.2024 - Update from the Webmaster and Author of the article:

First of all, we wish to express our gratitude to those who have taken the time to read the article. The article attracted thousands of visits within 24 hours, setting a record for our website. The feedback received is of fundamental importance to us, so we wish to sincerely thank everyone. It is nonetheless important to emphasize that our work relied entirely on publicly available information. Unfortunately, this limitation led to the unintentional omission of some Generals in the list. We are already working to prepare a second article that will delve deeper and integrate the missing information. **Our goal is to offer complete, accurate, and respectful information, especially in a field as sensitive as this.**

However, the article aims to highlight the theme indicated in the title: 'Paratroopers in the Italian Army'.

We therefore take the opportunity to thank once again all those who have interacted with the article.

C.le magg. Par. retired Alessandro Generotti - Webmaster BRIGATAFOLGORE.NET