



When the going gets tough, the Paratroopers start playing

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From World War II to today, we have a common element in the military deployment of airborne units: the difficulty of the mission. When the bar is raised, where the fight is tougher and the risk greater, the Commands of armies worldwide have always, without exception, sent the most reliable soldiers: **THE PARATROOPERS**. From **El Alamein**, through **Operation Varsity** in 1945, the (re)conquest of the **Falkland-Malvinas Islands** in the eponymous war of 1982, the battle of Check Point Pasta in 1993, **Operation Barras** in Sierra Leone in 2000, the advance of the Folgore in Afghanistan against the Taliban in 2009-2011, we have a common denominator: **THE PARATROOPERS**.

Today more than ever, with the war at Europe's doorstep, the Ministry of Defense of the Italian government has entrusted the armed force into the hands of an extraordinary Paratrooper Officer, Gen. C.A. Carmine Masiello, while numerous Paratrooper Officers are at the top of the Armed Force.

And it is no secret that the [Folgore Paratrooper Brigade](#), since its rebirth, [throughout the Cold War era](#), was, for geographical reasons as well, given Italy's position bordering a communist country, Yugoslavia, the first major barrier unit in case of military conflict with the Soviet Union.

Conscription Paratroopers underwent, in just 10-12 months, intense training. Just think of the **Cold Stream operation of 1971**, sadly known for [the Meloria tragedy](#): under the command of the legendary [General Ferruccio Brandi](#), already a Lieutenant Gold Medal at [El Alamein](#), 396 Paratroopers were launched divided into 10 planes 15 seconds apart. An impressive exercise, nothing like it had ever been done before in the history of Italian airborne troops and beyond.

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Gazzetta del Mezzogiorno of March 17, 1983

In the 1980s, the [mission in Lebanon](#) confirmed the capabilities of the Folgore Paratroopers in complex situations.

On September 18, 1982, Lebanese Christian militias massacred 700 civilians in the Sabra and Shatila refugee camps in Beirut. On September 20, 1982, with only 2 (!) days' notice, the Col Moschin Raiders were already in Beirut. On September 24, 1,000 Paratroopers would arrive on Lebanese soil.

The tasks were challenging: ensuring security from the airport to the city center, escorting political, civilian, and military personnel both local and foreign, and, most difficult of all, protecting themselves from attackers.

The spring of 1986 will instead be remembered as full of tension and adrenaline at its peak. Warned by intelligence services of an imminent political and military crisis between the United States and Libya, the [5th Paratrooper Battalion](#) and the [9th Battalion Col Moschin](#) went to Lampedusa and Pantelleria in record time. **Operation Sunflower** was launched.

During a training break, on the night of April 14, 1986, the USA bombed Tripoli: a platoon of the 15th Cp. "Black Devils" reinforced by an anti-tank team and a logistics quota, received the order at 2 am on April 15, 1986, to depart in combat gear. The Paratroopers received, still in their underwear, weapons, ammunition, and equipment. Tactical flight at very low altitude on C-130 to avoid Libyan anti-aircraft, escorted by F-104 fighters.

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Scud B SS-1 missile in service with Libyan military forces in 1986

Assault landing on Lampedusa at dawn. The Paratroopers deployed. Round in the chamber, finger on the trigger. In the early afternoon, two explosions, the ground shakes, the Americans from the Loran Base rush out to evacuate. Two SS1-Scud missiles were launched on Lampedusa with the aim of hitting the US military installation.

These are frantic hours that risk changing the history of Italy.

A counterattack is being planned. The USA is pushing, the Italian government is cautious. The American Delta Force would have paved the way followed by the 9th Btg. Col Moschin. The 5th Btg. Paracadutisti "El Alamein" would have finished "the job" with a war drop on Tripoli and Benghazi. The 2nd Btg. Paracadutisti "Tarquinia" would have defended positions on the Sicilian islands. This is not a movie. We are one step away from war. Fortunately, however, the diplomatic line prevails and naval operations, but this time, since World War II, and outside the context of the Cold War, we were one step away from military confrontation.

The 1980s continue with intense, exhausting, but extremely formative training like the "Mangusta", the "Istrice", the "Condor rosso". Those who stop are lost. **The Paratrooper is the ultimate, but very sharp instrument of foreign policy. And it must remain so for the defense of the Nation.**

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During Operation Airone the Paratroopers Brigade Folgore deploys almost 1,000 men - Copyright Italian Army

In November 1989, the Berlin Wall falls and new scenarios of military participation immediately open up: once again the Middle East, but not Lebanon, we are in Iraq and later in the Balkans, with a parenthesis that changed the history of the Folgore and the Italian Army: Somalia.

The 5th Paratrooper Battalion participates, in 1991, in the mission "**Provide Comfort**", also known as **AIRONE** in **Iraqi Kurdistan**, decided within the framework of UN Security Council resolution no. 687 to assist the oppressed Kurdish refugees and by Saddam Hussein's regime. The Paratroopers are employed in difficult environmental conditions, thousands of kilometers away from the Motherland, providing security and aid to populations fleeing the war while later being deployed in front of the Iraqi forces, pushed north by the pressure of the allies. With patrols, checkpoints, and cordons, the Paratroopers control a territory as wide as 1,400 km and the entire Zakho-Kirkuk-Baghdad road section.

It is July 25, 1992. 300 Paratroopers of the Folgore Brigade land at 4:00 PM at Punta Raisi airport, in Palermo, with weapons and luggage. Others will arrive in the evening. It is not a trip or a prize journey, it is a military operation, with military Paratroopers equipped and with war weapons, on Italian soil.

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Paratroopers on Iveco VM90 armed with MG 42/59 machine gun in turret: we are not in Lebanon but in Palermo in the "Vespri Siciliani" operation

After the assassination of magistrates Paolo Borsellino and Giovanni Falcone, the State responds with the [Vespri Siciliani operation](#). In Palermo, there are 1,000 paratroopers of the Folgore Brigade, operating through cordons, night ambushes, mobile checkpoints, and surveillance of important personalities, in close collaboration with law enforcement, facing intensive and prolonged shifts. Their exceptional commitment and sense of duty are recognized and celebrated by the entire nation.

December 3, 1992: the regiments are still in Sicily. A "forced" rotation will be necessary: the Folgore is expected at an appointment that cannot be missed. It is not a "normal" peace mission. But the [IBIS operation in Somalia](#). The UN has issued resolution number 794 and Italy will have to provide, together with the United States, the largest military contingent.

The Folgore has command of the Italian contingent and is authorized, together with the USA, to Chapter VII of the UN Charter: the one that authorizes the use of weapons. All departments are deployed, the reconstituted [183rd Nembo Regiment](#), [186th](#) and [187th Folgore](#), [185th Artillery](#), 1st Tuscania Battalion, [9th Col Moschin](#) and [Logistics Units](#).

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The coffins with the fallen from the battle of July 2, 1993, return home: they are those of S.ten. Andrea Millevoi, Serg. Magg. Stefano Paolicchi, and Par. Pasquale Baccaro

An unprecedented deployment of forces. Italy cannot fail. There will be numerous situations of extreme complexity culminating in actual firefights. The Folgore, even though hit straight to the heart in the clashes of [July 2, 1993](#), emerges holding high the Italian Military Honor.

We are in the mid-90s, and the Folgore Paratrooper Brigade is responsible, under the mandate of the Defense General Staff, for all special operations on behalf of the armed forces (the COFS and the [COMFOSE](#) would arrive several years later): it is the period of the "**Ippocampo**", the

missions to evacuate compatriots in the most turbulent areas of the planet, almost always carried out solo by the [Col Moschin Raiders](#) with only the support of the Air Force.

First Yemen, then Rwanda: on May 10, after landing first in Nairobi and then in Kigali, the Italian raiders, while disembarking from the C-130, will find themselves under mortar attack on the airport runway. The military aircraft will quickly move away from the runway, leaving the Italian forces on Rwandan territory.

Within a week, thanks to numerous missions in Kigali, the capital of Rwanda, the raiders will successfully complete the evacuation of all Italians, a feat made possible also by the valor and preparation of the 46th Air Brigade: during the takeoff of the last C-130, loaded beyond all expectations, a heavy attack by Soviet ZU-23 anti-aircraft machine guns occurs. According to General Raider Roberto Vannacci, then Commander of the operation's device in Rwanda, it represents one of the most difficult operations in which the 9th has participated.

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The Interfet operation in East Timor, located in Southeast Asia, represents the most distant mission in which Italian soldiers have ever participated.

The latter half of the 90s intensifies the presence of the Paratrooper Brigade in the Balkans, while in 1999 the Paratroopers of the 187th will be deployed in the faraway East Timor along with the Paratroopers of Tuscania and the raiders of Col Moschin. Located in the extreme southeast of Asia, and reachable after more than 24 hours (!) of scheduled flight, East Timor is for the Italians the destination of the Interfet operation, made necessary after the violent actions of groups not favorable to East Timor's independence from Indonesia.

The Folgore tactical group has an important task, that of patrolling and ensuring the safety of the population in the most arduous and difficult-to-reach areas due to the dense vegetation.

The mission in East Timor will also be remembered as the farthest mission where an Italian unit was deployed.

The summer of 2001 is instead that of the G8, an international meeting of the world's most important Heads of State.

The FOLGORE is deployed in the red zone of Genoa airport. The Paratroopers of the three maneuver regiments (183rd, 186th, and 187th) for three days perform the function of Public

Security Agents inside Genoa airport.

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George Bush's Air Force One - Copyright GEORGEWBUSHLIBRARY.GOV

They control, stop, and search anyone entering or moving within the airport. They monitor hangars and sensitive points with engagement rules that are not reassuring for any individuals inclined to play heroes: unconditional fire on anyone trying to enter the airport without authorization or even approaching the outer fence.

On July 20, the Paratroopers have a very important task: to guard the perimeter of **Air Force One of American President George W. Bush**.

September 11, 2001: the world changes. The Folgore is ready.

In April 2004, a detachment of Col Moschin, on the outskirts of Nassirya, falls victim to an L-shaped ambush.

A bit of luck, and a very high combat capability in tight spaces allows the raiders to save their skins and neutralize all the militiamen (about a dozen).

The Middle East is the most challenging scenario, but there is still glory for the Folgore in the Balkans: in March 2004, the 186th Regiment, in yet another mission in Kosovo (the third in three years!) named Determined Effort, will be of fundamental help to the Serbian ethnic population.

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UN and KFOR vehicles during the clashes in Kosovo in March 2004

The unit was forced to intervene to defend monasteries and protect villages during the riots on March 17 and 18. The Paratroopers, not at all intimidated by the violent attitude of the rioters, were forced to respond with weapons to repeated assaults.

For the achievements of those days, the regiment's flag was once again decorated, as happened in Somalia, with a silver medal.

In June 2006, the legendary Task Force 45 was born, the largest deployment of special forces ever fielded by Italy since the post-war period. In July of the same year, under the command of Lt. Col. Roberto Vannacci, it was already operating in the Afghan mountains participating in the infamous operation "Medusa." Initially composed of raiders from the 9th Assault Regiment "Col

Moschin" and the GOI, Operational Raiders Group of the Navy (COMSUBIN), it later expanded its personnel with units from the Italian Army's special forces and other special forces units from all the armed forces.

2009-2011 War Mission. We understand that for political correctness we must call, the one in Afghanistan, a "peace mission," indeed, for constitutional reasons we should call any military operation a "peace mission." However, if you talk to a Paratrooper who participated in the ISAF missions in Afghanistan between 2009 and 2011, you will see that it was not exactly a peace mission...

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Italian Raiders of Task Force 45 in the Afghan desert during the first phase of the operation (2006-2008)

In Afghanistan, there is war. And the Paratroopers, somewhat knowingly, somewhat romantically, know that their moment has come, no matter the cost, even the ultimate sacrifice.

The configuration and status of the Brigade, with the three battalions of maneuver regiments deployed on the front line, supported by one of the best engineer units of the Army (8th Rgt.) and the high level of troop preparation, at historic highs, will yield unprecedented results in the fight against the Taliban.

Base El Alamein (Farah), base Tarquinia (Shouz) and base Tobruk (Bala Boluk) will represent three crucial points that will have fundamental importance in the success of the mission.

The three Regiments, deployed between Herat, Kabul, and Farah, will deal a severe blow to the Taliban, and in the numerous firefights, the fundamentalist militia will be forced to strongly moderate their combat fervor.

The paratroopers of the Folgore will be the first Italians to be videotaped in combat in Afghanistan (October 6, 2009), thanks to Rai journalist Nico Piro. Images never seen before and discordant, indeed, with the label of peace mission given to the Italian mission in Afghanistan.

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Paratroopers of the 183rd Rgt. Par. Nembo in combat on June 10, 2009, near Bala Morghab, Afghanistan

In July 2009, **1st Cpl. Maj. Paratrooper Alessandro Di Lisio** was lost, but the hardest day was September 17, 2009. Six Paratroopers fell after an attack with an explosive charge of over

150kg near Kabul Airport. Hit straight to the heart, the Paratrooper Brigade nevertheless moved forward and left numerous wounded and another fallen, on July 25, 2011, **1st Cpl. Maj. Paratrooper David Tobini**, on the battlefield.

In the following years, the Brigade was deployed to train local forces both in Afghanistan, with the [Resolute Support](#) operation, and in Niger and Mali with the MISIN operation.

We live through the terrible period of COVID, closing one millennium and opening another.

On February 24, 2022, **the Russian Army invaded Ukrainian territory**, marking a sharp escalation of the ongoing Russo-Ukrainian conflict since 2014. Europe and the United States imposed heavy economic and financial sanctions on Putin's country and heavily armed the Ukrainian armed forces, but it is not enough, and the story is what it is today: more than two years after the conflict began, the Russians advance and bombs continue to fall on the Ukrainian population.

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Paratrooper Scouts of the 183rd Par. Reg. Nembo during a free-fall jump at the multinational exercise Swift Response 2021 in Bulgaria - [Copyright Italian Army](#)

The situation on the international scene, and specifically, at the gates of Europe, is complex.

NATO is obliged, according to Article 5, should Russian operations extend to a country of the Atlantic Alliance, to act militarily to defend the invaded country. Article 5 of NATO, in fact, presupposes armed intervention and establishes collective defense: if a nation belonging to NATO is attacked, the others are obliged to intervene with all their available means, including military ones.

Italy must BE READY. Thus, something never seen in Italy since the existence of the military specialty of Paratroopers (1941 with the Folgore Division) happens: [on February 15, 2024, the Council of Ministers, at the express request of the Minister of Defense Guido Crosetto, appoints an Officer of the Paratroopers as Chief of Staff of the Italian Army.](#) The Super Commander. The man of steel. The excellence among excellences: **General of the Army Corps Paratrooper Acquirer Carmine Masiello**.

An exceptionally valuable curriculum, profound military experience among airborne troops, special operations, intelligence, but also a holistic vision of the armed force.

Gen. C.A. Carmine Masiello is the first officer, coming from the paratrooper specialty, to be placed in the highest position of the Italian Army.

Masiello surrounds himself with men of the highest military caliber: within a few weeks, the armed force is revolutionized.

The Top in the Top positions. Paratroopers, of course, but let's not be provincial, there are exceptional Commanders also in other specialties of the Army. Commander Masiello is aware of this and is forging the Armed Force using EXCLUSIVELY the best excellences.

We are not warmongers. We firmly believe that diplomacy represents the best response in the face of an international escalation. However, we must consider that we are talking about the Army, the largest armed force of the nation, whose primary task is to defend our territories should, unfortunately, diplomatic solutions not be sufficient.

General Carmine Masiello in the past would have been an uncomfortable man. "Too capable." The missed appointment of Marco Bertolini as Chief of SME teaches us. Our politicians would have said "*We are in times of peace, we do not need a Chief of SME of such a level*". But we are not in times of peace. We are in times of war.

And the Paratrooper, once again, has answered PRESENT.