



April 30, 1941, the pioneering all-Italian feat: the first wartime jump of our Paratroopers

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«**The Homeland calls, the Paratroopers answer present**». With these unwritten words, but engraved in the heart of every Paratrooper, one of the most extraordinary operations — and too often forgotten — in Italian military history takes shape: the **first wartime jump of the Italian Paratroopers**, which took place exactly **84 years ago**, on **April 30, 1941**, on the Greek island of **Kefalonia**.

An audacious operation that would lead in a few hours to the **occupation of Kefalonia, Zakynthos, and Ithaca**, strengthening the Italian presence in the Ionian Sea and opening a new era for the newly born specialty. An event that time has sometimes ignored or diminished, but for those who preserve the memory, it remains **a symbol of daring, interforce organization, and absolute military valor**, in a pioneering era for the specialty of the **Paratroopers**.

The historical context and the urgency of the action

On **June 10, 1940**, Italy formally enters the war, marking the beginning of its participation in the Second World War. From the outset, Italian forces are engaged on multiple fronts: in **East and North Africa**, and in the **Alps against France**.

On **April 29, 1941**, an armistice with Greece is signed, but the geopolitical situation requires rapid interventions to **prevent total control of the area from falling into German hands**. The previous day, **five Cant Z.506 seaplanes** under the orders of **Colonel Grande** had transported an Italian unit to **Corfu**, where a Greek regiment had surrendered. Shortly after, the **1st Battalion of the 17th Infantry Regiment of the "Acqui" Division** landed on the island, consolidating the occupation.

However, one issue remained: Kefalonia. At that time, according to international practice, **territories belong to those who occupy them militarily**. It was therefore crucial to move quickly to ensure **an Italian presence on the island**, which was strategically essential.

The choice fell on **one of the youngest but most promising specialties of the Royal Army: the Paratroopers**. The Italian State had invested heavily in the training of these elite troops, and now it was time to test them in a real theater of war.

The **Balkans represent a crucial strategic node**: controlling this area means **dominating access to the Corinth Canal**, influencing maritime routes to the Eastern Mediterranean, and **protecting the southern flank of the Axis**. In this perspective, **Kefalonia assumes primary importance**: its conquest, in addition to ensuring a favorable tactical position, would demonstrate **the readiness and effectiveness of the newly formed Italian airborne troops**, in what would be the **first interforce operation in national military history**, jointly conducted by the **Air Force, Navy, and Army**.

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The race against time

According to the minutes kept in the State Major Archives, the operation is planned in **just a few days, between April 25 and 27**. On the evening of April 28, while the Paratroopers of the 2nd Battalion are on leave in the bars of Civitavecchia, an urgent order recalls them to the barracks. **Major Mario Zanninovich**, commander of the 2nd Battalion (later merged into the 187th Regiment of the Folgore Division), is urgently summoned to **Caserma Piave**, where he finds **General Frattini** waiting for him: the battalion is destined for the first wartime jump in Italian history. It is the beginning of a race against time.

On **April 29**, the **Caserma Piave** in Civitavecchia transforms into a true operational hive. Weapons, ammunition, provisions, IFSP 41 SP parachutes, and other materials arrive from the **nearby Parachuting School of Tarquinia** and are quickly prepared for the imminent operation. The paratroopers are equipped with the **Moschetto 91 with a folding bayonet**, the **MAB 38** for squad commanders, and the **Breda 30** machine gun as a unit weapon.

The selected companies are the **Fifth**, under the command of **Captain Avogadro**, and the **Sixth**, commanded by **Captain Macchiato**. At **midnight on April 29**, the battalion leaves the station of **Civitavecchia** headed towards **Lecce**.

Only during the train journey do the paratroopers receive the final information: **the target is Cephalonia**.

Upon arriving at the **Galatina** airport, they are met by **three Savoia-Marchetti SM-82** (initially six were planned). For this reason, it is decided that the **Fifth Company** will carry out the drop, while the **Sixth will remain in reserve**. In a hurry, the aircraft are adapted and optimized for the airdrop: the **static line is shortened from 5 to 3 meters**, and a **test drop** is conducted.

At the time of boarding, a **flag of the Kingdom of Italy** is handed to **Major Zanninovich**, entrusted to him by **Colonel Baudoin** — pilot, paratrooper, and considered the **spiritual father** of the young Paratroopers he had personally trained in Tarquinia. That flag will be **raised on the Prefecture of Argostoli** after the conquest of the island.

For Baudoin, it is a moment full of emotion: **finally “his” boys** are employed for what they had trained so hard for in Tarquinia — **a real war operation with an airdrop**.

April 30, 1941: the first war drop of the Italian Paratroopers. A too often forgotten feat. - brigatafolgore

The Paratroopers of the Fifth Company check the equipment before boarding the SM-82 planes

April 30, 12:30 PM: history takes off

Three SM-82 take off from Galatina escorted by **Cant Z1007 bombers** and **Macchi M.C.202 fighters**. On board, 72 Paratroopers ready to enter legend. After an hour of flight, they reach the **“Krameta” Drop Zone**, near Argostoli. The roar of the planes drowns out the silence of the island. When the green light comes on, **the officers jump first**. It is the paratrooper tradition: the example comes from the highest ranks. The altitude is low, about 300 meters, the wind and speed strong, but nothing can stop them. The desire to be protagonists in such a long-awaited moment overcomes any difficulty.

The sky fills with white canopies. The **Italian Paratroopers land**. Some among olive trees and dry stone walls, immediately regrouping into platoons and proceeding to take positions on the hills.

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A phase of the descent towards Argostoli by the Italian Paratroopers

The Greek surrender and the clearing of the town center

The Greek gendarmes, taken by surprise by the arrival of the **Italians**, surrendered immediately without resistance. Upon reaching the town, **the paratroopers** saw **white flags** waving as a sign of surrender. They then proceeded to **clear the urban area**, checking **house by house**, with particular attention to buildings with **closed doors or shutters**. During the operations, they requisitioned a **bus** to facilitate movements in the **town center**. Once the clearing was completed, they headed towards the **prefecture of Argostoli**, where they reunited with the **Italian units landed by sea** in the bay.

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April 30, 1941: Italian paratroopers aboard a requisitioned Greek bus to facilitate movements in the town center of the island

The Tricolor flies over Cephalonia

Around **2:30 PM**, five **Cant Z506 seaplanes** landed in front of the port, carrying personnel from the **Regia Marina**, the **Regia Aeronautica**, and the **Blackshirts**. These were the **forces completing the occupation**. Among them were **officers from the Bari Army Corps** and **Consul Giovanni Battista Cagnoni**, tasked with **formalizing the city's surrender**.

Meanwhile, **the paratroopers** headed to the **Argostoli prefecture**, where they reunited with the **Italian units landed by sea**. With the units lined up in the **square adjacent to the prefecture**, the **Italian Tricolor** was hoisted, handed over by **Colonel Baudoin** to **Major Mario Zanninovich** during the embarkation at Galatina.

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Gathered in the square adjacent to the Argostoli prefecture, the Paratroopers witness the officialization of the Greek surrender and the raising of the Italian Tricolor

A mission of war, but also of humanity

The **Italian Paratroopers**, once positions were consolidated, **quickly occupied the island's strategic points**: the port, hospitals, power plant, telegraph station, and prisons. But they soon realized a dramatic reality: the **civilian population was at the brink**, lacking essential food and medicine. On orders from the **Italian Officers**, **humanitarian air supplies** were carried out, with drops of **flour, rice, and medical supplies**, intended solely to support the local population. A **priest** was also sent to celebrate **Holy Mass** and offer spiritual comfort to the local Christian community.

The following day, **detachments of Italian soldiers** moved by sea to the islands of **Zante and Ithaca**, thus completing the **control of the entire Ionian archipelago**.

Major Verando, who also parachuted into Cephalonia and was destined to become **Chief of Staff of the “Folgore” Division**, drafted a **detailed report** that represents the first doctrinal nucleus for the development of future **Italian Airborne Troops**. It analyzed fundamental aspects such as **exit times, length of the static line, jump altitude, wind management, transported material, interforce coordination**, and more.

Of course, much remained to be perfected — as is natural in a **pioneering military action** — but it was from that experience that the **operational birth of the Italian paratrooper specialty** took concrete shape, revealing at the same time **how lethal and effective** they could be in action. A first, bold, and decisive step towards excellence.

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A moment of the air supply over Cephalonia, ordered by the Italian officers to aid the Greek population

A lesson for Italy and the world

The operation on Cephalonia demonstrates **the speed, precision, and flexibility** of the paratroopers. In less than three days, a battalion is alerted, equipped, transferred, and successfully launched into hostile territory. A pioneering feat that has set a precedent and is today the **foundation of the excellence of the Folgore** in the *airborne community*.

Today, April 30, the Paratroopers of the **187th Regiment “Folgore”**, which includes the glorious **2nd Battalion “Tarquinia”**, **honor this date every year**, remembering the faces and names of those who, with jump boots and blue insignia with sword and wing, wrote a bright page in Italian military history and airborne troops.

Honor to the Paratroopers of Cephalonia!