



## French paratroopers



**Constant "Marin" Duclos** was the first soldier of the French military history to execute a parachute jump on November 17, 1915. He performed 23 tests and exhibition parachute drops without any problems to publicise the system and overcome the prejudice aviators had for such life-saving equipment.



In 1935, **Captain Geille** of the French Air Force created the "**Avignon-Pujaut Paratroopers Schools**" after he trained in Moscow at the **Soviet Airborne Academy**. From this, the French military created two combat units called "**Groupes d'Infanterie de l'Air - GIA**".

Following the defeat of France, **General Charles de Gaulle** formed the "**1ère Compagnie d'Infanterie de l'Air**" in September 1940 from members of the free French forces that had escaped to Britain. It was transformed into the "**Compagnie de Chasseurs Parachutistes**" in October 1941. By June 1942 these units were fighting in Crete and Cyrenaica in June 1942 alongside the **British 1st SAS Regiment**. As part of the **SAS Brigade**, two independent **French SAS** units were also created in addition to the other French airborne units. They operated until 1945.



In May 1943 the "**1er Régiment de Chasseurs Parachutistes**" was created from the **601ème Groupe d'Infanterie de l'Air** in Morocco and the **3ème and 4ème Bataillons d'Infanterie de l'Air (BIA)** in England in the **Special Air Service**. The **2ème and 3ème Régiment de Chasseurs Parachutistes** followed in July 1944. The regiment kept a star in its insignia in reminiscence of the star of the Soviet Union, but the colour was changed in blue, to emphasize the discrepancy with the politic line of the communist block.

During the invasion of Normandy, French airborne forces fought in Brittany, (operation **Dingson**, operation **Samwest**). The first allied soldier to land in France was **Free French SAS Captain Pierre Marienne** who jumped into Brittany on June 5 with 17 free French paratroopers. The first allied soldier killed in the liberation of France was free French **SAS Corporal Emile Bouétard** of the **4th Bataillon d'Infanterie de l'Air**, also in Brittany. French SAS paratroopers also fought in the Loire Valley on September 1944, in Belgium on January and in

French Para - 1943

Netherlands on April 1945. The “**1er Régiment Parachutiste de Choc**”, another very famous French airborne regiment, carried out operations in Provence.



Para of the 3rd RCP

After **World War II**, the post-war French military of the Fourth Republic created several new airborne units. Among them were the “**Bataillon de Parachutistes Coloniaux (BPC)**” based in Vannes-Meucon, the **Metropolitan Paratroopers**, the **Colonial Paratroopers** and the “**Bataillons Etrangers de Parachutistes**”, known worldwide as the “**French Foreign Legion**”, which coexisted until 1954. During the **First Indochina War**, the “**Bataillon Parachutiste Viet Nam**” was created (**BPVN**) in southeast Asia. In total 150 different airborne operations took place in Indochina between 1945 and 1954. These included five major combat missions against the **Viet Minh** strongholds and areas of concentration.

two years. Only the **French Air Force's Commandos de l'Air** (Air Force) were excluded. In 1956, the “**2ème Régiment de Parachutistes Coloniaux**” took part in the **Suez Crisis**.

Next the French Army regrouped all its Army Airborne regiments into two parachute divisions in 1956. The 10th parachute division – “**10ème Division Parachutiste, 10ème DP**” - came under the command of **General Jacques Massu** and **General Henri Sauvagnac** took over the 25th Parachute Division – “**25ème Division Parachutiste, 25e DP**”. Again the **Commandos de l'Air** were kept under command of the Air Force.



Para of the 10th BPCP - Indochina

By the late 50's in Algeria, the **FLN** (the Algerian insurgency) had launched its War of Independence. French paratroopers were used as counter insurgency units by the French Army. This was the first time in airborne operations troops used helicopters for Air Assault and Fire Support.

But in the aftermath of the Algiers putsch, the 10th and 25th Parachute divisions were disbanded and their regiments merged into the **Light Intervention Division (Division Légère d'Intervention)**. This division became the 11th Parachute Division – “**11ème Division Parachutiste, 11ème DP**” - in 1971.



Para of 8e RPIMa in Afghanistan

In the aftermath of the **Cold War**, the French Army reorganised and the **11th Para Division** became the **11th Parachute Brigade** in 1999.

In the 21st century, some of French Airborne units have merged with some Marines Commandos, Alpine troops and other special forces units to create the "**Commandements des Operations Spéciales - COS**", which is an equivalent of **US SOCOM**.

**Ltn JC Damaisin d'Arès**



Pre-enlisted initiation badge



Initiation badge



Military para badge



Monitor para badge



Free-fall para badge



Free-fall instructor badge



Beret insignia of colonial paratrooper



Beret insignia of metro paratrooper



Red beret

## Insignias of French para regiments



1<sup>er</sup> RCP  
Airborne Infantry



1<sup>er</sup> RHP  
Airborne Cavalry



35<sup>ème</sup> RAP  
Airborne Artillery



13<sup>ème</sup> RDP  
Airborne Cavalry



17<sup>ème</sup> RGP  
Airborne Engineer



3<sup>ème</sup> RPIMa  
Airborne Marines



8<sup>ème</sup> RPIMa  
Airborne Marines



1<sup>er</sup> RPIMa  
Airborne Marines



1<sup>er</sup> RTP  
Airborne Air-delivery



2<sup>ème</sup> REP  
Airborne Legion