

German Paratrooper Beret Badge

Fallschirmjäger Barrettabzeichen

1936 - 1945

The original Parachute Rifleman's Badge (*Fallschirmhüttenabzeichen*) was instituted on November 5, 1936 by the Commander in Chief of the Luftwaffe. It was awarded to qualified parachutists after six training jumps, one of which was at night. The badge depicted a diving eagle set in an oval wreath. One side of the wreath was oak leaves, symbolizing strength. The other side was laurel leaves, symbolizing victory. Between 1937 and 1939, and again between 1943 and 1945, the German Army awarded a separate parachute badge. The Army badge was similar to the Luftwaffe badge, with a second close-winged Wehrmacht eagle at the top of the wreath. Both the metal version and the cloth version of the parachute badge were worn on the left breast pocket of the uniform.

German Fallschirmjäger Operations in WWII

Between 1936, when the first parachute school was established at Stendal, and 1938, both the German Army and the Luftwaffe established small parachute units. Some German paratroopers fought in the Spanish Civil War. In October 1938, the *7th Flieger (Air) Division*, an elite paratroop formation, was raised under Major General Kurt Student. He infused this unit with unusually strong fighting spirit. In 1939, all Army parachute units were absorbed into the Luftwaffe *7th Flieger Division*.

Elements of the *7th Flieger Division* fought in Poland in 1939, Denmark, Norway, Belgium, and the Netherlands in 1940, and in the 1941 invasions of Greece and Crete. Crete was the last large-scale German parachute operation of the war. The Germans had learned that high-quality, highly-trained parachute units suffered far too many casualties. From 1941 on, parachute units were employed solely as elite infantry. The *7th Flieger Division* deployed to Russia in 1941 and again in 1942.

1st Fallschirmjäger Division in Italy

The *1st Fallschirmjäger (Parachute Hunter) Division* was formed in France from the *7th Flieger Division* in April 1943. Elements fought as the strong rearguard in the defence of Sicily and again at Salerno, and in the famously ferocious defence of Monte Casino in 1944. The division served in Italy until April 1945. The Wehrmacht eventually raised eleven parachute divisions of almost 230,000 men, although only a small number of these soldiers were jump qualified. The 2nd, 3rd, and 4th Parachute Divisions formed in 1943. The 5th through 9th were formed in 1944. The 10th and 11th Parachute Divisions were formed in 1945.

1956 - 2006

In 1956, the West German Army, the *Bundeswehr*, stood up the *25th Airborne Brigade* and established an Army parachute school at Altenstadt. This Brigade became the core of the *1st Airborne Division* in 1957, based in Esslingen. In 1959, a new *26th Brigade* was added, and a reserve Brigade established. A separate airborne battalion was created and attached to the *5th Armored Division*. In 1970, this separate battalion became the cadre for the newly-formed *27th Airborne Brigade*.

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Since 1971, all German parachute troops have been issued with red berets. The current Bundeswehr paratrooper beret badge, *Fallschirmjäger Barrettabzeichen*, is based on the World War II badge design: A diving eagle, mounted on an oval wreath of oak leaves, symbolizing strength, with the German National ensign centered at the bottom. The metal Fallschirmjäger badge is worn on the front center of the red Fallschirmjäger beret.