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Feature Article

CAPT Paluso

From SEAL to Commandant: The Illustrious Career of CAPT Eugene “Geno” Paluso

If you have ever seen CAPT Paluso walking around The Citadel campus, the first word you most likely think of is “Commandant.” Throughout his seven-year stint as Commandant of Cadets at The Citadel, CAPT Paluso has made a tremendous impact on the Corps. His success here at The Citadel over the last seven years is only part of what he has accomplished in his lifetime. A long and successful 25-year military career is at the core of it all.



CAPT Eugene

“Geno” Paluso was born in Washington, Pennsylvania. According to Paluso, “I had a pretty normal childhood until sophomore year of high school. I was sent away to a naval honors school [or naval prep school]. That’s

where I got interested in the Navy.” This is how he was integrated into the military lifestyle, and this is what sparked an interest in him to serve. He quickly realized that had he not gone to a prep

school, he would have struggled throughout college. “Everybody’s got to know their limitations,” he said. Throughout his junior and senior years of high school, he applied to military colleges: Mass Maritime, Norwich, VMI, The Citadel, and Ole Miss. “And the only one I didn’t get into was The Citadel.” This made him want to go even more. He reapplied, and months later he attended his pre-knob visit, toured campus, and knew that The Citadel was the school for him.



Coming into The Citadel, CAPT Paluso knew that the Navy was the branch of service that best suited him. He entered The Citadel with the dream of wanting to be a Navy pilot, but he was not under a contract at the time, and he did not have a military scholarship when coming in. “When Topgun came out, everyone wanted to be a Navy pilot. Everyone wanted to be Tom Cruise flying F14 Tomcats.” A few years into his time at The Citadel, and this dream changed. One of his classmates introduced him to a SEAL, and he was hooked. By junior year, he had a Navy contract secured and was looking forward to commissioning, all while chasing a BUD/S slot. There were only a few slots available for officers, so he had a backup plan in place. “My senior year if I would not have secured a slot to go to Basic Underwater Demolition/SEAL training, I was prepared to drop my commission at commissioning, go enlisted, because at the time it was easier to go enlisted as a SEAL.” Luckily for him, he received his slot.

In May of 1989, CAPT Paluso commissioned in the Navy with a BUD/S slot and graduated from The Citadel with a Bachelor of Arts in Mathematics. Two weeks after



graduation, he was sent to Coronado, California, to attend Basic Underwater Demolition/SEAL training, a six-month process, broken down into three phases. Class 164 graduated in January of 1990. Unlike today's SEALs, SEALs at the time did not graduate with their

Trident. According to CAPT Paluso, “You had a six-month probation period with your SEAL team, you had to prove yourself at your SEAL team, and then your commanding officer awarded you your Trident.” His career began with SEAL Team THREE where he was the Assistant Platoon Commander of a Special Operations (SPECOPS) Platoon, as well as Platoon Commander of an Amphibious Ready Group (ARG) BRAVO Platoon. During this time, he was responsible for the manning, training, equipping, and deploying of each element to various locations to conduct special operations worldwide as required. He served in this role until March of 1994. He explained to me that “you’re constantly training, no matter what you’re doing,

throughout your career. We have a saying ‘You earn your trident every day.’” Training for a SEAL never stops. This is what makes Navy SEALs the best of the best.

SEAL
Team THREE
was focused on
the Western
Pacific region, so
naturally his first
deployment with
SEAL Team
THREE was to
the Philippines.
From there, he



went to Special Boat Squadron ONE where he was the Training and Readiness Evaluation Officer for all of the boat detachments on the West Coast. He attended training exercises and evaluated each detachment as they were preparing to deploy. He later moved to New Orleans, Louisiana, to join Special Boat Unit TWENTY-TWO and became their Executive Officer (XO). He spent a year and a half in NOLA before moving to Naval Special Warfare Development Group (NAVSPECWARDEVGRU), located in Virginia Beach, VA. One of his deployments was with SEAL Team FOUR, where he served as XO. During this time, they deployed to Bosnia, where he served as a Reconnaissance Task Unit Commander. To mention every position

CAPT Paluso has held, or every place he has served, would take up pages of its own. It is obvious he had a very successful and rewarding career as a Navy SEAL officer.

CAPT Paluso moved to Quantico, Virginia from June 2000 to June 2001 to attend school. He received his Master of Military Science from the United States Marine Corps Command and Staff College. Along with a successful career in the operational realm of the military, he also served a few



years in the administrative sector. Beginning in December of 2003, he was placed in the Pentagon as part of the Navy Staff. During this time, he was a Naval Special Warfare (NSW) Resources and Requirements Officer and Special Operation Forces (SOF) Analyst. He was solely responsible for the special operations input, planning, and staffing of the Navy's overall budget.

Due to his exceptional leadership ability, he was requested by name to deploy to Afghanistan for six months to augment a Joint Special Operations Task Force that was conducting counterterrorism operations. He worked hard during his administrative time and eventually ended up as part of the Joint Staff stationed in the Pentagon. He held several roles, including Action Officer and Deputy Current Operations Director in the J3 Deputy Director for Special Operations (DDSO); Chief of Staff (COS), Pakistan; and Afghanistan Coordination Cell,

Washington, D.C. In DDSO, he was in charge of coordinating special operations requirements, approvals and authorities for special operations being conducted in US Central Command and US Africa Command areas of responsibility, as well as other sensitive Joint Special Operations for the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. His last deployment was to Afghanistan from December of 2009 to July of 2011. For 19 months, as the Chief of Staff for the Combined Special Operations Component Command-Afghanistan, Kabul, where he was responsible for directing the higher headquarters staff for a 5,300-person Special Operations Force.

After 25 successful and momentous years in the service CAPT Paluso decided to retire. During his time as a cadet at The Citadel, he always told himself there was no way he would ever step foot on campus again, but despite that, in 2014 he ended up at The Citadel and assumed his position as the Commandant of Cadets. As the Commandant, he reported directly to the President of The Citadel for the leadership training, administration, military training, and overall cadet life of the 2,400 member Corps of Cadets. CAPT Paluso made many changes during his time as



Commandant. He strongly believes that the leaders he had during his time in the service and the leadership training he received set him up to be successful in his role as Commandant. He was very instrumental during his time in developing and implementing training courses for all four classes at The Citadel. Through these training programs, he strived to develop and better prepare cadets to be principled leaders after their time at The Citadel.

When asked what he enjoyed most about his time as Commandant, he told me, “I loved every minute here... The cool thing about this institution is

you watch individuals come in as freshman. You watch them four years later walk across the stage a completely

different person.”

Reflecting on his time,

he commented, “As

cliché as it sounds, I

wanted to leave

everything on the

field.” He hopes that he

made a positive impact



on the men and women who attended during his seven years.

CAPT Paluso currently resides in Charleston with his wife, Robin, and their three kids: Makenzi, Trevor, and Roman. His awards include the Defense Superior Service Medal, Legion of Merit, Defense Meritorious Service Medal, Bronze Star, Meritorious Service Medal (2 awards), Joint Commendation medal (two awards), Navy Commendation Medal (five awards), Joint Achievement Medal, Navy Achievement Medal, and numerous other joint and service awards. Currently he is awaiting his retirement in July of 2021, and he is looking forward to what is in store for him next.