

**Captain Eugene F. Paluso, USN (Retired)**  
**Biographical Summary**  
**Order of the Palmetto Nomination**

Captain Eugene ("Geno") F. Paluso, USN (Retired) concludes seven years in June 2021 as The Citadel's Commandant of Cadets. Prior to his time at The Citadel, he completed twenty five years as a Naval Officer and SEAL (SEa, Air, Land) Special Operations warrior, and four years as a Citadel cadet. His service to South Carolina and The United States is unparalleled. Captain Paluso deployed eleven times into combat, undertaking some of the most secretive and challenging tasks given to our military. He then returned to South Carolina to serve The Citadel and its young men and women.

Coming to The Citadel in 1985 as a Naval ROTC Scholarship winner, he graduated in 1989 and proceeded immediately to SEAL training in California. Known as BUD/S ('Buds' - Basic Underwater Demolition/SEAL), this course is widely acknowledged as the most grueling military program in the world. Geno graduated with Class 164 in 1990. He proceeded to serve in SEAL units in California and Louisiana, specializing in amphibious operations and deploying worldwide on classified combat missions.

In 1997, Captain Paluso joined the Naval Special Warfare Development Group, known to the public as "SEAL Team Six." This elite unit undertakes America's most dangerous, complex covert missions, and is best known for its 2011 raid taking the life of Osama Bin Laden. Selection is arduous, and only a tiny fraction of SEALs who apply are selected. Geno deployed several times with the unit to Bosnia and other locations as an element leader and operations officer.

He then served as Executive Officer of SEAL Team Four, where he oversaw combat deployments to Bosnia, Liberia, Afghanistan, Iraq, and other parts of Africa. Specific duties included oversight of all operations and activities for eight SEAL platoons who at times were simultaneously active throughout these disparate and austere locations.

As his time with Team Four concluded, Captain Paluso then moved to staff service at the Pentagon where he initially served as a Requirements Officer, coordinating Naval Special Warfare inputs to the overall Navy Budget. This role was short-lived; he was soon recalled to Afghanistan to augment a Joint Special Operations Task force for yet another six month deployment.

Captain Paluso then took command of SEAL Team Eight, one of ten conventional SEAL teams, comprised of over 120 Navy Special Operations professionals. While his tenure saw Team Eight members deployed around the world, Geno directly commanded combat operations in Africa, Afghanistan and Iraq.

Returning to the Pentagon in 2007, Captain Paluso served as an Action Officer for Special Operations with the Joint Chiefs of Staff, America's military leadership. He helped coordinate and brief the most secretive missions throughout the Middle East, and ensured our highest military officers understood and properly utilized these Special Operations personnel.

Time in Washington was again brief. He returned to Afghanistan in 2009 for a 19 month tour as Chief of Staff for a 5,300-person Special Operations force from each US military service and our allies.

Captain Paluso concluded his Navy career as Commodore, Naval Special Warfare Group Three. With over 700 personnel in his charge, Group Three specializes in undersea warfare, utilizing SEALs and

various underwater vehicles and techniques for sensitive operations. These activities remain highly classified.

Interspersed in these high-pressure assignments were interludes at The Marine Corps Command and Staff College and National Defense University where he completed advanced professional education and was awarded two Master's degrees.

After all this, Geno still felt compelled to serve. He returned to South Carolina, taking on the role of Commandant of Cadets at The Citadel, responsible for the leadership development and military training of the South Carolina Corps of Cadets (SCCC).

The Citadel, in operation since 1842, is part of the very fabric of South Carolina. Its influence, graduates, and overall stature impact our State and Nation in a unique way, and in disproportionately large fashion relative to its size. This is due to the iconic military system, and quality of its graduates.

The importance of the Commandant to The Citadel lifestyle and 'product' cannot be overstated- he oversees the very things making The Citadel a unique place. The Commandant controls cadet life outside academics and NCAA athletics. The military system, discipline, barracks life, clubs, intramurals and other activities are all part of his portfolio. In this effort, the Commandant leads a 100 person department, and serves as a college Vice President.

The Citadel was at something of a crossroads in 2014 as Captain Paluso took charge. The school had done much to professionalize behavior and training in the Corps, but persistent vestiges of poor leadership techniques and unacceptable behavior remained. Geno observed operations for several months before swinging to action. His first steps began with aggressively rooting out negative behavior within the SCCC. Hazing, abusive practices, and poor discipline by cadets would no longer be tolerated. While something of a shock to the system, his aggressive action set the tone for a new way The Citadel executed its mission "to train principled leaders in a challenging environment."

With The Citadel core values Honor, Duty and Respect as the foundation, Captain Paluso put in place not just disciplinary measures but training emphasizing servant leadership and teamwork. He understood while The Citadel prided itself on an 'adversarial' system designed to challenge new cadets, the school was missing opportunities to build truly effective leaders. The focus was not just on the challenges of freshman year- he built a continuum of leadership development over all four years a cadet spends in the barracks. Cadet life was no longer merely about enduring freshman year followed by simply adhering to regulations the following three- everyone was expected to play a part, serve those they led, and train (vice merely 'challenge') those in their charge.

The impact of these changes cannot be overstated. During Captain Paluso's tenure, The Citadel remained The Number One Public College in the South ten years running, as determined by the influential *U. S. News and World Report* college rankings. Citadel graduates benefit South Carolina and America with their outsized impact in earnings, revenue generation for the industries and other enterprises they serve, and take an outsized role in civic leadership throughout the State. They are stalwarts in their communities, churches, corporations, and public offices. Since 2014, the ascendant quality of these graduates is in no small part a credit to Captain Paluso's leadership.

Policy and organizational leadership aren't the whole story. Innumerable cadets have seen, on a personal level, the care and mentorship Captain Paluso brings to The Citadel. Many cadets join him each

morning for small group workout sessions in the pool or other intensive physical training activities. On any day one finds several cadets in his office, from those merely checking in to ones greatly in need of someone to guide or assist them through the myriad of challenges modern young people face. Often, these are who many would classify as 'bad cadets' after running afoul of the disciplinary system. Geno Paluso becomes their advisor, advocate, reality check, and often, port in a storm. Not what you would expect from a hardened veteran SEAL who serves as the school's chief disciplinarian, but it is the reality of Captain Paluso's leadership style.

His work expanded to other areas. In the wake of the Emmanuel Nine tragedy, The Citadel redoubled its efforts examining its place in history, how it deals with issues of race and equity, and its place in the Charleston Community. In 2015, Geno led the President's Task Force on Diversity and Inclusion. Comprised of a cross section of not just The Citadel family but also members of the wider Lowcountry community, the Task Force examined every facet of The Citadel's role in these issues, and offered the college over twenty substantial recommendations it works to maintain or achieve to this day. Geno has also been a key member of similar efforts and groups addressing these critical issues.

Geno is also a force for good in the Charleston community. Of particular note is his recent election as Board Chair of One80 Place, a prominent Charleston homeless shelter and assistance charity. He has served on its Board for several years. He also assists The Citadel Foundation and Alumni Association in advancing their goals in supporting the school, and is active in his family's schools and other civic pursuits.

Captain Eugene "Geno" Paluso, USN (Retired) has served our Nation and State in ways few can imagine, let alone emulate. He richly deserves inclusion into the rolls of South Carolina's highest award for service, The Order of the Palmetto.

**BOARD OF VISITORS  
THE CITADEL**

THE MILITARY COLLEGE OF SOUTH CAROLINA  
171 MOULTRIE STREET  
CHARLESTON, S.C. 29409-0100

1 March 2021

The Honorable Henry McMaster  
State House  
1100 Gervais Street  
Columbia, South Carolina 29201

Governor McMaster:

Greetings. It is my honor and pleasure to nominate Captain Eugene "Geno" F. Paluso, USN (Retired) to The Order of the Palmetto. I can think of no one in our great State more deserving of our highest recognition.

Captain Paluso began his Navy career upon graduation from The Citadel in 1989. He served twenty-five years as a Navy SEAL officer, including a tour in the highly-selective, secretive Naval Special Warfare Development Group (known colloquially as 'SEAL Team Six'). Captain Paluso completed innumerable combat deployments to Bosnia, Iraq, Afghanistan, Africa, and other classified locations throughout the world. He culminated his Navy career as Commodore, Navy Special Warfare Group THREE, commanding over 700 SEALs and Special Operations personnel engaged in high-risk operations across the globe.

In 2014, Captain Paluso returned to South Carolina and The Citadel as our Commandant of Cadets. He leads all practical leadership training associated with our military system, cadet discipline, and administration of all cadet activities outside classroom academics and NCAA Athletics. The Commandant, simply put, oversees the critical aspects most associated with The Citadel cadet lifestyle and system.

His impact on our 2300 cadets far exceeds this brief description. Captain Paluso is on duty 24/7 any time cadets are on campus, including holiday and summer breaks. He is a leader, and in spite of being the head disciplinarian, the greatest mentor, advocate and friend to every cadet entering our gates. A planned retirement in June 2021 leaves a great gap at The Citadel.

Captain Paluso's legacy is without question the advancement of leadership training. Efforts to professionalize standards and positively develop leaders directly impacts each cadet's experience here, and contributes to the high quality of Citadel Graduates we produce for South Carolina and America. He leaves The Citadel and those he led in a far better place, and our institution poised for continued success.

I am proud to nominate Captain Eugene Paluso, USN (Retired) to The Order of The Palmetto.

Sincerely,



Myron C. Harrington '60  
Colonel, USMC (Retired)  
Chairman, The Citadel Board of Visitors

MCH/wl

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First Vice-Chairman*

*Christopher J. "Chris" Murphy  
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**House of Representatives  
P.O. Box 11867  
Telephone: (803) 734-3120  
Columbia, S.C. 29211**

*Linda C. Anderson  
Executive Assistant*

*Emma Dean  
Chief Counsel*

*Roland Franklin  
Staff Counsel*

*Jimmy Hinson  
Staff Counsel*

March 1, 2021

The Honorable Henry McMaster  
Governor of the State of South Carolina  
1205 Pendleton Street  
Columbia, South Carolina 29201

Dear Governor McMaster:

I have the distinct honor in supporting The Chairman of The Citadel Board of Visitors' nomination of Captain Eugene "Geno" Paluso, USN (Retired) for selection to The Order of the Palmetto.

I have known Captain Paluso since our days as cadets at The Citadel, and have seen firsthand the impact he made on this iconic South Carolina institution since becoming Commandant of Cadets seven years ago.

Geno began his service to South Carolina and our Nation when he became a Citadel cadet in 1985. Taking a Navy Commission upon graduation, he proceeded to serve as SEAL, seeing combat on eleven deployments in conflict zones across the globe. He returned to our great State after Navy retirement to serve the young men and women of The Citadel. As Commandant, he oversees every aspect of cadet life outside academics, a large part of which is the leadership training, military lifestyle, and disciplinary system making The Citadel such a unique place and point of pride to our State.

I cannot overemphasize his impact on not only the school, but the thousands of men and women his work and innovations touched across South Carolina and The United States. I say this not only as an Alumni and Legislator, but also as the parent of a current cadet.

Captain Geno Paluso has my highest recommendation for The Order of the Palmetto.

Sincerely,

  
Christopher J. "Chris" Murphy  
Chairman





# THE CITADEL

THE MILITARY COLLEGE OF SOUTH CAROLINA

BOARD OF VISITORS  
COLONEL ALLISON DEAN LOVE

March 4, 2021

The Honorable Henry McMaster, Governor  
South Carolina State House  
1100 Gervais Street  
Columbia SC 29201-6215

Dear Governor McMaster:

It is with pleasure that I write to you on behalf of a distinguished South Carolinian, Captain Eugene "Geno" Paluso, Commandant of Cadets at The Citadel. I highly recommend Captain Paluso to be awarded South Carolina's highest civilian award, The Order of the Palmetto, for his great lifetime of achievement and impact to our state and nation.

Captain Geno Paluso, USN (Ret), a graduate of The Citadel in 1989, has served as Commandant of Cadets at The Citadel nearly seven years. Prior to coming to The Citadel, he was a highly decorated U.S. Navy SEAL officer. He has shaped the lives of thousands of Citadel cadets who have gone on to be leaders in our state and nation.

Captain Paluso was commissioned into the Navy from The Citadel. He served as a Navy SEAL officer on active duty as the commander of the Naval Special Warfare Group 3 at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii. The group consists of 700 specialized SEAL and fleet personnel. He served more than 25 years before taking his current position. After his arrival at The Citadel, Captain Paluso assessed The Citadel's leadership training model and added structure and focus. He established experiential training events including leadership reaction courses. Captain Paluso's innovations give cadets tools to be strong, professional, effective leaders.

The results speak for themselves—the South Carolina Corps of Cadets continues to shine. Our graduates are sought after not only for their academic achievements, but also their leadership skills and character. They continue to graduate in four years at the highest rate in South Carolina, have record employment rates, flourish in military service or their chosen careers, and garner the financial and professional rewards from doing so.

The Corps of Cadets' performance has been extraordinary in executing the real-world mission operating in the COVID-19 environment. Following appropriate health and safety measures while staying focused and holding each other accountable, it is no accident they are finding success while students at many other institutions are struggling. These achievements are the result of the direction and leadership our cadets learn and implement as part of their experience under the Commandant and his staff. Captain Paluso's leadership is facilitating our success, and imparting to the Corps invaluable lessons during these times.

The Commandant's role is vitally important to implementing The Citadel's leadership development model. Captain Paluso will complete his contract as of June 30, 2021. Recognized for his commitment to the training of thousands of cadets during his time at The Citadel, Captain Paluso has exemplified principled leadership and exceptional distinction. Due to his 31 years of collective service, both in the military and to The Citadel, he is worthy of South Carolina's Order of the Palmetto.

Thank you for your consideration of this recommendation. If I may be of further assistance, please contact me.

Sincerely,

Allison Dean Love  
The Citadel Board of Visitors

**BOARD OF VISITORS  
THE CITADEL**

THE MILITARY COLLEGE OF SOUTH CAROLINA  
171 MOULTRIE STREET  
CHARLESTON, S.C. 29409-0100

1 March 2021

The Honorable Henry McMaster  
State House  
1100 Gervais Street  
Columbia, South Carolina 29201

Governor McMaster:

I wish to lend my voice to Colonel Myron Harrington's nomination of Captain Eugene "Geno" F. Paluso, USN (Retired) to The Order of the Palmetto. In my thirty-five years' service in leadership roles to my Alma Mater, few people had an effect on The Citadel such as Captain Paluso.

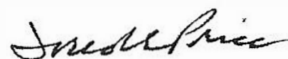
After an incredible career as a Navy SEAL, we were fortunate to have him return to our school as Commandant of Cadets. Geno's drive and spirit are special.

From his first days on campus in 2014, it was clear the school had selected the right man for the job. Through his tenure, he combined the right mix of leadership, discipline, innovation and hard work. The results are clear- The Citadel produces graduates for America and South Carolina second to none.

I also saw the care and mentorship he showed to our cadets. He was tough on them, but instinctively knew when a helping hand, or a departure from the rigidity of our Spartan lifestyle, was needed. Cadets knew not to cross him, but also knew he was there if times were rough.

As with any college, our mission is to produce great citizens who make our communities better places. A whole generation of Citadel graduates do just that thanks to Geno Paluso. The Citadel is a better place as a result of his time here, and South Carolina will reap the rewards for years to come.

Sincerely,



Fred L. Price '75  
Former Chair  
The Citadel Board of Visitors

FLP/wl



# THE CITADEL

1 March 2021

The Honorable Henry McMaster  
State House  
1100 Gervais Street  
Columbia, South Carolina 29201

Governor McMaster:

I write today in support of Citadel Board of Visitors Chair Colonel Myron Harrington's nomination of Captain Eugene "Geno" F. Paluso, USN (Retired) to The Order of the Palmetto.

One cannot overstate the impact Captain Paluso has on our cadets and graduates, and in the improvement of The Citadel writ large. Our institution and State are fortunate to have enjoyed his leadership and efforts.

The biographic summary and other letters supporting his nomination cover in great detail his time as a Naval Officer and philanthropic work in the community. I wish to focus on what I've seen on my two-plus years as President.

From training and mentoring individual cadets, through helping lead the college on the strategic level, Captain Paluso's influence on our cadets, graduates, and The Citadel will be felt for years. The benefits to South Carolina are in turn equally large. His leadership in large part contributed to The Citadel's ten-year reign as the Number One Public College in the South per *U. S. News and World Report*.

Of particular note is his lead role in The Citadel's response to the recent pandemic. He led our interface with Marine Corps Recruit Depot Parris Island, and their initiative housing Marine recruits aboard The Citadel campus before commencing Boot Camp. This yielded not only good use of capability and facilities laid dormant by the departure of cadets, but also lent critical insight on process and procedure used to this day facilitating in-person residence, education and training of the Corps of Cadets. His efforts greatly benefitted two of South Carolina's iconic institutions- Parris Island and The Citadel.

I look forward to Captain Paluso's inclusion into this most hallowed Order. The Citadel is a proud part of South Carolina, and his efforts on her behalf are worthy of such an honor.

Sincerely,

Glenn M. Walters '79  
General USMC (Retired)  
President

GMW/wl

**Office of the President**

171 Moultrie Street, Charleston, SC 29409 | (843) 953-5012 | FAX 843-953-5287 | [www.citadel.edu](http://www.citadel.edu)



February 25, 2021

I am writing to recommend Captain Eugene (Geno) F. Paluso for The Order of the Palmetto.

I have known Geno for 5 years and have nothing but positive things to say. I met him in 2016 when he joined the Board of Directors of One 80 Place in Charleston, SC. It became apparent to all stakeholders that Geno's dedication to the community and his exceptional leadership skills strengthened the board enormously. Whether it be contributing to a broad strategic plan in the mission to eradicate homelessness or providing counsel on tactics for operational excellence, his voice is universally respected. As the incoming Chair of the Board, Geno's discipline, energy and commitment will provide continuity and demonstrative community impact for years to come.

For his contribution to the country, higher education and the community, Captain Paluso is deserving of South Carolina's highest service award.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Anne Kirby Surrett", written in a cursive style.

Anne Kirby Surrett  
Chairman, Board of Directors  
One 80 Place  
38 Dalton Street  
Daniel Island, South Carolina 29492



February 19, 2021

The Honorable Henry McMaster  
Office of the Governor  
1100 Gervais Street  
Columbia, SC 29201

Dear Governor McMaster,

I am honored to join the effort requesting your approval of awarding Captain Geno Paluso, US Navy (Retired) the deserving honor of an Order of the Palmetto.

For nearly thirty years in the US Navy, seven years at The Citadel, and throughout his life as a citizen, Geno Paluso made service above self a guiding principle. Wherever he has been in professional career, but especially here in South Carolina, he has reached out to the local community with his talent and sweat to improve the lives of those with whom he has lived.

Across the State of South Carolina, Captain Paluso's impact is felt among young men and women matriculated at The Citadel where he has been the Commandant of Cadets, faithfully adjusting the leadership development training process and instilling accountability to the cadets and training staff which needed further positive changes which college presidents and commandants began to implement in the decades prior to his arrival. Captain Paluso's courageous actions are distinct in that he was willing to push those changes needed to mend the leadership culture which brought pushback from some corners of The Citadel's devotees.

When cadets and later Citadel graduates return to their South Carolina hometowns, Captain Paluso's positive impact on them is and will continue to be felt by all citizens there, and for generations. Better trained young leaders who are accountable to authority, devoted to civic virtue, committed to helping those around them, willing to shoulder the mantle of leadership locally, are Geno Paluso's hallmarks -sign posts of his life in South Carolina.

It is critically important to focus on Captain Paluso's personal example, sterling character, and community outreach in your judging this award recommendation. Geno Paluso is exactly the type of person who would bring further credit to our state's highest honor.

I thank you for your consideration of this prestigious award for Captain Geno Paluso and for your leadership and service to our great State of South Carolina.

Very respectfully,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads 'Frederick J. Whittle'.

Frederick J. Whittle  
Chief Operating Officer