

Regan Farfone

Dr. Lauren Rule Maxwell

English 562

4 December 2023

### Veteran's History Spotlight: A Dedicated Air Force Flight Nurse



*Paul Langevin, USAF*

Paul Langevin's path to the Air Force is a nontraditional one. When he initially applied after college graduation, the Army was not hiring nurses, so he worked as a nurse for six years before he came home and told his wife that he wanted to join the Air Force. She was on board with the decision and challenge ahead. As a self-proclaimed "military brat," Paul lived in many different places

during his childhood, including twice in Germany when his father served. This turned out to be the most significant place he lived; he graduated from high school there and then returned when serving in the Air Force with plans to earn his CRNA (Certified Registered Nurse Anesthetist).

The first assignment did not go exactly as planned. Paul had signed on to work in a NICU, but when he showed up, officers kept walking him up the chain of command. Finally, the Colonel on duty told him that they were forming an air evacuation team. Paul's experience as an

ER flight nurse was a perfect fit. They wanted him to be part of a CCAT (Critical Care Air Transport) team which included a doctor, nurse, and respiratory therapist. This required him to learn aircraft systems and how CCU systems could work at altitude on a plane when transporting patients.



*Paul (bottom right with mustache)*

Paul's most memorable experience was a time when he and his team experienced a large patient load of approximately 35 walking wounded and 25 soldiers who were badly injured.

Reflecting on the experience years later still makes him emotional; and he explained, "These guys were in bad shape." They worked all night on that flight. When compared to his average patient load of 15

to 20 patients, it is easy to see how such a significant increase in the number of patients with more severe injuries would be a challenge.

Even though he does not explicitly say so, it became clear that Air Force leaders recognized his dedication and enthusiasm, then provided a path for advancement. This remains a common theme in Paul's career in the Air Force. Once leaders realized that he could work independently, finish projects ahead of schedule, and also manage a team, many opportunities became available to him. When asked about his greatest influence during the military, he said that Colonel Vermillion, his commander at Pope Air Force Base, "took my stubbornness and

steered it.” She helped pave the way for his career advancement, as she set up openings for him to step right into. His dedication and reliability helped him move quickly through the ranks. Paul admired her and other strong leaders who were determined, motivated, and “took no crap.”

Paul insists that a good military member must be “mission-oriented.” This is what he feels sets apart the nurses and doctors who were more mission-minded versus those more work-minded or those who simply cared for their patients. Paul explained that in the military world, there is a level of accomplishment needed to move up the ranks and he feels that this keeps the members of the military striving for higher achievement. This is what separates them from the civilian world in his estimation. His return to civilian life after retirement was frustrating for the same reason. His work at the Ralph H. Johnson VA Medical Hospital in Charleston [SC] required him to manage people who did not always share his dedication or work ethic. Holding them accountable seemed logical to Paul but proved more difficult to implement in real life. This lack of accountability is what led him to change roles at the hospital. He now runs the Simulation Lab where doctors, nurses and staff practice skills such as starting a central line, installing catheters, or intubating on full-body mannequins.

When asked specifically about misconceptions that surround service in the Air Force, initially Paul said there were none but then he eventually said that it is viewed as a softer area of service and cushy. He insists this misconception exists largely because the Air Force takes care of their people. Paul shared that the biggest concern facing the military is “the soft approach” that the US military is now taking. Paul insists that some of the changes have been good and hopefully will lead to easier recruitment but “basic [training] isn’t basic anymore.” He says that the military has changed, specifically how they handle mental health and deal with people.

According to him, these changes are not good or bad, but a crucial piece for future success is being able to maintain discipline within the unit. Paul does have some concern with the military heading in a direction that is unable to maintain that discipline because the calling to serve is different than it once was. He explained that the biggest challenges facing the military are recruiting and being able to hold people accountable which he says is a top-down problem because “we allow it to be.”

Easily described as humble, Paul is hesitant to talk about the awards and accolades he has received. Being named Flight Nurse of the Year in 2002 is what Paul feels is his biggest accomplishment as this award happened during “the height of everything.” As far as his most significant duty, he explains: “My last duty assignment I was a Command Chief Nurse of US Transcom, so I oversaw one of our combatant commands, essentially the transportation of all military people out there that were injured, regardless of service.” More recently, he was inducted into the Charleston RiverDogs Circle of Honor after being nominated by the Ralph H. Johnson VA Medical Hospital.

Paul served 20 years and one day before his retirement. His detailer had a plan for him that was not what Paul had in mind, including an assignment at headquarters, which was not something that appealed to him. He explained that he preferred being in the action, not behind a desk. When he realized that making O6, the rank of Colonel, would require two more moves in three years, in addition to the less desirable assignment at headquarters, Paul made the easy decision to retire at 48 years old when he felt he could easily transition in the US workforce. He has two children: a son Parker, who is also in the military, and a daughter, Anna. Both children also work at the VA Hospital in Charleston, SC. At the conclusion of our interview, I asked Paul

if his family would learn anything new or be surprised by anything they heard in the interview. His words were familiar ones, “I did everything out of service to my country.” And for that we should all be so very grateful.



*Parker Langevin with his father, Paul*