



General Incursore Nicola Zanelli Has Passed Away: A Life in Service of Italy

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It is with deep sorrow that today the Italian Armed Forces and the entire military community bid farewell to **General of the Army Corps Nicola Zanelli**, who passed away at the age of 61 after a long illness he had been battling. A man of extraordinary operational experience and high professional profile, Zanelli has been an undisputed point of reference in the world of airborne troops and special forces for decades.

Born in **Castelnovo ne' Monti** (Reggio Emilia) on **July 6, 1963** and raised in **Felina**, a small village in the Reggio Apennines, Zanelli embarked on a military career in **1982** attending the **164th Course** of the **Military Academy of Modena**. After the School of Application in Turin, he was assigned to the **187th Paratrooper Regiment "Folgore"**, then passed the selective Special Forces course and joined the **9th Paratrooper Assault Regiment "Col Moschin"**, a unit he would later command.

An Outstanding Operational Career

General Zanelli participated in the main Italian operations of the last thirty years: in **1993**, during Operation IBIS in Somalia, he commanded the historic **5th Company "Pipistrelli"** of the 187th Folgore Regiment. He then moved, as an incursor, to the 9th Paratrooper Assault Regiment "Col Moschin", starting his career in the special forces, gaining significant experience in Europe, Africa, and the Middle East.

In 2003, he was integrated into the **3rd British Division** as an exchange officer, with which he participated in **Operation Telic 1** in **Iraq**. Returning to Italy, he was appointed Deputy Chief of Operations of the **Joint Special Operations Command (COFS)**. Between 2006 and 2008, he commanded the **9th Paratrooper Assault Regiment "Col Moschin"** and then served as **Italian Military Attaché in London**, with responsibilities also over **Ireland and Iceland**.

Back in Italy, he held top-level command positions in the special forces sector: in **2013** he was the **first commander of the Army Special Forces Command (COMFOSE)**, while in **2016** he became **Commander of COFS**, the Joint Special Operations Command, a position he held until 2019.

International Leadership and Honors

In **2020**, he was promoted to **General of the Army Corps** and appointed **Deputy Commander of NATO Resolute Support Operation in Afghanistan**, holding the position until July 2021. In 2022, he was appointed **Deputy Commander of Allied Land Command (LANDCOM)** of NATO, based in **Izmir, Turkey**.

Zanelli attended the **Advanced Staff Course** at the War School of Civitavecchia and subsequently the **UK Joint Command & Staff Course in Shrivenham**, where he earned a **Master's in Military Studies from King's College London**.

An Indelible Legacy

Throughout his career, General Zanelli built strong cooperative ties with allied armed forces, especially in the field of special operations, distinguishing himself for competence and spirit of service. His leadership was fundamental for the evolution and internationalization of the Italian special forces, helping to strengthen Italy's credibility within NATO.

General Zanelli leaves behind his wife, two sons, and two daughters. With his passing, Italy loses not only a soldier of exceptional value but also a man who embodied with honor, courage, and intelligence the highest meaning of service to the Homeland.

The funeral will be held on Friday, May 30 at 3:30 PM, at the Church of Santa Maria Assunta in Felina (RE).

Any messages of condolence can be sent to the following address:

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