

FUTURE VETERANS

Today, Veterans Day, the JROTC kids are busier than their usual beyond hectic. Following an American Legion ceremony in Taylor Park, they will go to Dogwood Village and present each vet there with a certificate of appreciation. "Gosh," smiles Daniel, "I've got old men in tears; so thankful. And these kids get to see that and participate in that." Some, not all, of these young men and women will be our future veterans.

JROTC is an elective class. This semester about 120 boys and girls participate. "We've got kids from every walk of life, demographically. It's all represented right here." Major Daniel looks out over the classroom. "I've got kids at all different skill levels...we have to tailor how we instruct them." And much of that tailoring is hands-on. "They need to hold it, see it, touch it, feel it, smell it and learn that way."

He can relate because he was like that when he was their age. "I'm the kind of person who needs regimentation. I need a calendar and a schedule. But I'm a flexible person too. I'm not so regimented that if this course of action doesn't work, I'm not willing to see what other alternatives exist. And that really helps with these kids because they throw you curve balls all day long." Despite the curve balls, these kids are polite, well-groomed and focused.

"Our mission is to motivate students to become better citizens," continues Daniel. "That is our number one mission. We're not allowed to recruit or anything of that nature. Recruiters all go through the guidance department in the school system. We just use the military model to help instill some of the Army values that we want them to learn: loyalty, duty, respect, selfless service, honor, integrity, personal courage...those values that they'll carry with them all their lives."

JROTC is cadet-led and cadet-run, "just like a military unit. That's hard because they're teenagers, and that's



PHOTO BY PHIL AUDIBERT

Second in command at the Orange JROTC is Christopher Karten. He has already enlisted in the Marines.

one of the things that really frustrates the first sergeant." Daniel's second-in-command, Charles McIntyre was a drill sergeant in a former life. "Soldiers when they do something, they are committed; teenagers, a little bit different to deal with."

Both he and McIntyre are dedicated to their task. McIntyre commutes from Grottoes every day! "That's my commitment. Loves it. Couldn't find a better partner," says Daniel gratefully. "After the school day is over, the typical teacher goes home. Not for first sergeant and me. We have five teams: rifle team, drill team, raider team, color guard, honor guard, drum corps. And then we have a battalion staff. These are all made up of cadets under cadet leadership. They are self-generating. We have the upperclassmen who bring in underclassmen, mentor, train, teach, coach them, and that's a continuous process for us."



PHOTO COURTESY KENT DANIEL

The Orange County High School JROTC Color Guard recently earned a first place in the annual Courtland High School Drill Meet last month. From left to right, cadets Brian Hubble, Kyle McCarthy, Kenny Daniel, and Rodney Barnwell.

The unit is led by Battalion Commander, Kyle McCarthy and Command Sergeant

Major, Christopher Karten. McCarthy plans to attend VMI on an ROTC scholarship. Karten has already enlisted in the Marine Corps. These boys and other military-bound cadets are our future veterans. But Daniel adds, "My goal is that they all go to college. I don't care where it is."

Daniel wears many different hats here. Not only is he senior instructor, he's also a fund raiser and a bus driver. "Pay to play?" he scoffs. "I can't do that. I've got kids here on free lunch; they don't have any money. So, I'll drive." Some expenses come out of his own pocket. "I have to raise those funds. I sell stuff, and try to raise money and get donations."

The curriculum is diverse. "This week we're doing presenting skills and then two weeks from now we're doing the Constitution and Shay's Rebellion and things like that. That's another thing I love about it. It's not Northrop-Grumman sitting in a little 12 by 12 windowless office."

Daniel thinks back to a speech made by a Green Beret general when he was at Fort Bragg, years ago. "Your most lethal weapons system is not the artillery or the infantry or the armor, it's what's between your two ears...You will have to call on your resourcefulness and your ability to adapt, improvise, and overcome obstacles that ordinary human beings encounter and are not able to get around, over or through." He watches his cadets march smartly up the street. "That was a great lesson," he says.

Major Kent Daniel hopes to pass it on.

THE VETERAN



A world away in Iraq, Major Kent Daniel (left), as civil affairs officer, is the connection between the brigade and the locals, many of whom can't be trusted.

PHOTO COURTESY KENT DANIEL

"Those bonds that you make..."

If he had his druthers, Major Kent Daniel would be in Afghanistan right now. If it wasn't for his wife, son and two daughters, a family that he missed watching grow up, he'd be there. He'd be clearing the streets of roadside bombs in some God-forsaken mountain town or dealing with the locals while a comrade watched his back.

"I'd be back in Afghanistan right now if weren't for my family," he says without a moment's hesitation. "Absolutely. Love it. That's where I'd be right now. Love it that much." Tears well up in his eyes. Major Daniel has seen and done a lot...joys and horrors that we civilians could never understand. But he would go back to all that.

"There's nothing that can replace a brother in arms," he explains somberly. "When we live and breathe and fight side by side, it's not for God and glory and the United States or democracy or anything else; it's for each

other. And those bonds that you make, last forever."

That, in a nutshell, sums up this Veterans Day. No matter what branch of the military you served "those bonds that you make, last forever." No matter what conflict, from World War II through Korea, Vietnam, Panama, Granada, Desert Storm, Iraq, Afghanistan, and the dozens of flare-ups from Somalia to Sierra Leone, from Kurdistan to Lebanon, Bosnia to heaven-knows-where, veterans share that bond. The rest of us can only honor them for it.

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INSIDER

What is it like to have a shot fired at you in anger? "It made me mad," he spits. "The first one that went by my head, made me mad." He sets his jaw. "I've never experienced hate like I've seen in the eyes of my enemy. People despise the air that you're breathing and want you dead. And I've had to work with those people and try to find some common ground. And then," his eyes narrow, "when you lose your own soldiers, there's a sense of wanting to even the score."

Major Daniel is back in Iraq right now and he hasn't budged from his desk at Orange County High School. He's thinking about that IED that went off his first day on the ground. Wounded? "No, not physically," he replies flatly. "My scars are more emotional; lost 53 of our soldiers and 22 of those were close friends who went up right in front of me when two Black Hawks collided at night time up near Mosul."

To this day, Daniel can't sleep more than four hours at a stretch.

His kids know to never sneak up silently behind him. "I was with an 11-man team embedded with a 300-man Iraqi battalion for about six months. And there were no other U.S. forces around. We lived with these guys, ate with these guys, and I didn't trust any of them. That's just the way it is. We were training them and helping them with their exit strategy of getting them self sufficient." But there was no way he could leave his back unguarded. "These were guys that were shooting at us not too long ago. Now all of a sudden, we're buddies?" He ruefully shakes his head. "No."

Major Kenneth Daniel is a long way from being downrange in Iraq right now. He, along with his brother in arms, First Sergeant Charles McIntyre, face the organizational challenges of running the Orange County High School Junior Reserve Officer Training Corps (JROTC). At times, such as during Hornet Hour in the middle of the day, it's akin to herding cats. At other times, as the JROTC kids tramp in-step up Main Street for the Homecoming Parade, it's a well-oiled machine.

He sees himself in their faces, remembers growing up as a child in Madison County, playing Army after school. And then, like so many kids nowadays, he got off track. "I had discovered girls and skipping class and doing all the things you shouldn't do in school. And Mama had a plan for me, bless her heart, and I loved it. I went to Fork Union (Military Academy) and excelled and did really well." He graduated company commander and captain of the football team.



PHOTO BY PHIL AUDIBERT

Major Kent Daniel served 26 years in the Army. In Iraq, he was awarded the Bronze Star.

But still he had no interest in joining the military. Instead, Kent Daniel went to Emory and Henry, where he promptly dropped out after one semester. Married "at the ripe age of 19," he figured, "I had the world all figured out." He moved back to this area, commuted to Northern Virginia, and woke up one morning with the feeling, "there's got to be something better. And I hadn't done very good maintenance on my marriage either, so I decided to join the Army." He even toyed with the idea of joining the French Foreign Legion, but his mother put a stop to that.

He decided to become a medic with the Green Berets instead. But before he could complete the training, he was selected for the "Green to Gold" program, earning a degree in Political Science from Campbell University. He met and married Garlene, and turned his life around.

But, it was not just the military that transformed him; he had some help from above. "By the time I went to Emory and Henry, I was just living for Kent," he shrugs. "I had to put that back into perspective to get squared away. And once I did that, every footstep, I let the Lord lead and guide."

Daniel was commissioned a second lieutenant in the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. He became a combat engineer platoon leader and "I had a blast, I mean literally and metaphorically," he grins, "just a really good time." Prophetically, this branch of the military prepared him perfectly for Iraq. Combat engineers "are focused on route clearance and IED intervention and removing

those. That's what they're doing." But he missed out on the opportunity to participate in Desert Storm, partly because he was such a good trainer. So, he went back to the Green Berets and back to school, this time for a master's degree in international relations. It took three years. He learned to speak French. He learned a lot of things.

"As a special operator, everybody has to have all these skill sets. I ran a Green Beret special-ops team for about three years." From 1996, "I started deploying. I mean I was gone...I mean everywhere." He went to Sierra Leone. He went to Kurdistan. He went to places that remain classified.

He remembers Operation Pacific Haven, where they rescued 6,500 Kurdish "doctors, lawyers, and key influencers" and their families from Sadaam's execution squads. "We ferried them out within three nights. We got everybody out of there that we could. I had mamas handing me babies on the back of planes as we

would take off. Didn't have enough room. It happened that fast." The refugees were relocated to an undisclosed island in the Pacific. After Sadaam's ouster, they returned.

Eight years later in Iraq, in Mosul, an interpreter walks up to him, and it's one of those Kurds who he rescued. "He remembered me," Daniel marvels. "I get goose bumps talking about it." The two still keep in touch.

Fast-forward to 2004. Daniel is now a major. He is the civil affairs officer for Colonel Steve Townsend in the Army's first Stryker Brigade. A Stryker is a combat vehicle that is "just a way of getting infantrymen into the fight." His job is to deal with Iraqi "civilians and government and

governance at each level from local to national level and everything in between." It is a huge job. He is arguably the most important guy there. He is the link, the fulcrum.

He remembers going into towns to set up "the fundamentals," sewer, water, electricity, and trash (SWET), "what it takes to make a town or city run...but then everything that goes with that, the political infrastructure and the voting and having a democratic-like setting when you've had a tyranny." Money talks in these situations. "When I was in Iraq, I carried \$50,000 with me everywhere in my backpack. That was the way we got business done."

They were called to secure a town where Al Qaeda had assassinated the local leaders. "Stomp this thing out," Townsend ordered. Daniel organized a neighborhood watch because the police force was so sketchy. He asked for volunteers. "Nine men stepped forward from their families, and said, 'Yeah, we'll do it.'" He worked with them; trained them. "It took incredible courage to step forward." One night "I said, 'Okay, I'll see you in the morning; we'll be back.' And when I came back the next morning...they were piled up, blindfolded, all assassinated, shot in the head, hands tied behind their back."



PHOTO COURTESY KENT DANIEL

Major Kenneth Daniel has been Senior Instructor for the JROTC program at Orange County High School for two years now. He is pursuing a masters degree in education administration and supervision from Liberty University.

It haunts him still.

"How do we...work with this Sharia law that supposedly overrides everything and have some kind of semblance of democracy?" he asks bitterly. "It's still an issue and I don't know that we'll ever be able to broach that...Their religion is their government. And it's the same with the Taliban. They see themselves as self-correcting and what we're doing is anti-theoretical to every-

thing that they believe in. And you're not going to change a culture like that."

Two years in Iraq was enough. Townsend begged him to stay. "In 27 years, this is the best civil Affairs officer I've ever had," the colonel wrote. "I couldn't stay," Daniel reasons. "My children are teenagers. Mama's been raising them now since '96 on her own basically. I wanted them to at least know me before they left home. So, I retired."

Daniel came home and literally kissed the ground at Fort Lewis. The family was living in Kentucky at the time because he had asked Garlene, "If someone walks up and knocks on the door, two guys in green suits and one of them is the chaplain, where do you want to be?" She wanted to be close to the support structure, the other wives and friends.

Major Daniel went to work briefly for defense contractor, Northrop-Grumman. They put him in a 12 by 12 windowless office pushing paper. It drove him nuts. And then one of those miraculous things happened when everything just falls into place. He heard about the job opening with JROTC in Orange. "Within six days of putting my application in, every door had opened. I had my kids in the RV, and said 'honey, I'll see you in Orange. I'm starting them in school. Sell the house; I'll see you on the other end.'"

And the veteran came home. Kenny Daniel walks into his dad's office. He's an

11th-grader at OCHS. He has a question about his uniform. "I didn't put that on him; he put that on himself," the major protests. "When we first moved here, he didn't take JROTC. He came in here the second semester and said, 'I want to do it dad,' and I got in trouble when I took him home in his uniform. His mom said, 'What have you done to my son?'"

Kenny is thinking about joining the Coast Guard, that or going to Virginia Tech or JMU on an ROTC scholarship. After he leaves the room, the father says privately, "He's calling me 'dad' now. What a blessing. He can tell you more than anybody, 'Dad's been gone a lot.'" That's one of the toughest sacrifices a veteran makes; he has to put duty before family.

Over his 26-year career, Kent Daniel has done just that. He jumped out of planes, shot guns and was shot at, was a combat engineer, led special-ops, wrote a manual on civil affairs, was even a successful recruiter in southwest

Virginia, among many other things. He earned a Bronze Star in Iraq. The list of his medals and awards fills a quarter page of his resume.

"War is about the most stupid thing mankind's come up with," he says pushing back from his desk. "If we don't see eye to eye, or can't reason or come to terms, we're just going to kill each other? It's just incredible that throughout our history, man has not been able to come up with better solutions. It doesn't make sense. Are we just going to annihilate each other?" The veteran shakes his head ruefully. Then his eyebrows arch to make a point. "But also, what history has taught us, is that if we are not strong and don't defend ourselves, we'll be taken advantage of."

As a vet, Daniel says the Army does a pretty good job preparing you for civilian life, but he adds, "It's a huge bureaucracy, still. And it's still hard to get things done." His advice: "Once you get out here in the hinterlands, it's up to you. If you're not proactive and don't pursue the VA, then they've got hundreds of thousands of other people that are clamoring for service and they're going to service those that clamor for it the most."

It all boils down to the vet helping himself. "They'll throw some meds at you, pat you on the back, thank you, and you feel alright. But it ultimately comes down to your support system and who's around you and your ability to move onward. So, I've found my reinvestment right here with these kids."



PHOTO COURTESY KENT DANIEL

This photo was taken in 1984, when Daniel was in the 117th Air Cavalry, 82nd Airborne, as a combat medic.