

Dept. of Military Affairs: Airmen Elite: MSgt Aric Daniels of the 128th Air Refueling Wing

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MILWAUKEE, WISC. – Master Sgt. Aric Daniels didn't enlist in Milwaukee, Wisc. with the intent to serve more than his initial six years. And yet, twelve years later, Daniels sits for a portrait as the newest first sergeant for the 128th Civil Engineering Squadron at the 128th Air Refueling Wing. For 2022's Black History month, we sat down with Daniels to discuss his history and the influence he is making on the 128 ARW.

Public Affairs: Looking back, what made you decide to join the Air National Guard?

Daniels: I joined active duty [Air Force] in September of 2009. I was stationed at JB McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst, New Jersey as my six-year enlistment was coming to an end and I wasn't exactly sure if I wanted to remain active duty. I knew that I wanted to continue serving but while I was active duty I hadn't visited home much. My wife and I were expecting our third child at the time and I was coming up on my third deployment in four years. It was just the right time for me to move home and be closer to family. I'm from the Milwaukee area so [the 128 ARW] was an easy decision for me.

Public Affairs: One of the best ways to progress in the military is to find a great mentor. Have you found one that has helped you along in your career?

Daniels: I had a really good First Sergeant who looked out for me. I now have the opportunity to pay it forward. Shoutout to Chief Master Sgt. Kevin Greene. I try to pick up a little bit of everything from multiple individuals I have viewed as great leaders and mentors. I think it's important that we as Airmen place an emphasis on

mentorship. Mentors that I have found beneficial to me thus far in my career are those that have led by example. I'd like to do a better job of expressing my appreciation to those who do.

Public Affairs: You mention Chief Master Sgt. Green specifically. What did he do to earn a specific callout?

Daniels: I owe him my career. He encouraged me to continually grow and learn beyond the HVAC shop I started in. He would sign me up for projects and events all the time, which pushed me out of my comfort zone. Although I didn't know it at the time, he was helping me grow as an airman. When I was considering not reenlisting, he reminded me of what I've learned and what the military has done for my grandparents, my parents, my family, and myself.

Public Affairs: During the month of February, we recognize the achievements by Black Americans and remember the positive impact they've had on the history of the United States and the Defense Department. What does the observance of Black History Month mean to you?

Daniels: I think it's extremely important that we recognize and honor the achievements of Black and African Americans in the United States and the DoD. It creates the opportunity to have conversations - sometimes, uncomfortable conversations. We shouldn't shy away from discussions centered around the oppression of others. Doing so would be a disservice to the courageous efforts of those who fought for freedom and equality. The observance of Black History allows me to reflect and express my gratitude to the men and women who made it possible to be where I'm at today.

Public Affairs: Earlier you mentioned that other generations of your family have also served.

Daniels: Yes. Not all Air Force, but they all served. The story of Black Americans serving in the military is both the history of the country and my own history. We each owe our success to the service we gave and continue to give. That's why it's so important to me to teach and mentor - so I can give back.

Public Affairs: Looking at the impact you've made, your leadership stated, "1st Sgt. Daniels has always been a go to mentor for CES Airmen... our airmen respect and gravitate to First Sgt. Daniels". What does it mean to you to know your leadership

has such confidence in you?

Daniels: At first thought, I can say that it's humbling, but I can also say that it's encouraging. It lets me know that what I am doing behind the scenes does not go unnoticed. Mentorship and overall Airmen development is an everlasting practice and something I believe we as leaders should always strive to achieve.

Public Affairs: As a first sergeant your primary responsibility is to advise the commander. What would you say is the number one issue facing our airmen, and what would you do to address those issues?

Daniels: It's hard for me to pinpoint the number one issue facing our airmen but I believe that one of the issues our airmen face is communication between ranks. I think a lot of that can be attributed to the generational gaps and the presence of social media. If and when information is passed via government email, I can't say confidently that all of our members are reviewing it. I'm not saying that it's intentional, it's just that many of our members don't have access to their government email because they are not on base daily.

Public Affairs: If you could say one thing to the airmen you will be responsible for as a 1st Sgt., what would it be?

Daniels: My only piece of advice is that you don't know what you don't know so that's why it's so important to get out of your comfort zone.