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Facing Adversity and Rising Above: The Life of Danielle Beck



Picture 1. Marine Corps Sgt. Danielle Beck fires an M41A4 Saber missile launcher during a live-fire exercise.

Danielle Beck might not look like a trailblazing woman with a strong will to dedicate her time to benefit the greater good. But, in fact, she is all these things, and more. Danielle is the epitome of humbleness; she holds her head high, puts others first, and drives to be the best version of herself – physically, mentally, and emotionally. Yet not many people know the story of how she came to be the driven, impactful woman she is today.

Danielle was born on March 18th, 1986, and raised in San Francisco, California, alongside her twin. She attended a private Catholic school and graduated in 2004. Upon

graduation, she began her college career at St. Mary's. Not knowing what she truly wanted, Danielle made the tough decision to leave college, despite her father's advice, and enlist in the Marine Corps in 2009. "He always told me, 'I will always support you if you want to pursue that type of lifestyle, but please get your degree first.'" Eventually, she decided it was her time to go back to college. From there, she attended The Citadel as part of the MECEP (Marine Enlisted Commissioning Education Program) and graduated with her bachelor's degree in 2021. She is currently enrolled in The Citadel's MBA program.



Picture 2. Sgt. Danielle V. Beck, anti-tank missileman with Anti-Armor Section, Weapons Company, Ground Combat Element Integrated Task Force, prepares to fire an M41A4 Saber missile launcher during a live-fire exercise.

Danielle knew from the beginning that she wanted to pursue a military lifestyle. Instead of joining the Army as her father did, she felt as if she needed something that challenged and gave her more structure. "I think that it 100% offered me the structure that I had my whole life... and the Marine Corps

provided me with that." At first, she looked into the possibility of joining the Navy as an air rescue swimmer, and as she was waiting in that program for her boat space to bootcamp, she realized that that program wasn't offering her what she needed. She felt compelled to leave the Navy and enlist in the Marine Corps, where she focused on combat training – this was not, at the time, offered for women, but she dove headfirst anyway. Her ultimate goal was to change policies pertaining to women in combat.

The Marine Corps was a lifechanging decision for Danielle. It drew out strengths that she didn't know she had. Her morals and leadership philosophy flourished once she entered the service. Danielle's leadership philosophy is based on failing: One must fail to grow and to learn. This was embedded within her since she was young. She also knew from a young age that she was passionate about serving others, and the Marine Corps encapsulates every part of that. "I think that I had those seeds planted in me at a young age, but the Marine Corps helped them grow more."

As with everything in life, Danielle faced many obstacles in the Marine Corps. Danielle was blessed to have been a part of the Marine Corps Integrated Task Force (ITF), a Marine Corps study on whether they should open combat arms to women. Although she was older than most of the people in that unit, she dedicated herself and rose to the challenge. Physical standards were one of the biggest challenges that Danielle had to overcome – being 5'2" and having to handle rigorous, heavy machinery was an immense part of that challenge. One way that she overcame this strength challenge was by focusing on her physical health. But even from the beginning of the study, not many people wanted her there. She tackled this problem by communicating with all parties and bridging the gap between her and her male subordinates while being true to her leadership philosophy: "I had to stay true to myself," she told me.

Not to any surprise, maintaining her morale in the Marine Corps was not a difficult thing for her to do. Being at the core a good person was a key trait that was foundational to Danielle's becoming the leader she is today. Breaking that wall between the leader and the led is what enables forming a good relationship with your superiors and subordinates, and Danielle highlights this in our interview: "Getting to know them as people, not just Marines, really helped bridge that gap." Being firm, fair, and empathetic is what has driven her to connect with others

and build them up. Everyone is going to make mistakes, but it takes a special leader to be humble enough to admit mess-ups; this transparency is crucial to forge the bond between you and your people and to lead them. Opinions matter, and respecting others' opinions is what also builds those relationships, but Danielle recognizes that not all confrontation can be good in military environments.

Physical readiness is a key point of Danielle's life and, of course, one of the most important. Being a woman in a male-dominated industry that pushes for top-tier fitness is not an easy accomplishment. She preserved immensely to rise to the top with her fellow male Marines. She did this by focusing on lifting heavy weights, maintaining a strong diet, continuing education towards body building, and changing her mindset. She told me her secret for getting stronger: "It's getting in there, it's getting over the fear of being in a gym, it's pushing yourself to educate yourself and figure out what works for you."

Up until she went into the Marines, not many physical situations have been able to challenge Danielle. During her time serving, hiking was one of the most strenuous things she had experienced when working with the ITF. In fact, her bulky ruck sack weighed more than she did. Keeping up with her male partner during their hikes was especially challenging for her as a female. She tells me that her partner was "a beefy guy from Ohio... and he could hike! And my



Picture 3. Sergeant Danielle Beck, right, checks the mounting of a weapons system during the Ground Combat Element Integrated Task Force in Twentynine Palms, CA.

little legs just got left behind.” At one point during her hike, she stopped; she sat down and didn’t get back up until her Master Sergeant motivated her to continue the long trek. “It was mentally tough. And I remember that I just stopped at one point in that hike and said to myself ‘I don’t know if I can do this.’” From there, she dug deep into her inner resources, got back up, finished her trek, and built relationships and her mindset in the process.

The ITF in 2nd Marine Division was one of her best, and favorite, parts of being in the Marine Corps. It was a mixed blessing when she was chosen for Staff Sergeant, so she had to shift areas and move on, but she’d later come to be grateful for this change in position. This led her to begin her commissioning process. In this pursuit, Danielle hit a series of events that pushed her back from that goal; she had the strength and judgment to recognize that she was not in the right headspace to follow her plan and pursued a different route to accomplish her dreams. Many people have supported Danielle in tough times in her journey, especially during times like these, and have motivated her to keep pushing through the suck.



Picture 4. Sergeant Danielle Beck before a conditioning hike during the Ground Combat Element Integrated Task Force in Twentynine Palms, Calif.

One of the many people whom she looked up to during these joyful, yet stressful, times was her father. “He instilled in me a lot of the drive, determination, perseverance, and strength that I have today, but he also instilled within me compassion towards people.” Danielle described her father as always having sound judgement, which led her to admire him even more. In the Marine Corps, Danielle

looked up to her female Gunnery Sergeant, who eventually retired as a Master Sergeant. She was the first female staff Non-Commissioned Officer (NCO) that she ever had, which gave Danielle a

sense of thankfulness and gratefulness towards her mentor. Her Gunnery Sergeant focused on the idea that to do well you have to be the best so that no one could question you, leading Danielle to do just that – aim to be the best. “She was really the example that to do well you have to be the best so that nobody can question you,” Danielle explained. Another person who has been a mentor towards Danielle was a fellow classmate and cadet at The Citadel, whom she considers as a little brother now. He was one of the few people who recognized her struggles and helped her validate her feelings through difficult times.

Danielle chose to finish her degree at The Citadel because she wanted to stay on the East coast; she also needed to qualify to commission within a Naval Reserve Officers Training Corps (NROTC) unit – The Citadel was one of the few universities that offered that. From these factors, it was a quick decision for her to choose to finish her schooling at The Citadel. “I love Charleston. I had been here before; I love the campus. I loved the school anyway, so it kinda was a no-brainer that [The Citadel] was where I wanted to be.”

Danielle Beck has had a major impact on those around her, from her Marines to current cadets here at The Citadel, she has truly been an inspiration to a wide range of different people. Although she has trekked through many valleys, she has always hiked back to the top of the mountain. In her future, Danielle plans to help others contract into the Navy and



Picture 5. Cpl. Janelle Lopez, left, loads a rocket into the MK153 shoulder-launched multipurpose assault weapon (SMAW) held by Sgt. Danielle V. Beck, right, during a Marine Corps Operational Test and Evaluation Activity assessment, April 11, 2015.

Marine Corps while focusing on finishing her MBA. Later, she plans to earn her PhD. We hope she will eventually come back to The Citadel to teach and train others.