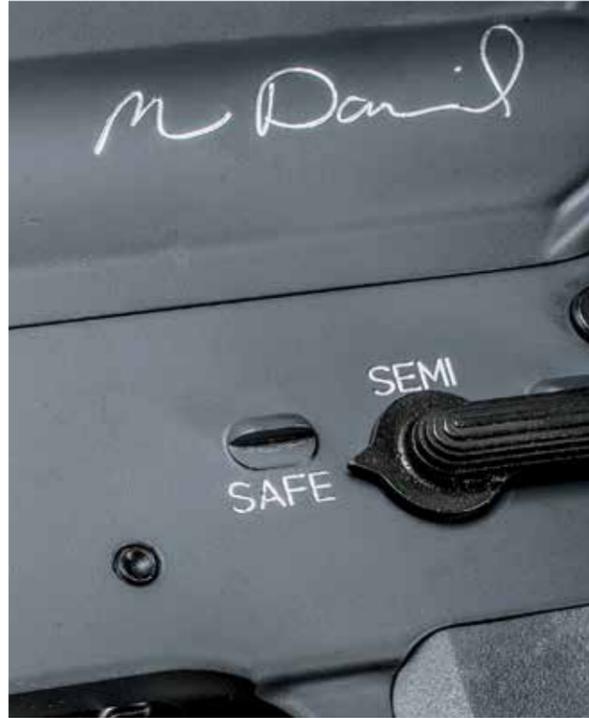




COMING FULL CIRCLE

IN 15 YEARS, DANIEL DEFENSE WENT FROM AN IDEA IN THE HEAD OF A PRIVATE AMERICAN ENTREPRENEUR TO BECOMING AN INDUSTRY JUGGERNAUT.

BY ERIC R. POOLE
PHOTOS BY SEAN UTLEY



Like all Daniel Defense products, every detail has been closely examined. Here we see clearly marked selector settings and consistent upper and lower receiver coloring.



“SOME COULD LOOK AT DANIEL DEFENSE AND THINK WE’RE A 150-YEAR-OLD COMPANY, BUT IN REALITY, WE’RE ONLY 15 YEARS OLD.”

DANIEL DEFENSE IS A REFLECTION OF ONE MAN’S LIFE.

Marty Daniel is an engineer who, when faced with adversity, overcomes challenges by combining clever thinking with an unstoppable will to succeed.

Perhaps the catalyst for this perseverance began with his failing out of the engineering program at Georgia Southern University — twice. He actually received a letter that summarized, “Don’t come back.” This moment prompted a new approach to life and business for Marty: domination. It wasn’t enough to just go back to school and graduate. Instead, he had to excel. He did so by making the Dean’s List and, in 1985, he graduated with the university’s electrical engineering degree.

Marty Daniel decided to go into business for himself; his garage door and fireplace company would eventually become the first home for Daniel Defense. Marty spent most of his free time unwinding on the golf course, until the day a friend invited him to shoot his AR. That invitation proved to be a rewarding opportunity, as Marty had been looking for a recreational outlet to deal with the stresses of being a business owner and an ongoing desire to grow something he was passionate about.

Marty found a new path that day at the range. Each shot fired filled him with a satisfaction unlike anything he had experienced. He had finally found a way to decompress. This was 1999, the year he purchased his first AR.



Daniel Defense’s Anniversary rifle is limited to just 100 examples to celebrate the company’s 15 years of service.

THE EPIPHANY

Marty spent almost all of his spare time shooting. The more he shot, the more he recognized the need for a flattop upper receiver. This led him to design the Big Hole Upper. So, Marty decided to go on his own and found a local machine shop to manufacture 100 of them. He then kept four, set up a website and sold the remaining 96.

The Big Hole Upper was compatible with legacy Colt lowers, which forever improved the way we mounted sighting

systems to an AR. Then came the Sling Loop, which repositioned how a web sling can be attached and used. Rather than threading front and rear swivels, Marty’s idea took a simple end plate he engineered in his free time. It changed the idea that a sling had to be mounted at the front and rear of an AR. Marty’s design located the sling attachment point to the rear of a receiver, secured by a castle nut or fixed A2 stock. One side featured a

loop to thread a web sling through, which opened the door for both users of single-point and three-point sling systems. Of course, a two-point sling could still be used, also.

In 2001, Marty attended a machine gun shoot in Kentucky at Knob Creek. At the event, he borrowed the corner of another exhibitors display with a simple handwritten sign that

2001

Daniel Defense was incorporated as the Big Hole Upper Receiver and Sling Loop became a success.

2002

The first handguard, the M4 12.0, was a direct replacement and used by the Army Marksmanship Unit.

2003

The family farm was leveraged for \$250,000 in capital, money used to fund development of the RIS II.

2004

Brand recognition grew commercially as Marty Daniel engineered new AR accessories.



said “Ask me about this tactical sling loop!” The price of the loop was \$45, and the response at Knob Creek was so overwhelming orders followed him home. Daniel Defense was initially nothing more than a metal cabinet tucked in the corner of his garage door business. However, that same year Marty incorporated his new venture “Daniel Defense.”

Thinking about other areas to enhance an AR, Marty recognized a void in the market, and knew he could make the AR platform more functional and easier to use. He originally approached a big-name AR company to purchase a rail system that was being sold to the U.S. military only to be told “We’re busy manufacturing for the government, and



The silver inlay is applied to all machined engraving surfaces on the upper and lower receiver by hand, giving the Anniversary rifle a special appearance.

we don’t have time for you.” Thus, a better rail system was designed in-house and manufactured by a local machine shop. This was the beginning of Daniel Defense’s rail platform. Marty pursued a way to replace the ribbed two-piece handguard with one that allowed users to attach accessories such as lights and bipods.

In 2002, Marty learned that his 12-inch rail systems were appearing on the competition and designated marksman rifles in use by the U.S. Army Marksmanship Unit (USAMU) at Fort Benning, Georgia. (Until 2009, the USAMU relied on Marty Daniel’s first rail system.)

In January 2003, Marty attended his first SHOT Show,

the firearm industry’s largest trade show where manufacturers come together to introduce new and existing products. There, in his 10 x 10 booth, representatives of the U.S. Naval Surface Warfare Center (NSWC), Crane Division approached him to develop and submit a forend rail system for an upcoming contract solicitation issued by the Special Operations Command (SOCOM). In order to participate in the competition, Marty approached his father, who decided to support his son’s business venture and bet the farm.

BETTING THE FARM

The fourth-generation family farm was used as collateral to acquire a \$250,000 loan. That money allowed Daniel Defense to purchase the materials, equipment and inventory to turn out a rail for the M4. Daniel Defense was still a small company, and in 2003 it went toe-to-toe with every major defense-industry manufacturer for the SOCOM contract. Marty developed prototypes for submission, as sales of the original M4 rail system and sling loops carried Daniel Defense through 2004 until the contract was awarded. In the same spirit as the story of David versus Goliath, Daniel Defense won the competition and was awarded the SOCOM contract in 2005 by beating out the same AR company that wouldn’t sell him a rail system just a few years prior. These new M4 forends are said to have exponentially increased the warfighter’s capability and were subsequently labeled the Rail Interface System (RIS) II. That year, Marty hired his first paid employee in addition to his wife Cindy.

In 2006, Daniel Defense delivered the first 40,000 RIS II forends to SOCOM. Marty also engineered a quick-detach (QD) rail mount that enjoyed commercial and military success alike.

The next year, Marty learned of a design solicitation in the works by the UK Ministry of Defence (MOD) to update the standard-issue SA80/L85A1 infantry rifle. He quickly went to work in designing and prototyping a system for the L85 based on measurements taken from a rare U.S. sample in private possession. The fact that no other manufacturers had convenient access to this rifle gave Daniel Defense an edge. In 2008, he won the UK solicitation and began immediate delivery.

To handle the increase in business, Daniel Defense purchased its first vertical milling machine and began construction on a new 38,000 square foot manufacturing facility in 2008. As their new home was being built, Marty and his



DD’s own flash hider does an effective job of reducing flash, while the ports help suppress felt recoil.



DD’s buttstock seamlessly blends with the rest of the Tornado colored carbine, for those who have an eye for commonality.

team of engineers created and patented the first ever drop-in free-float system for the AR market: the Omega Rail.

Marty soon decided it was time to design his first rifle: a black DDM4 V1 that was finished just in time to be unveiled at the 2009 SHOT Show. It is still in his personal collection. Two months later, his company moved into their new home; preparing to make more of them.

LET’S MAKE IT OURSELVES

The new facility brought new capabilities. Marty made a significant investment when he purchased a hammer forge machine to manufacture barrels for Daniel Defense and,

2005

Daniel Defense was awarded the U.S. SOCOM contract for the RIS II.

2006

In the first year following the SOCOM contract award, 40,000 RIS II forends were delivered to troops.

2007

The United Kingdom MoD solicited a rail system to upgrade its L85 LW bullpup service rifle platform.

2008

After a competitive selection process, the Daniel Defense L85 LW rail was selected by the UK MoD.

2009

A 38,000 square-foot manufacturing facility was built in Black Creek, Georgia, making the first DDM4 V1.

2010

Ambush Firearms, the hunting division of Daniel Defense’s rifle manufacturing, was created.



← DD's pistol grip boasts a rubber overmold for a secure, no-slip grip. Geissele's SSA-E two-stage trigger adds to the versatility of this carbine.



↑ Daniel Defense's DDM4 rail 12.0 FSP provides the user with extended, useable rail space while maintaining the consistency of a fixed front sight post. DD's A1.5 rear sight is a light weight, streamlined design built for reliability.



focal point for successful brands, and a company can't satisfy its customers if it can't deliver product in a reasonable amount of time.

By the end of 2009, Daniel Defense had manufactured 3,000 rifles, hired more employees, and had developed the Omega X Rail. To take hand-guard design to the next level, the Omega X Rail blended the features of the original Omega Rail with the strength of a new and proprietary barrel nut and never-before-seen bolt-up design.

As the leader of a brand now setting the pace for development in the AR market, Marty Daniel applied a coach's technique to his business. He set the direction for Daniel Defense, but he surrounded himself with competent staff and employees and then strategically delegated leadership responsibilities. To this day, Marty still sets the benchmark for achievement, but he then stands back and observes so that progress isn't stifled by just one man's ideas. Thus, Daniel Defense branched out into the hunting market. In 2010, the first Ambush Firearms were introduced in 6.8 SPC and received a positive reception at the SHOT Show.

Daniel Defense has seen its growth remain on a linear path rather than the traditional bell curve. So much so that, in 2011, Daniel Defense added a 90,000 square-foot facility in Ridgeland, South Carolina. Operations began in 2012 just as eight distributors signed on with Daniel Defense. That year, Inc. 5000 named Daniel Defense among its "Fastest Growing Companies" list, an achievement subsequently repeated for the last three consecutive years. Looking back on the DDM4's success since the original V1, Daniel Defense went

from producing 3,000 rifles per year to 50,000.

In 2012, Marty Daniel entered the suppressor business, and recognized the pending success of the industry's .300 Blackout cartridge. He championed both with a new platform: the first Integrally Suppressed Rifle, or ISR. This new platform was launched at the 2013 SHOT Show chambered for .300 Blackout, among several other new products.

As the DDM4 family and the line of accessories rapidly expanded, Daniel Defense made a significant capital investment for new equipment, and added two separate 4,500 square foot additions to their Black Creek facility in 2014, one for maintenance and the other a tool shop. Not only is Daniel Defense on the path toward making all of

its own parts for its products, Marty Daniel wants to see that they are making and maintaining the tools necessary to make the products, too.

NOW & TOMMORROW

For 2015, these efforts culminate in the DD5V1, the first 7.62x51/.308 chambered rifle platform for Daniel Defense. As Daniel Defense's engineering and production evolves with the next phase of firearm and accessory development, Marty is looking outside the walls of his company for growth opportunities. Last year, Marty collaborated with Georgia Governor Nathan Deal and Georgia Southern University helping create the new Manufacturing Engineering Degree program to benefit the next generation of engineers. Marty Daniel's life has appeared to come full circle. ~~END~~



↑ Marty Daniel's signature is neatly engraved to the left side of the upper receiver.

ironically, his competitors. Marty Daniel owned one of only a few hammer forge machines in the U.S. at that time, and increased his output by purchasing a second forge a few years later.

Marty's new target was to make everything for the AR platform in-house, and build them around the best barrels available. Only this way could Daniel Defense best control its quality and prevent low production levels in a competitive market from hindering output. Customer service remains a

2011

Operations expanded by adding a 90,000 square-foot manufacturing facility in Ridgeland, South Carolina.

2012

Daniel Defense revolutionizes the market with the first-ever Integrally Suppressed Rifle (ISR).

2013

With an 18-inch barrel chambered in 5.56 NATO, the MK12 proved to be a sub-MOA precision rifle.

2014

The new SLIM 12.0 and 15.0 lightweight rails with KeyMod attachment points were introduced.

2015

The DD5V1 was introduced and was the first 7.62-/.308-chambered rifle platform for Daniel Defense.

2016

In commemoration of 15 years, Daniel Defense is offering an anniversary edition V1 in Tornado.