Q & A for NHC

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Unlike most of your colleagues here, you did not always want to be meteorologist.

I did not. I started college with the goal in life to be an Air Force officer. To do that, I had to get a college degree. I was in dire straits for a scholarship, so I went to the Air Force ROTC commander, Colonel Tucker, and asked him what I needed to get an Air Force scholarship. He whipped out a pad and listed five or six majors that were the current Air Force needs – pilot program, navigator program, engineering, medical and meteorology. So I said alright, meteorology it is!

So, it was a choice. Any regrets?

Not at all, it worked out pretty good. I had to find a university that had a meteorology program as well as an ROTC program, and one to where I could be accepted. I went to the library (this is pre-Internet) and picked out a big book for universities and their majors. I found Florida State University - it was in-state for me and close to home (Miami). So I took the entrance exam, got accepted, and went into both the meteorology and the ROTC programs.

What about the scholarship?

When I began my sophomore year, I got a knock on my door and was told to come to the ROTC office for paperwork to sign. When I got there, I was congratulated on being awarded a three-year scholarship. That was fantastic! It paid all of the tuition and the books, plus $100 a month in pay. I thought that was a great deal.

How did you find the meteorology program?

Florida State is not easy. It's a tough program, as you know because you were there, too. Thermodynamics was a killer. But I did graduate, and I had a job waiting for me – the Air Force - unlike nine out of 10 of my classmates who did not have a job waiting.

Having that degree, were you immediately an officer?

Well, you take a chance when you go into that ROTC program. If you graduate, you become an officer. If you don't graduate, they put into the enlisted. So there is that pressure, and I got the degree.

So you're in the Air Force.

Yeah. And I got married right away, too. I ended up having six assignments in the Air Force, which usually averages three years at each place. It is a lot of moving, and a big risk in buying a house. But I was happy with base housing and stayed with that. One of the places was Hawaii, which was really nice. And in '95, I retired.

Now what?

I went through the good old U.S. jobs application process and found a job in my hometown of Miami at the National Hurricane Center. I said this is my job; this has got to be my job. I put in for it and got it. It was a big blessing.

That makes you one of the most senior members here.

Yes it does. I came here to stay. And I am not in a burn-out position. It's been dynamic, and it's changed over the years.

Let's get into that. It's changed just in the six years I have been here, but you've seen some amazing things.

We had some archaic computers – not user friendly at all. Then we went to NMAP2, which was a big improvement, and AWIPS was also introduced at the same time. But we used the NMAP2 predominantly just like all of the other National Centers. Now we have started to use GFE (Gridded Forecast Editor) on AWIPS. That is a win-win situation for us and our customers.

You all were the first.

Other National Centers are coming up behind us, especially in our marine world - OPC (Ocean Prediction Center) and the Honolulu Forecast Office. We began our offshore forecasts using GFE last April and we're getting better and better at it.

What's the biggest challenge with producing a gridded forecast?

Right now, there is a lot of learning to hit the right button at the right time. The text editor is very good, and we don't have to type as much as we did longhand in the old system. We can spend more time forecasting. The customers can go on their computer and get a gridded database and they can tailor it to their own personal needs.

What's the next step in evolution?

In our world here, we're making bigger strides in modeling every year. I would say the area in meteorology that's really expanding is satellite meteorology. The applications you can get include polar-orbiting scatterometers There's a multitude of instruments you can put up into space that will help us enormously in the forecast business. Every year there will be new tools to use.

That makes it fun.

It sure does. There's research being done right here in town on the subject. So is UCAR, Colorado State, University of Wisconsin – they're all doing a great job. And it's going to pay off.

Your unit is what I refer to as the first firewall to tropical cyclones.

Yes, we have two missions here at TAFB. One is the marine mission, putting out forecasts for the offshores and high seas. The other one is to augment the hurricane specialists, especially during landfalling situations. We are the first pool of meteorologists to be augmented to the day-to-day specialists' jobs. That includes running the Dvorak satellite technique to help determine intensity.

Can you turn it all off when you leave the building?

Absolutely! I have been blessed to be in my hometown, so I have my extended family and my wife's extended family all here, more or less. I've got four kids and they're all here, too. So, there's lots of family life going on, with lots of friends. And, I love boating, snorkeling and scuba diving.

What's the best part of your job?

I have it down pat, and it is low stress.

What's the worst part?

Working mids! Shift work is fine, expect for the mids. They are rough. I have been doing them for years, and they are no better than when I started.

What advice do you have for a high school student who wants your job someday?

The road is tough. Getting into college now is tough. Meteorology is one of those majors that is math-intensive. A lot of people get weeded out of the program not by the meteorology but by the math. If you can't handle calculus, it is time to switch majors.

Another hurdle will be the Dynamic Meteorology courses in your senior year. You'll find out when you are in a meteorology curriculum that you'll be doing schoolwork when other people are having a good time. Once you complete the program and graduate, there is finding a job, which is a trick in itself.

What do you consider the best jobs?

In my book, they are with the U.S. government, and that's either with the military or the U.S. National Weather Service.

Send comments to: nhc.public.affairs@noaa.gov