

Q & A for NHC



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You're one of the fresh faces in the Tropical Analysis and Forecast Branch. How did that all begin?

The two main missions of the Tropical Analysis and Forecast Branch are marine weather and tropical weather. Coincidentally, I've spent the bulk of my time as a meteorologist in tropical weather, much of that in the Air Force. I even worked on a ship for a couple of years, giving me some background as a mariner.

The military was your initial passion?

Not really at first. I was considering studying engineering at the University of Florida but got a scholarship from the Air Force to study weather at Florida State University. It was the only public university in the state of Florida at the time to offer meteorology. I had an uncle who was an Air Force meteorologist as well, so I thought I could follow in his footsteps to an extent and learn meteorology.

Where was your duty?

Once I got into the Air Force, I spent a good part of my active duty in Panama learning tropical meteorology there in the early '90s. A small part of my job even involved marine weather, supporting naval amphibious operations. After leaving active duty, I worked on a NOAA ship in coastal Alaska, and got a lot of hands-on maritime experience there. I really enjoyed it. It was mostly an outdoors type of job in the most beautiful parts of Alaska complete with bears, mountains, fjords, eagles – the whole Alaska package.

Where was home?

Florida. My wife's, too. We spent several years living in different places around the country, to include Guam where I started in the National Weather Service. That reinforced both my tropical and marine forecasting skills. We spent a couple of years there and loved it, but decided to move closer to our extended families in the southeast United States. I transferred to the Weather Service office in Mobile, Alabama in the late 1990's. We spent four years there and also enjoyed that. As luck would have it, it was about an hour away from Keesler Air Force Base in Biloxi, Mississippi.

The site of the hurricane hunters?

Yes. I was able to join the Air Force Reserves and signed on with the Hurricane Hunters after I got to Mobile. It was a real good deal and I have been with them since 1999. It's a very rewarding experience to be able to fly with them, especially for a meteorologist.

Any memorable storms?

There are a few including Katrina and Ike, but I spent the first three or four years flying what they call the "tropical trash". These are not the glamorous hurricane missions, but the much less glamorous, but still necessary, investigative missions. These are areas of thunderstorms over the ocean that may or may not form into anything. You're flying for hours at 500 feet above the water in an area of very bad weather out in the middle of nowhere. But it's still fun. My first real hurricane wasn't until Fabian in 2003. Contrary to what you may think, hurricanes are usually much easier to fly than a weak depression just getting its act together - and you get all of the glory with them, too. Yet, I can honestly say I have not had a more rewarding job no matter what I'm flying into.

Are you still flying today?

Yes, I still do that. We moved to Miami in 2003, and I have been commuting to Mississippi for my Reserve duty ever since. The long commute can be a burden, but it's worth it.

Is it still one weekend a month, two weeks out of the year?

It ends up being more than that. I have to keep my currency in the plane, so I try to travel to my reserve unit frequently. There are also winter storms that come up outside of hurricane season. We'll fly over the western Atlantic and much of the Pacific gathering information for developing winter storms. Just as with hurricanes, our data greatly improves the accuracy of computer models that drive the forecasts.

But being an Air Force Reservist, it's not just about weather.

No, it's not. A lot of my training when I go up there is not about my meteorology job. It has to do with being a member of the military and serving my country.

You've recently returned from the Middle East.

I came back this past August from a tour in Iraq, my first and only, and hopefully last tour there. It was an interesting tour. I was a weather flight commander at a large base

in central Iraq. I got a lot of satisfaction out of serving my country. And I was able to come back here in time to participate in hurricane season.

That's quite a juggling act, going between the civilian job and the Reserve job.

Because they both deal with hurricanes, I am out of pocket with one job or the other at some point during hurricane season. It's challenging. Fortunately, my family is used to it, and I try to make the most of my time with my family when I can. They are the priority. Reservists live in a life where you have three points of a triangle. You have your civilian work, your military work, and your family. The family has to come first. You can't let them suffer to support the other two.

When did you get to the Tropical Analysis and Forecast Branch (TAFB)?

I got here in late 2006, transferring from just down the hall on the Miami weather forecast office. And that was another great office to work for, too. I have been very blessed to work with top notch folks and I learn a lot from them.

The TAFB position is a good fit then.

It is. The bulk of my experience is marine meteorology; it is something with which I have a great interest. And that's not typical. Marine weather is something most people don't think of when they are considering being a weather forecaster. And a lot of meteorologists with the Weather Service are located at inland offices and don't practice marine meteorology. It is sort of a specialty, but a very important one. There are new frontiers yet to be conquered.

Such as?

Right now we are finishing up a project here whereby we will be putting out a gridded marine data base. It's a big advancement in the support we give to mariners, a new way to communicate the forecast. It's going to allow us to better use our skills because a lot of the work we've been doing in our section has been in text and low resolution graphic production. You can't build in a lot of detail. But a gridded data base allows us to fine tune our information and deliver it in a more precision way to the mariner. We can also better work with our private sector partners, too.

And down the road?

One of the technological frontiers that I hope we conquer during my career is forecasting ocean currents. That's a little advanced for us right now, but there's a lot of interest in that and I think we'll be in that business before long. I'm hoping anyway.

How do you get away from everything?

When I get the time, which isn't nearly as often as I'd like, I like to go biking, kayaking or snorkeling with my family.

Where will you be in 10 years?

Hopefully I will be doing what I am doing. I will have to leave the hurricane hunting eventually. But beyond that, I want to keep in the field and have my hand in the tropical and marine side of meteorology.

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