

Q & A for NHC



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You're one of those rare NHC people from the West Coast.

I grew up in southern California, and we moved to Oregon when I was about 11 years old. I think (NHC Deputy Director) Ed Rappaport is the only other person.

Was there an early interest in weather for you?

When I was 10 to 12 years old, I liked predicting things and seeing whether my prediction was correct or not. At the start of the baseball season, I would predict how the teams would finish in the standings. What I liked about weather was predicting the temperature and if it was going to rain, then getting immediate gratification the next day of how good I was with that forecast.

Did you think you could make a career out of it?

A part of my life wanted to do that. But I am pretty religious, so another part of my life wanted to go to Brigham Young University. That took priority for me and I got a U.S. Air Force ROTC scholarship to it. BYU did not have a meteorology program, but I could get

a Bachelor degree in math and science. Then, the USAF would send me somewhere to get the meteorology courses I would need to be a weather officer. And that's what I did. After I graduated BYU, I went up the road to the University of Utah, taking the basic meteorology courses in dynamical, physical and synoptic meteorology along with climatology. I ended up with a Bachelor degree in meteorology in addition to the math and science degree I got the year before.

What did the USAF do with you?

They sent me to Robins Air Force Base in Georgia as a weather officer. I would brief the weather crews every morning remotely, and I did the same thing for McGee Tyson AFB in Tennessee. I always wanted to be pilot, but that was not going to happen as I had color-blindness. I did find that I could be on a flight crew as a weather officer on the weather reconnaissance squadron flying out of Anderson AFB on Guam. I went to Guam, but there were no weather officer slots available. Instead, I was offered the job of managing the satellite operations at the Joint Typhoon Warning Center (JTWC) there. I took it, and hoped to transition into the reconnaissance squadron. But funding was cut in 1984 and the squadron was closed.

So you stayed with the JTWC?

Yes, I ran the satellite operations, working very closely with the Navy. I really enjoyed what I did, learning the Dvorak satellite technique and getting very skilled in what I do.

That would have triggered an interest in typhoon forecasting.

It did. When my two years of duty was up in Guam, I applied to get a Master's degree in tropical meteorology at Colorado State University under Dr. Bill Gray. I got the degree and came back to the JTWC for five years, serving as a typhoon duty officer and putting out typhoon forecasts for the Eastern Hemisphere. I owe the USAF a great debt of gratitude for educating me with skills for that job. But, it probably hurt my career path spending all that time on Guam.

How is that possible?

I was focused on one area, and the Air Force wants you to diversify. When it came time for me to be promoted from Captain to Major, I was passed over. And if you're not promoted to Major, you get separated. I left Guam and went to Europe for year hoping, for a second time, to be promoted. It didn't happen, so I had to leave the military.

Another door usually opens when one is closed.

The National Weather Service on Guam was in need of forecasters. It was a fairly new office, and they reached out to me to apply, as I had all that experience there. I began working for the Weather Service the day after I left the Air Force and stayed there for nearly 8 years as a lead forecaster. Then the opportunity came up to take a downgrade to a journey forecaster on the U.S. mainland in Medford, Oregon, which is very close to where I grew up.

Guam was nice, but?

You're outside the mainstream of weather offices, and I wanted to go back and work in an actual weather forecast office. And I really enjoyed Medford, it was great being home. The office did snow, fire weather, and a lot of marine forecasting. Then, after a few years, I saw an opportunity to come the NHC's Tropical Analysis and Forecast Branch (TAFB).

Had you thought of that before?

It was a lifetime ambition to be a hurricane forecaster. I could apply all of the skills I learned in Guam and work at NHC. I was told that TAFB was a great step to move into the hurricane specialist slot at some point. So, I made the move here in 2006. I took a brief break in 2007 when all of the administration problems were occurring and went back to Guam for a couple of years. But the military changed the rules for federal employees living on base, so my wife and I came back to South Florida and I returned to TAFB. I decided to not pursue becoming a hurricane specialist, choosing instead to stay as a marine forecaster in TAFB.

What is your greatest challenge in TAFB?

It's making the transition to gridded forecasts. The entire National Weather Service is using grids and speaking that kind of language. As a national center, we are on the leading edge of applying and using grids. I have the background in it from Guam and Medford. It is a challenge using a new way to do things, using the grids to develop a forecast for winds and seas instead of just using the models.

I hear you are learning a second language.

I have an assignment through my church to speak at different groups of people. Many of them are Hispanic and/or bilingual. So, I am trying to learn Spanish to better communicate with them.

How do you relax?

I'd like to play golf, but it is so expensive here. My father-in-law is a snowbird and lives in Brooksville, (Fla.); the rates are a lot better there. I am a big baseball fan, but the Marlins have me disenchanted right now. I am exercising more, which is a great way to clear the mind.

Where do you see yourself in five to 10 years?

I see myself remaining in TAFB with the goal to be one of its lead forecasters, and then retiring from it. Medford would be the only place I would want to move to if the chance came up. I still have a home there and plan to retire there.

Send comments to: nhc.publicaffairs@noaa.gov