



NOAA Teacher at Sea
Philip J. Hertzog
Onboard NOAA Ship RAINIER
July 24 - August 13, 2005

Log 15

Day 15: August 8, 2005

Time: 1600 hours

Latitude: 55° 53.3' N

Longitude: 158° 50.3' W

Visibility: 10 nm

Wind Direction: 223°

Wind Speed: 8 kts

Sea Wave Height: 0 feet

Sea Water Temperature: 12.8° C

Sea Level Pressure: 1027.0 mb

Cloud Cover: 6, stratocumulus, altocumulus, cirrocumulus

Science and Technology Log

I slept in an extra hour and set about doing my laundry and log entries since I stayed aboard the RAINIER today. Given a quiet day, I focused today's entry on careers with NOAA to provide information to students wanting a life of adventure while helping the environment.

Congress created NOAA (National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration) in 1970 to bring together several agencies under one roof. Congress recognized that the oceans of the world are closely tied to our atmosphere and we need to manage them through one organization. You best know NOAA through the National Weather Service which provides you with daily weather forecasts. However, NOAA has other branches that protect fish and marine wildlife; manage marine sanctuaries; observe changes in the environment; warn people about approaching tsunamis; respond to oil spills and disasters; and chart coastlines and bottom depths to protect vessels.

On the RAINIER, we have two categories of jobs: civilian and commissioned officers. I will save the civilian jobs for another entry and we'll look at the officers today. The NOAA Officer Corps is a uniformed branch of the United States military. Most officers spend two years assigned to a ship and then rotate to a land job for three years. The rotation starts over again and you can retire with a pension after twenty years. Ensign Andrew Halbach told me he could retire at age 43, though I believe he will stay with NOAA much longer and command his own ship someday.

You must apply to join the NOAA Officer Corps and only dedicated people get accepted. Ensign Laurel Jennings told me you need a four year college degree with a major in math, engineering or science. You also must be in good health, pass a physical exam and be 35 years old or younger. NOAA asks for four letters of recommendation from professional contacts and answers to several pages of questions. You also need to pass a

police background check and be interviewed by one of NOAA's officers. Several ensigns told me this process takes from several months to half a year.

Once accepted as an Officer Corps candidate, you go to the Kings Point Merchant Marine Academy located on Long Island, NY for three months of intensive training. The candidates train in safety, water rescue, navigation, CPR/first aid, ship fire fighting, knots, and ship handling. A few weeks before completing training, NOAA holds a formal ceremony to announce the ship assignment for the next two years.

Ensign Jennings told me she got on board the RAINIER in June and continues her training on the job. Her primary focus has been on ship duties such as bridge watch, navigation and ship operations. As she becomes confident on ship procedures, her training will shift to learning how to conduct hydrographic mapping and operating the computers. Here are some photos of Ensign Jennings at work:



Ensign Jennings has a Bachelor of Science degree in zoology from the University of Texas at Austin. She worked as an intern at Disney World's Living Seas exhibit in Florida where she scuba dived, fed the aquarium fish, scrubbed tanks, and talked to the public.

She moved to Boston after graduation and found that a Bachelor's degree was not enough to get a satisfying job. She wanted to work in science and with people, but not in a lab all day. Ensign Jennings said the NOAA Officer Corps was perfect for her.

Over the past two weeks, I have talked to several Ensigns about their next assignments. Ensign Andrew Halbach will move to Washington, D.C. next year and work on remote sensing from airplanes. He will travel 150 days a year to various locations throughout the United States. In December Ensign Briana Welton will command her own skiff and crew on the east coast. Whenever a hurricane hits, Ensign Welton will be one of the first people into the disaster area to chart how navigation channels have been affected by storm damage. In the past, other Ensigns have gone on to work on designing tsunami detection buoys and underwater vehicles. Many other opportunities exist both on land and at sea for young people seeking adventure. Here are pictures of Ensigns Andrew Halbach, Briana Welton and Michael Stevenson from left to right in action:



In addition to exciting career opportunities, an Officer Corps member can advance in rank as he or she gains experience and the confidence of senior officers. All Corps members start out at the rank of Ensign. You then can be promoted in progression to Lt. Junior Grade, Lieutenant, Lt. Commander, Commander, Captain, and finally only one officer gets to be the Admiral.

Personal Log

I wish I could be 35 or younger now! The NOAA Officer Corps has a lot of exciting opportunities that many young people don't know about. I think about the adventures I've missed because no teacher ever told me about NOAA.

Many exciting opportunities exist for young people if they get the right education and study hard in school. As a teacher I feel a responsibility to make sure students have the skills to take advantage of the careers and adventure that exist not only with NOAA, but with other organizations. Too often I see students playing video games or ignoring homework instead of preparing themselves for the future. Hopefully they can learn to dedicate themselves to learning and preparation like the young ensigns on board the RAINIER.

Question of the Day

Why is a well-rounded, college education important for today's young adults?