

Meet Rip Coleman, Vice President, Aviation Information Systems, Sonalysts, Inc. Waterford, CT



I've been working in meteorology for 37 years and wouldn't have it any other way. I spent 26 years in the Air Force in various jobs as a weather scientist, operations officer, and special operations weather team member and have been working in industry for the past 11 years, primarily in the aviation industry. It has never been boring! In fact, quite the contrary, I love to travel and my life has been filled with travel to exotic places, interesting people, and just plain fun. I was in Connecticut yesterday, am in Florida today and will be in London tomorrow. Next month, I will be in Korea for three weeks. While I'm there, I will climb my favorite mountain, Soyosan. Life is good!

How did you first get interested in weather?

While I admit that I've always loved being outside in bad weather, I really wasn't interested in meteorology, as a science, until after I graduated from college and joined the US Air Force. I received my Bachelor of Science degree in mathematics from the University of Memphis before joining the Air Force. Then the Air Force sent me to the University Of Texas School Of Engineering for a secondary degree in meteorology. The classes were interesting and the labs were great fun. I was hooked. After working as a forecaster for five or six years, I returned to North Carolina State University for a Master of Science degree in Marine, Earth and Atmospheric Sciences.

How did you find your first job, and what was it like?

I assume you're interested in my first weather job so I'll skip the part time job at a frequently-robbed liquor store in Memphis. That one was easy to find. No one else wanted it.

My first weather job was not so easy to find. I had to finish six years of college first. After leaving the University of Texas, I was assigned as a junior weather officer at Kelly Air Force Base near San Antonio, Texas. I worked rotating shift observing and forecasting the weather for central Texas. It was great experience and I was lucky enough to be trained by some of the finest meteorologists in the world. After a couple of years of shift work, I volunteered for military parachutist duties and became a special operations weather team member. Jumping out of airplanes came naturally since my nickname, derived from "ripcord," was passed down to me by my father, a master parachutist and combat veteran in the US Army.



Figure 1. Rip Jr. and Rip Sr.

How would you describe your current job and how is it different from your forecasting job?



Figure 2. The Weather Team at Sonalysts

At Sonalysts, I work with a great team of scientists and software engineers who are dedicated to building state-of-the-art software, used by international airlines for weather and flight tracking. As a group leader here, I help with business development and I'm also a member of our Configuration Control Board. Like in the Air Force, I still travel a great deal but to "nicer" places like Geneva, Paris, Berlin, London, Brussels and Seoul.

Is forecasting the weather part of your job anymore?

While I don't have the opportunity to forecast the weather much any more, I do work with aviation meteorologists all over the world. I find it extremely rewarding to translate the highly technical meteorological requirements into something the computer scientists can build. I have kept my finger in the science by teaching meteorology at the University of Connecticut as an adjunct faculty member and I even landed one research contract for developing a technique for assessing regional forecast uncertainty.

What would you say to those interested in working in the private sector?

Experience tells me that there simply is no other career field with all the diverse opportunities that we have in weather. The science will never get old. There are always new things to learn and to be applied in this field. While I've been very fortunate in the private sector, I don't think I would be where I am had I not started my career in the military. I strongly recommend the military as a place to get global experience forecasting the weather.