

# Weather Man

*He's not at the forefront, but his predictions affect the mission, and he's not afraid to make the call*

by Master Sgt. Chuck Roberts

photos by Master Sgt. Efrain Gonzalez

### Career Field Stats

1W0X1 – Weather

**Assigned:** 2,542

**Duties:** One of the main duties is providing a mission execution forecast to pilots before each sortie. The combat weather team at Holloman also provides weather watches, warnings and advisories.

**Civilian application:** Weather forecaster at a television station or for the National Weather Service.

Jason Conner may not have control over his job, but his personal life has been on solid ground since foregoing collegiate gridiron aspirations for an Air Force career.

The senior airman is a weather specialist at Holloman Air Force Base, N.M., where each day he combines computer technology, experience and common sense to predict something no one can control — the weather.

“There’s no exact science to it. It’s always different. Two plus two doesn’t always equal four,” said Airman Conner, whose 180 pounds appear stretched thin on his 6-foot-4-inch frame. The “formula” seemed so overwhelming in technical school, however, that he panicked during the first week and wanted to cross-train.

Now, three years wiser to the ways of wind, rain and snow, the 23-year-old brings a calm and confident demeanor to a job that continues to be as challenging as it is rewarding.

“The amount of responsibility we have, it makes you feel good,” he said, especially when a pilot returns from a sortie saying the forecast was “on the money.” But a forecaster also needs thick skin, he explained, because if he’s guilty of faulty forecasting and keeps a pilot on hold a few hours longer than predicted, the customer can sometimes get a bit grumpy.

“We have an interesting role in the

mission,” he said. “We’re not on the front lines in an F-16. We’re more like puppet masters. You never see us, but we’re involved,” he said, adding that the ultimate decision to cancel a sortie lies with the pilot.

“So you have to be calm and take it because weather is an inexact science. You are going to get it wrong sometimes. You just have to limit your wrongs, and make sure your wrongs were not way out in left field.”

Left field is about where Airman Conner found himself a few years ago. Although he never played football until high school, he excelled as a wide receiver and kickoff returner. He’s in the record books with the third-longest return in Arizona high school history with a 97-yard jaunt. He was in the process of attempting to be a walk-on player at the University of Arizona when he met a girl, fell in love, and got engaged.

“That’s when my dad sat me down and said, ‘You can’t keep going down this path,’ ” and explained that with family comes responsibility. “He treated me like a man,” said Airman Conner, who was only 19 at the time.

He took his father’s advice and followed in his parents’ footsteps and joined the Air Force. However, he and his fiancé parted paths shortly before he left for basic training.

After arriving at his first assignment, he met his future wife. She

was a shy airman stationed with him at Barksdale Air Force Base, La. After spotting him at a local club, she sent a friend over as an intermediary.

The rendezvous led to marriage and then Jason Jr., now 1, soon followed. What comes next isn’t written in stone.

“If there’s one thing I’ve learned, it’s not to get yourself locked into certain paths,” he said. “If you’re open-minded, you’ll pick the right path nine times out of 10.”

However, Airman Conner still contemplates a possible career in the Air Force, pursuing a degree in meteorology, and has definite plans

to make sure his son becomes well-acquainted with his grandparents. He said he loved being an Air Force “brat” living overseas and having the opportunity to “recreate myself every time we moved.” But the experience came at the expense of seldom seeing his grandparents.

He’s had the opportunity for extra quality time with his own son, however, while serving as Mr. Mom at times while his wife, Sarah, pursues a degree and an Air Force commission.

“I’ll put my wife first. She’s done so much for me, so the least I can do is watch my son while she goes to school.”

As for the dream of pursuing a football career, he said the only way he can get there now is through his Madden NFL 2004 for the PlayStation 2 that puts him “in the game.” He’ll never reach those earlier dreams, but he’s happy with the reality of a stable career, and a wife and son.

“I have a beautiful life,” he said. ☺



**Airman Conner gives weather forecasts to pilots before their sorties** and said he feels good when commended for an on-target prediction. But he’s also developed a thick skin because forecasting the weather is a challenging and inexact science that no one can get correct every time.



**Checking the tactical meteorological observing system** is one of the many duties Senior Airman Jason Conner does while working the weather desk at Holloman Air Force Base, N.M. The system is a tactical field weather station designed to be a mobile weather gathering instrument for use in any field environment.

### Senior Airman Jason L. Conner

Weather Forecaster

49th Operational Support Squadron, Operational Support Weather

**Years in Air Force:** 3

**Hometown:** Born at MacDill Air Force Base, Fla.

**Reason for enlisting:** Engaged at 19 and needed stability

**Assignments:** Barksdale Air Force Base, La., 2001 to 2003, weather forecaster; and Holloman Air Force Base, N.M., 2003 to present, weather forecaster.

**Coming up:** Supporting wife’s pursuit of a bachelor’s degree and Air Force commission

**The best thing about the job:** “There’s no exact science to it — it’s always something different.”