

## NOT FOR REPRODUCTION

John McMahan profile (first draft<sup>1</sup>)

“See the sunrise; race the sunset.” What this motto means will be revealed later, but this motto is one that John McMahan, program analyst at Coast Guard Headquarters, has lived by during his storied career, starting as an enlisted seaman in the U.S. Navy during the Vietnam War to his current position at Headquarters. However, McMahan will now be applying that motto to a new phase in his life: retirement, closing the chapter on his 30+ year career as an analyst with Coast Guard on November 30.

Born in Denver, Colorado, McMahan was the son of an engineer who performed missile defense work for the government and as a result, the family relocated frequently for his father’s work before settling for a while in Southern California near Jet Propulsion Laboratory (JPL). After graduating from high school, he was drafted into the U.S. Navy during the Vietnam War, serving onboard the U.S.S. Enterprise. Upon discharge, McMahan moved to Texas and worked a variety of odd jobs before he decided to join his father, who was by this time in Missouri.

In Missouri, McMahan transitioned into security work, winning a contract with the U.S. government to provide full security for the nationwide tour of the “Treasures of Tutankhamun” (King Tut) exhibit, which ran from 1976 to 1979 and sparked museum fever across the country. However, the long, stressful hours of security work prompted a career change and in 1979, McMahan enlisted in the Coast Guard as a fireman technician, serving for 20 years, the majority of those years at sea, before retiring as a rating force master chief (RFMC). In 1999, he transitioned into a civilian GS-12 position while starting the pursuit of one of his four college degrees; McMahan holds two bachelor’s degrees, with one in electronics engineering and the other in computer information systems, and two master’s degrees, with one in computer information systems and the other in public administration. When asked why he had so many degrees, he replied, “I like learning!”

In looking back over his career and best memories of his Coast Guard experiences, McMahan replied, “[I] miss the sea. Fourteen years of sea duty, I’d go again.” And of all his accomplishments, the one he’s most proud of is the harpoon launch on the CGC Mellon, not only because of the effort it took from procurement to launch and the numerous challenges, but also, according to McMahan, “Anything I’ve done to support the men and women on the deck plate, I’m proud of.”

McMahan doesn’t see retirement as the end; he sees it as another transition that will allow him to focus on activities that bring him joy and purpose, such as the restoration and improvement of his 1934 Chrysler 5 window coupe and raising and breeding bull terriers.

For those new to their career, he offers the following advice: “If you only do what you believe can be done, you have failed! You do what needs to be done and ask [for] forgiveness.”

As for the meaning behind his motto, “see the sunrise; race the sunset”, which came from his great-grandfather, it means from sunrise you are in a race to be as productive as possible before the sun sets. McMahan, a salty sea dog at heart who has seen many sunrises from the deck of a cutter, will continue this race for as long as possible.

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<sup>1</sup> A shortened form of this profile was published December 2023.