When I am asked how I decided on Aerospace Engineering as a career, I point to three prominent experiences I had growing up. The first was attending DoD STARBASE as a 4th grader at McConnell Air Force Base in Wichita, Kansas. The second was watching John Glenn blast off into space when I was in 6th grade, and the final thing was the amazing math teacher I had when I was in high school.

Twenty years later, I still look back at my time at DoD STARBASE as a profound moment that helped put me on the path I am on today. I can still feel the excitement I had as a kid when I found out I was going to attend DoD STARBASE. In my mind, going to DoD STARBASE for a day would have been preferred over a day at Disneyland.

I grew up in Hillsboro, Kansas, a small rural town. Most professions I had been exposed to were related to agriculture. However, as far as I can remember, I always had some interest in aerospace. For me, you could say attending DoD STARBASE “scratched an itch” I had as a young girl, and it gave me an opportunity to explore a career field to which I wouldn’t otherwise have had much real exposure.

I obviously wasn’t planning my career at 10 years of age, but DoD STARBASE was an experience that kept me interested in aerospace. Since my days at DoD STARBASE, I have received my Bachelors of Science and Doctorate degrees in Aerospace Engineering from the University of Kansas. After receiving my PhD, I joined the MITRE Corporation where I worked on the Air Force’s Battlefield Airborne Communication Node (BACN) E-11A program.

I currently serve as Assistant Professor in the Aerospace Engineering Department at the University of Kansas. I am the first female faculty member in the department’s near 75-year history. My research interests include multifunctional structures, airborne platform sensor integration, remote sensing, and Unmanned Aerial Systems (UAS). I am both an Amelia Earhart Fellow and a NASA Earth and Space Science Fellow. As a PhD student, I had the opportunity to travel to Antarctica and play a role at the Center for Remote Sensing of Ice Sheets (CReSIS) in developing NASA’s DC-8 and P-3 polar flying laboratories. Now back at the University of Kansas, I am continuing my collaboration with CReSIS in developing the next generation of polar remote sensing platforms and sensors.

DoD STARBASE is an important program as it exposes kids to careers they may not have otherwise experienced. I’m very lucky to have been a part of it, and I’m very happy to see it still going strong today.

 [1]

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