

Military Student

When you're simultaneously handling academic and military schedules for four years, it helps to have determination.

by Capt. Christine L. Kunz
photos by Master Sgt. Ken Wright

Cadet First Class Kristina Belcourt's day ended at 1 a.m. For most college kids, this is normal. But what isn't normal is the sound of her alarm clock going off at 5:15 a.m., the same day. But Cadet Belcourt isn't the average college student. And she's not going to the average college.

Life at the Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs, Colo., brings young students like 21-year-old Kristina into a unique world all its own. Not only must she face classes, homework and exams, but she also lives a military mindset 24 hours a day.

"Cadet life gets to be very stressful at times, but I have always been able to handle it by allowing myself to have fun and stay positive by getting involved," said the Waxhaw, N.C., native.

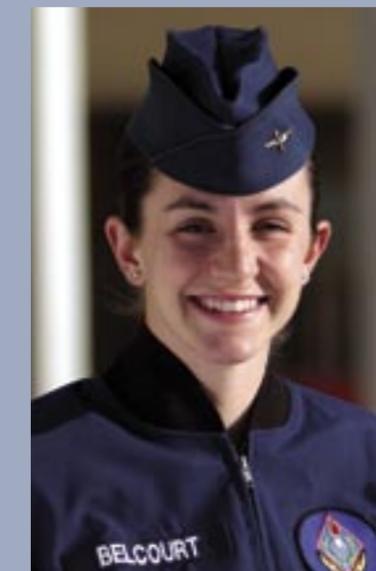
And staying involved she does. In her four years at the academy, she's participated in the soaring, combat survival training and cadet summer research programs; worked as a cadet trainer and element clerk; participated in Operation Air Force at an active duty base in Florida;

helped run basic cadet training during the summers; and stayed active in the cadet chorale and the cadets advocating sexual integrity and education program. Plus, she continually volunteers as a mentor for local Girl Scouts. So how does she do it all?

"Determination is the biggest factor in handling four years of cadet life," she said. "If you are not absolutely determined to be here, to stay here and to excel, you will not. That's the one constant among all cadets."

A quick look at her room would make her mother proud. It's neat, clean and near perfect. But it's not awash of color like you'd normally see in a college senior's room. No posters on the walls. No clothes strewn about. Her bed is identical to her roommate's — even down to the blue-gray bedspread. This is the military aspect of her college life. And she has accepted it.

But there are some remnants of home around, helping to remind her where she came from. A small refrigerator sits at the back of the room covered with alphabet magnets. A few of the letters have come together



Cadet First Class Kristina Belcourt

Cadet 1st Element leader
Cadet Squadron 17, "Stalag 17," Air Force Academy, Colo.

Rickenbacker Class of 2004

Years in Air Force: Four cadet years

Hometown: Waxhaw, N.C.

Reason for joining: "It seemed like the most exciting and enjoyable service. I've also wanted to serve my country, and I knew there were so many awesome opportunities in the Air Force."

Original career plan: "I have no plans on retiring in the Air Force just yet. With no operational experience, I have no idea how much I am going to like it. But I definitely see myself as a professor, teaching either here [at the academy] or at another college."

Accomplishments: Soar program, combat survival training, Operation Air Force at Patrick Air Force Base, Fla., flight specialist for basic cadet training, academic and element noncommissioned officer, cadets advocating sexual integrity and education program volunteer, cadet summer research program in Washington, D.C., combat survival training evasion cadre, academic officer, element leader and logistics officer for the cadet chorale.

Coming up: Graduated in June and began technical school training as an intelligence officer at Goodfellow Air Force Base, Texas.

The best thing about the job: "The best thing about being a cadet is the number of great friends you make and the support group you develop."

to spell phrases like "Rise up then," "Always plan" and "To walk speak poetry but dream." Perhaps these phrases give this history major a bit of philosophy to chew on. Or maybe comfort is found in the photos of her three cats she keeps on her desk: Snowflake, Crazy Minnie and Mars. But what matters right now to this

senior is where she's going.

After four years of building college credits to earn a degree and learning the Air Force way, Cadet Belcourt is now ready for her next phase — her Air Force specialty, or Air Force job. After the final culminating event — June graduation — she reported to Goodfellow Air Force Base, Texas, to

begin technical training as an intelligence officer. And that sits just fine with her.

"I chose the Air Force because it seemed like the most exciting and enjoyable service. I've also wanted to serve my country, and I knew there were so many awesome opportunities in the Air Force," she said. "Intelligence was something I wanted to do."

So as this lifetime Girl Scout who received the top Girl Scout award — the Gold Award — now joins the active duty ranks, she brings with her that sense of determination and positive attitude. This has guided most of her life and served her well during four years of academy life. It'll certainly guide her through an Air Force career as well. ☺

Cadet First Class Kristina Belcourt never has a shortage of responsibilities as a senior at the Air Force Academy. Between a challenging academic load, extracurricular activities and responsibilities that come with rank, such as conducting room inspections, there's little time to spare.



Student body facts

Assigned: 4,033 cadets made up the 2004 student cadet wing with 983 cadets a part of the graduating class of 2004.

Duties: Cadets perform a gamut of leadership and academic responsibilities ranging from positions within the cadet wing to extracurricular activities like athletics and music.

Civilian application: "I guess a civilian college student would be the closest," Cadet First Class Kristina Belcourt said. "But it's still so different it isn't really that comparable."