

Previewing...

**54th ARS boom operator trades boom for gold bars**

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1/7/2011 - **ALTUS AIR FORCE BASE, Okla.** -- He lays on his stomach with his head supported by a chin pad keeping his eyes steady. Both hands are carefully operating two joysticks that control the 20-foot boom off the end of the KC-135 Stratotanker. His eyes focus as he makes contact with the aircraft he is refueling 2,000 feet above the ground. But soon, this boom operator will let go of the joysticks and pick up a pencil as he embarks on his next challenge in his Air Force career - Officer Training School.

Staff Sgt. Cliff E. Leclerc, 54th Air Refueling Squadron boom operator evaluator, is leaving this month to attend OTS in Pensacola, Fla. He will be training to become a combat systems officer, also known as a navigator.

"I'm pretty hyped - it is career changing," Sergeant Leclerc said. "I have been a boom operator for eight years now but you start getting burned out after a while. I have reached the point where I'm ready to try something new. I love being a boom operator, but it is family first. So with family first comes finances and my finances are going to go up with officer pay."

Sergeant Leclerc earned his bachelor degree in professional aeronautics from Embry Riddle at the extended campus here in Altus.

"When I first joined the Air Force my attitude toward school was I'll see what happens and I'll take a class here and there," Sergeant Leclerc said. "While I was stationed at McConnell AFB, Kan., the operations tempo was very high - so it was difficult to take classes. I knew when I came here I would have time to take the classes I wanted because the operations tempo is much lower at a training base."

He took two or three classes a term with five terms in a year. After a year passed he had finished almost half of his degree and OTS started to become a realistic goal. When he only had eight credits left to complete his degree he started putting together a package. He spoke with Airmen who had submitted packages and officers who had attended OTS to help him develop a strong package, Sergeant Leclerc explained.

"I think Sergeant Leclerc going to OTS is awesome. He will be a great officer," said Tech. Sgt. Ben Cobb, 54th ARS C-flight NCO in charge. "He is one of the hardest workers I know."

It took Sergeant Leclerc about 2.5 years to complete his degree.

"Start one step at a time - get an idea of how you want to get the school done. Once you get school rolling things get easier from there," Sergeant Leclerc said. "You need to set the goals in front of you now or it will be very hard to do later in your career. When you have about 1.5 years left until your degree is complete, you should start to prepare a package to submit."

According to Sergeant Leclerc he submitted his package Feb. 15, 2010 and found out he had been selected to attend OTS in May 2010. He received his orders to Pensacola, Fla. in September 2010 and leaves Altus this month.

"Continue to achieve higher goals in life. Anyone can do it," Sergeant Leclerc said. "Altus is one of the best bases to get schooling done - there are no distractions."