

KARYN THOMAS CHRISTEN



Karyn (Thomas) Christen, a 1990 Crater graduate, was the class valedictorian and a standout woman athlete starring in volleyball, basketball and track. Indeed, it was her academic and volleyball skills that led to her being recruited by the United States Air Force Academy. Because Karyn graduated early at sixteen and the Academy requires an age of at least seventeen, she had to spend a year in the Air Force Preparatory School before starting at the Academy. During her four years at the Air Force Academy, Karyn played four years of intercollegiate volleyball, distinguished herself as a scholar/athlete, received her Bachelor of Science degree in Civil Engineering and graduated as a Second Lieutenant.

Like most Air Force graduates, Karyn longed to be a pilot, but the opportunities were very limited and competitive. Of her 900 fellow graduates, she was most pleased to be chosen for one of the 225 pilot-training slots while at the same time being accepted into graduate school, so she delayed her pilot training for a year and completed the 2-year Masters

program in Environmental Engineering at the University of Texas at Austin in 1 ½ years. Then it was on to Laughlin Air Force base for her initial pilot training. Karyn graduated from pilot school in April 1997 with a rank of First Lieutenant and #1 in her class.

Her first official assignment was at Travis Air Force base in California where she flew KC-10s, obtained the rank of Captain, upgraded to Aircraft Commander, flew 22 combat sorties in the Kosovo Air War, saw four different continents and circled the globe twice. Since re-assignment is obligatory every three to four years, Karyn chose to return to the Air Force Academy where she could still fly but also work with cadets in the Airmanship programs. While at the Academy this time, she obtained the rank of Major before separating from active duty in October 2005.

Her Air Force retirement did not last long as she relates, "I was immediately hired by a Reserve unit of the Academy and have to this day been an instructor for Cessna T-41 and Diamond T-52 aircraft." Her Reserve duties led to her obtaining her current rank of Lieutenant Colonel. She currently serves as Commander of the 13th Reconnaissance Squadron at Beale Air Force Base in California.

Karyn and her husband, Eric, have three children, Damien, Sophia and Gabriel. They live in Grass Valley, California where Karyn is especially enjoying her current job which "allows me to spend more time with my family and for this I am thankful. It reminds me how I truly appreciate all those still serving on Active Duty, in the Reserves and the National Guard who volunteer to serve, spend time away from their families and risk their lives to protect and defend our country."