Interviewer:
â€“ with an introduction. Iâ€™m Professor Greta Bucher, interviewing MAJ Beth Behn. And MAJ Behn, Iâ€™d like you to start off by talking to me about being a cadet at West Point in the years that you were here.
MAJ Beth Behn:
I played lacrosse while I was here, all four years. And being on the lacrosse team was great. Our season was in the spring. We were not a __ team. We were a club team. So we got â€“ I was able to leave the academy to go on trip sections. And the camaraderie and the support â€“ it was a fairly large team for a womenâ€™s team. There were 26 on the team. So that was great. That was very important to me. And when I look back on my cadet experience and think what were the â€“ what were some of the real highlights, certainly playing lacrosse and being part of that team was one of the big highlights.â€¨I also look back pretty fondly on my academic experience in my history classes. I mean, I enjoyed the history classes a lot.
And just the â€“ the Army is constantly throwing you into new positions that you havenâ€™t had any training for in a lot of cases or very little training for and asking you to do things that you just donâ€™t think you can do. But West Point did that to you every day. So thatâ€™s, I think, the best thing that I got out of the academics here was just being pushed harder than I â€“ I thought â€“ I always thought as a cadet, â€œOh, my gosh, Iâ€™m never going to survive this. Iâ€™m never going to get it all done.â€ â€¨And I see that with cadets. They think the same way, so thatâ€™s good. I think itâ€™s good that we continue to â€“ that we push them harder because theyâ€™re â€“ they can do a lot more than they think they can. I learned that here.
Interviewer:
Do you think that maybe you felt like the people in graduate school learned more history because they were coming right out of undergraduate and hadnâ€™t had as much time to forget their history?
MAJ Beth Behn:
Well, it could be.
Although my â€“ I wasnâ€™t the oldest person. I mean, I was older than some, but I think the median age in my â€“ I ended up being on the grad school admissions committee, and I did all these statistics for them, so I happen to know the median age of the graduate students â€“ was 27. And I was 30. So I was a little bit older than the average but not that much. There were certainly people that were older than me, so that could have been part of it too. But I had been away from school for a while by the time I got to grad school.
Interviewer:
What about low points? Any low points you want to discuss?
MAJ Beth Behn:
During my cadet time?
Interviewer:
__ math, but other than that.
MAJ Beth Behn:
Yeah, well, I already mentioned the real low points, which would be chemistry, physics and calculus. There were â€“ it was frustrating. I mean, certainly experienced frustration with being a 10 percent minority, and I think 10 percent minority group would probably be able to talk about some of those similar frustrations.
Interviewer:
Okay. How do you think â€“ what â€“ when you did your first deployment or you went to your first post-graduate posting, did you feel like being a West Pointer was something that made you stick out or something that helped you out? Once you hit the Army, like your initial contact.
MAJ Beth Behn:
Letâ€™s see. Not really. I always try â€“ I think itâ€™s important â€“ I think we get quality

officers from all of our commissioning sources: OCS, ROTC and West Point. And so I tend to minimize my commissioning source. I try to.
Interviewer:
Do you think it makes a difference about your â€“ what branch youâ€™re in?
MAJ Beth Behn:
Could be. Again, Iâ€™ve only been in â€“ I can only speak in my branch and itâ€™s just â€“
Interviewer:
Which is transportation.
MAJ Beth Behn:
Transportation Corps. Right. Not a big issue at the TC. You just have such a mix of people.â€¨My OBC class was predominantly West Pointers. I think there were 50 of us in my basic course, and over 30 were West Pointers. And that was kind of interesting because we all knew each other, and then these other people from various commissioning sources and schools didnâ€™t know each other. So that was kind of an interesting dynamic there, but that was only a six-month experience, and it doesnâ€™t really reflect what a regular Army unit is anyway.â€¨I certainly felt well prepared to be a platoon leader and â€“ coming out of West Point. I mean, I thought I had been â€“ I knew what was expected of me.
Interviewer:
So what â€“ can you just kind of give me the timeline of your career, and then we can kind of go back and talk about the different sections?
MAJ Beth Behn:
Sure. I graduated in â€™94. My first duty station was Fort Eustace, Virginia, which is also the home of the Transportation Corps, so I went there for the basic course, and then stayed there as my first duty station.â€¨I went to this very small section of the Transportation Corps, which is already a small portion of the Army. I went to the Army watercraft field, and so I was in the 7th Transportation group. I was a boat platoon leader, and so my very first unit was LCU 2000s landing craft. They each have a crew of 12.
interviewer:
It must have been pretty intimidating.
MAJ Beth Behn:
It was because I had just â€“ but again, I had those warrant officers who were senior. Most of them had just â€“ had spent a year in Desert Storm. They were between 12 and 20 years in the Army. And they didnâ€™t let me fail, and I appreciated that.â€¨And, again, what did I learn at West Point? I learned that you need to make sure that you build a relationship with your platoon sergeant, acknowledge that you donâ€™t know anything, and learn from them. And so I had a platoon sergeant, but I also had these warrant officers, so it was a whole other relationship to form.â€¨But a great experience. I learned a ton about actually doing the mission. I mean, we were moving stuff. The roads in Haiti were such a mess that you couldnâ€™t move heavy equipment over a lot of the roads.
Interviewer:
How long were you deployed for?
MAJ Beth Behn:
About four months, and then I came back for three months. I went back to Haiti with my sister platoon, which had a brand-new platoon leader. I went down there for a month again that same year. This was in â€™95. I kind of got him up and running and showed him how to do the â€“ use the supply system and pick up the missions and all that.â€¨I came back â€“ I moved around within that battalion.
0:18:00â€¨* {:.text} I was the executive officer in a light-boat company, smaller vessels, little landing craft. Did that for ten months maybe. And then I was the detachment commander for a detachment of 140-ton cranes. Theyâ€™re important in port operations to have cranes. So we had 140-ton cranes. About 40 soldiers in that detachment. Great. It was my

own unit.â€¨I was lieutenant. I didnâ€™t have a company commander. It was me to the battalion commander. It was a great unit. A good bunch of guys. I say guys because it happened to be all guys, and theyâ€™d been together for a long time. Really strong â€“ nobody on the overweight program. No PT failures. Didnâ€™t get DUIs. Just a real tight, well-performing, high-performing unit. And I was rocking with them for almost year.
Interviewer:
This is the detachment you were supposed to bring into shape that you never actually got to work with.
MAJ Beth Behn:
Yeah, right. So that didnâ€™t really work out that well. Well, I got a career with part of them. But anyway, so I was there February, March, April. We thought we were going to war. Third ID flew in. We were running the port and the airfield and did all the reception piece for the 3rd Infantry Division as they came in, and got them linked up with their equipment and moving forward.â€¨As it turns out, we didnâ€™t go to war. Not then. So we â€“ an agreement was reached, and we just sat and made sure the agreement held.
Interviewer:
And you were a captain by then?
MAJ Beth Behn:
I was. I was a captain. And so I had been â€“ I took command in June of 2001, and our very first thing we were planning for was operation â€“ Exercise Bright Star, which is a joint training mission with the Egyptians. It happens every year, and I was sending two of my platoons over to do that.â€¨And we were in the â€“ in fact, I was in a T&P van getting ready to drive down to Beaumont where our HETs were being loaded on a ship to go to Egypt when we were heard on the radio about September 11th. It was September 11th.
Interviewer:
In history?
MAJ Beth Behn:
One in history and one in chemistry.
Interviewer:
Oh.
MAJ Beth Behn:
And so I donâ€™t know. Had I not had those people saying this is a really good thing, Iâ€™m not sure I would have done it. I was flattered to be asked to come back. Itâ€™s a sweet deal. Two years in grad school and then three years teaching here. But I just didnâ€™t know. I wanted to do the best that I could do in the Army, and so I wasnâ€™t sure.
Interviewer:
Did the university â€“ did they â€“ was there any stigma attached to being in the Army?
MAJ Beth Behn:
I didnâ€™t get it.
Interviewer:
They had not had anybody for a long time, maybe ten years before. But I certainly didnâ€™t get that sense. I thought people were interested to know what my experience had been and what sort of things I had done and where I was going. I was sort of an enigma to other grad students, probably. Some of the faculty too.â€¨They could never quite figure out â€“ what baffled them, what really got them was they couldnâ€™t figure out that I was only going to come to West Point and teach for three years and then go back out into the Army. Their mindset was youâ€™re going to get a graduate degree, and youâ€™re going to teach, and thatâ€™s what youâ€™re going to continue to do.
Interviewer:
Okay. Well, I think there are two directions we can go. We can talk about what you think maybe has changed about West Point, and whether thatâ€™s good or bad in terms of application to the Army, and particularly the way the Army has changed or is supposed to have changed in the last five years or so. Or we could talk more about Iraq, your

deployment to Iraq. Or we could do both. But which one would you like to do first?
MAJ Beth Behn:
Iâ€™ll tell you about my Iraq because itâ€™s sort of simple. I was there for six months. So I ended up in the â€“ the unit I was attached to was a garrison command doing all of the base life support and base operations for the victory base complex in Baghdad.
Interviewer:
What was the problem?
MAJ Beth Behn:
Security. There was no way to create a safe place either for the Iraqis or for the Americans that were on â€“ the coalition forces that were on the base.
Interviewer:
So did you feel like â€“ I mean, other than the West Point skills that helped you out in Iraq, did you feel that â€“ keep my necklace from sitting on the microphone.
MAJ Beth Behn:
Yeah.
Interviewer:
Did you feel that the overall mission was starting to get shakier after the bombings that you mentioned?
MAJ Beth Behn:
I think everything was harder. The other interesting thing that I got involved in was sort of the strategic planning from how we would eventually drawn down from this huge presence, particularly at the Victory Base Complex but in Iraq overall.â€¨So I attended the weekly __ for Iraq meetings, which is the plan for how are we going to close __ and get closer. That took me back and forth across Baghdad to meetings in the green zone on a fairly regular basis, which I appreciated because it was â€“ not that I craved convoying through Baghdad.
Interviewer:
If you felt like the mission got shakier after this.
MAJ Beth Behn:
I think for sure that the Samarra bombing was a turn back â€“ I donâ€™t know if it had to be the Samarra bombing. I mean, maybe that sectarian strife was there, and it just needed to be ignited, but that was certainly the ignition.â€¨Yeah, there were some high points after that. The Iraqi government formed a unit government, and they came to terms on how the ministers were going to be. I mean, those were big deals, things that gave us hope.â€¨I saw reconstruction projects happening. I also saw them not happening at nearly the pace that anybody wanted them to. I mean, everything was just so hard. You know, to get raw materials from Baghdad out to __ Province, you know, the security required for those trucks and â€“ one convoy gets hit, and civilian truck â€“ Iraqi and civilian truck drivers get killed, and then nobody will work for a week.
Interviewer:
Also, given the nature of the mission over there and now youâ€™ve been back at West Point for, what, two years basically because the half a year was gone, do you think that the academy is preparing cadets for that? Inaudible comment.
MAJ Beth Behn:
Yeah. I donâ€™t know. Junior leaders are certainly â€“ Iâ€™ve talked about being a platoon leader and having all of that responsibility, but nobody was shooting at us in Haiti. So it was a lot of responsibility. And now those platoon leaders have the same responsibility but itâ€™s life and death every day. So I think weâ€™re trying hard to prepare them for that.
Interviewer:
Okay. Well, weâ€™re just about out of tape.
MAJ Beth Behn:
All right.

Interviewer:
Do you think weâ€™re done, or do you have more youâ€™d like to â€“
MAJ Beth Behn:
I have nothing further. I think Iâ€™ve talked plenty, so thanks.
Interviewer:
Great.
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