WOMEN VETERANS HISTORICAL PROJECT

ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION

INTERVIEWEE: Bernardine "Bernie" Donato

INTERVIEWER: Therese Strohmer

DATE: 20 June 2015

[Begin Interview]

TS: Today is October 6, 2015. I'm at the Jackson Library with Bernie Donato to conduct an oral history interview for the Women Veterans Historical Project at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. Bernie, go ahead and state your name the way you'd like it to be on your collection.

BD My name is Bernardine "Bernie" Donato.

TS: Okay. Excellent. Well, thanks for being here today.

BD: Well, thank you.

TS: All right, Bernie. Well, why don't we start off by having you tell me a little bit about when and where you were born?

BD: I was born in Albany, New York, in 1952 [30 May 1952]. My—I lived on a farm. My grandparents immigrated from Sicily in 1913. They had an eighty acre farm in a town called Slingerlands, New York. So I actually grew—

TS: Slingerlands?

BD: Slingerlands. Yes. It's a very, very small town, and we had lots of cows and lots of Italians. [both chuckle] So the farm still exists though it does not—owned by my family. I had five brothers and sisters; three boys, three girls. And my father was essentially a farmer as he grew up—as we grew up, and then went into construction. He basically worked in handicraft and construction. My mother was a homemaker, though she did have a job early on, but after six kids that was a lot.

TS: Yeah.

BD: I went to Voor—

TS: Did she have nine kids then?

BD: No, she had six kids.

TS: Six?

BD: Six kids. There were six of us total. Three boys, three girls

TS: Oh, three boys. I thought you said five boys.

BD: No, three boys and three girls. And I'm the number three out of the family. I went to Voorheesville grade school; the same school my father went to. I went to Voorheesville High School. Graduated with a class of ninety-six in 1970.

TS: Okay. Well, that's it. That's all the background. [both chuckle] You were born in the fifties. What kinds of things did you guys do for fun?

BD: Interesting that—obviously with this generation we didn't sit in front of iPads, so we actually played outside all the time. So with six kids and a zillion cousins, as good Italian families had, we always had someone to play with. A lot of our stuff was done outside. We played ball, we went down to the woods, we played in the creek, and—though I was kind of—I was one of the quieter kids. Hard to believe now, but I was a really quiet kid. I did a lot of reading books, and I doodled, did some artwork, and got teased by my sisters all the time. They called me a hothouse plant and—

TS: Why'd they call you that?

BD: Because I was really quiet. I was really withdrawn. And a quick story is that when I was a little girl I was so scared of everybody. Anybody who came to the door, I ran and hid in the closet. And my mother said that they got a puppy once and she said they had to get rid of the puppy. She said, "I almost wanted to get rid of you." She was just kidding, of course. But I was that withdrawn and that quiet. And I stayed like that until I was a teenager.

TS: Yeah?

BD: Yeah.

TS: Well, you're in a house full of all this energy, I'm sure, right?

BD: Yes.

TS: And so, there's constant motion going on.

BD: Constant motion. With six kids it's like—I look back now and I don't know how my parents did it. I mean, that's a lot of life. And we lived on the same farm for a long time with my cousins who had eleven kids. So you have seventeen kids.

TS: Okay. They were in a different house?

BD: Yeah, a different house; in the main house; my grandparent's house—my grandmother's house. My grandfather died in 1933, so my grandmother was tasked to bring up her seven kids.

TS: All by herself?

BD: Yeah, all by herself.

TS: During the Depression?

BD: I did live on a farm—Yeah, during the Depression. I lived on a farm with—there were—what?—there were six—seventeen kids.

TS: You could field a couple of ball teams and play against each other there.

BD: We could and we did. And we also had—you know back then we had a lot of chores and kids weren't expected to sit there while mom did everything.

TS: What were your chores?

BD: The girls had to wash—had to do the dishes. So one of us picked up the table and put away, one of us washed, and one of us dried. I was the dryer because that seemed to work good for me. And of course, we had to help sweep the house, clean the house, and the boys had to do—everyone had a chore to do, and we were expected to do it. There was no slacking around there.

TS: No. Now, did you have church activities or anything like that?

BD: Yes. We did—We were—[chuckles] I kind of have to laugh. We were born and brought up [Roman] Catholic. We went to the Catholic church, and I don't remember the whole story—we started—we were enrolled in Catholic school and my mother had some kind of fallout with the bishop and we immediately went to public school after that. I don't know what the whole story was. My mother's deceased so I—

TS: That story went to her grave, right?

BD: We went to religious instruction, and I remember as a teenager always disappearing during religious instructions and getting caught and getting beat by my mom. [chuckles]

TS: You got what?

BD: My mother spanked us all because we all—she found out we were all skipping religious instructions and hiding out, as teenagers do. So yeah, we did have that. And of course, we did—a lot of the stuff we did was with all our family.

TS: Right.

BD: With all our family. Dinner—we called it supper—Supper on Sundays was kind of an Italian tradition that we always had pasta. We had some kind of pasta on Sundays, and we'd invite the family over and it's a big event.

TS: Nice.

BD: All you do is sit and eat and catch up.

TS: That is also pretty busy too. I mean, that's again, a lot of energy.

BD: Exactly.

TS: Every week, expecting that. Well, how about school? Did you like school?

BD: I was—it's interesting that I was just okay in school. I just seemed to fall—In high school I started failing a couple of subjects, and it wasn't because of my intelligence. I was actually in an AP class—an advanced placement class—and my mother—as you can figure out, my mother was a pretty assertive person—she went up to the school and said, "The problem is you're not stimulating her. You're not challenging her." So I did just okay. And then I went to college. I went to a nursing school—a three year nursing school right afterwards and did okay with that.

TS: Yeah. Now, did you have any role models as a young girl?

BD: I would say my father was a role model in the fact that he really impressed upon us that—to have a good work ethic, and that nothing is free in life, and if you want something that you go for it and you work hard for it. My mother—the fact that life isn't free. That when I say that—not monetarily—that same thing: that everyone has a challenge, everyone has a chore, and everyone has to stand up and do something to get along in life.

My aunt Rose who I just adored—she was like my second mother—and she was a nurse, and back then—a lot of people don't understand this is in the 1960s when I am in high school—back then there wasn't a lot of openings for women. Really, women did four things: they were nurses, they were teachers, they were secretaries, or they got married and had kids. So with picking a career, it's like no one ever asked me. My parents never said, "Do you want to go to college? What do you want to do after high school?" I think my aunt was the role model for that.

TS: Oh really? Did you have those ideas yourself, though, even though maybe your parents didn't talk to you about it?

BD: I actually always wanted to be a doctor.

TS: Did you?

BD: But I knew affordably-wise that my family—there's myself and my family, we could have never afforded that.

TS: Why did you want to be a doctor?

BD: I don't know. I really don't know. Just kind of like when I got in the military, why did you want to do that? These ideas get in my head. So my aunt always loved nursing and I said, "Well, we could do that."

TS: Something with medicine.

BD: Yeah. Yeah.

TS: Were you drawn to that field for any particular reason, besides the fact that your aunt was in it?

BD: I think it was just—it seemed something inborn in me. I always wanted to do something for other people, and not because I was a martyr but because I just always liked helping other people for some reason.

TS: Yeah. Well, let's talk a little bit, then, about this era that you're in. So you're born in fifty—

BD: Fifty-two.

TS: Fifty-two. So you're about ten, eleven years old when JFK [John Fitzgerald Kennedy] was assassinated.

[President John Fitzgerald Kennedy was assassinated in Dallas, Texas, on Friday, 22 November 1963, while riding in a motorcade in Dallas' Dealey Plaza]

BD: I remember that day. I still remember that day.

TS: Talk about it.

BD: I was in sixth grade and our little rural school out there in sixth grade, all I remember—I just remember the school bells going off and every—and them telling us that the president got killed, and I remember crying. And I don't remember—even now it's emotional. I don't remember why I was crying, I just knew that even as kids that we knew JFK was a great man. And he was so popular. I think a lot of it was because the school

bells scared me; scared a lot of the kids. Kids that—We all got let out and we didn't understand. We didn't understand what the significance—at that age, what's the significance of this. So the president gets killed, all the kids are let out of school. Is something very bad going to happen?

TS: Right. Did you do "duck and cover" in your room?

["duck and cover" was the name of a U.S. Civil Defense program aimed at teaching schoolchildren the immediate steps to take to protect themselves in the event of a nuclear explosion. It was widely practiced in American public schools in the 1950s and 1960s.]

BD: Oh, yes. We did plenty of "duck and cover."

TS: Why don't you explain that to the people who are reading this.

BD: So "duck and cover" is in the case of a—because it was—it was a communist, Cold War—they didn't call it the Cold War—but it was a communist era and it was in case of a nuclear attack and in case—because I was way post-World War II. World War II stopped in 1945, but you're talking—I was born in 1952, so we're not too much after that.

TS: Right.

BD: So "duck and cover" is in the case of a nuclear attack, or an enemy attack, you had to—you had to hit the floor and go underneath your desk. And of course, when you look back now those flimsy little desks, what were they going to do? [chuckles]

TS: Right. What did you think about it as a kid? Was it scary or was it just like a game?

BD: No, it was just—it was part of our—it was just part of what you did. And kind of like people—people who know nothing about the military, they don't understand the significance of that. And as kids we didn't understand the significance until you really had to do it. So yes, we did duck—and the other thing is, I grew up in the sixties, so I was eighteen years old in 1970. And it was a time of revolution. It was the hippie stage. It was the time of protest. It was the time of Kent State.

[Shootings occurred at Kent State University in Ohio on 4 May 1970, and involved the shooting of unarmed college students, who were protesting the Vietnam War, by the Ohio National Guard. Four students were killed and nine others wounded]

It was the time of the protests for the Vietnam War, because the Vietnam War initially was like, okay, we're in this conflict. And then when the casualties started rising in '67 and '68, and they're realizing, "How many Americans are dying over there?" The public sentiment turned after the Mỹ Lai massacre—all the public sentiment turned—and it was

like, oh my God, this is a horrible thing. So it was a time of protest. I was eighteen and nineteen and I was kind of a hippie kid and, as I said, protesting the Vietnam War, and then my brother goes to Vietnam.

[The Mỹ Lai Massacre was the Vietnam War mass killing of between 347 and 504 unarmed civilians in South Vietnam on 16 March 1968. It was committed by U.S. Army soldiers from Company C, 1st Battalion, 20th Infantry Regiment, 11th Brigade, 23rd Infantry Division (Americal). Victims included men, women, children, and infants]

TS: Oh. Okay. Did he come back?

BD: He did come back. He went in 19—he got out of high school in 1966. He knew—his draft number was fairly high so he just went down and joined the army.

[From 1940 until 1973, both during peacetime and periods of conflict, men were drafted to fill vacancies in the U.S. Armed Forces that could not be filled through voluntary means]

TS: Oh, okay. So he enlisted then.

BD: Yes. So instead of being an infantryman in the army he was a generator operator and he got deployed in '67, '68. It's a year deployment to the war, and they said, "If you extend—"I think it was another five or six months—"we'll let you out of the army when you get back," so he did and he made it back. And he didn't talk about it for twenty-five years.

TS: He was there when Tet [Offensive] happened, then?

[The Tet Offensive was one of the largest military campaigns of the Vietnam War, launched on 30 January 1968, by forces of the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese People's Army of Vietnam against the forces of the South Vietnamese Army of the Republic of Vietnam, the United States Armed Forces, and their allies. It was a campaign of surprise attacks against military and civilian command and control centers throughout South Vietnam]

BD: Yes, he was there when Tet happened.

TS: He did talk about it later, though?

BD: He talked about it when I got back from the Gulf War.

TS: Oh, he did? Okay.

BD: When I got back from the Gulf War it slowly started—we started talking about—

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: Isn't that interesting how that triggered, maybe, like, kind of a bond?

BD: Yes, exactly. But I remember the day he came home. I was fifteen years old when he went. And the day he came home he surp—he didn't tell anybody. He surprised everybody. He showed up and no one was home. [chuckles]

TS: Oh no.

BD: He gets back to the house—so he goes across the street to our cousins, because Donatos lived up and down the street—to Cousin Zeke, and he gets home and he walks in and—when everybody got home—he walked in and said, "Hi, Mom." And my mother almost fell on the floor. And all the kids started crying. We all started crying. It was a very emotional moment.

TS: Sure.

BD: And so, the next thing they did is my mom did a Sunday dinner and invited all the relatives and didn't tell anybody he was home. So it was really—it was—I mean, the reception for the Vietnam veterans was so poor in the American society, calling them baby killers and stuff, so at least he had this whole family unit behind him.

TS: Well, you kind of touch a little bit on the complexity of that time. You say you're like a hippie. Did you protest, too, at all?

BD: Oh, a few little protests, but I think it was kind of like you go with the wave, because obviously I wasn't quiet anymore. I kind of reverted from that quiet stage about thirteen, fourteen. There was a book called *Primal Scream* and I read that when I was young—somebody told me to read it—and that sounded exactly like me.

TS: Oh, really?

BD: You would get a personality and all of a sudden that personality just kind of splits off and you—I now am a very outgoing, secure, confident woman, where I was like a quiet little doormat before.

TS: So you said in your teens was when you switched that over?

BD: Yeah, I started when I was like thirteen or fourteen, but I was still kind of "doormatty." I grew up on a farm, and I grew up—I had a very, very, let's say, overbearing, assertive mother who I love—I love more than anything—don't get me wrong about that—and a father who was working all the time so—

TS: She had six kids to take care of.

BD: Yeah. Yeah. And so, I just let—My sisters used to battle and battle. One was a year younger and one is a year older. They used to battle each other and I used to sit there and cry because I couldn't stand that they were doing that. So yeah. My personality turned.

TS: Do you remember why?

BD: I don't remember why. I don't know what was bringing me out of my shell. I don't know if it was high school and the peer—luckily, we didn't have the peer pressure I think kids have today. Today—You still had some. You still had—In our schools, what I think is really significant is they divided the kids by A, B, C, and D. So say you're in ninth grade. You have the A class, B class, C class, and you rotate differently. We didn't have any choices in courses. You took English, history, the New York state requirements. But what was significant about the division is the A class were the smartest kids. The B class was the next smartest. The D class are the ones that they encouraged to take [Wood] Shop and Home Ec [Economics]. And when you look at it now it's like, "Really? You divided—You basically trapped[?] those kids and told them that as a group of kids they were not as smart as that first group of kids."

TS: Right. Gave them their expectations, either high or low.

BD: Yes. That's how they divided it, by how you learned.

TS: When you're in high school, are you thinking about going into nursing then, or did it come a little bit later?

BD: Yes. I don't even remember how it came, I just thought that I needed to do something with my life. At least, I was at that stage in my life that says, "What am I going to do with my life?" So I think—My aunt Rose was a—she was a really, really good mentor for me as far as that. I said, "Well, she went to Ellis Hospital School of Nursing," because back then the nurses—the schools for RNs [registered nurse] were—a lot of them were three year schools. They were hospital-based. You had to live there and you paid one set fee and they provided you—you got fed and you got—even if I lived only fifteen miles away. So I—

TS: Where was this school at?

BD: It was in Schenectady, New York. So Schenectady has the Tri-Cities area—Albany, Schenectady, and Troy—so it was in Schenectady. And I applied to it and I don't know how I got in because my grades in school were not that great, but I did get in. Thank God

they didn't want straight—and I was in the A class, I was not a straight A student, but I did get in. And I struggled through anatomy and physiology and stuff, but I graduated okay and it was kind of cool. It was my first time away from home.

TS: So you stayed, like, on the campus?

BD: We had dorms with house mothers.

TS" Dorms. Oh. So you had a curfew?

BD: Oh yeah.

TS: No boys in the—

BD: Oh, absolutely not. Absolutely—we had a ten o'clock curfew during the week, a twelve o'clock curfew—if you didn't get in by 12:00 during the weekend you couldn't get back in till 6:00 in the morning. Right down the street was a men's college, so you know what happened. [chuckles] And not because we were doing hanky panky, but you know back in those days people went out all night. You're twenty years old, you went out all night and you hung around and hung around and just did whatever you did.

TS: What kinds of things did you do for fun there?

BD: So it was nice. It was kind of a bonding experience for me. It was the first time I'd been away from home. A funny story is when we came in the first day—back then we all wore mini-skirts, right? We're all little people and we wore mini-skirts. So you signed in with your house mother, and I was going upstairs and the person who ended up being my roommate, she says, "I saw this girl going upstairs with this tiny mini-skirt and I said, "God, I hope that's not my roommate." And it ended up she was my roommate. [both chuckle]

TS: So that was her or you?

BD: That was her. She said it about me. She said she saw this little mini-skirt going and she hoped it wasn't her roommate. And I was her roommate. She was a judge's daughter. But we ended up being really good friends, and we're still friends to this day.

TS: Now, did you go out to the movies?

BD: Yeah. Oh yeah, yeah. We went to the movies, we'd go shopping, we'd go to the local bar down the street, and drinking age was eighteen but I didn't drink, so I really didn't drink.

TS: No?

BD: No, I didn't.

TS: Any movie stars or celebrities that you guys were fixated on?

BD: Well, back then you remember music-wise—I mean, the Beatles came out when we were teenagers. I mean, the Beatles were huge. And Paul Revere and the Raiders, and the Rolling Stones. So now the people say, "I love the Rolling Stones," and we're thinking, "That's our era." [both chuckle] We grew up—We grew up then. I don't—I've never been a movie star person; never have been, and never been—thought that, "Oh, So-and-so is just so great." I would say, "Well, So-and -so is a good actor." Like Yul Brenner; I thought he was a great actor, but—So I've never been, like, movie-struck in my life.

TS: Right. But the music you were.

BD: But I did a lot of artwork.

TS: Oh, you did?

BD: I was an art person.

TS: What kind of art did you do?

BD: I did a lot of drawing, and I did pastels just in the time I had, which wasn't a lot of time. One of my friends in school, she played the guitar, so we would sit out there like little hippies and play guitar and try to sing and—because I've always liked music and the arts. Always, always, always. I love to dance so sometimes we'd go out to little clubs and we'd go dancing.

TS: Very nice. What year did you graduate from nursing school?

BD: Nursing school? 1973.

TS: Nineteen seventy-three. Okay. What did you do after that?

BD: So I graduated from nursing school, and of course we all had to look for jobs, and I don't know why but I looked for a job and I found one in Boston. But I had to take the boards; you still had to take the nursing boards. So the suggestion was, "Since you have your first job in Boston, take your boards in Massachusetts." Because back then they weren't reciprocal licenses. So I sat for the boards, and the nursing boards back then—right now it's seventy-five questions on the test online—it was two days; eight hours for two days.

TS: Pretty grueling.

BD: It was grueling. You had to take all these sections and I did—I did pretty well; I did pretty well. Obviously, I got my license. So I got my license in Massachusetts. You work as an interim permit nurse and I worked at University—

TS: An intern?

BD: They call them an interim permit, meaning you've taken your boards but you haven't found out yet.

TS: I see.

BD: And then you can work as an RN, and then once you get your license you're okay. So I worked at University Hospital in Boston, and my mother and my aunt Marie moved me out there with what little furniture they could find. I lived in an apartment in a place called Huntingdon and Hemenway, which is down in South Boston. It was—University Hospital is right next to Boston City Hospital, and it was my first time in a big city. And when people ask, "Well, how did you end up there?" Well, who knows? I always get these ideas in my head and I think it was time. That was the first time I started, kind of, getting myself off the farm. In my life, I can't picture myself staying on the farm.

TS: You could or could not?

BD: Could not.

TS: Could not.

BD: My whole life. I mean, I—

TS: Wanted to find a way to get out?

BD: Yeah, I wanted to do something else. Not because I didn't love where I lived, I did. But I wanted to do something with my life. I just didn't—wasn't sure what yet. So I worked in Boston. I worked on a neurology ward, and we wore the white uniforms. Lucky we didn't have to wear caps—well, we wore caps in nursing school but in Boston we did not have to wear the caps.

TS: Really? You didn't?

BD: But we still wore white uniforms. And so, I got my first—first glimpse of what nursing was like. And it was okay. It was fine. Of course, it was fun. I was in the city and I met—I met my neighbors, I went there. I met my neighbors and they were two gay guys and so I made friends with them, and I started dating there and—

TS: How was it different for you culturally to go from rural farm—

BD: It was really different for me.

TS: What was it that was difficult?

BD: I think it was hard because I have a tendency to go places and I don't know anybody, so that was really difficult at first. And then the first day—the first few days I cry—you cry

and say, "Why did I do this? I don't know anybody. It's kind of scary." It's kind of scary because of all the traffic and the noise and is somebody going to break into your place? And you never—on the farm we didn't even lock the house. I mean, it's like we didn't worry about that stuff. So—And then finding your way around, driving in the big city with all the traffic. But I learned to do—I took a little—they have a subway system and a streetcar system so I took the streetcar a lot of places, and I found the Italian end and learned—and the farmer's market—and so it took a while. I lived there for about a year and then I decided I was done with there.

TS: Why?

BD: It was a lot of personal reasons.

TS: Okay.

BD: It was—I got involved with somebody I should not have got involved with and it was just really painful and I just said, "I'm just going to go."

My brothers lived in Florida so I'm thinking, "Okay, that might be kind of cool to go to Florida." So I packed up my little 1966 Ford—it was an old state trooper car—and I drove to Florida. I got a job; this really kind of mundane job on a night shift in a small hospital in Florida.

TS: What town were you in?

BD: It was in Fort Lauderdale.

TS: Okay.

BD: And so, I lived in this apartment down there, and then I just finally learned after a few months that I hated Florida. I didn't like anything about it. It's buggy, it's muggy, it's just flat, it's ugly. [both chuckle] It's just Florida wasn't for me. And my brothers were there and that was kind of cool, but they had their own lives.

And so, I'm sitting on the night shift one night, and this is about—we're talking, like, 1974 now. I'm sitting on the night shift in this little hospital and I'm thinking to myself, "There's got to be more to life than this." I said, "This just isn't really what I want to do." So where I got the idea—I have a long family history in the navy. My father was in the navy '46 to '48. My Uncle Sam was in the invasion of Sicily in the navy, on an LST [Landing Ship, Tank; a navy vessel designed to support amphibious landing operations]. My Uncle Andy was on the USS *West Virginia* when it got bombed at Pearl Harbor. He survived it.

TS: Oh, wow.

BD: Yeah, he survived. He since died of other causes. So we have a long naval history, and I remember thinking, "I'm going to join the navy or the air force." I didn't know anything about the air force. Back then, of course, there's no Internet or anything, so I found a

phone book, I found a navy recruiter, walked in and said, "I'm a nurse. Do you have navy nurses?"

"Oh yeah, yeah, we have them," and there I was. I signed up in the navy.

TS: Even though you're thinking about the air force, did you just go to the navy recruiter and that was it?

BD: Yeah, that's kind of the only one I could find right then. For some reason I knew I didn't want to go in the army. And I knew they didn't have nurses in the Marine Corps because they were in the [U.S.] Navy.

TS: Did you talk to anybody else about—You just kind of decided?

BD: No. My brother was in the army during Vietnam, and I can't remember if we were in touch then, because you know how people kind of go out of touch, in touch. So I talked to the navy recruiter. I don't even remember what he said, but I just said, "I'm in."

TS: You said you signed up and you went back to Albany?

BD: I went to Albany. I told them I was from there, I was probably going to go back there, so he said, "Yeah, go back there," because they had to process the paperwork. And I went back there, and I have pictures of me raising my hand.

TS: Oh, you do?

BD: I have those pictures.

TS: I'll have to get one of those.

BD: Yeah, I'll send you one. It was great. I have plaid pants on.

TS: Oh, do you?

BD: Plaid pants. [chuckles] I have my initial orders.

TS: Oh, nice. Okay. Well, we have to have, like, a little record of some of that.

BD: I will send you all that.

TS: At this time that you're out on your own and making these decisions, it's also when the women's movement is percolating and pretty strong, really, in 1972, just before you graduated, with the ERA [Equal Rights Amendment]. Do you think that had an influence on any way of thinking that you had about what you could do or your limitations or opportunities?

[The Equal Rights Amendment was a proposed amendment to the United States Constitution designed to guarantee equal rights for women. In 1972, it passed both houses of Congress and was submitted to the state legislatures for ratification. It seemed headed for quick approval until Phyllis Schlafly mobilized conservative women in opposition, arguing that the ERA would disadvantage housewives. To this day, several organizations continue to work for the adoption of the ERA]

BD: I don't really remember much about the women's movement back then. I think it was just I was coming into myself as a person, and I was growing as a person. School was the firs—nursing school was the first step because I actually was away from home and got to—even how little your decision—you don't make a lot of decisions because your books and your uniforms and all that stuff are paid for, but you had decisions about things. "Oh, I could do this, or I could go out here, or I could do this with my friends," or whatever. So you start saying, "Oh, I can have a life of my own without Mom and Dad and everybody else." And I think I was just always, I think—I don't use the term—people use the term ADD [attention deficit disorder]—I've always felt like a little—all these ideas pop in my head and I just follow them. Sounds like a good idea, no reason not to do it, right? And that's what the military was; the bright idea came in my head, "I think the military might be really good for me." And I don't know why it was going to be good for me.

TS: Well, you saw that you had this history in your family.

BD: Yes, a very strong history.

TS: And they probably talked about it in prideful ways.

BD: Yeah, my father never really said much about it, but I have since interviewed my father and so we have the story online. And of course, my brother was not the best experience because that was a horrible war and it was perceived horribly by the American public. But I did at least have the inner circle of—that he served his country. And I thought that was, wow, what a cool thing—what a cool thing to do.

So I joined the navy. I went back to Albany, New York. I remember raising my hand, and it being one of the proudest days of my life when I raised my hand. And I still didn't, I don't think, understand the full significance of it.

TS: Of what you were doing.

BD: Of what I was doing. But then soon after I signed—I raised my hand and they said "Okay. You have a date to go to Naval Education [and] Training Center in Newport, Rhode Island."

TS: And so, you're all ready for it.

BD: Yes.

TS: Now, what about your family and friends? What did they think?

BD: Oh, my mother thought it was a great idea. My father thought it was a great idea. I mean, I think they thought it was a great idea because there were no wars going on then, so—Historically—

TS: Well, there was a war going on.

BD: Well, Vietnam was just ending—just ending. So it was '74, the bulk of Vietnam was essentially done. They stopped giving out the National Defense [Service] Medal in October of '74, and the last of the troops went out in April of 1975. That's the last of the—lift went out in April of '75.

[Operation Babylift was the name given to the mass evacuation of children from South Vietnam to the United States and other countries (including Australia, France, West Germany, and Canada) at the end of the Vietnam War]

TS: So that's just when you were coming in right there.

BD: Yes, just when I was coming in.

TS: Right. Let's talk about some of the places you went. Tell me a little bit about your initial training. Do you remember anything from that?

BD: Yeah. Oh gosh, yes. [chuckles] Naval Education and Training Center was a center in Newport, Rhode Island. It was during the winter so it was a little cool down there. And our class was a mix of lawyers and nurses. So what they did is—We didn't go to Officer Candidate School because we weren't line officers. In the navy the specialty officers are called staff officers. So we went to—went with just staff officers; so lawyers and nurses. And of course that's always fun. You've got a bunch of—At that time we had two male nurses and a bunch of female nurses and a bunch of lawyers together. And so, we all lived on the same floor—on the same corridor—and they put two to a room.

TS: It was mixed; co-ed? I mean, not in the room, but on the floor.

BD: Yeah, it was co-ed. It was co-ed. So we obviously learned—we learned naval history, we learned how to wear our uniforms and it was a very proud day when we put on those uniforms; a very proud day. And we learned—obviously learned the ranks. And the funnest part is we learned to march. And guess who taught us to march? A Marine Corps gunny [gunnery] sergeant. And Marine Corps gunny sergeants sit next to God in the Marine Corps. So a Marine Corps gunny sergeant has all these nurses—all these Gomer Pyle [American television character] nurses and lawyers, trying to teach us how to keep a good formation and how to march. And they broke us into little sections—little squads

there, and our squad was the worst. But at the end we won the trophy for being the most improved. Most improved.

TS: Very good.

BD: But when they talk about sexual harassment in the military—and we never really thought much of it back then—but all the small girls would always be last because they put you by height, and the gunny would be behind us and say, "I want to go upstairs with you and [take you?]." Well, we think he was probably just kidding, but still that's stuff they did back then that they would never touch these days.

And then we had to stand watch in our barrack room[?] in the evening. So two people had to be at the watch desk and I think sometimes we didn't take it as seriously because we were staff corps officers. So we'd be in our dress uniforms and I'd have my green fuzzy slippers on. And the watch commander would come around and say—and you'd have to stick your feet under the thing so they didn't see. And when it was snowing outside—when people had to shovel snow—the Officer Candidate Schools were below us, they had to shovel the snow and we didn't have to, so they had some resentment with that. But it was a good learning experience. It really was.

TS: Do you think the difference was that because you're in a profession and then the other ones are going into—

BD: The line corps.

TS: Right, the line corps.

BD: In the navy they call it the line corps. Yeah. Yes, that was exactly the difference. They figured back then—now I think it's probably all the same—but back then they just figured well, we're nurses so we're just going to go do nursing. We're not going to go out there in the field, we're not going to—all this other stuff. And the same thing with the attorneys. They're going into the JAG [Judge Advocate General] Corps.

TS: Now, were they mostly men going in the JAG Corps?

BD: There was not a woman in the JAG Corps; they were all men.

TS: They were all men.

BD: And we wanted to do things like—they always inspected our rooms—we had room inspections of course and you had to stand, the two of you, at your door. And we wanted to mix it up and put male/female at the door, but we figured, "Nah, they will probably—"

TS: Going a little too far?

BD: Yeah, a little. And of course, you couldn't drink, and of course the lawyers always had, like, a fifth of bourbon or something and they'd hide it [in their drawers?] [chuckles] The

usual stuff people do. And not because I really drank or anything, but we played practical—but in class we were serious. We learned a lot. We had a class leader, Lieutenant Di Giacomo[?], I remember that. And what the good thing at the end of it —I think it was only six weeks—that we got our choice of duty stations.

TS: Oh, you got your choice?

BD: You had to put—you had three choices and you got—you would always get one of them.

TS: What were your choices that you put down?

BD: Well, being young and adventurous—so I grew up on the east coast and I knew everything—I mean, I'd been there so I said, "I'm going to pick three choices in California," because I started branching out and thinking I want to see the world. I joined the military, I want to see the world. So I picked, I think it was, Camp Pendleton, Oakland, and San Diego, and I got the Marine Corps Base at Camp Pendleton.

TS: Oh, okay.

BD: So now I'm thinking, "I don't know much about the Marines, but this is going to be kind of interesting." After the six weeks I got assigned to Marine Corps Base, so I actually got on an airplane.

TS: Was that the first time, then?

BD: Yes. My first time on an airplane.

TS: How was that?

BD: It was fine. It was fine. And I went—but here I am again, going to a place where I knew absolutely no one. But you're in the military so you figure military—there's no strangers in the military world and the veteran world.

So I went out to Camp Pendleton and I stayed in the officers' quarters. The officers' quarters were right on the beach at Camp Pendleton and that was pretty cool. So it was like a little room in the officers' quarters, and so there I was. I was assigned to Naval Regional Medical Center Camp Pendleton. Significant that there they had the old World War II barracks-type hospital that had just closed, and so I started in the brand new facility.

TS: Oh, nice.

BD: For what was brand new in 1975. And I was assigned to—I think it was a medical surgical ward. I don't remember—it's like everyday thing is working in the military system that your patients there would not be patients in regular hospitals, meaning some of the patients—they had a broken arm so they couldn't go back to the barracks at that time—at that time they couldn't go back to the barracks so they keep them as walking

patients in the hospital, ambulatory patients. But they would have a job; like, they would—say, if they could push somebody to X-ray, they can help pass out the food trays. So they always had a job if they weren't sick that they had to stay in bed.

TS: Oh, okay.

BD: But what's really significant about that deployment is when the—when the refugees started leaving Vietnam. So this was in '75, remember the whole refugee airlift came out and they were going to the Philippines, they were going to Guam and to wherever. And then they landed in Camp Pendleton, California.

[On 29 April 1975, 851 refugees from South Vietnam arrived at United States Marine Corps Camp Pendleton, California. At its peak in the summer of 1975, nearly 20,000 Vietnamese refugees were housed in eight different camps around Camp Pendleton]

TS: Did they?

BD: They did.

TS: So how were you affected by that?

BD: They had a huge refugee camp—huge refugee camp—

TS: On the base?

BD: —on Camp Pendleton. Camp Pendleton, I mean it's ten miles—it's—I mean—

TS: Huge.

BD: It's a zillion acres out there. So they had a huge refugee camp of Vietnamese refugees, which is interesting because you also had a lot of marines that fought in Vietnam, so the dynamics were very interesting. We had patients—We had patients that were Vietnam veterans that had signs on the end of their bed that said, "Do not touch. Call my name first." So I got to see the post-Vietnam—How did the refugees affect us? We actually opened two floors for just the Vietnamese patients, and we had to get interpreters and Vietnamese patients, because there was a lot of TB [tuberculosis]. So we had one basically infectious disease ward, where we were in our masks the whole time. So I worked on a couple of those wards.

TS: Oh, did you?

BD: Yeah. Yeah. And bad things—I remember a lady having a—we found her bleeding out into the bathroom. She had a just horrible miscarriage. And I remember a lot of the TB patients—I remember not being able to communicate. But everybody was very nice, the

patients were great. They were grateful to be there and we were happy to take care of them.

Also in the two year tour I did there, I remember I saw my first young sailor die. And it was—he put his light on [?] and I walked in as a brand new twenty-two year old nurse. Didn't know a lot about reality, and he was looking really—I still see his face; I still see his face. He was panicking and he was really short of breath and he says, "I feel like I'm going to die," and he died right in front of me. And so, we tried to resuscitate him, but he had had knee surgery. Back then there weren't filters anything and he threw a big clot from his knee surgery into his lungs and he just died right there in front of me. And it was just—it was just so devastating. Sorry. So devastating for me as a young nurse to see a thirty-six year old look at you and say, "I think I'm going to die," and he did, right in front of me, so.

TS: And you couldn't do anything to help him.

BD: We couldn't do anything to help him. I mean, we did CPR [cardiopulmonary resuscitation], and I did the bag, and the doctor told me later, "You did a really good job," because they knew you were new nurses.

And my supervisor—I'll never forget, she had such a big effect on my life—Commander Lois G. Butler. I loved Lois G. Butler. She would come in and say, banging her fist on the desk, "My nurses are used and abused!" And she would just get in your face. But you know what? She was a great force in my navy life. I mean, she was just—she would yell and grouch and stuff, but she really loved her nurses and she would really stand behind you 100%.

TS: She had really strict standards but she had your back too.

BD: Yes. Absolutely. And you know in the—sometimes in the military life people—especially when they're trying to progress in rank, there are people who you do have to watch your back for, and she was not one of them. I mean, she was very supportive after that. She knew how upset I was, and some of the corpsmen were, and she was very supportive and kind of gave you her way of a pat on the back, and her way of trying to support you through something that she knew was traumatic. So yeah, there was a lot of stuff: the Vietnamese refugees and—

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: So when you talked—

BD: That was—

TS: Go ahead. I'm sorry.

BD: I'm sorry. What I was going to say is that was my first—one of my very first exposure to cultures—different cultures.

TS: Was with the Vietnamese?

BD: Yeah, it was with the Vietnamese refugees. Because I grew up on a farm and, really, we had Italians and a lot of them married Irishmen, but really it—

TS: I don't know. I actually think your first experience with culture was when you went to Boston. [chuckles]

BD: Yeah, you're right, it was. But still, it was like—really there wasn't a lot of Asian culture there and there wasn't—Boston had a big Italian section, big Irish—and of course what do we gravitate towards is what we know. But as far as Asian culture, yeah, Asian culture was very, very different for me. It's something the military does that a lot of professions don't do; that you get a broad range of exposure to not only cultures of overseas countries but cultures in the United States. People from the South, people from the North, people—

TS: Yeah, that's an interesting, I think, idea, that many of the women I've interviewed have talked about; is how you have to figure out how to get along with people from different regions. But also, people with different personalities who have different ways about doing things, and you figure it out. When you were talking about the men in the beds that had the "say my name before you touch me," do you think that was PTSD-related?

BD: Yes. Absolutely. But did they talk much about PTSD back then? Not at all. But it was. I mean, if you touched them they would have probably came up and slugged you, or beat you, or knocked you to the ground. But yeah, we had a lot of them that just said, "Say my name or call my name, but do not touch me."

TS: Now, what are you thinking about your decision to join the navy nurse corps?

BD: I thought it was great. I felt like I had a sense of belonging, I had a sense of purpose, and I was doing something greater than myself.

TS: And you felt that at that time?

BD: Yes. Yes, I mean, I was so proud the day I put on that uniform when I was in the navy and I was inducted and I got that uniform, I would wear it around at home and go see all my friends. I was just really proud.

TS: Yeah. Now, did you have a sense of how long you thought you might do it?

BD: No. Well, my commitment was—back then—so technically I was still in the navy reserves—so back then your commitment was a two and four contract. You had two years of active duty, four years inactive. So when your two years came—and Pendleton was my two years—when your two years came you had to request to stay.

TS: Okay. And did you?

BD: I did request to stay. And by the way, I got married in there.

TS: Oh, you did? At Camp Pendleton?

BD: I got married. I met a navy corpsman, and like I said, I was still pretty young and naïve, and at that time I had moved from the officers' quarters out into town. We rented a house with two other navy nurses, and that was really interesting because we were so different in personalities. But we all dated of course. And it was really hard for officers because you're a nurse. Who else are you going to date? Most of the doctors were married, so you had some of the brains, but you also had the corpsmen. So back then it wasn't really acceptable for the officers to date the enlisted. So a lot of us kept it really quiet. Nobody really knew.

I ended up marrying a guy who was an FMF [Fleet Marine Force]—field marine corpsman in Vietnam. What I didn't know is he was a closet alcoholic, because I was too young and naïve to even know that. But how would I know because he kept it really—he didn't really drink much around me. So we got married in Albany, New York in the winter, in December of 1975, and we got divorced eight months later.

TS: Oh, just eight months?

BD: Yeah. Yeah, so it was kind of a fly-by-night marriage. And he was a great guy. But I saw him again many years later at my last duty station when they sent him to alcohol rehab [rehabilitation].

TS: Yeah? You sent him?

BD: No, I didn't send him, somebody—wherever he was stationed. He was stationed in the Philippines and—

TS: Oh, so years later he was—

BD: Yeah, I saw him years—years later. I mean, he was an alcoholic in 1975.

TS: So like twenty-some years?

BD: Yes. He didn't go to rehab till '78 or '79, I think it was. Yeah.

TS: You talked a little bit about where you lived, but you lived off post, on post?

BD: I originally—We started on post because I was a brand new nurse in the navy. We started on post and then eventually—eventually, I can't—I don't even remember what the time span is. I met a couple of other nurses and we all decided we wanted to live off post.

TS: Okay, so you, kind of, all went together.

BD: Yeah, the three of us went together.

TS: Pooled your money?

BD: Yeah, we pooled our money and we rented a house. And I know it was toward the end because I ended up leaving because I was getting orders to Okinawa [Japan].

TS: Okay. Now, did you put in for Okinawa?

BD: Yeah, it was time for a short tour somewhere so—I can't remember if I had asked for Okinawa—yeah, I did. I think I asked—It was three choices again and I can't remember if I had picked the Philippines, Okinawa—but they wanted you, since you were on the West Coast, to go that direction.

TS: Oh, okay.

BD: Like, instead of asking for somewhere in Germany or France or whatever. So I got Okinawa and that was like [chuckles]—it was like the plane ride—I remember the plane ride. You went from California to Alaska to Iwakuni to Okinawa, and eventually twenty-four hours later, or more, you were there. And I was on a plane full of marines.

TS: Oh, you were?

BD: I was on a plane full of marines. I was, I think, the one only navy nurse on the plane.

TS: Oh, yeah. Now, what kind of plane were you flying on?

BD: It was one of those, like, commercial Flying Tigers that they transported out to the military troops, and so it was comfortable, it was an airline seat, but we were all crowded. I just remember all the young marines kind of looked out for me, made sure that I got out everywhere, and [laughs] they were very nice, very respectful.

TS: Yeah?

BD: Yeah.

TS: So when you got to Okinawa, how was that for you?

BD: My first overseas tour, so they gave you a sponsor, and my sponsor was Kathy Holbert[?] who—Kathy Holbert who was a captain in the U.S. Army, because again, transitioning—the hospital was an army hospital and the army hospital was transitioning to the U.S. Naval Regional Medical Center in Okinawa, so I was a plank—a planker, and I have that certificate.

TS: What does planker mean?

BD: Basically, it's you were the first crew in the new navy hospital.

TS: Oh, okay.

BD: So it wasn't a new hospital, it's just we transformed from the army, so the army was all leaving and the navy was taking over that place.

TS: Why did they do that, do you know?

BD: I think because the army presence on Okinawa—my understanding, I think, is because post-Vietnam that was a—like a wayside stop.

TS: I see. Drawing down.

BD: That there wasn't a lot of army presence there anymore. There was a lot of Marine Corps presence. There was a huge air force base, but Kadena Air Base only had clinics, so the navy—the army hospital, now the navy hospital, basically served the army. I mean, what army was left, the Marine Corps and the air force.

TS: How was that?

BD: We lived in little houses. In the back there were, like, little houses that had—it was really nice. They had two bedrooms at either end, and then you had a mutual living room and a kitchen, and then they just threw you in with whoever was available.

TS: This was on the base?

BD: Yeah, this was on the base. The hospital was kind of like in the center and then on the back they had little housing things.

TS: Is that like BOQ [bachelor officer quarters] quarters?

BD: Yeah, they were like BOQ quarters. Yeah, because I think there was a high rise for the enlisted, so the BOQ, we had, like, little houses. And we all got a mama san [older Asian women]. And the mama san was the person that helped clean your house, and you paid her whatever amount of yens back then. I remember I brought my car from California—

TS: Did you really?

BD: —because back then you could do it. I had a Toyota. But you had to—they had no unleaded gas so I had to take the catalytic converter off of it. And California has very strict rules. And then you had to take your mirrors and put them on the front fenders of your car.

TS: Instead of on the side?

BD: Yes, instead of on the side all your mirrors had to go up on the front fenders, which is really interesting. [chuckles] And I still have my license plate from Okinawa.

TS: Oh, do you?

BD: I do have it.

TS: Did you drive around a lot?

BD: I did drive around, because they were on the same side of the road until the end of my deployment when they decided to change—switch roads back. So instead of driving on the right side, one day we all drove on the left side. And my roommate goes, "Let's go out and drive."

And I'm like, "Are you crazy?"

TS: Not today, right?

BD: Well, we did.

TS: Oh, you did?

BD: Yeah, it was quite an adventure. So Okinawa was an adventure because it was my first overseas tour and they give you—they give you little lessons and little cards and—Okinawa laws and that kind of stuff, especially driving laws on base, off base. There's no right turns on red, and there's no—anything like that. I did get stopped once making a right turn on red because I kind of forgot, and I got stopped by the Japanese police who said, "Ricense prease."

And I said, "Excuse me?"

And he said, "Ricense prease." And I got a—I can't remember—it was a lot of yen. It was like thirty-five thousand yen or something like that, which was like a couple hundred bucks or a hundred bucks or something.

TS: Did you have to go to court?

BD: I had to go to the Japanese bank—no, no court. I just had to go to the Japanese bank and pay it.

TS: You had to go to the bank?

BD: Yeah, that's where you paid it there.

TS: Did you pay it right then?

BD: I paid it as soon as I got the ticket and whatever it is. Yeah, I got the money and I went and paid it.

TS: Well, that's interesting.

BD: Yes. So what did we do on Okinawa? So Kadena Air Base had a club on Friday nights, and of course all the nurses went there with all the air force, and we had a joke about the club. We had a joke about how many seconds would it take—does it take from the minute you hit the door to somebody either asking you to buy—have a drink or ask you to dance, and one day it was, like, four seconds.

TS: [chuckles]

BD: Because women were at a premium on Okinawa. So you have all these young nurses, and you have all these airmen and officers and pilots and marines, and that kind of stuff. So we had fun. We'd go and dance and have a good time and meet people to date, and that kind of stuff.

TS: Well, what was that like? I mean, was it like a fishbowl kind of environment?

BD: Oh yes. Definitely. Definitely, it was a fishbowl. And back then there was no talk about sexual harassment or that kind of stuff. But did it occur? Oh, of course it occurred. I mean, you have nurses and pilots and you have nurses and marines. And when I say sexual—"Hey, baby," making comments, making quips about the way you look or the way you dance or—and we just all shined it on [idiom meaning to reject or ignore] because that's—

TS: Well, how did you handle it personally?

BD: I just—we just figured that's the way—I just figured that's the way life was. There was nothing we could do about it and if you didn't like—if they said something you didn't like I would say something. But I still wasn't quite the person I am today, but I would say something. I'd say, "You know what, dude? You just need to stop."

TS: Right. Well, what would you do differently today, I wonder?

BD: I would just say, "What are you? Five years old?" That's what I would—I would say, "What are you? Five years old? This is 2015," because there's been some incidents actually since I've been in North Carolina. But we had—they had a rail, so when you walked in there was like an upper deck—they had a rail and all the guys were leaning. We called that Vulture Alley. [chuckles]

TS: You had to walk through the gauntlet of—

BD: Yes. It was like you walked down here to get up to the thing and all the guys would be leaning—we called it Vulture Alley; that's what we called it. [laughs]

TS: But you had a lot of fun too.

BD: Yes, we had a lot of fun. I mean, it was nice. I dated—I dated a marine—a marine from the northern area—because there was Camp Hansen up there, and then there was the northern area, they called it, where supposedly marines bit the heads off snakes and that kind of stuff. Basically, it was a tactical training area, so.

But we got to—I mean some bad—some interesting things that happened in my medical career is we got a whole slew of marines in from Mindanao, over near the Philip—over in the Philippines—one of the islands in the Philippines—and they all had malaria. Something you would never see in civilian life. And I remember having a whole ward full of them. They were so sick, because everything comes out of every end; every end. They throw up, they do other things, and I remember lining the glass IV [intravenous] bottles. Lining them. I mean, just lines and lines of them, because we gave them a full bottle every hour, with—full of vitamins and stuff we used to mix ourselves, and just some really, really sick guys. Really sick guys.

TS: How long did it take them to recover from that?

BD: It takes them weeks; weeks and weeks to recover. And they were in—I don't know how long—but remember I said they do keep people in longer in the military because you can't send them back—sick people back to their barracks, especially overseas.

I remember somebody's wife—it was a dependent wife—we didn't have a lot of dependent wives—she had a baby and she got something called DIC, which is a bleeding disorder. And she died, right after her baby, and that was sad.

[Disseminated Intravascular Coagulation (DIC) is a condition in which small blood clots form throughout the bloodstream, blocking small blood vessels. The increased clotting depletes the platelets and clotting factors needed to control bleeding, causing excessive bleeding]

One of our nurses—a [Boeing Vertol] CH-46 [Sea Knight helicopter] crashed right off the beach—beachhead—and they were unconscious and they drowned. So one of her boyfriends drowned.

There was a lot of significant things, emotional things, that went on when there—while we were there. And in medicine there's always a lot of—But we grow as nurses and we grow as people. And you don't get hardened to it ever. Ever. But you learn how to deal with it a little better. So I was still young, learning to deal with stuff like that.

I got to take trips. The air force had a—like, an army wives travel thing, so I got to—I went on an air force trip, and I remember it was pretty cheap. And we went to Hong Kong, Singapore, and Bangkok. So there was a bunch of nurses on there, and a bunch of pilots on there, and air force people. And the group was great. We had a great group. We all got along great and I got to see Hong Kong, Singapore, and Bangkok.

TS: Let me have you go back a second to when you were talking about, like, you're learning to deal with it. What kind of coping skills do you think you picked up along the way?

BD: You int—it's unfortunate but you internalize a lot. You internalize. You just say—You just say, "I can deal with this, and it's just a fact of life, and it's just—" For me it was always, "Just keep busy." For me it was always—I always found something to do. And guess what I found to do there?

TS: I don't know.

BD: I skydived.

TS: Did you really?

BD: I learned to jump out of airplanes there. It turns out my sponsor, Kathy Holbert, was a female skydiver there, so I looked and I said, "Well this sounds like kind of fun."

So we—Back in the day we jumped out of the Marine Corps SAR birds, search and rescue; helicopters that were just kind of hanging out. And of course, if they got a call they would disappear. So I learned the old static line jumping; the military jumping with a big T-10 parachute. It was run by a Marine Corps gunny sergeant, again. And I learned how to skydive in Okinawa. And so, the third jump—first jump, static line fine, second, fine, third jump I got caught in a high wind. At the time, I was the only woman, I was fairly light, and evidently—I don't remember it—I remember right before I landed and then I remember waking up in the helicopter. So evidently I landed, slammed down, started getting dragged by the open parachute because it was so windy. It's an island, it's always windy. I hit a bicycle belonging to a poor little Okinawan farmer, and me and the bicycle got dragged across two fields and I was unconscious.

TS: Oh, my goodness.

BD: But they said they—I guess they just stood there and watched me for a while until they figured out I wasn't—finally I wasn't going to get up. [chuckles] So the marines finally came and got me, and the next thing I remember is I woke up on the helicopter with the worst headache of my life.

TS: I bet.

BD: And the SAR bird was taking me to the hospital, and I got admitted—back then I had a really bad concussion and they admitted me for a week. I asked the marines when they came to see me, "Why didn't you help me?" Because they were telling me what happened.

And I said, "Well—"

They said, "Well, we didn't want to favor you because you're a woman."

I said, "Well, did it occur to you after the second field that maybe I couldn't get up?"

"Yeah, we finally figured that out."

But my helmet—luckily, we wore a motorcycle helmet—my helmet was on sideways. And they said, "Well, we thought you were like *The Exorcist* [1970s horror film] and your neck was like all twisted around." [both chuckle] It was just kind of funny.

So I got all cured from that and then I said I'm going back to skydiving, because you know what? You've got to get back on that horse if you want to do it. So the next time I went, when the helicopter went around, he said "Go," I didn't go. I just froze on the tail. So the gunny was pretty cool. He said, "Okay. We'll go around again." He said, "Go." And then he says, "If you're not going to go, don't get on that tail gate."

So I went, and I was scared, until somewhere around my tenth jump, all of a sudden the revelation hit me, the adrenaline rush hit me, and I said, "This is awesome." And I finally got off into free fall. And I made thirty-three jumps on the island of Okinawa.

TS: Wow. That's terrific. I'm not so sure I could have jumped back out again after being—

BD: It was tough. It was really tough, because all you could think about was how bad that headache hurt and stuff. But I just figured if I want to continue doing this—and I kind of did—that if I don't get back up now I'm never going to get back up. But I got back up, and I went into free fall, so.

TS: How many feet were you jumping from?

BD: In the United States it's 12,557 feet; it's five thousand meters. Back there it's the same thing. Usually I think we jumped from, maybe, ten thousand or less. Less from the helicopter, maybe eight thousand. Static line you can jump three thousand, because static line opens your parachute for you. Once you get into free fall—

TS: You have to open it yourself.

BD: Yeah, we have to open it ourselves. And I—We had the old, old—they call them belly warts—so your reserve was on your front and your main parachute was on your back. And of course, I continued to jump when I went to the United States, and I progressed into all the modern gear and that kind of stuff. But that was really fun. And I met—I was dating a PJ—Para rescue guy—in the air force—another enlisted guy—and I found out he was engaged to somebody back home so I broke up with him. And then I was out with another—and then I started dating another air force guy and we ended up living together for a while in California and then we broke up. But the PJ, we're still friends now. He and his wife live in Alaska and we're all still friends.

TS: Was that the main activity that you did on your off time then?

BD: Once you start skydiving it's addictive. It's adrenal—That adrenaline rush is absolutely addictive. So yeah, that was my—I still went out—went out with the gang, and I traveled on Okinawa. I did take a military hop on a Marine Corps—first time on a C-130—took a C-130 to Korea and got to visit Korea while I was there.

[Space Available Flight, more commonly referred to as Space-A travel or military hops, is a privilege afforded to military service members, their families, and service retirees. The system accommodates these passengers by letting them fill seats on Air Force air transport flights that would otherwise be left empty]

TS: Okay. How did you like that?

BD: It was great. It was great. It was like, I was all excited. I have pictures there. I have pictures of everything. I'm a pictures girl.

TS: This was in '77—

BD: I was there '77 to '78. So I—

TS: You said eighteen month tour?

BD: It was eighteen months, yeah.

TS: Okay. And so, you enjoyed it?

BD: I loved it. I wanted to stay.

TS: Why didn't you?

BD: The navy said no. They said, "Your short tour, you only get one for now."

TS: Then where did you go after that?

BD: I went to Long Beach Naval Hospital; back to California. It was—Because the fleet used to be in Long Beach. They used to have a big fleet in Long Beach. It's since been leveled and it's a shopping mall now. I went to Long Beach Naval Hospital in '77 to '78, and it was—it was getting to the point where it's like—because really all we could do was work in the hospitals. We didn't even have a lot of nurses in clinic. Certainly couldn't go with the marines. I mean, couldn't do FMF [Fleet Marine Forces] with the marines.

TS: What's that?

BD: It's fleet medicine.

TS: Okay, because you couldn't go on the ship?

BD: Well, they didn't have—the only women on ships were—they had the [USNS] *Mercy* [T-AH-19] and the [USNS] *Comfort* [T-AH-20] [both non-commissioned hospital ships]. Back then that was the only one—that was a tough assignment to get. So otherwise, no,

there was really—it was hospital. And so, I was starting to get restless again, as I do—I tend to do. And Long Beach—oh by the way, Lois Jean Butler was on Okinawa.

TS: Who was that?

BD: Remember the—the—my supervisor, Lois Jean Butler at Pendleton?

TS: Oh, Lois Jean Butler.

BD: She went to Okinawa.

TS: When you were there?

BD: Yes, I was so happy to have her there. So Long Beach Naval—I don't remember anything particularly eventful for that, except for my ex-husband showed up in alcohol rehab there. [laughs] So that was the only thing eventful to add there. It was just kind of a mundane—you go to work and—and so I started thinking about it. I just said, "I want to get out." I had still time on my commitment but I didn't have to—and then I had to figure out how to get out of active duty, and someone said, "Never resign your commission. Don't resign your commission." So we figured out I could release from active duty into inactive reserves, because I still had some time left on my commitment. So that's what I did. And I was okay with that. But then it was scary—now I have to get out in the civilian world.

TS: What was that like?

BD: It was—I worked registries, when they started having registries back then. So a registry is a company that—you work for the company and they send you to fill in needs at hospitals.

TS: Okay.

BD: Because I figured working registry is a good way for me to get to know different hospitals.

TS: To see what you liked?

BD: To see what I wanted to do. So I worked registry for a while, and I worked in the intensive care units because I was an intensive care nurse. The military sent me to critical care training in San Diego, so I was an ICU nurse. And the thing you find out about registry is they give you all the worst patients. The patients that nobody wants because they're in really bad isolation, or they're—or they're street people or homeless people, which is kind of sad but that's what happens. The people that have been in ICU for a month and everybody is sick of taking care of them, which sounds cold, but that's the way medicine goes.

So I worked a lot of ICU registries and eventually I ended up in—I ended up in a hospital in, kind of, south central LA [Los Angeles]. It was in the city of Inglewood and I

ended up as a recovery room nurse. And that was a good job. I mean, that was a fun job. It was something new and different. And then I decided—my manager was just an—she was an idiot. And we had a big problem with sexual harassment with one of the anesthesiologists. When I went to talk to him about a patient that was crashing—because that's what we did, we went to talk to them and said, "What do we do? What do we do?" He's grabbing my boobs and stuff like that. The doctor put his hands up my dress. So I told my supervisor and she just shined it on. Well, come to find out, evidently, he caressed a fifteen year old on the table and got caught. And then there was a big investigation and I guess my boss finally said, "Well, some of my nurses have problems." Well, she got relieved from her job for not reporting it, because I told them—the lawyers—I said, "We told her and she wouldn't listen to us." So I ended up in the emergency room.

TS: And this is in the '80s, right?

BD: Yes.

TS: So sexual harassment is starting to—

BD: Yes! Yes!

TS: You're starting to have terms for it.

BD: Right. Right. Exactly. And I just thought even if it didn't have the term "sexual harassment," it was wrong. It was wrong. I'm coming to you about a patient that's crashing and I need to know what are we going to do and you're grabbing body parts that you have no business grabbing.

And then I ended up in the emergency room, because I decided [I liked?] working in that department because of her, and the ER was my niche. I found my niche in medicine. ER was my niche. And it was a busy ER in south central Los Angeles. And I'm telling you, you talk about eye-opening in medicine. You talk about crack addicts that come in and they're on their hands and knees on the bed and nine months pregnant with their fifteenth pregnancy. And people coming in shot, and people coming in beat up, and people coming in just to get stuff for their kids, because they have no formula, they have nothing. And it's just—what an eye-opening. I mean—but I was in my niche. I found my niche, because it was fast-paced. I was an adrenaline junkie by then, probably because of the skydiving. I was an adrenaline junkie by then, and it was fast-moving and you had to learn to prioritize, so that was a great way to learn.

TS: Yeah.

BD: "What do I need to do first with who?"

TS: How was it different from working in the military?

BD: In the military, I mean, I didn't work in the ER there but you just don't—even their ERs, they just see everyday stuff. You don't see that—that—you don't see gunshot wounds and beatings and crack addicts and stuff in military medicine, not at least where I worked.

And then from that hospital I went—I was—I went to mobile intensive care school. Basically, it was to learn how to—how to talk with the paramedics and bring them in and give orders to the paramedics in the field. Centinela Hospital [Centinela Freeman Regional Medical Center] actually closed their base station so I moved over to a hospital a couple of miles away, Daniel Freeman [Memorial Hospital] in Inglewood and that's where I had an amazing ER career. A ten year ER career working the LA riots and—Oh, I didn't tell you I went to the LAPD [Los Angeles Police Department] Academy.

[The 1992 Los Angeles riots were a series of riots, lootings, arsons, and civil disturbances that occurred in Los Angeles, County, California in April and May 1992]

TS: No. Why did you do that?

BD: Because I needed to do one more thing.

TS: [chuckles] You had to do one more thing?

BD: Yeah. But we'll backtrack a little on that. So I was working in—I was working as an ER nurse. I was actually living with this skydiver and that eventually just didn't work out; that's another whole story. In the meantime, I kind of got the itch to go back in the military, but I had gone to Long Beach City College and I got a—I got a degree in airplane mechanics. [chuckles] And I actually got my A&P [airframe and power plant] license from the FAA [Federal Aviation Administration], so I was working on skydiving planes, because I was still skydiving. And I was making skydiving quite the—it was addictive. I did nothing else but skydive. You lived Monday through Friday to go to that drop zone [a designated area in which skydivers land].

And so, I found the Air National Guard somehow and I talked to the recruiter and I said, "I want to be an airplane mechanic." [chuckles]

So he got talking to me and then he says, "Were you ever in the military?"

"Oh yeah, I was a navy nurse."

"Well, you were an officer."

"Yeah."

"Well, you don't want to go in as enlisted."

I said, "Why not?"

"Well, we have nurses—"

"Oh no, I don't want to be a hospital nurse. I'm a hospital nurse all the time. I don't want to be a hospital nurse."

"No, we have flight nursing."

I said, "Well what's a flight nurse?"

"Well we have C-130 aircraft," blah, blah, blah.

I said, "Well let me think about it," because I really want to be [in the air force?].

So I went home and I thought about it and thought about it. So I called the recruiter and I said, "All right. I'll talk to the recruiter." So I went up to Van Nuys in the valley and I talked to the recruiter. I loved him. He talked more than I did. And I said, "Okay. I'll go in as a flight nurse." So this had to be, like '83. Yeah, '83, because now we had to get a release from the navy because I was still in the navy. Because when the six months came up—

TS: Inactive reserve?

BD: Yeah. When the six months came up for my inactive reserve I had no idea who to call to get out so I just stayed in. So I was still in inactive reserve. So the guard figured out how to do that, and so they requested a release and a transfer from the navy. It took the navy—Oh, and what I forgot to say about the navy was, I did try to get into the naval reserves as a nurse and nobody would ever call me back. I could never get a recruiter. So I said, "Well, forget about that." I was going to be—I wanted to be in the active reserves.

It took the navy eighteen months, and then they started calling me asking me if I wanted to be in the navy reserves. I said, "You had your chance. You had your chance. I tried to call and you didn't want anything to do with me so that was that. "

So in August of '84 the guard notifies me, like, on a Monday or Tuesday, he says, "You have your release. You are now in the air guard. Drill weekend is this weekend."

I'm like, "Oh my God. What do I wear?" [both chuckle] I had no idea what to—

TS: Oh, right, because you didn't have a uniform or anything.

BD: I did not. And my rank transferred and my time-in-grade [time spent at a certain pay grade or rank].

TS: Oh, good.

BD: So they counted those inactive years as time-in-grade. So I went to the LA air force station. They had a uniform store. I said, "Okay. Here it is. I'm a captain. I'm in the Air National Guard."

TS: [chuckling] "What do I wear?

BD: "What do I wear?" [both chuckle] So they got me a set of blues and that's what I wear at the first—of course everybody else had pickle suits on, the greens. And I showed up in my blues and they were fine with that. [chuckling] But I showed up in this uniform—

TS: At least you had the right color on.

BD: I had the right color on. I just said, "I'm in the—" I said, "I came from the navy. I have no idea. Tell me." So now it's like all the US's[air force lapel insignia] and all the—it's like, oh my God, there is so much stuff on this uniform.

TS: Really? I always thought there was more on the navy?

BD: No, the navy just had the stripes; that's it. The stripes and whatever ribbons you got. And I had—I had no idea I had any ribbons but I did get the Humanitarian Service ribbon for working with the Vietnamese refugees. But I had no idea until I went in the air force and they told me, "Oh, by the way, you have a ribbon."

"Oh, I didn't know that."

TS: What made you want to go into the guard then?

BD: Well, I figured I had a good career. I was—I think I was in—let me see. I went in in 1984 so yeah, I was an ER nurse by then, and so I figured I had a good nursing career but I missed the military.

TS: What did you miss about it?

BD: I missed the camaraderie. I missed the people. I missed the fact that you knew who people were by looking—You could look at their uniform and figure out where they've been, what they've done, how many years they have in, and to me that's really significant. I missed the fact that—In the civilian world the nurses are whine—the nurses are whiny. They whine about, "I didn't get my break. I didn't get my lunch. I've got too many patients. I'm too busy. And nah nah nah. I don't feel good."

It's like, "Really? Kind of stop. Just stop that." So I missed that. Because in the military you could whine, but you're not getting anywhere with it. Nobody's going to listen to you.

TS: So after a while you just stop, right?

BD: Yeah, you just stop. It's like you're going to do what you're going to do. I mean, in the navy I remember work—we worked seven days, eight hour shifts. We worked seven days of evenings, seven days of nights. And you got one weekend in between. Did anyone whine about that? No, that's just what you did. That's what you were tasked to do and you just do it.

TS: So you're working full time in the hospital in the ER, right.

BD: Yes. Yes, I was just going into the ER by then. Yeah.

TS: Okay. And then you get this job as a flight nurse.

BD: Yes. And then I had to go to flight nurse school. But it was so impacted it took me—because you couldn't fly till you—you could go on the plane but you couldn't fly, you couldn't do your job.

TS: Till you get certified.

BD: Yeah. Yeah. So flight nurse—

TS: You said, "What do you mean? I jumped out of planes!"

BD: Yeah, I jump out of planes. That's what they told me, when I first joined, they found that out they said, "You know what? You've got to stay in this plane."

TS: [chuckles]

BD: But what was really funny is I was so used to jumping out of planes, I didn't land in planes, and I was scared. When I took up—they used to laugh at me.

TS: Interesting.

BD: The enlisted guys especially. They used to laugh at me. They said, "You had—" and I didn't realize I was doing it—the Evans seats, you know the canvas [side-by-side] seats, and the netting behind us—they said, "You had a death grip on those nettings. Every time we landed you'd go like this, you'd do a sign of the cross and grab that thing," because I was used to getting out.

TS: You had a different exit.

BD: I landed on my size five feet. I was used to getting out. But before I joined the guard I organized a women's world record in skydiving in 1981. So we broke the form—the formation record was twenty-four, we tried to break it with thirty-six, but we broke it with thirty.

TS: Where was that at?

BD: At Perris Valley in southern California.

TS: What year was that?

BD: Nineteen eighty-one. And we are in the record—the record books.

TS: So how many did you say, thirty?

BD: Thirty. Thirty women in one formation, which is nothing now. I think they've done, like, a hundred and twenty now.

TS: But back then there weren't that many women—

BD: Back then? No, no. Back then. So we broke a women's world record and I was the organizer and it was very cool. We were in all kinds of newspapers, and I have them all of course. We were in *Parachutists* magazine—anytime you break a record. So that was

pretty significant. I was coming into myself, saying, "You know what? Now I am my own woman. I can do anything I put my mind to do."

TS: Neat. Actually, why don't we take a little break?

BD: Yes.

TS: Let's do that. Let me pause here. All right.

[Recording Paused]

TS: Okay. So we took a little break there. One of the things I wanted to ask you about is, so as you transitioned from the navy active duty to the Air National Guard, which is more of a part time, right? What's the difference in, like, the culture of those two services?

BD: Well, interesting that you ask that, because one of the first things I noticed is the navy is really steeped in tradition. There's so many traditions in the navy, and the guard are just kind of like—like, "Whatever it is we'll do it." Here's a good for instance: In the navy when you got promoted—and I got promoted twice—I started out as an ensign and left as a navy lieutenant, which is an air force captain. Every time you get promoted there's a ceremony and then you pick someone to pin on your—pin on your new rank for you, and twice for me it was Lois Jean Butler that I picked. They asked me, "Don't you want the chief nurse?"

I said, "No, I want Lois Jean Butler." So twice, and so that was very important to me because she was the significant person in my naval career. So in the air force when you got promoted you just showed up the next day with the next rank on. [both chuckle]

TS: Well, that didn't always happen. They have ceremonies sometimes.

BD: In the air guard—In our air guard we didn't have ceremonies. So the air guard is interesting. I belonged—the name of the wing—you know we have wings and we have squadrons—and so the wing was the 146th Tactical Airlift Wing. We were originally out of a city called Van Nuys, which is right north of LA, and then it moved because it was a civilian airport. They had a fifty year, two dollar a year contract. And then once the contract ran out they wanted to develop it for commercial, so we moved—so back to the navy—we moved to Point Mugu Naval Air Station. So on—they—the guard unit built their buildings and stuff on the other—one side of the runway and the navy had the other side. So it was an interesting air force/navy mix there.

My squadron was the 146th Aeromedical Evacuation Squadron. And so, a little history about air evac. The C-130 aeromedical evacuation—C-141, which are strategic Stratoliners [C-141 Starlifter] and now they're C-17 air evac. C-130 are the short field landing/short field takeoff, so we're in-country air evac. So when we fly patients in a wartime scenario we're flying in the country to an outer part of the country. And then the C-141s are the long distance ones that fly them, say, to Germany or England or

depending on where your war is. So in air evac there were only two active duty C-130 units and that's it. All the rest of the air evac C-130 units are all guard and reserve.

TS: Okay. About how many of those are there? Do you know?

BD: I can't remember what the total number is. I know our sister units were—my—we had all had sister units. Ours were Alaska and Wyoming. The two—I know there's Philadelphia, because when I went to the Gulf War I had Philadelphia people with me—or Pittsburgh. Pittsburgh. So I'm not sure how many there are, but we are the bulk of the air evac units. So when a wartime comes, these units—and we'll talk about that when that comes—but we all get activated.

TS: Right. Okay. So it's likely that you're going to get activated.

BD: Yeah. The other thing—The other commitment for Air National Guard—so people think, "Well, we've got these weekend warriors that go once a month." In a flying unit, and flight nurse world, you have to fly at least eight hours a month. So you have that additional commitment. So you have your one weekend a month, which is two eight hours, which it's not in the guard; not in our flying unit. You also have an additional job, so you have a job in the unit too. So my job, in the beginning I was kind of the orientation officer because I was the new person who came in the guard who had no idea what uniform to buy or what to do. So I started out, as a young captain, as the orientation officer. So when new people came in, not only did I help them around—if they wanted to I would meet them at LA air force station and help them get their uniforms. So that's what I did in the beginning. I ended up as a medical readiness officer, which is a very significant job. It's how ready your unit is to go to war. And in medical readiness we had to keep, at that time, maybe a hundred and ten people in the squadron current on thirty-two separate items to keep on flying status, because you had to keep your current flying status, or if you got deployed that's one person down. And then you'd have to explain to the higher-ups why you don't have enough.

TS: So it's a lot of paperwork?

BD: Well, it's classes. It's paper—It's anywhere from immunizations to paperwork to chemical warfare class to NBC—nuclear biological warfare—class to whatever. I mean, there was just every—

TS: So you're making sure everybody else is—

BD: And yourself. Everybody in the unit. Everybody. So you had to coordinate all the classes. You had to sum—

TS: Like a training officer?

BD: Yeah, yeah, it was like a training officer but it was medical readiness; how ready. And then we had the mobility unit, which was kind of our partner unit that—they made sure

all the mobilization bags and all the things that you needed for—the physical things that you needed for mobility were taken care of. So I had that additional job and that was almost a full time job. I mean, I went up there way more than just—I'd usually get extra active duty days if we could get them and go up there because it was such a big job. And when I took over that section, that section in the inspection was unsatisfactory. And so, by the time myself—not just me—myself, my captain, and my sergeants that worked for me—and my airmen—by the time we got done, the next inspection we had we got the first outstanding in the history of the unit, and we got five "Excellents", and maybe one "Satisfactory". We got one "Unsat" [unsatisfactory] because my commander overrode me, and then he apologized afterwards because what he told me to do and what I told him we needed to do were two different stories.

TS: Oh, he overrode you on what—

[Speaking Simultaneously]

BD: He overrode me on something—

TS: Something that you said—

BD: On one of the training that the—combat arms training. He overrode me when I told him all the officers had to have pistol training and all the enlisted needed M-16 training. He overrode me on the M-16 training and he got an unsat for it, so.

TS: Now, did you ever do any kind of weapons training in the navy?

BD: None. But we were all—we all—part of our training—part of our thirty-two separate items is we had to be weapons trained, because when we deploy, we deploy with weapons. So at that time we had, I think, old K-frame .38s [six-shot .38 Special revolver]. I called them Barney Fife and a bullet. But I got trained on .38s and because I went—that's another story—I went through the police academy. I was also an expert on Beretta [standard issue 9mm semi-automatic pistol] so I shot Berettas and I was the only one that shot M—only nurse that shot M-16, but that's because I ran the program and the combat arms guys were all my friends, so.

TS: Did they have to get qualified on them, the nurses?

BD: We did not. I was qualified, but only the enlisted got qualified on M-16 because that's what they deployed with.

TS: But they had to qualify on the pistol?

BD: No. They did not have to qualify on the pistol.

TS: Nurses didn't have to weapons qualify at all?

BD: No, nurses qualified on the pistol.

TS: On the pistol.

BD: On the pistol. Yeah. But the med techs—the med techs were the enlisted—they qualified with M-16s.

TS: So they had to qualify on both. They had to pull guard; like a guard duty.

BD: Yeah, so they had to be qualified. They didn't have to do pistols, they had to do M-16s. And then our flying crew—if a medical crew was two nurse—so you had your MCD, medical crew director, your second flight nurse, and you had three med techs with you. And that was a medial crew. So when you got deployed—In our air evac unit you had to have sixty people. You had to have fifteen crews ready to deploy at any time.

TS: Fifteen crews?

BD: Fifteen crews. So sixty people.

TS: Was that tough to keep?

BD: It was tough to keep. People all had regular jobs. I mean, you had your AGRs [Active Guard Reserve]; you had your people that had full time positions there, but that wasn't the majority. Everybody had regular jobs. We had a lot of nurses, firefighters. The thing about our air evac unit—and this is something I got into, like, a little pissing contest when we were in the Gulf—actually I didn't. I just told them how it was. Our flight nurses, most of them were pretty darn qualified. A lot of us were. I was an ER nurse, so we had quite a few ER nurses, we had quite a few—for the med techs we had ER—EMTs [Emergency Medical Technician] and we had firefighters and stuff. So we were really qualified, because I worked in south central LA in the ER, and you know what? If it wasn't shot, stabbed, or beat we didn't see it in our trauma center. So basically, I was a victim of urban war. For twenty-four years we fought an urban war, for the kind of things that we—I saw at my civilian job and we took care of it. We took care of gunshot wounds that got dumped out the door and dragged in, and people bleeding out, and people beat.

TS: The worst of the worst.

BD: Yeah, we took care of the worst of the worst. So we were ready. Ready for—

TS: Well, tell me about the police academy.

BD: So somewhere in my infinite wisdom I decided I needed to do one more thing. And I saw reserve police officer for the Los Angeles Police Department. So I looked at it thinking I'm probably too old for this. They said, "No, the age is forty." Oldest age you can go in

is forty. And there's two kinds of reserves. You could be a desk reserve, so basically you go through the academy but you're never going to have a weapon or go out in the streets. And you just do reports or you can go out to people's houses and do reports. And then you had the real reserve that—the line reserves—that actually go through the whole academy, the combat arms training, et cetera and so on. And you go through a probation period and you have the same peace officer powers as a regular person. You work for free. For free. Actually, you get a stipend of fifty dollars a month to help you with your uniforms and stuff. So I said, "Well, this sounds like fun." So I applied.

So I'm thirty—at the time what am I? Thirty-six years old? So I applied and when they got to the part about glasses and contacts they said, "Oh, no, you can't go because you wear contacts."

I said, "Well, wait a minute. The regular officers, it's okay to wear contacts."

"Yeah."

"Why not the reserve officers?"

"Well, that's just the way it is."

I said, "Well, that's wrong."

So I went to the lieutenant in the reserve unit, I talked to him, he said, "Okay. Let's fight it." And so, I fought it, and guess what? They said okay.

So when I went through the physical—I mean, you can see me now. It was kind of like I am now. The lady told me I was overweight and she was, like, three hundred pounds, and I'm like, "Really?" [chuckles] But anyway, they measured me and they said you were fine, so I just—The police academy now is—I was in the five ninety class—1990 class—and the police academy is—for the reserves it's every other weekend from the crack of dawn in the morning until late in the afternoon, and every Monday and Wednesday night. So they made it for working. So I get in this police academy—I'm the five ninety class so it must have been May of 1990, and I get in this academy class and I'm going through the class, and I'm in the class a month and they're starting to ramp up for the Gulf War.

[The First Gulf War occurred from 2 August 1990 to 29 February 1991. Codenamed Operation Desert Shield for operations leading to the buildup of troops and defense of Saudi Arabia, and Operation Desert Storm in its combat phase, it was a war waged by coalition forces from 35 nations led by the US against Iraq in response to Iraq's invasion and annexation of Kuwait]

At that time it was optional deployments. We came up with a ton of deployments in the guard. I deployed more—I did more active duty in the guard than I think I did in the navy. [chuckles] They were doing thirty day rotations over in Saudi Arabia, and so I got to thinking, I'm thinking—and then they said when the volunteers are done—when people stop volunteering then they start picking you. Well, I didn't want that to happen. So I was real early in the academy. I talked to our drill instructor—our academy leader—and I said, "Look, when the volunteers stop, somebody is going to have to go. So I'm kind of considering just volunteering early on."

He said, "If you go now, you can come back and just come right in the class," because a lot of what they're teaching was first aid and stuff like that. He said, "You're an RN. You don't need it."

So I did. I did a thirty day deployment out in Desert Storm. And that brings up another whole set of issues. You know we're ramping up for a war, and now you're thinking, "Oh my God. I'm really going to get to do what I'm trained to do," because what you spend the time doing—because people say, "Well, what do you do as a flight nurse when it's not war?" You train to fly the sick, injured, and wounded on a C-130. And when I say "train," we actually—we actually put your fellow people in the bunk. We actually take that empty plane—that plane's empty—and we set up—when I say "we"—the air evac people—we set up that whole plane. We put the stanchions in, we put the clips in, we put the seats in, we put the litters [stretchers] in, we put everything in that plane. We put all our medical equipment, we put the emergency equipment there. We have to know how to open the doors, we have to know how to deal with decompression. So we get trained as flying nurses, and so that's what we do.

And so, say we fly eight hours to Hawaii. You do a two—everybody does a two hour stint. Your crew does a two hour stint training and then the person that kind of leads the training throws in an emergency; "Rapid decompression!" So people have to do what they're supposed to do and deal with the patients and that kind of stuff. So you know the adage that you train—you train like you're going to do it in real life. And that's why people are very strict about training. You train like you're going to do it in real life because when real life comes, your rote memory is going to kick in and that's what you're going to do.

TS: Right.

BD: So that's what we did. We did a lot of training, a lot of flying, a lot of training.

TS: Before you tell me what happened there, I want to ask you a question. You said you volunteered to go.

BD: Yes.

TS: Did you not go with your regular unit?

BD: No, we went with our unit. So we volunt—there's X amount of volunteers—what they do—for every air evac unit we need X—they'll tell how many people are tasked to go. We need X amount of people, so we need one flight crew to go, or two flight crews to go, which is five people or ten people.

TS: Okay. And this is in August of 1990?

BD: This is August of 1990.

TS: Okay. Okay. Sorry.

BD: No, no, no, no. Ask me anything. It's hard. It's a long career. You forget things. [both chuckle]

So a group of us were tasked to go, and what's really interesting—I think we were two or three flight crews—that the local newspaper did a whole exposé on us because we had to check—you have to check out your mobility bags. Mobility bags in the air force are what they are. So you have one bag that has your basic needs, like your sleeping bag, your canteen, et cetera and so on; everything you need there. So you have another bag that's all your chem [chemical] warfare stuff. It's all your mask, your chem suits, you get X amount of those things. You have a winter bag that has your parkas, your boots, and stuff. You have your rain bag—Well, your rain bag, which is really bad anyway. So you have your rain suit but you have no rain boots. And so, you have all these different bags you have to take. So when we went to the Gulf you have to take, like, four bags with you. Plus your personal bag. You don't take a lot of stuff but you've got to take your personal clothing and underclothing and your toothbrush and all your usual stuff. So we call that a bag drag. And there are no porters there. You drag your own bag. And I don't care if you're five foot two [inches] and one hundred and twenty pounds; you grab every single one of those mobility bags by two hands and you drag them everywhere; onto the plane, off the plane, onto your quarters. So that's [unclear].

You had these newspapers—They decided to let a news crew go from Channel Islands to Delaware with us. So in the meantime we stopped and we picked up—I can't remember who we picked up. We picked up Wyoming, so we picked up those crews. I think they were the only ones we picked up at that time, and this news crew. So we have a whole C-130 full of mobility bags. And you put them—the loadmaster puts them all in the center of the C-130 and straps them down. And as you know, if you've been on a C-130, it's all Evans seats with a big old bar stuck in the back of your thigh. So where do you think we are? We're all in the mobility bags. So I'm laying on the mobility bags and I have—our flight suits and government[?] boots, and I have—back then it was like a little CD [compact disc] player and I'm listening to music like this, and all of a sudden I wake up. All of a sudden you see flashes. They're taking pictures and it was really annoying. Really annoying. I mean, really? Did you have to send a news crew? And of course, what do they ask? "Well, how do you feel?"

"Well, how do you think I feel?" You're going into the unknown. And that's the biggest thing about a deployment; you're going into the unknown. You have no idea what to expect. Is there going to be a war? Is there not going to be a war? Is there going to be one while you're there? Or is there going to be one after you leave? And then you're going to miss it and then you're going to say, "Wait a minute. I trained my whole life for this." So there's so many unknowns.

TS: What would you rather have had them ask you?

BD: Why are you doing this? What made you join the guard? I'd rather them ask about more things about—related to your job. What will you do when you're over there? What do flight nurses do? But all this stuff about how you feel? We see it on the news. "Oh, your three kids just drowned in South Carolina. How does that make you feel?" Really? "Your son just got killed in Oregon by some crazy shooter. How does that make you feel?"

Really? I mean, is that a realistic—in medicine we don't say, "Your mother just died. How does that make you feel?"

TS: Right.

BD: Yeah. I mean, that's just so wrong. I mean, really? Are you that disconnected? So I think it was just annoying because—because on the way to anywhere—at least for me, if I'm not flying and I'm at peace—you want to be at peace. And I'm on the way to an unknown deployment for unknown things, waiting forever everywhere as always, and you just want some peace.

TS: This is where you talked about we need our own space?

BD: Yes. We need our own space. And your space—your fellow travelers that are with you, your fellow guard people, they understand that. It's an unspoken thing. They understand what you'll see. Everybody brings a book stuck in their flight suit, or brings some kind of thing, or brings a little tape player. Back then it was CD players. So you'll see people listening to music, reading a book. Everybody's into their own private little space, dealing with however you want to deal with whatever's coming for this deployment, so.

So we went to Delaware and then we flew off—we flew off to—where'd we fly?—to Rhein Main [Germany] then we went to Saudi Arabia. So we get in Saudi Arabia and it's a hundred and twenty-six degrees. The flight line is about a hundred and fifty [degrees]. We landed in the—Did we land in Riyadh? I think I'm getting my two deployments confused. Yeah. So we landed—No, we went to Riyadh. We went to Riyadh. So we get to Riyadh and we're with this whole air evac crew, and then we're with the—we call them the "strat weenies." Strat weenies are 141 air evac crews, and C-130 and 141s always have this little healthy animosity toward each other. [chuckles]

TS: Healthy animosity. [laughs]

BD: Yeah, healthy animosity toward each other. And so, I think the person in charge—the nurse in charge, who seemed like a pretty good person, but she decided that we all need a C-130 orientation. What are you, crazy? We're C-130 flight nurses. So that kind of went by the side. But here's what the deal is. So we end up staying in the Intercontinental [Riyadh] hotel in the city of Riyadh. The Intercontinental hotel there is a five star hotel. So now all the—all these—all these people when you left and this—I write this in my journal that I kept—it's just really weird. Everybody is, "Goodbyes. Goodbyes," and that bothers me more than anything. I mean, I think it's great that you care enough about me, but it's just like, I'm done with the goodbyes. Let's just get up and go, and everybody else was more stressed than I was, and that, in turn, stresses you out. It's just—so I'm thinking as we're sitting in this five star hotel—they took a bunch of us ladies—officer, enlisted—they didn't care—we all shared a room, which is fine because we all got along really good. We had to wear abayas—the black robes—the women, because you can't show any skin from the elbow down or from the knee down, so anywhere outdoors, if we didn't have uniforms on, we had to wear long pants underneath.

TS: What did you think about that?

BD: I thought it was okay because it's their culture. Now, whether or not we're helping them out of war, because the goal was—Kuwait got taken over and Kuwait's right next to Saudi Arabia, but Saudi Arabia's graciously allowing us in their country. That's just the way it is. And like they said, if you were Catholic and had a cross on—which I have one on my dog tags—if you were Jewish and had a Star of David you need to hide it, you need to cover it. And yeah, you think, "Well, why should I renounce who I am?" but you're in their country and it's not America. And of course, now we think—you think in America, "Well, if we have to do that in your country, why can't you do that in our country? Why can't you integrate into our country?" So there's a lot of controversy about that. But that's what we had to do, and they tell you what the laws are, especially with women. You just do what you have to do, because you're not there to agitate your hosts. You're there to possibly—

TS: Perform some duty.

BD: —perform some duty during a wartime/peacetime. So the thirty days there was kind of—We stayed in the Intercontinental. We got two meals a day, which was a buffet. It was amazing. The guys could go swimming, the girls could not. But the owner of the hotel—the manager—his wife was part Lebanese, part Arabic. She had a private pool, so they put boards up around it. She invited all the American girls over with her. So we got to hang out in the pool and basically never—we were supposed to be able to take turns flying. We never got to fly. It was very frustrating because you were just waiting. You're just waiting.

TS: And this is in the summer?

BD: Yes. You're just waiting, waiting, waiting, waiting. But we finally got moved—I guess there was a whole bunch of condos they built for the Bedouins. The Bedouins didn't want the condos so they moved all the Americans into this condo place. So we go into this empty place, and we all have little cots. That's fine. We're in the military. We're used to sleeping on anything. So we have a cot. That's it. That's all the furniture we have. They put the officers together, so I got to bunk with other majors—I was a major at the time—majors and lieutenant colonels; I didn't know any of them. And that's the beauty of the military. You don't know anybody, but everybody gets bunked together and we're fine. Everybody's fine. We all got along fine. So they called it Eskan Village in the condo—

TS: Eskan?

BD: Eskan. E-S-K-A-N. It was called Eskan Village. It was just a bunch of empty condos and everyone lived everywhere. They had explosive ordnance. They had air force. They had army. They had everybody there. So in the Intercontinental I had met a Saudi businessman who sat with the Americans every night and liked to talk to the Americans. And he kind of takes a liking to all the Americans—took a liking to me but I don't think necessarily that kind of liking—but he liked us all and I'm pretty personable so he liked

us all. So we would sit there in our abayas every night and sit and talk to the Saudi businessman. He would tell us about life in Saudi. And one day he came in and I said, "Are you drunk?" because there's no alcohol in Saudi; it's a Muslim country.

He goes, "Yes."

I go, "Where are you getting alcohol?" I didn't want alcohol because I don't drink but—I said, "Where do you get alcohol?"

He goes, "I make it." [chuckles] He makes moonshine from dates.

TS: Dates? Really?

BD: Dates. He made moonshine. I said, "How do you make it?"

He said, "You want to taste it?"

Well, so, just for adventure—I didn't want to drink it—I went out and took a taste. I said, "You're going to go blind." [both chuckle] I mean, it was really bad.

TS: Pretty strong?

BD: So anyway, we were moving and we had no idea, because they don't tell us; it's a pre-war time and they don't tell us we're moving. Well, they all knew. He said, "I know where you're going." All the Saudis knew where we were going but we didn't know. So we moved out in this condo. The first night there I get a call from the MPs [military police] at the gate. They said, "Major Donato?"

"Yes."

"We have something for you at the gate."

I go, "Well, what do you have for me at the gate? I don't understand."

He said, "Well, somebody just ordered a pizza for you." [laughing] It was the Saudi guy; he knew where we are. He delivered pizza, breadsticks, stuff from Pizza Hut for all my friends.

TS: That was pretty nice.

BD: Yes. So this is really cool. So we're sitting, they go, "Who do you know that delivered us pizza?" [both chuckling]

TS: In Saudi Arabia, right? [chuckles]

BD: In Saudi Arabia. So I'm a believer in getting to know everybody.

TS: Yeah. It came in handy at some point.

BD: Yeah. So he delivered all this pizza for everybody, and then he came and he wanted to ask—

"Well, I don't think I'm supposed to go out in the Village." And they said you could go out so I met him at the gate and he took me to dinner at this really nice place, and then he went to this bakery. He bought bread, he bought candy, he bought cookies, he

bought this—he bought this whole thing, and I come back to the—to our hooch [a hut or simple dwelling]—I have a picture of it—I actually have a picture of it.

TS: That'll be good to see.

BD: Yeah, I have a picture of it where all of us—[chuckling] the five of us are sitting on the thing with these big things of bread sticking out. He kept buying things for them. And I was telling them when we went to dinner they had put a screen up because you can't see other women eat. So they put a whole screen up, so it's just he and I behind this screen. The Americans, when we went out to Bas—say, Baskin Robbins for ice cream, the women couldn't eat the ice cream inside. We had to eat it outside. So our GIs all went out with us.

TS: Right.

BD: A couple of times we went down to the gold markets. We went to the city of Riyadh, went to the gold markets, and the girls, we had to wear our abayas unless we were in—but what's interesting in the culture, the guys—the Saudi men would walk up behind—like, one guy walked up behind me and whispered, "I want to take you—I want to go to your hotel," and he was kind of pushing his body parts against me.

And I went, "You need to stop! You need to stop!" I said, "No!" It was just—of course our male companions start laughing. I said, "Don't encourage these guys, all right? Don't encourage this guy."

TS: Right.

BD: But they—their idea of Western women is we're all very loose, because we're so different than Saudi women—that we're all very loos—so a lot of the women got approached by Saudi guys who wanted to do nasty things and go to their hotels and that kind of stuff.

TS: Well, that's kind of interesting.

BD: Yeah, that was pretty interesting. That was a pretty interesting thing. So yeah. And then one day I get a call—[chuckles]—said, "Major, there's something here for you." He sent me a rocking chair, because I told him that we had nothing to sit on but bricks and stuff. He sent me a rocking chair. [laughs]

TS: Oh, my goodness. Did you get to keep it?

BD: Yeah. I brought it home with me.

TS: Did you really?

BD: I don't have it anymore. I think I gave it away, which is unfortunate, but it was a really nice rocking—wood rocking chair and padding. So my new nickname was Grandma.

TS: I bet. [chuckles]

BD: Grandma. So I'd sit on the porch. I've got pictures of that too. So I'm sitting on the porch one day—so one day—

TS: So you had, like, a sugar daddy [a man who offers financial support] in Saudi Arabia.

BD: Yeah, yeah, I had a Saudi sugar daddy, but it was pretty cool. He was a very nice guy and he was nice—he was generous to everyone, not just me. He was generous to everyone. If he sent things he'd send things for everyone.

TS: Oh no, it definitely sounds like [unclear].

BD: And of course, I got a reputation; the girl who keeps getting all the gifts. [chuckles]

TS: Yeah.

BD: And so, one day we're all—a bunch of us are sitting out on the porch, and it was our enlisted, our officers, because they put all the air evac on one street—we called it Air Evac Street—and we all drew posters—and I have a picture of that too—we have a thing that says "California 10,000 Miles," "Atlanta X amount of miles," and I drew lobsters and palm trees and stuff like that.

One day a Humvee goes by—goes by, sees all of them, and stops and says, "Anyone want to take a ride?"

"Yeah, we do!" A bunch of us jumped in; it was the explosive ordnance guys.

So we're just running around in the Humvee, and then they said, "Hey, you want to drive?" And they gave me the Humvee and I'm driving around. They go, "Where did you get a hum vehicle?"

I go, "It's who you know."

So then they said—one day said—oh no, that was the next deployment, because I met up with the same people next deployment. I got to drive a tank. But that's another whole story.

So really what we ended up doing was not a lot of anything. And that was kind of demoralizing. It was kind of like—We bought—We bought a little kiddy pool because it was so hot, and we all sat in the kiddy pool. [chuckles]

TS: Right. Right. So you were there—

BD: Just a month. So I came back Oct—

TS: A month.

BD: I came back October 5th, and my brother—one of my younger brothers—was very, very, very ill and he died when I came—he died October 25th. So it was very traumatic. He actually ended up dying in California, and it had to do with the health care—but it had to do with a lot of things—but he died in the state of California. My mother was out with

me and it was devastating. It was her youngest son, it was my brother, and it was just—he's thirty-two years old.

TS: Yeah.

BD: So my brother died and then we get Title 10 orders. Title 10 orders, for people who don't know, are federal activation orders to send sixty crews back out to—

[Title 10 of the United States Code outlines the role of the armed forces in the U.S. Code. It provides the legal basis for the roles, missions, and organization of each of the services, as well as the U.S. Department of Defense. Title 10 allows the President of the United States to "federalize" the National Guard forces by ordering them to active duty in their reserve component status, or by calling them into Federal service in their militia status in accordance with U.S. Code]

So I'm in the police academy and in my journal I talk about the quandary of being—I really wanted to finish the police academy, I really wanted to go. My commander said, "Stay home."

I said, "I'm not staying home. I've trained my whole life for this and I want to go as part of my unit."

TS: Right.

BD: This is what I do—So we had an argument about that, but she was a great commander—Edie Dominguez[?]—she was a Vietnam air evac vet, and she was a tiny little woman with big presence, and she was just a terrific commander because she was hard but she was like Lois Jean Butler, she always knew what she wanted, and she always said to me, "I never have to worry about you. If I ask you to do something you get it done. I never have to look behind you."

And I said, "Thanks so much, Edie." We'd argue, we'd go head to head.

TS: Sure.

BD: But that's all right. So we got Title 10 orders and I just told the academy, and luckily I had passed my last physical qualification test. They said, "We will recycle you in the next class if you'd like to finish when you get back."

TS: Okay.

BD: Yeah, very cooperative. So December 26th [1990]—And I have to throw in one thing. When you're single and have no kids and no husband or no significant person, they will say, "Well, you have no family."

"Yeah, I have family. I have brothers, sisters, mother, father. Yeah, I have family."

But it's not even that, it's you have to figure out what to do—at the time I didn't have a house, I had an apartment. But I also had bills. I also had commitments. Who's going to do all that stuff? Who's going to—I lived in California. All my family is on the East coast. Luckily, my younger brother, at the time, lived in California, not far away, so I signed out—signed all power of attorney to give him the check—I gave him the checkbook, and you have to get somebody to deal with all that stuff. What are you going to do with your car? So we put it in his garage. A [unclear] call your insurance company and you just get the insurance suspended for a while. And so, there's so much stuff you have to do because you have no one to take care of your stuff when[?] you get home. No one.

And we reported December 26th. We didn't leave—And we kept going back home. They'd say, "Okay, come here." Now, my home was eighty-five miles away. So we went back and forth and back and forth. Finally left in January [1991]—finally left in January—and it was just a really strange thing because we had to go with all the goodbyes to your job again. All the goodbyes. I'm thinking, "I can't take this." My brother had just died, so it was a hard emotional state.

TS: Sure. You're dealing with grief and everything.

BD: And you look at my parents who just lost a child, and now has a child going to war. So it was just a very difficult time.

So we get up there, and the day we're finally leaving—I can't remember the day in January—and they had—it was really strange—they had a band there. It was, like, crack of dawn; like 5:00 in the morning, 4:00 in the morning. They had a band there, which was fine. So they had a band nobody listened to. They had honor guard. Really nobody paid any attention because we're so focused; that this is really going to be a war.

TS: Just get going. Yeah.

BD: This is going to be a war this time, and we want to get there before the war starts because you don't want to get there after it starts. So the commanding general is saying goodbye—everybody is saying goodbye— and it was nice. And we just wanted to get on the C-130. So we got on the C-130, and it takes eight hours on a C-130 to get to Dover, Delaware. We get to Dover, Delaware, it's a nightmare. It's cold. It's winter time. It's January. It's cold, and I swear the hangar was twenty-five degrees. There was really no heat in the hangar. There's just hundreds and hundreds of cots, because that's all you have, because everyone's waiting to go overseas.

TS: Right.

BD: So you have hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of cots. And you have to get out of Dover, so it's a big thing. And we went with pallets; pallets full of our supplies. So we go as a group and our pallets—and our officers in charge were a couple of lieutenant colonels, and one of them was really ineffective. Actually, there were two or three—I think two—and one of them was really ineffective and the other one was okay, and one

of them just kept asking me to go to all the meetings. And so, that kind of started some animosity for me. But anyway, we're in Dover, Delaware—

TS: They asked you to go to the meetings because they—

BD: All the safe—All the security meetings and the briefings and that kind of stuff because she didn't want to do anything. She didn't want to carry her own bags. She always had an enlisted person carry it. So it was—That was a lot of ani—some animosity that just started then. So we get to Dover and Dover is, like, cold and it's icky, and I slept one night on a grate in Dover, Delaware. It was the only heat coming out; just like the street, on a newspaper on a grate.

TS: Right.

BD: And I actually have it—all I said is I slept on concrete but I actually slept on a grate in my flight suit—in my flight suit. We really couldn't change clothes. I mean, everything—you could change your underwear or something. And they had a place—you really couldn't take a shower but you could brush your teeth and do basic stuff.

TS: Right.

BD: And I can't even remember how long it took to get out of Dover—it's in my journal—but we didn't stay in Dover that long. And we finally went over to Rhein Main in Germany, and of course, it's cold. We're staying in tents but the tents were heated so it's okay. And thank God for the USO [United Services Organization]. The USO is amazing. The USO—We have a picture of all of us in our unit that went. We have a picture in the USO. And they had a big, like, sheet—or paper thing—that everybody wrote on and we wrote a thing. We wrote—Somebody put our squadron insignia on there and they said, "In memory of Willie Baptiste[?]," which was one of our squadron members that died of a brain tumor.

So we're at the USO and all we're doing is waiting. You know the military; you wait and wait and wait and wait. We needed to get a flight out of there with all the pallets because in our infinite wisdom the colonels would not break up the pallets, which is ridiculous. If you're going to the same end point, break up the frickin' pallets so you can get your people out of there. So we waited and waited and the U—we'd go over to the USO, but you couldn't go anywhere. You couldn't go out on town because you didn't know when your plane was leaving.

So we got the first C-5A, which is huge. A C-5, it's full of trucks, it's full of tanks, full of supplies, and the troops sit on top—backwards—in troop seats—I mean, airline seats, which is good. We get in the first C-5A and it's great. We take off in the C-5A, one of the engines goes out, or they have engine trouble, and we have to land full of fuel, troops, pallets, supplies, trucks. And so, you're landing a full load back on Rhein Main, so it's like—everybody is just, "Hold on."

They land that plane, the brakes start catching on fire, and it's none of this, "Ladies and gentlemen, leave your seats." They popped those doors and said, "Get out!" We come flying out of the C-5. So that was our first experience. Then we go back to the

tents and we'd just hang out. You have to—If you're signing out of your tent you have to just say you're going to the USO. And like I said, they were great. They had books and things, basically—and then there was like a little club there. We'd sit there and we'd have pictures of partying and we partied at the club and that kind of stuff.

And so, we just waited and we waited—I can't remember if it was three days—and we took off in the same C-5A, and we landed back on the same C-5A, but the brakes didn't catch on fire. So then we said, "We're never going to get out of here," and it was like—I think it was a day or two later—they just came and got us and said, "You've got thirty minutes to get on the plane." We got on the C-5A and we flew to Saudi Arabia. It was like—we got there, like, almost a day before the war started.

TS: Oh, okay.

BD: A day before the war started. So we go to [unclear]. It was interesting. It was really quiet. It was nighttime. All the lights are out. I had one little light and I was writing in my journal. But everybody was kind of in their own space, because this is like—this is the real thing.

TS: Show time.

BD: Well, it was the—it was—remember the ultimatum? George H.W. Bush gave Saddam Hussein an ultimatum: you will be out of Kuwait by this date. And that date was coming. And we were a few days away from the date.

[On 16 January 1991, then President of the United States George H.W. Bush gave a war ultimatum speech directed at Saddam Hussein, ordering him and his sons to leave Iraq within twenty-four hours]

So all the air power was there. The whole thing was building up. That's why it was so hard to get out of Rhein Main. They were trying to get everything they can into Saudi Arabia. So we landed in Dhahran and—and—did we land in Dhahran? Was it that time or the other time? I get all confused of when we landed in Dhahran. So we landed in Saudi Arabia and we ended up in Riyadh again, and we end up with this big old mess, because it's wartime so it's a big old mess; big old mess. Who's going to go where? Because they're going to take the air evac crews and send them all over the country. And of course, the C-130—

TS: They kind of stationed you in different places?

BD: Yes, yes. The C-130 crews go in-country, and the [Lockheed C-]141 crews are the ones that fly everybody to Europe, so they're the secondary flight. They fly into Europe. They'll go—So it turns out they had places down in the Emirates—down in UAE—United Arab Emirates—and that's where a lot of—that's where a lot of the C-130s were.

That's where they were based. A lot of—some—but all of the air evac ones were based in UAE.

Well, when we got the assignments they assigned the colonel that I did have a falling out with her—I had a falling out with her in Riyadh. I got—I just—It was really tense. It's very tense and you don't know what you're doing and I had had it and she sent me to another security meeting, and I had actually had a falling out with her. I just said, "Look, you're not the—you don't do shit. You don't do shit." I said, "You send me to every meeting. You don't take the responsibility, so you're the one who is supposed to be responsible for that. You make the enlisted people carry your bags." I just—everything—

TS: Laying it out.

BD: And you've got to remember, I had a lot of—not only the war stress, the stress of a family member dying right before I left. And you know what? She took it okay. She never held it against me and she just took it like that.

So they ended up—One of the things—They ended up—The war started actually while we were in Riyadh. So we're in Riyadh. We had not been assigned a form—we're staying in tin hooches next to—next to the airport—not far from the airport. So we're in these little tin hooches, we have fifteen women in there, and we have air evac crews from all different places; from Pittsburgh, from Oklahoma, from Wyoming. They flew there from everywhere. So they mixed us all up in our groups. So I had two of my sergeants with me—or one of my sergeants with me—and fifteen of us and forty-five mobility bags in a little tin hooch, which was really fun. Basically you had a cot and you had a mobility bag. [both chuckle] So you have cots and mobility bags.

TS: So they were a making space for you.

BD: And fifteen women. One of the women there—I'll never forget her—from Pittsburgh—she was the mother of five-month-old twins so—I mean, you talk about—when you talk to people and you hear their stories of all the things that they leave behind, I mean, the civilian population doesn't understand the sacrifices you make. And they think when you're single you have no sacrifice, but you do. You leave your whole life—your life, your friends, your family and everything and you go.

So the war started—and the war started—and the young lady from Pittsburgh, she came running in at two o'clock in the morning and she said, "The war started!" I will never forget that. And we popped on the lights and I sat bolt upright in my bed and the first thing on my mind is like, "What do you do when a war starts?" [both chuckle] Really? I mean, it goes through your mind, "What do you—Are we supposed to do something?" So the next thing we know we got our first Scud [Cold War-era tactical ballistic missile] alert. And with a Scud alert we put all our chem gear on.

TS: Right.

BD: We put our flak vest, our chem gear, and all this stuff. Backtracking a little, our commanding general—Tandy Bozeman—our commanding general said when we left he did not want to send us with flak vests or helmets.

TS: Why?

BD: I think it was because we were women and we were nurses and he didn't think we needed them. So I think it was the senior master sergeant that talked him into it—or somebody—probably my squadron commander, Edie Dominguez, talked him into it, so he finally conceded and sent us with those. Thank God he did.

So we got our first Scud alert. We did not get Scud rocketed that night. It did go—If you remember the history of the Scud rockets—flew everywhere. They tried to target something but they were just not accurate and they flew everything, and our response was Patriot missiles [surface-to-air missile system]. We had Patriot missile batteries everywhere in Saudi Arabia. So we got our first Scud alert, we put on all our gear, and we got an all clear and we took off all our gear. So not a lot that—but a lot of people didn't sleep. You know that there's now a ground war—there's now an air war started—it was the air war—there's an air war started so everybody's like—it's all, you don't know; it's all unknown; you just don't know what's going to happen.

TS: Right.

BD: We had some of the 82nd Airborne there with us, having been in country for six months, and of course the public didn't know that; been in country six months. So we all got chatting with them one day. In front of my hooch there was a—there was a cot in front of our hooch, so one of the lieutenants and I we were just sitting there talking and all of a sudden—all of a sudden we see a Patriot missile flying in the air, and we see an airplane, and I'm looking and I say, "That looks like one of ours." It was a 141. Somebody had sent a Patriot missile after one of our own planes—never in the news—and next thing you know you see another Patriot come up and knock that Patriot out of the sky.

TS: Oh, really?

BD: Yes. Yes, yes, yes. It's in my journal. And so, the 82nd finally left and then we were finally in—the chow hall was really funny—it was run by—in Saudi, Saudis don't do any manual labor; nobody does. It's all Pakistanis and stuff, so we used to say there's, like, a grease slick on top. I ran into the—

TS: Like a what?

BD: Grease slick; like a little grease slick on the top of some of the food; it was, like, a little oily. So they made food. We had food in the tent. And one of the Airborne lieutenants just kind of found an attachment to me but not a romantic attachment. He just kind of thought he should—he should kind of keep an eye on me. So after the first war [unclear] he knocked on the door, he said, "Major?"

I said, "Yes, Sergeant."

He goes, "Everybody okay?"

I said, "Everybody's fine. Thanks for asking."

I'd walk out the door and he'd say, "Where's the major going?"

I said, "Major's going to chow hall?"

"I'll go with you," and he'd walk me everywhere. Everywhere. Very respectful though. Very respectful, never hit on me, but just was very respectful and walked me—walked me everywhere, which I thought was kind of interesting. I have his name in my—Sergeant—Sergeant Jeffrey[?]—I can't remember his last name. But anyway, he gave me the compass off his watch, which I thought was very significant, and I still have it. I met up with the EOD guys again; the same explosive ordnance guys I met in Desert Shield; they were there.

TS: When you were in the hummer.

BD: I got to drive an M60 tank down the side of the runway in Riyadh. [both chuckle] There was a truck coming and he says, "There's a truck coming."

I said, "That's all right. The truck will move," and I just stayed straight.

That night in the chow hall, "Some idiot was driving a tank and almost ran over me!"

I leaned over, I go, "That would be me."

He goes, "Aren't you a nurse?"

I go, "Uh huh." [chuckles] So that was fun, I got to drive a tank.

And the second night we got a Scud alert we got rocketed almost all night, and we did get Scud rocketed. I mean, it wasn't that it was somewhere else so we got bombarded—it was actually a couple of hours—we got bombarded for a couple of hours and one Scud got knocked out of the sky at treetop level a mile from us. So that was a—It was a night. It was interesting how the Scud alert came—we all slept in the chem gear, except for the mask and the boots; we all slept in chem gear. So out of 2:00 in the morning and twenty-six seconds we had everything on, and the flak vest, and we all hit the deck. And then I finally sat up, I said, "Why are we on the deck?" I said, "If it hits us we're gone anyway." So we all sat up and we put armed forces radio on and we just sat it out.

TS: And listened to it.

BD: Yeah. We listened to it and sat it out. And it was scary. I wrote in my journal, I was scared. I think if you're not scared, you're crazy. But it's a respectfully scared. It's not a scared that—"Oh my God. I'm paralyzed. I can't do anything." If I had to do something I could have still done it.

TS: Well, did you get sent anywhere?

BD: We did, eventually. So that was our first—When the air war started that was our first few nights. And they finally—finally made the assignments. Well, they put the ineffective colonel—they were going to put her way up north. And I'm thinking, "No, that's not going to work." So I said to her, I said, "You don't really want to go—don't you want to go down to UAE?" They said they were going to send me to UAE [unclear].

So she says, "Yes. I'll do that."

I said, "Well, how about I ask if we trade?"

She says, "Okay." So I asked and they said okay.

So I ended up—The first place my crew went—So I was the OIC [officer in charge]. What they did is, they took the two majors, they asked you your date of rank—And this is what happens whether you're guard, active duty, or reserves: whoever is the senior major, or the senior colonel, you get the OIC assignment, so there's no differentiation during wartime. I was the senior major so I was the OIC and I had fourteen others with me. So we had three flight crews—fifteen of us—and they were from Oklahoma, Pittsburgh, and California. We went—first went to King Khalid Military City; we got flown up there.

TS: Where's that at?

BD: It was kind of further north; it was a lot further north but not necessarily real close to the Iraqi border. It was a tent base. It was an air force base so we had Temper [Tent Extendable Modular Personnel] tents—air force has temper tents—hot and cold running air—and there we waited, because we had another final destination. So we kind of hung out there, and there was a lot of multinational troops there, and we hung out there for a few days, and we got Scud rocketed—we got Scud rocket alerts a couple of days. One guy broke his ankle by running to the bunker. I didn't even run to the bunker anymore. It's like, really? I mean, what's the point? [chuckles] So I stayed in the tent.

Then we got sent to—ourself and an active duty—I don't know if you know what a MASF is. A MASF is a mobile aerial [correction: aeromedical] staging facility. So in air evac what they—where you get your patients—so the patients come in to the hospitals and they get sent to the mobile aerial staging facility, which is a tent close to the flight line, and you stage your patients how they go on your plane. So your sickest patients always go on—actually your sickest patients go on last—

TS: Go on last so they get off first.

BD: Go on last so they get on first. So that's what they do. They stage the [unclear] patients and they stage the ambulatory patients. So we went with an active duty MASF and what a frickin' disaster, they were just awful. They treated us awful—us guard and reserves—but I would not have it. They had an OIC who had no clue what she was doing, so they had another captain with her who vying to take over and they eventually changed them.

And so, we went to a place called—called Al Qaysumah, which is an air base thirty miles south—actually it was a commercial air—air—it was an air base now but it was a commercial airport for the Saudis. It was thirty miles south of the Iraqi border and not far from Kuwait either, so it was kind of near Iraq and Kuwait, and it was near a town called Hafar Al-Batin. So we get up there, we have no place to stay. We have one MASF tent and we have forty-five of us in one tent. We have no food. It's cold. It's miserable. The active duty are not being very nice to the guard and it was just—

TS: What kind of things happened?

BD: There were just—like, the sergeant said, "Well, we're in charge of you," and blah, blah, blah.

I said, "Nobody's in charge of anything here." I said, "You deal with your own and I will deal with the flight crew and that's the end of it."

I mean, technically the MASF is in charge of getting the patients out and they—"Oh, you're never going to fly in." As it turns out we didn't. But you're never going to fly—and they were just mean. I mean, we're active duty, and this is where I came in about the experience. One day I finally said, "Well, we're active duty." I said, "I'm going to tell you something here. This crew and myself," I said, "I work at Martin Luther King [Jr. Medical Center, now Community Hospital] in Watts and Daniel Freeman [Memorial Hospital, now named Centinela Freeman Regional Medical Center, Memorial Campus] in Inglewood. That probably doesn't mean anything to you." I said, "I see more trauma in one night than you see in your whole lifetime of active duty. So don't even tell me what you see in active duty." And that was it. That got cut off. That was the end of that conversation.

TS: Right.

BD: So when we got there they said, "Well, we're staying here."

I said, "I am not staying on a flight line—not staying on a flight line." Because what's the first thing somebody is going to bomb? It's the friggin' airport.

We found out there was an army evac hospital just, like, a mile from us, so we go to the evac hospital and I talk to the commander there—an army commander there from the Kansas national guard—great group of people—I said, "Look. I have fifteen flight crew of people. We have nowhere to live." I said, "Any ideas?" So the air force sent us with nowhere to live. "Any ideas?"

They said, "Yeah, we'll put up a GP [general purpose tent] large for you." So they put up a GP—the army guys—and we all helped—we all put up a GP large. I said, "Would you care if we all lived together?"

He goes, "You're the OIC. I don't care." So we lived officer, enlisted, male and female, all in the same tent. We didn't have any problems.

In the meantime, we found some bricks, we found some wood, we found—we found all kinds of stuff. We built—we called it the kitchen—we built a floor in part of the thing and we put curtains on it so when people wanted to change and stuff we had privacy curtains. We found brick, we built a patio. We built a wood doorway because it was so windy every time you opened the door the whole sand pile came in. So we did all kinds of things to our tent.

And then what I did is, I had my master sergeants set up rotations schedules. I said, "One crew is down. One crew has to go work with the MASF—God help us—and one crew is on alert in case we get a flight." And that's the master sergeants' job, not my job. So I had them set up—set up our stuff. And the people that were down had to fill the ker—we had one kerosene heater, that was all that was left—had to fill the kerosene heater, had to clean up the tent, clean up our area, police the area, and that kind of stuff. So everybody had a job, and I think how it's significant because when you go to war you're not always at war. People think you're always at war. You have a lot of down time waiting for stuff because the ground war hadn't started yet. So everybody needs to have a job. They need to feel like—you need to feel like you're significant in some way. You need to feel like you're doing something, because otherwise boredom gets the best of you.

So when we went to the MASF, a lot of the time there wasn't a lot to do. We really didn't really get a lot of patients, but what we did get in the evac hospital is the—they call them EPW—enemy prisoner of war—they didn't call them POW camps. So once the war started the—a lot of the POW—because the Iraqis gave up in mass—in mass numbers. So they had all these EPW camps and they all came for sick call every day at our thing. So I said, "I'm going to work sick call," because you could kind of do what you want, just because I was an air evac nurse. So I just said to the air guys, "Can I come work sick call or something with you?"

"Oh, sure. Come on."

One of my guys was an X-ray tech so he went there and helped the X-ray people. So we all found something to do. We'd work EPW sick call, which was really interesting. One guy came every day. We had a Kuwaiti interpreter, I said, "Ghareeb, what's wrong with this guy?"

He said, "How do you say—how do you say," he said—oh God, I forgot the word—but anyway, basically he was just—he was just—didn't want to be in the EPW camp so he came with a complaint every day. [chuckles] Every day. Malingerer. He said, "How do you say malingerer." He was a malingerer. [chuckles]

TS: Oh.

BD: But you've got to—But we did have some casualties in the hospital. We had a guy that his Bradley tank got blown up by friendly fire and he watched his friends on fire, crawling out of the tank. And he made it and he had a big broken leg. So I'd go over and talk to the patients and hang out with the patients. We did have some Republican guard in there, which were the elite forces in Iraq. And—But we never got to fly. I mean, it was very frustrating for flying crews to never get to fly, because what they did is the planes—the air evac planes originate out of UAE and they would just pack the crew in there. They wouldn't pick up a crew; even though they put crews all over Saudi Arabia they wouldn't come pick us up.

TS: Why not?

BD: Because they would just take a crew right out—that was down in UAE and they would take those crews and fly them out of there. So my mistake; I should have gone there. But I was glad where I was.

TS: Yeah.

BD: And as the OIC—it's a really difficult job, because you have fourteen personalities to deal with. You have to deal—You are ultimately responsible for everything they do, say, [unclear]. One of my majors got so depressed—my only other major—because the mail was such a mess—because all this "any service person"—the mail was such a mess nobody got mail hardly ever. Evidently there was, like, fifteen packages I never got. But he didn't get mail. He was married with two kids and he was getting—sinking into depression. He wouldn't get out of his cot, he wouldn't take a shower, he wouldn't eat.

And I'm like, "Okay." And I tried to talk to him and he'd just sit. So I went out to the army—army OIC and I said, "You have a psychiatrist, right?"

"Yeah."

"Have him stop by our tent."

So I told him what was going on, because we ended up being good friends. And I told him, I said, "Ron, I need you to help me with this guy. I don't know what else to do." So he did, he sent the psychiatrist, because a lot of the army guys would stop in—we were the only air force people and we became friends with the army guys. So he stopped in and he talked to him and then he got mail the next day, and I go, "Oh, better." So there was that.

And then we had some cat fights and we had people—in wartime people tend to get involved with each other, and I had to send somebody down to King Khalid Military City to get sup—that's where we got our supplies—so I sent a truck down there with some of our crew and six o'clock at night they weren't back. Nine o'clock at night they weren't back. Ten o'clock at night—and I'm panicking. Oh my God. What happened? Did they get lost? Did they get captured, da da da, because the ground war hadn't started yet. Well, the ground war was going to start shortly. The whole 7th Army Corps was moving forward and they got stuck in the convoy.

TS: Wow.

BD: And they had no way—they didn't have radios, they had no way—We didn't have Internet, we didn't have cell phones.

TS: Right.

BD: They had no way of telling me. They finally got there—I'm pacing. Pacing, pacing, pacing, pacing.

TS: Yes, I bet.

BD: There's nothing else I could do. So they finally got back. And so, what's really—you not only have to deal with your own stuff, but you have to deal with fourteen other personalities' stuff. You have to make sure—I was trading—nobody had sand goggles and it was really sandy, so I traded sand goggles for all kinds of things with the British troops that came in.

TS: Oh, yes.

BD: We had a British C-130 unit collocated on the airport—Al Qaysumah—so the British invited us over for a barbecue, only a few people went, and then we'd invite the Brits over for dinner. The Brits would fly to Al Jabail, go across to Bahrain, they'd buy booze, they'd put them in wooden crates, put a red cross and say "emergency medical supplies," nail it shut so the Saudis wouldn't look in it, and they'd fly it back to where we were. [chuckles] So the Brits had booze.

TS: Creative.

BD: What?

TS: I said that's creative.

BD: Yes.

TS: Well, what kind of lessons did you think you learned from your experience during the Gulf War?

BD: There's a lot of interesting lessons. The set—I call it "the set up of kingdoms," and in—I don't know if it was just the air evac system, but it sounded like people were setting up their own little kingdoms. Like, who got what. Like, who got desert—desert jackets and who got this and who got that and who are you going to let fly. And it's who you know and who you—and that was really interesting. They sent another major up, adding to my unit, which I don't know why because that added an extra nurse on our unit, and he was just awful. He was trying to horn in [idiom meaning to intrude or interfere]—he was trying to—he created a lot of discourse at my unit. And I finally called the air evac staging center, I said, "Get him out of here. He's causing a lot of problems down here." And I was the senior major here. And so, that was—they didn't know what to do with him, I guess, and so they sent him to me and I told them to get him out because he was creating so many problems in our little tent with our people.

So it was that—fighting the boredom—it's a big lesson—is how do you keep your troops motivated, stimulated. I mean, we did work with casualties and stuff; we didn't do what we were trained to do. That was the hardest thing; we never got to fly any air evac missions and that was tough. But we did—keeping everybody safe. I mean, there's only so much you can do to keep people safe. Luckily, we weren't with the big evac hospitals; people standing guard and that kind of stuff. But once we were all walking around to exercise—we were all walking around the little perimeter—and a Scud rocket—[makes noise]—boom, a Patriot hit it. It's like no warning systems.

TS: Right.

BD: So dealing with the unknown. I mean, there's—can you learn that lesson? There's no dealing with the unknown. And then putting yourself—no matter how hard it was—in my journal I talk about the days I'm tired of the war. It was only a short war, but you're tired of the war, but you just dig deep into your inner self and you say whatever it is that you think you have no more of, you have lots more of. And you dig deep into your inner self and pick yourself up by the bootstraps and just keep on going. And you learn to prioritize—you learn when you get back—it was harder to come back because—because there were so many things that just weren't important anymore. I mean, I lost my brother before I left, I went to a wartime thing, I dealt with all the personalities. I got sick one day with a severe headache, but they took good care of me and took care of that. We got anthrax vaccines that were not FDA [Federal Drug Administration] approved yet; we all got sick from that. So it's—And you learn just to—you deal with the culture, you deal

with the fact you have cold showers; when you're a warm shower, yeah! You had a million MREs [meals ready to eat] and that was fine, and you learned to pool them all together into a big box—whatever you didn't eat—and give it to somebody else.

TS: Right.

BD: And you work with everybody. We were working with three different squadrons, but you know what? We all worked together.

TS; Even though you had these little bickering things going on too.

BD: And—But, yeah, personality-wise, I found out that somebody was countermanding [an order revoking a previous one] the things I said to do and not to do; that she was trying to countermand. Like once they went into—they said, "Well, we—Julie said that you said this."

I said, "I didn't say that. If you have a question about anything that I say—" because I told them, like, they couldn't go into town and somebody took a truck and went into town, because at that time the ground war was starting up and it was too dangerous. We did go into town a couple of times but it was too dangerous; you can't go into town. So it's a lot of living life. And then the MASF treating us really poorly; thinking that they were it because they were active duty, and that was bad. When we went back—when we finally—when the war shut down, you know it was a hundred hour war—and this is kind of a funny story. We were told the war is done, so we're all just hanging out, right? And to clean the outhouses, the poor, lower grade army private has to do that, and they park—they take them out of the berm—because they're in a berm and stuff like that. They take them out of the berm and they pour kerosene on them and they light them up and they clean them, right? So the war is done and one day we see them dragging all the stuff out—nobody thinks anything of it—all of a sudden—boom! Right? We're all putting our chem gear on. All of a sudden I go, "Wait a minute, wait a minute, wait—there isn't any more war. Why are we putting on our chem gear?" Well, some little private took it out and put gasoline on it and we had you-know-what flying everywhere. [laughing]

TS: Oh no. You needed your chem gear.

BD: We needed our chem gear.

TS: Oh, my goodness. Oh. When you came back and you got back to your unit, how were things different?

BD: When we came back—When we got to—I think—we get back to King Khalid Military City, and then we got back to Riyadh, and they said, "Who's senior here?" And it ended up me. So I was responsible for getting ninety-two people back to Dover, Delaware. So it's easy. We're all on an airplane, right? We fly to Rota, Spain, and then in Rota, Spain five people were missing at takeoff time. So they come to me and said, "What do you want to do?"

And I said, "Close the door and let's go. It's a freedom bird." I said, "You know what Mr. Spock [fictional character in the *Star Trek* media franchise] says: the needs of the many outweigh the needs of the few. They knew what the time was, they knew to be here. Close the door." Just as they closed the door, the five of them, drunk as a skunk, came up. I didn't care they were drunk.

They said, "Well, you were going to leave without us?"

I said, "You knew the time. You knew the thing."

So ninety-two of us get to Dover, Delaware. Dover had redone the whole thing. It was warm. They had hot dog stands and beer for us.

TS: They learned, huh?

BD: They said, "Welcome home." I swear I got on my knees and kissed the ground. But it was really cool. Dover took really good care of us there, and it was just so neat to see—see the beer and see the hot dogs—beer and hot dogs. I didn't even drink beer, but I drank a beer. But they had beer and hot dogs and they had a warm place—a nice place where we could take a shower, because on the way over we didn't change uniforms in two weeks.

TS: Right. I was thinking about that.

BD: Even the cat didn't—wouldn't drag us away. So we get home and then they have to get the California people back—back. And they put us on United Airlines and we're all in uniform, and United Airlines bumped us up to first class, and they said, "What do you miss the—What did you miss the most?"

We said, "A bath and a good bottle of wine."

She said, "Well, I can't do anything about the bath." They gave us all a bottle of wine.

TS: Very nice.

BD: But we really didn't—I mean, we didn't open the bottles, we took them. And I have a picture with all the United Airlines—and this year is twenty-five years; I'm going to send it to United Airlines.

TS: Oh, that's cool.

BD: So we get back to California and my commander in Dover—I called my commander and she says, "You have to come up to the unit and bring back all your weapons and gear and stuff."

I said, "No." We're flying into LAX [Los Angeles International Airport], right? Our unit—well, from my house in Long Beach at the time, it was eighty-five miles so you're taking maybe twenty miles off of that, so sixty. I said, "No. How is it you think we're going to get up there? I am not bringing—" So Edie and I are fighting on the phone. I said, "You want that stuff? You bring somebody down to meet us." So we get to LAX

and sure as hell—and I understand what she was saying. We had weapons; they didn't want us to take our weapons to our home.

Nobody was there to meet me. I had no family there. My brother had lived there, they were out of town, and I was just like—it was really sad. I mean, I think it was sad now, but I know I get emotional over it. But one of my squadron mates, Annette Collier[?]—who I'm still friends with; she lives with her partner in Colorado—she knew that I had no family and she came to get me. And it's just—I will nev—I will never forget that. That was, like, so cool. So Annette came to meet me and somebody from the squadron came. They took our weapons, took our mobility—which is good. I go home. I had sublet my apartment out to a friend from the police academy—Dean—and he was actually almost graduated from Cal State Long Beach—and so when I got there I just said—he said, "You can sleep in—" It's a one bedroom apartment.

I said, "No, you sleep in the bedroom. I don't really care." We got along fine. I said, "I'm used to sleeping in a cot, man." I was so glad to be home. I was looking—I almost walked out my back door looking for the outhouse. [laughs]

TS: Oh, yes. I'm sure you get those—

BD: And I didn't go back there. So here's the deal. The squadron says, "We want you to readjust to your lives," so they kept us on active duty for another thirty days. Well, how am I going to readjust to my life when I end up staying in a hotel with my squadron eighty-five miles away. They got us all hotel rooms because a lot of us lived really far away. So now I'm in a hotel on active duty, integrating back into my life, which is back in Long Beach, right? Then they said, "Now, you've got to stay the whole time. You can't go back on the weekends." Of course, what do we all do? Got in our cars and we went home on the weekends.

TS: Sure.

BD: But they paid for this hotel room for myself and a lieutenant colonel who is great, Mo Masson[?]. She lived, like, twenty miles away so she went home every night. So I had this hotel room all to myself, so we all hung out and partied in the hotel and hung out.

TS: A time for decompression?

BD: It was decompression, but when they asked—when you come back to war, does anybody ever talk to you about it? Nothing. Nothing. Nothing. It was just, like, back to normal. It was like, okay.

What was really interesting is the dynamics of the squadron, because out of the sixty crews, not everyone made it into Saudi Arabia. And so, there was—there was a little kind of controversy or the people were feeling—grudgingly saying, "Well, you people went to the war." Some people stopped in Europe. And then some people only made it to Sacramento and never made it out of the United States. So there was some people had a grudge that we went to the war—we went to the war and they didn't. Well, not our fault. That's where we got assigned and that's where we went. So the dynamics were very different for the people in the unit because—and then this outside squadron—the flying

squadron that had all the pilots and navigators—one guy said to me, "A bunch of women went to the war," because they didn't go because they were C-130 pilots and there was like a zillion C-130 pilots.

I said, "Let me just tell you something. We're a critical AFSC—Air Force Specialty Code—we're a critical AFSC. We're medical people." I said, "When a war comes, who goes? Who went? The loadmaster? Not the loadmasters, the cargo people and the medical people. Gone." I said, "So don't tell me a bunch of women went to the war." I said, "You guys are a dime a dozen. Too bad." That's what I said, "Too bad." [both chuckle]

TS: Well, there was a lot of publicity about how mothers were going to war—

BD: Right. We had a lot of mothers.

TS: Women were getting pregnant to stay out of the war.

BD: Oh, yeah. And when we—the doctors were trying—those doctors that tried to get out, who said, "I never knew I was going to war."

TS: Yeah.

BD: Yeah, yeah. And what—that's interesting that you say about the publicity. When people ask me, "Well, Desert Storm was—"

I say, "I had no idea." When you go to the war all you know is your little piece of the war. That's all you know.

TS: You don't get that big picture on TV.

BD: No. I actually have a lot of old magazines from the war. I haven't read all of them, but I have a whole book full of them. I also have, like, the little *Stars and Stripes* [the U.S. military's independent news source] papers in my journal; things that correspond to a date, I cut them out and they're in my journal.

TS: Well, how do you think your—I don't know if this is the right word—maybe your attitude changed about the role that you were playing in the Air National Guard after the war. Was there a difference between before and after?

BD: Sure, because after you come back from a war it's like, well, what else is there? You did what you were supposed to—We didn't get to fly. That was the biggest thing. But I still played my part. We saw enough casualties, and maybe I didn't get to fly as a nurse but I got to at least help take care of patients—patients there—so at least I got to do part of what—because you're still AFSCed [Air Force Specialty Code] as a clinical nurse too. It was interesting that it was so much more political—in the air evac system it was very political. So I got to see that. And then once you get back everything seems like superfluous. It's just like once you go back and now you're doing your section duties, it's like, "Really?"

TS: Boring?

BD: Yeah. It's like, "Really?" And—I mean, the unit's pretty good but we don't have a lot of whiners or criers, but it was more in my civilian life, I think, that things changed because when I went back to the ER—it was really neat that five of us went to the Gulf War from the ER—five of us from the ER.

TS: Oh, really? The same?

BD: So when we got back they had stars up there with all our pictures, which was really neat. And the reception back was good. And then I had to—back to reality now in—when you go to war all you deal with is what's there. So I had to deal with all the problems and the people and that stuff, but I only had to deal with what's there. I didn't have to worry about paying bills, I didn't have to worry about everyday life, I didn't have to worry about going back to work, the police academy. So you're just so focused and now you come back and everything seemed so much more difficult, because now you're like—I was overwhelmed. I was overwhelmed. I was almost overwhelmed, because it just seemed so difficult now that I don't want to do all this stuff. You know how you say you want to get into your own little space? I wanted to get into my own little space and just be left alone for a while because now I have to deal with—I have to get my car back in order, I have to get my insurance going, I have to call all these people. I have to get my brother to tell me what's going on with all the bills, what bills are due, my apartment, and on and on—the sublet. And then you eventually go back to work. And then when you start hearing the nurses, "I need a break. I didn't get this."

You're like, "Really?" It's like—and it just seems [unclear].

So I got interviewed by the local news, and I got interviewed actually in—when I got back from Desert Storm I picked up "any person" mail and there were kids—lots of kids. So I went through the barrel, which was huge, and I found kids who were really close to me in California, from Santa Ana. So I started picking up the kids' mail and I answered one of the kids.

TS: Oh, okay.

BD: And he was thrilled. And when I got back from Desert Shield they invited me to the school. What I didn't know was they were going to have Channel 7, Channel 12, 13—and so I went in my flight suit. I brought back abayas, I brought chem gear, I brought everything and I talked to the kid's school. And I gave him one of my dog tags, I gave him a hat, I gave him all this kind of stuff. And he wrote to me during the war—as his whole class did—and so when I got back they interviewed me again. And then they interviewed me a year after the Gulf, so if you want those copies I will send them to you.

TS: Yes, that would be great to have.

BD: I will send them to you. So what I talk about in the interview is I don't recommend everybody go to war, but your priorities certainly change when people complain about

traffic and this, that, and the other thing. It's like—It's like, it's not important. What's important is you learn that your mortality—you really think of your own mortality. I mean, especially my brother died before, so you think a lot more about it. And that you learn a lot about yourself; what you can do and what you can't do.

TS: Yeah. And what other people can and can't do.

BD: Yes, and what other people—like the Pittsburgh person that pulled her gun out and was swinging it around and I almost beat her.

TS: Oh, my goodness.

BD: I said, "Give me that weapon!"

And so, when I got back I did other deployments in the guard. I went to Korea for Operation Team Spirit, which is Korea in the winter. That was really a lot of fun. And I can't remember if that was before or after, I don't know. But I went there and we did a whole operation with lots of other air evac units. We had big operations in California. We had Wounded Warrior, which was a big operation with the Marine Corps, the [U.S.] Air Force, the [U.S.] Army and stuff. And that was a great thing because we set up our whole MASF, air evac—

[The Wounded Warrior Project is a charity and veterans organization that offers a variety of programs and services for wounded veterans of the military actions following 11 September 2001. In January 2006, it was reported that only 60% of revenue was spent on programs to help veterans.]

TS: All these are exercises?

BD: We did tons of exercises. Anybody who thinks the guard doesn't do work has not been in my unit. So we took all the marines that played casualties—we set them all up in the MASF and they looked and they said, "A bunch of women are going to carry us?" [chuckles]

I said, "Sure." A lot of us are pretty little. So we'd put a one hundred and sixty pound marine with a sixty pound rucksack on him—four women would pick him up and put him on the fifth tier of a C-130. So we had lots of [real world?]—

TS: But you did it.

BD: Yes. Yes. And I'll tell you what you learn is—I wrote a letter from the Gulf to the general—oh, no, to one of the senior master sergeants from one of the units who was very active with us, and I said, "Dear Duffy[?], tonight we got Scud rocketed all night"—blah, blah, blah—I said, "Whoever the fool was—" because I didn't know it was the commanding general who didn't want to send us with flak vests—"Whoever that fool was

who said that we shouldn't have flak vests—" I said, "I don't know who the fool was who said we shouldn't have flak vests, but I'm glad we had them," blah, blah, blah, blah, blah.

Well, Duffy showed it to the general and the general wrote me an apology letter and I still have it. He said, "Dear Bernie, I was that fool who said that you didn't need the flak vests."

TS: Did he write that?

BD: He did.

TS: Wow.

BD: And I have the letter. It's in my journal. And he says, "And I'm really sorry. I'm glad that you're all safe and is there is anything we can do for you, I hope you'll let us know."

TS: Well, that's good. Well, good. Well, let me ask you some other questions; like, just kind of basic questions about being in the service. Did you notice any difference, as you got more rank, in your experience?

BD: I noticed a difference in the way—I just—I felt very accomplished. I felt that—that—I don't know. I just—one of the things I learned in—learned from the deployment in the war is rank doesn't bring respect. The person brings respect. And what I noticed about myself is I think I learned people more, and I learned when I ran my section I would say, "This is what we have to do in the two days that we're here. This has to get done. I don't care if you do them all in one day, or all in two days. But this is what we need done by Sunday, however you want to do it." And I would give people—I trusted people more to deal with their job. I think I took that after Edie Dominguez. So I think with my rank I earned respect because I cared for the people that worked under me, but also had enough rank to be someone of importance to them. So somebody told me that I really changed as a major. I got told that a couple of times. I'm not sure.

TS: In what way?

BD: I guess I couldn't see it, but they said—but maybe it's because I feel like I can't have everybody buddy-buddy now because I'm getting up there in rank, and I think that's what it was. In the medical units, a lot of the officers and enlisted all hang out together, and I think I separated myself a little more as I started to become a field grade officer.

TS: Well, did you feel like you were treated fairly during the time that you were in the military?

BD: In the last few years, absolutely not. Okay, so in the—we had a couple of commanders while I was there. Hap[?] Griffith was the first commander, and he was the one with the operational readiness inspection who got it—but he apolo—he knew what he did and he apologized. Edie was a terrific commander. I mean, she was tough but she was just—she got the job done. And for me it's like, there's four things important in the military: it's

your mission, your men, your equipment, and yourself. Your mission is what's paramount, and you need your men to do the mission, the supplies to do that, and yourself should be last.

We got a commander after Edie. She recommended him, not knowing he had been in the squadron forever, and he was a good ol' boy. When I say a good ol' boy he was just—he wasn't fit to be a commander, number one. He was a great flight nurse—he was a great flight nurse—he was not fit to be a commander. And what he did is he underhandedly took women that were in good positions, like myself as in charge of medical readiness even, and my friend who was in charge of mobility, which are huge, important sections, and he replaced us and never said a word to us.

One guy walked in to me—he was a medical service corps officer, which were the admins—were never looked on very highly by the nurses but we had a couple that were great—This guy walked in to me one day and said, "You're sitting at my desk."

I said, "What do you mean?"

He said, "Well, I'm the OIC of medical readiness now." And that was just—I mean, what a slap in the face. The person who took it from unsatisfactory and made it into an outstanding section—and not only did you not have enough respect for me to come to my face and say, "I'm changing the assignments," but you gave some fool the position. And the same thing happened to my friend in mobility. So all the women that were officers in charge of these major sections—except for one flight nurse who no one liked, who just would stab you in the back and jump over you to get where she wanted to go—the positions were taken away from women and given to these medical service corps officers that were just idiots.

TS: At what point in your career did that happen?

BD: That was getting toward the end of my career, so that was—actually I still had—to make my twenty good years I still had about three years left, and he was just—I got called into his office one day because this flight nurse that no one else liked because she would do anything to further her career—he accused me of something on a flight that somebody said I did this, that, and the other thing, which wasn't true. And he believed her and not me. And so, I could see that my career under him was just not going to be—so basically, I kind of went on autopilot. I still—all the prime—we got lots of deployments and a lot of times they were volunteer. "We got a deployment to—" wherever, Chile—and "who wants to go?"

"Me, me, me , me, me."

But he'd give the prime deployments to his buddies, and we knew that the people around him were running the unit and not him. So I just felt really uncomfortable. Well, it came to an opportunity—I didn't think I was going to get promoted to lieutenant colonel. I had not finished a bachelor's degree by then. I figured I'd never get promoted, but they had the old ROPA [Reserve Officer Personnel Act] boards. I went to the boards and I got promoted. My master sergeant called me one day and he said, "Hi."

I go, "Hi. What's up?"

He goes, "What's up?"

I go, What?"

He goes, "Congratulations, Lieutenant Colonel."

I was so excited. I just like—wow. But I also knew I had to be a lieutenant colonel for three years to get it as retirement and I had three years left. I had seventeen years by then. When you were saying about the promotion thing [chuckles]—so I got promoted. My date was, like, December 14th. I just happened—on that drill I got appointed to—you know what an administrative discharge board is? I got appointed to an administrative discharge board—the senior ranking colonel that was on was an army JAG officer. I went and sat on the board and he's calling roll, and he says, "Colonel Donato."

And I looked and I said, "Yes, Sir."

And he goes, "But you're a major."

And I said, "Yes, Sir. My date of rank is December 14th."

And he said, "Well, this says you're a colonel." And that's all I needed. When the colonel says, "This says—"

I said, "Yes, Sir." That night I went to the parachute shop, I go, "Sew on these things!" and he sewed them on.

I came on the next day, he called roll and he goes, "Colonel Donato."

And I said, "Yes, Sir."

And he looked at me and he said, "That's better." [both chuckle] And that was it. One day I was a major, one day I was a colonel.

TS: That's great.

BD: So at the end of my career I stopped flying. I had two years left, I was having—what I didn't know is I had rheumatoid arthritis. I was just having—I didn't know that yet, I didn't get diagnosed for a long time. But I was tired of flying, driving the eighty-five miles, and I knew I was coming to the end of my career. Well, it turns out the commanding general of the wing, John Iffland, he wanted a medical person to be his weight monitor for the whole wing, and the wing is fourteen squadrons, because he wanted somebody that knew about medical stuff and was high enough of rank, he said, "to deal with Charlie." Charlie was one of his full bird colonels who was a terrific guy. He was a big guy. And so, he asked me if I would do that. Well, they can keep you—they can keep you in the flying squadron. They can keep, I think, two officers that are not on flying status that are nurses. And so, they put me in that spot because the colonel—the general said to. And I was the weight monitor.

TS: So that's what you did for the last two—

BD: Yeah. And it was a—I actually sat over with the general. I sat over there with the general, and the general and I got along really well. And I talked to Charlie. Well it turns out the squadron commander I didn't like? He was overweight. Well, that's all right, I didn't bother him. But the weight monitor came to me and said, "He's gaining weight every month."

And I said, "Okay." So I went to the general, I said, "General, Sir, the colonel here—" I'm not going to say his name—I said, "He keeps gaining weight. You are his responsible person to counsel him."

He said, "Okay. Call him up and tell him to come over right now."

So I called him and he says—I said, "The general wants to speak to you."

He goes, "What does he want to talk to me?" [inaudible]

And I said, "He wants to talk to you about your weight, and he needs you to come now." He was pissed. So I said to the general, I said, "You know he's not nice to me. He doesn't treat me very well. He's going to take it out on me. "

So I guess the general told him. Afterwards, the general says, "I told him to leave you alone, I told him to be respectful to you, and I told him you're doing what I asked you to do."

TS: Did he leave you alone?

BD: He did.

TS: Oh, good. That's good.

BD: He did. And when I had my retirement party he didn't come, because I didn't invite him. [both chuckle]

TS: Well, if you are talking to someone who's not in the service, what do you think a civilian may misinterpret or not understand about what it's like to be in the military?

BD: I don't think they understand the commitment. Because when you—the day you raise your hand you commit yourself to putting your country before you. And that entails anything. Anything. I mean, it entails, if they tell you to leave your job today and go, you go. And if they tell you to do the littlest task or the biggest task, you just do it. You don't question why you do it, and you don't question if the war is right, you don't question if this is right. I mean, obviously, if they tell you something that's against the law—the UCMJ [Uniform Code of Military Justice]—but I think they don't understand that commitment; that it is a commitment part time or full time.

TS: Well, if you'd had any children would you encourage them or recommend military service for them?

BD: Absolutely. But what I would recommend is, I would tell them, whatever you decide to do, whether it be officer or enlisted, get a career that if you decide not to make the military a career, that you could do something on the outside. And find your niche, whether you—I, as a mother, would think it's right. You find what you want to do.

TS: Well, do you think your life has been any different because you joined the navy?

BD: Absolutely.

TS: In what ways?

BD: It built me as a person. I really changed as a person. I changed from—in 1975 when I went in as a young, kind of doormatty kind of, like, insecure, not really confident navy nurse, into—and it wasn't the rank that built me, it's the experience that built me as a

person. And it's the woman I am today that I have—that I am confident and that I am not afraid to confront—when I say confront people just say—say, like I confronted a couple of pilots one time when they said something, and I said, "You know what? That's not okay for you to say "A", "B", and "C", or—we had a lot of sexual harassment in the Air National Guard because we had pilots and nurses; making comments about you in a flight suit, making comments about your body—da da da da da da da. You learn just to say, "It's not okay." So I am now grown into a confident, secure woman.

TS: Yeah. Do you think maybe some of that was there but it was drawn out because of that environment that you were in?

BD: Yes, yes. I think the military gave me the pathway to do that. The other thing is, working with people, you work—as we were talking before—not only with different cultures outside the United States, but you work with—like, I never met anybody from the South. And it's fun to hear them talk about the kind of food they eat or the kind of culture that they have. And it's so—you bring people from all over the United States—and we did that when we went to the Gulf War. We're all different squadrons, all different states, all different things, but we all had the same mission. You bring all these people together and you learn to work with each other. All cultures, all races, and we all work together.

TS: Do you think that kind of breaks down barriers?

BD: Yes. Absolutely. Absolutely. And I find myself—I get along with everybody, unless there's a reason not to.

TS: Yeah. It's the individual, right?

BD: Yes. Yes.

TS: On an individual basis. I think I had somebody tell me once, that I interviewed, one of the more difficult things for them—and you already actually kind of talked about this because you're in the civilian world on one foot and then you're in the military on the other. Sometimes maybe two foot in one place and two foot in the other. But that in the work environment for that person in the civilian world there was no sense of urgency to get things done.

BD: Yes. Yes. Absolutely.

TS: But in the military there is, and so that was a difficult transition. You're transitioning period, when you actually retired, how did that go for you?

BD: It was hard, but I knew it was time, because I had a couple of things I wanted to do. I wanted to finally finish my bachelor's degree. I wanted to finally finish my degree. So that was one thing. And I think it was just—my sense of purpose wasn't there anymore, in that unit. I actually considered transferring somewhere else and I just said, "I did twenty-some good years. I'm forty-eight, so I'm still fairly young, and I'm not going to get my

retirement until I'm sixty—" because everybody says, "Oh, why?" I said, "Because I want to do other things in life."

The day I retired—I actually retired up there—my last day, I was okay with that. But then they brought me back—they wanted me to come back to the next drill. What I didn't know is they had written me up for a meritorious service medal and an air force commendation. So I came up in civilian clothes because I wasn't in the military. And that was fine. They didn't care. And then they gave me the send-off, you know where they put people on either side and then the commander walks me down it. I didn't even like the commander but I thought it was good that he did that, because my retirement party—they gave me no party. I got no party. I got no shadow box, nothing. But other people do. And I'm not the only nurse that said that, because I keep in touch with a lot of nurses. It's still a good ol' boy network and it's who you are is what you get. So I really didn't get much send-off but I had—so transitioning to civilian life, I was ready. But that day when I got awarded the medals, I kind of cried on the way home, because it was just like a final word.

TS: Yeah. Maybe, like, bittersweet?

BD: Yeah, I was ready. I mean, I was definitely ready to go, but you know when—when 9/11 came along I wanted to just jump right up and join again. But I just said, "You know what? Now you're—" Right now I'm sixty-three during this interview, so it's like, no. And I didn't have the health. I had already had breast cancer. I was diagnosed with rheumatoid arthritis and—

[The September 11, 2001 attacks, or 9/11, was a series of four coordinated terrorist attacks by the Islamic terrorist group al-Qaeda on the United States on the morning of 11 September 2001. The attacks killed 2,996 people and injured over 6,000 others]

TS: You'd done your time.

BD: Yeah, I did my time. But now I'm so involved in veterans' projects now.

TS: Are you?

BD: I moved to North Carolina two years ago. I'm the senior vice commander of the Durham VFW. So we do—like, tonight we have bingo at the VA. So we do—I get out in the community. I'm speaking at Durham Academy to their English class, who talk about the wars. I've been asked to speak at the Veterans Day at the Hillsborough Senior Center, it has tons of veterans. I spoke in Yanceyville last year, the first woman. I spoke in Burlington.

TS: Well, when you speak and you're connecting to these different organizations, what is it that you want to convey to them? Instead of telling me what you say, just tell me what you want to convey to them and have them understand.

BD: Well, what I talk to them—like a good example, what I conveyed in Yanceyville, I stressed over. "What am I going to talk about?" I said, "Talk about what you know." So what I talked about is, what did we learn from the military experience? I said. "What I learned, but I think relates to everything—" and I talked about commitment and I talked about respect, and working with others. I talked about camaraderie. I talked about patriotism. So I talked about all the things that—and that's what I convey to them. I just kind of reinforce that.

TS: Well, tell me what patriotism means to you.

BD: Well, patriotism—I gave an example—patriotism is a love for your country, but patriot—I think the example I use for military people is when that flag comes up and you see the tears in your eyes. I said, "Veterans understand that." When we play the national anthem and we take our hat and we salute or we put our hands over the heart, to us that's patriotism. And I think military people understand this so much more than the civilian population.

TS: I remember when I got out of the service and I would go to a movie and I would set all my stuff down by me, getting ready for the movie to start so you could stand up. [chuckles] There's, like, those little things that you—like, "Oh, they're not going to play—"

BD: When I went to—I went to Paris and Normandy last year, and I went because I wanted to go to Normandy, and in our group they asked who the veterans were—and four veterans—they had us lay a wreath there, and I actually brought my VFW hat with me, kind of thinking that would happen. And I put that on to represent our VFW, and saluted, and the tears—not just me, the guys too—but it was just really emotional, and I don't think—there were other Americans—other people—and I don't think the other people understand that; that kind of patriotism.

TS: A different kind of connection that you have.

BD: It's a different connection. Absolutely.

TS: Well, is there anything about your service—the challenges that you faced—that you want to talk about?

BD: I think the challenges, especially in the nurse corps—in the nurse corps, that understanding really what nurses really go through—that we see death and destruction and trauma and disease and that does affect us. That lives—We live with that every day of our lives. Every day of our lives. And for me—even more so in my civilian life because I was an ER nurse in south central LA, and I was a nurse during the Los Angeles riots—in that hospital where Reginald Denny was brought, so that's one thing as far as the nursing profession. And to—for people to recognize that we are not—we don't give back rubs and change bed pans. That's not what our career is all about. And to

recognize—the other thing is to recognize women in combat zones, and say, "Well, you're just a nurse."

"Well, yeah. Well, I got Scud rocketed every night." And I said, "Anytime you think that's not a combat zone—" I kind of thought—in Al Qaysumah we watched—every night the B-52s flew right over top of us so we watched the bombing of Iraq, thirty miles away. We watched the bombs fall and—on Iraq. So anytime you think women are not—this delusion in Congress that women are not in combat zones and we're out of harm's way, ask the three hundred people that died in the first Gulf War and the hundred and sixty women that have died in Afghanistan, and the four thousand other people.

TS: So when you joined in 1975—

BD: Yes.

TS: —and then you got out in 1999, the transformation of women's roles in our society, and within the military, changed. If you could pick out two or three things to say, "Here's what I saw," for good or for ill, what would they be?

BD: I saw the first woman navy admiral, Alene Duerk. I saw that in the early seventies. Yeah, that was the first admiral. I see women transitioning in rank, that's one thing I saw. I saw the sexual harassment get less. Its—I don't think it's gone yet, but it was much less.

TS: You think it got less?

BD: I think it was much less, though I have to say, I was in—I got out in 1999 and in the Guard it was still a little tough with all the pilots and nurses, but I saw women stop it more.

TS: I see. Okay.

BD: I saw women speak up more than in the seventies. In the seventies we just kind of—just ignored it. But I saw women kind of speak out into themselves. And I saw career transformations. I mention that women, even in 1999 there were a lot more careers open, you know you could have [unclear]. So I saw women loadmasters, which we didn't have in '84. I saw women engineers on the planes. And I'm thrilled now that I just met these Marine Iraq War veterans. So I love seeing the transition of women, and they bonded with me because they said to see people like us that have paved the way.

TS: Do you feel like a pioneer?

BD: I feel like a pioneer. Sure. Absolutely, because, I mean—even in—because even navy nurses can do so much more than what we did before. So yeah, I feel like a pioneer.

TS: Yeah. Well, I don't actually have any more formal questions, but is there anything that you want to mention that you haven't been able to talk about while we've been sitting here?

BD: No. I think I've mentioned everything. It's just the military was, I think, the best thing I ever did for my life.

TS: Yeah. Well, thank you so much, Bernie, I really enjoyed talking with you.

BD: Well, thank you for taking the time.

TS: All right. I'm going to go ahead and turn it off then.

[End of Interview]