

## **USMA Featured History Alumni – LTC CHAD CHALFONT**

Branch: ARMOR

Current Assignment: Battalion Commander, 2-7 IN, Fort Stewart, Georgia

Years Assigned to West Point: 2005-2007

*(1) Please tell us a little about yourself.*

I received my commission as an Armor officer from West Point in 1995. I have served in mechanized units for the majority of my time in the Army: Fort Benning (3ID) as a lieutenant, Fort Hood (1CD) as a captain, and Fort Irwin (11ACR) as a major. I deployed twice to Iraq – once as a Battalion MITT Team Chief and once on USF-I staff. I currently serve with the Cottonbalers of 2-7 IN at Fort Stewart, GA.

*(2) Can you please describe your duties as a History faculty member?*

I served as an Instructor in the American Division from 2005-2007. I taught the American History core curriculum courses and had the opportunity to teach the Cold War History elective. I also served as the American Division's career counselor during my last year with the Department of History team.

*(3) What made you decide to come to USMA as a History instructor?*

While completing my last year of company command back in 2002, I put some thought into what I wanted to do next. Serving in line units was what I enjoyed most about the Army, but I wanted to do something different following company command. My brigade commander thought that serving as an OC at NTC would be the best thing for my career progression, but I was convinced that I wanted to do something that would develop/exercise my mind. I didn't major in History as an undergraduate, but I found myself reading very little other than history books as a junior officer. The combination of my personal interests and the desire to develop myself as a leader in a different way led me to compete for an assignment to serve with the Department of History.

*(4) Please tell us a little about your graduate school experience at Penn State University. How did your study of history in graduate school help prepare you for future assignments in the operational Army?*

I don't think it's possible to overstate the impact that graduate studies had on me – both as a military officer and as a person. To be sure, my graduate studies made me a much better critical thinker and critical writer. Thinking and writing are core competencies for any commissioned officer; these skills that I learned at graduate school have helped me perform my job better as a field grade officer. More important, though, is the fact that my course of study in History gave me a better appreciation for context and perspective – both in our American experience and interacting with people overseas. I'm convinced that leaders emerge from a humanities-based graduate program well ahead of their peers and ready to contribute to the mission at higher level than mere line experience affords. Finally, the two years I spent at graduate school were incredibly fulfilling on a personal level. Not only was I studying full time what I loved to learn about, but it also gave me time to better connect with my family.

*(5) What was the most rewarding part of serving on the faculty? How did your faculty time prepare you for future assignments in the operational Army?*

Without question, the most rewarding part of serving on the Department of History team was the people. I was surrounded by outstanding leaders – both commissioned officers and distinguished civilian scholars. Serving on faculty and teaching History helped crystallize all that I learned at graduate school so that I could apply it beyond an academic setting. Working with the team at West Point also helped me think about my service in the Army up to that point. I had great opportunities to talk/think about warfighting – both in terms of what I had done and what I would do moving forward. There are outstanding field grade officers on the faculty who have already served as battalion commanders and field grade staff officers. I sought their counsel and perspectives and this better prepared me to serve as a Squadron XO and Regimental S3. The experience with these people, coupled with thinking/writing skills gained at graduate school, helped set conditions for what I continued to do in the Army after leaving the faculty in 2007.

*(6) How was your West Point assignment in terms of family time and work-life balance?*

I truly enjoyed my time as a member of the Department of History team. There are great opportunities to connect with great people – both faculty and cadets. I found the climate of the department to be outstanding – the department set conditions for its team members to achieve great work/life balance.

*(7) What advice would you give to officers considering a faculty position at West Point?*

I would encourage officers to follow one general principle when it comes to their careers – Do What You Want To Do. So often, well-meaning leaders outline an “optimal path” for their subordinates. This path often reflects the experiences and preferences of the advice-giver, rather than what is possible for the individual officer. I have found that there is no single “optimal path” to success in the Army. To be sure, you need to understand the timeline of your career – the decision to teach at West Point can have some significant impacts on your career in the short term. You need to understand these impacts and your branch manager can usually help you understand them. However, I assess that the combination of graduate school and teaching at West Point can open up outstanding long-term opportunities for any officer seeking continued service in our Army. I mentioned earlier that my brigade commander counseled me to serve as an OC at NTC following company command. Instead, I did what I wanted to do and I assess that I am better off for doing so.