

# Andrew DeStefano

- *Interviewed by Kyle DeSantis, Lucas Bertone, Michael Rusinko, Perry Verrino*
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**Branch:** Army

**Rank:** Sergeant

**Years of Service:** 1983-1996

**Locations of Service:** Germany



Why did you join?: “I graduated from St. Raymond's High School for Boys in 1982 and I wasn't very serious about school. So, my grades were okay and I think I did graduate but I needed to grow up a bit. I felt that the army was a good fit for me; and I wanted to serve my country at the same time. So, I joined the army for the first two years and extended one year. I got money for college, and I was able to serve and travel so it was a good, good decision.”

Andrew DeStefanos' first day in the military was an eye opener. He realized that you are awake all day and night. You are also being told to do things left and right. “Well, when you first got there, I first arrived at Fort Benning in January of 1983. It's an eye opener, because the first thing you know, first thing you realize is that you're, you're awake all day, all evening, all night, and then into the next day. So, you're not getting any sleep. That first night, you're up all night and that's intentional. Because that's made to try to recreate the feeling of chaos, you know, because combat is chaos. So they try to recreate the exhaustion and chaos and those types of effects. And so, but, you know, being from the Bronx, I was, I think pretty well prepared for it.”

Boot Camp/Training: “Basic Training was in Fort Benning, Georgia, In the army, depending upon your Military Occupational Specialty or MLS that's where they send you. So for the army, I was in the infantry. I was in 11 Charlie. That was 13 and a half weeks. Then from there, I went to airborne school. Same thing, Fort Benning and went right from basic training to the other side of the base to jump school which was actually easier for me. Jump school is very tough. They start out with about 700 guys, and after about four weeks, they're down to about maybe 550. You lose a lot of people in that school.”

Where did you serve?: “Basic training was January to April of 1983 in Fort Benning, Georgia and then airborne school was an additional five weeks also at Fort Benning, Georgia. I was stationed at Fort Bragg, North Carolina and my unit came down on what's called a levee. We were sent to

Germany for about a year and then we came back from there in 1985. Then in Fort Bragg for an additional year in 1986.

First reactions after arriving in Germany: "It was a culture shock, but then I realized, not really, because there's so many Americans over there. You know, wherever America goes, they bring America with it. So it was a little bit of a culture shock, but it was very quick to adjust."

Memorable Experiences: "I remember still being very young in 1983 and we're being notified that the United States is going to go into a Caribbean island called Grenada to rescue American students that had been kind of trapped there. There had been no notice at all, we had never even heard of that place on that island. I still don't know much about it. It was a lot different than today. I saw commanders going in and out of meetings and there were meetings going on all night that I knew something was going on. Then they put the military police there and there were no cell phones back then. They put military police by the payphones so nobody can make any phone calls because they didn't want anybody to spill the beans as to what was going on. That was very eye opening. I was 18 years of age and being in shooting, that lasted about two weeks."

Were you in Combat?: "Yeah, well for as long as it lasted a night not as direct because even though as an infantryman, we were in a reserve unit so they plugged us into active duty units. So we were kind of in a support role in Desert Storm. We did go north with them, everybody goes together."

Staying in touch with Family while in service: "Well, when I was 18 it was just basically my parents and brothers and sisters and stuff like that. So it wasn't really, you know, that difficult to pack up and go. I think that the married guys with kids have it much harder today, when they pack up and go, especially the reserves. But you know, when I first joined a team, it was just, you know, single no kids."

Food: "I thought the food was great. You know, I was really surprised. I thought, you know, you see things on TV and hear the stories. But when I got there, I was really surprised how good it was, you know, there was just food. You know, in fact, when I was in basic training all you do all day is workout. But I gained almost 40 pounds; but it was all muscle. I mean, I went in very skinny, so I gained like 40 pounds."

Traveling in Service: When I first went to the military, there wasn't any traveling, that was just basic training. Then they shipped us to Germany. Germany at the time Germany was two countries. Today it's one country. Back then you had West and East Germany, and the United States controlled West Germany. So when I was in West Germany, I used to take weekend trips all the time. I used to go to Ireland. I used to go to Switzerland. I went to France and then trained with the army. We went to Italy and some other places, you know, for a few days at a time. So it was very nice."

The day your service ended: "The first time around as soon as I came back within about two weeks, I was in college. That was probably a bigger shock for me than going off to the military. When I was away, I had already applied to go to Manhattan college in the Bronx. So when I got back, there was a seat waiting for me."

Career after Serving: "After I served then after I graduated college, I went on to the New York City Police Department."

Services/Experiences affecting your life: "It brought an appreciation for life. It made me proud to serve. I was very, very immature when I went off to the military and I came back a lot more mature. That's, that's a great thing because I really, I needed it."

Mr. DeStefano is glad he served in the army. He retired from the army in 1996. But it doesn't end there. He is now a member of the VFW and the American Legion.