

Andres Gil

- *Interviewed by Kyle DeSantis, Lucas Bertone, Nicol Haywood, Adam Payne, Perry Verrino*
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Branch: Army

Rank: Major

Years of Service: 2009 - 2012, 2016 – 2017

Locations of Service: Iraq Baghdad Province, Afghanistan, Horn of Africa

Medals: Bronze Star, Two Meritorious Service Medals



Interview

Why he joined the Army: "I actually enlisted in the Army. After high school before college. I enlisted as an eleven mike which was a mechanized infantry soldier. And then got out, went to college, went to law school. Then after 9/11, I joined the reserves and got a commission as an officer. I chose the Army over the other branches because the Army's everywhere. You know the Army actually has more boats than the Navy does, the Army has more airplanes, aircraft than the Air Force does. And I like to have my boots in the ground." He also mentioned the story of the USS Indianapolis as a reason for not joining the Navy.

Boot Camp memories: "Well, I've been through two camps, actually. I've been through boot camp as an enlisted guy and I've been in boot camp as officer basic. Boot camp at 19 years old, young, crazy, was actually an eye opener from being a kid to being an adult, or being treated like an adult, being expected to be responsible as an adult. And so boot camp was very interesting, a lot of achievements, identifying how far you can push yourself, not knowing what you really have inside of you. And learning what motivation is and learning what drive is and learning what self-sacrifice and personal courage are. It's pretty interesting how you cram.

Now looking at it from an officer's standpoint, when you get older you look at the larger picture, you understand that it's broken down into categories, and you can categorize pretty much everything. You spend a portion on developing a soldier over a period of time and you think about how you teach every soldier the basics of shoot, move, and communicate. So it's really understanding how you're meeting those roadblocks. But at the time when you're young and you're an enlisted guy fresh outta high school going into the military you might at that time think

this really stinks, am I going to make it through it, oh my God. And there were a lot of soldiers that did not make it through it. There were trainees that did not make it through it and for some reason it was the tough guys that you thought would make it through it but for some reason had a hard time with it. But then, looking back, you're talking 9 weeks for basic and whatever and it's something called OSUT, one station unit training, which is basic to AIT it's all one block, which was fifteen weeks. But think about it relatively, fifteen weeks compared to a fifty-two week deployment and you're away from your family for a year working in a different environment under hostile threat. That when you put it into perspective, you're like wow that fifteen weeks doesn't seem like a long amount of time, but when you're in it, it seems like a long period of time."

Differences in his two tours of Service: "There were a lot of differences, but a lot of similarities too. You're still in the shoot, move, communicate stage but you're also developing leadership traits. I used to have this rule: First one out of the truck, and last one in the truck. So it's lead by example on the front. So if you don't know the basics, then how will you teach someone else the basics? If you don't know how to navigate using maps and compasses and GPS then how are you going to lead people in combat? Are you going to lead people overseas or are you just going to lead people in your daily job? If you don't know how to use a radio, then how are you going to lead people? That's the thing as an officer you're supposed to be an expert at everything that you do. The expectations are higher, but corrective training through physical training is less because you're supposed to realize the importance of failure. And how it can impact or be detrimental towards accomplishing the mission, while understanding that everyone makes mistakes. It's just how you're correcting those mistakes and moving forward. What level of incompetence can be accepted? How do you learn from it?"

Overseas experiences: "As a Civil Affairs Officer, we notify command of what is going on within the populous, which is 50% of the battle space. In Iraq, I worked with provincial reconstruction teams to reintegrate Sunese into Toshia neighborhoods and help them get into the government itself so they could get paid and have jobs and identify the core cause of driving instability at the time. We identify why the populous doesn't agree with the government and you need to identify where you need to go to address a conflict. If there is no place to address that, then people turn to violence. How do we shift the Sons of Iraq from the US sponsored program to the Iraqi sponsored program and make sure they're actually getting paid. One thing the insurgents would take advantage of is that there are resources in Iraq, but some people can't get those resources and that's why we identify those causes of instability and use resources to eliminate those things. In Afghanistan, I worked in the southern Pakia province, which is right on the border of Pakistan and worked in an area that was seventy two hundred feet above sea level. It was very rural. In Afghanistan, it was more eyes and ears in the population. In Iraq, I did 75 combat patrols. In Afghanistan, I did 138 combat patrols. So we facilitated the local/national Afghan police. So we would get binders, paper, things that you guys would send overseas. But one thing you realize is

that no matter where you are, the security issue is huge. Can you imagine living in a rural area and all you're trying to do is just farm wheat, provide for your kids and then somebody comes and dishonors your family? So you travel 30 min over IED stricken roads to the biggest city so you can file a complaint with a judge and a prosecutor. Because you don't have money and the other guy does have money because he's backed by the Taliban Insurgency, he provides the judge with money so he prevails. There's no justice in the system. Every time we tried to bring a government official to the district, they would get killed because the Taliban would kill them. They would blow them up with an IED. They would do a complex ambush and destroy the car that they're driving in. So, no one wanted to come down besides the people that were down there already. In Africa, we did a lot of humanitarian work like immigration issues and issues in Yemen."

Experiences with Army Food: "They had really good food in the embassy. One of the benefits of my job is getting to eat out in society and eat out in the culture, which is pretty good. When I was in Afghanistan, we used to go to the village on patrol through the district center where there are stores and stuff like that and we stopped at a kebab place and we would eat kebabs or bring kebabs back to base. I mean, food's food. Some foods are good, some foods are not so good. So many blueberry Pop Tarts in Afghanistan. I haven't eaten blueberry Pop Tarts since 2012."

Entertainment while in service: "Dumb things I guess. In 2009 or 2010, I got to see Zach Brown. We entertain ourselves in a truck, over the coms system, talking movie-wise. In Africa, I played a lot of poker with other officers."

Close Friendships in service: "Yep. Facebook and Skype have been awesome to talk with friends. And because friends is something that transitions from one year to another or deployment to home or other assignments it allows me to stay in touch."

Balancing military responsibility with home and family life: "It's constantly a struggle. The reality is it's tough. There were 4 Easters in a row where I wasn't home. On one side you're managing a business representing people in court at critical points in their lives but on the other side I'm a dad. I'm trying to raise kids and make up for lost time. Losing 3 years plus from your kids lives when deployed or in training. And then you're balancing that with a military career where they're like 'look the things that we do are serious' and you're paid part-time for a full-time job is really what it is because they say one weekend a month but when you're in a leadership you have a lot of things to get done actually. It's a job where if you mess up your tasks people get hurt. That's the reality."

Advancing in rank while in the reserves: "The reserves is a sub-command of US command, which controls 80% of the forces. So the reserves is just a command. That's all it is. There's a difference between the National Guard and the reserves. The National Guard is controlled by the states'

governors and they need an order from the president to be mobilized. So someone in the National Guard could be promoted to Captain from First Lieutenant, but the federal government would still have to recognize that promotion. We're not part of that National Guard structure. One benefit of that is that when we mobilize we can go anywhere in the world and when we're unordered we can go to any state, anywhere. We can go from 0 to 100 in 2 seconds."

Thoughts about war or about the military based on experiences: "War is a necessary evil but it's something people wish for. I think that's the reality of war. I think our country has gotten too far away from where we were in the 60s early 70s with the draft. Where, because, we always look at the second or third order of effects, right? If you look at second or third order effects, the honorable thing about a draft is you get rid of people who don't want to be there. And getting rid of people who don't want to be there creates a more professional force. Because you're creating a force of people that want to be there or have a duty or obligation to be there. Because the reality is our military is a political unit that is utilized for advocacy of the national state and to influence our way of life around the world. That's why I'm a proponent of some type of service.