

From the Army to the Tactical Team, a Chronicle of Commitment

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Army 1st Lt. First Lieutenant Joseph Brunone needed a job when he left active duty in 2011.

With a business marketing degree from Seaton Hall University, Army training in armor and reconnaissance as well as planning and leadership skills, it's the kind of resume most employers would covet.

But Brunone wasn't interested in just any job. He longed for a position with camaraderie and where his military background would prove useful—something with edge. He wasn't interested in a desk job and joining the 9-to-5 crowd. Brunone also reasoned that finding employment with those qualities would not be easy. Meanwhile, applications to state and local police departments followed and Brunone became an Army ROTC instructor at Lehigh University. He also joined the New Jersey National Guard. Still, the search continued.

Then in December 2010, Border Patrol Agent Brian Terry was killed in a firefight with gunmen waiting to rob Mexican drug traffickers. Brunone said the tragedy riveted his attention and inspired him to investigate the Border Patrol.



"I grew up in New Jersey and didn't know anything about the Border Patrol," he said. "I decided to check it out. I wanted to become who he was."

Similar inspiration occurred after the 9/11 attacks, when the military experienced a spike in recruitment.

Brunone said he discovered the Border Patrol offered a way to serve the country as a civilian on a military-style team, the kind of job he was seeking. He stayed focused as he proceeded through the vetting—application, interviews, physical test and a polygraph exam. Hiring took nearly two years.

"You have to have a strong interest," he said, of the extensive process. "You can't get distracted. You need to be committed."

He was.

Brunone entered duty in September 2012 and headed to the Border Patrol Academy in Artesia, New Mexico. For five months, Brunone studied immigration law, applied authority, the Fourth Amendment, and he learned Spanish. Firearms, physical training, tactical driving and defense tactics—training where his Army background proved valuable—were also part of the curriculum. In February 2013 he graduated as Agent Joseph Brunone.

During his first assignment to the Border Patrol station at McAllen, Texas, he spent two years patrolling the border, apprehending drug smugglers and illegal immigrants as well as learning the arrest process and the paperwork that followed.



Finishing his midnight shift, BORTAC Agent Joseph Brunone surveys the terrain just before sunrise.

Still, Brunone's ambition to follow in Terry's path loomed.

Terry belonged to the Border Patrol's elite tactical unit, or BORTAC. The Border Patrol requires two years of experience before an agent can apply for that select team. Brunone didn't waste a day after reaching two years—he applied immediately.

As his goal grew closer, Brunone was determined to prevail. He worked hard to stay in top shape and practiced shooting firearms—all on his own.

"It was a vast investment of my time," he recalled.

Applying to the BORTAC selection and training course in El Paso, Texas, was the easy part. Getting selected and then completing the training was another matter. Selection hinged on passing three weeks of physical and mental challenges. Complex problem solving and team-building exercises, paired with food and sleep deprivation, were high on the list of challenges rating a candidate's leadership and character. Not everyone succeeds.



BORTAC training takes its toll. It's not uncommon for just 20 agents—or, amazingly, even as few as three—from a class of 75 to finish, said Brunone of the arduous screening. Typically, just 33 percent of the selectees graduate.

He made the cut.

BORTAC schooling emphasizes teamwork in solving tactical problems and completing missions. Tasks involving counter-terrorism, drug interdiction, direct action operations, foreign internal defense, security

Specialized training continued for Agent Brunone after returning to the Rio Grande Sector.

assistance, national security events and special reconnaissance within the United States and abroad were team assignments, said Brunone, who sweated through seven weeks of primary and advanced training.

His unwavering commitment paid off. Brunone completed his training in November 2014, becoming BORTAC Agent Joseph Brunone. He's now assigned to the Rio Grande Sector Special Operations Detachment, one of 25 agents, where learning continues on the job. There are still sacrifices—living in

austere conditions and working shifts of 10 or more hours. But also rewards, foremost the camaraderie of a tight-knit tactical team that helps and supports one another, said Brunone.

“I take pride in being on a team that takes prides itself on being the best,” he said. “You directly get to see how your work effects the community and benefits the nation.”

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