

Suspicious about Andre Rand, surprise, shock Army buddy

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Mike Getz never thought the Army buddy he spent a Christmas leave with would end up accused as a child kidnapper.

It was in 1962 at the Fort Dix, N.J., Army basic training station, that the former corporal socialized with Andre Rand, now charged with kidnapping Jennifer Schweiger, whose body was discovered Thursday on the Staten Island Developmental Center's Willowbrook grounds.

"I'm in shock," Getz said. "He didn't seem to have a mean bone in his body. If I had to pick someone who would go off the deep end, I wouldn't pick him. I didn't think he would be living in a shack," the Brooklyn resident added, referring to Rand's campsite in the SIDC woods.

It was Christmastime when Getz got to know Rand, one of only two trainees who remained in Fort Dix during the holiday. They dined together, went to the movies and were on friendly terms until Rand finished training and was re-stationed two months later, Getz said.

"He (Rand) seemed like an ordinary guy. He seemed like he

would do anything for anybody. He seemed like he had a future and could take care of himself," Getz said.

Getz also said that Rand appeared to be a "pleasant" loner, an assessment which mirrors the comments of Staten Islanders who knew him. "If I needed help around the barracks," he said, "(Rand) would do it. He didn't seem to be a crazy guy at the time.

"He was a good soldier. He went through basic training with flying colors. He seemed to enjoy the Army," Getz said. The 43-year-old Rand was 18 — five years younger than Getz — when he entered the Army.

Ironically, after being discharged from the service, Getz landed a job as a recreation therapist at the former Willowbrook State School in 1965. A few years later, he was surprised to see Rand also working at the facility.

Getz occasionally would have coffee with Rand in the cafeteria, but only saw Rand in passing, perhaps "10 to 12 times" since their days in the service. He had not seen the transient for about 10 years after Rand left the Willowbrook facility.

"I remember running into him once, years ago at the Jack-in-the-Box restaurant. I was with my kids. We sat and ate, and he told me he was interested in buying a new truck," Getz said. He knew little else about Rand's life.

Since Rand used the name Frank Rashen when he was in the army, Getz did not immediately realize authorities had linked his Army chum to the disappearance of Jennifer and at least two other missing children. But, after press accounts listed his background with photographs, Getz realized it was the same man.

What also surprised Getz was Rand's physical appearance. He said Rand was well-built and groomed years ago, unlike the disheveled, skinny man arrested by police last week.

"He was a very good-looking chap. What the hell happened to the guy?," he asked. "It just seems like he aged overnight. It was kind of frightening.

"Something just must have happened to him," Getz said. "I didn't know he had that kind of trouble. I guess I didn't know him that well."