

# Famous New Yorker Andrew Aitken Rooney

Andy Rooney risked his life to report some of the most dramatic events of World War II, but he only became famous decades later for joking about the quirks of everyday life.

Andrew Aitken Rooney was born in Albany on January 14, 1919. While he attended the Albany Academy Andy worked as a newspaper copy boy, delivering stories from reporters' typewriters to the editors' desks. He dreamed of being a football star when he enrolled at Colgate University. Once he recognized his limits as an athlete, Rooney grew more interested in creative writing and journalism. His career plans were interrupted when he was drafted into the military in May 1941.

After basic training in Fort Bragg, North Carolina, Rooney was assigned to the 17th Field Artillery Regiment. When the U.S. entered World War II, the 17th was stationed in Great Britain. Rooney wrote a weekly newsletter for the regiment before he was transferred to the main military newspaper, *Stars and Stripes*. He became part of the "Writing 69th," a group of war correspondents who flew on Air Force bombing missions over Germany. Some of his colleagues died with their crews. He co-authored *Air Gunner*, an account of these dangerous missions, in 1944. Later, Rooney was one of the first U.S. war correspondents to see evidence of the Holocaust in captured Nazi concentration camps.

After the war ended, Rooney didn't become a full-time journalist. He joined the CBS radio and television network in 1949 as a writer for *Arthur Godfrey's Talent Scouts*, an entertainment program. He wrote for comedy shows and documentaries, but by the 1960s he worked most often for the news department.

Rooney worked behind the scenes, winning two Emmy awards for writing commentaries that anchormen read on the air. He finally became an on-air personality after CBS rejected an anti-war commentary partly based on his war experiences. He quit CBS and briefly joined PBS, where he read "An Essay on War" and won a third Emmy. When he returned to CBS, the network put him in front of the camera more frequently.

In the summer of 1978, CBS gave Rooney a time slot on the popular *60 Minutes* news program for a weekly comic commentary. "A Few Minutes with Andy Rooney" was only meant to last through the summer, but the segment proved so popular that it became a permanent part of the program. As he entered his sixties, Rooney suddenly became a celebrity.

For the next three decades, Andy Rooney was America's favorite curmudgeon. He rarely commented on politics, but made viewers laugh with sharp observations on the absurdities of everyday life. Older viewers sympathized with his frequent dismay at the modern world, while his portrayal of himself as a cranky old man amused younger viewers. His new popularity led to a syndicated newspaper column beginning in 1979 and best-selling books from the 1980s to the 21st century. He also published *My War*, about his World War II experiences, in 1995.

Rooney still got into trouble with CBS occasionally when his old-fashioned attitudes offended minorities. Despite the controversies he continued his *60 Minutes* commentaries and newspaper columns until October 2011, when he was 92 years old. He was one of the last members of the World War II "greatest generation" to appear regularly on TV. Less than one month after retiring, Rooney died on November 4, 2011.



Photo courtesy of the Times Union,  
Albany, NY



**Albany** is New York State's Capital City and is located on the western bank of the Hudson River. The area was first settled by the Dutch for the fur trade.

You'll find many of Andy Rooney's short video clips from *60 minutes* online at [YouTube.com](https://www.youtube.com). This is one of a series of Famous New Yorker profiles written by Kevin Gilbert for the NYNPA-Newspaper In Education. All rights reserved 2014.