

# Robert Raddatz

*DHQ/106th Infantry Division*

November 17, 2005 - [Life during wartime](#)

At a time when many young men fear reinstatement of the draft, it can turn heads to hear that during World War II, most servicemen enlisted.

Winston Cone and Robert Raddatz, residents of Woodbridge and Bethany respectively, and veterans of that war, both enlisted.

Both also knew they would be drafted if they did not enlist, so they took matters into their own hands. Cone, then a recent college graduate, approached his enlistment with the mindset that because of his education, he would have a say in his military occupational specialty (MOS).

"I had a degree, so I was more advanced than most people in the army, especially during the depression," Cone said. "So I enlisted because I wanted to get into the [Army Air Force] Weather Service, and if I had waited for the draft, I wouldn't have gotten in," Cone said.

"I went into the recruiting office and said I was interested in meteorology, and he [the recruitment officer] said, 'We don't have it,'" Cone said. "I said, well look it up. So he did, and said, 'Oh, I guess we do.'"

Raddatz had just graduated from high school a year early when he enlisted.

"I was 17 when I went in and I was healthy," Raddatz said, "and I mean, there was no hope of being excluded [from the draft] at that age unless I went to Canada, which was out of the picture."

Although the Vietnam War comes to mind when people think of draft-dodgers fleeing to Canada, during WWII there was a minority that fled north.

"I don't mean to say that there were many, but there were some," Raddatz said.

But he and Cone faced the Army head-on, and eventually served overseas.

Raddatz is a combat veteran of the famed [106th Infantry Division](#) that served in Germany, France and Belgium.

"We had just arrived as the replacement division for one that had been doing battle a long time," he said, "and we were green, so it was kind of disorganized."

His division fought in the decisive Battle of the Bulge. In the first week, Raddatz's 14,000-man division suffered 7,000 casualties.

Aside from bloodshed, Raddatz experienced extreme and dangerous cold while his division camped in the Ardennes forest and awaited battle in the dead of winter.

"I was never so cold in my life," he said, "and I had on everything I could get on."

Raddatz also investigated atrocities, such as the mistreatment of civilians during wartime. "All this stuff that's going on now started then," he said.

Cone's overseas assignment as an observer for the Weather Squadron took him throughout Africa and even into India and present-day Israel.

"It was 120 degrees, with five degrees humidity, and we had haboobs, which are like hurricanes, and the winds would spin planes around," Cone said. He contracted malaria while in Africa, and the only doctor who could treat it was so far away that he had to be flown in.

After Cone's initial recovery, he suffered subsequent malarial symptoms for years.

"It wasn't easy sometimes being in some of those places," he said. "And I never knew what we were doing [next]. I just had orders to go."

Yet he and Raddatz both say they are some of the lucky ones. "I never was sorry that I joined the Weather Service, because I might have ended up on a flying fortress [B-17], so I always figured I was rather fortunate," Cone said.

"I was lucky to get out of [to survive] the Battle of the Bulge," Raddatz said. "I was lucky to have my 52 points [the number at which he was discharged], and I was lucky to be at an age where I didn't question what I was doing. I mean I didn't know any better."

Raddatz and Cone thankfully emerged with their lives from the war they served in. Raddatz received a Bronze Star medal and four battle stars. He went on to attend college, work at Winchester Repeating Arms in New Haven, and have seven children.

He doesn't often talk about his wartime service. "I wait for people to ask me," he said. Yet he is proud. But he takes no greater pride than he does in his children, two of whom also were in the service.

His wartime experiences left Cone with a lifelong passion for the main place he was stationed: Africa. Army life also awarded him another passion - his wife, Virginia. They met when the Army assigned him to Illinois to teach new weather observers. Virginia was teaching nearby. Not long after they married, they traveled to Africa to teach, and did so again many times. Cone became an African history professor.

"It was touch-and-go in places, not only in war but also in my lifetime, but everything worked out," Cone said. "The war changed my entire life."

War today divides the country. While some support the President's Middle East efforts, others protest his every move. But during World War II, 12 million men, many of who enlisted, fought in the war that united the country.

For their sacrifices, America honors them and says thank you - not just on Nov. 11, but every day.

*Ashley Lyons, Amity Observer - Shelton,CT,USA*



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James D. West

[www.IndianaMilitary.org](http://www.IndianaMilitary.org)

[jjmdwest@centurylink.net](mailto:jjmdwest@centurylink.net)