

# BETWEEN PACIFISM AND PATRIOTISM

## Helping Students Think About Military Options



*RESOLVED, That it is the judgment of this Conference, that the bearing of arms, or engaging in war, is a direct violation of the teachings of our Saviour and of the spirit and letter of the law of God.*

**S**o stated the body of Christian believers recently organized as the Seventh-day Adventist Church, meeting at their fifth annual General Conference session in 1867. As this emerging movement forged its organizational identity, the crisis of the American Civil War forced them to reflect about the implications of their radical faith in dealing with the moral dilemma of war.<sup>1</sup> As I prepare this article early in 2003, the United States is mobilizing for war in Iraq, with thousands of Adventists serving in the U.S. Armed Forces—in both active duty and Reserves, the majority bearing arms.<sup>2</sup>

While encouraging young people to choose options other than combatant service in the military, the church's official stance since 1972 has recognized the possibility that conscientious Adventists will reach different conclusions on this momentous moral issue. Adventist educators thus face the responsibility of informing those consciences. The historical sketch, interpretation, and resources in this essay are intended to assist educators in developing their own approaches to teaching the issue. The main arguments and the background material are based on American Adventist history, though some comparisons with developments in other parts of the world are included.

**By Douglas Morgan**

### **Pacifism, Pragmatism, and Prophetic Witness: 1860-1915**

While many of the earliest Seventh-day Adventists considered pacifism, or nonresistance, a part of their radical faith,<sup>3</sup> it was also important for the success of the fledgling church to show that its outsider identity did not cause members to resist civil authority. According honor and subordination to earthly governments, too, was commanded by Scripture. Thus, Adventists, who had not spread beyond the Northern states at that point, sought ways to overcome suspicions that their pacifism entailed disloyalty to the Union or sympathy for the Confederate rebellion. Moreover, their passionate

and near unanimous opposition to slavery made for heartfelt identification with the Union cause.

So, the dilemma: If they resisted military service in order to be faithful to Scripture, they risked being accused of disloyalty, which could lead to a severe government crackdown on their fledgling movement. They would also be indirectly abetting the continuation of the slave system they had so fiercely denounced. To participate in armed combat, though, would make a mockery of their claim to be a remnant faithful to “the commandments of God and faith of Jesus.” Their prophetic message would be compromised, along with their witness to the fourth and sixth commandments.

Let us trace, then, how they worked through this dilemma. With the possibility of conscription on the horizon in August 1862, James White, the church’s foremost organizer, set forth a pragmatic line of thought in an *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald* editorial entitled, “The Nation.” White reasoned that if Adventists were drafted, they should submit, letting the government assume responsibility for any violations of God’s law.<sup>4</sup>

White’s editorial sparked vigorous, extended debate in the pages of the *Review*.<sup>5</sup> Some believers called for Adventist participation in the Union’s “crusade against traitors”—one even fantasizing about an armed regiment of Sabbath keepers that would “strike this rebellion a staggering blow.”<sup>6</sup> Other believers weighed in for total pacifism, including Henry Carver, who maintained “that under no circumstances was it justifiable in a follower of the Lamb to use carnal weapons to take the lives of his fellowmen.”<sup>7</sup> Fortunately, before the federal draft was instituted in March 1863, a testimony from Ellen White deftly set forth a position that avoided inflammatory rhetoric, yet took a principled stand on noncombatance. Mrs. White rebuked both the pacifists’ enthusiasm for draft resistance as well as the zealotry of those who longed to volunteer for the Union’s righteous cause. Adventists should not court



James White

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martyrdom by making provocative pronouncements, she cautioned. Yet she also warned that “God’s people . . . cannot engage in this perplexing war, for it is opposed to every principle of their faith. In the army they cannot obey the truth and at the same time obey the requirements of their officers.”<sup>8</sup>

The 1863 federal draft law allowed conscripts to purchase an exemption or to provide a substitute, thereby giving Adventists a way out of their dilemma. Though the hefty \$300 commutation fee placed a financial strain on the church, which tried to raise the funds for those who could not afford it, this provision made it possible to avoid messy confrontation with the government.

Congress, in July 1864, restricted these options to conscientious objectors with membership in a recognized pacifist church.

The Adventist leadership quickly sought governmental recognition of their noncombatant position. Declaring themselves “a people unconditionally loyal and anti-slavery” but unwilling to shed blood because of their convictions, based on the Ten Commandments and the teachings of the New Testament, they obtained an exemption allowing them two options: (1) accepting assignment to hospital duty or care of freedmen, or (2) paying the \$300 commutation fee.<sup>9</sup> Despite this government recognition, at the local level, many Adventist draftees were refused alternative duty, threatened with imprisonment or court-martial, and harassed when they tried to claim their right to alternative duty.

Obtaining governmental recognition formalized the church’s commitment to pacifism, which though widely held, had not been systematically delineated or expressed in a generally agreed-upon form prior to the war. A resolution voted by the General Conference session of 1865 declared: “While we thus cheerfully render to Caesar the things which the Scriptures show to be his, we are compelled to decline all participation in acts of war and bloodshed as being inconsistent with the duties enjoined upon us by our

divine Master toward our enemies and toward all mankind.”<sup>10</sup>

Our Adventist founders’ encounter with the American Civil War thus established a legacy that combined a religiously based pacifism with a commitment to cooperating with government, both as a matter of expediency and in supporting the government’s just cause against the slaveholders’ rebellion. It remained for their successors to adapt the elements of this legacy to new situations.

Matters of war did not again create a major crisis for the church until World War I. However, important developments relating to its noncombatant stance occurred because of the church’s expansion overseas and the Spanish-American War. During the late 19th century, Adventism began winning adherents in European states with universal military service systems.<sup>11</sup> While visiting Basel, Switzerland, in 1886, Ellen White wrote a letter in which she briefly referred to three Adventists working in the conference office there who had been called to participate in three weeks of military drill. Mrs. White warmly commended the young men and their course of action, noting that they did not perform the military exercises by choice, but “because the laws of their nation required this.”<sup>12</sup> Though hardly an in-depth “testimony,” the letter from Basel would prove influential. Some European Adventist leaders interpreted it to mean that members need not resist required military service.

Still, the pacifist ethos ran deep if not wide in European Adventism. Russian Adventists in the early 20th century received harsh treatment for refusing to carry weapons, including one convert from atheism who, in 1913, suffered severe floggings while in the penal section of the army.<sup>13</sup> According to a Soviet study in the 1930s, Adventists were the third-largest group among religious objectors to bearing arms in World War I.<sup>14</sup>

Though frequently overlooked, the era of the Spanish-American War, during which America began to emerge as a world power, is significant because pacifism—and with it, protest against war and militarism—were more prominent than at any other time in Adventist history.<sup>15</sup>

Adventist leaders warned against getting caught up in the “war fever” sweeping the nation and joining in the cheers for the war as a Christian cause, which were being sounded by mainline Protestant voices. A *Review* editorial decried the “spirit of militarism” being fostered “right within the bosom” of American churches and the companies of “Christian cadets” being trained for action under church auspices.<sup>16</sup> Denominational leaders called on the church to adhere to a pacifist ethic. In a sermon preached at the Battle Creek Tabernacle 12 days after the United States entered the war with Spain, General Conference President George A. Irwin declared “we have no business whatever to become aroused and stirred by the spirit [of war] that is abroad in the land.” Citing several passages from the Sermon on the Mount, he declared that these Scriptures “show what I believe is the position of the Christian in this conflict, and what are the teachings of our Lord and Master in regard to war and the spirit that comes with it.”<sup>17</sup>

At the same time, critique of the increased mingling of nationalistic patriotism with Christianity became a prominent theme in Adventist publications. The Christian’s citizenship is in heaven, Adventists insisted, and thus, “Christian patriotism” meant loyalty to the heavenly kingdom, not to any earthly nation.<sup>18</sup>

### Noncombatancy as Conscientious Cooperation, 1915-1950

The 20th century, with its world wars, Cold War, weapons of mass destruction, and repeated genocide, brought



Three of many conscientious objectors in the American Army during World War I. Dick Hamstra, center, wears the Croix de Guirre (Cross of Gallantry Medal), awarded him for bravery by the French Government. Others shown are Julius Peters (left) and Henry Skadsheim.

# Why Adventists Took A Noncombatant Stand

**W**hat was the basis for the early Seventh-day Adventist commitment to non-violence? Why did they feel compelled to take such an unpopular stance?

The central rationale running through articles, petitions to governmental authorities, and General Conference resolutions was, quite simply, the obligation to obey the biblical mandate—both the Ten Commandments (particularly the fourth and sixth) and the teachings of Christ. Jesus declared that “peacemakers will be called the children of God,” and exhorted His followers, “Do not resist an evil doer. But if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also” (NRSV).

Before the Civil War, the *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald* published occasional articles contending that the sixth commandment and Christ’s teaching that His followers should love their enemies meant that Christians must not engage in killing or use of “carnal weapons.”

While the debate within the church sparked by the pressures of war and the draft in the early 1860s revealed a diversity of perspectives, the assumption that biblical commands were meant to be obeyed framed the entire discussion. Even James White’s controversial initial proposal—that Adventist draftees would not bear moral responsibility for what government compelled them to do—rested on the assumption that: (1) Adventists would not volunteer for service in the army; (2) if drafted, church members would do their best to obtain Sabbath privileges and recognition as non-combatants. Only if such efforts failed would moral culpability fall upon the government (see the *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald* [September 9, 1862], page 118).

In its first official step to obtain recognition as a peace church, the General Conference Committee in August 1864 approved a “Statement of Princi-

ples” for presentation to the governor of Michigan. This document cited the fourth and sixth commandments as imperatives of their faith to which they could not give allegiance in military combat.

The “Statement of Principles” contained no references to Christ or the New Testament, which indicates that adherence to the Ten Commandments was the basis for Adventist resistance to engaging in warfare. After all, keeping the fourth commandment—and indeed the entire Law—was central to their reason for existence.

However, when the church sought federal recognition from the provost marshal general James Fry in September 1864, it also cited “the teaching of the New Testament” in its rationale. Moreover, the resolution adopted by the General Conference the following year cited “the duties enjoined upon us by our divine Master toward our enemies and all mankind,” without explicitly mentioning the Ten Commandments. The General Conference resolution of 1867, cited on page 16, included both “the teachings of our Saviour” and the “spirit and letter of the law of God” in its rationale.

The consistent theme was radical faithfulness to the whole biblical testimony. Early Adventists found imperatives for nonviolence in both in the Ten Commandments and in the teachings of Christ.

However, the early Adventists were not reading Scripture in a vacuum. The movement sprang up in the cultural climate of radical reform in the antebellum North, where the causes of temperance, abolitionism, and peace were bound together.

Millerite Adventist leader Joshua V. Himes had joined with abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison and others in forming the New England Non-Resistance Society in 1838. The society linked repudiation of force, including “militia service” with the millennial theme of bearing a peace testimony “until right-

eousness and peace shall reign in all the earth” (see Henry Mayer, *All on Fire: William Lloyd Garrison and the Abolition of Slavery*, pages 250, 251). Other Adventists supported this movement, and William Miller himself, according to Garrison, was an “outspoken friend” of this and other reform causes (see Ronald Graybill, “The Abolitionist-Millerite Connection” in Ronald L. Numbers and

Picture Removed

## William Lloyd Garrison

Jonathan M. Butler, eds, *The Disappointed: Millerism and Millenarianism in the 19th Century*, pages 140-143).

While it does not appear that anyone in the Sabbatarian branch of the broader Adventist movement was also prominent in the peace movement, the Sabbatarian Adventist literature of the 1850s and 1860s breathes the spirit of Garrisonian abolitionism and nonresistance. That radical reform ethos in turn drew on the heritage of radical dissenting Protestantism—from the Anabaptists of the 16th century to the nonconformists of England and New England. A nonviolent orientation was thus an outgrowth of the line of dissenting, “always reforming” Protestantism with which Adventists identified. ✍

challenges beyond even the apocalyptic imagination of Adventism's founders. During the first half of the 20th century, noncombatancy in general remained nonnormative in Adventism, despite significant exceptions outside the U.S. However, a subtle but significant change in emphasis occurred. Most 19th-century Adventists viewed pacifism as a matter of faithfulness to Christ and obedience to the law of God, although they sought to accommodate the state as far as possible without violating principle. Twentieth-century Adventists tended to shift the priority to the Christian's patriotic duty to the nation-state, and sought ways to fulfill that duty within their religious scruples.

With church members facing military conscription for the first time in many years, denominational leaders met in April 1917, one week after the U.S. declaration of war, to thrash out a position. One participant in the Huntsville, Alabama, meeting recalled a "heated debate" in which those

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religious groups whose principles forbade participation in war, but required them to accept service declared by the President as noncombatant.<sup>21</sup> No provision was made for a 1-O, or totally pacifist stance.

Holding strongly to their refusal to bear arms, Adventists were willing, even eager, to accept other roles defined for them in support of the war effort. They were, said F. M. Wilcox, "seeking to assist the government in every way possible, aside from the work of actually bearing arms."<sup>22</sup>

Though accommodation between church leaders and government was readily achieved, its application produced considerable difficulty and conflict. Church members still faced local draft boards and training camp officers unfamiliar with their church or with government exemptions for noncombatants. Many faced harassment, beatings, court martial, and imprisonment for adhering to their convictions.<sup>23</sup>

The problems Adventists experienced in World War I prompted efforts to be better prepared for the next war. However, not everyone was convinced that the direction taken during World War I was the right one. Some, who shared in the wave of pacifism that developed as a reaction to the crusading militarism of many churches during the Great War, urged the General Conference to take a firm stand, not only against bearing arms but also against other forms of voluntary support for the

war, such as buying bonds. General Conference leaders also received several inquiries from student groups concerning the church's position.<sup>24</sup>

The renewed attention to the problem of military service, however, did not produce a shift toward pacifism or a resistance to militarism, but rather a move in the opposite direction. In May 1934, the General Conference Committee approved a pamphlet by J. P. Neff, *Our Youth in Time of War*, to guide young people in preparing for the possibility of military service in a future war. Adventist youth, said Neff,



**British Seventh-day Adventist noncombatant soldiers who were imprisoned during World War I for refusing to bear arms or work on Sabbath.**

favoring acceptance of noncombatant service in the military prevailed over those favoring "a more pacifistic stance."<sup>19</sup> In the statement finally agreed upon, Adventists affirmed their loyalty to the government and petitioned that "we be required to serve our country only in such capacity as will not violate our conscientious obedience to the law of God as contained in the decalogue, interpreted in the teachings of Christ, and exemplified in His life."<sup>20</sup>

The Selective Service law enacted shortly thereafter contained exemptions from combat for members of reli-

# War and Peace in the Christian Heritage

How have Christians through the ages dealt with the moral dilemmas associated with war and military service? While an ethic of non-retaliation, peacemaking, and love of enemies is central to New Testament theology, soldiers who appear in various biblical passages were not exhorted to abandon their occupation. The centurion Cornelius, for example, highlighted as the charter Gentile convert, received, along with his household, the gospel message and an outpouring of the Holy Spirit without being required to resign his commission.

On the other hand, the early Christians' passionate commitment to the nonviolence of the gospel message created a tension with requirements for military service. Hippolytus, in the early third century, describing moral standards for new converts (which by then were long-established), wrote: "A military constable must be forbidden to kill. If he is commanded to kill in the course of his duty, he must not take this upon himself . . ." (*The Apostolic Tradition*, cited in Eberhard Arnold, *The Early Christians in Their Own Words* [Farmington, Pa.: Plough Publishing House, 1997], p. 113).

One of Emperor Diocletian's first steps in his escalating efforts to eradicate Christianity included a decree prohibiting Christians from serving in the army because he suspected that they would not obey orders to fight. Several Christians were executed for resisting pressures to deny their faith so they could remain in the Roman army (see Justo L. Gonzalez, *The Story of Christianity*, vol. 1 [New York: HarperCollins, 1984], p. 103).

When Christianity became the religion of the empire after the conversion of Constantine in the fourth century, an entirely new issue came to the forefront, one with which believers have struggled ever since. Christians were now in charge of the army, or later, in modern democracies, had significant influence over those who were in charge and how they should behave. For the most part, Christians since Constantine have been

guided by the theory of "just war," first set forth by Augustine in the fourth century and refined by Thomas Aquinas in the 13th century. Just war theory holds that Christians may rightfully, even lovingly, engage in warfare, if

- the cause of the war is just,
- military action is initiated by legitimate governmental authority,
- this action is the last resort,
- it has a reasonable hope of success, and
- it is a proportional response to the evil it seeks to redress.

During the Reformation in the 16th century, the Anabaptist movement (which was the precursor of the various Mennonite and Amish churches), followed by the Quakers in the 17th century, revived the concept of pacifism as a core Christian value. The historic witness of these and other "peace churches" has gained a broader influence in the wider Christian community in recent decades through the work of scholars such as John Howard Yoder and Stanley Hauerwas.

## Sources for Further Study

For information on recent events such as peace protests by Adventist college students, the church's official statement on the Iraq War, and the fate of church members seeking noncombatant status in Russia and North Korea, see the March 2003 news section in the official church Web site: <http://www.adventist.org/news/data/2003/02/>.

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“should be patriotic, ready to serve their country’s welfare at personal sacrifice.” To that end, he suggested that they acquire specialized training as medics or in some other field that would equip them for efficient noncombatant military service. Neff denounced pacifists as advocates of “peace at any price,” conscientious objectors for refusing all forms of military service, and “antimilitarists” for their disrespect for “our uniforms and flag.” Adventists inclined toward pacifism protested, but Neff’s approach and spirit prevailed.<sup>25</sup>

Meanwhile, Adventists organized a program of pre-induction training. As world tensions increased, veterans of World War I expressed concern that the difficulties Adventist soldiers had experienced in that war not be repeated, should another one break out. Everett N. Dick, a historian at Union College in Lincoln, Nebraska, who initiated what later be-

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came known as the Medical Cadet Corps (MCC), wrote that the purpose of the program was give the Adventist recruit, “who would otherwise be entering the service of his country at a handicap,” an orientation enabling him “to fit into a place where he could serve God and his country conscientiously.” In 1935, the General Conference recommended that all Adventist colleges and academies provide MCC training similar to what had been instituted at Union College. After the war began in Europe in 1939, the program spread rapidly.<sup>26</sup>

When the Selective Service Act was passed in September 1940, those refusing to bear arms were classified as “conscientious objectors.” Carlyle B. Haynes, head of the National Service Commission (the organization’s name was returned to War Service Commission after the United States entered the war), took pains to show that despite this classification, the



In many wars, Seventh-day Adventists have bravely served as medics and in other noncombatant roles.

Adventist position was quite different from other forms of pacifism. Picking up J. P. Neff's line of argument, Haynes wanted "a well-defined separation drawn between ourselves and war resisters, pacifists, conscientious objectors to war, and all others who refuse service to their country." As "noncombatants," he declared, "we do not oppose war, we do not agitate against war, we do not organize against war, we make no protest against war, we are not unwilling to serve in the military organization when drafted, we are not opposed to saluting the flag, and we are not opposed to wearing our country's uniform."<sup>27</sup>

A 1941 Fort Worth, Texas, newspaper article on an MCC camp described Adventists as "conscientious cooperators," and church leaders quickly adopted the phrase.<sup>28</sup> Adventists arrived at their unique accommodation by viewing the ethical problems raised by war in strictly individualistic terms. As Haynes put it, "Christian noncombatancy concerns itself only with the individual's accountability and relationship to God." Adventists took no responsibility for the corporate policies or actions of the state; thus participation in the "military establishment" posed no problem so long as the acts they performed were ethically proper.<sup>29</sup> As seen in a brief book by *Review* editor Francis D. Nichol, the main question that concerned Adventists was not, How can we avoid complicity in making war? but rather, In view of our conviction against taking human life, "How then shall we make a direct contribution in relation to the armed forces?"<sup>30</sup>

During World War II, American Adventists enthusiastically embraced the national consensus about the rightness of defending freedom against the aggression of ultra-nationalist dictatorships. Noncombatant military service, rendered more useful by the MCC, offered a way to prove their patriotism.<sup>31</sup> Moreover, their distinguished service demonstrated that noncombatancy was not cowardice.<sup>32</sup> Desmond T. Doss, with his bravery in winning the Congressional Medal of Honor in 1945—the first ever awarded to a noncombatant—provided compelling evidence for that point.<sup>33</sup>

### Adventists and the Military in Europe

While going to impressive lengths to put noncombatancy to the service of patriotism, American Adventism at the end of World War II remained generally firm on the re-



Left to right, Terry Johnsson, first Seventh-day Adventist in the U.S. Air Force Honor Guard, and Desmond Doss, recipient of the Congressional Medal of Honor—the only conscientious objector to receive this award. Photo taken about 1988-1991.



Rear Admiral Barry Black, Chief of Chaplains, U.S. Navy.

ligious duty of refusing to bear arms. In Europe, however, during the era of the two world wars, non-combatancy as a normative ideal suffered irreparable damage.

As World War I neared, Germany had the largest Adventist membership of any European nation. Ludwig R. Conradi, who played a major role in establishing Adventism in

Europe, led the German church. Drawing on Ellen White's favorable comments from Basel in 1886 about Adventist participation in military drill exercises, Conradi basically repudiated noncombatancy. Under his leadership, the German church took the position that during wartime, Adventist draftees would not only bear arms, but also not make an issue of Sabbath observance. Conradi insisted only on Sabbath keeping by Adventist military personnel during peacetime.<sup>34</sup>

The General Conference condemned the German course after World War I, though Conradi argued that he was only following guidelines given him by church

leaders. At a meeting in Gland, Switzerland, in 1923, European church administrators agreed upon a statement close to the American position, affirming that Adventists should refuse all combatant service as well as any non-humanitarian Sabbath work. The German church leaders admitted they had erred. However, the statement also included a proviso that each church member had "absolute liberty to serve his country, at all times and in all places, in accord with the dictates of his personal conscientious conviction."<sup>35</sup>

Thus, the European church's between-the-wars stand was relatively flexible, leaving believers with plenty of room to work out for themselves the tensions between national and religious loyalties. In the post-World War II era, American Adventism followed a similar course.

### Noncombatancy Becomes Non-Normative, 1950-

After World War II, the American Adventist church continued a strong program of support for Adventist soldiers, promoting the effectiveness of their service through the National Service Organization (NSO), though it did not recommend that members voluntarily join the military. The NSO functioned as liaison between the church and the Pentagon, dealt with problems faced by servicemen in following their religious beliefs, conducted centers and retreats, coordinated MCC training, and published the newsletter *For*



*God and Country*.<sup>36</sup> NSO materials tended to encourage continuance of the “conscientious cooperation” stance, avoiding critical scrutiny of national military or defense policy.<sup>37</sup> However, the church was not immune to the growing skepticism in American society regarding the military, which peaked during the Vietnam War era. While the influence of the “conscientious cooperators” model remained strong, the consensus regarding it was breaking down.<sup>38</sup>

Responding to young Adventists who felt their faith compelled them to resist all forms of military service—combatant or otherwise—church leaders in 1969 somewhat re-

luctantly went on record supporting those who chose a pacifist stance, thereby making available the 1-O classification for members. While the church had never made military service a test of membership, the 1972 Autumn Council made clear that those who accepted 1-O or 1-A (combatant) classification would not be denounced or excluded. Denominational leaders still recommended noncombatant military service for Adventist draftees (1-A-O classification) but tacitly recognized that thoughtful Adventists might also choose to be pacifists or even to carry arms.<sup>39</sup>

Consequently, as the Vietnam conflict—and the U.S.

## Teaching Points for Students

**T**he accompanying article and its references and sidebars can form the basis for discussions about war and noncombatancy with students. These documents will help young people appreciate the complexity of the moral issues, as well as the courage of those who have stood up for their convictions. But what are teachers to advise if young people ask them directly, “Should I join the military?”\*

As a former military chaplain, my concise response to young people who ask me whether they should volunteer for the army, air force, navy, or marines is this: “Look at the whole picture before you make a decision. This includes Sabbath keeping, weapons training, and the issue of control.” However, I find that I get their attention when I describe in some detail what they can expect if they voluntarily enter military service.

Two questions will usually grab the attention of most students considering joining the military. They are:

**1. Would you rather give orders or take orders?** Most 18-year-olds I have encountered have no difficulty answering that one! I can then point out that if they join the military right out of high school/academy, they go in at the lowest rank and will be taking orders from everyone they encounter. If, on the other hand, they would rather give orders, then they should finish college and enter the military as an officer.

Then they will be dealing with superior officers who generally have a more enlightened worldview than those who command enlistees.

**2. Would you rather have a starting salary of \$1,500 per month or \$3,000 per month?** Get a current pay chart from any military recruiter or online, and show it to students. Point out that the enlisted person’s pay starts at about 50 percent of what an officer receives. Even if the enlisted person has a two-year associate degree, he or she will earn much less than an officer (college graduate) with the same time in service. Further, use the chart to show students that if they choose to make the military a career, there is a big difference between the pay scale at the 20-year mark for an enlisted person (E-7) and an officer such as a lieutenant colonel (O-5).

Even if the student must take out loans to get through college, he or she will be much better off in every way to have a degree. Students may argue that they can get money for college if they enlist and even receive a bonus for choosing certain fields. However, a comparison of income differentials from the pay chart quickly reveals that those who enter the military with a college degree are better off from day one to retirement.

The student may counter with, “But I can get college classes while I am on active duty!” That depends on the assignment. People in a unit that does lots of field training will not be

able to attend night classes. They will be in the field, on the ship, or in the airplane. The military’s mission is to prepare for conflict, not to provide a college education. *MIS-SION* comes first. If there is time left over, members of the military may be able to get some college classes, but the chances of that are very slim.

The basis for my asking these questions is not to encourage young people to join the military, but to (1) urge them to delay making this decision, which will give them time to mature in their thinking and life experiences so they can make better choices, and (2) urge them to get their education *first*. However, even students who do not have the grades or inclination to attend college will understand the implications of these two questions: “**Do you want to give orders or take them? Are you willing to take 50 percent less pay for the same work?**”

### Sabbath Accommodation

It is not true, as some have alleged, that by joining the U.S. military you give up all of your rights. You can re-



draft—ended, the noncombatant principle the church had repeatedly advocated for more than a century had officially been rendered non-normative. The substantial number of Adventist combatants in the Persian Gulf conflict of 1990-1991 suggests that the recommendation has carried minimal weight in practice.

Through the NSO, now under the umbrella of Adventist Chaplaincy Ministries, the church continues to provide high-quality resources for guidance on how to be a faithful, Sabbath-observing Adventist while in military service. Whether the principles of Adventism call into question the

quest noncombatant duty (that is, military duty that does not require training with or use of a weapon). Usually, this is restricted to assignments in the medical field for enlisted personnel, or serving as a chaplain or doctor in the



officer corps. Not all services offer this option—the U.S. Marines do not have any noncombatants. Other forms of duty will require weapons training and use. You can also request Sabbath privileges.

However, once again, there are significant differences, based on whether you enter as an enlisted person or an officer. If students join the military as officers, they will work with peers and superiors who have a wider view of life and therefore will be more likely to gain accommo-

dation on Sabbath observance. Enlisted men and women usually have supervisors who are younger, less educated and experienced, and thus less likely to allow Sabbath privileges.

The important point to stress is that for the military, MISSION takes precedence over all else. If the mission, or training for the mission, demands Sabbath duty, the commander can give a legally binding order for all troops to be at their assigned posts, regardless of whether that goes against their conscience or usual practice. And some tasks must be performed on a continuous or emergency basis: People need to be fed, to be cared for when ill, etc. In wartime, military action may continue seven days a week, 24 hours a day, and no one is exempt from commands given during a battle.

One major change in the U.S. military relating to Sabbath accommodation has occurred in the past decade. Until recently, Sabbath-keeping soldiers had to show why the unit commander should accommodate their request for Sabbath privileges. Now, the commander must justify to his or her superior officer why the accommodation cannot be made.

All basic training programs, in all services, officer or enlisted, schedule required training on the first few Sabbaths. Military persons will probably have more freedom after the first few weeks of basic training, but keeping the Sabbath can still be a serious challenge.

Sometimes, recruiters tell prospective enlistees that they can have time off to worship. But in basic training, no

wisdom of entering the military in the first place—particularly when one is not compelled to do so—does not currently seem to be a prominent issue in church pulpits and publications.

Nonetheless, careful consideration of the moral issues inherent in peace, war, and combat remains vital to the worldwide Adventist community, heightened of course by increased world tensions. “A Seventh-day Adventist Call for Peace,”<sup>40</sup> approved by the General Conference Spring Council in 2002, reflects this concern and makes specific recommendations for peace education in the denomina-

one is routinely given a 24-hour period off for any reason. The recruiter may not understand that a Sabbath keeper wants more than an hour off once a week to attend church.

As with other accommodations for conscience, it depends on the assignment and the mission of the group to which one is assigned.

### Church Support for Members of the Military

The church, through Adventist Chaplaincy Ministries, provides literature, Bible kits, devotionals, a newsletter, and mediation for North American Division church members serving in the U.S. military. For additional information, call 1(800) ACM LIST, send an E-mail to [acm@gc.adventist.org](mailto:acm@gc.adventist.org), or check the following Web site: <http://www.AdventistChaplains.org>.



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\* Facts in this sidebar relate to the U.S. military. Teachers in other nations should investigate the local situation regarding the rights of those who voluntarily enter the military, as well as information about required military service, and advise students accordingly.

tion's schools and churches.

Unanimity on this complex and momentous issue will likely continue to elude the Adventist Church, as it has the Christian Church as a whole. Yet it touches on matters so central to the gospel message that no serious believer can avoid addressing it. Doing so with intelligence and integrity will require recovery of a history that has to a large extent faded from our collective consciousness. ✍



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*A resolution voted by the General Conference session of 1865 declared: "While we thus cheerfully render to Caesar the things which the Scriptures show to be his, we are compelled to decline all participation in acts of war and bloodshed as being inconsistent with the duties enjoined upon us by our divine Master toward our enemies and toward all mankind."*

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## Information and Sources for Further Study

### Project Whitecoat

In one of the most intriguing episodes in the history of American Adventist involvement with the military, more than 2,000 Adventist draftees fulfilled their military duty between 1954 and 1973 by participating in a program testing defenses against biological weapons. With the new level of threat from biological weapons in the early 21st century, the story becomes all the more relevant.

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### The Nazi Specter

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