

A BRIEF HISTORY OF SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTISTS IN THE UNITED STATES  
REGARDING MILITARY SERVICE: CONVICTIONS IN TRANSITION

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Christian Attitudes to War, Peace, and Revolution  
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## A Brief History of Seventh-day Adventists in the United States Regarding Military Service: Convictions in Transition

### **Introduction**

Seventh-day Adventists (SDA), more commonly known in the contemporary context simply as Adventists, have historically refused to bear arms in the military. This paper will trace the outline of the changing views of church leadership and practices of church members from the Civil War through the present War on Terror. As far as I am able, I will present a historical description that is both accurate and unbiased; however, I will refrain from discussing what I believe the proper stance of the church should be. The former is a historical analysis; the latter, a theological pursuit.

### **Historical Setting (1830 – 1863)**

Although the early Seventh-day Adventist leaders who formed the church in 1863 attempted to base the movement's beliefs and culture on scripture alone, it would be naïve to think they were unaffected by the *zeitgeist* of the Second and Third Great Awakenings in the United States (1790-1840 and 1850-1900, respectively). "The radical reform movements centered in New England and upstate New York in the 1830s and 1840s constituted [the Adventist pioneers'] spiritual and moral breeding ground."<sup>1</sup> In addition to increased religious fervor during these periods which saw the growth of Restorationist and pietist movements, significant attention was also given to social causes such as prison reform, expanded education,

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<sup>1</sup> Douglas Morgan, "Following the Prince of Peace in a Time of War: How the Adventist Pioneers Dealt with Issues of War, Peace, and Military Service," *Adventist Review*, June 14, 2007, 14.

temperance and the abolition of slavery.<sup>2</sup> The latter two of these issues figure prominently in early Adventism.

William Miller, a former deist, became a Baptist in 1816 and soon began studying biblical prophecies. His Millerite Movement, which expected Jesus' return to Earth first in 1843 and then 1844, is the single most important religious influence on later SDA leaders. "Although the announced event never took place, leaving the believers in bitter disappointment, the Millerite movement bequeathed a system of prophetic interpretation and biblical literalism that helped shape the character of the Adventism that arose from its ruins. In the Millerite movement of the 1830s and 1840s lie the roots of [the] Seventh-day Adventist church..."<sup>3</sup> A man of the times, "Miller formed part of the great ferment of reform that included abolitionism, pacifism and nonresistance.... At least two prominent Adventists, Joshua V. Himes and James S. White, were active supporters of William Lloyd Garrison's New England Non-Resistance Society, though neither of them joined the sabbatarian wing of the Adventist Movement."<sup>4</sup>

Here is mentioned another characteristic of the church that came to weigh significantly on the question of military involvement—sabbatarianism. "Soon after the 1844 Disappointment, Joseph Bates—upon reading Thomas M. Preble's article on the seventh-day Sabbath—concluded that keeping the seventh day was necessary.... The next year he published a tract on the subject and influenced James and Ellen White... to accept the belief late in 1846."<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> John Howard Yoder, *Christian Attitudes to War, Peace, and Revolution*, ed. Theodore J. Koontz and Andy Alexis-Baker (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2009). See also the Introduction and Chapter 1 of *Adventism and the American Republic* (Douglas Morgan, Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2001).

<sup>3</sup> Everett N. Dick, "The Millerite Movement 1830-1845" in *Adventism in America: A History*, Edited by Gary Land (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1998), 1.

<sup>4</sup> Peter Brock, *Freedom from Violence: Sectarian Nonresistance from the Middle Ages to the Great War* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991), 231.

<sup>5</sup> Godfrey T. Anderson, "Sectarianism and Organization 1846-1864" in *Adventism in America: A History*, Edited by Gary Land (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1998), 31.

In 1848, four years after the upheaval of the Great Disappointment, Seventh-day Adventism began to coalesce; however, the church would not formally organize until 1863. Although the church came to focus on the issues of health reform, Christian education, missions, biblical prophecy and the seventh-day Sabbath, the pacifist leanings of the movement were also given voice during this interim period of adjustment. “From the mid-fifties the organ of the Seventh-day Adventists, the *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, began from time to time to print articles expressing a pacifist point of view.”<sup>6</sup>

### **American Civil War (April 1861 – April 1865)**

By the time the SDA church was formed in 1863, the United States was fully engaged in the Civil War, forcing the young church to wrestle with the issue of military participation and patriotic duty from its very inception. Indeed, the Civil War was the “anvil on which the church’s current position on military service was beaten out.”<sup>7</sup> Despite the earlier publications against war and military participation, members of the movement questioned how to respond to the war. “They were at a loss what to do at this juncture, wishing well to the Union and its efforts to end slavery but at the same time anxious to follow what their church’s leaders told them was the way a Christian should react...”<sup>8</sup>

However, Brock notes that leadership was slow to provide guidance because the loose association of churches had members who ranged in belief from absolute pacifism to pro-war, and leaders did not want to alienate any major portion of the movement during the process of organization. Adventist historian, Douglas Morgan, describes the conflicting issues that were at play:

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<sup>6</sup> Peter Brock, *Freedom from Violence: Sectarian Nonresistance from the Middle Ages to the Great War*, 231.

<sup>7</sup> Ron Graybill, “This Perplexing War: Why Adventists Avoided Military Service in the Civil War,” *Insight*, October 10, 1978, 4.

<sup>8</sup> Peter Brock, *Freedom from Violence: Sectarian Nonresistance from the Middle Ages to the Great War*, 233.

The dilemma for the Adventists of the 1860s was multifaceted: if they resisted military service out of faithfulness to Scripture, they risked accusations of disloyalty, a severe government crackdown on their movement just as it was getting off the ground, and indirectly abetting the slave system they so fiercely opposed. Joining freely in armed combat, though, would make mockery of their claim to be a remnant faithful to ‘the commandments of God and faith of Jesus.’ Their witness to the fourth commandment as well as the sixth would be compromised.<sup>9</sup>

Finally, James White published a *Review and Herald* editorial in August 1862 titled “The Nation,” which resulted in heated and necessary debate.

Stressing that Adventists had always been totally opposed to the crime of secession and the sin of slavery and that their sympathies were wholly with the Lincoln administration, he pointed out at the same time that ‘the requirements of war’ were in line neither with the Fourth Commandment (‘Remember the Sabbath, to keep it holy’) nor with the Sixth Commandment (‘Thou shalt not kill’).<sup>10</sup>

The most controversial and unexpected pronouncement in the editorial was White’s conclusion that despite the sinfulness of breaking these commandments, Adventists should not resist the draft because “the government assumes the responsibility of the violation of the law of God, and it would be madness to resist.”<sup>11</sup> White viewed resistance as suicide because resisters would be shot according to military law. In reaction to the strong backlash, especially against

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<sup>9</sup> Morgan, “Following the Prince of Peace in a Time of War: How the Adventist Pioneers Dealt with Issues of War, Peace, and Military Service,” 14.

<sup>10</sup> Brock, *Freedom from Violence*, 233. James White’s editorial, “The Nation,” appeared in the August 12, 1862 edition of the *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 234.

breaking the Sabbath, White clarified that this advice was only for draftees who had done everything in their power to secure Sabbath privileges and status as a noncombatant.

Graybill notes that “the reaction to the editorial was especially vigorous on the part of the ‘nonresisters,’ some of whom charged James White with virtually teaching Sabbathbreaking and murder.”<sup>12</sup> This controversial conversation carried on in the pages of the *Adventist Review and Sabbath Herald* for three months as leaders and laypeople worked out their understandings.<sup>13</sup>

Regarding Jame’s editorial, Ellen White wrote in early 1863, “He gave the best light that he then had. It was necessary that something be said. . . . In some places [Sabbathkeepers] were looked upon as sympathizing with the Rebellion. The time had come for our true sentiments in relation to slavery and the Rebellion to be made known.”<sup>14</sup> The Trustees of the Ellen G. White Publication provide further explanation of this issue:

Although at heart noncombatants, the sympathies of the church members were, almost without exception, entirely with the Government in its opposition to slavery. . . . As there was no provision made for assigning Seventh-day Adventists to noncombatant service, and no allowance for Sabbath observance, Sabbathkeepers, when drafted, usually. . . purchased their exemption. . . . In July, 1864, the national conscription law was so amended as to revoke the \$300 exemption clause. Steps were immediately taken to secure for the Seventh-day Adventist young men the privileges granted to members of religious denominations who were conscientiously opposed to bearing arms.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Graybill, “This Perplexing War: Why Adventists Avoided Military Service in the Civil War,” 4.

<sup>13</sup> Peter Brock, “The Problem of the Civil War: When Seventh-day Adventists First Faced War,” *Adventist Heritage Magazine* 1, no. 1 (January 1974): 23. Brock’s article goes into much more depth on this particular controversy than space here allows me.

<sup>14</sup> Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 1 (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1948), 356.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:716-717.

As the intensity of the debate increased and individuals in some areas, especially Iowa, began to make bold statements about draft resistance, Ellen White wrote to encourage deep reflection rather than boastings:

I saw that those who have been forward to talk so decidedly about refusing to obey a draft, do not understand what they are talking about. Should they really be drafted, and, refusing to obey, be threatened with imprisonment, torture, or death, they would shrink, and then find that they had not prepared themselves for the emergency.... Those who would be best prepared to sacrifice even life, if required, rather than place themselves in a position where they could not obey God, would have the least to say. They would make no boast. They would feel deeply and meditate much, and their earnest prayers would go up to heaven for wisdom to act and grace to endure. Those who feel that in the fear of God they cannot conscientiously engage in this war will be very quiet, and when interrogated will simply state what they are obliged to say in order to answer the inquirer, and then let it be understood that they have no sympathy with the Rebellion.<sup>16</sup>

J. N. Andrews, after whom Andrews University in Berrien Springs, MI, is named, was sent to Washington on behalf of the church, where he successfully campaigned for recognition as a noncombatant sect in September 1864.<sup>17</sup> It should be noted that the term *noncombatant* was congruent with the current usage of the term *pacifist*. At the time, “All religious conscientious objectors, including the Quakers, were then covered by the term

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 1:357.

<sup>17</sup> John N. Andrews, “Seventh-day Adventists Recognized as Non-Combatants,” *Review and Herald*, September 1, 1864.

‘non-combatants.’<sup>18</sup> Yet in contrast with these other bodies, Brock points out, “The Adventist conscience, uneasily balanced as it were between the old and the new dispensations, has led members of that church to collaborate more closely—and more heartily—with the military than has been the case with any other peace sect.”<sup>19</sup>

This conflicted stance is demonstrated by both word and action of the young church. First, Ellen White was clearly against participation in the Civil War. She wrote in early 1863, “I was shown that God’s people... cannot engage in this perplexing war, for it is opposed to every principle of our faith.”<sup>20</sup> Taken out of context, this could appear to be language and logic of the justifiable war tradition. However, her other comments on the Civil War and military in general preclude this conclusion. Immediately after the previous quote, she states, “In the army they cannot obey the truth and at the same time obey the requirements of their officers. There would be a continual violation of conscience.” She goes on to clarify that if there could be a justifiable war, this would qualify since God was involved and the goal of the conflict was noble—ending slavery and the cessation: “God is punishing the North, that they have so long suffered the accursed sin of slavery to exist; for in the sight of heaven it is a sin of the darkest dye. God is not with the South, and He will punish them dreadfully in the end”<sup>21</sup> She taught that “both the South and the North were being punished.”<sup>22</sup>

Consistent with these proclamations, the church disciplined church members who voluntarily enlisted as combatants in the army. Two Adventists were disfellowshipped in 1865, a decision that James White publicly supported in the *Review and Herald*. The rationale for the discipline was stated boldly yet in general terms: “As voluntary enlistment into the service of

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<sup>18</sup> Brock, *Freedom from Violence*, 351.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 240.

<sup>20</sup> White, *Testimonies for the Church*, 1:361.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:359.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:368.

war... is contrary to the principles of faith and practice of Seventh-day Adventists as contained in the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus, [congregations] cannot retain those within their communion who so enlist.”<sup>23</sup>

Despite strong sentiments against members participating in the war, prominent leaders such as James White and John Preston Kellogg actively participated in meetings, committees and fund drives all related to raising money for bonuses given to individuals willing to voluntarily enlist in the army to fight. Leadership believed SDAs should not fight, but they strongly supported the enlistment of others who lacked such convictions.<sup>24</sup> Here we see evidence of Brock’s conclusion that Adventists have a history of avoiding armed conflict while still collaborating with the military.

Although the church had gained status as noncombatants, a number of draftees continued to have difficulties with combat assignments in the military. In response three small pamphlets were prepared—*The Draft, The Views of Seventh-day Adventists Relative to Bearing Arms as Brought before the Governors of Several States and the Provost Marshal General with a Portion of the Enrollment Law*, and *The Compilation of Extracts from the Publications of Seventh-day Adventists, setting forth Their Views of the Sinfulness of War*.<sup>25</sup> Notable portions of *The Compilation of Extracts* include a diatribe by Joseph Bates against the Mexican War (1846), William Miller forbidding the support of war (1844), James White decrying war prayers in the Defense Department (1853), Elder E. Everts calling disciples to be a little flock separate from the

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<sup>23</sup> Brock, *Freedom from Violence*, 242.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 240. More details regarding these activities can be read in “The Spirit of Prophecy and Military Service,” a statement prepared by W. C. White, D. E. Robinson and A. L. White, which can be found in the Adventist Research Center at Andrews University (hereafter AUARC) in file *DF 320—Miscellaneous*. Portions of this statement appear in the November 26, 1936 edition of the *Review and Herald*.

<sup>25</sup> AUARC file *DF 320—Pamphlets*.

world including its wars (1856), and Elder M. E. Cornell condemning alliance with civil power as being against Christ (1858).<sup>26</sup>

The pamphlet, *The Views of Seventh-day Adventists Relative to Bearing Arms*, states unequivocally, “The denomination of... Seventh-day Adventists, taking the Bible as their rule of faith and practice, are unanimous in their views that its teachings are contrary to the spirit and practice of war; hence they have ever been conscientiously opposed to bearing arms.”<sup>27</sup>

As further evidence of the church denouncing military involvement, Douglas Morgan sites a resolution by the church’s governing body, the General Conference, concerning the military during this early period:

*May 17, 1865...*

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>28</sup>

In concluding this review of Adventist history during the Civil War, we will summarize the rationale given for noncombatancy. In 1865 George W. Amadon published eight reasons why Seventh-day Adventists could not engage in war.<sup>29</sup> The list includes the impossibility of keeping the Sabbath, the biblical admonition not to kill, God’s calling to peace, the other-worldliness of

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<sup>26</sup> *Compilation of Extracts from the Publications of Seventh-day Adventists Setting forth their Views of the Sinfulness of War* (Battle Creek, MI: Seventh-day Adventist Publishing Association, 1865). AUARC file DF 320—Pamphlets.

<sup>27</sup> *The Views of Seventh-day Adventists Relative to Bearing Arms, As Brought before the Governors of Several States, and the Provost Marshal General, with a Portion of The Enrollment Law* (Battle Creek, MI: Steam Press of the Seventh-day Adventist Publishing Association, 1865), 6. A copy of this pamphlet is available in the Adventist Research Center at Andrews University in file 32

<sup>28</sup> Douglas Morgan, “The Beginnings of a Peace Church: Eschatology, Ethics, and Expedience in Seventh-day Adventist Responses to the Civil War,” *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 45, no. 1 (Spring 2007): 36.

<sup>29</sup> George W. Amadon, “Why Seventh-day Adventists Cannot Engage in War,” in *The Peacemaking Remnant: Essays and Historical Documents* (Silver Spring, MD: Adventist Peace Fellowship, 2005), 95-96. This originally appeared in the March 7, 1865 edition of the *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*.

the kingdom, the love of enemies, the need to save life not take it, obedience in turning the other cheek, and following Peter's example of putting up the sword.

After considering this early period of Adventist development, Brock summarizes the most prominent arguments given against military participation: (1) "the shedding of human blood for whatever cause, was contrary to the Christian faith," (2) "a desire for nonconformity to this world," and (3) "unwillingness to risk the desecration of their Sabbath as a result of military orders."<sup>30</sup> More succinctly, Wilcox states that Adventists have "held as a matter conscience that they could not engage in warfare, believing that this was a violation of the principles of the gospel of Christ."<sup>31</sup>

From this historical sketch, despite the necessity of smoothing some contours of early Adventist history, it can be seen that there is ample evidence to support Douglas Morgan's conclusion that "the Seventh-day Adventist Church began as a peace church."<sup>32</sup>

### **Time of Relative Peace for the U.S. SDA Church (1865-1914)**

As the country began the daunting tasks of physical, political and social reconstruction, the Adventist church continued to wrestle with issues relating to military participation. In 1867 and 1868, the General Conference made two additional resolutions regarding war, thus reinforcing earlier commitments:

*May [14,] 1867... resolved*

that the bearing of arms, or engaging in war, is a direct violation of the teachings of our Saviour and the spirit and letter of the law of God. Yet we deem it our duty to yield respect to civil rulers, and obedience to all such laws as do not conflict

<sup>30</sup> Brock, "The Problem of the Civil War: When Seventh-day Adventists First Faced War," 27.

<sup>31</sup> Francis McLellan Wilcox, *Seventh-Day Adventists in Time of War* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1936), 57.

<sup>32</sup> Morgan, "The Beginnings of a Peace Church: Eschatology, Ethics, and Expedience in Seventh-day Adventist Responses to the Civil War," 43.

with the word of God. In the carrying out of this principle we render tribute, customs, reverence, etc.

*May[14,] 1868... [resolved]*

That we feel called upon to renew our request to our brethren to abstain from worldly strife of every nature, believing that war was never justifiable except under the immediate direction of God, who of right holds the lives of all creatures in his hand; and that no such circumstance now appearing, we cannot believe it to be right for the servants of Christ to take up arms to destroy the lives of their fellow-men.<sup>33</sup>

Speaking against war in 1888, Ellen White wrote in her seminal work, *The Great Controversy*, “Satan delights in war, for it excites the worst passions of the soul and then sweeps into eternity its victims steeped in vice and blood. It is his object to incite the nations to war against one another...”<sup>34</sup>

Even though Adventists believed biblical prophecy pointed to a time of diminishing religious freedom in the future<sup>35</sup>, the general SDA view of the U.S. government had been quite positive. James White had gone as far as to call it the best government under heaven, and church documents consistently voiced the positive good of rendering to Caesar the things that are Caesars.<sup>36</sup> Yet there existed a relevant counter-current. For example, in 1846 prominent founding member Joseph Bates chastised the government for its part in the U.S.-Mexican War, and called the combatants, “gallant murderers (for they would be considered such in *every case*, until they

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 36-37.

<sup>34</sup> Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy between Christ and Satan* (Boise, ID: Pacific Press, 1888), 589.

<sup>35</sup> For pictorial examples, see *Adventism and the American Republic* (Douglas Morgan, 2001), pages 77-80.

<sup>36</sup> W. C. White, D. E. Robinson, and A. L. White, “The Spirit of Prophecy and Military Service,” 1936, 9. This document is available at the Adventist Research Center at Andrews University in file *DF 320--Miscellaneous*. Portions of this document were published in the *Review and Herald* on November 26, 1936.

were licensed by the rulers, chosen by the people)... [T]hey have killed or murdered thousands more of their neighbors than they have had murdered of their own.”<sup>37</sup> Bates credited this violence to the U.S. reaction against the freeing of Mexico’s slaves.

This practice of speaking prophetic truth to power continued during the period after the Civil War. In 1898 A. T. Jones and Uriah Smith, both editors at the *Review and Herald*, wrote an editorial highlighting the erroneous efforts of many non-Adventist denominations to align the U.S. war with Spain with Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount, calling it a “novel Christian duty.”<sup>38</sup> Reminding readers of which kingdom they belong, Jones and Uriah assert that:

as soon as men recognize the truth that Christians are not of this world[,] but are chosen *out* of the world; that Christians are strangers and pilgrims on the earth, seeking a country, even a heavenly; that no Christian can make war—that no Christian can kill even his enemies, even in war—just so soon will they be easily rid of the inconsistency of the “novel Christian duty” of doing their best to kill the “enemies” whom they “love,” and of exercising active Christian pity toward them only when, having failed to kill them, they are wounded and suffering.<sup>39</sup>

When the United States annexed the Philippines in 1899, “A. T. Jones, at this point editor of the *Review and Herald* as well as the *American Sentinel*, and Percy T. Magan, a prominent Adventist educator and writer, were among the most vocal Adventist critics of the newly manifest American imperialism.”<sup>40</sup> That same year Magan published *Peril of the Republic* in which he called the forced annexation of the Philippines an example of the national apostasy of

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<sup>37</sup> *Compilation of Extracts from the Publications of Seventh-day Adventists Setting forth their Views of the Sinfulness of War*, 3.

<sup>38</sup> Alonzo T. Jones and Uriah Smith, “A Novel Christian Duty,” in *The Peacemaking Remnant: Essays and Historical Documents* (Silver Spring, MD: Adventist Peace Fellowship, 2005), 102-104.

<sup>39</sup> Jones and Smith, “A Novel Christian Duty.”

<sup>40</sup> Douglas Morgan, *Adventism and the American Republic: The Public Involvement of a Major Apocalyptic Movement* (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 2001), 68.

imperialism. It is argued that Magan was not concerned about altering American policy and believed that Christians should not get involved in politics. Rather, “Magan saw himself in a role similar to that of biblical prophet sent to warn kings and nations about the consequences of departure from the divine intention. In this sense, he believed ‘ambassadors of Jesus Christ’ should make their voices heard ‘in the courts and congresses of human powers, of earthly government.’”<sup>41</sup> “Adventists, in this period, were not hesitant to apply their apocalyptic world view to the foreign policy of their own government, and in so doing to hold the government to its own highest standards of human rights.”<sup>42</sup>

Thus we see that Adventists had a mixed view of government from its inception; at some points calling it the best government under heaven while at other times decrying its military ambitions in Mexico and the Philippines.

### **World War I (July 1914 – November 1918)**

Morgan notes a significant philosophical shift during this period: “Most 19<sup>th</sup> 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.”<sup>43</sup>

Three years after hostilities broke out in Europe, the United States became entangled in the first World War and called for all men between the ages of twenty-one to thirty-one to be registered on June 5, 1917 as a preparatory measure for the draft. In response, I. H. Evans again stated the church’s stance toward military involvement, the Sabbath, and obedience to

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 70.

<sup>42</sup> Douglas Morgan, “Adventism’s Peacemaking Heritage,” in *The Peacemaking Remnant: Essays and Historical Documents* (Silver Spring, MD: Adventist Peace Fellowship, 2005), 87.

<sup>43</sup> Douglas Morgan, “Between Pacifism and Patriotism: Helping Students Think about Military Options,” *Adventist Review Online Edition*, 2003, ?

government in the June 7, 1917 edition of the *Review and Herald*, presumably as an encouraging reminder to both members and government officials alike. He wrote, “Existing conditions present to our people in the United States special difficulties because we are noncombatants in religious belief, and further because we conscientiously observe the seventh day as the Sabbath. We have always tried faithfully to obey the divine injunction concerning the duty of Christians toward those who bear rule over them.... He obeys with fidelity the laws of his country when those laws do not compel him to violate his duty to God.”<sup>44</sup> Evans did not promote resisting the draft, but instead wrote of young draftees, “We know that wherever they are placed, and to whatever noncombatant work they may be assigned, they will prove themselves true representatives of the Master, serving with faithfulness and fidelity, commending to all their associates the holy religion of the Lord Jesus.”<sup>45</sup>

Even before the United States officially became party to the war, Seventh-day Adventist leaders devised a response that would be a pattern for subsequent wars—providing medical care. By this time a growing collection of sanitariums and colleges was equipped to provide young Adventists with medical training that could be used in military service. This role went a great distance in overcoming the two primary faith-based objections to military participation; as medics, Adventists could observe the 4<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> commandments because rendering health care on the Sabbath was considered acceptable and because medics saved lives rather than taking them. “Our young men are working as noncombatants, principally in the base hospital and ambulance units. Here they feel they are engaged in a work of mercy, doing good seven days a week. This line of service on the Sabbath is in harmony with their religious belief and practice....

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<sup>44</sup> Wilcox, *Seventh-Day Adventists in Time of War*, 90-91.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 92.

Our Saviour set us the example of doing works of mercy and actual necessity on the Sabbath day.”<sup>46</sup>

In the same article, Evans sites a 1916 recommendation passed by the North American Division executive committee (the branch of the General Conference responsible for the United States and Canada), “That as far as consistent there be given in connection with our colleges... instruction in simple treatments, fundamental principles of nursing, and ‘first aid’ to the injured; in short, such instruction... will enable them to render service in the care of the sick in either the home or foreign field.”<sup>47</sup>

The following week, I. H. Evans included a lengthy official church statement in a follow-up article in the *Review and Herald*, which Francis Wilcox relates<sup>48</sup>:

We believe that civil government is ordained of God, and that in the exercise of its legitimate functions it should receive the support of its citizens.... We are loyal to the Constitution, which is based upon the principles of democracy, and guarantees civil and religious liberty to all its citizens.

We deplore that our nation has been drawn into the horrors of war, and shall continually pray that the God of heaven may speedily bring peace to our country.

We have been noncombatants throughout our history.<sup>49</sup>

The church statement went onto reaffirm the May 17, 1865 statement quoted above, and finished by stating the desire to serve in capacities that would allow

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 244.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 90.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 112-113.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 113.

“obedience to law of God as contained in the decalogue, interpreted in the teachings of Christ, and exemplified in His life.”<sup>50</sup>

Evans includes a word of encouragement and missions: “Let us pray that God will help [SDA draftees] to exert a saving influence on those about them. Our mission to the world is to preach Christ and Him crucified, and to proclaim good tidings to all.”<sup>51</sup> This reference to mission work within the military establishment is a foreshadowing of a movement that would later develop during WWII—military chaplaincy.

In addition to training young men and women to be nurses, the church engaged in other initiatives. For instance, the church “voted to... establish in France a soldiers’ rest home, to give to our boys overseas care and rest and encouragement. The members of the church were also advised to purchase Liberty Bonds and to contribute to the Red Cross in the humanitarian work it was carrying forward.”<sup>52</sup> Despite these overtures supporting the government and its policies, Wilcox uses strong language in admonishing draftees, “Show yourself willing to cooperate, but keep your conscience clear, even unto punishment and death itself.”<sup>53</sup>

In the July 1918 GC meetings, church administrators officially recommended that C. B. Haynes lead the newly formed War Service Commission (WSC) on a full-time basis and that membership should include notable figures such as A. G. Daniells, W. T. Knox and F. M. Wilcox. The GC resolution of that year also encouraged pastors near army camps to work in conjunction with the Y.M.C.A.<sup>54</sup>

Naturally, the question arises: How many SDA young people followed the church’s teachings on noncombatancy? While I do not have statistics to answer this question, Wilcox

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 113.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 114.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 137.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 385.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 138-141.

devotes 70 pages to stories of young draftees who kept the Sabbath and refused to kill despite significant obstacles. In summary he states:

We are glad that our youth, when brought into test and trial in camp and on battlefield, proved loyal to Christ and His gospel. The Lord opened the door of deliverance to them from many unexpected quarters. They found friends among the army officers who recognized the principles for which they stood. We are glad also that our boys, in dealing with the difficult questions which confronted them, recognized the value of the exercise of Christian courtesy on their part. They were faithful in the duties assigned them. They brought to their work a conscientiousness exercised only by the Christian. In many instances they made themselves so useful and valuable that their commanding officers were inclined to give them special consideration.<sup>55</sup>

These “tests and trails” were very real. “Many faced harassment, beatings, court-martial, and imprisonment for adhering to their convictions.”<sup>56</sup> By the end of the World War, no fewer than “35 Adventist soldiers were serving sentences of five to 20 years in prison at Ft. Leavenworth, Kansas” because of their determined stance not to do “unnecessary” work on the Sabbath.<sup>57</sup>

Throughout this discussion of WWI, we have not heard the same voices of dissent that were evident during the Mexican War and the action in the Philippines. Although the term “conscientious cooperator” would not be coined until the start of the Second World War, Douglas Morgan believes this term aptly

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 163.

<sup>56</sup> Morgan, *Adventism and the American Republic*, 92.

<sup>57</sup> Jiggs Gallagher, “Colonel Everett N. Dick, MCC,” *Adventist Review*, June 7, 1984, 8.

“fits not only Adventists’ approach to military service but also their relationship with the entire public order during this era of two world wars and the cold war. As *cooperators*, they no longer voiced passionate critiques of government policy such as they had from time to time in the nineteenth century. They sought to be loyal, responsible citizens—generally not politically active but conservative in orientation.”<sup>58</sup>

This shift did not occur without debate. Heated discussions among leaders took place in Alabama in 1917, “in which those favoring noncombatant military service prevailed over those favoring ‘a more pacifistic stance.’”<sup>59</sup> Because of the outcome of these conversations, “World War I would prove to be the watershed in the Adventist relationship to the military in the twentieth century. The policy of encouraging noncombatancy along with willing support of war in ways other than combat became dominant, almost completely obliterating the pacifist dimension of Adventist heritage.”<sup>60</sup>

After World War I came to a close, and nations began to rebuild, SDA leaders again addressed the political establishment by reaching out to President Harding in support of his involvement in efforts to limit armaments. At the GC Annual Conference of 1921, a letter was prepared by committee and signed by the GC President, Treasurer and Secretary, stating the church’s “hearty accord with the commendable efforts now being put forth under [Harding’s] leadership in behalf of international peace and tranquility.”<sup>61</sup> Although the leaders were pessimistic about establishing lasting peace, they still applauded efforts to reduce arms.

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<sup>58</sup> Morgan, *Adventism and the American Republic*, 81.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 90-91.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 92.

<sup>61</sup> A. G. Daniells, W. T. Knox, and J. L. Shaw, “Address to President Harding,” in *The Peacemaking Remnant: Essays and Historical Documents* (Silver Spring, MD: Adventist Peace Fellowship, 2005), 105.

We are well aware that as war springs from the selfishness of men, the perfect ideal of abiding peace can never be realized in this present world.... But while we may not hope to realize the full fruition of our strivings, the mitigation of the evils of war in any measure is well worth the effort....

We are therefore encouraging our people devoutly to pray for your personal guidance, and... that the great Ruler of nations may further the cause of international peace, to the end that future war and bloodshed... may be averted, and that the vast sums spent for armaments of war may be devoted to the amelioration of human woe...<sup>62</sup>

To summarize this period of WWI and the two subsequent decades, we can say that the church's official position remained intact—church members should not enlist, but if drafted, they should enter the armed services as noncombatants, ready to serve in any role that did not require bearing arms. Furthermore, Sabbath observance continued to be a challenge, though medical positions greatly lessened this struggle. The most significant change was the rise of patriotic language and the lack of any major voice questioning U.S. foreign policy as evidenced in the earlier period.<sup>63</sup>

### **World War II (September 1939 – September 1945)**

In the years leading up to World War II, the Adventist church continued to define its position on military involvement. In 1934 J. P. Neff wrote a pamphlet, *Our Youth in Time of War*, which was approved by the General Conference Committee.<sup>64</sup> In addition to promoting

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 106-107.

<sup>63</sup> See Morgan, *Adventism and the American Republic*, 89-93.

<sup>64</sup> Morgan, *Adventism and the American Republic*, 92.

patriotism and support of the government<sup>65</sup>, it also clarified what the church meant by the term *noncombatant*.

There are four classes of people that question active participation in war:

*The Pacifists*.—These do not believe in war under any circumstances.

They advocate peace at any price....

*The Conscientious Objectors*.—These not only do not believe in bearing arms, but they do not believe that any service should be rendered that supports war or makes warfare possible....

*The Antimilitarists*.—These not only object to military activities, but they would banish our uniforms and our flag.... They are opposed to... military operations, and to all Government appropriations for such.

*The Noncombatants*.—While recognizing that warfare is unavoidable in maintaining civil Government in a world of sin, noncombatants conscientiously object to taking human life.... They do not, however, condemn those who take part in war. On the other hand, noncombatants are willing to aid their Government in every consistent way in time of warfare, except by taking human lives....

Seventh-day Adventists of the United States are registered with our Government as noncombatants. They are always ready to serve without reservation, except bearing arms in combat and doing unnecessary work on the Sabbath day....

While the foregoing is the position of the Seventh-day Adventists as a denomination in the United States, the church does not attempt to dictate to its

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<sup>65</sup> J. P. Neff, *Our Youth in Time of War* (Takoma Park, Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1934), 4-5.

members individually, but each person must stand upon his own conscientious convictions.<sup>66</sup>

As previously described, “noncombatant” had originally been the term used by the U.S. government to designate all churches and sects that opposed military involvement. Now, however, Neff attempts to differentiate Seventh-day Adventist belief from the Peace Churches and other who held stronger stances toward pacifism. Moving away from the church’s 1865 position statement (“we are compelled to decline all participation in acts of war”), this 1934 declaration argues that virtually any participation in war is favorable except directly taking life. And even this injunction is no longer enforced, as compared to the two individuals who were disfellowshipped in 1865. Morgan notes that Neff’s conclusions did not go unopposed by “Adventist more inclined toward pacifism... but Neff’s approach and spirit prevailed.”<sup>67</sup> Neff’s differentiation between noncombatants and other similar groups, as well as his description of both church policy and enforcement remain virtually unchanged to this day.

By 1942 the need arose to assist Adventist recruits in properly registering for the Selective Service. To this end, the War Service Commission published a small booklet, *Information and Instruction for Seventh-day Adventist Noncombatant Selective Service Registrants*, which states that SDA “men, because of their religious training and belief, are rightly classified under the Selective Training and Service Act as “Conscientious Objectors.”<sup>68</sup> More specifically, “The historic position of Seventh-day Adventists places their registrants under the first class—those who claim exemption only from combatant service [Class I-A-O]. They are not among those of the second class—those who claim exemption from both combatant and

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 5-7.

<sup>67</sup> Morgan, *Adventism and the American Republic*, 92.

<sup>68</sup> Carlyle B. Haynes, *Information and Instruction for Seventh-day Adventist Noncombatant Selective Service Registrants* (Takoma Park, Washington, D.C.: War Service Commission, 1942), 11. Available at the Adventist Research Center at Andrews University in file DF 320—Pamphlets.

noncombatant service [IV-E].”<sup>69</sup> Even more forcefully, “Seventh-day Adventists should never be classified as IV-E mean—unless of course their individual consciences lead them to take a position different from that of their denomination...”<sup>70</sup>

Desmond Doss is a clear example of a “conscientious cooperator,” a term he much preferred to conscientious objector.<sup>71</sup> For his brave service as an unarmed medic who rescued some 75 fellow soldiers off Hacksaw Ridge while under fire on the island of Okinawa, Doss became the only noncombatant to win the Congressional Medal of Honor.<sup>72</sup>

Similar to the call for medical training for young Adventists during WWI, Everett N. Dick spear-headed the establishment of the Medical Cadet Corps (MCC), which aimed to prepare students to be of service to God and country as the signs of another conflict grew.<sup>73</sup> The MCC and its thoughtful and practical curriculum received commendation from the G.C. in 1935 and were duplicated by other Adventist schools across the U.S. after 1939. This would remain a significant educational endeavor until the end of the conflict in Vietnam.<sup>74</sup>

Included in the 1942 edition of the booklet used in MCC’s training was a description of the church’s noncombatant position that had been approved by the General Conference Committee in September 1941. Excerpts reveal that the new statement was consistent with Neff’s views of government and noncombatancy. The addition of directives regarding the questioning of government policy mark the most significant unique contribution of this document.

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 25. AUARC file *DF 320—Pamphlets*.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> Terry Benedict, *The Conscientious Objector: A True Story of an American Soldier*, DVD, 2004, [www.desmondoss.com](http://www.desmondoss.com). See also Booton Herndon’s *The Unlikeliest Hero* (Boise, ID: Pacific Press, 1988).

<sup>72</sup> George Johnson and Mark A. Kellner, “Desmond Doss, World War II Noncombatant Hero, Passes Away” (Adventist News Network, March 24, 2006), <http://www.adventistpeace.org/templates/System/details.asp?id=39491&PID=465417>.

<sup>73</sup> Morgan, *Adventism and the American Republic*, 92-93.

<sup>74</sup> National Service Organization, *An Urgent Appeal on the Draft* (General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1965). AUARC file *DF 320—Pamphlets*.

A Seventh-day Adventist noncombatant does not agitate against war. He recognizes that war is a natural, unavoidable consequence of a race in a state of sin. He does not arrogate to himself the prerogative of deciding whether his government is right or wrong in entering upon war. He leaves that where it belongs—to his government....

He does not presume to sit in judgment upon civil governments for engaging in war. He merely maintains an attitude and a conviction that war, whether right or wrong, whether justified or unjustified, whether of aggression or defense, does not change the individual Christian's obligation of obedience to God....

He holds that his supreme allegiance to God, his discipleship to Jesus Christ, prevents him from engaging in any act, any service, any participation in anything which contributes to destroying or injuring human life, in the military service or out of it, in war or in peace...<sup>75</sup>

Joseph Bates, Percy Magan, Uriah Smith and A. T. Jones would surely have balked at this assertion that Adventist noncombatants do not question U.S. foreign policy and the legitimacy of a given war; clearly this was a major shift using language closer to “blank check” than to “justifiable war tradition,” to use Yoder's typology.<sup>76</sup> Yet, statements against “any participation in anything which contributes to destroying... human life,” sound nearly pacifistic. This language is reminiscent of 19<sup>th</sup> century SDA church statements, though much room is left for personal conscience and interpretation. Morgan summarizes this mindset: “[T]he question was not, How can we bear witness against war and avoid complicity in making it? Rather, it was,

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<sup>75</sup> Carlyle B. Haynes, *Studies in Denominational Principles of Noncombatancy and Governmental Relationships* (Washington, D.C.: Seventh-day Adventist War Service Commission, 1942), 23.

<sup>76</sup> Yoder, *Christian Attitudes to War, Peace, and Revolution*, 27-33.

in view of the conviction against taking human life, ‘How then shall we make a direct contribution to the state in relation to the armed forces?’”<sup>77</sup>

One significant development during this period involved military chaplaincy. The church first took steps in this new work after being approached by the Army Chief of Chaplains in December 1940, who invited the church to commission Adventist chaplains for active duty. In response, the 1942 General Conference Committee stated, “We cannot as a religious body counsel or encourage our men to apply for or accept military commissions, but leave such decisions to be made on the basis of individual convictions.”<sup>78</sup>

The rationale for the decision included five arguments:

1. Government employment and remuneration from public funds for the teaching of religion is a violation of Biblical principles regarding church and state.
2. The church’s position is to have complete separation of church and state as stated by the General Conference Committee on January 29, 1908.
3. Clergy employed by the government could not preach the full Gospel message for this prophetic hour.
4. Embarrassment would arise from the chaplains who would have to defend the church’s noncombatant position and at the same time fulfill their function as morale builders.
5. The purpose of ministering to Seventh-day Adventists in the military can be best cared for by the camp pastor plan. The possibility of Seventh-day

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<sup>77</sup> Morgan, *Adventism and the American Republic*, 94. See also Francis D. Nichol, *The Wartime Contribution of Seventh-day Adventists* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1943).

<sup>78</sup> Keith Philips and Karl Tsatalbasidis, *I Pledge Allegiance: Remnant Publications* (USA: Remnant Publications, 2007), 40.

Adventist chaplains being placed where other Seventh-day Adventists are placed is very remote.<sup>79</sup>

Soon, however, two Adventists, Floyd Bresee and William H. Bergherm, received commission directly from the Army Chief of Chaplains, and a new chapter in Seventh-day Adventist participation in the military had begun. Although the issue continued to be debated within the church, Bresee and Bergherm remained the only Adventist military chaplains until the 1950s when W. H. Branson became the G.C. President and began supporting chaplaincy. In 1955 the church indicated “entire approval of the chaplaincy.”<sup>80</sup>

Thus the attitude of the denomination as expressed by the General Conference officers had moved full circle between 1944 and 1955, from a decided attempt to keep ordained Adventist ministers from joining the Armed Forces to one of encouraging students to become chaplains by aiding them financially to prepare for that line of work and ordaining them specifically for it.<sup>81</sup>

By 1984 there were 33 Adventist chaplains on active duty<sup>82</sup>, and by 2006 the number had grown to 50.<sup>83</sup> Quite possibly the most notable Adventist military chaplain is Barry Black who achieved rank of Rear Admiral in the U.S. Navy before becoming the 62<sup>nd</sup> Chaplain of the United States Senate in 2003. In this role he was the first Seventh-day Adventist and first African American Senate Chaplain.<sup>84</sup>

### **Vietnam (September 1959 – April 1975)**

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<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 41.

<sup>80</sup> Everett N. Dick, “The Military Chaplaincy and Seventh-day Adventists: The Evolution of an Attitude,” *Adventist Heritage Magazine* 3, no. 1 (Summer 1976): 45.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

<sup>82</sup> William Johnsson, “Pastors in Uniform: Walking the Narrow Road,” *Adventist Review*, June 7, 1984, 3.

<sup>83</sup> Elizabeth Lechleitner, “Is the Adventist Stance on Noncombatancy Shifting?” (Adventist News Network, September 22, 2006), <http://news.adventist.org/2006/09/a-feature-is-the-avetist-stace-o-ocombatancy-shiftig.html>.

<sup>84</sup> Barry C. Black, *From the Hood to the Hill: A Story of Overcoming* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2006).

In 1954, five years before the police action in Vietnam began, the General Conference Committee again stated the church's position on war. Following the example of Jesus, "who came into this world not to destroy men's lives but to save them," church members should be willing "to serve the state in any noncombatant capacity, civil or military, in war or peace, in uniform or out of it, which will contribute to saving life, asking only that they may serve in those capacities which do not violate their conscientious convictions."<sup>85</sup>

As evidence of on-going Seventh-day Adventist convictions regarding noncombatancy following World War II, we turn to Operation Whitecoat, which operated from 1954 to 1973 under the auspices of the War Research Service (WRS). Under WRS supervision, the United States Army Medical Research Institute of Infectious Diseases (USAMRIID) began Operation Whitecoat as a research project at Fort Detrick in Maryland with the purpose of better understanding the effects

of certain biological pathogens upon humans in an effort to determine the vulnerability of man to attack with biological agents. Additionally, the studies were conducted... to develop and improve the United States' medical defense against biological warfare by developing more rapid means of medical identification of biological agents, improving methods of treatment and prophylaxis and developing vaccines for immunization...<sup>86</sup>

The unique role of Seventh-day Adventists in this volunteer program began in 1955 as a collaboration between church representatives and the Office of the Surgeon General of the Army. Eligible participants had to be registered as conscientious objectors and give informed consent to treatment. "The General Conference, as well as the Surgeon General, regarded the services being

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<sup>85</sup> General Conference Committee, "Relationships to Civil Governments and War," October 1954. AUARC file *DF 320—Miscellaneous*.

<sup>86</sup> Robert L. Mole and Dale M. Mole, *For God and Country* (Brushton, NY: TEACH Service, Inc., 1998), 20.

rendered by the Adventist Whitecoat volunteers so highly that a commendatory article was published in... *The Review and Herald* (November 3, 1955. Pp. 20-21).”<sup>87</sup> By the time the draft ended in 1973, some 2,200 SDAs had participated in the program.<sup>88</sup>

In 1970, while Operation Whitecoat was in full-swing, C. D. Martin, then Associate Director of the NSO, reported on the 1969 Autumn Council statements for the *North Pacific Union Gleaner*. He writes,

Historically the Seventh-day Adventist Church has maintained that [military service] is an individual matter and must be a personal decision. Through the years the church has also held that the most satisfactory answer to this question is for our young men to enter military service as non-combatants (1-A-O classification), most of them serving as medics. The church has not changed....

The majority of draftees go into military service as noncombatants (1-A-O). A few declare themselves pacifists (1-O) and choose alternative service in civilian occupations.<sup>89</sup>

In 1972 the church again spelled out its stance toward military involvement of church members, emphasizing the historical position of noncombatancy and I-A-O status, yet twice highlighting the important of personal choice. “The [church’s stance] is not a rigid position binding church members but give guidance, leaving the individual member free to assess the situation for himself.”<sup>90</sup> Those who select I-O should receive support from their local pastor to

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<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 37.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.

<sup>89</sup> C. D. Martin, “Autumn Council Action Concerning Military Service,” *North Pacific Union Gleaner*, May 25, 1970. AUARC file DF 320 — *Miscellaneous*.

<sup>90</sup> “General Conference Annual Council,” October 14, 1972. Document available at the Adventist Research Center at Andrews University in file DF 320 -- *Miscellaneous*.

secure this status, and those who enter as I-A combatants should also receive care “since the Church refrains from passing judgment on them.”<sup>91</sup>

While acknowledging that documentation is not readily available, James Coffin asserts that unlike previous wars, during the Vietnam War, “Seventh-day Adventists in unprecedented numbers either dodged the draft or claimed total conscientious objection. A significant number of Adventists even carried guns and actively engaged in combat.”<sup>92</sup> Despite the church’s recommendation to participate in the military without killing, the practices of the laity continued to move both to the right and to the left.

Within a decade of emphasizing this nonjudgmental stance of 1972, voices began to warn that substantial numbers of Adventist young people were beginning to view the military as a career option. Associate Editor of the *Adventist Review*, George W. Reid, reported that every “year between 6,000 and 7,000 enlistees write ‘Seventh-day Adventist’ in the blank where incoming trainees designate religious preference,” thus evoking the questions of why this was happening in absence of a draft and what could be done to alter this trend.<sup>93</sup> He stressed that this was an ongoing problem for conscientious Adventists because “Sabbath observance and noncombatancy create almost insuperable problems” in the military context.<sup>94</sup>

### **Persian Gulf War (August 1990 – February 1991)**

The trends of the 1980s continued in the 1990s, leading Morgan to conclude, “The substantial number of Adventist combatants in the Persian Gulf conflict of 1990-1991 suggests that the [noncombatant] recommendation has carried minimal weight in practice.”<sup>95</sup>

### **War on Terror (October 2001 – Present)**

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<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

<sup>92</sup> James Coffin, “Second Thoughts on Adventists in the Military,” *Spectrum* 15, no. 1 (1984): 29.

<sup>93</sup> George W. Reid, “Adventists and Military Enlistment,” *Adventist Review*, June 7, 1984, 14.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

<sup>95</sup> Morgan, “Between Pacifism and Patriotism: Helping Students Think about Military Options.”

In 2006, with the War on Terror already five years old, the Adventist News Network (ANN) looked at the shifting attitudes of SDAs toward military involvement. ANN reported that at that time “an estimated 7,500 Adventists serve in the United States military. And virtually all of them [were] enlisted as combatants, barring the 50 chaplains classified as noncombatants by the Geneva Convention.”<sup>96</sup>

Church leaders have expressed concern that young people are enlisting without thinking through the ethical and religious implications. For example, former Navy chaplain, Larry Roth, shares, “With near zero training on the subject and very few ‘experts’ in the church available to counsel those youth who raise the issue, it is fully understandable why today very few of our youth see combatancy as an issue. They are not getting any counsel on the topic—at school, at church, and probably not at home. It is too late once they sign up with the recruiter.”<sup>97</sup>

A recent article by SDA General Conference President, Jan Paulsen, is further indication that church leaders continue to view military involvement as a serious issue even as lay members continue to enlist. Paulsen shares that he has “sensed, at times, a certain ambivalence toward our historic position—a sense, perhaps, that ‘that was then, and this is now.’”<sup>98</sup> To this sentiment he answers strongly, “I know of no reason why this should be so.” He goes on to warn, “In proactively choosing to accept circumstances where you may be required to carry arms or forfeit your ability to keep the Sabbath, I suggest that you have placed the spiritual and moral foundations of your life in serious jeopardy.”<sup>99</sup>

### **Conclusion**

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<sup>96</sup> Lechleitner, “Is the Adventist Stance on Noncombatancy Shifting?”

<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

<sup>98</sup> Jan Paulsen, “Clear Thinking about Military Service,” *Adventist World*, March 2008, 9.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid., 10.

Though not every viewpoint during each time period has been equally covered, and though a number of milestones have gone unreported, I have here attempted to provide a clear historical overview of Seventh-day Adventists' beliefs and practices regarding military involvement. It has been demonstrated that the Seventh-day Adventist church has undergone significant attitudinal shifts toward military service since its inception in 1863. The statistic that most clearly demonstrates this change is the fact that two individuals were disfellowshipped for enlisting with Union forces in 1865, whereas today there are some 7,500 SDA enlisted combatants. Although the church still encourages draftees to register as noncombatants, this decision has become a personal choice rather than a denominational statement of faith.

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