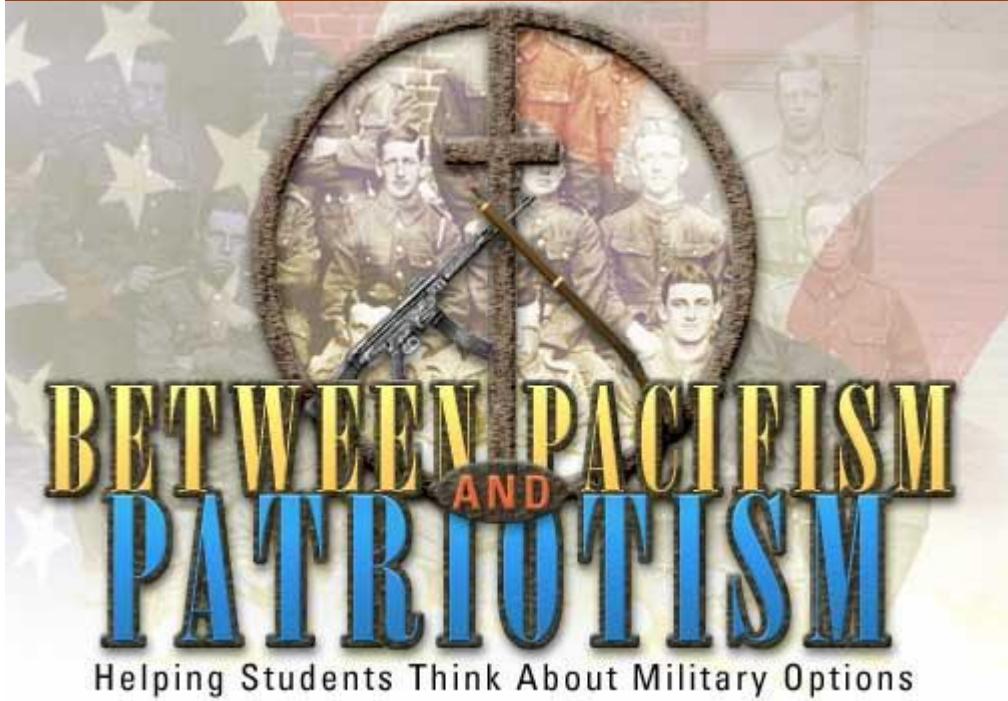


IN THE SPOTLIGHT

ADVENTIST  
Review



BY DOUGLAS MORGAN

*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.

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

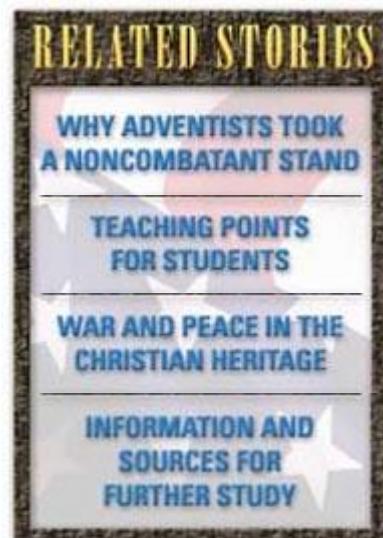
While many of the earliest Seventh-day Adventists considered pacifism, or nonresistance, a part of their radical faith,<sup>3</sup> it was also important for the success of the fledgling church to show that its outsider identity did not cause members to resist civil authority. According honor and subordination 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 fellow-men."<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 zealousness of those who longed to volunteer for the Union's righteous cause. Adventists should not court 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 unanimously 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.

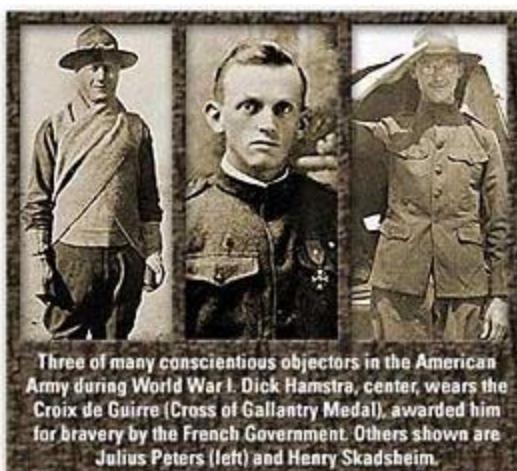


Obtaining governmental recognition formalized the church's commitment to pacifism, which though widely held, had not been systematically delineated or expressed in a generally agreed-upon form prior to the war. A resolution voted by the General Conference session of 1865 declared: "While we thus cheerfully 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 man-kind."<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**

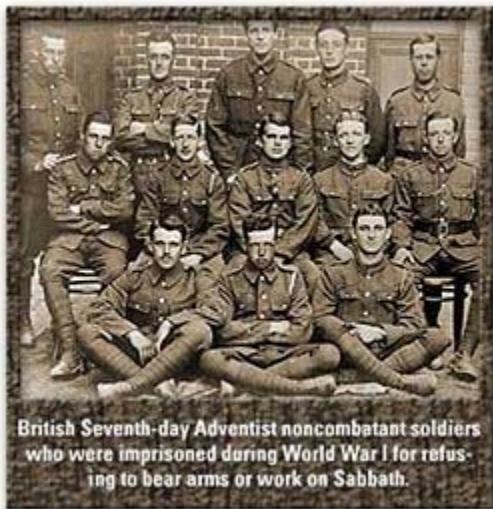
The 20th century, with its world wars, Cold War, weapons of mass destruction, and repeated genocide, brought challenges beyond even the apocalyptic imagination of Adventism's founders. During the first half of the 20th century, noncombatancy in general remained normative in Adventism, despite significant 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 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

*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 zealousness of those who longed to volunteer for the Union's righteous cause.*

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>

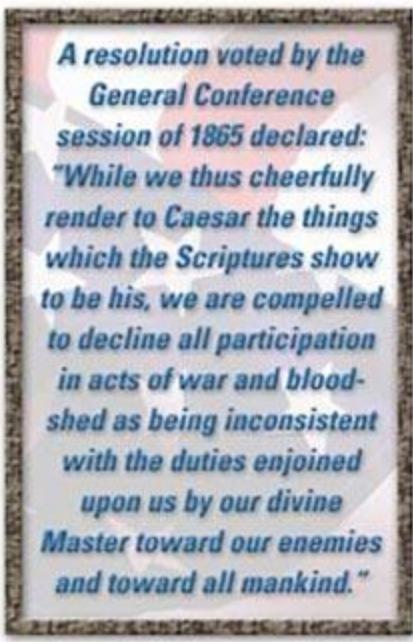
government was readily achieved, its application produced considerable difficulty and conflict. Church members still faced local draft boards and training camp officers unfamiliar with their church or with government exemptions for noncombatants. Many faced harassment, beatings, court martial, and imprisonment 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, "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 became 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 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>

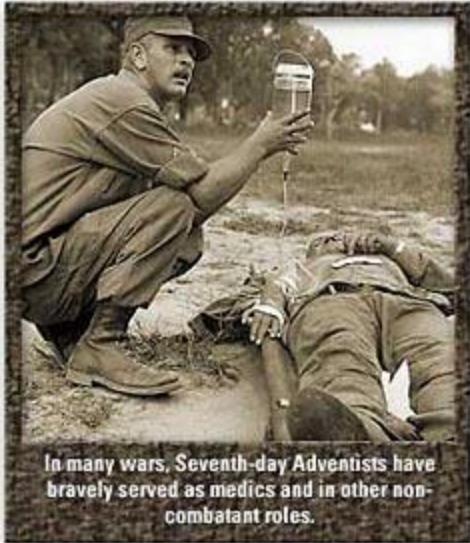
A 1941 Fort Worth, Texas, newspaper article on an MCC camp described Ad-ventists as "conscientious

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



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

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>

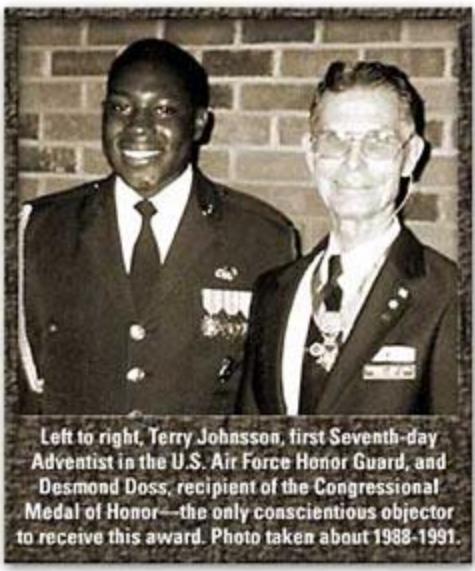
The General Conference condemned the German course after World War I, though Conradi argued that he was only following guidelines given him by church leaders. At a meeting in Gland, Switzerland, in 1923,

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 cooperator" model remained strong, the consensus regarding it was breaking down.<sup>38</sup>



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.

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 reluctantly 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. 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 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 denomination'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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## NOTES AND REFERENCES

- <sup>1</sup> Similar resolutions were voted at the 1865 and 1868 sessions. General Conference Session Minutes at General Conference Office of Archives and Statistics, <http://archives.gc.adventist.org/ast/archives>.
- <sup>2</sup> *For God and Country* (April-June 2002), p. 2. The number of Adventists serving in the Persian Gulf War was estimated to be 2,000-2,500, a large majority in combatant roles ("Adventists in the Gulf," *Spectrum* 21 [March 1991], p. 7).
- <sup>3</sup> For a detailed and insightful study of Seventh-day Adventist views of war and military service through World War I, see Peter Brock, *Freedom >From Violence: Sectarian Nonresistance From the Middle Ages to the Great War* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991), pp. 230-258. See also *Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publ. Assn., 1973), "Noncombatancy," pp. 978, 979.
- <sup>4</sup> James White, "The Nation," *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald* [hereafter cited as Review] (August 12, 1862), p. 84.
- <sup>5</sup> Brock summarizes and gives key quotes from the debate in the pages of the *Review* in *Freedom From Violence*, pp. 234-236.
- <sup>6</sup> Joseph Clarke, "The War! The War!" *Review* (September 23, 1862), p. 134.
- <sup>7</sup> Henry E. Carver, "The War," *Review* (October 21, 1862), p. 166.
- <sup>8</sup> Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Publ. Assn., 1948), vol. 1, pp. 357-361.
- <sup>9</sup> J. N. Andrews, "Seventh-day Adventists Recognized as Noncombatants," *Review* 24 (September 13, 1864), pp. 124, 125.
- <sup>10</sup> "Report of the Third Annual Session of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists," *Review* 25 (May 17, 1865), pp. 196, 197.
- <sup>11</sup> On European Adventism and military service in the years between the American Civil War and World War I, see Brock, pp. 246-256.
- <sup>12</sup> Ellen G. White, Ms. 33, 1886, published in *Selected Messages* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publ. Assn., 1958), Book 2, p. 335.
- <sup>13</sup> Brock, p. 250.
- <sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>15</sup> Doug Morgan, "Apocalyptic Anti-Imperialists," *Spectrum* 22 (January 1993), pp. 20-27.
- <sup>16</sup> "The Gospel of War," *Review* 75 (May 3, 1898), p. 351.
- <sup>17</sup> George A. Irwin, "The Present Crisis," supplement to *Review* (May 3, 1898), p. 1.
- <sup>18</sup> See Douglas Morgan, *Adventism and the American Republic* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2001), p. 89.
- <sup>19</sup> Roger G. Davis, *Conscientious Cooperators: The Seventh-day Adventists and Military Service, 1860-1945* (Ph.D. dissertation, George Washington University, Washington, D.C., 1970), pp. 113-115.
- <sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>21</sup> Francis McLellan Wilcox, *Seventh-day Adventists in Time of War* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publ. Assn., 1936), pp. 109-134.
- <sup>22</sup> F. M. Wilcox, "Are Seventh-day Adventists Loyal to Their Government?" *Review* 95 (July 18, 1918), pp. 3-5.
- <sup>23</sup> Wilcox, *Seventh-day Adventists in Time of War*, pp. 149-159; Davis, pp. 142-159.
- <sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 168-176.
- <sup>25</sup> A portion of the pamphlet is reproduced in Wilcox, *Seventh-day Adventists in Time of War*, pp. 383-385. Neff's polemic against other positions was not published in that book but is discussed by Davis, pp. 174, 175.
- <sup>26</sup> Everett N. Dick, "The Adventist Medical Corps as Seen by Its Founder," *Adventist Heritage* 1 (July 1974), pp. 18-27.
- <sup>27</sup> Carlyle B. Haynes, "Conscription and Noncombatancy," *Review* 137 (October 10, 1940), pp. 16-18.
- <sup>28</sup> \_\_\_\_\_, "Conscientious Objection or Conscientious Cooperation," *Review* 138 (February 13, 1941), p. 18.
- <sup>29</sup> \_\_\_\_\_, "Conscription and Noncombatancy," p. 18.
- <sup>30</sup> Francis D. Nichol, *The Wartime Contribution of Seventh-day Adventists* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publ. Assn., 1943), p. 7.
- <sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 57.
- <sup>32</sup> Haynes, "Conscription and Noncombatancy," p. 18; F. D. Nichol, "Medical Corpsmen 'the Bravest,'" *Review* 128 (March 22, 1951), p. 15; and "The Present World Crisis," *Review* 139 (November 8, 1962), pp. 12, 13.
- <sup>33</sup> Heber H. Votaw, "A Noncombatant Receives the Nation's Highest Honor," *Liberty* 41 (First Quarter 1946), pp. 15-17.
- <sup>34</sup> Brock, pp. 252, 253.
- <sup>35</sup> Richard W. Schwarz and Floyd Greenleaf, *Light Bearers: A History of the Seventh-day Adventist Church* (Nampa, Idaho: Pacific Press Publ. Assn., 2000), p. 365.
- <sup>36</sup> J. R. Nelson and Clark Smith, "Directors Recount Work of WSC After Four Years of Ministry," *For God and Country* 11 (Third Quarter, 1962), pp. 3, 4, 7; *Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publ. Assn., 1976), p. 946.
- <sup>37</sup> Clark Smith, "Character Guidance Studies for the Seventh-day Adventist Medical Cadet Corps," chapter on "Privileges and Responsibilities of Citizenship," p. 2; and chapter on "Noncombatancy and Governmental Relationships," p. 1 (unpublished syllabus, n.d.).
- <sup>38</sup> See, for example, the debate in *Spectrum* 1 (Winter 1969).
- <sup>39</sup> *Review* 146 (December 18, 1969), pp. 16-18; "Recommendations of General Interest From the Autumn Council, 1972-1," *Review* 149 (November 30, 1972), p. 20.
- <sup>40</sup> See [http://adventist.org/beliefs/main\\_stat52.html](http://adventist.org/beliefs/main_stat52.html).

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The 20th century, with its world wars, Cold War, weapons of mass destruction, and repeated genocide, brought challenges beyond even the apocalyptic imagination of Adventism's founders. During the first half of the 20th century, noncombatancy in general remained normative 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.

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contained in the decalogue, interpreted in the teachings of Christ, and exemplified in His life."<sup>20</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 challenges beyond even the apocalyptic imagination of Adventism's founders. During the first half of the 20th century, noncombatancy in general remained normative 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.

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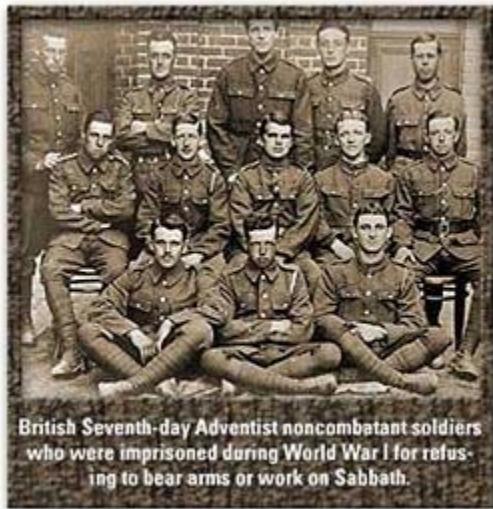
*A testimony from Ellen White deftly set forth a position that avoided inflammatory rhetoric, yet took a principled stand on noncombatance. Mrs. White rebuked both the pacifists' enthusiasm for draft resistance as well as the zealousness of those who longed to volunteer for the Union's righteous cause.*

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 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>

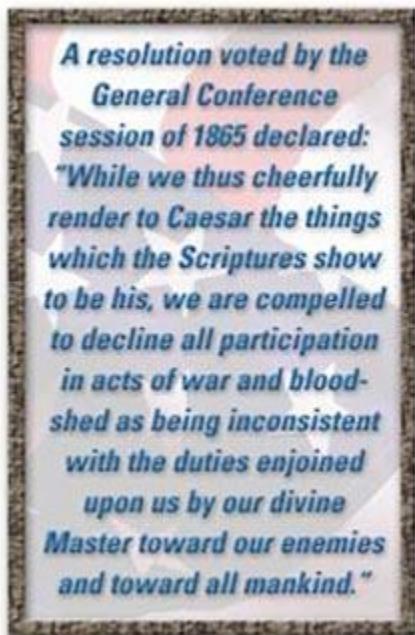


The problems Adventists experienced in World War I prompted efforts to be better prepared for the next war. However, not everyone was convinced that the direction taken during World War I was the right one. Some, who shared in the wave of pacifism that developed as a reaction to the crusading militarism 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, "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 became 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>



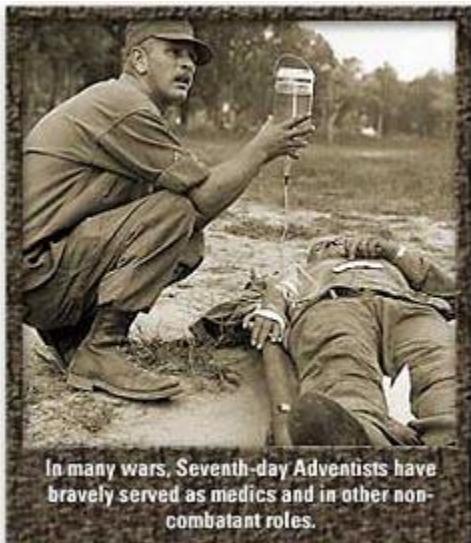
When the Selective Service Act was passed in September 1940, those refusing to bear arms were classified as "conscientious objectors." Carlyle B. Haynes, head of the National Service Commission (the organization's name was returned to War Service Commission after the United States entered the war), took pains to show that despite this classification, the 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 religious duty of refusing to bear arms. In Europe, however, during the era of the two world wars, noncombatancy 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>

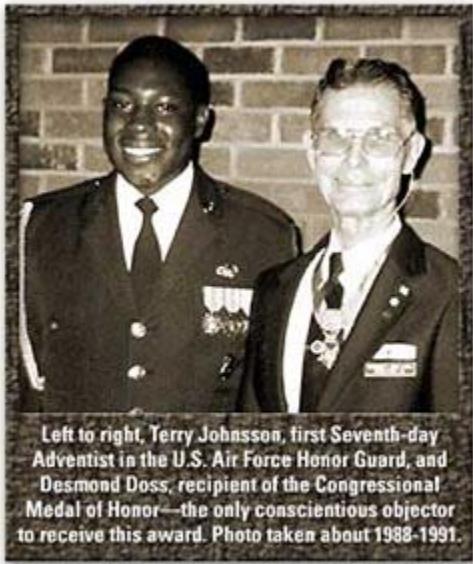
The General Conference condemned the German course after World War I, though Conradi argued that he was only following guidelines given him by church leaders. At a meeting in Gland, Switzerland, in 1923, European church administrators agreed upon a statement close to the American position, affirming 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 cooperator" model remained strong, the consensus regarding it was breaking down.<sup>38</sup>



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.

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 reluctantly 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. 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 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 denomination'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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## NOTES AND REFERENCES

- <sup>1</sup> Similar resolutions were voted at the 1865 and 1868 sessions. General Conference Session Minutes at General Conference Office of Archives and Statistics, <http://archives.gc.adventist.org/ast/archives>.
- <sup>2</sup> *For God and Country* (April-June 2002), p. 2. The number of Adventists serving in the Persian Gulf War was estimated to be 2,000-2,500, a large majority in combatant roles ("Adventists in the Gulf," *Spectrum* 21 [March 1991], p. 7).
- <sup>3</sup> For a detailed and insightful study of Seventh-day Adventist views of war and military service through World War I, see Peter Brock, *Freedom >From Violence: Sectarian Nonresistance From the Middle Ages to the Great War* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991), pp. 230-258. See also *Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publ. Assn., 1973), "Noncombatancy," pp. 978, 979.
- <sup>4</sup> James White, "The Nation," *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald* [hereafter cited as *Review*] (August 12, 1862), p. 84.
- <sup>5</sup> Brock summarizes and gives key quotes from the debate in the pages of the *Review* in *Freedom From Violence*, pp. 234-236.
- <sup>6</sup> Joseph Clarke, "The War! The War!" *Review* (September 23, 1862), p. 134.
- <sup>7</sup> Henry E. Carver, "The War," *Review* (October 21, 1862), p. 166.
- <sup>8</sup> Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Publ. Assn., 1948), vol. 1, pp. 357-361.
- <sup>9</sup> J. N. Andrews, "Seventh-day Adventists Recognized as Noncombatants," *Review* 24 (September 13, 1864), pp. 124, 125.
- <sup>10</sup> "Report of the Third Annual Session of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists," *Review* 25 (May 17, 1865), pp. 196, 197.
- <sup>11</sup> On European Adventism and military service in the years between the American Civil War and World War I, see Brock, pp. 246-256.
- <sup>12</sup> Ellen G. White, Ms. 33, 1886, published in *Selected Messages* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publ. Assn., 1958), Book 2, p. 335.
- <sup>13</sup> Brock, p. 250.
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- <sup>15</sup> Doug Morgan, "Apocalyptic Anti-Imperialists," *Spectrum* 22 (January 1993), pp. 20-27.
- <sup>16</sup> "The Gospel of War," *Review* 75 (May 3, 1898), p. 351.
- <sup>17</sup> George A. Irwin, "The Present Crisis," supplement to *Review* (May 3, 1898), p. 1.
- <sup>18</sup> See Douglas Morgan, *Adventism and the American Republic* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2001), p. 89.
- <sup>19</sup> Roger G. Davis, *Conscientious Cooperators: The Seventh-day Adventists and Military Service, 1860-1945* (Ph.D. dissertation, George Washington University, Washington, D.C., 1970), pp. 113-115.
- <sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>21</sup> Francis McLellan Wilcox, *Seventh-day Adventists in Time of War* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publ. Assn., 1936), pp. 109-134.
- <sup>22</sup> F. M. Wilcox, "Are Seventh-day Adventists Loyal to Their Government?" *Review* 95 (July 18, 1918), pp. 3-5.
- <sup>23</sup> Wilcox, *Seventh-day Adventists in Time of War*, pp. 149-159; Davis, pp. 142-159.
- <sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 168-176.
- <sup>25</sup> A portion of the pamphlet is reproduced in Wilcox, *Seventh-day Adventists in Time of War*, pp. 383-385. Neff's polemic against other positions was not published in that book but is discussed by Davis, pp. 174, 175.
- <sup>26</sup> Everett N. Dick, "The Adventist Medical Corps as Seen by Its Founder," *Adventist Heritage* 1 (July 1974), pp. 18-27.
- <sup>27</sup> Carlyle B. Haynes, "Conscription and Noncombatancy," *Review* 137 (October 10, 1940), pp. 16-18.
- <sup>28</sup> \_\_\_\_\_, "Conscientious Objection or Conscientious Cooperation," *Review* 138 (February 13, 1941), p. 18.
- <sup>29</sup> \_\_\_\_\_, "Conscription and Noncombatancy," p. 18.
- <sup>30</sup> Francis D. Nichol, *The Wartime Contribution of Seventh-day Adventists* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publ. Assn., 1943), p. 7.
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- <sup>34</sup> Brock, pp. 252, 253.

<sup>35</sup> Richard W. Schwarz and Floyd Greenleaf, *Light Bearers: A History of the Seventh-day Adventist Church* (Nampa, Idaho: Pacific Press Publ. Assn., 2000), p. 365.

<sup>36</sup> J. R. Nelson and Clark Smith, "Directors Recount Work of WSC After Four Years of Ministry," *For God and Country* 11 (Third Quarter, 1962), pp. 3, 4, 7; *Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publ. Assn., 1976), p. 946.

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<sup>39</sup> *Review* 146 (December 18, 1969), pp. 16-18; "Recommendations of General Interest From the Autumn Council, 1972-1," *Review* 149 (November 30, 1972), p. 20.

<sup>40</sup> See [http://adventist.org/beliefs/main\\_stat52.html](http://adventist.org/beliefs/main_stat52.html).