

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

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

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

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

Teaching Points for Students

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Sabbath Accommodation

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



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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Church Support for Members of the Military

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



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