



Seventh-day Adventist World War II service personnel during a visit of chaplain, Pastor E. H. Guilliard, somewhere in the Northern Territory of Australia.

Photo courtesy of the *Record*, January 22, 1973.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church and Military Service in the South Pacific

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The Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) Church in the South Pacific region has been fortunate that issues of military service have been relatively few and that national governments in the region have been prepared to work cooperatively with the Church on practical solutions that have met the needs of governments while respecting the SDA stand on noncombatancy. Both Australia and New Zealand have had various forms of compulsory military training over a number of decades of the twentieth century, and even conscription at times. The Church's regional governing body (initially the Australasian Union Conference [AUC], later the Australasian Division [AD], then South Pacific Division [SPD]), after initial problems in finding a consensus position among its

members, was able to negotiate an understanding whereby SDAs served in noncombatant roles, which permitted SDA young men to serve their country in ways that did not violate the stance of the Church, even during the crises of wars. In more recent times governments of Pacific nations with military forces either have purely voluntary armed services or have also made provision for conscientious objectors. Perhaps the most difficult circumstances were for nationals of Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands who were put to forced labor by Allied forces during World War II and who were most at risk of having their principles disregarded.

Compulsory Military Training in Australia and New Zealand to 1914:

Grappling with the Issues

Being geographically distant from the protecting umbrella of British military might, the self-governing British colonies of New Zealand and Australia from the mid-1800s floated various schemes of self-defense, including compulsory military training (CMT) based on the widely admired Swiss model of citizen forces. By the early 1900s CMT was gaining political traction, especially as competition for Pacific hegemony between France, Britain, Germany, the U.S.A., Russia, and Japan heated up. The Sino-Japanese War of 1904 and the stunning defeat of Imperial Russia by Japan in 1905 made the Australian and New Zealand governments nervous.¹ An influential lobby group, the National Defence League, was established in 1905 in Australia, and CMT was justified as preserving freedom from foreign armies, from an “internal threat posed by a standing army,” and for improving the fitness and morals of young men.² New Zealand followed suit soon after, founding a National League of New Zealand in 1906, and reporting on Australian moves to introduce CMT.³

The AUC and conference leadership in Australia and New Zealand responded to anticipated changes brought about by the possibility of CMT. The Church already had Religious Liberty secretaries for the AUC and its subterritories in place in 1898,⁴ though at this stage the issue of military service was mainly seen in terms of exemption from training on the Sabbath. Already, in 1901, an SDA teacher in a state school in New Zealand had been threatened with dismissal over the state requirement to teach the students military drill. He refused because he was required to do so on the Sabbath, and because “it was training the young how best to ‘kill,’ and therefore was a violation of the sixth commandment.”⁵ This, along with the need to lobby governments on issues such as the Sabbath, led the New Zealand Conference to upgrade its religious liberties secretary to a department in 1906.⁶ As the political conversation of CMT rose in both Australia and New Zealand, the Church was able to put lobbyists in place and generate articles for the popular press on the issue, especially challenging provisions for Sunday to be the only day excluded from training.⁷

After several failed attempts, the Australian Defence Act was passed in 1909, empowering the government to introduce CMT, with implementation coming into effect on July 1, 1911.⁸ Again, New Zealand followed Australia’s

lead, passing its own defense act, requiring CMT for boys 12 to 14 (junior cadets), those aged 15 to 17 (cadets), and 18 to 21, in late December 1909. Opposition grew to this, and limited exemptions were granted, requiring noncombatant military service in its place.⁹ Immediately the Church set about wrestling with the best approach to the new demands of both countries, and camp meetings became the forums where delegates debated the issues. While many felt strongly that SDAs should have nothing to do with war, some argued that taxes paid for weapons, that the state had a legitimate role to protect its citizens (even by force), and that the moral responsibility for war deaths was on the state, not the individual.

“Studies were held with the delegates of these conferences,” reported the *Union Conference Record*. “It was seen that the conference could only place the matter on the basis of the individual conscience.” Two principles were identified: the first was the nonnegotiable nature of the Sabbath, but as for the second, actual military service was left to the individual’s conscience. However, the article highlighted a need to recognize the SDA ministry of reconciliation to all peoples, while also protesting the rising nationalism and militarism evident in state schools, thus taking a de facto position against military service.¹⁰ As it turned out, Adventism had chosen the harder principle to defend before secular authorities: Sabbath exemption from military service was far less palatable or practical for governments than the principle of noncombatant service.

In the Australian Parliament a series of amendments to the Australian Defence Act were proposed by 1910, and the AUC delegated three of its leaders, F. W. Paap, A. W. Anderson, and G. Teasdale, to present a petition to the minister of defence, Senator George Pearce, while other government ministers were lobbied, a process made more complex by three changes of governing party in three years. Negotiations were delicate affairs, as the Church sought to avoid any hint of disloyalty. As Church constituency opinion was “about equally divided” on military service, “it was evident we could make no representation to the Government. . . . There is only one plank on which we can all take a united stand,” and that was over no military service on the Sabbath. The petition, addressed to the governor-general, asked that the regulations of the act would respect religious freedom, and that Sabbathkeepers “be exempt from Naval, Military, Non-combatant, and Civil services (acts of mercy excepted), on said seventh day.”¹¹

In August, Pearce received the delegation “very kindly” and listened to their request for Sabbath exemption as an equal right to the Sunday exemption already in the act. Pearce immediately agreed with the principle, but pointed out the difficulties in implementation, noting, ironically, that it would be easier to accommodate exemption from military service. He concluded by promising to “give the matter careful consideration,” and indicated that he was optimistic of a favorable outcome.¹² In the end, the exemption in the act “provides that one whose conscientious convictions forbid his doing military service may be given noncombatant or civil service instead,” though the burden of proof lay with the individual seeking exemption. Neither the Australian nor New Zealand acts offered Sabbath exemptions, such privileges being granted only by exceptional governor-general-in-executive-council actions. Nevertheless, the Church continued its lobbying to that effect.¹³

Conference negotiations with the New Zealand government were hindered “on account of having no literature to meet the position, and because of the delicate nature of the situation and the danger of becoming complicated through misrepresentations.” However, they received an encouraging response, while representations made to other officials led to the exemption of students at the conference’s school at Pukekura, who were asked instead to form a “peace-scout patrol,” which was vaguely defined as “drill in first aid and in the cultivation of the natural observation.”¹⁴ This led conference leaders to advertise the school as offering “no safer place” for SDA students.¹⁵ Unfortunately, the exemption lapsed when the conference moved the school from Pukekura to Oroua (Longburn) in 1913.¹⁶ Despite this, the position of SDAs as conscientious noncombatants was recognized by the Defence Department in a letter in April 1914, granting them exemption from military training.¹⁷

In timely anticipation of the new requirements the Avondale School for Christian Workers (Avondale), the Church’s training school at Cooranbong, NSW, Australia, where the largest group of Adventist men of military age were located, organized for Church leaders to meet with the students on January 11, 1911, to brief them on the regulations and how they might respond to them in the light of the Bible. “Our position with reference to the Defence Bill is an individual one,” students were told, reflecting the lack of formal policy from the Church, though once a stand was formulated, the Church continued to regard the issue as one of private conscience, not Church doctrine. The students were shown the registration form all young men had to complete, and “at the same time impressed [of] the necessity of immediate registration.” But each was urged to “claim exemption on the grounds that he is in school in training to become a missionary or a minister of the gospel.”¹⁸

With only weeks to spare before SDA young men were subjected to the provisions of CMT, the Church administrators for the AUC finally sought to define a formal position for the SDA Church on the matter of military service, which had “greatly agitated” church members in Australia, leading to “some division of opinion.”¹⁹ On the first of three days from May 20 to 22, 1911, they established a committee to thrash out the complex issue, which met the next day.²⁰ The group debated what to do, hearing lengthy presentations from several members, but consensus was difficult to achieve. The rights of the state to run civil authority and protect its citizens were covered on the second morning, as George Teasdale in a three-hour speech insisted that “*to military training as such there can be advanced no valid objection.*” Countering this after lunch, Robert Hare spoke on the issue of bearing arms, arguing that it broke the commandment “Thou shalt not kill.” Legal opinion was given “that the 116th clause of the Federal Constitution [protecting religious freedom] would not safeguard our young men against having to drill on the Sabbath.”²¹ This opinion was validated in a court case the following year, which dismissed an appeal against military service of any kind.²² By 9:00 p.m. the meeting had voted “that we recommend that immediate steps be taken to frame a petition requesting the Federal Defence Department for a regulation which will exempt our young men from drill on the Sabbath,” before wearily adjourning overnight.²³

The activity intensified on May 22 as the committee members picked up where they had left off. A telegram to the Defence Department in Melbourne asked about exemptions for SDAs from Sabbath drill, and the AUC president and two others were delegated to speak with the Defence Department to clarify matters. There was further discussion on “the matter of military training, it being quite manifest that the brethren were not all agreed as to what we should do.” Eventually it was voted to regard the section of the Defence Act on CMT as “an infringement of the civil rights of the inhabitants of this country; and that in the Sabbath—the seventh day of the week—it infringes the religious rights of Seventh-day Adventists. And that while we may yield, under protest, to compulsory military drill, because it violates our civil rights only, yet we cannot consent to military drill of any kind on the Sabbath, because that would be a violation of the fourth commandment.”²⁴

Amazingly, the group received a telegraphed reply at 5:15 p.m. that same day from the Defence Department. In it the acting secretary of defence announced that the “minister has decided that any person of the Seventh-day Adventist or other religious bodies, who has religious objections to military training on Saturdays, and is certified to by the head of his church, is to be given an opportunity to perform the training on other afternoons and nights.” The surprise at such a prompt and welcome response from government officials is evident in the minutes: “On the secretary’s reading [the telegram], the brethren sang, ‘Praise God from whom all blessings flow.’” A telegram of thanks was quickly organized.²⁵

The committee also authorized a book titled *Rights of Man* (not the famous book by atheist Thomas Paine), and intended it for wide distribution. They planned a promotional campaign for August, including giving a copy to all legislators in the country, with the obvious intention of lobbying lawmakers to take religious liberty issues seriously while framing legislation around military service.²⁶ Having won exemption from military training on the Sabbath, the AUC directed “that the certificates of exemption from military training on the Sabbath be signed by our conference presidents or duly ordained and registered ministers.”²⁷

At Avondale the school board voted, in harmony with the AUC action of May 21, to change the school name from “Avondale School for Christian Workers” to “Australasian Missionary College.” Some felt that the addition of the words “Missionary” and “College” “more fully represented the character of the work done in this place,” offering better grounds for exemption from CMT. The act exempted those attending a theological institution, meaning specifically those studying for the ministry, but the new name also offered potential protection for Avondale students who were not studying for the ministry.²⁸

An account of the AUC decisions was published in a lengthy article in the *Union Conference Record* in June 1911, revealing the complexities at play. Some Adventists had refused even to register for military service, with lofty rhetoric of martyrdom instead of compromise on the Sabbath. The union denounced such “rash words and fanatical boasting,” which was in fact “evil and truly deplorable,” instead emphasizing the degree to which Christians should cooperate with governments. They cited examples from the Bible and pioneer SDA leaders such as James and Ellen White and J. N. Loughborough, and quoted cases in which “it is clearly shown that in

certain conflicts God's people have been found among those who have performed certain military duties." The article even quoted James White, on conditions during the American Civil War and with regard to the fourth and sixth commandments, that "in the case of drafting, the government bears the responsibility of the violation of the law of God, and it would be madness to resist." Nevertheless, the article stated that "we have always felt conscientiously opposed to bearing arms," and hoped that SDAs would be given "the privilege of ambulance service in preference to the military drill."²⁹ This article was followed two weeks later by a cover article by Ellen White that, while rarely mentioning military service, made plain that SDAs should make every effort not to antagonize governments or appear treasonous, and resort to defiance only "when, *because of our advocacy of Bible truth*, we shall be treated as traitors."³⁰ Military service, and even combatancy, were not considered by White to be Bible truths requiring an unbending stand on principle.

In practice, Australian SDAs encountered relatively little difficulty in substituting extra drill on other days in exchange for having Sabbath free, courtesy of the goodwill of defence minister Pearce and his department. However, the newly appointed religious liberty director for the union in 1914 spoke darkly of the future, warning that the Australian Defence Act had established conditions under which religious persecution would threaten the future, and indeed had already occurred. In New Zealand, the situation was even more troublesome. While "we are treated with marked kindness, and our boys are allowed to leave the camp to attend the Sabbath worship," colporteurs had to apply for a special permit from a magistrate, "which is a very unsatisfactory method of procedure." School students were granted exemption from parades, camps and gun drills, instead getting extra physical exercises. With "obstacles to face in regard to military training which are peculiar to New Zealand," New Zealand leaders hoped that the September 1914 union session would offer a chance to "obtain clearer light to guide us in our dealings with the Defence Department."³¹

The Union had prepared two tracts on the issue in early 1914: "The Military Menace in Australia," written by a former Avondale student, (who ironically would also become the first SDA to volunteer for military service in September 1914, and the first to lose his life in the war, at Gallipoli in August 1915), and "Is the Defence Act Popular?" Both tracts were enjoying widespread distribution when the World War I broke out in August 1914. A petition against CMT had also gained respectable numbers of signatures from the general public. With the outburst of jingoistic patriotism that accompanied the declaration of war on Germany, the Church found it politic to shelve these tracts and petitions.³²

Military Service during World War I and the Interwar Period, 1914–1938³³

As loyal members of the British Empire the governments of both Australia and New Zealand quickly offered to Britain local military units composed of specially raised volunteers. The CMT units could not be used, as the acts limited their deployment to the immediate defense of Australia and New Zealand and prevented their use

overseas. The Australian Imperial Force (AIF) and New Zealand Expeditionary Force (NZEF) proved popular at first and were oversubscribed by volunteers in August-September 1914, but by mid-1915 it was obvious to both governments that volunteers would fall short of demands.

The first issue that SDA leaders and young men faced was the popular perception that noncombatancy was a cowardly or even treacherous option, made worse by the stands of some SDAs who refused any level of compliance with what they might have perceived as war-related work, and whom the church labeled as “extremists.” Leaders issued statements to the press clarifying the Church’s willingness to obey laws and cooperate with the authorities as far as possible. Articles in the Adventist press sought to promote the Church’s position, culminating in the republication of an earlier Ellen White article on a proper attitude toward government, in which she advocated wisdom in cooperating with authorities. Only on matters directly crossing the Church’s mission was it to oppose the demands of government.³⁴

In mid-1915 the Australian government conducted a census of all men aged 17 to 60 to identify eligible recruits, and then began a campaign of sustained targeted pressure on those eligible to enlist. The AUC, affirming “that as Seventh-day Adventists we are noncombatants,” promoted the St. John’s Ambulance training course that “will enable [Adventist men] to perform noncombatant duties.” At Avondale, college administrators met with students who were being pressured to enlist and supported their response to recruiters.³⁵ To ease the pressure nearly eighty students, both male and female, earned first-aid certificates.³⁶ Later, renewed recruiting pressures in 1917 were met by pastors briefing students “with the whole military position from the beginning, as far as we as a people are concerned.” Fortunately, the local recruiting officer “quite understood the position and was very reasonable and courteous in the pursuance of all his duties.”³⁷

Australian prime minister Billy Hughes organized a conscription referendum for October 1916, and required all military-aged men to register for compulsory military service in Australia ahead of the poll, with exemption only for theology students. In response the AUC executive issued a statement in September 1916 of “what is, and has ever been, our denominational attitude toward military service. That, as loyal citizens, we will conform to all the requirements of the Government as long as they do not conflict with the Law of God; that is, we will perform at any time, except on the Sabbath of the Lord (from sunset Friday till sunset Saturday), noncombatant service which may be imposed upon us by law.” The conferences followed suit, sometimes adding riders about respecting personal conscience in matters of military service.³⁸

New Zealand introduced conscription in November 1916, its ballots making up the difference between voluntary enlistments and the need for reinforcements. The New Zealand Military Service Act of 1916 applied to all single young men and those married since the war began, with exemptions only for members of organizations with military service prohibited in their written creeds. With no creed at that time, New Zealand SDAs could obtain no protection from the Church. The North New Zealand Conference (NNZC), the larger and better resourced of the two New Zealand conferences, undertook the long struggle to have the church officially recognized as a non-

combatant church, appealing to the minister of defence, Sir James Allen, and to various military boards before whom SDA men at first unsuccessfully sought exemptions.³⁹ In a widely reported case, a newly appointed minister in the South New Zealand Conference was denied exemption on the grounds that he was not an ordained clergyman. Authorities claimed that the Church had invented its noncombatant position post-1914 in order to claim exemption.⁴⁰ The discussions turned bitter as Allen rejected the NNZC position, finding that “exhaustive inquiries have been made, but it cannot be found that your body claims, as a tenet of its Faith, that the bearing of arms is contrary to Divine revelation.” A troublesome former conference official made a reckless statement that was “subversive of the principles we hold, [and] has been treasured up against us and have given the military authorities some ground for rejecting our appeal.” The Church hit back with claims the state was “reviving the persecutions and martyrdoms of the Dark Ages.” A more rigorous process of research put together the Church’s historic positions on both noncombatancy and loyalty to the State, drawing on positions articulated during the American Civil War fifty years earlier, and a press campaign combatted myths over the Church’s position on war.⁴¹ The AUC also authorized the NNZC to work with Baptists, Quakers, and other denominations to create a more effective religious liberties lobby.⁴²

This more thorough documentation, along with the discovery of a pre-war letter from the Defence Department recognizing the exemption of SDAs from CMT, led to the official classification of SDAs as noncombatants in June 1917. In April 1917 the Army had already given the quiet nod to SDAs being released on Sabbath in exchange for extra fatigues on Sunday, done without fanfare lest it spark a rush of similar claims for privileges.⁴³ Nevertheless, a number of SDAs had already been punished for refusal to bear arms or work on the Sabbath, though most were given light sentences in de facto recognition of their religious convictions.⁴⁴

However, SDA men still had to demonstrate their SDA credentials before appeal boards, and the conference religious liberties directors were kept busy, especially in the NNZC, where the new director lacked the experience to handle matters smoothly. However, an appeal over the call-up of all the eligible men at the Oroua Missionary School at Longburn was successful, with all but one exempted, and other men were sent to State Farms to work instead of serving in military camps.⁴⁵ Some SDA men made specious claims for exemption, one claiming that as an Australian he was not eligible (he was jailed for 10 months), and another initially refusing to serve in case he was given non-ambulance work to do on the Sabbath. One SDA was in the awkward position of being a regular attender but not baptized, which jeopardized his exemption.⁴⁶

In late 1918 the NNZC president claimed “that no Seventh-day Adventist has been compelled to leave our shores, and all those who have been called upon to assist their country in this time of national crisis and peril by engaging in agricultural pursuits have been kindly treated by the authorities and their religious convictions respected.”⁴⁷ However, new scholarship shows that about 25 SDAs called up by ballot served, and “at least 10 Adventist young men are known to have taken up arms during the first half of 1917,” some of whom were killed in action. Some of those imprisoned for refusing to bear arms remained in custody until mid-1919.⁴⁸

While the Australian conscription referendum of October 1916, and a second referendum in December 1917, failed, heavy-handed recruiting tactics backed by women handing out white “cowards” feathers to young men not in uniform placed enormous social pressure on SDAs. An employee at the Church’s printing press in Warburton, Victoria, agreed to help the local recruiter with clerical tasks, but had to face down the sergeant’s persistent bullying to enlist himself.⁴⁹ Some SDAs were prosecuted for refusing the oath of allegiance or compulsory military training (one of whom had German parents, which complicated his defense). In the meantime, SDAs attempted to defuse perceptions of disloyalty by training as stretcher bearers for the AIF’s field ambulances.⁵⁰

The SDA Church in Australia had cooperation from the highest level in the person of Australian defence minister Senator Pearce. Responding to one appeal by a new SDA convert to transfer to a non-combat unit, he said that he “would like to treat a Seventh-day Adventist in the manner in which he himself would like to be treated should he by accident of birth or for any other reason have been a Seventh-day Adventist.”⁵¹ However, AUC religious liberty director A. W. Anderson reported that “some military officers were disposed to ignore the privileges which had been granted to us by the government; and at times it was necessary for me . . . to make very strong protests to military authorities against the actions of certain men who were inclined to regard noncombatants and Sabbathkeepers as unworthy of any special privileges,” noting that “occasionally it was necessary for me to do things which in time of war were positively dangerous to one’s liberty.” The Church had struggled to define its position, he noted, for the “wise decision” to be loyal to the government save on noncombatancy and the Sabbath “was not unanimously approved at the time of its adoption” by the AUC, but that “gradually circumstances have taught us the wisdom of the course which was followed.” Church leaders preferred to describe their position to be labelled as “conscientious cooperation,” but government legislation made no provision for that.⁵² As in New Zealand, Australian SDA leaders and laity used the press to refute charges of disloyalty.⁵³

Despite Church leaders promoting nonenlistment, at least 60 Australian and New Zealand SDAs volunteered during the course of the war, exercising the liberty of conscience that the Church granted on the matter.⁵⁴ Some served as stretcher bearers, while others were comfortable in combat units. Avondale contributed seven current or former students, at least two of whom died, while seven are known to have enlisted from the Oroua Missionary College, four of whom were killed.⁵⁵ Probably the first to enlist, in September 1914, was Henry “Harry” Stout, who, as the religious liberty secretary for South Australia, had published a pamphlet titled “The Military Menace in Australia,” and who was a forceful public speaker on the subject. While opposed to conscription, he was firmly in favor of voluntary service and joined a field ambulance, losing his life on Gallipoli in August 1915. A number of other SDAs died of wounds or disease while serving, and their loss was felt in the small SDA communities in Australia and New Zealand, perhaps none so much as that of Albert Anderson, the son of AUC religious liberty secretary A. W. Anderson, who worked so hard to ensure that SDA men would not have to serve.⁵⁶ In another case A. W. Anderson instructed a new SDA, who had deserted upon reading SDA

literature, to return to the army in order to keep his original promise to the state.⁵⁷ One former SDA reportedly rediscovered his faith under heavy fire, walking calmly to HQ to deliver a message after a desperate prayer for assurance.⁵⁸

The end of the war in November 1918 brought some relief from the pressures of overseas service, but both New Zealand and Australia maintained the provisions for CMT for home defense immediately after the war. Only in November 1929 did Australia suspend compulsory military training, as the federal budget strained under the pressures of the Great Depression. New Zealand followed suit in 1930. However, with the wartime understanding between the Church and the two dominion governments still firmly in place, there were relatively few issues in the decade after the war. The church routinely helped SDA men to good effect when faced with CMT. The AUC Religious Liberty Department reported in 1930 that “this apparently dormant department has really been active in a way little realized by our good people. Many a lad of conscientious principles has been helped in getting release from military drill on God's Sabbath in Australia, while in New Zealand they have been released from it altogether. Enforced military drill has been dropped in Australia, and there are not wanting signs that in New Zealand also it will be dropped. Yet ever ‘the price of liberty is eternal vigilance.’”⁵⁹

Military Service and World War II, 1939–1945⁶⁰

The first two years of World War II appeared to be a replay of World War I, as both Australia and New Zealand raised volunteer divisions to fight in Europe and the Middle East, but manpower crises forced Australia to reintroduce CMT in January 1940, and New Zealand to bring in conscription in June 1940. The Japanese attacks on British territories in Asia beginning on December 8, 1941, jolted Australia and New Zealand into realizing that the war was now in their own backyard. Governments urgently ramped up preparations as the war overtook territories on the fringes of Australia, threatening its existence. Conscripted men in Australia were restricted by law to service only in Australia, but the emergency led the government to stretch the definition to include the Australian territories in Papua and New Guinea, formally extended to the South-West Pacific Zone in January 1943, which allowed for the deployment of conscript citizen militia forces units in Dutch New Guinea (modern-day West Papua) and the Solomon Islands. Conscripted New Zealand SDAs served in the Middle East, Europe, and the Pacific, while the bulk of Australian SDAs served only in Australia and New Guinea, with only a handful serving in the voluntary Second Australian Imperial Force and British air forces in the Middle East and Greece.

With the experience of World War I to draw on, Church leaders were quick to publicize the Seventh-day Adventist position on military service, reiterating the stand on cooperation with government in all matters save in bearing arms and nonhumanitarian military duties on the Sabbath. While officially classified as conscientious objectors, administrators were at pains to emphasize loyal noncombatant service, and willingness to do acts of service on Sabbath if necessary.⁶¹ In the meantime a new difficulty had arisen with the arrival of the Seventh Day Adventist Reform Movement in the person of Dumitru Nicolici, which painted the Church as apostate for

allowing its members to serve in noncombatant roles in the military. Church leaders expended some energy refuting these charges, mostly to shore up the understanding and support of the SDA constituency, which was most affected by Nicolici's attacks, rather than the general public.⁶² A series of articles published in the Church press during the war reiterated the Church's position, seeking to educate Church members on the nuances of the SDA position. One article insisted that Adventists "will, when called, willingly and loyally perform any military duty which contributes to the preservation, the maintenance, the welfare, the sustaining, of human life," while follow-up articles repeated the message. One introduced a term preferred by SDA leaders to describe their position, that of "conscientious cooperators," which some felt better reflected the Adventist position.⁶³ But when an Australian SDA tried to register as a "conscientious supporter," he found himself denied by the Australian Defence Act, which did not recognize such a category, though the court willingly granted him noncombatant status.⁶⁴

Ignoring the position supported by the Church led some SDAs into trouble. Pamphlets published and distributed by dissidents claiming that the SDA Church would not participate in any war-associated activity were quickly disowned.⁶⁵ Another SDA, a foreman in a bullet factory, was fortunate to be allocated civilian work when applying for noncombatant status, the judge noting the irony of the tension between his religious and work professions.⁶⁶ A farmer had trouble with his appeal for total exemption on conscientious grounds, having recently joined the SDA Reform Movement but still having his name on the official SDA roll.⁶⁷ Yet another SDA was jailed for refusing both the oath and the alternative affirmation on enlistment, a stand not supported by the Church, which in 1941 had negotiated a rewording of the oath to make it acceptable to Seventh-day Adventists.⁶⁸

With the war heating up in the Pacific in early 1942, the AUC committee took a special action to meet the new challenges and conditions. This included plans to "indoctrinate men in camp or liable to be called up," especially through sending them literature and through pastoral visitations, and action to educate ministers and laity on the principles of religious liberty on Sabbath observance and noncombatancy. Local churches were soon encouraged to stay in touch with members who had been conscripted, and one began supplying SDA men in the nearby training camp with "comforts and tuck boxes" customized to soldiers' individual tastes, including devotional items, temperance cards, toiletries, and healthful snacks.⁶⁹ As some Seventh-day Adventist soldiers were pressed to perform sanitary duties on the Sabbath, the AUC took an action to permit this if it was essential work to maintain the health of the camp.⁷⁰

In order to ensure the progress of church work, Union administrators sought to have clarity over protected roles. Various applications were made over the course of the war for specific individuals to be released from the military, such as Church employees, doctors formerly in Church employ and men wishing to study for the ministry, and the Church also sought clarity over protected essential industries, such as the workers at the denominational press, Signs Publishing in Warburton, Victoria, and at the various Church-owned Sanitarium Health Food factories.⁷¹ Other exemptions were sought for lay preachers, a concession made to some other

Protestant denominations, while union officials toyed with the idea of forming Adventist teachers into a religious order, which would have protected them from conscription.⁷²

As in World War I, the largest group of military age SDA men was at Avondale, and efforts were made to protect them from conscription. Theology students were automatically exempt, but there were other courses that were not. The teaching degree was renamed Theological Normal at this time, in a possible attempt to exempt teacher trainees. It was not wholly successful, and the AUC negotiated with the authorities to cut in half the standard six months military training. Instead, Military Eastern Command gave Avondale students permission to do their training during the long vacation, and the college calendar was reorganized to better accommodate this. By 1942 conscription of young men had noticeably lowered the Avondale enrollment.⁷³

As well as working to keep young SDAs out of the military, Church leaders also worked to support those who could not avoid military service. Articles in denominational papers featured stories of those who refused to bow to pressure and who by sticking to their principles were rewarded for their stand. Servicemen and servicewomen were encouraged to “stand as did Daniel and his companions as a true representative of the God of heaven, and should realize that any deviation from the path of truth, or any compromise with error, brings discredit not only to his own profession of Christianity, but also to the church which he represents. We say to one and all, be faithful to every principle of truth. Pray God daily for strength rightly to represent the Master in all things, and may He make you a constant blessing to others and use you to His glory.”⁷⁴ An early report of two New Zealand soldiers emphasized that there was “no difficulty in observing the Sabbath, and had not on any occasion been asked to bear arms.” One of them, who returned to his former Adventist faith while in the army, was taken out of a combat unit and given noncombatant duties without hesitation. A soldier who converted to Adventism also found no trouble in being transferred from the artillery to noncombat nursing orderly duties.⁷⁵

The AUC provided legal support for conscripts who were court-martialed in early 1941 over Sabbath issues, and developed better liaison with the authorities to avoid the same conflicts, and searching for the best legal protection for SDA conscripts.⁷⁶ Printed cards with instructions for young men entering military service were freely distributed, and updated as required to accommodate changing circumstances, while church membership cards were customized to suit the specific needs of New Zealand SDAs in the forces.⁷⁷ The Religious Liberty Department also prepared church attendance cards as proof that military personnel were at church while on leave, thus reassuring military authorities that their claims for noncombatant status as members of the Seventh-day Adventist Church were bona fide.⁷⁸ A regular column in the AUC newspaper titled “With Our Boys in the Forces” provided a network of communication between servicemen in various locations and the broader constituency. The noncombatant status of SDAs flared again in February 1943 when a camp insisted on issuing rifles to newly arrived SDAs from an ambulance unit. Church leaders helped clarify the situation, resulting in a confirmation from the army that all SDAs were to be used only on noncombatant duties.⁷⁹

Local pastors visited men in military units where possible, supplemented by the work of E. H. Guillard, the AUC field secretary who was appointed chaplain to U.S. Army SDAs in Australia, and who included Australian and New Zealand SDA servicemen in his work at every opportunity.⁸⁰ He ran services for SDAs in various camps around Australia, and was complimented for his work.⁸¹

SDA soldiers reported some initial religious harassment from certain officers and men, but on the whole felt well received and respected, to the point where some of their comrades began their own religious devotions and even attended SDA meetings.⁸² While identifying some friction points, several soldiers considered that they were able to practice their faith without compromise.⁸³ Soldiers also found spiritual encouragement from services run by Protestant chaplains, enjoying the fellowship across denominational boundaries.⁸⁴ They were also very active in running SDA services for themselves, mostly along the lines of a formal Sabbath School or SDA church service. Many SDA servicemen were clustered in medical units, which meant that such gatherings could attract up to 20 or more attendees. Others serving in the Mediterranean, Papua New Guinea, or the Solomon Islands were able on occasion to worship with local SDAs.⁸⁵

Because the majority of Adventists in the military served behind the front lines, often in medical or logistics units, relatively few saw combat. Stretcher bearers attached to infantry units in New Guinea came under fire from Japanese attacks and ambushes while carrying out their duties, often through deep mud, crossing rivers chest-deep in water, while at least one SDA airman was captured when his aircraft was shot down over Germany.⁸⁶ For many others, their contact with combat came through treating the casualties in field hospitals behind the lines. Sometimes the flood of patients on Sabbaths obliged them to work, although typically they had Sabbath off.⁸⁷ Only one battle casualty among Australian and New Zealand Adventists has been recorded, a Royal Australian Air Force officer shot down, and drowned, in the Mediterranean in 1942, while one Australian and two New Zealanders died in active service— the first in a plane crash, and the others in a traffic accident at an advanced dressing station..⁸⁸

Circumstances were different for indigenous populations living in Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands, experiencing persecution from both the Japanese military and from Allied forces. Many SDAs provided help to Allied military personnel at some risk to their own lives. The Japanese made some use of indigenous labor and naturally made no allowance for Christianity, which they considered to be a sign of allegiance to Western powers.⁸⁹ Once Australian and United States troops had driven back the Japanese, large numbers of locals were forced to provide Allied logistical support. While not formally part of the military, they were effectively conscripted for military service. Many of these men were SDAs, and the Church provided them with printed cards to facilitate their exemption from Sabbath and combat duties.⁹⁰ The most famous were the “Fuzzy Wuzzy Angels,” Papuan porters co-opted by the Australian Army, carrying supplies in to troops on the physically challenging Kokoda Track, and then carrying out thousands of wounded Australians. A good number of the porters were from SDA villages, and often were made “boss boys” because of their integrity. They suffered

considerable hardship under sometime brutal discipline, carrying supplies in the rugged terrain and inhospitable conditions. One Australian officer singled out the Seventh-day Adventist porter as being the only local in whom the Allies could have unqualified confidence, proving to be “particularly loyal” and “really very good and reliable.”⁹¹ However, SDA locals were not always well treated, being subjected to racially motivated harassment and lack of respect for their religious convictions. Noted Solomon Islands leader Kata Ragosa was arrested by the irascible New Zealand district officer in March 1943 for refusing to work on the Sabbath, or serve on a jury, repeatedly beaten and assaulted, and sentenced to death. Three times the officer tried to have him shot, but he survived when the gun failed to fire twice and the soldier could not bring himself to give the final command on the third occasion. He was put to convict labor on the wharf, but was released several weeks later without explanation.⁹²

Post-World War II Military Service

Both Australia and New Zealand revived CMT soon after the end of World War II, especially as Communist activities in Asia (China, Korea, Malaysia, and Vietnam) maintained a sense of threat to the Western governments of the South Pacific. New Zealand formalized it in 1949 as the Military Training Act, coming into force in 1950. Australia followed in 1951 with the National Service Act. Compulsory military service remained in force under one form or another until 1972, when it was dropped by both nations. By now, both Church and governments had well-established processes for noncombatant service for SDAs, and religious liberty principles were upheld. A two-page typescript document was circulated offering practical guidelines for those subjected to military service, and how to apply for noncombatant status. Among those listed as exempted were students in the strategically named teaching courses at Avondale, “Theological Normal.” The Church also took an action not to recognize military service as counting toward Church Sustentation entitlements, disappointing at least one hopeful retiree.⁹³

In an attempt to reduce the liability of SDA employees to military service, the Australasian Inter-Union Conference (AIUC), as it was now labelled, recommended that church teachers on their first appointment from Avondale be appointed as deacons or elders in their local congregations, and revived the idea “that all our male teachers be classified as ‘teaching brothers,’ ” a notion that appears to have gone no further.⁹⁴ At the same time the AIUC quadrennial session recommended “that we encourage all our young men coming up to the age of military service to endeavor to secure their St. John [first-aid] medallion as this will help greatly in their application for noncombatant service and make them immediately useful in the Army Medical Corps.”⁹⁵ The message needed reinforcing: in 1957 the newly named Australasian Division (AD) again recommended that local church leaders “encourage our youth, particularly those in the military age group, to take a course in first aid as given by the St. John Ambulance Association, as this will be helpful to them in their military training.” As well as this, there was a perceived need to work with young men approaching military age, “carefully instructing them as to the reasons . . . the church counsels its young people to know what they believe and why.”⁹⁶ To support the

continuing education of its young men, the Church issued several documents. One pamphlet, *Our Youth in Time of War* (1951), was an updated version of a World War II publication, while other typescript documents issued at conference level offered catechism-style question-and-answer information based on actual court cases for exemption from military service. Another tract issued by the AD in 1966, "Procedure for Young Men Liable for National Service," required a slight correction to its terminology.⁹⁷

For the first time in its history, Australia sent conscripts to foreign wars, including them among units sent to Vietnam. However, the only Australian SDA killed there was a volunteer, former Avondale student and helicopter pilot Ronald Betts, who was killed in action in March 1971.⁹⁸ At times the Church intervened to attempt to have selected men released from military service as they were wanted in Church employ, but not all attempts were successful, though always sympathetically heard by the authorities.⁹⁹ In the 1960s the AD followed the lead of the General Conference in establishing protocols by which SDA ministers could accept appointments as chaplains in the services, insisting that the chaplains remain under the ecclesiastical authority of the Church.¹⁰⁰ With the unpopular Vietnam War in its closing stages, both the Australian and New Zealand governments ended conscription. Ironically, social change in both nations from the 1980s onward made it increasingly acceptable for SDAs to serve in the military, even in combat roles, paralleling developments in American SDA attitudes to participation in the military.

The only other regions with compulsory military service in the South Pacific area were the French Overseas Territories of French Polynesia and New Caledonia. However, the French government had in place arrangements whereby conscientious objectors could replace their year of compulsory military service with two years of voluntary civil service, which enabled French SDAs to avoid any military training or service. Some of these SDAs were able to do this service as teachers in French SDA schools around the world, including the primary school and high school in Tahiti. In 1996 the French government halted compulsory military service.¹⁰¹

Conclusion

SDAs in the South Pacific have been fortunate to live in a region relatively unaffected by war, and under governments that have recognized the principles of religious liberty and have worked cooperatively with church leaders to facilitate noncombatant roles for SDAs in military service. Few regions in the world have experienced such benign conditions regarding war and military service.

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