



One of hundreds of memorials in the South Pacific to those who sacrificed their lives in World War I.

Photo courtesy of Barry Oliver.

World War I and the Seventh-day Adventist Church in the South Pacific

DANIEL REYNAUD

Daniel Reynaud, Ph.D. (University of Newcastle, New South Wales, Australia). Reynaud is professor of history at Avondale University College, NSW, Australia, where he has taught since 1992 in media, literature and modern world history. He has many publications on Australian war cinema, and on religion and the Australian soldier. He has also published on media in a Christian context, and how to read the Bible from a literary perspective.

The First World War (1914-1918) radically affected New Zealand and Australian society, but its impact on the Seventh-day Adventist Church in the region was limited by its geographic remoteness from the theaters of conflict and the Church's circumspection over participation in the war. While almost all other religious groups actively promoted the war and the enlistment of their young men, the denomination walked a largely successful but very fine line between loyalty to the government and opposition to a worldly war that conflicted with the Church's global mission and vision. Church leaders managed ultimately successful negotiations with governments to ensure that military service requirements accommodated Adventist positions on non-combatancy and the Sabbath. As far as possible, the Church remained firmly fixed on its mission, which by global standards was relatively unaffected by the war or by government policies.

The War and the “Homeland” Territories of New Zealand and Australia

As self-governing Dominions within the British Empire, both Australia and New Zealand were automatically involved once Britain declared war on Germany on August 4, 1914. The Adventist Church in the region was still small, numbering only a few thousand, and relatively unknown, though it had achieved some influence in matters of temperance and religious liberty, even negating influential Protestant lobby groups to ensure there were no religious clauses in Australia's constitution.¹ Adventism's American origins, otherworldly outlook, prophetic emphasis, and seventh-day Sabbatarianism created a people set apart, an identity cherished by Adventists which was at odds with many elements of the prevailing British culture, especially the pragmatic and secular tone of Australian society.² Prior to the outbreak of the war in Europe, the Adventist Church was circulating a tract opposed to the growing military culture in Australia. The patriotic upsurge provoked by the declaration of war so “influenced the passions of the people” that the tract was withdrawn in order to avoid a popular backlash against the Church. This led to later complications when huge stocks of the tract were destroyed and Church leaders had to organize a shared arrangement to cover the financial loss to local churches and individuals.³ Otherwise, the leadership attempted business as usual. Camp meetings continued to run during the war in the various states of Australia and in New Zealand, their sessions well covered by the local press.⁴ By December 1917, with just about a year of the war to run, the Australasian Union Conference (AUC) was able to note with satisfaction “the growth of our work under war conditions” with about 20% membership growth in the years 1915-17, and significant increases in receipts through tithes, offerings, and book sales. Almost a year later, with the end of the war in sight, reports were equally positive, with strong growth over war years in tithes and offerings. The newly-established North New Zealand Conference, for example, which feared that war taxes and restrictions would affect its income, instead discovered that it was better off to the tune of £1,423 over the pre-war budget of the combined North and South New Zealand Conference.⁵

The war provided considerable scope for evangelism, especially with contemporary Adventist thought on the prophecies of Daniel 11 relating to Turkey, and Armageddon in Revelation 16. Soon Church leaders were preaching and publishing on the issues of Armageddon, a topic that already had considerable currency in the public eye,⁶ and which some Adventists had enthusiastically identified with the war. Senior Adventist figures refuted this argument, noting that it failed to fulfill the conditions of Bible prophecy, though conceding that the war may lead to it. The AUC asked for thousands of copies of a tract by L. A. Smith titled "Is It Armageddon?" to be printed which, while recognizing the gravity of the world crisis, tried to defuse melodramatic responses to the war. By February 1915, sales were expected to top 55,000 copies. Sermons and evangelistic series on Armageddon continued to feature during the war, reaching a relatively wide audience, and generating feedback in letters to the editor and even in a non-Adventist soldier's letter home from France.⁷ *The World's Crisis*, a follow-up to Smith's book, emerged in early 1915 dealing with contemporary issues around the war and Europe and Turkey, with another publication in mid-1916 boasting a state-of-the-art three-color cover and a string of articles on end times, including "Turkey and the War." The Church's evangelistic magazine, *Signs of the Times*, ran many purely informational features describing the amazing new technologies on display in the war, but also spoke of spiritual rather than military means as the real way to peace.⁸

Adventist interpretations of the King of the North in Daniel 11 were more problematic, for Turkey was predicted to lose Constantinople and make Jerusalem its capital. The capture of Jerusalem in December 1917 by British troops (including mounted Australian and New Zealand troops) shook the faith of some Adventists and required hermeneutical first aid from Church theologians. They argued that prophecy gave just the high points, not the details, of events, and that Adventist prophetic interpretation was still trustworthy.⁹

A special war edition of *Signs of the Times*, planned for early November 1914 but released later due to delays, was motivated by sentiments that "now that the attention of the whole world is directed to the awful war which is in progress in Europe, it is a most excellent opportunity of spreading the message." Members were encouraged to order it in quantity to distribute. The constituency supported the issue with over 50,000 copies in pre-orders, and a record-setting 95,000 printed and selling well by late November 1914. Another special war edition, "The Marshalling of the Nations" in early 1915, was also expected to be popular. Such success was notable "in spite of adverse conditions engendered by the war and the drought [in Australia]," which shrank the disposable incomes of ordinary people. In the meantime, an American cardinal's comments on the war and the end of the world were used to sell books to Catholics.¹⁰ A report on literature work in North New Zealand stated, "There has never been a better opportunity for presenting the doctrines of our faith than at the present time. People, the world over, have been stirred by reason of the terrible conditions now in existence."¹¹ Like many other Christian groups, Adventists were certain that the crisis of the war would bring about religious revival!¹² Evangelism tapped into future world politics with presentations such as "The coming World-empire! Will it be England, France, Germany, or some other nation?"¹³ Some seized on the death of many young soldiers in the war as an opening for a public meeting on the state of the dead.¹⁴ Other traditional Adventist topics featured

alongside prophecy, such as the Sabbath and temperance issues. Increased public interest in missions and public debates on key doctrines was credited to wartime conditions. Such work was crowned by the establishment of new churches in some towns, and one historian has credited the war years with creating the most favorable conditions for evangelism in the history of the New Zealand Adventist Church.¹⁵

Church publications also used the war to highlight Adventist thought and practice to its own constituency. Reports of how the Church was faring world-wide kept members informed of the disruptive economic and social impact of the war on the global Adventist Church, especially in the war zones, as men were called up, funds frozen, union conference territories divided between warring nations and denominational assets seized. Other articles used the war crisis to appeal for greater faithfulness from church members, and drew spiritual lessons from the war. Members were asked to pray for embattled European Adventists, and to give generously, as the AUC voted £1,000—a huge sum at the time—to the General Conference to help ease the financial crises in Europe. Among the responses was a woman who donated the £2 she had otherwise saved to see her son for the first time in eight years.¹⁶ Other articles made appeals for mission workers along the lines of military recruiting, or promoted distributing tracts as “ammunition ... [to break] down the enemy’s defenses.”¹⁷ Anti-war poems were featured, as were pieces condemning nationalistic partisanship, and instead emphasizing the global nature of Adventist work.¹⁸ A reprint of a London news article on preparing economical meals dovetailed nicely with Adventist ideology on more vegetables, more wholesome meals, and simple fare, while also enhancing the Church’s credentials for supporting the war effort.¹⁹

The war proved disruptive for the publishing work, which was very much dependent on imported paper, supplies of which were limited by wartime restrictions on both shipping and paper. As early as April 1915, urgent paper supplies were at threat from German U-boats sinking supply ships.²⁰ Severe drought and war demands on personal income also led to a drop in subscriptions to the Church’s news magazine, the *Australasian Record*. Now published at a loss, requests were made for donations to subsidize it for those hardest hit, often isolated church members. The situation only compounded, as increasing shortages of paper leading to rapidly inflating prices, and surcharges on subscription books, pushed prices ever higher, finally culminating in the *Australasian Record* being published fortnightly as a paper and cost saving measure. There were also increases in the cost of the Sabbath School lesson pamphlets. Despite this, and rising wages and “perplexing” delays over unreliable shipping schedules, the Church’s publishing house, Signs, showed “steady progress” leading to an increase in sales during the war of 3.235 million periodicals.²¹

The Church in Australia undertook an unusual mission initiative in the early war years by conducting high profile evangelism among the German communities in South Australia, led by several prominent Adventist leaders of German origin. While this had started just before the war, it was risky to show special interest in Germans at a time when the government was locking up peaceful German settlers in internment camps, and inciting anti-German hysteria and paranoia about German fifth columnists. In an effort to show their non-partisanship, Adventist leaders pushed ahead undeterred. A number of reports in 1915 noted good attendance at evangelistic

meetings despite strong opposition from the Lutheran clergy and press, which published a warning against the “more noisy forms of modern bogus religions.” The Adventist Church was at the top of the list.²² A German Adventist church was established on April 10, 1915, and soon added new members. Although shunned, scorned, and occasionally assaulted by their former friends, they and their descendants have given generations of prominent and valuable denominational service.²³ A special offering for this mission was heavily promoted, while the AUC voted the large sum of £450 in June 1915 to promote the work for the next financial year, and added further funds in 1916, seeing the work there as a training ground for reaching other German communities in Australia.²⁴ The Church’s training school in Australia, the Australasian Missionary College in Cooranbong, New South Wales, (usually known as Avondale), introduced German language classes to further this work. However, political realities sunk in, with reports to the constituency talking of the work in Nuriootpa or South Australia, rather than the potentially fraught term “the German work,” while the German-speaking church there switched to English services in 1917.²⁵

Wartime conditions created ideological tensions that required a finely balanced approach and repeated communication of the Church’s nuanced approach in the face of both constituents and outsiders who were quick to jump to conclusions. Consistent with its stand on liberty of conscience and opposition to war, the Adventist Church published anti-conscription articles in 1915, and other topical articles tended to be anti-war, or neutral at best, insisting that “the only sword that His servants can use is the ‘sword of the spirit.’” A *Signs* article, published in February 1915, offered an account of a tearful German infantryman comforting a dying British soldier. Such sympathetic portrayals of Germans were at odds with government intentions, which aggressively pushed the image of the ravaging Hun, raping and pillaging his way across Europe. But as the war progressed, Adventist rhetoric was eased from anti-war into a less politically provocative desire for peace. “We recommend,” read a later statement from the AUC executive, “that every one of our churches engage in earnest prayer that the present turmoil which exists throughout Australasia shall be brought to a speedy termination, and that peace and good will among men may once more reign throughout the land.”²⁶ However, at the same time, leaders were warning of pressures to create international peace movements based on world political and religious unity. Maintaining a philosophy of peace while distancing itself from virtually all other peace movements was paradoxical, but consistent.²⁷

One of the ways to ease both government and popular pressure on the Church was for it to undertake visible service in support of appropriate aspects of war work. This could be done most readily by fund-raising for various war-related charities, such as the Red Cross, and the Comforts Fund, or donating food to returned wounded soldiers or war widows and orphans. The Citizen’s War Fund Committee forwarded 56 cases of granola, an Adventist granulated breakfast cereal, to the troops in Egypt. Given that these were similar in texture to the notoriously tough teeth-breaking biscuits of official Army issue, the troops may not have been grateful. The New Zealand conferences also collected money for the Soldiers Literature Fund, which enabled

them to place Adventist literature on troopships and in camps. There is evidence of their reach, with both Australian and New Zealand soldiers registering their appreciation of the publications, and in some cases, asking for more. One man was captured with a *Signs of the Times* magazine in his possession, and requested more to share with fellow prisoners-of-war.²⁸ A New Zealand regional newspaper tracked donations from the local Adventist congregation to the Sick and Wounded Fund, while another stated that while the denomination was “opposed to the bearing of arms, [it] is not neglecting its duty in the great war,” noting that the world-wide organization was funding, equipping, and sending a base hospital to France, complete with 24 doctors, 50 female nurses and 75 orderlies.²⁹ The Australasian Missionary College Brass occasionally farewelled new recruits from the local train station or played at war fund-raising concerts.³⁰

The War and the Adventist Church in the Pacific Islands

Mission outreach in the Pacific was still in its infancy at the outbreak of the war. Polynesian fields had some presence, but difficult terrain and the challenging cultural environment meant that Melanesian missions were mostly embryonic. The German colonies of New Guinea and Samoa were easily overrun by Australian and New Zealand forces in the opening weeks of the war. This resulted in all territories in the region being under British or French control, thus simplifying mission administration for the AUC. However, German ships made their presence felt on several occasions. The German East Asia squadron, fleeing its port in Tsingtao, China, stopped at Samoa, but chose not to bombard for fear of damaging German commercial interests. Instead, it sailed to French Polynesia and bombarded the port of Papeete on September 22, 1914, causing widespread damage to property and frightening the population into the hills. The Adventist church at Arue was converted into an emergency shelter for two nights, while a missionary bound for Tahiti reported heightened interest in the Adventist message because of the war. Meanwhile, missionaries in the Cook Islands continued to get mails and supplies, despite the risk of the steamer’s capture.³¹ With the destruction of the German East Asia Squadron in December 1914, the Australian government lifted a ban on mailing newspapers to New Zealand and the Pacific, allowing the Church to resume distribution of its publications.³²

In Samoa, missionaries gained increased credibility, for the locals were much impressed by Adventist teaching on the signs of the times, saying, “The words of the *Tala Moni* are so true that we think the rest of what you have said will be coming too.”³³ The presence of the German cruiser *Emden* in the Indian Ocean in 1914, and two shipping raiders, the *Seeadler* and *Wolf*, in waters around Australia, New Zealand, and the eastern Pacific in 1917 caused disruptions to shipping that impacted isolated missions and the transfer of missionaries. Another disruption to island missions was the constant threat that young men trained and suited for mission work could be siphoned into the military instead. In one case, the AUC attempted to preempt this by seeking a passport for such a young man in whom they had invested time and training. Also causing concern were Church employees who carried mail and parcels for others on their travels. This was seen as a security risk by the government, and the Church had to ask workers to desist.³⁴

The secular press reported the progress of Adventist mission work in several parts of the Pacific during the war. The “steady progress” in the Polynesian Mission was noted at a conference session in Fiji involving over 100 delegates, along with reports of 47 baptisms and 30 professions of faith. Two Fijians workers and their wives were being sent to the Solomon Islands and New Hebrides [Vanuatu] as well. Meanwhile, the departure of two medical missionaries from the Cook Islands was reported as being “a loss to the island, as they have done a great deal of nursing and minor medical work here.” A sensational report was made of the first white missionary to set foot on Malekula [Maleluka] in the New Hebrides, who was calm while being felt over by cannibals as he moved among them, and delivering a sermon “while the cooked body of a man was waiting to be eaten.” News even trickled in from remote Pitcairn Island whose Adventist population of 164 had received belated notice of war only in early 1915.³⁵

Military Service

Issues over compulsory military service only affected Australia and New Zealand. Other territories in the South Pacific were under the colonial administrations of the British and French empires, and the policies of the era meant that the indigenous populations across Polynesia and Melanesia were not called on for active armed service—a rare example of race-based attitudes working in favor of the indigenous. On the other hand, the peacetime governments of both New Zealand and Australia had introduced legislation for compulsory military training of citizen forces in 1909, which became active in both Dominions in 1911.

However, at the start of the war, both Australia and New Zealand used only voluntary enlistment for service overseas, in the specially-raised Australian Imperial Force (AIF) and New Zealand Expeditionary force (NZEF). The challenge was to maintain the Adventist non-combatant stand in the face of widespread popular opinion that saw non-combatancy as cowardly at best and treacherous at worst. To compound the problem, the Church was characterized as being “not altogether free from extremists.” Some members interpreted the Adventist position as being total non-cooperation with any kind of war-related activity. Leaders were at pains to clarify loyalty to the civic authorities and a willingness to obey all laws regarding war service that were consistent with the Church’s principles. In 1917, for example, the *Australasian Record* republished an article by Ellen White, who had died in 1915, which stated that “many things have been spoken and written that are interpreted as expressing antagonism to government and law” by “some of our brethren.” This was causing problems as the fault-finding opened the way to misunderstanding. White urged tact, wisdom, and caution to ensure maximum cooperation with governments in pursuit of the Church’s mission.³⁶

From early in the war, the AUC committee was sensitive to religious liberty issues, requesting conferences to track issues regarding Sabbath and military service so that the AUC could offer a unified and informed response to the governments of both Australia and New Zealand. The unity was sometimes fragile: a bellicose member of the AUC executive made some unrecorded pro-war comments, all the more tactless because he was of German

origin. But even in backing down from these, his assurance that he was “positively a non-combatant” was undermined by his insistence that he supported committee actions regardless of private opinion.³⁷

The abiding fear that conscription would be introduced was heightened in mid-1915 by the Australian government census of all men aged 17-60 in the face of sliding voluntary enlistments, followed by sustained targeted pressure on those eligible to enlist. The AUC responded by affirming “that as Seventh-day Adventists we are non-combatants.” It encouraged Adventists to acquire certified ambulance training through the St. John’s Ambulance Association that, in case of conscription, “will enable them to perform non-combatant duties.” Avondale, where the most visible and vulnerable collection of young Adventist men were gathered, organized its students into two branches of St. John’s, with 56 men and 29 ladies taking First Aid certificates.³⁸ Around the same time, the local public school principal asked for a list of eligible men at the college, and in early August met with them to collect their details and urge them to volunteer. College leaders met with the group beforehand to brief them on the Church’s position on “the Military question,” and also held a prayer meeting on the morning of the visit.³⁹ In 1916, ahead of the first conscription referendum in October, Prime Minister Billy Hughes required all military-aged men to register for compulsory military service in Australia, with exemption only for theology students.

This increasing pressure from government and public opinion spurred the AUC executive into action, for a statement of September 1916 defined “what is, and has ever been, our denominational attitude towards 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) non-combatant service which may be imposed upon us by law.” Individual conferences adopted the action for themselves, sometimes adding riders about respecting personal conscience in matters of military service.⁴⁰ The Church established clear boundaries: it was not volunteering the services of its young men, but rather responding to government requirements, and preemptively stating the limits that Adventist would place on service to their country.

Low voluntary enlistments eventually forced New Zealand to resort to conscription in November 1916, but it was used only to fill the shortfall in volunteers. From this point, the issue of military service diverged in the two Dominions, as New Zealand Adventists felt the force of their government’s narrow attitude to conscientious exemption of conscripts. The New Zealand Military Service Act of 1916 mandated military training for all single young men, and those married since the war began, but made no provision for individual conscience-based exemption; instead an amendment made exemption possible if, prior to the war, the man had been a member of a religious organization which in its creed prohibited military service. This immediately created a dilemma for Adventists, who at that stage lacked a written statement of beliefs.

It was a drawn-out argument in New Zealand, involving protracted negotiations with the Minister of Defence, Sir James Allen, and a number of appeals to the Military Service Board, most of which were lost.⁴¹ In particular, the

case of John Thompson, a newly appointed minister in the South New Zealand Conference, attracted widespread press coverage. As Thompson was not ordained, the authorities considered him not to be a clergyman and therefore eligible to be conscripted. They also cast aspersions on the Church's wartime statements of non-combatant attitudes, insinuating that they were a post-1914 invention in an attempt to gain exemption.⁴² Statements from a problematic former conference official aggravated the situation, characterized as "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." In April, Allen wrote to North New Zealand Conference President W. H. Pascoe, saying 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." The deputation of Adventist leaders was angered by the failure of authorities to recognize their point. Amidst heightened rhetoric over "reviv[ing] the persecutions and martyrdoms of the Dark Ages," Adventist leaders put together a much more thoroughly researched case going back to the American Civil War of the 1860s, emphasizing both Adventism's long opposition to participation in combat as well as a very clear statement of loyalty to the government.⁴³ Statements in the press corrected misinformation, affirming loyalty where it did not conflict with the law of God, and Adventist willingness to tend to the wounded on the Sabbath, while the North New Zealand Conference floated the idea of forming a "committee of experienced farmers" to advise on the best use of Adventist non-combatants placed on farms.⁴⁴

Finally, in June 1917 New Zealand Adventists could join Quakers and Christadelphians as officially-recognized non-combatants. A clinching argument was a prewar letter from the defence department indicating that Adventists were granted exemption from military training, as they were opposed to the bearing of arms. Military leaders then issued instructions to respect Adventist convictions. By this stage, the battle to allow Adventists to keep the Sabbath had already been won, a ruling in April 1917 granting Adventist soldiers official leave on Saturday in exchange for doing fatigues on Sunday, though this was done quietly, lest others claim similar privileges.⁴⁵ In the meantime, soldiers who had refused to work or train on the Sabbath had been punished, though most had been given pragmatically light sentences in recognition of their principled stand and the lack of threat that they posed. A grateful Church published the outcome in a lengthy *Australasian Record* article with a palpable sense of relief, giving thanks for God's leading and quoting 1 Timothy 2:1-2 in requesting prayers of support for governments.⁴⁶

It was not the end of the issue, however. Conscripted New Zealanders still had to prove their Adventist bona fides. Church work was disrupted by the call-up of key workers, and the untimely transfer of the experienced C. K. Meyers from North New Zealand to South New Zealand in order to prop up the small and ailing conference there, which was divided over attitudes to the war and the loss of several ministers to military service. Replacing Meyers was F. G. Rampton as religious liberties secretary. He had several protracted arguments with the authorities.⁴⁷ There were some wins: the Oroua Missionary School at Longburn in the North Island lost all its eligible young men, including the farm manager, in a single conscription ballot, but through negotiations was

able to have all but one of them exempted, even from camp training. Several other young men, on appeal, were released from camps and allocated to work on state farms.⁴⁸

Individual cases still emerged where soldiers' circumstances were irregular. One man claimed exemption on the grounds of being both Australian and a conscientious objector, which he argued rendered him not liable for New Zealand military service. He even refused the medical checkup, and was promptly given ten-months detention with hard labor. Another balked at the non-combatant declaration on the grounds he may be compelled to do non-ambulance work on the Sabbath. Labeled "absolutely disgusting" by the military board chairman, the appellant finally gave in and signed up as a non-combatant, in line with the Church's position. Another man found his situation ambiguous, as he was an "adherent" but not a baptized member. His case was adjourned.⁴⁹ The AUC also authorized the North New Zealand Conference to organize a Religious Liberty Association with Baptists, Quakers, and other denominations to maximize its political leverage.⁵⁰

The North New Zealand Conference President reported in late 1918, "Suffice it to say, 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."⁵¹ A post-war study claimed that, despite "some battles during the years with officious military authorities who thought they could compel us to serve on the Sabbath or engage in combatant duties," appeals "to the higher authorities [have] always been successful so far... Eventually we won even a greater freedom in New Zealand than we have so far succeeded in obtaining in Australia."⁵² However, a more recent study shows that about a quarter of the 105 Seventh-day Adventists "called to the colors" by ballot appear to have served, and "at least 10 Adventist young men are known to have taken up arms during the first half of 1917," some of whom perished in combat. Furthermore, others languished in the Waikeria Reformatory after courts-martial, not being released until mid-1919. Life for many military-aged New Zealand Adventist young men was not as easy as some have assumed.⁵³

In Australia, the matter was legally simpler, though the enormous social pressure to enlist remained. The conscription referendum of October 1916 failed, as did another attempt in December 1917, but Adventist men were harassed by recruiters. One young *Signs Publishing Company* worker registered for military service as required in June 1916, and agreed to act as recruiting clerk to demonstrate his loyalty, filling out the enlistment forms of volunteers at Warburton, Victoria. The recruiting sergeant repeatedly bullied him but failed to break his resistance to enlisting.⁵⁴ In August 1917, recruiters again targeted the students at Avondale. College staff organized a prayer meeting in support, while four pastors briefed the students "with the whole military position from the beginning, as far as we as a people are concerned," and remained with them during the recruiting meeting. The college was regularly visited by the district commandant, but fortunately this sympathetic official "quite understood the position and was very reasonable and courteous in the pursuance of all his duties."⁵⁵ Australian newspapers reported on other Adventists who faced court for refusing to undergo compulsory military training (one of whom made his stand more difficult by having German parents) or take the oath of

allegiance. On the positive side, a press story told of several fully-trained Adventists who were prepared to volunteer as stretcher bearers, but that there were no vacancies in the field ambulances.⁵⁶

The Australian Defence Minister, Senator Pearce, was generally very responsive to appeals from Adventist leaders. When one soldier read a *Signs of the Times* on a troopship and became convinced of the Adventist position on war, he successfully applied for a transfer to a non-combat unit in the light of his new beliefs. Pearce was quoted as saying 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.”⁵⁷ Despite such cooperation at the top, the religious liberties secretary for the AUC, A. W. Anderson, observed 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 non-combatants and Sabbath keepers as unworthy of any special privileges.” He added with just a hint of humor, “occasionally it was necessary for me to do things which in time of war were positively dangerous to one’s liberty.” The opposition was not purely external, for he noted that the “wise decision” to be loyal to the government save on non-combatancy 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.” Ideally, the Church would have liked its position to be labeled as conscientious co-operation”, but government legislation made no provision for that.⁵⁸ Other articles and letters appeared in the Australian press refuting charges that Adventists were disloyal. One protested a Salvation Army captain’s accusation of Adventists not participating in public affairs, listing all the committees and groups he and his wife belonged to, including trade unions, the Red Cross, and the British and Foreign Bible Society, among others. Defusing accusations of predicting the end of the world or other apparently disloyal statements connected to the war occupied other writers.⁵⁹

Australian and New Zealand Seventh-day Adventist Soldiers

in Gallipoli, Palestine, and France

Church leaders encouraged Adventist young men not to enlist voluntarily, but more than 60 Australian and New Zealand Adventists volunteered during the course of the war, joining units of the AIF or NZEF. They enlisted for a variety of reasons: a sense of adventure, a devotion to their temporal king and country, or merely giving in to overwhelming social pressure. Recruiters often were not too sensitive to the niceties of denominational differences: only a portion of Adventist soldiers had their religion recorded as such. Some recruiters, who had probably never heard of the denomination, wrote down “7th Day Eventist,” “Seventh Day Advocate,” or “7th Day Evangelical.” Many recruiters were not too fussy, sometimes putting down “Church of England” for any Protestant. Some Adventists may also have offered another denominational affiliation, either because they were

drifting from the Church or out of embarrassment at having to explain their “weird” religion to fellow soldiers in the often faith-hostile environment of the army.⁶⁰

Some asked to be allocated to field ambulances as stretcher bearers, alongside other Christians who preferred non-combat duties, such as Congregationalists and the Churches of Christ. Others elected to stay in combat units. In Egypt, the units from both nations were combined and given the acronym ANZACs, for the Australian and New Zealand Army Corps, and the ‘Anzac’ moniker has stuck ever since as a generic name for antipodean servicemen and women. Avondale contributed seven current or former students, at least two of whom died, while seven are known to have enlisted from New Zealand’s Oroua Missionary College, four of whom were killed.⁶¹ The Church made military service a matter of individual conscience and did not sanction those who enlisted any more than it sanctioned war in the first place.

Perhaps the first Adventist to enlist, in September 1914, was a former Avondale student. Henry “Harry” Stout was on the face of it an unlikely candidate. A man of strong opinions, he had been the religious liberties secretary for South Australia, and made a name for himself as a public speaker of some force against conscription, even publishing a pamphlet titled “The Military Menace in Australia.” But he was also passionately in favor of voluntary military service, and enlisted in the field ambulance. A soldier letter mentioning an Adventist in an ecumenical Bible study group in Egypt in early 1915 probably referred to Stout, among the Anglicans, Methodists, Baptists, Presbyterians, Brethren, and Salvationists in the group. The war made for strange religious bedfellows, for Australian sectarianism ran deep, so the mix of Anglicans, Salvationists and Baptists, for example, was highly unlikely in peace-time Australia, let alone the admission of a suspicious sectarian like an Adventist. Adventism naturally reciprocated, with an aversion to fellowship with “fallen” Protestant churches. Yet Stout was not alone. George Gane was a long-standing member of a Bible study circle at the front, and was described by a fellow soldier as “one of the most lovable of our Members.” Gane occasionally led out in studies in the group, often choosing Adventist perspectives on apocalyptic prophecy. Both men died in the war, Stout in August 1915 and Gane in June 1918. Stout, whose faith had wavered since leaving Avondale in 1911, had written to a friend a week before he died, “expressing implicit confidence in all the fundamental principles of the truth, referring especially to some points that had previously troubled him. He spoke of having spent much time in carefully reviewing the prophecies of Daniel.”⁶² A number of other Adventists died of wounds or disease while serving, and their loss was felt in the small Adventist communities in Australia and New Zealand, and at Avondale a plaque was erected, while two large trees, it is believed, were planted in honor of two slain Avondale students.⁶³ However, the death of Albert Anderson, son of Pastor A. W. Anderson, ironically the Church’s religious liberty secretary and the one most responsible for the policy of non-combatancy, was the one that most touched the Church. Albert Anderson joined the glamorous flying arm of the Australian Army as a fighter pilot, but was killed in a mid-air collision in France on a routine training flight.⁶⁴

Wartime experiences for Adventist soldiers varied. At least three Adventists were decorated for bravery: D'Arcy Amos for repairing telephone lines during a heavy bombardment, Alexander Forster, for eliminating a machine gun post and capturing many prisoners, and New Zealander William Allom, for carrying out wounded men under heavy fire. Allom's brother died while serving in the AIF. One soldier who served in a dental unit later gave years of valuable missionary service in India. One Catholic boy read an Adventist tract the day he enlisted, was convinced and immediately deserted, serving the Church as a colporteur. Hearing his story, a year later, A. W. Anderson told him to honor his first promise, which he did, returning to the colors under a false name to avoid punishment, and serving in France. The incident reveals the importance placed by Church leaders on honoring prior commitments to the State.⁶⁵ While several Adventists left the Church during the war or post-war years because of their war experiences, others rediscovered their faith. A long war story in the *Australasian Record* gave the account of a former Adventist on the battlefield who found new assurance in prayer, then coolly crossed under a severe bombardment to deliver a message to headquarters, to the astonishment of those who witnessed his passage. The writer offered hope to all parents whose boys had left the fold.⁶⁶

Conclusion

Religious Liberty Secretary A. W. Anderson commented several times on the relationship between the Church and the governments of the region during the crisis of the war, emphasizing that "Never at any time has this denomination officially taken the position that we cannot engage in non-combatant services. Individuals, here and there, have done so, and may do so again; but such persons will be unable to plead that they are taught to do so by the denomination." In conversation with Senator Pearce, the Australian Minister of Defence, Anderson said that Seventh-day Adventists would obey all laws of the government which did not conflict with the laws of God. Pearce had replied, "That is the only consistent position for a Christian."⁶⁷ In October 1918, weeks before the war ended, Anderson reflected at length on the journey that the AUC had taken during the war years. "It is of the utmost importance that we should fully recognize the duality of our obligations. Because our citizenship is in heaven we are not, therefore, absolved from the obligations of earthly citizenship," Anderson began, before tracing the "evolutionary process" by which the denomination came to balance its spiritual and temporal obligations. Recalling the "fiery trial" of the Church that "removed much dross and has clarified our vision," he added, "We have learned by hard and bitter experiences that loyalty to the government means much more than a mere sentiment. Loyalty to the government means much more than to refrain from disloyal acts. A neutral is expected to refrain from such acts, but a citizen is not only expected to refrain from disloyal acts but to actually render loyal service."

While the Church did its best to avoid being engulfed by the war, willing to do the minimum required by the state but not volunteering much more, the post-war years saw a gradual change in the relationship between the Church and the legacy of the war. The Anzac story quickly became entrenched in both New Zealand and Australian society as a defining national narrative, with a growing cult of remembrance. Over time, the Adventist

Church in the South Pacific has joined with the rest of society in this, as Anzac memorial services and events have become a regular feature of many Adventist churches, schools, Pathfinders, and other institutions over recent decades.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church in the South Pacific during the years of the First World War was fortunate indeed to be subject to governments that had developed liberal outlooks, informed by a history of accepting non-conformist religious sentiments and creating an environment in which the Church could continue its distinctive mission during a war that tended to draw all the resources of society into it. Few other Adventist organizations in major combatant nations could have experienced such a benign impact of the war on their work.

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