

ELLEN G. WHITE ESTATE

THE SPIRIT OF PROPHECY AND MILITARY SERVICE

A detailed illustration of a Civil War battle scene, showing soldiers in blue uniforms engaged in combat on a battlefield with smoke and flags. The scene is filled with the chaos of war, with soldiers in various positions of action, some running, some firing, and others in the foreground. The background shows a hazy landscape with trees and a distant horizon. The overall tone is somber and historical.

W. C. WHITE, D. E. ROBINSON AND A. L. WHITE

The Spirit of Prophecy and Military Service

Ellen G. White

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About the Author

Ellen G. White (1827-1915) is considered the most widely translated American author, her works having been published in more than 160 languages. She wrote more than 100,000 pages on a wide variety of spiritual and practical topics. Guided by the Holy Spirit, she exalted Jesus and pointed to the Scriptures as the basis of one's faith.

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Statement prepared by W. C. White, D. E. Robinson and A. L. White

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Introduction

During the years 1860 to 1863, while the final steps were being taken in the development of church organization, the leaders of the church were facing with increasing intensity other new and grave perplexities. The political strife in the United States, culminating in civil war, brought to the front a number of problems whose solution affected not only their relation to current issues, but which was to mold the policy of the church during even more troublous times of international conflict. Naturally as the Civil War crisis developed, the members of the church looked to the leaders, particularly to James and Ellen White, for some pronouncement regarding how the new and perplexing situations should be met.

Fortunately, there were no sectional divisions among the Sabbath-keeping Adventists. While their work had expanded steadily from east to west, it had not, prior to the Civil War, penetrated the Southern slave-holding states. Those who had accepted the message were united in their opposition to the principles of human slavery. They were patriotically in sympathy with the Northern States, and with the government of the Union at Washington. Their attitude was such that in the later years of the war they could declare to the civil authorities that “Seventh-day Adventists are rigidly anti-slavery, loyal to the government, and in sympathy with it against the rebellion.”—*The Views of Seventh-day Adventists Relative to Bearing Arms*, p. 7 (1864).

Despite their common viewpoint, there were dangers confronting the young and growing church. There was the danger that the minds of the believers should become so absorbed in the political issues that they would be diverted from their work of proclaiming the message. And there was danger that the public would lose interest in the message as their attention was absorbed in the national affairs. [2]

Both these dangers were anticipated by James White. In the late summer of 1860, when the excitement of the presidential election was at its height, he sounded an editorial note of warning against

being drawn into political controversy. He counseled the ministers either to conduct their efforts in “small places away from the heat of political strife,” or to close them for the season. He wisely avoided either condemning or advocating the exercise of the ballot, stating:

We are not prepared to prove from the Bible that it would be wrong for a believer in the third message to go in a manner becoming his profession, and cast his vote. We do not recommend this, neither do we oppose.

¹ —[The Review and Herald, August 21, 1860.](#)

Abraham Lincoln, the Republican candidate for the presidency, while not deeming it best to meddle with slavery in the states where it existed, was pledged to oppose its spread into new territory. It was natural that those of our people who went to the polls should vote for him. His election in November was followed in a few weeks by the beginning of the secession of the Southern States. South Carolina passed the secession act December 20, 1860. Similar ordinances were passed on three successive days, January 9, 10, and 11 by Mississippi, Florida, and Alabama respectively, and by the first of February Georgia, Louisiana, and Texas had united with them in raising the flag of the “Confederate States of America.” Thus seven states seceded before Lincoln was inaugurated and took office on March 4, 1861.

¹At a prayer meeting of the Battle Creek Church, held on the evening of Sunday, March 6, 1859, with both James and Ellen White attending, decision was reached that it would be proper for the Sabbathkeeping Adventists to cast their votes in the town election of the next day, lending support to men running for office who stood for temperance principles. See [Temperance, 255-256.](#)

Chapter 1—Vision at Parkville

For January 11 and 12, 1861, meetings were appointed in Parkville, Michigan. These were attended by James and Ellen White and Elders J. H. Waggoner, Uriah Smith, and J. N. Loughborough. On Sabbath, January 12, after Sister White had spoken, she was taken off in vision.

In this vision it was revealed to Mrs. White that other states would unite with South Carolina, and that a most terrible war would result. She was given views of armies in conflict, with terrible carnage by bullet and bayonet. She saw battle fields covered with the dead and dying. She witnessed scenes of suffering in overcrowded prisons, and she saw homes where distress and anguish reigned because of the loss of husbands, sons, or brothers.

After coming out of vision, she looked around the house, and said sadly, “There are those in this house who will lose sons in that war.”²

At the time this vision was given, neither the North nor the South was expecting a great war to follow. The Southern politicians argued that they “could make better terms out of the union than in it.” It was their thought that they would “withdraw temporarily from the Federal government until proper guarantees for the observance” of what they regarded as their rights and interests should be given. “They did not believe the United States authorities would really attempt” such a tremendous undertaking as the occupation of their vast territory in an effort to conquer them by force. (See *Encyclopedia Britannica*, art. United States.)

As for the Federal government, their limited expectations regarding the war are indicated by the fact that even after the first aggressive shot had been fired at Fort Sumter on April 12, and war was regarded as inevitable, the president on April 15 issued a call for only 75,000 men, and that for a period of three months.

[4]

²For further details of this vision, and of the accuracy of its fulfillment see *The Great Second Advent Movement*, pp. 337-340.

Chapter 2—Calls for Volunteers

This call for 75,000 volunteers for the Federal army was quickly and enthusiastically met. When the quotas allotted to each state, each county, and township were filled, further applications were refused. In Battle Creek, following a mass meeting held April 20, attended by more than a thousand citizens, 71 volunteers enlisted. The following morning others came and were turned away disappointed because the roll was full.

Chapter 3—Early Reverses and Their Significance

President Lincoln called the Congress into special session July 4, 1861. Congress addressed itself immediately to the execution of the war, its finance, and authorized an army of 500,000 volunteers. Before the special session closed, the forces of the North and the South met in combat on July 21, 1861, in the Battle of Bull Run at Manassas, Virginia, some thirty miles south of Washington. The disheartening defeat of the Northern forces emphasized their lack of preparation for the war. But there were other reasons for this defeat and the lack of a decisive victory for either side. To Ellen White, in a vision given to her at Roosevelt, New York, on August 3, just two weeks after the conflict at Manassas, the curtain was drawn aside, and she was permitted to see just what took place. Of this she wrote in the article published in the *Review* of August 27, 1861, entitled “Slavery and the War,” and reprinted in *Testimonies*, Volume 1:

I had a view of the disastrous battle at Manassas, Virginia. It was a most exciting, distressing scene. The Southern army had everything in their favor, and were prepared for a dreadful contest. The Northern army was moving on with triumph, not doubting but that they would be victorious. Many were reckless, and marched forward boastingly, as though victory were already theirs.

[5]

As they neared the battle-field, many were almost fainting through weariness and want of refreshment. They did not expect so fierce an encounter. They rushed into battle and fought bravely, desperately. The dead and dying were on every side. Both the North and the South suffered severely. The Southern men felt the battle, and in a little while would have been driven back still further. The Northern men were rushing on, although their destruction was very great.

Just then an angel descended, and waved his hand backward. Instantly there was confusion in the ranks. It appeared to the Northern men that their troops were retreating, when it was not so in reality, and a precipitate retreat commenced. This seemed wonderful to me.

Then it was explained that God had this nation in His own hand, and would not suffer victories to be gained faster than He ordained, and would permit no more losses to the Northern men than in His wisdom He saw fit, to punish them for their sins.... The sudden falling back of the Northern troops is a mystery to all. They know not that God's hand was in the matter.—
[Testimonies for the Church 1:266-267.](#)

The “sins” of the North here referred to, she explains at length to be their toleration of slavery, and their efforts only to confine it to the states where it already existed, rather than to free all bondmen.

Chapter 4—Bounties to Encourage Enlistment

As the war progressed, calls were issued by the President for more soldiers. Each state was required to furnish a certain quota of men for each call and this in turn was apportioned to each county, city and ward. If the number of those who freely volunteered failed to reach the required quota, it would become necessary to institute a draft. To avoid this, they must find some means of encouraging the enlistment of men to make up the required number. As a means to promote enlistment, citizens' committees were formed in many municipalities and they arranged to offer a bounty to be paid to recruits. Beginning at \$25.00, it was soon raised to as high as \$100.00 as more and more men were called to the front.

As Seventh-day Adventists were particularly anxious to avoid [6] the threatened draft which would involve Sabbathkeepers, James White participated heartily in the matter of raising funds from which a liberal bonus should be paid to volunteers. While as a rule our brethren were conscientiously noncombatant, yet they felt it to be their duty to join heartily in raising money for the payment of the bonus offered to volunteers who had no religious scruples against army service.

James White and other leading Adventists attended, and took part in a number of mass meetings of Battle Creek citizens, where there was free discussion of the various activities in behalf of the war, but particularly the problem of furnishing the quota of men, if possible, without the necessity of the draft. He made it clear that his Sabbath-keeping brethren had not refrained from volunteering because they were cowards, or ease-loving. Though they were generally poor, they would willingly contribute as freely as the well-to-do.

James White would relate to his wife some of his experiences in these mass meetings. Several of his associates would appoint him as their representative to offer their pledges to the fund at the most opportune time. So he would say in the meeting, "In behalf of my friend, A. B. who is subject to the draft, I am authorized to

subscribe _____ dollars. Also in behalf of my friend, C. D., who is not subject to the draft, but who is willing to share the burden of the bonus fund, I am authorized to subscribe _____ dollars.”

On October 20, 1862, a large war meeting was held in Battle Creek “to take the preliminary steps necessary to fill up the quota of men due from this city under the call of the Government for 600,000 men.” The audience voted down the proposal of a committee to recommend a bounty of \$100.00 for each volunteer, and substituted an offer of \$200.00 in its place. A committee of nine was chosen to raise funds, among whom were at least two Sabbathkeepers, J. P. Kellogg and Elder James White, representing the second and third [7] Battle Creek Wards. (*Battle Creek Journal*, Oct. 24, 1862.)

As the war progressed, this procedure was questioned by some. His attitude and that of other leading brethren was plainly expressed in reply to a number of inquiries received by Elder James White “as to whether it was right to contribute to raise local bounties for the purpose of encouraging enlistments.” To this the answer was given:

We would say we think it is, and have done so in Battle Creek.—[The Review and Herald, August 30, 1864.](#)

Chapter 5—Difficulties in the Field

[8]

And so the perplexities incident to the war increased, as the rate of bounty was raised, necessitating still heavier calls of means from our own people. Reports from the workers in the field indicated difficulties in connection with the proclamation of the message. Elder Ingraham reported the Illinois tent was laid up because “it was useless to pitch the tent in new fields while the war excitement lasts.” In Iowa Elder J. H. Waggoner and B. F. Snook were arrested under martial law, and detained till they secured a certificate from the county judge “setting forth their place of residence, their present occupation and calling. The Judge advised them to repair immediately to their homes, as they would be daily more and more liable to troubles and difficulties.” From Rochester, New York, Elder Cornell reported:

The war excitement was so great we had to adjourn for two nights. Our tent was used for the war meetings. I never saw such an excitement as there is here in Rochester. The streets are blocked up with the tents of recruiting officers. The stores are all closed up 3 to 6, P.M., and all are trying to induce men to enlist. War meetings every night.—[The Review and Herald, August 26, 1862.](#)

Yet notwithstanding the difficulties attending the holding of public efforts, there were compensating conditions. The troubles and perplexities made the hearts of our brethren sober. They sought the Lord more earnestly, were more zealous in missionary activity in the communities where they lived, and the Lord blessed them with many souls.

Chapter 6—Facing the Draft

The year 1862 witnessed continued and unexplained reversals for the Northern forces and more and more men were needed. Up to this time the Union army was supplied entirely with men recruited on an enlistment basis. Seventh-day Adventists with their Sabbath-keeping and their non-combatant views had not enlisted and this led some onlookers to question their loyalty to the government. Wrote Ellen White:

The attention of many was turned to Sabbath-keepers, because they manifested no greater interest in the war, and did not volunteer.—[Testimonies for the Church 1:356](#).

And she commented:

There was need of moving with wisdom to turn away the suspicions excited against Sabbath-keepers. We should act with great caution. “If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men.” We can obey this admonition, and not sacrifice one principle of our faith. Satan and his host are at war with commandment-keepers, and will work to bring them into trying positions. They should not, by lack of discretion, bring themselves there.—[Testimonies for the Church 1:356](#) (January, 1863).

All could see that a draft was inevitable and not far away. How should Seventh-day Adventists relate themselves to the draft when it came, was the question in the minds of nearly all.

At this juncture, in an attempt to give guidance to those who found it difficult to reach a conclusion, Elder White published in the Review of August 12, 1862, an editorial entitled “The Nation.” Here, after stating reasons why Seventh-day Adventists were in sympathy

with the cause of the government in the war that was then being fought, and why they could not conscientiously volunteer for service, he says, speaking of a possible draft by the government:

The position which our people have taken relative to the perpetuity and sacredness of the law of God contained in the ten commandments, is not in harmony with all the requirements of war. The fourth precept of that law says, "Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy;" the sixth says, "Thou shall not kill." But in the case of drafting, the government assumes the responsibility of the violation of the law of God, and it would be madness to resist. He who would resist until, in the administration of military law, he was shot down, goes too far, we think, in taking the responsibility of suicide. We are at present enjoying the protection of our civil and religious rights, by the best government under heaven.... It is Christlike to honor every good law of our land. Said Jesus, "Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's, and unto God the things that are God's." [Matthew 22:21](#). Those who despise civil law, should at once pack up and be off for some spot on God's foot-stool where there is no civil law.

[9]

When it shall come to this, that civil enactments shall be passed and enforced to drive us from obedience to the law of God, to join those who are living in rebellion against the government of Heaven, see [Revelation 13:15-17](#), then it will be time to stand our chances of martyrdom. But for us to attempt to resist the laws of the best government under heaven, which is now struggling to put down the ... rebellion, ... we repeat it, would be madness.

Those who are loyal to the government of Heaven, true to the constitution and laws of the Ruler of the universe, are the last men to "sneak" off to Canada, or to Europe, or to stand trembling in their shoes for fear of a military draft.

This article caused in some quarters a storm of criticism, the nature of which may be inferred from the following, printed in the *Review* two weeks later:

Several brethren refer to our remarks under this caption (*The Nation*), two weeks since, in rather a feverish style. We invite them to read the article again, and be sure they understand our position before opposing it. Hold! brethren. This is no time for Christian gentlemen to give way to feelings of prejudice, and virtually charge us with teaching Sabbath-breaking and murder. You had better all go to God with this matter, and secure to yourselves a humble, teachable spirit; then if any of you are drafted, and choose to have a clinch with Uncle Sam rather than to obey, you can try it. We shall not contend with you, lest some of you non-resistants get up a little war before you are called upon to fight for your country. Any well-written articles, calculated to shed light upon our duty as a people in reference to the present war, will receive prompt attention.—[The Review and Herald, August 26, 1862.](#)

There followed through the columns of the *Review* a free discussion of the questions raised regarding the duty of Sabbath-keepers in the face of a draft, with the result that when the issue was finally reached there was unanimity of action. The divergence of views for a time, however, is indicated in a notice on the back page of the *Review* for September 9, 1862, to the effect that James White would be unable to meet certain appointments “in consequence of the sickly season, war excitement, fear of the Indians (doubtless groundless), excited feelings over our article entitled ‘*The Nation*,’ and the General Conference so near.”

[10] The general attitude of the brethren toward government requirements and the war was reflected by H. E. Carver in his response to James White’s position as he set it forth in the *Review*:

We owe an allegiance to the government under which we live. We are bound to sustain the government

until the government shall require us to disobey God, then we must not hesitate as to which we shall serve.... I trust the Lord will save us from this great trial, but if the trial must come, I pray God for wisdom and strength to glorify Him by keeping His commandments.—[The Review and Herald, October 21, 1862.](#)

Chapter 7—Instruction Through the Spirit of Prophecy

At this juncture the church received counsel through the Spirit of prophecy. In January, 1863, “Testimony for the Church,” No. 9, was advertised in the *Review*, with the statement that it contained instruction regarding “the war, and our duty in relation to it.”

This was not the first testimony article making reference to the Civil War, but it was the first to give specific counsel in regard to the draft, enlistment, etc. An article entitled “The North and the South” (Vol. 1, pp. 253-260), published a year earlier (January, 1862), helped to clarify in the minds of Seventh-day Adventists the true issues of the war. And there was a second article which followed entitled “Slavery and the War” presenting the vision of August 3, 1861.

But it was in this chapter, “The Rebellion,” published in January, 1863, and now found in [Testimonies for the Church 1:355-368](#), that entered into a discussion of the draft that seemed inevitable. It was revealed to Mrs. White that God held the nation accountable for the sin of slavery, and that both the North and the South were being punished. Of the final outcome of the war she said:

God is not with the South, and He will punish them dreadfully in the end.... I saw that God would not give the Northern army wholly into the hands of a rebellious people, to be utterly destroyed by their enemies.... I saw that both the South and the North were being punished. In regard to the South, I was referred to [Deuteronomy 32:35-37](#): “To me belongeth vengeance and recompense: their foot shall slide in due time; for the day of their calamity is at hand, and the things that shall come upon them make haste.”—[Testimonies for the Church 1:359, 365, 368](#).

[11]

Regarding some who were boldly asserting that they would die rather than submit to the draft, and who had criticized the position taken by James White and other leaders, the testimony declared:

I saw that those who have been forward to talk so decidedly about refusing to obey a draft, do not understand what they are talking about. Should they really be drafted, and, refusing to obey, be threatened with imprisonment, torture, or death, they would shrink, and then find that they had not prepared themselves for such an emergency. They would not endure the trial of their faith. What they thought to be faith, was only fanatical presumption.—[Testimonies for the Church 1:357](#).

The following most excellent caution was given against maintaining a boastful confident attitude as to how a future crisis would be met:

Those who would be best prepared to sacrifice even life, if required, rather than place themselves in a position where they could not obey God, would have the least to say. They would make no boast. They would feel deeply and meditate much, and their earnest prayers would go up to Heaven for wisdom to act and grace to endure. Those who feel that in the fear of God they cannot conscientiously engage in this war, will be very quiet, and when interrogated will simply state what they are obliged to say in order to answer the inquirer, and then let it be understood that they have no sympathy with the Rebellion.—[Testimonies for the Church 1:357](#).

Jealousy and lack of unity among the leaders of the Northern army was declared in this testimony to be largely responsible for the long protraction of the struggle and for many of the losses of the Federal forces.³

³A few weeks after the publication of this Testimony, there appeared in the Review a lengthy letter from Brother Otis Nichols, accompanying which were newspaper clippings which confirmed the statements regarding the conduct of the war, and regarding those in

Chapter 8—Counsel Concerning Enlistment

Then Ellen White turns to certain very practical phases of the crisis of the times. Concerning our allegiance to the government she wrote:

I saw that it is our duty in every case to obey the laws of our land, unless they conflict with the higher law which God spoke with an audible voice from Sinai, and afterward engraved on stone with His own finger. “I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts; and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people.”

He who has God’s law written in the heart, will obey God rather than men, and will sooner disobey all men than deviate in the least from the commandment of God. God’s people, taught by the inspiration of truth, and led by a good conscience to live by every word of God, will take His law, written in their hearts, as the only authority which they can acknowledge or consent to obey. The wisdom and authority of the divine law are supreme.—[Testimonies for the Church 1:361](#).

With the principle laid down that the Christian is duty bound to obey the laws of the land, unless there is a conflict with God’s higher law, Ellen White then comes to a very critical point, that of enlistment in an army which makes no provision for individual conscience. We quote from the next paragraph in the testimony:

I was shown that God’s people, who are His peculiar treasure, cannot engage in this perplexing war, for it is opposed to every principle of their faith. *In the army*

the Northern army who were traitors at heart to the cause for which they were supposed to be fighting. He made reference to Mrs. White’s positive statement to the effect that “they (the South) will not fully triumph over the Northern armies.”

they cannot obey the truth and at the same time obey the requirements of their officers. There would be a continual violation of conscience. Worldly men are governed by worldly principles.... But God's people cannot be governed by these motives....

Those who love God's commandments will conform to every good law of the land. But if the requirements of the rulers are such as conflict with the laws of God, the only question to be settled is, Shall we obey God, or man?—[Testimonies for the Church 1:361-362](#). (Emphasis supplied.)

The reader must bear in mind that when this statement was published in January, 1863, there was as yet no draft. All military service in the Union forces was on a purely enlistment basis. A man entered the army by volunteering his services and at the same time became without reservation subject to the orders of his officers. There was a sharp conflict with the fourth commandment and the sixth of God's law. There was no provision for Sabbath observance or noncombatancy. "In the army they" could not "obey the truth and at the same time obey the requirements of their officers." [13]

We should pause to note at this juncture that there are some who have taken this January, 1863, E. G. White statement that "in the army they (Seventh-day Adventists) cannot obey the truth and at the same time obey the requirements of their officers" ([Testimonies for the Church 1:361](#)) to mean that at no time and under no circumstances can a Seventh-day Adventist be loyal to God and engage in military service. It must be recognized that Ellen White was speaking of the circumstances in connection with "this perplexing war"—the Civil War—at that period when military service was on an enlistment basis only, and there was no provision whatsoever for the convictions of individual conscience. ⁴

⁴Note: Concerning some such counsels which must be studied in relation to the circumstances of the times of writing, Ellen G. White stated in a later year: Regarding the testimonies, nothing is ignored; nothing is cast aside; but time and place must be considered.—*Writing and Sending Out of the Testimonies*, p. 25.

Chapter 9—The First Enrollment Law and the Draft

In March, 1863, a little less than three months after the publication of the testimony article referred to above, with its guiding counsels, the Congress of the United States passed an act for “the enrollment of all able bodied male citizens between the ages of eighteen and forty-five,” and the president was authorized to make drafts for military service.

[14] Although this Conscription Bill of March, 1863, made no provision for noncombatant service, it did allow one drafted to be released, either by the furnishing of a substitute, or by the payment of \$300. This provision was welcomed by the Adventist believers as a providential means of avoiding combatant service and conflicts over Sabbath observance, but it also carried a threat of a new and *growing danger*. With such a call for means upon our brethren in the purchasing of substitutes, the financial interest of the cause was imperiled. Recognizing this danger, James White wrote:

The advancement of the third message is the highest object on earth for which we can labor. Whatever suffering there may be elsewhere, this cause should be the last to suffer for want of means. Should our brethren be drafted, they should, if necessary, mortgage their property to raise the three hundred, rather than to accept means that should go into the Lord’s treasury. We would say this even of our ministers.—[The Review and Herald, November 24, 1863.](#)

In urging that the money raised by Systematic Benevolence should not be lessened nor diverted from the support of the ministry, he cited his own practice. Without lessening his usual annual payment into this fund, he had laid aside an equal amount to help drafted ministers, if necessary. A year later, he claimed as “one privilege,”

the payment of “ten dollars to each efficient minister who shall be drafted from among us, to help him pay the \$300.”—[The Review and Herald, September 27, 1864](#)

Thus he set an example of faithfulness in the support of the cause, and in helping those who might be involved in the draft. A similar spirit was manifest throughout the field. One of our ministers, Elder Isaac Sanborn, facing payment for a note which was soon coming due, inserted a notice in the *Review* stating that he had borrowed \$150.00 to clear another brother from the draft, and inviting the help of any who would like to assist “in this enterprise.” It was this spirit of mutual helpfulness in providing funds for the payment of bounties or exemptions which made it possible, in most cases, for our brethren to avoid serious conflicts over the question of bearing arms.

Chapter 10—Basic Provisions for Noncombatants

[15] The Conscription Act of 1863 was amended in February of 1864. In the amendment provision was made by the Federal government that “members of religious denominations, who shall by oath or affirmation declare that they are conscientiously opposed to the bearing of arms,” shall when drafted “be considered noncombatants.” They might then be assigned to duty in hospitals, or to the care of freedmen; or they might avail themselves of the privilege of exemption granted to those who should pay \$300.00.

So long as the general provision for the release of any drafted men from military service by the payment of \$300.00 each was in force, no steps were taken by Seventh-day Adventists to obtain recognition as noncombatants. Our denomination was young and its membership relatively small and unknown. So, for more than a year, most of our men when drafted secured exemption by paying the \$300.00.

But a bill signed July 4, 1864, revoked “the clause commonly known as the \$300.00 exemption clause,” *except for those “conscientiously opposed to bearing arms.”* This action precipitated a crisis, for if Seventh-day Adventists were to secure the continued benefits of exemption, or were to secure noncombatant status should they respond to the draft, they must now publicly declare their position and attitude.

Prompt steps were taken to meet the issue. On August 3, there was laid before Austin Blair, Governor of Michigan, a declaration of principles, signed by the General Conference Committee, giving the reasons why Seventh-day Adventists “have not felt free to enlist into the service,” and requesting the governor’s endorsement of the claim that “*as a people we come under the intent of the late action of Congress concerning those who are conscientiously opposed to bearing arms, and are entitled to the benefits of said laws.*” (Emphasis supplied).

The Governor of Michigan readily granted this request.

Similar steps were taken in other states, as Wisconsin, Illinois, and Pennsylvania, with equally satisfactory replies from the governors. These endorsements, together with letters of recommendation from certain military officers, were carried to Washington, D. C., by Elder J. N. Andrews, who laid them before Provost Marshal James B. Fry. [16]

[17] **Chapter 11—Seventh-day Adventists Recognized as
Noncombatants**

Mr. Fry stated to Elder Andrews that he construed the exemption clause of the enrollment law as applying to any denomination who held noncombatant views, and issued orders to all the Deputy Marshals in accordance with this construction of the exemption clause. He gave detailed instructions as to how our brethren should proceed, if drafted, in order to be given the privilege of exemption through the payment of \$300 or to be assigned to some noncombatant service. Many who were drafted took advantage of the \$300 exemption clause provided for noncombatants. But some who were drafted applied for assignment to noncombatant service.

It is only in accordance with the facts to state that in a number of cases brethren who, being drafted, entered the army in late 1864, were treated unfairly by local officers who refused to recognize the provision of the law. Under most trying circumstances our young men remained loyal to the God of heaven, while doing their duty to their fellowman. They endeavored to let their light shine in the army. Responding to their call for literature, a tract fund was raised to furnish them with reading matter that they might distribute among their associates. Many letters were received from drafted men whose claims to exemption from bearing arms were angrily refused. Two of these letters were published in one issue of the *Review*, together with a note from James White as follows:

The experience they give seems not to be the exception, but the rule. We have not yet heard of any who though their claims as non-combatants were endorsed by the provost marshalls of their districts and certificates granted them accordingly, have succeeded in obtaining a position in hospitals, or in the care of freedmen. And even the district provost marshalls sometimes refuse to endorse the claims of our brethren, notwithstanding

all the evidences as noncombatants.—[The Review and Herald, January 24, 1865.](#)

Chapter 12—Special Light Concerning the Draft

At this juncture, the inquiry is rightfully raised, “Did the Lord give Ellen White light, either guiding the leaders of the church in the steps they took in 1863 and 1864 in relation to military service, or approving the course which was followed?”

This question is vitally important to us today, for the position of the denomination toward military service is based on the “historic stand” we took in Civil War days.

In the counsels of *Testimonies for the Church*, Volume One, which parallels this period in our history, there is no direct information on this point. After January, 1863, there are no utterances concerning the Civil War or the draft. Had the war not come to a close within such a short time after the draft became effective with all its attendant problems, there would undoubtedly have been some published counsel. It is logical to conclude from inference that as the leading workers were cautiously feeling their way along on this crucial question, they kept very close to Mrs. White, and that they were guided by light which she received from the Lord. It is further logical to conclude that, if in the absence of any light they took a position in regard to military service which was out of harmony with God’s will, the Lord would have given them a message to this effect, and the course would have been altered by correcting counsels. All this seems reasonable and logical.

But we are not left to inference or logical conclusions alone in this matter which is of such interest and vital importance to our young men throughout the world. It is indeed gratifying to observe that as the leaders of the church moved forward prayerfully and carefully in meeting the crises as they arose, and in finding the “historic positions” we as a denomination take in regard to the draft, they did so in harmony with the light given by God through the Spirit of prophecy. Ellen White makes direct reference to this some two decades after the close of the Civil War in a letter to church leaders, Elder G. I. Butler, President of the General Conference,

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and S. N. Haskell, pioneer executive and evangelist. Ellen White, then in Europe, had before her certain questions these brethren had placed before her, and as she answers, she looks back and comments concerning the propriety of our church leaders seeking relief from oppressive measures:

You inquire in regard to the course which should be pursued to secure the rights of our people to worship according to the dictates of our own conscience. This has been a burden on my soul for some time, whether it would be a denial of our faith, and an evidence that our trust was not fully in God. But *I call to mind many things God has shown me in the past in regard to things of a similar character, as the draft and other things*. I can speak in the fear of God, it is right we should use every power we can to avert the pressure that is being brought to bear upon our people.—Ellen G. White [Letter 55, 1886](#). (Emphasis supplied)

Thus we have the certain answer. The Lord did give Ellen White direct and definite light which helped the leaders of the church in arriving at the position they took at that time and since hold concerning the relation of Seventh-day Adventists to military service.

Chapter 13—A Call to Prayer

As the conflict between the forces of the North and the South moved into 1865, President Lincoln made another call for men—this time 300,000. The Adventist leaders were appalled. Of what this would mean to the church Elder White wrote:

It is said that the next draft will take about one in three of able-bodied men, liable to the draft. And it is supposed that this proportion of Seventh-day Adventists will be drawn; that is, one in three. In this case if each should pay into the treasury \$100, the same would be sufficient to pay \$300, for all drawn at the coming draft.—[The Review and Herald, January 24, 1865](#).

After heading the list with his own pledge for one hundred dollars for a fund, for the benefit especially of his fellow workers, James White urged others to join him, and concluded with the words, “If this war continues, God only knows what it will do for even non-combatants.”

[19] In a forceful editorial the following week, Elder White expressed his personal conviction that the impressive petition of the angel of [Revelation 7:3](#), “Hurt not the earth, neither the sea, nor the trees, till we have sealed the servants of our God in their foreheads,” “symbolizes earnest prayer on the part of God’s loyal people at the present period of this dreadful American war.” He recommended to the church members:

That prayer and giving of thanks for those in authority constitute a proper portion of their Sabbath and other seasons of public worship, and also, of family and private devotions, [and also that] the second Sabbath in each month be especially set apart to fasting and prayer in view of the present terrible war, and the peculiar

relations which non-combatants sustain to the government, that they may still enjoy liberty of conscience, and lead quiet and peaceable lives in all godliness and honesty.—[The Review and Herald, January 31, 1865.](#)

This personal recommendation was formally adopted by the General Conference Committee who especially made a call for the setting apart of the second Sabbath in February as a day of fasting and prayer for the objects specified in Elder White's article. A few weeks later another call for humiliation and prayer was issued by the Committee in a two-column article entitled "The Time Has Come! For the Fulfillment of [Revelation 7:3.](#)" The brethren were urged to set apart four days, from Wednesday, March 1 to Sabbath, March 4, as days of "earnest and importunate prayer." Business were to be suspended, church services were to be held daily at 1 p.m., and two meetings were to be held on Sabbath. The earnestness and confidence of the brethren signing this call is set forth in the concluding paragraph:

The number of God's servants will be made up; for the prophet so declares; but not till after an earnest work has taken place on the part of the church. We firmly believe the time has come for us to act—then follows the sealing work, or the loud cry of the third message—then triumph—then translation—then eternal life. Amen.—[The Review and Herald, February 21, 1865.](#)

Among the conditions that seriously affected the cause was the large and increasing financial burden to raise means for the exemp- [20]
tion of noncombatants from draft. It was estimated that to secure the exemption of those who would be drafted from the Battle Creek church would cost more than the amount of their systematic benevolence for the four preceding years, or for the whole cause, from twenty-five to forty thousand dollars. Thousands of people who should be hearing and accepting the truth were being drawn away to the fields of carnage. And while the mind of the nation was so absorbed in the dreadful contest, it was almost impossible to call their minds to religious subjects.

With these retarding effects on the spreading of the message caused by the war, the General Conference Committee in their appeal stated that the denomination was brought to the place where “if the war continues, we must stop.” Then confidently their hope and faith was set forth:

Relying upon God, and having confidence in the efficacy of prayer, and the indications of His prophetic word, we believe that the work of God must not be hindered.... God’s work in these last days must not, will not stop.—[The Review and Herald, February 21, 1865.](#)

And so it was that on that Sabbath day, March 4, 1865, when Abraham Lincoln was inaugurated for his second term as President of the United States,⁵ ten thousand Seventh-day Adventists were petitioning heaven that for the sake of the cause of truth which was being hindered the war might be brought to a speedy close. On April 9, 1865, General Lee surrendered and the long disastrous war was virtually over, and wrote James White:

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The air rang with shouts, Richmond is taken! and Lee has surrendered! Cities and villages were illuminated. Bonfires and rockets streamed up to the heavens, while cheers for Lincoln, Grant, Sherman, and Sheridan rang again. But God’s loyal people were on their knees, blessing Heaven for the answer of their prayers, and weeping with joy over the faithfulness of God in fulfilling His word.—[The Review and Herald, April 25, 1865.](#)

Little do we realize what we today owe to the pioneers who in those days of perplexity were led to adopt an attitude toward war

⁵In his inaugural address, President Lincoln said: Fondly do we hope, fervently do we pray, that this mighty scourge of war may speedily pass away. Yet, if God wills that it continue until all the wealth piled by the bondman’s two hundred and fifty years of unrequited toil shall be sunk, and until every drop of blood drawn with the lash shall be paid by another drawn with the sword, as was said three thousand years ago, so, still it must be said, that the judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether.—Quoted in [The Review and Herald, March 21, 1865.](#)

that enabled them to maintain the respect of government officials for their loyalty to the ordained powers that be, and that without compromising their loyalty to God in obedience to His commandments. The history they recorded at that time has made it possible for our young men to be recognized, not as pacifists, but as noncombatants, ready to give fullest allegiance to their earthly governments, so long as they need not violate their conscience in so doing.

Chapter 14—Recognition of European Military Service Laws

When Ellen G. White, in response to the invitation of the General Conference, spent two years laboring in Europe (1885-1887) she came face to face with the problems our young men there must deal with in regard to military service. While living at the new headquarters building in Basel, Switzerland, erected to serve as the center from which our work in Europe would be directed, three of the young men employed in our printing office on the ground floor were called to put in their three weeks of compulsory military drill required annually of each young man in Switzerland. There was no counsel given that our young men should resist or disregard this requirement, nor that they should refuse to wear the uniform of their country required in such service. Ellen White's contemporary reference to the experience is illuminating:

We have just said farewell to three of our responsible men in the office who were summoned by the government to serve for three weeks of drill. It was a very important stage of our work in the publishing house, but the government calls do not accommodate themselves to our convenience. They demand that young men whom they have accepted as soldiers shall not neglect the exercise and drill essential for soldier service. We were glad to see that these men with their regimentals had tokens of honor for faithfulness in their work. They were trustworthy young men.

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These did not go from choice, but because the laws of their nation required this. We gave them a word of encouragement to be found true soldiers of the cross of Christ. Our prayers will follow these young men, that the angels of God may go with them and guard them from every temptation.—*Ellen G. White Uncopied*

[Letter 23, 1886](#). (Written from Basel, Switzerland, Sept. 2, 1886)

When World War I broke out, Ellen White was well advanced in years and she gave no instruction in writing which would bear on the duty of our men to the requirements of military service. In oral conversation she counseled against defying military authority.

Thus through the years we find a consistency in the instruction and counsels which give us a certain assurance that the church as it found its way in the question of the attitude its youth should take to military service, did so in full harmony with the counsels of the Spirit of prophecy, given of God to guide and guard His people.

Manuscript prepared by W. C. White, D. E. Robinson, and A. L. White giving in detail a carefully documented account of how Seventh-day Adventists met the Civil War crisis as it related to the draft, the Sabbath, and the bearing of arms and amplified by A. L. White to include all items available from the pen of Ellen G. White which have a bearing on the subject. Extracts of the original draft appeared in the [The Review and Herald, November 26, 1936](#), as a part of the series of articles entitled “Sketches and Memories of James and Ellen White.”—A. L. White.

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