

## NON-COMBATANT MILITARY SERVICE AND PACIFISM

*By Allon Maxwell*

Many Christians who are convicted that they should not directly participate in warfare ask questions which draw a distinction between "active" military service and non-combatant roles in the armed forces. Such roles exist in the medical corps, various clerical duties, stores administration, etc.

Some Christians do mistakenly see these as a valid alternative.

Others, I fear, see it as the "easy option", compared with the cumbersome procedures required to obtain recognition as a Conscientious Objector and total exemption from military service.

For others it is preferable to the potential open persecution which is suffered by many Conscientious Objectors.

Australia is one country which does make provision for exemption from Military Service on the grounds of religious conscience. However, the procedure is not easy and is fraught with the risk that if the application is not successful, a prison term can be imposed. In the 1950s, some of my friends suffered several months of military detention, when their names came up in the ballot and for conscience' sake they had to refuse to respond to the compulsory draft which was in force at that time. For some of them with young families and heavy financial commitments, the cost was quite high. However, they were fortunate compared with other young men in other countries and other times, who paid a much higher price for their faith. For all of these, life would have been much easier, if non-combatant service had been seen as a valid option.

Were they wrong? Did they suffer persecution unnecessarily?

Or was it after all what Jesus meant when He spoke of persecution for the sake of righteousness?

I believe they were right.

Few realise that under Australian military law, non-combatants swear the same military oath to enter the service, undergo the same basic training in the use of weapons and, in extremity, can be ordered to bear arms and fight. (The requirement to swear an oath ought to be, in itself, a warning signal and a barrier, for those who take the teaching of Jesus seriously.)

However, the actual bearing of arms is not the real issue.

To be in non-combatant military service, is to be a part of the total war machine, trained to destroy and dedicated to do so on command. Whether they admit it or not, non-combatants are a part of the essential SUPPORT SERVICES without which the killing machine could not function effectively. Whether they face it or not, they are as much a party to war making as the men who fire the guns and drop the bombs, even if they are remote from the battlefield.

No matter how they rationalise it, their supporting role assists in war making. It is not what Jesus meant when He called us to do good to our enemies. It is certainly NOT PEACE MAKING.

It is disobedience to Jesus.

It is sin.

It is no doubt, for many, a sin of ignorance. However, when light comes, as it surely will to all who are led by the Spirit of God, godly sorrow will lead to repentance.

It is the PEACEMAKERS who are children of God. ([Matthew 5:9](#)).