



To The Gulf War Dead

Reporter: "I'm struck by how somber...you seem."

George Bush: "Well, to be very honest with you, I haven't yet felt this wonderful euphoric feeling that many of the American people feel."

—White House Press Conference
End of the war, Saturday, March 2

Thank you, Mr. President. How could anyone be euphoric after ordering the start of a war that the Saudi commanding general has said left 50,000 to 100,000 dead? General Schwarzkopf, on the day before the president's press conference, had called the low number of deaths "miraculous." Only for the allies. God performed no miracles for Iraqi conscripts caught between mine fields and Saddam Hussein's firing squads, unable to surrender, unprotected from allied fighter bombers, incinerated in their trenches and tanks by the thousands upon thousands. After ordering the most intense aerial bombing in the history of humanity, no wonder George Bush could not immediately exult in patriotic fervor. No wonder the President, a churchgoing layman, told the reporter that first Sabbath that he needed "a little more time."

Did Adventists, that first Sabbath after the war, also pause? Were American Adventists as somber as their President? This issue of *Spectrum* not only chronicles the life of an American Adventist missionary in Kuwait under Iraqi occupation, it also reports that an estimated 2,500 American Adventists were in the Gulf War because they voluntarily joined the American armed forces. The vast majority of these Adventists volunteered as combatants, willing to shoot-to-kill.

They reflect an American Adventist membership that seems much less ambivalent than before about the justice of using force to repel aggression. Of course, some Adventist Americans remain opposed

to a war they consider to have been fought over oil, and here and there are Adventists who refuse to participate or condone war under any circumstances. But the majority of American Adventists seems to have reluctantly approved the use of military means to protect the vulnerable communities of the Gulf.

But can any Adventist exult in what happened in the Gulf? How can Adventists celebrate what embarrassed American flyers described as "shooting fish in a barrel," a "turkey shoot"? Some of us have eaten and slept in the homes of fellow Adventists in Iraq. We are an international community of Christians. Whether pacifists or reluctant supporters of this war, can any Adventist wholeheartedly enter into patriotic festivities? Can we hail an American-enforced "new world order," erected on tens of thousands of Iraqi bodies?

The first Sabbath after the war ended, worship in the Sligo Adventist church was never more healing. A Canadian-American pastor and an Arab-American mother of a soldier in the Gulf, alternated in offering the pastoral prayer in English and in Arabic. They remembered all those killed in this war—on both sides. It made me wonder. Our quarrel has never been with the Iraqi people, President Bush has said. If so, when the memorial of the Gulf War is constructed, could it go beyond honoring Americans and their allies who were tortured or killed in action? Could it not also be a memorial to the thousands of unknown Iraqi dead? President Bush's initial instincts were right. Euphoria is not the appropriate response to war. Wars, no matter how justified, are not for celebrations of patriotism. Wars are tragedies, to be remembered in congregational prayers and memorials of stone.

Roy Branson