
Paint the World with Love

Ordinary Adventists doing extraordinary things to change their corner of the world.

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The Boy From Paducah



It wasn't that Claudie had anything against religion. It was just that in all his 20 years he'd had absolutely no exposure to it. So he really didn't have any feelings one way or the other that day he found himself standing across the street from the sports arena. Looked like something was going on over there. Maybe another wrestling match. He enjoyed those. Might as well go see.

What was going on over there was the last week of an evangelistic series. What he saw aroused enough interest that he decided to come back. And when the meetings transferred from the sports arena to the Seventh-day Adventist church a couple nights later, Claudie followed.

One night it was announced there would be a baptism the very next Sabbath. Might be interesting to find out what that was. When Claudie arrived, the person passing out white robes handed him one. Whoa, a minute! Last time he checked, he was still only in the curiosity mode.

He bolted down the center aisle and through the door. He had covered most of the church yard when he heard pounding footsteps behind him and felt a strong hand grip his arm. It was the evangelist, puffing but determined.

Claudie is a little vague on the particulars of the next hour or so, but he does know that the preacher somehow got him back inside the church and into a robe. Baptized him first, too. Probably a wise move, in light of what had just happened.

When Claudie came up out of the water, he now knew two things about religion. Somehow, during those five or six evangelistic meetings he'd attended, a single-minded flame of resolve that was never to be extinguished had been kindled in the deepest core of his being. No matter what, he was going to be faithful to God.

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At this point, he had no clear idea how to do it; he only knew he would.

The second thing he knew about religion was that from now on he would be going to church on Saturday while everybody else he knew went to church on Sunday.

A few months later, he was drafted into the Army and sent to Ft. Knox for basic training. He left behind a girl he intended to marry. It was important to him that she become an Adventist first. So before he left, Claudie asked his pastor to give her Bible studies. Then he made her promise that she'd write to him in Korea and explain everything she was studying. That way, this boy who didn't even own a Bible could learn, too.

The first Sabbath morning his company fell out for formation, Claudie "disqualified" himself from the Army till sundown. There was no Adventist church on the base, nor, so far as he knew, any other Adventists. But he had noticed several other churches. So he made his way from one to the other until he found one whose door was open. Slipping inside, he picked up a red Gideon Bible from the rack and sat down in a pew. There, this guileless child of God from Kentucky spent the entire day all alone, reading and singing.

This became his pattern for the four months he was in basic training. If one church door was locked, he kept going from church to church until he found one that was open.

Of course, his absence during Saturday morning fallout was noticed and reported, and two officers eventually came to his barracks to question him. When he saw them coming, he got so scared he "didn't hardly have good sense." So he ran down to the basement of the barracks and hid behind the furnace.

It wasn't that he was afraid of what they would do to him. By the same "knowing" that he would be true to God, he knew God would fight his battles for him. No, that wasn't what was worrying Claudie. What he needed was help answering the questions those officers were sure to ask. That's what he was discussing with the Lord behind the furnace.

When he finished praying, he leaned out just far enough so the

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light could shine on his Gideon Bible. It fell open to Matthew 10:28: "And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell."

As he read these words it was as though an electric current passed through his body. Stepping out from behind the furnace, he walked confidently upstairs to meet the officers. They questioned him for 20 minutes and left the barracks. And that's the last he heard of it, even though his sergeant kept turning in complaints.

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**Just as Sabbath
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Just as Sabbath belonged to the Lord, every other day belonged to the U.S. Army. Claudie kept everything inspection-ready at all times. His boots were always shined. His locker was in order, and a quarter thrown on his well-made bunk jumped a yard. He never failed to clean his gun as soon as he fired it.

Claudie always got good points at every inspection. Good points meant special privileges, such as going to the PX every night, and home every weekend that he could afford to. And going to the PX meant working on a way whereby he could afford to go home. Each night he'd buy seven boxes of candy and several cartons of cigarettes to sell the next day to his barracks mates who had failed inspection. By buying for four cents and selling for ten, he made a whole lot more than the government was paying him.

He'd been selling cigarettes for a month or so when his conscience got to bothering him. He couldn't account for it. He was just impressed not to sell them anymore, so he quit.

After basic training, his company shipped out for Korea, stopping over in Japan. Claudie's feet had scarcely touched land when he was in trouble for refusing a direct order. It was Sabbath, and he had to refuse to mop the kitchen floor. So he was hauled off to headquarters to await questioning.

"I won't know how to answer any of the questions they're going to ask me," he confided in another soldier waiting nearby.

"When they take us in," his new friend counseled, "just listen to what I say and you'll know what to do."

Unfortunately, his friend was moved to another section of the jail, leaving Claudie on his own. Two guards came to escort him

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to a cell. Sandwiched between them, Claudie proceeded down the hall. But before they reached the cell, the guards received word that they were to take Claudie by the colonel's office. Before the worried soldier had time to gather his thoughts, a door was opened and he was thrust inside.

There sat the colonel! Poor Claudie was so unnerved he didn't even salute, let alone give his name, rank, and serial number.

"Have a seat," the colonel invited.

Sitting on his bunk later, Claudie tried to remember their conversation, but his mind was blank. The Lord had supplied all the answers. The colonel had dismissed him by saying, "Private English, go back to your bunk. If anybody else bothers you, let me know."

Claudie's first contact with another Adventist soldier came during this layover in Japan. As an infantryman, Claudie had been trained not only to shoot every weapon the Army used, but had also become a sharpshooter. One day a Jehovah's Witness boy he knew asked him what faith he was. Hearing he was a Seventh-day Adventist, he said, "There's another Adventist soldier in our barracks. Want to meet him? I'll go find him."

True to his word, the Jehovah's Witness was back in a few minutes and introduced the two soldiers. While they visited, the other Adventist kept eyeing Claudie's gun.

Finally he blurted, "What are you doing with that gun? Seventh-day Adventists don't carry weapons."

Well, that's the first Claudie had ever heard of that! "How do I get rid of it?" he wanted to know.

"Go over to the officers' quarters, lay the weapon on the counter, and say you won't carry it anymore, that you're giving it up. Then walk away," the Adventist soldier instructed.

So that's what Claudie did. There was all kinds of trouble. The Army insisted that that was what he had been trained for and he would have to do it. They forced him to take the gun back, stating he would have to stay with it.

Knowing he shouldn't carry a weapon bothered Claudie so

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much he couldn't get any peace. Back he went to the officers' quarters.

"You know where you're going, don't you?" the officer shouted. "You're going right up on the front lines! If you want to go up there without a weapon, that's your business."

He was transferred over to tanks. But tanks have to be fired, too. Every day he tried to get help for his situation, but without success. There was no Adventist chaplain, so he sought out the Baptists, the Presbyterians, anyone who might help. By this time, the officers were making it so hard on him he was getting desperate. As a last resort, he decided to visit the Catholic priest.

Overnight Claudie was made a medic and sent to the front lines, not knowing how to do anything beyond putting on a Band-aid. But he learned it quickly, firsthand, as soon as he arrived in Korea.

He told his new officers right away that he would need to be relieved on Fridays about two hours before sundown. They laughed at him as though he was the craziest person they'd ever heard talk, and walked away. Nevertheless, when no replacement showed up that first Friday evening, Claudie walked off the front line.

That's not a healthy thing to do. Soldiers who walk away from the front line can be subject to court martial or even be put before the firing squad.

Once again Claudie asked the Lord to fight his battle for him because he didn't know how. He waited. Nothing happened. Nobody said anything, nobody did anything, for seven weeks. The seventh week they sent a replacement, and for the nine months Claudie served on the front line, a replacement came every Friday two hours before sundown.

It was strange, but the men in his company never harassed Claudie. There was something about him, a childlike transparency, that drew them, made them feel safe in that hellish place. When he knelt down to pray at night, the barracks went dead quiet until he finished.

Before men are sent to the front everything is taken away

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So he fixed the eggs in butter. He even worked out a way of letting Claudie know when anything had lard in it. "As you're going through line, if anything is cooked with lard, we'll shake our heads no," the cook told him. "But if it's OK, we'll shake our heads yes."

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When it got to be just about dark on the battlefield, the men would begin looking for a bunker in which to spend the night. Often, Claudie would crawl into the nearest one of these holes in the ground and fall asleep. The other men would keep hunting until they found him. Sometimes when he woke up, 15 or 20 men would be in there with him. You were safe if you were with Claudie.

Often Claudie's crank radio would ring in the night, summoning him into no-man's-land to pick up wounded. Nobody wanted to go to no-man's-land. If a man didn't let his people know he was going out, he could likely get shot at, not only by the enemy but by his own troops. No, it wasn't a place a man went voluntarily. But when Claudie swung onto the jeep to make his run, he'd look back to see men hanging off every available inch of the vehicle. It was safer in no-man's-land with Claudie than in the foxholes without him.

The time came for him to be sent home, and once again he was called before his officers. "We've called you in to see if you'd be willing to miss this boat and catch the next one in 10 days. If you will, we'll make you a sergeant."

"No, sir," Claudie replied, "I don't care about being a sergeant. Besides, just as soon as I get home I'm getting out of the service. It's my turn, and I'm going."

Once on ship he met another soldier who had left camp right after him. "It sure was good you made the choice you did, Doc, because a mortar round landed on your jeep and tore it to bits. Didn't leave nothing."

Within three years after Claudie returned from Korea, his mother, father, two sisters and two brothers, his wife's mother, her two brothers and sister, and the sister's husband, joined Claudie and his wife in the Adventist church.

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from them—even their watches and calendars. All they have is their clothes, weapons, and dog tags. While the other men devised methods of keeping track of time, Claudie never did. He knew the Lord would let him know when it was Sabbath. On Friday afternoon, men would stick their heads out of their foxholes and call “Another week’s past; here comes Doc!”

Claudie would meet with 35 or 40 other Adventist soldiers for Sabbath services in what was called the two-point zone, 15 miles behind the front lines. After their Sabbath service, they’d eat lunch, then break up into small groups to talk.

One Sabbath Claudie and another soldier, Carlton Freeman, walked three or four miles until they came to a creek. Carlton began telling Claudie what he believed about hell.

“I don’t see it that way,” Claudie said. “I’ve always heard that people in hell will burn forever and ever and ever.”

Carlton didn’t say another word. He just reached into his pocket and pulled out a big piece of paper and some matches. Wadding up the paper, he set it on fire. Both men watched silently until the paper was nothing more than a wisp of smoke.

“Now, Brother English, that’s the way hell is going to be,” Carlton said. “Hell’s going to burn till it burns itself out, then that’s the end. Like smoke arising from paper.”

That’s how Claudie began learning about Bible doctrines.

One Sabbath he went through chow line behind another Adventist soldier. As they began to eat, the soldier said, “That’s pork you’re eating.”

“I know,” Claudie answered between bites.

“Seventh-day Adventists don’t eat pork.”

Claudie stopped in mid chew.

His friend took out his Bible and gave him an on-the-spot Bible study on unclean meats. When he got back to the front lines, word filtered down to the cook that Claudie wasn’t eating pork anymore. But when he even passed up the eggs one morning, the cook asked why.

“Because you fry them in hog grease,” Claudie told him.

“Well, if I fix them in butter will you eat them?”

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Claudie is God's friend. It's a simple, uncomplicated relationship. "In Korea, I could reach out and put my arms around Him anytime I wanted to."

Yes, Claudie is transparent. A person can see right through him to God's throne.