

A Fervent Desire for Peace

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In an unpublished civil war diary, Lieutenant Charles Alley inscribed the following, echoing the sentiments of thousands of other faithful Christians who battled and bled on both sides.

Monday, May 1, 1865 - News of the surrender of General Johnston and his army--and also all the posts in his department, comprising the Carolinas, Georgia and Florida... Soon again with the blessing of our Heavenly Father we will be at home among friends, our swords beaten into plough shares and our spears into pruning hooks, never, I trust, to learn war again. Thank God for peace; may it be lasting and righteous, the evil cause of it being entirely blotted out.

Alley's devout hopes were common to the soldiers of his day. The fervent desire for peace has occupied the thoughts of innumerable warriors through the ages. It is true that few people hate war more than those manning its front lines.

No one resting in the comfort of their home fully comprehends the dread of combat which is often the lot of those who bear arms in their nation's defense. The good news is that God has promised his children that we will one day see the realization of the miracle longed for by Alley.

Occasionally, particular weapons become so closely associated with the military that their very image evokes a strong connection. The crossed sabers of the cavalry, for instance, were not used only during the eighteenth century. They retain their significance for Army 'cavalry' units today, long after the retirement of horses from military ranks.

To students of military history, the weapon most closely associated with the Marine Corps is the kabar. 'Kabar' is the familiar name of a knife which accompanied Marines around the globe during the Second World War. Its muscular build and vicious blade elicit images of fierce hand-to-hand combat.

My father served nearly three decades in the Marine Corps, enlisting in 1946 at the age of seventeen. He stood in awe of the veterans he met who were well acquainted with the kabar. In time he possessed his own, and it accompanied him to subsequent wars. Since his retirement, he gave himself over to more peaceful pursuits.

In his seventies today, he still manages a sizeable garden; but when he first retired, he oversaw a veritable farm. He had rakes and hoes, of course, but it seemed his tool of choice for close combat against the tares, was his trusty kabar. The knife found many peaceful uses, even mixing concrete for retaining walls and other construction projects.

Eventually, soil and stone dulled and scarred his kabar. Peaceful employment transformed it over the years from a knife into a trowel. My father intuitively recognized that in life there are different seasons for different pursuits. When his weapon had completed its military service, it was properly suited for a nonviolent use. Man forms instruments for war. God changes them into tools of peace.

That is at the heart of this promise in the Book of Isaiah. 'Many peoples will come and say, 'Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD-- He will teach us his ways, so that we may walk in his paths...' They will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore' (Isaiah 2:3-4).

Today the world finds itself in the midst of a global war against terrorism. The enemy's cowardly

forces avoid facing an armed adversary, preferring to wage war on the defenseless. And once again, we are vividly reminded of a lasting truth. Only when our Lord returns to usher us into the fullness of his Kingdom, will we be free to lay aside--for all time--the weapons with which we now defend peace.

In the meantime, in my office I have a precious reminder of this comforting Messianic promise. It is a weapon-- turned tool-- now retired.

Robert Stroud is a Lutheran pastor who serves as a chaplain in the United States Air Force. His father, Sergeant Major Charles Stroud, a veteran of Korea and Vietnam, retired from the United States Marine Corps. Charles Alley served in the Fifth Iowa Volunteer Cavalry, the same regiment as Chaplain Stroud's great grandfather.

Stroud hosts a web site in that regiment's honor: www.scriptoriumnovum.com/c.html