

Are You 4F, AWOL, MIA, or a POW?

Last Monday was Memorial Day, a day set-aside by our nation to honor our soldiers who have paid the ultimate price of giving their lives defending our country and its principles. It was not a day to thank living soldiers for their service, that's Veteran's Day (November 11, to commemorate the signing of the armistice which ended hostilities between the Allied Forces and Germany in 1918, WWI). These things got me to thinking...

The word "soldier" does not occur in Paul's letter to the Ephesians (in the NASV), but a good portion of chapter six is filled with the imagery of **armor** and **warfare**. He writes of:

- *"the full armor of God, v.11,13;*
- *"our **struggle**" (or "wrestle" in some versions- to *fight*), v.12;*
- *"loins girded with truth," v.14a; "the breastplate of righteousness," v.14b;*
- feet *"shod with the preparation of the gospel," v.15; and,*
- *"the shield of faith," v.16. And then, of course, there is*
- *"the sword of the Spirit which is the word of God" in v.17.*

So even though the word "soldier" is not present, there is no doubt that being a Christian is supposed to involve us in warfare- a fight against the *"schemes of the devil," v.11*, and *"world forces of darkness"* and *"spiritual forces of wickedness," v.12!* **But does it always? The answer depends on the individual soldier!** For instance...

1. Are you "4F"? This is the military designation given to those "not qualified for service in the Armed forces" because of "physical, mental, or moral" unfitness.

Though *physical* fitness is not nearly as important in the Lord's army as in Uncle Sam's, **mental** and **moral** fitness are vital to the soldier of Christ! Intimate knowledge of the weapon itself, and its capabilities and limitations, is crucial to the proper use of the *"sword of the Spirit, which the word of God"!*

Heb. 5:12 highlights the importance of good training with the *sword* in preparation of its proper use, *"For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you have need again for some one to teach you the elementary principles of the oracles of God...."* Thus, **mental** fitness is important for the soldier of Christ- but, so too, **moral** fitness is required.

Note 2Tim.2:21 in this regard, *"Therefore, if a man cleanses himself from these things, he will be a vessel for honor, sanctified, useful to the Master, prepared for every good work."* The *"things"* from which Paul urges us to cleanse ourselves are further clarified in the context as *"wrangling about words," "worldly and empty chatter," "ungodliness," "wickedness," and "youthful lusts," v.14,16,19,22*. Given these things, are you "4F," or **physically, mentally, and morally** fit for service in the Lord's army?

2. Are you "AWOL"? This is the military designation for those who are "absent without leave." It means they left their post and/or duties without permission to do so. This is a problem in the Lord's army too!

On a local level, the church is plagued by AWOL members who think nothing of absenting themselves for weeks at a time from the assembly, and its fellowship and duties, without a word to anyone. If questioned about it, they sometimes bristle and become indignant at the question, or pass it off with something along the lines of, "Oh, we've been really busy lately." Can you image an infantryman explaining his being AWOL that way?

No one is suggesting that local church members need some sort of advanced "permission" to be out of town for business or pleasure. But at the same time, shouldn't members feel some

sense of obligation to their local church families? And wouldn't advanced notice prevent Shepherds and fellow-members from unnecessary concern?

What happens to our responsibilities to *assemble* with one another for *worship*, and to *teach*, *admonish*, and *encourage* one another when we choose to be AWOL for weeks at a time? Do we expect God and our brethren to just "suspend" our responsibilities because we prefer to be somewhere else doing something else? Please consider that:

- Neglect of duties/privileges that we're supposed to do *together* ("wait for one another") can leave us spiritually *weak*, *sick*, or *dead*, 1Cor.10:16-17; 11:18-34.
- We're supposed to *encourage one another* and *worship* together, Eph.5:18-21.
- We're also commanded to *draw near*, *hold fast*, and *stimulate* one another, Heb.10:19-29. Interestingly, one of the definitions for *egkatalieipo* {eng·kat·al·i·po}, translated as *to "forsake"* by the NASB, is *to leave behind among*, *to leave surviving*. This seems to suggest a military comparison to abandoning a fellow soldier on the battlefield that is wounded, but still alive.

3. Are you "MIA"? This is the military designation for those who are "missing in action."

I suppose the correlation this case would be comparable to church member being away from his own "regiment" (local fellowship), but still working for the Cause. That is, he may not be with his own congregation, but he is assembling with and encouraging others wherever he is to be "*strong in the faith*."

Is this the attitude you have when away from home- to find brethren that you can help to strengthen and encourage with your presence and participation? Or, is it more along the lines of, "I'll go somewhere for worship if it's not too far and I'm not too busy or tired"? The first one is MIA- the second is probably just AWOL!

But for some in the Lord's church, "MIA" could also refer to:

- Minimum Interest Altitude- just not interested in *soaring* to new heights or *overcoming* anything, Thess.4:1,10;
- Minimum Input Attitude, Mal.1:12-14; "What's the *least* I can do?"
- Minimum Individual Activity- contributes only the bare minimum of time, energy, and resources to the Cause, Matt.6:33ff. Therefore, he/she is often...
- Missing In Assembly, Acts 2:42,46; and
- Mostly In-Active, 1Cor.15:58!

4. Are you a "POW"? This is the military designation for those who are "prisoners of war." Unfortunately, in *physical* and *spiritual* wars, there are captives.

There are some who, despite their efforts to "fight the enemy," fall prey and are captured as POWs. They become *entangled in the defilements of the world* and the *affairs of this life* and are *overcome*, cf. 2Tim.2:4,26; 2Pet.2:20.

In short, they are *overrun* by sin, Heb.12:2; or *caught/captured by trespasses*, Gal.6:1.

Is this you? Are you a POW? If so, you're supposed to have fellow soldiers out diligently searching for and rescuing you, Gal.6:1ff; Heb.12:12,13,15!

Conclusion: It is good to remember and honor those who have fought and died to defend us, and protect our ability to worship and serve God without fear. But let's not use that hard-won freedom to become complacent or neglectful of our duties as *soldiers in the Lord's Army*!