

# Are We Ready for Battle?

By Dan Adler

The second war in Iraq put the reality of war and military strategy in the faces of all of us. Unless you're in the military or are a war buff, it's probably not the kind of stuff that you spend a lot of time thinking about in times of peace. But the daily barrage of news reporting almost made experts out of the average observer. In the news coverage, there was much attention given to the U.S.'s military superiority with its' technological advancements achieved since the first Gulf War. There were those unmanned drone planes and those massive "bunker busters". There were precision guided missiles and smart bombs, satellite guidance, better tanks and mobile communication. In the realm of war technology, it was pretty impressive stuff.

But what was even more impressive, was the incredible support and coordinated efforts among the different armed services. The Special Forces, The Marines, the Air Force, the Army and the Navy operated in unprecedented coordination, communication and support of a central plan. The Special Forces went in ahead of the war when they could and dropped in behind enemy lines to help forge a plan and penetrate the enemy's infrastructure. The Air Force worked with a massive air campaign to bomb strategic sites and clear the way for the Marines and Army ground troops. The Marines cleared mines and built "insty-bridges" to cross over where real bridges had been blown up. The Navy provided transportation and landing strips for planes and other troops. The Navy also brought in the much needed supplies, which were then delivered to the troops on the battlefield through ground carriers. All the generals and military personnel were in close communication with each other so that strategy could be adjusted and reinforcements could be sent where needed. The wounded were brought to the medics and taken to where they could be attended to and could heal. Those taken captive were noted and not abandoned but sought after and rescued when possible. And through this coordinated effort a quick initial victory was brought.

Now this is just a human war. Everyone's got different opinions about what they think about it. But no matter what your opinion of the war itself, it's hard to deny that, as far as wars go, it was well executed, at least at first, from the United State's perspective.

But the Bible says that Christians are in a spiritual war. The military metaphors in the New Testament abound. We are to think and function as a part of God's military forces fighting against the forces of evil. We are called to be more than conquerors. We are called to set captives free and push back the gates of hell. We are fighting against a powerful and hideous foe that Martin Luther calls "The Prince of darkness, grim". The state of the world and the quality of life on earth and the eternal destiny of souls are what is at stake in this battle.

Yet, as I've pondered this latest war, I can't help but compare how the Christian spiritual army called the Church, functions in stark contrast in the way it conducts it's spiritual battle.

As we fight this spiritual battle, there are virtually no lines of communication between branches of service (denominations, ethnic groups, church and para-church groups). Many of those entities have a major focus of their energies and resources directed instead of building up the whole military, to building up their own entity. Then from platoon to platoon, there are also virtually no lines of strategic communication. Many of those platoons actually function as if they are the army and they can win the war on their own! And they too spend much of their energies in building up their own platoon while sometimes ignoring, looking down on or actually shooting at the others.

With the lack of strategic communication between the branches of service and platoons, reinforcements are seldom ever sent to those who have been wounded in battle. In this mode, there are no supply lines because either those with the supply don't have any idea of the need of the others because of the lack of communication, or they are hoarding what they have because they are focused on building up their own battalion or platoon and don't care about the rest.

Commanders and Generals tend to function with indifference, competition or distrust of other commanders and generals. So each unit has it's own completely independent strategy, training and supply or lack of it. Many of these leaders are so weary from fighting the battle without reinforcement, ample supplies and training, that they can't even find energy to consider the big picture

And with this "McHale's Navy" approach to war, friendly fire is a constant reality on the battlefield. Many units on the front lines get completely wiped out. Other units are farther from the enemy fire, well supplied and building up their own entities without even knowing the need on the front lines. Platoons lacking supplies and reinforcements exhaust their troops and lose ground while other platoons don't even enter the battle and spend their time celebrating the victory.

Some skirmishes are won. Some captives are freed. Some ground is gained. But great battles are lost. Great territory is given up and countless souls are taken captive because this military will not work together. The contrast of what battles are won versus what could be won is almost too great to consider.

But most alarming of all in this chaotic picture of this Christian military, is the almost complete blindness to the chaos and ineptness of the situation that the commanders, generals and soldiers have. We know there's a battle to be fought. We know the enemy is powerful and cunning and well-supplied. But we go on in our independent, uncooperative, blindly ambitious efforts to fight the battle on our own.

But as always, the biggest question is, "So what can we do about it?" And that's the hardest one to answer. None of us have a history of the kind of cooperation in the Church that we need. We've never seen it and in fact, we've never seen anything close to it. So I don't believe we're even at a place to begin to strategize about it. I think the big step to get to first, like AA says, is to admit we have a problem. We need to admit it and embrace the reality in such a way that we start by humbling ourselves before God and

admitting our failure. We have to begin to see the urgency of the problem as being even bigger than our own individual problems in our organizations. And we have to start to cry out to God to do a radical change in us. We need a new history with a whole new pattern and way of waging this spiritual war. I don't know how to get there from here, but I know God does and I feel convinced that the way we function now, is nowhere near what God has called us to. If you haven't already, will you pick up the burden with us and begin to pray for a move of God among us like we've never seen? God is able if we are willing.