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Ex-Marine goes to war against the enemies of Christian values

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On the wall by the door of his office hangs an AK-47 with fixed bayonet. An American flag stands sentinel by a window. Above the mantle rests a portrait of him in full dress uniform, his chest full of medals, flanked by the official seals of the U.S. Navy and U.S. Marine Corps.

It's a soldier's room.

But stacks of legal briefs and case files and a library of law books speak of another purpose.

Though retired Marine Corps Reserve Col. Ron Ray is accustomed to battle, in the past few years, the 58-year-old Crestwood, Ky., attorney has fought a different kind of war. He's fought for traditional values and Christian principles—for a ban on women in combat and homosexuals in the military, for the right of American citizens to hang the Ten Commandments on the walls of public buildings.

please see COL. RAY
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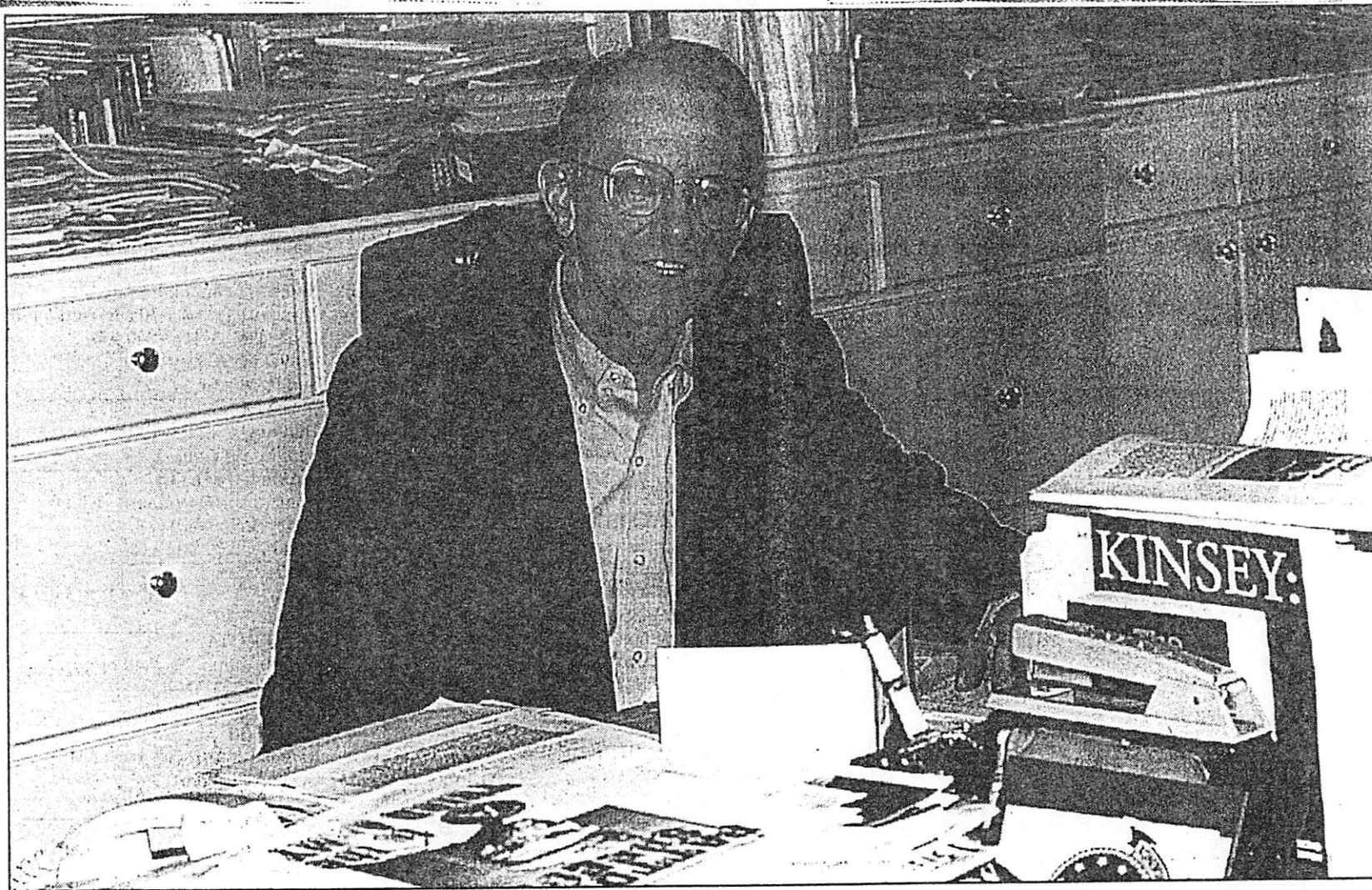


PHOTO BY NINIE O'HARA

Col. Ron Ray stands guard over American rights protected by the Constitution and based on the Christian beliefs of the founding fathers.

Ray finds his country facing another kind of battle

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His battlefield has been the courtroom; his weapons a keen legal mind, a fierce patriotism and an abiding faith in his Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

"My friends know how passionate I am about what I believe," said the Louisville native with a grin. "They know I am frequently in error, but never in doubt."

Battle cry

It was, perhaps, predictable. When World War II was declared, his father joined the Navy, even though he was a 36-year-old pharmacist with a family. His grandfather had been an Army doctor. Several uncles had been Marines.

Still, the boy growing up in St. Matthews never dreamed of a career in the military. For one thing, all his military relatives were citizen soldiers. When America was at war, they served with distinction. Then they came back home, hung up their uniforms, put away their medals and their weapons, and took up their civilian lives again.

And just as important, Ray's boyhood ambition was far more glamorous—and less dangerous—than hand-to-hand combat in a jungle. He wanted to be a shortstop for the New York Yankees.

But all that changed the summer after his senior year at Waggener High School. Home sick with the flu, Ray read a book that transformed his life. The book was the Leon Uris classic tale of World War II Marines called *Battle Cry*.

"Maybe it was because I was sick," he said thoughtfully, "or because I got to read it all at once with no distractions. I don't know for sure. All I do know is that the book went straight into me. It went right into my heart."

He recalled the stories his Army doctor uncle had told about wounded Marines brought to him for treatment—about their great spirit and lack of self-pity. That spirit came alive for Ray in *Battle Cry*.

"On Aug. 7, 1960, two weeks before I was to leave for my freshman year at Centre College, I went down to the Marine Corps recruiting station. They gave me the test—and made sure I passed it!—and administered the Marine oath on the spot. I was 17 years old at the time."

Ray's military service obligation at that point was simple: He had to make good grades at Centre and survive two summer sessions of Marine Corps boot camp. In exchange, he would be commis-

sioned a Marine second lieutenant upon graduation, with a three-year commitment to the Corps.

The feather merchant

What had sounded exotic and exciting to the 17-year-old who proudly swore the Marine oath began to sound more and more intimidating as the time neared for his first six weeks of basic training at Quantico, Va. He wasn't comforted by how fellow Marine recruits described the training: "They can kill ya, but they won't eat ya."

Quickly dubbed a "feather merchant" because of his slight build, he became the smallest soldier in a 48-man platoon made up largely of six-foot former football players.

"The Corps teaches that it's not the size of the man in the fight that matters," he said, "but the size of the fight in the man."

Somehow the 140-pound out-of-shape teenager didn't fall victim to the boot camp's 40 percent failure rate. The six weeks completely altered the course of the rest of his life.

"I was a different person after that summer," he said. "Except for the change in me that came from my conversion to Jesus Christ, that was the most profound change in my life."

He didn't fit in at Centre when he went back to school in the fall. He couldn't relate to fraternity parties anymore. He felt like a man in a boy's world.

After graduation with a bachelor's in English and psychology in June 1964, he was commissioned a second lieutenant. Trained as a platoon leader, Ray felt like he'd come home. He identified with the Corps' values of virtue, honor and patriotism, and set his sights on a career in the military.

Getting shot at

Three years later, he and another second lieutenant were reporting for duty to a new commanding officer when the officer asked brusquely: "Which of you two lieutenants hasn't unpacked yet?"

"He was going to send one of us somewhere. We flipped a coin, and I got the orders to ship out. To this day, I don't know if I won or lost."

In short order, the still "wet-behind-the-ears" second lieutenant found himself the platoon leader for 44 veteran Marines charged with defending the American embassy and American property in a speck on the map called Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic.

"We landed by helicopter on a

golf course in the pouring rain," Ray remembered. "The flagsticks were still in the holes. The rakes were still in the sand traps. If I'd brought my clubs, I could have hopped out of the chopper and played 18 holes. It sure didn't look like Guadacanal."

He and his men took a taxi to the American Embassy, which historians would later discover was never under direct attack. The building simply had the misfortune of being located between two warring factions of insurgents.

But when the Marines were fired upon, they had the direct authority of then-President Lyndon Johnson to "ignore the rules of engagement and shoot back."

They did. Thirty days later, the Marines left Santo Domingo with 62 casualties, 56 wounded and six dead.

"It was the first time I ever got shot at," Ray said. "But it wasn't the last."

Ordered then to Fort Bragg, N.C., to learn how to speak Vietnamese, he was soon deployed as an advisor in warfare training to the South Vietnamese Marine Corps.

Ray saw the devastation of real war in Vietnam. He fought for his life as fellow soldiers fell around him. He watched friends die, and he learned he could kill.

In 1968, he was due to ship out for home. Just three hours away from his flight, he "thought for the first time that I really was going to make it out of there alive."

Instead, his departure was interrupted, and he was sent to direct three battalions of Vietnamese Marines in a raging battle in the old capital city of Hue.

Something happened during that battle that Ray never forgot.

"It was hard for me to believe, but I watched Walter Cronkite—the most trusted man in America—tell lies about what was going on and what we were doing there. Outright lies! Something was wrong with that. Something was very, very wrong."

I regret to inform you...

After his return to the United States, Ray took the assignment that would signal the end of his active military career. As the head of a Marine Corps recruiting office in Albuquerque, N.M., one of his duties was to make "casualty calls."

"We had to go out and tell families that their son or brother or husband had been killed," he said. "And we had to get there before the telegram because the Corps believed a Marine ought to tell the family. When they saw us in dress blues, they knew it was bad news."

Ray once had to tell a high school

English teacher that her son had been killed. He called her out of the classroom into the hall, and when she heard the news, "she screamed and screamed and screamed. I can still hear those screams."

Making casualty calls was "the one thing the Marine Corps had not trained me for, and I was not equipped to do it," he said. "I was totally inadequate to deal with it. I had no spiritual resources at all."

Oh, Ray knew there was a God, "but that fact didn't factor into my life," he said. He had heard the Word preached as a boy; he was what he called "well-churched."

Confirmed and sprinkled at age 12, by age 14 he had stopped going to church entirely.

"The Marine Corps was my religion," he said simply. "It was enough ... until we started burying guys I had recruited."

And so it was that the young Marine with four rows of decorations—a career's worth of recognition and success—stood for two hours in front of a post office with his letter of resignation in his hand. Finally, he slipped it into the slot and set out on another road in life.

Ray came home to Louisville, was accepted to the University of Louisville School of Law and graduated second in his class.

He joined a prestigious law firm, and got a reserve commission as a colonel in the U.S. Marine Corps Reserve.

But something was eating at him.

Hazardous to your health

"I wanted answers, so I went looking for God in a serious way."

He began going from church to church, searching in vain for the real faith the buildings represented.

"I think there ought to be a warning label like the one on packages of cigarettes: 'Warning, looking for God in a serious way can be hazardous to your health.' Because when I started looking for God, Satan came gunning for me."

His life functioned well, he said, as long as he was "in the enemy camp," but as soon as he sought God, the counterattack was swift and deadly.

"I'd married in 1965 and had two little girls. Before I knew what hit me, I was getting a divorce. Everything started falling apart around me."

Shortly after Ray's divorce, Ronald Reagan was elected president, and Ray was assigned as a deputy assistant to the Secretary of Defense—the civil equivalent of a three-star general.

But he soon learned that life in the Pentagon involved what he called "a

verticle learning curve."

"It's like asking for a drink of water, and they turn a fire hose on you. They speak a foreign language of acronyms to keep outsiders out."

Writing speeches about "God and country," Ray figured he'd better get a Bible. He began reading it, a King James Version he got on sale.

Back in Louisville after his stint in Washington, he entered into politics. After declining a request to run for the U.S. Senate against Wendell Ford, he agreed to take charge of fund-raising for presidential candidate George Bush in Kentucky. He raised \$1.3 million.

But he was still seeking God, going on retreats at Gethsemane Monastery in Nelson County, and looking for and finally joining a church.

Thirty days after he joined the Catholic church, someone recommended he contact Eunice Sears to help him raise the remaining \$600,000 for the Bush campaign.

"She came at me with a Bible in her hand!" he said, of the woman he married in November 1989. "She showed me how to read the Bible as a book of governance and a book of law. She introduced me to Jesus Christ as my Lord and Savior."

On the offensive for Jesus

In 1990, he and Eunice started the Christian Cabinet of Kentucky, an organization formed to stand up for spiritual values in public affairs and to defend biblical principles in government.

It was then that Ray first heard about the works of Christian historian David Barton.

"I got Barton's *America's Godly Heritage* and watched just a little of it before I stopped the tape. I was stunned. I thought, 'I finished second in my class in law school, and I don't know any of this!'"

A month later, a two-star general recommended Ray's wife, Eunice, as a member of the Defense Advisory Committee on Women in the Services—a committee charged with recommending whether or women should serve in combat.

Ray went to Washington to support his wife—knowing in his heart that Deut. 22:5 was "clear as a bell" in forbidding women in combat.

Discussing the subject with a friend in the military, the soldier looked at him and said, "If you think that's bad, wait until you see what other shoe is going to drop."

The other shoe was homosexuals in the military, which his friend, Gen. Colin Powell told him was "inevitable."

That's when Ray decided to write a book warning the military what was coming at them, "to give men of honor ammunition to fight" More than 25,000 copies of the book, *Military Necessity and Homosexuality*, were printed and sent to every line officer in the military.

"It couldn't be more simple," Ray said. "The first principle of military service is that we are to guard against and suppress immoral character. Having gays in the military breaks that principle."

Ray made the rounds of talk radio shows, and appeared on *Larry King Live* promoting his view, but in 1993 the "don't ask, don't tell" principle was adopted regarding homosexuals in military service.

By that time, Ray believed God was calling him to go on the offensive, to look for places to fight for biblical morality. In 1994, he closed his law practice and opened a public interest law firm in Crestwood, Ky.

"I prayed for five weeks—then I got a call from the family of a soldier in Germany named Michael New."

New objected to being forced to wear a United Nations uniform, asserting that he had joined the U.S. Army and "would not wear the flag, the badge or the uniform of another country."

Though the soldier was found guilty of insubordination and given a bad conduct discharge, his defense of New put the lawyer on the front page of the *Wall Street Journal* and earned him a call from ABC's anchorman, Peter Jennings.

The next command

Ray had become so well known as an advocate of traditional values and biblical principles that when three eastern Kentucky counties were sued in November 1999 by the American Civil Liberties Union for hanging the Ten Commandments in public buildings, he was hired as the lead attorney to plead their case.

The case went before U.S. District Court Judge Jennifer Coffman in May 2000, and she ordered the

documents removed. "I call what I do now guerilla law," Ray said. "I show up where they don't want to let me in. I go where people don't want to hear that America was founded as a Christian nation and that those principles are worth fighting for. I'm still a Marine, and Marines are always the first to hit the beaches in a war."