

Retired General Recruits Soldiers for Spiritual Army

Former Army officer Jerry Boykin says Christians need to get off the pews and put on their armor.



[] Lt. Gen. Jerry Boykin knows how it feels to be under fire.

The retired military man has participated in almost all of the United States' special operations since 1979, including Desert One, the failed 1979 mission to rescue American hostages held in Iran after the Islamic revolution that toppled the shah.

He led the invasions of Grenada and Panama in 1983 and 1989 respectively, accepted the surrender of Manuel Noriega and headed the chase to capture Colombian drug czar Pablo Escobar in 1992. In 1993, he clashed with Muslim warlord Osman Atto in Somalia, chronicled in the film *Black Hawk Down*.

But after a 36-year military career Boykin is encouraging Christians to stay vigilant in a different kind of battle. "We are involved in a battle, whether people realize it or not," Boykin told *Charisma*. "Being a Christian is not a matter of getting saved, then sitting fat and happy with it. There is a spiritual war going on, and people need to get off their pews, put on their armor and get into the battle."

Since he retired from the Army in 2007, Boykin has traveled extensively on behalf of the ministry he founded, Kingdom Warriors. He said the organization, which he leads with Stu Weber, senior pastor of Good Shepherd Community Church in Portland, Ore., encourages Christians not to become spiritually lethargic—a lesson he learned from personal experience.

At the height of his career, while serving as deputy undersecretary of defense for intelligence at the Pentagon, Boykin was tasked with finding such fugitives as Osama bin

Laden. But his military duties were overshadowed by a controversy that erupted at home.

Appearing at a Florida church in 2006 wearing dress uniform and spit-polished boots, he declared that radical Islamists hated the United States "because we are a Christian nation, because our foundation and our roots are Judeo-Christian."

Later, he proclaimed, "We are the army of God, in the house of God, the kingdom of God have been raised for such a time as this."

Discussing the battle against Atto, Boykin told another audience: "I knew my God was bigger than his. I knew that my God was a real God and his was an idol."

On at least one occasion, in Sandy, Ore., Boykin said of President Bush: "He's in the White House because God put him there."

After Boykin's comments casting the war on terrorism in religious terms appeared in the media, both President Bush and Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld publicly denounced Boykin, insisting that the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan were not religious conflicts and that the general's comments did not reflect the view of the administration.

He was called a national embarrassment, a religious fanatic and a three-star bigot. Congressmen and senators demanded that he be fired. Later, he was linked to the prison scandal at Abu Ghraib, an accusation he denies.

"I can't tell you how many times I went home during those days and just went into my bedroom, shut the door, got down on my knees by my bed and asked: 'Why, Lord? I can't take this anymore,'" Boykin said.

"That's when God spoke to me, when I was at my lowest, and ... told me the same thing He told David in the book of Psalms: 'Get up off your knees! Get your armor on and get back into the fight.' That's when I knew I was going to be OK."

Instead of being beaten, Boykin requested and was granted an investigation by the Pentagon's inspector general, which soon exonerated him for his actions.

"I was nothing more than an easy target, a convenient way for the media to get back at President Bush and Secretary Rumsfeld for the war in Iraq," said Boykin, who recounts the controversy in a new book, *Never Surrender: A Soldier's Journey to the Crossroads of Faith and Freedom*. "I am certain that neither the president or Secretary Rumsfeld ever heard what I said. They were simply responding in a way they were told to by a group of assistants and handlers that surround them.

"I know what the real fight was about," he added, "and I kept my faith."

Boykin said the experience has made him all the more vigilant about two things: fighting militant Islam and urging Christians to become warriors in God's kingdom. "Christians need to build an army to fight that [spiritual] battle," he said. "I want to make people, wherever I find them, to be aware of the very real nature of this battle and give them the tools to fight it effectively." **—Michael W. Michelsen Jr.**