

The Significance of Cromwell's Soldiers' Pocket Bible

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According to the historical records, Oliver Cromwell's soldiers were provided with a small pocket Bible (Congressional 1022). This particular version of the pocket Bible was quite unique. *Cromwell's Soldiers' Pocket Bible*, also known as *The Soldier's Pocket Bible* or *Cromwell's Soldier's Bible*, was carried by the soldiers of Oliver Cromwell's Commonwealth army during the First English Civil War (Bremer 548). In 1643, *The Soldiers' Pocket Bible* was first issued to Cromwell's army and was put in general use among soldiers (Edmund 2). The pocket Bible was an octavo booklet with a dimension of $5\frac{1}{2} \times 3$ " or 136×78 mm (Daniell 471). In comparison, it was about the size and thickness of a 20th-century international traveling passport. *The Soldier's Pocket Bible* was composed of just 16 pages which contained 150 verse quotations from the Geneva Bible (Edmund). For its relevance at the time, the pocket Bible was intended to inspire the morale of Cromwell's soldiers during battles. Non or less, *The Soldiers' Pocket Bible* was significant to those who were involved.

The pocket Bible contains 150 verses that were organized into sixteen selections (Daniell 471). Cromwell helped select some of the verses, but the editing of *The Soldier's Pocket Bible* was supervised by Edmund Calamy (Waylen 300). In his early life, Edmund Calamy (February 1600 – 29 October 1666) was an English Presbyterian church leader and divine (*Memoirs of the Puritans*). Known as "the elder", he was the first of four generations of nonconformist minister bearing the same name. The Calamy family claimed to be of Huguenot descent. During his Presbyterian activist time, Edmund Calamy was an influential evangelical preacher, calling in December 1641 for a preaching ministry throughout England (Hill 1974, 25). He was an active member in the Westminster Assembly of divines in 1643. In that year he edited the *Soldier's Pocket*

Bible (Hill 1974, 25). Calamy did not support Congregationalism, but he found within Presbyterianism a middle ground that best suited his views of theology and church government. He opposed the execution of King Charles I and lived quietly under the Commonwealth. Asked for advice by Oliver Cromwell on the dissolution of the Rump Parliament and the establishment of a Protectorate, he replied that “nine out of ten would oppose it” (Hill 1984, 182).

The Soldier's Pocket Bible was an octavo booklet (Daniell, 471). Octavo, a Latin word meaning “in eighth” or “for the eighth time” is a technical term describing the format of a book, which refers to the size of leaves produced from folding a full sheet of paper on which multiple pages of text were printed to form the individual sections of a book. An octavo is a book or pamphlet made up of one or more full sheets on which 16 pages of text were printed, which were then folded three times to produce eight leaves. Each leaf of an octavo book represents one-eighth the size of the original sheet. Other common book formats are folios and quartos. *Octavo* is also used as a general description of the *size* of books that are about 8 to 10 inches or 200 to 250 millimeters tall being close to A4 paper size (Beal, 1450–2000). It does not necessarily indicate the actual printing format of the books. There are many variations in how octavos were produced. The actual size of an octavo book depends on the size of the full sheet of paper on which it was printed. The size of the sheets varied in different localities and times. For example, a sixteenth-century octavo printed in France or Italy is about the size of a modern cheap paperback, whereas an eighteenth-century octavo printed in England is larger, about the size of a modern hardcover novel (McKerrow, 28). Following the same format, *The Soldier's Pocket Bible* was printed at a much smaller size of $5\frac{1}{2} \times 3$ ” or 136×78 mm for the sake of compactness (Daniell, 471).

Cromwell's military success was mostly due to the training of his soldiers. Cromwell's military-style relied on impact rather than firepower. His tactic followed a common practice of

ranging his cavalry in three ranks and pressing forward (Woolrych 117–118). His strengths were the ability to lead and train his men, and his moral authority. Thus, *The Souldiers Pocket Bible* was used for religious inspiration and to help influence good morals and rigid discipline. This pocket Bible was usually buttoned on the inside of the waistcoat, placed near the heart, and under the soldier's outer coat. The placement was meant to not hinder the movements of the soldier (Congressional 1022). English Puritan church leader Richard Baxter once mentioned a story of one of Cromwell's soldiers whose life was saved by carrying a copy of *The Souldiers Pocket Bible* near his heart; a bullet fired at him became lodged into the pamphlet instead of his heart (Waylen 300). Before Cromwell's soldiers went into battle, they would pray and sing religious songs from the Book of Psalms. Some of the verses in *The Souldiers Pocket Bible* were:

Psalms 44: 6 - I doe not trust in my Bow, neither can my Sword save me.

Psalms 33: 16 - A King is not saved by the multitude of a Hoste, neither is the mighty man delivered by much strength.

Psalms 46: 4 - God is our hope and strength, and help, in trouble ready to be found.

According to Cromwell, his soldiers (the “Ironsides”) never lost a battle after *The Souldiers Pocket Bible* was issued to them in 1643 (Preface to *The Soldier's pocket Bible*, 2).

Till now, there are only two copies of *The Soldier's Pocket Bible* 1643 edition. The London copy was presented by George III to the British Museum (Stock 3). The only other 1643 copy is found in the United States and was once owned by the 19th-century book collector George Livermore (Waylen 300; Congressional 1022). The work was reissued in 1693 with the title *The Christian Soldier's Penny Bible* (Stock 3; Beal, 114). The British Museum has the only copy of the 1693 version that still exists. This version is similar to *The Souldiers Pocket Bible* except for changes to some of the "Headers" and minor alterations in the text. Most versions after 1643 used

the King James Version of the Bible rather than the Geneva Bible text, except for the 1861 version (Congressional 1022).

In 1854, George Livermore, an American book collector from Cambridgeport, Massachusetts, discovered a copy of *The Soldier's Pocket Bible* (Congressional 1022). In 1861 Riverside Press reprinted one hundred copies of the 1643 text in facsimile for Livermore. This was the time of the American Civil War. The American Tract Society printed *The Soldier's Pocket Bible* in large numbers to serve as a religious manual for the Northern troops. About fifty thousand copies of *The Soldier's Pocket Bible* were reprinted for the troops at that time (Fry 3). One of these copies (1861) can be found at Houston Baptist University's Dunham Bible Museum.

The Souldiers Pocket Bible was the first of the shortened Bible versions that became popular for distribution to troops by military authorities and use by individuals for personal guidance and inspiration. In a war fought mostly by amateurs, elements such as these pocket Bibles were significant and are likely to have contributed to the discipline of soldiers. Whether or not *The Souldiers Pocket Bible* truly impacted the results of wars, it is certain that this pocket Bible was important to the individuals that were involved.

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