

"May This Keep You Safe From Harm"
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A Heart-Shield Bible is not just a shield against bullets; it is a shield of faith. Made to fit in a soldier's uniform pocket and plated with a metal cover, this specific version of the New Testament was advertised to help protect a soldier's heart from enemy bullets on the World War II battlefield. The comforting words, "May this keep you safe from harm," were also etched into the front cover of the small Bibles that were given to World War II soldiers by their family and other loved ones.

Stories dating back to the American Civil War have been told about Bibles saving soldiers from dying, but it wasn't until the second world war broke out that people began putting a metal plate on the front cover of the soldiers' Bibles. The Know Your Bible Company created some of the earliest versions and covered their Bibles with a gold-plated steel cover, including the one that belonged to James Scott Cummings, a captain during World War II.

Unfortunately not much can be found out about Captain Cummings' particular Bible, other than what can be seen through the display case. Its cover is tarnished and worn to the point that it is difficult to make out the inscription on the front cover, showing both its age and, most likely, its use.

However Captain Cummings was not the only one to have a Heart-Shield Bible. Other men, such as George E. Ferris, carried their Bibles with them to war. Like most of the stories passed down since then, Ferris' Bible saved his life, with the help of a spoon:

I was sitting in front of my fox hole and watching the next hill with a pair of binoculars from a German officer. I guess the sun must have reflected from them because the next thing I knew it felt as if something had hit me in the stomach hard...I rolled back on the other side of the

fox hole in a small depressed place, pulled up my shirt and it looked as if someone had run a broom stick through it but I don't remember any pain, (but pain is easily forgotten).¹

Ferris is taken off the field by stretcher and then transported to a field hospital that was set up in a two-story building. He was never sure how long it took for him to arrive at the hospital or how long after that until he was operated on, but it wasn't until he was about to be transferred to another hospital in England that he finally learned what had happened to him.

The first thing they showed me was the Bible that my oldest sister sent me with a metal shield on the front inscribed 'May this keep you safe from harm'. There was a bullet hole in it. The spoon that I had in my field jacket also had a hole. The medics said that the bullet evidently went through the metal shield and hit the spoon behind, it went through the spoon and the curvature of the spoon deflected the bullet because the bullet had been slowed enough so it went across my body through rib, liver, lower lobe of lungs, and out the other side instead of through my heart.²

Ferris was saved by a Heart-Shield Bible and a spoon. The Bible didn't stop the bullet – it didn't even deflect it – but it slowed the projectile enough that when the bullet hit the spoon that was behind it, the utensil's curve directed the deadly projectile away from the man's heart and out his back.

"[The doctors] were amazed," Ferris said. They had a right to be. A man had been spared death by a piece of gold-plated steel and an eating utensil.

¹ Ferris, George E. "May This Keep You Safe From Harm". *87th Infantry Division Legacy, Association*. Web. 2/15/2013.

² Ferris, George E. "May This Keep You Safe From Harm". *87th Infantry Division Legacy, Association*. Web. 2/15/2013.

However the Heart-Shield Bible does not just protect soldiers' hearts from physical dangers like bullets and other men. Like all other Bibles, it is there to guide and protect men from the unseen enemy, although that is a harder job to accomplish on a battlefield, especially for the soldiers that fought against the Germans in 1940's Europe.

Private First Class Robert W. Crook understood the difficulty of trying to keep faith in a world consumed with war. In a letter he wrote to his father on May 6, 1945, Crook tells his father of how he and his partner Bauman tried to rescue three men from a burning tank. They were able to rescue two from the tank before another shell struck, however Crook's partner was killed and one of the tankers died a few hours after being rescued.

"I guess you'll feel proud of me," Crook writes to his father, "and maybe I should be, but I can't. I lost so much more than I gained. I lost a friend, and no recognition, no medals, can make up for that."³ The feeling of loss during war is inescapable, and it is easy for men to let that loss overwhelm them and make them hopeless. It is this hopelessness that the Heart-Shield Bible is there to protect the soldiers from. They serve as a reminder that not all of the attacks aimed at them will be physical and that they should not lose faith, even in the face of death and grief.

Crook realized this too. He goes on to tell his father that he'll, ...never forget the thanks we all owe to the Lord. He has given me strength, and courage, and confidence. I'm sorry that sometimes my fear was stronger than my faith...God gave us courage and strength that night to save that fellow's life. But, if we had never left our holes, Bauman would probably be here today. Why wasn't it me? Why is it he was killed and I wasn't? I don't know the answer to that. The Lord does, and it was His will that I live, and I can't question that.⁴

³ Crooks, Robert W. Letter to his father. May 6, 1945. TS

⁴ Crooks, Robert W. Letter to his father. May 6, 1945. TS

Even after being put through the death of his friend and being injured himself, Crook refuses to let go of his faith in God and his plan. He relies on him instead and continues to believe that even his friend's death will mean something in God's plan.

The Heart-Shield Bible serves as a reminder of the same faith that Crook has. By standing in front of the soldiers' hearts, protecting them from bullets and reminding them of the promises of God, the Heart-Shield Bible is transformed from just another protective measure into the Armor of God.

Works Cited

Crooks, Robert W. Letter to his father. May 6, 1945. TS
Ferris, George E. "May This Keep You Safe From Harm". *87th Infantry Division Legacy Association*. Web. 2/15/2013.