

# **Bible citations will be taken off weapons: Military contractor put codes on gun sights**

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After a firestorm of complaints arose from both believers and atheists, a Michigan military contractor said it will remove encoded scripture references on the gun sights it builds for the U.S. military.

“Trijicon has proudly served the U.S. military for more than two decades, and our decision to offer to voluntarily remove these references is both prudent and appropriate,” said Stephen Bindon, president and CEO of Trijicon Inc., based in Wixom, Michigan, in a January 21 statement.

“We want to thank the Department of Defense for the opportunity to work with them and will move as quickly as possible to provide the modification kits for deployment overseas.”

A Canadian Special Operations Forces Command spokesperson said its military has a limited number of the affected sights but added that the armed forces will move as quickly as possible to remove the inappropriate inscriptions. Australia and New Zealand also expressed concern about the previously little-noticed references.

ABC News’ “Nightline” reported January 18 on the biblical citations on weapons used by soldiers in Afghanistan and Iraq after learning about them from the Military Religious Freedom Foundation, a watchdog group.

One rifle sight included the code “JN8:12,” a reference to the Gospel of John in which Jesus says, “He who follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.”

Mikey Weinstein, founder of the watchdog group, hailed the decision by the Michigan company.

“Trijicon’s outrageous practice of placing Bible verse citations on military-issued gunsights for weapons was an unconstitutional disgrace of the highest magnitude to our military and an action that clearly gave additional incentive and emboldenment to recruiters for our nation’s enemies,” he said.

The military contractor said it took action “in response to concerns raised by the Department of Defense.”

Baptist pastor Welton Gaddy, president of the Interfaith Alliance, urged President Obama on January 21 to launch a thorough investigation “aimed at creating guidelines that ensure that religion no longer plays an inappropriate role in our armed forces.”

Gaddy said the controversy affects soldiers regardless of their religious affiliation.

“Trijicon’s actions should be of concern to people of all faiths including Christians, but it is particularly appalling that soldiers who do not practice Christianity have been unknowingly wielding weaponry . . . that preaches the merits of a religion to which they do not adhere,” Gaddy said.

On the same day, Army Gen. David Petraeus called the practice “disturbing” in an address at the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington. “This is a serious concern to me and the other commanders in Iraq and Afghanistan,” said Petraeus, now Central Command’s top officer.

Robert Parham of the Baptist Center for Ethics said the weapons are another example of a “crusade mentality” espoused by some Americans, citing the example of putting Bible verses on intelligence reports for former Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld. “Such twisted misuses of Christianity reflect badly on Christianity,” he said.

Muslim groups had also written to the Pentagon decrying the encoded weapons, with the Muslim Public Affairs Council saying they are “unacceptable” and the Council on American-Islamic Relations urging their withdrawal “as soon as logistically possible.”

*-Religion News Service*