

Thu, 22 Jun 2006 15:28  
L Tom Perry PerryLT@ldschurch.org  
To Norman T Erektion zye@juno.com Mormon Battalion

My secretary did send it as an attachment. Wasn't it there? We'll attach it again. It is a Word document.  
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**MORMON BATTALION COMMEMORATION**  
**June 17, 2006**  
**Bountiful Regional Center**

The wake-up call came a half-hour early on this particular day as we were going through Marine Corps boot camp. We got up, prepared ourselves for a 20-mile forced march. We had a good breakfast, then the order came to fall-in, with backpacks on our back, an M-1 rifle over our shoulder and an ammunition belt and K-bar around our waist.

Off we started on a cool California morning. It was not long until the hot sun started to beat down. The trail through the California wastelands required a lot of over the hills and down the other sides, through the gullies and up the embankments. We had the best of equipment; our backpacks were made so they could be light. Our shoes and socks were well broken-in and prepared for the long trip. Extra socks were in our pack, to change into, if needed. Step by step the long morning crept on, hour after hour. There was great boredom, walking and walking and walking, over about the same terrain, as the hours passed. It wasn't long until fatigue started to take its toll. We were breathing harder. Each step seemed to require a little more energy. We were supposed to be in good condition, for we had been training for some weeks in a vigorous routine. At noon, there was a break for lunch. In our backpacks we had a K-ration, a canteen full of water, and a little powdered mixture that we mixed with the water that tasted about like I would think battery acid would taste! This short break for lunch, then on again—step after step—boredom, fatigue, starting to feel sore feet. Finally, a spot was located for us to make camp. The twenty miles had been accomplished. We were worn out, hot and dirty.

We set up camp, then went through some very basic training, then rolled out our blankets and stretched out for the night on the hard, hard ground. The coolness of the night turned very cold as the night progressed. Turning over many times, trying to dig a new hole for your hip, finding a more comfortable position for your head and on went the night.

Again, the bugle sounded early in the morning. This time, it was almost welcome after a night on the hard ground. Up, breakfast prepared, break camp and then the long, long march back to the base.

A 6 x 6 truck followed us. It was called the meat wagon. Those that could not make it or developed sore feet or some other ailment were loaded on the wagon. There was some shame attached to giving up and riding the rest of the way. Marines were supposed to be tough. They were supposed to endure and not give up if times were a little hard. Back in camp, the first thing we would look for was a shower to wash the dirt and grime off our bodies. A shower seemed so refreshing. Then it was time for the Band-Aids to cover up our sore toes and blisters on the heel. Finally, crawling into clean sheets for a very comfortable night's rest.

I have often thought of that 40-mile hike. It only lasted two days. I just can't imagine what fortitude, what suffering and what determination must have impelled the march of the Mormon Battalion to go forward day after day with poor equipment. Rations became so scarce they were reduced to a half-ration a day per man.

Not just 40 miles, but 2,000 miles; not just 48 hours, but according to my calculations, leaving and beginning the march south to Fort Leavenworth on July 20 and finally arriving in San Diego on January 29, totals 193 long, tiring, hard days.

As I compare the two experiences, my, how my heart goes out to those noble and great men of the Mormon Battalion. Not even in the great wars that have occurred since this epic march has the Mormon Battalion's march been equaled. It has not been equaled by any march of infantry in the world's great wars or in ancient times and is not likely now, with modern equipment and new ways of fighting and transportation of troops that have been developed, that the Mormon Battalion march across more than half of the North American continent will ever be equaled. It will stand as the world's record for a march of infantry. What a noble and great heritage they have given to us of devotion, of loyalty, of determination, of deep-rooted desire, of suffering, of great trials and yet emerging with this never to be equaled march of foot soldiers.

Today, we again gather to honor these great men, women and children who were a part of this very special accomplishment. We honor them because of the march which has had such great historical significance; such as first, the world's record for a march of the infantry; second, the historical significance of being the only religious unit in American military history in federal service; third, for the contribution they made in building roadways, both east and west, as a connecting link for our great country's expansion; fourth, for the enviable reputation, for their industry and frugality; fifth, for their special place and their assistance in the establishment of a home for the saints in the Rocky Mountains; sixth, for their part in the great history of the California gold rush; seventh, etc. etc. etc.

Goethe once wrote, "Whatsoever you inherit from your fathers, you must earn it in order to possess it." This is our challenge and the reason for such commemorative gatherings for which we have assembled today. In the midst of all of the problems that confront us in the world today, no problem is of greater magnitude than preserving our heritage.

As a people, we have been blessed with a rich and noble heritage. It has given us a solid foundation on which to build our lives and the foundation for our future generations. Our heritage should cause us to focus on the foundation principles granted us by those noble men and women who have gone before us. There are three fundamental principles coming out of the Mormon battalion experience I would like to comment on this morning.

The first is the **faith** these bold men carried into the long march.

The Mormon Battalion is the story of a grueling march across prairies, mountains and deserts. It is very difficult for us to appreciate in the modern era. They were not trained soldiers and had to be indoctrinated into the discipline of a military army. They had been given the great promise by Brigham Young that they would not have to fight and wage battle against mankind if they would only be obedient to the charge they had been given. They served their country as they should have and as their countrymen expected them to do: with courage, honor and sacrifice.

The Mormon Battalion was the only religious unit in American military history in federal service, having been recruited solely from one religious body and having a religious title. Other men joined the army because of individual reasons, patriotism, adventure, boredom or avoiding the law. This did not apply to Mormon men who enlisted because of the directives and desire they received from their ecclesiastical leader, Brigham Young. There is no doubt that without Brigham Young's acceptance of the offer to form a battalion there would have been no Mormon Battalion. The men enlisted as a religious duty, rather than a call to arms.

Their service was linked to a promise that if they enlisted to support and help fund the Mormon trek across the plains, the Church, in turn, would support their families. No other American military unit has been formed to forward the cause of a religious group. Religion was central to the men and it shaped the Battalion in many ways.

They were obedient to the voice of a prophet of God. A belief in prophets and their message lies at the heart of LDS doctrine. The Latter-day Saints recognize the biblical and Book of Mormon prophets as well as latter-

day prophets as servants of Jesus Christ and accept as scripture, the Bible, the Book of Mormon, the Pearl of Great Price and the Doctrine and Covenants. They believe that Joseph Smith and all subsequent presidents of the Church were and are prophets and representatives of Jesus Christ.

Prophets and their messages have occupied a central place in God's dealings with His children from the beginning. Prophets are always witnesses of Jesus Christ, a fact that is particularly true as evidenced in the Book of Mormon. The experience common to all of its prophets is the witness they bore of Jesus Christ, the Messiah, of His divine Son-ship and of His earthly ministry. No true prophet, ancient or modern, has ever called himself to this position. Some, such as Moses, Amos, and Jeremiah have even accepted the calling reluctantly. Some, including John the Baptist, Samuel, Nephi, and Joseph Smith were called in their childhood or youth.

The instructions received when the Church was being organized from the revelation given on April 6, 1830, contained in Section 21 of the Doctrine and Covenants, state: Wherefore, meaning the Church, thou shalt give heed to all His words and commandments which he shall give unto you as he receiveth them walking in all holiness before me for his words ye shall receive as if from my own mouth in all patience and faith. (D&C 21:4.)

To be a prophet of the Lord, one does not need to be everything to all men. He does not need to be youthful and athletic, an industrialist, a financier, nor an agriculturist; he does not need to be a musician, a poet, an entertainer, nor a banker, a physician, nor a college president, a military general, nor a scientist.

He does not need to be a linguist to speak French and Japanese, German and Spanish, but he must understand the divine language and be able to receive messages from heaven.

He need not be an orator, for God can make his own. The Lord can present his divine messages through weak men made strong. He substituted a strong voice for the quiet, timid one of Moses, and gave to the young man Enoch power which made men tremble in his presence, for Enoch walked with God as Moses walked with God.

What the world needs is a prophet-leader who gives example-clean, full of faith, godlike in his attitudes, with an untarnished name, a beloved husband, a true father.

A prophet needs to be more than a priest or a minister or an elder. His voice becomes the voice of God to reveal new programs, new truths, new solutions. I make no claim of infallibility for him, but he does need to be recognized of God, an authoritative person. He is no pretender as numerous are who presumptuously assume position without appointment and authority that is not given. He must speak like his Lord, "as one having authority, and not as the scribes." (Matthew 7:29.)

He must be bold enough to speak truth even against popular clamor for lessening restrictions. He must be certain of his divine appointment, of his celestial ordination, and his authority to call to service, to ordain, to pass keys which fit eternal locks. (Teachings of Spencer W. Kimball, 465.)

Second, we must recognize the **sacrifice** they made for their families.

Certainly, one of the great lessons we can learn from the Mormon Battalion is the faith they had in their prophet, Brigham Young. Few soldiers have ever faced the difficult circumstances that the Mormon soldiers experienced in 1846. Their families were also crossing the plains, incurring hardships and dangers themselves, rather than being comfortable and protected at home. This situation would cause tremendous anxiety for the soldiers at war. One of the great comforts for soldiers in any era is a knowledge that should they survive they would return home to the safety of their loved ones. The members of the Mormon Battalion did not have the same assurance, as they did not have a traditional, stable family homestead to return to after their service was over. They had faith in the prophet that he would be establishing homes for their families in the valleys of the mountains. With that faith in him, they went forward to accomplish their tremendous undertaking in the march of this historic battalion.

## HOMeward BOUND

As the expiration of the terms of the Battalion's enlistment grew near, strong efforts were made by General Kearney for their re-enlistment, before departing for the east. There were added pressures to get them to remain in California. Samuel Brannan arrived and greeted the Battalion members with a doleful account of the semi-desert region where the Mormon people had settled and predicting that their final removal would be to California. He urged all of those who could to remain and start preparing for the arrival of the rest of the Saints.

James Brown, the ranking officer of the Pueblo Detachment of the Battalion and a small party in route to California, brought with them letters from many of the families of the Battalion. He also brought an epistle from the Mormon leader advising those who had no means of sustenance to remain in California and labor during the winter, and then make the way to the Salt Lake valley in the spring bringing their earnings with them. About one-half of the 240 volunteers accepted this suggestion and returned to Sutter's Fort where they found employment.

The rest of the company continued their journey on into Salt Lake. The ones with families, of course, were anxious to make their way to the Salt Lake valley. I cannot imagine the stress that was put on these family units to leave their wives and their children and make the long journey to California. Their families had been left to travel the wilderness with the pioneer company on their way to Salt Lake. Of course, those with families were anxious to be united again and relieve the pressures that had been on their family units.

Today we must say that we face a different kind of pressure on our family. Divorce is rampant, high debt is all too much in evidence, immorality is becoming all too commonplace. Again, we must be certain that we are rendezvousing with our families to keep them strong. The family, not the individual, is the real center of society; the key-link to prevent the great social change that is occurring. America's views about virtually all aspects of the family have shifted dramatically to the left since 1960. Shifts that now mean immorality is commonplace.

Establishing a common household and having children is reaching a level below a population replacement requirement. We found in the nations of Europe that they will lose their national heritage because all the countries' replacement level is below the required numbers to keep alive their great history and heritage. If a change does not occur, the great heritage of those countries of Europe will disappear.

We teach families are first. We teach the preeminence of the home and the family is the basic organizational unit of the Church. We encourage each family member to study the scriptures, pray regularly, and follow the example of the Savior in all things. The family organization is one that can endure through the eternities. Surely all our efforts and programs must be designed to strengthen the family unit. We must remember that marriage and families are necessary to complete our Father in Heaven's plan.

Among the first instructions given to man and woman was, "Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife, and they shall be one flesh." (Abraham 5:18.) God in His divine plan ordained marriage to bring about His basic organizational unit – the family. The scriptures state that Adam, and Eve, his wife, called upon the name of the Lord. They heard the voice of the Lord speaking unto them and they saw Him not, for they were shut out of His presence. He gave unto them commandments that they should worship the Lord their God and offer the first fruits of their flock as an offering to the Lord and Adam was obedient unto the commandments of the Lord. Then the Lord instructed our first earthly parents to teach their children about obedience to His law and Adam and Eve blessed the name of God and made all things known unto their sons and their daughters.

Home should be an anchor, a safe haven, a place of refuge, a happy place for families to dwell and a place where children are loved. In the home, parents should teach their children the great lessons of life. Home should be the center of one's earthly experience, where love and mutual respect are appropriately blended. If we are to preserve this noble heritage, which has been given us through the sacrifices of the men, women and children of the Mormon Battalion, we must be eternally vigilant to see that succeeding generations remember and live worthy of keeping it alive and keeping our families strong.

The third foundation principle was the gift of a **heritage of service**.

While performing garrison duty, many members of the Mormon Battalion stationed at San Diego obtained permission to accept employment offered by the inhabitants of the town, such as making adobe, digging wells, building houses and making brick. The first bricks in San Diego, if fact, in all of California, were made and burned by members of the Mormon Battalion. They had an enviable reputation of industry, frugality and service.

King Benjamin gave us the great example of service as he taught from his tower to the people who were assembled in tents around him, saying:

I say unto you that as I have been suffered to spend my days in your service, even up to this time, and have not sought gold nor silver nor any manner of riches of you;

And even I, myself, have labored with mine own hands that I might serve you, and that ye should not be laden with taxes, and that there should nothing come upon you which was grievous to be borne—and of all these things which I have spoken, ye yourselves are witnesses this day.

Yet, my brethren, I have not done these things that I might boast, neither do I tell these things that thereby I might accuse you; but I tell you these things that ye may know that I can answer a clear conscience before God this day.

Behold, I say unto you that because I said unto you that I had spent my days in your service, I do not desire to boast, for I have only been in the service of God.

And behold, I tell you these things that ye may learn wisdom; that ye may learn that when ye are in the service of your fellow beings ye are only in the service of your God.

Behold, ye have called me your king; and if I, whom ye call your king, do labor to serve you, then ought not ye to labor to serve one another? (Mosiah 2:12, 14-18.)

In this day and age, where too much sedentary time is spent in front of televisions and in front of computers, one of the important lessons we can learn from this great expedition of the Mormon Battalion is their reputation for industry, frugality and service. Their example can be a light to all of us. Our own reputation should be known for industry, frugality and service. We should be sure to teach our children this lesson.

## CONCLUSION

How fortunate we are to have the shield and protection of our Lord and Savior to lead, guide and direct us. His will has been given to us in the Holy Scriptures as revealed through His prophets whom He has chosen to direct His work here on Earth. Now that we have the blessings of the gospel, the way has been forged for us to guide us through this mortal experience.

First, we must exercise **faith** in God our Eternal Father and place our trust in Him as a foundation of all things. Second, we have to have the **courage** to uphold righteousness and be a part of preserving it. Third, we must be **industrious** in building for the future. Fourth, we must **learn to sacrifice willingly** for our brothers and sisters in need, and fifth, we must **hold on to the glorious heritage** which is ours, which has been so remarkably demonstrated by the sacrifice of the pioneers and those of the noble Mormon Battalion.

Now for a brief moment, the pen is in our hands to mark the pages of history. You are children of promise. Elder Delbert L. Stapley has said to us: “As children of promise, do not choose to be common; rather, choose to excel. There is no prominent place in the society of men and women today for the mediocre. Strive for perfection and you will attain perfection in many areas and approach it in others. You have a rich heritage. Be unafraid to think and act in accordance with gospel principles, and enjoy the benefits and blessings of it as you fulfill on earth the full measure of your creation as a child of God.” (Conf Reports, Oct 1969, 44.)

May God bless us as we gather today and review the history of this noble march, to remember the ball is now in our court. It is our duty to fulfill and honor the great heritage that is ours from which we have been so richly blessed.

**BLESSING**  
**TESTIMONY**