

The Mission of the Modern Mormon Battalion Association: How to Fulfill Brigham's Prophecy?

By Ltc Max W. Jamison, Acting Editor

In 1954, the Prophet David O. McKay asked the Sons of Utah Pioneers to form a modern Mormon Battalion association to fulfill the February 1855 prophesy of the Prophet Brigham Young:

“The Mormon Battalion will be held in honorable remembrance to the latest generation; and I will prophesy that the children of those who have been in the army, in defense of their country, will grow up and bless their fathers for what they did at that time. And men and nations will rise up and bless the men who went in that Battalion. ...As the Lord lives, ...you will never be forgotten, worlds without end, but you will be had in honorable remembrance, for ever and ever.” (Daniel Tyler, *A Concise History of the Mormon Battalion in the Mexican War, 1846–1847*, p. 354)

Ever since the reorganization of the Battalion, we have been figuratively marching backwards, paying homage to the heritage of our forefathers. In doing so, we have frequently pondered, but only partially understood and fulfilled President Young's prophesy and President McKay's intent. What did Brigham *really* intend when he uttered that historic prophesy? Did David have any intimation of how it should be fulfilled by a modern Battalion? It is true that we have memorialized numerous grave sites, marched in numerous parades, bestowed numerous Battalion neckerchief slides at Eagle courts of honor, participated in numerous youth conferences, raised monuments, and worked toward memorializing the Mormon Battalion Trail. But there are only a *finite* number of graves which can be memorialized, a *limited* number of parades in which we can march, a *finite* number of Eagle scouts eligible for our neckerchief slides, and a *single* Mormon Battalion Trail to be memorialized. We can only build so many mausoleums to the past. When this is done, is our duty complete? Or does the modern Battalion have a new, larger role to fill?

In the Fall of 2006, I proposed the need for a business plan for the modern Mormon Battalion Association. Then, after months of labor, Col Jerome J. Gourley, Maj John Hayes, and I presented an initial business plan to the Executive Committee on 15 September 2007. After considerable editing and revision by the Executive Committee, the second iteration of the business plan was partially published in the Fall 2008 issue of The Valiant and then completely published in the following Winter 2008 issue as “Building a New Legacy from a Great Heritage: Business Plan for the Mormon Battalion Association.” (A third and final version, including demographic studies, is intended to be researched and published shortly.) In that business plan, we asked three vital questions:

1. *The original Mormon Battalion will be held in honorable remembrance by whom?* — The Mormon Battalion Association is far more than a historical preservation group consisting of only descendants of the original Mormon Battalion. Everyone is welcome to join and take part in this great organization. Careful analysis suggests an impact rippling outward to a far greater audience than one might expect:

- descendants of the original Mormon Battalion,
- descendants of all “Mormon” pioneers whose westward emigration in time of need was enabled by the Battalion,
- descendants of all western pioneers who profited from their trail blazing efforts,
- modern historians and citizens just beginning to appreciate the full impact of their accomplishments over 150 years later,
- military veterans throughout the world who know what it means to selflessly serve their country with little hope or need for public recognition,
- worldwide humanitarian service organizations,

- young people in opportunities for service,
- people of good will everywhere.

2. ***How are we to hold them in honorable remembrance?*** — This question cuts to the heart of the purpose of the modern Battalion. It is only partially answered by the By-Laws, which specify that we:

- properly identify all men, women, children, servants, dependants, suttlers (supply contractors), teamsters, and camp followers who originally served in, or were officially associated with the Mormon Battalion march,
- mark gravestones or historic trail sites with markers, monuments, plaques, signs, statues, and other identifiers,
- seek National and State Trails designation for Battalion routes, including, but not limited to designation of a Mormon Battalion National Historic Trail,
- further public relations with Native American groups, officials, and civilians who aided or showed gratitude for the Battalion in its march and subsequent military service in California and other areas,
- *perform other activities needed to fulfill the purpose of the Battalion.*

3. ***Why should men and nations to the latest generation, worlds without end, forever and ever rise up and bless the original Mormon Battalion? What grand prototype or model might they provide for unlimited future generations?***

– It has been said that those who fail to learn from the past are destined to repeat its lessons. It is a shallow person who only looks *back* to honor the heritage of dead ancestors without engaging in some self examination. To only *retrospectively* honor the *heritage* of the original Mormon Battalion is but a hollow sham if we learn nothing from their humble sacrifice. To truly fulfill Brigham Young’s prophesy, we must make their simple hymn of service reverberate and amplify within our deepest souls until it becomes our own great anthem whose crescendo reaches out to mold yet unborn generations. We too are pioneers, and must *prospectively* add our own humble *legacy* to theirs – rendering selfless and unrequired service, compassion, and charity to “men and nations to the latest generation, worlds without end, forever and ever.” The 1,600 year old words of our namesake, the American prophet Mormon, ring from the dust: “If ye have not charity, ye are nothing, for charity *never* faileth. ...it endureth *forever*.” (Moroni 7:46-47)

Strategic Intent – The modern Mormon Battalion Association is only just beginning to understand and fulfill its mission “to the latest generation, worlds without end, forever and ever.” We will teach children, youth, adults, and senior citizens throughout the world to work together to build a *future legacy of personal service* – a legacy shared across the wide spectrum of all faiths and nationalities – one where all can learn and apply the *past heritage* and experiences of the Mormon Battalion to their *present and future* daily lives.

When are we going to do an “about face, forward march” (with an occasional look over our shoulders) and accept our own destiny as heirs to the mantle of the original Battalion? There are plenty of grants available for service organizations. There are many other service and educational organizations for youth like the Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, Camp Fire Girls, Boys and Girls Clubs, Big Brothers, Big Sisters, and the youth programs of many churches. There are many other adult service organizations like the Sons and Daughters of Utah Pioneers, Kiwanis, Lions, and Knights of Columbus with similar goals to our own with whom we can find common purpose. ***To truly fulfill Brigham’s prophesy, the modern Battalion must transform itself into a worldwide service organization***, reaching out and fulfilling our mission statement:

We are not an *exclusive* group comprising only descendants of the original Mormon Battalion, but an *inclusive* “umbrella” organization with many units and associated organizations sharing the common goal of ***service to humanity***. We are building a new legacy from a great heritage – a legacy whereby citizens of all ages, faiths, and national origins can learn, emulate, and apply the heritage and experience of the Mormon Battalion to their current lives.