

Ellis R. Ivory

Mormon Battalion Heritage Day

June 14, 2008 (Flag Day)

Assembly Hall, Temple Square

It's a pleasure to be here today, and an honor to participate in this Heritage Day celebration. It's fitting that today we once again remember the 500 amazing soldiers we call the Mormon Battalion. And it's particularly fitting because it's FLAG DAY.

You will observe on your programs the reproduction of a beautiful painting by Sister Helen Paul, wife of your dedicated soldier, Robert Paul – Co-Chairman of this event. Please note in Helen's painting, the American Flag is being displayed by a Mormon Battalion soldier as they view the Pacific Ocean.

The flag of the United States of America flies over the western parts of this great land at least in part because of the historic 2000 mile march of the Mormon Battalion and the subsequent stability they provided in the California territory when they got there. All of this was done in response to a call from the same government that had refused to support and protect them in their desire to settle in the Midwest.

The Mormon Battalion soldiers were the first Americans to raise the stars and stripes in what would become the states of Arizona and California.

Before they left, Brigham Young told them their names would be held in honorable mention for generations to come because of the service they would render their country while in the Battalion.

After their historic march, Brigham wrote, "I felt glad that their conduct had proved to their commanders and general that they were their best and most reliable soldiers; and although there were, perhaps, no other people in the Union who would have responded to the call under our circumstances, still it was the best course, as a people, we could have pursued. I further remarked that I saw the whole plan concocted as plain as I saw the faces then before me, and I felt within myself that my faith in God would out general the wickedness of our enemies. Away went the battalion and sword fell on the other side; if they had not gone, we would not have been in the valley now."

In the political battles of this past year, there were stories in the media questioning the loyalty of Mormons to our country. We can always point to our 12<sup>th</sup> Article of Faith, but we can also point to our history, and there is probably no chapter more poignant to illustrate that support than the story of the Mormon Battalion, as they answered the call to duty from their country.

Historians claim there were four major events responsible for opening the west to colonization and national stability, and the Mormon Battalion played a part in each one:

First, Their role in the Mexican War, where this territory was eventually ceded to the United States.

Second, Opening of roads into the West. Wagon roads they built have become three national highways.

Third, Discovery of gold in California. They participated in the first discovery at Sutter's Mill.

Fourth, They introduced irrigation into Southern California.

We don't ever want to forget the sacrifice and contributions of the Mormon Battalion. That's why we're excited to welcome the ambitious project of the Battalion to create your visitor center at This is The Place Heritage Park, including the two heroic size statues, by Dr. Neal – Duty Calls and Duty Fulfilled. There has been a lot of work already accomplished at the site, but there's still much to be done.

This Project will not only help us remember the Mormon Battalion, but will visualize and dramatize this critically important event in the history of the westward movement.

I'm very grateful that we have a place for this kind of remembrance.

I've had the privilege to spend much of my past two years at This is The Place Park. I've come to appreciate the tremendous investment of time and resources that have been expended at there to develop and maintain a place where we can remember and visualize the incredible stories of the settlement of the West.

The State of Utah has contributed 450 beautiful, priceless acres for a historic park.

The LDS Church and many devoted donors have contributed millions to provide the facilities.

Thousands of hours of faithful volunteers are given every year, and a committed, hard-working staff gives extra miles of service every day the Park is open – which is 364 days a year, every day but Christmas.

And so, it's a natural for the Mormon Battalion to find a home for its Visitor Center at This is The Place.

We all look forward to next summer's dedication of the Battalion Center's First Phase.

I close with a personal note about my Great Grandfather, Matthew Ivory. He joined the Church in Philadelphia, then made his way to Nauvoo to join the Saints. They had already left on their westward trek. He continued his journey to Winter Quarters, where he met up with Brigham. The Battalion had already departed, but I am sure my Great Grandfather knew the wives and family members of those brave soldiers who answered the call to duty. Matthew joined the march and was in the first company to enter the valley with Brigham Young. I love to look at his name engraved in the monument at the Park.

I'm proud to be a descendant of one of those amazing pioneers. May we all be blessed as we strive to do our part to insure that our generation and those of the future will never forget the people, the struggles, and the successes that built the foundation for God's Kingdom in this special land, in the name of Jesus Christ, Amen.