

subsistence, would have been considered a God-send. But joining the army and leaving their families in such a condition was repugnant to their feelings. Such a thing had never been thought of, much less asked for, by the Saints.”² Although the call for five hundred Mormon men to help in the war against Mexico at first seemed to be an extra burden, it turned out to be the Lord's way of blessing his people.

When Brigham Young heard of the call for men, he said: “If we want the privilege of going where we can worship God according to the dictates of our consciences, we must raise the Battalion.”³ He also declared: “This thing is from above for our good.”⁴ The Mormon Battalion became a blessing in many ways.

Forming the Battalion proved the loyalty of the Mormons to their country. No one can doubt the loyalty of a people who give up five hundred of their best men when they themselves are in dire need of help and protection. Brigham Young stated: “Let every one distinctly understand that the Mormon Battalion was organized from our camp to allay the prejudices of the people, prove our loyalty to the government of the United States, and for the present and temporal salvation of Israel; that this act left near five hundred teams destitute of drivers and provisions for the winter, and nearly as many families without protection and help.”⁵

The Battalion also served to provide money for the Saints. Each soldier was given money for clothes, but decided to send it back to his family and march in what he had. They also sent back all the pay they received that could be spared. This was a welcome blessing to the Saints and to the Mormon Church, who stood in great need of assistance. All the arms and camp equipment were to become the property of the Battalion, as well, when they were discharged in California.

Before the Battalion left, they received instruction and promises from apostles of the Lord. Sergeant William Hyde recalls: "President B. Young, H. C. Kimball, P. P. Pratt, W. Richards, John Taylor and Wilford Woodruff met in private council with the commissioned and non-commissioned officers, on the bank of the Missouri river, and there gave us their last charge and blessing, with a firm promise that, on condition of faithfulness on our part, our lives should be spared, our expedition should result in great good and our names should be held in honorable remembrance to all generations."⁶

Their lives were spared. More than five hundred volunteers enlisted in the Mormon Battalion; less than 25 were killed.⁷

Their expedition resulted in great good. As before mentioned, they received money to send back to the church and proved their loyalty to the U.S. They also served their country by being ready and willing to fight and cutting a trail to California.

Their names have been held in honorable remembrance to all generations. Five generations later, this essay contest is one of the small ways of honoring them.

Brigham Young prophesied of other blessings they would receive while in the Battalion. Each one was literally fulfilled. Among other things, he promised they would never be required to shed human blood, but would only fight wild beasts, and "that there would not be as many bullets whistle around [their] ears as did around Dr. Willard Richards' in Carthage jail."⁸

December 11, the Mormon Battalion engaged in battle. However, as President Young had promised, they shed no human blood and fought only wild beasts. This battle was against wild bulls. Less than a week later, on December 17, it looked like the Battalion would have to fight again, but this time it wasn't against animals. The alarm

was made and the orders given; the army stood at attention, ready to begin. They waited and waited, but the enemy never attacked, never even drew near. They were not required to shed human blood that night, nor any other night. William Hawk later testified, “The President promised this Battalion, that inasmuch as they would go forth and do right there should not be a ball shot at them; and I can say for one, that I realize the truth of that saying; I have experienced it—I have seen those words fulfilled and that promise verified to the very letter, when placed in the midst of my enemies with nothing but these little mallets to defend myself with, (the speaker here exhibited his fists) and they were well armed with bows and arrows, knives and rifles, but they burnt the priming, the powder flashing in the pan, and not a gun aimed at me went off, and their arrows broke.”⁹

President Young also promised that “not one of those that had enlisted would fall by the nation's foe.”¹⁰ That did not mean no one would die, just that no one would be killed by “the nation's foe.” Sickness was the main cause of death for the few who did die. For example, the first death in the Battalion was Samuel Boley. He became dangerously ill, and, though Dr. William L. McIntyre nursed and doctored him, he died July 23, 1846.¹¹ Other deaths in the Battalion were blamed on Dr. George B. Sanderson, an army physician who had prejudices against the Mormons.

President Brigham Young had counseled the men: “If you are sick, live by faith, and let surgeon's medicine alone if you want to live, using only such herbs and mild food as are at your disposal. If you give heed to this counsel, you will prosper.”¹² In many cases, it was difficult to follow Brigham Young's instructions. Dr. Sanderson insisted on giving them medicines and often went as far as to force it down their throats. He threatened to cut anyone's throat who gave assistance without his orders. Christopher

Layton, one of my ancestors, wrote: "It would be difficult to find American citizens from any other community who would have submitted to the tyranny and abuse that the Battalion did from. . . Sanderson. Nor would we have done so on any consideration other than as servants to our God and patriots to our country."¹³ Those who did find ways to follow the prophet's counsel did prosper. Daniel Tyler wrote of one such instant: "Henry G. Boyle was taken violently sick, through drinking too much water on his arrival when he was very warm and thirsty. It being his turn to go on guard, he had no alternative but to go (on guard duty) or report himself on sick list. He chose the latter, and Sanderson, the doctor, gave him the usual dose—calomel—which, however, he did not swallow, but consigned it to the flames. The writer and another Elder or two were called upon to anoint him with oil and lay hands upon him, and before night he was well."¹⁴

Throughout the course of the Mormon Battalion's journey, many prayers were given and many prayers were answered. As Sanford Porter lay dying, he called upon the Lord in prayer, summoning all his faith and asking that, if there was any more work for him to do, his life might be spared. Instantly, his pain left, and his health was as good as ever.¹⁵

Another answer to prayers came when a detachment of fifty-five men, under command of Lieutenant W. W. Willis, were left without a decent team. Lieutenant Willis wrote: "What to do for a team we did not know. This was a dark time, and many were the earnest petitions that went up to our God and Father for Divine aid. The next morning we found with our oxen a pair of splendid young steers, which was really cheering to us. We looked upon it as one of the providences of our Father in heaven. Thus provided for, we pursued our march."¹⁶

An additional example of prayers being answered came at a time when Colonel Cooke decided to travel in the direction where they were more likely to find food, than to go on to California. This sent a gloom across the whole camp; the Battalion had wanted to go to California ever since they left Nauvoo. Brothers David Pettegrew and Levi W. Hancock went from tent to tent and told the men: "Pray to the Lord to change the Colonel's mind." More than three hundred prayers ascended to heaven that night, all for the same purpose. The next morning, they began marching, but had not gone far before Colonel Cooke ordered a halt and, with firmness, said: "This is not my course. I was ordered to California; and I will go there or die in the attempt!" Brother Pettegrew spoke for all when he cried: "God bless the Colonel!"¹⁷

Christopher Layton wrote of many times when the Lord blessed them in small, simple ways. When they were able to get fresh oxen and mules and better wagons, he wrote: "The hand of the Lord was thus manifested to us, for without something of the kind, we must have been left without conveyance in the desert."¹⁸ When they were in need of food, they slaughtered an ox that had given out and rationed his remaining flesh, though he was a mere skeleton. Along with the ox, they had California quail and a couple of goats. Christopher Layton said, "we regarded all these luxuries as gifts from our Heavenly Father."¹⁹

Through all the hardships, inconveniences, and trials, the Mormon Battalion never failed to recognize the hand of the Lord in the details. "The Colonel expressed great surprise at seeing us singing merry songs and playing the fiddle when we were so worn out and hungry, but we were thankful to our Heavenly Father and rejoiced that our journey was nearly finished and the night air was full of the songs of the Saints."²⁰

Sources Cited

1. Tyler, Daniel. A Concise History of the Mormon Battalion in the Mexican War. Glorieta, NM: The Rio Grande Press, Inc, 1980. page 111
2. Tyler, pg.116
3. Tyler, pg 117
4. Ricketts, Norma Baldwin. The Mormon Battalion: U.S. Army of the West. Logan: Utah State University Press, 1996. pg. 14
5. Roberts, B.H. The Mormon Battalion: Its History and Achievements. Provo: Maasai, Inc, 2001. pg. 28
6. Tyler, pg 128
7. <http://www.answers.com/mormon%20battalion>
8. McIntyre, Myron W., and Noel R. Barton, ed. Christopher Layton. Christopher Layton Family Organization, 1966. pg. 30
9. Tyler, pg. 363
10. McIntyre, pg. 30
11. Tyler, pg. 131
12. Tyler, pg. 146
13. McIntyre, pg. 39
14. Tyler, pg. 209
15. Tyler, pg. 141
16. Tyler, pg. 191
17. Tyler, pg. 206-207
18. McIntyre, pg. 47
19. McIntyre, pg. 54
20. McIntyre, pg.66