

Man of Vision
Brigham Young's
U.S. Army of the West
By Roger B. Blakeley

In order to understand the full impact of the Army of the West one must realize the culture from which they came. After the Martyrdom of Joseph Smith the Saints turned to Brigham Young. He was a man that believed God had a purpose for his life and because of this belief he gave himself over to the Master's touch. After reading the Book of Mormon another testament of Jesus Christ Brigham went to see the Prophet Joseph Smith. He became a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and never looked back. Brigham was no stranger to sacrifice for the Lord's work.

Along with many of the Saints who had gathered in Ohio, Brigham also responded to the Prophet's call to gather together into one body. When Brigham arrived in Kirkland Ohio he had nothing. Not a pair of shoes, pants, or even a coat. He borrowed some boots and clothes. All the money he made he gave away to preaching of the gospel. Many of the Saints were in the same condition and gave to each other in true Christian charity. Such stalwart people formed the foundation of the restored church of Jesus Christ.

During the building of the Nauvoo Temple Brigham Young knew the Saints had little food and other provisions for the work parties at the temple. Brigham was full of faith and asked the Saints to give everything they had to the building of the temple and the Lord would provide. The Saints did and at the very moment when all food had run out and there was nothing left the Lord did provide by bring to them Joseph Toronto a recent convert to the Church who arrived at Nauvoo with \$2,500 in gold. He gave it to the church for the lifesaving food and supplies.

After continued harassment from the Mobs against the Saints the "extermination order" proclaimed by Governor Boggs to kill all Mormons on sight, and the Martyrdom of Joseph Smith. The Saints left Nauvoo during the cold of winter and crossed the Mississippi River on a sheet of ice. It was like Moses of old opening up the river to have the Saints cross on dry ground. The Saints journey in winter was horrendous. Many of the Saints died of exposure. It took the Saints 131 days to travel 300 miles from Nauvoo to the Iowa camp because of the condition of the trails and winter weather. When they finally reached the Missouri River the Saints set up camps the largest camp became known as Winter Quarters. This would be the launching point to the Rocky Mountains and safety for the Saints. As many as 2,500 Saints lived in the camps along the Iowa side of the Missouri River, in the summer the swarms of mosquitoes carried malaria and in the winter there was no fresh food. The Saints suffered from cholera, scurvy, and severe diarrhea. While in this condition the Saints were approached by the United States Army to help fight the Mexican American War.

The Mormon group looked toward Brigham for divine guidance and what to do, as this was the same government who had condoned the "extermination order," had let the mobs drive them out of their homes and farms, and had killed their Prophet. Many friends and

family had died coming to the camps at Winter Quarters. Many of the Saints had no shoes and had wrapped their feet with cloth to save them from frostbite.

Brigham Young was led by the spirit and asked the Saints to serve in the Army. He told the men that the Lord would protect them and the funds raised from the Army wages would help them reach the Salt Lake Valley. He also told the men and woman that they would be protected and always remembered. Most of the men left families. They did not know if they would ever see their wives or children again yet they had faith and did not feel the need to murmur about the situation.

The Battalion marched 2,030 miles across the southwest to California. The men and women in the Battalion suffered from the lack of food, water, the lack of rest and medical care due to the rapid pace of the march. They came to Yuma in the winter and it was very cold suffering many hardships with shoes worn off their feet and only a small wool blanket to cover them. After crossing the Colorado River they faced desert and sand dunes for miles. The lack of water and the fast march left some of the Battalion lagging behind. Lot Smith the youngest member of the Battalion was ordered to find the lagging members and give water to them. However, Lot was to give water to the last straggler and then work back up the rank. But when he found the solders they were in such a pitiful state that he broke the order and gave water to the men as he found them. When Lot Smith returned to camp he was punished for breaking the orders.

Yuma was the last leg of the journey before they reached San Diego. These good solders gave all they had for God, Nation and Freedom. The Yuma U.S. Army of the West Mormon Battalion Foundation's mission is to promote the history and education about the Battalion's historic march. It is the longest overland march in militarily history. Brigham Young's vision came true and the people on the Battalion learned discipline and grew in physical capacity and helped the church prosper during a very pivotal time. We encourage you to learn more about the U.S. Army of the West Mormon Battalions efforts by visiting the official Yuma website at www.usarmyofthewest.org