

Chapter 4

*The Mormon Battalion*¹

Abraham Hunsaker was one of the first to respond when the call came for 500 young able-bodied volunteers to serve in the war against Mexico. At this time he was nearing his thirty-fourth birthday.

After he had time to reflect he feared that he had acted unwisely in offering his services. He knew that this response meant that he would have to leave Eliza, his wife, with six small children, the oldest being 11 years old. His family would be homeless with nothing but a covered wagon to shelter them and would have little provisions for even the barest necessities of life. He knew not how long his services might be required; he knew also that his travels would take him over many miles of uncharted territory, where hazards and dangers of every description might be lying in wait for him, making the possibility of his return doubtful.

With all this in mind, he wrote to Eliza's parents telling them of her situation and asking if they would look after her and the children until his return.

Church leaders urged the men to join the Mormon Battalion regardless of personal sacrifices and promised to care for the families that were left. Brigham Young stated:

If we want the privilege of going where we can worship God according to the dictates of our conscience, we must raise

the Battalion. I say it is right and who cares for sacrificing our comfort for a few years.²

Now I want you men to go and all that can go, young or married. I will see that their families are taken care of; they shall go on as far as mine, and fare the same.³

The men of the Battalion were mustered into service Thursday, 16 July 1846 and marched toward Sarpy's Store, a trader's post some 10 miles away on the Missouri River, where they were to obtain blankets and commissary supplies for the journey to Fort Leavenworth, Kansas.

How Abraham felt at leaving his wife and little children at Council Bluffs is pretty well described in the journal of William Hyde, who also served in this expedition. Hyde wrote, "The thoughts of leaving my family at this critical time are indescribable. They are far from the land of their nativity, situated on a lonely prairie with no dwelling but a wagon, and the scorching sun beating upon them, with the prospect of the cold winds of December finding them in the same bleak, dreary place."

The day after the Battalion left, a meeting of all the Saints was called and there many instructions were given, as well as comfort-

¹Source of much of the information for this and the following two chapters is: Sergeant Daniel Tyler, *A Concise History of the Mormon Battalion in the Mexican War, 1846-1847*. (Place of publication is not indicated.) 1881, 376 pp. A second edition was published in 1969 by the Rio Grande Press, Inc.

²B. H. Roberts, *The Mormon Battalion, Its History and Achievements*. Salt Lake City, Utah: The Deseret News, 1919, p. 18.

³B. H. Roberts, *A Comprehensive History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Century I, Vol. III*. Salt Lake City, Utah: Deseret News Press, 1930, p. 87.

ing assurances. At the conclusion of the meeting, a number of bishops were appointed to take care of the families of the men who had gone to serve their country.

On the following day, July 18, President Brigham Young met with the members of the Battalion as they were about to begin their march from Sarpy's Store to Fort Leavenworth, a distance of about 200 miles. President Young encouraged the men by predicting that not one of them would fall by the hands of the nation's foe and that their only fighting would be with wild beasts. They must be true to their country, he said, and true to God. Not on a single occasion, he added prophetically, should they be required to shed human blood. They were to remember their prayers; to refrain from profanity, obscene language, and the improper use of Deity's name; to be strictly virtuous and cleanly; to treat all men with kindness, and never take that which did not belong to them, even from their worst enemies in time of war, if they could possibly avoid it.

On 20 July 1846 the memorable march of the Mormon Battalion began. Even that 200-mile march to Fort Leavenworth was not without its hardships and suffering. On their fourth day out they crossed the Nishnabotany River at Hunsaker's Ferry and camped near Lindon, Missouri. Before reaching the fort they had run out of flour, and for three days they marched through heat and dust, rain and mud, alternately, without sufficient food.

Lieutenant Colonel James Allen, under whom the Battalion enlisted, was in favor of moderate marches; but Adjutant George P. Dykes, being himself a great walker and having the advantage of a horse to ride, urged long marches. It is no wonder that at the very outset the health of many of the men began to fail.

One of the first nights out they were awakened when a strong gale hit the area in

which their camp lay. Trees were uprooted all around them; lightning flashed and thunder roared, making the whole region a scene of terror, but not one tree fell in the camp of the Battalion and only one ox was killed.

At Fort Leavenworth, Kansas on August 3, the members of the Battalion drew their arms and accoutrements, and on August 5 each man received \$42.00 clothing money for the year. Abraham Hunsaker and a majority of the men sent most of the money back to help their families and to assist in preparations of the Saints for the journey west.

Sergeant Daniel Tyler in his *Mormon Battalion History*, page 136-137, wrote:

The paymaster was much surprised to see every man able to sign his own name to the pay roll, as, according to a reliable journal in my possession, only about one in three of the Missouri volunteers, who drew their pay previously, could put his signature to that document.

The first three companies took up their line of march on August 12; two days later Company D, to which Abraham Hunsaker belonged, and Company E left the fort. It was only a few days before the last two companies had caught up with the main army at Stone Coal Creek. Here another terrible storm assailed them; when the storm hit camp only five or six out of more than 100 tents were left standing, and it took six men to each tent to hold it. Three wagons were upset, two of which were heavy government baggage wagons. A patch of willows was flattened by the wind like lodged grain. However, no one was injured. The day after the storm, it was necessary to rest and dry their clothing and bedding.

Colonel James Allen, who was dearly beloved by the members of the Battalion, passed away 27 July 1840; after his death the hardships and suffering of the Mormon boys were

much increased. The new commander, Lieutenant A.J. Smith, was appointed without consulting the soldiers; he and the Battalion surgeon, Dr. George B. Sanderson, contrived between them to abuse the men unmercifully. The medicine which the doctor compelled the men to take was ruinous to their health and helped to make them unfit for the long marches, without water and on reduced rations. According to *Mormon Battalion History*, page 147:

It would have been difficult to select the same number of American citizens from any other community who would have submitted to the tyranny and abuse that the Battalion did from Smith and Sanderson. Nor would we have done so on any consideration other than as servants to our God and patriots to our country.

Abraham often told of "Doc" Sanderson and his old rusty iron spoon from which every man was forced to take his dose of calomel and arsenic if he showed any inclination to be unable to carry his end of the load. Concerning this old iron spoon, Sergeant Daniel Tyler said on p. 146 of *Mormon Battalion History*:

It was customary every morning for the sick to be marched to the tune of "Jim along Joe" to the Doctor's quarters, and take their portion from that same old iron spoon. It was believed by many that this spoon had been thrown away by some soldier at the garrison and picked up by the Doctor, thinking a new one would either be too expensive or too good for the "Mormons" to use in taking their medicine. It may, however, have descended from the Doctor's ancestors and been preserved by him as a precious heirloom.

So determined was Dr. Sanderson that the men should take his calomel and arsenic (these being all, or nearly all, the medicines he used except a decoction of bayberry bark and camomile flowers, as strengthening

bitters to the convalescent), that he threatened with an oath, to cut the throat of any man who would administer any medicine without his orders.

As fast as one obstacle was overcome, the Battalion boys were confronted by another; there were creeks and rivers whose banks were so steep that it was necessary to tie strong ropes to the wagons, which several men had to hold onto as the wagon was let down. Then the process was reversed on the other bank and the men pulled on the ropes to bring the wagons to the top again. There were long stretches of sand where the soldiers were ordered to march in two columns to make tracks for the wagons to follow. There were also long stretches over steep ascents or through sand beds where as many as 20 men had to pull on long ropes to help the teams drag the wagons along.

To add to all of the physical suffering of these men was the anxiety about the dear ones left near Council Bluffs. Abraham spent many a restless night, thinking of his little family, worrying about them, and praying for them. In those days, there was no postal service that reached so far beyond the bounds of civilization.

During one of these harrowing nights, he had pictured Eliza and their six children out on the lonely prairie in a crudely built, homemade, covered wagon, perhaps even now suffering for lack of food and from the inclemencies of the weather. He recalled the sadness of their parting and Eliza's tearful assurance that the Lord would take care of them. Then he pleaded with the Lord to protect and care for them and that he might have some sustaining assurance that all was well with them.

The following morning, as the men were washing and preparing for breakfast, a dove flew into the camp, straight to Abraham, and

lighted upon his head. Some of his companions called attention to the bird resting on Hunsaker's head. It stayed there but a moment then flew back over the trail made by the Battalion the day before; it flew low directly over the line of march. Abraham watched the dove as far as the eye could see, and in his heart there was a feeling of peace, a feeling that a blessing and a promise had been sealed upon his head.

The next morning as the men prepared for breakfast, the dove again appeared. This time it circled around Abraham's head, then flew away. Some of his companions remarked, "There is Hunsaker's dove," but no one else realized, as did Abraham, that it had come to him in answer to his prayers, bringing with it the assurance that all was well with his loved ones, that they were in God's keeping, and that His promises never fail.⁴

From the sketch of Eliza Collins Hunsaker, we learn that friends built a cabin for the Hunsaker family "up Honey Creek." On the map of Iowa there is a Honey Creek which empties into the Missouri River about 10 or 15 miles to the north of Council Bluffs; this likely is the creek where Eliza's cabin was built.

Of her grandmother, Eliza Collins Hunsaker, Meltrude Hunsaker Stohl wrote:

In the years that I knew Grandmother Hunsaker, although I heard from her many Pioneer stories, there was never a complaint of the hard times, or of a scarcity of food or clothing or any other necessity during the year and a half that she waited for the return of her husband. She was independent, thrifty, and resourceful, and most likely she and her children were able to eke out an

existence without being a burden to her friends.

The previously mentioned sketch of Eliza Hunsaker added this information:

Her people wrote again and again begging Eliza to return to them, criticizing her husband severely for leaving his family in such destitute circumstances, promising that neither she nor the children should want for anything if she would but renounce her husband and her religion and return to them. Her brother, who lived near Council Bluffs, repeatedly offered to take Eliza and her children to his home, telling her she would never see her husband again. But nothing tempted her nor shook her faith. She had complete assurance that her Heavenly Father was caring for her and that he would bring her husband safely back. She knew well the trials and hardships that awaited her, but her husband and her religion were her dearest possessions, and not for any earthly pleasure or comfort would she forsake either.

On October 2 the Battalion reached the Red River; orders had been received from General S. F. Kearney that unless the command reached Santa Fe by October 10 they would be discharged. He suggested selecting 50 able-bodied men from each company, taking the best teams and traveling on a double forced march, leaving the sick with the weak teams to follow as best they could. Previous to this, 55 of the sick had been sent back to Pueblo.

According to *Mormon Battalion History*, p. 163:

The sorrow which they [the sick] felt at the loss of friends through having the Battalion divided, was in a great measure compensated by the relief they experienced at being rid of the Doctor's drugs and cursing for a few days. There was a noticeable improvement, too, in most of those who were sick after the Doctor left. . . .

⁴Meltrude Hunsaker Stohl wrote: "The foregoing story of the dove I have heard from Grandmother many times. Benham Hunsaker, a son of Abraham and Cathrine Jensen Hunsaker, is authority for it as it appears here."

After the division of the command, no unnecessary time was spent on the road even by those who brought up the rear. They were anxious to reach Santa Fe as early as possible, lest their friends of the advance division should be attached to some other corps and they be left to serve under their old religious persecutor of Missouri memory, Colonel Sterling Price.

Feed for the animals and water for all became more plentiful as they advanced, and the invalid soldiers were able to reach Santa Fe only three days behind the main Battalion.

The first division of the Battalion arrived at Santa Fe on the evening of 9 October 1846. On their approach, General Doniphan, the commander of the post, ordered a salute of 100 guns to be fired from the roofs of houses, in honor of the Mormon Battalion. This same General Doniphan had been a lawyer in Clay County, Missouri, when Joseph Smith and others were tried by a court martial of the mob at Far West in 1838. When the prisoners were sentenced upon that occasion to be shot in presence of their families, General Doniphan denounced the decision as "cold-blooded murder," and by his influence the court martial was changed.

The Battalion passed through a number of Mexican towns where they visited the inhabitants. While passing through the village of San Miguel, Abraham saw, for the first time, Spanish sheep and goats, and he was much amused at watching the process of milking the goats. It was generally done by boys who sat at the rear of the animals, and of course the milk pail caught frequent droppings of "nanny-berries" which the boys carefully skimmed out with their fingers. Abraham often described the process and always with a great deal of enjoyment.

From Santa Fe, the Battalion traveled under Lieutenant Colonel P. St. George Cooke,

whose judgment in traveling was much better than Smith's. Colonel Cooke never crowded the men unnecessarily, but the roads as the company advanced grew so much worse that both men and teams failed fast. Their only hope lay, as Daniel Tyler put it, "in our faith in God and on pulling at the ropes." Food, which was always scarce, became more so. The commanding officer, because of the discouraging reports of his principal guide, found it necessary to again reduce rations, which were already insufficient to keep up the strength of the men. On top of all this, they received orders to construct a wagon road to the west coast.

On November 8, four scouts who had been sent out by Colonel Cooke to explore the route ahead returned with the disheartening report that, in their opinion, it was impossible to get through with wagons. But the Colonel had started out to make a wagon road, and he was determined not to abandon the enterprise.

Wagon after wagon had to be abandoned, also some of the tents and army equipment, even a part of their meager supply of food had to be left behind as the roads became more and more rugged and difficult.

The following entry dated Monday, November 16 is of special interest to descendants of Abraham Hunsaker:

Levi Hancock told the men not to whip their animals or swear so much. He said the meat would be better to eat when it was butchered if the animals hadn't been beaten. He suggested the men imitate Abraham Hunsaker, Company D, as he didn't whip much or swear any and had a mild spirit.⁵

By November 17 the Battalion struck a copper mine road leading to Yanos. The

⁵Norma Baldwin Ricketts, *The Mormon Battalion, U.S. Army of the West, 1846-1848*. Logan, Utah: Utah State University Press, 1996. p.82.

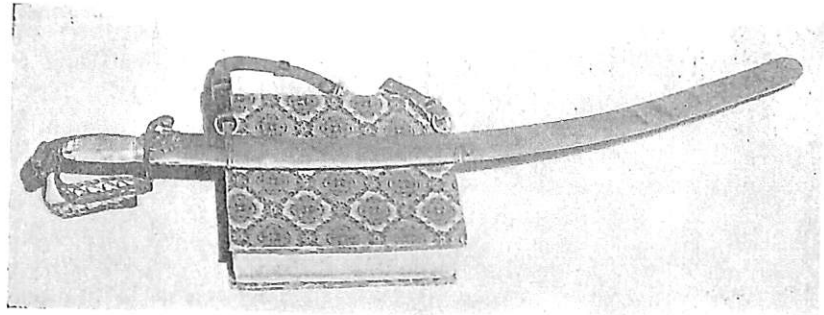
guides had traveled on 12 miles ahead and had been able to see much farther, but found no indication of water. They reported that, in their opinion, no water would be found short of the Gila River, 100 miles distant.

The Colonel was dumb-founded. To turn back was starvation and chagrin; to go forward seemed rashness; and to follow the road to Yanos and through other Mexican settlements would be to fall under General Wool's command and the men would find themselves in Mexico instead of California at the end of their year's enlistment. The commander and his staff held a council and decided to follow the road to Yanos through the settlements where food and fresh teams could be obtained.

A gloom was cast over the whole Battalion. All of the men's hopes, dreams, conversation, and songs since they had been forced to leave Nauvoo were centered in California; somewhere near there they hoped to find their families and friends.

In this critical moment Brother David Pettegrew, better known as Father Pettegrew owing to his silver locks and fatherly counsels, and Brother Levi W. Hancock, went from tent to tent and in a low tone counseled the men to "pray to the Lord to change the Colonel's mind." A few of the men slipped out to a secret place where they could unite in prayer. That night in the tents there were more than 300 fervent prayers asking for that one favor.

The following morning the journey was resumed along the Yanos road for about two miles, then the Colonel stopped. He looked in the direction of the road, then to the southwest, then west, saying, "I don't want to get



This sword was carried by Abraham Hunsaker when he was a member of the Mormon Battalion. Abraham gave the sword to his grandson, Jedediah Grant, who passed it on to his son, Benjamin Grant.

Abraham's Bible (shown above) was given to his eldest daughter, Mary, when it was more than a hundred years old. Mary gave it to her son, Jedediah Grant, who gave it to his son, Royal Grant.

under General Wool, and lose my trip to California." He rose in his saddle and ordered a halt. He then said with firmness, "This is not my course, I was ordered to California, and I will go there or die in the attempt!"

At this juncture, Father Pettegrew involuntarily exclaimed, "God bless the Colonel."

From here on the men found scarcely enough water to keep them and their animals alive. They drank from puddles where they had to spoon the water out; they drank from swamp holes; they dug deep wells; and many a night they made camp with no water at all. The summit of the mountain was finally reached with the wagons, but going down the other side was even more difficult. It was necessary to let the wagons down with ropes upon which the men pulled. But by December 1 the Battalion had reached the valley where there was water in abundance.

It was on the San Pedro River that the battle with the bulls occurred. This section seemed to be overrun with herds of wild Mexican cattle, and the bulls were very ferocious. They would gather along the line of march out of curiosity and would alternately run away and approach. Then the bolder ones would charge the marching column. Several mules

were gored to death by the wild bulls, and the end-gates of one or two wagons were stove in. Several men nearly lost their lives in the battle with the bulls. Abraham often told of the narrow escape he had when a charging bull selected him for its victim. He barely missed being gored by dodging behind a wagon.

Vividly descriptive of these battles was a song composed by Levi W. Hancock; this was one of the Battalion songs that Abraham used to sing. It was a great favorite with the younger generation in later years; in fact, some of the small Hunsaker boys could sing along with their father the entire nineteen stanzas.

THE BULL FIGHT ON THE SAN PEDRO

By Levi W. Hancock

Under command of Colonel Cooke,
When passing down San Pedro's brook,
Where cane-grass, growing rank and high,
Was waving as the breeze pass'd by:

There, as we gain'd ascending ground,
Out from the grass, with fearful bound,
A wild, ferocious bull appear'd,
And challeng'd fight, with horns uprear'd.

"Stop, stop!" said one, "just see that brute!"
"Hold!" was responded, "let me shoot."
He flashed, but failed to fire the gun—
Both stood their ground, and would not run.

The man exclaimed, "I want some meat,
I think that bull will do to eat;"
And saying thus, again he shot
And fell'd the creature on the spot:

It soon arose to run away,
And then the guns began to play;
All hands at work—amid the roar,
The bull was dropp'd to rise no more.

But lo! It did not end the fight—
A furious herd rushed into sight,
And then the bulls and men around,
Seemed all resolved to stand their ground.

In nature's pasture, all unfenc'd,
A dreadful battle was commenc'd;
We knew we must ourselves defend,
And each, to others, aid extend.

The bulls with madden'd fury raged—
The men a skillful warfare waged;
Tho' some, from danger, had to flee
And hide or clamber up a tree.

A bull at one man made a pass,
Who hid himself amid the grass,
And breathless lay until the brute
Pass'd him and took another shoot.

The bulls rushed on like unicorns,
And gored the mules with piercing horns,
As if the battle ground to gain,
When men and mules should all be slain.

With brutal strength and iron will,
Poised on his horns with master skill,
A bull, one mule o'er mule did throw,
Then made the latter's entrails flow.

One bull was shot and when he fell,
A butcher ran his blood to spill,
The bull threw up his horns and caught
The butcher's cap, upon the spot.

"Give up my cap!" exclaimed the man,
And chased the bull, as on he ran:
The butcher beat, and with his knife
Cut the bull's throat and closed his life.

O. Cox from one bull's horns was thrown
Ten feet in air: when he came down,
A gaping flesh-wound met his eye—
The vicious beast had gored his thigh.

The Colonel and his staff were there,
Mounted, and witnessing the war:
A bull, one hundred yards away,
Eyed Colonel Cooke as easy prey.

But Corp'ral Frost stood bravely by,
And watch'd the bull with steady eye;
The brute approach'd near and more near,
But Frost betray'd no sign of fear.

The Colonel ordered him to run—
Unmov'd he stood with loaded gun;
The bull came up with daring tread,
When near his feet, Frost shot him dead.

Whatever cause, we did not know,
But something prompted them to go;
When all at once in frantic fright,
The bulls ran bellowing out of sight.

And when the fearful fight was o'er,
And sound of muskets heard no more,
At least a score of bulls were found,
And two mules dead upon the ground.

Again after a few days march, water became scarce. The straggling, worn out, famished men came into camp at all hours of the night. Then one morning it was reported that there was water about 14 miles ahead, but there was no water. And to make matters worse, at intervals during the day, the men had to pull on the ropes to help the teams through the stretches of sand. At sundown a small pool was found, enough to give those present a drink by lying down; but as before the main portion of the camp had no water. When water was finally found the following day, those who were able to get to it filled their canteens and carried them back to their suffering comrades.

About noon on 27 January 1847 the tired, footsore, hungry, emaciated men of the Mormon Battalion reached the old deserted Catholic Mission of San Luis Rey. One mile below the mission, they ascended a bluff⁶ where the long-looked-for Pacific Ocean appeared to their view only about three miles distant.

⁶A monument to the Mormon Battalion was erected on this bluff 100 years later.



Monument near San Luis Rey, where Mormon Battalion first saw the Pacific Ocean.

An express from General Kearney directed that the Battalion take quarters in a Catholic mission, five miles from San Diego. They arrived at this mission January 29.

Here the Battalion learned for the first time their commander's real sentiments toward them. Colonel Cooke issued the following "order" dated 30 January 1847:⁷

⁷*Mormon Battalion History*, pp. 254-255.

The Lieutenant-Colonel commanding, congratulates the Battalion on their safe arrival on the shore of the Pacific Ocean and the conclusion of their march of over two thousand miles.

History may be searched in vain for an equal march of infantry. Half of it has been through a wilderness where nothing but savages and wild beasts are found, or deserts where, for want of water, there is no living creature. There, with almost hopeless labor we have dug deep wells, which the future traveler will enjoy. Without a guide who had traversed them, we have ventured into trackless tablelands where water was not found for several marches. With crowbar and pick and axe in hand, we have worked our way over mountains, which seemed to defy aught save the wild goat, and hewed a passage through a chasm of living rock more narrow than our wagons. To bring these first wagons to the Pacific, we have preserved the strength of our mules by herding them over large tracts, which you have laboriously guarded without loss. The garrison of four presidios of Sonora concentrated within the walls of Tucson, gave us no pause. We drove them out, with their artillery, but our intercourse with the citizens was unmarked by a single act of injustice. Thus, marching half naked and half fed, and living upon wild animals, we have discovered and made a road of great value to our country.

Arrived at the first settlement of California, after a single day's rest, you cheerfully turned off from the route to this point of promised repose, to enter upon a campaign, and meet, as we supposed, the approach of an enemy; and this too, without even salt to season your sole subsistence of fresh meat.

The Battalion returned to San Luis Rey February 3 and orders were issued requiring the men to comply with all of the regulations of soldiers in garrison, such as lines of parade, cleaning arms and clothes, shaving, cutting hair, and saluting officers. The only

complaint was that some who had not shaved since leaving home didn't want to do so until they returned to their families. But military orders were imperative; according to its rules, no beard should be allowed to grow below the tip of the ear; hence the mustache only could be saved. The hair also must be clipped even with the tip of the ear.

At this time the men were nearly barefooted; some used, instead of shoes, rawhide wrapped around their feet, while others improvised a novel style of boots by stripping the skin from the leg of an ox. To do this, a ring was cut around the hide above and below the gambrel joint, and then the skin taken off without cutting it lengthwise. After this, the lower end was sewed up with sinews; when it was ready for the wearer, the natural crook of the hide adapted it somewhat to the shape of the foot. Some of the men had made trousers of old wagon covers. Clothing was scarce in California and what little there was in the country was far too expensive for the Mormon soldiers to purchase.

Whenever possible religious services were held on Sunday. Captain Jefferson Hunt frequently presided, but sometimes Father Pettegrew or Levi W. Hancock was in charge.

Private Abraham Hunsaker was appointed a sergeant in Company D on 18 March 1847 on the recommendation of his commanding captain. On the same date First Lieutenant George W. Oman and Sergeant Ebenezer Brown and nine privates of Company A, eight privates of Company C, Sergeant Hunsaker and five privates of Company D, and eight privates of Company E were ordered to comprise the detachment which would remain to garrison the post of San Luis Rey.

They remained at this post until April 6, when the post was ordered discontinued, and they were ordered to join the main Battalion at Los Angeles.

On April 24 the Mormon Battalion received orders to erect a small fort on the eminence which commanded the town of Los Angeles. Company A commenced work immediately at excavating the ground for the fort, and the work was afterwards prosecuted by 28 men from each company who were relieved every fourth day. A liberty pole, consisting of two large pine logs each 50 feet long, was raised at the fort on July 1 by the Battalion.⁸

When General Kearney arrived at Los Angeles from Monterey on May 9, he remarked to an officer that history might be searched in vain for an infantry march equal to that performed by the Battalion, all circumstances considered,



In March 1950 three of Abraham Hunsaker's grandsons from Honeyville, with their wives, were part of a Sons of Utah Pioneers group who picked up the Mormon Battalion route at Phoenix and followed it to San Diego and back to Utah. Left to right are: Ken and Sylvia Hunsaker, Horace and Viola Hunsaker, Loren and Millie Hunsaker. These grandsons wore Battalion uniforms, but Abraham didn't—his uniform allowance was sent home to help the Saints prepare for the move west.

⁸According to the *California Intermountain News* dated 2 March 1954, a monument honoring the Mormon Battalion and other Los Angeles pioneers is under construction. The article stated, "As the Battalion members were the first to raise the stars and stripes over the city, on Ft. Moore Hill, they will be honored by a huge flagpole and pylon. . . . Names of the Mormon soldiers who made the longest infantry march in history, from Council Bluffs to San Diego (and then to Los Angeles) . . . [will be] placed on the monument." Also, according to this article, Dr.

Fauntleroy Hunsaker, president of East Los Angeles Stake (and great grandson of Abraham Hunsaker), will be among the descendants of that valiant group who will be honored when the memorial monument in the civic center is dedicated.

Faun reported in a letter dated 1 August 1957 that the Fort Moore Monument was then about four-fifths completed. He added that "members of the church here raised near \$100,000.00 as a gift toward the completion of the monument."

and added: "Bonaparte crossed the Alps, but these men have crossed a continent."⁹

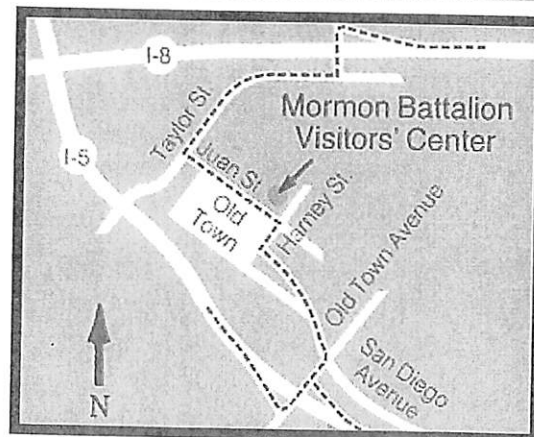
The promise of Brigham Young that not one of the Battalion would fall by the hands of the nation's foe and that their only fighting would be with wild beasts was literally fulfilled. When the Battalion approached Tucson it was a veritable Mexican stronghold. But word reached the Mexican officers that a vast army was approaching and that their advance scouts numbered several hundred. Consequently the Mexican troops quartered in Tucson fled the city and the Mormon soldiers marched through its streets without even seeing the enemy. Again, though Santa Fe had surrendered and the war apparently was at an end a month before the Battalion reached California, one of the most bloody battles of the war was fought in an encounter with Mexican guerrillas near San Diego, shortly before the Battalion boys reached the San Luis Rey Mission.

As the time drew near for the release of the Battalion, various offers and plans were brought forward to induce the men to reenlist for another six months. Some of the officers suggested that the men be compelled to do so. But most of the men were too eager to get back to their families to listen to any plan that might keep them longer than the year of their enlistment.

The men of the Battalion were permitted to take jobs, such as making adobes, burning brick, building houses, digging wells, and performing various other kinds of labor. Many availed themselves of the opportunity to labor to obtain provisions for the journey home.

On 16 July 1847 the five companies comprising the Mormon Battalion were formed in lines according to the letter of the

company. Lieutenant A. J. Smith marched down between the lines, saying the words, "You are discharged." Abraham Hunsaker was a first sergeant in Company D at the time of mustering out.



⁹Mormon Battalion History, pp. 281-282.

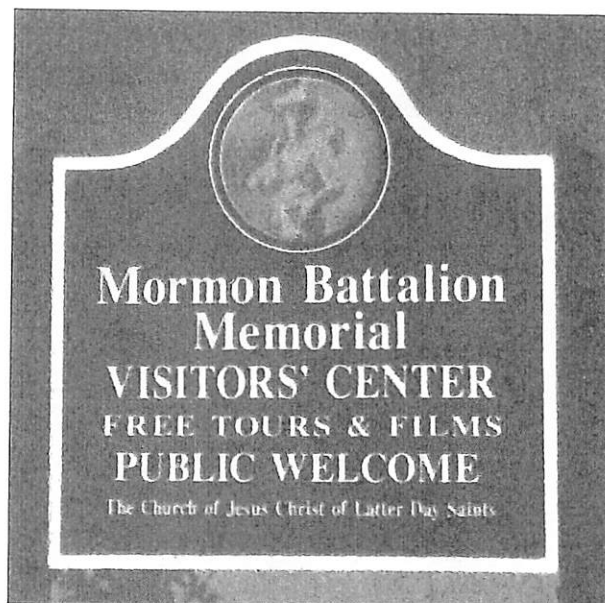


Top: Mormon Battalion Monument, Presidio Park (Old Fort Stockton). The petrachrome wall of soldiers was a joint project by the San Diego Chapter of the Daughters of Utah Pioneers and the United States Government.

Right and Bottom: Mormon Battalion Visitors' Center, Old Town San Diego, California.

Left (on preceding page): Statue of a Mormon Battalion soldier by Edward Fraughton and map showing freeway routes to Old Town San Diego and the Mormon Battalion Visitors' Center. The Mormon Battalion's 2,000-mile march still stands as the longest infantry march by any unit of the United States Army.

Pictures were taken in 1999 by Patricia Ensign Canady, great-granddaughter of Abraham Hunsaker.



Chapter 5

Homeward Bound from California

The men received their pay, and on July 20 the majority of those who did not reenlist were organized into companies for traveling, with captains of hundreds, of fifties, and of tens. A few of the men who did not have sufficient money to buy their needed supplies stopped at Sacramento, where there was opportunity to obtain work at good wages. Some of these men were on the scene when gold was discovered at Sutter's Mill.

The balance of the men continued their journey. All were badly in need of clothing, but from past experiences they had learned that food and a means of transportation were the most vital necessities. Consequently horses and mules were obtained, and at Francisco's Rancho, where the company stopped for three or four days, beef cattle were purchased for all of the men who were returning. They obtained but little flour, for which they paid \$8.00 per hundred pounds. Beef cattle and horses were very cheap: for example, wild mares sold for \$3.00 or \$4.00 each and horses broken to ride for \$10.00 to \$20.00.

Their plan was to drive the beef animals before them, slaughtering them only as their needs required. However, they had not traveled far when they decided this plan was not feasible; there were many high and steep mountains and some of the cattle were lost within the first few days. Therefore it became necessary to make camp for a few days while they slaughtered and dried their beef.

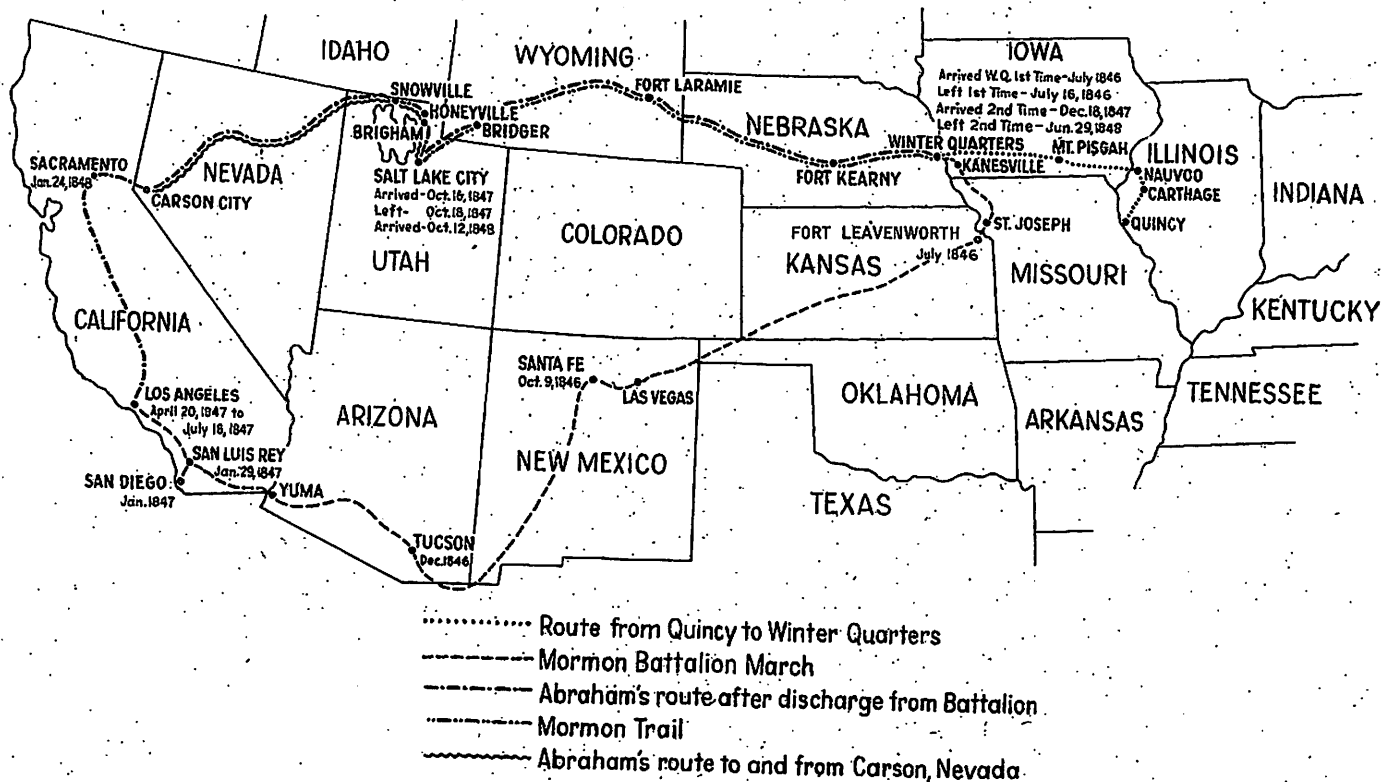
Before these travelers were well over the Sierra Nevada Mountains, many difficulties had been encountered. They crossed on the same route that the ill-fated Donner Party had

attempted to travel the preceding winter and were witness to some of the gruesome reminders of the tragedy that had befallen that company. Abraham Hunsaker told many times of the terrible scene that the melting of the winter snows had uncovered by the time these Battalion men were journeying toward their loved ones.

On September 6, the morning after they passed the remains of the Donner Party, the Battalion men met Samuel Brannan returning from his trip to meet the Saints. Here is Daniel Tyler's account of that meeting as recorded in *Mormon Battalion History*, p. 315:

We learned from him [Samuel Brannan] that the Pioneers had reached Salt Lake Valley in safety, but his description of the valley and its facilities was anything but encouraging. Among other things, Brother Brannan said the Saints could not possibly subsist in the Great Salt Lake Valley, as, according to the testimony of mountaineers, it froze there every month in the year, and the ground was too dry to sprout seeds without irrigation, and if irrigated with the cold mountain streams, the seeds planted would be chilled and prevented from growing, or, if they did grow, they would be sickly and fail to mature. He considered it no place for an agricultural people, and expressed his confidence that the Saints would emigrate to California the next spring.

...
We camped overnight with Brannan, and after he had left us the following morning, Captain James Brown, of the Pueblo detachment, which arrived in Salt Lake Valley on the 27th of July, came up with a small party. He brought a goodly number of



Travels of Abraham Hunsaker.
 (Map drawn by Eugene K. Shepherd, a great-grandson of Abraham Hunsaker.)

letters from the families of the soldiers, also an epistle from the Twelve Apostles, advising those who had not means of subsistence to remain in California and labor, and bring their earnings with them in the spring.

Before they reached Salt Lake, there was some suffering from lack of water, but to these veterans who had endured so much while on the march to California, present hardships were but minor affairs. They arrived in Salt Lake City on 16 October 1847.

A few of the Battalion members found their families already in the Salt Lake Valley, and for them it was the end of the journey. Some of the men were so worn out with fatigue and sickness that they were unable to

proceed farther eastward at that time. Still others preferred to remain in the valley to try to prepare a home for their families.

But there were thirty-two of the returning veterans who were so eager to meet their wives and children that they did not hesitate about continuing their journey another thousand miles, even at that late season of the year. One of that number was Abraham Hunsaker.

Abraham had hoped to find Eliza and the children awaiting him in the valley. It has been said by some of the older children in his family that his disappointment and his displeasure were very keen when he found that they had been left behind and were still with the Saints who awaited their turn upon the banks of the Missouri River.

Chapter 6

The Last One Thousand Miles

Abraham Hunsaker and his 31 comrades did not tarry long in Salt Lake Valley when they learned that their families had not yet arrived; the second day after their arrival in the valley found this little group of veterans again on the march.

They were unable to obtain flour in the valley. The Saints had scarcely enough food to supply their own needs and it was doubtful that they would have sufficient to last until they could harvest a crop. The veterans were informed, however, that plenty of flour could be obtained at Fort Bridger, only 115 miles distant.

So these men began their thousand-mile journey on 18 October 1847, with but 10 pounds of flour each, mounted on horses or mules. Some of the men were still garbed in the clothing, or what was left of it, which they wore when they left home. Others, whose clothing had completely worn out, were clad in outfits of various sizes, styles, and colors—whatever the Saints in Salt Lake could spare from their own already scanty wardrobes. Abraham wore the same boots on his return as he did when he left, but they were patched and mended and reinforced until no part of the old original boot could be seen.

Fort Bridger was reached during a rather severe snow storm, and, as if the weather were not sufficient to dampen the spirits of the travelers, they learned that there was no flour at the fort. Jim Bridger said his entire supply had been sold to emigrants to California and Oregon. However, the returning veterans were able to purchase a little beef and were assured that they would be able to purchase all the flour they wanted at Laramie.

Before reaching Laramie they killed two buffalo bulls and jerked the best of the meat. They had also been able to kill other game for food. It was about November 10 when the men reached Fort Laramie. They had used the last of their flour a week before. But again they were doomed to disappointment—no flour was to be had at any price. On top of this the post trader advised them not to kill any buffalo as it would offend the Indians. He suggested that it would be a better plan to hire the Indians to kill their buffalo for them.

Twelve miles below Laramie they found an Indian trader on the south side of the Platte River. A few of the men crossed over and purchased 100 pounds of flour for \$25.00. This gave them about three pounds to the man, so they decided to use it only for making gravy or for thickening soup so that it would last for a longer time.

When they were about 60 or 70 miles below the fort, their meat supply was exhausted. They were among buffalo, but remembering the advice of the post trader had not dared to kill any. Finally their hunger drove them to kill a bull and a calf; they reasoned that they might as well die of battle as of hunger—at least in battle their sufferings would be of shorter duration.

About 150 miles below Fort Laramie they awoke one morning to find 12 inches of snow. From this point to Winter Quarters, a distance of some 350 miles, they had to break trail through snow from one to two feet deep.

Some of their animals were either lost or stolen by the Indians just before and after crossing the Loup Fork River. Near the cross-

ing they found the head of a donkey which had been killed by a company some time before. Captain Allred took an ax and opened the skull, and he and his messmates had a fine supper of the brains. Near the same point, Corporal Newell opened the head of a mule that had been killed the day before by Colonel James Pace's company with the same result.

The day before they reached Loup Fork they divided and ate the last of their food, which in the main consisted of rawhide saddle bags which they had used from California to pack their provisions in. This was during a cold storm which lasted several days. Their next food was one of Captain Lytle's mules that had become unfit for travel.

Because of floating ice they were unable to cross the Loup Fork for five days, in which time they traveled down the river a few miles and found Captain Pace's company just in time to save it from being robbed by the Pawnee Indians. The two companies remained together for the rest of the journey.

It was here that Abraham Hunsaker, in the hope of procuring some corn from an Indian corn field on the other side of the river, took his frying pan full of coals from the fire and started across the ice on his hands and knees. He used two long sticks as skis and pushed his frying pan ahead of him. When near the other shore, he broke through the ice and went under, frying pan and all. He poured the water off the coals to save his fire, as the fire was his chief concern at the moment.

According to Benham Hunsaker this is the story as he heard it many times from his father's lips:

Father quickly slid the frying pan across the ice to the other bank of the river, then began his fight to get out. Since the ice would not hold him up and since his feet could scarcely touch the bottom, it was a desperate fight from there on to break the ice and fight

his way out, inch by inch, as he was forced to do in that icy water.

He finally reached the other shore, almost frozen. There he saw, right in front of him, an old rotted stump of a tree, which he felt sure Providence must have provided. He gathered some of the slivers and laid them over the coals in his frying pan, which at that moment showed not a sign of life. He blew and blew until his breath was almost exhausted, then he rested and blew again. Finally his efforts were rewarded when he could see a faint glowing among the coals, and soon after that he had a roaring fire. He dried his clothes and warmed himself.

Later he again filled his frying pan with coals and pushed on alone to the Indian corn field. He saw no Indians, for which he was thankful. By diligent searching, he succeeded in finding a few nubbins of corn—enough for a feast as it seemed to him at that time. This he carried to an abandoned Indian wickiup, where he renewed his fire and parched the ears of corn. He ate until he was satisfied—or at least he ate as much as prudence allowed that he partake.

That night he slept in the abandoned Indian hut. The following morning he went again to the corn field—this time he hoped to gather corn for his friends. He had just returned to the hut with a few nubbins when three Indians appeared looking very forbidding and warlike. When they appeared in front of him, he thought, "This is probably the end." As he told the story, he used to say at this point, "I stood up as tall, straight, and fearless as it was possible for me to do. The Indians grunted and jabbered, and jabbered and grunted, and looked me over from head to heel. Then with a look of disdain on their faces, they turned and rode away. Perhaps they thought such a skeleton of a man could not long survive anyway, why bother with him. And yet I know that if I had tried to escape from them, or had shown in any way the fear that I felt, they would have taken my life, then and there. Again my Heavenly Father had overruled in my behalf."

The cold then became so intense the river froze over and Abraham returned to his group, to be greeted apathetically by his companions who were near death from starvation and cold. They said, "Hello Hunsaker, we had given you up for dead." The corn Abraham gave the men strengthened them enough that they could then continue the march.

As the company started across on the ice, it bent and cracked, and holes were broken in places, but the men succeeded in getting across. As soon as that was accomplished the ice broke up. The men felt that a kind providence had made a bridge of ice for their special benefit and then removed it as soon as it had filled its purpose.

From the time they killed Captain Lytle's mule until they reached Winter Quarters, probably 10 days, these Battalion veterans lived on mule meat alone and that without salt.

They reached the Elkhorn River, about 30 miles from Winter Quarters, on 17 December 1847. They found the ferry boat with

ropes stretched across waiting for them to step into and pull over. This ferry had been built for and by the Pioneers who had gone on to Salt Lake Valley. It had been used by all of the various companies going that way and at this time by the returning Mormon Battalion, for whom it had been last left.

The next morning the men arose early and took up their line of march. The foremost men, including Abraham Hunsaker, arrived in Winter Quarters about sundown, while the rear came in a little after dark on 18 December 1847. They had been just two months making the journey from Salt Lake Valley to the Missouri River.

For most of the men, Winter Quarters was the end of the trail, but for Abraham Hunsaker there was still another day of travel. There was the Missouri River to cross, then from Council Bluffs it was almost a day's journey up the river to Honey Creek, where he had parted from his family and where friends had built a cabin for Eliza and the children. Happy indeed was that reunion of the Hunsaker family just before Christmas in 1847.