

Faith, Service, and Sacrifice: The Stories and Impact of the Mormon Battalion

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In 1846, the United States was at war with Mexico. Captain James Allen was tasked with enlisting men from the Mormon Pioneers to assist. Brigham Young, the leader of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, called for volunteers to join this effort. These volunteers became known as the Mormon Battalion, the only religious unit in United States military history recruited solely from one religious body. Five hundred men responded to this call. The battalion embarked on one of the longest marches in U.S. history, traveling westward from Council Bluffs, Iowa, to San Diego, California, and blazing a trail through the American Southwest. This class will explore the history and records of the Mormon Battalion and discuss the impact of their journey on the American Southwest.

OBJECTIVES

- History and Background of the Mormon Battalion
- Their Impact on the Southwest
- Records that they created along the way
- How to find the records
- Demonstrate the records with a case study

THE MORMON BATTALION, U.S. ARMY OF THE WEST

- The Mormon Battalion, U.S. Army of the West was the official name given by Captain James Allen to the Latter-day Saints. They were a United States Army unit formed in 1846 during the Mexican American War, composed primarily of members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.
- It is unique in U.S. military history as the only unit recruited entirely from a single religious community, enlisting around 500 Latter-day saint volunteers at the request of the U.S. government.
- The Battalion completed a grueling march of nearly 2,000 miles from Council Bluffs, Iowa, to San Diego, California, becoming one of the longest military marches in U.S. history.
- The Battalion helped build infrastructure in the Southwest, including roads and forts, which facilitated westward migration and set the path for the Southern Emigrant Trail.



IMPACT ON THE SOUTHWEST

- **Creation of New Routes and Roads**
 - The Mormon Battalion's march from Council Bluffs, Iowa, to San Diego, California, blazed new trails through present-day New Mexico, Arizona, and California. Under Colonel Philip St. George Cooke, they cleared obstacles and widened paths, creating portions of Cooke's Wagon Road, which became a major pathway for westward migration, especially during the California Gold Rush.
- **Improvement of Existing Trails**
 - The battalion enhanced established routes, such as the Gila Trail in Arizona, historically used by Native American tribes and Mexican settlers. Their improvements made these trails accessible for wagons, facilitating safer and more efficient transportation across harsh desert terrain.
- **Bridges, Road Repairs, and River Crossings**
 - To navigate rivers and difficult terrain, the battalion constructed bridges, repaired roads, and stabilized river crossings like the San Pedro River in Arizona. These efforts not only supported their journey but also eased future migration and trade in the region.
- **Surveying and Mapping the Region**
 - Although not officially tasked with detailed surveying, the battalion's journey provided valuable reconnaissance on the Southwest's geography and resources. Reports from Colonel Cooke and others informed later maps and planning, aiding U.S. expansion in the region.
- **Influence on Later Infrastructure Projects**
 - The routes established by the battalion laid the groundwork for later infrastructure developments, such as the Southern Pacific Railroad and modern highways like Interstate 8. These projects followed the paths initially carved by the battalion, facilitating commercial and residential growth.
- **Local Economies and Settlements Along the Routes**
 - The improved roads boosted trade between the southwestern U.S., California, and Mexico, supporting the establishment of towns, farms, and businesses along these routes. The trails also enabled military and civilian access, fostering settlement and economic development in the region.
- **Legacy of the Mormon Battalion**
 - The battalion's journey laid the foundation for regional development, with their routes becoming essential for settlers. Their efforts paved the way for infrastructure that remains vital to the Southwest's connectivity and growth today.

RECORDS CREATED

Service Records: Military documents of enlistment, rank, and discharge.

Pension Records: Applications for financial support with personal and service details.

Bounty Land Records: Land grants awarded for military service

Personal Diaries: Firsthand accounts of experiences and challenges.

Newspapers: Contemporary reports on activities and contributions.

FINDING THE RECORDS

Mexican War, 1846 to 1848 • FamilySearch

https://www.familysearch.org/en/wiki/Mexican_War,_1846_to_1848

Latter-day Saint Military Records

https://www.familysearch.org/en/wiki/Latter-day_Saint_Military_Records

United States Military Records

https://www.familysearch.org/en/wiki/United_States_Military_Records

Mormon Trail

https://www.familysearch.org/en/wiki/Mormon_Trail

Church History Biographical Database

<https://history.churchofjesuschrist.org/chd/article/about-mormon-battalion-data-in-the-biographical-database>

Report and Journal of Lieutenant Colonel Philip Saint George Cooke's March from Santa Fe, New Mexico, to California, in command of the Mormon Battalion

<https://catalog.archives.gov/id/300370>

Mexican War NARA

<https://www.archives.gov/research/military/mexican-war>

Bureau of Land Management

<https://glorecords.blm.gov/search/default.aspx#searchTabIndex=0&searchByTypeIndex=0>

Mormon Battalion Association

<https://mormonbattalion.com/>

The Mormon Battalion Association

<https://www.familysearch.org/en/cemeteries/sites/4/mormon-battalion-center-at-san-diego?page=0&pageSize=50&relativesOnly=false&relativeId=&showOriginal=false&sortOrder=asc>

FamilySearch Cemeteries

<https://www.familysearch.org/en/cemeteries/>