

The Struggle for Power in the Mormon Battalion

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THE MORMON BATTALION REACHED SAN DIEGO in late January 1847 with five and a half months of service remaining in its one-year enlistment. Mustered by the Mormon church at the request of the U.S. government, the battalion was intended to help defend federal interests in its war with Mexico, while bringing much-needed money to church coffers. These last five to six months of battalion service would be filled with military drills, occupation duties, and internal strife. Battalion members entered California disgruntled and were more ripe with discord and division when discharged. Supposedly the hard portion of their service was behind them, but inter-battalion conflict soon replaced the trials of the trail. Their California experience would prove contradictory. That which bound the soldiers together in the beginning became in the end the primary source of discord: their religion. Ultimately such problems turned on the issue of whether the battalion belonged to the U.S. government or the LDS church.

The problems in California did not equally bedevil the five companies of the battalion. Company B was ordered to San Diego. Members looked forward to their assignment, and none of those keeping journals recorded negative accounts of their stay. They meshed readily with the community. Some served in civic positions, and most took advantage of the opportunity to work for the citizens of the town in a wide range of employment. Dr. John S. Griffin, the physician who came west with General Stephen W. Kearny and served Company B for almost two months, praised their industry. The town's citizens asked the army to retain the company in their community and expressed deep emotion at their departure. When the time came for re-enlistment, twice as many men from Company B volunteered as in the other four companies combined.¹

1. Daniel Tyler, *A Concise History of the Mormon Battalion in the Mexican War, 1846-1848* (Glorieta, NM: Rio Grande Press, 1969), 284-90; William Hyde, *Private Journal of William*

The remaining four companies were assigned to Los Angeles. Members of these companies were ultimately less inclined to re-enlist. They had more complaints, internal strife, and trouble with military regulations. They performed less work and were negative about the community and its residents.² These men were assigned to labor on the fortification which became Fort Moore. Colonel Philip St. George Cooke ordered "diligent persecution" of the work for ten and a half hours a day,³ but by their own words the men refused to work more than a half day.⁴ Yet even during their easy California duties, these men at Los Angeles complained that their noses were continually held to the grindstone, that they were enslaved for ten months by their Mormon officers.⁵

The reasons for this dissymetry of response between those stationed in San Diego and those in Los Angeles can be traced to their locations during the bitterest infighting for control of the battalion in California. Company B was removed from the center of the problem much of the time, and company members did not allow past grievances on the trail to dominate them afterwards. Many in the other companies took the opposite approach and participated in the struggle for power as if it were spiritual warfare where religious resentment played the crucial role. Their attitudes reflected negatively against their commanding officer, the Mormon officers, the government, the army, the Californians, and almost everything except their religion. The roots of the problem stretched back to the beginning and became troublesome on the plains of Kansas. Before the end of the battalion's service a self-appointed leader, Levi W. Hancock, had sufficiently undermined those in authority to become the most influential man in the battalion.

Hyde, typescript, archives, Historical Department, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah (hereafter LDS archives); "The Journal of Robert S. Bliss, with the Mormon Battalion," *Utah Historical Quarterly* 4 (July 1931): 88-90; Frank Alfred Golder, *The March of the Mormon Battalion From Council Bluffs to California Taken From the Journal of Henry Standage* (New York: The Century Co., 1928), 212; George Walcott Ames, Jr., "A Doctor Comes to California: The Diary of John S. Griffin, Assistant Surgeon with Kearny's Dragoons," *California Historical Society Quarterly* 22 (Mar. 1943): 54-57.

2. Golder, *March of the Mormon Battalion*, 220, 221. Henry G. Boyle diary, typescript, 1 July 1847, Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah.

3. Cooke's Order No. 9, 24 Apr. 1847, in Tyler, *A Concise History of the Mormon Battalion*, 279.

4. David B. Gracy and Helen J. H. Rugeley, "From the Mississippi to the Pacific: An Englishman in the Mormon Battalion," *Arizona and the West* 7 (Summer 1965): 158, 159. Golder, *March of the Mormon Battalion*, 219, 220, 224, 225; James Pace diary, 4 June 1847, LDS archives.

5. Tyler, *History of the Mormon Battalion*, 296; Journal of Levi W. Hancock, 16 July 1847, LDS archives.

When the Mormon Battalion was called in 1846, LDS church leaders selected most of the officers and placed them in charge of all religious and social affairs of the battalion. Among the almost entirely Mormon unit only the cadre leadership of battalion commanders James Allen, Andrew J. Smith, and Philip St. George Cooke plus Lieutenant George Stoneman and surgeon George Sanderson were non-Mormons. In the march from Council Bluffs to Santa Fe only one non-Mormon officer was present at a time, thereafter Cooke, Smith, and Stoneman were with the battalion to California. In a meeting with the commissioned and non-commissioned officers, Brigham Young, president of the LDS church, instructed them to act as fathers to those they presided over.⁶ If a comparable meeting had been held with rank-and-file members of the battalion, no doubt considerable emphasis would have been placed on the men to obey those chosen to lead them. Obedience to authority was a cardinal principle of both the army and the Mormon church.

The Mormon Battalion first moved to Fort Leavenworth to outfit their march to California. Here they experienced some delay due to sickness of both their commander Colonel James Allen and some enlisted men, which caused three companies to move out on the trail under Captain Jefferson Hunt, the senior Mormon officer. Most in the remaining two companies followed a couple of days later. They reunited on 19 August 1846 at Hurricane Point because of a terrific storm they experienced. Some believed the storm was a manifestation of Satan's displeasure at the joyous reunion of the battalion companies. Others took it as an ominous judgment of God on the battalion for their imprudence and misdemeanor.⁷ The battalion spent a few days at this campsite recovering from the effects of the storm.

More important, the battalion had some internal sorting out to do. The two late arriving companies, C and D, had had serious problems en route from the fort. In both companies the problem concerned men dissatisfied with the captains the church had placed over them. Between Council Bluffs, Iowa, and Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, many men had become involved in conspiracies to oust the two captains.

These mutinous impulses had first erupted the day after the first three

6. Golder, *March of the Mormon Battalion*, 123-29; Eugene E. Campbell, "Authority Conflicts in the Mormon Battalion," *Brigham Young University Studies* 8 (Winter 1968): 127-29. Only two works of any note indicate that there was disharmony in the battalion above what little Sargent Tyler's covered. They are Campbell's article and John Yurtinus's dissertation, "A Ram in the Thicket: The Mormon Battalion in the Mexican War," Ph.D. diss., Brigham Young University, 1976.

7. Golder, *March of the Mormon Battalion*, 146-48; Tyler, *A Concise History of the Mormon Battalion*, 138-39; William Coray journal (incorporated into the Journal History in LDS archives by dated entry), 19 Aug. 1846; Levi Hancock journal, undated entry, probably 21 Aug. 1846.

companies left Fort Leavenworth. At the time Captain James Brown of Company C was sick and temporarily relieved of duty. In his absence Adjutant George P. Dykes ordered the acting company commander, Lieutenant George Rosecrans, to clean up the campground vacated by the three departing companies. Rosecrans refused to comply. Someone reported this to Captain Brown, who directed the men to do as Dykes had ordered. This put the two officers at odds with each other. More serious trouble came with Lieutenant Robert Clift, who had been trying to persuade Brown's wife to get her husband to resign his commission and quit the battalion. Brown heard Clift making some threats and uncomplimentary remarks about the captain. Brown grabbed his pistol and declared "he would shoot Clift." He did not find his antagonist while his anger was up but soon found he was facing a possible court martial.

Clift had preferred charges against Captain Brown. Brown wanted to make amends, but Clift was not willing. In an attempt to settle the matter internally, Adjutant Dykes finally prevailed on Clift to drop the charge if Brown publicly apologized to Clift and his company. The apology meeting was held, but Brown spoke too long, and Rosecrans, still the acting commander, had Brown placed under guard and renewed Clift's charges.⁸

Thus troubles in the two companies were left festering. On the evening of the storm at Hurricane Point, Rosecrans and Clift held a toast meeting in which participants drank and gave toasts expressing their sentiments concerning the captains of companies C and D. The toasts were as follows: "Here is to Capt. Brown that he may be discharged and sent back to the Bluff, having disgraced himself as an officer and that his place may be filled by Lieut. Rosecrans who raised the company. Here is to Capt. Higgins that he may be discharged and the one take his place (meaning Canfield) to who it rightly belongs."⁹

On the morning of 20 August the case of Captain Brown was taken up by battalion officers under the leadership of Captain Hunt. The toast of the previous night was not known or brought up. After details of the trouble were reviewed, the matter was brought to a head and settled. Brown, Rosecrans, and Clift were given a "complete dressing out," and each gave necessary acknowledgment of responsibility. Brown retained his office, and the three officers shared the blame for the troubles.¹⁰

Meanwhile a seemingly smaller problem had been causing a stir among a few. Ultimately the man at the center of this disturbance would become a driving force behind the struggles and controversies which would continue to plague the company. Shortly before the last two com-

8. William Coray journal, 20 Aug. 1846.

9. *Ibid.*

10. *Ibid.*

panies caught up to the rest of the battalion, Levi W. Hancock had a dream. He was a forty-three-year-old musician in Company E and one of the Seven Presidents of the Seventy of the LDS church. Despite his high church rank, he had been given no authority in the battalion. But because of his age, church standing, and friendship within the battalion, he was accorded much respect.

In his dream he saw some of the battalion cut their own throats. This made him feel bad since he felt he had warned them all of approaching danger and recited to them how the church expected them to keep themselves clean. While engrossed with concern for his dream, he was visited by a private making charges that some of the men had defiled themselves with adultery and swearing at the fort. This caused Hancock to feel that he must "come out against all sin and disorder."

None of the private's charges concerned those involved in the authority conflict in the two companies. Hancock decided he could not lay his hands on the offending parties to bless them lest he be seized by the same spirit afflicting them. He decided to approach Captain Hunt about the battalion holding religious meetings, hoping this would help the men. Hunt responded favorably to Hancock's suggestion and called Hancock and Private David Pettigrew to assist the officers in the battalion's spiritual affairs.¹¹ Hunt and Hancock were long-time friends. But eventually Hunt's decision to elevate Hancock to a position of authority would come back to haunt him.

Later that day the battalion held a religious meeting in which Daniel Tyler, William Hyde, David Pettigrew, and Hancock and Hunt spoke to the battalion on their duties as soldiers and members of the church. Hancock focused his remarks on the improper conduct of some for the last few days and stressed the need for obedience to counsel. He promised the sick would recover if they put away evil from their lives.¹² Captain Hunt expressed his feelings at some length, and with emotion according to one of the listeners, as "He fairly laid the ax at the root of the tree and discountenanced vice in the strongest terms, which imported a good spirit to the Battalion and checked insubordination materially." He also advised the captains of the companies to assemble their men frequently to pray for them and instruct them on the principles of virtue and "to be united with each other."¹³

11. Levi Hancock journal, 21 Aug. and 10 Sept.; "Autobiography of David Pettigrew," 74, manuscript, Utah State Historical Society, Salt Lake City. Hancock gives himself alone the credit, but Pettigrew claims both were called by the officers.

12. Journal of Samuel Holister Rogers, 20 Aug. 1846, LDS archives; Golder, *March of the Mormon Battalion*, 148.

13. William Coray journal, 20 Aug. 1846.

Assisting the officers, Hancock and associates addressed the task of correcting personal misconduct—being in the ranks, they were closer to the situation. Hunt maintained his authority by presiding at these meetings. It looked like a good start, but within ten days the new structure was coming apart.

After the first meeting “the brethren” met for a special prayer in behalf of the sick. Illness had plagued them since Council Bluffs. The following day the sick, who had been left at the fort, caught up with the battalion and brought word that Colonel Allen was still ill. Sickness continued to stalk the command despite the work of the Mormon doctor, admonitions to live right, as well as administrations to and baptisms of the sick. Then they received the bad news that Colonel Allen had died at the fort.¹⁴

The following day the battalion marched into Council Grove. They held a memorial service for Colonel Allen and buried two older people who were with a family party accompanying the battalion. The battalion now needed a new commander, and the officers were unsure of the procedures to accomplish this. They met and after some investigation decided that Captain Hunt should be their commanding officer until they reached General Kearny.¹⁵ Feeling the government must confirm their choice, the officers addressed a letter to U.S. president James K. Polk informing him of Allen’s death and asking him to appoint Hunt as Allen’s successor. This letter was read to the troops and money collected to pay the cost of getting the letter posted at Independence, Missouri.¹⁶

Matters became complicated the next day when another candidate to lead the battalion arrived. On 29 August Lieutenant Andrew J. Smith of the regular army arrived with Dr. George B. Sanderson (the battalion’s surgeon), a paymaster general, a guide, and the men’s staff members. Earlier Smith had tried to convince the Mormons attending Colonel Allen at the fort that he should lead them to Kearny. Both he and Sanderson had sent letters to Brigham Young requesting that Smith take charge.¹⁷ A couple of days after writing Young, Smith sent a letter to the U.S. Adjutant General explaining that just prior to his death, Colonel Allen had requested him to forward to Washington, D.C., select papers concerning the battalion. Smith

14. Golder, *March of the Mormon Battalion*, 148-49; William Coray journal, 24 Aug. 1846; Tyler, *A Concise History of the Mormon Battalion*, 140. See also “Extracts From the Journal of Henry W. Bigler,” *Utah Historical Quarterly* 5 (Apr. 1932): 37. Baptizing the sick for the restoration of their health was a practice of the early Mormon church started by Joseph Smith. It was later discontinued.

15. Golder, *March of the Mormon Battalion*, 154-56.

16. Samuel Rogers journal, 29 Aug. 1846; Tyler, *Concise History of the Mormon Battalion*, 143. Polk received the letter too late to affect the change of command.

17. Tyler, *Concise History of the Mormon Battalion*, 143, 150-54; William Hyde journal, 23.

stated that he was on his way to report to General Kearny. He had the general's instruction to Colonel Allen in his possession, and he felt it his duty to see that his instructions were carried out. Therefore he would "with the consent of the Mormons" take charge of and lead them to Kearny. He hoped his course of action would be approved by the War Department.¹⁸

Smith met with the Mormon officers and let them know that he hoped to lead them to General Kearny. He stressed the advantages of having a regular officer at their head. He knew the army's way of reports, rolls, and how to get provisions. He told the Mormons, who were short of supplies, that there were provisions in advance and rear which were available for their use. But the men in charge of those supplies did not know the Mormon officers, who had not yet received their official commissions. Smith could get these provisions. He also knew the trail to Santa Fe and had a guide who could direct them.¹⁹

Smith also had a letter from the commander of Fort Leavenworth to Captain Hunt informing him that because of Colonel Allen's death, the government property in the battalion's possession had not been duly receipted. He advised that they accept Lieutenant Smith, who could remedy the problem.²⁰ The paymaster general urged the Mormon officers to take the advice of the post commander and alluded to potential problems if they tried to go by themselves. Smith's guide also told the Mormons that their old nemesis from Missouri, Colonel Sterling Price, leading a command of Missouri volunteers, was nearby and intended to attach the Mormon Battalion to his regiment if Smith was not selected.²¹ Because Price had earlier been involved in what Mormons believed were mobbing activities against them in the late 1830s and in the harsh treatment and abuse of Mormon prisoners including Joseph Smith at Richmond, Missouri, he was considered in 1846 an "inveterate enemy" of the Mormon church. Thus the guide's warning carried some weight.

The Mormon officers remained silent except for Adjutant Dykes, who stated the present command did not know how to fill out the pay rolls and other documents. Dykes expressed his view that Smith should be accepted. Hunt, suspicious, asked Smith about his intentions and whether he planned to carry out Colonel Allen's designs. Smith assured the Mormon that such were his plans.²² In the same meeting, according to Daniel Tyler,

18. Lieutenant Andrew Jackson Smith to Roger Jones, Camp near Fort Leavenworth, 25 Aug. 1846, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

19. Golder, *March of the Mormon Battalion*, 156-57; William Hyde journal, 23.

20. Tyler, *Concise History of the Mormon Battalion*, 143-44.

21. *Ibid.*; Golder, *March of the Mormon Battalion*, 156-57.

22. Jefferson Hunt and J. D. Hunter to Brigham Young and His Council, 17 Oct. 1846, in *Journal History*, 17 Oct. 1846, and in Golder, *March of the Mormon Battalion*, 156-57.

"Captain Hunt stated boldly and emphatically that it was his [Hunt's] right to assume command, and that he had no fears of the responsibility of leading the Battalion," but that he was one man and the whole council of officers should decide.²³ Smith and supporters were excused, and the Mormon officers discussed the matter. Then Captain Nelson Higgins of Company D moved that Smith lead them to Kearny, and Captain Daniel Davis of Company E seconded the motion, which carried unanimously. Smith was notified of the results, and he took command of the battalion on 30 August 1846 at Council Grove.

The men in the battalion were surprised at the move; one man was convinced the sole reason was because Smith was a West Pointer.²⁴ Another noted that the men did not know the reason why, "but time will show leaving it in the hands of those who knows concerning our mission."²⁵ A third thought that Smith had been accepted on his "genteel promises."²⁶ After trouble erupted with Smith, the men remembered things differently. Only then did charges emerge that the Mormons had not been consulted about the change in command and that Smith's appointment went against the counsel of church leaders and a promise of Colonel Allen. None of the battalion's numerous diarists mentioned Allen's promise that he would be the only non-Mormon officer in the command.

The basis for this argument came over two weeks later in a letter from Brigham Young. John D. Lee traveling with Lieutenant James Pace and Howard Egan brought the letter, reaching the battalion at the crossing of the Arkansas River. The letter was addressed to Lieutenant Samuel Gully, who had dispatched Lieutenant Pace to the Mormon camps with the news of Allen's death and a report that Smith sought to take command of the battalion.

Young's letter stated that Colonel Allen had repeatedly promised there would be no other gentile officer in the command and that if he became sick or died, the command would devolve on the ranking Mormon officer. Therefore, according to Young's letter, "the command must devolve" on Captain Hunt. Colonel Allen may well have made the comments, but apparently no one at Council Grove in late August knew of this promise. The letter arrived too late to be acted on.²⁷

The day after Smith took command, a private in Company D declared the soldiers had "cause to rejoice." About thirty of the men including himself had been baptized for the remission of sins and restoration of

23. Tyler, *Concise History of the Mormon Battalion*, 144.

24. "Extracts from the Journal of William W. Bigler," 38.

25. Golder, *March of the Mormon Battalion*, 158.

26. William Hyde journal, 23.

27. Tyler, *Concise History of the Mormon Battalion*, 144, 155-56.

health. He took it as a sign of "a great reformation" in the company. He also noted that there were many sick in the battalion.²⁸

But the real reform in the battalion was soon revealed as a matter of order and protocol. The new command insisted the men comply with military regulations which heretofore had been ignored. Previously, the army's method of determining who was excused from marching and duties was not followed. Instead when soldiers decided that they were unable or unwilling to march, they climbed in a wagon and rode. Or they were left with a tent and an able-bodied man to attend them. A wagon was then sent back.²⁹ The men also had an aversion to doctors and medicine and tended to rely on faith healing. Before leaving the Council Bluffs area, church leaders told the men that if they were sick to call the elders who could rebuke "all manner of disease." Six weeks later the battalion received a letter from Brigham Young telling the soldiers to live by faith and leave the company surgeon's medicine alone if they wanted to live.³⁰

But after a month and a half of doing things their way, the new commander, Lieutenant Smith, pulled men out of the wagons because they had not complied with the army's regulation for sick call. Smith was approached twice, once by a sergeant and once by Captain Hunt, with information that the men had "religious scruples against taking mineral medicine." But Smith insisted on army regulations. Thereafter any man who claimed to be sick or afflicted could only ride or avoid duties by reporting to the doctor and being diagnosed unfit for marching or duty.³¹

Next the new commander divided the battalion, sending the family and friends contingent to Pueblo and taking the soldiers on to Cimarron Cutoff, bypassing Bent's Fort.³² These actions caused more complaints, with Levi Hancock objecting that it violated counsel of church leaders.³³ A day later John D. Lee, the agent from the Mormon camps seeking money

28. John Steele diary, 31 Aug. and 1 Sept. 1846, typescript, Special Collections, Lee Library. The Mormons also later abandoned the concept of repeated baptism to wash away sins.

29. Golder, *March of the Mormon Battalion*, 147, 149; "Extracts from the Journal of William W. Bigler," 38-39.

30. *Journal of Discourses by President Brigham Young and His Two Counsellors and the Twelve Apostles* (Liverpool, Eng.: Published by Horace S. Eldredge, 1871), 13:142; *Journal History*, 18 July 1846; Golder, *March of the Mormon Battalion*, 152. Extremists in the battalion claimed that the doctor's medicine would poison them and that natural death was preferred. They charged the doctor with killing some of the men. It would be interesting to compare the battalion's death rate with that of the Mormons in their Missouri River camps.

31. Tyler, *Concise History of the Mormon Battalion*, 144-45, 160.

32. Levi Hancock journal, 15-17 Sept. and 3 Oct. 1846; Golder, *March of the Mormon Battalion*, 165, 169.

33. Levi Hancock journal, 15-17 Sept. and 3 Oct. 1846.

from the soldiers, reached the battalion. He tried to reverse the change of command and the separation of families. He strongly objected to the battalion traveling any other route than that marked out by the church and Colonel James Allen even though the Cimarron Cutoff was a direct order from General Kearny.³⁴

Smith's order separating the family and friends company from the battalion became a major complaint against his command. The group consisted mostly of wives with some elderly and children. They had been included at the last minute with little thought and less preparation. Sickness and suffering afflicted them, and at Council Grove an older couple died.³⁵ They had to keep up with the battalion, or the command had to slow down for them. Both groups suffered from the relationship. They struggled along the easy travel of the Santa Fe Trail, and ahead lay the severe trials of the waterless stretches of the Cimarron Cutoff and worse deserts before reaching the Pacific Coast.

On 12 September 1846 as the battalion moved up the Arkansas River, members encountered Mormons traveling downstream from Pueblo. The chance meeting was with members from the Mississippi Company of Saints, who had traveled from their homes to Fort Laramie before they realized the mass Mormon emigration had not moved across the trans-Missouri River plains in the summer of 1846. At the invitation of some trappers, they moved south to Pueblo to spend the winter. Then a small party left the group to return home for their families and supplies and met the battalion.³⁶

34. Juanita Brooks, ed., "Diary of the Mormon Battalion Mission: John D. Lee," *New Mexico Historical Review* 42 (July and Oct. 1967): 191-99; Golder, *March of the Mormon Battalion*, 161.

35. Tyler, *Concise History of the Mormon Battalion*, 140, 142, 359-60; John Steele diary, 27 July 1847. The precipitant forming and unprepared state of this group are illustrated by the example of Thomas Williams of Company D. He left his wife and children at Council Bluffs with only five days' provisions and a yoke of oxen with an old wagon. He had no money and no idea where his family would get food after the five days. The next day his company commander, Captain Higgins, went back to get his family to accompany the battalion, and Williams decided on the spur of the moment to do the same. He would take them although he had no money to equip and supply them for any trip (see Tyler, *Concise History of the Mormon Battalion*, 359-60). Also see the church's Return List Mormon Battalion for Companies A and B enrolled at Council Bluffs on 16 July 1846 (LDS archives). These lists have Captain Hunt's families assigned to go forward with the church on the day the lists were made, but in short order he took his two wives, seven children, plus four other people with him. Captain Brown changed the arrangements for his wife and took her, while Lieutenant Luddington added his mother to accompany his laundress wife.

36. John Brown, *Autobiography of Pioneer John Brown* (Salt Lake City: Stevens & Wallis, 1941), 38-70. There is surprisingly little mention of this encounter in the diaries of battalion members. Private Samuel Holister Rogers mentioned the encounter in his

Lieutenant Smith decided to send the contingent of family and friends accompanying the battalion up the Arkansas River to Pueblo to join the Mormons already there. When the Mormon officers accepted his proposal, he detached a guard detail to escort them to Pueblo.³⁷ This was a wise decision, but resentment increased against most of the Mormon officers for allowing the separation. The focal point of their anger was Senior Captain Hunt. The opposition was led by Lee and Hancock, and they became increasingly bold in their actions and criticisms. Some of the more vocal soldiers said they needed a leader such as Lee who would stand up for their rights. The situation deteriorated to the point that most of the Mormon officers reprimanded both Lee and Hancock.³⁸ Within a week Lee and Hancock were engaged in a plot to replace Captain Hunt with Lieutenant Samuel Gully by using claims about dreams to justify their actions.³⁹ The plot was not implemented, but resentment against Hunt increased. Finally Hunt relieved Hancock of the religious calling he had given him a month earlier.⁴⁰

Hancock's journal does not record this dismissal, but Lee's does. According to Lee, Hunt told Hancock he had to put him down because of his actions. No one had the right to counsel in regard to the battalion but Hunt himself. Hunt continued that he would exercise his authority in the name of the Lord and no man would take it from him. This declaration was no doubt a rebuttal of the notion that Hunt could be replaced by Lee.

Then Lee addressed the council of officers and disclaimed any personal desire to command the battalion. He declared that if Hunt had "been as willing to have used his authority in behalf of the Bat[t]. as he is to exercise it over his best Friend" and brother, there would have been no trouble or complaints.⁴¹ A dozen years earlier Hancock had introduced Hunt and his wife to the LDS church and taught them the gospel, and a special friendship and bond had been formed and maintained until now when the "best Friend" felt hurt.⁴²

journal (12 Sept. 1846), and John D. Lee did the same when he met them a couple of days after the battalion (Brooks, "Diary of . . . John D. Lee," 188-89.)

37. Tyler, *Concise History of the Mormon Battalion*, 157-58.

38. Brooks, "Diary of . . . John D. Lee," 191-99.

39. William Coray journal, 28 Sept. 1846. Besides the many dreams concerning the removal of an army officer, the conspirators probably had the "numerous revelations, visions, and prophecies" that Mormon officers referred to in their letter to church leaders of 13 October 1846. The specific prophecies all failed, such as the advance party continuing on to California before the second group reached Santa Fe.

40. Brooks, "Diary of . . . John D. Lee," 198; Levi W. Hancock journal, 28 Dec. 1846; Golder, *March of the Mormon Battalion*, 216.

41. Brooks, "Diary of . . . John D. Lee," 198.

42. Pauline Udall Smith, *Captain Jefferson Hunt of the Mormon Battalion* (Salt Lake City:

On 3 October Lieutenant Smith stopped the battalion after a short march and held a council with the officers. They had recently received orders from General Kearny that unless they reached Santa Fe by the 10th, they would be discharged. Smith explained that at their present rate of march, they would never make the deadline. The Mormon officers and Smith decided to divide the command, taking the most able men and teams on a "double forced march" to Santa Fe and leaving the rest to follow. The purpose of the plan was to meet the deadline and save the whole battalion from being dismissed.⁴³ The plan worked. The advance group reached Santa Fe on the 9th, the others on the 13th, and all were retained in the service.

But at the time this second separation raised a storm of bitterness in the command. As with the separation of the families at the Arkansas crossing, charges were made that the plan violated church counsel against dividing the battalion. The opposition also claimed that Colonel Allen had pledged that the battalion would not be divided. Those opposed reacted variously. Some cried, prayed, swore, while others wanted to forcibly "settle the dispute on the ground." Hancock, after citing violation of church advice and Allen's promise, stated that it looked as though the leaders were determined to go against church counsel "in every movement."⁴⁴ Colonel Allen had promised not to divide the battalion, and church leaders had counseled the same. But far from betraying their command, the Mormon officers' decisions to support Smith had served the battalion well.

In arguing against separation, Lee and Hancock welcomed early termination of the battalion. Lee thought discharge would be a blessing with each man receiving a full year's pay and provisions. Then they would be free to assist their families and friends with money and food. He thus viewed the efforts of the Mormon officers and Smith to arrive on time at Santa Fe as a treacherous scheme to take this privilege away from the soldiers. Lee thought marching to California would be wasteful, as it placed the soldiers some 800 miles from their eventual destination in Great Salt Lake Valley. He concluded that it was better to leave the army with its money and goods in New Mexico.⁴⁵

Lee and Hancock thought that the battalion belonged more to the LDS

The Nicholas G. Morgan, Sr., Foundation, 1958), 24-26.

43. William Coray journal, 3 Oct. 1846; Golder, *March of the Mormon Battalion*, 169; Tyler, *A Concise History of the Mormon Battalion*, 163. Although Tyler includes Hancock and Pettigrew in this council, Hancock's journal and Lee's diary suggest this was not the case. Lieutenants Pace, Lytle, Gully, and Clark did oppose the separation.

44. Levi Hancock journal, 3 Oct. 1846.

45. Brooks, "Diary of . . . John D. Lee," 289-91; Levi Hancock to Brigham Young, Santa Fe, 18 Oct. 1846, LDS archives.

church than the U.S. army. And they had good reason to believe their view was shared by church leaders since Brigham Young had explicitly informed Mormon officers that he reserved the right to counsel them in more than religious matters.⁴⁶ When church leaders learned that after Colonel Allen's death the Mormon officers had written to President James K. Polk rather than to Brigham Young for help in establishing the battalion's legitimate commander, they were incensed.⁴⁷ Church leaders had been sympathetic to John D. Lee's concerns about Lieutenant Smith's appointment. Lee reported that he had called Smith a tyrant and threatened to cut his throat if he did not cease oppressing his brethren. In response, Brigham Young had leaped to his feet and inquired why Lee had not taken Smith's head off.⁴⁸

Young was still intervening in battalion matters in 1847. He dispatched Apostle Amasa Lyman to the Pueblo detachment with instructions for the officers to prevent the group from marching west by the southern route. If the officers would not do what the church wanted, they were to be replaced. If Lyman learned the main portion of the battalion was still at Santa Fe, he was to go there and bring them back to the church. He was to throw out all gentile officers. And it did not matter whether General Kearny objected.⁴⁹ Mormon leaders assumed that the army would adapt to the church, not the other way around.

Lee's close connection to Brigham Young helped to empower Hancock and him in the eyes of battalion men. Lee and Hancock continued to escalate their resistance to the officers. They pushed their version of what the church wanted so effectively that many men became "ready to revolt." Soldiers went to Lee and stated "they would obey council of the Church or loose their lives in the attempt."⁵⁰

At Santa Fe Hancock and Lee endorsed the proposal to send a sick detachment plus the majority of the women and all the remaining children to Pueblo. When the battalion departed, Lee turned back to the Mormon camps on the Missouri River, taking with him the battalion's money. Hancock remained with the battalion, which had received a new commander by order of General Kearny: Colonel Philip St. George Cooke.⁵¹

46. Elden J. Watson, ed., *Manuscript History of Brigham Young 1846-1847* (Salt Lake City: Elden J. Watson, 1971), 333-34, 595-96; *Journal History*, 19, 20 Aug. 1846; Yurtinus, "A Ram in the Thicket," 1:64-65.

47. Council of Twelve Apostles to Elders Orson Hyde, Orson Pratt, and John Taylor, *Journal History*, 7 Jan. 1846.

48. Charles Kelly, ed., *Journal of John D. Lee, 1846-47 and 1859* (Salt Lake City: Western Printing, Co., 1938), 20-21.

49. Thomas Bullock journal, 30 June 1847, LDS archives.

50. Brooks, "Diary of . . . John D. Lee," 192-93, 291.

51. *Ibid.*, 302; Hancock journal, 13 Oct. 1846.

Hancock was still convinced the battalion was being mismanaged by its Mormon and gentile officers. Five days after the decision to detach the sick, he wrote a letter to Brigham Young, explaining his view of the situation. According to Hancock, the Mormons had lost an opportunity to take power from their "enemies" and were now being forced to make a needless march to California. If the officers had behaved wisely, the battalion would now be traveling either to Bent's Fort or to Pueblo to spend the winter and then north to meet their families.⁵²

Hancock continued to work behind the scenes to undermine the men's confidence in their officers. Often when enlisted soldiers were disciplined, Hancock rushed to their side, portraying both the Mormon officers and Colonel Cooke as oppressive. On one occasion Hancock visited a soldier under arrest for sleeping on guard duty. Cooke had issued orders forbidding visits. Hancock excused his ignorance of the order, but he never excused Cooke. In Hancock's view, Cooke was the meanest man he had ever seen and Lieutenant Smith was a gentleman in comparison. Hancock thought Cooke was so low a "cur" that the devil would hate his appearance and refuse him power in the lower realm.⁵³

Thus bad feelings continued as the battalion marched to the Pacific Ocean. A day before the battalion's long march ended, Lieutenant George Oman of Company A told Private Henry Standage of Company E that Hancock's behavior would have led to insurrection if "he had been left to pursue the same and had not been checked."⁵⁴ It was the Mormon officers led by Captain Hunt who would try to check Hancock, whose support was to be found among the enlisted men.⁵⁵

Hunt tried to fulfill both the military and religious responsibilities he had received in connection with the battalion. He called meetings, spoke at each of them, and counseled commanding officers to hold religious services. The role of Hunt and his officers became complicated when some wanted the battalion to swear allegiance to church leaders regardless of the orders from General Kearny.⁵⁶

The battalion took up its station at San Luis Rey on 3 February 1847 and prepared for inspection on the first Sunday. By the following Sunday

52. Levi Hancock to Brigham Young, Santa Fe, 18 Oct. 1846.

53. Levi Hancock journal, 4 Nov. 1846, 14, 26 Jan. 1847.

54. Golder, *March of the Mormon Battalion*, 216.

55. Jefferson Hunt and others to Brigham Young, Los Angeles, 14 May 1847, in Kate Carter, ed., *Our Pioneer Heritage* (Salt Lake City: Daughters of the Utah Pioneers, 1968), 11:356-57.

56. Samuel Rogers journal, 9, 20, 29 Aug. 1846; Golder, *March of the Mormon Battalion*, 148, 210; William Coray journal, 20, 29 Aug. 1846; Tyler *Concise History of the Mormon Battalion*, 156-58, 163; Levi Hancock journal, 14, 16 Feb., 17, 18 Apr. 1847.

Captain Hunt had obtained permission from Colonel Cooke to hold religious meetings and had planned the service. Hunt presided over the meeting, and after the pre-arranged sermon, spoke to the men of their duty to their God and to each other. Then Hunt stated he would give out an appointment for a meeting the following Sunday.⁵⁷

Hunt's meeting and his call for a second one upset Hancock, who reacted immediately. He pressed for a meeting the following evening. Hancock had been holding secret meetings for eight days, and now he came out in the open to challenge Hunt and the officers over who would lead the spiritual affairs of the battalion. Hancock charged that the captains had tried to take away his rights. He then described the confidential meetings, which were becoming known outside the circle of participants. They had washed each other's feet and anointed each other with oil, and the Lord had testified to them that it was right. Hancock continued with disparaging remarks about the captains taking the lead when it was not their place.⁵⁸ In a final tactical move for advantage, Hancock declared it had been revealed to him that Daniel Tyler was the man to preach to the battalion. He quickly called for a vote of those assembled about whether Tyler should preach or not. The meeting voted as Hancock had wanted: he would conduct the next Sunday meeting and Tyler would preach.⁵⁹

Of course Hancock was strategically ignoring the charge which had been given to the officers by church leaders—and his own lack of formal authorization to lead from either army or church. Sergeant William Coray, who observed the struggle, knew this. In his journal he focused the problem as an issue of authority—Hancock thought he had the most and the captains thought they had the most. Coray knew that Hancock had been given no authority in the battalion. When the battalion was called into service Coray was assisting Apostle Willard Richards and asked if the church would send a religious leader. Richards told him the officers would be the sole religious counselors. Coray concluded that Hancock acted improperly in setting the men against their officers. Coray would not justify the officers altogether, as some had set bad examples and been somewhat tyrannical. But Hancock had usurped their position.⁶⁰

Hancock's resistance to the officers had been escalating. Back in late December 1846 at the Indian villages on the Gila River, Hancock had heard that Hunt was going to preach to the Indians. Someone asked Hancock what he thought of it, and he responded that the Lord had manifested

57. Golder, *March of the Mormon Battalion*, 210; Henry Bigler journal, 57; James Pace diary, 14 Feb. 1847.

58. William Coray journal, 15 Feb. 1847.

59. *Ibid.*; Samuel Rogers journal, 21 Feb. 1847; James Pace diary, 21 Feb. 1847.

60. William Coray journal, 15 Feb. 1847.

nothing to him about it or to any of the Seventies. But if the Lord had spoken to the high priests, then he had no objection. He was pleased when Hunt did not preach. A few days later Lieutenant Dykes came to Hancock seeking counsel. At first Hancock refused, stating he had been "put down" for giving counsel to the officers and had been charged with seeking power and authority. Finally he told Dykes to do right and everything would work out. He declared this would be his only counsel to officers until he saw the Twelve and gave an account of his stewardship. Then in an implicit bid for Dykes's support, Hancock stated that if Hunt would acknowledge that he [Hancock] had a right to counsel the soldiers, he would choose good men to assist him and the battalion would have better times.⁶¹

By the second week in February 1847, Hancock was no longer conciliatory. He was explicitly using his position as a Seventy as base for his bid for power in the battalion. When he first began ordaining seventies during the march, he told the men he would place them in some quorum when there was a convenient opportunity.⁶² By the time the battalion reached California, he seemed to be forming his own corps of loyal seventies. Soon he reported that they were calling him chief.⁶³ By June they were even taking up money for Hancock to return to his family when the battalion's service ended. During this time he secured a scribe to write down his words when he preached.⁶⁴

In California Hancock had pulled off a virtual religious coup d'état. By forming his own group over which he exercised power, he had excluded Mormon officers from exercising religious leadership over the men. Frequently during the march Hancock had put on his old Nauvoo Legion jacket and thrust his right hand into the coat in a decidedly Napoleonic pose, which he would maintain for some time.⁶⁵ Certainly he had made of himself a figure of power and dissension during the battalion's stay in California.

By late spring Hunt addressed a letter to Brigham Young explaining the situation in the battalion and his deteriorating position. He stated that a few restless souls had stirred up dissension and had aimed their harshest blows at him, construing his best intentions into something evil. Hunt declared that he was considered the most vile person in the battalion.⁶⁶

61. Levi Hancock journal, 24, 25, 28 Dec. 1846.

62. *Ibid.*, 26, 27 Aug. 1846, 6-9 Feb. 1847.

63. *Ibid.*, 12 May 1847.

64. Samuel Rogers journal, 20, 21 June 1847; "The Journal of Robert S. Bliss," 87; Golder, *March of the Mormon Battalion*, 217, 218; Levi Hancock journal, 14, 16 Feb., 17, 18 Apr. 1847.

65. James Van Nostrand Williams journal, 14 Dec. 1846, LDS archives.

66. Jefferson Hunt, Philemon C. Merrill, D. C. Davis, and Lorenzo Clark to Brigham

On 4 April the battalion held a Sunday evening service under Hancock's direction. The featured speaker was Sergeant Tyler who lectured on his desire to honor the priesthood. Hancock then spoke a short time and "gave way." The giving way was to Hunt, who had a message he wanted to express. The senior captain reminded his audience that the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles had "strictly charged" the officers to lead all religious meetings. He implored the officers to regain their lost leadership position. They should preach themselves and call on the elders to assist them. According to Hancock's journal, Hunt concluded with the declaration: "now as I have said before so I say now you are the men who the twelve charge to be fathers to the Batalion and we must see to it." Hancock's retort came later in his private journal:

A poor shorte sighted creature he nor no other man ever got the right of presiding over men called to be seventies in the priesthood and And I am bold to say there is no such a thing can exist and if he or any other ofiser has bin called to be fathers for one yeare to those whom I am called to preside they at the end of the year shall be hered if my voice in the councill is hered I have seen them labour and patience in the kingdom as in their uniforms.⁶⁷

The Mormon officers did little in response to Hunt's challenge to reassert their religious leadership. But Hancock was aroused to action. It had become "dangerous" for him to counsel openly, he claimed. On 18 April he assembled his Seventies separately and formally organized them into a quorum with a president and a host of counselors. Hancock's journal makes it clear the move was in reaction to Hunt's call to the officers.⁶⁸

Unfortunately for their cause, the officers lined up on the unpopular side of several struggles which occurred that spring in California. The first concerned how a discharge from the army would be effected. When the battalion finally determined that California would not be their home, some claimed that Colonel Allen had promised to pay them for the time it would take them to reach their final destination after discharge. In an attempt to calm the brewing tempest, Mormon officers produced the instructions of General Kearny to Colonel Allen, which told him to discharge the soldiers in California with no promise of pay to go anywhere. A Seventy and close supporter of Hancock decried the discharge without money or guns as another example of mistreatment, and three days later he stole ammunition while on guard duty, rationalizing his act on the basis of the supposed

Young, Los Angeles, 14 May 1847, in Carter, *Our Pioneer Heritage*, 11:356-57.

67. Levi Hancock journal, 4 Apr. 1847.

68. *Ibid.*, 17, 18 Apr. 1847; Golder, *March of the Mormon Battalion*, 217-18.

grievance.⁶⁹ Such a promise from Colonel Allen would have been unlikely. Not only did the promise contradict Kearny's instructions but Allen's own written appeal to the Mormons.⁷⁰ Certainly the controversy served Hancock's ends.

The final controversies were tied up in a struggle over whether to re-enlist and how to organize the men's return to the main body of Mormons. In early April 1847 officers tabled a petition signed by the men for an early release. Instead they favored a re-enlistment of the battalion with Hunt as lieutenant colonel in charge. Even when it became evident that the men were in no mood to re-enlist, officers carried through promises made to their superiors to push recruitment. The issue came to a head at a meeting, with both sides rehashing the pros and cons of re-enlistment. As the arguments continued, Pettigrew became agitated and exclaimed that the prophets of the Lord should be considered before signing on for another year. Captain Hunter of Company B took up the issue. It had been hinted that there was a prophet in the camp, he said. If so, he wished him to come forth and give the word of the Lord on the subject. Hunter also charged that someone had set the men at variance with their officers. Hancock responded to Hunter's remarks and denied ever setting the men against their officers. When the talking finished, only a few men gave their names for re-enlistment.⁷¹ Colonel Jonathan Stevenson, commander of the Southern Military District, reported to military Governor Richard B. Mason that in the Mormon Battalion were two "chief men" who prevented the enrollment of at least three companies for another year of service. Of these two men, Pettigrew and Hancock, the latter had become the most influential.⁷²

The day after the recruitment meeting, the Mormon officers, conceding to the will of the men, met to draft a plan for taking them back to their families and the church.⁷³ They felt their charge from church leaders dictated this course. But Hancock was ahead of them. Three days earlier he had assembled his corps and organized the main company going home. He was in overall command with tactical leadership of its two primary divisions given to lieutenants James Pace and Andrew Lytle. Hancock praised the latter as the only two officers who had shown respect at all times to the priesthood and served as fathers to the men under them.⁷⁴

69. Golder, *March of the Mormon Battalion*, 227-28.

70. Tyler, *Concise History of the Mormon Battalion*, 113-15.

71. *Ibid.*, 275, 281-83; Golder, *March of the Mormon Battalion*, 231-33.

72. Private and Confidential letter of Colonel J. D. Stevenson to Colonel R. B. Mason, Los Angeles, 23 July 1847, Mormon Battalion Papers, National Archives.

73. James Pace diary, 30 June 1846.

74. Golder, *March of the Mormon Battalion*, 229, 230; Albert Smith journal, 16 July 1847, typescript, LDS archives.

Thus the Mormon Battalion split into various groups. The largest party consisting of 164 persons formed around Hancock; 81 men finally re-enlisted; and about 50 men followed Captain Hunt up the coast to Monterey. A few men chose to stay in southern California. The religious dispute was instrumental in these divisions and in the decisions of some to remain in southern California.⁷⁵

The internal strife in the Mormon Battalion reduces itself finally to a struggle to answer one question: Whose battalion was it? Hancock believed they were the church's and therefore his to direct. Officers accepted the fact that they had enlisted in the United States army and were under that command. There never was a showdown before church leaders as to who was right. Perhaps by the time the main portion of the battalion reached the church, they were no longer in the mood to plumb the depths of its disputes. More pressing matters were at hand. Captain Hunt did not meet Young until the summer of 1848, and if Hancock made his report as planned, there has been no evidence found of the meeting.

75. Tyler, *Concise History of the Mormon Battalion*, 298, 305; *Journal of Elijah Elmer*, 25 July-11 Aug. 1847, typescript, San Diego Historical Society; Robert Bliss journal, 96; Henry Boyle diary, 20 July 1847.