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“Here Is One Man Who Will Not Go, Dam’um”: Recruiting the Mormon Battalion in Iowa Territory

John F. Yurtinus

Captain James Allen, a personable career officer in the United States Army, rode directly into the Mormon camp at Mt. Pisgah, Iowa Territory. It was 26 June 1846 and the migrating Latter-day Saints were scattered in camps west from Nauvoo to Council Bluffs. William Huntington, who commanded the Mt. Pisgah camp, and Wilford Woodruff, a Mormon Apostle who happened to be passing through on his way west, agreed to meet the government representative. Captain Allen explained to the surprised Mormon leaders that President James K. Polk had commissioned Colonel Stephen W. Kearny at Fort Leavenworth to “give the Mormons an invitation to raise five hundred volunteers to assist the USA in the Mexican War.”

The Mormon leaders, though unreceptive to the invitation, tactfully agreed to permit Captain Allen to address a gathering of brethren and issue a circular explaining his mission. Captain Allen offered to enlist four or five companies of Mormon volunteers to serve twelve months in the War with Mexico. He personally would lead the soldiers from Fort Leavenworth via Santa Fe to California where they would be discharged. He offered the volunteers pay, clothing, rations, and any other allowance granted by the government to recruits. Each company could maintain four women laundresses, and upon discharge the soldiers could retain their arms and accoutrements. The captain offered to enlist any healthy, able-bodied men from eighteen to forty-five years of age. Assuming the Saints intended to settle in Iowa Territory, Captain Allen would return to the United States Army via Fort Leavenworth.

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1Wilford Woodruff Journal, 26 June 1846, Library–Archives, Historical Department of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah (hereafter cited as Church Archives).
2William Huntington Journal, 26 June 1846, Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah (hereafter cited as Lee Library).
California, he explained, this gives "an opportunity of sending a portion of their young and intelligent men to the ultimate destination of their whole people, and entirely at the expense of the United States and this advanced party can thus pave the way, and look out the land for their brethren to come after them."  

The initial Mormon reaction to Captain Allen's call for volunteers was overwhelmingly negative. Based on previous experiences with the United States government, the rank and file Latter-day Saint tended to be blinded to any positive aspects of enlistment. Ultimately, many Saints feared that Captain Allen was part of a government conspiracy designed to obstruct or prevent their emigration west. They felt Captain Allen apparently was snooping around to investigate their arms, numbers, attitudes, and condition. Five hundred enlistees would remove "the strength of our camp," men who could very likely be destroyed in battle with the Mexicans. Those Mormons left scattered and helpless across Iowa Territory could perish from inclement weather, Indian raids, or limited food supply. If the Mormons did not "volunteer," they would be branded as disloyal or treasonous, leaving them susceptible to attacks by Missouri mobs. The United States Army, as a war measure, could even obstruct their exodus. Few people foresaw anything beneficial from Captain Allen's request.

Hosea Stout reflected the Mormons' prevailing attitude regarding the Mexican War. On 27 May, when he first learned the war had started, he wrote, "I confess that I was glad to learn of war against the United States and was in hopes that it might never end until they were entirely destroyed for they had driven us into the wilderness & was now laughing at our calamities." Later when he learned of Captain Allen's request, he expressed the commonly held view: "We were all very indignant at this requisition and only looked on it as a plot laid to bring trouble on us as a people. For in the event that we did not comply with the requisition we supposed they would now make a protest to denounce us as enemies to our country and if we did comply that they would then have 500 of our men in their power to be destroyed as they had done our leaders at Carthage." Although less indignant than Hosea Stout, William Hyde, who eventually joined the Battalion, also expressed a passionate sense of

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1"Circular to the Mormons," cited in Journal History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 26 June 1846. Church Archives.
4Ibid., 1:172.
disappointment in the United States, saying his “soul revolted” at the treatment the Saints had received:

The Government of the United States were at this time at war with Mexico, and not being satisfied with either having assisted, or by their silence acquiesed in driving and plundering thousands of defenceless men, women and children, and driving them from their pleasant and lawful homes, and of actually murdering, or through suffering causing the death of hundreds, they must now send to our camps, (While we, like Abraham, by the commandment of Heaven were enroute for a home, we knew not where; and after having expelled us from their borders), and call upon us for five hundred young and middle aged men, the strength of our camp, to go and assist them in fighting their battles.  

In less poetic but very precise terms, Abraham Day responded: “Here is one man who will not go, dam’um.” However, after Brigham Young’s talk to the brethren the following day, Abraham Day volunteered.

To a degree, the Mormons’ fear appeared justified. The United States government did not know the attitude or strength of the Mormons. Could the Mormons not excite the Indians and threaten the frontier while the United States engaged the Mexican Army? Although the Fort Leavenworth commanders had no intention of interfering with the emigration, they reconnoitered the Latter-day Saint camps. On the other hand, the Mormons offered little information. Uncertain of Captain Allen’s integrity or intentions, Jesse Martin and Henry Bigler even refused to tell the captain of Brigham Young’s location. They “did not wish him [Brigham] taken by mob authority under the cloak of law.” For want of reasonable information, a general sense of apprehension and mistrust pervaded both sides.

While Captain Allen rode westward from Mt. Pisgah toward Council Bluffs in search of the Mormon leaders, Brigham Young desperately needed to find a location for his followers to spend the coming winter. The struggle through the rain-soaked quagmires of southern Iowa Territory took longer than anticipated, and Brigham Young realized the Saints obviously could not safely reach the Rocky Mountains in 1846. Rather than lead all the Mormons to disaster, he and the other Church leaders already were analyzing final plans to

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8 Abraham Day III Journal, typescript, p. 6. Lee Library. This journal was kept by Abraham’s son, Eli A. Day, and was written in third person.
10 Henry W. Bigler Diary, 30 June 1846, typescript, p. 22, Lee Library.
send a pioneer party of between two hundred and five hundred hardy men to one of three possible locations: the Bear River Valley, Great Basin, or Great Salt Lake. Brigham Young explained the urgency of sending this party: "It is for the salvation of the Church that a Pioneer company start immediately, and we call upon all the Saints at Mt. Pisgah & within call to listen to our delegates—learn the particulars from them & help them without delay, to men, money & means to perfect the company, and come with them to head quarters or follow after immediately." While a pioneer party might search for suitable locations, Brigham Young had to find a place where the rest of his followers could spend the 1846–1847 winter. Well before Captain Allen entered the Mormon camps, Brigham Young had decided the Saints could not emigrate to the Rocky Mountains during 1846. However, the Potawatomi Indian agent refused outright to permit the Mormons to spend the winter on the tribal lands east of the Missouri River. Without official permission, Brigham could only pray that the Mormons could spend the winter either at the Grand Island of the Platte River or, perhaps, at Fort Laramie.

Meanwhile, would the Mormon camps strung out along southern Iowa Territory or the Missouri and Platte rivers be safe? On 26 June the Twelve Apostles met in council to discuss a report that the governor of Missouri had been requested to send an armed force to stop the Mormons from crossing the Missouri River. Although they soon learned that the rumor was a hoax, the fact that the leaders considered it worthy of serious consideration meant that the Saints were quite apprehensive of their safety.

Messengers dispatched by Wilford Woodruff warned Brigham Young of Captain Allen’s mission two days before the captain entered Council Bluffs on 30 June 1846. Before greeting the captain, Brigham Young, Heber C. Kimball, and Willard Richards hurriedly met in Orson Pratt’s tent where they decided it “was best to meet Captain Allen in the morning and raise the men wanted.” While most Latter-day Saints denounced the government’s proposal, the Church leaders quickly recognized it provided an opportunity to earn needed capital for the exodus and a rationale for establishing

13Brigham Young to William Huntington, Camp of Israel, Missouri River, 28 June 1846, Church Archives.
14Ibid.
15History of George Albert Smith, 26 June 1846, Church Archives.
16Manuscript History of Brigham Young, 30 June 1846, Church Archives.

478
temporary Mormon settlements on Indian lands.15 On the other hand, the government could at least gain the neutrality of the Saints if not their enthusiastic support during the Mexican War.

When Captain James Allen met with the high council on 1 July 1846, the Mormons' paramount concern was to secure a satisfactory place—presumably along the Missouri or Platte rivers—where they could remain throughout the winter. All of the potentially favorable sites, however, were located within the boundaries of Indian reservations and could only be occupied by whites with special permission from the United States government. Although Captain Allen promised publicly to request that President Polk allow the Mormon families to remain the winter on these Indian lands, the Mormon leaders wanted stronger assurances. At a private meeting in John Taylor's tent, Brigham Young pointedly inquired "if an officer enlisting men on Indian lands had not a right to say to their families: You can stay till your husbands return"? Captain Allen specifically replied "that he was a representative of President Polk and could act till he notified the President, who might ratify his engagements, or indemnify for damages."16 Although Captain Allen may have gone beyond the powers of a captain in the army, Brigham Young accomplished his primary goal with this agreement. Most of the Latter-day Saints eventually wintered for several years across the Missouri just north of present-day Omaha, Nebraska.17

From the bed of an empty wagon Captain Allen addressed the Mormons during the afternoon. He asserted that hundreds of thousands of volunteers were waiting to enlist in the army, but through the special benevolence of President Polk, the army reserved five hundred positions just for the Latter-day Saints. Next, Brigham Young rose "to clear their [the LDS] minds of all prejudice" by exempting the federal government from previous mob violence in Missouri and Illinois:

I wished them to make a distinction between this action by the general government and our former oppressions in Missouri and Illinois. I said, the question might be asked, is it prudent for us to enlist to defend our country? If we answer in the affirmative, all are ready to go.

Suppose we were admitted into the union as a state, and the government did not call on us, we would feel ourselves neglected. Let the Mormons be the first to set their feet on the soil of California. Captain Allen has assumed the responsibility of saying that we may locate

16Journal History, 1 July 1846.
on Grand Island, until we can prosecute our journey. This is the first offer we have ever had from the government to benefit us.

I proposed that the five hundred volunteers be mustered and I would do my best to see all their families brought forward, as far as my influence extended and feed them when I had anything to eat myself. 18

In light of subsequent events it is critical to cite John Taylor's account of Brigham Young's speech. According to Elder Taylor, Brigham Young said he had been

... trying to effect [federal aid] for several years, and this move had been made a little too quick for us. ... Supposing we were to refuse this offer; we would have to go to California and have to depend upon our own resources to fight, when if we embrace this offer we will have the US to back us and have an opportunity of showing our loyalty and fight for the country that we expect to have for our homes. If we did not go and help take it, what would be said when we got there and settled down. It would be as it always had been, get out of the way Mormons, get out of the way. Our fathers and us fought for the liberties of this country and we are the only citizens. Whereas if we go and help take the country we will at least have the right, and I do not want any body to be in these wilderesses and undiscovered before we are. I thing [sic] the President had done us a great favor by calling upon us. It is the first call that has been made upon us that ever seemed likely to benefit us. Now I want you young 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, and if they wish if [sic] they shall go to Grand Island first. Elder Young them [sic] got up and called upon those who were willing to volunteer to follow him. A good many followed, but great many held back on account of not knowing that arrangements could be made with their employers. 19

Although by a year later he was asserting that the Battalion was a plan of the government to destroy the Church, Brigham Young at this time appeared grateful to President Polk for the opportunity to enlist Mormons in the army and sharply distinguished the benevolent federal government from the blatant anti-Mormonism of the nearby states. He admitted seeking federal assistance and argued that enlistment was an opportunity to demonstrate loyalty to the United States. While willing to fight for homes in the West, these Latter-day Saint soldiers would become some of the first United States settlers in California. Finally, Brigham Young promised to personally take special care of the families left behind by the enlistees.

On the following day John Taylor penned a lengthy, but exceedingly valuable, entry in his diary in which he pondered the

18 Manuscript History of Brigham Young, 1 July 1846.
19 John Taylor, "Extract from Journal of John Taylor," 1 July 1846, typescript, Lee Library. California at that time referred to the area west of the Rocky Mountains.
circumstances of the Saints and explained why he encouraged the brethren to volunteer. Enlisting Mormons into the United States military would insure the migrating Saints a place to stay on the Indian lands, secure a stock of guns, provide much-needed capital, and give the Saints the opportunity of being pioneer settlers in a new land. At a meeting to encourage enlistment, John Taylor explained:

Many have something like rebellion against the US. I have myself felt swearing mad at the hands of those in authority, although I don't know that I have swore much. We are something like Abraham was, wandering not knowing wither we wander; fleeing from a land of tyranny and oppression we are calculating to settle in some parts of California. If you go to California you must have legal pretense for going there. The US are at war with Mexico and the US have a perfect right to march into California according to the laws of the nations. The US calling upon us to them gives us a perfect right to go there according to the requisition made that we should be disbanded at California. Those that go there will at least supposing there are 500 will have $6000 and have 500 stand of arms; we have been too weak heretofore and if we have the carry out of the US motto Vox Popula, Vox Dei, . . . we would be old citizens, and . . . we would have a lot of land allotted to us.20

On 3 July Brigham Young, Heber C. Kimball, and Willard Richards left Council Bluffs to recruit soldiers along the route to Mt. Pisgah.21 When they met William Clayton, the Church leaders privately admitted Captain Allen's offer was "a good prospect for our deliverance and if we do not do it we are downed."22 Near Mt. Pisgah they met Jesse C. Little, the Mormon representative to President Polk, who reported on his labors in Washington to obtain this recruitment invitation and who confirmed the government's offer.23 Once in Mt. Pisgah, Brigham Young inducted about sixty volunteers. He also took the opportunity to write a letter to Church leaders at Garden Grove, informing them of the government's promises in glowing terms. According to Brigham Young:

They may stay [in California], look out the best locations for themselves and their friends, and defend the country. This is no hoax. . . . The United States want our friendship, the president wants to do us good and secure our confidence. The outfit of these five hundred men costs us nothing, and their pay will be sufficient to take their families over the mountains. There is war between Mexico and the U.S. to whom California must fall a prey, and if we are the first settlers, the old

20ibid., 2 July 1846.
21Willard Richards Journal, 3 July 1846, Church Archives.
23Journal History, 6 July 1846.
citizens can not have a Hancock or Missouri pretext to mob the Saints. The thing is from above, for our good. 24

Brother Brigham also wrote to the Church Trustees at Nauvoo and characterized the government's offer as "another leaf of the Gospel." 25

Back at Council Bluffs other Mormon leaders continued to recruit volunteers. Parley P. Pratt used church service time to admonish the Saints to quit swearing and to join the army. 26 He noted that the Mexican government would tolerate only the Catholic religion and implied that such a law establishing a particular faith would be particularly repugnant to the Mormons. 27 Willard Richards prophesied that if the Saints did their duty and continued faithful "not a man would fall by an enemy. . . . There would not be a[s] much bloodshed as there was at Carthage [sic] jail when Joseph and Hyrum fell." 28

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24Brigham Young to Samuel Bent, Mt. Pisgah, 7 July 1846, quoted in Journal History, 7 July 1846.
25Brigham Young to Babbitt, Heywood, and Fulmer, Trustees, Mt. Pisgah, 7 July 1846, in Journal History. Brigham Young wrote:

Beloved brethren: We send you another leaf of the Gospel, which you know is glad tidings, or that which brings us salvation, and we feel assured, that you will consider that salvation, which shall deliver you from the care, trouble and anxiety of raising teams to ship the poor saints over the Mountains, and this is the Gospel we send. . . .

But this time you will probably exclaim: Is this Gospel. We answer yes. . . . And now, brethren, does this look like Gospel to you? You will probably say "no; we cannot do it. Every man is engaged to get means to get away with his family, and it is as much as they can do to take care of themselves. And we need help instead of furnishing it. What can we do?" We will tell you, Call upon all the old men, the young men and boys, big enough to drive cattle, and who want to emigrate west, and put them on the road to Council Bluffs without delay, leaving their women, children and effect[s] behind them. . . . But how is this going to deliver us? say you; not much gospel in this yet; be patient, brethren, the day is dawning, don't stop to ask us any question[s] yet; but send us every man and boy you can without delay. . . . if everyone is diligent, we expect the whole Church will be together, at that point [Grand Island] before winter closes upon us. That is the Gospel. Capt. Allen has pledged himself on the part of the United States that we may stop wherever we choose on Indian lands, in consideration of the five hundred volunteers. . . .

This is the first time the government has stretched forth its arm to our assistance, and we received their p[j]offers with joy and thankfulness. We feel confident the Battalion will have little or no fighting. Their pay will take their families to them. The Mormons will then be the old settlers and have a chance to choose the best location.

See also Parley P. Pratt. "To All the Saints to Whom these presence shall come," 9 July 1846, Pratt Collection, Church Archives. Elder Pratt wrote:

It is the mind and will of God that we should improve the opportunity [sic] which a kind providence has now offered for us to secure a permanent home, in that country, and thus Lay a foundation for a temporal or State Government under the Constitution of the United States, where we shall be the first Settlers and a vast majority of the people and thus be independent of Mobs and be able to maintain our Rights and freedom. . . . should it fail to be Done, we need not think of gathering for we know of no place to gather, with an assurance of peace unless we hearken to Council, and improve the means which our heavenly father has put within Reach.

27Taylor Journal, 12 July 1846.
28Bigler Diary, 12 July 1846, p. 22.
After Brigham Young returned from Mt. Pisgah, the Saints at Council Bluffs held a grand public meeting on 13 July to recruit additional volunteers to fill the five companies. In his address, Brigham asserted, "My experience had taught me that it is best to do the things that are necessary and not keep my mind exercised in relation to the future." He continued:

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

We have lived near so many old settlers, who would always say: Get out! that I am thankful to enjoy the privilege of going to settle a new country. You are going to March to California; suppose the country ultimately comes under the government of the United States which it ought to, we would be the old settlers, and if any man comes and says, 'Get out', we will say 'get out'. Now, suppose we refuse this privilege what will we do? If you won't go, I will go and leave you. We told you sometime ago we would fit you out to go, and now we are ready to fit you out with Captain Allen as the agent of the United States to help us. The president has now stretched out his hand to help us and I thank God and him too.39

In conclusion, the Mormon leader vowed, "I will promise this company, if God spares my life, that your families shall be taken care of, and shall fare as ours do."30 After this speech, the brethren unanimously authorized Brigham to select the Battalion's Latter-day Saint officers.

In another speech, Orson Hyde added his testimony, urging the Saints to enlist:

The work is laid out, and it is for us to perform; we have petitioned government repeatedly to redress our wrongs; hitherto there has been no effort to do it, and our spirits have been discouraged, but recollect large bodies move slowly. When the Savior was crucified, the Apostles said they would go a fishing, but an angel appeared to assuage their grief. Although you may think you are going to be led to a field of battle my opinion is, that it will result in your obtaining peaceable possession of a home, and He who sent quail may send us means of deliverance. Arise, then, the standard is raised, the call is made; shall it be in vain? No, let us rally to the standard and our children will reverence our names; it will inspire in them gratitude which will last for ever and ever.31

In response to the united efforts of the Church leaders, over four hundred men enlisted in the Mormon Battalion. Heber C. Kimball appreciatively concluded, "These military Affaires is now found and

39Journal History, 13 July 1846.
30Ibid.
31Ibid.
by most all of the people acknowledged to be one of the greatest blessings that the great God of heaven ever did bestow upon this people."  

The volunteers assembled on 15 July 1846 in Council Bluffs to hear Brigham Young admonish them to be faithful soldiers and to abide by the advice of Church leaders. Once disbanded in California the ex-soldiers could work along the West Coast. The next temple, however, would not be built in California or Vancouver Island but in the Rocky Mountains "where the brethren will have to come to get their endowments."

Four and one-half companies of Mormon volunteers gathered around a hollow square at Council Bluffs on 16 July 1846 where Captain James Allen unpretentiously mustered them into the service of the United States Army for one or two years. From Kearny's original order, it had taken twenty-eight days to enlist the Mormons. Captain Allen had spent twenty-one of those days with the Latter-day Saints. He explained, "The delay in raising this battalion since Colonel Kearny's order, was caused by the dispersed condition of the Mormon people whom I found moving in detachments, between the Mississippi and Missouri, and many of them more than 200 miles from this post."

After observing the Mormons for nearly three weeks, Captain Allen concluded, "They came into the service very readily and will, I think, make an active and efficient force."

Once his command was staffed and organized, Captain Allen marched the Mormon Battalion about eight miles south to Peter A. Sarpy's trading post on the Missouri River. There he issued the men "blankets, provision, camp kettles, knives, forks, plates, spoons," and other supplies. While some of the men dawdled around Sarpy's post, others returned to visit their families. The Church authorities never ceased their effort to "beat-up for volunteers." Brigham Young still wanted forty or fifty enlistees to fill the fifth company and exclaimed in a last-ditch effort that "hundreds would eternally regret that they did not go, when they had a chance."

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32 Heber C. Kimball Diary, 14 July 1846, Church Archives.
33 Richards Journal, 15 July 1846.
34 Journal History, 16 July 1846.
37 Franklin Allen Journal, 1846-1847 Battalion, 17 July 1846, Church Archives.
38 John Steele Diary, 17 July 1846, typescript, Lee Library.
While the privates cleared a square for a military ball on 18 July, Brigham Young, Heber C. Kimball, John Taylor, Orson Pratt, and Wilford Woodruff counseled with the commissioned and non-commissioned officers in a poplar grove next to the riverbank. "Take your Bibles, Book of Mormon—burn up cards," exhorted the President of the Twelve Apostles. Since all but three of the officers had previously been to the temple, he admonished them to wear their garments. They were to act as fathers to their companies and to manage their men by the power vested in the priesthood. They were cautioned by the Mormon leader to be gentle and civil, but to prohibit swearing and insults. Desiring no unnecessary confrontations, Brother Young advised the men not to preach or even converse with the Missourians, Mexicans, or any other class of people. If each man used his religious authority and implemented these directives, Brigham prophesied that "every man will return alive if they will go in the name of the Lord & pray every morning & evening in every tent." He concluded by explaining that the Latter-day Saints would go to the Great Basin where they would build temples and strengthens against the mobs. He told the officers, "You will probably be dismissed about 800 miles from us."40 This was the first time the officers learned, with any degree of certainty, the ultimate destination of the Church.

Heber C. Kimball "exhorted the brethren to humility and prayer, that God might lead them in paths, and before the people in a manner to get as great a name as any people since the days of Moses; advised them to hold their tongues and mind their own business; if they were sick, they had the privilege of calling the Elders, and rebuking all manner of diseases."41 Even before the soldiers left Iowa Territory the ecclesiastical authorities left the impression the Mormon Battalion would contribute to a Latter-day Saint self-image of hardships and trials similar to the Old Testament Jews.

Along with the moral advice, the authorities also explained their material considerations. The Latter-day Saint leaders expected that the soldiers' pay would help the main body of Saints camped along the Missouri. Brigham Young specifically wanted to know the amount of property and wages the men would acquire at Fort Leavenworth. Even before the soldiers left Council Bluffs, the Church Council selected Newel K. Whitney, Jonathan Hale, and Daniel Spencer to collect the soldiers' wages.42 At Fort Leavenworth each

40 Richards Journal, 18 July 1846.
41 Journal History, 18 July 1846.
42 Richards Journal, 18 July 1846.

485
man would receive a $42 advance for the year’s clothing allowance which would add up to approximately $21,000. Available records do not indicate whether the money was intended to go directly to the families of the soldiers or to the Church leaders to be distributed for the general welfare of all the Mormons. This issue, which proved quite divisive in the future, probably was not discussed at the time.

Clearly most of the religious and military standard-bearers realized the significance of their assignments and left the meeting in excellent spirits. For example, William Hyde, 2nd orderly sergeant in Company B, records in his journal that he and other Battalion officers began their journey with a “firm promise that on condition of faithfulness on our part, our lives should be spared and our expedition result in great good, and our names be handed down in honorable rememberance [sic] to all generations.”

After the meeting between the Church authorities and military officers concluded, most of the Latter-day Saints gathered in the cleared square along the Missouri River for the memorable Mormon Battalion Farewell Ball. Captain Allen, who had to write a report to Washington, could not attend; but just about everyone else in camp enjoyed an evening of music, dancing, and friendship. To the music of Captain Pitt’s Brass Band the company officers commenced the celebration by dancing a suitable French four. Guy Keysor, one of the participants, noted: “Every one of the assembly was invited to join in the dance: Officers, Soldiers, Citizens & natives—Everything moved in perfect order not an officer, soldier, or Citizen getting out his place; all was still and quiet and nothing was heard but the Musick, except now & then a soft breeze stealing over the tops of the lofty coten woods.” One noteworthy guest, Thomas Kane, who previously had arranged a meeting between Jesse Little and President Polk, the meeting which led to the Battalion’s call, wrote that “a more merry dancing rout I have never seen, though the company went without refreshments, and their ball-room was of the most primitive.” Dancing continued until the sun dipped below the Omaha hills; then, according to Thomas Kane:

Silence was then called, and a well cultivated mezzo-soprano voice, belonging to a young lady with fair face and dark eyes, gave with

44Steele Diary, 18 July 1846.
45Guy M. Keysor Journal, 18 July 1846, Utah State Historical Society Library, Salt Lake City.
quartette accompaniment a little song, . . . touching to all earthly wanderers:

“By the rivers of Babylon we sat down and wept.’’

“We wept when we remembered Zion.’’

There was danger of some expression of feeling when the song was over, for it had begun to draw tears! but breaking the quiet with his hard voice, an Elder asked the blessing of heaven on all who, with purity of heart and brotherhood of spirit had mingled in that society, and then all dispersed, hastening to cover from the falling dews.47

After roll was called on the following morning, Sunday 19 July, the men were furloughed for the rest of the day.48 A few soldiers remained at Sarpy’s, but most returned to the Bluffs for family farewells and Sunday service.49 During the meeting “the brethren began to take courage’’ when the authorities speaking from the stand explained that the raising of the Mormon Battalion was a “command of the Lord.’’50

Monday 20 July was the soldiers’ last day in camp. Recruitment efforts to fill the fifth company continued through this last day.51 Wanting to leave as much food as possible with their families and brethren, many of the ill-clad soldiers kept few rations to eat for their journey southward to Fort Leavenworth. A steamboat that had been expected to carry the men never reached Sarpy’s post, so Captain Allen decided to proceed overland.52 After a morning downpour, the soldiers took their wet packs and began on 21 July 1846 their unforgettable western journey.

47Ibid., pp. 81-82.
48Keysor Journal, 19 July 1846.
49Samuel Hollister Rogers Diary, Reminiscences, and Recorded Letters, 7 June 1841-28 February 1886, 2 vols., 19 July 1846, typescript, Lee Library.
50Steele Diary, 18 July 1846.
51Frank Alfred Golder, Thomas A. Bailey, and J. Lyman Smith, eds., The March of the Mormon Battalion from Council Bluffs to California Taken from the Journal of Henry Standage (New York: The Century Co., 1928), p. 139.
52Keysor Journal, 19 July 1846.