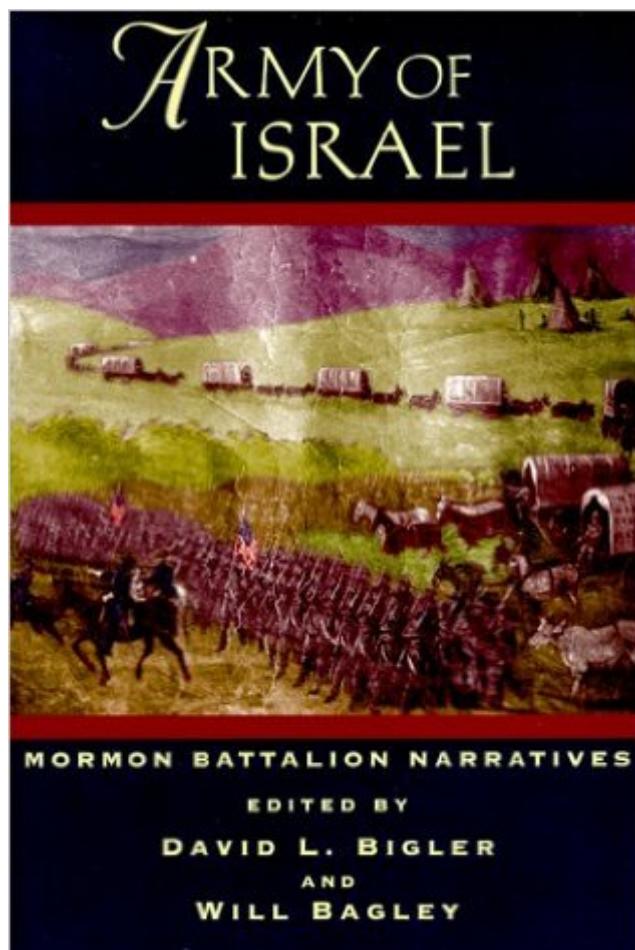


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# Army Of Israel: Mormon Battalion Narratives



## **Synopsis**

Giving priority to previously unpublished documents, editors David Bigler and Will Bagley have compiled, introduced, and annotated dozens of firsthand accounts and other primary sources regarding the Mormon Battalion's march and subsequent adventures. These include such perspectives as the journal of teenager William Pace, letters from a few of the women associated with the battalion (some thirty wives accompanied their husbands), and military and government correspondence. These and the many other collected documents provide an expansive portrait and detailed record of a large part of the American West--including portions of what became Iowa, Kansas, Colorado, New Mexico, Arizona, California, Nevada, and Utah--and its inhabitants at a crucial juncture in the region's history, the late 1840s.

## **Book Information**

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## **Customer Reviews**

The significance of the events from 1846-1848 in the history of our country has long been overlooked. Education in many schools jumps from the Revolutionary War to the Civil War; completely disregarding the major influence the Mexican-American War had on our nation. Not only did the war result in the United States increasing its territory by over a third, but the wealth of mineral resources in California, Arizona, and New Mexico helped to propel the United States to global prominence in the twentieth century. But if the war as a whole is neglected, the unique contributions of a single group to the formation of the U.S. border and to the development of American western migration is almost completely forgotten. The Mormon Battalion, which marched in 1846 from Iowa to California, blazed a trail that would define our nation's borders and history.

Published in 2000, ARMY OF ISRAEL: Mormon Battalion narratives gives a fresh look at this regiment's history from their own viewpoint. The editors are both historians with backgrounds in journalism and a special interest in the American Far West. Mr. Bigler is a past president of the Oregon-California Trails Association, founder and first president of the Utah Westerners, and has served on the Utah Board of State History. He has also edited the diary of his great-uncle Azariah Smith, one of the members of the Battalion. Mr. Bagley has edited several books and narratives on the American West and serves as the chief editor of the series KINGDOM IN THE WEST: The Mormons and the American Frontier. The narrative focuses primarily on the events encountered by the battalion during the actual march from Council Bluffs, Iowa to Los Angeles, California in from June 1846 to January 1847. Thought the infantry regiment made the entire journey without firing a single shot, the march was the longest in the history of any American army. Its legacy, however, is much greater than simple trivia. On its way to California, the battalion occupied Santa Fe, Tucson, Yuma, San Diego, and Los Angeles, instituting the first American military presence in each of these cities. They were also to first to construct an east-west wagon road, which intersected the great mountain ranges of the Southwest. Previously, Mexican and Native American merchant traffic traveled north-south along the valleys. The roads were a major factor in the mass migration to California that would soon follow. The roads continued to be used until 1880, when the railroad was built along the same path. Interstate 10 now follows almost the exact same path that the company forged over 150 years ago. The little "Army of the West", made up of five regiments of one hundred men each, made President James Polk's vision of a continental nation into reality. In the Introduction the editors claim, "Only in recent times have historians begun to realize the achievements and the important role the Mormon soldiers performed in California and Western history. The narratives found in these pages reveal ... the significant part these men and women played in that history" (p. 29). Fortunately for us, a great number of the soldiers kept account of their experiences in pocket diaries, which many then transcribed into more detailed journals after the war. These documents not only provide us with detailed information on their day-to-day activities, but also give us eyewitness accounts of the major events of this period - the occupation of Northern Mexico, the opening of major transportation routes, and the discovery of gold in California. The book proceeds chronographically, beginning with the situation surrounding the Mormons and the U.S. government at the time. The Mormons were in need of money to finance their exodus to Utah; President Polk was in need of an army to occupy California. Polk's concern for the West Coast was not over Mexican possession but of the threat of British invasion. Once the deal was brokered, the Battalion set out almost immediately, under the command of Gen. Stephen W. Kearny and Lt. Col.

Philip St. George Cooke. The editors utilize a great number of original documents from James Polk's presidential papers, War Department records, and Congressional archives. Correspondence between the Mormons and the government is also well recorded. The narrative then turns to the march itself, which is presented mostly by means of diaries and journals from the soldiers and their officers. The editors employ a framework that keeps the narrative interesting and ties the various accounts together, giving historical background for each event. This approach enables them to let the documents stand on their own merit but also provides them with the opportunity to accentuate events that demonstrate the importance of the Mormon Battalion campaign. The editors clearly explain the ramifications of events not only during the war but even down to our time. The result is indeed convincing. They make proper use of their source data describing not only the events but also their historical significance. The narrative is interesting and informative. An effort is made to include the journals of women who traveled with the army, as well as to maintain a balance between purely historical documents with entertaining stories. On the other hand, although the stated scope of the book is to present the experiences of the Battalion from their own perspective, there is very little information on Native Americans and even less about the Mexicans. Additionally, though the editors make an attempt to curb their glowing assessment of the Battalion by introducing a few arguments that call the Mormons' intentions into question, the effort is half-hearted and falls short of credibility. What remains is a biased depiction of the campaign that nonetheless does not detract from the authenticity of the source documents. The end result is an extremely readable book about an extraordinary group of people who played a part in our nation's history that often goes unnoticed.

This book is very much in the tradition of the great documentary series of the Arthur H. Clark Co., and presents dozens of firsthand accounts and other primary sources regarding the Mormon Battalion's march and subsequent adventures. All of these are expertly introduced and analyzed to present an expansive portrait and detailed record of a large part of the American West and its inhabitants at a crucial juncture in the region's history. This work won the "Best Documentary History Award" presented by the Mormon History Association. This work offers excellent grist for what I consider the fundamental questions to be explored in the history of the Mormon Battalion and its place in the history of the U.S. West and Mormonism. Among other questions I would like to see considered the following relating to the unit's myth and memory:<sup>\*</sup> Why does the Mormon Battalion loom so large in the historical consciousness of present-day Mormons? How did it gain this reverential status?<sup>\*</sup> What writings, reenactments, public commemorations, etc. structured this conception of the past?<sup>\*</sup> How has the story of the Mormon Battalion been used by Mormons to help

create their unique identity?\* Is the story of Mormon pioneering--and the battalion's role in it--critical to the modern Mormon identity? If so, how and why?\* Is the story of the battalion's military service important to Modern Mormonism? If so, how and why?\* What is the historical consciousness of the battalion's role in military history, and how did it attain that particular position? These are not necessarily questions to be answered in a documentary history such as this, but the sources offered here provide valuable insights that will help in considering them. Editors David L. Bigler and Will Bagley are to be commended for producing this excellent work, and the publisher must be recognized for its support in making available these invaluable documentary sources..

David Bigler and Will Bagley successfully collaborated to bring together a series of previously unpublished documents, as well as some published ones, in an outstanding collection of firsthand accounts and other primary sources on and about the Mormon Battalion's epic 1846 U.S. - Mexican War march and their role in securing the Southwest from Mexican control and claiming the territory that would become the states of Iowa, Kansas, Colorado, New Mexico, Arizona, California, Nevada, and Utah -- thereby fulfilling the mandate inherent in the concept of "Manifest Destiny". Several eye-witness sourced perspectives are provided including the journal of teenager William Pace, letters from some of the women associated with the battalion; as well as military and government correspondence. *Army Of Israel: Mormon Battalion Narratives* is a superlatively presented and informative contribution to American history in general, and the role of a unique military command in particular.

David Bigler and Will Bagley are two of the nation's leading experts on the history of the Rocky Mountain Mormons. They have combined to present an extremely readable history of the Mormon Battalion - an army unit that traversed thousands of difficult miles and never fired a shot in anger. Extremely well researched, *ARMY OF ISRAEL* is must reading for those interested in the many facets of 19th Century Mormonism.

From time to time, a historian will write a book, as opposed to an author writing history. And when TWO historians write a book, you get what Bigler and Bagley have created here. The entire series, "Forgotten Kingdom" is dynamite, we are fortunate to have these books available to us.

Good

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