

A Victorious Defeat:
Mission Command Failure of the 1857-1858 Utah Expedition

A Monograph

By

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Abstract

A Victorious Defeat: Mission Command Failure of the 1857-1858 Utah Expedition, by MAJ Travis R. Bailey, 90 pages.

In the summer of 1857, President James Buchanan dispatched the 2,500 man Utah Expedition from Fort Leavenworth to reassert Federal control over the Utah Territory and replace its incumbent governor. Based on dubious reports made by returning federally-appointed territorial officials, the President had become highly suspicious of the Mormon sect that settled the distant mountain west and feared that they might soon rebel against the United States and possibly ally with Mexico or Native American tribes. As the force approached the Salt Lake Valley, they encountered unexpected resistance from the Mormon's territorial militia, the Nauvoo Legion. The combination of unclear strategic guidance and the Legion's delaying tactics thwarted the expedition's efforts to enter the Salt Lake Valley and forced the US Army into winter camp in the midst of the Rocky Mountains.

The Utah Expedition provides tremendous insight into the employment of Mission Command by two opposing forces, the US Army and the Nauvoo Legion. Though both American, each organization possessed unique social and cultural factors that influenced its employment of Mission Command. For the US Army, the Utah Expedition is a cautionary tale; the seniority system, rivalries, and the general American distaste for large standing armies inhibited Mission Command philosophy within the US Army. Conversely, the religious bond and history of persecution of the Mormon Church, fostered an environment for the Nauvoo Legion's own unique brand of Mission Command. As the US Army endeavors to train and educate tomorrow's leaders and teams, the Utah Expedition reveals the contextual nature of Mission Command and how society and culture impact its adoption and execution.

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Acronyms

ADP	Army Doctrinal Publication
ADRP	Army Doctrinal Reference Publication
FM	Field Manual
TP	TRADOC Pamphlet
TRADOC	Training and Doctrine Command

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Introduction

“Sir, we are entering on a new experiment in the government of a Territory. The Territory of Utah stands out entirely distinct from the whole line of our past experience.”

— Senator William Seward (NY) address to US Senate floor regarding Utah Expedition

In the summer of 1857, US President James Buchanan dispatched Federal forces from Fort Leavenworth, Kansas to Utah Territory. The mission was to accompany Alfred Cumming, the newly-appointed territorial governor and, if necessary, provide support in restoring federal authority, thereby initiating one of the most peculiar episodes in the history of the United States Army. Acting on reports made by returning Federally-appointed territorial officials, the President had become highly suspicious of the Mormon sect that had settled in the distant mountain west. Fearing that the Mormons would soon rebel against the United States and possibly ally with Mexico or Native American tribes, President Buchanan resolved to reassert US control over the territory.

By July 1857, the 1,500 man Utah Expedition began departing Fort Leavenworth and made steady progress albeit late in the campaigning season. As the force left the plains and entered the mountains, problems began to mount. Ignoring an ultimatum issued by the former territorial governor and Mormon leader Brigham Young to refrain from entering the territory, the expedition found itself facing a surprisingly well-organized Mormon militia known as the Nauvoo Legion. Employing “a mode of warfare against which [the Army’s] tactics furnish no information” the Nauvoo Legion delayed the expedition’s advance using scorched-earth tactics long enough to prevent their passage into the Salt Lake Valley before the onset of winter.¹ As cold weather set in and the loss of mounts and supplies grew, the expedition’s leadership acknowledged that it would be impossible to achieve their objectives that season.

¹ Brigham Young, letter to Colonel Edmund B. Alexander, October 16, 1857, in *The Utah Expedition: Message from the President of the United States, 35th Cong., 1st sess., 1858, H. Doc. 71, 51* (hereafter referenced as “The Utah Expedition,” *House Ex. Doc. 71*).

By late November 1857, the expedition was forced to take refuge within and around the remains of a burned out Fort Bridger deep in the heart of the Rocky Mountains to pass the winter. The Utah Expedition was immobilized. Without a single combat death, a major US Army campaign had been frustrated.² Only through the intervention of civilian representatives would a peaceful resolution be negotiated.

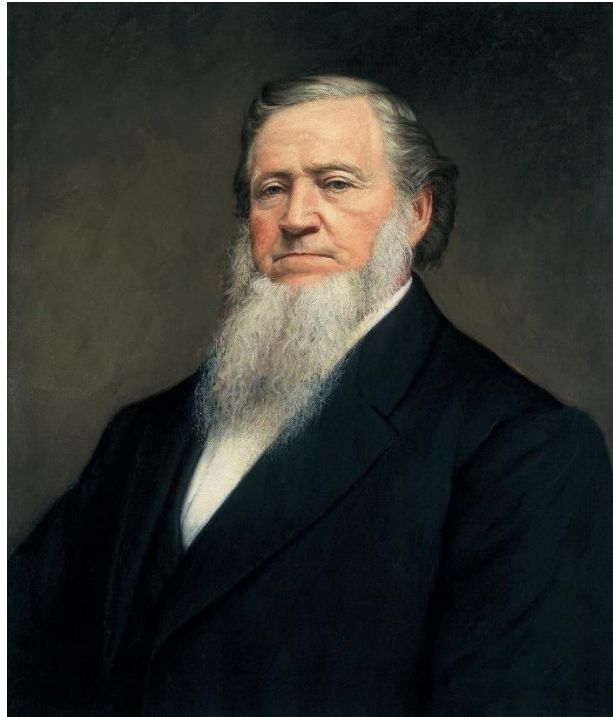


Figure 1. Brigham Young, Governor of the Utah Territory and Second President of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormon Church)

Source: “Brigham Young,” The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints Newsroom, 2015, accessed March 6, 2016, <http://www.mormonnewsroom.org/article/brigham-young>.

Following the successes the US Army experienced in the Mexican War not less than ten years earlier, it is surprising that it should experience such difficulties in Utah. General Winfield Scott and his staff had successfully overcome the challenges of campaigning deep in Mexican territory. The Mexican War is often used as an example of exceptional logistics planning, maintaining positive relations with the

² Richard D. Poll and Ralph W. Hansen, “Buchanan's Blunder: The Utah War, 1857-1858,” *Military Affairs* 25, no. 3 (Autumn 1961), 121.

indigenous population, and effective collaboration between military and civilian partners. Yet, despite the veteran experience found within the Utah Expedition, the mission failed miserably in its early stages in each of these areas.

Just as in the Utah Expedition, the invasion of Iraq in 2003 involved many veterans of a very successful campaign in its not too distant past. Entering that conflict, leaders similarly expected great success. Many of these expectations were realized as US forces quickly defeated the Iraqi military; major combat operations lasted only forty-one days. Despite these initial successes, an insurgency formed that was unexpected and for which leaders were unprepared. For months leaders were paralyzed with indecision as to how to handle the growing insurgency.

As the US Army reflects upon its performance in Iraq and its ability to address unexpected conditions, Mission Command philosophy has increased in prominence. Evidence of this emphasis exists in the Army's Warfighting Challenges (AWFCs), a list of "first order problems" published throughout the Army to encourage collaboration on solutions.³ Of the twenty current AWFCs, two are directly related to the exercise of Mission Command: AWFC #10: Develop Agile and Adaptive Leaders, addresses how the Army develops leaders capable of confronting, assessing, and acting in complex situations, and AWFC #19: Exercise Mission Command, deals with a broader requirement to train Army leaders on the principles of the philosophy of Mission Command.⁴

Notwithstanding the successful political outcome of the Utah Expedition (the removal of Brigham Young and restoration of federal authority), the operation was a military failure. Specifically, the operations failure came as a result of a breakdown in the application of the philosophy of Mission Command. Explaining these failures as solely the consequence of the individual faults of its commanders

³ TRADOC Pamphlet (TP) 525-3-1, *The U.S. Army Operating Concept: Win in a Complex World* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2014), 9.

⁴ "Army Warfighting Challenges (AWFC)," Army Capabilities Integration Center Initiatives, March 1, 2016, accessed March 1, 2016, <http://www.arcic.army.mil/Initiatives/army-warfighting-challenges.aspx>.

renders an inadequate explanation. Examining the experiences of the Utah Expedition and Nauvoo Legion demonstrates that certain social, cultural and institutional factors converged to cause a break-down in the employment of Mission Command of the expedition.

This monograph will provide a thorough examination of the US Army's Utah Expedition (also known as the Army of Utah) campaign planning and preparations, to include the guidance provided by strategic leadership, and how it contributed to the campaign's initial failures. It will explore how the command culture of the time lacked the guidance of the Mission Command philosophy and, as a result, was unprepared to address the unexpected conditions it encountered in the Utah Territory. Problems associated with the guidance from civilian and military strategic leadership, as well as an underestimation of their opposition's capabilities, led to poor operational planning by the expedition's field commanders. In order to be of greatest usefulness in the modern context, planning, leadership, and execution will be analyzed using contemporary principles of Mission Command as outlined in current US Army doctrine.

The Utah War has received relatively little attention from military writers and analysts. Most attention comes from writers and researchers of western history or those associated with The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, (commonly referred to as the Mormon Church). The Utah War certainly does not fit the mold of a "military engagement of glorious report" and thereby has attracted little interest from military scholars.⁵ The same is true of most other minor conflicts throughout US military history. The amount of literature detailing the history of stability and support operations conducted by the US Army is disproportionately small compared to that covering major wars and battles. This is understandable given the disruptive nature of these wars and the lives, resources, and energy expended to win; the impact on the nation socially, politically, and militarily as a whole has been greater. As a result, the typical American student or soldier is far more likely to be familiar with the American War of Independence, Mexican-American War, American Civil War, and World Wars I and II, while relatively

⁵ Norman F. Furniss, *Mormon Conflict: 1850-1859* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), 1.

few would be able to recall, let alone provide details, concerning the dozens of smaller operations conducted by the US Army, or the lessons learned executing them.

Yet historically, the US Army engages in stability and support operations much more frequently and for longer periods than high-intensity conflict. Indeed the US Army is considered to have only fought in eleven “conventional” wars from the American War of Independence through Operation Enduring Freedom.⁶ During that same 240-year period, the Army has conducted hundreds of other minor stability or support operations. Even the US Army is coming to realize that its history should be characterized more as a steady string of stability operations interspersed by episodes of major wars.⁷ It should follow that a proportional amount of research and analysis should then be dedicated to identifying and preserving the lessons from these types of operations for future generations.

The Utah Expedition is one such event that has been largely ignored. It represented the largest military operation to occur between the Mexican-American and US Civil Wars and ultimately involved nearly a third of the Regular Army.⁸ For the space of a year, it competed with the conflict in “Bleeding Kansas” for the national dialogue and debate in Congress. However, as the crisis regarding the slave debate began to rise once again, it was forgotten almost as quickly. Overshadowed by the Civil War, the events of the Utah Expedition and those who participated in it have largely been reduced to mere footnotes in history.

Several reasons explain this oversight. As mentioned above, the lack of pitched battles failed to attract the attention of military analysts of the 1850s, nor did it provide the fodder sought by officers seeking to advance their careers through reports of gallantry and courage. The guerilla tactics and

⁶ Army Doctrine Reference Publication (ADRP) 3-07, *Stability* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2012), 1-1.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ William P. MacKinnon, “Who's in Charge Here? Utah Expedition Command Ambiguity,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 42, no. 1 (Spring 2009), 54.

methods employed by the Mormons did not conform to the officers' conception of honorable conflict.⁹ Some viewed the expedition to be a farce and waste of time.¹⁰ Furthermore, the Utah Expedition represented a particularly unflattering episode in US Army history. A territorial militia, without a shot being fired (except for sound effect,) contributed to the frustration of a major military campaign, reflecting not only the success of the Nauvoo Legion, but also the mistakes made by the Army and Federal government. Although the ultimate political outcome of the expedition was successful, major flaws in US Army planning and execution were exposed. Unlike the Mexican War, in which participation was used successfully in the election campaigns of two future presidents, the Utah Expedition presented no such opportunity for its leaders to advance their reputations.¹¹

Consistent with this lack of attention by past military commentators, the Utah Expedition today still fails to draw much consideration. Utah State and Mormon Church historians are responsible for the majority of the study and writings on this particular episode as it figures so prominently in their respective histories. This absence of interest by the military could be due in part to the nature of the mission of the Utah Expedition. A result born from the War of Independence was an inherent distaste for employing military forces for maintaining domestic order.¹² Presidents and soldiers have been disinclined to order

⁹ Colonel Edmund B. Alexander, letter to Brigham Young, Oct 12, 1857 in "The Utah Expedition," *House Ex. Doc. 71*, 84.

¹⁰ Jesse Augustus Gove, *The Utah Expedition, 1857-1858: Letters of Capt. Jesse A. Gove...to Mrs. Gove, and Special Correspondence of the New York Herald* (New Hampshire Historical Society Collections) (Concord, NH: New Hampshire Historical Society, 1928), 164.

¹¹ Henry Montgomery, *The Life of Major General Zachary Taylor: Twelfth President of the United States* (Philadelphia: Porter & Coats, 1847), 375-76; *Life of Gen. Franklin Pierce, the Democratic Candidate for President* (Trenton: M.R. Hamilton, 1852), 4-5. Two senior commanders of the Mexican-American War, Zachary Taylor and Franklin Pierce, were elected to the presidency in 1848 and 1852 respectively. Taylor gained his party's nomination largely based the notoriety he gained from victories at the Battles of Monterrey and Buena Vista. Conversely, Pierce overcame a somewhat dubious reputation he gained during the war to win the presidency.

¹² Paul J. Scheips, *The Role of Federal Military Forces in Domestic Disturbances 1945-1992* (Washington DC: Center of Military History, 2012), 451.

such actions and typically never favored the duty.¹³ Its characterization as a *domestic* disturbance has likely concealed its value as a case study for Mission Command in 21st Century stability operations.

Despite the reasons historians and military students have overlooked the Utah Expedition, it is a case study that should be examined by military professionals today. With minimal and, even at times, conflicting strategic guidance, the President ordered commanders of the Utah Expedition to lead their troops over one thousand miles to territory whose population was rumored to be hostile. Unlike the Shays' or Whiskey Rebellions, these forces would not be facing a spontaneous, loosely-affiliated group, but a well-organized, religiously-devoted militia that would zealously protect its territory. With soldiers itching for a fight on one side and zealous settlers willing to die for their faith on the other, the stage was set for bloody conflict. Yet, no such conflict occurred as leaders on both sides resolved the crisis, largely without resorting to combat. The successful turn-around alone should draw the attention of today's operational artist.

Another contributing reason why the Utah Expedition has escaped critical examination by military students is the fact that it is typically viewed from the federal perspective as a successful operation. Defeat in war usually leads to greater introspection by the defeated than for the victor. Such was the case for the Prussians in 1806 following the catastrophe at Jena and Auerstädt and again for the Germans following World War I. During the winter of 1857-58, with the Army immobile in the midst of the Rocky Mountains, Congress demanded that President Buchanan explain the expedition's delayed and uncertain prospects. Had the expedition been recalled the next spring without accomplishing its mission, a great deal of examination and review would have taken place to identify the cause of the failure. Fortunately for both strategic and tactical leaders, agents outside the military intervened to achieve a negotiated resolution. Success was achieved in spite of the US Army's actions, not because of them. With the onset of the Civil War only a few years later, no review of the Utah Expedition's failures took place.

¹³ Ibid.

A number of works have greatly aided this study and are cited throughout this work. Members of the US House of Representatives, dissatisfied with President Buchanan's recess actions required him to provide documentation on the expedition in his annual report. The product of that report, US House of Representatives Executive Document #71, or *House Ex. Doc. 71*, was a collection of official reports, correspondence, and orders beginning with General Scott's orders requisitioning forces for the expedition until the report's preparation in February 1858. It also included a selection of letters and reports from federally-appointed Utah Territory officials that led to Buchanan's decision to form the expedition. For many decades, it presented the most comprehensive collection of primary source information on the expedition and serves as the basis for most works written on the topic.

Though touching relatively lightly on the Utah expedition, the personal memoirs of President James Buchanan and General Winfield Scott (both written in the 1860s within the context of the Civil War) also proved helpful in understanding the decision making process of strategic and operational-level leaders. Collections of letters and diaries written by officers and soldiers who participated in the expedition, such as those of Captains Jesse A. Gove, Albert Tracy, and John W. Phelps, provide insight on daily events, assumptions, expectations, and the general sentiment towards the Mormons during the campaign.

Several secondary sources, by notable historians such as Norman Furniss, LeRoy and Ann Hafen, and Will Bagley, generally seek to provide the reader a complete record of events or present arguments to justify decisions and actions by the US Government and Mormon Church. The works of historian William P. MacKinnon, however, are notable for their comprehensive and unbiased treatment of the Utah Expedition. Furthermore, MacKinnon has expanded his examination of the Utah Expedition beyond a retelling of history to include an analysis of the expedition's confusing command situation and President Buchanan's Political Spoils System.¹⁴

¹⁴ A few of William P. MacKinnon's notable works on the Utah Expedition include: *At Sword's Point, Part 1* (2008), *Thomas L. Kane and the Utah War* (2008), *Epilogue to the Utah War: Impact and*

The intent of this monograph is not to criticize 19th century military leaders unfairly using 21st century military concepts and doctrine, but instead to use contemporary Mission Command doctrine to maximize the usefulness of an analysis of the Utah Expedition. A summary explanation of Mission Command history, development, and current doctrinal definitions used for analysis will be provided in Section II.

Furthermore, this work is neither meant to add to the historical record nor to justify the actions of the Mormons or US government. Nevertheless, some context must be provided to understand the nature of the conflict, as well as the logic upon which the opposing sides developed strategies and campaigns. Section III of this paper will provide this context by examining the history of the Mormon Church, its leaders and how its early experiences and interactions with State and Federal military forces and government impacted how it responded to the Utah Expedition. Furthermore, this section will recount the events of the 1850s that directly led to President Buchanan's decision to launch the Utah Expedition.

Section IV will consist of a brief recounting of the expedition's activities from the time it departed Fort Leavenworth in July 1857 until its march through Salt Lake Valley to establish Camp Floyd in 1858. Sections V will analyze the use of Mission Command by the expedition's tactical leaders, Colonels Edmund B. Alexander and Albert S. Johnston, in the preparation and execution of the mission. This will include the shortcomings of the strategic and operational guidance provided to the expedition's leadership by President Buchanan, Secretary of War John B. Floyd, and General in Chief of the United States Army, Winfield Scott. By way of comparison, Section VI will give attention to Brigham Young's guidance to his field commander and the Mission Command of the Nauvoo Legion. Section VII will comprise conclusions and applicability of the lessons garnered from this case study for current planners and leaders.

Legacy (2003), and *Prelude to Armageddon : James Buchanan, Brigham Young, and a President's Initiation to Bloodshed* (2012).

Mission Command Defined

“You, I propose, to move against [Confederate General Joseph E.] Johnston’s Army, to break it up and to get into the interior of the enemy’s country as far as you can, inflicting all the damage you can against their War resources. I do not propose to lay down for you a plan of Campaign, but simply to lay down the work it is desirable to have done and leave you free to execute *in your own way*. Submit to me however as early as you can your plan of operation.”

—Lieutenant General Ulysses S. Grant to Major General William T. Sherman, Spring, 1864

A clear understanding of key concepts is essential to understanding the root causes that led to the near disastrous failure of the Utah Expedition in the winter of 1857-1858. Therefore, this section will examine the concepts of Mission Command by providing a clear definition and a brief history of their development and adoption into US Army Doctrine. While the term Mission Command would not have been familiar to military commanders of the mid-19th century US Army, certainly some of its underlying concepts were.

In contemporary doctrine, Mission Command stands for more than just philosophy of command, but also a warfighting function as well as a system. As a warfighting function, it outlines specific tasks and individuals responsible for accomplishing those tasks as a part of the operations process. As a system, Mission Command refers to personnel, hardware, facilities and processes that allow the function of Mission Command to be accomplished.¹⁵

As a philosophy, doctrine describes Mission Command as the exercise of authority and direction by the commander using mission orders to enable disciplined initiative within the commander’s intent to empower agile and adaptive leaders in the conduct of unified land operations.¹⁶ It builds upon the guiding principles of the 19th century Prussian command philosophy of *Auftragstaktik* such as shared

¹⁵ Army Doctrinal Reference Publication (ADRP) 6-0, *Mission Command* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2012), iv.

¹⁶ Army Doctrinal Publication (ADP) 6-0, *Mission Command* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2014), 1.

understanding, commander's intent, disciplined initiative and mission orders.¹⁷ Additionally, it raises the importance of mutual trust between commanders, staffs and subordinates as critical; alluded to in earlier doctrinal publications but made explicit here.

Army Doctrinal Reference Publication (ADRP) 6-0 identifies six principles of Mission Command. First, leaders must build cohesive teams through mutual trust resulting in shared confidence among commanders, subordinates, and partners. Commanders, staffs, and subordinates must have a shared understanding of the operational environment, operation's purpose, problems, and approaches to solving them consistent across commanders, staffs and subordinates. The commander must issue clear intent that encompasses an expression of the purpose of the operation and the desired military end state. Subordinates must be allowed to exercise disciplined initiative, taking action to develop the situation in the absence of orders, when existing orders no longer fit the situation, or when unforeseen opportunities or threats arise. Higher headquarters must issue orders that emphasize to subordinates the results to be attained, not how they are to achieve them. Lastly, commanders must accept prudent risk through careful deliberation, judgement and analysis when the outcome in terms of mission accomplishment is judged to be worth the cost.¹⁸

While doctrinally the Army has matured in its recognition of Mission Command and the benefits that can be derived from its use on the battlefield, its adherence continues to prove a challenge to today's Army. Technological developments present a double-edged sword; it aids communication and situational awareness, yet this very benefit often encourages micromanagement by superiors and undermines a subordinate's ability to act on his own initiative. Nevertheless, Army leaders increasingly pronounce the importance of Mission Command today as it gains an increasing appreciation for the complex nature of the environment in which it operates.

¹⁷ ADRP 6-0, 2-1.

¹⁸ Ibid., 2-1 – 2-4.

Modern Mission Command doctrine has its origins in the 19th century Prusso-German Army. The defeats suffered by the Prussian Army in 1806 at Jena and Auerstädt at the hands of Napoleon shattered the long-held sense of Prussian military superiority that had existed from the time of Frederick the Great. The crisis prompted Prussian leaders to search for answers to the changes in size, composition, and tactics that Napoleon introduced onto the battlefield. Among the solutions identified was a greater appreciation for ability as a qualifier for commission as an officer in the army over birthright.¹⁹

The proliferation of military writings following the Napoleonic wars, most notably those of Carl von Clausewitz and Antione Henri de Jomini, led many militaries throughout Europe and America to attempt to replicate Napoleon's techniques. Prussian leaders such as Gerhard von Scharnhorst and August Neidhardt von Gneisenau, however, were not content to copy Napoleon.²⁰ They aimed to devise a Prussian response to Napoleon's techniques. For them, learning was more than just copying.²¹ Their social and military reforms paved the way for the most prominent of the next generation of Prussian military leaders, Field Marshall Helmuth von Moltke the Elder. He served as Chief of the German General Staff from 1857-1888 during which he institutionalized his ideas concerning techniques for leadership and issuing orders in the concept known as *Auftragstaktik* or mission orders.²²

Though Moltke never used the term *Auftragstaktik*, he described this leadership concept in his *Moltke's Military Works (Moltkes militärische Werke)* published after his death in 1891.

¹⁹ Peter Paret, *The Cognitive Challenge of War: Prussia 1806* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), 79-103.

²⁰ Gerhard von Scharnhorst (born November 12, 1755—died June 28, 1813) and August, Count Neidhardt von Gneisenau (born October 27, 1760—died August 23, 1831) were two of the most prominent of the Prussian reformers of the early 19th century. Despite neither coming from prominent noble pedigrees, both rose to distinction during the Napoleonic Wars and the aftermath of the Prussian defeat in 1806.

²¹ Paret, *The Cognitive Challenge of War*, 86-87.

²² Of the various translations for *Auftragstaktik*, US Army doctrine uses "Mission Command;" Eitan Shamir, "The Long and Winding Road: The US Army Managerial Approach to Command and the Adoption of Mission Command (*Auftragstaktik*)," *Journal of Strategic Studies* 33, no. 5 (21 Oct 2010), 647, accessed January 4, 2016, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/01402390.2010.498244>.

Because of the diversity and the rapid changes in the situations in war, it is impossible to lay down binding rules. Only principles and general points of view can furnish a guide.

Prearranged designs collapse, and only a proper estimate of the situation can show the commander the correct way. The advantage of the situation will never be fully utilized if subordinate commanders wait for orders. Only if leaders of all ranks are competent for and accustomed to independent action will the possibility exist of moving large masses with ease. The absence of these characteristics inevitably leads to loss of time.

In time of peace, the habit of acting in accordance with correct principles can be learned only if every officer is allowed the greatest possible independence. In that case, the practical intelligence of subordinate commanders will understand how to act in war according to the wishes of the superior commander, even when the latter cannot expressly state his will because of time and conditions.

In doubtful cases and in unclear conditions (which occur so often in war), it will generally be more advisable to proceed actively and keep the initiative than to await the law of the opponent. The opponent frequently can see our situation just as incompletely as we can see his, and will occasionally give way where the actual situation itself would not have required it.²³

Auftragstaktik emphasized decentralization of leadership that not only encouraged but required aggressiveness and initiative on the part of subordinate leaders even at the cost of disobedience, so long as those actions adhered to the commander's intent.²⁴ Moltke recognized that the modern battlefield had grown too large for a single commander to control all his forces. Even someone with the military acumen of Napoleon could not be everywhere on the battlefield at the same time. He therefore concluded that distributing authority to take initiative would allow his subordinate commanders, dispersed as they would come to be over large areas, to act rapidly, seize the initiative, and overwhelm their enemies who persisted in centralizing that authority into one figure.

The extent to which Moltke wove his leadership philosophy into German military culture is evident by the fact that it endured well beyond his own lifetime and extended beyond the tactical environment of the battlefield. Through World War I and into the interwar years, German military culture allowed for open discussion and free-thinking and was less damning of those who deviated from established mores. The culture within the German military allowed for, and even expected, officers to

²³ Helmuth Moltke, *Moltke On the Art of War: Selected Writings*, ed. and trans. Daniel J. Hughes (Novato, CA: Presidio Press, 1995), 132-33.

²⁴ Antulio J. Echevarria, "Auftragstaktik: In Its Proper Perspective," *Military Review* 66, no. 10 (Oct. 1986), 50-56.

disobey “when justified by honor and circumstances.”²⁵ Within the classrooms of the *Kriegsakademie*, a German officer could hear “His Majesty has made you a Major of the General Staff so that you know when to disobey an order.”²⁶

Mission Command did not enter into American doctrine until the US Army had experienced a crisis of its own during the Vietnam War. The successes the US Army experienced in each of the major wars throughout the 19th and 20th Centuries served to reinforce confidence in centralized control processes that emphasized efficiency. After all, American expertise in mobilization, organization and supply led to victory in not one, but two world wars.²⁷ The US Army had experienced defeat in individual campaigns, but had ultimately been victorious in every major war since its creation.²⁸ Failure in battle differs greatly from failure in war in terms of the aftermath. Defense Secretary Robert McNamara, himself a former business executive, embraced an extreme style of centralized, statistically-driven mode of control during the early years of the Vietnam War which trickled down throughout the officer corps in the form of managerial ethos supplanting military experience.²⁹ Ironically, it took the American experience in Vietnam, where the US won every battle militarily but ultimately lost the war politically to stimulate a re-evaluation of US Army command culture.

²⁵ Horst Boog, “Civil Education, Social Origins, and the German Officer Corps in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries,” in *Forging the Sword: Selecting, Educating, and Training Cadets and Junior Officers in the Modern World*, ed. Elliot V. Converse (Chicago: Imprint Publications, 1998), 122.

²⁶ During a high-level war game, Emperor Friedrich Wilhelm III gave a young major on the Great General Staff an order that would lead his unit into a perilous situation. When the major relayed the order without hesitation a general on the staff stopped him and gave him this advice.

²⁷ Shamir, “The Long and Winding Road,” 649.

²⁸ The astute student may refer to the Civil War as a case in which an American army, albeit the Confederacy, lost a war. However, this case stands as an exception due to the fact that 1) the victorious army (Union) was American as well, and 2) the Civil War stands as a case of a closed system where both of the opposing armies presented mirror images of each other in terms of doctrine and technology.

²⁹ Shamir, “The Long and Winding Road,” 651.

Added to the failures of the Vietnam War was the jolt caused by the 1973 Arab-Israeli War in which Soviet doctrine and equipment nearly caused the complete collapse of the Israeli Defense Force in a matter of days. The Army responded by establishing the Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC), commanded by General William E. DePuy, tasked with responsibility for training centers, Army schools, and doctrine development.³⁰ Among his priorities was developing tactics, techniques and procedures to overcome the quantitative disadvantage the US Army found itself in relation to the Soviets.

The first significant product issued by TRADOC was the 1976 version of Field Manual (FM) 100-5 *Operations*, which introduced the operating concept of “Active Defense” but also emphasized key principles of Auftragstaktik or Mission Command without explicitly calling it such. “Success depend[ed] on the ability and willingness of leaders at all levels to operate independently, to follow *mission-type orders*...”³¹ The concept of “mission-type orders” steered commanders away from the managerial and formulaic style of command that dominated the Vietnam era, recognizing that in the complex nature of war neither planners nor commanders could anticipate all contingencies. Mission-type orders required a leader to “act responsibly and intelligently on his own.”³² Consistent with Moltke, this decentralized decision making must be bound by the superior commander’s intent. “Soldiers must not only understand *what to do*, they must also understand *why it must be done*.”³³

TRADOC continued to develop the concept of mission-type orders in the updated version of FM 100-5 published in 1982. It further emphasized the importance of decentralizing decision making and empowering subordinate commanders to act with initiative stating, “Commanders who are *flexible rather than mechanical* will win decisive victories... Decentralization converts initiative into agility, allowing

³⁰ Benjamin King and Robert W. Cone, *Victory Starts Here: A Short 40-Year History of the US Army Training and Doctrine Command* (Fort Leavenworth: Combat Studies Institute Press, 2013), 2-3.

³¹ Field Manual (FM) 100-5, *Operations* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1976), 1-5. Emphasis added.

³² *Ibid.*, 3-2.

³³ *Ibid.*, 1-5. Emphasis in original.

rapid reaction to capture fleeting opportunities.”³⁴ It also expanded upon what constituted commander’s intent, a glaring omission from the 1976 version. Commander’s intent should clearly state the commander’s objective, what he wants done, and why he wants it done, establish limits or controls necessary for coordination, and delineate available resources and support from outside sources.³⁵

Successive versions continued to incorporate the concept of mission orders and commander’s intent. TRADOC segregated doctrine concerning Mission Command from operations manuals with the 2003 publication of Field Manual 6-0, *Mission Command*. In 2009, the Command and Control warfighting function was renamed Mission Command. Today, multiple doctrinal manuals exist covering this topic which stands today as one of the most important doctrinal concepts in US Army operations processes. Though Army leaders almost universally acknowledged Mission Command’s importance to operational success, its implementation often falls short of satisfactory. Indeed, such was the case with the Utah Expedition. Though the phrase “Mission Command” was unknown to military commanders and staffs of the Utah Expedition, its concepts would not have been entirely foreign. The purpose of using contemporary Mission Command doctrine is to maximize the usefulness of the analysis of the Utah Expedition.

³⁴ Field Manual (FM) 100-5, *Operations* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1982), 2-7. Emphasis in original.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

Genesis of the Utah Crisis

“Mr. President: There is no disguising the fact, that there is left no vestige of law and order, no protection for life or property; the civil laws of the Territory are overshadowed and neutralized by a so-styled ecclesiastical organization, as despotic, dangerous and damnable, as has ever been known to exist in any country, and which is ruining not only those who do not subscribe to their religious code, but is driving the moderate and more orderly of the Mormon community to desperation.”

—William M.F. Magraw

“If it be treason to stand up for our constitutional rights; if it be treason to resist the unconstitutional acts of a vitiated and corrupt administration... if it be treason to keep inviolate the Constitution and institutions of the United States, when nearly all the States are seeking to trample them under their feet, then, indeed, we are guilty of treason.”

—Apostle John Taylor

Before examining the preparations and execution of the Utah Expedition’s mission, it is essential to understand the circumstances that occasioned the decision to send the expedition. What was the impetus for the president to organize the largest military action since the Mexican War? What reasons were there to overcome the national aversion to employing federal forces against American citizens? Answers to these questions are never simple and such is the case here. The Utah Expedition was not the result of a single event or incident; rather, it was the product of decades of incidents, misunderstandings and violence.³⁶

³⁶ William P. MacKinnon, *At Sword's Point, Part 1* (Norman, OK: The Arthur H. Clark Company, 2008), 44.

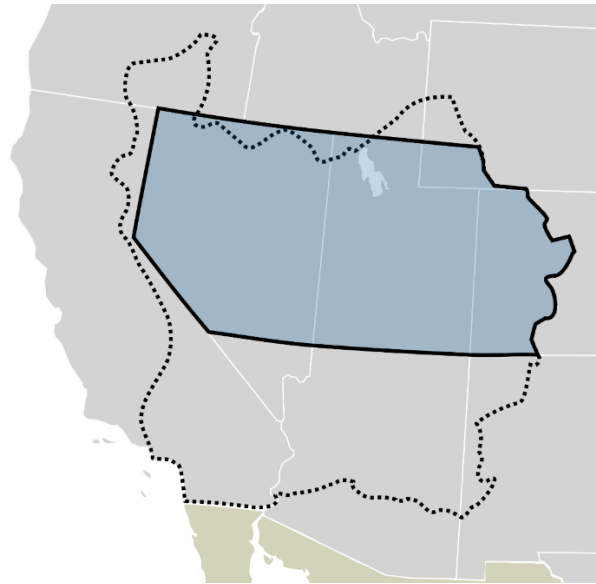


Figure 2. Unofficial boundaries of the State of Deseret and boundaries of the Utah Territory in 1857

Source: “Utah Territory with Deseret Border,” Wikimedia Commons, August 14, 2011, accessed March 6, 2016, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Utah_Territory_with_Deseret_Border,_vector_image_-_2011.svg.

As President Buchanan took office in March of 1857, he inherited a nation struggling not only with the question of what to do with slavery, but also the question of what to do about The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints or the “Mormon” Church. In 1846, angry mobs had driven the Mormons from their Illinois homes along the Mississippi River and forced them to move west. Following a two-year trek, the group arrived and settled the Salt Lake Valley. By 1850, the population had reached more than 10,000 and church leaders petitioned the US government for statehood as the State of Deseret, a state that would have encompassed a large portion of the American Southwest. The petition for statehood failed, and instead, the Federal government organized Utah into a territory with church leader, Brigham Young, appointed in 1850 by President Millard Fillmore, as the chief executive. Others appointed to govern were mostly Mormon, but also some non-Mormon or “Gentile,” officials were included.³⁷

³⁷ *Church History in the Fullness of Times* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2003), 354. Among the Federally-appointed officials were the Territorial Secretary, chief and

Founded in 1830 in up-state New York by Joseph Smith Jr., the small church had developed an acrimonious relationship with the United States government by 1847. Poor relations began in the 1838 Missouri-Mormon War. Pro-slavery residents of western Missouri, concerned with the influx of Mormons from pro-abolitionist states, organized into mobs to evict them. Mormon settlers organized to defend themselves resulting in a series of minor skirmishes in the northwest corner of the state.³⁸ In response to these skirmishes, Missouri Governor, Lilburn W. Boggs signed the now infamous Executive Order 44, that ordered all Mormons to depart from the state or face extermination and called upon the Missouri Militia to enforce it.³⁹ Mobs that had previously been operating extra-legally now had government authorization to attack Mormon settlements.⁴⁰ Lacking government protection, Mormons fled to Illinois and saw their homes and lands seized by the mobs. Brigham Young, one of the few senior leaders not arrested, assumed responsibility for organizing the evacuation of Mormons from Missouri through the winter of 1838-39.

Mormon relations with the government deteriorated further the next year. After exhausting efforts to gain compensation in Missouri, church leaders turned to the Federal government for assistance. In November 1839, Joseph Smith led a delegation of church leaders to Washington DC in an effort to gain redress for their losses in Missouri. Smith gained an audience with President Martin Van Buren to argue

associate justices of the Territorial Superior Court, Commissioner of Indian Affairs, US Marshal and US Attorney.

³⁸ Stephen C. LeSueur, *The 1838 Mormon War in Missouri* (Columbia: University of Missouri, 1987), 145. The term “Mormon War” used here refers to this earlier conflict in 1838 and is not to be confused with the Utah War of 1857-1858,

³⁹ Executive Order 44, in *Document Containing the Correspondence, Orders, etc. in Relation to the Disturbances with the Mormons* (Fayette, MO: Boon's Lick Democrat, 1841), 61. This executive order was rescinded by Missouri Governor Christopher Bond in 1976.

⁴⁰ The state militia never officially conducted exterminations of Mormons. However, the attack on a small Mormon settlement at Haun's Mill that resulted in the death of seventeen Mormon men and children, is attributed to mobs that interpreted the executive order as carte blanche for their activities.

the Mormons' case, but reported in a February 6, 1840 letter the president's response, "Gentlemen, your cause is just, but I can do nothing for you; if I take up for you I shall lose the vote of Missouri."⁴¹

After departing Missouri, Mormons settled in western Illinois and established a city on the Mississippi River named Nauvoo. Learning from their experience in Missouri, the Mormons secured a charter from the State of Illinois that granted them an autonomous court system, strong local government, and a city militia. For five years, the city flourished, becoming the second largest in the state. The militia, called the Nauvoo Legion, boasted a strength of approximately five thousand members.⁴² However, relations between Mormons and their neighbors soured once again. Distaste for the Mormons' peculiar beliefs, such as plural marriage and extra-biblical scripture, and fear of the now formidable Nauvoo Legion caused opposition to mount in surrounding communities.⁴³ Illinois Governor Thomas Ford called out the state militia and ordered the Nauvoo Legion to surrender their arms. On June 24, 1844, Joseph Smith was arrested once again and imprisoned in Carthage, Illinois, secured by various militia groups from around the region. Within three days, the militia/mob assassinated Joseph Smith and his brother, Hyrum, while in state custody.

With the Nauvoo Legion disarmed and disbanded, the Mormons were once again defenseless. Unsatisfied with the death of Joseph Smith, only a promise to depart the state within a reasonable amount of time kept the mobs at bay. Brigham Young, who assumed the senior leadership role upon the death of Joseph Smith, once again organized an evacuation of the Mormons from their homes. For the second time in less than ten years, Mormons watched a state government and federal administration sit idly by as their homes were seized and ransacked by mobs.

⁴¹ B.H. Roberts, *The Rise and Fall of Nauvoo* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Publishers, 1900), 54. James Buchanan, a US Senator from Pennsylvania at the time, was present for this meeting between Joseph Smith and President Van Buren.,

⁴² Richard W. Young, "The Nauvoo Legion," *The Contributor* 9, no. 2 (December 1888), 46.

⁴³ Norman F. Furniss, *Mormon Conflict: 1850-1859* (New Haven London: Yale University Press, 2005), 3.

Having been driven from two states in less than ten years, Brigham Young sought an isolated place where the church could settle and grow without fear of persecution. Such a place only existed far to the west well beyond the borders of the country. On February 4, 1846, the first Mormon emigrants began the journey westward. Concerns arose in Washington DC when news reached President Polk of the planned mass migration of Mormon settlers to the West. By this time, war with Mexico had begun and Polk worried that the disaffected Mormons might be persuaded to join in alliances with either the Mexican government or local natives, thus denying him his prize of California.⁴⁴

Into this setting arrived a young, non-Mormon Pennsylvania lawyer by the name of Thomas L. Kane, who would later figure prominently during the 1857-58 conflict. Sympathizing with the Mormons' plight, Kane perceived an opportunity by which both the Mormons and Federal government could benefit from each other. Using his family's political connections to Polk, Kane proposed enlisting a volunteer battalion of Mormons as part of General Stephen W. Kearny's pending overland campaign to California. Polk eventually agreed writing in his personal diary on June 2, 1846, "'Col. [Stephen W.] Kearny was. . . authorized to receive into service as volunteers a few hundred of the Mormons who are now on their way to California, with a view to conciliate them, attach them to our country, and prevent them from taking part against us."⁴⁵ The Mormons would benefit from the funds generated by the enlistments and allay the government's concerns about Mormon loyalties.⁴⁶ Though initially suspicious of the government's intentions, Kane and Young were able to convince church members of the benefits of enlisting and five-hundred men volunteered.

On August 1, the newly recruited "Mormon Battalion" arrived at Fort Leavenworth where it received supplies, weapons, and advanced pay. From there they began what has often called the longest

⁴⁴ Matthew J. Grow, "*Liberty to the Downtrodden*": *Thomas L. Kane, Romantic Reformer* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 50-53.

⁴⁵ James K. Polk, *Polk: the Diary of a President, 1845-1849*, ed. Allan Nevins (New York: Longmans, Green & Co., 1952), 109.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 54.

overland march by any US Army unit in history. The 1,900 mile march took them from Fort Leavenworth to Santa Fe, New Mexico, through Tucson and ended at San Diego Mission on the Pacific coast. The only “combat” they experienced was an encounter with a herd of wild bulls near the San Pedro River in modern day Arizona. Though they engaged in no combat, they mapped the territory through which they passed (which would figure prominently in the Gadsden Purchase in 1853), created a new wagon trail leading to California, and established an American presence in California that would become official by the 1848 Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo.⁴⁷ Discharged veterans of the battalion would also help discover gold at Sutter’s Mill near modern-day Sacramento, setting off the California gold rush in 1848.

On July 24, 1847 the first company of Mormon pioneers entered the Salt Lake Valley. Over the course of the next decade, tens of thousands of additional Mormon emigrants and converts completed the trek. Under Young’s direction, Mormons would establish settlements ranging across Canada, Mexico, and California. Satisfied that the Mormons had found the isolation they were seeking, Young made the somewhat prophetic statement “If the people of the United States will let us alone for ten years, we will ask no odds of them.”⁴⁸ The isolation, however, would be short-lived. The signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848 transferred the American Southwest to the United States and brought the Mormons back under its auspices. The onset of the gold rush led thousands of fortune seekers to transit the Salt Lake Valley on their way to California. Organized into a territory in 1850, the government sent the US Army and Federally-appointed officials to survey and govern the area. Tensions rose with the arrival of Army survey expeditions in 1849 and 1854.⁴⁹ Relations with the DC-appointed officials proved even worse.

⁴⁷ Clayton C. Newell, “America’s Longest March,” Church History, October 3, 2013, accessed March 17, 2016, <https://history.lds.org/article/pioneer-story-council-bluffs-americas-longest-march?lang=eng>.

⁴⁸ Brigham Young, *Journal of Discourses by Brigham Young... His Counselors... and Others... Reported by G. D. Watt [27 Volume Hardcover Set]*, ed. Asa Calkin (London: Latter-Day Saints' Book Depot, 1858), 5:226.

⁴⁹ MacKinnon, *At Sword’s Point*, 42, 46-48. The first US troops to enter Salt Lake Valley arrived in 1849 on an escort mission. During their brief stay, scuffles erupted stemming from an alleged rape of a

These “Gentile” officials viewed Governor Young’s rule as that of an autocratic theocracy, incompatible with the principles of republican government.⁵⁰ On the other hand, Mormons viewed these Federal officials as “carpet-baggers” and individuals of low moral character, incompatible with their vision of the utopian society they were trying to create.⁵¹ Determined not to be victimized again, the Mormons sought ways to rid themselves of these undesirables.

Between 1850 and 1857, all but two of the non-Mormon officials appointed by the President abandoned their assignments and returned east. Upon their return, several of these “runaway officials” as they came to be known, accused the Mormons of murder, tampering with the Indians, interfering with Federal courts, and destroying court records. One lengthy report sent to US President Franklin Pierce in 1856, focused its accusations solely on the church’s leadership, not the general population when it stated, “There exists a considerable and highly respectable portion of the community that is oppressed and outraged by the theocracy and its band of bravos and assassins... Men striving for the ‘American Dream’ are clamoring for the government to protect them from the abuses of the Mormon’s leadership in Utah.”⁵²

Brigham Young never hid his displeasure with the quality of the officials sent by the Federal government. Their accusatory reports, he stated, were the result of “character[s] whose chief delight and business is and has been to stir up strife between us and the general government by their foul and false

local woman by a soldier. Thereafter, several other survey missions brought additional troops to the area. The most notable was the Stansbury Expedition in 1849 where local Mormons accused soldiers of luring away Mormon women.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Mahomet [pseud.], “The Mormon Rebellion,” *New York Times*, February 16, 1858. “Carpet-bagger” was a derogatory term referring to an economic opportunist or political candidate who sought advancement or election in an area where they had no local connections. During Reconstruction (1865-1876), the term was used widely to describe Northern politicians who moved to the South seeking political office.

⁵² W.M.F. Magraw, letter to President Franklin Pierce, October 3, 1856 in “The Utah Expedition,” *House Ex. Doc. 71*, 3.

statements.”⁵³ The Territorial Legislature, in an official memorandum to the President and Congress, characterized the runaway officials as “an insult to humanity, an imposition upon intelligence, and, so far as lay in their power, a serious injury to the interests of this Territory and of this Union.”⁵⁴

With the inauguration of President Buchanan in early March 1857, additional reports arrived at the White House as individuals sought to influence the new administration. A letter from W.W. Drummond, a returning district and supreme court judge from Utah, spoke of secret, oath-bound organizations, raids on court offices, and harassment of non-Mormon officials that reinforced the belief by the President that the territory was in a state of rebellion.⁵⁵ Little effort was made to verify the truthfulness of the allegations levied against the Mormons and many of the exaggerations and falsehoods would not be discovered until the expedition was stalled in the mountains.⁵⁶ Not until the next spring, with Congress demanding explanation for his decisions, would President Buchanan dispatch representatives to Utah.⁵⁷

⁵³ Brigham Young, letter to George Smith, John Taylor and John Bernhisel, January 3, 1857 in MacKinnon, *Sword's Point*, 65.

⁵⁴ *Memorial and Resolutions to the President of the United States, Concerning Certain Officers of the Territory of Utah*, January 6, 1857.

⁵⁵ W.W. Drummond, letter to US Attorney General Jeremiah S. Black, March 20, 1857 in Buchanan, *Messages*, 212-214.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 213; E.G. Beckwith, report to Secretary of War Jefferson Davis, November 25, 1854, 71-74 in Edward G. Beckwith, *Report of Explorations for a Route for the Pacific Railroad* (Washington DC: War Dept., 1854), 71-74. An example of this was the case of the Gunnison Massacre. In 1853 Pahvant (Ute) Indians attacked an Army topographic mission led by Captain John W. Gunnison while it surveyed overland routes through the Salt Lake Valley. The Pahvants killed Gunnison and seven others and mutilated their bodies. Rumors circulated that the Pahvants acted on orders from Mormon leaders. Despite evidence to the contrary, anti-Mormon officials regularly cited the Gunnison Massacre as evidence of Mormon rebellion.

⁵⁷ Curtis E. Bolton, letter to Attorney General Jeremiah S. Black, June 26, 1857, in “The Utah Expedition,” *House Ex. Doc 71*, 215. Curtis E. Bolton, Deputy Clerk of the Utah Supreme Court, did submit a report to his superiors in Washington that contradicted many of Judge Drummond’s accusations. However, the report, dated June 26, 1857, was written after the President had made his decision to send the Utah Expedition and likely did not arrive in Washington until after the expedition departed from Fort Leavenworth.

Drummond, no doubt seeing an opportunity to advance his own career, recommended that the President appoint a new governor and ensure his installation by military force.⁵⁸ His request for military support was an attempt to make good on threats he had made towards the Mormons before his departure in 1857. The Utah Legislature, likely referring to Drummond, said as much in its memorial or petition to the President-elect Buchanan, “Whenever [these Federal officials were] checked in their mad career, [they] threatened us with death and destruction by the United States troops, which they seem to consider are ready to march against us at their foul and false instigations.”⁵⁹

President Buchanan also experienced political and public pressure to act. Many of the returning officials sent copies of the reports submitted to the President and his cabinet to newspapers as well. The reports caused a swell in anti-Mormon sentiment and for a short while competed with the issue of slavery for the nation’s attention. Not long after President Buchanan’s inauguration, editorials around the country began demanding an answer from the government on the “Mormon Question.”⁶⁰ Criticisms of his inaction grew more numerous each month following his inauguration, with most demanding the immediate removal of Brigham Young through military force.⁶¹

President Buchanan also became the target of increasingly sharp criticism from his political opponents concerning his handling of the “Mormon Question.” Taking advantage of the bi-partisan disgust with polygamy, Republicans tied it to the debate on slavery. Their 1856 platform had demanded that Congress prohibit what it termed the “twin relics of barbarism, polygamy and slavery.”⁶² Republicans

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ *Memorial and Resolutions to the President of the United States, Concerning Certain Officers of the Territory of Utah*, January 6, 1857.

⁶⁰ Amicus Curia [pseud.], “The Mormon Question,” *New York Times*, June 27, 1857.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*; see also “Affairs in Utah,” *National Era* (Washington DC), May 28, 1857; “Utah,” *Evansville Daily Journal* (Evansville, IA), May 9, 1857.

⁶² Poll, “Buchanan's Blunder,” 122.

also stoked fears that Mormons would use the Democratic doctrine of Popular Sovereignty to codify their polygamist practices into law.⁶³

Some later writers have suggested that President Buchanan used the Utah Expedition to help unify the nation on an issue that everyone could agree upon, or at the very least, divert attention away from the divisive debate over slavery.⁶⁴ Robert Tyler, son of the former president, wrote to Buchanan proposing just such a tactic.⁶⁵ There is no direct evidence that suggests that Buchanan entertained such ideas to manipulate the nation's attention, though newspapers did not fail to draw such conclusions concerning the connection.⁶⁶

Compounding this complex political and social problem was difficulty in communication. Neither the railroad nor telegraph had yet reached the Salt Lake Valley. Mail or couriers were the only options and, even under the best of conditions, took months to move between Salt Lake City and Washington DC. Transit time increased even more during the winter months as overland routes became impassible. During such times mail was routed south by boat, then across the Isthmus of Panama adding additional months. Transit time, however, mattered little in the end as Buchanan administration ordered westward mail service across the plains terminated in June 1857, shutting down all communication between Brigham Young and the US Government.⁶⁷ Most unfortunate was the fact that both of Brigham Young's principal

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ William R. Hamilton, "History of the Mormon Rebellion of 1856-57," *United Services* 4 (July 1890), 14.

⁶⁵ Robert Tyler, letter to President Buchanan, April 27, 1857.

⁶⁶ Editorial, *New York Daily Tribune*, April 25, 1857.

⁶⁷ MacKinnon, *At Sword's Point*, 177; see footnote 61. The decision to halt mail service would prove to be exceptionally unfortunate. It is unclear who made the decision, but both leaders of the Utah Expedition and General Scott were angered. Secretary Floyd did little to mitigate its effects. In addition to closing off communication with Brigham Young, it also disrupted communication between field commanders and their superiors in the east. General Scott resorted to an improvised army courier service until the mail service officially resumed in May 1858. Interestingly, ten years later the trans-continental railroad and telegraph would pass through the Utah Territory.

advocates in Washington DC, Utah territorial delegate to Congress John Bernhisel and friend of the Mormons, Thomas Kane, were absent from the capital while Buchanan deliberated whether to send military forces.

President Buchanan left no written record of when or why he decided to send the Utah Expedition. For unknown reasons, Buchanan preferred to respond to sensitive correspondence in person or not at all.⁶⁸ Nevertheless, in mid-spring 1857, Buchanan had become convinced that action needed to be taken. He would appoint a new governor to replace Brigham Young and provide a military escort to ensure his installment and restore federal authority while suppress any rebellion that might exist in the territory. It is unclear whether it was the accusations alone that convinced him of the need to act, or if it was political and public pressure that forced his hand. A decision to send the expedition would certainly have appeared as an attractive option. This was an issue for which he could comfortably assume bipartisan and popular support. With one decision he could satisfy the demands of the public while parrying his political rivals, not to mention the prospect of quelling the divisiveness that gripped the nation over the issue of slavery. Likewise, an expedition would demonstrate firmness and resolve in dealing with those who would threatened rebellion. As with so many complex issues, the decision was likely a combination of all these factors.

Throughout the month of May 1857, orders began to flow to various military commands around the country to begin consolidating the forces that would comprise the expedition at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. The summer of 1857 would mark ten years since the Brigham Young's declaration that "If the people of the United States will let us alone for ten years, we will ask no odds of them."⁶⁹ Prophetic or not, the coincidence is uncanny that almost to the day a rider arrived in the valley with reports of federal troops headed to Utah to quell a rebellion.

⁶⁸ Mackinnon, *Sword's Point*, 39.

⁶⁹ Young, *Journal of Discourses*, 5:226.

The Utah Expedition

“I may be excused from expressing the pride I feel in the successful accomplishment by my regiment [10th Infantry] of so much of its first arduous duty, and I confidently express the belief that unless some very unforeseen accident occurs, I will reach the Territory of Utah in a condition of perfect efficiency and discipline.”

—Colonel Edmund B. Alexander, September 3, 1857

“I will, however, mention, that unless a large force is sent here, from the nature of the country, that a protracted war on their part is inevitable. The great distance from our source of supply makes it impracticable to operate with a small force. It, in fact, requires the employment of such force to guard numerous trains of the supplies, leaving but a small portion, if any, for offensive operations.”

—Colonel Albert S. Johnston, October 18, 1857

In 1845, the Regular Army numbered roughly 7,300, a mere fraction of the size of its European counterparts and less than half the size of the standing Mexican Army. When war with Mexico began in 1846, Congress authorized a temporary supplement of fifty thousand volunteers. By the end of the war, the Army had mobilized one-hundred sixteen thousand men.⁷⁰ The Army did not fully return to its pre-war levels as the need to secure the large expanses of new territory gained through the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo outstripped pre-war capability. When President Buchanan took his oath of office in March 1857 he became Commander-in-Chief of an army that numbered roughly 16,000 soldiers and officers divided into ten infantry regiments, four of artillery, two of dragoons, two of cavalry, and one of mounted riflemen.⁷¹

This small size would have significant repercussions for the planned expedition, for Utah was hardly the sole focus of the Army’s attention that year. Despite the increased size the Army enjoyed due to the Mexican War, it was stretched exceptionally thin executing its peace-time responsibilities.

Competing with the Utah Expedition was the need to secure over eleven thousand miles of external

⁷⁰ Clayton R. Newell, *The Regular Army Before the Civil War 1845 - 1860* (Washington, DC: Center of Military History, 2014), 13, 19.

⁷¹ Report of the Secretary of War, 35th Cong., 1st sess., 1858, H. Doc. 2, Vol 2, 3.

boundaries, garrison up to 138 forts, and secure over 6,700 miles of vital trans-continental lines of communication.⁷² There were yet additional draws on the Army's manpower consisting mostly, but not entirely, of conflicts with native tribes across the United States. The Third Seminole War in southern Florida was entering its third year in 1857. Likewise, from 1855 to 1858, a series of conflicts with native tribes took place in the Pacific Northwest that required the stationing of forces nearby.

Lastly, the chief competitor for not only Army formations but also the attention of the nation and President was the disturbance between abolitionists and pro-slavery settlers in Kansas Territory which came to be known as "Bleeding Kansas."⁷³ Violence between the opposing groups had risen to such levels that the territorial governor appealed to the Federal government to intercede and restore stability. By the summer of 1857, the Army would commit up to fifteen hundred troops drawn from several formations including the 1st US Cavalry, 2nd Dragoons, and 6th Infantry regiments.⁷⁴ The concurrent conflicts in Utah and Kansas caused no shortage of confusion among military commanders and civilian leadership alike regarding prioritization of material and reinforcements.

This overabundance of requirements and shortage of available forces undoubtedly factored into Secretary of War John Floyd's decision on the size of the expedition. Coupled with President Buchanan's decision not to request an expansion of the military from Congress, Floyd was forced to resort to an

⁷² *Ibid.*, 3-6.

⁷³ Newell, *The Regular Army Before the Civil War 1845 – 1860*, 34-35. In 1854, the question of whether slavery should be permitted to spread westward provoked civil disturbances in Kansas. The Missouri Compromise of 1820 had prohibited slavery north of 36°30', but during its efforts to organize the Kansas-Nebraska Territory, Congress passed the Kansas-Nebraska Act that repealed the Missouri Compromise and left the slavery question up to local authorities to resolve. The inevitable outcome of this decision was a fierce and sometimes violent debate in Kansas between proslavery and antislavery settlers. With lawlessness becoming endemic, the territorial governor, Wilson E. Shannon, requested assistance from the Federal government. Colonel Edwin V. Sumner, commander of the 1st Cavalry and Fort Leavenworth, sent mounted troopers to patrol the roads between Lawrence and the slave state of Missouri. Nevertheless, for the rest of the summer chaos reigned in Kansas as free-soil and proslavery forces terrorized each other. Not until 1858 did Captain Nathaniel Lyon, who by then headed the pacification program, manage to bring calm to the territory.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 60.

extensive reshuffling of forces across the country to bring together what would comprise the Utah Expedition. What resulted was a patchwork of units that would marshal at Fort Leavenworth for last minute preparations before setting off on the 1,200-mile overland campaign.

To accomplish President Buchanan's objectives, General Scott assembled forces from around the country. Ten companies of the 10th Infantry Regiment came from assignment in Minnesota. The 5th Infantry Regiment, tired and frustrated from operations in Florida against the Seminoles, was diverted to Fort Leavenworth and replaced by volunteers. Light Battery B, or Phelps' Battery, 4th Artillery came off of an assignment (in support of operations in "Bleeding Kansas") at Jefferson Barracks, Missouri. The 2nd Dragoons, already located in the Kansas Territory as part of the force designated to stabilize "Bleeding Kansas," were also committed to the expedition.

The formations consisted of a mix of veterans and raw recruits. The 10th Infantry companies arrived at half strength and the 5th Infantry with even less.⁷⁵ During the roughly one month encampment at Fort Leavenworth, over seven-hundred new recruits arrived, equaling nearly one-third of their end strength. Many of the recruits were recent immigrants from Europe and spoke little English. Captain Phelps, commander of the expedition's artillery battery, bemoaned the difficulty he had communicating with his troops and the fact that only one of his eight non-commissioned officers was American.⁷⁶ This trend continued the following year as reinforcements that departed the next spring also experienced rapid influxes of raw recruits just prior to departing for Utah.⁷⁷

The formations were not just short of enlistees, but officers as well. A standard practice in the US Army at that time often saw large numbers of officers on leave, detached for recruitment duty, or on another duty assigned by the War Department. This practice, however, left the expedition exceptionally

⁷⁵ John W. Phelps, diary entry of June 27, 1857 in Hafen, *Mormon Resistance*, 91.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 115.

⁷⁷ Harold D. Langley, ed., *To Utah with the Dragoons and Glimpses of Life in Arizona and California 1858-1859* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1974), 11.

short of officers. Colonel Edmund B. Alexander, commander of the 10th Infantry Regiment, reporting to the expedition's initial commander, General William S. Harney, on the status of his regiment, requested that officers that had been detached from his regiment be returned to their companies as soon as possible. By November, the problem had not been rectified as evidenced by Johnston's request to General Scott, "I beg leave to ask your attention to the absence of a great number of officers as exhibited by the return."⁷⁸

On paper, the Utah Expedition would consist of 2,500 troops. However, desertion continually sapped combat power. The 5th Infantry reported around three-hundred desertions prior to their departure from Leavenworth. The 10th Infantry experienced one-hundred within one week on the trail.⁷⁹ This rate of loss diminished somewhat as the expedition moved away from civilization; a small fraction would either return on their own or be caught at the nearest location one could purchase alcohol. Furthermore, before the expedition departed, President Buchanan decided to keep General Harney and the 2nd Dragoons in Kansas, depriving the expedition of both its commander as well as its only mounted element. Though remaining in Kansas, Harney continued in the official capacity of overall commander, attempting to direct both the stabilization of Kansas and the expedition from his headquarters at Fort Leavenworth. Harney's replacement, Colonel Albert S. Johnston, would not be able to take command of the expedition for three months. In the interim, Colonel Edmund B. Alexander, commander of the 10th Infantry Regiment, was the most senior officer after Harney and therefore, next in command in the field. However, he resisted assuming overall command of the expedition, preferring instead to restrict himself to his regiment.

As the expedition prepared to depart from Fort Leavenworth, many of the junior officers expressed concern over the level of preparedness. Captain Gove, commander of I Company, 10th Infantry

⁷⁸ Johnston, letter to I. McDowell, November 30, 1857 in "The Utah Expedition," *House Ex. Doc. 71*, 77. Officer shortages in the 5th Infantry remained acute. None of its companies had all three officers and two of them were commanded on an acting basis by Second Lieutenants who entered the Army directly from civilian life in the spring of 1857.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 112.

Regiment, noting the poor health of many soldiers, the lack of men and lateness of the season, wrote his wife saying, that his battalion was in the “worse possible condition for an expedition.”⁸⁰ Captain Phelps’ battery of artillery was likewise ill-prepared for departure commenting that “we are none of us prepared for such a move and my battery less so than other commands.” His command in particular suffered many “small inconveniences attending the sudden bringing together of raw elements for taking the field.”⁸¹

When the expedition headed west on July 18, it numbered only 1,500.⁸² The effect of the loss of the dragoons was felt early. Preceding the Army on the trail were several supply trains that had departed early, expecting the Army to overtake them. However, without the dragoons, they remained exposed to raids by native tribes. On August 2, a Cheyenne raiding party attacked and scattered over eight hundred head of beef cattle meant to supply the troops through the winter.⁸³ This raid signaled to General Harney, who continued to command the expedition from Leavenworth, the significant disadvantage the loss of the dragoons placed upon the expedition. His attempts to source a mounted escort from Colonel Sumner’s 1st Cavalry, also operating in Kansas, were unsuccessful.⁸⁴

While the main body of the expedition made its way west, General Harney dispatched Captain Stewart Van Vliet from Leavenworth to procure supplies in the Salt Lake Valley, as well as identify a suitable location for a garrison in preparation for the troops expected arrival that fall. Furthermore, Van Vliet was to “ascertain...such other as information [he] could gather which will be useful to the general

⁸⁰ Jesse Augustus Gove, *The Utah Expedition, 1857-1858; Letters of Capt. Jesse A. Gove, 10th Inf., U. S. A. to Mrs. Grove, and Special Correspondence of the New York Herald* (Concord: New Hampshire Historical Society, 1928), 11.

⁸¹ Phelps, diary entry of July 18 and 26, 1857 in Hafen, *Mormon Resistance*, 94, 99.

⁸² MacKinnon, “Who’s In Charge Here,” 58; see footnote 9.

⁸³ Harney, letter to Lieutenant Colonel L. Thomas, August 8, 1857 in “The Utah Expedition,” *House Ex. Doc. 71*, 17.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

commanding.”⁸⁵ In addition to his supply and intelligence missions, he was to convey a message from General Harney to Brigham Young requesting his assistance in acquiring the necessary supplies. Noticeably absent from the letter was any mention of Young’s removal from office of Territorial Governor or the President’s concern about disloyalty and rebellion.⁸⁶

Van Vliet overtook the lead element of the main body at Fort Kearny on August 9. Along his way, he encountered several eastbound wagons from Utah whose teamsters that indicated that the Mormons would not permit the Army to enter the valley. Notwithstanding these warnings, Van Vliet resumed his march and arrived in Salt Lake City on September 8. Van Vliet’s selection for the mission was a wise choice by General Harney as Van Vliet had had previous favorable dealings with the Mormons which likely contributed to his admission to the valley.⁸⁷

While he was unsuccessful in acquiring supplies for the Army (as the Mormons would sell him none), he did meet privately with Brigham Young who expressed his intent to resist the Army’s advance. Young recounted for him the several dealings of the Mormon Church with the state governments in Missouri and Illinois, citing them for his decision to resist the advancing army.⁸⁸ Van Vliet recorded in the official report of his visit, “During my stay in the city I visited several families, and all with whom I was thrown, looked upon the present movement of the troops towards their Territory as the commencement of another religious persecution...”⁸⁹

Herein lay one of the greatest miscalculations of the Utah Expedition. Harney and many of the other expedition leaders greatly underestimated Mormon unity and resolve. One of the common rumors

⁸⁵ Captain A. Pleasanton, instructions to Captain Stewart Van Vliet, July 28, 1857 in Hafen, *Mormon Resistance*, 37.

⁸⁶ Harney, letter to Brigham Young, July 28, 1857, *Ibid.*, 39-40.

⁸⁷ *Deseret News (Salt Lake City)*, September 16, 1857.

⁸⁸ Wilford Woodruff, undated journal entry, September 1857, in Hafen, *Mormon Resistance*, 44.

⁸⁹ Stewart Van Vliet, letter to A. Pleasanton, September 16, 1857 in Hafen, *Mormon Resistance*, 52.

promulgated throughout the east by newspapers was the idea that Brigham Young and the senior leadership of the church governed through oppression and tyranny.⁹⁰ Already mentioned was W.M.F. Magraw's description in his letter to President Pierce in 1856.⁹¹ Additionally, and perhaps based on this, newspapers wrote of "the tenacious hold of Brigham Young upon the rule of the Mormon people."⁹² Former Utah Chief Justice Samuel G. Brandeberry's report to President Millard Fillmore accusing the Mormon Church of "overshadowing and controlling the opinions, the actions, the property, and even the lives of its members..." was repeated on the House floor and reprinted in newspapers.⁹³

These misimpressions led leaders to believe that they faced only a small, dedicated coterie within the Mormon Church and that the majority of Utah's population would welcome the arrival of the Army.⁹⁴ This led Army planners to underestimate the size of the force needed for the mission. Even General Scott, who recognized the danger of underestimating the fanaticism of Mormon men, believed that the women likely would favor the government's intervention when he wrote, "The military organization & discipline of the Mormons may be set down as in-different [sic]; but we must remember that religious fanaticism has often proved itself to be an over-match for military discipline... The only hope of schism rests on the

⁹⁰ W.M.F. Magraw described the general the situation in Utah as "self-constituted theocracy" "driving the moderate and more orderly of the Mormon community to desperation."

⁹¹ W.M.F. Magraw, letter to President Franklin Pierce, October 3, 1856 in LeRoy R. Hafen and Ann W. Hafen, eds., *Mormon Resistance: A Documentary Account of the Utah Expedition, 1857-1858*, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2005), 361. William M. F. Magraw was a former mail contractor responsible for the Independence, Missouri-Salt Lake City route. In 1856, following the loss of the contract, he wrote a strongly-worded letter to President Franklin Pierce charging that the Utah Territory was in a state of lawlessness because of the Mormon Church, a "despotic, dangerous and damnable" ecclesiastical organization. He would return to the Territory in 1857 with the Utah Expedition as Superintendent of the South Pass Wagon road.

⁹² "The Mormons: Who and What They Are and What They Propose," *Vermont Phoenix* (Brattleboro, VT), July 4, 1857.

⁹³ "Speech of Mr. Morrill, of Vermont, On Utah Territory, Its Laws, Etc.," *Weekly National Intelligencer* (Washington DC), March 21, 1857.

⁹⁴ Gove, *Letters of Capt. Jesse A. Gove*, 297; see also page 222. Even after entering the valley and observing the people directly, many soldiers resisted the belief that the general population supported Brigham Young and the resistance voluntarily.

women. They may create a party, among the American men, in favor of Christianity, law & order.”⁹⁵ Van Vliet’s visit and subsequent report tagged these assumptions false. “I attended their service on Sunday, and , in the course of a sermon delivered by Elder Taylor...he referred to the probability of an overpowering force being sent against them, and desired all present who would apply the torch to their own buildings...; every hand in an audience numbering over 4,000 persons was raised at the same moment.”⁹⁶

Interestingly, General Scott, whose position and experience should have allowed him to influence the make-up of the expedition, seemed to hold little sway. He disagreed with Floyd’s recommendation of 2,500 troops and the selection of General Harney as its commander. Yet in all cases he acceded without much argument.⁹⁷

Van Vliet hastily returned eastward encountering Colonel Alexander and the 10th Infantry on September 21 near South Pass. He informed them of the Mormons’ plans to resist by fortifying the canyons leading into the valley from the east. He also attempted, but failed to convince Colonel Alexander to halt his advance early, anticipating the supply disaster that awaited them even if they were to make it into the valley before winter began. Captain Gove, a company commander in the 10th Infantry, recorded his reaction to Van Vliet’s intelligence in a letter to his wife:

He brings intelligence that the Mormons will oppose us in entering the city of Salt Lake. They have burnt the grass for many miles along the road and are determined to resist us at all hazards. This much of it is talk, but that some seven hundred Mormons are in the mountains there can be

⁹⁵ Winfield Scott, Orders for the Garrison of Salt Lake, May 26, 1857 in Cannon, “Winfield Scott and the Utah Expedition,” 209.

⁹⁶ Stewart Van Vliet, letter to A. Pleasanton, September 16, 1857 in Hafen, *Mormon Resistance*, 52; Young, letter to Alexander Brigham, October 16, 1857 in “The Utah Expedition,” *House Ex. Doc. 71*, 53. Young was aware of this misperception that predominated in the East. In a message to Colonel Alexander he sarcastically stated, “Doubtless you have supposed that many of the people here would flee to you for protection upon your arrival, and if there are any such persons they shall be at once conveyed to your camp in perfect safety, so soon as such fact can be known.”

⁹⁷ Cannon, “Winfield Scott and the Utah Expedition,” 209; see also Scott, letter to Harney, May 28, 1857 in “The Utah Expedition,” *House Ex. Doc. 71*, 4. By General Scott’s estimates, the Utah Expedition would require at least four thousand to garrison the Salt Lake Valley, not to mention requirements should the Mormons resist.

no doubt... Had the blockheads in Washington had an idea in their heads, or listened to those who were able to give advice, all this would have been avoided, and in the spring a splendid fit out might have been made, and supplies of grass, wood and water obtained.

We may have to winter in the mountain; if so, how dreary and lonesome! *Thank God we have provisions just behind us that will subsist us and save us from starvation...*⁹⁸

With a steady flow of converts, traders and missionaries traversing the plains to Utah it did not take long for news of the expedition's existence to reach Salt Lake City. On July 24, riders reached the valley to appraise Governor Young of the situation. On August 1, Lieutenant General Daniel H. Wells, commander of the Utah Nauvoo Legion, issued orders mobilizing the force.⁹⁹ In a series of speeches given over the summer months, church leaders publically denounced the expedition as an illegal and unconstitutional overstep by the Federal government and urged the population to prepare to raze their towns and cities if necessary.¹⁰⁰

In Salt Lake City, news spread rapidly of the approaching army. On July 28, Young and Heber C. Kimball addressed a congregation in which they announced publicly the existence of the expedition as well as their intentions to resist it.¹⁰¹ In a letter sent to Colonel Alexander October 15, Brigham Young

⁹⁸ Gove, *Letters of Capt. Jesse A. Gove*, 60. Emphasis added.

⁹⁹ Daniel Hamner Wells (born October 27, 1814 – Died March 24, 1891) was a resident of Commerce, IL (later Nauvoo) in 1839 when Brigham Young led Mormon refugees there from Missouri. Though not a member of the LDS Church until 1846, Wells served in many capacities in Nauvoo and was a member of the Nauvoo Legion. When mobs attacked the city in 1846, Wells helped organized its defense, preventing the surrender of the city for three days. At the time of the Utah Expedition, Wells served as an Apostle and Second Counselor to Brigham Young in the church's First Presidency as well as the commander of the Nauvoo Legion; Ralph Hansen, "Administrative History of the Nauvoo Legion in Utah" (master's thesis, Brigham Young University, 1954), 48.

¹⁰⁰ Brigham Young, speech, July 26, 1857; in Hafen, *Mormon Resistance*, 183; Heber C. Kimball, speech, July 26, 1857, *Ibid.*, 189; Young, speech, September 13, 1857, *Ibid.* Brigham Young often cited past abuses by state troops in Illinois and Missouri and misconduct by US Army's Steptoe Expedition as his reasoning for assuming malicious intent behind the expedition's mission. He also repeatedly apprised expedition leaders that the president had never removed him or notified him of his removal from the office of territorial governor.

¹⁰¹ "Remarks by President Brigham Young, Bowery July 26, 1857," *Deseret News (Salt Lake City)*, August 5, 1857; see also "Remarks by Pres. Heber C. Kimball, Bowery July 26, 1857," *Deseret News (Salt Lake City)*, August 12, 1857. Heber C. Kimball (born June 14, 1801 – died June 22, 1868) served as First Counsellor to Brigham Young in the Mormon Church's First Presidency.

stated explicitly his reason for resisting. “We have a number of times been compelled to receive and submit to the most fiendish proposals, made to us by armies virtually belonging to the United States, our only alternative being to comply therewith.... We for the first time possess the power to have a voice in the treatment that we will receive, and we intend to use that power.”¹⁰²

Nauvoo Legion scouts closely monitored the Army’s advance from Fort Laramie and sent almost daily reports to Young on their location, activities, and condition. Aided by their familiarity with the terrain and their mobility, Mormon scouts collected intelligence on the expedition with impunity. Army officers were aware of the “Mormon spies,” but without cavalry of their own, they could do little about it.¹⁰³ Emigrants and travelers on the trail also proved to be productive, if somewhat unreliable, sources of information for the intelligence hungry Young. From them, Young and the Nauvoo Legion gained a highly accurate picture of the expedition’s composition and disposition as well as the fact that neither Harney nor his eventual replacement, Colonel Johnston, were personally leading the expedition.¹⁰⁴

The strategy devised by Brigham Young stands among the more unique and risky, yet successful, employed in American history. Contrary to predominant opinion in the east, statehood, and not independence, was his goal. His ambiguous phrasing and fiery rhetoric, condemning what he saw as abuses of power, was often interpreted as calls for independence. In 1855 Young refuted these misperceptions by drawing comparisons with the church’s earlier experiences in Missouri.

Again; it was industriously circulated [in Missouri] that we were going to declare our “*Independence*,” not that we had, or intended to do so absurd a thing; yet anything, no matter how absurd, seemed sufficient excuse to startle the fears of the community, and they began to drive, plunder, rob, burn our houses, and lay waste our fields, and this was called, “*Mormon*

¹⁰² Brigham Young, letter to Colonel Edmund B. Alexander, October 15, 1857 in “The Utah Expedition,” *House Ex. Doc. 71*, 53.

¹⁰³ Gove, *Letters of Capt. Jesse A. Gove*, 62.

¹⁰⁴ John M. Bernhisel, letter to Brigham Young, September 21, 1857 in MacKinnon, *At Sword’s Point*, 254-256; see also Samuel W. Richards, letter to Brigham Young, August 18, 1857, *Ibid.*, 252.

disturbances,” and the aid of the Government was invoked to quell “*Mormon insurrection,*” “*Mormon troubles,*” and “*Turbulent Mormons.*”¹⁰⁵

The predominant opinion among members of the church at that time, was that the US Constitution was a divinely-inspired document whose guarantee of religious freedoms had allowed the church to be formed. The church had and could only continue to flourish through the freedoms guaranteed in the United States. Juxtaposed upon this desire was the news of a Utah-bound expedition they perceived as an existential threat. Whatever actions Young, the church, and the Nauvoo Legion took must be able to defeat the Army while not jeopardizing an amicable resolution that would eventually lead to statehood.

The strategy that Young and his counsellors devised is best described as “Bloodless Resistance;” a step above Mahatma Gandhi’s civil disobedience, but not a violent insurgency. General Wells and the Nauvoo Legion would deny the US Army entrance into the Salt Lake Valley by exploiting the expedition’s vulnerabilities: its lack of mobility and extended supply lines. Legion cavalry would attack and destroy supply trains, stampede livestock, and burn forage along the expedition’s anticipated route in an effort to slow its advance. Bloodshed, however, was to be avoided.¹⁰⁶ There was hope that if the expedition could be delayed sufficiently, the fierce Rocky Mountain winter would take care of the rest. Brigham Young, for his own part, maintained hope that a demonstration of Mormon solidarity might “capture the public fancy,” or prompt Congress or the president to send an investigatory envoy.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁵ Young, *Journal of Discourses*, 2:170-178. The full discourse titled, “The Constitution and Government of the United States—Rights and Policy of the Latter-Day Saints” represents an expansive description of Young’s thoughts on the love-hate relationship that existed between the US Government and the Mormon Church; see also, Brigham Young, *Journal of Discourses*, 5:231-236, “Movements of the Saints’ Enemies—The Crisis”

¹⁰⁶ Daniel H. Wells, letter to Major Joseph Taylor, October 4, 1857, in “The Utah Expedition,” *House Ex. Doc. 71*, 56-57. In mid-October, after initial actions failed to slow the expedition’s advance, Brigham Young did authorize an escalation of lethal force, “kill the officers, mountaineer guides, and NCOs first.” The fact that these targeted attacks did not occur suggests that this was a reluctant escalation and departure from his strategy; Young was willing to sacrifice future goodwill with the US Government to avoid further abuses.

¹⁰⁷ Poll, “Buchanan’s Blunder,” 128-129.

In the event the Legion's cavalry could not sufficiently delay or deter the expedition, the infantry would establish defenses along the most direct route into the Salt Lake Valley, Echo Canyon, the Legion's own Thermopylae Pass. The canyon was sufficiently restrictive that even a small force could block a much larger force from advancing. The only practicable alternate route to the north followed the Oregon Trail to Bear Lake and then turned south adding 150 miles to the journey. If neither the cavalry harassment, nor the defenses in the canyon stopped the expedition's advance, Young and church leaders devised a plan by which every community would be razed and civilians evacuated to the south while the Nauvoo Legion continued its resistance from the mountains.



Figure 3. Echo Canyon in the 1860s

Source: "Echo Canyon," Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints Church History, accessed March 6, 2016, <https://history.lds.org/place/pioneer-story-echo-canyon?lang=eng>.

Young and Wells recognized that the Nauvoo Legion had no hope of defeating the US Army in decisive battle. The Army had distinct advantages in weaponry and training while the Nauvoo Legion

suffered from a shortage of ammunition and powder.¹⁰⁸ The Legion counted approximately seven-thousand members on its rolls, though the exact numbers fielded are unclear.¹⁰⁹ The US Army estimated the Legion's strength at six-thousand.¹¹⁰ The ranks of the Legion consisted of a mix of cobblers, tailors, and farmers, hardly a crack organization. With domestic tasks a priority, there had been little opportunity to train.¹¹¹ The Legion possessed four cannons, but all were old and immobile, suitable only for ceremonial purposes.

The Legion's first priorities involved locating and shadowing Federal forces approaching Utah Territory. This included both the Utah Expedition as well as Colonel Edwin V. Sumner's 1st Cavalry in western Kansas conducting a punitive expedition against the Cheyenne tribe. Weapons were repaired, or purchased, supplies cached and outlying communities in California and what is now Nevada were consolidated into the larger cities.¹¹² Young also considered the possibility of allying with native tribes in the area and the plains to bolster their numbers.¹¹³

On September 15, the day after Van Vliet departed from Salt Lake City to return east, Brigham Young publicly declared martial law throughout the territory. Young sent a copy of his proclamation to Colonel Alexander, along with a personal message that reached him on October 2, just as the expedition entered Utah Territory at Ham's Fork. In it, he reiterated the fact that the President had not removed him

¹⁰⁸ Hansen, "Administrative History," 62-65; Brigham Young recognized this as a strategically important shortcoming. Powder and weapons were hard to come by in the Utah Territory and emigrants passing through were not good sources either as they still had need for their weapons. Young explored options for manufacturing powder, ammunition and weapons locally as early as 1852. Undoubtedly, these efforts contributed to the rumors of Mormon insurrection in the east.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 48.

¹¹⁰ P.F. Smith, letter to Secretary Floyd, November 24, 1857, in MacKinnon, *At Sword's Point*, 428.

¹¹¹ Hansen, "Administrative History," 103.

¹¹² MacKinnon, *At Sword's Point*, 231.

¹¹³ Ibid., 234.

as governor of the territory and forbade entry to the Army. He gave Alexander the option of departing immediately unmolested, or remaining at his current location for the winter on the condition his troops surrendered their weapons to the Nauvoo Legion quartermaster.¹¹⁴ Confronted with a decision that effected the entire command and not just his regiment, Alexander simply responded that he would deliver Young's demands to the expedition's commanding general once he arrived.

Legion raiding parties attempted several times to stampede the expedition's cattle and draught animals with little success. However, the Legion's knowledge of the terrain and hidden trails along with the expedition's lack of mounted troops eventually produced results. On October 3, a troop of twenty-three legionnaires led by Major Lot Smith located and burned two unescorted supply trains near the Big Sandy River totaling fifty-two wagons. The next day, the same raiding party encountered another, larger train and likewise burned it. Ten days later, Legionnaires successfully cut off a herd of cattle, routing them to Salt Lake City and further depleted the expedition's supplies. The expedition lost thousands of pounds of rations in these raids, yet despite their loss, retained sufficient stores for seven months if rationed carefully.¹¹⁵

While the raids did not destroy enough supplies to endanger the expedition, they did have other significant effects on the Federal troops. They exposed the vulnerability of expedition supply lines; continued losses could not only prevent their entry into the Salt Lake Valley, but might also drive them back to Fort Laramie, a humiliating retreat. To prevent such an eventuality, Alexander dedicated additional forces to secure supply trains, leaving fewer forces for offensive operations. Alexander reported to Scott's adjutant October 9, "It [the expedition] is strong enough to defend itself and its supplies; whether it is able to assume and sustain an offensive position remains to be seen."¹¹⁶

¹¹⁴ Brigham Young, letter to Colonel Edmund B. Alexander, September 29, 1857 in Hafen, *Mormon Resistance*, 62.

¹¹⁵ H. F. Clarke, letter to F.J. Porter, October 10, 1857, *Ibid.*, 63, 105.

¹¹⁶ Alexander, letter to Cooper, October 9, 1857 in "The Utah Expedition," *House Ex. Doc. 71*, 32.

Alexander sent four infantry companies to salvage supplies from the burned wagons and to disperse the marauding Legionnaires, but without cavalry to pursue they were limited to responsive defense. On one occasion infantrymen, frustrated by the hit-and-run tactics employed by the Legion, attempted to use mules to level the playing field. This “jack-ass cavalry,” so nicknamed by the Nauvoo Legion, was unsuccessful.¹¹⁷ It would not be until the 2nd Dragoons approached in late October that Nauvoo Legion raids were halted.¹¹⁸

To replace General Harney, Scott and Floyd had selected Colonel Albert S. Johnston, commander of the newly constituted 2nd Cavalry Regiment in Texas. Summoned from Texas to Washington DC, Johnston received his orders on August 28 and quickly repaired to Fort Leavenworth, arriving on September 11.¹¹⁹ He remained one week, conferred with Harney regarding the orders and guidance Scott provided him, recalled the 2nd Dragoons from their missions across Kansas, and awaited the arrival of the civilian officials (including the new governor) he was tasked to escort to Utah.¹²⁰

On September 18, Colonel Johnston departed from Fort Leavenworth with an escort of forty dragoons intent on rapidly overtaking his new command. The remainder of the 2nd Dragoons, about three hundred in total, would escort President Buchanan’s newly appointed territorial governor of Utah, Alfred Cumming, as well as other replacement civilian officials.¹²¹ As he approached South Pass, Johnston,

¹¹⁷ Albert G. Browne, “The Utah Expedition: Its Causes and Consequences,” *Atlantic Monthly* (March 1859), 370.

¹¹⁸ Governor Walker finally released the 2nd Dragoons from their mission in Kansas on September 16. However, they would not reached the expedition main body until November 20.

¹¹⁹ McDowell, letter to Johnston, August 28, 1857 in “The Utah Expedition,” *House Ex. Doc. 71*, 13.

¹²⁰ William Preston Johnston, *The Life of Gen. Albert Sidney Johnston Embracing His Services in the Armies of the United States, the Republic of Texas, and the Confederate States* (New York City: D. Appleton & Company, 1878), 209-210.

¹²¹ Browne, “The Utah Expedition: Its Causes and Consequences,” 367, 371. Alfred Cumming (born September 4, 1802 – died October 9, 1873) was not President Buchanan’s first choice to replace Young as territorial governor. Buchanan offered the position to several others who refused the offer. At last Cumming accepted the offer though his only previous executive experience was as the mayor of Augusta, Georgia. Mr. Cumming had been a sutler during the Mexican War, and more recently a

determined that an entry into the Salt Lake Valley was unlikely and began considering possible locations to winter the expedition.¹²²

Meanwhile, the Nauvoo Legion continued their surveillance of the Utah Expedition's progress unabated. Terrain familiarity and horsemanship aided the Legion's cavalry as much as its mobility. In one case, Legion cavalry came upon a supply train that happened to have an escort of dragoons. Despite this surprise, the Legion commander calmly ordered a retreat but remained unworried, later commenting, "I was no ways uneasy for my own safety as I was aware that the soldiers [sic] poor horsemen & their horses no match for ours outside a beaten road. For while our horses would dodge around among sagebrush & grease wood without any guiding, their horses would plow through the brush checking their speed & generally throwing their riders in advance of their saddles."¹²³

While Legion cavalry conducted its reconnaissance and harassment mission, the Mormon infantry prepared defenses in Echo Canyon. General Wells established his headquarters at the western end of the canyon from which he directed the Legion's efforts. About 1,250 Legion infantrymen reported at the canyon and began building obstacles and breastworks, loosening boulders and dredging fords.

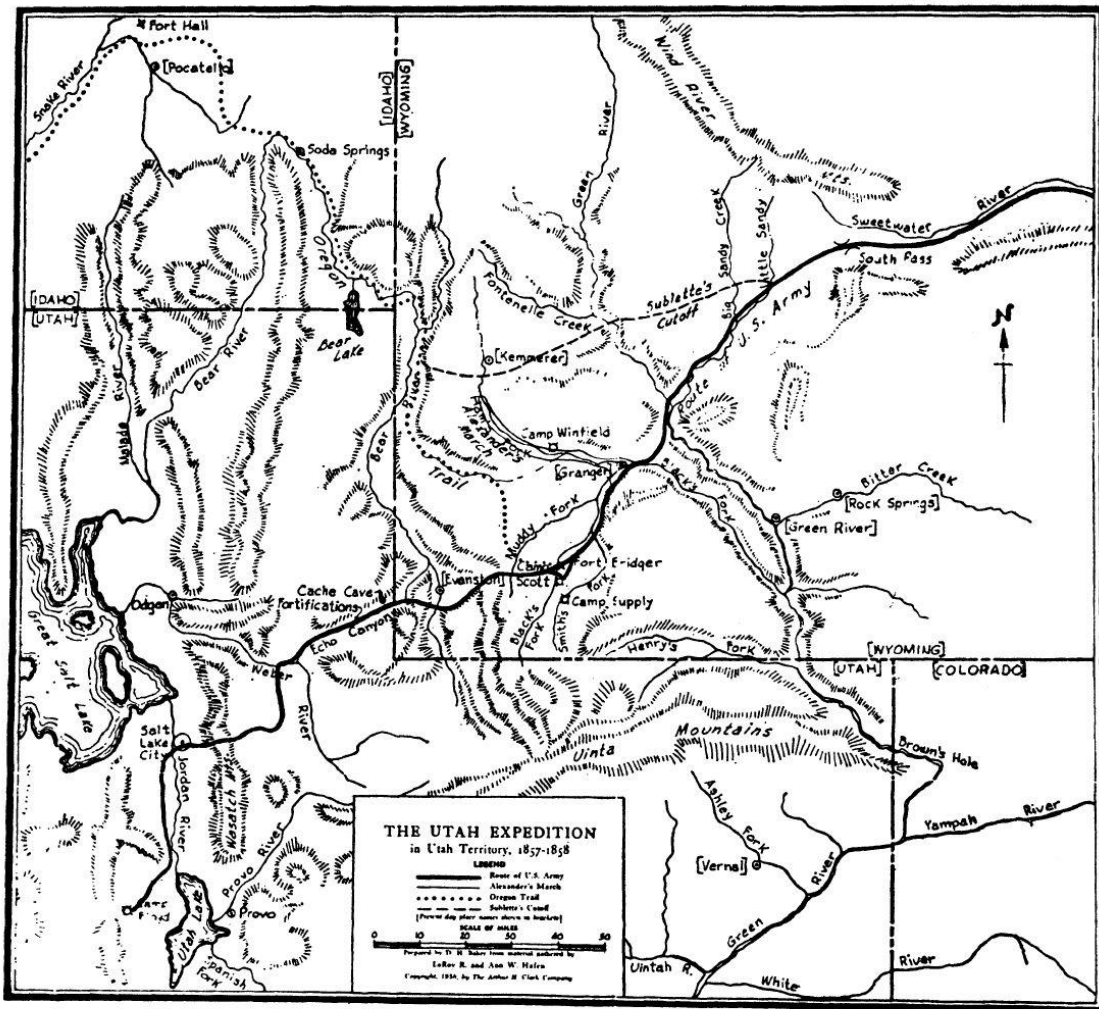
With supply trains under attack, forage along the trail burning and news of the Mormons fortifying Echo Canyon, Alexander made a fateful decision. Determined to force an entry into the Salt Lake Valley that fall, he decided to attempt the circuitous northern route that would outflank the Legion's defenses in Echo Canyon. On October 11, the command commenced its movements north along Ham's Fork toward Bear Lake. Unfortunately, the trail he selected proved entirely unsuitable for a force the size of the Utah Expedition. The command eventually stretched out over eight miles along the trail. The need

Superintendent of Indian Affairs on the Upper Missouri. He was reputed to be a gentleman of education, ambition, and executive ability. Governor Cumming had delayed his departure to Utah due to several trips he made between Washington DC and St. Louis trying to negotiate a higher salary, increased territorial budget, and transportation to the territory.

¹²² Ibid., 370.

¹²³ Hansen, "Administrative History," 99.

to fell trees and improve the trail further slowed their advance. Snow began falling on October 12 and the cold nights and poor forage started to take a toll on draught animals and horses. On October 19, seeing only more difficult terrain ahead of his forces, Alexander decided to retrace his route. A message from Colonel Johnston, who at this time had just reached South Pass, confirmed the wisdom and necessity of this decision. The combination of worsening weather and loss of animals, though, slowed Alexander's return to October 31, no closer to Salt Lake City than he had been a month earlier.¹²⁴



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Figure 4. Route of the Utah Expedition

Source: Poll, "Buchanan's Blunder," 125.

¹²⁴ John W. Phelps, diary entries, October 7-31, 1857 in MacKinnon, *At Sword's Point*, 383-395.

The “Campaign of Ham’s Fork” as the many of the Nauvoo Legion referred to it, accomplished little but cost the expedition greatly in time, animals, and morale. The only boon they gained was the October 16 capture of two Nauvoo Legion officers, along with a copy of General Wells’ instructions. But even this was of little value as the captured documents said little more beyond what Van Vliet had already reported to Alexander a month earlier.¹²⁵ Worsening weather further delayed the linkup between Johnston’s party, the remainder of the 2nd Dragoons, and Alexander’s elements which did not occur until November 3 on Ham’s Fork. The arrival of a new commander briefly lifted the morale of the expedition, which began advancing once again towards the Salt Lake Valley on November 6. Concerned that the Army might attempt to force the canyon, the Nauvoo Legion concentrated roughly 2,500 troops in Echo Canyon and torched both Forts Bridger and Supply.¹²⁶ The defenders remained on high alert until late November when it became clear that Johnston would winter at Fort Bridger. Legionnaires were gradually released to return home for the season leaving a force of thirty to monitor the pass. Just as Brigham Young had hoped, winter weather ground the expedition’s advance to a halt.

¹²⁵ Daniel H. Wells, letter to Joseph Taylor, October 4, 1857 in “The Utah Expedition,” *House Ex. Doc. 71*, 56-57. Compare with Captain Van Vliet’s report to Colonel Johnston’s adjutant, Captain A. Pleasanton, Van Vliet, letter to A Pleasanton, September 16, 1857, *Ibid.*, 25.

¹²⁶ Poll, “Buchanan’s Blunder,” 128.



Figure 5. 2nd Dragoons' Winter March

Source: Don Stivers, “Never a Complaint,” *The Art of Don Stivers*, accessed March 6, 2016, <http://www.donstivers.com/#!Never A Complaint/zoom/mainPage/imageilk>.

The grueling march endured by the Utah Expedition to Fort Bridger from November 6 to 19 caused many soldiers to draw comparisons to Napoleon’s famous retreat from Moscow. Though not nearly the scale of that famous campaign, and endured while advancing and not retreating, livestock losses were still great. Captain Gove of the 10th Infantry wrote his wife, “Hundreds of animals die every twenty four hours...Some of the men were frost bitten. My dear Maria, it is quite Russian...Troops have never been called upon to do more arduous duties than now. On duty all the time, night and day almost,

yet, strange to say, no one is sick scarcely.”¹²⁷ Johnston likewise remarked that while the expedition lost a substantial number of animals, “the troops [were] in fine health and condition...”¹²⁸

Johnston determined that Fort Bridger, despite its damaged condition, presented the best available option to pass the winter. By November 19, the last elements of the expedition, six companies of the 2nd Dragoons commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Philip St. George Cooke, along with Governor Cumming and other civilian officials, reached Fort Bridger.¹²⁹ A thorough accounting determined that sufficient stores remained to last the expedition until resupply could be made the next spring. Johnston recognized though that to resume offensive operations in the spring, many horses, mules and oxen had to be replaced. He dispatched a party led by Captain Randolph B. Marcy of the 5th Infantry to New Mexico to purchase replacement mounts for the anticipated spring offensive.¹³⁰ From November until June 1858, Johnston took no significant actions aside from resupply missions and improving defenses to New Mexico.

While Johnston and the expedition remained immobilized at Fort Bridger, and the nearby Camp Scott, events were put into motion in the East that would significantly impact the resolution of the conflict. Thomas L. Kane, the Philadelphia lawyer who had assisted the Mormons on several previous occasions, received messages from Brigham Young requesting his assistance. Kane travelled to

¹²⁷ Gove, *Letters of Capt. Jesse A. Gove*, 92.

¹²⁸ Johnston, letter to N.J. Eaton, February 5, 1858 in MacKinnon, *At Sword's Point*, 399. The health of the expedition troops on the march and in garrison in Utah was so dramatically better than that of troops in Kansas and Nebraska that the Army's Surgeon General commissioned a study of the difference.

¹²⁹ Ibid.; *Church History in the Fullness of Times* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2003), 377. Lieutenant Colonel Philip St. George Cooke (born June 13, 1809 – died March 20, 1895) in 1846 assumed command of the Mormon Battalion at Santa Fe, New Mexico that had been raised to participate in the Mexican-American War. His firm, but fair leadership of the battalion during the last 1,000 mile march to the Pacific coast earned him the admiration and respect of his men. In June 1858, when Johnston marched his army through Salt Lake City, church members reported seeing Cooke remove his hat and place it over his heart as a gesture of respect for the soldiers he had led on the long march.

¹³⁰ Johnston, letter to Brigadier General John Garland, November 25, 1857 in “The Utah Expedition,” *House Ex. Doc. 71*, 81-82.

Washington DC twice in order to meet with President Buchanan with the hopes of securing official sanction for a mission to serve as a government intermediary. While Buchanan refused to grant official status to Kane, he did give Kane his blessing and letters of introduction, encouraging Federal officials to render him courtesies and assistance.¹³¹

After returning home, in late December Kane travelled by ship from New York to Panama, crossed the isthmus and from thence by boat up to California. He reached Salt Lake City from the south on February 25, where he conferred with Brigham Young and other church leaders. On March 12, he arrived at Camp Scott where he received a cold reception from a surprised Johnston, who, wholly unaware of Kane's interactions with Buchanan and Young, suspected him of being a Mormon sympathizer or spy. Given the troops' anger and frustrations from that fall's campaign, there was a legitimate risk to Kane's life at Camp Scott. "About retreat a man came in from Salt Lake direction with a pack mule...He is very reserved, says he came from California to Salt Lake City, remained there nine days, and then came here under a Mormon escort till within a few miles. Says he has despatches [sic] for Gov. Cumming. My men want to hang him. Say he is a Mormon."¹³² He had greater success with Governor Cumming whom he convinced to accompany him to Salt Lake City to negotiate with Brigham Young.

In the East, as it so often does, the political tide began to turn. As news of Lot Smith's raids and subsequent immobilization of Johnston's forces reached Washington, the once enthusiastic press began to question the wisdom of the Utah Expedition.¹³³ When Congress reconvened in early December it immediately took up the topic for debate, which had two outcomes. First, the House of Representative

¹³¹ Browne, "The Utah Expedition: Its Causes and Consequences," 475.

¹³² Gove, *Letters of Capt. Jesse A. Gove*, 134.

¹³³ "Important from the Plains," *Evening Star (Washington DC)*, November 17, 1857; "President Washington's Proceedings Against the Whiskey Boys Contrasted with President Buchanan's Proceeding Against the Mormons," *Weekly American (Washington DC)*, April 24, 1858; "Washington News," *Prairie News (Okolona, MS)*, February 10, 1858.

passed a resolution on January 27, 1858 requiring the President to provide a report on the decision and execution of the Utah Expedition.¹³⁴ Second, Congress authorized an increase in the size of the US Army and allocated an additional 2,400 troops as reinforcements, bringing its total size to 5,900, approximately one-third of the total active Army.

By April, political pressure had grown so intense that President Buchanan sought a quick and quiet resolution to the whole matter. The Utah Expedition had ceased to be a galvanizing force and had instead become an encumbrance and political liability to his administration.¹³⁵ To that end, he sent US marshal, Ben McCulloch of Texas, and US Senator-elect Lazarus Powell of Kentucky as official emissaries along with a letter granting “free and full pardon to all who will submit themselves to the authority of the federal government.”¹³⁶ When the two arrived in June 1858, they discovered that Kane and Cumming had already laid the groundwork for an amicable resolution to the conflict. On June 12, McCulloch and Powell reported to Secretary Floyd that a final agreement was in place stating, “After the fullest and freest conference with them we are pleased to state that we have settled the unfortunate difficulties existing between the government of the United States and the people of Utah.”¹³⁷

Despite the agreement, and assurances from Cumming and the Powell-McCulloch Commission, tensions continued due to the presence of Johnston’s forces in northeastern Utah. The Army, still encamped at Camp Scott, remained under orders to march into the territory and establish several posts from which it would protect emigrants traveling to California. Before Kane’s return with Cumming that spring, Young and other leaders held a council in which they decided to proceed with the evacuation of northern settlements. During this great “Move South,” all settlements north of and in the vicinity of Salt

¹³⁴ *Cong. Globe*, 35th Cong., 1st sess., 1858: 247. The response to this resolution was the *Ex. Doc 71* cited throughout this work.

¹³⁵ Browne, “The Utah Expedition: Its Causes and Consequences,” 476.

¹³⁶ Buchanan, official proclamation, in *House Exec. Doc. 2*, Cong., Sess. 2, vol. 1, 113.

¹³⁷ McCulloch and Powell, letter to Secretary Floyd, June 12, 1857, in *House Exec. Doc. 2*, Cong., Sess. 2, vol. 1, 167.

Lake City were abandoned save for small groups that were prepared to set them ablaze if ordered. Johnston pledged his word that his forces and their camp followers would remain orderly and would not be bivouacked within Mormon settlements. On June 26, he marched his forces through Salt Lake City without incident, eventually establishing a post, named Camp Floyd, in Cedar Valley forty miles southwest of the city. Four days later, Brigham Young and Mormon families began returning to their homes in the north.

Though the conflict known as the Utah War came to an end in June 1858 tensions would remain between Mormon settlers and the US Army until their departure at the start of the Civil War. Governor Cumming served a successful term that expired in 1861, though true, if not legal, executive power was seen to remain with Brigham Young and the ecclesiastical hierarchy of the church.¹³⁸ For Buchanan, the episode proved detrimental to his presidential legacy as well as his political party's fortunes. The Republicans, notably Abraham Lincoln, fared much better than Buchanan's Democratic Party during the next election in 1860. Brigham Young continued as President of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints until his death in 1877. His goal of statehood, however, would not be obtained until January 4, 1896.

¹³⁸ Poll, "Buchanan's Blunder," 131.

Mission Command of the Utah Expedition

"Victory or defeat in battle changes the situation to such a degree that no human acumen is able to see beyond the first battle. Therefore no plan of operation extends with any certainty beyond the first contact with the main hostile force... The advantage of the situation will never be fully utilized if subordinate commanders wait for orders, it will be generally more advisable to proceed actively and keep the initiative than to wait to the law of the opponent"

—Helmuth von Moltke the Elder, Chief of the Prussian General Staff

"No information of the position or intentions of the commanding officer has reached me, and I am in utter ignorance of the objects of the government in sending troops here, or the instructions given for their conduct after reaching here."

—Colonel E.B. Alexander, Acting Commander of the Utah Expedition

As discussed in a previous chapter, the exercise of Mission Command can be the difference between the success and failure of an operation. Those units that enjoy mutual trust, a unifying vision of the goals, and allow for disciplined initiative by subordinates within the bounds of the commander's intent can effectively address the complex nature of war. Though doctrine distinguishes five separate principles, Mission Command is innately comprehensive, meaning that one cannot employ only some of these principles and execute Mission Command effectively. Each of the principles of Mission Command have a reciprocal effect on one another. Conversely, violation of these same principles often leads to failure where success is expected.

Such is the case of the Utah Expedition. The US Army enjoyed the advantage of better equipment, more extensive training, and the leadership of veterans of the highly successful Mexican War campaign ten years earlier. Leaders and soldiers alike had every expectation of success if the Mormons chose to resist and engage them in battle.¹³⁹ Regrettably for the expedition, such success was not the case. As Brigham Young warned, the Nauvoo Legion employed its "mode of warfare against which [the Army's] tactics furnish no information" and the expedition's leadership was unable to respond

¹³⁹ Jesse A. Gove, *The Utah Expedition, 1857-1858: Letters of Capt. Jesse A. Gove...to Mrs. Gove, and Special Correspondence of the New York Herald* (New Hampshire Historical Society Collections) (Concord, N.H.: New Hampshire Historical Society, 1928), 54.

adequately. This chapter will examine the failures of Mission Command, not only at the tactical level, but at every level of command. Furthermore, it will discuss institutional and cultural factors that contributed to these failures at the tactical level.

Build Cohesive Teams through Mutual Trust

Mission Command begins first with building a team through mutual trust. Current Army doctrine explicitly notes that trust must be shared not just between a commander and his staff and subordinates, but also with superiors, between peers and non-military partners.¹⁴⁰ Trust builds unity of effort and unity of command. A commander who does not trust subordinates inhibits or limits their ability to use their initiative. A lack of trust at any level can lead to mission failure. Unfortunately for the Utah Expedition, issues of trust and unity existed at several levels from the tactical to the strategic level.

No relationship would have more far-reaching effects than that which existed between General Scott and Secretary Floyd. The poor condition of their relationship manifested itself in the professional as well as physical distance maintained between them.¹⁴¹ This separation created an awkward dual command structure, with Scott, as General-in-Chief, directing the line regiments from New York, while the Secretary of War controlled the Staff Bureaus in Washington. The two headquarters disagreed on various points concerning the expedition, from its size to its timing. Scott maintained that the season was too late and the size of the force too small to be successful.¹⁴² Floyd, more attuned to political expediency, insisted on launching the expedition that summer.

¹⁴⁰ Army Doctrinal Reference Publication (ADRP) 6-0, *Mission Command* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2012), 2-1.

¹⁴¹ General Winfield Scott's political ambitions and rivalries gave rise to poor relationships with a number of Presidents and Secretaries of War beginning with Secretary William Marcy during the Mexican-American War. These relationships grew increasingly acrimonious with the nomination and election of General Zachary Taylor to the presidency over Scott in 1848. The relationship between Scott and Floyd will be addressed more fully later in this chapter.

¹⁴² Winfield Scott, *Memoirs of Lieutenant General Winfield Scott Vol 1* (New York: Sheldon & Company, 1864), 604.

As the expedition played out, Scott's concerns proved valid, yet despite his reservations he maintained an awkward acquiescence to Floyd's decisions. He attempted in his 1864 memoirs to divest himself of responsibility for the expedition, placing the blame and hints of corruption solely on Secretary Floyd when he wrote, "The expedition set on foot by Mr. Secretary Floyd, in 1857, against the Mormons and Indians about Salt Lake was, beyond a doubt, to give occasion for large contracts and expenditures, that is, to open a wide field for frauds and speculation. This purpose was not comprehended nor scarcely suspected in, perhaps, a year; but, observing the desperate characters who frequented the Secretary, some of whom had desks near him, suspicion was at length excited."¹⁴³ For his part, President Buchanan maintained that he never had knowledge of Scott's objections and learned of them only after Scott published his memoirs in during the Civil War.¹⁴⁴

The lack of unity among the senior leadership also played out in the search for the expedition's leader. One of the chief concerns discussed by Scott and Floyd was who among the senior commanders of the time could endure the rigors of the expedition. Overlooked were many of the younger officers who would come to prominence during the Civil War such as Robert E. Lee and Braxton Bragg, despite their having had substantial experience and time in service. As such, Floyd identified only two officers who he felt possessed both the expertise and stamina necessary to accomplish the task, while not upsetting the current standings of seniority at the time. In a letter to President Buchanan, Floyd stated his preference.

But one other important consideration remains to be determined, and that is as to the commander of the forces. On this point, I am pretty clear, in my own mind, and cannot doubt but that [Brevet] Genl. Harney is the proper man. I am not sure how Genl. Scott would take this proposition, but Harney is really the only general officer – [A.S.] Johnston alone excepted – who has the physical capacity to conduct such a campaign as this. If therefore, the suggestion meets your approbation, I will give the orders.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ James Buchanan, *Mr. Buchanan's Administration On the Eve of the Rebellion* (New York: D. Appleton & Company, 1866), 239.

¹⁴⁵ John B. Floyd, letter to James Buchanan, August 5, 1858 in William P. MacKinnon, *At Sword's Point* (Norman, OK: The Arthur H. Clark Company, 2008), 151.

Had Floyd and General Scott been on better speaking terms, he may have known well in advance of General Scott's dislike for Colonel Harney. The two served together extensively throughout the Mexico City campaign when Harney commanded Scott's corps cavalry brigade. Despite speaking highly of Harney's performance during the campaign in his memoirs, Scott subjected Harney to a court-martial early in the war in connection with an unauthorized incursion Harney led into Mexico from Texas in 1846.¹⁴⁶

Floyd settled on Harney, over the protests of Scott, as the commander of choice as early as May 1857. What followed, was an inexplicably long delay in formalizing the appointment of Harney as the expedition's commander and tasking him with appropriate orders. Though Scott informed Harney informally of his appointment on May 28, his official orders did not appear until June 29. It is unknown the extent to which Scott's dislike of Harney contributed to the delay, but Scott asserted to Harney that blame resided with his superiors in Washington and not him.¹⁴⁷ Regardless of the cause, the lag in communications only added complications to an operation already perilously deep into the campaigning season.

The enmity between Scott and Harney continued throughout the period of the Utah Expedition, evidenced by the fact that Harney typically circumvented General Scott and communicated directly with Secretary Floyd and President Buchanan in Washington. Scott could do little when his civilian superiors bypassed the chain of command, but exercised his full power and authority when Harney did so. One noteworthy instance occurred as the expedition prepared to depart from Fort Leavenworth; Harney,

¹⁴⁶ Howard Roberts Lamar, ed., "William Selby Harney," in *The New Encyclopedia of the American West* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 469-70. In June 1846, Colonel Harney became commander of the 2nd Dragoons. When hostilities with Mexico began, Colonel Harney conducted an unauthorized expedition into Mexico from Texas, resulting in General Winfield Scott ordering Harney to transfer most of his command to a subordinate, Major Edwin V. Sumner, Scott's protégé. Harney defied Scott's order, leading to his eventual court-martial and conviction. Harney's political connections allowed him to retain his command and even earn the censure of Scott over the matter.

¹⁴⁷ William P. MacKinnon, "Who's in Charge Here? Utah Expedition Command Ambiguity," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 42, no. 1 (Spring 2009), 36.

concerned with the vulnerability of his supply lines, sent a request for control over Forts Kearny and Laramie and the forces posted there directly to the President, bypassing not only General Scott, but Secretary Floyd as well. The President was eager to acquiesce to Harney's request, but General Scott balked at the highly inappropriate sidestepping of the chain of command. In a telegram through his adjutant, Scott responded, "The General directs me to express his surprise at this highly improper departure from the plain line of your duty. Nor is this the only case in which you have recently passed by him..."¹⁴⁸ Scott somehow successfully countermanded the President's decision, and the forces were not allotted to Harney. Consequently, the expedition's supply lines proved to be especially vulnerable as the troops approached Utah, which the Nauvoo Legion would exploit.¹⁴⁹

Issues, likewise, existed between the expedition's military leaders and their civilian partners. While the relationship between Governor Alfred Cumming and Colonel Albert S. Johnston was not quite as acrimonious as that between Scott and Harney, it never developed into anything resembling a team based on trust. Meeting for the first time at Fort Leavenworth in September, neither officer demonstrated an interest nor thought it important to develop the relationship. Cumming declined the Colonel's offer to travel together, opting instead to travel with Lieutenant Colonel Philip St. George Cooke's six companies of the 2nd Dragoons while Johnston moved more rapidly ahead with a small escort.¹⁵⁰

Cooperation between the two leaders never improved. Nearly a month transpired from the time Cumming arrived at the Army's winter encampment before he was furnished copies of correspondence

¹⁴⁸ Captain A. Pleasanton, letter to Colonel Harney, July 17, 1857 in MacKinnon, *At Sword's Point*, 164.

¹⁴⁹ Harney, letter to President James Buchanan, January 30, 1858, in MacKinnon, "Who's in Charge Here," 30. General Harney continued to undermine General Scott's authority throughout the Utah Expedition, even after his reassignment as its field commander, as demonstrated by a letter sent to President Buchanan on January 30, 1858 stating, "Has it ever occurred to your Excellency that neither ignorance or imbecility, but a settled plan to defeat and confuse your administration are the motives of such conduct [by General Scott]?"

¹⁵⁰ MacKinnon, *At Sword's Point*, 377-378.

that occurred between Brigham Young and military leaders prior to his arrival.¹⁵¹ The lack of collaboration reached its apex in the early summer of 1858. Johnston's insistence on marching his army into the Salt Lake Valley as soon as possible threatened to derail Cumming's negotiations with church leaders to end the standoff without further violence.¹⁵²

Conditions were not much better within the expedition's military leadership. In general, the relationship between key commanders is best described as a milieu of contention and mistrust.¹⁵³ Feuds, insults, and complaints were common-place. Subordinates lost confidence in their superiors.¹⁵⁴ The resulting tone set throughout the expedition's ranks manifested itself in a high desertion rate and "an endless round of court-martial offenses: murder, theft, insubordination, gambling, [and] drunkenness."¹⁵⁵ One critical soldier writing anonymously to his hometown newspaper sadly commented, "Are the men the United States are sending there, fit champions of order and morality; and will the presence of a body of such men as composed the American army, be likely to bring about a healthier moral state of society than exists under the present Mormon rulers? To both parts of this question, I answer no."¹⁵⁶

Unity of Command and Effort

¹⁵¹ Alfred Cumming, letter to Secretary of State Lewis Cass, December 13, 1857 in Hafen, *Mormon Resistance*, 302.

¹⁵² Cumming, letter to Johnston, June 15, 1858, *Ibid.*, 320.

¹⁵³ In addition to the antagonistic relationship that existed between Harney and Scott, and Johnston and Cumming, a disagreement between Johnston and Lieutenant Colonel Cooke over pressing on to the Salt Lake Valley that winter developed into a lasting resentment between the two. This was exacerbated further by a disagreement over the court-martial of a Major Henry H. Sibley for drunkenness.

¹⁵⁴ Gove, *Letters of Capt. Jesse A. Gove*, 12. Captain Gove, a company commander within Colonel E.B. Alexander's 10th Infantry Regiment, wrote scathingly of his commander regularly. "Col. Alexander is the same old woman as ever and more so. He is entirely neglectful of his command, and is up at the Fort [Leavenworth] playing wet nurse most of his time."

¹⁵⁵ MacKinnon, *At Sword's Point*, 369.

¹⁵⁶ "Private Utah" [pseud], *To Utah with the Dragoons and Glimpses of Life in Arizona and California, 1858-1859*, ed. Harold D. Langley (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1974), 21.

While doctrine does not specify unity of command or effort as a principle of Mission Command, it highlights them as key components of building a team.¹⁵⁷ Little detracts more from assembling a team than disparate figures claiming authority and responsibility. Therefore the discussion of unity of command is germane to that of Mission Command. Of all the issues that plagued the expedition, the most damning was the consistent lack of clarity as to who held overall command authority.

Already mentioned was the selection of Brevet Brigadier General Harney in May as the commander, despite the fact that President Buchanan had already committed him, as well as the whole of the 2nd Dragoons, to the stabilization of Kansas.¹⁵⁸ Upon hearing the news of Harney's appointment, Governor Walker began to lobby furiously the President to keep Harney in Kansas, which was eventually successful. On July 19, the expedition would depart without its commander and without instructions or the guidance Harney had received from General Scott. Lead elements would reach Fort Laramie, 600 miles from Fort Leavenworth, before Harney's replacement, Colonel Johnston, reached Fort Leavenworth from Texas via Washington DC on September 11.¹⁵⁹

In the interim, the expedition fell under the nominal command of the senior colonel in the field, Colonel Edmund B. Alexander of the 10th Infantry Regiment, a responsibility he was reluctant to assume. For the majority of the march from Fort Leavenworth, he confined his responsibility to his own regiment. As the expedition entered Utah Territory, Brigham Young sent messages demanding Federal troops withdraw immediately. Alexander's somewhat sheepish response only betrayed to the Mormon leader the

¹⁵⁷ ADRP 6-0, 2-2.

¹⁵⁸ MacKinnon, *At Sword's Point*, 160-161. Upon his appointment, rumors began to circulate that Harney was reluctant to lead the expedition because "he could see ahead of him no glory, nothing but hard work, and perhaps defeat." Yet the opposite seems to be true. Harney was eager to shed his obligation to the Kansas governor and embark on the Utah mission where he could gain greater notoriety and fame campaigning against a nationally excoriated foe. Harney launched himself tirelessly into the preparations for the expedition, contracting for logistics support, arranging for new recruits to bring his depleted ranks back to full strength, and acquiring all the necessary draft animals, wagons, and provisions that would make the 1,200 mile journey possible.

¹⁵⁹ Poll, "Buchanan's Blunder," 124.

state of leadership within the command: “I am at present the senior and commanding officer of the troops of the United States at this point, and I will submit your letter to the general commanding as soon as he arrives here.”¹⁶⁰ During what turned out to be the most crucial phase of the expedition, it was essentially leaderless.

As late as October 18, Alexander remained oblivious as to the identity of the expedition’s commander; Harney, Cumming, or someone else.¹⁶¹ This confusion persisted chiefly due to the dual chain of command situation that existed at the strategic level established by General Scott and Secretary Floyd. Correspondence from Alexander flowed to the adjutant general and Secretary Floyd in Washington, while Johnston communicated with General Scott in New York.¹⁶² As Johnston’s group approached from the east, Alexander addressed dispatches to the nearing, but still unidentified commander, “To any officer of the United States Army, en route to Utah, or Governor Cummins [sic].”¹⁶³ Even with Johnston’s arrival at the head of the column, the question of overall command continued to arise multiple times.¹⁶⁴

The civilian and military efforts also suffered from a lack of unity of effort. As Alfred Cumming and Colonel Johnston never developed a close relationship, their efforts to resolve the conflict developed along separate tracks as well. Cumming, mindful of his assignment as governor, and perhaps aware of the difficulties experienced by previous Federally-appointed officials, preferred a more conciliatory approach

¹⁶⁰ Edmund B. Alexander, Letter to Brigham Young, October 2, 1857, in “The Utah Expedition,” *House Ex. Doc. 71*, 35.

¹⁶¹ Alexander, Letter to Unknown Officers, October 18, 1857, *Ibid.*, 51.

¹⁶² Alexander, letter to Colonel S. Cooper October 9, 1857, *Ibid.*, 30-32; Johnston, letter to MAJ I. McDowell October 19, 1857, *Ibid.*, 35-38.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁴ MacKinnon, “Who’s In Charge Here,” 42-43. When reports of the expedition’s troubles and stagnation reached Washington, the disparate headquarters of Scott and Floyd separately began investigating options to rescue the forces in the field as well as the reputation of the Army. One proposal originating with Brevet Major General Persifor F. Smith, commander of the Department of the West, placing himself at the head of the expedition, along with a reinforcement of 15,000 additional troops. Another had the seventy year-old General Scott sailing to California to lead a second column towards Utah from the West. Both proposals were eventually rejected.

to resolving the conflict. He fully understood the need to bring the territory back under the control of the Federal government, but recognized that in order to govern effectively he would need the cooperation of church leaders. He also recognized that an overly aggressive approach would lead to the realization of Brigham Young's threats to raze the city and depart the area.

Though stymied for the winter by bad weather, geography, and a lack of animals, Johnston was eager to advance at the earliest opportunity. He became overly fixated on the requirement to occupy the territory and became frustrated with the delays upon which Cumming insisted to conduct negotiations with Brigham Young. Furthermore, Johnston deemed it unnecessary to confer with his civilian counterparts on the movement of his forces, despite guidance issued to him through Scott and Harney that he was to maintain a "jealous, harmonious and thorough cooperation with him [Gov. Cumming]."¹⁶⁵ Personality differences aside, a great deal of confusion over whose authority took precedence resulted from conflicting guidance issued to the military and civilian leaders which will be discussed in the succeeding section.

Create shared understanding & provide clear commander's intent

A clear commander's intent is essential to effective Mission Command for its contributions to creating shared understanding. When speaking of shared understanding, one typically speaks of achieving common knowledge of the environment in which one operates, including knowledge of the enemy, his goals, capabilities, weaknesses as well as the physical environment among other aspects. However, it is equally important to know one's self. A clear commander's intent achieves this understanding by establishing priorities, outlining the purpose of the operation and the desired end state, thereby facilitating a unity of effort.¹⁶⁶ Without it, subordinates are left to guess for themselves and are prone to inaction.

¹⁶⁵ Johnston, letter to Cumming June 19, 1858, in Hafen, *Mormon Resistance*, 322-323; Scott, letter to Harney June 29, 1857, in "The Utah Expedition," *House Ex. Doc. 71*, 30.

¹⁶⁶ ADRP 6-0, 2-3.

Ideally, commanders and staffs should always receive perfect guidance. But as many subordinates can attest, this ideal does not often reflect reality and many have grown accustomed to coping with unclear or absent guidance. At higher echelons, this guidance takes on increasing importance and results in increasing consequences. At the strategic level, where direction comes from either the President or Secretary of Defense, commander's intent can impact the conduct of an entire campaign or war.

Many of the difficulties and much of the confusion experienced by subordinate leaders of the Utah Expedition came as the result of unclear guidance issued by strategic leadership. From its inception, directives issued from the various offices in Washington and New York contained inconsistent, unclear, and at times contradictory, guidance.

Starting with the President and Secretary of War, orders and directives were inconsistent and contradictory. Buchanan had difficulty prioritizing between Utah and the lawlessness in Kansas. Perhaps in response to Governor Walker's impassioned pleas for assistance in Kansas, Buchanan shifted his priority from Utah to Kansas. The redirection of General Harney has already been addressed, but just as damaging was the loss of the expedition's mounted element, the 2nd Dragoons, to Kansas as well. The result of these last minute changes left the expedition without a critical capability, a vulnerability that the Nauvoo Legion quickly exploited.

Indicative of a lack of communication between Washington and New York and Buchanan's indecision, is the disparity between Buchanan's guidance to Walker and Scott's official orders to Harney. To Walker, Buchanan wrote in no uncertain terms, that "Kansas is vastly more important at the present moment than Utah."¹⁶⁷ Scott's orders, though, delivered a much different message to Harney: "So deeply are the honor and interests of the United States involved in its success, that I am authorized to say the government will hesitate at no expense requisite to complete the efficiency of your little army..."¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁷ Buchanan, letter to Governor Walker, July 12, 1857 in MacKinnon, *At Sword's Point*, 179.

¹⁶⁸ Scott, letter to Harney, June 29, 1857 in "The Utah Expedition," *House Ex. Doc. 71*, 8.

The contrasting priority portrayed in General Scott's June 29 order to General Harney was not its only problem. As a whole, Scott's orders to Harney represent a distinct failure at providing the necessary clarity, intent, and guidance required by Mission Command. In preparing General Harney for the complex situation he was expected to encounter following an overland march of over one thousand miles, Scott includes a single sentence: "The community and, in part, the civil government of Utah Territory are in a state of *substantial rebellion* against the laws and authority of the United States."¹⁶⁹ Whether Scott assumed a level of knowledge on Harney's part due to official reports or newspapers is unknown. Harney, and later Johnston, would be expected to develop a plan to confront a particularly volatile situation based on very little information.¹⁷⁰

Scott demonstrated a further lack of appreciation for the nuanced environment in Utah by inferring that the situation in Kansas be a guiding model.¹⁷¹ On the one hand, Scott described the state of affairs in Utah as "a state of substantial rebellion." Yet two paragraphs later, he issued the incongruent order that "in no case will you, your officers or men...attack any body of citizens whatever, except on such requisition or summons [from Gov. Cumming], or in sheer self-defense." Understandably, Scott wished to avoid unnecessary violence, but this put Harney, and later Johnston, in a difficult situation. Scott clearly anticipated that the expedition would encounter an active and organized resistance, yet issued impractical directives.

Scott's instructions also created a convoluted command situation in which Harney would be subordinate to Cumming, unless Harney disagreed with his civilian counterpart's judgment, a situation that would surely arise. "[You] will conform your action to his requests and views in all cases where your

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., 7.

¹⁷⁰ MacKinnon, *At Sword's Point*, 169.

¹⁷¹ Scott, letter to Harney, June 29, 1857 in "The Utah Expedition," *House Ex. Doc. 71*, 7.

military judgment and prudence do not forbid, nor compel you to modify, in execution, the movements he may suggest.”¹⁷²

Unfortunately for the expedition’s leaders, Scott’s orders had the opposite effect of their intended purposes. Mission orders, of which commander’s intent is a key component, should provide clarity for subordinates. Yet, in this case, Scott’s ambivalent language and contradictions engendered more confusion than clarity. Even more perplexing is the fact that Harney failed to issues his own guidance to his subordinates, leading Colonel Alexander to declare that he was ignorant of his commander’s intentions.¹⁷³

Exercise disciplined initiative & accept prudent risk

Military planners are familiar with the axiom, “no plan survives first contact,” a paraphrase of the less well-known Moltke statement that, “no plan of operation extends with any certainty beyond the first contact with the main hostile force.”¹⁷⁴ The purpose of Mission Command is to address the unexpected in military operations. Trust, shared understanding, and clear commander’s intent allow subordinates to react to unexpected threats and opportunities in order to achieve the commander’s overall objectives.¹⁷⁵ Initiative, however, requires accepting a risk. Even the most thoroughly planned operations incur a certain amount of risk. Acting on initiative usually entails a greater risk because it involves action taken in a developing situation where there are unknowns. A commander’s judgment and experience allows him to assess the risk and determine whether it is acceptable or prudent. Risk aversion, or refusing to act due to

¹⁷² Ibid.

¹⁷³ “No information of the position or intentions of the commanding officer has reached me, and I am in utter ignorance of the objects of the government in sending troops here, or the instructions given for their conduct after reaching here.” Edmund B. Alexander, Letter to US Army Officers, October 8, 1857, in “The Utah Expedition,” *House Ex. Doc. 71*, 39.

¹⁷⁴ Moltke, *Art of War*, 45.

¹⁷⁵ ADRP 6-0, 2-4, 2-5.

either a lack of perfect information or fear of the chance of failure, can be just as detrimental to the mission as recklessness.¹⁷⁶

The Utah Expedition suffered from great deficiencies in the areas of trust, unity of effort and command, understanding, and clear intent. When the expedition departed from Fort Leavenworth, its commanders expected little if any resistance on the part of the Mormons.¹⁷⁷ As a result, preparations for this contingency were lax. Harney gave little thought to the need to identify an acting commander of the column, even if such an appointment would be temporary. When Harney learned he would remain in Kansas, he sent no message to the field, and in his absence, no one assumed overall responsibility for the expedition.

Departing late in the campaigning season placed the force at great risk of being caught in the mountains if winter arrived early. But, expedition leaders seemed unconcerned, thinking they could still reach Salt Lake Valley in good time. Expecting the march to be uneventful, the expedition's quartermaster carelessly loaded supplies according to what laid most conveniently at hand instead of assigning to each train a proportionate quantity as procedures required. As a result, when Lot Smith's forces attacked and burned wagon trains, the expedition lost entire quantities of certain supplies, such as footwear and stockings. Luckily, Mormon raids missed trains containing the force's cold winter clothing.¹⁷⁸

As they neared Utah, leaders grew increasingly aware of Mormon preparations and intentions to resist. Encountering Captain Van Vliet, returning from his mission to secure supplies in the Salt Lake Valley for the winter, they learned that Mormon forces intended to "resist to the death the entrance of the

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷⁷ Gove, *Letters of Capt. Jesse A. Gove*, 54.

¹⁷⁸ Browne, "The Utah Expedition: Its Causes and Consequences," 372.

troops into the valley.” Furthermore, they also learned that he was unable to obtain any supplies.¹⁷⁹ As a result, they were forced to subsist entirely on what they had brought with them. Shortly thereafter, on October 2, a messenger from Salt Lake entered the camp bearing Brigham Young’s ultimatum that the Federal forces depart from the Utah Territory or surrender their arms and go into winter camp.

Despite these pieces of bad news, and the increasingly apparent danger in which the force found itself, no one assumed command responsibility. Colonel Alexander, the senior officer accompanying the expedition, resisted the responsibility until he was shamed into action by his subordinates. Captain Gove, his most outspoken critic, wrote his wife concerning his frustration with Alexander’s lack of initiative, “Gen. Harney is eternally damned as far as the troops here are concerned, and the government doubly so for not sending us a commander in season... Col. Alexander is senior officer, and you know how much confidence we have in him. He don't know what to do [sic]. Every officer in his regiment says "take command and push on!"¹⁸⁰

When Alexander finally did take command on October 9, it was too late. The Nauvoo Legion had blocked Echo Canyon, the most direct route to Salt Lake Valley, and attacked and destroyed multiple supply trains. In a vain effort to salvage the situation, Alexander decided on the ill-advised “Ham’s Fork Campaign,” a circuitous route along poor trails that was abandoned shortly after it was started due to poor weather. When Colonel Johnston finally arrived on November 3 and assumed command, the expedition had advanced a mere thirty miles over the past month.¹⁸¹

Johnston’s actions following his arrival demonstrate that experience can, to a certain extent, compensate for a lack of guidance. Even before his rendezvous with Alexander, he determined that a

¹⁷⁹ Stewart Van Vliet, letter to Captain Pleasanton, September 16, 1857 in “The Utah Expedition,” *House Ex. Doc. 71*, 25.

¹⁸⁰ Gove, *Letters of Capt. Jesse A. Gove*, 71.

¹⁸¹ Browne, “The Utah Expedition: Its Causes and Consequences,” 371.

march to Salt Lake City was impossible and began searching for a suitable location for a winter camp.¹⁸² As soon as Johnston had situated his command satisfactorily for the winter, he turned his attention to the anticipated spring campaign. The exceptionally cold weather had already resulted in the death of over five-hundred mules and fully two-thirds of his dragoon force had been dismounted.¹⁸³ Recalling how the Nauvoo Legion had raided his supply trains with impunity due to the expedition's lack of a mounted force, he dispatched parties to New Mexico, Oregon, and Washington to purchase horses, cattle and mules. Even with the parties departing on November 27, they would not return with the mounts until June 8, 1858. Delaying the departure of these parties until the spring would have risked jeopardizing the next year's campaign.

Johnston took further steps to rebuild his combat power while his forces passed the winter. Within the expedition's make-shift camp resided hundreds of teamsters who, now bereft of their wagons and animals, chose to remain at the make-shift camp rather than risk the march back east in the dead of winter. Some received work assisting the force's quartermaster, but most became a burden on the Army, responsible for an increasing number of assaults, thefts, and much drunkenness. Johnston, therefore, took the steps to organize them into a volunteer unit and occupied their time with drills and training. In all, three-hundred, twenty-five were organized into an infantry battalion of four companies.

Though Johnston brought much needed direction and order to the faltering expedition, he focused his initiative towards preventing failure rather than acting on opportunities to ensure success. Furthermore, a combination of frustration, and a lack of clear understanding of his commander's intent, led Johnston to become fixated on the task of marching through Salt Lake City and occupying the territory, as opposed to achieving the overall strategic objective of restoring observance of Federal authority. All his preparations through the winter of 1857-1858 were directed at the resumption of a

¹⁸² Johnston, letter to Irvin McDowell, October 18, 1857, in "The Utah Expedition," *House Ex. Doc. 71*, 65.

¹⁸³ John H. Dickerson, letter to F. J. Porter, November 22, 1857, *Ibid.*, 101.

military campaign and little was done to resolve the conflict between the Mormon Church and the Federal government.

Upon assuming command of the expedition, he abruptly terminated correspondence with Brigham Young, something that Colonel Alexander had maintained during his month-long command of the expedition. Johnston replied to Brigham Young's messages with threats, stating that "Brigham [should] not attempt to hold any more communication with him or his emissaries would hang; that he could not treat with him only under a white flag, as he considered him as a traitor to his government and he should treat him as such."¹⁸⁴ To his adjutant, Fitz John Porter, he stated, "I can hold no intercourse with Brigham Young and his people. I have nothing to do with him or them."¹⁸⁵

Johnston regularly resisted efforts by Governor Cumming to negotiate with Mormon leaders. Thomas Kane, a long-time friend of the Mormons, who had traveled to Utah of his own volition to mediate between Young and Johnston, was nearly shot by Johnston's men as he unexpectedly approached Camp Scott.¹⁸⁶ Johnston resented Kane's presence, who he and his men suspected to be a Mormon spy. Fortunately, Cumming, who as the new governor of the territory, was more concerned with the long-term relationship between the Federal government and the church. He was more willing to meet with and discuss matters with Kane. As Johnston and his men toiled to survive the winter and prepare for the spring's campaign, Kane and Cumming worked out an agreement with Brigham Young to bring the new governor to Salt Lake City without army escort and end active resistance by the Mormons.¹⁸⁷

The lack of clear commander's intent inhibited the expedition commanders' ability to act with initiative in their efforts to bring resolution to the conflict. Alexander, unfamiliar with the objectives, became frozen with indecision. Fear of failure and lack of information made acting beyond the already-

¹⁸⁴ Gove, *Letters of Capt. Jesse A. Gove*, 103.

¹⁸⁵ W.P. Johnston, *The Life of Gen. Albert Sidney Johnston*, 219.

¹⁸⁶ Grow, "*Liberty to the Downtrodden*", 181.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 182.

dictated tasks too risky for him. Inaction created delays; when finally forced to take action, he lacked confidence and second-guessed himself leading to further delays. By the time Johnston reached the head of the column, winter had already set in.

Though Johnston's arrival brought with it a sense of order and leadership, saving the expedition from total ruin, he too failed to act on opportunities that could resolve the conflict peaceably. Instead, he and his forces became an impediment to a peaceful resolution. Whether through a misunderstanding of intent, distrust of Governor Cumming, or a simple desire for revenge for the suffering endured by the troops, Johnston focused solely on the task of marching on Salt Lake City and garrisoning the territory.

Unguided by the principles of Mission Command, the military component of the Utah Expedition experienced repeated frustrations and setbacks. From its creation, the expedition suffered from unclear leadership and a lack of unity of effort. Furthermore, its string of commanders either misinterpreted or lacked knowledge of strategic guidance and intent. As assumptions proved incorrect, leaders became indecisive and failed to recognize or act on opportunities that presented themselves to resolve the conflict without violence.

Cultural, Social and Institutional impacts on Mission Command in the US Army of 1857

Just as current doctrine outlines the importance of Mission Command as critical to mission success, it likewise states commanders are “legally responsible for their decisions and for the actions, accomplishments, and failures of their subordinates” as well as “for accomplishing assigned missions.”¹⁸⁸ Eliot Cohen and John Gooch in their study of military failure, *Military Misfortunes: The Anatomy of Failure in War*, refer to the tradition of assigning complete responsibility for what does or does not happen to the commander as the “dogma of command responsibility.”¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁸ ADP 6-0, 6; ADRP 6-0, 1-4, 2-6.

¹⁸⁹ Eliot A. Cohen and John Gooch, *Military Misfortunes: The Anatomy of Failure in War* (New York: Vintage Books, 2003), 32-34.

As outlined above, responsibility for failures during the Utah Expedition certainly lies with President Buchanan, Secretary Floyd, General Scott, and their field commanders. Their actions, or lack thereof, had the most widespread impact on the success or failure of the mission. Be that as it may, was the outcome of the campaign simply a result of having the wrong leaders? Would a shuffle in personalities or positions have produced different results? Different leadership could have altered the outcome drastically, but in the discussion as to the root cause of the failure of the Utah Expedition, it is essential to look beyond simple assignment of responsibility, which is not the same as causation. Organizations that go no further than assigning blame are destined to repeat those mistakes as neither their understanding of the problem nor their solution address the true cause.¹⁹⁰

Once again, Carl von Clausewitz, provides a worthy method of analyzing military failures to determine root causes. Clausewitz' concept of critical analysis or *kritik* emphasizes examining relationships between phenomena, determining facts, tracing effects to causes, and evaluation of means.¹⁹¹ Equally important is the need to study relationships of causation at all levels from the individual to the organizational, and cultural. Doing so reveals that failure is rarely the result of a single cause. Cohen and Gooch summarize their key lesson stating, "To understand why and how military organizations fail, we must abandon the temptation to focus a spotlight on any particular component to the exclusion of the rest, or to seek universal causes of failure. To understand military misfortune it is necessary first of all to understand the nature not of all organizations, but the particular organization and above all, its critical tasks. Then, and only then, we can begin to think of warding off failure."¹⁹²

The US Army of the mid-19th century and the Army of today differ in many aspects beyond the obvious technological and aesthetical differences. The common perception of the US Army held by the majority of American civilians today is based on the structure and organization that persisted following

¹⁹⁰ Ibid., 24, 32-34.

¹⁹¹ Ibid., 44-45.

¹⁹² Ibid., 233.

World War II. Today's large, professional force, focused on expeditionary campaigns, resulted from the need to defend against and deter the threat presented by the Soviet Union during the Cold War. Internal security and border defense are not and have not been significant considerations in how the Army is structured or arrayed across the nation for decades.

For the majority of the nation's history, the US Army was a very small, constabulary institution focused on internal security and defense of the nation's increasingly lengthy borders. One reason for the Army's small size, aside from the economic burden imposed by a large, permanent force, was the public's distrust of a large standing Army. This long-standing aversion developed during the colonial period and became an American article of faith as a result of the War of Independence. Even though the Army had been the means by which the colonies gained their independence, they feared that it could become a tool of coercion and despotism just as they perceived King George had misused the British Army. Even George Washington, commander of the Continental Army, never believed in the need for a large standing army.¹⁹³

Instead, the Army remained small, led by an even smaller cadre of professional officers expanding via use of volunteers only to fight wars as needed and authorized by Congress. When not involved in declared wars, its focus was on internal security and the protection of frontier settlements and emigrant trails. As a result, the small size of the Army made success even in these limited missions a challenge.

Aside from a scarcity of forces, the small and static nature of the US Army of the mid-19th century had demonstrable impacts on the officer corps from which the leaders of the Utah Expedition would be selected. Senior leaders of the time were over-aged, under-promoted, and often seriously ill. The lack of a retirement or pension system kept many in the ranks well beyond their prime.¹⁹⁴ In 1857,

¹⁹³ Richard W. Stewart, ed., *American Military History*, 2nd ed. (Washington, DC: Dept. of the Army, 2005), 105.

¹⁹⁴ MacKinnon, "Who's in Charge Here," 31.

Major General Winfield Scott at seventy years old was in his forty-ninth year of military service. Of those that commanded the Utah Expedition, even temporarily, all were in their mid to late fifties: Brigadier General Harney was fifty-seven years old, Colonel Edmund B. Alexander, fifty-five and Colonel Albert S. Johnston, fifty-four. Brevet Major General Persifor F. Smith, selected to lead the reinforced expedition in the spring of 1858, died at the age of fifty-nine before he could assume command. An extreme example was Colonel John D. Walbach, commander of the 4th Artillery Regiment who died in 1857, while in command at the ripe age of ninety!¹⁹⁵

Furthermore, the lack of upward mobility gave rise to fierce competition and rivalry between some officers. Many well-known rivalries which sprang from the Mexican War persisted and affected decisions made before and during the Utah Expedition. Chief of these was the rivalry that developed between the Army General-in-Chief Winfield Scott and his military/political rivals, Zachary Taylor and Franklin Pierce. Scott's famous dislike for Taylor resulted in the former unilaterally moving Army headquarters from Washington DC to New York when the latter was elected president.

The dislike Scott held for his political rivals would extend itself to multiple Secretaries of War to whom he reported. A particularly rancorous relationship developed between Scott and President Franklin Pierce's Secretary of War, Jefferson Davis. Affairs between the Secretary of War and the General-in-Chief became so poor that even a change in administration and a new Secretary of War could not repair the damage. Though no bad blood existed between Scott and Floyd on a personal level as with Davis, the two never developed a good working relationship and the dual headquarters continued. This situation introduced unnecessary complications in communication and a lack of unity of command.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., 74; Brevet Brigadier General (Colonel) John Baptiste de Barth Walbach (born October 3, 1766, died June 10, 1857), was one of the few foreign born senior officers in the US Army in 1857. His advanced age is evident by the fact that he was a veteran of the French Revolution and received his commission in the US Army from George Washington himself. General Walbach served as commander of the 4th Artillery Regiment for over fifteen years succeeding his predecessor who served as its commander for twenty years. Ten years prior to his death, Brigadier General Walbach remained in Baltimore while his regiment served in the Mexico City Campaign due to concerns over his advanced age.

While a degree of healthy competition among peers is not considered detrimental to a unit, and is often encouraged, history is replete with examples of extreme rivalries that have gotten the better of a commander's judgment. The competitive environment that existed in 1857 at times obstructed cooperation as seen between Harney and Scott. It also encouraged leaders to take unwarranted risks, employ extreme measures, or even escalate a situation unnecessarily in order to achieve notoriety which they considered essential ingredients for future promotion. Among the many missions and tasks the Army engaged in 1857, the Utah Expedition presented an opportunity to gain real glory. Both of its principle commanders, General Harney and Colonel Johnston, envisioned a campaign that relied heavily upon military might and little in the way of diplomacy, for therein lay the most glory.¹⁹⁶

Military command culture within the United States concurrent to this time developed along a separate line from that of Prussia that did not emphasize Mission Command. Through no lack of self-promotion, the military writings of Jomini were taking Europe and the United States by storm. Many students who passed through West Point in the mid-19th century were enthralled with his prescriptive methods for successful warfare. They readily accepted his premise that "there exists a small number of fundamental principles of war, which could not be deviated from without danger, and the application of

¹⁹⁶ Adams, *Prince of Dragoons*, 168.; L.U. Reavis, *The Life and Military Services of Gen. William Shelby Harney* (Saint Louis: Bryan, Brand & Co. Publishers, 1878), 278-79. William S. Harney at the time of his selection as the commander of the Utah Expedition had already achieved notoriety for his extreme leadership. By 1857, he had accumulated an impressive legal record, having been court-martialed four times for insubordination and misbehavior. He fled a fifth trial in civilian court for the torture and beating death of a female slave in 1834. However most foretelling was his leadership of a punitive expedition against the Sioux in 1855, in which his command surrounded and killed eighty-six Sioux including women and children. He rightfully earned the nicknames "Squaw Killer" and "Mad Bear." These were certainly not the telltale signs of a composed and diplomatic leader that the crisis developing in Utah needed. Far from reprimanding Harney for his behavior with the Sioux, his superiors praised him for the quick and decisive manner in which he had resolved the issue. This served only to reinforce and encourage a "shoot first and ask questions later" type of mentality. That Harney intended to employ similarly harsh measures in Utah is evident by his boastful claims that he would "hang Brigham first and try him afterward... And not just Brigham Young, for his campaign plan consisted of capturing the twelve apostles, and execut[ing] them in a summary manner" while wintering in the Latter-Day Saint temple."

which, on the contrary, has been in almost all time crowned with success.”¹⁹⁷ These principles, however, are not the stuff of strategy nor policy. They are almost exclusively in the realm of the operational and tactical; turning the decision to go to war into success through ordered operations and engagements (campaigns) and positioning of forces on the battlefield (tactics).

Yet this alone does not fully explain why the concept of Mission Command did not take hold in the United States in the 19th century, for Jomini’s teachings are compatible with Auftragstaktik. Rather, a fundamental difference in attitude towards the military in the United States proved incompatible. The great military tradition of Frederick the Great was not only a distinct characteristic of Prussian military culture, but Prussian culture as a whole even well into the 19th century. Noble birth carried with it an inherent right to command. The national outrage and social upheaval that resulted from the defeats in 1806 demonstrated the significance of the military in Prussian society.

Conversely, the United States eschewed a large professional military favoring instead a part-time militia system. Indeed, the Constitution and Bill of Rights reflected the strong desire to control or limit power, specifically that of the government, but by extension also the military. The small cadre of professional officers that American society tolerated trained at West Point, which was chiefly an engineering school. The typical US Army officer of the mid-19th century was therefore the product of these attitudes; steeped in Jomini’s utilitarian methodology rather than the psychological dimension of war.

Nevertheless, the US Army was not totally devoid of leaders who exhibited traits consistent with Auftragstaktik. Indeed, the demands of operations in the field led many to demonstrate superior command leadership such as General Winfield Scott during the Mexican-American War and later General George C. Patton during World War II. Nevertheless, US Army doctrine and education system never incorporated

¹⁹⁷ Antoine Henri Jomini, “Précis de l’Art de la Guerre (Summary of the Art of War)” in *Roots of Strategy: Book 2*, ed. and trans. J.D. Hittle (Harrisburg: Stackpole Books, 1987), 437.

these tenants of Mission Command and therefore were never ingrained into American military command culture.

Mission Command of the Nauvoo Legion

“To waste away our enemies and lose none, that will be our mode of warfare... [W]e say again let there be no waste, save life always when it is possible, we do not wish to shed a drop of blood if it can be avoided. This course will give us great influence abroad.”

—Brigham Young

As the US Army approached Utah Territory during the late summer and fall of 1857, it did so with great confidence. Expectations among the soldiers were that they would easily crush any resistance by the Mormons and pass a leisurely winter in Salt Lake City courtesy of the locals’ “hospitality.” They enjoyed seemingly great advantages in equipment, training, and professionalism, among its officers if not its rank-and-file. These expectations, however, would not be fulfilled. Instead, the Nauvoo Legion enjoyed great success in frustrating the US Army’s goals. They successfully accomplished Brigham Young’s goals of halting the expedition’s advance while minimizing loss of life on both sides thus maintaining an environment in which peace could be reached that would keep Utah in the union.

As such, one would believe that the Nauvoo Legion achieved this great success due in large part to superior employment of Mission Command principles. In some cases, this was true. The Nauvoo Legion certainly experienced greater unity of command and purpose, shared understanding, and trust. Nevertheless, the micromanaging style of Brigham Young often suppressed initiative, which violated the principles of Mission Command. Notwithstanding these shortcomings, the Legion still performed well. Superior ability among its leadership though, cannot adequately explain this discrepancy. The environmental, social, and cultural factors that contributed to success of Brigham Young, General Wells, and the Nauvoo Legion demonstrates that Mission Command is often contextually based.

To understand better how the Nauvoo Legion executed Mission Command, it is essential to understand the unique structure and function of the Nauvoo Legion. In 1857, the Nauvoo Legion existed as the reincarnation of the original Nauvoo Legion organized while the church’s center was located in Nauvoo, Illinois from 1839 to 1845. Following its westward migration, church leadership, who served as the de facto government in the Salt Lake Valley, authorized the organization of a militia for the purpose

of protecting settlers. On April 28, 1849, the Nauvoo Legion was formally organized with the Illinois name carried over to Utah.¹⁹⁸ In form, it appeared very similar to the organization of the US Army with divisions, brigades, regiments, battalions, and companies. The whole of the Legion was commanded by a lieutenant general, each of its two divisions by major generals, brigades by brigadiers, etc. A unique feature of the Legion was its manner of selecting commanders. While the territorial governor commissioned the Legion's officers, the soldiers elected their commanders from among their ranks.¹⁹⁹

While the territorial governor was responsible for officer commissions, within the Legion, he did not serve as its commander-in-chief.²⁰⁰ This distinction, however, was virtually non-existent during Governor Young's administration, as little difference existed between civil and ecclesiastical administration. Young took a very active role in devising strategy and dictating tactics. Further blurring of the division was the fact that at the time of the Utah Expedition, Wells served as both commander of the Legion and as counselor to Young in the church's First Presidency.

This mixing of civil and ecclesiastical organizations extended further into the Nauvoo Legion. As units were organized geographically, their corresponding church congregations, or wards as they are called in the Mormon Church, provided food and material aid during the Utah War. These congregations also helped organize those that did not serve in the field to tend the farms and businesses of those that did.²⁰¹ While Legionnaires did receive pay for time spent in drills and training, during the Utah War, many wards supplemented the Legion with church tithes. In essence, the organization and administration of the church overlaid that of the Legion and often filled the latter's sustainment shortcomings.²⁰²

¹⁹⁸ Hansen, "Administrative History," 10.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰⁰ Ibid., 35.

²⁰¹ Ibid., 55.

²⁰² Ibid., 53.

Build Cohesive Teams through Mutual Trust

Perhaps the quality that contributed the most to the Nauvoo Legion's successes in 1857 was its unity of purpose and command. The Nauvoo Legion was relatively free of the crippling personal and professional rivalries from which the US Army suffered. As a volunteer organization, professional advancement and political ambitions were not a factor. Therefore, fierce and long-standing rivalries such as those that plagued the US Army's senior officers of the time, did not form. Brigham Young and Daniel Wells, the latter selected by Brigham as a counselor in the church's First Presidency, enjoyed a close personal, as well as professional relationship, until Young's death in 1877.

A further overlaying of ecclesiastical with military authority existed with the nature in which the senior Nauvoo Legion leadership took counsel regarding the conflict. While Brigham Young remained mostly in the vicinity of Salt Lake City, two additional church leaders, Apostles John Taylor and George A. Smith, joined General Wells in the field as "counselors."²⁰³ Neither of these two held any current position or rank within the Nauvoo Legion, but were nonetheless brothers with Wells within the most senior ecclesiastic councils.²⁰⁴ Together, Young encouraged them to use their "united judgement" in directing the Legion's actions in the field.²⁰⁵ Of the relationship that existed between them, John Taylor spoke nearly thirty years later, "Well, we went out and did the best we could, and I must say that General Wells displayed a good deal of knowledge, tact, vim, life and fidelity, and we tried to step up to him as near as we could being his counselors."²⁰⁶

²⁰³ John Taylor (born November 1, 1808 – died July 25, 1887) was at the time of the Utah Expedition a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, the second highest governing body in the Mormon Church. Though he held no official status or rank within the Nauvoo Legion, his ecclesiastical position led to him playing a pivotal role in advising Legion leadership. Taylor would succeed Young as president of the church upon the death of Brigham Young in 1877.

²⁰⁴ George A. Smith had, up to the summer of 1857 held the rank of colonel in the Nauvoo Legion. He did not, however, resume either his position or rank upon this assignment from Brigham Young.

²⁰⁵ MacKinnon, *At Sword's Point*, 330.

²⁰⁶ John Taylor, speech, February 20, 1884 in *Journal of Discourses*, 26:355-356.

Junior officers also generally held the respect and admiration of their soldiers, unsurprising given the fact that commanders were elected by their troops. One private wrote concerning his commander, Major Lot Smith, who commanded the company of Legion cavalry responsible for the torching of the three expedition supply trains: "I want to say in honor to Lot Smith that I never travelled or would wish to travel with a better officer than he was. He was a boy with the Boys. Always shared what he had with them and fared just as they did."²⁰⁷

Civilian, church and military efforts became so intertwined that the division between them blurred throughout the conflict. As the general population viewed the Legion as defending their religion and society, few schisms occurred. Indeed, close coordination was often necessary in executing Young's scorched earth policy and evacuation plan. When the expedition resumed its march from Ham's Fork towards Fort Bridger in November, Wells ordered Fort Supply and Fort Bridger burned along with all the supplies that could not be carried away. This included buildings, homes, and produce that had been stored by the civilians who had worked the land in those areas. This they did gladly. "I will mention that owners of property in several cases begged the privilege of setting fire to their own, which they freely did, thus destroying at once what they had labored for years to build, and that without a word... Thus was laid waste in all the labor of a settlement for three or four years..."²⁰⁸ Occasional strife between Legionnaires and civilians did in due course occur, mostly over issues of supplying the forces in the field, but in general no rupture formed such as that between Colonel Johnston and Governor Cumming.

The unity that existed between officers and their men, and between the military and civilians sprang not just from their common religion, but from the presence of an existential threat. It superseded personal or professional differences and focused them on a common goal. This presented itself in the general harmony and lack of disciplinary issues despite the threat that approached.

²⁰⁷ James P. Terry, autobiography, in MacKinnon, *At Sword's Point*, 347.

²⁰⁸ Jesse W. Crosby, personal journal entry, *Ibid.*, 346.

Create Shared Understanding & Provide Clear Commander's Intent

As soon as riders arrived in Salt Lake City, Brigham Young and other church leaders such as Counselor Heber C. Kimball began addressing the situation with the inhabitants of the territory through their usual weekly sermons and meetings. In unambiguous terms, Young proclaimed his intentions to resist the approaching army. These speeches, while effective and quick, at times proved problematic. Acting as both chief civilian executive as well as unofficial military commander-in-chief, Young's fiery rhetoric led some to misconstrue it as military directives, thus creating a tone of violence. One such example was the Mountain Meadows Massacre that occurred September 11, 1857. The incident had the potential to derail completely Young's strategy of "bloodless resistance."

Unlike the Utah Expedition whose lines of communication stretched out over one thousand miles, the Nauvoo Legion enjoyed regular and rapid communications despite the mountain environment. During the winter of 1857-58, transit of communications between Johnston and Scott or Floyd required up to four months while the Legion could count on daily messages between Brigham Young in Salt Lake City and General Wells' headquarters in Echo Canyon.²⁰⁹ Therefore, intelligence and orders were rapidly disseminated across the force. With this ease of communication, Brigham Young flooded his field commander with direction and advice on matters both strategic as well as tactical, and even trivial. Young's directives spanned the spectrum from broad strategic guidance concerning the avoidance of shedding blood to operational matters such as how to react to a movement northward by the expedition and even tactical minutiae about how to engage enemy sentries. Known colloquially by military officers as "too much guidance" it demonstrated Young's tendency for micromanagement.²¹⁰

²⁰⁹ MacKinnon, *At Sword's Point*, 320.

²¹⁰ Young, letter to Wells, Taylor, and Smith, October 17, 1857, *Ibid.*, 359. An example of Young's involvement in detailed planning was the Nauvoo Legion's effort to encourage desertion among expedition soldiers. In an October 17 letter to General Wells, Young detailed in exceptional detail the method by which Major Lot Smith should speak to US soldiers stating, "Inasmuch as there are rumors of more or less disaffection in the enemy's camp...br. Lott Smith [should] be furnished with a good horse and instructed at once to proceed to the enemy's camp and upon the first opportunity, at about dusk of a still evening, approach within hailing distance, on the windward side, and on a point or rise of ground if any, and shout something as follows, 'Attention the camp,' (to be repeated, perhaps, once or twice, till

Notwithstanding Young's involvement in the details of Legion operations, commander's intent proved to be well understood by subordinate commanders. On October 4, General Wells issued orders reflecting Young's guidance of avoiding bloodshed. The Utah War was far from bloodless. Historians have identified and cited several examples of atrocities committed by Nauvoo Legion members, to include the Mountain Meadows Massacre and others.²¹¹ Nevertheless, the effectiveness of the dissemination of orders is exhibited by the general lack of combat deaths on either side during the conflict, which given the circumstances stand out as particularly peculiar.²¹²

Shortly after arriving in the valley, the church began printing a newspaper called *Deseret News*. In addition to current events and editorials, the *Deseret News* published doctrinal pieces as well as territorial administrative notices. It represented the most efficient means of mass communication within the territory and as such the Nauvoo Legion used it as part of its communications network. Orders published by handbill or in the newspaper were considered official and binding. In the absence of formal military education, the *Deseret News* occasionally published military articles. The Crimean War and the Siege of Sebastopol were of particular interest in 1855 and 1856.²¹³

attention is attracted,) "all who wish to fight the Mormons had better stay where they are; and all who do not wish to fight are advised to make for Salt Lake City at every opportunity, where they will be well treated, furnished with employment and permitted to proceed to California when they please."

²¹¹ Ibid., see Chapter 12 "Lonely Bones," 295-328. In this chapter, MacKinnon gives due diligence in identifying examples of atrocities and murder perpetrated by Nauvoo Legion member before and after Wells' orders on October 4. These examples prove that either Young's or Wells' intent did not circulate perfectly, were misunderstood, or ignored by these individuals, or were in fact intended by Young. Nevertheless, given the proximity, activities, and tensions that existed between US Army soldiers and Legionnaires, the general lack of combat casualties attests to the effectiveness of issuing commanders' intent by Young and Wells.

²¹² Irvin McDowell, letter to Samuel Cooper, December 10, 1857, in "The Utah Expedition," *House Ex. Doc. 71*, 14.

²¹³ "Siege Operations," *Deseret News (Salt Lake City)*, April 4, 1855; Interest in the Crimean War was particularly high as the *Deseret News* ran nearly weekly articles on the war over the course of two years.

Exercise Disciplined Initiative & Use of Mission Orders

In 1838 and again in 1846, Brigham Young assumed responsibility for mass migrations over great distances during adverse conditions. These experiences benefited Young greatly in his ability to organize and lead large and detailed operations. However, it also instilled a leadership style that was non-delegatory and centralized.²¹⁴ As Young once again faced a crisis in 1857-1858, he resorted to this same style as he directed the movements of the Nauvoo Legion.

Despite the fact that as governor, Young held no official position in the Nauvoo Legion, in practice he served as its commander-in-chief. Lieutenant General Wells, as overall commander of the Nauvoo Legion, filled the role of field commander. Mission Command emphasizes that orders “contain everything that the subordinate must know to carry out his mission, but nothing more.”²¹⁵ Yet, Young’s instructions to his subordinate leaders exhibited a high degree of detail and minutiae that inhibited initiative. Instead of identifying desired conditions, he often described in detail methods of conducting operations. Orders sent by Young to Legion commanders on September 15, demonstrate Young’s tendency to begin with broad guidance but delving into details that today would be described as micromanagement.

They [Captain Van Vliet and John Bernhisel] will carry the word to them [federal troops] that they will be opposed in attempting to come to this place, they must not be permitted to come here... *Take the [army’s] baggage train animals first as this you know will stop the troops.* Keep your men concentrated as much as possible. If the forces show a determination to come in after the Capt has passed them, *pitch in to the animals* whenever and wherever you can safely do so and not be seen by them, *go the night work on them.* This we think will stop them for this fall and no blood shed, a collision is to be avoided if possible that is if they can be kept back by taking their animals.²¹⁶

²¹⁴ MacKinnon, *At Sword’s Point*, 85.

²¹⁵ ADRP 6-0, 2-4.

²¹⁶ Young, letter to Colonels Cummings and Burton, September 13, 1857 in MacKinnon, *At Sword’s Point*, 333. Emphasis added.

Young clearly states his intent that the expedition not be allowed to enter the territory. Yet, he constrained his commanders in the field by directing a specific course of action: targeting of expedition draught animals. Throughout the month of September, Legion cavalry attempted to scatter expedition animals with little success. In doing so, they missed multiple opportunities to raid exposed supply trains, much like they did later in October. Furthermore, the fact that Young communicated directly with subordinate field commander instead of through General Wells further attests to the degree of micromanagement that Young employed through the conflict.

Notwithstanding this tendency for micromanagement, Young did recognize the importance of allowing a degree of initiative, albeit a small one.²¹⁷ By late September, Young and Wells had discussed the necessity of razing Forts Supply and Bridger if the expedition continued its advance. Wisely, Young, who even at Salt Lake City, was far too removed to learn when conditions warranted execution, delegated the timing of such destruction to Wells and his subordinates.

One notable and crucial demonstration of initiative came from General Wells in early October. As the tactic of stampeding expedition animals had born little fruit, Wells and his war council decided on October 2 to escalate their activity to include the burning of wagons and supply trains. That day, Major Lot Smith and his company of forty-four men departed on their mission that would result in the highly successful torching of three expedition supply trains. That this was a decision made in the field and not by Young is clear from statements by George A. Smith, one of the two “counselors” assigned to Wells by Young, “Prest. [Young] remarked that his natural feelings were not to destroy property, and he thought that if he had been in the mountains, he would not have given his consent to the burning of the Government Wagons, but still he believed that it was the best thing that could have been done...”²¹⁸

Cultural, Social and Institutional Impacts on Mission Command in the Nauvoo Legion

²¹⁷ Ibid., 340.

²¹⁸ George A. Smith, Historian’s Office Journal, October 4, 1859, Ibid., 351.

One would expect that for the Nauvoo Legion to be effective it must adhere to the same principles of Mission Command as those laid out for the US Army. However, it is important to note that the two organizations were not the same. The US Army existed with the express purpose of fighting the nation's wars, defending its borders and (pre-Posse Comitatus) ensuring domestic stability.²¹⁹ It was a full-time profession for those officers and enlisted men. However, the Nauvoo Legion was at best a part-time endeavor for those who were a part of it. Its purpose was defense only, and usually mostly ceremonial. These differences figured prominently in how each operated and the manner by which command was executed in each. Several have been alluded to already, but will be revisited briefly here.

The Nauvoo Legion, much like the US Army of the time, was a heterogeneous mixture of Americans and European immigrants. Army commanders viewed this as a disadvantage, and attributed their high desertion rate to this lack of commonality. The Nauvoo Legion, on the other hand, experienced little if any desertion among its ranks, the difference being that the immigrants joining the Nauvoo Legion shared a religious bond that transcended their cultural backgrounds. Units generally organized according to community or geographic divisions, therefore, soldiers had pre-existing relationships one-with-another. The shared experience and trials of emigrating across the plains also contributed greatly to the building of teams. Young often established communities with emigrant companies that had traveled together. These shared experiences and trials developed bonds of trust that did not exist in the hastily recruited and gathered units that comprised the US Army.

The impact of the volunteer, part-time nature of the Nauvoo Legion on team building has been noted already. However, this same amateur nature also detracts from the ability to employ Mission Command, which requires and assumes a certain level of proficiency and expertise. The trust that is

²¹⁹ 10 U.S.C. 3062; 18 U.S.C. § 1385; Robert W. Coakley, *The Role of Federal Military Forces in Domestic Disorders, 1789-1878* (Washington DC: Center of Military History, 1988), 269. In response to demands made by former Confederate states in 1877, Congress passed the Posse Comitatus Act of 1878 which limited the use of US Army to enforce domestic policies within the United States.

required as a team includes trust that peers and subordinates have the requisite ability to accomplish tasks given to them.

Unlike Generals Winfield Scott and Harney, General Wells had no formal military education. His only prior military experience came during the defense of Nauvoo in 1846. Some of the Legion's other commanders such as Major Lot Smith, Colonel Nathaniel V. Jones, and Brigadier General James Ferguson had served in the Mormon Battalion during the Mexican War, Smith as a private, Jones as a First Sergeant, and Ferguson as a sergeant major.²²⁰ However, none gained any combat experience as the Mormon Battalion completed its entire campaign without any hostile engagements. Finally, the one that formulated and directed the strategy for the resistance, Brigham Young, had neither military training nor experience. With the general lack of experience or training it is therefore, not surprising that orders contained a high level of detail, leaving less room for initiative. The events of the Mountain Meadows Massacre in September 1857 also likely had a significant impact on Young's willingness to leave orders open to interpretation.

²²⁰ Ibid., 372; see footnote 76.

Conclusion

“Leaders think ahead in time to anticipate opportunities and dangers and take prudent risk to gain and maintain positions of relative advantage over the enemy. Leaders foster trust among other leaders and Soldiers. They develop unit cultures that encourage the exercise of initiative consistent with the philosophy of Mission Command. Leaders and Soldiers are committed to each other and the Army professional ethic. They remain resilient and preserve their moral character while operating in environments of persistent danger.”

—TRADOC Pamphlet 525-3-1 Army Operating Concept: Win in a Complex World

As the US Army looks forward to the rest of the 21st century, it also looks back at the two most recent conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan for guidance. The experiences gained in those conflicts have caused a greater appreciation for the complex and unexpected. Truly, war is as Clausewitz described it nearly two hundred years ago, “not the action of a living force upon a lifeless mass but... directed at an animate object that reacts.”²²¹

This need to adjust and react to the unexpected once again brought to the Army’s attention another famous Prussian, Helmuth von Moltke and his ideas of Auftragstaktik or mission orders in which he proclaims, “Prearranged designs collapse, and only a proper estimate of the situation can show the commander the correct way... Only if leaders of all ranks are competent for and accustomed to independent action will the possibility exist of moving large masses with ease. The absence of these characteristics inevitably leads to loss of time.”²²²

Accordingly, the post-Vietnam US Army assimilated Moltke’s teachings on command philosophy, formalized it, and incorporated it into doctrine as Mission Command. Today, Army leaders place great emphasis on altering the command culture of the US Army to incorporate Mission Command philosophy and evidenced by its inclusion in the Army’s Warfighting Challenges stating, “The nature of

²²¹ Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, Everyman's Library (New York: Knopf, 1993), 173-4.

²²² Helmuth Moltke, *Moltke On the Art of War: Selected Writings*, ed. and trans. Daniel J. Hughes (Novato, CA: Presidio Press, 1995), 132-33.

operations and the patterns of military history point to the advantages of Mission Command.”²²³ Mission Command philosophy allows commanders to better respond to the unexpected situation or circumstances.

Overshadowed by the Civil War, the Utah War and the lessons it provides have gone unnoticed by most military scholars. Yet, a close examination of these events has revealed a number of lessons that reinforce the importance of Mission Command philosophy that still resonate today. First, the failures of the Utah Expedition and the successes of the Nauvoo Legion underscore the importance of Mission Command. Second, Mission Command represents more than a simple delegation of decision making to a lower level; all the principles of Mission Command must be present for it to be effective. Last, to incorporate Mission Command more effectively into the US Army command culture, the Army must also examine cultural, societal and institutional impediments that inhibit its employment.

The events of the Utah War resonate fully with Moltke’s ideas and current US Army doctrine concerning the importance of enabling subordinates to make decisions at their level. Unexpectedly, the Utah Expedition, better equipped, better trained, and led by veterans of the successful Mexican War failed to accomplish its objectives because subordinate commanders were ill-prepared to make decisions when encountering unexpected situations. Conversely, the Nauvoo Legion, aided certainly by better communications and familiarity with the terrain achieved all its strategic objectives due in large part to its unity of purpose and ability to adjust its tactics when others failed.

The exercise of Mission Command is more than simple delegation of decisions to a lower level. Allowing initiative is but one principle of the philosophy. The lack of trust and teamwork among both strategic and tactical leaders led to unclear and confusing guidance and, as a result, the expedition lacked unity of purpose and command. When confronted by unexpected resistance and the fortification of Echo Canyon, Colonel Alexander lacked information and understanding causing him to miscalculate risk and therefore inhibited initiative. When he finally did make decisions, he lacked confidence, vacillated, and ultimately reversed them. Even Colonel Johnston, who exhibited greater confidence than Alexander,

²²³ ADRP 6-0, v.

failed to build a team that included the civilian component of the expedition. The resulting schism effectively removed the military component as a factor in the conflict's resolution and nearly led to prolonged violence.

Ironically, the Nauvoo Legion, which arguably had less latitude to make decisions than the expedition, exhibited initiative when it counted most. General Wells' decision to modify the Legion's tactics in October to target the expedition's supply trains altered the expedition's timeline enough to prevent their entry into the Salt Lake Valley during the fall of 1857. The failure to enter the valley that fall created additional time and generated enough political pressure on Buchanan that diplomatic alternatives to resolve the conflict were employed.

Finally, as senior leaders examine how to better incorporate Mission Command in the Army's command culture, they must look beyond doctrine and formal education and examine how societal and institutional factors may prevent its implementation. Societal factors are inherently difficult to change and require generations to take hold, yet if the Army desires to alter its own command culture, it must first understand the culture from which it draws its officers. The long-held aversions to a large standing army may have faded, but there remains fear within American society of government and military overreach. Such modern concerns are embodied in President Dwight D. Eisenhower's farewell speech in 1961 in which he warned, "In the councils of government, *we must guard against the acquisition of unwarranted influence, whether sought or unsought, by the military-industrial complex.*"²²⁴ This fear could contribute to deep-seated aversion to risk and the creation of a zero-defect army.

Institutional factors may also hinder the successful incorporation of Mission Command. The current officer evaluation system that requires a forced distribution unintentionally generates competition and inhibits cooperation between officers. This degrades trust and teamwork that is vital to effective Mission Command. Furthermore, Mission Command requires the empowerment of subordinates to make

²²⁴ Dwight D. Eisenhower, "Farewell Address to the Nation" (lecture, White House, Washington, DC, January 17, 1961). Emphasis added.

decisions which entails in and of itself a risk of failure. Subordinates will occasionally fail; in a zero-defect environment, officers are unintentionally encouraged not to delegate authority as it could ultimately impact their chances of promotion in the future.

The uncertain battlefields that the US Army will encounter throughout the remainder of the 21st century require more than just senior leaders who are agile and adaptive. It will require command teams, staffs and units to be likewise agile and adaptive. Mission Command is not an individual quality; by definition, it can only be employed by teams. The Utah Expedition, and its difficulties provides an excellent cautionary tale to military leaders and students alike of Mission Command failure.

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