At Sword's Point, Part I

A Documentary History of the Utah War to 1858

Edited by
William P. MacKinnon

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I anticipate nothing but your success, & an increase of your present high estimation in the army & country...

All the officers & their families here are well, except Major [Henry] Prince. I know all would send their kindest regards if they were aware I was writing. Please present mine to Major [Fitz John] Porter. I am glad you have him with you. He is an able aid[e] in the field, & valuable everywhere.

When Johnston reached Fort Kearny on 24 September, a week after departing Leavenworth, he paused to write to his old friend Capt. Amos Beebe Eaton. For Eaton, Johnston was full of optimism as well as caution about how best to obtain newspaper coverage for his campaign:

The weather is fine, the sky for the last four days without a cloud, grass excellent as far as Laramie, beyond I learned it is not good, or rather that there is none as far as 150 miles west. This will not delay the march of the Dragoons as they will be provided with corn. There is no indication of an early winter and I now can have no doubt of a successful accomplishment of the march of all the troops destined for Utah. Do not have anything published I write, if you choose, there is no objection to your giving publicity in your own language to any information of interest contained in this & future letters.⁶

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**So Little Thus Far Accomplished:**
**Captain Phelps’s Frustrations on Hams Fork**

Without question the most complete, vivid account of Colonel Alexander’s march up Hams Fork toward Sublette’s Cutoff and back appears in one of the unpublished segments of Capt. John W. Phelps’s diary.

Phelps was a Vermonter and member of the West Point class of 1836. Once commissioned he served in the early Seminole wars in Florida, in the Mexican War, and in Texas fighting still other tribes. By the time of the Utah Expedition, Phelps’s Battery was in Kansas Territory. His diaries are invaluable because their editorial comments and observations go well beyond the typical frontier journal entries focused on matters of wood, water, and grass. What one finds in Phelps’s diaries is his prejudice against non-Americans, an interesting point of view since more than half of his artillerymen, including his valued first sergeant, were born outside of the United States.⁷

As commander of the Fourth U.S. Artillery’s Light Battery B, Phelps was one of the Utah Expedition’s principal unit commanders. Accordingly,

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⁷ For a fictional account of life in Phelps’s Battery during the Utah War, see Moss, *Soldier’s Salute.*
although only a captain by rank, he was included in the councils of war on 6 and 19 October by which Alexander decided to move on Salt Lake City via the northern route and then fatefuly decided to retrace his steps. Through Phelps one experiences the wasted month of Indian summer and early snowfalls that set the stage for Albert Sidney Johnston's desperate November trek from Hams Fork, up Blacks Fork, to Fort Bridger in a series of blizzards. With these October segments, we now have more of Phelps's fascinating diary to join the excerpts published fifty years ago by the Hafens.8

The entries presented here start as Phelps's Battery, eight companies of the Tenth Infantry, ten companies of the Fifth Infantry, and Reno's Battery—all now gathered on Hams Fork near its juncture with Blacks Fork and the overland trail—first received word of Lot Smith's raid.9

PHPELS DIARY, 5 October—3 November 1877,
Hamilton Gardner Transcription, Utah State Historical Society, from Original in New York Public Library.

Monday Oct. 5th
A day of excitement. The Mormons set fire to the grass in the valley some two or three miles above us and a considerable portion of the 10th Infy. as also of my own command were engaged all the morning in prevents its spread. Fortunately the wind has been gentle from the S.E. sweeping up the valley, but a great deal of grass has been consumed which would be indispensable if we are to remain here long.

The 5th Infantry and the [Reno] Ordnance train have arrived in the valley, and a report has been brought by ox drivers from Green River that two ox trains containing provisions were burnt at that point last night by an armed party of Mormons. There are 160 ox wagons with us—each of which carries from four to five thousand pounds. The train with our clothes is still behind.

An express arrived from Fort Leavenworth. The commanding officer of this expedition had not arrived at that post as late as the 10th of September. The Governor was to leave on the 15th of Sept. Six companies of Dragoons had been ordered to Utah....

Another Indian summer day—warm, whilst the night was very cold.

Tuesday Oct. 6

8 The Hafens' book, Mormon Religion, 89-138, used Phelps's diary through 10 September 1877.
9 The editor has omitted Phelps’s daily recording of cloud formations and wind conditions.
Reno of the Ordnance, the adjutant of the 10th—[1st] Lieut. [Henry E.] Magnier and myself. There was also a guide Jim [Tim] Goodale present.

The question was whether to go back to Wind River Valley, to stop near here, say at Henry's Fork, or go on. The majority seemed to be in favor of going on—by the way of Bear River Valley.10

There was never a military command in such a position as ours—so far from resources, these and free intercourse with home about to be shut out by the snows of winter, our trains in the rear and the grazing in front being interminable assailed with fire by the enemy, that enemy outnumbering us five to one; and our governor and the officer assigned to the command absent together with their instructions and an uncertainty as to when they will arrive.

The order to the troops however is clear—it is to establish a fort at or near Salt Lake City, and this should be attempted whatever may be the consequences.

... It was very cold this morning; but the day has been warm.

Mounted Mormons have shown themselves upon the hills near us to-day.

The 12 pd Battery moved up the Fork above us this morning. It consists of 4 12 pd guns, 2 32 pd Howitzers, 1 Battery wagon and 1 Forge.11

It is under the command of Capt. Reno of the Ordnance. He has some 12 or 15 ordnance men, 32 men (instructed artilleryists) who were sent to Fort Leavenworth from [the recruit depot on Governor's Island] New York for my Battery (originally 40 but eight deserted) and one company of the 5th Infy, of one officer and 50 men. A few teamsters are also employed as drivers. There are with the Battery 47 wagons—viz—12 containing chiefly ordnance stores of some kind probably ammunition for small arms, 7 belonging to the Infantry company and 28 for forage and baggage. The Infantry company had been with the Battery from Fort Laramie here. From Fort Leavenworth to Fort Laramie there was a detachment of some 60 mounted Dragoon Recruits under [2d] Lieut. [John] Green. The Battery has half a supply of ammunition. The rest with half of my ammunition and other ordnance supplies are back in some ox train. The Battery when passing up to-day had eight horses, to each piece and four to each caisson—the two rear chests of the caissons being carried in the wagons. The Forge was drawn by mules.12

Wednesday Oct 7

Col. Alexander issued orders assuming command of the troops present.

10 The Wind River Mountains due north of South Pass had several sheltered valleys along the Pothole River's branches teeming with elk and warmed by hot springs. Magrath's Pacific Wagon Road crew had already gone into winter quarters there as frequently did the region's Shoshone and Crow bands.

11 "Pound" referred to the weight of the projectile that the gun threw and was the standard way of describing an artillery piece. Here Phelps describes Reno's heavy (siege) battery; his own light battery was equipped with six-pounder field howitzers.

12 Here Phelps may be displaying a little professional rivalry vis à vis Reno, who was the expedition's ordnance officer doing double-duty in a role for which he was not trained—artillery officer.
and directing a continuation of the advance day after to-morrow. But he has sent back four Infantry companies to Green River to see about the burning of the wagons and the forward movement will probably be delayed. It is much to be regretted, for our corn is getting scarce and the grazing bad.

Thursday Oct. 8
A circular was issued from headquarters suspending the forward movement for the present.
Received twenty men of the 40 that were originally sent from the New York Harbor to Fort Leavenworth for my battery. The 12 remaining ones have been assigned to the 12 pdr. Battery brought along by the ordnance Department. Those received are deficient not only in instruction but also in clothing. Some of them have no great coats, others no blankets, and all of them have but one pair of shoes or boots and most of them but one pair of pants. This clothing is all very worn and is of the Infantry pattern.

Have been busy in reaming out shells and case shot, and preparing the battery for action.

One of my men went out gunning [hunting] yesterday and has not been heard of since. He joined the company last June and is a German from Holstein where he had been a soldier.

The 5th Infantry moved up the fork yesterday and they will take last grass between here and the burnt region. Grazing is consequently getting scarce. We ought to go on and take Fort Bridger garrison and then proceed down Bear River.

Snow has seemed to fall at times in every direction, without reaching the 9th however in any shape.

by Oct. 9th
Still in camp, overhauling the Battery wagons and limber chests, making a great deal, drilling recruits, etc.—it has occupied every minute of my time all day.

It was very cold last night, water freezing solid in a basin. It was nearly freezing this morning but has been gradually over clouding during the day. Cumulus seen along the N.W. and smooth darkish cirrus along the S.E. From snow seemed to descend, the former over a low range of mountains called [unintelligible], not far distant, and the latter over the Uintah Mountains. Temperature has been mild and pleasant.

by Oct. 10th
The four companies of Infantry that were sent back to Green River returned yesterday, and orders are issued for resuming the march to-morrow morning.

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the Infantry company had been with a Fort Leavenworth to Fort Laramie Dragoon Recruits under the supply of ammunition. The ordnance supplies are back in stock. 1-day had eight horses, to each mule.
ug command of the troops.
the sheltered valley of hot springs. Magrath's Pacific Way rivalled the St. Louis heavy (sight) battery, his own in rivalry with the Raton, who was not trained—artillery officer.

Charles H. Wilken, formerly of the Prussian army, in which he had been decorated C.S., See Stitt, "Charles Henry Wilken," 3rd.
the 9th was probably adjacent to the functioning of the battery's important forge.
Received, as have all the other officers commanding corps a roll of late numbers of the Deseret News from Brigham Young.

Mr. Smith, our guide, was sent back to Laramie as an express.
The earth this morning was covered with an inch of snow. It has gradually melted away until at sundown little if any is left.

Several flocks of ducks were noticed during the morning, flying along the stream. Rabbits are numerous here.

A snow squall passed along the S.W. about mid afternoon.

Sunday Oct 11th

The whole command commenced the movement up the Fork this morning—viz, two half filled regiments of Infantry and two batteries with their numerous wagons numbering altogether (ox and mule) about 400. We marched 9.12 miles.

The valley of the stream is about a half a mile in width. The stream is skirted with willows and was bordered with grass, the this has been nearly consumed by fire. We find enough however for our some 5000 animals. The banks of the valley are two or three at least a hundred feet in height, and on ascending them one sees a desolate country covered with shingles thro' which runs the deep valley of Ham's Fork.

It was overcast this morning with clouds that moved to the south. During the march the wind beat in our faces from the W and N.W. occasionally bringing mingled sleet and rain—a cold raw day, causing the horses to shrink and tremble.

Saw a human skull glaring at us today from the surface of the ground. We asked the guide if it was of an Indian. He said yes, because its forehead was low. We asked if the Indians did not bury their dead. Sometimes they do, he said, but at others they cover them over with bushes in the spot where they happen [to] die and so leave them.

One of my horses gave out and was abandoned, after sending back for him and trying to get him into camp.

Monday Oct 12th

The command marched up the Fork 9.44 miles. The rear guard did not come up until 4 P.M.

Two men by the name of Hickman, brothers to Bill Hickman who is celebrated in this country as one of the "Destroying Angels" came into our camps yesterday with a letter from their Brother Bill to the sutler of the 9th Infantry. One of them had a sword belt in his possession which had belonged to the man (Wilkins) [Wilden] who went out gunning on the 7th inst. and had not been heard from since. These men say that Wilkins deserted; and that they saw him at Fort Bridger; that one of them exchanged with him a common belt.

These were Thomas Jefferson Hickman and Dr. George Washington Hickman.
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1 Dr. George Washington Hickman.
We are encamped on the slopes of the hills, and numerous camp fires, like
the lights of a city, remind one of the immense outlay which this
expedition has occasioned, and of the comparatively small results which are
likely to flow from it. . . .

A led horse fell down a steep [bank] this morning into the stream and
soon died.

Thursday Octr. 15th

Marched 6.45 miles by a better—less hilly route than we anticipated and
camped at an early hour (half past ten A M) near the old Oregon and Cali-
forania route which, coming from the South pass by what is called [Stablett's
Cut-off] here crosses the valley of Ham's Fork. The numerous wagons all
came up in good season. We have thus followed up the Fork into the range
of Bear Mountains nearly fifty miles from the Green River route to Salt Lake
City; our course being North of West. We are to leave the Fork here and pass
over into the valley of Bear River. On our arrival at this point the grass was on
fire at two different places, but we find enough between those two places
for the time that we shall remain here, that is until day after to-morrow.

Abandoned two horses to-day. They fell down whilst on the march and
could not be lifted up to stand, set up again on their feet so as to stand. One
of them had done nothing for nearly a month and had always had the same
rations as the other horses. He was very poor—"got down" about a month
ago, and had never "picked up" since. And so too of the several other horses
which have died or been left behind since our arrival in this valley. They have
four pounds of corn a day besides grazing.

We have several guides—mountaineers—two French men and two Amer-
icans. Some of them have all their whole possessions along—Indian wives,
ponies, cattle, lodges etc. Their lodges, bedding, cooking utensils etc. they
carry on their ponies; the poles for the lodge being fastened to the animal by
one of their ends and the other end trailing on the ground. We saw a
party of women with all the establishment, ponies, cattle and all, coming down
a nearly perpendicular bank of the valley. It was a mode of travelling that the
animals were evidently accustomed to, and the sight was truly patriarchal. Some
of these scenes ought to be well portrayed upon canvas. 19

Buffalo skulls are occasionally seen; and sage hens and rabbits are numerous.
It was very cold last night, and to-day it is quite warm. . . .

Friday October 16th

Remain in camp. Had an alarm—one section [of artillery] was harnessed,
the horses of another led up, and the third made ready for action. It was occasioned
by the report of an officer that another officer had seen 500 Mormons

19 In 1869, after the conclusion of the Utah War, Albert Bierstadt and several other artists accompanied
Frederick W. Lander's Pacific Wagon Road crew and painted magnificent scenes of the Wind River moun-
tains and South Pass area.
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all which is unknown, except that there was no occasion for it.

Capt. Marcy of the 6th went out with about a hundred men on a recon

naissance to find a road towards Henry's Fork; and a party of ten wagons.

Marcy (mounted) met a party of some 40 mounted Mormons. As they passed

they first exchanged salutations, such as Good morning Sidi then when some

little distance off, abusive epithets, and finally (when beyond rifle range),

shot—by which one Mormon it is thought was wounded. One shot was sent

by the Mormons and forty by our party. 20

The Colonel commanding called for reports to-day concerning the con

dition of the animals of the command. Whilst they arc all failing, the ox trains

are said to be less fitted for resuming the march than any other. The jaunt

from here to Bear River presents thirty miles of hilly road. In the meantime

not a word is heard from the governor or officer assigned to the command

of the expedition or of the ox trains containing many of our necessary sup

plies. The colonel, as he well might be, is considerably perplexed.

The nights are very cold—I was told by one of the surgeons of the com

mand that the thermometer had ranged from 18 to 90 during 24 hours at one

stage, and from 18 to 75 at another. Yet the consumptives [tubercular cases] of

the command appear to be thriving; one of these is an officer's lady. 31

"Two very cold last night. . . ."

Friday Oct. 17th

Still in camp. Was notified to meet with other commanders of corps and

fids of staff at the Colonel's tent at 8 A.M. Capt. Marcy's party had brought

two prisoners during the night upon whose persons some important letters and papers had been found, and we were called together in order to con

sider upon the new phase which those papers seemed to give to our movement

this direction.

One of the persons apprehended was styled as major [Joseph] Taylor of

Mormon Army, and the other was his adjutant [Lt. William R. R. Stow-

]. The paper of chief consequence was a letter of instructions to Major

Taylor from Lieut. General Wells. He Major was to proceed down Bear River
cross the channel, and harass us in all possible ways by burning grass, alarming our

and stamping our animals, etc. The Major looked to me as if he might

be an impostor, even in his pretensions to Mormonism. Both letters which I

were of a military character, and both concluded with the expression—

"we are brother in Christ."

Taylor and his infantrymen were mounted on mules, and were described by the better-mounted Na

tives as "jackass cavalry." This encounter was with Lot Smith's party and is described in vivid

narrative of Lot Smith," Hafen and Hafen, eds., Mormon Reliquia, 239-42. Smith recorded that

the party was wounded, although one man's hat was pierced by a bullet and two of his horses

were Indian Capt. Jacob Forney.
This Major Taylor claims a birthplace in Kentucky. He is a man of fine personal appearance and about 30 years of age. He estimates the Mormon army at 2,500 men; had been told and believed that we were a mob coming upon them to destroy both women & children; was a poor, laboring innocent true spoken man who never inquired into matters of state; could not read or write; wanted our protection &c.

In short he is a favorable specimen of the American character in the ultimate extreme of its licence, shrewdness—crime and wickedness, for he has killed his man it is said—he is to all appearances a perfectly unshaped chaos of 
telligence shrewdness and stolidity, and differs in no wise, morally, from the brute Bohemian or belligerent Bulgarian the victim of long centuries of despotism who tills the land of the Danubian principalities, Turkey and Greece. The change that took place with Nebuchadnezzer in his transference from the palace to herd among the beasts of the field, was no greater than it is with the American Character as exhibited on the one hand by the signers of the declaration of independence and on the other by this Major Taylor of the Mormon Army.

He says however that he has a leaning toward us; that we are not so bad as he took us to be; that he has so expressed himself in presence of his Mormon friends, and that in consequence his command which consisted of 30 men has been taken away from him.

By the officers called together our views as to the best course to be pursued was again discussed. One proposition was to return to the other side of the South Pass—to Wind River Valley; & Henry's Fork was again mentioned as a good wintering place. Another proposition was to burn up all our ox waggons and provisions over and above a forty days supply and march directly upon the City of Salt Lake by the way of Bear River. The majority seemed to be in favor of going on by the way of Bear River as we have commenced to do, taking every thing with us as far as we can, and stop only when compelled so to do. Such at all events was my own opinion expressed to the Colonel. As to what conclusion was arrived at I do not know since after giving my opinion I withdrew and have not heard much from the council since.

In the meantime nothing is heard from the Governor or our commanding officer or the troops and trains on the road following us. It is uncertain what route they will take whether by Fort Bridger or by the road which we are now on, and this real uncertainty renders our position the more embarrassing.

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22Daniel 4:32–33.
23One of Captain Phelps's severest prejudices was against those who were not native-born Americans. In the election of 1880 he ran for president as the candidate of the nativist American party and received a total of 707 votes. McClaughry, "John Wolcott Phelps," 265–90.
24Joseph Taylor's account of his capture on 16 October and interrogation appears in the same series as Lyot Smith's narrative. See James F. Wells ("Viest"), "The Echo Canyon War," 76–83. Taylor claimed that when he exaggerated the size of the Legion to Colonel Alexander at twenty to twenty-five thousand men, "I could have hung my hat on his eyes."
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Loch Canyon Win," 380-83 Taylor claimed that
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COL. EDMUND B. ALEXANDER, TENTH U.S. INFANTRY
He was the Utah Expedition's senior officer present
until Colonel Johnston arrived at Hans Fork in early
November. Preoccupied with inconsequentials such
as the number of steps per minute at which the
marched, Alexander drew the ridicule of
his officers as timid, indecisive, and supercilious
("the old woman"). This was the type of leadership
about which Ben McCulloch had warned
Hazen and Floyd in July. With the shock and
embarrassment of Lot Smith's raid to the army's
worst, Alexander reluctantly assumed the overall
command that he had avoided and then led a dis-
terous trek and counter-march along Hans Fork
in a failed attempt to reach Salt Lake by the looping
northern (Bear River) route. Courtesy of Massachusetts
state Collection (Image 16540), US Army Military History
Institute, Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania.

Our expresses back, it would seem is suspected have been cut off; tho' Major
Taylor says not.

One of the Hickmans mentioned as being prisoners some days since has
been allowed to go to Salt Lake with permission to return if he chooses.

From here to Bear River Valley it is about 50 miles of very hilly tho' old
well beaten road. Thence on down to the elbow or Soda Springs it is some
sixty miles of good level road; thence onward to Fort Hall on the Oregon
Route it is 66 miles with excellent grass and where hundreds of fit beves
could probably be got. From Soda Springs down the River to the Mormon
settlements it is sixty or seventy miles. Thus by a march of some 160 miles we
might reach a point less than one hundred miles from the city, and where
the people could not destroy the grass or other resources without injuring
themselves as well as us; 25 and where the Oregon and California routes would be
open to us, where we could comply with the orders which we have received
and is to establish a post at or near Salt Lake City, and where in future we might
compel the Mormons to such a distinct avowal either of rebellion or sub-
mision as to enable the United-States to act with decision next season.

25 Phelps had not yet grasped Mormon willingness to destroy their own resources, possessions, and
infrastructure.
By retracing partly our route, occupying and garrisoning the points of Forts Bridger and Supply and sending our animals to graze on Henry’s Fork, we could have South Pass and Bridgers Pass open to us if not clogged with snow, and we should hold one of the avenues to the city; but we should thus probably remain in an undecided attitude with respect to the Mormons and hence not comply with the intentions of the government.

In Bear River Valley the guides say our stock would perish. At Henry’s Fork we might save them if; tho’ the grass can be either burned or covered with snow in either locality.

We cannot expect supplies from the Atlantic states until next July or August, and we have not sufficient to last us till then.

Our oxen they say would all die if driven down Bear River Valley and we should not have them for beef; whereas, on Henry’s Fork they might be saved for that purpose.

Such are some of the considerations that still present themselves and which receive a new aspect as each revolving day comes round. We have corn for only ten or fifteen days of forage and hence must go somewhere now for we can’t stay here—at a point which is nearly the highest point level of travelled route between the Atlantic and Pacific. . . .

At this hour, half past 8 P.M. there is a driving snow storm from the North of East.

Three wild geese were seen flying towards the South.

This snow storm had commenced by sunset at the South Pass.

**Sunday Oct. 18th**

At 9 A.M. the snow storm having prevailed during the night was still continuing and had covered the earth to the depth of several inches. But at 10 it began to break away in the N.E. and the sun became visible. . . . Our poor horses have been pawing away the snow to find some grass—they suffer very much. One died last night from having fallen into a hole and strained himself the night before while chilled benumbed with the cold.

Have at length heard from the east—by Mr. [Ben] Ficklin. Two companies of the 10th Infantry under [Brevet] Col. [Charles F.] Smith were six days march from here, i.e. two days march on the other side of the South Pass waiting for the ox trains to come up. This was four days ago.

The Colonel commanding received letters from Brigham Young and Lieut. General Wells. They are both of which were of a hostile tenor. That of Brigham is six pages long.

One of the First Sergeants of the 10th Infantry died yesterday (of bilious cholic) and was buried this evening. The funeral procession reached the hillside where his grave had been dug; and the dirge like notes of the march had ceased and the ceremonies were being performed just as the last rays of the sun were gilding the tops of the eastern hills. The wintry barrenness cold-
STAGGERING ALONG LIKE SO MANY DRUNKEN MEN

ness of the scene, the land being covered with snow; the good character of the deceased and the suddenness of his death all contributed to render the spectacle peculiarly desolate and gloomy. 26

Col. Smith writes that he is out of corn; and it is said that with his two companies he is to escort 150 ox wagons.

Monday October 19th

It was finally decided to retrace our steps down the Fork and establish winter quarters at Fort Bridger and on Henry’s Fork; and accordingly, to this end, the ox wagons were divided into three trains of 50 each and the troops assigned to them as escorts. The first division moved this morning and both the others will probably follow to-morrow. 27

One section of my battery has been ordered to go with the rear division.

The 9th Infantry, it is said, have lost about a dozen mules and are in consequence breaking up some of their wagons giving the wheels to officers to make tent pins of.

It was very cold last night—the stream freezing over in the stiller places. But the snow has thawed away considerably to-day and the ice is all gone....

Another express from the rear came in, but it is not known what it brings since it went on to overtake the commanding officer who is with the first division.

Tuesday October 20th

Marched back about twelve miles—I say about because the odometer is with the left section which is detached.

Received an order by which Col. Johnston assumes command. He is somewhere near the South Pass and will be up in the course of seven days. Our course in seeking the region of Henry’s Fork as winter quarters appears to be approved by him.

Received another copy of the Deseret News from Brigham Young. It came thru’ Col. Alexander.

Abandoned two horses which had become too much debilitated to stand.

It was still very cold last night, tho’ not as cold as the night previous.... The snow has not melted to-day; it lies in patches. The breath has congealed

26 Curtis R. Allen of Centerville, Utah, identifies this man as Sgt. John McDonnell, age 48, of Company E, Tenth U.S. Infantry, Allen to Mackinnon, e-mail message, 7 September 2006. A first sergeant was the senior enlisted man of each company.

27 As a result of this decision, Private Scott of Phelps’s Battery wrote in his diary, “Orders to return, the command divided into three divisions 10 miles back on the fork[1] The King of France marched up the hill. And then marched down again,” Stewart and Ellis, eds., “Charles A. Scott’s Diary of the Utah Expedition,” 166, entry for 20 October 1857. Scott was quoting from the Mother Goose poem, “The King of France, the King of France, with 10,000 men, marched up the hill and then marched down again, and when they were up they were up and when they were down, they were down; and when they were halfway up, they were Neither up nor down.” The lines have been used multiple times to express frustrated with seemingly pointless government actions.
in the beard, it lies in patches covering the ground by about one third. It has been sufficiently cold most of the time to congeal the breath in the beard.

Fortunately, we have found some grazing that the horses can eat. They are fond of brushing away the snow with their lips and taking the grass from under it. I could hear the animals throughout the night pawing at the stiff icy snow in search of food. I had for my horses about 4 lbs. of grass which I had cut before the storm and three pounds of corn, and a warm place among the bushes.

Wednesday Octr. 21st

Marched about 10 miles—our division of 50 ox wagons coming in at an early hour in the afternoon. The 1st division is only a mile or two ahead of us.

It is much easier to come over a road that has been broken by carriages than thro' sage bushes. On coming back it is frightful to see what my poor horses did in leading the way; and all to no purpose.

It was again very cold last night, the wind prevailing from the N of W; but the horses were well sheltered by the willows and had something to eat. Some of them were as warm as if in a stable.

The wind has been pretty fresh from the N.W. It is a cold wind; and it seemed to-day to come down from above since no hill see furnished any protection from it . . .

Thursday Octr. 22nd

Marched about seven miles and encamped on comparatively good grass, tho' it is but indifferent at best. We are over all the hills but one which were traversed during our up-river march. With the same outlay of house work we might now have been arrived at this time in Bear River Valley and had a good road before us towards the Mormon settlements. The Mormons have grain for their horses but no money, and long before spring many of them would be glad I think to exchange one for the other. 28

It was again quite cool last night, but without wind. It has been mild and warm to-day, the columns of smoke rising upright in the air with Indian summer tranquility . . .

Friday Octr. 23rd

Remain in camp. Col. Johnston has ordered us back some forty miles or more to Fontenelle Creek, where it empties into Green River, and we are waiting to hear from him with regard to our previously formed plan of going to Henry's Fork to winter.

Some bands or companies of Mormons have been watching our movements from the banks of the valley. They caught up one of our wagon masters who was behind looking for stray animals; and after keeping him over night sent him in yesterday with a note from Capt. [William] Maxwell who

28 More wishful thinking by Phelps.
said that he had tuk him and might have tuk twenty wagons; but he sent him
in and requested that Major Taylor might be sent back in his place.

Had a fine dish of trout this evening, which were taken from the stream
by one of the sergeants, . . .

Saturday Oct. 24th

Remain in camp writing letters for the next opportunity to the States. It
is one month since we have heard from there.

A mild warm day. Last night as usual very cold. Yesterday morning and
this the vapor stood up from the stream like thick long fir. Little or no wind
at the surface, . . .

Sunday Oct. 26 [25]th

Still in camp. One of my horses is down flat; and seems paralized, espe-
cially in his hind quarters. He seems otherwise to be in good healthy; has made
many attempts to get up and has been lifted up by the men but all to no pur-
pase, he falls back as if under an incabus. It is, perhaps, the alternation of
cold nights and warm days; together with his reduced condition, that has occa-
sioned a paralisis. A horse generally turns his hind quarters to the storm and
it is in those quarters that he is most affected.

The earth was again covered with snow this morning, tho' to no great depth
for by midday only the old sparse patches of the preceding snow remained.

Monday Oct. 26

Remain in camp—until the grazing is consumed three times over.

But we have at length heard from Col. Johnston and in consequence shall
move to-morrow to Black's Fork.

A part of the Infantry went out among the hills to-day and, concealing
themselves, sent one of their number in advance. A party of Mormons saw
this one and came down upon him, but when at the distance of about 250
yards the Infantry arose and fired upon them. They were well mounted and
ran away rapidly. It is not known whether any of them were hit. A strange
state of warfare this, . . .

Lost a horse last night—the one mentioned yesterday.

Tuesday Oct. 27

The Col. (Alexander) received an express last night and we are to meet
Col. Johnston at Black's Fork—near where we encamped when coming out;
and accordingly we are to move slowly, since the Col. was to come there from
South Pass, a distance of nearly 150 miles while we have only about 30 to go,
& while there is some grass here on this fork (notwithstanding the Mormon
efforts to burn it all up) and little or none on Black's Fork.

We shall be out of corn in a few two or three days, and we should there-
fore endeavor to be amidst good grass—say on Henry's Fork, before it entire-
ly fails. Else we may lose more animals than necessary. We marched only one hour this morning.

Received back the left [artillery] section from its service with the 3rd division of ox wagons, and sent the middle section in its place.

Found a stray horse in our camp—too poor to work—but brought him along.

It was perfectly clear this morning after a cold night...  

This cold, pure, dry air stimulates the appetite and conduces to the health. The men don't find 18 ozs. flour (tho' made doubly heavy with water) enough to satisfy their hunger, and are constantly running to the commissary to buy more. When mixed with water without leaven and baked in a Dutch oven it is about as heavy as lead; and yet, only one man has the fits.

**Wednesday Octr. 28**

Remain in camp.

The horses get pretty well filled up.

Encounter a current of little miseries, e.g., a man had lost his knapsack, and to hear the story one could not tell whether stupidity or knavery was at the bottom of it.

2nd. One of the sentinels had broken a musket [illegible] during the night and was not honest enough to acknowledge it.

3rd. A wagon tail was negligently left open during the night and a horse discovered that (much to his surprise and disgust no doubt) that both beans and rice were carried in bags as well as corn.

4th. The Doctor's Tent took fire before our eyes and burned up, injuring his bedding and every thing else more or less contained therein. It was one of the most awful conflagrations that I ever witnessed. All that a dozen of us could do was to stand appalled and gaze at the wholesale destruction...

**Thursday Octr. 29th**

Marched 7.03 miles and encamped near the ground which we left on the 11th inst...

**Friday Octr. 30th**

Remain in camp. Sent off the horses about two miles to graze. Lost a horse last night. It was the third that seemed to be afflicted with indigestion. They ate till the last; but their food seemed to do them no good. They became thinner and more languid every day, until they were no longer able to stand, and their hind quarters seemed paralyzed. They have had no salt for some time. The idea occurs of mixing glauber salts with their food.

This last horse that died was one of a lead span to a gun which was drawn by four horses most of the way from Fort Leavenworth. They are both dead. They were young horses and willing workers while one of the wheel horses of their team—a sorrel, with four white feet and a white nose, is now really fat. He has shirked all the way.

It is unpleasant to see these horses dying off after such a long compan-
POINT

necessary. We marched only one
from its service with the 3d divi-
tion in its place.

II work—but brought him along.
a cold night... petit and conducive to the health,
doubly heavy with water) enough
aming to the commissary to buy
en and baked in a Dutch oven it
man has the fits.

SATURDAY OCT. 31ST

Marched 8.40 miles and encamped nearly a mile below our first encamp-
ment on this Ham's Fork—it being exactly one month since our arrival here.

Mustered at 3 P.M. The day has been quite warm...

The strange horse mentioned on the 27th inst. was down flat this morn-
ing; and as 20 men couldn't lift him he was left behind...

SUNDAY NOV. 1ST 1857

Remain in camp.

Another express came in from Brigham Young.

One of the officers of the command brought letters of introduction to
some of the principal Mormons. He sent them on not long since with a note
saying that he hoped soon to call in person—and to-day he received an answer
from one of them about a dozen pages long.

The night as usual was very cold; but the day has been more than usually
warm... The northern flanks of these [Uintah] mountains are, as they were
when we first saw them, covered with snow. Their aspect of wintry repose is
intense; and the clouds, in their slow march along their flanks, give them an
air of peculiar grandeur and solemnity. The association of mountains with
the clouds is exceedingly elevating and pleasant to the thoughts and feeling—
Perhaps it reminds us that we of the earth—we too may become the associ-
ates of higher and more ethereal beings.

MONDAY NOV. 2ND

Marched 8.72 miles and encamped on Black's Fork, not far from where we
encamped on the 20th of Sept. The 9th Infantry is just above us and the 10th
Infantry just below. It was expected that Col. Johnston would meet us here
to day; but he has not yet made his appearance. There is but little grazing
here for our some four thousand animals. It is not pleasant to see so many
wagons, such an outlay of wagons and animals on so long a march and with so
little thus far accomplished. A company of Infantry fired yesterday one thou-
sand yards at 30 or forty Mormons.

As usual it was very cold last night. But has been mild during the day...
Abandoned another horse to-day—too weak to stand—fell down whilst...

29 Under army regulations, each unit stood muster and inspection on the last day of every other month
beginning with February.

30 The officer to whom Phelps refers was Capt. R. B. Marcy of the Fifth Infantry, who had New York
friends in common with Apostle John Taylor from his days as editor of "The Mormon" in Manhattan. The
long letter was written by Taylor as an exposition of the Mormon case and position and is Taylor to Marcy,
Routes Followed by the U.S. Army Expedition in 1857-58

This sweeping map shows the area between South Pass and Salt Lake City, including the routes taken by the army during its frustrating October march and counter-march along Hams Fork and the ordeal of its November slog up Black's Fork to Fort Bridger. Adapted from Gowans and Campbell, Fort Bridger; Island in the Wilderness. Map drawn by Bill Nelson.

eating the frost-killed grass which constitutes our grazing. One of the accom-
paniments of such debility is a loss of power in the muscles that move the
eye-balls as well as the limbs.

I am writing this by the light of the moon. We are probably some 5000
feet above the level of the sea. The difference of level between this point and
the highest point attained in the valley of Ham's Fork (distant from here 55
miles) is, I should say, between 2 and 3 thousand feet. The track that our
carriages have made up the valley crosses the Fork nearly a dozen times, so that
it would be hardly passable for carriages perhaps in the month of May or the
early part of June, but later in the season it would be a good route. I think
from Fort Kearny by the way of Bridgers Pass to either Oregon or Califor-
nia. It would be at least a hundred miles shorter than the way by Fort Laramie;
would not offer steeper hills, and would furnish better grazing and water. It
is decidedly the better route of the two for a Pacific railroad.

The white flanks of the Uintah Mountains could be plainly seen last night
at this hour reflecting the light of the moon, tho' some sixty miles distant...
Tuesday Nov. 3rd

Col. Johnston arrived upon the Fork to-day with two companies of the 10th Infy, two of Dragoons and a long train of upward of 340 wagons, containing supplies for the troops and sutlers stores. By this arrival we shall receive medical and ordnance stores both of which we could have hardly done without had we advanced on Salt Lake at all. We have been very much in need and especially if we had advanced on Salt Lake as we set out to do three weeks ago.

With the train comes the Chief Justice (Eccles) [Eckels] and also Mr. Morrell, the post master for Salt Lake City. We get a few letters and papers. . . .

It has been a very cheerless day. . . .

One Magnificent Struggle from the Beginning:
The Accounts of Porter, Johnston, Stewart, and Carter

When Maj. Fitz John Porter, a New Hampshireeman, was detailed as Colonel Johnston’s adjutant in late August, he had been serving in the same role with Brevet Maj. Gen. Persifor F. Smith, commander of the Department of the West. Both officers were West Pointers, although as a member of the class of 1845, Porter was nineteen years junior to Johnston. On the trail west of Fort Leavenworth, these officers became tentmates and close friends.

Porter’s letter to his counterpart at General Scott’s headquarters covers the period from the resumption of march on 6 November to soon after his arrival at Fort Bridger on 17 November. From this material, which found its way into the Washington Union, emerges not only a view of the hardships endured but a typical army officer’s uncomplimentary view of Mormons. Here one also finds Porter’s open admiration for the willingness of Colonel Johnston to share his troops’ hardships.

Porter to McDowell, “Interesting Information from the Utah Expedition,” 29 November 1857,

Washington Union, 24 January 1858, 2/5–6.

I left you [with my last letter] on Black’s Fork, 16 miles from Fort Bridger, on the 7th instant, after one day’s march from the point of uniting the commands by Col. Johnston. You now find us in this camp, named in honor of our cherished chief [Scott], whose foresight and action has placed us in winter-quarters, under excellent shelter, without the blow of an axe. Our first day’s march was over a dreary waste, made more desolate by the fall of snow two days previous, and the driving storm of snow and wind which met us in the middle of the march, miles from wood, water, grass, or shelter. To return was destruct-
Buchanan and Van Dyke designed these letters to be helpful but without committing the administration to any responsibility or substantive support for his mission. Fundamentally, they were merely expressions of good wishes.

Unknown to Kane as he left Philadelphia on his long journey on 4 January 1858, he also carried in his small trunk a fifth letter: a highly pessimistic admonition from his father, Judge John K. Kane. Here was a message in stark contrast to the type of patriarchal blessing that Mormon men typically received before embarking on such a mission, or for that matter the one Brigham Young had received on Christmas Day from his brother. This was to be the last word Thomas L. Kane would ever have from his revered father, James Buchanan's Democratic Party intimate.

**His Power Has Been, Therefore, Absolute:**

*Explaining Utah*

The thrust of Buchanan's message to Congress was hardly the Mormon problem. It was a subject in an address largely unexamined by Utah War historians to which he allocated only five lawyering paragraphs, or 4 percent of the total address.


Whilst Governor Young has been both governor and superintendent of Indian affairs throughout this period [since 1850], he has been at the same time the head of the church called the Latter-Day Saints, and professes to govern its members and dispose of their property by direct inspiration and authority from the Almighty. His power has been, therefore, absolute over both church and State.

The people of Utah, almost exclusively, belong to this church, and believing with a fanatical spirit that he is governor of the Territory by divine appointment, they obey his commands as if these were direct revelations from Heaven. If, therefore, he chooses that his government shall come into collision with the government of the United States, the members of the Mormon church will yield implicit obedience to his will. Unfortunately, existing facts leave little doubt that such is his determination. Without entering upon a minute history of occurrences, it is sufficient to say that all the officers of the United States, judicial and executive, with the single exception of two Indian agents, have found it necessary for their own personal safety to withdraw from the Territory, and there no longer remains any government in Utah but the des-
"Sketch of the Country Between South Pass & The Great Salt Lake," 1857 (portion)

Based on the October reports of Alexander and Johnston, this map marks Alexander's "Camp Winfield" at the juncture of Hams and Blazes Fork. No indication is made of plans to go into winter quarters at Fort Bridger, thus reflecting an incomplete understanding in Washington of the Utah Expedition's situation when Buchanan and Floyd finalized their annual reports in December 1857. From "Report of the Secretary of War, 1857," U.S. Senate Exec. Doc. 22, 35th Cong., 1st Sess., Serial 970. Courtesy of Neal Carmack, Merrill-Catter Library, Utah State University.
potism of Brigham Young. This being the condition of affairs in the Territory, I could not mistake the path of duty. As Chief Executive Magistrate, I was bound to restore the supremacy of the Constitution and laws within its limits. In order to effect this purpose, I appointed a new governor and other federal officers for Utah, and sent with them a military force for their protection, and to aid as a esse comitatus, in case of need, in the execution of the laws.

With the religious opinions of the Mormons, as long as they remained mere opinions, however deplorable in themselves and revolting to the moral and religious sentiments of all Christendom, I had no right to interfere. ... My instructions to Governor Cumming have therefore been framed in strict accordance with these principles. At their date a hope was indulged that no necessity might exist for employing the military in restoring and maintaining the authority of the law; but this hope has now vanished. Governor Young has, by proclamation, declared his determination to maintain his power by force, and has already committed acts of hostility against the United States. Unless he should retract his steps the Territory of Utah will be in a state of open rebellion.

There is reason to believe that Governor Young has long contemplated this result. ... He has, therefore, for several years, in order to maintain his independence, been industriously employed in collecting and fabricating arms and munitions of war, and in disciplining the Mormons for military service.

As superintendent of Indian affairs he has had an opportunity of tampering with the Indian tribes, and exciting their hostile feelings against the United States. This, according to our information, he has accomplished in regard to some of these tribes, while others have remained true to their allegiance, and have communicated his intrigues to our Indian agents. He has laid in a store of provisions for three years, which, in case of necessity, as he informed Major Van Vliet, he will conceal, and then take to the mountains, and bid defiance to all the powers of the government.

A great part of all this may be idle boasting; but yet no wise government...

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2 The Indian agents were Dr. Garland Hunt and George Armstrong, a Mormon.

3 See Chapter 10 for discussion of the extensive Mormon quest for arms and munitions.

4 This section reflects the inputs of Secretary Thompson, Commissioner Denver, and Indian Agent Twins.

5 Stewart Van Vliet was then a captain and was not promoted to major until August 1860. Heineman, Historical Register, 1594.
will lightly estimate the efforts which may be inspired by such frenzied fanaticism as exists among the Mormons of Utah. This is the first rebellion which has existed in our Territories; and humanity itself requires that we should put it down in such a manner that it shall be the last. To trifflc with it would be to encourage it and to render it formidable. We ought to go there with such an imposing force as to convince these deluded people that resistance would be vain, and thus spare the effusion of blood. We can in this manner best convince them that we are their friends, not their enemies. In order to accomplish this object, it will be necessary, according to the estimate of the War Department, to raise four additional regiments; and this I earnestly recommend to Congress. At the present moment of depression in the revenues of the country I am sorry to be obliged to recommend such a measure; but I feel confident of the support of Congress, cost what it may, in suppressing the insurrection and in restoring and maintaining the sovereignty of the Constitution and laws over the Territory of Utah.

Accompanying Buchanan's message were the annual reports of Secretary of War Floyd and Secretary of State Cass—the cabinet officers with jurisdiction over the army and territorial affairs—as well as the comparable report of General Scott, the army's general in chief. Consistent with the extent to which Cass and Scott had been subordinated to Buchanan and Floyd, respectively, neither officer mentioned Utah or Mormons in his report, a remarkable omission, especially for General Scott. Secretary Floyd's report differed from Buchanan's. It provided more operationally oriented comments; it explicitly linked Kansas and Utah; and it ranged into the political as well as social arena. Floyd, as did Brigham Young in his letters of 12 September, described Utah's greatest threat as its strategic position astride America's transcontinental emigration routes.

Floyd, Annual Report, 5 December 1857,
Senate Ex. Doc. 11, 6–9.

From the first hour they fixed themselves in that remote and almost inaccessible region of our Territory, from which they are now sending defiance to the sovereign power, their whole plan has been to prepare for a successful secession from the authority of the United States and a permanent establishment of their own, . . .

But, unfortunately for these views [of governmental forbearance], their set-

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*This sentence is Buchanan's most famous utterance about the Utah War—the federal counterpart in the conflict's folklore to Lot Smith's "for His sake" assertion two months earlier.

* Buchanan's choice of words—leaving ambiguous whether "additional" regiments meant regular or volunteers—touched off a hopeful flurry of military organizing in virtually every state of the union. At that time the regular U.S. Army consisted of twenty regiments. Floyd's annual report recommended five additional regiments, including one for Indian warfare in Texas.

* A reference to the Financial Panic of 1857; see Chapter 16.