

Pvt. William Reynolds' Enigma

This story is about Warren Ford Reynolds' younger brother William, who, as a young single man on his way to California joined the Mormon Battalion, served in a manner becoming a patriot, but never joined the LDS church. The March of the Mormon Battalion has become an epoch saga in the annals of LDS history. Here is a man who performed an awesome feat by virtue of his outstanding service as a private in Company C Iowa Volunteers. At the conclusion of the march in California, William was chosen, along with fourteen others of the "best soldiers," for a special detail by General Stephen Watts Kearny. Yet, the written records that survived him paint him as a non believer of the religion and institution that formed the basis for creating his famed army unit in the first place.

For many years the credit for his service in the Battalion, and afterwords, as an escort to General Kearny and Colonial John C. Fremont, on their long return journey to Fort Leavenworth, has been given to another individual of nearly the same name, William Fletcher Reynolds, simply because our William disappeared into an anonymous lifestyle "back home" in Michigan and never joined the Mormons. Even within this decade monuments have been erected giving credit to the wrong William for his service. In today's digital age the truth is finally in evidence; the original service records are available online and open for anyone to view.

In a way it is ironic that it took so long for William to receive credit for his military feat. It was only after his war record was revealed, through his wife's pension affidavits and related war records, that his role was made known publicly. How this came to be is a unique story. To define the tale it should be pointed out that the mission of the Mormon Battalion, and the role of it's members, has been highly acclaimed over the years in Mormon culture. But, in William's case he was one of only a handful of recruits that never joined the church. So, how is it that William Reynolds has not been given credit for his valor and service to the Mormon Battalion?

Military records, including muster rolls and assignments, of the Mexican War were carefully made and preserved through the years in the National Archives. Early on many of these records were microfilmed and made available in various libraries. Until the digital age these records required personal archival research in order to access and use the correct information. In carefully studying the best known published works on the Mormon Battalion it is obvious that the National Archives, though cited, were not always the original source of information about the individual Battalion members listed. For example, with special regard to William Reynolds, the confusion began when Kate Carter of the Daughters of Utah Pioneers, writing her 1960 volume of OPH or "Our

Pioneer Heritage, OPH: Vol 11 page 402." mistakenly named William Fletcher Reynolds to her roster of the Mormon Battalion, and then in 1996, when Norma Baldwin Ricketts published her acclaimed work "The Mormon Battalion, U. S. Army of the West, 1846-1848, Utah State University Press, Logan, Utah, 1996, she cited the National Archives as the roster source, but she obviously used the list first put together by Kate Carter. Finally, even in the award winning "Army of Israel," Mormon Battalion Narratives by David L. Bigler and Will Bagley, they credit William F. Reynolds as the Kearny Escort member, rather than our William, and they cite their list as coming from the "primary sources." Now, with respect to William Reynolds, even today the wrong Reynolds is being listed on the various websites treating the Mormon Battalion on the Internet. (1)

Who was this William Fletcher Reynolds who has wrongly received the credit? A good man, in fact a very good man; but he had no military record for serving in the Mexican War, nor did he ever claim to. A little research on William Fletcher Reynolds reveals that in 1846 he was working as a logger (wood chopper) in eastern Iowa at the same time as our William was mustered into Co. C. of the Mormon Battalion on July 16, 1846 at Council Bluffs, Iowa. On February 20, 1846, William Fletcher Reynolds married Anna Hawley at the Bloomfield County Courthouse, Iowa, and on January 20, 1847 their first child, Ellis Reynolds was born at a Logging Camp at Davis, Iowa. The 1850 U. S. Federal Census for Henderson, Illinois, Township 10 N 5 W has William Fletcher Reynolds with wife Anna Reynolds listed with the Occupation "Wood Chopper." On October 13, 1851 he was baptized and confirmed a member of the LDS church. Daughter Ellis Reynolds Shipp became a leading medical doctor in the Utah Territory and had a school for midwives in Salt Lake City. In later years Ellis wrote her fathers biography in which she said, "In the year of 1852 my happy father left his native land and all his kindred but his youngest brother Levi W. Reynolds whom he sponsored to the far west, greatly to the dissatisfaction of his elder brothers because of their unbelief in what was called by them the Mormon Doctrine. My father was sincere in his belief and enduring faith and joyfully took up his ox whip and steered the way of his covered wagon with his dearest treasures and all his human possessions. He had been a wise and helpful coworker with my mother's father in the years of preparation for their long journey into the wilderness of the west. He was a true son to his wife's parents and they loved and honored him as did all who knew him for his genial, upright, helpful ways as a husband and father. He was as perfect as a mortal could ever be. As a saint of the living God, his faith and integrity was true to the end."

Why The Mystery?

Carter's mistake is truly mystifying in light of the intense research effort made by the individuals who worked on the Mormon Battalion Monument on the Utah State Capitol grounds in 1920, seventy-two years after the fact. There, William's name is listed correctly with no middle initial.

Kate Carter's roster research evidently was not based solely on the earlier work that created the roster for the Capital grounds monument. One must surmise that when she prepared her 1960 work on the Mormon Battalion that she searched for a William Reynolds in the archives of the Daughters of Utah Pioneers, and found only one William -- that of William Fletcher Reynolds. To think otherwise would presuppose religious discrimination because there exists not one twittle of data to support the idea that the Mormon convert William Fletcher Reynolds was a Private in Company C of the Mormon Battalion, and that the non-Mormon William Reynolds who died at Hubbardston, Michigan in 1886 was not.

William's Enlistment and Special Guard Service:

The Mormon Battalion was mustered in on July 16, 1846 at Council Bluffs, Iowa and mustered out exactly one year later at Los Angeles, California. Some extended enlistments and some special assignments then occurred. The absolute best account of service involving our William Reynolds can be found in the book "Army of Israel, Mormon Battalion Narratives" edited by David L. Bigler and Will Bagley, Utah State University Press, Logan, Utah, 2000.

Bigler and Bagley devote an entire chapter of their profusely sourced work (Chapter 6) entitled "Over a Beautiful Country" Kearny's Life Guards. This chapter is a day-to-day recounting of Brig. General Stephen W. Kearny's return from Los Angeles via Monterey and then overland back to Fort Leavenworth with a detachment of about 60 men, including 15 Mormon Battalion "guards" -- William Reynolds being one of the fifteen -- with Col. John C. Fremont in tow. (2) Upon reaching Fort Leavenworth Kearny arrested Fremont, had him placed in irons and taken to Washington D.C. where Fremont was tried in a three month court-martial trial for insubordination and mutiny. Fremont was found guilty and almost as soon given a pardon by President Polk.

The Kearny detachment, including the Mormon Battalion guards, covered almost thirty miles a day on their return to Fort Leavenworth. They had 170 good horses and mules. The Battalion escort reached Fort Leavenworth on 22 August 1847 having traveled 2,152 miles from Monterey in 83 days. The Battalion guards were paid \$8.60 cents each for their extra service from the time they were officially mustered out at Los Angeles. Each was also given \$75.00 severance for their service in the Mexican War. The account recorded by Bigler and Bagley include much actual transcript from diaries kept by some of the men in the detail. Unfortunately, Williams' name is not mentioned, nor are many others, except at the beginning where the process of picking the very best men for the job of Kearny's detail is interestingly described. There William is given a middle initial "F" which, as previously described, was the mistake of Kate Carter of the Daughters of Utah Pioneers in her original publication on the "Mormon Battalion." Nearly every author

who has written since has repeated her mistake when listing the battalion members.

After being mustered out at Fort Leavenworth the members of the escort or guard went their different ways. Since they no longer had "army mounts" most of them walked the 200 miles back to Council Bluffs or Winter Quarters, as it was called. But the accounts are clear that some went different ways. In William's case it is unlikely he even knew where his brother Warren was at the time. From William and Calista Carver Reynolds' Mexican War Pension files, in the 1890 deposition of Alonzo A. Sunderlin, long time business partner of William in Ionia County, Michigan, it is said that William was "detailed out to work for the doctor" and that upon discharge "he came to St. Louis." Of interest, Sunderlin also testified that "his (William's) brother wanted him to join that (Mormon) church but that he would not." Further, "I have heard his brothers, Levy and Asa, both now dead, conversing among themselves and with Mr. William Reynolds in regard to his services in the Mexican War."

Upon studying the depositions in Calista's file one obvious factor jumps out -- that is the lack of specific detail remembered by any of the deponents, including Calista. The sense of wonderment here is enhanced when you think of all the colorful scenes that William experienced not the least of which was the trek from Los Angeles to Monterey under the command of General Tecumseh Sherman. Here is a small group of men riding horseback pushing their pack mules and staying each night in a Spanish Mission for over a week; and then while crossing the High Sierra they discover and are given the gruesome task of disposing of the Donner Party remains. And the most that survives of his military service in the minds of those making affidavits is that he "served with a Dr. and with Col. Fremont?" Incredible almost, until one considers that William's service in the Mexican War may have been overshadowed by the day-to-day events of the mid-1800s until his death in 1886. Things like the California gold rush, the Civil War with all its tragic battles, Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation, the laying of the transcontinental railroad, etc! Think about it. How sad it is that William did not keep a journal.

The Sanderson Connection:

From bits and pieces from the depositions and from journal histories it seems probable that William became sick before reaching Fort Leavenworth, 200 miles south of Council Bluffs; and when well was rejoined with his outfit and assigned to assist the notoriously disliked United States Army surgeon, Dr. George B. Sanderson, who was hated for his "wicked cursing" and his mandatory administrations of a mixture of arsenic and mineral oil of some kind in a rusty iron spoon. Official war records list William's original assignment as "Teamster." Did he then serve in driving Dr. Sanderson's wagon? Was William picked for the Escort and Guard assignment, that depended upon 170 "good horses and mules," because of his "Teamster" skills? Upon discharge, did William drive Dr. Sanderson to St. Louis?

An interesting Vignette of Dr. George B. Sanderson by Bob Brown, Vice President, U. S. Army of the West - Mormon Battalion association follows:

Dr. George Sanderson
Surgeon, Mormon Battalion Staff

On August 1, 1846, the first official order Colonel James Allen gave at Fort Leavenworth was the appointment of Dr. George B. Sanderson, M.D. as Surgeon in the U.S. Army. He was to serve with the general staff of the Mormon Battalion during their march to California during the War with Mexico.

Dr. Sanderson's treatment of the sick usually included a concoction of calomel and arsenic. Calomel, or mercury chloride, was a medicine used chiefly to deal with constipation, a condition that many doctors of the day thought was a leading cause of abdominal, or stomach disorders.

In a letter that arrived some time after Dr. Sanderson began his treatments, Brigham Young, president of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, counseled the members of the battalion, "If you are sick, live by faith, and let the surgeon's medicine alone if you want to live, using only such herbs and mild food as are at your disposal. If you give heed to this counsel, you will prosper; but if not, we cannot be responsible for the consequences."

Lieutenant A.J. Smith had seen malingerers; slackers and misfits use the sick list as a means of shirking duty in his previous military assignments. So it was without spite that he required sick men to receive medical treatment through proper authority, meaning the good doctor's prescription. This conflict of directives created great animosity between the troops and Dr. Sanderson. Whether deserved or not, he earned the nickname "Dr. Death" among the enlisted men and inspired the following poem by Sergeant William Hyde:

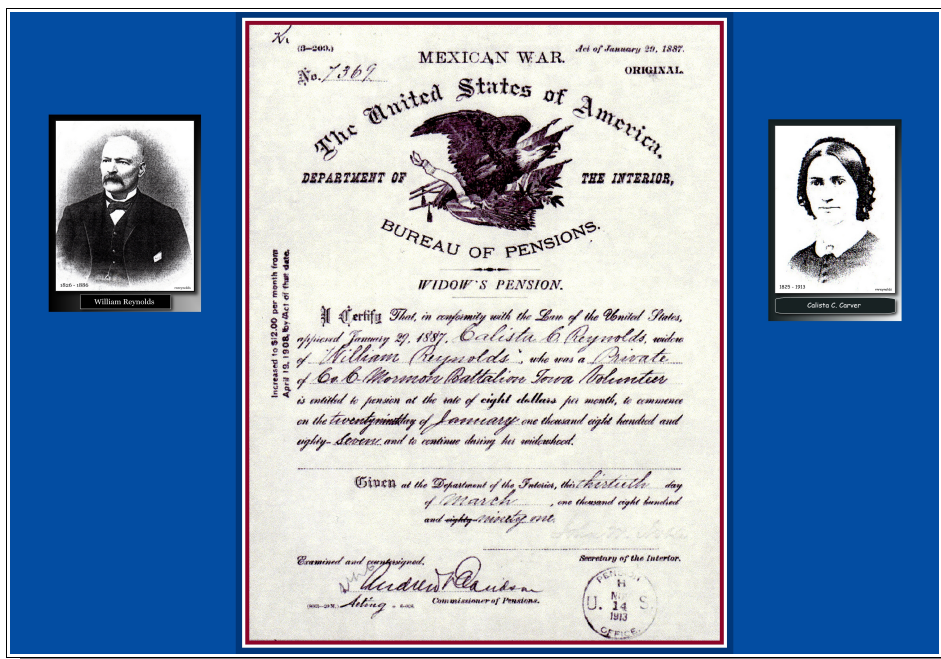
Our Doc, the wicked swearing fellow
With Calomel thought to make us mellow
The boys his poison spurned to take
Which made him act his father, snake!

He swore that damned his soul should be
Or else a change of things he'd see
To which our feelings did assent
To have him damned were all content

Because the sick had not obeyed
He raved, and like a donkey brayed
My mind on him I'd like to free
But as I'm placed I'll let him be

Time will show his heart is rotten
And sure his name will be forgotten.

Other than being mentioned in the various journals of Mormon Battalion members, Dr. Sanderson was almost forgotten. However, in 2003, his personal journal written during the march was discovered. Although it is clear that he and the enlisted men had a rocky start, it is apparent within his journal that he held great affection for these valiant soldiers as they made their way to San Diego. Note: Opinion of Bob Brown.



William's wife, Calista Carver's Widow Pension

References:

1. A search for William Reynolds' pension and military service records in the Mexican War at FOLD3.com will return well over 80 pages of digital images of original records and affidavits made in the late 1800s regarding Williams's service in 1846-1847. The affidavits, especially, fill in many blanks regarding his life.

2. The detachment also included the notorious Dr. George B. Sanderson. Crossing the Sierra-Nevada Kearny's detachment was the first to find the remains of the Donner Party and his men were ordered to gather the grizzly remains and bury them and then burn the refuse. From Los Angeles to Monterey where the return trip began, William's small group of 12 escorts (3 went by boat with Kearny) journed overland, traveling with pack mules, under the command of William Tecumseh Sherman. They followed the El Camino Real staying in six missions en route. They arrived at Monterey about noon May 25. 1847, two days before General Kearny.

Compiled and written by Robert N. Reynolds
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