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Author: Tom Sutak
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Reviewed by Roy Schmidt for the Association for Mormon Letters

"Into the Jaws of Hell" is subtitled: "Jefferson Hunt: the Death Valley '49ers Wagon Train & His Adventures in California 1846-1857." The name Jefferson Hunt was slightly familiar to me. I knew Huntsville, Utah is named for him, and I came across him in various accounts of the Mormon Battalion.

Beyond that, my knowledge of his was virtually nil. Nil, that is, until I received this biography for review.

In a letter included with my copy, author Tom Sutak wrote the following: "I would like to comment that this book came from a simple project (I thought at the time it was a simple project) to find out who Jefferson Hunt was and why he was the guide for an 1849 wagon train that contained the first group of whites to enter Death Valley. Very quickly, I discovered that the Mormon influence on early California History was far greater than I ever had heard about or suspected. Later, I came to realize that while Jefferson Hunt is somewhat known in the Mormon Community, the true scope of his influence and his accomplishments are not well understood. Thus, what began as some light reading, became a major research project and resulted in this book."

Tom Sutak worked as a criminologist, served as a community college instructor, and was involved in the security industry. His work has been published in the Journal of Mormon History as well as the Proceedings of the Sixth Death Valley History Conference. He worked on the latter in conjunction with noted historian, Leo Lyman.

The book itself contains a number of helpful maps, has a good index, and a nice bibliography. It is, however, devoid of footnotes or endnotes which I expected to be included. Sutak does include some commentary within the text that would normally be found in a footnote. I found

these inclusions did not detract from the text itself. In fact, I rather enjoyed them. That said, the book is not without faults. The cover started to separate from the text soon after I received it. I hope this applies only to the copy I received. I also feel additional editing would have helped. For example there is an excessive use of the word "that" which I found distracting. Distracting, but minor in my opinion. Otherwise the text is easy to read, and printed on good paper which I appreciated immensely.

The book is divided into three major sections: 1. The Mormon Battalion, 2. Mountaineer and Guide, and 3. Settler and Politician. There are twenty-four chapters in all. A helpful Forward and Epilogue are included.

Jefferson Hunt was born in Kentucky in 1803. His family sold their Kentucky property in 1823 and moved to Illinois. Hunt married Celia Mounts in 1823. The couple joined the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints on 7 March 1835, and joined the body of the Saints in Caldwell County, Missouri late 1837 or early in 1837. When the Saints moved to Illinois, the Hunts settled near Bear Creek, about twenty miles from Nauvoo.

Author Satak writes about the attempts to have Joseph Smith extradited to Missouri in connection with the attempted assassination of former Governor Lilburn Boggs. Porter Rockwell was accused of the act. Satak states: "A British made pepperbox revolver was found in a rain puddle very near the shattered window [of Boggs' home]. Unlike Colt revolvers which had a single barrel with a revolving cylinder carrying the cap, powder and ball for each charge, the pepperbox had several revolving barrels. It was found that only one barrel had discharged and that the others were all loaded with an extra charge of gunpowder and four balls rather than the one ball the weapon was designed to fire. (Schindler 1993, 67-69).

"The Author, a trained, certified and licensed defensive handgun instructor for nearly fifty years has conducted an analysis of what likely occurred. The inquiry indicates that the assassination attempt failed because the shooter didn't understand the physics involved when loading the weapon. In attempting to maximize the impact of the shot with additional gunpowder and extra balls, the recoil was increased substantially. This caused the revolver to fly out of the shooter's hand and into the puddle where it was found. Boggs survived because the bullets had much less energy than one ball would have had. The balls did not have enough ballistic force to penetrate deeply enough to cause fatal injuries (16)." The above is an example of the in-text commentary I referred to above. I found it helped my understanding of the assassination attempt quite a bit.

Although much has been written about the Mormon Battalion, there is still much to be learned. Sutak does a fine job of telling the story. He states, for instance: "Brigham Young's emissaries, Parley Pratt and Orson Hyde, arrived in Fort Leavenworth on August 4th to collect the men's uniform allowance, which was paid the following day. Each battalion member received \$42.00: \$3.50 per month for a twelve month period, as had been stipulated by Colonel Allen [the Battalion commander]. Young and other leaders assumed that most of the money would be sent back for the benefit of the families left behind and the Saints on the migration. However, of the \$21,000 collected by the men, less than \$6,000 was given to Pratt, Taylor and Hyde to take back to Council Bluffs. Young was not pleased and expressed his displeasure in many Sunday services over the following months. Much of the money that was taken back was not given to the remaining families, but was used to stock Young's store and to finance other parts of the migration. Many of the families felt they had not received the money sent for them by their men in the Battalion (56)."

Jefferson Hunt had been appointed chief Captain for the Battalion. When the much-loved Colonel Allen unexpectedly died, Hunt became the commanding officer. It wasn't long before Lieutenant Andrew Jackson Smith arrived in camp along with Dr. Sanderson who soon became known as Dr. Death because of the unsanitary and unsafe methods he used to treat the soldiers. Smith desired to take command of the troops. After much deliberation, Hunt ceded command to the lieutenant. Was this the right decision? Historians will argue the question, but in least one instance, it was shown to be a good one.

"On September 16th, Lieutenant Smith ordered the Battalion to rest and prepare for the difficult jornada that would begin the following day. Since the bulk of the Battalion's provisions had been sent ahead to Bent's Fort and that place would now be bypassed, Smith requested additional provisions from Colonel Price who, true to his long held animosity toward the Mormons, refused to comply. Smith was outraged, and according to Henry Bigler, sent word back to Price that if he didn't comply, Smith would "let loose the Mormons and come down on them with his artillery" (Yurtinus 1975, 137). Price sent the requested supplies. This incident and its successful resolution precisely demonstrated the wisdom of having a regular Army officer in command of the Battalion. Had Jefferson Hunt been in command, the results would have been much different (98)."

After the Mormon Battalion was disbanded, Hunt made his way back to Salt Lake City. He didn't have a lot of time to rest as the Gold Rush began, and he was soon leading a train of over 100 wagons to California. The majority of the train decided to attempt to get to California more quickly, and left Hunt and fewer than a dozen wagons behind. Many of the dissenters had second thoughts, and backtracked to catch up with the

Hunt party. They arrived safely in California, but those who did not return eventually found themselves stuck in Death Valley. I enjoyed the authors account of this journey.

Before returning to Utah in 1851, Hunt worked with Apostles Amasa Lyman and George Albert Smith in getting the Saints established in California. His stay in Utah Territory lasted only a few months before Hunt and his family traveled back to what would become "the Golden State." In California, Jefferson Hunt was instrumental in establishing San Bernardino County. He also served in the California Legislature. Hunt, and most of the Mormons, were called back to Utah by Brigham Young in 1857. There was word that Federal forces under command of General Albert Sydney Johnston were on their way to put down the Mormon Rebellion, as it was called. Much of this was new territory for me, and I relished in the way the material is presented in this book.

After a long life of service and accomplishment, Jefferson Hunt died of cancer on 11 May 1879. He left a rich legacy, one that deserves to be remembered. I'm pleased Tom Sutak decided to take on this "simple project." Reading his book has been an enriching experience for me, and I have no hesitation in recommending this work to others.