A Tale of Two Men:
How President James K. Polk and Brigham Young Utilized the Mormon Battalion

In 1846, President James K. Polk authorized the formation of the Mormon Battalion, a military unit that would serve in the U.S. Army during the war against Mexico. Brigham Young, president of the Mormon Church in 1846, agreed to form the Mormon Battalion despite the uneasy relationship that existed between the Mormon community and the U.S. federal government. An assessment of contemporary popular American newspapers coupled with personal letters and private journal entries of James Polk and Brigham Young help elucidate the reasoning behind this sudden cooperation between the Mormons and the U.S. government. These resources reveal that although both men agreed that a Mormon Battalion should be mustered, each had ulterior motives for doing so. President Polk and Brigham Young were social and political opportunists, and the Mormon Battalion was an effective way for them to accomplish their goals of territorial expansion and settlement in the west.