INTRODUCTION

This book follows in the footsteps of the other *Saints at War* volumes—on nineteenth-century conflicts, World War I, World War II, the Vietnam War, and the Korean War—that were authored by my colleagues and friends Robert C. Freeman, Dennis A. Wright, and Andrew C. Skinner. As the first volume in this series explained, "The chief objective of the *Saints at War* project is to create an archive at the L. Tom Perry Special Collections housed in the Harold B. Lee Library at Brigham Young University. This archive will preserve the personal histories, journals, letters, photographs, and other documents contributed by the veterans and their families. The materials we are collecting will be a valuable contribution in Church history, military history, and family history research."[1] This volume is the next contribution to that cause.

In November 1831, Joseph Smith Jr. was informed by the Lord that "the hour is not yet, but is nigh at hand, when peace shall be taken from the earth."[2] While commenting on that verse during a general conference address in April 1986, Church President Ezra Taft Benson explained, "We live in a day of great challenge. We live in that time of which the Lord spoke when he said, 'peace shall be taken from the earth.'"[3] Surely, we live in a time of "wars and rumors of wars, and the whole earth [is] in commotion."[4] We "hear of wars in foreign lands" and the "perplexities of the nations."[5] This book documents military conflict during the past three decades and shares insights into the experiences of Latter-day Saints during the Gulf War as well as the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq.[6]

While this volume shares many things with previous volumes, especially organizationally, it is also unique in several ways as well. The previous volumes have included reminiscences that were sometimes recorded many decades after the actual events. In contrast, many of the experiences included here were submitted soon after the events occurred. In a few instances, email messages included here were written and sent within a few hours or days.

There are three key differences between the conflicts documented in this volume and previous *Saints at War* volumes. First, in military conflicts before the Gulf War, conscription played a major role in determining who served in uniform. All of the service men and women whose experiences are shared here were volunteers. Second, military service opportunities for women have changed significantly since the Vietnam War. And third, religion played a much larger role in the Gulf War and the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq than it did during earlier military conflicts. The world wars, Korean War, and Vietnam War were ideologically oriented and did not have a religious overtone as these more recent conflicts have. For Latter-day Saints, it has influenced how, when, where, and to whom they can share the message of the restored gospel.

The electronic revolution we have experienced in recent decades has provided us with a host of new communication tools. Emails, instant messaging, and video chats, for example, have made it easier than ever to share feelings and experiences in real time. It is somewhat paradoxical that as the ease with which we can communicate has increased, the time we generally spend preserving portions of our life for posterity has declined. The military experiences of previous generations

were most often first recorded in letters home. You would be hard-pressed to find soldiers, sailors, airmen, or Marines who wrote many letters during their service in the Gulf War, Afghanistan, or Iraq. Instead, they shared emails, phone calls, and video chats with friends and loved ones as their preferred means of communication. The result is that much of their military service is still waiting to be recorded in a more permanent fashion (in the case of email) or recorded at all (in the case of phone calls and video chats).

While no polls are available showing support among Latter-day Saints for the Gulf War, the Afghan war, and the Iraq war, it seems reasonable to assume that the attitudes of American Church members toward those conflicts may have been generally in line with the views of the broader American public. Based on that standard, the Gulf War and the War in Afghanistan were probably both widely supported. During the Gulf War, for example, President George H. W. Bush's approval rating was 89 percent. At the beginning of the War in Afghanistan, following the attacks on 9/11, President George W. Bush's approval rating stood at 90 percent—the highest rate in Gallup polling history.[7] As the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq continued, President Bush's approval rating continued to slide. By his last month in office (December 2008), the president's approval rating reflected a significant partisan gap: 57 percent of Republicans approved of his performance, while only 7 percent of Democrats did.[8]

This book is organized into three major sections—the Gulf War (Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm), Afghanistan (Operation Enduring Freedom), and Iraq (Operation Iraqi Freedom). Each section includes a timeline (listing conflict events on the left with world and Church events on the right), a contextual discussion of the conflict (that includes information about how The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints was organized and operated during that conflict), and a representative sample (listed in alphabetical or-

der) of submissions from Latter-day Saint service members, civilian government employees, and government contractors. Many of the experiences included in this volume are illustrated by photographs provided by the authors.

Several of the submissions that follow have been edited for length and clarity. Service members use a lot of military slang, acronyms, abbreviations, and nomenclatures. I have sometimes included explanatory text in brackets to help improve readability. I have also included a glossary that defines the numerous acronyms, abbreviations, specialized terms, weapons and equipment nomenclatures, and military slang that service members used in their accounts. I have included a list of all contributors listed alphabetically.

The opening chapter of the Book of Mormon concludes with this insightful statement from Nephi, "But behold, I, Nephi, will show unto you that the tender mercies of the Lord are over all those whom he hath chosen, because of their faith, to make them mighty even unto the power of deliverance."[9] In April 2005, Elder David A. Bednar testified that "the tender mercies of the Lord are real and that they do not occur randomly or merely by coincidence. Often, the Lord's timing of His tender mercies helps us to both discern and acknowledge them." He further explained that "the Lord's tender mercies are the very personal and individualized blessings, strength, protection, assurances, guidance, loving-kindnesses, consolation, support, and spiritual gifts which we receive from and because of and through the Lord Jesus Christ. Truly, the Lord suits 'his mercies according to the conditions of the children of men' (D&C 46:15)." Regarding the blessings of tender mercies, Elder Bednar further taught that "we should not underestimate or overlook the power of the Lord's tender mercies. The simpleness, the sweetness, and the constancy of the tender mercies of the Lord will do much to fortify and protect us in the troubled times in which we do now and will yet live."[10]

Many of the experiences shared in this volume outline tender mercies and miracles, both large and small, received by Latter-day Saints during times of military conflict. It is the hope of Brigham Young University's *Saints at War Project* that these experiences will be preserved and shared long after the Prince of Peace has returned and wars will be no more.

This volume is dedicated to the many Latter-day Saint men and women who served in the Gulf War, the War in Afghanistan, and the Iraq War, whose service has truly blessed their country.[11]

NOTES

1. Robert C. Freeman and Dennis A. Wright, *Saints at War: Experiences of Latter-day Saints in World War II* (American Fork, UT: Covenant Communications, 2001), 2.

2. Doctrine and Covenants 1:35.

3. Ezra Taft Benson, "The Power of the Word," *Ensign*, May 1986, 79.

4. Doctrine and Covenants 45:26.

5. Doctrine and Covenants 45:63 and 88:79.

6. It is important to note that between the Vietnam War and the Gulf War, the United States military participated in several combat operations throughout the world, including Grenada (Operation Urgent Fury, 1983), Panama (Operation Just Cause, 1989–90), and a NATO intervention in Bosnia-Herzegovina (Operation Joint Endeavor, 1992–95).

7. David W. Moore, "Bush Job Approval Highest in Gallup History," Gallup News Service, September 24, 2001.

8. Kathleen Frankovic, "Bush's Popularity Reaches Historic Lows," CBS News, January 15, 2009.

9. 1 Nephi 1:20.

10. David A. Bednar, "The Tender Mercies of the Lord," *Ensign*, May 2005, 99–101.

11. At the time this book went to press, United States military forces were engaged, with varying degree, in eighty separate countries. See Stephanie Savell, "Where We Fight," *Smithsonian* 49, no. 9 (January/February 2019): 58–59.