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## Chapter LX

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**Abstract:** The Art of War Among the Nephites—Their Weapons, Armor and Fortifications  
—Moroni's Line of Defense

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the foundations rock, even to the very center; yea, and if he say unto the earth, move, it is moved; yea, if he say unto the earth, thou shalt go back, that it lengthen out the day for many hours, it is done; and thus according to his word, the earth goeth back, and it appeareth unto man that the sun standeth still; yea, and behold, this is so; for sure it is the earth that moveth, and not the sun. Thus we find that in these points, the astronomical knowledge of the Nephites was, at least, equal to that of the moderns.

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## CHAPTER LX.

THE ART OF WAR AMONG THE NEPHITES—THEIR WEAPONS,  
ARMOR AND FORTIFICATIONS—MORONI'S LINE OF DE-  
FENSE.

NO sooner had the separation taken place between the families of Nephi and Laman, and the foundation been laid for the two nations that for a thousand years contested for the supremacy on this continent, than Nephi, to protect his people from the threatened attacks of the Lamanites, found it necessary to prepare for war. He took the sword of Laban, and, using it as a pattern, fashioned many others, which he distributed among his subjects as a means of defense. These swords, with cimeters, spears, javelins, darts, bows and arrows, slings and stones, appear to have been the principal weapons of war used by the Nephites throughout their entire national existence, though

reference is more than once made to unnamed and undescribed weapons. We have no reason to imagine from any of the descriptions of their battles that gunpowder or any like composition was known to them. It is more probable that the unnamed weapons were something of the same kind as the ancient ballista and catapult, (machines made by the ancients for throwing stones, arrows, etc.,) and used for the same purposes. From the abundance of metallic ore in the regions most densely populated by the Nephites, and the oft-mentioned skill possessed by their artisans in the working of iron, steel, brass and copper, we have no reason for supposing that less satisfactory substitutes were brought into use in the manufacture of their weapons. There was no necessity for using bone, flint, etc., when metal was so abundant and its preparation so well understood.

The accounts we have of the early wars between the two races are but mere notices of the fact of their occurrence and results. It is not until the days of the Judges that anything like details are given. At that time the Nephites had adopted the use of defensive plate armor for their heads, bodies and thighs; they also carried shields and wore arm plates. These arts for the protection of the soldiers were carried to their greatest excellence under Moroni, during the first half of the last century before Christ. This officer, one of the greatest, if not actually the greatest, generals the Nephite race ever gave birth to, appears to have made a great revolution in their military affairs. He re-organized their armies, compelled more stringent discipline, introduced new tactics, developed a greatly superior system of fortification, built towers and

citadels, and altogether placed the defensive powers of the commonwealth on a new and stronger footing. The Lamanites, who appear to have developed no capacity for originating, but were apt in copying, also, in course of time, adopted defensive armor, and when they captured a weak Nephite city they frequently made it a stronghold by surrounding it with ditches and walls after the system introduced and put into execution by Moroni.

The foundation of Moroni's system of fortification was earthworks encircling the place to be defended. The earth was dug from the outside, by which means a ditch was formed. Sometimes walls of stone were erected. On the top of the earthworks strong defenses of wood, sometimes breastworks, in some cases to the full height of a man, were raised; and above these a stockade of strong pickets was built, to arrest the flight of the stones and arrows of the attacking forces. Those arrows, etc., that passed above the pickets fell, without doing injury, behind the troops who were defending the wall. Besides these walls, towers were raised at various convenient points, from which observations of the movements of the enemy were taken, and wherein corps of archers and slingers were stationed during the actual continuance of the battle. From their elevated and commanding position these bodies of soldiers could do great injury to the attacking force.

To make this subject yet plainer we insert a few extracts, from the Book of Mormon, that have a bearing thereon.

In the year B. C. 73 a severe war was being waged, in which Moroni had command of the Nephite armies

and Amalickiah of those of their foes. It is written that at this time Moroni erected small forts, or places of resort; throwing up banks of earth round about, to enclose his armies, and also building walls of stone to encircle them about, round about their cities and the borders of their lands; yea, all around about the land; and in their weakest fortifications he did place the greater number of men; and thus he did fortify and strengthen the land which was possessed by the Nephites.

The year following Moroni caused his soldiers to dig up heaps of earth round about all the cities, throughout all the land which was possessed by the Nephites; and upon the top of these ridges of earth he caused that there should be timbers; yea, works of timbers built up to the height of a man, round about the cities. And he caused that upon these works of timbers there should be a frame of pickets built upon the timbers round about; and they were strong and high; and he caused towers to be erected that overlooked those works of pickets, and he caused places of security to be built upon those towers, that the stones and the arrows of the Lamanites could not hurt them. And they were prepared, that they could cast stones from the top thereof, according to their pleasure and their strength, and slay him who should attempt to approach near the walls of the city. Thus Moroni did prepare strongholds against the coming of their enemies, round about every city in all the land.

Again, in the same war, the Lamanite prisoners were set to work digging a ditch round about the land, or the city Bonntiful; and Moroni caused that they should build a breastwork of timbers upon the



inner bank of the ditch; and they cast up dirt out of the ditch against the breastwork of timbers; and thus they did cause the Lamanites to labor until they had encircled the city of Bountiful round about with a strong wall of timbers and earth, to an exceeding height. And this city became an exceeding strong hold ever after.

The forces of both races appear to have been composed very largely, if not entirely, of infantry. We have failed to notice any passages that give a definite assurance that either cavalry or war chariots were used in their campaigns.

Like nearly all rude or semi-civilized races, the Lamanites depended on the strength of numbers and brute force for victory in the open field. They massed their troops in solid bodies, and with wild cries rushed to the assault in the hope of bearing down all resistance by their superior numbers, as in almost every war they greatly outnumbered the Nephites. Indeed it is doubtful if even the last-named people used much scientific strategy previous to the days of Moroni; before this time it was a hand-to-hand conflict, wherein the Nephites, though fewer in numbers, had many advantages over their half-naked foes, by reason of superior weapons and defensive armor, and, above all, through the blessing and guidance of the Lord.

In the year B. C. 72 the armies of Moroni drove the Lamanites out of that portion of the east wilderness bordering on the land of Zarahemla into their own lands. The northern line or boundary of the latter ran in a strait course from the sea east to the west. The Lamanites having been driven out of those portions of the wilderness north of the dividing line,

colonies of Nephites were sent to occupy the country and build cities on their southern border, even to the Atlantic coast. To protect the new settlers, Moroni placed troops all along this line and caused them to erect fortifications for the better defense of the frontier. This fortified line ran from the west sea (the Pacific Ocean) by the head of the river Sidon (the Magdalena) eastward along the northern edge of the wilderness.

Some of the readers of the Book of Mormon have imagined this line of defense to have been one continuous rampart or wall—after the style of the great wall of China—reaching from ocean to ocean, and on this surmise have argued that the completion of such an immense work in a few years was an impossibility to a people of the limited numerical strength of the Nephites. To get over this difficulty of their own creation they have resorted to various theories with regard to its locality, inconsistent with the geographical details, on purpose to shorten its distance to what they deemed a reasonable length, possible for the Nephites to have built in a few years. The writer holds the opinion that the Book of Mormon conveys no such idea; it simply states that Moroni erected fortifications along this line; or, as he views it, Moroni took advantage of the natural features of the country, its wide rivers, far-stretching swamps and ranges of high mountains, and built fortifications at every point where the Lamanites could find ingress, such as at the fords of the rivers and the passes between the mountains. He there stationed bodies of troops sufficiently strong to hold their posts, and, if necessary, defend the surrounding country. This system of defense would be more powerful and effective than an artificial wall; high mountains and deep rivers

largely taking the place of earthworks, masonry and heavy timbers.

A number of years later (B. C. 34), the Lamanites having temporarily driven the Nephites from the southern continent, Moronihah, the son of Moroni, fortified the Isthmus of Panama from sea to sea, and in this way prevented the Lamanites from pushing yet further north. This defensive line was again fortified by Mormon (A. D. 360) in the last great series of wars between the two races.

It does not appear, so far as can be gathered from the record, that any very great improvements, either in the system of fortification, the style of defensive armor, or the manufacture of their weapons, were made by the Nephite commanders who lived after the days of Moroni.

There is another kind of defensive clothing, beside plate armor, mentioned as being worn by the ancient American warriors. It consisted of very thick clothing, possibly made of cotton or woolen cloth, thickly padded. Moroni uniformed some of his troops in this manner when he first took command of the Nephite armies (B. C. 74), and the next year the Lamanites followed his example and not only prepared themselves with shields and breastplates, but also with garments of skins; yea, very thick garments to cover their nakedness.

The various enemies that the Nephite armies had to meet, from time to time, on the field of battle—Lamanites, Amulonites, Amalekites, Zoramites, Gadianton robbers, etc.—were very differently equipped for their bloody work. Those who had dissented from the Nephites naturally held to the same tactics, used the



arms and protected their bodies with the same armor as the people to whom they had turned traitors. With the original Lamanites it was different. At first, when they came against the Nephites they were clothed with a short skin girdle about the loins, and with their heads shaven; and their skill was in the bow and the cimeter and axe. The dissenters, while armed and equipped like the Nephites, set a mark upon themselves by which they might be known and distinguished on the battle field. In doing this they unconsciously fulfilled the word of the Lord to their fathers. Thus, the followers of Amlici, the would-be king, marked themselves with red in their foreheads after the manner of the Lamanites, though they did not shave their heads as did the direct descendants of Laman (B. C. 87).

The description of the Gadianton robbers, as they appeared when prepared for war (A. C. 18), is a very terrible one: They were girded about after the manner of robbers; and they had a lamb-skin about their loins, and they were dyed in blood, and their heads were shorn, and they had head-plates upon them: and great and terrible was the appearance of the armies of Giddianhi, because of their armor, and because of their being dyed in blood.

