



Type: Magazine Article

The Art of War among the Nephites

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Source: *Juvenile Instructor*, Vol. 15, No. 7 (1 April 1880), pp. 77

Published by: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints

Abstract: Describes different aspects of warfare as found in the Book of Mormon, with emphasis on the battle techniques of Moroni. Notes that detailed accounts of warfare do not appear in the Book of Mormon until the period of the judges.

THE ART OF WAR AMONG THE NEPHITES.

BY G. R.

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 supremacy on this continent, than Nephi, to protect his people from the impending 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 amongst 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 used 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, general 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 pickets (undoubtedly quite another affair to our garden pickets) was built to arrest the flight of the stones and arrows of the attacking forces. These 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 those 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 strong holds 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 Bountiful; and he" (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." ‡

(To be Continued.)

A HINT FOR YOUNG MEN.—Not long ago a young man of this city had an opportunity to enter a business house in this State, at a large increase over his present salary, with a prospect of soon getting a place in the firm.

His recommendations were first class, and the officers of the institution were highly pleased with his appearance.

They, however, made him no proposals, nor did they state their favorable impressions. A gentleman of this city was requested to ascertain where the young man spent his evenings, and what class of young men his associates were.

It was found that he spent several nights of the week in a billiard-room on Main Street, and Sunday afternoon drove a hired span into the country with three other bloods. He is wondering why he didn't hear from the house concerning that coveted position.—*Springfield Union.*

*—Book of Mormon, new edition, pages 377-378.
 † " " " " page 383.
 ‡ " " " " page 395.