

DAVID E. SPENCER



C A P T A I N

MORONI'S

C O M M A N D

DYNAMICS OF WARFARE
IN THE BOOK OF MORMON

DAVID E. SPENCER

C A P T A I N

MORONI'S

C O M M A N D

DYNAMICS OF WARFARE
IN THE BOOK OF MORMON

CFI
An Imprint of Cedar Fort, Inc.
Springville, Utah

Contents

Acknowledgments

Introduction

Setting the Stage

Chapter 1: Captain Moroni's Genius

Chapter 2: Military Systems

Chapter 3: Patterns of Conflict

Gaining Experience

Chapter 4: Battle of Sidon River Crossing

Battles of Experience

Chapter 5: The Great War

Chapter 6: The Introduction of Strategic Thinking

Chapter 7: Battle of the City of Mulek

Chapter 8: The Cities of Cumeni and Manti

Chapter 9: Gid and Dissent in Zarahemla

Chapter 10: The Retaking of Nephihah

Final Observations

Chapter 11: Post-War

Bonus Content

About the Author



Setting the Stage

Chapter 1: Captain Moroni's Genius

Two **military campaigns** are described in greater detail than any others in the Book of Mormon, largely revolving around the man who led the Nephite armies: Captain Moroni.

It is evident that Mormon, the compiler of the text, was something of an admirer of Captain Moroni, as he offered this praise: “Yea, verily, verily I say unto you, if all men had been, and were, and ever would be, like unto Moroni, behold, the very powers of hell would have been shaken forever; yea, the devil would never have power over the hearts of the children of men” (Alma 48:17).

No other major figure in the rest of the book is granted that high of an accolade. Especially intriguing in a religious book, this could be seen as an unusual compliment for a military man, one who spent most of his adult life continuously at war. Captain Moroni made no prophecies and performed no miracles, both accomplished by a number of others throughout the work.

Despite this, it's easy enough to understand why Mormon admired Captain Moroni more than just about any other person mentioned in the work. Part of the explanation is no doubt due to who Mormon was. He had been made a military commander at the age of sixteen (Mormon 2:2), and to the time of his death he was almost constantly at war—most of the time leading his doomed people into battle. With that kind of life and background, it's understandable how the accounts of Captain Moroni were Mormon's particular favorites and a source of great inspiration and comfort to him because they showed how an individual, particularly a military officer, could remain true to and favored of God despite being thrust into the ugliness of war. It is almost certain that Mormon saw a lot of parallels between his own life and the life of Captain Moroni. Mormon's admiration extended into his personal life, as he likely named his son after his great hero. Mormon's son Moroni also became a military officer and a captain of thousands (Mormon 6:12).

As the Book of Mormon was written for the latter days (Mormon 3:17–22), Captain Moroni is an example worth emulating, especially for members who are currently serving in the military. The fundamental theme of Captain Moroni's service is that it's possible for individuals heavily involved in war to still retain their ideals and avoid descent to the depredations often associated with armed conflict.

What were Captain Moroni's attributes that made him so great? In Alma 48:11–13, Mormon gives us some clues: he was physically strong and mighty, intelligent, and a patriot in the sense that he was willing to fight and dedicate his life to the freedom and liberty of his country; however (and this is key), he did not delight in bloodshed (verse 11). He was a religious man, one who feared God and recognized His hand in all things, especially his victories. In other words, he acknowledged his total dependence on God to win. He felt so strongly about his faith that he was willing to give his life so that others might enjoy the right to worship (verses 12, 13). Finally, and above all, he was a hard worker and was constantly involved in improving the defenses of his people (verse 12). He faced problems head on wherever he found them and never held back.

What else is known about him? From the remainder of the account, we know that he was a man of action. He led many armies personally and was wounded in battle (Alma 52:35). He cared deeply for his men and was enraged when he thought they were being mistreated by the government. A typical soldier, he hated bureaucracy, especially when it affected his soldiers' lives. He had a temper and could be impulsive, often when confronted by real or perceived incompetence and wickedness that caused innocents to die or suffer in misery (Alma 59:13). He could be judgmental and critical if he thought a person deserved it, as can be seen by the letters that he wrote to Ammoron, the enemy leader, and Pahoran, Moroni's own political leader (Alma 54:5–14; 60). Modern-day officers have lost their careers for milder words directed in anger at their political leaders, particularly if they prove to be wrong. This willingness to confront what he saw as evil and incompetence indicates a far greater concern for the task at hand than his personal advancement.

In contrast to how he treated those he held in contempt, Captain Moroni displayed strong fraternal feelings for those he esteemed, being incredibly close to his comrades in arms. This showed clearly with his subordinate commanders Teancum and Lehi (Alma 53:2). In today's world, Moroni would be considered a soldier's soldier, meaning a man who leads from the front, shares the deprivations of his men, puts his mission and men above himself, and never asks his subordinates to do things he is not willing to do himself. Modern military commanders could learn a thing or two about integrity by studying him.

Captain Moroni was also a military genius, possessing a knack for developing new technology and tactics to give his forces a competitive edge on the battlefield, thus managing to stay one step ahead of his foes. And he was particularly adept at developing ingenious—not to mention innovative—application methods of time-tried principles of war. The most outstanding examples of his genius were the development of field works and body armor for his troops.

Both armor and fortifications were well known. The Nephites knew of armor from Palestine. Nephi, for example, had worn Laban's armor (1 Nephi 4:19), and cities had been surrounded by walls and protections in Lehi's day (1 Nephi 4:4), so these would most likely have been familiar to Nephite military leaders. If we assume that Central America was the Nephite's home, the terrain, resources available, and climate were quite different from Palestine. The types of body armor and fortifications employed in the Middle East were not necessarily practical, available, or efficient in the New World setting, as Spanish forces found out during their wars of conquest in the sixteenth century. Captain Moroni's genius lay not in inventing fortifications and armor, but rather in developing armor and fortifications that were cheap, practical, and could be used efficiently in his environment. In other words, they were effective and could be mass produced, where previously their production of such things may have been a slow and costly process.

Armor

Breastplates and other armor were a part of battle from the times of Nephi. However, prior to Moroni's time, they did not seem to be used generally and didn't figure prominently in any of the previous war accounts. Perhaps this was because at that time in the Nephite civilization, each individual was responsible for equipping himself for war. Metal armor was probably incredibly expensive, slow to make, cumbersome, and unsuited to the tropical climate, thus making it impractical for use in battle except for in special circumstances. From various accounts in the text, it can be said a large professional army was not maintained. Only a small cadre of professional officers and fighting men remained permanently on duty. This professional force was designed to be the first line of defense and form the backbone of a rapidly mobilized citizen's army in the event of major war.

Armies were mobilized when circumstances required. When wars broke out, preparations were frantically made, primarily by producing weapons and distributing them to citizen soldiers or militias (Mosiah 9:15–16; Alma 2:12–13). Because of this type of organization, time was precious, perhaps too short to produce much armor. This indicates that the use of armor prior to Captain Moroni's time was probably rare and only worn by leaders, professional officers, and wealthy men.[1]

Captain Moroni made an important innovation when he insisted that his entire army wear armor. The accounts say this wasn't necessarily metal armor, but consisted of thick clothing reinforced by rigid plates at critical junctions. The text talks of breastplates, arm-shields, and head shields (Alma 43:18). If Central America is indeed the land of the Book of Mormon, the thick clothing was likely similar to that worn by Aztec and Mayan warriors. This armor consisted of a quilted cotton waistcoat that the Spaniards reported was much cooler and more comfortable than their own metal breastplates were and that it resisted the penetration of arrows and stones nearly as well.[2]



Statue of a Mayan soldier. He's armed with a two-edged sword and dressed just in a skirt. His protection consists of an elaborate feathered helmet and a small shield. The necklace may have provided some small protection for the upper chest. (The Guatemalan Military Museum, November 2006.)



Recreation of a northern Peruvian Moche warrior from the Book of Mormon time period. Armed with a copper club, he is only protected by a small round shield. (Callao Army Museum, July 2007.)



Recreation of a warrior from Colombia's pre-conquest period. Scantily clothed, his armor is largely symbolic, consisting of a thin gold breastplate and arm, leg, and headbands. (Colombian Military Museum, February 2008.)

The plates of Captain Moroni's armor may have not been made of metal either, a fact consistent with archeological findings in the Americas, which indicates the use of metal was rare. Scarcity would prevent its general issue to thousands of troops. Moroni's uniform gave added protection, but the armor was by no means invulnerable against the weapons of the day. Armor is not generally designed to stop everything thrown at it; instead, it seeks to balance protection and offensive maneuverability, so Moroni's armor made penetration wounds and death more difficult, sacrificing absolute protection for economy and weight. Accounts indicate that if hit hard enough, the head plates could be split in two and the breastplates pierced (Alma 43:44). Metal can be pierced, but it isn't usually broken in two by a blow unless it's made of low-quality material. The previously cited verse makes specific reference to the head

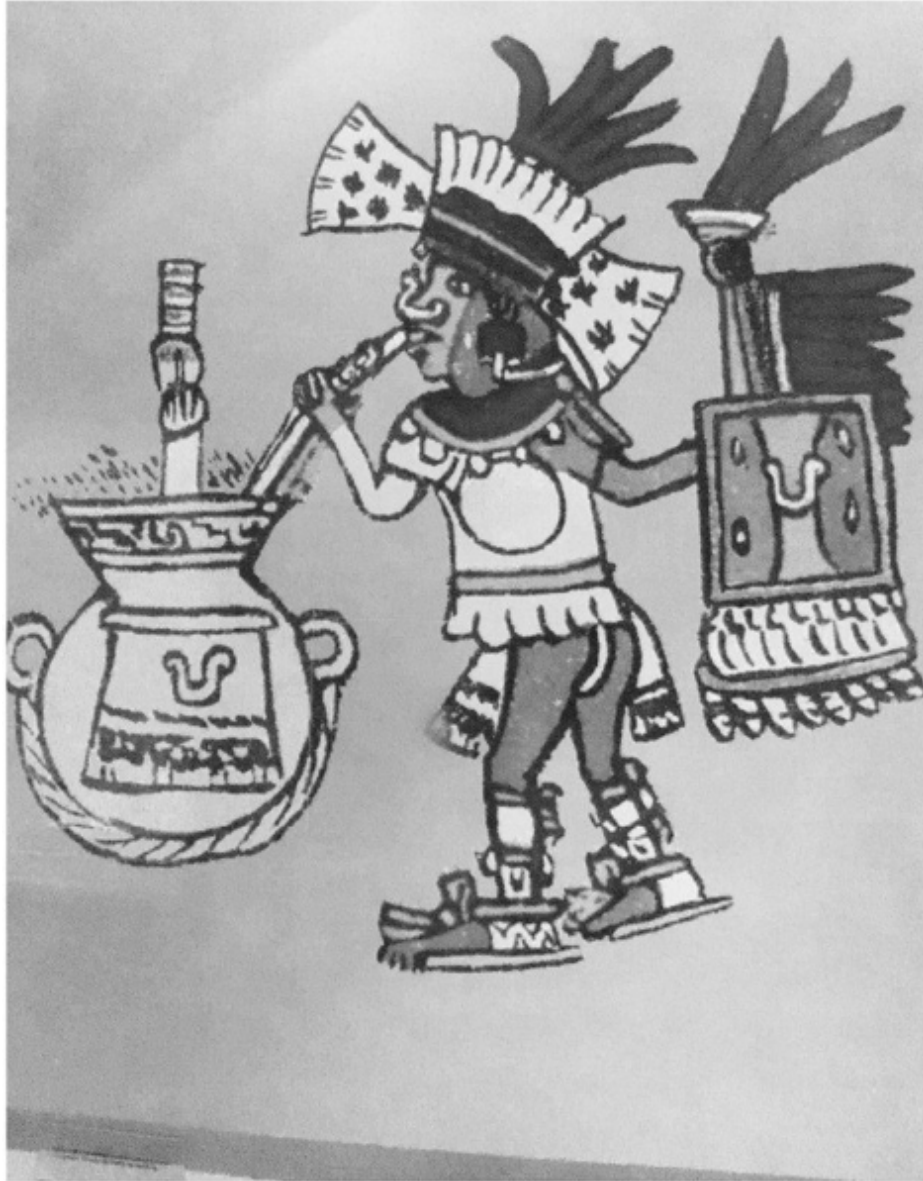
plates, suggesting that they may have been made of something like wood—a material that, if hit hard enough, will break in two. The breastplates and arm plates may have been made of a single layer or multiple layers of rawhide, which could be pierced but not split in two. Rawhide, wood, and ceramics tend to be lighter than metal and are also cheaper to produce. The use of rawhide and wood for armor is consistent with the effort to keep the armor light and cheap to effectively deal with the problems of tropical weather and production costs.



Aztec shield displayed at the Chapultepec Castle museum.



Aztec armor of leather sewn onto quilted cotton at the Chapultepec Castle museum.



This photo shows a Mayan warrior drinking *chicha* before going into battle. His outfit is similar to those described in the Book of Mormon, with a helmet covering the head and ears, a quilted waistcoat, a thick collar covering neck and shoulders with a round chest plate to protect the heart and lungs, and a shield. Note also his banner identifying him as an individual and for which side he fights. (Museo Antropologico de El Salvador.)

Part of the body that was conspicuously unprotected by Moroni's armor was the legs. During the famous battle for the city of Noah, only fifty Nephites were wounded. All of the wounds were to the legs and, according to the account, "many were severe" (Alma 49:24). This same verse implies that the reason they suffered wounds on the legs was they

were not covered and protected in the same way that their heads, chests, and arms were. This was probably done in the interest of keeping the armor light and minimizing loss of mobility.

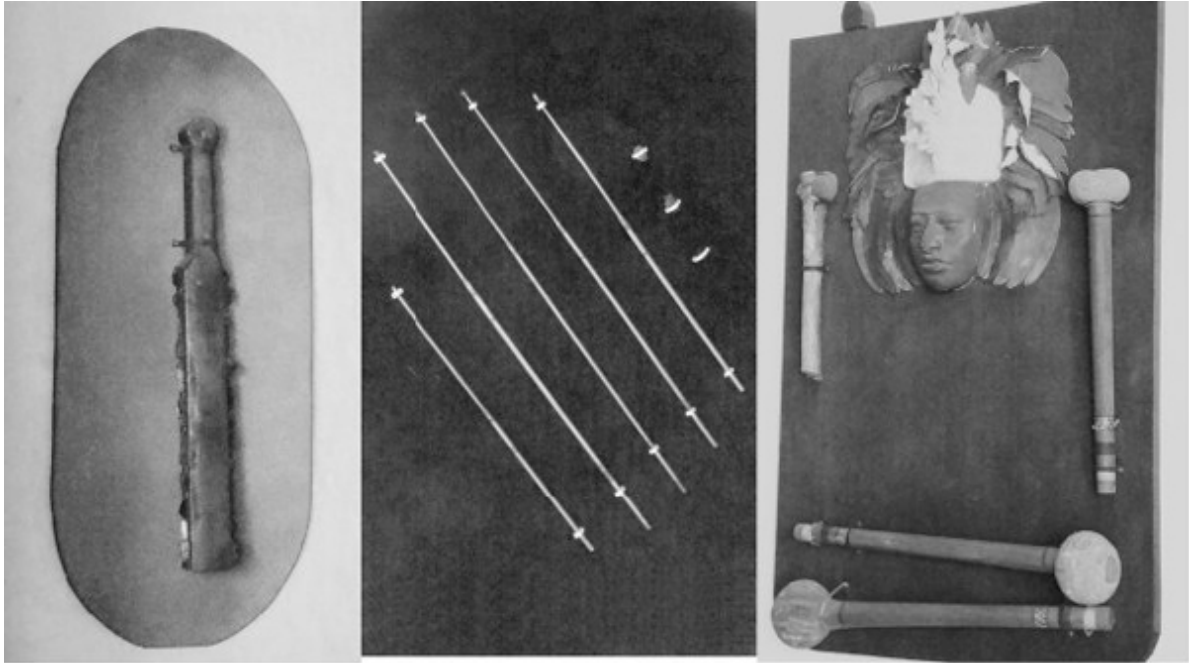
The notion that Captain Moroni's design consisted of large metal protective plates covering the whole body is not consistent with the accounts. This type of suit would be nigh impossible to wear by even the strongest men for any length of time in a tropical environment. For that matter, heavy metal plate armor would be impractical just about anywhere in the Americas, particularly in the tropical lands of Central America or the mountainous terrain of the Andes, which are considered by many to be likely candidates for Book of Mormon lands. Marching up and down hills or mountains with heavy armor would push a man to exhaustion before he ever entered the battlefield.

Consistent with the archeological evidence, beasts of burden are never mentioned. This means that men had to carry everything on their backs, or they had servants who served as porters. So Moroni's armies were made up entirely of infantry men who had to march and countermarch long distances over rough terrain. Even in the flatter lands and temperate climates of Europe, infantry soldiers couldn't wear metal armor for long periods of time. Armor and heavy weapons were generally carried in baggage trains and donned only shortly before battle. Armies that, for a variety of circumstances, were forced to wear armor during the march invariably arrived to the battlefield exhausted and were consequently of little military value unless first given a rest. Not only is heavy metal armor for infantry expensive and impractical, but when soldiers are left to their own devices, they'll often discard whatever they think is useless encumbrance. Experience has repeatedly demonstrated that soldiers will only keep equipment they feel is indispensable to their immediate survival.

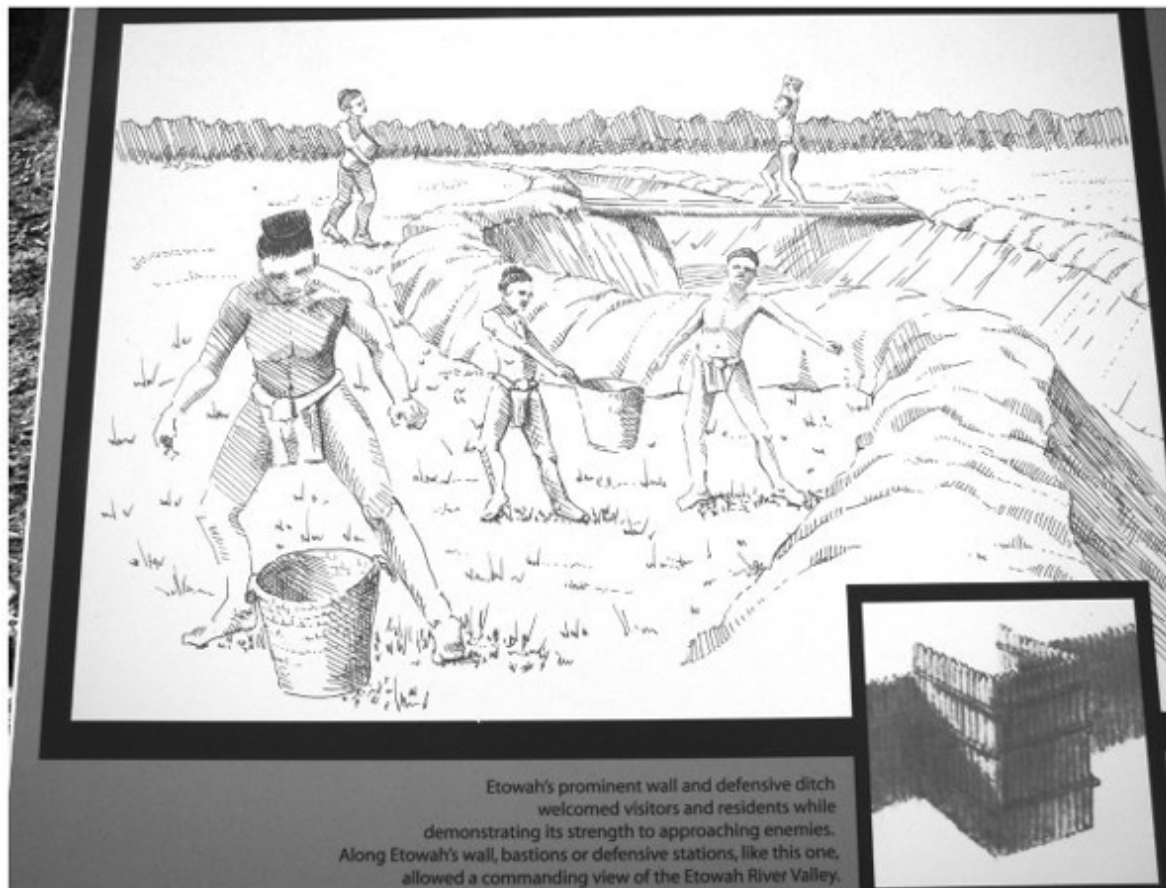


Aztec bronze and copper axe heads at the Chapultepec Castle museum.

Captain Moroni's innovative armor was not only worn by the Nephites throughout the war, but subsequently the Lamanites adopted it as well. Enemies adopting equipment developed by their rivals is a good indication of usefulness. Moroni's genius is clear in the armor he developed—practical, cheap, and light enough for general issue to his fighting force. If geographical calculations are correct, his armor is probably the direct ancestor of Aztec and Mayan armor encountered by the Spaniards in the sixteenth century, showing historically the enduring practicality of Captain Moroni's developments.



(Left to right) A Mayan sword, *atlatl* darts, and Mayan warrior weapons and feathered helmet used during the conquest period in Guatemala, consisting of stone-headed maces and an axe. (Municipal Museum of Antigua, August 2009.)



Photograph of a sign at the Etowah Indian Mounds in Georgia that depicts the theoretical construction of the defensive ditch at Etowah. (Etowah Indian Mounds Historic Site, Cartersville, Georgia, December 2007.)

Ingenious Fortifications

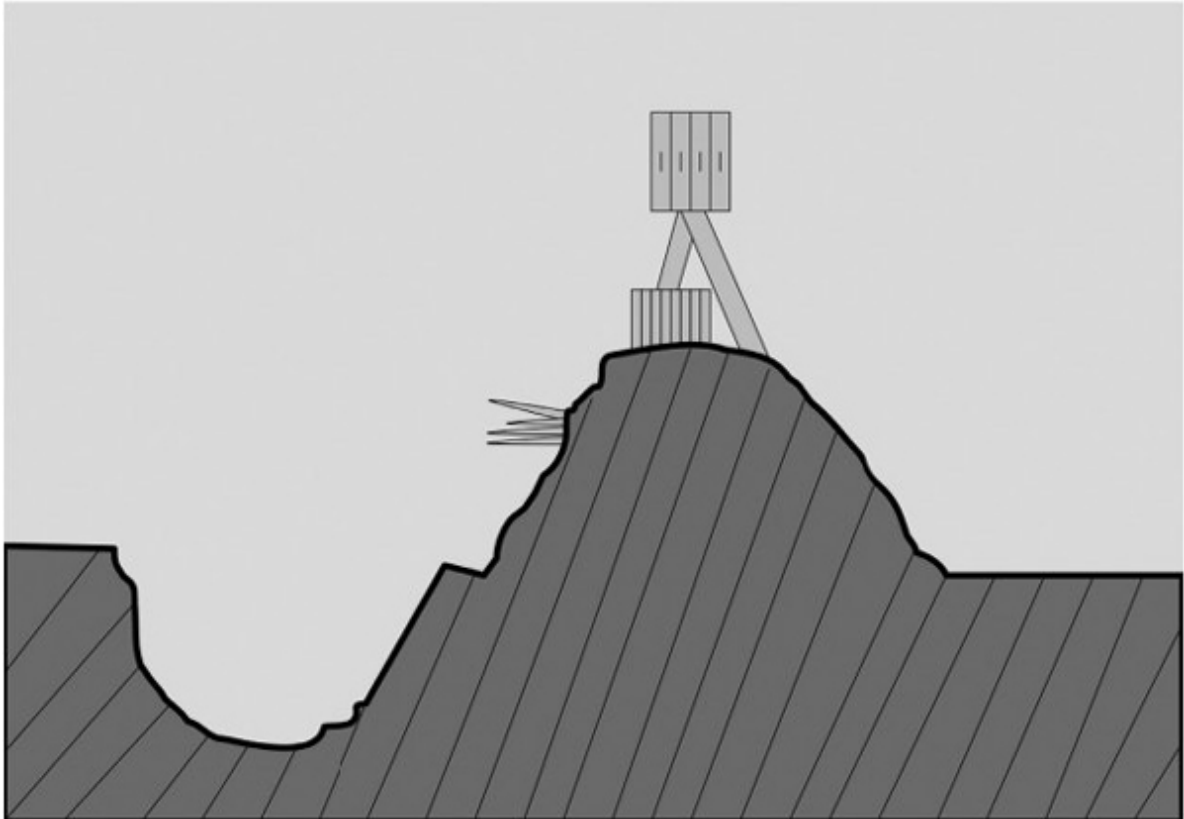
Captain Moroni's second major innovation was the development of ingenious fortifications, described in detail in Alma 50. Moroni had his men dig deep ditches around each city, piling up the dirt on the closest side in a continuous mound (Alma 49:2, 4, 18; 50:1). On the crest, he ordered a chest-high wall of wood built, presumably with logs (Alma 50:2). In front of this wall were what he called "pickets," which were probably sharpened and angled stakes stuck in the ground facing outward, designed to prevent the enemies from getting close enough to assault the wall (Alma 50:3). At strategic intervals, frame towers were erected and topped off with a protected turret that was perhaps covered in rawhide, wood, or some other arrow-resistant material. From there,

archers and men with slings were stationed (Alma 50:4). These men were positioned high enough to completely overlook all the approaches to the ditch. Besides dominating the ditch with missile fire, the men in these towers would also serve as sentries who would warn the garrison where exactly the enemies were approaching to make their assault.



The fortified bastion at Yorktown, Virginia, July 2008. The log spikes on the walls of the bastion are likely similar to the “pickets” of Captain Moroni’s fortifications. This shouldn’t pose a dilemma for the modern believer since principles of fortification are fairly constant across cultures and history.

A common problem for most defenders of fortified positions is the inability to distribute their garrison to adequately defend all sectors of the fortifications. As a consequence, they have to take calculated risks and distribute their forces where they think the attack is most likely to happen while leaving other sectors either weakly garrisoned or even abandoned. The towers would’ve contributed to the defending commander’s decision-making process by helping the commander see the enemies approaching and anticipate where their likely avenues of attack were. With that knowledge, he could quickly distribute his forces to reinforce threatened sectors before attackers could properly make their assault.



The above drawing by the author shows a profile view of Captain Moroni's innovative fortification. This included an outer ditch and mound surrounding the city with pickets embedded into the mound. At the crest of the mound, a high wall would be built with strategically placed frame towers overlooking the approaches to the ditch.

The only opening into the city was through a main entrance. The vulnerability of this gap was minimized by stationing the strongest and most heavily armored men to repel attackers (Alma 49:4, 18, 20). Moreover, the men in this narrow passage were probably supported by the stones and arrows shot by the men posted in the towers. While the accounts don't specifically say so, the ditch around the city was likely extended to the entrance as well, and there was probably some sort of bridge that could be placed or withdrawn as needed. Any attacker would first have to cross the ditch under the Nephite stones and arrows from the towers. After crossing the ditch, an attack would have to move through a narrow channel dominated by the towers and men posted behind the walls that was designed to limit the number of attackers that could

advance abreast. This would create a shooting gallery within which there was little cover or escape.

Should attackers reach the entrance, they would then have to deal with the strong, heavily armored men. As long as the flanking defensive positions remained intact, only a few enemies at a time would've been able to reach the position of these strong men unscathed; most would not arrive, and those that did would be wounded and exhausted—easy prey for the defenders. The narrowness of the entrance also meant that the defenders could rapidly and easily rotate or reinforce their men at this entrance position while the attackers could do neither. In this way, Moroni employed the tried-and-true tactical principle that obstacles and fortifications are not always effectively employed when set up as absolute barriers. Their most effective use is dependent on designing them in such a way as to channel the enemy forces into terrain where the defenders' weapons can be brought to bear for maximum effect. In other words, a fort that channels attackers into the prepared kill zones. Captain Moroni designed all of the Nephite fortifications specifically for this purpose.



A view showing one of the two narrow entrances at Etowah. An example of a fortification designed to channel enemy forces into terrain where weapons can be used to their maximum effect. The entrance is at an angle, which makes it impossible for attackers to fire directly into the village. Also, it is dominated at the end by a bastion tower and flanked by palisade walls from which an attacker would've had to run through a gauntlet of projectile fire before even reaching the entrance. (Etowah Indian Mounds Historic Site, December 2007.)

The Lamanites under Amalickiah were rather astonished when they first encountered these fortifications, believing that they had leveled the playing field by adopting Captain Moroni's style of armor for all of their armies. They had assumed that by armoring up, they could use their numerical advantage to overwhelm the Nephites (Alma 49:6). However, Moroni did not underestimate his enemy (Alma 49:15). He understood how armies adapt and knew that his forces' armor would no longer be sufficient to give them the upper hand after Amalickiah and his men became familiar with his equipment. By developing field fortifications,

Moroni stayed one step ahead of the Lamanites and again ingeniously compensated for the numerical disadvantage the Nephites faced. He ordered fortifications and walls to be thrown up around every Nephite city.

The Book of Mormon mentions city walls in earlier chapters. Most likely these walls were made of stone, requiring years of skilled labor to construct. Moroni's innovative fortifications showed his genius in using mounds of dirt topped with timber walls. These fortifications could be built quickly with unskilled labor. His adversary, Amalickiah, was a Nephite defector—as were most of his military leaders—but he was unacquainted with these fortifications, which indicates they had not been in place when Amalickiah and his men had gone over to the Lamanites. When Amalickiah came back with a large invading army a year or so later, all of the major cities had been fortified—a remarkable feat that wouldn't have been possible with stone walls.

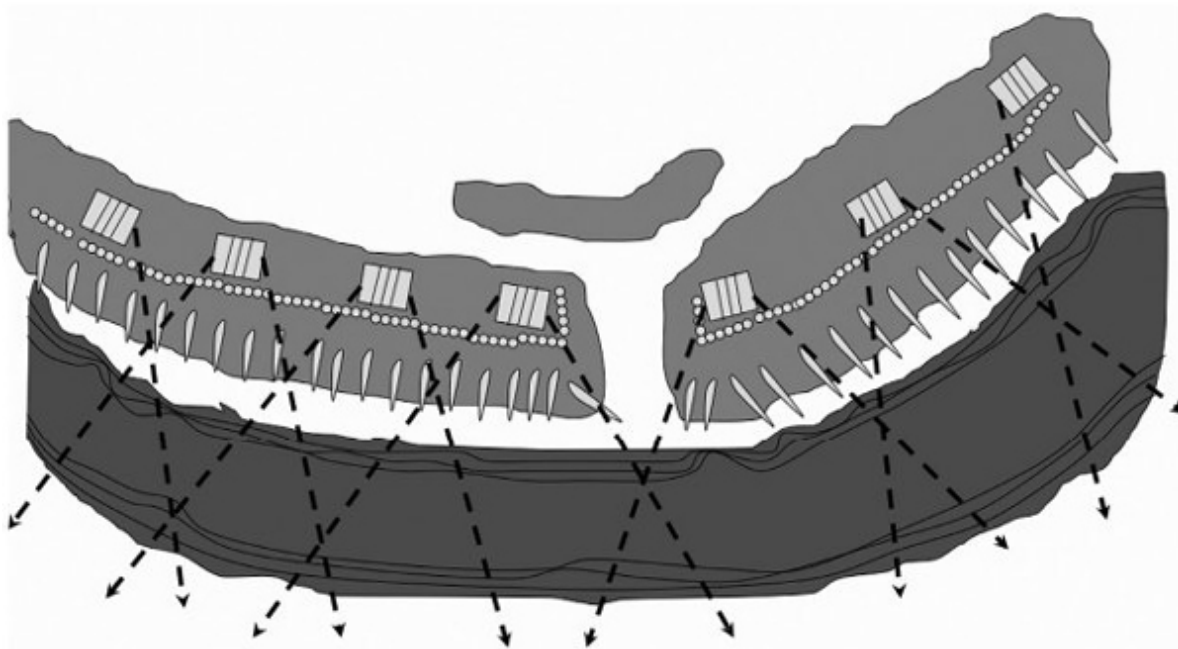
The constant introduction of new tactical innovations and their adoption by both sides demonstrates the presence of an important dynamic of war: the process of escalation. The presence of this dynamic throughout the text supports the idea that the military accounts are authentic. It would've been difficult for Joseph Smith or any of his contemporaries, who had little military knowledge, to understand this and include it so consistently in the accounts of Book of Mormon warfare. Escalation of war is one of those subtle complexities found in the text that constantly argues against Joseph Smith's authorship.



A view showing one of the two narrow entrances at Etowah. The entrance is at an angle, making it impossible for attackers to fire directly into the village. Also, it is dominated at the end by a bastion tower and flanked by palisade walls from which attackers would have to run a gauntlet of projectile fire before reaching the inside of the fort, where they could easily be blocked by a group of select warriors. (Etowah Indian Mounds Historic Site.)



Aerial view of a narrow pass with a bridge that could be withdrawn if needed. (Etowah Indian Mounds Historic Site, December 2007.)



Above drawing by the author showing an aerial view of the towers all placed strategically to allow the city defenders to cover every approach to the ditch.



Model of the Etowah village fortification, which is remarkably similar to the system described in the Book of Mormon. In this case, an outer ring of nut tree orchards prevents flaming arrows from being shot in. A flooded man-made ditch meets with the Ohio River. The inner bank is topped with a twelve-foot palisade that's reinforced with square bastion towers at roughly eighty-foot intervals from which stones and arrows can be hurled at enemies. Etowah flourished from AD 1000–1550 and was part of the Mississippian culture. While Indian mounds were well known in Joseph Smith's time, knowledge of their culture and fortification systems were not. (Etowah Indian Mounds Historic Site, December 2007.)



An outer-earthen berm protecting the northwest side of the ruins of Iximche, Guatemala. Iximche is protected on its other sides by steep ravines. It was built in AD 1470 and was the capital of the Kaqchikel Mayans until the Spanish forced them to abandon it in 1526. (Iximche National Park, Guatemala, August 2009.)



The outer slope of the berm and what appears to be the remains of a ditch at Iximche.
(Iximche National Park, Guatemala, August 2009.)



The remains of a defensive ditch at Ocmulgee, Georgia, another Mississippian fortified village in central Georgia. This one flourished from AD 900–1150. Trenches have been found to the north, northeast, south, and southeast of the site. (Ocmulgee National Monument, December 2007.)



The remains of the defensive ditch at Etowah. (Etowah Indian Mounds Historic Site, December 2007.)

You've Just Finished your Free Sample

Enjoyed the preview?

Buy: <http://www.ebooks2go.com>