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A Rigorous Test: Military History

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A Rigorous Test: Military History

History with Tears

Readers of the Book of Mormon often express disgust or at least weariness and impatience at having to wade through 170 pages of wars and alarms in a religious book. This writer must confess to having suffered from the same prejudice. After surviving three years of military intelligence at every level from company to army group, with frequent visits to the Supreme Headquarters of the Allied European Forces (SHAEF) on the one hand and a muddy foxhole on the other, and after reading and writing thousands of reports on enemy dispositions and tactics from company sector to army front, I have always been inclined to rush through the military parts of the Book of Mormon as painful reminders of an unpleasant past. In twenty years of writing about the Book of Mormon we have studiously ignored the war stories. But that is where we were wrong.

The whole point of Alma's (or rather Mormon's) studies in "the work of death" as he calls it, is that they are supposed to be revolting—they are meant to be painful. It is Mormon and Moroni, the tragic survivors of a nation destroyed in a senseless war, who are editing this book, and they put into it whatever they think might be useful as a warning to us. It is not their purpose to tell an entertaining or reassuring tale. War is anything but glamorous in the Book of Mormon; the campaigns and battles are described not as a writer of fiction would depict ancient warfare with all its excitement and color; all that a romantically inclined

young American of the 1820s would imagine as the gaudy trappings of heroic derring-do is conspicuously missing. It is real war that we see here, a tedious, sordid, plodding, joyless routine of see-saw successes and losses—brutally expensive, destructive, exhausting, and boring, with constant marches and countermarches that end sometimes in fiasco and sometimes in intensely unpleasant engagements. The author writes as one would write—as only one *could* write—who had gone through a long war as a front-line observer with his eyes wide open. Everything is strictly authentic, with the proper emphasis in the proper place. Strategy and tactics are treated with the knowledge of an expert: logistics and supply; armaments and fortifications; recruiting and training; problems of morale and support from the home front; military intelligence from cloak and dagger to scouting and patrolling; interrogation, guarding, feeding, and exchange of war prisoners; propaganda and psychological warfare; rehabilitation and resettlement; feelers for peace and negotiations at various levels; treason; profiteering; and the exploitation of the war economy by individuals and groups—it is all there.

Mormon and his son are summing up the situation after spending most of their lives in the field—and they hate it. For them war is nasty, brutalizing, wasteful, dirty, degrading, fatiguing, foolish, immoral, and above all unnecessary. It is also inevitable, as long as men are running things. But before we hear their conclusions, let us hear their story. For in their long and involved surveys of the wars, they have supplied us with irrefutable credentials to the authenticity of the record. Let the reader judge whether anyone writing in the peaceful world of the 1820s could have faked this complicated and swiftly moving history of the distinguished military career of Captain Moroni.

Prologue: The Cold War

The best survey of Nephite military history is supplied by the career of the great Moroni, recorded with enthusiasm

and admiration almost 500 years after by the only other Nephite general who would ever compare with him, the noble Mormon, who named his son and heir after his hero. To Mormon, Moroni was "a man of a perfect understanding. . . . Yea, . . . if all men had been . . . like unto Moroni, behold, the very powers of hell would have been shaken forever" (Alma 48:11, 17). Like most great military leaders, Moroni puts in his appearance only when he is needed in a moment of great national crisis, and gracefully retires from the scene as soon as the country is safe. The story begins with a brief introductory chapter (Alma 31–35) on cold war ("And thus commenced a war betwixt the Lamanites and the Nephites" [Alma 35:13]) which deserves the most careful study.

Observing that "the preaching of the word . . . had had more powerful effect upon the minds of the people than the sword, or anything else" (Alma 31:5), Alma had led a very powerful missionary team (Alma 31:6–7) among the Zoramites. The Zoramites were "dissenters from the Nephites" who would not "observe the performances of the church" (Alma 31:8–10), but had gone off by themselves and, in the best Nephite tradition, founded their own community between the Nephite buffer-state of Jershon and the Lamanite-controlled wilderness (Alma 31:3). It was felt that the hostility of the Zoramites and their proximity to the Lamanites posed a definite threat to Nephite security, and that was why Alma, "exceedingly sorrowful because of the separation of the Zoramites" (Alma 31:2), and sharing the concern of his fellow Nephites, who "greatly feared that the Zoramites would enter into a correspondence with the Lamanites" (Alma 31:4), gave top priority to the Zoramite mission.

The preaching of the brethren proved highly successful among one segment of the Zoramite population and thereby greatly alarmed the rest, for there was great social unrest among the Zoramites at that time. Alma and Amulek had

preached to throngs of poor people sitting on the ground (Alma 34:1), whose leaders complained that they were “despised” and “cast . . . out of our synagogues which we have labored abundantly to build with our own hands” (Alma 32:5). It was among this oppressed minority that the missionaries had their success (Alma 32:2), causing “the more popular part of the Zoramites” to take counteraction, holding angry meetings to discuss the alien teaching that “did destroy their craft” (Alma 35:3). The authorities, “their rulers and their priests and their teachers,” without letting the public know what they were doing, secretly started checking up on everybody, “therefore they found out privily the minds of all the people” (Alma 35:5). Anyone known to have been sympathetic to the teachings of the missionaries, “those who were in favor of the words . . . spoken by Alma and his brethren were cast out of the land; and they were many” (Alma 35:6). It will be recalled that the Nephites considered it “strictly contrary to the commands of God” that there should be any “law against a man’s belief” (Alma 30:7-11). But these people had dissented away from the Nephites in preference for a way of life that combined a great display of religious piety with an even more impressive display of clothes and jewelry, “their costly apparel, and their ringlets, and their bracelets, and their ornaments of gold, and all their precious things, . . . and behold, their hearts are set upon them, and yet they cry unto thee and say—We thank thee, O God, for we are a chosen people unto thee, while others shall perish” (Alma 31:28). Such people were in no mood to listen to “the word, for it did destroy their craft; therefore they would not hearken unto the words” (Alma 35:3). All this is relevant to show that behind the great war that follows there is an “ideological” conflict.

It was natural that the followers of Nephite missionaries, being expelled from their own land, should follow their new spiritual leaders “also into the land of Jershon,”

that being the nearest territory under Nephite influence (Alma 35:6). And it was also natural that the inhabitants of Jershon, the pacifist Ammonites who were themselves refugees from the Lamanites, should give them asylum; “and they did nourish them, and did clothe them, and did give unto them lands for their inheritance” (Alma 35:9). The Zoramites promptly lodged an official protest with the Ammonites, requesting them to deport their Zoramite refugees (Alma 35:8), just as the Nazis protested the asylum given to their outcast citizens by neighboring and other nations. And just as the Nazis issued grim warnings to those who did not heed such requests and used the situation to stir up crises and issue ultimatums, so the Zoramites when the people of Ammon refused to comply “breathed out many threatenings against them” through their “chief ruler, . . . a very wicked man” (Alma 35:8-9), and used the occasion to bring on a crisis between the Nephites and the Lamanites. For they did just what the Nephites had feared and “began to mix with the Lamanites and to stir them up also to anger against them” (Alma 35:10), no doubt pointing out to them that the people of Ammon, lately dissented from the Lamanites, were now building up strength by receiving more dissenters into their midst, and this with the obvious approval and assistance of the Nephites. Thus two small states, set against each other, by each appealing to a great power set two great powers against each other: “And thus the Zoramites and the Lamanites began to make preparations for war against the people of Ammon, and also against the Nephites” (Alma 35:11). It is a story that has become painfully familiar in our own day.

So far there had been no military action – this is strictly “cold war.” The next step was for the Nephites to evacuate the Ammonites from Jershon, moving them to Melek; Jershon thus returned to its old status as a defense zone, now offering the Nephites a clear field of fire as the operation “gave place in the land of Jershon for the armies of the

Nephites, that they might contend with the armies of the Lamanites" (Alma 35:13). And so with mounting tensions and threats, with each side feeling itself increasingly endangered by the other, the cold war moved into a hot war. The Ammonites, being pacifists, moved out of the war-zone, but the recent Zoramite refugees stayed on there and armed themselves for the event (Alma 35:14). The Nephites felt as insecure as the Lamanites, and with good reason: this is not going to be a war of "the good guys against the bad guys." What was worrying Alma was the decline of Nephite morality; when Nephites and Lamanites lock horns there is little to choose between them in the matter of good and bad. What grieved Alma at this time was "the wars, and the bloodsheds, and the contentions which were among them" – the Nephites themselves (Alma 35:15). He had visited every city in the land and found the country in a deplorable state as "the hearts of the people began to wax hard" (Alma 35:15) and they refused to listen to his preaching. So he sent his sons forth on special missions to the people, and he "also, himself, could not rest, and he also went forth" (Alma 42:1).

The Trouble with Zerahemnah

The Zoramites now severed all connection with the Nephites and considered themselves as being officially Lamanite (Alma 43:4). They invited the Lamanite hordes to move in and occupy their country as the first major move against the Nephites (Alma 43:5). At their head came the Lamanite commander-in-chief, the Amalekite Zerahemnah. The Amalekites were Nephite dissenters of an earlier day, and like most dissenters were more bitter against the Nephites and "of a more wicked and murderous disposition than the Lamanites were" (Alma 43:6). Zerahemnah had seen to it that all the key commands in the army had gone to Amalekites like himself or to equally ferocious Zoramites (Alma 43:6). So we see the Nephites being punished for

their own wickedness in more ways than one; in fact the Lamanites appear at times as no more than the simple-minded tools of Nephite or ex-Nephite wickedness. Certainly Zerahemnah was using them as his cat's paw, "for behold, his designs were to stir up the Lamanites to anger against the Nephites; this he did that he might usurp great power" (Alma 43:8). Another familiar story – the hate campaign as a means to personal power. Zerahemnah worked on the Lamanite resentment of the people of Ammon, whom they regarded as traitors (Alma 43:11) – conveniently overlooking the fact that his own people were dissenters from the Nephites – and in time found himself in command of a huge coalition army against the Nephites, who understandably felt themselves desperately threatened (Alma 43:13).

At this moment the twenty-five-year-old Moroni appears on the scene, a military genius if there ever was one. He introduced improvements in armor to make his people far more than a match, man for man, for the enemy (Alma 43:19-21); he arranged the Jershon defense zone (Alma 43:22), and being on the defensive and greatly outnumbered, was particularly diligent in keeping a sharp lookout on all enemy movements, at the same time inquiring of the holy prophet Alma (after what is now known to have been an ancient custom in Israel) regarding the enemy's plan of battle, "whither the armies of the Nephites should go to defend themselves against the Lamanites" (Alma 43:23). On the other hand, the Lamanite campaign was directed by Amalekite and Zoramite officers, whose knowledge of Nephite military secrets and methods would have given them an enormous advantage over any commander but Moroni. Right at the outset his foresight had robbed them of their first and logical objective – the buffer land of Jershon (Alma 43:22). He had taken up his main defensive position there, but when the messengers returned from consulting the prophet he learned that the Lamanites were planning

a surprise by directing their push against the more inaccessible but weaker land of Manti, where they would not be expected (Alma 43:24). Immediately Moroni moved his main army into Manti and put the people there in a state of preparedness (Alma 43:25-26).

Informed of every Lamanite move by his spies and scouts, Moroni was able to lay a trap for the enemy, catching them off-guard as they were fording the river Sidon (Alma 43:28-35). Here the younger Moroni inserts an apology for the use of espionage, which he realizes is not playing fair, but since "it was the only desire of the Nephites to preserve their lands, and their liberty, . . . therefore he thought it no sin that he should defend them by stratagem" (Alma 43:30). The ensuing episode shows what a stickler Moroni was for fair play.

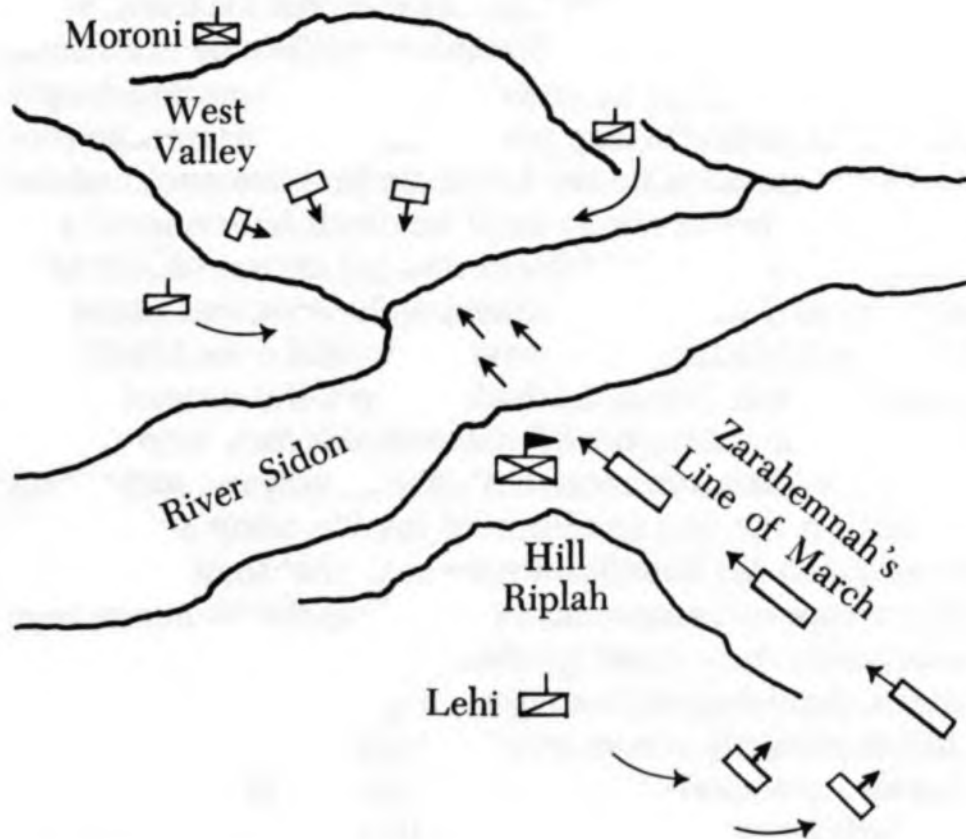
The battle at the ford was "the work of death" – no glamor and no glory; after they had crossed the river and collided with Moroni's reserves in the "west valley" the Lamanites were at bay, but this was only their first setback, and "they did fight like dragons" (Alma 43:44). But the Nephites had the better cause, as Mormon explains, since they were fighting strictly on the defensive. This was no pious cant, for the Nephites in this case were really not the aggressors; they had observed the rule that God had given them, that "inasmuch as ye are not guilty of the first offense, neither the second, ye shall not suffer yourselves to be slain" (Alma 43:46). The Lamanites, on the other hand, were fighting for monarchy and power, and made no secret of their intention of subduing and ruling (Alma 43:45). Even so, the ancient rule of the third offense (observed alike by the ancient Jews and Romans) rendered "preventive warfare" out of the question.

The sorely pressed Lamanites, by flocking together for protection, as beaten armies usually do, made it all the easier for Moroni with his carefully hoarded reserves to surround them. Then he immediately called a halt to the

fighting: "Now Moroni, when he saw their terror, commanded his men that they should stop shedding their blood" (Alma 43:54). He had his men fall back and went out to meet Zerahemnah, telling him, "We do not desire to be men of blood. Ye know that ye are in our hands, yet we do not desire to slay you" (Alma 44:1). Here was Moroni's chance to settle the Lamanite problem once and for all on the spot; a vastly superior force had entered and ravaged a large part of his country, bent on subduing it entirely, and now he had them, as he says, completely in his power. Well might he have said, "Kill or be killed. It is either you or us!" and finished them off. But instead of that type of total victory he did not even ask for unconditional surrender—an oxymoron, that, since everyone surrenders at least on the one condition of his life being spared. All he asked of his bloodthirsty foe was that they deliver up their weapons and promise not to fight the Nephites anymore; then they could go their way in peace without reprisals, punishment, hostages, or guarantees (Alma 44:6). He felt perfectly secure in taking such a step, because he was aware of God's guarantees of security to the Nephites, of which he reminded Zerahemnah: "Ye see that God will support, and keep, and preserve us, so long as we are faithful unto him" (Alma 44:4).

Zerahemnah handed over his sword to Moroni, but his hatred of Nephites was only heightened by his humiliating defeat, and he cynically and realistically observed in so doing that there was no point in taking an oath "which we know that we shall break" (Alma 44:8). He reciprocated Moroni's gallantry and humanity by accusing him of not playing fair (Alma 44:9), and flatly refused the original terms (Alma 44:8). Instead of ordering his insulting and threatening adversary cut down on the spot, Moroni handed him back his sword, with an invitation to "end the conflict" (Alma 44:10), but at the same time indicating his reluctance to do so: he is forced into this position, he says—"I cannot

The Battle of Riplah (Alma 43:31-54)



Phases:

- a. Zarahemnah, heading for Manti, which he thinks undefended, passes the hill Riplah on the north and begins to ford the Sidon.
- b. Lehi, concealed "on the south of the hill Riplah" attacks Zarahemnah's rear.
- c. The main Lamanite force turns and engages Lehi.
- d. Thwarted by the superior armor of the Nephites, the Lamanites with heavy losses, seek security on the other side of the river Sidon.
- e. Lehi accelerates their withdrawal by pressing them hotly in the rear, but forbids any of his force to pursue them into or beyond the river.
- f. On the other side of the river Moroni and his army have been awaiting the Lamanites in the west Valley.
- g. The Lamanites try to break through to Manti but are met by Moroni's reserves.
- h. Lamanite numbers begin to prevail until Moroni rallies his forces, and the Lamanites fall back on the Sidon again.
- i. The entire Lamanite force is concentrated on the west bank of the Sidon, where Moroni is able to encircle them.
- j. Moroni, perceiving the Lamanite perplexity, immediately stops the battle and approaches Zarahemnah for a conference.

recall the words which I have spoken," but he again points out to the Lamanites their hopeless position and again invites them to accept his easy conditions (Alma 44:11). He was willing to discuss things to the end, but Zerahemnah put an end to the conference which was so much to his advantage by madly rushing Moroni with the sword he had given him; he was intercepted but went down fighting with the top of his scalp missing (Alma 44:12). The guard who had cut it off put it on the end of his sword and held it up for Zerahemnah's men to see, at the same time repeating once again Moroni's offer of an easy peace (Alma 44:13-14). By this time the Lamanites were impressed, and many accepted the offer, being forthwith "suffered to depart into the wilderness" without prejudice or penalty (Alma 44:15).

The oath was indeed binding with these people, yet Zerahemnah had served notice that though they might take an oath they would not keep it. Whilst the prisoners were being released, Zerahemnah stirred up some of his die-hard supporters and turned savagely on the Nephites in a wild melee (Alma 44:16). This time Moroni had had enough of the obnoxious Zoramites and gave the order to let them have it. But very quickly Zerahemnah and his crew knew they were beaten, and again Moroni instantly stopped the fighting; he "caused that the work of death should cease again, . . . and after they [including Zerahemnah himself] had entered into a covenant with him of peace they were suffered to depart into the wilderness" (Alma 44:20). So they lived to fight another day (though Zerahemnah, lacking a scalp, is never heard of again), as Moroni knew they would. He would have been justified in view of Zerahemnah's threats in finishing them off as a preventive measure, by modern standards; but he would not condemn them for a crime they had not yet committed, and in offering them a chance to sin again was also offering them a chance to repent and become his friends, which, as we shall see, many of them later did. The Nephites fittingly celebrated their

victory, not with getting drunk, but with fasting and prayer (Alma 45:1). And yet it was at this happy time of deliverance that Alma warned the people, to whom he had been zealously preaching all this time, that in the end it would be the Nephites and not the Lamanites who would "become extinct" (Alma 45:10-14), by their own wickedness—after which final admonition "he departed out of the land" and "was never heard of more," giving rise to the tradition, which Moroni refuses to confirm or deny, that he had been translated (Alma 45:18-19).

The Trouble with Amalickiah

It was not long after this that the sinister figure of Amalickiah appeared on the scene to undo all that Moroni had been fighting for. Amalickiah is one of a line of brilliant trouble-makers who keep things stirred up through the turbulent pages of the Book of Mormon. Beginning with Laman and Lemuel we meet in order Sherem, Amulon, Nehor, Amlici, Zeezrom, Korihor, Zerahemnah, and now, neither last nor least, Amalickiah. All of these men had certain traits in common: all were personally ambitious and unscrupulous, aspiring to be either king or the religious head of the people; all were powerful speakers and clever propagandists, skilled in the use of "flattering words"; all sought to undermine, if they could not seize, the highest authority of the church and state, being particularly opposed to popular government and drawing their support from those who sought to overthrow it.

Of these the most dangerous yet to appear was certainly Amalickiah. During the post-war boom there was a strong tendency to ignore the admonitions of Helaman, the new spiritual head of the nation, as people "grew proud, being lifted up in their hearts, because of their exceedingly great riches" (Alma 45:24). Helaman's unyielding position became a great annoyance to those people whose hearts were set on the things of the new prosperity, and they formed

an opposition party under Amalickiah (Alma 46:1-3). His object was to become king, and he had started out as head of the most violent of the factions, organized in high anger and out to kill, "gathered together against their brethren . . . exceedingly wroth . . . determined to slay them" (Alma 46:1-3). To these, by promises of high office and power, he added a host of ambitious local officials, "lower judges of the land . . . seeking for power" (Alma 46:4-5). These were those lawmen who had plotted against Helaman's father, Alma, when he had been the head of the state, and of whom he had said, "The foundation of the destruction of this people is beginning to be laid by the unrighteousness of your lawyers and your judges" (Alma 10:27). To the royalists and ambitious lawyers Amalickiah added a third force, "those people who professed the blood of nobility" (Alma 51:21). Such would have been the great families, the "kindreds" of 3 Nephi 6:27. Finally, there were "many in the church who believed in the flattering words of Amalickiah," who obviously told them what they wanted to hear (Alma 46:7).

It was a dangerous coalition to be threatening a government which had barely succeeded in making a precarious peace with a foreign enemy of vastly superior forces, "and thus were the affairs of the people of Nephi exceedingly precarious and dangerous" (Alma 46:7). "Thus we see," reflects Moroni, "how quick the children of men do forget . . . and we also see the great wickedness one very wicked man can cause" (Alma 46:8-9).

No one saw more clearly than Moroni where this was leading – all that he had achieved with great toil and danger was going to be thrown away if he did not act quickly. "Angry with Amalickiah," (Alma 46:11), he reacted with that speed and decision which is the mark of the great leader in the field. Raising his "Title of Liberty" according to the ancient custom and as the type of the torn garment of the outcast Joseph, and the symbol of the poor and outcast of

Israel, he announced to the people, "Surely God shall not suffer that we, who are despised because we take upon us the name of Christ, shall be trodden down . . . until we bring it upon [ourselves]" (Alma 46:18). Then "behold, the people came running," arming themselves as they came and rending their garments and casting them at Moroni's feet in the ancient gesture of covenant and submission (Alma 46:21–22). Thus Moroni rallied the people in defense of the constitution of Mosiah, of government "by the voice of the people," against a coalition of royalists (for so they are called in Reynolds' *Concordance*), self-styled nobility, and ambitious local officials who sought to destroy it in a time of national emergency.

Things were getting hot for Amalickiah, who accordingly tried to make a break for it and join the Lamanites. This sort of thing had happened before, and Moroni knew that it would wreck his hard-bought peace, "for he knew that he would stir up the Lamanites to anger . . . that he might obtain his purposes" (Alma 46:30). Stirring people up to anger is the specialty of the great trouble-makers in the Book of Mormon, who find it the surest road to personal prominence and power. To check Amalickiah's move, "Moroni thought it was expedient" to force a peace on the dissenters with all possible haste (Alma 46:31). Moving with his usual dispatch, he intercepted them before they got out of the country, made them surrender to him, and required them to take an oath, "a covenant to support the cause of freedom" and not fight against their own government (Alma 46:35). No citizen could give less, and those who refused were knowingly accepting the status of combatants, and could expect to be treated as such. At the time, Moroni was acting with special military powers given him "by the chief judges and the voice of the people" (Alma 46:34), and accordingly put to death as an enemy in arms those who refused to lay down their arms; but these were only a few (Alma 46:35); instead of a blanket order for the execution

of all Amalickiahites as traitors, in the modern fashion, Moroni merely exacted from them a promise to support the government during a dire national emergency.

Moroni had been right about Amalickiah, for that hero escaped into the wilderness and made his way to the Lamanites, "and did stir up the Lamanites to anger against the people of Nephi," to such a degree that the Lamanite king ordered a general mobilization for war (Alma 47:1). Such an order to a people who had just had their fill of war was coolly received, and most of the people refused to obey it (Alma 47:2) and organized a huge protest-meeting at the marshalling area at Onidah, electing a king for themselves on a no-war platform (Alma 47:5–6). Amalickiah promptly arranged a deal with the new "king," whom he later poisoned, taking over his leadership of the anti-war party (Alma 47:10–18). The fact that Antipus, the king-for-a-day, had to be urged four times before he would risk a secret meeting with Amalickiah shows that the latter already had something of a reputation as a smooth operator. The triumphant Amalickiah now led the obedient rebels in submission to their grateful king, whose assassination he engineered with such a show of loyalty and patriotism that he was able to marry the queen and thereby (he hoped) quiet her uncomfortable suspicions (Alma 47:32–35). His big problem, however, was to get the Lamanites to fight for him, and no professional public-relations office could have done a more skillful job than he did. "He did appoint men to speak unto the Lamanites from their towers, against the Nephites" (Alma 48:1) – trained orators delivering set speeches from the official information centers; accusing, always accusing: "And thus he did inspire their hearts against the Nephites," until by the end of the year they were howling for blood, "for he had hardened the hearts of the Lamanites and blinded their minds, and stirred them up to anger" (Alma 48:2–3). So now he had no trouble raising an army (Alma 48:3), his object being "to reign over

all the land, . . . the Nephites as well as the Lamanites" (Alma 48:2).

Moroni, as you might suppose, was not idle during this time. Instead of fighting fire with fire, however, "he had been preparing the minds of the people to be faithful" (Alma 48:7), at the same time building up a marvelously well conceived system of defense in depth for the Nephites. Indeed, all of Moroni's strategy and tactics are dictated by the necessity of meeting vastly superior numbers at all times. If his strategy was necessarily defensive, so was his psychology, for he "did not delight in bloodshed," Moroni the Younger reminds us again and again, but "did labor exceedingly for the welfare and safety of his people (Alma 48:11-12). "He had sworn . . . to defend his people," and had taught them "to defend themselves," but at the same time "never to give an offense, yea, and never to raise the sword . . . except it were to preserve their lives" (Alma 48:13-14). For their part, the people "were compelled reluctantly to contend with their brethren, the Lamanites," and when they took the field it was "notwithstanding their much reluctance. . . . They were sorry to take up arms against the Lamanites, because they did not delight in the shedding of blood; . . . they were sorry to be the means of sending so many of their brethren out of this world" (Alma 48:21-23). This was Moroni's own attitude, and like Alma he insists on designating the enemy as his "brethren," and he means it. This, then, would seem to be a case of "the good people against the bad people," until we remember that the Lamanites were equally reluctant to fight the Nephites, our story being a lesson in "the great wickedness one very wicked man can cause."

Moroni's defenses were based on a series of strong-points, being a defense in depth, as modern defense-lines are; beside specially placed "small forts, or places of resort," towns and cities on the line were also converted into strong points (Alma 48:8). Such an arrangement can take the mo-

mentum out of any military steamroller and slow down or stop any attacking force, no matter how formidable, by forcing it to reduce one strong place after another or else bypass the fortifications and thereby leave dangerous enemy forces in its rear to disrupt communications and launch harassing counter-attacks on invading units. With this strictly defensive program (the preparation being to fight if at all only on their own grounds), an early-warning system was all-important. And it was Moroni's idea that God himself would provide such a system if the people were only faithful: "If they were faithful in keeping the commandments of God that he would . . . warn them to flee, or to prepare for war, according to their danger; and also, that God would make it known unto them whither they should go to defend themselves" (Alma 48:15-16). In short, God was their "Dew-line," their radar, and warning system, and that saved them the need of constant and costly vigilance on all fronts, to say nothing of expensive and wasteful war-plans and war-games. This was Moroni's policy of preparedness, "this was the faith of Moroni, and his heart did glory in it; not in the shedding of blood but in doing good" (Alma 48:16). The keystone of all defense was unity at home, and for this the sons of Alma, "Helaman and his brethren were no less serviceable unto the people than was Moroni; for they did preach the word of God. . . . And the people did humble themselves, . . . and thus they were free from wars and contentions among themselves," always the main source of danger in any war (Alma 48:19-20).

Amalickiah, having worked up a war-fever among the Lamanites and carefully laid his grandiose plans of conquest, finally launched his thunderbolt. Great wars often open with nasty surprises to both sides. Von Kluck in his epic sweep into France through Belgium in 1914 did not count on Belgian resistance, British cooperation, or the amazing resilience of the French which by his own confession took him completely by surprise. The French, on the

other hand, insisted in the face of all the evidence that the main German attack would be to the south, while they hopelessly overestimated the effectiveness of cavalry and underestimated that of the new automatic weapons. Amalickiah's great drive ran into just such a series of nasty surprises. Moroni's system of defense in depth took all the initial momentum out of the big push: "But behold, how great was their disappointment" when they ran against his prepared "places of security," and when they found "to their uttermost astonishment" that the armaments of the enemy more than made up for their numerical inferiority, on which Amalickiah had been counting heavily (Alma 49:4–8). Generals should not be surprised that way, and yet they often have been, because of their ingrained habit of preparing for the next war in terms of the last one, exactly as the Lamanite generals had, supposing "that they should be privileged to come upon them as they had hitherto done; . . . and being thus prepared . . . they should easily overpower and subject their brethren" (Alma 49:6–7).

But Moroni was unconventional, as military geniuses must be, and his preparations had been as thorough as they were ingenious. By a complete administrative shakeup at home, he had denied the Lamanites the use of certain facilities which they thought would fall into their hands, possibly through administrative incompetence or corruption: "For Moroni had altered the management of affairs among the Nephites, insomuch that the Lamanites were disappointed in their places of retreat and they could not come upon them" (Alma 49:11).

Now when a major offensive bogs down, especially when it bogs down at the outset – the initial momentum of a Blitzkrieg being all important – exalted personages start having fits back at headquarters, and if things do not quickly improve, heads begin to roll. King Amalickiah had stayed back at his base, confident of a quick and easy victory. "He did not care for the blood of his people" (Alma 49:10) –

Moroni actually cared far more for it than he did! "His chief captains," furious at their rebuff at the city of Ammonihah, promptly lunged for the important city of Noah. They were determined to save face and retain the offensive by taking and utterly destroying a city which they believed to be unfortified and not expecting them, as the Germans did to make an object-lesson of Antwerp in 1914. The only trouble was that thanks to Moroni the city was fortified and waiting, and "they were again disappointed" (Alma 49:13-17). The supreme test of generalship, we are told, is to have the enemy play your game, making just the moves you want him to make under the impression that he is being very smart on his own. Moroni did just that, and the attack on the city of Noah "was according to his desires" (Alma 49:15). He had devised a new and ingenious type of defense for the city gate, which proved a death-trap for the Lamanites. For their desperate commanders had taken a true Prussian officers' oath to wipe out the inhabitants of the city of Noah, and their savage and repeated assaults on the impregnable gate became simply suicidal, and finally "their chief captains were all slain; yea, and more than a thousand of the Lamanites were slain" (Alma 49:21-23).

So the great and carefully planned offensive with all its high hopes for a quick victory fizzled out, and a beaten army went back to report to the infuriated "Führer" (Alma 49:25-26). In a towering rage, "exceedingly wroth . . . he did curse God, and also Moroni, swearing with an oath that he would drink his blood" (Alma 49:27). At every step in his career he had found that man Moroni barring the way; at every step in the campaign his own army had played into the hands of that Moroni. No wonder Moroni began to be an obsession with him. The Nephites, however, thanked God "because of his matchless power in delivering them from the hands of their enemies" (Alma 49:28).

Peace again brought prosperity (Alma 49:30), but Moroni was not idle. He launched out on an ambitious program

of national fortifications, displaying his usual genius in the design and disposal of the strong places (Alma 50:1–6). First of all, it was necessary to remove a dangerous bulge or salient over on the east coast. The area was cleared of Lamanites and settled by local people and colonists from Zarahemla (Alma 50:7, 9). Thus was Moroni was able to shorten and straighten his defense line (Alma 50:8), and having determined the best possible course for the line, he proceeded to fortify it along its entire length from the east wilderness (north of Jershon on the coast) to the west sea (Alma 50:9, 11), again employing not a single wall but a defense in depth, including even the founding of new fortified towns at strategically located places “by the borders” (Alma 50:13–15). At the same time he effected a gradual buildup of military power within the country (Alma 50:10), though his principal concern was ever to keep the peace at home, knowing that it had “been their quarrelings, and their contentions . . . and their abominations, which were among themselves, which brought upon them their wars and their destructions” (Alma 50:21).

Accordingly, when as the result of a land-squabble a group of people under a loud and hot-tempered man named Morianton (another of those ambitious masters of “flattering words”) decided to move out of the country, Moroni, fearing that he would add to his supporters among the people of Bountiful and thereby “lay a foundation for serious consequences” (Bountiful being the most important Nephite military base), lost no time heading off the migration, sending his most mobile commander, Teancum, to stop them. Morianton was killed in the tussle that ensued, and all his people were “brought back.” “And upon their covenanting to keep the peace they were restored, . . . and a union took place between them and the people of Lehi” (Alma 50:25–36). Again Moroni’s quick action had averted disaster but, more important, his humane policy, foregoing all reprisals and reparations, gave a happy ending to the

episode with the original antagonists joined in friendship. Though the Nephites never lived in a time of greater danger, "there never was a happier time . . . than in the days of Moroni," according to the verdict of the younger Moroni at the very end of Nephite history (Alma 50:23). For their security was not in an absence of enemies but in the faith that they would be "delivered at all times" if they kept "the commandments of the Lord" (Alma 50:22).

Absence of enemies? Soon Moroni had to face the most dangerous coalition of all, for the king-men were again united with "those of high birth" and all the others "who sought power and authority over the people" (Alma 51:5, 8), in a determined attempt to change the form of government, by law, to a monarchy (Alma 51:4–5). The opposition to this move was led by the chief judge Pahoran, who "would not alter nor suffer the law to be altered" (Alma 51:2–3); and was supported in this by a party calling themselves the Freemen (Alma 51:6). An election was held, and "the voice of the people came in favor of the freemen" (Alma 51:7). But the royalists had not played all their cards; their agitation had been timed to coincide with a move from the direction of their banished leader Amalickiah, who "had again stirred up the . . . Lamanites . . . and [was] preparing for war with all diligence" (Alma 51:9). Counting on Amalickiah's aid, the beaten party "were glad in their hearts" of his approach, and "refused to take up arms" to resist it, being "wroth with the chief judge, and also with the people of liberty" who had given them a setback (Alma 51:13).

Again Moroni saw all his work threatened by the same elements with whom he had been forced to deal before. It was almost more than he could stand, "yea, he was exceedingly wroth; his soul was filled with anger against them" (Alma 51:14). But he knew that the people were solidly behind him, and by popular vote received special powers to "go against those king-men, to pull down their

pride and their nobility" by force of arms – which he did. (Alma 51:16–19). Again he gave the rebels the opportunity to support the common cause without punishment or prejudice, and used his special powers to deal summarily with those who held out, four thousand of them, "for there was no time for their trials at this period" (Alma 51:19). "And thus Moroni put an end to those king-men . . . to the stubbornness and the pride of those people who professed the blood of nobility; but they were brought down to humble themselves like unto their brethren" (Alma 51:21). There is no talk of humbling in the dust, but simply the restoration of equality, in which Moroni emerges as the champion of popular government, "beloved of all the people of Nephi" (Alma 53:2). His methods had been admittedly severe, and all that justified them was an extreme national emergency.

But the emergency was very real, for even at that time Amalickiah, made wise in the ways of war, was leading his greatest army yet into the weakest parts of the land and sweeping all before him. Bypassing the strongest places, he flanked the Nephites along the coast in a lightning move that knocked out the weaker fortified places one after another and sent the occupants fleeing like sheep from one collapsing fortification to the next as he "went on, taking possession of many cities" (Alma 51:26–28). It was a well-executed operation that spread panic and converted many of Moroni's strong places into Lamanite bases (Alma 51:27). Then the inevitable happened. The Lamanites in their forward rush having overextended themselves met an unpleasant rebuff when their spearhead was blunted by a flanking blow of the wily Teancum, who after bringing their advance guard to a halt continued to harass the army with his highly trained and highly mobile troops (Alma 51:31). Then on a two-man night patrol such as able and enterprising generals sometimes fancy, Teancum himself slipped into Amalickiah's tent and killed him in his sleep, after which he hurried back to his own headquarters and alerted

his forces to an expected enemy attack at dawn (Alma 51:33–36).

The Trouble with Ammoron

The attack failed to materialize, for when the Lamanites awoke on the first day of the new year – albeit the weather was hot – showing this to be in the tropics (Alma 51:33), and found their king dead and Teancum “ready to give them battle on that day,” that is, without giving them time to adjust to the new situation (Alma 52:1), they were alarmed at their position – “affrighted” – and fell back on their own strong places without a fight (Alma 52:2). Teancum then strengthened his own positions, digging in and awaiting reinforcements from Moroni (Alma 52:6–7), who, however, was pinned down on the west coast and could offer little assistance. The Nephites with their inferior numbers were being forced to fight that kind of a war that all commanders dread – a war on two fronts. Ammoron, the brother and successor of Amalickiah, made the most of this advantage to himself and sent a strong diversionary force to occupy Moroni and if possible split the Nephite forces even more, while harassing them everywhere and keeping them off-balance by sallies and infiltrations from the numerous former Nephite strong places now held by the Lamanites (Alma 52:11–13).

Things looked very bad indeed for Moroni “in those dangerous circumstances” (Alma 52:14); here was a situation that would test his skill to the utmost, and he rose to the occasion. First he ordered Teancum to sit tight on his sector while harassing the Lamanites as much as possible and keeping a sharp lookout for any chance opportunity or opening to do them real damage (Alma 52:10); at the same time he was instructed to take and keep as many prisoners of war as possible with a view to future exchange of prisoners with the Lamanites, for the addition of one man to the Nephite forces meant far more than it did to

the Lamanites (Alma 52:8). Moroni followed up these instructions with "orders to make an attack upon the city of Mulek, and retake it if it were possible" (Alma 52:16), for Moroni was determined to get things moving. It is a neatly authentic touch, however, that Teancum after sizing up the situation decided against an attack on Mulek and sat and waited in Bountiful for Moroni to show up (Alma 52:16–17). When the commander-in-chief finally got through with an army, a top-level "council of war" was at once convened to study the situation; at this conference it was agreed that the first thing on the agenda was for the united forces of Teancum and Moroni to take the city of Mulek, which was the eastern anchor of the main defense-line (Alma 52:18–19).

But how was a major city, superbly fortified by Moroni's own foresight, to be taken? The first step was a logical one. It was the ancient custom of warfare to invite the occupants of a city to come out on the open plain and engage in a fair set contest, or, as the Nephites put it, "upon fair grounds";¹ the Nephite commanders in issuing such an invitation to the comfortably ensconced opposition hardly expected the Lamanites to comply with a request so disadvantageous to themselves, but they thought it was worth a try and at any rate it was the conventional thing to do (Alma 52:19–20). Their next move was to try a decoy trick. Teancum allowed the Lamanites to discover a task-force of his moving along the coast and to give it chase; Moroni then slipped into the city behind them and overpowered the defenders, characteristically sparing all who yielded up their arms (Alma 52:22–25). Then he too took the coast route on the heels of the Lamanites who were chasing Teancum. As a secondary diversion a small Nephite force under the terrible Lehi had issued out of the main base at Bountiful and met the Lamanites head on (Alma 52:27). Confused by this new development, the Lamanites sought counsel in safety by returning to Mulek, even as it occurred to them with a shock

that in dashing forth they had left that city only lightly defended; and so their return to Mulek turned into a wild race with the Nephites to see who would get there first (Alma 52:27–28). Bent only on reaching home-base in safety, the exhausted Lamanites with Lehi hot behind them ran smack into Moroni's army coming up behind them. That was the last straw (Alma 52:28–32).

With his usual forbearance, Moroni waived total victory and spared all the Lamanites who would stop fighting him (Alma 52:32). But their leader was Jacob, a Zoramite who hated the Nephites as only a dissenter could hate; with an elite guard he tried to fight his way out of the sack but died in the attempt (Alma 52:34–35). Moroni immediately offered the usual easy terms to his followers: "Now Moroni seeing their confusion, he said unto them: If ye will bring forth your weapons of war and deliver them up, behold we will forbear shedding your blood" (Alma 52:37). Even so, those who would not surrender were not killed but disarmed, bound, and marched off to the great central prison compound at Bountiful (Alma 52:39). The prisoner of war problem was now becoming a very serious one for the Nephites. Their best solution was to put their prisoners to work, apparently because it was easy to guard them while at their labor, and because the Nephites were frightfully short of manpower (Alma 53:1). The work was mainly the conversion of Bountiful into a very strong "Stalag," with ditch and breastwork – more of Moroni's ingenuity (Alma 53:3–5).

In the absence of Moroni from his army "on the west sea, south," an outbreak of intrigues and dissensions greatly weakened the war effort and placed the Nephites "in the most dangerous circumstances" (Alma 53:8–9). When the Lamanites finally suggested the exchange of war prisoners that he had been waiting for, Moroni sent them a "get-tough" letter, deliberately taunting Ammoron, "a child of hell," and insisting on receiving a Nephite prisoner

with his wife and children in exchange for one Lamanite soldier (Alma 54:1–13). This three-to-one exchange was actually to the advantage of the Lamanites, who were eager enough to transfer the feeding of noncombatants from themselves to the Nephites, but Moroni wanted to get the best possible bargain by not appearing too eager (Alma 54:2–3) and so got tough. The result was an exchange of insults between the chiefs with mounting tempers, and in the end the deal fell through (Alma 54–55:2). This was not to be the last time that Moroni's hot temper ran away with him.

But Moroni knew more than one way of skinning a cat. He planned by a ruse to free the war prisoners held in the city of Gid. The trick exploited the well-known psychology of troops on permanent guard duty. Such troops must always be on the alert for what they never expect to happen and what, if they do their duty, never *will* happen. Their way of life becomes a stultifying bore, with the same dull routines from day to day and from week to week. Nothing offers a more welcome release to such misery than a little nip now and then, or, better still, a party. A native Lamanite in the Nephite service answered the challenge of the Lamanite guards one evening with the announcement that his little party were escapees from the Nephites who had managed to get away with some of their wine. Of course the guards insisted on sampling the stuff on the spot and on the sly; the protest of its owners that they should keep it against the day of battle "only made them more desirous to drink of the wine" (Alma 55:10). It was a typical "G.I." binge with everybody getting happily drunk at the guardhouse since the stuff was doctored, "having been prepared in its strength" (Alma 55:13). While the guards were carousing and falling asleep, weapons were being thrown over the wall at certain places under Moroni's personal supervision, and the guards even "had they awakened" would have been out of a job (Alma 55:16–18).

Again Moroni did the decent thing, forbidding anyone

to “fall upon the Lamanites and destroy them in their drunkenness,” since that would be an “injustice,” and especially since “he did not delight in murder or bloodshed, but . . . in the saving of his people from destruction” (Alma 55:19). Note that Moroni is not only averse to shedding innocent blood, but is against the shedding of any blood at all. The guards when they came to readily handed over their weapons on order of their superiors, and pleaded for mercy; this “was the desire of Moroni,” who promptly put them to work in the place of the prisoners they had just been guarding, and then had them transported to the main base at Bountiful (Alma 55:23–26).

After this the Lamanites hopefully experimented with some of the Nephite ruses, including the wine-trick, but the Nephites were pretty well on to them (Alma 55:29–30). They did succeed, however, in effecting a major buildup in the very strong city of Morianton (Alma 55:33–34). At this juncture, Moroni was heartened by a long letter, with an accompanying map (plainly referred to in Alma 56:13–15), from Helaman reporting how he had organized a company of 2,000 young invincibles from, of all people, the pacifistic Ammonites. His recruits had been too young to take the oath against bloodshed when their parents took it, and so were free to join the army (Alma 53:11). As every commander knows, the most desirable quality in a soldier is perfect reliability, and Helaman cannot too highly praise this quality in his “2,000 Sons.” They could be perfectly trusted because their parents could be trusted, having already displayed perfect integrity in refusing to take up arms even against those who were cutting them down with the sword. Moved by compassion at the sore straits of the Nephite hosts who had done so much for them, the older people had been on the verge of breaking their oaths and arming themselves to lend a helping hand in the war, when Helaman as high-priest of the land had talked them out of it, convincing them that the welfare of their souls had prior-

ity over any military expediency or emergency whatever (Alma 53:13–15; 56:7–8). No wonder their sons called themselves Helaman's sons and were "true at all times in whatsoever thing they were entrusted" (Alma 53:20–21).

The intervention of the 2,000 proved a great morale-booster on the eastern front, where the exhausted Nephites had been working themselves to death fortifying by night and fighting by day with no sign of relief in sight (Alma 56:16–17). Their fresh and youthful vigor and the supplies they brought from home stiffened the Nephite position, but the result was a stalemate in which neither side dared move (Alma 56:23–26). However, the boys continued getting packages from home, and then 2,000 new recruits arrived from the capital (Alma 56:27–28). At this the Lamanites began to grow uneasy in the face of what looked like a Nephite buildup, and so it was possible to stage another decoy act by giving it a new twist. The 2,000 Sons of Helaman were instructed to escort a supply-train up the coast, knowing that the Lamanite spies from the city of Antiparah would be sure to spot them. Naturally it was a chance not to be missed for the Lamanites, and at any rate the supplies had to be stopped. So they took a calculated risk and sent out a large force in pursuit of the 2,000, who moved briskly and kept out of reach, following instructions. Even when the Lamanites learned that another Nephite force was pursuing them they continued the chase of the 2,000, for they expected a situation like that and felt strong enough to cope with it: "Even . . . when they saw the army of Antipus pursuing them, . . . they did not turn to the right nor to the left, but pursued their march in a straight course after us" (Alma 56:30–37). In the hot pace that the three armies were setting each other nobody dared relax or turn to either side; but when the straining troops of Antipus started stepping on Lamanite heels the army turned to face them with overpowering numbers (Alma 56:49–50).

Then it was that Helaman up ahead asked his boys if

they had had enough of running away: “What say ye, my sons, will ye go against them to battle?” (Alma 56:44). Would they! Helaman knew the Lamanite numbers were still overwhelmingly superior to the combined Nephite forces, and suspected that this might even be a trap for him, but he was willing to risk it (Alma 56:43). Unleashed, the 2,000 waded in with such terrific elan that the whole Lamanite army turned to meet them (Alma 56:52); but like the young Israelis in 1948, these kids introduced a new dimension into the war: they were inspired; their strange spirit, devoid of hatred and utterly free of fear or hesitation (Alma 56:46–47) began to frighten the seasoned Lamanite troopers, who had never seen anything like it (Alma 56:56). They started surrendering in vast numbers, and the road back to Zarahemla was soon clogged with prisoners of war (Alma 56:57).

When he saw that he would not be able to hold the city of Antiparah, the sly Ammoron approached Helaman with an offer to give the Nephites the city in exchange for all their prisoners; but Helaman would have no part of that—it would have to be on a prisoner-for-prisoner basis; so Ammoron called it off, and the Nephites took Antiparah without pains, the inhabitants having fled to Lamanite country (Alma 57:1–4). The success at Antiparah was rewarded by strong reinforcements from the capital; with these Helaman blockaded the city of Cumeni, intercepting all their supplies and finally forcing surrender (Alma 57:5–12).

By now the Nephites were simply swamped with prisoners of war, who seeing the embarrassment of their captors began to stage prison riots, “for behold, they would break out in great numbers, and would fight with stones, and with clubs” (Alma 57:14), and had to be bloodily suppressed (Alma 57:14–16). A very large body of prisoners was being escorted back to the capital by crack Nephite troops when they collided with a Lamanite army escorting a large supply

train – embarrassing moments (Alma 57:16–17). The guards forgot about their prisoners and high-tailed it back to Helaman’s headquarters or command post to report the new danger; only just as they arrived there they found the headquarters company hotly engaged with the advanced elements of the same Lamanite army, and were able to join in the fighting just in time to turn the tide and save the command post (Alma 57:18). (Author’s note: Shades of the dear old 101st!)

Again it was the 2,000, now augmented by 60 more boys from home, who turned the tide, for “they did obey and observe to perform every word of command with exactness” (Alma 57:19–21). Helaman explains that their mothers taught them that God would protect them if they were upright, and they had believed what they were taught, did what they were told, and “were firm and undaunted.” And indeed, though they were all wounded in the battle, not a single one of them lost his life, proving to their simple minds “that there was a just God, and whosoever did not doubt, that they should be preserved by his marvelous power,” so, Helaman explains, “their minds are firm, and they do put their trust in God continually” (Alma 57:20–27).

Another huge prisoner contingent was sent to Zarahemla, this time under the supervision of the capable Gid. En route the Nephites got news of a Lamanite army marching on Cumeni, the city the Nephites had just taken by blockade. Their disturbance at the news became apparent to their prisoners, who assumed that something was going badly for them and that they were in trouble, “which caused them to take courage, and they did rise up in rebellion against us,” rushing in a body on the Nephite swords. Most of them were slain, but the rest escaped (Alma 57:28–33). However, this was not an unmixed evil, for Gid was now free to hasten to the aid of Cumeni, arriving just in time (Alma 57:34).

Again things settled down to a stalemate, with Helaman faced with the problem of containing greatly superior forces, who were now discouragingly familiar with the Nephite decoy tricks (Alma 58:1). He could only appeal to the capital for aid, which was forthcoming, but was largely canceled out by the Lamanite counter-buildup—for they too were receiving reinforcements, and had in the bargain begun copying the Nephites' own tactics of harassment (Alma 58:4–6). As in all long wars, the two opponents in their methods, armaments, tricks, and appearance had come to be more and more alike—for an enemy may not be allowed safely to monopolize any technical advantage for long. Both Nephites and Lamanites were holed up in Moroni's strong places and using his defense in depth.

So the war dragged on, and then something went wrong. Support from the capital began to fall off. "The cause of these our embarrassments, . . . why they did not send more strength unto us, we knew not." But the strange turn of things stirred up the usual camp rumors and misgivings: "We were grieved and also filled with fear" (Alma 58:9). In this tense and gloomy situation the army turned to prayer for comfort and found it (Alma 58:10–11). With morale somewhat restored, Helaman planned to take Manti by a ruse—and it would have to be a good one, since the Lamanites now knew all the answers. He pushed his bivouac as near to the town as he dared "by the wilderness side" (Alma 58:13), where the enemy easily discovered that his force was not a very strong one; but the insolent position he had taken, which put him in a position to cut off supplies to the city (Alma 58:15), demanded that something be done about him, even though his little army was far too weak to attempt a siege. As soon as Helaman made sure that the Lamanites were getting ready to come out and teach him a lesson, he divided his small forces into three bodies; one under Teomner went off and hid out in the wilderness in one direction, while the other under Gid moved out and

lay low in the other direction. The Lamanites came out in full force and took after Helaman, who of course retreated at top speed, leading the pursuers unawares right between the forces of Gid and Teomner, who lay quietly until they had passed and then “ran to the city and fell upon the guards,” for in their haste and confidence the Lamanites had left only a few to guard the town, and they were easily destroyed (Moroni not being there to prevent it) (Alma 58:16–22). The Lamanites had to give up the chase when they found that the quarry was heading straight for Zarahemla, leading them to suspect another of those Nephite ambushes. But what they did not suspect was that their fleeing victims would double on their tracks, march around them in the nighttime while they were sleeping, and beat them back to Manti – the last place in the world they would expect to find them. So the Nephites took Manti “without the shedding of blood” (Alma 58:24–28).

The discouraged Lamanites now began an evacuation of the area, and the Nephites began cautiously, and not without risk, to resettle some of the lands they had retaken (Alma 58:30–33). Helaman permitted his 2,000 to go into a rest area at Manti (Alma 58:39), and waited for news from the capital, wondering what could have possibly gone wrong. We know they have more men and material than they have been sending us, he writes to Moroni; perhaps you have been having trouble and they had to send it to you, in which case we have no complaints; but “if it is not so, behold, we fear that there is some faction in the government” blocking the much-needed aid. “But, behold,” he concludes, “it mattereth not – we trust God will deliver us” (Alma 58:34–37).

The Trouble with Pahoran

Moroni had been wondering about the breakdown of communications also. At once he sat down and sent an urgent dispatch to Zarahemla, addressed directly to the

chief of state, urging that help be sent to Helaman without further delay (Alma 59:3). Then he turned to the execution of an ambitious plan he had been working on, a grand stratagem to regain all the Nephite cities (Alma 59:4). It was never put into operation, however, because the Lamanites beat Moroni to the punch with a massive attack on the people of Nephihah, whose survivors came streaming to Moroni's camp (Alma 59:5–8). It seems that Moroni had made a serious mistake in overestimating the defensive strength of Nephihah (Alma 59:9); his grand design collapsed and he was greatly out of sorts, blaming the failure of the operation onto "the wickedness of the people" while his staff stood around nodding agreement, and berating the indifference of the government, with which he was very angry (Alma 59:11–13).

Heavy-hearted ("exceedingly sorrowful") for the loss of Nephihah, Moroni wrote another letter to Pahoran, "the chief judge and the governor over the land," in which he appears as a very tired commander indeed, following up a serious military blunder with an equally deplorable political one. The letter seethes with the resentment of the man at the front for the easy-living ways of the "VIP's" back at the capital—the old misunderstandings between the "office" and the "field." He starts out by reminding the governor of his duty to supply the armies in the field, and reminds him that both he and Helaman have suffered from short supplies from the beginning (Alma 60:1–5). He admits his ignorance of the situation and asks for information, and yet he cannot resist passing judgment with a peevish and quite unjustified charge of negligence: "We desire to know the cause of this . . . neglect; yea . . . of your thoughtless state" (Alma 60:6–7). He goes on to charge deliberate mismanagement: "Ye have withheld your provisions" (Alma 60:9), and incompetence: "for ye ought to have stirred your-

selves more diligently. . . . Ye have neglected them inso-much that the blood of thousands shall come upon your heads for vengeance" (Alma 60:10).

This is getting serious, but there is worse to come. Swept on by the momentum of his pent-up emotions, the frustrated commander, who has just seen his favorite project for ending the war go to pot, piles one accusation on another. The government officials, he claims, in their comfortable offices, "sit upon [their] thrones in a state of thoughtless stupor" (Alma 60:7; a wonderful expression), and have trusted in the goodness of God to justify their neglect, and blandly attributed the calamities overtaking the soldiers in the field not to their own high and mighty indifference but, of all things, to the wickedness of the poor soldiers themselves and other suffering victims of the war (Alma 60:12). The politicians are responsible for the disasters and setbacks of the war, for "the wickedness . . . first commenced at our head," back in the days when the king-men threw the nation into turmoil at the beginning of the war: It was "the desire of power and authority which those king-men had over us" that opened the door to the murderous Lamanites; nay, they "are [still] seeking for power and authority, yea, even those king-men" (Alma 60:15–17). Moroni even goes so far as to hint that Pahoran himself is one of those power-seekers, and worse still, "we know not but what ye are also traitors to your country" (Alma 60:18). The grave charge of treason is hardly palliated by the admission, "We know not." Moroni may only have suspicions, but what he suspects is the very worst. He becomes scathingly sarcastic as he describes the fat government officials complacently sitting in idleness, surrounded by hordes of lazy slackers like themselves, "tens of thousands, who do also sit in idleness, while there are thousands around about . . . who are falling by the sword" (Alma 60:22). The picture may seem overdrawn to us, and yet it probably was not, for that is actually the way things are in wartime.

Moroni's next step was to charge the head of the state with immoral behavior and call upon him to repent (Alma 60:24). But now comes the height of his indiscretion, for after lecturing the governor like a "Dutch uncle," Moroni promises him a good spanking, and ends up threatening open rebellion: "And except ye grant mine epistle, and come out and show unto me a true spirit of freedom . . . I will come unto you. . . . I will stir up insurrections among you, even until those who have desires to usurp power and authority shall become extinct" (Alma 60:25–27). This is not as bad as it sounds, for he is not attacking those in authority but those who have *usurped it*, namely that power-seeking faction he knows so well. Still, the same Moroni who had begun his letter with a profession of ignorance and a request for information can now bring the flat accusation and fling a challenge at the governor: "I do not fear your power nor your authority, but it is my God whom I fear, . . . and it is because of your iniquity that we have suffered so much loss" (Alma 60:28). Carried along in the spirit of his eloquence, he shifts from vague references to troublemakers to placing the blame squarely on the shoulders of the people to whom he is writing: "and, except ye do minister unto our relief, behold, I come unto you, even in the land of Zarahemla, and smite you with the sword" (Alma 60:30).

It seems strange that this man who had deplored more than anything else the contentions and dissensions among the Nephites as the principal cause of their misfortunes in war, should now propose to add to the turmoil by stirring up insurrection. But Moroni was bursting with pent-up emotions and the accumulated memories of reverses that could have been avoided and operations that could have ended the war had the necessary support been forthcoming from home. He knows, as Helaman suspects, that someone in high places is working against him, and for his noble and idealistic nature the thought that anyone should make capital of the miseries of others was simply maddening—

yet he had seen that sort of thing going on in the capital all his life. "The Lord will not suffer that ye shall live and wax strong in your iniquities," he writes to Pahoran (Alma 60:31). He does not blame the Lamanites—they are only doing what they think is right, "it is the tradition of their fathers that has caused their hatred"; the real enemy is as ever the private citizen or public official seeking to promote himself: "Your iniquity is for the cause of your love of glory and the vain things of the world" (Alma 60:32). Finally Moroni goes all out: the Lord has commanded him, he says, to go up in battle against the governors if they do not repent! (Alma 60:33). He closes with what might be called Moroni's watchword: "I seek not for power, but to pull it down" (Alma 60:36).

It was, to say the least, not the most tactful letter in the world, but Moroni's patience was worn out. Also, it turned out, he was right—on every point but one. And that point was an important one: he had accused the wrong man. Aside from that, he had the situation correctly sized up—his long experience with the king-men had not been for nothing.

Fortunately the man thus wrongly accused was a governor worthy of his high office, as his wise, temperate, and constructive reply reveals. Instead of getting on his high horse, Pahoran reacted to Moroni's withering onslaught by telling him that he had a right to be upset, as he himself is (Alma 61:2), and that instead of resenting such language addressed to himself he understands Moroni's intention perfectly and rejoices in his greatness of heart (Alma 61:9). As a matter of fact, Moroni has made a pretty good estimate of the situation, for there were indeed plenty of important people in the capital who were only too pleased to see the great Moroni in trouble—"who do joy at your afflictions"; what is more, Moroni had correctly guessed who they were—the old power-seekers, who had actually been able to take over the government by clever propaganda, "for

they have used great flattery, and they have led away the hearts of many people," and being in office had succeeded in intimidating the opposition, "and have daunted our freemen" (Alma 61:2–4). They had forced the president, Pahoran, to leave town, but in doing so he had energetically rallied as many supporters as he could (Alma 61:5), and was sure that the masses of the people, who had always followed Moroni, were still behind him, and that the ruling clique did not dare risk a test of strength in the field (Alma 61:7).

Who the new government were becomes apparent when we learn that upon seizing the capital they had abolished democratic government and set up a monarchy, and, as might be expected, immediately entered into negotiations with the king of the Lamanites. It was the old royalist crowd that Moroni knew so well (Alma 61:8). Pahoran, who was as much for popular government and as little interested in personal power as Moroni himself, proposed a plan for restoring the old government. But first of all as a civil officer he explored every possibility of avoiding violence. Like Moroni, he would, he says, gladly suffer the Lamanites if they would let him: "We should not shed the blood of the Lamanites if they would stay in their own land" (Alma 61:10). This is no self-righteous accusing, since every battle in Moroni's time was fought on Nephite, not on Lamanite, soil. So far is Pahoran from patriotic heroics that he declares, "We would subject ourselves to the yoke of bondage, if it were requisite with the justice of God, or if he should command us" (Alma 61:12), and he insists that one should take to the sword only when words have failed (Alma 61:14). But "the spirit of God" is "the spirit of freedom" (Alma 61:15), so what was he to do now? Even in this dire emergency he hesitates to use force, being "worried concerning what we should do, whether it should be just in us to go against our brethren" (Alma 61:19). Like Moroni sparing the drunken guards, he is more concerned with doing what

is *just* than anything else, and it is Moroni's letter, he says, that has made up his mind for him, since it declares that the Lord wants action (Alma 61:20). So, full of fight and ginger, he and his supporters join up with a small task-force of Moroni's that had marched to meet them, and as soon as Moroni raised his Title of Liberty the people flocked in ecstatic thousands to the well-known banner. Moroni and Pahoran, now fast friends, made a triumphant progress through the land, culminating in a battle in which the army of King Pachus and his supporters was quickly beaten (Alma 62:3–8).

Again Moroni showed his accustomed leniency. This was the third time that his Title of Liberty had been called out to put down a royalist coalition, timed to take advantage of a great national crisis; yet he pardoned without penalty or punishment all who would prove their loyalty by willingness "to take up arms in defense of their country," executing only those who still insisted on wielding the sword against it (Alma 62:9–11). Then, able at last to count on the help he needed, Moroni hastened back to strengthen the Nephite position on both fronts.

His first interest was to retake Nephihah, lost by his own miscalculation, and during the operation who should assist him but Pahoran, familiarizing himself with the war's problems at first hand (Alma 62:14). On the way to Nephihah, the two commanders ran into a special task-force of Lamanites and defeated it (Alma 62:15). What followed showed that the tide of war was turning and there was a new spirit in the air—Moroni's patience and humanity in dealing with the defeated was beginning to bear fruit. For instead of making prisoners of the beaten Lamanites, Moroni permitted all of them who would accept the usual covenant (about 4,000 of them did) to go off and settle peaceably among the people of Ammon! (Alma 62:17).

At Nephihah the usual formal invitation was sent to the enemy to meet the Nephite army in the field, which invi-

tation the Lamanites wisely declined (Alma 62:18–19). In a personal reconnaissance Moroni learned that the enemy were sleeping over in the area of the city's east gate, leaving the west side practically unguarded. So Moroni scaled the walls on the west side and the frightened enemy left by the opposite gate, leaving him in possession (Alma 62:20–25). He rounded up a lot of the fugitives and made them prisoners, but when they begged to be allowed to go and "join the people of Ammon and become a free people," he at once gave them his permission to do so (Alma 62:27–28). Plainly everybody was getting rather tired of war when thousands of Lamanite warriors began to see the light—that the people of Ammon were the really sensible people after all. And so the wicked Lamanites, who had made life a hell for the Nephites for as long as anyone could remember, whose territories and resources still remained intact and unravaged by war, and who still outnumbered the Nephites by an immense margin, were dismissed without even a reprimand, and in short order became model citizens of the Nephite realm (Alma 62:29). This also solved the vexing prisoner of war problem.

The Lamanite armies in the field, knowing that the war was going against them, drew together for mutual support, as beaten armies will, but their fighting spirit was kept up by Ammoron, the brother of that Amalickiah who had sworn undying hatred of Moroni, embracing the old philosophy of "kill or be killed," "it is either you or me," in which both the conjunctions are wrong, "kill *and* be killed . . . it is you *and* me" being the verdict of history. So Ammoron suffered the same fate as his brother when Teancum tried to repeat his former performance by stabbing the king in his tent—he succeeded but lost his own life in the attempt (Alma 62:33–36). With the death of their leader, the Lamanites finally withdrew. Then Moroni made a careful inspection of all the country's defenses and went into retirement (Alma 62:38–43).

Sequel to the War

After the war the son of the popular hero Helaman became president (chief judge) “by the voice of the people” (Helaman 2:2). There was a great post-war boom, with its accompanying corruption and moral decline; indeed the book of Helaman is essentially a story of criminal activities which we have treated elsewhere.² Eight years after the long war ended, while the arch-criminal Kishkumen was plying the art of murder in an attempt to help a defeated candidate into power (Helaman 1:5–12), the Lamanites were preparing another attack. It struck with such speed and force under the leadership of the Nephite defector Coriantumr that it achieved a complete surprise, and before anyone was aware of what had happened, he had succeeded in taking and occupying Zarahemla itself! (Helaman 1:18–20). Coriantumr instantly followed up his advantage by marching through the country almost unopposed (Helaman 1:24), burning and destroying as he went, “slaying the people with a great slaughter, both men, women, and children” (Helaman 1:27). But like the Germans in Russia, Coriantumr had really gotten himself in a jam: his drive had been successful because it was completely unexpected; and it had been unexpected because it was utterly foolish. The Nephite forces were stationed, of course, on the frontiers (Helaman 1:18, 26), and so Coriantumr’s great breakthrough which had put him in the heart of the country had also got him neatly surrounded (Helaman 1:25, 32). The Nephite army leaders only had to tighten the bag until Coriantumr was forced to surrender (Helaman 1:28–32). And then what? The Nephite commander Moronihah did just as his namesake Moroni would have—he let all the Lamanites “depart out of the land in peace” (Helaman 1:33). No reprisals or vengeance for an army that had seized the capital and devastated the land without mercy! What would the Nephites think in reading the history of some of our present-day wars?

During the post-war prosperity that followed, the greatest corruption "was among those also who professed to belong to the church of God. And it was because of the pride of their hearts, because of their exceeding riches" (Helaman 4:11–12). Because of contentions in the church many of these people went over to the Lamanites and started to stir them up (Helaman 4:1–4), and in the ensuing troubles a sudden Lamanite drive overran the entire Nephite country with the exception of the Bountiful region (Helaman 4:5–8). Moronihah was able to win back about half of the country, but the rest was lost to the Nephites forever (Helaman 4:9–10); from then on they had to fall back on a strategy of containment (Helaman 4:19). Then came the Gadianton wars which we discuss below, ending with the great earthquake, followed by the coming of the Lord.

Then after about two centuries of peaceful existence, free of international or ideological controversy of any kind (4 Nephi 1:15–17), the classic Nephite-Lamanite feud was resumed as people on both sides lapsed into wickedness, "one like unto another" (4 Nephi 1:39, 45). The most tragic and heroic figure in the Book of Mormon is Mormon himself, whose melancholy task it was to lead the last long retreat of his people to the north, fighting a desperate rear-guard action with determined delaying tactics and gallant counter-attacks, but always in the end losing ground. The retreat begins in a scene of total confusion, "one complete revolution throughout all the face of the land," with Lamanites, robbers, and Gadiantons prowling among the Nephites, who had broken up into tribes and in a last mighty effort for survival were trying to shape up into some sort of fighting force (Mormon 2:7–8). They fight, fall back, hunted and driven, then counterattack with the courage of despair, retake their lands and get a territorial agreement with the Lamanites and Gadiantons, after which they spend ten years in an all-out preparation for war (Mormon 2, 3:1). It was then that the Lord offered them a last chance for

survival, but they turned it down and “did harden their hearts against the Lord their God” (Mormon 3:2–3).

From then it was all downhill in spite of Nephite victories. Two surprise victories won a ten-year peace for the Nephites (A.D. 350–360, Mormon 2:24–29), after which a formal invitation to battle was accepted by the Lamanite king, and the Nephites in another surprise comeback won two brilliant victories in succession (Mormon 3:7–8, 13). In a great surge of pride and confidence “because of this great thing which . . . the Nephites had done” (Mormon 3:9), they declared themselves ready to settle the Lamanite question once and for all, swearing by God that they would avenge the blood of their brethren and cut the Lamanites off from the face of the land—“It is either them or us!” (Mormon 3:9–10). Mormon, the author of the recent victories, reacted to this policy by at once resigning under protest: “I, Mormon, did utterly refuse from this time forth to be a commander and a leader of this people. . . . I had led them many times. . . . [I] had loved them . . . with all my heart; and my soul had been poured out in prayer; . . . nevertheless, it was without faith, because of the hardness of their hearts” (Mormon 3:11–12). In taking the offensive, Mormon explains, the Nephites lost everything: “And it was because the armies of the Nephites went up unto the Lamanites that they began to be smitten” (Mormon 4:4; see especially 3 Nephi 3:20–21).

The see-saw war raged on as each side, seeking vengeance for the war-crimes of the other, surpassed those crimes in a dismal escalation of atrocities, mostly at the expense of noncombatants (Mormon 4:11–15). Finally there came a day when the Nephites “began to be swept off by them even as a dew before the sun” (Mormon 4:18). With their resistance broken, they were simply melting away; the situation so alarmed and moved Mormon that in spite of his vow to have nothing to do with the business, his great heart could not resist the people’s pleas for assistance,

“as though I could deliver them. . . . But behold, I was without hope” (Mormon 5:1–2). Hypnotized by the “kill or be killed” psychology, the Nephites “did struggle for their lives without calling upon that Being who created them” (Mormon 5:2). Now it was the Lamanites who were all out for total victory, sparing nothing that was Nephite from destruction—and why not? Hadn’t the Nephites planned the same fate for them?

The retreat became a rout (Mormon 5:7), until the Nephites finally decided to call a halt by requesting for the last time the ancient courtesy of stipulating the time and place for a final showdown on a fair field (Mormon 6:2). This was granted them, and in the last scene the Nephites are allowed the melancholy and terrifying privilege of enjoying one last tremendous spectacle—the full-dress approach of their executioners: “And with that awful fear of death which fills the breasts of all the wicked, did they await to receive them” (Mormon 6:7). The “wicked”—please note: this is no contest between good people and bad people. As for the wicked Lamanites, their total victory turned out to be a cruel deception—nobody won the war, for it still went on: “The Lamanites are at war one with another,” wrote Moroni after Cumorah, “and the whole face of this land is one continual round of murder and bloodshed; and no one knoweth the end of the war” (Mormon 8:8).