

# TRAINING —

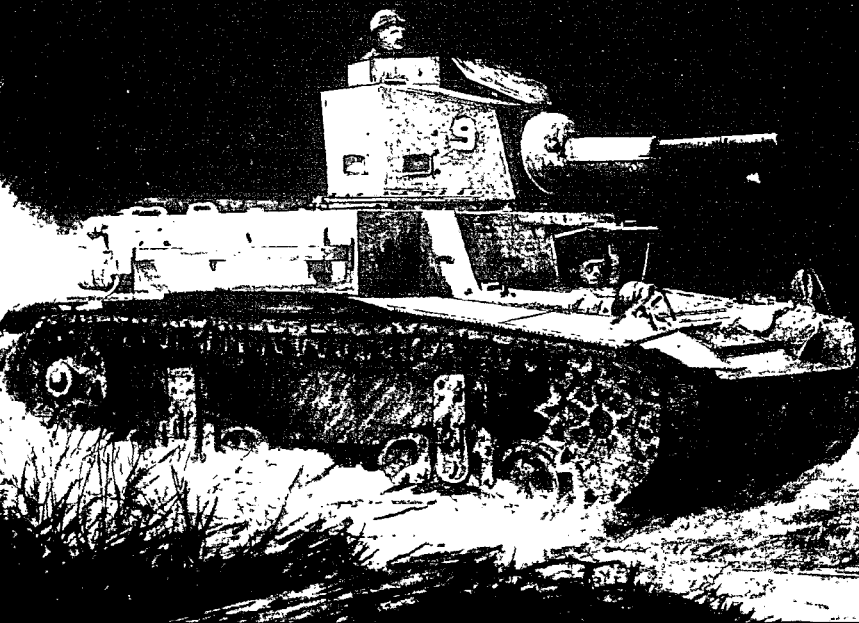
## The 1941 Louisiana Maneuvers

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*The operational level of war and the operational art have been touted as revolutionary doctrinal concepts for the US Army. The concepts are not new to the Army; only recently resurrected. This article examines a time when the Army may not have recognized these concepts as doctrine, but did design exercises to practice them in the field.*

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**T**HE ARMY'S capstone doctrinal publication, Field Manual (FM) 100-5, *Operations*, emphasizes the importance of the operational art. The preface to the 1986 manual points out the continuation of the previous edition's doctrinal thrust: "Central aspects of the AirLand Battle doctrine—its recognition of the operational level of warfare, its focus on the seizure and retention of the initiative, and its insistence on the requirement for multi-service cooperation—remain unaltered."<sup>1</sup>

However, as noted by Lieutenant Colonel L. D. Holder, one of the principal authors of the current manual, despite the authors' intent to highlight its importance, little attention has been paid to the operational art.<sup>2</sup> Instead, he writes, most attention has gone to the manual's discussion of deep attack and maneuver tactics.<sup>3</sup>

This article discusses the operational art, as related in AirLand Battle doctrine, and reviews the record of pre-World War II large-scale maneuver exercises.<sup>4</sup> In particular, the Army's performance in preparing for, executing and critiquing the 1941 Louisiana Maneuvers is explored by addressing two related questions: To what extent did the Army's senior leadership appreciate and train in the operational art prior to sending units into combat in World War II? What is the relevance of studying these maneuvers when considering training at the operational level for today's Army?

This study shows the potential value that large-scale training maneuvers provide for learning the operational art. In addition,

the designing, planning and executing of large-unit maneuvers in the real world of time and space provide the opportunity for significant multi-echelon training in combined arms and joint operations at the operational and tactical levels of war.

### ***Operational Art Imperatives***

The operational art is defined as: "the employment of military forces to attain strategic goals in a theater of operations through the design, organization, and conduct of campaigns and major operations."<sup>5</sup>

The essence of the art is the "identification of the enemy's operational center-of-gravity—his source of strength of balance—and concentration of superior combat power against that point to achieve a decisive success."<sup>6</sup> Commanders of army groups and armies responsible for a theater of war or theater of operations must design, plan and conduct campaigns to achieve strategic objectives. Corps and division commanders plan and conduct major ground operations and battles in a sequence designed to achieve operational objectives.<sup>7</sup>

The operational commander should consider three interrelated questions:

- What military condition must be produced in the theater of war or operations to achieve the strategic goal?
- What sequence of action is most likely to produce that condition?
- How should the resources of the force be applied to accomplish that sequence of action?<sup>8</sup>

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task is the concentration of superior strength against an enemy's weakness at the decisive place and time to achieve an objective.<sup>9</sup> Subtasks include synchronizing the

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movement and effective concentration of large forces and exploiting tactical gains.<sup>10</sup> Campaign planning requires "the staging, conduct, and exploitation of major operations."<sup>11</sup>

Holder elaborates on these essential tasks in his discussion of the "spectrum" of the operational art.<sup>12</sup> At its upper end, the operational art required analyzing complex situations, fitting means to ends and designating objectives. The lower end covers designing campaigns: deciding where to fight, how to move and position forces, and when and how to exploit tactical advantages. According to Holder, the pre-World War II practitioners of the operational art did not have a "doctrinal thrust" for focusing their efforts.

While the US Army Command and General Staff College of the 1920s and 1930s recognized large-unit operations as a field

of study, there was no overarching vision similar to the German's blitzkrieg.<sup>13</sup> Thus, for the Army staff officer on the eve of the Louisiana Maneuvers, the operational art only consisted of classroom-learned principles. Despite the lack of a doctrinal thrust, the principles, tasks and sub-tasks of the operational art were considered in the training and operations of corps and armies in 1941.

### ***Operational-Level Training***

J. Lawton Collins was named chief of staff of the US VII Corps in January 1941.<sup>14</sup> By the time the Louisiana Maneuvers concluded in September, his corps had completed a full plate of what we would today call operational-level training. To begin with, the corps' three subordinate National Guard divisions had never trained together as a corps. In addition, as part of these maneuvers, VII Corps' higher headquarters, the newly formed Second Army, participated in field maneuvers for the first time. The eight months of training prior to the maneuvers included a program that was truly monumental in comparison with any previous peacetime training conducted by the US Army.

Jean Moenk, in a study of large-scale Army maneuvers, records the magnitude of the training task facing the pre-World War II Army. Although armies and corps had been organized during the Civil War, from 1865 to 1898, the Army was criticized for its "glaring deficiencies in the field of unit training."<sup>15</sup>

It was only in 1898, at the direction of the Army inspector general, that some limited large-scale training was attempted. Even in preparation for World War I, in the rush to send American soldiers to the Western Front, no large-scale maneuvers or field-training exercises were conducted. It was not until 1936 that the Army again began



M2A4 of the 7th Cavalry Brigade (Mechanized) overtakes a horsed squadron during the summer exercises of 1940.

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forming corps and conducting command-post exercises for large-unit operations. Thus Collins, his staff and their contemporaries had little experience to build on.

The VII Corps developed a four-part training mobilization program (TMP). This program was approved by Lieutenant General Lesley J. McNair of the General Headquarters, US Army, and was later adopted Armywide for training corps and armies.<sup>16</sup> Part one of the TMP consisted of 13 weeks of individual and small-unit training up to the battalion level. This was followed by a series of tests. The third phase was set aside for correcting deficiencies. Training at the operational level was conducted in part four and included division, corps and army maneuvers.

Collins reinforces Moenk's description of the historic proportions of these maneuvers

by noting that this training marked the "first time in peace . . . a tactical headquarters . . . was created to supervise training of divisions . . . and to participate in field maneuvers."<sup>17</sup> There were four major principles and objectives for conducting these exercises:

- Training high-level staffs and support elements by requiring a realistic exercise of time and space factors.
- Generating tactical and logistical situations requiring decisions and actions.
- Providing a framework for joint coordination.
- Introducing the "unexpected."<sup>18</sup>

Moenk reports that the consensus among senior commanders was that achieving these objectives required having all parts of the large units—the corps and armies—operate simultaneously in a representative

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environment. In addition, the maneuvers were designed for testing new organizations, tactics and equipment.

The stated purpose of previous 1940 maneuvers expresses a real concern for conducting training in the operational art: "The announced general purpose of the Third Army Maneuvers was to train the new type corps, composed of triangular divisions, in concentrations over long-distances against a mobile enemy, and in maneuvers under combat conditions, both alone and coupled with combat aviation and mechanized forces."<sup>19</sup>

This series of large-scale maneuvers "marked the progress of the United States Army into modern methods of warfare. . . ." <sup>20</sup> After completing divisional maneuvers in Tennessee in June and then corps maneuvers in Arkansas in August, VII Corps was ready for its "culminating field maneuver"—the Louisiana Maneuvers of 1941.

### ***Louisiana Maneuvers***

In an area covering approximately 30,000 square miles, more than 400,000 soldiers participated in the 1941 Louisiana Maneuvers. This first, largest and only free-play, army-on-army field maneuver pitted the Second Army of Lieutenant General Ben Lear against the Third Army of Lieutenant General Walter Krueger. The exercise di-

rector was McNair, who later became commander of Army Ground Forces—the Army's chief trainer in World War II.

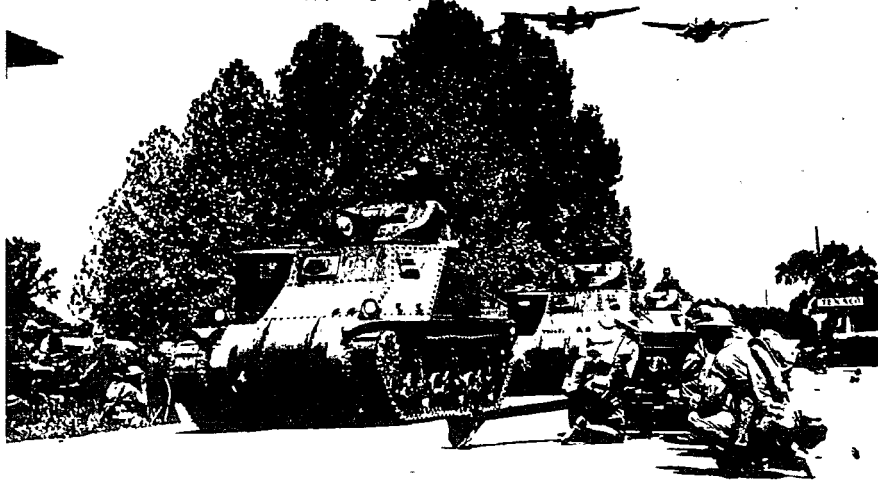
The Second Army included 2 corps and 8 divisions, while the Third Army fought with 2 corps and 10 divisions. Each army was allocated its own air assets, and more than 1,000 aircraft participated. Other "firsts" included the introduction of an armored corps under Major General George S. Patton Jr.; the use of a company of paratroopers in a raid against a communications installation; the testing of antitank weapons and doctrine; and the field testing of the triangular division.<sup>21</sup>

The planning for the exercise included testing the participating units' abilities in operational maneuver. For instance, in commenting on the disparity in strength between the Second and Third Armies, Moenk records that Brigadier General Mark Clark, the maneuver's deputy director, reported that the scenario was designed to force the smaller Second Army to assume offensive operations "to seek advantages by careful selection of terrain, by skillful employment of offensive weapons, and by speed of action."<sup>22</sup>

The tactical play consisted of two phases, designed for placing each Army in the offense and defense at least one time during the course of maneuver play. The comments of the maneuver's observers reflect a concern for the operational art, and senior commanders were bluntly criticized when their units came up short when performing operational tasks. Recorded comments included: not employing forces to achieve mass at the decisive time and place; not recognizing opportunities for exploiting tactical advantages; overextending beyond their culminating points; and shortcomings in effectively using what we today refer to as agility, initiative, depth and synchronization.

Collins's writings about the exercise also

two M48 medium tanks pass a 57mm antitank gun as B-26 Marauder medium bombers roar overhead during the 1941 Louisiana Maneuvers. Note that the tanks lack their hull-mounted 75mm guns which were in short supply during this period.



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show an appreciation for the operational art. During phase one, he reports, the Second Army's maneuver placed it in a favorable position for striking an exposed flank of the Third Army. Although the Second Army failed to attack, the Third Army was able to demonstrate its agility and "regroup, change its front so as to checkmate the Second Army, and then, with its greater strength force Lear's Army to withdraw."<sup>23</sup>

The logistics imperatives of the operational art were not overlooked during the maneuvers. One assistant G4 staff officer, as reported in the Third Army's history, noted that maneuvering in such a large area changed the way his army had originally planned to conduct resupply operations. Logistics had to be decentralized and the G4 soon realized that he had to work closely

with the G3 staff officer to know the "general plan of action" at all times. The logistician also learned that he had to devise ways to plan for the "unpredictability of people like General Patton [who] loved [conducting] 250 mile end-run sweeps."<sup>24</sup>

Upon completion of the maneuvers, General George C. Marshall cabled McNair, congratulating him on the "complete success" of the exercise.<sup>25</sup> Without a doubt, mobilizing, organizing and deploying two newly formed armies, and executing a series of complex training maneuvers was a truly remarkable accomplishment. However, comments from the on-scene observers reflected both the significant problems in the level of training of the units involved, as well as the "friction" involved in the practice of the operational art.<sup>26</sup> Collins's autobiography pro-



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vides a brief summary of the key lessons he learned:

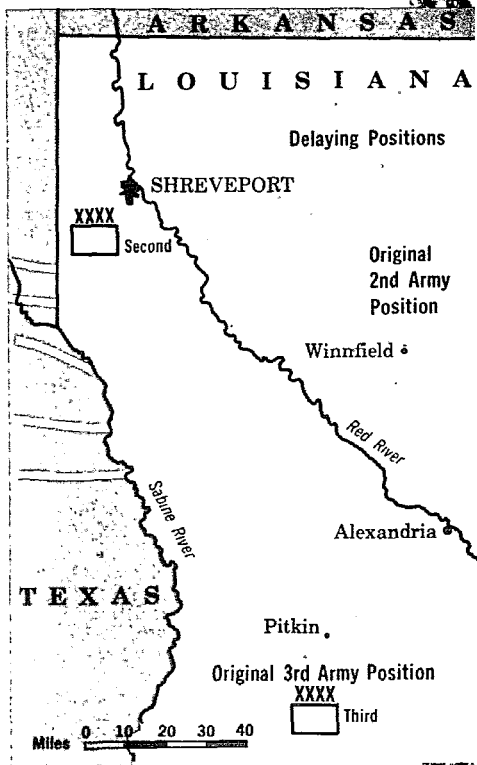
- The requirement for extensive coordination of infantry, armor and air-ground forces in attack and defense.
- The difficulties involved in performing withdrawals and river crossings.
- The need for testing combinations of combined arms forces and capitalizing on the flexibility and maneuverability of the triangular division.
- Overall, the gaining of logistical experience equal to the maneuver's tactical experience.<sup>27</sup>

McNair reserved his highest praise for the excellent performance of the logisticians. He had less praise for the operational and tactical conduct observed during the exercise. The maneuver director was critical of the state of command and leadership at all echelons and seemed particularly upset with the "low training ceiling of officers." He left no doubt that personnel changes would be forthcoming as a result of sub-par performances by various leaders.<sup>28</sup>

### Implications For Today

McNair's comments reflect an appreciation for operational and tactical imperatives similar to those found in AirLand Battle doctrine. Readers of the lessons-learned literature from the National Training Center (NTC) will also note the similarity between his recorded comments and many of the deficiencies being found during today's maneuver exercises. Whereas the NTC concentrates on tactical-level training, the Louisiana Maneuvers illustrate the opportunity for multi-echelon training, including operational and tactical levels of war, that is possible during large-scale maneuvers. Thus, McNair's observers were able to report numerous tactical deficiencies in addition to their operational-level comments.

For instance, the maneuver's after-action report notes that orders were usually too



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Generals Lesley J. McNair (left) and George C. Marshall discuss troop movements during the Louisiana Maneuvers, 26 September 1941.

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long, often unclear and normally too late in arriving to permit adequate planning in subordinate units. McNair urged reducing orders to a "few lines" and relying on overlays and standard operating procedures.<sup>29</sup> He also placed particular emphasis on fire-support problems that were observed, both for air-ground and infantry-field artillery coordination. During one division's attack, only one of the seven assigned field artillery battalions was in position to provide fire support.<sup>30</sup>

Other comments underlining McNair's concern for developing the operational and tactical capabilities of the two armies and their subordinate units included criticisms for:

- Failing to react swiftly to changing orders and situations.
- Not coordinating "up, down, and laterally."
- Constructing vaguely conceived plans and employing piecemeal methods of attacking.
- Not properly coordinating air force and logistical support for maintaining the tempo of offensive operations.<sup>31</sup>

The pages of comments on the deficiencies observed during the 1941 Louisiana Maneuvers are filled with similar tactical and operational problems. Participants in the maneuvers, such as Collins, note the importance of the maneuvers in their own professional development. They learned about the difficulties of maneuvering large formations of combined arms, coordinating ground and air operations, and providing logistic support over long distances. They also learned the strengths and weaknesses of their equipment and units, and, perhaps most importantly, about the skill of their leaders and staffs.

Studying these past experiences of large-scale maneuvers is particularly relevant for today's trainers because they are a source of ideas for multi-echelon sustainment train-

ing and for the possibilities of linking training at the operational and tactical levels. In learning about training in the operational art, attention should be paid to these lessons of history and the record of a period when the Army prepared corps and armies for combat at what we now call the operational level of war.

The consensus on the requirement for large-scale training that existed among senior Army commanders prior to World War II proved to be a wise assessment of the Army's training needs. Today's leaders should reflect on their predecessors' approach to training at the operational level and the potential for capitalizing on the multi-echelon training opportunities of large-scale, joint and combined exercises.<sup>32</sup> As one of the contemporary authors of FM 100-5 said: "In

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fact, the adoption of the operational art may be the most important change in Army doctrine since World War II. The Army's response to it might well determine the force's success in the next war."<sup>33</sup>

#### NOTES

- 1 US Department of the Army, Field Manual (FM) 100-5, *Operations* (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, May 1986) 22
- 2 L D Holder, *A New Day for the Operational Art: Army* (March 1985) as reprinted in Student Text 101-4, *Operational Environment* 4-208
- 3 Ibid.
- 4 Large scale refers to corps- and army-size units.
- 5 FM 100-5 10
- 6 Ibid.
- 7 Ibid.
- 8 Ibid.
- 9 Ibid. 27
- 10 Ibid. 28
- 11 Ibid.
- 12 Holder, 4-208
- 13 Ibid. 4-207
- 14 J. Lawton Collins, *Lightening Joe: An Autobiography* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1979) 100-101
- 15 Jean R. Moenk, *A History of Large Scale Maneuvers in the United States, 1935-1964* (Fort Monroe, VA: US Army Training and Doctrine Command, 1969) 1-3
- 16 Collins 103
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- 18 Moenk 4-5
- 19 US Third Army Third Army Maneuvers, May 5-25, 1940 (Headquarters, undated)
- 20 Moenk 61
- 21 Collins 111-12 and Moenk 10 53
- 22 Moenk, 57
- 23 Collins 113
- 24 Francis G. Smith, *History of the Third Army* (Washington, DC: Headquarters, Army Ground Forces, 1946) 18
- 25 Smith 21
- 26 Lesley J. McNair, *Comments on Second Army Versus Third Army Maneuvers, 1941* (Camp Polk, LA: GHQ Director Headquarters, 22 September 1941)
- 27 Collins 114
- 28 McNair 4-5
- 29 Ibid. 1
- 30 Ibid. 4
- 31 McNair's Comments
- 32 For some practical ideas, see L D Holder, *Training for the Operational Level: Parameters* vol 16 no 1 (Spring 1986) 7-13
- 33 Holder 4-208

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