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The Louisiana Maneuvers 1940-41 The Anvil on Which the United States Army Was Shaped

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If an individual had to conjure up a visual image that represented the U.S. Army by the summer of 1945, that image would be of a sword. This sword; long since unsheathed and with a tatty hand-grip, its blade covered with nicks and scratches, and worn from continuous use, would be found stuck deep in the bowels of our enemy. This final thrust ensured our victory; freedom was restored and peace returned. But, this is the ending, what of the beginning?

In 1935 the U.S. Army was divided geographically into four Field Armies numbered First through the Fourth. These Field Armies were charged with training of their subordinate units from Corp level down. Since WWI the U.S. Army had not sent to the field or maneuvered any unit larger than a Regiment. So, in August of 1940 The First Army appropriately conducted the first large scale training maneuver. This maneuver looked impressive on paper but the actual number that participating was only 36,000. One officer who was pleased was Army Chief of Staff Gen. George C Marshall. Gen. Marshall knew that units needed to go to the field to execute tactical exercises compared to just exercising theories or Command Post Exercises. So, in 1940 two more maneuvers were held with over 50,000 troops participating.

It was decided that the next series of maneuvers would be held in the Texas-Louisiana area in the summer of 1940. This area was in Third Army's Area so it would be the host Army for this maneuver. A Field Headquarters was setup at Camp Beauregard and it secured hundreds of thousands of acres for use during the maneuvers. The initial operation would be the first Corp versus Corp exercise with over 60,000 men participating. The soldiers were divided between IV Corps and IX Corp (Provisional). The two Corps waged, "war" from the late spring throughout summer. This maneuver showed the capabilities of some units and the shortcomings of others. Col.

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Patton, an observer for Third Army, was very critical in his remarks toward some commanders and their units. On June 22, 1940 France surrendered to Germany and Britain stood alone. Due to this Congress decided to conduct the first peacetime draft in US history. On September 14, 1940, citizen soldiers came pouring in to fill out the ranks of Army and National Guard units. This buildup would continue until the fall of 1941. The Army continued to execute maneuvers and Louisiana would witness five more Corp level maneuvers until August 1941 because September was the month the two armies would clash.

A new concept: the Army versus Army Maneuver. This maneuver would be the first time one American Army trained with another. The two armies chosen to "fight" would be the Third Army (Blue) Commanded by General Kruger, and the Second Army (Red) Commanded by Gen Lear. The total number of troops committed to this simulated war was 472,000. This represents the largest concentration of American military might inside the continental United States. Two Major "battles" were fought and many lessons were learned. Generals were replaced and new equipment and ideas were implemented. Some great and beneficial, others would be straightened out in the crucible of combat.

The Army Air Force was also involved. Designated the Blue and Red Air Forces they divided up over 1,000 planes between them to perform tactical and strategic missions. The Army Air Corps did not have enough aircraft so they borrowed eight squadrons of pilots and planes from the United States Navy and Marine Corps making it a Joint Service Maneuver as well.

The "grand" Louisiana Maneuvers were over, the units began to move out of the area to begin another exercise in the Carolinas. They did not remain gone for long. War began to the US on December 7, 1941, and once again Louisiana had another active role to play. The Army had a goal of establishing 100 combat divisions; it settled for 89. Out of these 89 divisions, 45, or over half, of the divisions trained in Louisiana. These Divisions left Louisiana and deployed overseas the camps, now empty, served another purpose. Camp Beauregard became an induction center for the other Camps in the area. Camps Livingston and Claiborne them, became infantry replacement training centers preparing over 1 million men as replacements. Camp Polk (Fort Polk today), became and Armor Replacement Training Center.

The Maneuvers contributed much to the war effort during World War II. It could be said that it was one of the furnaces in which the U.S. Army was forged. If that is indeed true, then the Louisiana Maneuvers surely was the anvil on which the Army was shaped.

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Military History Workshop Held in June

The Military History Affinity Group sponsored the Collections Camp: Military History workshop in June at the Atlanta History Center.

This workshop, led by Gordon Blaker, Myers Brown, and Gordon Jones, focused on the care and identification of military artifacts of the 19th century. It was well-attended and provided great information.

This workshop is held every two years, so the next class will be in 2014. Check the [Military History webpage](#) for more information as it becomes available.



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