

THE LOUISIANA MANEUVERS, SEPTEMBER, 1941:  
PRACTICE FOR WAR

by

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter	Page
I. The Louisiana Maneuvers. . . . .	1
II. The Fighting . . . . .	20
III. What the Maneuvers Showed. . . . .	31
IV. Acknowledgments. . . . .	42
Footnotes. . . . .	43
Bibliography . . . . .	52
Appendix A . . . . .	55
Appendix B . . . . .	57
Appendix C . . . . .	59
Appendix D . . . . .	61

LIST OF MAPS

1. Map 1 - Louisiana Maneuver Area, 1941 - 1962 . . . . . 3
2. Map 2 - Second Army vx. Third Army - Louisiana Area - 1941 . . . . . 26

## CHAPTER I. THE LOUISIANA MANEUVERS

In the latter half of September, 1941, less than three months before the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor forced the United States into World War II, Lieutenant General Ben Lear's Second Army and Lieutenant General Walter Krueger's Third Army fought the first and only army-versus-army war game in United States history.<sup>1</sup> From September 15 to September 28, 1941, nineteen divisions participated in the maneuvers throughout over 30,000 square miles (19.2 million acres) of Louisiana.<sup>2</sup> The estimate of men involved varied greatly from source to source; suffice it to say that approximately 123,000 served in Second Army and 219,000 in Third Army.<sup>3</sup> The Louisiana Maneuvers were the largest war games ever undertaken by the United States Army and represented the culmination of the Army's large-unit training exercises prior to the American entry into World War II.

Unlike many previous maneuvers which were "played," the strategy and tactics known in advance, the Louisiana Maneuvers were a "free" maneuver. There was nothing prearranged about their outcome. The Army's General Headquarters (GHQ) favored free maneuvers and gave Lear and Krueger a wide strategic directive, but the tactics and results were up to each commander's daring and initiative, plus the ability and resourcefulness of his men.

Hemispheric defense was the strategic assumption behind the maneuvers. Lieutenant Lesley J. McNair, Chief of Staff of the recently formed GHQ, told Brigadier General Mark W. Clark, Deputy Chief of Staff GHQ, "...keep the directive as simple as possible."<sup>4</sup> Clark took a roadmap of Louisiana and drew a "big goose egg" in the area of Shreveport where Lear would assemble his army, and another for Krueger's forces to the south, put a broad line between the two which no troops could cross before signaled, and gave each

army a mission to draw them into contact.<sup>5</sup> Krueger's forces represented the mythical nation of ALMAT (Arkansas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, and Tennessee) and were part of a hypothetical invasion bridgehead on the Texas and Louisiana Gulf Coast, acting as a screening force for the other invasion troops supposedly pushing north behind them. Lear's job as vanguard of the defensive forces of the mythical KOTMK (Kansas, Oklahoma, Texas, Missouri, and Kentucky) was to stop Krueger and push him back into the Gulf.<sup>6</sup>

Due to their unprecedented size and unpredictable nature, the war games were the Army's closest approximation to actual combat, and because of their implicit value, the Army stressed realism. The Louisiana Maneuvers marked the following firsts: the first time armored forces figured in American battle strategy; the first use of the new provisional antitank battalions; the first use of paratroops by the United States; the first joint Navy Marine Corps and Army Air Force support of ground troops--the greatest number of tactical airplanes yet assembled (over 1000); the first field-test of the Army's medical and signal facilities; and two types of air-raid warning systems.<sup>7</sup> The maneuvers featured the last time mounted cavalry made an appearance in strength, as two regular cavalry divisions and a National Guard brigade took part.<sup>8</sup> Adding to their realism, the maneuvers were of greater duration than prior war games, and there were no ceasefires or rest periods during the fighting--only a pause between the two stages.

The maneuvers between Second and Third Armies took more time than previous war games because the forces involved were much larger, and they were not merely acting out a set of prearranged instructions. For example,

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