Soldiers marching during the May 1940 Louisiana Maneuvers

A Soldier's Place in History: Fort Polk, Louisiana

Kane and Keeton

2004

A Soldier's Place in History

Fort Polk, Louisiana

Sharyn Kane and Richard Keeton

A Soldier's Place in History

Fort Polk, Louisiana

Sharyn Kane and Richard Keeton

Funded by

The Joint Readiness Training Center and Fort Polk

Administered and published by

Southeast Archeological Center
National Park Service
Tallahassee, Florida

2004

To the soldiers
who have passed through the gates of Fort Polk,
and to those yet to come.

May we never forget their service to our nation.

Contents

Preface

In the midst of our daily lives, few of us stop to reflect on how we might become part of history. Yet we all share roles in the unfolding narrative of our people and nation, even if we are never singled out for special recognition and school children fail to find our names and deeds recorded in their text books.

The goal of this book is to document the collective story of the thousands of soldiers who have trained at Fort Polk or were stationed there during their military service. Some of them are famous, and deservedly so, for their great military skill and valor. Others might have names that are familiar to us. The great majority, however, remain unknown except to their own families and fellow troops. Nonetheless, their contributions to the security and national interests of the United States are no less important.

> *We have an opportunity to tell an important story, a story that needs to be told.*
>
> *— Jim Grafton*
> *Fort Polk Cultural Resource Management Coordinator*

In their letters home, soldiers have long shared bits and pieces of their personal military experiences, sometimes taking great pains to avoid causing worry with too many telling details. Some kept diaries, noting their actions and thoughts as political and military events swirled around them, determining their fates. Most of these first-person accounts are eventually forgotten or lost, and with them disappear not just the minutiae of the daily grind, but thousands of recollections of those moments and momentous events that shape character and test resolve, that lead to acts of individual sacrifice and reflect commitment to a greater cause than self.

No single book could accurately portray the contributions of every Fort Polk soldier, but chronicling the post's history preserves some of all of their stories.

In searching for a suitable location for a military post, U.S. Army scouts were far from the first to discover the stretch of north-central Louisiana now occupied by Fort Polk. Prehistoric wanderers called Paeloindians explored the region some 12,000 years ago. In the waning years of the last Ice Age, these hunters left their characteristic spear points in the Peason Ridge training area of Fort Polk, which may have been a favored meeting place. Other prehistoric people followed. Over thousands of years, they too left remnants of their existence across the landscape of present-day Fort Polk.

Archeologists, studying the artifacts and other evidence of prehistoric life in the region, have documented their findings in several technical reports. These, in turn, were summarized in an extensive study funded by Fort Polk and directed by archeologist David Anderson of the Southeast Archeological Center (SEAC), National Park Service.

The sequel to this archeological study, Steven Smith's 1999 book *A Good Home for a Poor Man: Fort Polk and Vernon Parish, 1800–1940*, was also funded by Fort Polk and edited and published by SEAC. Smith focused on the hearty breed of pioneers who carved out new lives in a virtual no-man's-land. Through sheer determination, these settlers forged a new culture based on turpentining, lumbering, and hardscrabble farming.

A Soldier's Place in History picks up where *A Good Home for a Poor Man* leaves off, covering the arrival of the military and its impact on the region and its inhabitants since the 1940s. We are honored to take our turn at ensuring that the history of Fort Polk and the surrounding area is being documented and preserved.

Acknowledgments

Studying, preserving, and sharing information about Fort Polk is an ongoing, cooperative effort for Fort Polk's Environmental and Natural Resources Management Division (ENRMD) and the National Park Service's Southeast Archeological Center (SEAC). We are grateful to the many people who have helped shape this book, beginning with Jim Grafton, Cultural Resource Management Coordinator, ENRMD, and Charles Stagg, Chief, ENRMD, who envisioned a book on Fort Polk's military history that soldiers, veterans, residents of the surrounding communities, and others would find interesting and informative.

John Ehrenhard, an archeologist and the director of SEAC, has long championed sharing with the public archeological and historical research regarding our national heritage. His contributions and support have been extensive.

John Jameson, another archeologist with SEAC, shares this deep commitment to cultural resource outreach. He was instrumental in organizing an invaluable data-gathering symposium in the early stages of this project.

Ellen Ibert, with Fort Polk's Cultural Resource Management Office, suggested important sources of information and, along with coworker Bob Hays, helped ensure the symposium's success. Ellen also generously offered the use of her office and equipment while we were collecting the historic photographs for this volume with the help of David Bingham, curator of the Fort Polk Military Museum. David opened his files to us and shared his extensive knowledge without hesitation.

The insights and recollections of the following, who granted us interviews, helped shed light on the events and developments that impacted the post, the adjacent communities, and the rest of the United States. Their input, so integral to this narrative, was greatly appreciated.

- David Bingham, Curator, Fort Polk Military Museum
- Howard Blackburn, Leesville, Louisiana
- Wiley Clark, former commandant of the Non-Commissioned Officers Academy, Fort Polk
- Mary Cleveland, Director, Museum of West Louisiana, Leesville, Louisiana
- Albert Dunn, former paratrooper, Leesville, Louisiana
- Harry Fisher, former Fort Polk soldier, Eunice, Louisiana
- James Grafton, Cultural Resource Management Coordinator, ENRMD, Fort Polk
- Mr. and Mrs. John Guy, Anacoco, Louisiana
- Bruce Mann, forester, Fort Polk
- Doris (Dolly) Mayo, Leesville, Louisiana
- Kenneth Prud'homme, Natchitoches, Louisiana
- Jimmy Wyatt, Project Manager, Transportation Pool, Fort Polk

SEAC's editor Virginia Horak is responsible for the skillful arrangement of images and text, a laborious task she executed with the highest standards.

A final thank you to the many others who helped us along the way.

I. Tanks Descend on Leesville, Winning Favor and a Future

Early in the morning on Tuesday, May 15, 1940, residents of central Louisiana were startled awake by military tanks speeding toward their objective, the small community of Leesville. For almost a week, the region had swarmed with soldiers. Divided into the Red Army and the Blue Army, the men rushed about, shooting their rifles loaded with blanks, while war planes buzzed overhead, diving at the troops. All of central Louisiana seemed to be engulfed in war, caught up in the largest military maneuvers ever held in the United States.

> *American tanks do not surrender.… As long as one tank is able to move, it must go forward.*
>
> *— General George S. Patton*

After years of public apathy, the nation's military had been seriously neglected. The poorly equipped United States Army had few armored vehicles, so the sight of fifty-four tanks rolling through the Louisiana countryside caught everyone's attention. Few had ever seen a single tank before, much less the thundering fleet advancing on Leesville.

Tanks had been used in World War I, but since then the technology had been largely abandoned. Military leaders still favored the cavalry, with its showy units that were a nostalgic holdover from the days of cavaliers. In 1940, on the eve of World War II, some still argued that the large-scale use of tanks was an ineffective strategy. Events that unfolded during the Louisiana Maneuvers soon soundly refuted this view.

According to Nick Pollacia Jr., author of a thesis about the Louisiana Maneuvers, at dawn on that spring day in May, the tanks of the Blue Army easily scattered the Red Army's horsemen guarding the small village of Hornbeck. As part of a combined armored, infantry, and artillery force, the tanks then turned southeast toward Leesville. To speed up deployment, the infantry rode in trucks borrowed from other units. Roaring down a rural road in the dim light of a new day, the tanks stormed into Leesville at 6:20 a.m., catching the 1st Cavalry Division off guard. Firing blank shells, the tank forces quickly overpowered the opposition, who only managed to fire one machine gun and one antitank weapon. The rapid collapse of the cavalry headquarters was breathtaking, as tanks surrounded defending commander Major General Kenyon Joyce. Military umpires declared the general and many of his men captured and sidelined them for the rest of the day.

Brigadier General Jonathan (Skinny) Wainwright had awoken early that morning and was apparently fueling equipment at a Leesville service station when the opposition tanks first appeared. He slipped behind a gas pump and, shielded from view, crouched perfectly still until the tanks passed. Moving stealthily out of town, he joined with and took command of the remnants of the 1st Cavalry.

Not far from Leesville, many more Red Army troops were positioned, including the 7th Cavalry (Mechanized) Brigade. Commanded by Brigadier General Adna P. Chaffee, the 2,750 soldiers of the 7th Cavalry formed a potent force, equipped with 1,200 machine guns, 190 motorcycles, and 112 light tanks (most of the entire army's remaining tanks). Chaffee, a stalwart supporter of armored forces, had long argued with less enthusiastic officers over the use of tanks.

Before the capture of Leesville, the 7th Cavalry had been operating east of town, crisscrossing land

that was to become Fort Polk. At one point, the mechanized cavalry had to halt their battle because of a forest fire, perhaps ignited by the soldiers' weapons. For a while, the 7th Cavalry hid near the town of Cravens, just south of present-day Fort Polk. Once back in the fray, they engaged numerically superior infantry and were almost trapped just north of the future Fort Polk. They managed to escape, wheel around, and begin a drive toward Leesville, which they hoped to recapture.

Chaffee's forces and Wainwright's 1st Cavalry Division assaulted Leesville at 3:30 p.m. that same day. A wild mock battle erupted, with more than one hundred tanks racing through the town, sometimes facing off at point-blank range. The staccato sounds of firing machine guns seemed to erupt around every corner. Dense smoke engulfed houses and stores as a column of tanks, clanking loudly, lumbered down a side street, trying to sneak behind the enemy troops. Another battle flared. The chaos and cacophony seemed all too real as armored vehicles halted, spun around, and darted between the buildings, churning up dust and ripping apart sidewalks.

Many of Leesville's residents, numbering some 2,800, had adjusted to seeing their community transformed into a battleground. They avidly watched the unfolding action like spectators at a sporting event. Some sat on their porches and rooftops to get a bird's-eye view. Others, unnerved by the noise

Thousands of soldiers passed through Louisiana during the 1940 maneuvers. Officers often rode in the motorcycle sidecars.

Finding fuel was an ongoing challenge during the various Louisiana Maneuvers. Here army vehicles line up for gas.

and commotion, peered out from behind curtained windows.

Abruptly, the engagement stopped. Umpires declared that Chaffee's tanks, along with the 1st Cavalry, had successfully regained the town. The Red Army now controlled Leesville, and the battle appeared to be over. The respite, however, was short-lived. Within two hours, around 5 p.m., the Blue Army returned, augmented by overwhelming numbers of men from the 1st and 5th Infantry Divisions. Yet another mock battle flared up, and the Blue Army recaptured the town. In a mere twelve hours, control of Leesville switched three times.

Before the United States ever entered into World War II, three major maneuvers had been conducted in Louisiana. These exercises helped recast the entire U.S. Army—its strategies, equipment, and leadership. A new generation of officers moved to the forefront, including Generals George S. Patton and Dwight D. Eisenhower and Brigadier Generals Adna P. Chaffee and Jonathan Wainwright.

Within weeks after taking Leesville in May 1940, Chaffee received a promotion and orders to form the nation's first armored divisions replete with tanks and geared for rapid movement. He author-

Columns of vehicles sometimes clogged roads during the May 1940 maneuvers.

ized the acquisition of land near Leesville for the 3rd Armored Division, which later was to distinguish itself in the battle to retake Normandy and in other crucial European engagements. The new post that Chaffee helped establish ultimately became Fort Polk.

Wainwright's destiny carried him to the Philippines where he served as a deputy commander to General Douglas MacArthur. In the days following the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, Wainwright skillfully maneuvered U.S. and Philippine armies, delaying the onslaught of numerically superior Japanese forces. When President Franklin D. Roosevelt ordered a reluctant MacArthur to evacuate, Wainwright assumed command of U.S. forces trapped on the island of Corregidor. With supplies and food dwindling and soldiers starving, he was eventually forced to surrender. This dark moment in American history culminated in the march of U.S. prisoners of war across the Bataan Peninsula. Many died, but Wainwright survived long years of imprisonment. He later witnessed defeated Japanese officials signing surrender documents on the battleship *Missouri*.

To the casual observer of the Louisiana Maneuvers, the street fighting was an exciting diversion with little peril of real casualties. The long-term implications, however, were deadly serious. Within a year and a half of the first maneuvers, the Japanese attacked U.S. ships at Pearl Harbor, thrusting the nation into a global conflict that ultimately killed sixty million people. The U.S. military recovered from the assault at Pearl Harbor and the costly setback in the Philippines to become the world's most powerful armed forces. The training provided during the Louisiana Maneuvers and later at Fort Polk proved pivotal in turning the tide toward victory.

From World War II until today, the post has served as an important plank in the foundation of the nation's military defense. This is the story of Fort Polk and the soldiers, officers, and citizens who contributed to its history.

2. War Threatens, Reputations Rise and Fall

On September 1, 1939, Adolph Hitler, the führer of Germany, unleashed the most powerful army on earth against Poland. By using fast tank columns and waves of warplanes, Hitler crushed the opposition and set in motion a war that ultimately would engulf the United States and validate the need for a military post in Louisiana.

Coincidentally, on that same day, an important promotion occurred that would affect the formation of Camp Polk—General George C. Marshall became U.S. Army Chief of Staff, the most important military adviser to President Franklin D. Roosevelt.

> *The only way to learn how to do things properly is to get out on the ground and actually do them.*
>
> *— General George C. Marshall*

A slight, bookish-looking man, Marshall was an astute observer known for his excellent memory. Colleagues considered him a brilliant military strategist, although he was prone to be overlooked in a crowd. Quiet by nature, Marshall nonetheless could persuasively present arguments that were difficult to dispute. Anyone who underestimated him did so to their ultimate regret.

Joining the Army before World War I, Marshall habitually made notes about colleagues he considered exceptional. This knowledge eventually helped him reshape the armed forces. As chief of staff, he began the overhaul slowly, but soon realized there was little time. Almost overnight, Germany had transformed from an insignificant and defeated nation into a menacing armed camp. At the same time, thousands of miles away, militarists in Japan had taken control of their government and launched a brutal invasion of China.

To some, an imminent clash between the two aggressor nations and the United States seemed likely. While the majority of Americans resisted even considering war, President Roosevelt and other national figures concluded that the country had to at least prepare for a conflict. The task was formidable. At this dangerous juncture in history, the United States militarily ranked seventeenth in the world, behind even the tiny country of Romania.

Years of public indifference and tight purse strings had left the Army a mere shell. Many high-ranking officers resisted innovations to an organization still structured for fighting World War I. Soldiers were issued 1903-model, bolt-action rifles and antiquated machine guns and artillery. The Army had only 329 light tanks, mere window dressing compared to the fleet of heavily armored tanks deployed by Germany.

In response to Germany's invasion of Poland, President Roosevelt declared a state of "limited national emergency" and began securing funds to expand the U.S. military and buy modern equipment. According to local historian Nick Pollacia Jr., Marshall started reorganizing by pushing for transformation of the Army's basic fighting unit, the infantry division.

During World War I, every Army division consisted of some 28,000 soldiers assigned to four infantry and two artillery regiments. Called square divisions, the name derived from the four infantry or combat units that figuratively formed the sides of a box. This tactic allowed the entire infantry to charge straight toward enemy trenches, while the artillery regiments fired sweeping barrages just in front of the advancing infantry.

Although this approach was ideal in a war of attrition and successfully used in past wars, by the 1930s some military strategists saw the need for

Plan Carefully, Then Improvise

Perhaps the most important figure orchestrating the three major prewar Louisiana Maneuvers and influencing the early history of Fort Polk was General George C. Marshall, Army Chief of Staff. Marshall's involvement with military exercises stretched back even before World War I.

In 1910, First Lieutenant Marshall was on extended leave in Europe, enjoying a second honeymoon. He learned while in London that the British Army was about to conduct major maneuvers and sought permission to observe them by accompanying the U.S. military attaché. His request to the U.S. embassy was rejected, but undaunted he set out on his own, bicycling through rural England until he came to a good vantage point where he stopped to watch the action with binoculars. He saw "about three times as much as our attaché" because his movements were unrestricted, he later wrote. "I just rode all over the place and had an interesting time of it."

A year later, in 1911, the U.S. Army ordered Marshall to Texas to take part in maneuvers near the Mexican border. Before the war games began, he organized a dry run for staff personnel and communications officers in a forerunner of what more recently has come to be known as a command post exercise or CPX. The 1911 Texas maneuvers were unique because of three new technologies—portable wireless transmitters, field telephones, and airplanes. During the exercises, Marshall received what he believed to be the first military message ever broadcast over a portable wireless transmitter. In the message, a cavalry commander reported that he was "just west of the manure pile." Marshall later admitted that the communication, although historic, was of little help since only the cavalry commander knew the location of the manure pile.

In the spring of 1912, Marshall received orders to report to New York where he planned and organized the second largest maneuvers conducted in the United States since the Spanish-American War, involving fifteen thousand National Guardsmen from six eastern states and twenty-three hundred regular Army troops. Marshall's performance and organizational skill drew influential attention. Brigadier General Tasker Bliss wrote to Marshall that the success of the maneuvers derived largely from "the skillful manner in which you planned the various situations.…"

A defining moment for Marshall came in 1914 when he participated in maneuvers in the Philippines. Unexpectedly, Marshall, a first lieutenant, was assigned command of five thousand soldiers, even though others who outranked him were present. His troops performed so well that Lieutenant Henry H. (Hap) Arnold, who later headed up the Army Air Force during the Louisiana Maneuvers and World War II, correctly predicted that he had just "met a man who was going to be Chief of Staff of the Army some day."

(continued on next page)

Plan Carefully, Then Improvise (cont.)

Judges ruled that the Philippine maneuvers were a draw, but Marshall had a different opinion. "We pretty convincingly licked the other side," he wrote in one letter. The normally reticent officer even allowed himself to boast, writing in another letter to his brother that he had "absolute command" of the troops and was allowed to appoint "even the adjutant and the aides." In the same letter, however, he instructed his brother to destroy the letter. "Tear it up and disabuse your mind of the idea that I am rather a remarkable braggart."

Marshall joined in various other maneuvers as he continued his rise in the ranks. He firmly believed in the worth of such exercises and developed a philosophy that commanders should be trained to improvise. Occasionally, he required officers to plan maneuver movements in exacting detail, then he would "throw in a monkey wrench," according to Frank Hanner, director of the Infantry Museum at Fort Benning, Georgia. "He would come in and take all your maps, take all your notes, and see how well you did without them. The ones who could be put under that kind of pressure and scrutiny and then succeed, Marshall felt like they had achieved the goal."

smaller, more mobile divisions. Arguing that the introduction of new, fast vehicles and powerful weapons made trench warfare obsolete, they developed the triangular division.

About half the size of the old square divisions, the triangular divisions were divided into three infantry and one light artillery regiments. The design called for one infantry regiment to engage the enemy, while the second probed for weaknesses, perhaps skirting around the enemy and striking at its flank or rear. The third regiment could be held in reserve, joining the action as needed. Because these three infantry regiments formed a virtual triangle of power, the term triangular division was coined.

The light artillery or fourth regiment was divided into sections that could be added to the different infantry regiments. When necessary, these infantry/artillery combinations, or combat teams, could also operate independently, far from the rest of the division. This flexibility allowed infantry and artillery to be dispersed over miles, rather than confined to trench warfare.

Scattered throughout the triangular divisions were crews who handled machine guns, mortars, and antitank weapons. This meant that regiments could be broken into smaller units of battalions, companies, platoons, and squads, all of which could fight independently. The triangular divisions were also equipped with medium-range artillery capable of lobbing shells some distance behind enemy lines.

Each triangular division incorporated support personnel, such as engineers, medics, quartermasters, and reconnaissance experts. They were limited in number, however, for the sake of mobility. Also important was the triangular division's reliance on trucks rather than pack horses and mules to transport ammunition, equipment, and supplies. In the words of Marshall, the triangular division was "the carefully considered product of some of the best minds in the Army."

Yet on the eve of World War II, considerable opposition to the concept persisted. In August 1939, Major General Hugh Drum, commander of the 1st Army, recommended retention of the square divisions. Other officers, observing maneuvers at Fort Benning, Georgia, in early 1940, concluded that square divisions, equipped with modern weapons, would be more powerful than the new triangular

divisions. They also argued that eliminating pack animals was not necessarily wise because "in certain types of terrain…the absence of animal transport may seriously limit the tactical mobility."

Despite this resistance, Marshall pushed ahead with plans to eliminate the square divisions and pack animals. He also sought extensive field tests of the newly organized 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th, and 5th (Triangular) Divisions. He decided that most of the outfits should train in the southern United States where weather was less likely to hamper operations. To evaluate the divisions' readiness, Marshall ordered the largest maneuvers ever planned to be held in the spring of 1940.

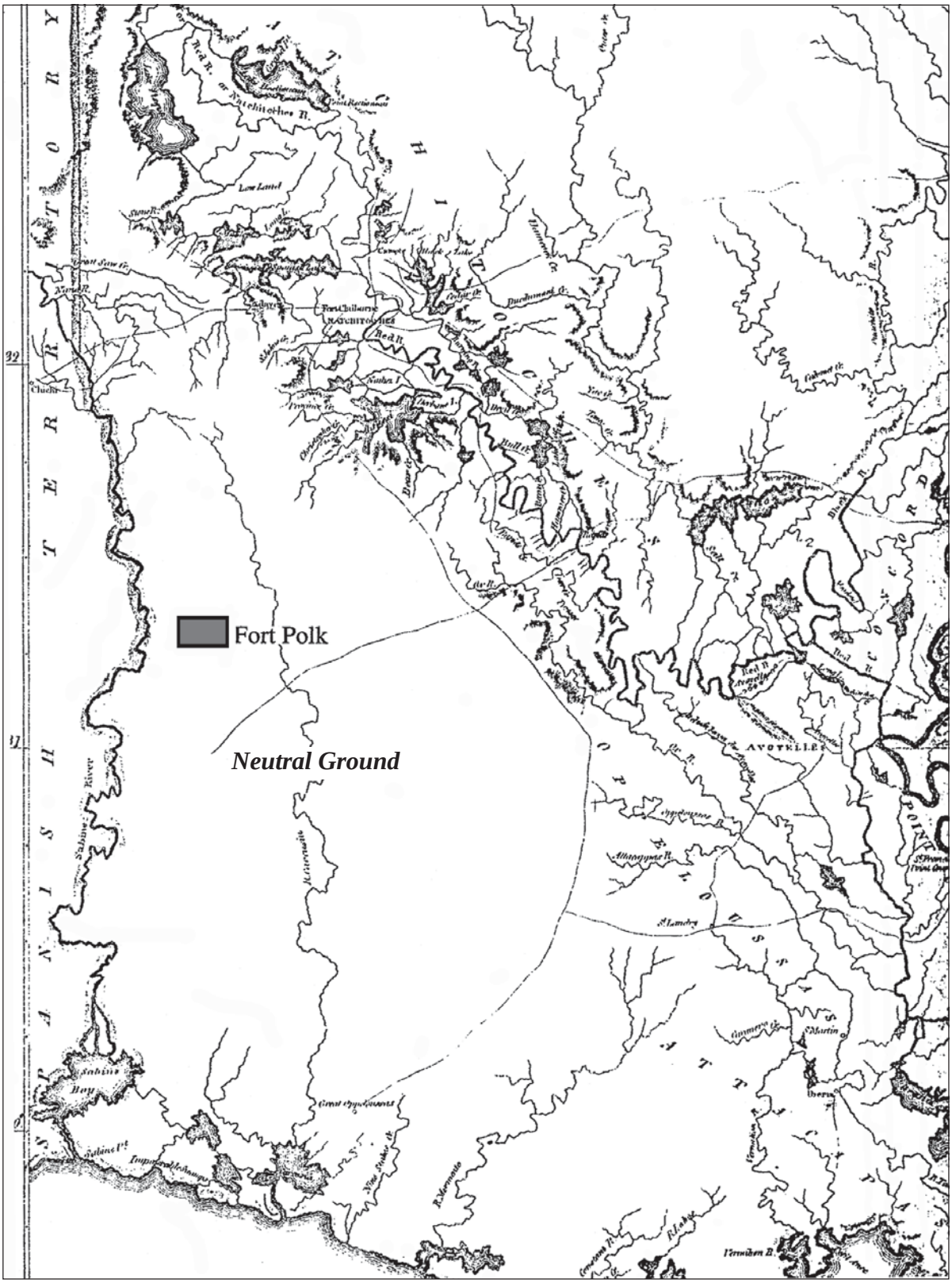
Army reconnaissance teams scouted across the South, searching for the ideal location for the war games. Marshall wanted the following: a varied terrain to test soldiers and equipment under different conditions; "thinly populated country" that was "conveniently and economically accessible" to participating divisions; and a willing population who would not demand huge reimbursements for any damage caused by the military. Officers finally chose large tracts of land on both sides of the Sabine River, the Texas-Louisiana boundary.

The area selected by the scouts had long been sparsely populated, serving in the early 1800s as a virtually lawless neutral ground between territories controlled by both the United States and Spain. According to local historian Don Marler, President John Quincy Adams labeled the region a "back door" into the nation, a home to cutthroats and smugglers who sneaked contraband and slaves into the United States. The number of settlers gradually increased over the years, but the population remained scattered across a rural region of pine forests. Steven D. Smith, author of the Fort Polk history *A Good Home for a Poor Man*, estimated that just before the Civil War only about three thousand people occupied the region that became Vernon Parish. Even into the late 1800s, probably no more than seven hundred people were living on the land that is now Fort Polk.

Before settlers arrived, towering virgin longleaf pines dominated the landscape. The first branches of these mighty trees began some fifty feet above the ground. Tall grasses and pine straw carpeted the forest floor. Hardwood trees and underbrush were sparse, except near rivers, creeks, and bogs. Deer and other wildlife could be observed up to a half mile away. Amos Parker, an early pioneer, described the land as "sandy, gently undulating, but seldom rocky. The trees were of good size, but not so thick together as to prevent the grass from growing beneath them or the traveler from seeing a great distance as he passes along." Other settlers noted an incessant murmuring of wind, as if the forest was breathing. One wrote, "A slight breeze always sighs in the elevated tops of the pines, and the fleckered mixture of light and shade creates a pleasant appearance and a delightful freshness of air."

Settlement came slowly to the area around the future Fort Polk. One reason was that since migration routes follow paths of least resistance, the early pioneers en route to Texas traveled along the Red River north to the Louisiana town of Natchitoches where the river veered westward, thus circumventing the Fort Polk area. Even as they began taking more southern routes that cut across the area, most merely stopped to rest before continuing west toward richer soils. Those who did settle locally carved out small farmsteads, surviving primarily by hunting the bountiful game. The area, which eventually became known as *Hog Wallow* lands, was described by Samuel Lockett in 1874 as having "…a stiff, calcareous soil which becomes terrifically muddy in wet weather.…The soil is not at all fertile and has nothing to recommend it."

Even so, by the late 1800s, speculators began buying up the land. Prices leaped from seven dollars an acre in 1890 to sixty dollars in 1906. Historian Smith estimated that settlers never owned more than about 15 percent of the property that became Fort Polk. Absentee landlords pocketed profits by selling their holdings to timber barons who encouraged construction of the railroads that soon crisscrossed the state. A pivotal moment in Vernon Parish history occurred in 1895 when residents, by a margin of only four votes (463 to 459), taxed themselves to facilitate railroad building. At least one, perhaps two earlier votes rejected similar tax hikes. The Kansas City, Shreveport, and Gulf (KCS & G) Railway was built to cut north and south across



Fort Polk's location superimposed on Matthew Carey's ca. 1814 map showing the Neutral Ground (Smith 1999).

Vernon Parish, opening up new markets for the area's timber while providing the local population easier and faster access to other materials.

The railway affected everyone. Local historian Erbon Wise, a retired Army major general who grew up in the area in the 1920s, recalled waiting for the train as a boy. "The greatest happening was the daily arrival, each afternoon, of the KCS passenger train, the *Flying Crow*. Most everyone who had a Chevy, a Model T, or later Model A, found it exciting to drive to the depot and watch the monster engines snort their great gushes of steam."

Some residents earned a living collecting sap from pine trees to distill turpentine and produce related products, but this work diminished as logging became dominant. The timber industry flourished as the national economy boomed and the demand for new houses and commercial buildings escalated. In Louisiana, scores of workers were hired by the large lumber-processing businesses, such as Fullerton Mill located adjacent to Fort Polk's present-day boundaries. For the first time, significant numbers of people migrated to the area seeking jobs. An influx of Mexican and African-American laborers joined the population formerly dominated by residents tracing their lineage to the British Isles, Germany, and the Netherlands.

Mill work was often hot, backbreaking, and dangerous, but not without some fringe benefits. For example, Fullerton Mill workers could swim in a company pool. A pipe transported water to the pool from the West Fork of Six Mile Creek, occasionally discharging a slithering water moccasin into the midst of the surprised bathers. Workers were given company housing equipped with indoor plumbing, free electricity, and running water—all luxuries at the time. On sweltering summer days, they even had access to a ready supply of ice.

The mill and adjacent town, established in 1906 by S.H. Fullerton, brought some prosperity where poverty had long been the norm. The Gulf Lumber Company, which owned the mill, also bought up much of the surrounding land that would one day form major portions of Fort Polk. As the mill flourished, other businesses opened, including two hotels, a drug store with a soda fountain, a barbershop, a blacksmith barn, a café, and a bakery. There were also two segregated dance halls. Although blacks and whites mingled on the job, after hours they socialized apart and lived in separate sections of town designated for the whites, blacks, and Mexicans.

Fullerton Mill produced 2.25 billion board feet of lumber before closing in 1927, according to Smith. All told, some thirty-seven companies in the area produced lumber at the height of the boom. The demand for timber virtually denuded the entire parish of trees, leaving miles of land scarred with blackened stumps. Once bountiful wildlife disappeared as rain eroded the top soil and turned the earth into mud, destroying the natural habitat.

The lumber industry hastened into decline as a result of uncontrolled tree removal and a decrease in demand fostered by the Great Depression. Large mills shuttered operations, even as some smaller enterprises continued on for a time, managing to make Louisiana the nation's top lumber producer in the 1930s. Vernon Parish often milled more lum-

Turpentining with the cup-and-gutter system (Smith 1999).

A Vernon Parish mill town (Smith 1999).

ber than any other parish in the state, but the output could not last. Fullerton eventually became a ghost town.

As the timber business collapsed, residents fled the state, leaving central and western Louisiana sparsely populated once more. Those who remained lived mostly a hardscrabble existence, surviving on their livestock and the meager crops they coaxed from the poor soils. Consequently, few complained when the Army surged into the area bringing the hope of government dollars.

The presence of the Kisatchie National Forest was another factor in the military's choice of west-central Louisiana for the 1940 war maneuvers. Beginning in the late 1800s, conservationists, alarmed at the pace of deforestation and the resulting soil erosion and loss of wildlife, urged reform. Caroline Dormon of Louisiana, the first woman elected to the Society of American Foresters, was among the activists seeking federal protection for lands where forests could be reseeded, nurtured, and restored, and where clear-cutting would be restricted. In 1908, President Theodore Roosevelt authorized the National Forest Service, which led to the formation of the Kisatchie National Forest in 1928. The Army reached agreement with National Forest authorities in 1939 to use 259,400 acres for its maneuvers. Eventually, the Kisatchie National Forest also supplied acreage for various military posts, including Camp Polk, the temporary military encampment that preceded Fort Polk.

By 1940, isolated stands of trees growing outside National Forest boundaries had either been overlooked by loggers or were in the early stages of recovery from clear-cutting. Most private land, however, remained treeless because farmers regularly set fires to clear pastures for livestock. According to local historian Marler, farmers let livestock roam free, even across primary roads. The few fences that existed tended to enclose houses and plowed fields, serving to keep animals out rather than pen them in. More fences were found within the National Forest, where rangers encouraged landowners to corral cattle to avoid interference with reforesting efforts.

On February 20, 1940, the Army dispatched a dozen "Rent and Claims Board" officers to persuade Louisiana and Texas landowners to allow the Army to conduct maneuvers on their private property without charge. Raymond Fleming, Louisiana National Guard Adjutant General, and his staff helped encourage property holders to sign the

agreements. By April 1940, the Army had access to some 3,400 square miles—1.7 million acres in Louisiana and 400,000 in Texas.

Not every landowner approved, however. National news publications reported that yellow signs reading "Troops, Keep Out" could be found nailed to fence posts and trees. But these were relatively few, according to Pollacia. One published account, perhaps apocryphal, stated that a woman had adamantly refused to allow maneuvers on her land until an Army officer asked, "Madam, don't you know that Louisiana is at war with Texas? And don't you want Louisiana to win the war?" She replied, "I sure do. Give me that paper to sign!"

In some ways, the first of the three large-scale maneuvers did resemble an invasion by Texas into Louisiana. The IX (Provisional) Corps, based at Fort Sam Houston in central Texas, moved just west of the Sabine River in late April 1940. There the troops began nine days of exercises leading up to the first Louisiana Maneuvers. The IX Corps was considered provisional because it lacked a full complement of troops and consisted of only 25,000 soldiers, primarily in the 1st Cavalry Division and the 2nd Infantry Division.

Also in late April 1940, the IV Corps, based at Fort Benning, Georgia, prepared to travel west to defend central Louisiana. This was the Army's only fully staffed corps, with about 45,000 soldiers in the 1st, 5th, and 6th Infantry Divisions, as well as smaller armored units. Some soldiers traveled from Georgia by train, others rode in trucks along two highway routes. The northern route took the convoy through Montgomery, Alabama, west to Jackson and Vicksburg, Mississippi, where the troops crossed the Mississippi River into Louisiana. They continued west to Monroe, where they turned south

The 1st Signal Company passes near Montgomery, Alabama, en route to the Louisiana Maneuvers.

Residents of central Louisiana had never seen as many soldiers as the multitudes that came for the 1940 maneuvers.

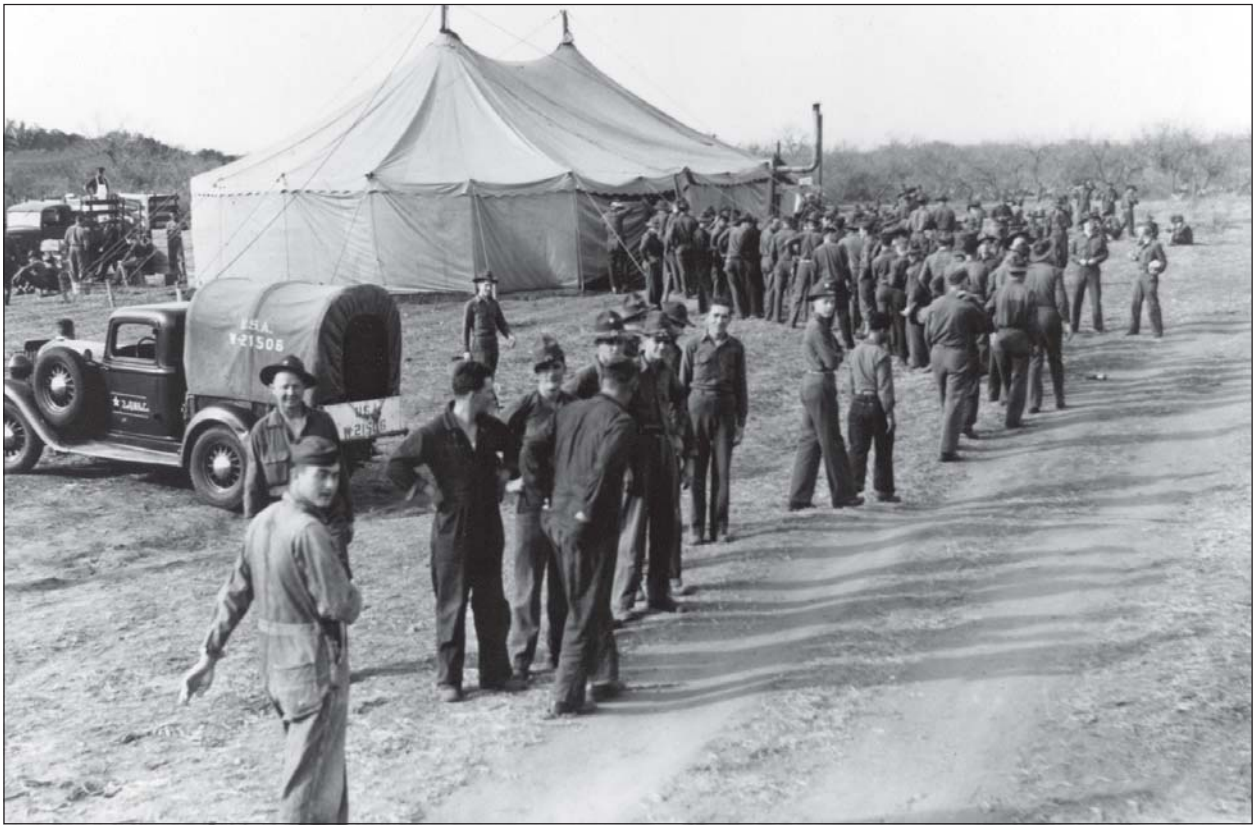
and streamed toward Alexandria, the designated capital of the fictitious nation they would defend in the war games. Other IV Corps troops followed a southern route, skirting Mobile, Alabama, then passing through New Orleans west to St. Martinville where they turned northward.

Divided into four groups, each with about fourteen hundred trucks and other vehicles, the IV Corps rode along narrow, poorly maintained roads that were a far cry from today's interstate highways. Covering more than six hundred miles, the trip from Georgia to the exercise area was a significant early test of the triangular divisions' mobility. Historian Christopher Gabel of the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College said that it was, at the time, the longest motorized deployment ever accomplished by such a large contingent of American troops.

As the IV Corps converged on Alexandria, the IX Corps (the Texas army) edged closer to the Sabine River, establishing camps along a broad front. The invading Texas-based soldiers, designated the Red Army by maneuver organizers, wore olive-drab cotton uniforms. The troops defending Louisiana were designated the Blue Army. They wore blue denim uniforms and some donned blue work caps.

Plans called for the exercises to be divided into four phases, each lasting two to three days, with scheduled breaks to rest and regroup. As the maneuvers progressed, some units switched sides to equalize forces and demonstrate how well the various units would respond to offensive and defensive situations.

Pollacia commented that in some ways participants in these first Louisiana Maneuvers were better equipped than the soldiers who trained in the exercises a year later. Nearly all of the first maneuver participants carried real weapons, although much of their equipment was obsolete. The follow-



The 2nd Infantry Division setting up tents during the Louisiana Maneuvers.

ing year, as the Army rapidly expanded, equipment became more scarce. Some soldiers had to carry sticks instead of rifles, and it was decided that some of the trucks would be labeled tanks.

The first Louisiana Maneuvers in 1940 began when the Texas-based Red Army used bomber airplanes based at Barksdale Field in Shreveport, Louisiana, to attack bridges spanning the Mississippi River at Vicksburg and New Orleans. The objective was to slow the Blue Army's advance toward Alexandria. Instead of dropping real bombs, pilots plastered the structures with sandbags. Maneuver judges (contact control officers) ruled that the two bridges would have been partially damaged if real bombs had been used. According to the judges, the Red Army air raids also succeeded in knocking out McComb Airfield, a Blue Army base in Mississippi. Even so, Blue Army pilots managed to retaliate the next day, hitting Barksdale Field in a raid that would have interrupted operations in actual warfare.

The air raids both engaged pilots in simulated attacks and provided opportunities to test an early warning system that had been deployed across the region. Some seven thousand American Legion volunteers had been taught to identify military planes. Stationed in fourteen hundred observation posts, they spent long hours searching the skies, helping the Army successfully track almost all the bombers and fighter planes flown during the maneuvers.

At about 4 a.m. on May 9, 1940, the Red Army (IX Corps) left their concealed positions in Texas's Angelina National Forest, crossed the Sabine River with their horses into Louisiana, and became the invaders in Blue Army territory. One of the three bridges used was located at Burr's Ferry. This site of a key crossing between Texas and Louisiana since the early 1800s was named for Dr. Timothy Burr, second cousin of Aaron Burr, U.S. Vice President under Thomas Jefferson from 1801 to 1805.

To aid in the attack, the 5th Engineers built a fourth bridge across the Sabine River at Toledo

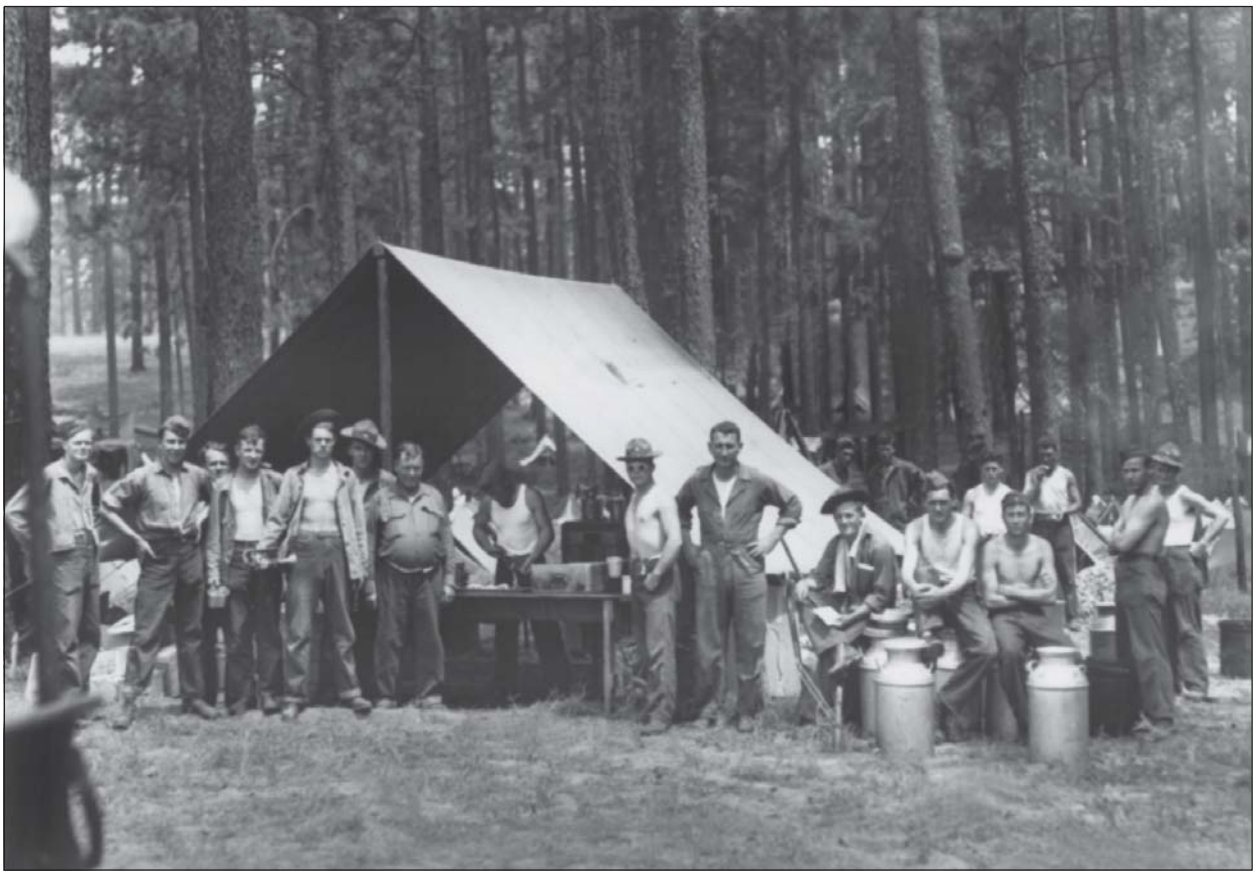
The Louisiana Maneuvers tested all aspects of the U.S. military, including how soldiers would handle building roads, bridges, and camps for thousands of troops. An 11th Infantry convoy (top) crosses one of the pontoon bridges built during the maneuvers, and men from the 7th Engineers, Company A (bottom), take a break from construction labors.

Ferry, just north of Burr's Ferry. In a mere five hours, they erected a pontoon bridge that spanned 367 feet and could support eight tons.

The Red Army swiftly advanced into the main maneuver area, some 2,400 square miles that included parts of Sabine, Natchitoches, Rapides, and Beauregard Parishes, and all of Vernon Parish. Over the next ten days, the two armies grappled for territory, crisscrossing today's Fort Polk and Peason Ridge to its north, where maneuvers are still con-

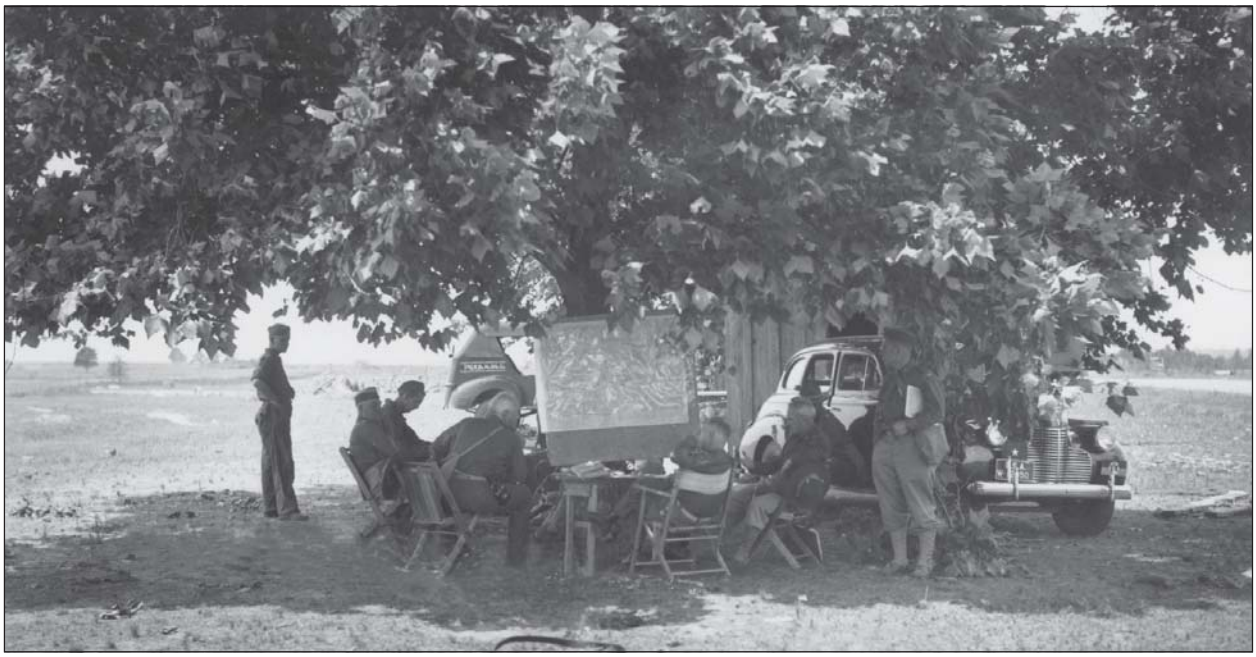
Above: Camping out at Christine, Texas, in January 1940, in preparation for the Louisiana Maneuvers.

Below: Hungry soldiers with the 11th Infantry Division wait their turns to eat in the mess tent in Flatwoods during the Louisiana Maneuvers.



Above: The 2nd Infantry Division camping near Zimmerman, Louisiana. The scarred trees are the result of sap being collected for turpentine, once a primary source of employment in the region (see photo, page 16).

Below: Soldiers wave to the camera as they wait in the mess line near Zimmerman, Louisiana.



Above: To escape the intense heat, officers with the 6th Infantry Division plot strategy in the shade at Cravens.

Below: During the May 1940 Louisiana Maneuvers, troops established tent camps throughout the area now dominated by Fort Polk and often interacted with local residents.

Soldiers near the town of Simpson, Louisiana, prepare to fire artillery during the Louisiana Maneuvers.

ducted today. Simulated battles erupted in and around both areas. Journalists labeled these clashes the "Battle of the Bayous" and "Trial by Gumbo."

The widely dispersed invading Red Army swept eastward through Louisiana in the early morning darkness. By 8 a.m. the first day, May 9, the army had formed a long, moving line stretching from Fort Jesup in the north to DeRidder in the south, a distance of some fifty miles. Advanced units, already situated in present-day Fort Polk and Peason Ridge territory, moved closer to the Red River and Alexandria. Initially, they met only scattered opposition from the defending Blue Army, but clashes between the opposing forces did erupt at two small towns, Cravens, south of Fort Polk, and Slagle to the north.

Blue Army cavalry units staged hit-and-run attacks to slow the invaders' advance. They set up road blocks that, according to the judges, halted at times the oncoming Red Army units. By afternoon, one of the first significant battles occurred when cavalry units from each side charged one another near the town of Simpson, just north of where Fort Polk was later established. As horses' hooves thundered and men yelled, this mock battle showed the Blue Army stiffening its defense of Louisiana.

More battles occurred further north where the Red Army's fastest troops, some five thousand infantry and cavalry, were led by Brigadier General Joseph Stilwell, a commander destined for fame. His troops passed through the town of Many, Louisiana, then through Fort Jesup, which many years earlier was a staging ground for soldiers heading into the Mexican-American War.

Stilwell's rapid deployment had his men covering some seventy miles in mere hours, until his soldiers approached a key bridge near the historic community of Natchitoches. After capturing the bridge, Stilwell intended to turn south along the Red River and create chaos among the defenders of Alexandria, the Blue Army's capital. His plans, however, were compromised when, on the outskirts of Natchitoches, his troops encountered fierce opposition, mainly from the 29th Infantry Regiment, which had dug in around State Normal College.

Major General Walter Short, commander of the Blue Army, realized the danger posed by Stilwell's troops and sent reinforcements, including tanks that

In May 1940, during the Louisiana Maneuvers, soldiers fought a pitched battle using blank shells near the community of Slagle, Louisiana.

circled behind the attackers. Threatened with being surrounded, Stilwell saw that he had advanced too far, too fast. To save his force, he ordered everyone to withdraw back toward Texas. By nightfall, he stopped the retreat and prepared to defend the area near Fort Jesup.

That evening, along a line stretching across the future Fort Polk, the Red Army was positioned just a short distance from the Blue Army. Soldiers on both sides slept little, as sounds of sporadic gunfire shattered the stillness, maintaining an impression of almost constant combat. By morning, the invaders were on the move again, with some Red Army troops reaching within twenty miles of Alexandria by the end of the second day. Blue Army defenders, some of them only now arriving from Georgia, were still outnumbered but beginning to put up a sustained fight. During the third day, the Blue Army took control. Enough soldiers had arrived so that its greater numbers and heavier firepower proved decisive.

During the last hours of the first phase of the maneuvers, the 7th Cavalry (Mechanized) Brigade's light tanks, commanded by Brigadier General Adna P. Chaffee, became potent weapons for the Blue Army. The general's three thousand soldiers drove south from Monroe, Louisiana, covering almost one hundred miles in less than a day. Although slowed by air attacks, the 7th Cavalry seemed almost unstoppable and soon threatened the invading Red Army's northern flank at Peason Ridge.

Major General Walter Krueger, commander of the Red Army, learned of the tank advance through airplane reconnaissance, which also ascertained that the Blue Army infantry was massing for attack. Krueger immediately began withdrawing his forces and taking a defensive posture. The entire Red Army made an orderly retreat with the Blue Army in hot pursuit. As both forces converged on Leesville, the first phase of the maneuvers ended.

That same day, May 11, 1940, news reached the United States that Germany had invaded Belgium, Luxembourg, and the Netherlands. Before long Germany was also invading France, using a *blitzkrieg* of tanks and fighter planes to stream past defenses once thought impregnable. Near Alexandria, Louisiana, at Camp Beauregard, headquarters of the maneuver organizers, one journalist reported "a stunning silence" as the "grim reality" sunk in. Lieutenant General Stanley D. Embick held

Right: Walter Krueger as a West Point cadet. Krueger served as a commander during all three major pre–World War II maneuvers in Louisiana, helped promote Dwight D. Eisenhower's career, and established his own distinguished record as a general during World War II.

Below: Officers gather at General Krueger's headquarters during the Louisiana Maneuvers.

a news conference to declare that the Army was "ready…to defend this country."

Those who participated in the first Louisiana Maneuvers would soon put their training to the test. Major General Walter Krueger, who would also participate in the two subsequent prewar Louisiana Maneuvers, was soon promoted to lieutenant general. Because of his seniority, he was slated to become Hawaii's top military officer, but was passed over by Army Chief of Staff George C. Marshall. Although Marshall considered Krueger a friend, he deemed him unsuitable for the job in Hawaii because, according to military historian Gabel, Krueger was prejudiced against virtually all Navy officers, and cooperation with the Navy would be essential at Pearl Harbor. Marshall instead selected Krueger's opponent in the first maneuvers, Major General Walter Short, commander of the Blue Army.

Short, who proved highly skilled in the Louisiana exercises, was reluctant to accept the Hawaiian post, but Marshall persuaded him that the position was crucially important. On February 7, 1941, Short assumed the command. Ten months later, on December 7, 1941, the Japanese launched their surprise attack on Pearl Harbor, sinking five battleships, severely damaging three others, and crippling much of the U.S. Pacific Fleet. The attack that welded the American public together in a common determination to defeat the enemy also ignited a search for scapegoats. As a result, Short was pressured to retire in early 1942.

Conversely, Krueger went on to a career of distinguished service. During the first Louisiana Maneuvers, he had developed a reputation for being deliberative and not particularly aggressive. Brigadier General Frank Andrews, Army Assistant Chief of Staff, characterized him as "ponderous, slow, and very careful." Some observers, nicknaming him "Molasses in January," compared Krueger to Civil War General George McClellan because, like McClellan, he sought to perfect every detail before ordering an attack.

Although this assessment would change somewhat during the last of the prewar Louisiana Maneuvers in 1941, Krueger's career appeared to be ending early in World War II. Then, at age 62, when many of his contemporaries were being eased out of service, he was chosen as a top lieutenant by General Douglas MacArthur. Krueger commented, "My assignment came as a complete surprise to me….I must admit that I was greatly pleased to be mistaken." He led the 6th Army in the Pacific, commanding troops that helped defeat Japan.

The first Louisiana Maneuvers in 1940 also enhanced the reputation of Brigadier General Joseph Stilwell. Called *Vinegar Joe* because of his acerbic, no-nonsense disposition, he began a meteoric rise that culminated in his promotion to lieutenant general and commander of all U.S. forces in China, Burma, and India. In cooperation with the British forces under Admiral Lord Louis Mountbatten, Stilwell's troops battled the Japanese in sweltering heat in the almost impenetrable jungles of Burma. They engaged in combat so fierce that British Prime Minister Winston Churchill likened the fighting to "munching a porcupine quill by quill." Stilwell's men had tough-as-nails reputations. Merrill's Marauders, for example, were famed for infiltrating deep behind enemy lines far from supplies or any other support. Stilwell oversaw swift jabs at the Japanese, a tactic reminiscent of the rapid marches he had organized during the first Louisiana Maneuvers.

For better or worse, the escalating European conflict would alter the lives of all who were involved in the first Louisiana Maneuvers.

3. "Basement Conspirators" Hatch a Plan

The May 1940 Louisiana Maneuvers created a unique opportunity for the U.S. military to witness firsthand the strengths and limitations of both air power and armored warfare. As a result, an important framework for the effective use of tanks in battle was developed. The twenty-seven hundred men of the 7th Cavalry (Mechanized) Brigade under Brigadier General Adna P. Chaffee and the twenty-two hundred soldiers of the Provisional Tank Brigade, commanded by Brigadier General Bruce Magruder, participated in every maneuver phase, sometimes on opposite sides. Both brigades performed exceedingly well, even with armored vehicles that were flimsy compared to the Sherman tanks the Army later used in World War II. In fact, during the maneuvers, the cavalry called their armored vehicles combat cars, not tanks.

> *Genius is an immense capacity for taking pain.*
>
> *— General George S. Patton*

The Provisional Tank Brigade and the 7th Cavalry maintained a large share of all the tanks owned by the Army at the time. Commanders of the two outfits were determined advocates for expanding tank forces and using them in massed assaults. Their views, however, were largely disregarded until Germany began deploying the powerful panzer (armored vehicle and tank) divisions. According to Nick Pollacia Jr., whose thesis provided much of the information herein about the maneuvers, many U.S. Army officers were in Louisiana observing the May 1940 war games specifically to see the tanks in action and evaluate their effect on battle strategies.

The visitors closely observed, for example, how an armored force would perform when combined with infantry under a single command. Magruder's Provisional Tank Brigade, which for most of the exercises operated as an independent unit, was temporarily expanded during the second phase of the maneuvers when soldiers with antitank weapons joined up with infantry and mechanized cavalry troops and engineers. Foot soldiers, to avoid slowing down the rest of this improvised outfit, rode in trucks scrounged from other units.

Magruder pulled this disparate group together in the midst of the exercises in fewer than forty-eight hours and then moved everyone some seventy-five miles in one day. During this fast advance, the improvised force won various simulated battles, including the May 15 surprise dawn attack on Leesville described in Chapter 1. Combining tanks and motorized infantry under one command proved to be a strategic breakthrough, setting the stage for military outfits such as the 5th Infantry (Mechanized) Division, stationed at Fort Polk more than thirty years later following the Vietnam War.

Another precedent was established during the third and fourth phases of the May 1940 maneuvers when the Provisional Tank Brigade, again operating as a separate unit, switched sides to join the Red Army (the Texas force). The tank brigade was now on the same side with tanks of the 7th Cavalry (Mechanized) Brigade. Near the end of the maneuvers, the two units fought side by side. Combining so many of the Army's tanks into one group was a pivotal development in military strategy. Although these two armored forces never officially joined under unified command, according to military historian Christopher Gabel, the close arrangement of their approximately four hundred tanks was a crucial step in forming the nation's first armored division.

During World War II, armored divisions played vital roles, and five of the divisions—the 3rd, 7th, 8th, 9th, and 11th—trained at Camp Polk. Colonel Alvan C. Gillem, second in command of the Provisional Tank Brigade during the maneuvers, later

The Devil is Coming!

The idea of the tank, which became so important to Fort Polk, first originated with a journalist, Lieutenant Colonel Ernest D. Swanton, who was attached to the British Army during World War I. Inspired by the American Holt Caterpillar tractor, Swanton conceived of a military vehicle that could crush barbed wire, roll into and out of trenches, and fend off bullets. He conveyed his idea to Britain's War Department in 1914, but no one in the stodgy bureaucracy paid much attention. Oddly enough, according to historian Carlo D'este, the notion caught the eye of a senior naval officer, Winston Churchill, First Lord of the Admiralty and future prime minister.

Churchill seized on the concept and had his staff begin work on a prototype. Other military leaders became serious about developing a tank only after hearing about the navy's attempt. By 1916, Britain had manufactured an enclosed, armored car with four machine guns and a small cannon that fit inside a revolving turret. Designated the Mark I, the vehicle came to be known as the *Big Willie*.

Painted in an assortment of rainbow colors, the tank first saw action during World War I on September 15, 1916, at the Battle of the Somme in France. Forty-nine of the contraptions rattled forward the night prior to the battle. Before the dawn assault ever got underway, seventeen broke down or became stuck in the mud. Once the attack began, quite a few more tanks floundered, but several managed to break through with astounding results. One helped capture the small town of Flers without a single life lost among the supporting New Zealand infantry. Another tank, while straddling a trench, caused three hundred German troops to throw up their hands and surrender. Germans, terrorized by their first tank sighting, yelled, "The devil is coming!"

led the 3rd Armored Division, Camp Polk's first unit.

The third phase of the maneuvers began Monday, May 20. For most locals, the day was like any other, despite the military activity. Fifty-two Leesville High School seniors graduated on schedule that day. None could have foreseen that class president John Paul Jones would become the first person from Leesville to die in World War II.

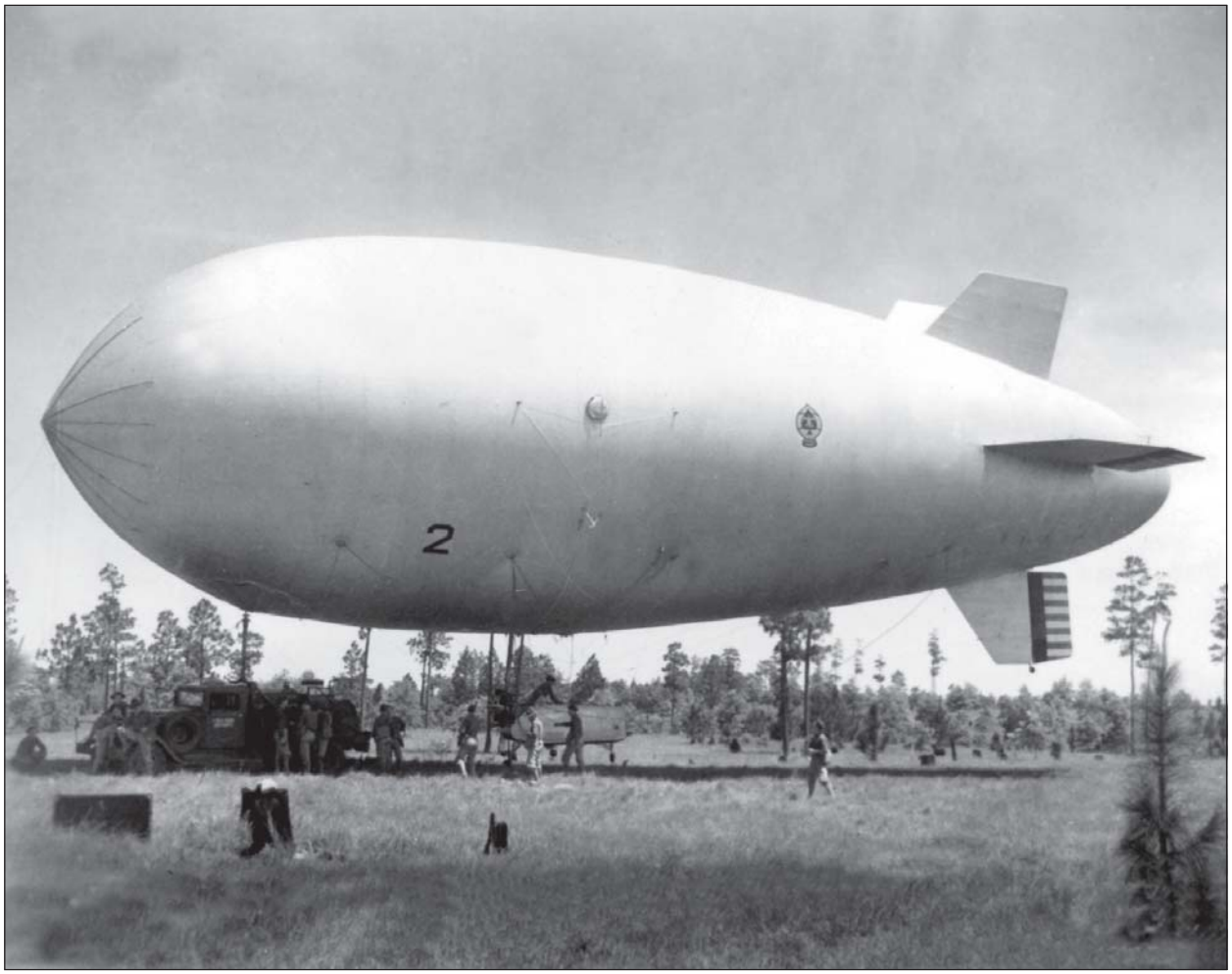
The maneuver organizers decided that the Red Army (the Texas force) should begin the third phase on the defensive. Commanders organized most of the Red Army in a compact line stretching from Peason Ridge south through where Fort Polk is now located. The Red Army's 1st Cavalry Division patrolled on horseback in front of the line to absorb the initial shock of the attack everyone was expecting. The cavalry received orders to slow the Blue Army's advance toward Leesville as long as possible, then withdraw through the Red Army's defensive line, thus allowing the main battle to begin.

To further ensure the strength of the Red Army's defenses, the 7th Cavalry (Mechanized) Brigade, guarding the southern flank, hid in forests near the small town of Cravens, just south of present-day Fort Polk. Red Army commanders were unaware that Blue Army personnel were intercepting their radio messages and consequently knew the 7th Cavalry's exact location. The Blue Army attacked

in a major effort to smash the 7th Cavalry tanks. Even so, a full-bore infantry advance could not overwhelm the armored force. Instead, the 7th Cavalry assumed the offensive, attacking relentlessly and driving the Blue Army infantry back. At the end of the day, the entire Blue Army advance was stalled, while the Red Army's defensive posture held firm in about the same location the force had occupied from the start.

The Blue Army prepared that night for another assault. Before dawn, their commander Major General Walter Short attempted to confuse the opposing forces by ordering the 51st Signal Battalion to broadcast tank sounds over loudspeakers near the northern end of the battlefront. He then launched an infantry assault in the same area, with troops surging through some of the Red Army defensive positions near Peason Ridge—a location first recognized for its strategic advantages by prehistoric peoples thousands of years before. The Red Army counterattacked with a force spearheaded by part of the Provisional Tank Brigade and succeeded in halting the Blue Army's advance. Nonetheless, by 10:30 a.m., the Blue Army held the vitally important high ground at Peason Ridge.

About the same time, the Blue Army probed the Red Army's center, assaulting an infantry and artillery force led by General Joseph Stilwell, who had observers track the enemy from helium-filled dirigible balloons drifting above the battlefield. His



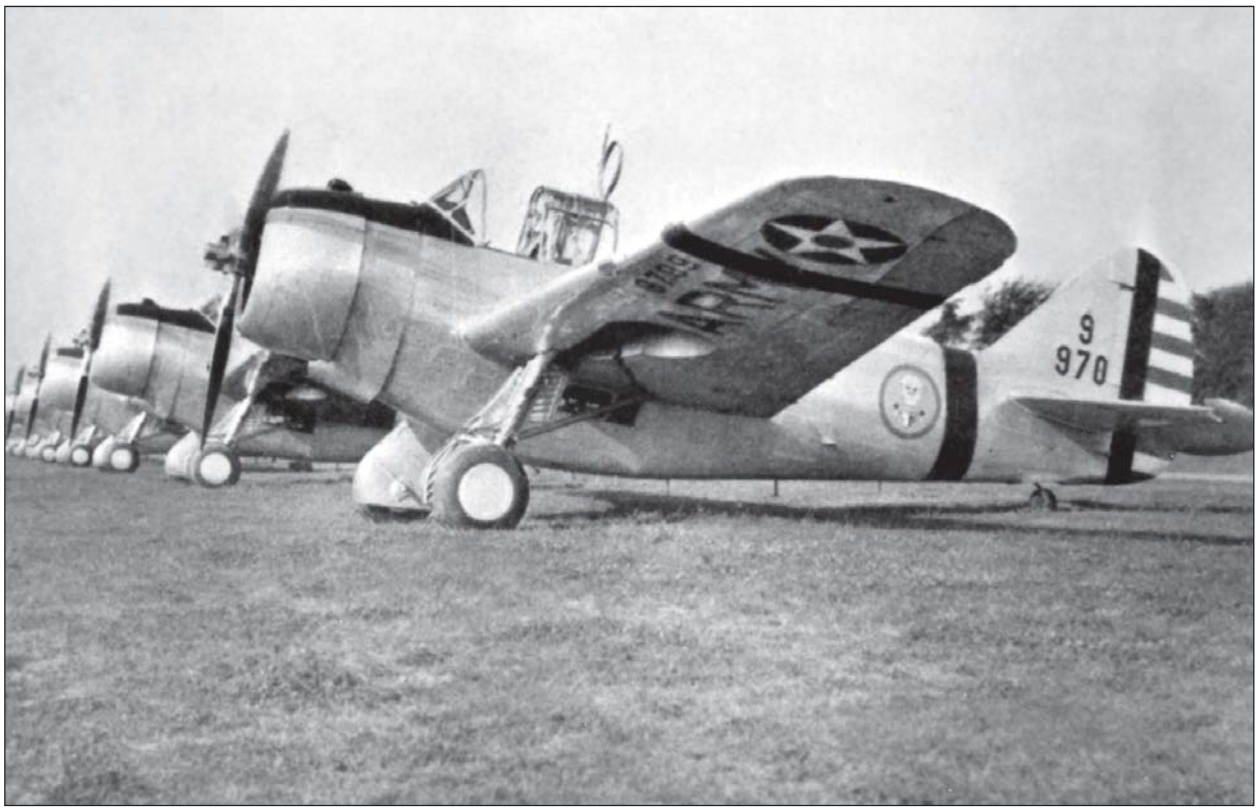
Photographed near Leesville in 1940, this gas-filled observation balloon was used to monitor opposition forces during the Louisiana Maneuvers.

soldiers put up a spirited defense in what was described as one of the most intense conflicts of the entire maneuvers. Near the small town of Slagle, just north of Fort Polk, battle sounds rolled through the hills in "thunderous blasts," according to one journalist. Slagle's school principal dismissed class so students could stream outside to witness the action. The Blue Army surged ahead, forcing Stilwell's soldiers back about four miles. Once again, the Red Army staved off defeat by rushing part of the Provisional Tank Brigade into the breach, halting the Blue Army's advance.

Further south, Blue Army infantry also stormed across land later occupied by Fort Polk. The troops attempted to destroy the 7th Cavalry (Mechanized) Brigade, but once again the armored force proved too powerful and resilient. Tank forces, cooperating with horsemen of the 1st Cavalry Division, repulsed the attack and again went on the offensive. Just before the third phase of the exercises ended, judges ruled that the tanks had destroyed much of the Blue Army's 6th Infantry Division.

Planners arranged for the fourth and final phase of the maneuvers to differ from the other three phases. This last exercise would involve a massive display of air power, the mightiest ever seen in the United States. For the first time, an entire fleet of aircraft, including an array of heavy and light bombers and fighter planes, would support a ground assault. Earlier in the maneuvers, about 150 planes were stationed at Barksdale Field in Shreveport, Louisiana, to support the Red Army. Now, some 250 additional aircraft flew to Barksdale from

Troops fired blanks at approaching aircraft during the May 1940 Louisiana Maneuvers.



Lined up to participate in the 1940 maneuvers in New York, planes such as these played an important role in the various exercises that helped prepare the U.S. armed forces for World War II.

around the country, landing less than twenty-four hours after orders summoning them were issued. A steady stream of planes flocked in from bases in Michigan, California, New York, and Virginia. Major General Henry H. (Hap) Arnold, Chief of the Army Air Corps, also arrived in Louisiana to observe the planned air assault, which was to precede another attempt by the Red Army to capture Alexandria, the Blue Army's capital.

The Blue Army still maintained a numerical advantage with 30,148 troops to the Red Army's 25,344, but the latter, in addition to the enhanced air power, now boasted nearly every available tank. The plan called for the Red Army to mount a combined air and armored assault, mimicking a German *blitzkrieg* that would test how the Blue Army's triangular infantry divisions handled defense.

Late on the afternoon of May 22, the Red Army inched forward from positions near Leesville. The force prepared to attack the following day, but foul weather that night interfered. By 2 a.m., driving rains and low clouds enveloped the region, delaying the planned takeoff of the airplanes, which sat idle on Barksdale Field. Finally, by late morning, pilots could begin flying. By early afternoon, thirty B-17 bombers roared over bridges spanning the Red River and began releasing sand bags.

Crews in the four-engined planes used a new innovation, the top-secret Norden bombsight, to target where to drop the simulated bombs. The Norden sight contained an analog computer that helped gauge wind speed and direction, as well as the airplane's angle of drift, while aiming the weaponry. A bombardier set cross hairs on a target, then the bombsight briefly guided the plane while the bombs dropped. Information about this important device was considered so sensitive that, according to historian Janice Campbell, during World War II all bombardiers took an oath to protect the equipment from the enemy with their lives.

The 2nd Infantry Division, Company B, participating in a mock battle near the community of Slagle, Louisiana, during the May 1940 Louisiana Maneuvers.

Flying escort for the big bombers were single-engined pursuit planes, more than one hundred fighter aircraft that were to ward off attempts by the Blue Army's air force to spoil the bombardment. This was one of the first times airborne convoys were used, a strategy that would prove critical within a few years over the skies of Europe and Japan. Flying close behind the first waves of planes were light and medium bombers that attempted to pelt railroads, depots, other bridges, and an airfield at Natchitoches. Bad weather limited the effectiveness of the air strikes, a problem that would also plague air crews in Europe during World War II. Even so, judges ruled that mock bombs did partially damage several bridges and the Natchitoches airfield, resulting in the loss of about a third of the Blue Army's observation planes stationed there.

The weather worsened as the Red Army planes turned back toward Barksdale Field. The fast fighter planes reached the base just before a violent storm swept through Shreveport. The first wave of the slower bombers, however, was still three miles from the field when fierce winds began buffeting the area. The bomber pilots altered course and tried to outrun the storm. Some managed to land quickly at Natchitoches, an enemy field, while others flew all the way to Dallas, Texas, or Jackson, Mississippi.

The situation on the ground also worsened as the Red Army's forces, seeking to capture Alexandria, surged forward into the area around Peason Ridge and the small towns of Kurthwood and Slagle. Troops with their heavy equipment sloshed through the mud, making little headway in the driving rain. Some Blue Army defenders further hampered visibility for the Red Army by releasing a thick smoke screen. The Red Army's cavalry slowed to a crawl as men on horseback forded the Calcasieu River, swollen from the downpour.

Blue Army officers considered counterattacking, but decided the weather would only obstruct the effort. Both armies settled into the miserable night. Apparently no significant gunfire was exchanged because most of the soldiers were too busy trying to dry out, eat, and catch some sleep while the downpour continued. Nonetheless, some Red Army units, including the Provisional Tank Brigade and the 7th Cavalry (Mechanized) Brigade, were on the move, preparing for an early morning attack. The Red Army soon had 382 tanks and other vehicles positioned to spearhead an advance.

Once again, massive air strikes were to precede the Red Army's assault. By early morning, the rain had finally subsided, but the coordinated air attacks had already been compromised. Some of the bomber pilots that had flown elsewhere to escape the storms the previous day, managed to return to Barksdale Field to participate in the air campaign. But many planes were stranded at Barksdale, fifty-four of which never left the ground because dirty gasoline apparently had been pumped into their fuel tanks. Although some bombers and fighter planes took off and supported the Red Army's advance, many of the planned strikes against the enemy's artillery never took place.

Red Army tanks and the 2nd Infantry Division bore down on the Blue Army's center, attacking along a front three thousand yards wide as they aimed for the small town of Hutton north of present-day Fort Polk and a bastion in the Blue Army's main defensive perimeter. Once again, however, Blue Army intelligence personnel intercepted radio messages and knew precisely where the Red Army

Participants in the Louisiana Maneuvers often had to stop to free vehicles from the mud.

units would be. This allowed the Blue Army commanders to assemble and position massive numbers of heavy artillery, along with fifty-four 37-millimeter antitank guns and sixty-six .50 caliber machine guns, where their opponents would be attempting an advance toward Alexandria.

The Blue Army officers also shrewdly selected an area studded with tree stumps to set up defenses. Red Army tanks made slow progress in this treacherous environment, struggling to dodge the obstructions and gain traction after the heavy rains. Tanks slid and slipped, and sounds of grinding gears competed with the noise of gunfire. The battlefield, in the words of Magruder, deteriorated into "a morass."

By 10:30 a.m. on May 24, about 75 percent of the Provisional Tank Brigade vehicles were stuck or barely moving. Only eleven tanks managed to travel the mere two miles to reach Hutton. Nearby, the 7th Cavalry (Mechanized) Brigade fared little better. Judges deemed that, despite some forward progress, the 7th Cavalry was in a position to be assaulted by the full brunt of the enemy's massed artillery and antitank weapons. The maneuvers concluded before the armored thrust made any significant headway.

Colonel Edmund Gruber, maneuver deputy director and the individual most responsible for planning the exercises, expressed disappointment with the inconclusive final engagement. He commented

Civilians and soldiers alike agreed that mud was a pervasive hindrance during the Louisiana Maneuvers.

Right: Soldiers learned to quickly set up artillery and take aim at aircraft during the Louisiana Maneuvers.

Below: The Louisiana Maneuvers proved to be an important testing ground for tanks, which were mostly disparaged by U.S. military leaders after World War I.

that "in addition to the enemy there are two redoubtable antagonists who are always lurking in the offing to break up the best laid plans.…Old Man Fog and his twin brother Bog." The following day, May 25, in Alexandria's high school auditorium, Gruber presented a detailed analysis of the exercises for the officers who had participated in the war games. He used thirty-one maps to illustrate his critique during two sessions, one held primarily for the officers of the Blue Army, the other for the Red Army officers.

The colonel had already attained some renown for cowriting the song "The Caissons Go Rolling Along" in 1908 while stationed in the Philippines. He later remarked that the tune was "never written in a studio; all good ones are written in the field." Reworked by John Philip Sousa in 1917, the tune with modified lyrics eventually became the Army's official song in the 1950s.

The May 1940 maneuvers created a flurry of interest throughout the military. Some four thousand officers, among them Brigadier General Courtney Hodges and Lieutenant Colonel Omar Bradley, traveled to Louisiana to observe the exercises. Bradley served as an escort to such dignitaries as Massachusetts Senator Henry Cabot Lodge. After watching the unfolding strategies, Bradley sharply criticized commanders of both the Red and Blue Armies, calling them "undistinguished and unimaginative." He noted how ill-equipped the infantry was and called for "more tank and antitank units, armored vehicles, more powerful and mechanized artillery (including antiaircraft weapons), and a dozen other major items." He also criticized how strategists deployed the airplanes, calling the air support for ground troops "a joke."

Bradley, who was eventually promoted to the rank of five-star general, commanded all U.S. ground forces in Normandy, France, during and after the D-Day invasion. Again he recognized problems with coordination between ground troops and air support. One contributing factor was the friction between some ground commanders and some of the generals directing the air war, friction caused, in part, by intense rivalries dating back to World War I. Because of a resulting lack of communication, the Allied planes at times failed to strike German ground positions effectively, despite having achieved virtual dominance of the skies. Some U.S. pilots even mistakenly bombed their own troops, causing desperate American soldiers to shoot back.

Many officers, including Omar Bradley (second from right), traveled to Louisiana to observe the war games. Bradley later became one of the most important commanders in Europe during World War II.

Because of his experience observing the Louisiana Maneuvers, Bradley clearly understood the importance of coordinated air and ground strikes and forged a friendship with General Pete Quesada, commander of the IX Air Force. According to historian Thomas Alexander Hughes, the two shared strategy information and had radios installed in tanks so ground personnel could call in pinpoint air strikes. The subsequent air bombardments helped U.S. troops burst through the German perimeter hemming in Normandy. This was key to winning the European war and an example of how the Louisiana exercises helped prepare military leaders.

George S. Patton's military career seemed near an end until he became involved in the Louisiana Maneuvers at Camp Polk. His startling accomplishments during the exercises brought him recognition and the appreciation of superiors.

During the May 1940 maneuvers, another notable figure stepped onto the Louisiana stage. A colonel at the time, George S. Patton was destined to have a significant impact on Louisiana, the military, and training methods at Camp Polk, Fort Polk's precursor. Patton's involvement with the installation and two of the Louisiana Maneuvers helped place him in the spotlight.

As a youngster in a family steeped in military tradition, Patton could memorize long biblical passages yet struggled with school. He apparently suffered from dyslexia. According to historian Carlo D'este, Patton, unaware that he had a handicap, instead considered himself unintelligent. As a first-year cadet at the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, he floundered with his studies, writing to his father, "Pa, I am stupid.…It is truly unfortunate that such earnestness and tenacity and so much ambition should have been put into a body incapable of doing anything but wish."

Patton failed the first year and had to repeat the courses. More determined than ever, he alienated classmates with his zealousness and willingness to report them for rule infractions. Patton continued to struggle academically, but still managed to graduate. Once he was in the active military, his unusual behavior began to draw attention. For example, he claimed to be testing his courage when he stood up beside a target during firing range exercises while bullets passed mere inches from him. He wanted, he explained, to experience what General George Washington called the "merry sound" of bullets whipping by his ears.

During World War I, Patton was chosen to command the nation's first tank brigade, which included about fourteen hundred soldiers. More than once he disobeyed orders to remain safely behind battle lines and instead charged into danger. He believed that was where a good commander should be.

Patton sidestepped reprimands successfully, but not gunfire. In September 1918, he was wounded at the battle of Meuse-Argonne when he rushed to help dislodge tanks stuck in trenches. When the tanks began rolling forward, Patton walked alongside them, taking charge of some 150 foot soldiers who had lost their leaders. "Twice the infantry started to run," Patton later wrote, "but we hollered at them and called them all sorts of names so they stayed. But they were scared and soon acted badly. Some put on gas masks, some covered their faces

Two Legendary Officers Share a Dangerous Moment

A moment when the slightest shift in movement could have changed history occurred during World War I on September 12, 1918, at the Battle of Saint-Mihiel. Persistent rains and low fog hung over the scarred landscape as a furious artillery battle shook the earth.

Lieutenant Colonel George S. Patton was behind the battle lines, staying in communication with his superiors, as ordered, when the tanks he commanded seemed to founder on the outskirts of a small, enemy-held village. The lieutenant colonel was initially wary of charging into the battle. He later wrote, "When the shelling first started, I had some doubts about the advisability of sticking my head over the parapet, but it is just like taking a cold bath, once you get in it, it is all right." Ignoring direct orders, Patton handed over his telephone to an aide and rushed forward on foot, according to historian Carlo D'este. Five soldiers accompanied him, four of whom served as runners so Patton could stay in contact. With so many artillery shells exploding and gunfire erupting, Patton admitted, "I wanted to duck and probably did at first, but soon saw the futility of dodging fate."

The noise from gunfire and artillery was deafening. Other soldiers pressed their bodies flat into shell holes, trying to avoid being shot, but Patton climbed up a small hill next to the only other person standing, a young brigadier general named Douglas MacArthur. The two apparently spoke little to each other as a German artillery barrage swept toward them. Neither man even flinched as the exploding shells moved closer. "Each of us wanted to leave, but each hated to say so, so we let it come over us," Patton explained, adding that he wanted to "live up" to being an officer. "It was much easier than you would think and the feeling, foolish probably, of being admired by the men lying down is a great stimulus." The barrage passed directly over the two officers, but neither suffered even a scratch. Had one shell landed only inches closer, a pair of World War II's most famous characters would have been killed and U.S. military history and the story of Fort Polk would have been vastly different.

with their hands, but none did a damn thing to kill [German soldiers]. There were no officers there but me."

They soon found themselves trapped on a hill being fired on from three sides. As gunfire and artillery blasts zeroed in on them, Patton lost his bravado. "It was quite bad," he recalled, "men were falling or rather being blown to bits all around.…I felt a great desire to run." He claimed that what stopped him from fleeing was a vision in the clouds of deceased ancestors dressed in military uniforms, including his grandfather and great uncle, both Confederate soldiers killed in battle. They seemed to beckon him to join them, he explained, describing how he became suddenly calm. Emboldened, Patton charged a German machine gun nest and was shot in the thigh. He lay on the battlefield for two hours while the fighting continued.

Patton spent the rest of World War I recuperating and feeling miserable to be out of action. Life

between the world wars was equally frustrating as he watched contemporaries win promotions while his own career sputtered. He continued to make enemies, often letting peers know he considered them inept. His wife, Beatrice, a well-to-do socialite, used her connections with powerful friends, such as First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt, to help make amends for his stumbles.

At first a strong advocate for improving tank forces and tank strategies, Patton tempered his advocacy after being warned to keep quiet because so many powerful military figures considered tanks unimportant. He rejoined the cavalry, where he had formerly served, and spent time defending it against those who argued that horses should be replaced by tanks. Regarding those advocating the cavalry's demise, Patton even cautioned in a speech "They will be corpses, not we."

At times, Patton criticized tanks outright, placing him at odds with pioneers such as Brigadier General Adna P. Chaffee, who was promoting an independent tank force and directly confronting antagonists to the idea. Patton managed to keep a foot in both camps, however, advocating the need for more tanks, but arguing that they should be incorporated into the cavalry.

At age 60, Patton seemed to be at the end of his career. Younger men were winning the promotions he sorely wanted. He considered retiring, but then joined in the Louisiana Maneuvers. During the first exercises, Patton played only a minor part, serving as a judge or senior control officer. In his written comments, he criticized infantry, cavalry, and tank commanders alike for moving troops and equipment almost exclusively along roads where they were vulnerable to air attacks. He cautioned that foot soldiers heading into battle had remained in the trucks too long, a lapse that would cost lives in actual combat. He argued that armored vehicles had not been used creatively enough to outflank enemy troops and stressed that at no point in time had "tanks or combat cars attacked or moved cross country." He also accused the cavalry of leaving their horses vulnerable to attack by failing to adequately camouflage them.

Patton revealed another of his strong opinions when he wrote, "Despite the difficulties of the situation, an effort should be made to improve the appearance of the troops, now so bad as to affect adversely discipline and morale." He believed that meticulous grooming promoted military pride. This preoccupation of his soon permeated armed forces training.

Having steered a middle course in the increasingly acrimonious debate over the future of tanks, Patton was invited to a historic meeting regarding armored warfare on the final day of the maneuvers. The gathering, held in a high-school basement in Alexandria, was kept secret from some of the Army's most powerful officers. The topic of tanks was so highly charged that attendees could have possibly risked their career advancements by participating. Nonetheless, these men had just witnessed how effective tanks could be in such encounters as the devastating assault on the cavalry defending Leesville. The experience convinced them that the Army had to change quickly if it was to be effective against potential enemies.

Also attending the clandestine meeting were high-ranking officers from the 7th Cavalry (Mechanized) Brigade and the Provisional Tank Brigade, including General Adna P. Chaffee, Brigadier General Bruce Magruder, and Colonel Alvan Gillem. Excluded were Major General George Lynch, Chief of the Infantry, and Major General John K. Herr, Chief of the Cavalry. Both had blocked significant expansion of armored forces for more than a decade. They did not necessarily oppose all tank use, but were reluctant converts who resisted transforming existing units to armor. At the same time, they hedged their bets by seeking control of any new armored forces.

At the meeting, the participants, later called the *Basement Conspirators*, revolted against what they considered the parochial and self-serving attitudes of some commanders. They decided the Army should immediately create an independent agency to strengthen armored forces and devise new strategies for U.S. involvement in a war many considered imminent.

One of the *Basement Conspirators*, General Frank Andrews, Assistant Chief of Staff, was instrumental in toppling the established order. It was Andrews who relayed the participants' recommen-

dations to the Pentagon and his boss, General George C. Marshall. Within two weeks, on June 9, 1940, Marshall took action. He ordered the cavalry and infantry to hand over all their tanks in order to create a new, independent armored force. On July 10, 1940, Chaffee assumed command of a new corps, consisting of two armored divisions and a reserve tank battalion. Within a year, a third armored division was added and soon moving to the new headquarters at Camp Polk.

4. Louisiana Maneuvers Stir Worry and Change

The May 1940 Louisiana Maneuvers elicited mixed assessments from observing officers, some of whom were highly critical of the participants' performances. Nonetheless, the military gained considerable knowledge from the war games. More importantly, the Louisiana exercises served as a vast laboratory for testing strategies and innovations. Officers were able to evaluate troop adaptation to new weapons, such as the Garand M-1 semiautomatic rifle and the 105 mm Howitzer. Even though, at the time, the Army had only one of the latter, the soldiers hauled it from place to place during the war games.

> *Weakness cannot compete with anything. Only strength can cooperate.*
>
> *— General Dwight D. Eisenhower*

For the first time, C-rations were consumed by large numbers of troops. These tightly packed food allotments were designed for use in the field during periods when cooking would be impractical. A newspaper article described the individual servings as "one 12-ounce can of pre-cooked meat and beans, one of beef stew, one of meat and vegetable hash, and three companion cans, each of which contains six ounces of crackers, one ounce of sugar and three-fourths of an ounce of pulverized coffee soluble even in cold water." C-rations were vital to soldiers along the front lines during World War II, and although the trials in Louisiana led to improved C-rations, the troops almost universally derided them.

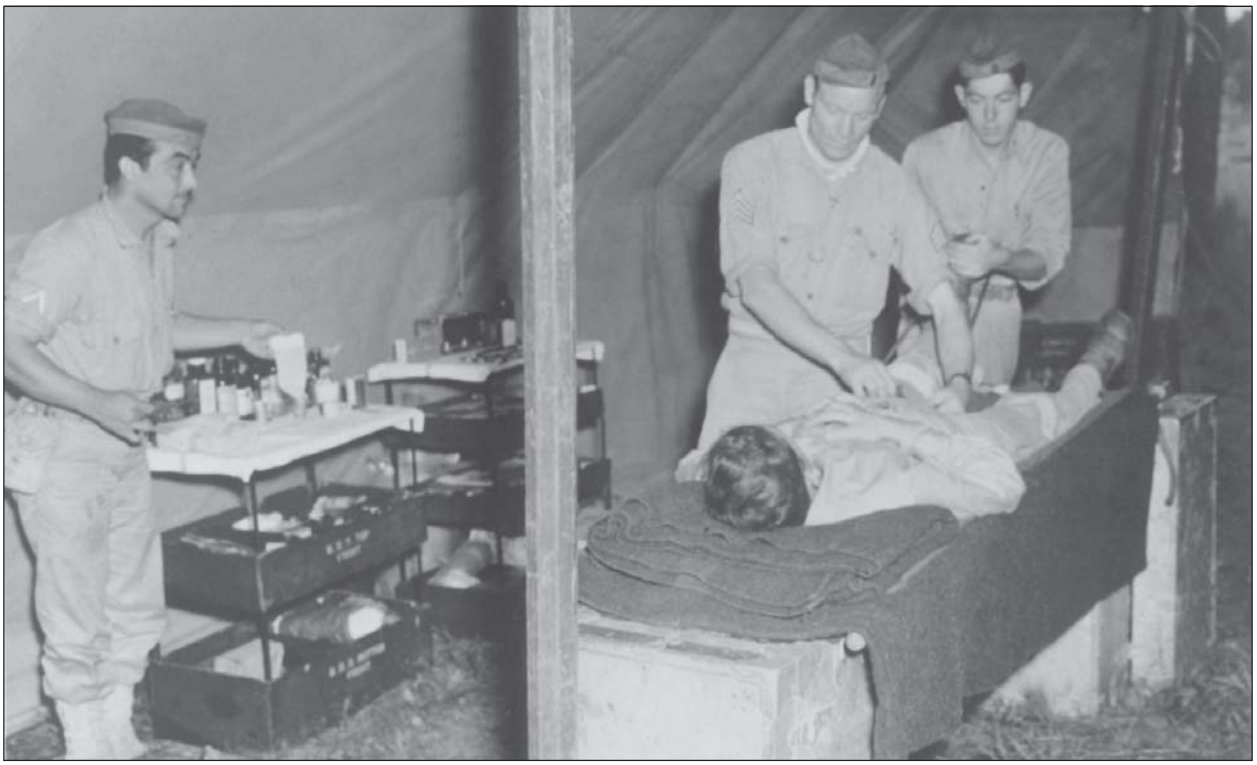
Mobile kitchens and hospitals were tested in the field for the first time and adapted to the new, fast-moving triangular infantry divisions. The triangular divisions were still not universally accepted. Some of the officers considered them ineffective, and one complained in his report on the exercises that there was too much reliance on speed and maneuverability and not enough concern about troop safety. In fact, there were thirteen casualties, primarily caused by vehicular accidents. The last death occurred when a soldier drowned while swimming on a break. Other critics complained that triangular divisions required too many trucks and that dispensing with pack animals actually limited rather than enhanced mobility. It was General George C. Marshall, Army Chief of Staff, who decided there had been enough debate and decreed that experimentation was over. All new Army infantry divisions would be triangular.

The maneuvers also affected how future exercises would be conducted. The Army published an umpires' manual to rectify the lack of consistent rules for judges. The handling of internal reviews changed as a result of the blistering remarks by Major General Herbert J. Brees, maneuver director. He delivered his assessment to the commanders of both the Red and Blue Armies, sparing few from criticism and offering almost no positive comments about their leadership. Brees expressed dismay over how the "helpless infantry" was left unprotected from air attack, which in real war would have been "sure murder." For years, the Army had instructed officers on how to defend against low-flying planes, he said, and yet "those teachings seem to have been forgotten entirely."

Brees, like Patton, also complained that there was a "striking disinclination" among participants to leave roads and travel over unpaved terrain. "We obtained and are paying good money for special vehicles which are supposed to have good cross-country mobility," he said. "If these vehicles are not capable of moving across country, then we had

Above: Major General Walter Krueger (left), commander of the Red Army, converses with Major General Herbert J. Brees (right), director of the May 1940 maneuvers. Brees's caustic comments to participating officers at the end of the exercises forced changes in how the Army handled subsequent critiques.

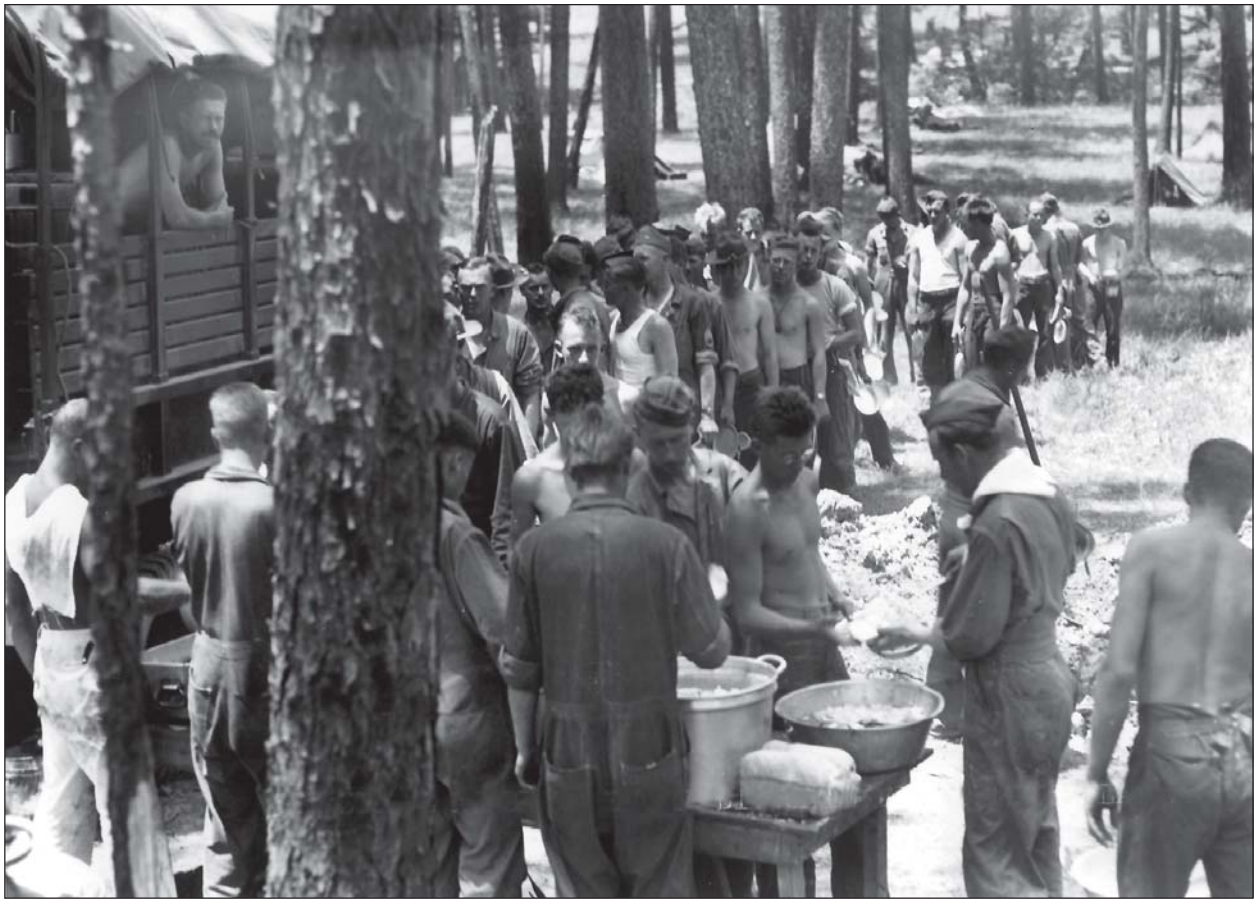
Below: Medical personnel from the 2nd Medical Brigade National Guard. The Louisiana Maneuvers provided an opportunity to practice treating soldiers wounded in combat.



The Army supplied and fed thousands of men during the Louisiana Maneuvers—a logistical feat that helped the Army prepare for World War II.

Right: One of the mobile kitchens tested by the Army.

Below: Hungry soldiers line up to eat.



better find it out before we expend large additional sums.…"

The Army released Brees's remarks unedited to the press. Excerpts were printed, casting a pall over the public assumption that the nation's defense was in capable hands. Marshall subsequently issued guidelines forbidding any further release of unexpurgated military critiques to reporters. He also limited junior officers' exposure to biting condemnations given to their immediate superiors.

As American troops packed their equipment to leave Louisiana in the spring of 1940, the European situation rapidly deteriorated. The world had never before seen an army as powerful as Germany's. In merely ten days, German soldiers swept across much of France. Benito Mussolini, the Italian dictator, waited until Germany's success seemed certain before he, too, declared war on France, eliciting the denouncement of President Franklin D. Roosevelt who said, "The hand of the neighbor has stabbed its neighbor in the back."

In late May 1940, a large section of the British Army, fighting beside the French, retreated from the approaching Germans to the small coastal village of Dunkirk in northern France where they were stranded with no way to escape. Defying terrible odds, the British government instigated an unprecedented rescue attempt on May 26, 1940, just two days after the first Louisiana Maneuvers ended. The British Navy moved every ship it could muster across the English Channel toward France, accompanied by thousands of commercial ships and small pleasure craft with volunteers at the helms. German airplanes, the Luftwaffe, harassed this citizens' flotilla and the navy ships by dropping hundreds of bombs and blasting away with machine guns. British fighter planes rose to fight the attackers, filling the sky with screaming, darting war machines. German pilots still managed to sink many small boats and some eighty large vessels, including major warships. Even so, the British rescued some 338,000 soldiers, including 110,000 French troops. About 40,000 troops failed to escape and were captured by the Germans.

The daring rescue cheered flagging spirits in Britain, but prospects for overall victory looked bleak. By June 1, 1940, French and British forces began withdrawing from Norway, leaving most of Europe under heavy Nazi oppression. Hitler's forces seemed poised to conquer Great Britain next. Prime Minister Winston Churchill declared they would never surrender and rallied the English with fiery speeches. He proclaimed, "Let us therefore ...so bear ourselves that, if the British Empire and its Commonwealth last for a thousand years, men will still say, 'This was their finest hour.'"

A majority in the United States continued to favor neutrality and wanted no part of Europe's war. Even so, President Roosevelt tilted trade and aid policies toward the British, trying to save the beleaguered nation. On May 31, 1940, he also called for a massive U.S. military build-up and a billion federal dollars for domestic defense. U.S. military leaders kept adjusting their own theories about how best to counter the growing threat abroad. The French army, long idealized and considered the world's best by some, had often been used as the model for U.S. strategies. Now, with the French forces in tatters, shredded by the superior German army, new strategies seemed prudent.

Louisiana's importance in the nation's military preparedness seemed to be gaining momentum. At the close of the May maneuvers, Lieutenant General Stanley D. Embick, commander of the 3rd Army, extolled the state as "ideal" for military training. He thanked the local population for a "pleasant reception" and for extending "unfailing courtesy." Almost immediately, speculation spread that the military might choose Louisiana as a permanent maneuver site. The first exercises had enhanced the state's economy at a time when almost everyone was still struggling financially from the Great Depression. The *Alexandria Daily Town Talk* (the local newspaper) reported on the economic impact of soldiers on weekend leaves. "Every roadside establishment in the local area was crowded with troopers…and while they were here, there was a steady tinkle of cash drawers in every establishment where refreshments and sandwiches could be obtained."

According to Jerry Sanson, an associate professor at Louisiana State University at Alexandria,

Governor Sam Jones and Brigadier General Raymond Fleming, commander of the Louisiana National Guard, traveled to Washington, D.C., to promote Louisiana for future maneuvers and military training. Jones, collaborating with Louisiana's congressional delegation, returned several more times that summer to meet with President Roosevelt and other Washington officials.

The effect of this lobbying is difficult to quantify, but military activity boomed in Louisiana soon after. With the danger of a world war escalating, Army leaders focused attention on the National Guard, which was comprised of citizens who devoted one weekend a month and two weeks every summer to military preparation.

Lieutenant General Stanley D. Embick played a major role in the Louisiana Maneuvers.

In August 1940, some two hundred thousand National Guard troops attended summer camps in New York, Wisconsin, Minnesota, Washington, and Louisiana. The Louisiana encampment was centered at the old post of Camp Beauregard near Alexandria, on the outskirts of the small community of Pineville. According to historian Terry Jones, during World War I the camp had served as a training post for the National Guard and, in the 1930s, as local headquarters for the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC), a federal program that hired out-of-work men to construct public works and perform other public service such as building dams and planting trees. During the first Louisiana Maneuvers in May 1940, Camp Beauregard was headquarters for the war games.

Army officials decided to expand the annual National Guard encampment from two to three weeks. The first two weeks would focus on intensive training. During the last week, soldiers would be tested in simulated combat. From the outset, the National Guard performed poorly. The first two weeks revealed that the citizen soldiers were in alarmingly poor condition. Rigorous marches and other demanding physical activities, all conducted beneath a blazing sun, left many exhausted and gasping. Participants suffered a variety of ills including sunburn, heat prostration, and nausea, the latter brought on, some speculated, by gulping down soft drinks bought from roadside vendors. Years of public apathy and insufficient funding resulted in a force that was ill-equipped and unaccustomed to functioning in larger units. The citizen soldiers also were loosely disciplined, further evidence that they were unprepared for combat. To make matters worse, remnants of a hurricane blew in, dumping heavy rains that turned the ground into mush, increasing the difficulty and the strain on everyone.

Lieutenant General Stanley D. Embick, who organized the one-week maneuvers, realized that the National Guard would be unable to handle anything too taxing. He divided units into the two corps of the Red and Blue Armies, adding regular Army soldiers. Embick and his aides carefully scripted the exercises so that individual commanders on the battlefield were allowed little leeway to make decisions. Control officers, under Embick's command, accompanied the two forces. They told commanders at every stage what to do and when, whether to advance or to retreat. The tight management caused

Soldiers clearing a river crossing during the August 1940 National Guard maneuvers.

some Pentagon officials to grouse that the exercises were not true maneuvers at all, but rather "tactical drills."

The war games began with some twenty-eight thousand soldiers of the Blue Army, commanded by Major General Albert Blanding, camped north of present-day Fort Polk near the small towns of Simpson and Flatwoods. The opposing Red Army, with about thirty-seven thousand troops, was camped just south of the Fort Polk area near Cravens and Pitkin. A local newspaper described the Red Army camp. "Traveling along the Leesville-Oakdale highway and the Pitkin-Glenmora highway you see tents [and], now and then, culverts leading from the highway to the open woods, places for storage of grain and hay for the cavalry."

Major General Walter Krueger, who commanded the Red Army during the first Louisiana Maneuvers, again led the Red Army. This time, however, his force was divided almost equally between National Guard units and regular Army troops. The Blue Army also contained a mix of regular Army and National Guard soldiers.

The Louisiana exercises, which took place primarily in Vernon Parish, began in the early morning on August 17, 1940, as the Red Army cavalry, a regular Army division, galloped north across present-day Fort Polk and slammed head on into a National Guard unit, the 23rd Cavalry Division, which was headed south after fording the Calcasieu River. Because of some bureaucratic mix-up, the National Guard troops arrived in Louisiana with

few horses. They were forced to rent mounts from local farmers. These farm animals were never trained to perform military maneuvers and, apparently, neither were their riders.

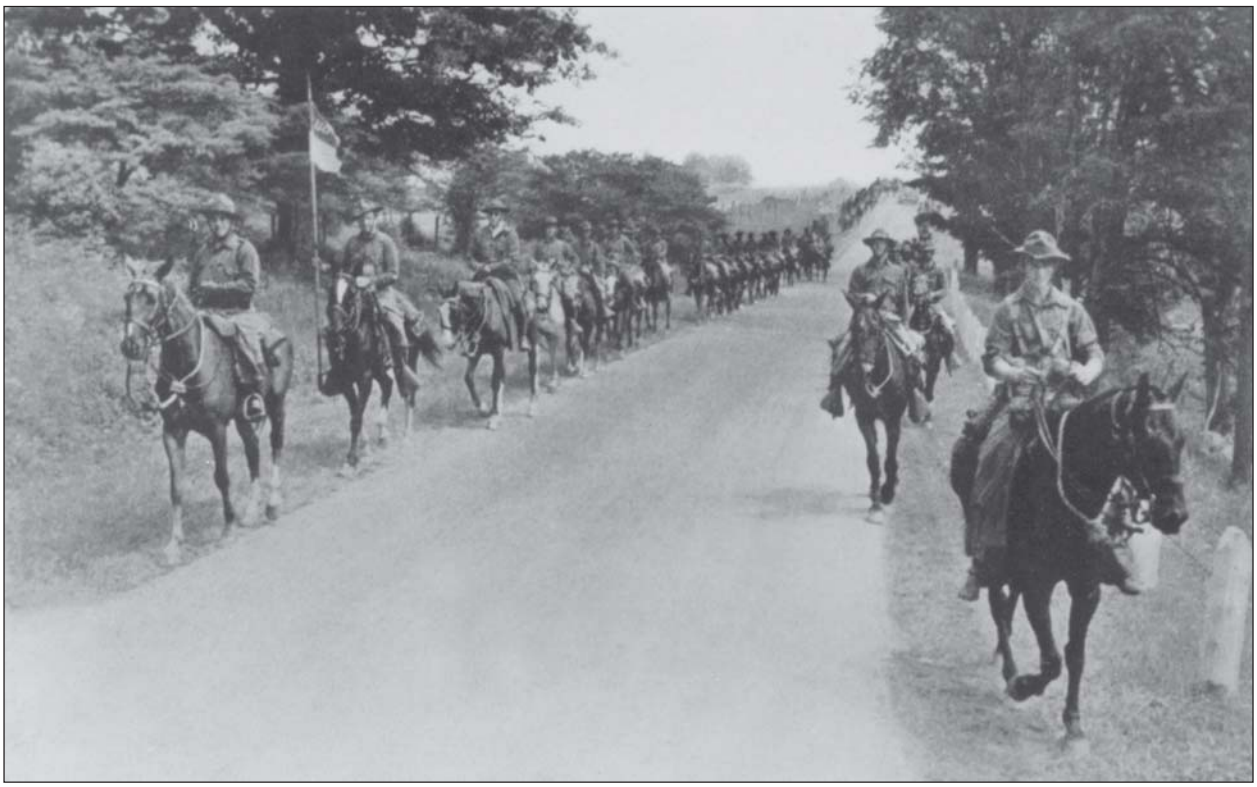
The two cavalries clashed in a series of skirmishes lasting most of the day, exhausting both men and horses of the 23rd Cavalry. The animals were so spent that their riders had to abandon them temporarily to allow them to recover. This left soldiers without transportation, forcing commanders to dispatch trucks to pick them up, an inglorious close to one of the last major actions involving U.S. soldiers on horseback.

Long lines of soldiers on horseback traveled through the area during the Louisiana Maneuvers before World War II. These men were participating in the August 1940 National Guard exercises.

The next day, infantry units from the Red Army marched north through the Fort Polk area to attack the Blue Army. Later, the Blue Army counterattacked. During the four days of maneuvering, these engagements produced little noteworthy action. Soldiers walked through prearranged scenarios, staging events that only remotely resembled warfare. The National Guard often looked disheveled in their World War I uniforms, some wearing leftover "Doughboy" helmets resembling big saucers. To complete their vintage appearance, the troops carried outdated 1903 Springfield rifles, for which they were given ten blank bullets daily. Artillery units also struggled with antiquated equipment and frequently had no vehicles to move the big guns from place to place. Few tanks were available, and soldiers used drainpipes to represent antiaircraft and antitank weapons. Infantry soldiers, when not on foot, rode in a ragtag array of vehicles, including many civilian automobiles, instead of Army trucks.

The news media provided enough coverage of the encampments to stir a general uneasiness across the nation about military preparedness. The National Guard was supposed to be a primary force for defending the United States. *Newsweek* magazine encapsulated these doubts by printing a photograph of a delivery truck used in the National Guard maneuvers with the word *Tank* emblazoned on the side. This was far from reassuring, given that Germany had just conquered France with ten Panzer Divisions replete with genuine tanks.

The National Guard's poor performance spurred President Roosevelt and a previously recalcitrant Congress to action. Within days after the second Louisiana Maneuvers ended, Congress passed and



National Guard units line the road during maneuvers in New York. Active in all of the Louisiana Maneuvers before World War II, the cavalry was soon after replaced by tank brigades.

President Roosevelt signed a resolution federalizing all reservists and the National Guard and mandating twelve months of intensive training. The President also changed his stance from tepid support to strong advocacy for a military draft after observing the National Guard maneuvers in New York. Congress, which had dawdled over a selective service bill for three months, finally authorized the draft in mid-September 1940. Soon, some nine hundred thousand young men were inducted into the military.

With the rapid expansion of the armed forces, new bases were needed to house and train the influx of soldiers. Many Louisiana civic and elected leaders, including Governor Jones, lobbied to maintain the military presence in the area. The Louisiana Maneuvers had been a windfall, spurring the state's economy on two levels—government and individual spending. The National Guard encampment alone cost the federal government more than $1.8 million or about $87,000 a day, and a portion of the needed supplies and equipment were bought in Louisiana.

Although spending by individual soldiers was on a smaller scale, it was still significant. Collectively, the soldiers participating in the National Guard encampment earned about $700,000 in pay and allowances.

During the early May maneuvers, privates earned only $21 a month, but the young soldiers were prone to spend freely in the local stores and bars. One common purchase, besides food and drink, was a sleeping bag. Many soldiers willingly paid the $5 to buy the sleeping bags, which were considered luxuries and were not standard Army issue.

Hopes for more military expenditures in Louisiana were raised by Army Chief of Staff Marshall. He visited the National Guard encampment in August 1940, accompanied by Colonel John Wood, who later led the 4th Armored Division during World War II. After inspecting the troops and ter-

Horses Leave the Battlefield

The Louisiana Maneuvers helped bring to a close the once glorious role of mounted troops in the United States military, at least until the Special Forces rode horses in the war in Afghanistan in 2001. Notwithstanding memories of Civil War cavaliers such as J.E.B. Stuart and Phillip Sheridan, the cavalry was under fire even before the first Louisiana military exercises in May 1940, when horse units were outmaneuvered and more than once defeated. According to Nick Pollacia Jr., some argued that criticism of the cavalry's performance was unfair, in part because no trailers were available to transport horses and troopers from one site to another during the first war games.

Using trailers to speed deployment, a fairly new idea at the time, was called *porte cavalry* and was intended to help the cavalry keep pace with mechanized units. Major General John K. Herr, the last Chief of Cavalry, also implied that the way all three prewar Louisiana Maneuvers were staged rigged the results against the horse units, but there is scant justification for this view.

Germany's success with armored Panzer divisions also prompted increasing numbers of military observers to argue that the cavalry could not keep pace with advances in modern weaponry and that the needless slaughter of defenseless animals was all but guaranteed. The National Guard fiasco during the second maneuvers in August 1940, when the 23rd Cavalry Division's rented horses became so exhausted they had to be abandoned, was another major blow to the cavalry. While cavalry units did take part in the third Louisiana Maneuvers in September 1941, Major General Lesley McNair soon after ordered all cavalry units to dismount.

Early in World War II, Philippine troopers on horseback, led by U.S. Colonel Franklin Pierce and under the overall command of General Jonathan (Skinny) Wainwright, fended off the Japanese Army as U.S. soldiers retreated. After the war, Wainwright and a few others recommended that the 1st Cavalry Division should remount. Wainwright theorized that horseback riders could provide better battlefield surveillance than either airplanes or armored vehicles. His recommendations faced strong resistance and were ignored. The opposition was summed up by General Joseph (Vinegar Joe) Stilwell, who, when asked about the role of horses in combat, replied, "Good eating, if you're hungry."

rain, Marshall declared that central Louisiana was the "finest [training] area" he had ever seen.

Soon after the second maneuvers had ended, Governor Jones announced that the Army was assuming control of Camp Beauregard, which had formerly been owned by the state. This was the first of several announcements concerning the imminent establishment of new Army posts in central Louisiana. The Army revealed plans to develop two additional bases near Alexandria. One, eventually named Camp Livingston, was located north of Alexandria. The other, which was called Camp Clai-

Soldiers sleeping in the woods during the maneuvers.

borne, was situated about eighteen miles southwest of the city. The Army also scouted for a site to base a major armored division. General Adna P. Chaffee, who was in charge of all the armored forces, wanted the installation, the future Camp Polk, to be in central Louisiana, an area he knew well from his experience participating in the first maneuvers.

Some sources claim that a young Army colonel named Dwight D. Eisenhower helped choose the location for Camp Polk, changing the history of central Louisiana and influencing his own future. Born in Denison, Texas, on October 14, 1890, Eisenhower was the son of Quaker pacifists who soon moved the family to Abilene, Kansas. A difficult child with a foul temper, Eisenhower beat his head and fists against a tree on several occasions when he failed to get his way. His mother told him that his anger hurt no one but himself, an admonition that he later said deeply affected him. According to historian Merle Miller, Eisenhower developed a reputation as an adult for rarely humiliating anyone, from his worst enemies to the lowest junior officer. Instead, whenever he felt insulted or treated poorly, he wrote the individual's name on a slip of paper and cast it into a desk drawer. In his mind the offender no longer existed. The "bottom drawer," as he called it, "became over the years a sort of private wastebasket for crumbled up spite and discarded personalities" and helped him "avoid harboring useless black feelings."

A lackluster student, Eisenhower showed academic interest only in ancient history. He continued his lackadaisical habits at the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, which he attended not out of interest in the armed forces, but because his tuition was free and there he could pursue his real passions of baseball, football, and boxing. His athletic career, however, was cut short when he injured his knee while riding a horse. "Not making the baseball team at West Point was one of the greatest disappointments of my life, maybe the greatest," he reflected. After the accident, Eisenhower seemed even less inclined to study, spending his time reading magazines while others crammed for tests.

Eisenhower, who made friends easily, was not without guile. For instance, in one math class students were called upon to explain complex calculations. Toward the end of class, those who had not yet recited sometimes tried to slow the presentation, hoping to be saved by the bugle blast that ended the period. Hume Peabody, later a brigadier general, noted that Eisenhower was an expert at this "bugling." He recalled the day when he confided to "Ike" that he was unprepared. When Peabody's turn came, Eisenhower intervened, skillfully asking questions and stalling. "The instructor was completely taken in and answered each question thoroughly," Peabody said. "Then that blessed bugle blew and I was off the hook."

During World War I, now in the active military, Eisenhower was ordered to remain in the United States. Although frustrated by this decision, he came to love Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, where he led a tank training center. After the war, in 1920, when many military leaders decided that tanks had little value, Eisenhower wrote a paper advocating a bright future for armored vehicles. He argued in a

mild, seemingly inoffensive manner that many officers were unfairly ignoring the potential of tanks. "The clumsy, awkward and snail-like progress of the old tanks must be forgotten and in their place we must picture a steady, reliable, and efficient engine of destruction." The paper infuriated the chief of the entire infantry, Major General Frank Sheets. He summoned the young officer and upbraided him for his views, advising him to keep them private. Should Eisenhower disregard this advice, Sheets warned, he would face court-martial and disgrace.

Dwight D. Eisenhower's rise to prominence occurred quickly after his success in the 1941 Louisiana Maneuvers.

In the years following World War I, Eisenhower developed a close friendship with George S. Patton that continued until the tensions of war interfered. They were an odd couple. Recognized as a hero for his actions in World War I, Patton was wealthy and exuberant, as well as eccentric. Eisenhower, who had never been in combat, scraped to get by financially and appeared bland and unassuming. Patton seemed destined to succeed in the military early on, while almost no one suspected that Eisenhower would ever claim anything but a midlevel desk job. Eisenhower, however, did have a winning smile and affability. As his friend General Mark Clark explained, "There was something about him that made you want to help him." Eisenhower's seemingly easygoing nature, however, disguised a fierce determination, fiery competitive spirit, and near photographic memory. For the most part, Eisenhower's life and career inched forward. He would have perhaps remained in the shadows except that two generals—Walter Krueger and George C. Marshall—spotted the potential others had missed.

Eisenhower's participation in the Louisiana Maneuvers at Camp Polk helped propel him into the limelight. His precise role in Camp Polk's earliest history is difficult to pin down because so much time has passed and so little was recorded about his specific involvement. In one letter, Eisenhower, heading to Camp Polk to establish headquarters for the 1941 Louisiana Maneuvers, wrote about the area as if he had never been there. "All the old timers here say that we are going into a God-awful spot, to live with mud, malaria, mosquitoes, and misery." However, local historian Don Marler indicated that Eisenhower undoubtedly helped select central Louisiana for the 1940 maneuvers and possibly specifically chose land near Leesville for Camp Polk. Bolstering this view are various articles that appeared in the *Leesville Daily Leader* newspaper after World War II, suggesting that Eisenhower played an important role in selecting Camp Polk's location.

In one story written in 1990, Gary Moore Sr. stated that in 1940 his grandfather Marvin Arthur Beaver, an employee of the Kansas City Southern Railroad, led Eisenhower on a tour of the land that became Camp Polk. According to the article, Beaver secured the railroad's luxurious *Presidential Car*, called the *KaySee*, for transporting Eisenhower to Louisiana. Eisenhower and Beaver then rode across land near Leesville on horses borrowed from J. A. Porter. Local historian Martha Palmer added credence to this account, saying Eisenhower definitely rode a horse across land that became Camp Polk, and that he was accompanied by at least six other people, including Beaver, Porter, and Leesville Mayor Jean King.

Mayor King orchestrated strong local support for a military base with help from the local newspaper. On August 29, 1940, just after the National Guard maneuvers, an editorial claimed that "Vernon Parish has the opportunity, now, to render a ser-

Authority Bears Responsibility

During the 1950s, the United States struggled with major social issues, including the *Red Scare*—a fear of Communists fanned by Senator Joe McCarthy—and equal rights for African Americans. President Dwight Eisenhower deliberated over these and other matters. According to historian Stephen Ambrose, Eisenhower was criticized by some as being slow to act, almost always protecting the status quo and rarely initiating meaningful change. Few, however, questioned his integrity or his resolve to spare others from needless humiliation.

Once, as a young captain at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, Eisenhower, according to historian Merle Miller, heard a commotion outside his office and went to investigate. He found a 1st lieutenant berating a young, temporary officer who stood helplessly embarrassed as a crowd gathered. Eisenhower listened to the outburst, then retreated to his office, sending word summoning the lieutenant. Major John Harris, who witnessed the incident, recalled that as the lieutenant entered the door, Eisenhower spoke sharply, telling the lieutenant "he didn't care to know the circumstances of the incident [but] that no infraction could conceivably have justified the public humiliation to which the boy had been subjected."

What happened next perhaps helps explain Eisenhower's popularity with many who knew him. Harris said that Eisenhower, in a voice that turned kinder but was no less firm, "lectured the lieutenant on the responsibility that comes with authority. It was hardly a new idea, but Ike expressed it so eloquently, yet, so simply, that I found myself listening, as intently as the lieutenant."

vice to its country and even profit in doing so. A second great Army Maneuver has just been concluded in this area, and various Army Commanders and Officers were so impressed with the many natural advantages of the territory, as a training ground, that they are recommending that this area be used as a permanent training area…."

The editorial added that "every business in this parish will benefit directly or indirectly. Let's think this thing over and get busy and get these camps and share in the many millions this country is to spend for military defense and army training." The newspaper advised citizens to be prepared to renew maneuver lease agreements and forego seeking money for minor damages caused by the maneuvers. Residents could also help, the newspaper declared, by encouraging civic and business organizations to pass resolutions favoring a military base. The editorial concluded with an admonition to "help the Army so they will be ready to defend you."

Not long after, Major C.E. Morrison and Lieutenant A.G. Sage represented the Army in a meeting with Leesville's mayor and other local civic leaders. The officers gave them a list of properties, including the names of landowners, title descriptions, and acreage, that the military wanted leased within a week. The community leaders, including clerk of the court Jack Hadnot, began immediately that Saturday night visiting local residents. They worked through the weekend and into the following Monday, signing up landowners. By October 3, 1940, the newspaper headlines declared *All Land Obtained For Location of Army Camp Here*.

5. Thousands Apply to Build Camp Polk

Residents of Camp F-4, the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) facility that opened in 1933 near Leesville, contributed significantly to Fort Polk's development. Funded by the federal government to help the unemployed, the camp was originally occupied primarily by men from Georgia. As these first CCC workers moved on, the camp took in a greater number of men from central Louisiana, especially Leesville and DeRidder.

The Great Depression, which began with the stock market crash of 1929, struck especially hard in Louisiana. A few years earlier some of the lumber companies began to close, including Fullerton Mill. Some smaller mills managed to continue operating during the 1930s, providing work for a lucky few, but many of the large lumber companies were shutting down, throwing thousands out of work.

> *Fortune favors the bold.*
>
> *— Emperor Julius Caesar*

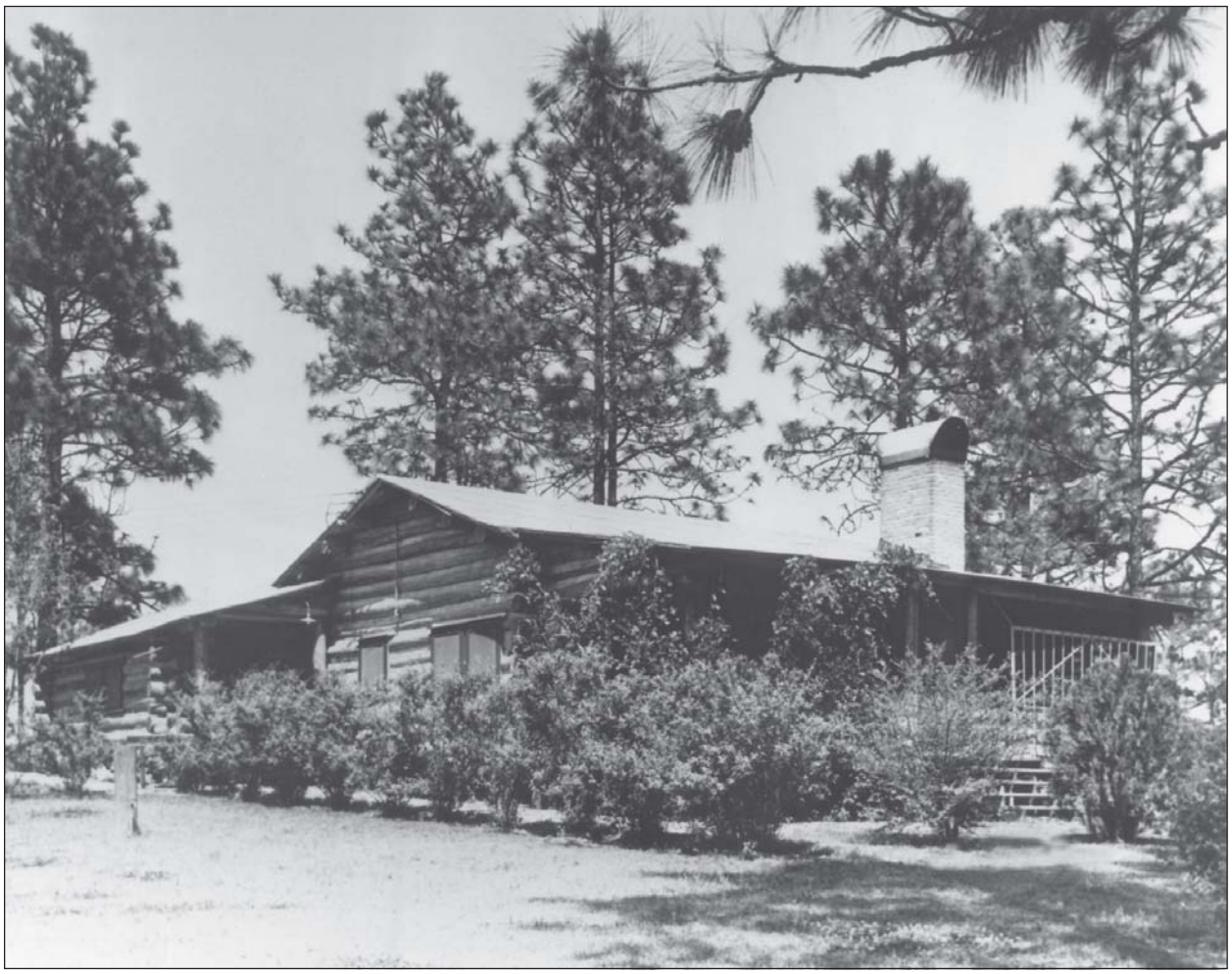
The economic slump also caused hardship for farmers, many of whom cut every tree they owned as they struggled to scratch together enough money to survive. Farmers lined up at the Leesville courthouse seeking loans, trying to stave off disaster. A number of them managed to hang on to their property, but others failed as markets dried up, prices plummeted, and landowners could no longer afford to pay their mortgages or taxes.

According to historian Steven D. Smith, more than fifty CCC camps opened in Louisiana to help men who lost land or jobs. Enrollees received food, medical care, clothing, and housing, as well as $30 a month in return for hard, physical labor. The camps, supervised by the U.S. Army, also offered high school education programs and classes for college credit. Camp F-4, about fifteen miles southeast of Leesville, featured Spartan dormitories, a first-aid building, and a large recreation hall. Every Sunday night, camp administrators showed a motion picture for residents and their guests.

The CCC crews accomplished a great deal in the area. They laid out roads, created firebreaks, strung telephone lines, built bridges, and fought forest fires. According to Erbon Wise, a local historian and retired Army major general, the crews planted trees on some thirty-one thousand acres in Vernon Parish and built fences enclosing about forty-two thousand acres, mainly to prevent livestock from trampling the tree seedlings. The new growth was key to the development of the Kisatchie National Forest's Vernon Ranger District, which provided much of the land for Camp Polk. CCC workers also erected some of the earliest buildings on Camp Polk, including the Log Cabin. Originally the residence of the first base commander, the building still stands and today serves as guest quarters.

News about whether there would even be a Camp Polk was hard to come by in the autumn of 1940. The *Leesville Daily Leader* printed a steady stream of articles supporting the establishment of an Army post in the area, hinting that one was imminent. But after the Army announced in early October 1940 that they had secured agreement from enough landowners to proceed, there was no further word.

Local residents continued to do their part. On October 16, 1940, the first day of the new military draft, the town of Leesville staged a patriotic parade. Some three thousand people lined the downtown streets filled with fluttering American flags to honor not only the young men registering for the new draft, but the veterans of past wars as well. Governor Sam Jones delivered a rousing speech to the crowd. Leesville had not witnessed such an outpouring of enthusiasm since 1929 when Louisiana Governor Huey Long, the fiery populist who proclaimed that "Every man is a king," visited to celebrate the Fourth of July.



Built in 1941 by the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC), the Log Cabin at Fort Polk is still used today to house distinguished guests.

The Leesville newspaper finally seemed to have definitive news on October 30, 1940, when it announced that the Army would begin building an armored division camp near Leesville "in a few days." Once again, however, days passed with no action. Rumors swirled that the Army had changed its mind and decided to look elsewhere. Then, on November 14, 1940, a crew from the Kansas City Railroad arrived and began laying a spur rail line connecting downtown tracks with what was rumored to be the new Army post. Again, no official word was forthcoming to explain the track's purpose. Finally, on December 19, 1940, the *Leesville Daily Leader* quoted a "reliable source" saying construction would begin in early 1941. The new camp, the article said, would include a headquarters area encompassing six square miles, an artillery range, and fifty thousand acres for maneuvers. The article also noted that real estate prices were rising as speculators bought land, hoping to cash in on the military's imminent arrival.

Official activity began in earnest on New Year's Day 1941, when Major Walter H. Daub of the Army Quartermaster Corps arrived in Leesville to prepare for construction. He established headquarters in two railroad cars supplied by the Kansas City Southern Railroad. Then, on January 7, 1941, the U.S. Department of Agriculture released a document to the Secretary of War authorizing the Army's use of 27,615 acres of the Kisatchie National

Forest's Vernon Ranger District. On January 11, 1941, the Army signed a building contract with the W. Horace Williams Company of New Orleans.

The much-anticipated post was finally named in January 1941 when the Army announced that the facility would be called Camp Polk, honoring Leonidas Polk, a Confederate officer from Louisiana who had served in the Civil War. Soon a dozen Army engineers arrived to help design Camp Polk and supervise construction. One of them, First Lieutenant William Lynch from Savannah, Georgia, told Fort Polk's *Guardian* newspaper in 1990 that when he received orders in 1941 to report to the Kisatchie National Forest, he asked, "Where's that?" A superior replied, "Hell, I don't know." Lynch's misgivings grew when he arrived in Louisiana. He recalled that "Vernon Parish was a barren, desolate place that had been cleared out [by logging]." In every direction, there were "pine stumps and mud holes." Lynch and his wife lived for a while in DeRidder before moving to a small apartment in Leesville. Finding housing was becoming difficult as job seekers streamed into the area.

Lynch and his fellow engineers were unsure how to design Camp Polk. Less than a year had passed since the *Basement Conspirators* met in Alexandria, Louisiana, and encouraged the establishment of the nation's first two armored divisions. And now there were already plans for a third. The Army had no experience in housing such a division, so, as Lynch explained, it was uncertain what the correct "size and composition" of the ideal military instal-

The General Was a Bishop

Leonidas Polk, Louisiana's first Episcopal bishop, attended the U.S. Military Academy at West Point. There he made influential friends, including the future president of the Confederacy, Jefferson Davis. A lieutenant general for the Confederacy during the Civil War, Polk successfully led an entire section of forces at the battle of Chickamauga in Georgia. Earlier, Polk had led troops at the bloody battle at Shiloh, Tennessee, which Confederate forces lost to an army commanded by General Ulysses S. Grant.

Following a falling out with his superior General Braxton Bragg, Polk spent some time in Mississippi. He returned to Georgia when a new commander, General Joseph Johnston, took control of the forces seeking to delay Union General William Tecumseh Sherman's push toward Atlanta. The two opposing sides played a brilliant game of cat-and-mouse as Confederate forces gradually backed up, inflicting as many Union casualties as possible in the process. It was during this exacting withdrawal, on June 14, 1864, that Leonidas Polk, "the fighting bishop," died from battle wounds near Kennesaw Mountain, just north of Atlanta, Georgia.

A Family Watches as Tanks Demolish Their Home

More than two hundred landowners sold property to the federal government in the first round of purchases for Camp Polk's main post. While sizable holdings were acquired from companies, including Anacoco Lumber, Central Coal and Coke, Commercial National Bank, Copeland Chevrolet, Federal Land Bank, Texas Creosoting Company, and Gulf Lumber, many properties were bought from individual landowners. Some, suffering from the economic depression, gladly sold their land. Not everyone, however, was satisfied with the price the government paid or how they were treated.

Doris "Dolly" Mayo recalled that her parents, Willie Lee and Viola Haymon, received a token amount for their land near Fullerton, which the government bought to create a shooting range. Her family traced their relatives to pioneers who settled in Louisiana before the Civil War. "My great-grandfather moved here at a time when the timber was so thick, they had to mark trees to keep from being lost," Mayo said. Her mother was born October 14, 1892, and knew hardship early, losing her own mother when she was fifteen. The teenager was left to help raise seven younger siblings. Willie Lee Haymon, born in the Texas hill country on September 23, 1889, moved to Louisiana and married Viola, a distant cousin, when he was twenty-one and she was nineteen.

Willie Lee worked for the Gulf Lumber Company, owners of the Fullerton Mill, where his job was to load logs onto railroad cars. The work was dangerous and accidents were common. When Willie Lee's foot was crushed on the job, he lost his leg below the knee, but kept working after making his own wooden leg. The lumber company assigned him to tend the horses that pulled heavy equipment. When the mill closed in 1927, he was out of work like everyone else. Using nearly all their savings, the Haymons bought about twenty acres on Bird's Creek near the shuttered mill.

Working a small farm was never easy, especially for a man with only one good leg, but the family survived, Mayo recalled. The three eldest sons helped with chores. Her mother, besides performing the many tasks expected of a farm wife, also spent time behind the plow, despite her husband's disapproval. Mayo's father developed a number of enterprises to supplement the farm income. He learned to blacksmith and managed a sugarcane mill that produced syrup and a grist mill that ground corn into meal. Neighbors paid him with a portion of the meal he ground for them. He also became an expert butcher and a barber. Young boys lined up on Saturday afternoons on the family's front porch to have their hair sheared.

They always had plenty of food. "I never went hungry in my life," Mayo recalled. "We had peach trees, plum trees. We always had a lot of blackberry jelly. Picked lots of huckleberries. There were peas and pickles, and we had barrels of brown sugar and white

(continued on next page)

A Family Watches as Tanks Demolish Their Home (cont.)

sugar. There were not a lot of big people and little people then. We were all just farm people. People talk about they didn't have anything. No one else had anything, either."

During the first Louisiana Maneuvers, when Mayo was sixteen, a fleet of tanks parked across from their house. "The whole area was tanks. Those tanks really impressed me. The tanks were just one right behind the other. Of course it was exciting, but the noise was terrible. The noise was around the clock. I'd never seen so many soldiers. They slept on our front porch, which went all around the house. They brought momma hams and everything else to eat. Momma cooked chickens and biscuits [for them]. They loved those biscuits."

When the federal government wanted her family's land for Camp Polk in 1941, a representative offered her parents $350, not enough for them to buy replacement property, but they had little choice, Mayo said. The family lingered for a time, hoping to be allowed to stay, but finally had to leave. The teenage girl helped load their belongings into a wagon. "I saw the tanks run over that fence. A tank ran right over our kitchen. They crushed our house with tanks. My mother cried."

The family left behind friends, the family cemetery, the children's schools, and the "old home place" built with their own hands. They moved near Anacoco Lake into a house so small that two of the boys had to sleep in the barn and her mother had to cook outside because there was no kitchen. In the midst of the Great Depression, even with Camp Polk's construction boom, jobs were hard to come by, especially for a man with one leg. Nevertheless, Mayo's father never accepted charity. Once World War II began, fewer and fewer men remained in the area as the able-bodied joined the military and were sent overseas. This provided Mayo's father an opportunity to work in Camp Polk's maintenance shop. Always good with his hands, he became so skillful and was so diligent that the Army gave him several awards.

lation should be. The engineers decided to pattern Camp Polk after a 1939 training chart drawn up in Germany for a Panzer tank division.

Camp Polk acquired more than twenty-seven thousand acres from the Kisatchie National Forest, so some adjustments had to be made. Anna Burns, a professor at Louisiana State University at Alexandria, quoted one Forest Service employee who recalled an incident while installing barbed wire fencing. "We had strung 12 miles of fence around a [seedling] plantation and just lacked 200 yards of closing it, when [a Camp Polk engineer] came out and told me to stop because the Army had decided to build their camp there.…A new roll of barbed wire was only one and one-half feet in diameter when we took it out of the [railroad] box car, but it took up 40 acres when we tried to roll it back up."

By late January 1941, a wild scramble ensued for construction jobs to build Camp Polk. Erbon Wise was attending classes at Louisiana State Normal College in Natchitoches when he read an announcement that hiring was about to start. He hitchhiked to Leesville and found himself among the

hordes of hopefuls flooding into the community of some three thousand residents. Perhaps as many as twenty thousand applicants looking for work descended on Leesville. Wise remembered seeing makeshift camps of prospective workers dotting the roadsides leading into town. Their campfires burned by the hundreds, providing the only warmth on cold nights. Many of the applicants were young, but there were also worn, older faces among them.

On the morning when hiring was supposed to begin, a long line formed outside a small, abandoned church where the construction company's employment manager had established his office. About thirty-five state police patrolled nearby, maintaining order. The church, later demolished, was located about where the Leesville bus station now stands. Wise peered inside the windows and caught a glimpse of the employment manager. Discouraged by the size of the crowd, however, he decided to abandon his job hopes and return to Natchitoches. He walked to the Happy Hour Café to order a ten-cent hamburger before journeying home. As luck would have it, the employment manager took the next table, and the young college student seized his chance. He introduced himself and asked for an appointment. "Come see me at 2 p.m.," came the reply.

That afternoon the employment manager hired Wise as an office boy for $35 a week, a princely sum for the time, and gave him his first duty. "Go to the front door and spend the rest of the day telling everyone to come back tomorrow. You be here

Aerial view of early Camp Polk construction in 1941.

Workers lay foundations for Camp Polk buildings, June 12, 1941. Thousands flocked to Camp Polk for construction jobs.

at seven in the morning and we will begin hiring to build Camp Polk."

Early the next morning, the small church was soon packed with personnel interviewers and applicants for carpentry, painting, plumbing, and other work. New employees had to be fingerprinted by state police, Wise remembered, adding, "I observed that often, men, not expecting this police check, would suddenly turn about and leave…." Those who stayed to be fingerprinted then stepped outside for another unexpected encounter. As Wise explained, "Trade union representatives, often newly recruited themselves, sought membership dues, a fee that strained many of these Depression-era workers."

Wise, who worked seven days a week from seven in the morning to seven at night, said that many workers found housing hard to come by. Some built shacks along the roads outside of town, leaving remnants that still mark the landscape in places. Others took up residence in chicken coops and barns. Luckier individuals found lodging with local residents who rented out virtually every available space. Wise's father, for example, owned a house and took in tenants. The son bought four double beds for two rooms where he and seven other men slept. Altogether, twenty-one people slept in the seven-room house, sharing a single bathroom. Because crews building Camp Polk worked around the clock in three eight-hour shifts, enterprising landlords could rent out the same bed to multiple tenants to use at different hours.

Leesville quickly swelled into a boom town, choked with dust, automobiles, and crowded restaurants and bars. The state police patrolled the streets breaking up fist fights. On occasion, there

Aerial view of new temporary buildings in the early days of Camp Polk construction, February 2, 1941.

were robberies and even a few homicides. For the most part, however, Leesville remained fairly peaceful. Some residents even claimed that they never felt the need to lock their doors.

The dirt road leading to the new Army post became rutted by frequent winter rains and constant traffic that turned the dirt into mud. Vehicles with tires spinning frequently became stuck and were abandoned until the rain stopped. The same route is now a busy paved thoroughfare that passes by Northwestern State University.

In a *Beauregard Daily News* article published in 1990, Luke Calhoun of Rosepine recounted his experience as a Camp Polk construction worker. Employees had to be 18 years old, he explained, and because he was only 17 he lied about his age to get a job, probably not an unusual occurrence. He remembered that the unskilled laborers earned forty cents for an hour of work, while carpenters earned seventy-five cents, and truck drivers one dollar. Crews often rode buses to and from the construction site.

Another worker, Fred Brewer of DeRidder, told the *Beauregard Daily News* in the 1980s that laborers often learned on the job. "Anyone with a hammer and saw" could get a job, he recalled. "If you were to ask someone [working at Camp Polk] how long they'd been carpentering, they were likely to say, 'Oh, about three hours now.'" Many immigrated to Louisiana from other states as part of a flood of job-seekers that also included workers from various parts of Louisiana. By April 1941, some

Above: Automobiles line the dusty road during the construction of the Infantry Regiment Area, March 29, 1941.

Below: Construction of Camp Polk took place at a feverish pace in 1941. Concrete block was used for some of the early buildings.

Colonel Otto Wagner, Camp Polk's first commander, served in the cavalry during World War I.

eighty thousand employees were building Camp Polk and the three other Army posts near Alexandria, according to Jerry Sanson, professor at Louisiana State University in Alexandria.

The first buildings to be erected at Camp Polk were in an area now called the South Fort. The Army engineers, cooperating with civilian engineers, designed the site in an east-west, horizontal pattern divided into sections with space for training, barracks, offices, motor pool, and maintenance. This simple plan worked so well that the basic layout with a few variations remains today. The planners also designated an area near the railroad tracks for parking tanks. Soon, the Army's M-3 light tanks and M-2 medium tanks began arriving at the new facility by rail.

Workers strung electrical wires and raised telephone poles in a line stretching all the way to Texas, sixty miles from Camp Polk. Others dug a network of trenches for water pipes and built a sewage treatment plant. By Spring 1941, South Fort was a beehive of movement and sound as workers pounded with hammers and sawed wood, constructing scores of unadorned buildings. They used some thirty-five million kegs of nails in the process. The steady hum of truck engines and grinding gears announced a parade of vehicles carrying 7,500 truckloads of sand, gravel, and lumber. By the time the first phase of building ended, 220,000 barrels of cement and 3.9 million square feet of roofing paper had been used, according to National Park Service archeologist David G. Anderson.

The construction company had signed a cost-plus contract, whereby the federal government reimbursed their expenses and paid an additional fixed percentage of the costs. Thus, the greater the costs, the greater the profits. Perhaps an attempt to provide the maximum number of jobs during a poor economy, this system certainly gave the construction company an incentive to hire more men than needed. Even with an incentive to balloon payrolls, the South Fort construction, which began on January 28, 1941, proceeded rapidly. By March 1941, construction had progressed to the point that the camp's first commander Colonel Otto Wagner and some of the troops began arriving.

At the same time, plans were underway at Fort Benning, Georgia, to take some officers and troops from the 2nd Armored Division, commanded by General George S. Patton, to form the 3rd Armored Division, destined to be stationed at Camp Polk. These soldiers had already demonstrated a fierce pride based on Patton's insistence on rigid discipline. "If you can't get them to salute when they should salute and wear the clothes you tell them to

wear," he reasoned, "how are you going to get them to die for their country?"

Most of the key officers assigned to Camp Polk were also imbued with Patton's theory of constant motion. Patton advised his men to "remember that one of the greatest qualities which we have is the ability to produce in our enemy the fear of the unknown." He continued, "Therefore, we must always keep moving. Do not sit down, do not say, 'I have done enough.' See what else you can do to raise the devil with the enemy. I remember once when I was trying to play football at West Point. I didn't do so well. The coach came up and said, 'Mr. Patton, if you can't do anything else, throw a fit.' The same thing applies to armored forces. If you can't think of anything else to do, throw a fit, burn a town, do something."

Major General Alvan C. Gillem, commander of the 3rd Armored Division at Fort Polk in 1941, participated in the May 1940 Louisiana Maneuvers. Gillem was instrumental in helping improve the nation's tank warfare capabilities.

With the draft reestablished, young men were entering the armed forces in droves. Some of these inductees were slated to join the new 3rd Armored Division led by Brigadier General Alvan C. Gillem, one of Patton's top officers. Gillem had served as second in command of the Provisional Tank Brigade during the brigade's triumphant assault on Leesville in the first Louisiana Maneuvers. Gillem's role in forming the new armored division and establishing Camp Polk and his service during World War II were so outstanding that the Army eventually honored him by naming a Georgia military post Fort Gillem.

On April 15, 1941, the 3rd Armored Division officially came into existence at Fort Benning, Georgia. Within a few days, the new unit moved to Camp Beauregard near Alexandria, taking up temporary residence while waiting for more construction to be completed at Camp Polk. On June 2, 1941, the division's first advanced attachment arrived near Leesville. Troops filed into Camp Polk over the following weeks while construction on the South Fort continued. Many of the early arrivals pitched tents as their first quarters at Camp Polk.

The events of June 22, 1941, were a further indication that training the 3rd Armored Division at Camp Polk would prove to be vitally important. That day, word came that Germany had invaded Russia, ignoring the existing nonaggression pact between the two nations. Adolph Hitler sent three million troops swarming into Russia. Advancing along a broad front that stretched from the Arctic to the Black Sea, Germany, with three thousand tanks and two thousand aircraft, tore gaping holes in the Russian defenses. Stunned by the unexpected assault, the Russian Army fell back. The Russian commanders were hoping that the brutal winter would be overwhelming for their aggressors and help save their nation, just as the winter weather had contributed to Napoleon's defeat during another war. Few now doubted Hitler's immense ambitions and capacity for conquest.

Great Britain, for the moment, had survived the devastating German bombing raids that left much of London in smoldering ruins, but the future seemed bleak. Prime Minister Winston Churchill declared, "Victory at all costs, victory in spite of all terror, victory however long and hard the road may

be; for without victory there is no survival." The United States government, while officially remaining neutral, did everything possible to help Great Britain, maintaining a vigorous trade and supplying military equipment. British and American ships laden with goods steamed back and forth across the Atlantic Ocean, becoming targets for the U-boats (German submarines) launched from the French coast, which the Germans controlled. Numerous ships were sunk. President Roosevelt ordered the U.S. Navy to defend against any threats to American merchant vessels. The prospect of a world war grew even more inevitable when Japan conquered Hong Kong in the summer of 1941.

The U.S. Army began sending more and more military personnel to central Louisiana to prepare for the largest, most important maneuvers ever held in the United States. All told, nearly one-half million soldiers would participate. Strategists selected Camp Polk as the headquarters for the massive exercises. Before long, some of the best military leaders from across the nation were setting up living quarters at the new post, even as the construction continued.

6. The Battle of Mount Carmel Rages

Leesville, DeRidder, and many other nearby Louisiana towns experienced another onslaught of military personnel by midsummer of 1941 as the U.S. Army prepared for its largest maneuvers ever, involving nearly four hundred thousand soldiers. Units poured into central Louisiana, setting up camps and preparing for battle, with the greatest number arriving between August and early September 1941. "It was almost more than Vernon Parish could cope with," LaVonne Brack told the *Leesville Daily Leader* in 1989.

On August 11, 1941, Colonel Dwight D. Eisenhower left Fort Sam Houston in central Texas to take up residence in a recently completed Camp Polk barracks. From his office at the new military post, he continued to prepare for the upcoming exercises and helped coordinate the movement of thousands of troops to Louisiana from several states. "The opening date of maneuvers is rushing towards us," he wrote, "and with each passing day it seems we discover new problems that must be solved before the shooting starts."

> *I want the mistakes down in Louisiana, not over in Europe, and the only way to do this is to try it out, and if it doesn't work, find out what we need to make it work.*
>
> *— General George C. Marshall*
> *Army Chief of Staff*

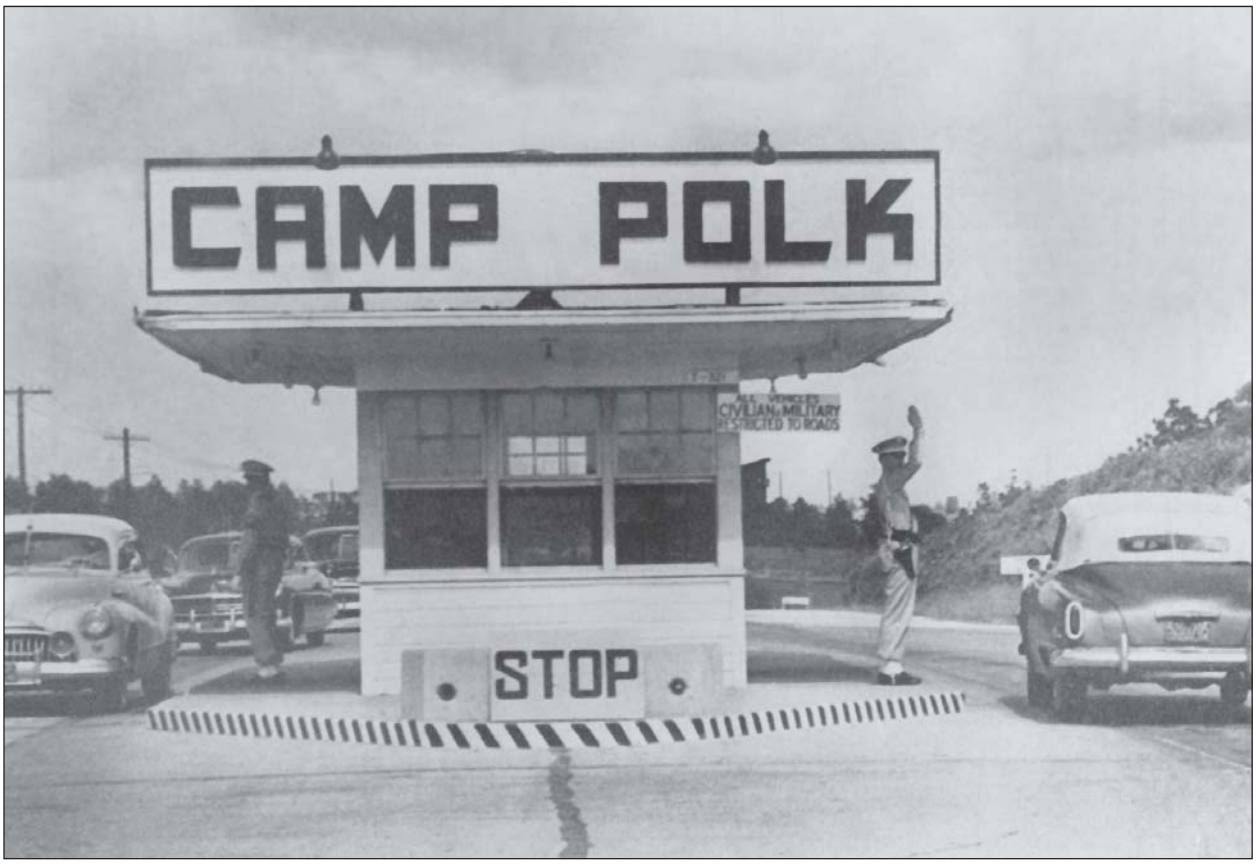
Some soldiers, including James Stack, who accompanied Eisenhower to Camp Polk, grumbled about what they found. Stack described an environment "where I don't think any human beings have been for 50 years. We found snakes all over the place, rattlers. We killed 15, 20 rattlers a day and we were just torn apart by the ticks. A lot of men had poison oak.…It was 100 degrees in the daytime and 40 or 30 at night. You would go down and take a shower and by the time you got back you were just as dirty and sweaty as you were when you left. Because of dysentery, all the mess equipment had to be scalded before and after we ate."

Eisenhower worked closely with Lieutenant Colonel LeRoy Lutes, an assistant chief of staff for supply for the 3rd Army. Lutes oversaw the transportation to Louisiana and distribution of some eleven million pounds of bread, eight million pounds of meat, and nine million pounds of potatoes to feed the soldiers participating in the maneuvers. His efforts proved to be a warm-up for the demanding task of supervising the massive supply effort for American troops storming the French beaches at Normandy on D-Day in June 1944. Lutes remained in charge of supplying vast numbers of U.S. troops until the end of the European war.

Even as soldiers arrived for the September 1941 Louisiana Maneuvers, construction continued at Camp Polk. Crews finished erecting most of South Fort's twelve hundred structures in August 1941 and immediately began building the North Fort. Most of the nearby remaining longleaf pines were cut to construct the South Fort, so the eight hundred buildings planned for the North Fort were eventually constructed with loblolly pine or hardwood lumber.

The 3rd Armored Division began training amidst the construction at Camp Polk, which was quickly transformed into quarters for eighteen thousand soldiers. Troops opened a service club on June 26, 1941. A week later they began firing heavy weaponry, testing the new Camp Polk ranges. At about the same time, the first books arrived for the soon-to-open post library. A New Orleans radio station, WWL, started broadcasting a regular program about Camp Polk and the soldiers.

Encouraged by their commander Brigadier General Alvan C. Gillem, the 3rd Armored Division troops launched an effort to build goodwill with local residents. Gillem, for example, met with business leaders from surrounding communities, trav-



Cars line up at the main gate to enter and exit Camp Polk.

eling to Lake Charles and Alexandria. His goal was to make Camp Polk a good neighbor. Speaking to the Leesville Rotary Club, he stated that Camp Polk was "by far the best suited" of any of the four armored division posts in existence. However, while Gillem praised the varied terrain for military purposes, he noted one deficiency—Camp Polk's distance from major cities. The Army would have to build theaters and swimming pools to provide soldiers adequate leisure activities, he said. For their part, soldiers from the 3rd Armored Division formed singing groups and performed free shows in nearby towns.

Camp Polk troops staged their first major military review on July 10, 1941. Visitors watched as soldiers in crisp uniforms marched and new tanks rolled by in tight formations. There were indications that the post was generally being warmly received by the local population. DeRidder residents, for example, opened a recreation center for soldiers in August 1941. Then, in September 1941, word spread that the government had approved a large housing development in Leesville. Called Lee Hills, it was apparently named, like the town, to honor Confederate General Robert E. Lee.

In the late summer of 1941, the military's main focus was the upcoming maneuvers. Some newly arrived units participated in practice versions of the war games with equipment that was often far from ideal. With the draft, the armed forces had ballooned in less than a year from fewer than five hundred thousand soldiers to one and a half million, sorely straining the military arsenal. Weapon shortages were so acute that some soldiers drilled with sticks or broom handles instead of rifles. The scarcities extended to vehicles and heavy armament. Hand-painted signs on trucks designated them as "tanks," and some units hauled telephone poles and steel pipes to represent artillery.

Despite these disadvantages, the Army had gained significant experience from the earlier maneuvers, and American industry was rapidly mass-producing all sorts of new weapons and vehicles for the increasingly inevitable war. Unlike the earlier Louisiana Maneuvers, which some observers disparaged as little more than children playing "cowboys and Indians," the September 1941 exercises would resemble actual warfare. Indeed, photos taken during the exercises are almost indistinguishable from images shot during World War II combat.

General George C. Marshall, Army Chief of Staff, visited Camp Polk during the September 1941 maneuvers. He described the massive event as "a combat college for troop leading." The maneuvers, Marshall added, were a field laboratory for the newly formed "armored, antitank, and air forces." Most importantly, the exercises were the first major test of antitank divisions equipped with 37- and 75-millimeter cannons.

General George C. Marshall, Army Chief of Staff, at Camp Polk to observe the 1941 Louisiana Maneuvers.

One important question organizers hoped to answer was what would happen when an antitank division faced the tanks of an armored division. Some generals contended beforehand that antitank units had already made the new armored divisions obsolete. Those who favored tanks, however, had grown more powerful. Tank pioneer Major General Adna P. Chaffee had died from cancer in August 1941, but in his place Major Generals Jacob (Jake) Devers and Charles Scott, and Brigadier Generals Bruce Magruder, George S. Patton, and Alvan C. Gillem became forceful advocates. They argued that tank mobility, if skillfully used, could defeat any opposition.

General Lesley McNair, who oversaw the entire maneuvers, favored the antitank view. Considered one of the Army's brightest officers, he arrived at Camp Polk in the summer of 1941 to establish headquarters, where he received reports and monitored far-flung units throughout the exercises. He was already familiar with Louisiana, having headed the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) at Camp Beauregard in the mid-1930s. Practically deaf at age 57, McNair was full of energy, able to bound up stairs two at a time. Besides supervising the maneuvers, he was responsible for training the Army and National Guard troops. More than anyone else, he was ultimately credited with preparing millions of young soldiers to fight in World War II. He would also become the highest ranking officer killed in action, just one casualty of the American pilots' fatally misdirected carpet-bombing over Normandy.

In 1941, as McNair faced the enormous task of organizing the Louisiana Maneuvers, he felt the terrible pressure of time. "We didn't know how soon war would come, but we knew it was coming.…We had to get together something of an Army pretty darn fast." McNair noted that rebuilding the Army after two decades of disarmament was far from methodical. "We didn't dare stop for the progressive and logical building of a war machine. As a result, the machine was a little wobbly when it first got going."

The M-3 light tank was an important element in the 1941 Louisiana Maneuvers and in early training for the 3rd Armored Division at Camp Polk.

McNair and his top aide, Lieutenant Colonel Mark Clark, decided to keep instructions and rules as uncomplicated as possible for the September 1941 exercises. Resolved that this time the maneuver results would not be predetermined, they left specific tactics up to the participating commanders, encouraging innovation and daring. Officially, these exercises, like the earlier maneuvers, were not considered a contest. But in the September 1941 war games, as in the earlier ones, many observers, including journalists, pored over every move, analyzing who won and lost. The soldiers considered the events competitive, as was sometimes revealed in vehement fist fights between opponents.

To set the stage for the event, Clark, on a standard road map, drew an egg shape near Shreveport in northern Louisiana to show where the 2nd Army would be stationed at the start of the war games. Commanded by the acerbic, no-nonsense Major General Ben Lear, the 2nd Army would be designated the Red Army during the exercises.

Lear established headquarters near Winnfield, east and north of the Red River, from which he would command about 130,000 soldiers, including the nation's first armored corps, the 1st and 2nd Armored Divisions. The more than six hundred tanks in the armored units gave Lear an advantage during the first stage of the maneuvers, but he was uneasy with these assets. According to local historian Ricky Robertson, Lear, an experienced infantry and cavalry commander, was unfamiliar with armored tactics and tank warfare.

Opposing Lear's Red Army and its two corps, was the Blue Army with three corps of the 3rd Army commanded by Major General Walter Krueger. Following plans drawn up by McNair and Clark, the 3rd Army established camps in the central and southern part of the state between Lake Charles and DeRidder. The 3rd Army's frontline stretched just south of and parallel to Camp Polk's southern border. Under McNair and Clark's scenario, participants were to assume that the 3rd Army had just invaded Louisiana from the Gulf Coast. With 215,000 soldiers, the 3rd Army enjoyed a numerical advantage but had few tanks during the first stage of the exercises. To offset this deficit, the 3rd Army depended on three antitank divisions and highly skilled officers.

Krueger, though considered plodding, had the advantage of combat experience in the Spanish-American War, World War I, and two earlier Louisiana Maneuvers. Just before the September 1941 maneuvers began, he made one of his most inspired decisions. According to historian Merle Miller, Krueger skirted bureaucratic channels and appealed directly to Marshall to allow a young, virtually unknown Eisenhower to become his chief of staff. Together, Krueger and Eisenhower forged a formidable collaboration built on mutual trust and a willingness to share success.

The two commanders carefully plotted how they would counter the Red Army's powerful tank fleet.

Motorcyclists from the 11th Infantry Division camping near Flatwoods Landing during the Louisiana Maneuvers.

Just before the maneuvers started, Krueger and Eisenhower abandoned Camp Polk and moved to new headquarters near DeRidder, just south of the Army post. There they spent the final hours organizing the Blue Army, refining their plans, and waiting for the war games to begin.

Maneuver organizers decreed that the Red Army would make the first move on Monday, September 15, 1941. Just before dawn, Red Army soldiers slipped across the Red River and headed south. Reconnaissance troops led the way, riding in scout cars (pickup trucks with heavy guns) and vehicles called *peeps*. The small, four-wheel-drive peeps were the forerunners of the jeeps that would become so indispensable to the Americans during World War II. The peeps and scout cars drove in pitch darkness and steady rainfall, remnants of a tropical storm. Close behind, tanks rumbled across Red River bridges as muddy water swirled below.

These soldiers and vehicles were the advance guard of the 2nd Armored Division, part of the most powerful tank force ever assembled by the Army. Commanded by Patton, the division was equipped with several hundred M-3 light tanks and M-2 medium tanks and included mobile infantry and artillery. Oblivious to the rain, Patton seemed to be everywhere, barking orders and exhorting soldiers to press ahead full speed. His armored division extended for miles as tank columns, like lethal snakes, pushed south along the Louisiana roads. Long lines of Red Army cavalry also moved south in the predawn blackness. Many troopers still rode horses, but cavalry units now also included soldiers riding on motorcycles and in peeps and scout cars.

Lear intended the Red Army's tank-led force to smash into the left side of the Blue Army on the western flank and force the Blue Army to roll back. Instead, the Red Army's initial assault resembled a jab into a giant marshmallow because the Blue Army was already on the move according to Krueger and Eisenhower's detailed plans. The Blue Army pushed north in a great wave, many of the soldiers advancing through Camp Polk's Main Post. As the Red and Blue Armies edged closer to one another, the foul weather slowed their movements. Roads were now slippery messes, and the pelting rain obscured visibility. Soldiers in open vehicles hunched over as the rain soaked them, while others wrapped chains around truck tires to get extra traction. Even so, some vehicles became stuck, forcing

A New Army Vehicle Proves Its Worth

A significant development during the September 1941 Louisiana Maneuvers was the success of the four-wheel-drive vehicles that were forerunners of the jeep. These vehicles were made by a variety of firms, including Dodge, Ford, Willys-Overland, and the Bantam Car Company. Soldiers called one of the smaller, three-seat vehicles a *peep*.

Word about how well the peeps negotiated over all sorts of terrain, even Louisiana mud, reached American households through widespread media coverage of the Louisiana war games. *Life* magazine reporter John Field helped publicize the vehicles when he wrote in a 1941 article about his long ride in a peep en route to the frontlines south of the small community of Many. As part of a small convoy with at least one other peep, Field was accompanied by another reporter and three Red Army soldiers, two privates and a lieutenant.

Arriving at a bridge, apparently dynamited by the opposing Blue Army, the reporters and their escorts waited two hours while Red Army engineers constructed a new bridge. As they began moving forward, Field saw massive billowing clouds of dust ahead. The lead elements of the Red Army were retreating, closely followed by a rapidly advancing Blue Army. Surrounded by the noise of gunfire and booming cannons, the drivers wheeled around and sped north to escape. At one point, the convoy appeared to be trapped as the Blue Army surged ahead of them. The peep drivers left the main road and traveled cross-country. Field called it "the wildest ride of my life." He wrote, "Dodging trees, swamps, stumps and valleys, we drove straight through the forest. The peep never stopped or got stuck." As the sun set, the men endured a high-speed, jarring ride along poorly maintained rural roads, sometimes no more than lonely paths lined with dark forests. Gripping the vehicles' sides, they hung on as the peeps heaved up and down, flying in and out of ruts and over bumps.

After nightfall, they continued their flight in the dark. Soldiers had orders to maintain a strict blackout to avoid illuminating targets for enemy bombers, so using headlights was out of the question. There was the persistent realization that somewhere behind them in the dark lurked the Blue Army. Finally around midnight, the soldiers and reporters arrived near Many. "Suddenly, just ahead, a well-concealed light flickered on, then off, then on again," Field wrote. "Quickly we stopped and shut off the motors. I lay flat in the dust behind the peeps and waited to see if the strangers would come to investigate. Next, I heard a voice cry, 'Halt.' " Soon after, surrounded by friendly Red Army soldiers, they were safe at last.

The next year, the Ford Motor Company and Willys-Overland both mass-produced vehicles similar to the peeps that came to be called jeeps. One explanation for the derivation of the word jeep is that it came from Eugene the Jeep, a character in the newspaper cartoon strip *Popeye*. Resembling a small dog that stood on its hind legs, Eugene was able to solve complex problems and could travel into the fourth dimension. Similarly, the jeep vehicles could travel almost anywhere. Jeeps quickly became the Army's workhorses. During World War II, jeeps carried many soldiers, including important generals, into battle.

the drenched soldiers to slog through the mud to dig them free.

Sometime after dawn, the first meaningful reports filtered back to Eisenhower in his headquarters just south of Camp Polk. The colonel, anxious for more news, wrote a letter while he waited. "Our big war started this morning.…We have three Corps in line, all attacking to the northward.…The weather has closed in so much that air operations are almost out of the question."

Despite the rain, enough Blue Army airplanes broke through the clouds and evaded enemy fighters to spot Red Army tanks streaming south. As Eisenhower wrote, "Operations early this morning were quite productive of results, both as to information and tactical effect. We've located at least a large part of the hostile mechanization, and if we can stymie it in the swamps and batter it to pieces with our A-T [antitank] Groups, those Reds are going to be on the run by the day after tomorrow. If the hostile tanks can preserve their freedom of action, the battle will probably become a confused dog fight."

Red Army tanks easily reached their first objective, an area encompassing the town of Many and nearby Fort Jesup, formerly a U.S. military post in the 1800s. Here, the tanks made first contact with Blue Army forces. Krueger and Eisenhower had ordered a cavalry division to try to slow the tanks by firing shots and retreating, but cautioned the men to keep out of harm's way. Withdrawing down Highway 171 toward Leesville, the cavalry was luring the tanks into a trap.

Almost simultaneously and unexpectedly, Krueger and Eisenhower launched a powerful counteroffensive far to the east, miles from the Red Army tanks. They sent Blue Army infantry and cavalry toward Alexandria, attacking on the eastern side of the battlefield and catching the Red Army off guard. These Blue Army units made steady progress, even though Red Army soldiers had destroyed numerous bridges to slow their advance. In the midst of the action, the rain stopped only to be followed by oppressive heat.

During the battle's early stages, a seesaw equilibrium developed, with both sides advancing in different places along the hundred-mile front. The Blue Army made rapid progress in the east, eventually capturing Alexandria, while in the west, Red Army tanks continued to spearhead an attack that at first seemed unstoppable. Then Krueger and Eisenhower sprang their trap, rushing Blue Army antitank units forward to counter the Red Army's armored thrust. The Red Army faltered, making two serious mistakes. The first came when Lear ordered a halt to the rapid tank advance, hoping to allow his infantry time to catch up with the armored vehicles. He did not anticipate that the pause would sap momentum and give the Blue Army antitank units time to organize counterattacks. The second error occurred when Lear ordered the Red Army tanks to resume the advance with a head-on attack, neglecting to take advantage of his force's mobility by sweeping around the Blue Army's powerful guns. A stalemate developed in the west, even as the Blue Army continued to make slow but steady progress in the east, pushing north of Alexandria along the Red River.

The western stalemate produced some of the most dramatic confrontations of the maneuvers. Red Army tanks and troops repeatedly tried to storm Peason Ridge and hold the high ground. With all the gunfire and smoke and with the two sides so equally balanced, umpires at times had trouble discerning who held the advantage. The battles became bitter. Fist fights broke out. In some instances, soldiers even threatened umpires with physical harm if they failed to rule in their favor.

Ultimately, the tiny crossroads community of Mount Carmel, too small to appear on most maps, became pivotal to conquering Peason Ridge. Until a reporter from *Life* Magazine wrote an account of the fierce battle he witnessed there, few outside central Louisiana had ever heard of the settlement. Named after a biblical summit where the Old Testament prophet Elijah reportedly summoned fire from heaven, Mount Carmel was located in a clearing surrounded by trees. It consisted of a small church and cemetery, a general store, a country school, and a few houses. A small sign on the outskirts of the settlement, erected by the Future Farmers of America, was the only indication of the town that became a major flashpoint during the war games.

Eisenhower Finds Himself in a Ditch

Mickey McKeogh served as Colonel Dwight D. Eisenhower's orderly at Camp Polk just prior to the 1941 Louisiana Maneuvers. McKeogh, who fondly called Eisenhower the Boss, ensured that the colonel's room in the new barracks was clean. He explained, "I'd go to his room the first thing in the morning and take care of things for him, straightening up his room, finding clean laundry for him, and things like that." He would dispatch the colonel's uniforms to the post laundry, then for the rest of the day perform odd jobs for Eisenhower, who was organizing troop movements into Louisiana.

One night, McKeogh accompanied Eisenhower to a meeting, either on Camp Polk or nearby. They arrived in the pitch-darkness due to blackout rules forbidding the use of headlights. A young major with a flashlight was waving them to a parking spot. As McKeogh recalled, the major directed the car very carefully right into a ditch. Then he began to bawl out Corporal Wood, the driver. Eisenhower, sitting in the car in the ditch, considered this loud lecture unnecessary and unfair and gave the major a stern tongue-lashing of his own. "I wouldn't want to have been that major," McKeogh commented. "The Boss pointed out…that if we were in a ditch…the major put us there, not Wood. The major had to stand there and take it, and it was the sort of thing that made us proud of the Boss, and glad to be working for him."

Red Army tanks and infantry troops captured Mount Carmel first, but they had little time to enjoy their victory because Krueger and Eisenhower had ordered the Blue Army forces to direct their attack toward Mount Carmel. Just before the assault, Red Army infantrymen, oblivious to the approaching danger, lolled around the small church in the town. Some sat in the peeps or leaned against them, resting and talking, wearing the tin hats identifying them as members of the Red Army. Others sat nearby in half-tracks (pickup trucks with regular tires on the front axles and treads on the rear, like those on a tank). Aside from voices conversing and the steady clank of a few Red Army tanks moving into the community along a nearby road, there was little noise. Suddenly, a soldier detected Blue Army enemy forces approaching and sounded the alarm. The soldiers bolted for their rifles and sprang into the vehicles, while drivers gunned the engines, unsure whether they should charge the attackers or flee.

Nearby, Red Army tanks rattled out from underneath the protective camouflage of trees, into the Mount Carmel clearing. Inside tank turrets, gunners wheeled the big guns around, preparing to fire on whomever approached. With a confrontation looming, three signal corps sound trucks began broadcasting battle sounds. The trucks played recordings of loud explosions, whistling bullets, and screaming airplanes and sirens to add realism to the confrontation. Soon, however, actual battle sounds drowned out the recordings, even though the bullets fired were blanks.

Gunfire erupted from nearby trees as Blue Army infantry charged the clearing from three sides. These soldiers, hailing primarily from Oklahoma, were part of the 45th Infantry Division, one of the best-trained National Guard units. The troops wore the soft hats with floppy bills called "duck bills" that identified them as part of the Blue Army.

The Blue Army soldiers stormed through the cemetery, sidestepping gravestones as they sprinted

forward, yelling like cowboys on the open range. They ducked and dodged, halting to crouch and fire their weapons at their foes. An umpire's assistant carrying a banner atop a pole ran beside them. The banner signaled that the Blue Army had powerful artillery planted just behind the charging infantry.

The Blue Army soldiers, sprinting straight toward the Red Army machine guns spitting out blank bullets, never faltered. They continued to pour into Mount Carmel. The Red Army began fleeing in the face of their opponents' overwhelming numbers. Drivers jammed the peeps and half-tracks into gear. With tires spinning, they sped out of town along two roads. Other Red Army soldiers simply ran as the battle turned into a rout.

Red Army tanks maneuvered to cover the retreat, belching out smoke and firing away at the opposition, who continued to advance shooting, ignoring the stifling heat and the enemy tanks. Some Blue Army soldiers, crouching beside a wood fence, managed to install a machine gun atop a tripod in the dirt. From there, they fired at the retreating Red Army.

Then the Blue Army's antitank weapons arrived. Soldiers set up 75-millimeter guns, fired, then moved forward again, hounding the fleeing Red Army. Every time the big guns ignited, a loud boom clapped like thunder and shook the earth. Umpires ruled that the antitank weapons destroyed four Red Army tanks, forcing the defeated tank crews to spill out of their vehicles. Blue Army soldiers quickly swarmed around the tanks to siphon gasoline for their own vehicles. In this simulated war, as in the real one to come, fuel was a precious commodity and not a drop was wasted.

The battle ended as suddenly as it began. Krueger and Eisenhower's forces triumphantly began securing their victory at Mount Carmel. More Blue Army trucks arrived, bringing in additional troops and supplies. Soldiers climbed down, stretched, and surveyed the landscape. The sky was now blue and

During the various Louisiana Maneuvers, the military tested different aircraft, such as this gyroplane, to determine how best to provide air support for land-based combat troops.

clear with only a few puffy clouds to soften the intense sun baking the soldiers and equipment. The men relaxed, savoring their victory, forgetting a cardinal rule of warfare—no one is ever completely safe. Suddenly, Red Army fighter planes blanketed the sky, diving at Blue Army soldiers and their trucks. Machine-gun fire punctuated the sharp screams of aircraft engines.

Stunned Blue Army soldiers began to run and hide. They had neglected to set up antiaircraft guns, so they had no way to fend off the air assault. All they could do was scatter into the trees to escape the diving planes. Their trucks sat abandoned out in the open, tempting targets for the attacking aircraft. Because drivers had neglected to camouflage the vehicles by parking them beneath the trees, umpires ruled that an entire squadron of trucks had been riddled with gunfire and rendered useless.

The air attacks also allowed the scattered Red Army to regroup. Soldiers halted their retreat, turned around, and assaulted Mount Carmel. Tanks of the 2nd Armored Division boomed as the ground battle once again raged. The tide of victory surged back and forth. The struggle continued over several days, with control of the community in doubt. In the end, however, the Blue Army infantry and antitank forces prevailed.

During the struggles for Mount Carmel and Peason Ridge, the Blue Army was making steady progress on the eastern side of the battlefield, advancing some fifteen miles north of Alexandria. Krueger and Eisenhower helped this advance by springing another surprise. Blue Army soldiers parachuted from airplanes behind Red Army lines. The paratroopers floated down silently, tumbling into cotton fields near the small town of Clarence on the Red River near Natchitoches. Once on the ground, the men began creating havoc almost immediately. They sneaked up on startled Red Army truck drivers and captured them at gunpoint, rolled a smoke bomb into a Red Army command facility, and blew up bridges, disrupting Red Army supply efforts and communications. One lone paratrooper even charged into Red Army headquarters. Armed only with a pistol, he ordered everyone to surrender. A Red Army general admonished the young soldier for being foolish and sternly commanded him to lay down his gun, but the paratrooper refused, shouting, "Nuts to you, General! This is war."

Eventually, the Red Army captured all the Blue Army paratroopers, but not before they sowed doubt and disorder among their foes. Eisenhower later used the same technique on a much grander scale when he ordered paratroopers to drop behind German lines just before the D-Day landings at Normandy.

At the outset of the September 1941 exercises, each army had more than four hundred war planes. Once the rain had ebbed, bombers, fighters, and surveillance craft filled the skies, compel-

Surrender While There Is Yet Time

Near the end of the first phase of the 1941 Louisiana Maneuvers, Blue Army airplanes dropped propaganda leaflets similar to those the U.S. military would disperse during World War II. The leaflets claimed, "Your commanders are withholding from you the terrible fact of your impending defeat.…Your food stores have been captured. No one is going to bring up any of the steaks that the men of the 3rd Army will have tonight. Rout, disaster, hunger, sleepless nights in the forest are ahead of you. Surrender while there is yet time." Since the Blue forces (3rd Army) were already winning, it is unclear whether the leaflets changed any minds.

Powerful searchlights scan the skies for bombers and fighter planes during night exercises. The Louisiana Maneuvers tested both air support for ground troops and the soldiers' ability to defend themselves against air assaults.

ling all on the ground to stay alert, as the careless Blue Army troops at Mount Carmel discovered.

Many aerial dogfights broke out as fighter pilots tried to eliminate one another. Planes, their single engines whining, twisted, dove, then swooped back up high into the clouds, all the while emitting puffs of smoke and popping noises as they fired blanks.

Amazing bombing raids punctuated the war games. Some were conducted at night, accompanied by flares that illuminated the sky. Gasoline storage dumps, bridges, and airfields were especially vulnerable to these raids. On one daytime sortie, a formation of Blue Army four-engine bombers flew over Barksdale Field near Shreveport. The airplane engines droned as the doors of the bomb bays slowly opened and hundred-pound bombs (represented by sandbags) cascaded down, five and six at a time, from every plane. This attack and other raids took a heavy toll on Red Army forces.

The Blue Army also did an unusually thorough job of using subterfuge to protect aircraft on the ground at Esler Field near Camp Beauregard. An engineering team erected fake buildings of wire mesh to draw enemy bombs away from the main installation. From burlap and lumber, they built dummy airplanes that appeared authentic from the sky. The engineers painted part of the landing field to resemble a wheat field and camouflaged a runway with paintings of fruit trees so pilots overhead would think they were looking at an orchard. These decoys proved so successful that the Army used similar misrepresentations and fake constructions during World War II.

At Esler Field, Blue Army personnel hid the genuine warplanes, single-engine P-40s, in sand-

bag bunkers concealed beneath trees and covered with cut branches. Nearby, soldiers waited in a dug-out hole lined with sandbags as they trained their machine gun on the sky in case low-flying fighter planes swooped in to attack. They could yank a retractable metal shield over their hole to protect them from airborne machine-gun fire.

The Blue Army air force, commanded by Major General Herbert Dragué, outfought the Red Army pilots, primarily through sheer extra effort. While the Red Army might use three airplanes to bomb a bridge, the Blue Army would send in a dozen. Predictably, the Blue Army air force soon controlled the skies. The pilots were then free to pursue Red Army tanks already being battered by Krueger and Eisenhower's antitank weapons. In a single two-hour period, Blue Army pilots dropped more than eight hundred dummy hundred-pound bombs on Red Army tanks near the town of Florien. Every B-25 bomber participating in the raid unloaded eight fake bombs.

Increasingly, Red Army tanks were either pinned down in swamps or forced to flee straight into withering antitank firepower. The umpires ruled that the tanks were battered to pieces. In just twenty-four hours, the Red Army lost 20 percent of Patton's 2nd Armored Division tanks.

Even so, the Red Army managed to claim some successes. A few tanks, for instance, punched deep into the center of the Blue Army, endangering advances being made elsewhere. The accompanying Red Army infantry even managed to fight their way behind enemy lines where the soldiers began destroying Blue Army vehicles. There were also other setbacks for the Blue Army. Notably, Krueger and Eisenhower had to hurriedly shut down their headquarters and move, fearing that Brigadier General Magruder and the 1st Armored Division were sweeping around their forces, although the attack never materialized.

Forces directed by Krueger and Eisenhower also made other miscalculations, particularly when Blue Army commanders ordered an infantry detachment of twelve hundred soldiers to ford the Red River. The crossing, within sounds of enemy guns, proved vexing from the onset. Soldiers sank to their thighs in mud while scrambling to reach boats for the crossing. Grunting and grumbling, mud sucking at their feet, they had to use their rifle butts as crutches to remain upright. By the time they waded into the river and clamored into boats, they were soaked, coated with mud and sweat.

Twelve small boats, each manned by three soldiers from the 112th Engineers paddling only eleven passengers across at a time, rode dangerously low in the rain-swollen river during the painstakingly slow crossings. In the end, these efforts proved futile because commanders had failed to send artillery across the river to support the force, leaving the soldiers stranded and surrounded by the Red Army. All twelve hundred men were captured within twenty-four hours.

Even so, the loss proved to be only a minor setback for Krueger and Eisenhower. The Red Army began to collapse, part of it rapidly retreating in what is today known as the Horse's Head Maneuver Area near Natchitoches. Soon after, the entire Red Army began to retreat all along the hundred-mile front.

Just south of Shreveport, the 1st Cavalry Division under Krueger and Eisenhower's command forded the Sabine River into Texas, then crossed back into Louisiana at Zwolle to confront the Red Army's 2nd Cavalry Division. In the only cavalry battle of the maneuvers, troopers on horseback charged one another, shouting and firing rifles. Once again, the Red Army forces lost and retreated. Some of Patton's tanks appeared, halting the Blue Army's cavalry advance, but the effort was not enough to turn the tide. Everywhere, Red Army forces were on the run.

At Camp Polk, McNair monitored reports that sketched the Red Army's unfolding disaster. There was no reason to continue, he concluded. On Friday, September 19, after five days of conflict, McNair ordered a cease-fire, ending the first phase of the exercises. The Red Army, which began the maneuvers so proudly and confidently, returned to camp dispirited and exhausted. Krueger and Eisenhower's antitank forces had triumphed, strengthening the arguments of those who contended that the importance of tanks was overstated. Within a few days, however, Patton and the 2nd Armored Division would quiet the critics.

7. There Are No Rules in War

Military authorities deemed the first phase of the September 1941 maneuvers a success. Despite the thrashing the Blue Army gave the Red Army, soldiers on both sides performed well. They demonstrated they were generally in good physical condition and capable of enduring long hours of military exercises, including night marches. Withstanding long hours without food, insect bites, and drenching rains, they showed resilience and determination. Furthermore, the seriousness with which almost everyone approached their duties boded well for future combat overseas.

There were, however, tragedies during the war games. Seventeen soldiers died the first week. Seven perished in motor vehicle accidents, which were perhaps inevitable with so many troops rushing about on unfamiliar roads. Five were killed in accidents involving airplanes, presumably in crashes, although records are unspecific. Two soldiers drowned, two more died from unspecified infectious disease, and one committed suicide. Still, the casualty toll was far less than the 130 deaths Army organizers had projected for the maneuvers.

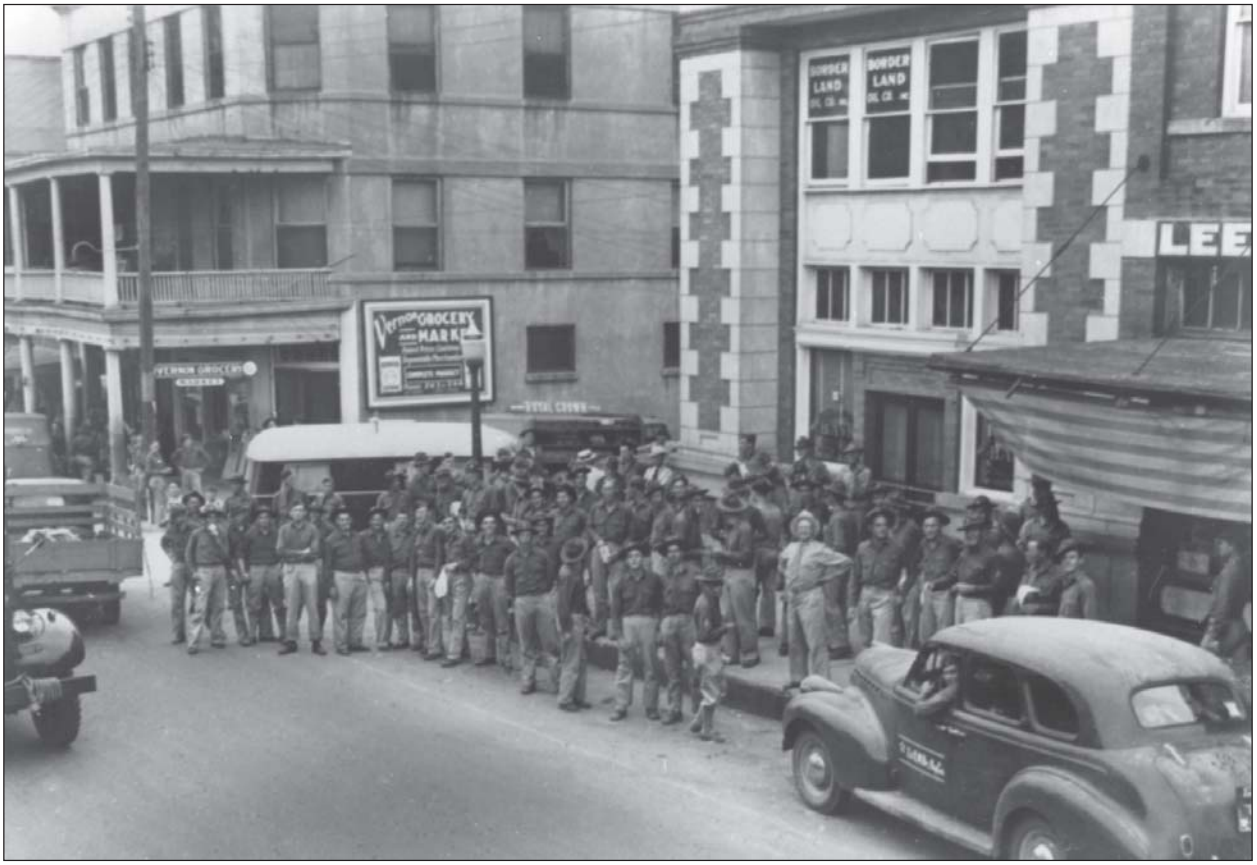
> *No man can properly command an army from the rear, he must be at the front…at the head of the army—[he] must be seen there, and the effect of his mind and personal energy must be felt by every officer and man present with it.*
>
> *— General William Tecumseh Sherman*

The many injuries and ills that occurred during the maneuvers presented another training opportunity. Soldiers suffering ailments from wrenched backs and sprained ankles to food poisoning were put on stretchers and carried to ambulances. Dodging other vehicles, these raced along rutted roads to field hospitals or railway stations where specially equipped trains waited. Some Blue Army casualties were taken by ambulance to the Lake Charles, Louisiana, train station where they were transferred to a Pullman rail car for the trip to a New Orleans field hospital. Between one hundred and two hundred soldiers entered military field hospitals daily, allowing doctors and other medical personnel to get realistic experience. Surgeons in a field hospital in Jonesboro, Louisiana, even performed at least one surgery, an emergency appendectomy.

Not all emergencies involved military personnel, however. Local historian Ricky Robertson told the story of a woman living near Peason Ridge who went into labor during the fierce mock battles of the maneuvers' first phase. The roads were too wet and damaged by military equipment for her to be driven to a doctor, so Army medics were summoned to help. The medics, with no physician in their ranks, placed the woman in a half-track, a truck with rear wheels resembling a tank, for the twenty-five-mile trip to the hospital in Many. Half-tracks had proven capable of going almost anywhere, around almost any obstacle, but on this day the vehicle became stuck in the mud near Mount Carmel. Out of options, the medics assisted in the birth of a baby boy.

Indeed, the war games profoundly affected many local people. Years later, residents, many of them children during the exercises, recalled vivid memories of the events. James Martin, for example, told Fort Polk's *Guardian* newspaper in 1990 that he remembered when the soldiers first came. "It was a big day for Leesville because all of a sudden our small town was the center of attention in Louisiana. I don't know how many people arrived but the streets were very crowded."

DeRidder resident Frank Pollacia shared similar recollections in an interview with the *Beauregard Daily News*. He described restaurants that were so packed, soldiers had to eat in shifts. Troops also had trouble finding places to spend the night. "Sol-



Soldiers often congregated in downtown Leesville.

diers slept in people's front yards and even on the courthouse steps.…Sometimes it looked like a war was going on in town."

Before, during, and after the maneuvers, residents throughout the region would find soldiers camping next to their houses. These were unwelcome intrusions for some landowners, who nailed signs to trees and fence posts with such warnings as "Off Limits to Troops." National Forest Service personnel, determined to keep soldiers from trampling newly planted seedlings, also posted signs, but their efforts were often futile. Observers recalled seeing a Kisatchie National Forest employee coming upon soldiers cutting seedlings to use as camouflage. According to Anna Burns, professor at Louisiana State University in Alexandria, he dashed among the troops, yelling "You can't do that! That's government property."

Other sources maintained that apart from the occasional friction, the maneuvers generally stirred an outpouring of goodwill between soldiers and residents. John Guy, considered the founder of archeological research at Fort Polk, recalled his experience with the soldiers' honesty. At age thirteen he delivered newspapers for *The Shreveport Times* in the town of Anacoco. The newspaper distributor, he said, would "…throw a bundle of papers on my porch at about four in the morning. I rode my bike one hour and a half [delivering papers]. I think I had ninety customers scattered out pretty good. Anacoco listed then about three hundred population when it was raining and all the cats and dogs were home." Awake and about before Guy, soldiers routinely took newspapers from the pile on his porch leaving their payment on top of the stack. Each would lift the money already deposited, take a paper, then add his own payment. "If they picked up 25 papers, they left me 25 nickels because that was what the papers cost. As far as I know, I never lost a nickel."

Local residents often shared food and hospitality with the troops. Soldiers would reciprocate by providing them with goods procured through the Army, such as soap, coffee, and sugar, which poor rural residents, still strapped by the Great Depression, often lacked. Historian Robertson related a story about some soldiers camped near Peason Ridge. Constantly exposed to the mud and heat, they borrowed a washtub from a farmer for several days to bath in. To express their gratitude for this small luxury, they returned the tub filled with rations and other gifts. Some residents opened their homes to the young men. Mary Harris of DeRidder told the *Beauregard Daily News* in 1989 that her mother, after preparing a meal for some soldiers, said she hoped that somewhere someone was performing the same act of kindness for her three sons in the military.

Helping soldiers keep clean became a money-making enterprise for some residents. Ciro S. Lampo told the *Beauregard Daily News* in 1989 that the barbershop in DeRidder installed showers. "That was a great event [for soldiers]—to have a shower." Lampo, 17 years old at the time, recalled thousands of troops pouring into DeRidder. "It was like the streets of New York City. You couldn't walk down the streets of DeRidder without bumping into people." Cots in rooms above the local newsstand, which rented for one dollar, were in such demand that, according to Lampo, when one soldier awoke and left, another quickly took his place.

Tempers occasionally flared. Lampo told of a fistfight in a bar near the DeRidder courthouse. The fight apparently pitted National Guard and Army soldiers against each other and evolved into a "small riot." Lampo watched from across the

During lulls in the Louisiana Maneuvers, soldiers sometimes staged impromptu boxing and wrestling matches. Here troops with the 11th Infantry Division are camped near Flatwoods, Louisiana.

While the Louisiana Maneuvers often proved to be very intense, soldiers still found moments to relax with a drink.

street as the fracas raged, with soldiers ripping apart the bar and a nearby café. Members of the fire department rushed to the scene and finally squelched the brawl by spraying everybody with water.

Many residents recounted being awed by the sheer immensity of the maneuvers, especially the long caravans of tanks, troops, and the magnificent horses. Juanita Martin told the *Beauregard Daily News* that she watched hundreds of cavalry soldiers on horseback. John Mitcham told the *Guardian*, "Horses with their artillery would pass one spot for as long as 24 hours, their hooves would cut a rut in the side of the road knee deep."

According to Mitcham, high-ranking officers spent time in Leesville's hotels and held meetings in the Red Hound Bar. "They would put several tables together, spread out maps, order the drinks, and plan strategy. They would do this [plot strategy] with any civilian [around].…and there were many [who ventured near the tables], because everyone was curious."

Martha Palmer, Vernon Parish historian, told the *Leesville Daily Leader* in 1990 that she and her mother watched four generals riding in a vehicle on Third Street in Leesville. Her mother told the young girl, "You should remember this. It's a sight that few are privileged to see."

Mary Cleveland, manager of the Leesville Museum of West Louisiana, remembered watching long columns of soldiers and military equipment pass on Highway 171. She recalled her excitement as a young girl the night she was allowed to stay up late to see the troops parade through town. She spoke of another occasion when a group of soldiers erected "a machine gun nest at my grandma's house and I got to shoot the machine gun." She also remembered having set up a lemonade stand for thirsty soldiers. One client, on discovering a tick latched

onto his skin asked, "What's this?" She laughed because some of the recruits had never before seen ticks or armadillos. Apart from the novelty of their presence, however, the soldiers caused some inconveniences for younger residents. Cleveland remarked, "We couldn't go to the movies anymore without an escort. Just about the time I got old enough to date soldiers, the war had ended."

Some soldiers' unfamiliarity with Louisiana wildlife proved another source of amusement. A youngster at the time, T.L. "Sonny" Berry, who later served as an aide to the Secretary of the Army, told a Fort Polk researcher in 1990 that some soldiers exaggerated what they saw in Louisiana. "Troops told stories about mosquitoes the size of bumblebees. [Some] claimed to have seen twelve-foot alligators. I have been in Louisiana all my life and I haven't seen over one or two in the wild, unless you go down into the marshland."

Historian Robertson recalled the tale his father told about "a beautiful cavalry horse" racing down the lane leading to the Robertson's house. "The horse was running lickety-split, as fast as he could go, without a rider, but with full gear on." Before long, a cavalryman, on foot and covered with dust, approached the house and asked about his horse. He obviously hailed from outside the South because he was unacquainted with the native insects, especially yellow jackets. The soldier explained he had "tied his horse to some bushes and that all of a sudden it was covered by 'little yellow flies,' which made it run away." Later that evening, the soldier

Local residents often stopped to watch passing troops.

Children Win the Popgun War

Three local boys provided one of the lighter moments and strangest battles during the September 1941 maneuvers. Their confrontation with the U.S. Army occurred at the Grove Plantation, now managed by the National Park Service as part of the Cane River National Heritage Area near Natchitoches, Louisiana. In 1941, the site was the residence of the Prud'homme family. In an interview for this book, Kenneth Prud'homme, who was 12 years old at the time of the incident, commented that he and his two brothers, Alphonse Jr. and Mayo, were fascinated by all the military goings-on.

The boys sold candy bars from their father's small store to the soldiers in a cavalry unit camped in a wooded pasture near the family home. Later, troops skirmished on the plantation grounds. "Soldiers were running through the yard, firing their guns. They were falling down, taking cover, and firing," Prud'homme recalled. He watched as two-engine bombers flying low over the bridge spanning the Red River's main channel, which flowed just east of his home, "dropped a sack of flour on the bridge. It wasn't that big a sack, but it was the reason [umpires] ruled the bridge had been demolished."

One day, the three brothers were sitting on the store's porch, tinkering with a toy cannon. "They called it a big bang cannon," Prud'homme explained. "You put powdered carbide into it and water, which generates a gas. The cannon had a spark system similar to a cigarette lighter. When it went off, it sounded like a 12-gauge shotgun." The boys watched as an Army vehicle arrived on the east bank across the river. "We could see the dust from that truck or jeep, or whatever it was. Then we saw this soldier climbing up in a tree with his binoculars, trying to see what was on our side of the river." On a whim, they ignited their little cannon. Its loud boom startled the soldier, who fell from the tree, then scrambled to his vehicle and departed. "Down the road he went in a cloud of dust," Prud'homme said. "It wasn't long after that, an armored unit started arriving, you know, half-tracks and tanks and a lot of men. They formed a skirmish line, right across the river from us, and started firing. Boys being boys, we thought this was a lot of fun, so we kept firing back."

The boys' father, Alphonse Prud'homme Sr., a veteran of World War I, amused by what was happening, decided to fuel the fight. He dispatched a store employee with an armload of firecrackers, providing his three sons with more fire power. "We started lighting and firing firecrackers in the brush on our side of the river," Prud'homme continued. The soldiers kept on shooting blank bullets in return fire. "We had a pitch battle there for, I guess, twenty or thirty minutes before the umpires showed up. They came to see who was holding the Army up and they realized there was no opposition, just these three kids." One of the umpires "asked my dad if he would please stop us so they could get on with their war."

Meanwhile, the commander across the river ordered crews to fire a large artillery piece. The gun's tremendous blast shook the countryside. Even after the umpires returned to

(continued on next page)

Children Win the Popgun War (cont.)

tell the troops that no enemy soldiers were threatening them, they still unleashed smoke screens. "In those days, you could hardly see the road over there, the brush and trees and Cherokee rose were so thick. They went upstream a little ways and put smoke pots out, I guess, and it was a terrific smoke. It masked all their movements on the other side [apparently some 500 vehicles were involved]."

When reporters learned about the boys' skirmish with the troops, they wrote humorous articles, detailing "The Pop Gun War" and "The Battle of Bermuda Bridge." Later, national radio commentator Paul Harvey discovered that the troops halted by the children were armored cavalry commanded by Brigadier General George S. Patton.

with his mount in tow came trudging back by the farm house.

Some cavalry horses escaped permanently during the maneuvers and mated with local herds. In the late 1990s, wild offspring of the cavalry's horses still roamed Peason Ridge.

Louisiana residents in 1941 were also fascinated by the array of equipment assembled by the Army, not only the various types of guns, but also the tanks, half-tracks, and small reconnaissance cars, which became commonly known as jeeps. In 1989, Thurmond Willis told the *Leesville Daily Leader* about the motorcycles he saw accompanying the cavalry units. Many, he recalled, were equipped with sidecars where officers rode while enlisted men drove.

Minnie Seigler Elkins told the *Guardian* that, at the time, she worked in a country store owned by the M.A. Pinchback family in Fullerton, just south of Camp Polk's boundaries. "Mrs. Pinchback kept fifty boarders, carpenters from Mississippi [who worked on Camp Polk]. She furnished them three delicious meals per day, plus sleeping accommodations for $1.25 per day." The various Louisiana Maneuvers were a boon for local businesses, and the Pinchback's store was no exception. "Our little store would hear of a pending exercise ahead of time and stock extra candy, drinks, crackers, canned meats, et cetera," Elkins said. "But when the hordes hit our place there was never really enough. Lots of times Mrs. Pinchback and her daughter would start making fried pies and hot biscuits to sell in the store, but by the time she'd get to her front gate with them, the soldiers would snatch them." To boost sales even more, Pinchback and his son drove a food truck to wherever the soldiers camped. Minnie Elkins explained that "At the time, the Army didn't send canteen trucks out in the field with a soldier's every want, and if one was sent, there were hundreds not reached.…[The Pinchbacks would haul] cold drinks, crackers, Vienna sausages…and do more business in two or three days than we could normally in two weeks. They even bought five-cent cans of grapefruit juice."

Elkins recalled meeting many young soldiers who were "away from home for the first time and really reaching out for a kind word. I remember one outwardly tough boy, Chip Krutchiki from the Bronx, New York, who wrote to us several times. Later, we heard he was on a ship going overseas that was blown up."

Local parents sometimes worried about their daughters with so many young men descending on the area. LaVonne Brack told the *Leesville Daily Leader* in 1989 that her mother warned her to stay inside when soldiers were nearby. Later, however,

Young ladies wave to passing soldiers.

an officer visited her mother and said the children would be safe outside. One soldier, Brack said, "fell in love" with her and later wrote her a letter or two, which her mother ordered her to throw away.

Rufus Strother was about 11 years old and living in Pitkin, just south of Camp Polk. He remembered soldiers camping in his front yard and told the *Beauregard Daily News* in 1990 that his mother cooked for the men, while his father distributed watermelons from the family garden. The soldiers were quite friendly, Strother recalled. One of them entertained the Strother family at night with his guitar playing.

Many of the tales residents recounted concerned Brigadier General George S. Patton. Brownie LeRay told the *Beauregard Daily News* that one day Patton walked into the DeRidder drugstore she operated with her husband. Something about the general immediately commanded attention, she recalled. He strolled past others waiting to be served and asked to see the best smoking pipes. While LeRay displayed two pipes for the general, another soldier, a lowly private who had been waiting in line, asked to be served. Apparently, Patton was irked by the interruption and began cursing. LeRay, as was expected of ladies of the era, slipped out the back door to avoid hearing anymore.

Just prior to the maneuvers, Patton established an agreement with the owner of another store in Many to allow soldiers under his command to buy goods on credit. Troops apparently signed for their purchases, billing the 2nd Armored Division. As the maneuvers drew to a close, Patton visited the store and found two young soldiers there animatedly criticizing him. They were unaware of the general's presence and continued railing against him as he listened. Historian Robertson described what happened next. "With a loud bellow, he [Patton] walked up, slapped the two privates on the back,

Patton's Prayers Are Answered

General George S. Patton, never one to mince words, became noted for clashes with church leaders. He once told a military chaplain that his sermons were too long, that none should exceed ten minutes. "I'm sure you can make your point in that time," he urged. The next Sunday, according to author Carlo D'este, Patton sat in the front pew and made a show of pulling out his watch. The clergyman nervously took note and within ten minutes finished his sermon.

During the Battle of the Bulge in December 1944 and January 1945, Patton issued wallet-sized cards to his soldiers and the press containing a Christmas greeting on one side and a prayer on the other. The prayer asked God "to restrain these immoderate rains with which we have to contend. Grant us fair weather for battle. Graciously harken to us as soldiers who call upon Thee that, armed with Thy power, we may advance from victory to victory and crush the oppression and wickedness of our enemies and establish Thy justice among men and nations. Amen."

Persuading a minister to write the prayer required a display of Patton's famous temper. When he asked an Army chaplain to compose the words, the chaplain declined, arguing that "It isn't a customary thing among men of my profession to pray for clear weather to kill fellow men." Patton prevailed, however, replying, "Are you teaching me theology or are you the Chaplain of the 3rd Army? I want a prayer."

During the September 1941 Louisiana Maneuvers, Patton had one of his earliest recorded encounters with a church leader. Patton's 2nd Armored Division was preparing to attack the Blue Army commanded by Major General Walter Krueger and his chief of staff Colonel Dwight D. Eisenhower, when, according to historian Ricky Robertson, his tanks became ensnared in a traffic jam in the town of Many. Vehicles were trying to barrel ahead in different directions, clogging the intersection of Highway 6 and U.S. Highway 171 (San Antonio Avenue). A frantic military policeman attempted to unravel competing columns when Patton, as he later did in France, stepped in to serve as traffic cop. With his usual bluster, he brought order out of chaos, and the military vehicles began moving again. However, Patton's loud curses and obscenities disturbed parishioners worshiping in the nearby St. John's Catholic Church. An exasperated priest left the Mass to confront Patton, asking him to please lower his voice. This time Patton didn't bicker. Instead, he apologized and relinquished traffic duties to the MP. Reportedly, Patton saluted the priest before riding south with his troops.

told them to keep up the good work, and keep attacking the enemy." The stunned soldiers quickly slunk away. Patton told the storekeeper he liked "such fighting spirit in his men." If they were cursing him, Patton reportedly said, that proved he was training them well. The general then paid the division's $500 bill and left.

At the end of the maneuvers' first phase, everyone took a week off to rest. Jerry Sanson, professor at Louisiana State University, explained that

Local entrepreneurs often sold food or soft drinks to soldiers during the Louisiana Maneuvers. Here a mobile canteen is open for business.

during the interim, as well as before and after the maneuvers, "Troops crowded stores in the maneuver area, sometimes buying out a store's entire stock, especially tobacco, candy, and refreshments. Theaters and restaurants both experienced continuous lines for seats, and some smaller store owners reported selling as much in a day as they normally sold in a year." One study, cited by Sanson, credits the maneuvers with generating $25 million in economic activity in Louisiana.

According to historian Merle Miller, Major General Walter Krueger flew with his staff to Baton Rouge, the state capital, to attend a luncheon hosted by Governor Samuel H. Jones. Later, Governor Jones wrote about the encounter: "During the course of the meal, the General said to me, 'Governor, I want you to know my chief of staff. He's the colonel down the table. He has one of the brightest minds in the American Army. In my opinion, he's going places.' To which I replied, 'General, I missed the colonel's name.…' Whereupon the General replied, 'Eisenhower.'"

Reporters were already touting Eisenhower as one of the military's rising stars. Eisenhower knew the second phase of the maneuvers would again mean close scrutiny of commanders by the Army's top brass and the media. Flashbulbs, he later wrote, had become a fairly routine "element in my daily life."

Forces were shifted somewhat before the second maneuver phase began. Primarily, the three

During the Louisiana Maneuvers, soldiers with the 5th Division take a break at Cain Lake near Derry, Louisiana.

antitank divisions switched sides to join the Red Army, still commanded by Major General Ben Lear, while the 1st and 2nd Armored Divisions and all their tanks joined the Blue Army commanded by Krueger and Eisenhower. The Red Army would defend Shreveport in northern Louisiana.

The second phase started about noon on September 24, 1941, and once again heavy rains hindered operations. "Just before we started the problem in which we are now engaged," Eisenhower wrote, "the tail end of a hurricane visited this section of the country and the Army got a good drenching." All the participants and vehicles were soaked. Just as during the first phase, soldiers again had to attach chains to vehicle tires to bolster traction. Despite the unpleasant weather, morale remained high. Eisenhower wrote of the Blue Army, "Everybody was full of vim and ready to go."

The first move of the war games belonged to Krueger and Eisenhower, who ordered most of their force to move straight ahead, advancing north along a broad front. Many of their troops passed through Leesville or Camp Polk with the objective of capturing Peason Ridge. Red Army forces began pulling back, offering little resistance. Lear planned to retreat northward, then turn and fight from the strong defensive positions being prepared by another branch of his force just south of Shreveport. He hoped to pin down the Blue Army from there and batter his opponents to pieces. His plan was sound, but in the end he was outfoxed.

Because of the rain and the Red Army's reluctance to fight, the exercises unfolded slowly. At first, little seemed to be happening. Krueger and Eisenhower were biding their time. Eisenhower wrote during the early stages, "I do not know how long this problem will last, but I can assure you that in Armies of about a quarter of a million you don't do things in a hurry. You have to take time to unwind things, even for minor changes in plans and orders."

As most of the Blue Army advanced, Krueger and Eisenhower held a large contingency of tanks in reserve in southern Louisiana near Lake Charles. To cloak the tanks' activity and to protect the western side of their northward thrust, they dispatched the 1st Cavalry Division across the Sabine River into Texas. Horseback riders and motorized troops crossed the river at Burr's Ferry and Bon Weir, then turned north, passing through Jasper, Texas. The Blue Army cavalry remained near the banks on the other side of the Sabine. Simultaneously, most of the Blue Army in Louisiana steadily advanced along a front extending between the Sabine and Red Rivers.

A large contingent of Blue Army infantry soldiers rode north along Highway 171 through the towns of Florien and Many. Blue Army soldiers also took control of Mount Carmel and Peason Ridge where heavy combat had occurred during the first maneuver phase. The Red Army continued to back up, consolidating forces and waiting to defend what their commanders hoped would be impregnable positions just south of Shreveport.

To thwart their opponents, Krueger and Eisenhower had already launched a bold ploy that was reminiscent of the gambles risked by Confederate Generals Robert E. Lee and Stonewall Jackson during the Civil War. Under Patton's command, the 2nd Armored Division, seemingly languishing in southern Louisiana, transformed into a hive of activity and started streaming west, away from the rest of the Blue Army. The division crossed the Sabine River into Texas near the town of Orange. The long column of tanks and mobile infantry continued driving west, reaching Beaumont, Texas, then turning north. Leading this probe into Texas, Patton was in his element. He hoped to sweep around the Red Army and attack from the rear.

Patton characteristically darted back and forth along his advancing lines, sometimes offering encouragement, at other times yelling disapproval laced with profanity. During these tirades, his high-pitched voice assumed astounding authority. Repeatedly urging his troops to move faster, Patton had reason to be concerned. Speed was crucial if this end run was to succeed and not result in disaster. If the Red Army detected Patton's movements and smashed into his long column, strung out and on the move, the entire division as well as the Blue Army's overall assault would be at risk.

While the foul weather helped cloak the division's movements, it also created dilemmas. Flooding caused a major bridge to collapse, forcing the men to a halt. Patton and his commanders hesitated only momentarily, then resumed the advance by detouring further west, plunging even deeper into Texas. Because of this decision, Patton's vehicles drove outside the maneuver area's designated boundaries. According to historian Carlo D'este, instead of 350 miles, the soldiers now had to cover 400 miles and avoid being detected by the enemy the entire way. The general, his arms waving wildly like a windmill, spit out a constant fusillade of commands, urging everyone forward. Over several days, the tanks and armored vehicles covered so much ground that the refueling trucks could not keep pace with them, so commanders bought gas from service stations. Some sources report that Patton paid for the fuel with his own money. The tanks rumbled forward through Woodville, skirting Nacogdoches, and into Henderson, Texas.

Krueger and Eisenhower, directing most of the Blue Army in the frontal assault, could only wait and hope their gambit was working. Krueger had entered the maneuvers advocating the power of tank mobility. Eisenhower, a long-time tank advocate, had faith in Patton. He later wrote, "Patton pushed his men to fight and dress like the best soldiers in the world.…They knew they were led by a commander who would not let them fail."

For a while, however, the success of the strategy devised by Krueger and Eisenhower seemed extremely doubtful as the Red Army stiffened its defense in Louisiana. A major battle erupted at Mansfield, near where Confederate and Union soldiers had fought during the Civil War. Rows of artillery boomed, firing blank shells one after another. Airplanes buzzed through the sky, dropping dummy bombs. The war sounds reverberated for miles. The sharp clash temporarily halted the Blue Army advance.

Krueger and Eisenhower's cavalry forded the Sabine River in two places, crossing near Logansport, Louisiana, and Carthage, Texas, then went on the attack. Once inside Louisiana, the cavalry aided the overall Blue Army assault at Shreveport's front door. Meanwhile, Patton began knocking at the back door. His troops continued their charge, sweeping north of Marshall, Texas, and skirting Caddo Lake, which straddles the Louisiana border with Texas. Patton's column then turned south and began streaming toward Shreveport's northern suburbs. Patton characteristically stationed himself near where he expected fighting to erupt. He would later boast that, during the 1941 maneuvers, he was one of the few commanders who genuinely knew how his troops conducted themselves in battle because he was among them as they fought.

Eisenhower Hosts Cracker-Barrel Corner

The 1941 Louisiana Maneuvers turned Colonel Dwight D. Eisenhower into an unlikely media star, largely due to his availability to nearly everyone, according to historian Merle Miller. Both at Camp Polk and later at Blue Army headquarters, Eisenhower talked with many people, including soldiers of all ranks. "During the maneuvers," he wrote, "my tent turned into something of a cracker-barrel corner where everyone in our army seemed to come for a serious discussion, a laugh, or a gripe. These visitors prolonged my hours and considerably reduced sleeping time. But I never discouraged those who came to complain, for I was often astonished to see how much better they worked after they unburdened their woes; and, of course, the harder they worked the smoother things went for us at army headquarters."

Eisenhower offered the same easy access to reporters. Although cautious, considering every word, he answered questions clearly and honestly. Reporter Robert Sherrod was among those who helped publicize Eisenhower's crucial role in the maneuvers. "I've forgotten who directed me to him," Sherrod wrote, "but I did go down and had quite a long and enlightening talk with Colonel Eisenhower, who was very articulate…so much more articulate than any other officer I encountered during the Louisiana Maneuvers that I was deeply impressed by him.…He was a deeply impressive man. He looked like a soldier. He talked like an educated man. He was very forceful, altogether, as I've said, the most impressive man I'd seen."

Eric Sevareid, whose war reporting made him a fixture at CBS news, also helped make Eisenhower a household name. He reflected, after World War II, about the maneuvers and how Eisenhower "answered my questions with quiet precision and looked at me with remarkably steady eyes in a relaxed face." Later, Sevareid watched as Eisenhower became the master of "the natural pressures of his position and fame…his heart expanding rather than contracting under duress until he was more than a mere leader of men."

To observe the 1941 Louisiana Maneuvers, syndicated newspaper columnist Drew Pearson dispatched an assistant, whom Eisenhower treated well. Pearson then wrote, "Colonel Eisenhower…conceived the strategy that routed the 2nd Army.…Krueger's chief of staff has a steel-trap mind plus unusual vigor.…To him the military profession is a science and he began watching and studying the German Army five years ago."

Eisenhower also learned during the maneuvers that not every reporter would be accurate in press accounts about him. During the final maneuver critique at Camp Polk, a photographer snapped a picture of key officers, including General Walter Krueger and his chief of staff. When published, the photo caption identified Eisenhower as "Lieutenant Colonel D.D. Ersenbeing." Amused, Eisenhower quipped, "At least the initials were right."

Patton's determination to remain in the thick of things meant he was also on hand to make crucial decisions. His 2nd Armored Division was spread out for miles in a line reaching back into Texas. Many commanders would have halted and waited for more fire power to attack, but not Patton, who gambled that surprise was on his side. He committed the leading edges of his column, a relatively small force, to battle, a dangerous strategy that he would later use during World War II. Sharp firefights erupted in Shreveport's northern extremities as Patton's forces hammered away at Red Army troops protecting Barksdale Field, the important base for Red Army planes. For a short time, Patton's soldiers even occupied part of the airfield, but Red Army forces battled back and retook the perimeter.

Patton never hesitated to maintain the assault as the 2nd Armored Division continued to pour into Shreveport's suburbs, helping catch the Red Army in a vice. The Blue Army was hammering Shreveport's defenders from two sides. Back at Camp Polk, General Lesley McNair, monitoring reports, realized that the Red Army was virtually surrounded. If he allowed the battle to continue, McNair knew downtown Shreveport would soon erupt in simulated house-to-house combat. Earlier than planned, McNair called a halt to the maneuvers. The second and final stage ended on September 28, 1941, after only four days.

Many Shreveport residents were so caught up in the excitement of the maneuvers, they chose sides, wearing red arm bands to show their support for the Red Army. When the maneuvers ended, townspeople celebrated because the Blue Army had failed to capture their city. Church bells clanged, congratulating the Shreveport defenders. Some journalists also expressed doubts that the Blue Army could have conquered Shreveport, if the maneuvers had been allowed to continue. "The big question—Who won?—was one that not even the uniformed newsmen traveling with the armies could answer," wrote a *Time* magazine reporter.

Nevertheless, the overall consensus was that Krueger and Eisenhower had outwitted and overwhelmed the opposition. By the time McNair ordered the cease-fire, Patton's tanks were massing on Shreveport's outskirts, and the Blue Army had already captured the city's water-pumping station. Hanson Baldwin of the *New York Times* had no doubt about the likely outcome. "Had it been a real war, Lear's forces [the Red Army] would have been annihilated," he wrote.

Some Red Army commanders grumbled that Patton violated procedures by pushing outside the maneuver boundary lines and accused him of writing his own rules. Patton grinned and shrugged off the complaints, arguing he was unaware of any rules in war.

8. Camp Polk Builds for World War II

The Louisiana Maneuvers, the largest ever held in the United States, accomplished a great deal. For the first time, the Army demonstrated that troops could be mustered quickly to fight on a modern battlefield. Furthermore, soldiers showed they could engage in simulated battles on unfamiliar and difficult terrain in extreme weather, from blinding rain to stifling heat. In staging the events, new leaders emerged. Some of the commanders, including Colonel Dwight D. Eisenhower and Brigadier General George S. Patton, displayed exceptional boldness and creativity, traits that were not always prevalent among the Army's upper ranks. Eisenhower would later say the maneuvers "provided me with lessons and experiences that I appreciated more and more as subsequent months rolled by."

> *It is not enough to fight. It is the spirit which we bring to the fight that decides the issue. It is morale that wins the victory.*
>
> *— General George C. Marshall*
> *U.S. Army Chief of Staff*

In addition to the prewar maneuvers, the Army conducted ten other training exercises at Camp Polk or nearby during the war. In all, fifty of the eighty-nine divisions that fought in Europe, the Pacific, and Africa during World War II trained in central Louisiana. According to historian Nick Pollacia Jr., no other state matched Louisiana's record in readying troops for combat.

The exercises in Louisiana provided thousands of men with their first experience of armed conflict and ultimately helped many of them survive overseas. Even when, in the course of the maneuvers, they carried only stick weapons or did not participate directly in the simulated combat, they learned to adapt and to fulfill their duties as part of a large military force confronting a determined enemy.

For many, memories of the Louisiana Maneuvers lingered for years. Edwin F. Whitney from Massachusetts, for example, joined the National Guard at age 19 in 1940. At the time, many considered the National Guard little more than a social club with scant relevance to world events. Whitney's unit, however, was among the first to be nationalized. Assigned to a mobile antiaircraft outfit that was also equipped with antitank guns, he trained at Camp Edwards on Cape Cod, Massachusetts, then was sent to Texas for more training before heading to Louisiana to participate in the September 1941 maneuvers. Whitney told Fort Polk researchers in 1990 that the weather was among his most vivid memories as he moved from the bitter cold of the northeast to the extreme heat of Louisiana.

His outfit, apparently attached to the Blue Army, saw little action during the maneuvers. They spent most of their time transporting three-inch antiaircraft guns and 37-millimeter cannons from one location to another. "As cocky young Yankees…we welcomed the opportunity to show everyone what top-notch soldiers could do," he remarked. "We would set up guns [and] range-finding equipment, and orient and synchronize everything, and be ready to fire. As soon as we were [ready], it seemed, we would be ordered to pick up and move several miles down the road and do it all over again. In the humidity, we were an exhausted outfit of young men."

Whitney, who remembered being elated when he heard that his side won skirmishes during the war games, described how his unit was ordered to move to high ground and establish camp. There was "more copious sweating from setting up two-man pup tents, latrines, mess tent, et cetera. Eventually, it was done and we had free time, which meant collapsing on the ground. Lying there, doing nothing, seemed like heaven—but needless to say, we continued sweating profusely."

The young soldier twice earned passes, which he used to visit nearby Lake Charles and Alexandria. "They seemed like glamorous big cities after time spent in the boondocks," Whitney recalled. The swimming pool in Alexandria was especially welcome and "gorgeous in the heat," he said, adding that he was troubled that African-American children were barred from swimming there. Louisiana law and the laws of many states in the South then segregated blacks and whites. "I remember seeing young black faces pressed against the outside of the fence and being told of their 'separate but equal facilities.' I didn't see those facilities and that made me think."

Whitney spent World War II in the Pacific, serving in the Aleutian Islands and the Philippines. Many years later, he retained a mostly favorable impression of Louisiana. "The area had some beautiful homes, trees, flowers, and very gracious people." Whitney said he loved everything about Louisiana except the humidity and the unfairness of excluding blacks from public facilities. Some fifty years later, Whitney's son also served at Fort Polk.

Thomas G. Wickham from Muskegon, Michigan, also participated in the maneuvers. He was 19 years old in 1941, and after a year in college was unsure what to do with his life. He joined the Army, intending to enlist for a year, then return to college as the military then allowed. Wickham's father, disabled in World War I, vehemently opposed the idea, but finally signed papers allowing his son to enlist. Wickham, as recounted by author Edwin Hoyt, received his first uniform at Fort Custer near Battle Creek, Michigan. The clothes, leftovers from World War I, included leggings and pants that tightly cinched his calves. Wickham's overcoat and blouse were also unbearably snug, about "two sizes too small." He received a new, better fitting uniform just before shipping off to Fort Monmouth, New Jersey, where he was assigned to the Signal Corps.

Swallowing his disappointment at not receiving a combat assignment, Wickham diligently studied

Communication experts sometimes camped in the wilds far from other troops. This photograph captures a team in action during the August 1940 National Guard Maneuvers in Louisiana.

Morse code and learned to operate radios before being dispatched to Selfridge Field in his home state of Michigan. Almost immediately, he was ordered to Louisiana for the maneuvers. In July 1941, his platoon traveled south through Indiana, Kentucky, and into Tennessee. They crossed the Memphis bridge spanning the Mississippi River before heading into Arkansas, then south into Louisiana. Finally they arrived at Esler Air Field near Alexandria, which they were ordered to guard. The platoon erected sleeping tents and built two shacks, one for a mess hall, the other for the showers and latrine.

Wickham and his buddies called the Louisiana Maneuvers the "wooden gun war." All they had to defend the airport were wooden stakes painted yellow with stenciled lettering reading "30-caliber machine gun" or "60 mm mortar." The soldiers pretended to fire these stick weapons at airplanes dropping dummy bombs made from flour sacks.

With little for a radio operator to do, Wickham learned to be a telephone lineman. At first, he would lose his grip and slide down the pole, but he soon mastered the job. He spent days in a mostly unpopulated wilderness, living out of a pup tent and stringing telephone wires so outfits scattered over many miles could communicate during the war games. His stay in Louisiana was mostly uneventful, except for the weather. "God, it was hot! Rain clouds would form every day," he said. "After a short deluge that turned the clay soil to gumbo, the sun came out and baked the ground hard again."

Several years later, on June 6, 1944, Wickham, along with many others who participated in the Louisiana Maneuvers, landed on the beaches of Normandy, France. Wickham, a radio operator with the 29th Division's 115th Infantry, spent the first night in a ditch near the beach waiting for the German counterattack that his superiors told him to expect. A German plane roared over, plastering the nearby ground with bombs. The fiery explosions kicked up dirt, but did no major damage that Wickham could see. He propped his M-1 rifle on the edge of the ditch, trying to peer into the blackness. The night reverberated with menacing sounds. Off and on, Wickham heard machine-gun fire. There were bright flashes and ear-shattering booms as German 88-millimeter artillery took aim on American positions. The powerful shells tore into the earth near Wickham, but he was unhurt.

Finally, dawn arrived, and an officer ordered him and his fellow soldiers to advance. They moved forward, their rifles poised for battle. "Snipers seemed to be everywhere," he remembered. "I heard the pop of rifle bullets and the sound of burp guns. Crossing a field, I hit the dirt as mortar shells dropped near." Wickham saw the strange sight of young French women approaching and smiling at the advancing soldiers. Suddenly, the women, German sympathizers, pulled out guns and began shooting. Bullets whizzed by as the Americans scrambled for cover and fired back. Wickham, for the first time, saw a woman killed in combat.

Along with two million other Allied soldiers, Wickham fought his way across France. In February 1945, he received orders to return to the United States. Of the men from his radio section that landed at Normandy, he was the only one not killed or wounded.

General George C. Marshall, Army Chief of Staff, visiting Camp Polk in September 1941 to observe the maneuvers, saw much that encouraged him. Generally, soldier morale seemed to be good, and the Army's new equipment and weaponry functioned well. However, Marshall concluded that sweeping changes were still needed. American industry had to produce far more equipment and improved weaponry if the military was to wage war effectively. The tanks, for example, could operate in varied weather and proved valuable during the maneuvers, but they were far from perfect. Within a year, the Army had turned to the faster Sherman tanks, equipped with more armor and firepower. This rapid transformation reflected what was happening across the nation.

By the start of 1942, manufacturers responded to the military's needs by launching an unprecedented conversion from commercial industry to defense production. Kathleen Smith, a professor at Louisiana's Northwestern State University, explained: "A vacuum cleaner plant was turned into a plant that produced machine guns. The automotive industry made war planes and tanks. Submarines were built in the Midwest and launched down

Promotion Triggers a Practical Joke

Lieutenant Colonel Mark Clark, aide to General Lesley McNair, was perhaps most responsible for the detailed planning that made the September 1941 Louisiana Maneuvers successful. Clark became one of the nation's best known generals during World War II when he commanded the 5th Army's invasion at Salerno, Italy. The troops landed on September 9, 1943, and soon were embroiled in a desperate fight. The engagement began so poorly that Clark considered abandoning the invasion and withdrawing his remaining forces, which were clinging to a tiny strip of land and being battered by fierce German shelling. Clark's assault, however, finally surged forward and became a major victory in the Italian campaign.

When the Louisiana Maneuvers of September 1941 ended, according to historian Merle Miller, Clark conducted the final critique session at Camp Polk. All the commanding officers attended, including Clark's old friend, Colonel Dwight D. Eisenhower who sat on the first row. Clark reviewed the maneuvers, frequently pointing to a large map of Texas and Louisiana while he spoke. As he finished his presentation, an aide handed him a piece of paper with the names of those who were to be promoted. The air must have crackled with tension as Clark, standing on a platform before the assembled officers, glanced over the list. Seeing that Eisenhower, whose name was third on the list, was to be promoted to brigadier general, Clark decided to play a joke on his friend. "I read out the whole list—with one exception," Clark recounted. "I deliberately left out Ike's name. I tell you, you could hear a pin drop, and I didn't dare look at his face. I knew what must be going through his mind, and I knew his face had to be red, and that vein…had to be throbbing, but I left out his name, and I said, 'That's all gentlemen. Congratulations.'"

There was a rustling and murmuring as the crowd began to depart. Clark waited agonizing seconds, then banged down his gavel and announced, "Please be seated. I have an apology to make. I have made a grievous error. I neglected to mention the name of another officer to be brigadier general, he's number three on the list." Clark then announced Eisenhower's promotion.

As Clark later recalled, Eisenhower came up on the platform and said, "I could kill you." Clark replied, "Ike, I couldn't resist the temptation."

the Mississippi River. Ship yards operated 24 hours a day." From July 1940 to the end of the war in 1945, American industry, with women providing most of the labor, produced about 300,000 aircraft, 639,000 jeeps, 100,000 tanks and armored vehicles, 2.5 million military trucks, 71,000 naval ships, 15 million rifles, machine guns, and pistols, and 41.5 million pounds of ammunition.

Marshall's most daunting military problem, however, was personnel. The Louisiana Maneuvers revealed a dearth of strong leaders among the Army's upper echelon. Others also recognized the Army's leadership dilemma. Eisenhower wrote, "One of the things that is causing the greatest trouble is that of eliminating unit officers of all grades. But it is a job that has got to be done."

Marshall was acutely aware of the predicament, as one observer noted. "He never forgets a brilliant performance and he never forgives a dullard. Mediocrity seems to make little impression on him, except by way of irritation." Although displeased with many officers during the maneuvers, Marshall identified young talented replacements with help from his subordinates and by reading reports about the exercises.

Lieutenant General Lesley McNair, who supervised the maneuvers, signaled to the press that changes were imminent. "A lot of these generals who want to fire their chiefs of staff ought to fire themselves. We're going to start at the top and work down.…Have we the bright young majors and captains to replace them? Yes."

A broad purge followed quickly on the heels of the September maneuvers. Thirty-one of forty-two corps, army, and division commanders were either transferred to desk jobs or sacked, according to historian Carlo D'este. By 1942, twenty of twenty-seven division commanders were replaced. A new generation of officers assumed command, including Eisenhower, Omar Bradley, William H. Simpson, Terry Allen, Leonard Gerow, and LeRoy Lutes. In the aftermath of the maneuvers, only eleven of forty-two senior officers who participated were promoted, including Patton. He was ordered to leave his beloved 2nd Armored Division to lead an entire Armored Corps, which included two divisions.

Just as the military was being reshaped, so was Camp Polk, where construction continued. In addition to some fourteen thousand civilian employees, military personnel also participated in the effort. The Army's 711th Railway Operating Battal-

Camp Polk's main road, Mississippi Avenue, under construction on April 30, 1941.

ion, originally based at Fort Belvoir, Virginia, arrived in Louisiana on August 19, 1941, to begin laying tracks connecting Camp Polk to Camp Claiborne near Alexandria, some fifty miles away. Two African-American engineer battalions, the 91st and 93rd, joined in the work. Day after day, crews based at Camp Polk and Camp Claiborne edged closer together as they laid the rails. Laborers, swinging picks, pounding spikes, and throwing off sweat, trudged through miles of fetid swamps to raise twenty-five bridges, aided by a clanging steam-powered pile driver.

According to author William Church, the workers designed and built the bridges with little experience. The most spectacular structure, the Big Cut Bridge, soared thirty feet over the Red River near Camp Claiborne. Another bridge, extending more than two thousand feet, spanned the Calcasieu River. After finishing the rail line, the 711th Battalion traveled to Iran where their Louisiana experience helped them maintain the Trans-Iranian Railroad, which carried vital military materials to Russia throughout World War II.

The Claiborne-Polk Military Railroad (CPMR), sometimes shortened to the "CP," became known as the "Crime and Punishment" line, befitting the hard labor required to build it. Completed on July 10, 1942, when the two work crews met at LaCamp, the railroad was officially inaugurated the next day as two shiny black engines faced each other, hissing steam. The engines pulled railcars carrying dignitaries from both Camps Polk and Claiborne. Brigadier General Carl R. Gray, general manager of the Military Railway Service, drove in the final track spike, officially opening the railroad. Witnesses included Louisiana Governor Sam Jones and Brigadier General Matthew Ridgway, who would earn renown with the 82nd Airborne Division during World War II and later as General Douglas MacArthur's replacement in command of all United Nations troops during the Korean War.

Throughout the World War II years, nine oil-burning locomotives traveled the CP Railroad. Two first-class passenger trains made daily runs between Camps Polk and Claiborne, while a slower, second-class freight train made the trip daily, except Sundays.

The flurry of construction at Camp Polk ended for the most part after about ten months. All told, building the North and South Forts cost the federal government about $22 million, a huge sum in the early 1940s. On November 8, 1941, five new chapels were dedicated, all built with wood siding. By the end of World War II, the number of chapels rose to nine. Two still stand. The one on Mississippi Avenue features a stone monument honoring Fort Pork soldiers killed during the Vietnam War.

During World War II, seven theaters were dispersed around Camp Polk's North and South Forts. Only one remains, the Kisatchie Playhouse in Building 1228, located between 5th and 6th Streets. Troops continue to use the facility to present plays and for other activities.

Construction in 1941 also produced various mess halls. One, just off Mississippi Avenue on the South Fort, later became the Fort Polk Military Museum. The current Joint Readiness Training Center and Fort Polk Headquarters was also built in 1941 as an information center. Various other structures remain from 1941, including the eleven wood residences on Traditions Circle, formerly used to house senior officers and now serving as guest quarters. The Post Field House, where heavy-weight boxing champion Joe Lewis fought an exhibition bout in 1943, also dates to this period.

Although the major pre–World War II maneuvers were over, military activities continued at Camp Polk. In October 1941, the 1st and 3rd Armored Divisions conducted a small exercise along the Calcasieu River. Within a year, the 1st Armored Division would be in North Africa battling German and Italian troops commanded by German Field Marshal Erwin Rommel, the *Desert Fox*.

Excitement stirred at Camp Polk in the autumn of 1941, when a Hollywood film crew arrived to shoot scenes of soldiers in training to be used in the MGM movie "The Bugle Sounds" starring Wallace Beery, Marjorie Main, and Lewis Stone. Another highlight of the year was the participation of troops from Camp Polk in Armistice Day parades on November 11 in Port Arthur, Texas, and New Iberia and Lake Charles, Louisiana.

Photographed on January 29, 1943, Chapel No. 34 on Fort Polk's North Fort was built during the early years of World War II.

As the build-up to war continued, the nation's first USO opened in DeRidder. According to historian Ricky Robertson, the facility, built in just thirty-nine days, was completed on November 28, 1941, just one day prior to completion of another USO center in Galveston, Texas. The DeRidder USO welcomed thousands of soldiers during the war, including many stationed at Camp Polk. Today, it serves as the War Memorial Civic Center honoring forty-seven local residents killed in World War II.

Local residents donated most of the furniture for the DeRidder USO. Volunteers planned activities to entertain and comfort young troops far from home. They helped soldiers write letters and make phonograph voice messages for their loved ones. They sewed insignia patches on uniforms, provided travel advice for men going on leave, and staged birthday parties and carnivals. Once the war started, a favorite carnival activity was throwing tennis balls at a target decorated with a photograph of German dictator Adolph Hitler. Hostesses distributed countless roasted peanuts, homemade baked goods, and glasses of pink lemonade.

What residents remembered most, however, were the USO dances. Held three times weekly, the Saturday night dances were the best attended. Young women from nearby communities rode buses to the dances. Rules were strict and included a prohibi-

Top and bottom: When it opened on November 28, 1941, the DeRidder USO was one of the first facilities of its kind. Those who attended events and participated in activities there during World War II especially remembered the dances. For some it was the last opportunity for entertainment before being shipped overseas. The DeRidder USO building later became the War Memorial Civic Center.

Top and bottom: A photographer captured the construction of the Leesville USO in November 1941, shortly before the Japanese surprise attack on Pearl Harbor.

tion against alcohol. Brownie LeRay, a DeRidder resident and USO volunteer, told the *Beauregard Daily News* in 1989 that women were not allowed to wear slacks to the dances or purple fingernail polish, although red polish was permitted.

Dolly Mayo fondly remembered being 19 years old and attending the USO dances at DeRidder and Camp Polk. "I was at them all the time. We had a wonderful time. We had to wear formal dresses. The buses would pick us up. You'd get all get-up in formals." Mayo recalled that meeting people was never difficult. "It seems like everybody began to mingle by the time we got there. They were already maneuvering around. We had paratroopers [who] would do some dancing, I'm telling you. We did jitterbug, two-steps, waltz. I love to waltz. I'm a preacher's wife, but I still love to dance."

When asked if soldiers tried to get the women to leave the dance, Mayo replied, "Probably so, but those chaperones were strict." Brownie LeRay agreed, saying that anyone who left the building during a dance was prohibited from reentering. Despite the rules, LeRay recalled that USO dances sparked romances, with many local women meeting their future husbands at these events.

Ciro Lampo told the *Beauregard Daily News* that he was a hat checker at the dances in DeRidder, storing soldiers' coats and hats. Lampo, then 18 years old, said some "bigwigs" handed him their hats, including Patton and Major General Alvan C. Gillem, 3rd Armored Division commander at Camp Polk. "We'd wear their hats after they went into the ballroom," Lampo said. On one particularly memorable night, Patton tipped Lampo a silver dollar. "That was a lot of money for those days."

Lampo explained that Camp Polk soldiers sometimes formed the swing bands that played at the dances, and that civilian musicians also performed. The hardwood floor at the DeRidder USO vibrated with stomping feet, he recalled.

The good times, however, carried somber undertones, particularly after December 7, 1941, a date President Franklin D. Roosevelt said would "live in infamy." The possibility of the United States going to war had been steadily building. The German military was on the outskirts of Moscow, seemingly poised for a final victory over the Russians. U.S. warships prowled the Atlantic Ocean, searching for the German submarines that were sinking supply transports sailing toward Great Britain. Japan had invaded southern Indochina and continued a brutal assault on China. The United States, protesting these aggressions, froze Japanese assets and cut off all trade. Japan retaliated by launching a surprise attack on Pearl Harbor, Hawaii.

When the first wave of Japanese fighter planes swooped in that Sunday morning on December 7, 1941, at 7:55 a.m., many of the men and women at the base were still asleep. At the time, some fifty U.S. warships and other Navy vessels were anchored in the harbor, moored so closely together that the enemy bombers could hardly miss. The pilots swung in low over the harbor, firing machine guns and dropping bombs and torpedoes, which churned through the water, hitting their marks. Deafening explosions erupted, docks splintered into pieces, and ships were ripped apart. Sailors ran, confused and dazed. Some leaped overboard to escape deadly flames, while others were blown into the water by the powerful explosions. Everywhere young men lay dying.

Within two hours, some 360 Japanese planes that had been launched from six aircraft carriers virtually destroyed the Pacific fleet of the United States, killing 2,330 and wounding 1,145 more. The Japanese escaped with fewer than one hundred casualties. A Japanese mini-submarine sailor, Kazuo Sakamaki, was captured and later imprisoned in central Louisiana at Camp Livingston.

On the morning of the attack, George Marshall was horseback riding at Fort Myer near Washington, D.C. On returning to his official residence, he received a phone call summoning him immediately to his office in the munitions building. There, sometime after lunch, he received the message, "Air raid on Pearl Harbor. This is not a drill."

Brigadier General Eisenhower, after being promoted at Camp Polk, was back in Texas at Fort Sam Houston where he had attended a parade honoring his decisive role in the Louisiana Maneuvers. On December 7, he was taking a nap when he was awakened by an emergency phone call, breaking the disturbing news.

Saturday night, December 6, a dance was held at the Camp Polk officers' club, but little else of note was happening. December 7 dawned cool and overcast in Louisiana. Few soldiers milled about, except for those attending services at the post chapels. Officers with the 3rd Armored Division began preparations to shift an artillery outfit to one of the nearby firing ranges for yet another round of shooting practice. By early afternoon, however, the entire post was transformed into a swirl of activity as word quickly spread that real war was at hand. Officers issued urgent orders that everyone should be alert for possible sabotage. Rumors spread that the Japanese might attack the western United States and that Camp Polk troops might be sent there to fight.

The following day, a grim President Roosevelt appeared before Congress to excoriate the Japanese and assert the obvious—the nation was now in a state of war. Germany and Italy, tied to Japan by treaty, soon after declared war against the United States.

9. Rationing, Dancing, and New Roles for Women

As construction wound down at Camp Polk in the closing months of 1941, Leesville's population, according to historian Steven D. Smith, finally stabilized at around eighteen thousand, where it remained throughout World War II. Overcrowding continued to be a problem, especially on weekend nights when the town was bursting with soldiers searching for entertainment.

T.L. "Sonny" Berry, former civilian aide to the Secretary of the Army, told Fort Polk researchers in 1990 that he was a young boy when Leesville transformed from a sleepy community of about three thousand people, if "everybody was home," to a vibrant Army town.

All men are afraid in Battle. The coward is the one who lets his fear overcome his sense of duty.

— General George S. Patton

During World War II, Camp Polk soldiers on leave rode to Leesville in Army trucks. "On Saturday you didn't drive an automobile up and down Third Street because the troops would come in from the field," Berry recalled. "They would let them out on the south end of town and they would come north [on Third Street]." He continued, "All you could see was khaki-clad uniforms wall-to-wall, down the street. I don't know how they ever got them all back together [to head back to Camp Polk], but I guess they did."

Berry recalled that the weekend crowds strained local law enforcement. "We had a police force here of three or four people then. We were just not prepared for that number of people.…There were some minor offenses, but not any major crime.…My family lived a block off Third Street and we didn't lock our door at night. We frequently left the screen door open." There were some brawls, however. Berry remembered one particular night when the soldiers "literally tore up" Third Street. "They came in off break during their training and kind of took over the town."

Albert Dunn, who lived near Leesville during World War II, also recalled a lot of fighting. "Soldiers were coming into town to have a good time. They were going overseas and they didn't know if they were ever coming back. Mostly it was people getting drunk and people would get into fights because there would be animosity between different Army units. The jails stayed full."

In an interview for this book, Dunn spoke of the military police sometimes flooding downtown Leesville. "One time they had a truck backed up to the courthouse and they were loading that up with people to carry back to the stockades. A lot of them [the soldiers] were just drunk."

The south part of town, according to Dunn, was especially lively. "They called the last three blocks—most of that has been torn down now—the Gold Coast or Little Chicago. You know, it was a little rough and rowdy. There were juke joints and beer joints and dance halls."

Some residents must have resented the military's presence, but ill will between the local citizens and soldiers was apparently uncommon. "There wasn't much animosity," Dunn recalled. Leesville was actually pretty tame, he said, especially compared to San Francisco, Phenix City, Alabama, and other communities with a strong military presence.

Even though some workers had left Leesville when the first wave of construction ended at Camp Polk, other civilians moved in to take new jobs at the Army camp. "There were all types of workers coming here and people had trouble finding a place to stay," Dunn said.

Army nurses in 1941. Nurses served at Camp Polk during the Louisiana Maneuvers and World War II.

"I would see people sleeping in stores at night," Berry recalled. "In the evening, you couldn't walk down Third Street hardly, much less on the sidewalks.…We had a couple of hotels in town, but there just were not many places available for people to live.…There were a lot of women who came in to be secretaries [and] telephone operators."

The newcomers often rented space in private homes. Berry's family, for example, owned a three-bedroom house and rented two bedrooms to seven women who worked at Camp Polk. "My mother, dad, brother, and I lived in one of the rooms, so there were eleven people in our home."

The employment of women at Camp Polk reflected a vast social change that was sweeping the United States as women joined the work force in unprecedented numbers. In central Louisiana, women began working at banks and stores in positions once reserved almost exclusively for men. Nationwide, women test-piloted war aircraft, became mechanics, operated drill presses, and riveted airplane wings, replacing the thirteen million men who joined the Army, Navy, and Marines. "Five million women worked in the defense industry and there were 350,000 women in the military," according to Kathleen Smith of Louisiana's Northwestern State University, who has studied how Americans at home responded during World War II.

These women "certainly proved they could do the job as well as any man," Smith said, adding

that female defense workers, nicknamed "Rosie the Riveters," were considered "home-front fashion plates in their new jump suits and their sturdy work shoes, with their hair tied up…and wearing steel welding helmets.…These same women began to prefer pant suits or slacks to dresses for leisure time, leading to a more masculine fashion."

More women began visiting bars and dance halls unescorted. "They learned to curse and holler alongside middle-aged male co-workers.…Women learned to drink and smoke with the men, bonding together under the stress of living through war," explained Smith. The stress caused some men and women to abuse alcohol. "I've read quite a few studies that people drank rather heavily during the second World War," Smith continued. "Alcoholism was rampant, even though it [alcohol] was rationed."

Pearl Kaufman, a WAAC (Women's Army Auxiliary Corps) at Camp Polk during World War II, greets Private Frank White, 11th Armored Division. The 11th was based at Camp Polk and later participated in the Battle of the Bulge. The women's barracks at Camp Polk were adjacent to the German POW compound.

Whether employed or not, many women continued to be primarily responsible for managing their homes and families, Smith said. They also often volunteered to be "local Red Cross workers or joined civilian defense auxiliaries such as the American Legion, which took pride in two million female members." After the war, when soldiers returned home, most women were forced out of the paid workforce and resumed more traditional roles, but wartime experiences had presented new possibilities that would affect future generations of women.

Those women who moved to central Louisiana to be near their husbands training at Camp Polk were under great strain. Living away from their families and friends in an unfamiliar place, they worried about when their spouses would be ordered overseas. Gladys Dennis of Louisville, Kentucky, moved near Leesville in 1942 as a military wife. Her husband, she said, "thought we were fortunate to be able to rent two large furnished rooms, but neglected to tell me there was no plumbing."

Dennis recalled renting wartime housing between Camp Polk's North and South Forts, east of Leesville about a quarter block from the railroad tracks. The loud train noises bothered her at first, but surprisingly soothed her infant son. "The train was better than any baby-sitter could have been. This made my chores easier." One task involved pumping a handle to draw water.

Despite all the hardships, Dennis still had many fond memories of her Leesville experiences. Several longtime residents, for example, took time to teach her local "health remedies." The good times in Leesville, she said, "compensated for everything else [bad] during the forties."

Prostitutes, attracted by the growing male population arriving for the military maneuvers, also traveled to central Louisiana. "They had women come in this part of the country from everywhere," recalled one resident. "During the maneuvers, I saw two women out in the woods with a 1935 Ford. They were right beside the road. They said they were from Arkansas. There were soldiers everywhere. I said, 'Well, what do you charge these boys?' And they said one dollar."

The soldiers training at Camp Polk continued to stage maneuvers even after the war had begun. Albert Dunn remembered that at times it seemed as if there were "soldiers camped everywhere in the woods. They were living in pup tents and had different training programs. They didn't just stay on Camp Polk."

Military wives arrive at Camp Polk after a long train ride, as reported in LOOK Magazine *on September 7, 1943.*

LOOK
SEPTEMBER 7, 1943

Night and day, the Leesville Hotel is bombarded by incoming Army wives. Turned away, Dorothy Dennis (center) asks her husband, "What next?"

Don't Visit Your Husband in an Army Town

Congested and hectic, it's generally no place for a soldier's family. The wise wife stays at home

On train, plane and bus they come—sleepy-eyed, grimy, slumped in seats—the vast, unrecruited legion of servicemen's wives. Invading communities near our more than 1,200 military camps, each is determined to snatch a few hours, weeks, months if possible, with her soldier.

In most camp towns, the problem of accommodating visitors has become critical. Rooming houses and hotels, if any, are bursting; civilian homes are overflowing. Army wives have had to sleep in railroad stations, sit up in all-night cafes, even live in remodeled chicken coops. Food prices and rents have skyrocketed. Sanitation facilities are overtaxed. Wives who left friends, parents and comfortable homes behind find such towns no romantic garden spots, but dull, dusty, grim.

This is the documentary story of one Army wife and a representative camp town.

Dorothy Dennis, wife of Sgt. James Wiley Dennis, of Lewisburg, Tenn., arrived in Leesville, La., eight miles from Camp Polk, a month after he was transferred there. Her experiences, paralleling those of thousands of other Army wives, are pictured in the following pages.

Like every other camp town, Leesville is harassed but booming. Since January, 1941, when the Army started to build Camp Polk, Leesville's population has jumped almost sixfold—from 3,200 to 18,000. Until then, the town—in an area of cutover timberland—struggled along. In recent months, the community has expanded its water supply and sewerage systems, paved streets, cooperated in building 475 housing units (chiefly for officers).

Despite such valiant and zealous efforts to meet "the invasion," Leesville is a flat disappointment to the young bride of a soldier. To Dot Dennis—and to virtually every other migrant wife—"back home" soon became "God's country."

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE 21

An article in LOOK Magazine *on September 7, 1943, related the plight of women moving to Leesville to be near their soldier husbands.*

Shot on July 1, 1943, this aerial photograph shows the type of vast tent camps that were erected during the Louisiana Maneuvers and for other exercises conducted during the World War II years.

Lynn Bennett, who lived in Simpson, recalled seeing a convoy of Army vehicles appear near her home. In a 1990 article for Fort Polk she wrote, "Out of the blue, one quiet summer afternoon, comes this rumbling from 100 or more Army trucks and jeeps in a cloud of dust." She stealthily watched the soldiers establish camp, even though her mother forbid her to crack the curtains for a better look. "By sundown, brush had been cleared and tents set up as far as the eye could see."

Bennett, then fourteen years old with shiny red hair "braided in long, thick pigtails," remembered her mother's uneasiness as she ordered her curious daughter to remain inside and stay several feet away from the drawn curtains. Bennett's stepfather was away working, and the soldiers looked menacing to her worried mother, who kept a baseball bat by her bed that night and slept little.

The next day, Bennett's grandfather, who lived nearby, talked with the soldiers and felt reassured. He told her mother the men were not a threat. As Bennett recalled, "A mutual admiration society formed and [my] Grandmama sealed the pact with the lure of her fried chicken, creamed potatoes, English peas, Southern gravy, and famous hot biscuits." The family served the troops a special meal just before they reported back to Camp Polk. "The guys were fed in three shifts, with eight men per shift dining at Grandmama's white-linen-covered table. Grandmama, Mother, and my aunt spent all

morning plucking chickens and peeling potatoes in preparation for this finale. I was worn out just from the excitement of it all, plus my very first young girl crush on a certain good-looking lieutenant." In 1990, Bennett still had a photograph of the young lieutenant standing ramrod straight on her grandmother's porch. Someone snapped the photograph just before "he went back to Camp Polk, and from there to foreign places to fight for our country's freedom."

Bennett recalled another incident involving a Camp Polk Signal Corps detachment that camped near Simpson in 1943. Some homing pigeons, used by the soldiers to carry messages, escaped and flew to an old storage shed behind the Bennett's home. The dusty shelves lining the shed served as ideal perches for the birds who entered through a ventilation opening near the roof. "Mother walked down to where the men were bivouacked to let them know that they had some AWOL couriers [escaped pigeons]," Bennett recalled. "The corpsmen came that evening [to the family shed], when the messengers had settled in, and gently took them away. The next day they had to repeat the expedition, and again once more. But the renegades refused to return to their cages [voluntarily]." The pigeons kept flying back to the shed. "The corpsmen had to return to Camp Polk defeated," Bennett wrote, noting that some years later when her family moved, pigeons were still everywhere. "I bet descendants of those pigeons are still swooping over those tall pine trees as they head for home."

Bennett attended ninth grade at Simpson School in 1943, and often during morning recess she and two friends crossed the highway to buy sodas at a nearby store. One day, she recounted, they suddenly found themselves "right square dab in the middle of a war. Camp Polk soldiers with red bands were

Battery B with camouflaged artillery near Simpson, Louisiana. This type of training taught soldiers valuable lessons on how to set up and fire weapons, as well as protect themselves.

shooting and being shot at by soldiers with blue bands. They were firing their rifles from behind trees, shrubbery, signs, store columns, and some lying prone on a carpet of pine needles."

Far from being frightened, the three friends "weren't fazed in the least," Bennett wrote. The girls bought big bottles of RC Cola for five cents each and "returned to our studies as if these mock battles were simply a part of our normal routine. Of course we all ended up with brass casings to keep as souvenirs."

On a less pleasant note, the many military maneuvers, which were staged repeatedly over roughly the same area, severely damaged local roads, causing residents great inconvenience. Although the federal government appropriated money for repairs, road damage and traffic jams were ongoing problems throughout the war years. "Many people experienced difficulty reaching jobs," explained Jerry Sanson, professor at Louisiana State University. "Adequate supplies failed to reach rural stores; school buses and mail carriers sometimes failed to make their rounds; doctors sometimes failed to reach their patients; and farmers found it difficult to bring their produce to market."

In 1990, Rufus Strother told the *Beauregard Daily News* that civilian drivers ensnared in Army convoys learned to be patient. Particularly trying were the times when soldiers declared "blackouts," requiring all artificial light to be extinguished. Strother remembered soldiers yelling at drivers traveling with their headlights lit during the blackouts.

Albert Dunn remembered tanks damaging Kurthwood Road, a gravel byway north of Leesville. "They would tear it up and they would just bulldoze the center out.…It was real muddy." Dunn explained that "You might come to an intersection and there'd be tanks and stuff. You had to wait until it all went by. You'd stop while the soldiers went marching by."

Howard Blackburn, who operated a tractor for a lumber company and also occasionally drove a logging truck, recalled in an interview for this book that there were times when "you just couldn't hardly get over the roads.…I mean, behind every stump, every tree, or culvert, or whatever it might have been, there were soldiers everywhere, and when the night came on during the blackouts it was very dangerous. The Army did not travel with lights on, just a little bitty slit in their headlights was all there was." Blackburn said many accidents were caused by troop movements, with "trucks running into one another." His wife's sister, Joelyn Robinson, collided with a tank during a blackout. "She was trying to get from Anacoco to Hornbeck, and it was after dark. This tank ran up on the back of her car and squashed it. There was another lady in the car. My wife's sister says now: 'I don't know which one of us was more scared.' Fortunately, she wasn't hurt."

Because there were few fences, cattle often roamed free and sometimes lay on the roads, according to local historian Don Marler who grew up in the area. One of his early childhood memories involved a convoy passing near his home "with all the lights out and cattle in the road being run over." An Army vehicle that struck one cow knocked off a horn. Screwworms dug into the wound "and got down into her brain," Marler said. "It was my job to go out in the woods and try to find her and bring her home. I found her, but it wasn't easy bringing her home. She was alive, but she was crazy. Worms were in her head, and I had a problem getting her to go in one direction. She wanted to go in circles." Finally, Marler coaxed the animal home where the family treated the wound with coal oil to kill the worms, then they bandaged the cow's head. After that, she "got better, but she was always a little crazy."

Lynn Bennett, who worked in Camp Polk's publicity department in 1945, recalled enjoying the daily commute to her job. "All we had to do was catch a Camp Polk bus at the crossroad in Simpson, ride 23 miles, be dropped off at our workplace, and then be picked back up at closing time to be returned home." Passengers were usually in high spirits, she remembered. "Most mornings and afternoons we would sing, always patriotic or religious songs."

For others, however, gasoline rationing crimped their travel considerably. Felix Weeks of Rosepine told the *Beauregard Daily News* in 1990 that individuals could buy only three gallons a week, unless they earned extra rationing coupons by car pooling. In the same article, Johnny B. Hall, also

Gas Grows Scarce

America's love affair with the automobile was already in full bloom before the first bombs fell in World War II. The war, however, severely dampened the romance by causing significant curtailment of automobile use all across the country. According to Kathleen Smith, history professor at Louisiana's Northwestern State University, industry produced no new cars for civilian use after February 1942, leaving drivers no choice but to maintain their old cars. A slogan at one used-car dealership summed up the prevailing view. "Your car is a weapon of war. It is your duty to keep it constantly in shape and serve your country's wartime transportation system."

The lack of new cars was only one limitation to transportation. Because Japan had conquered the Far East nations that produced rubber, this material was no longer available for export to the United States. As a result, new tires were nearly impossible to find. Smith commented that "Tires for automobiles had to be retreaded again and again until they were unsafe." Scrap drives collected millions of old tires to salvage rubber for war materials. The federal government also mandated a speed limit of 35 miles per hour to conserve tires and gasoline. Fuel shortages appeared as early as 1942, and by January 1943 the government prohibited pleasure drives. Most Americans also participated in strict gasoline rationing. The government issued windshield stickers with letters designating a vehicle's status.

- A Vehicles non-essential to the war effort
- B Vehicles for commuters who didn't drive on the job
- C Vehicles for sales and delivery people who used them for work
- E Emergency vehicles, such as ambulances
- T Delivery trucks for groceries or other supplies
- X Vehicles for members of Congress, who were exempt from rationing

According to Smith, this system predictably "brought wide criticism and griping." She added, "Some things never change."

of Rosepine, said he worked at a Leesville automotive store during the war. Most people could only buy used tires with retreads, while the military and other government personnel were permitted new tires.

Posters encouraging support for the war seemed to be everywhere. They were stuck in store windows and on government building walls. According to professor Kathleen Smith, they were part of an "advanced propaganda machinery and sophisticated media development that really permeated every area of civilian and military life." Americans generally believed this was "a just war and their patriotic enthusiasm to fight was doubly fueled by the propaganda," she explained. There was a "ceaseless bombardment from newspapers and magazines and product advertisements, from war-themed songs, wartime Hollywood movies, special radio programs. All these were geared to help the war effort."

The government printed posters with hundreds of different subjects that encouraged car pooling to conserve gas and other types of conservation,

volunteering for the armed services, increasing war-oriented production, and buying war bonds. One poster displaying a pig pushing a shopping cart read, "This little pig went to market to buy war bonds." Another encouraged workers to "Save 10 percent of your income for war bonds." Still other posters promoting rationing appeared in restaurants requesting diners not to embarrass waiters by asking for extra pats of butter or margarine or refills of coffee. Some posters urged people to grow vegetables in "victory gardens" with phrases such as "Raise and share food."

Posters featured bold colors, conveyed easily understood messages, and often featured the "V for victory" emblem. The graphics, frequently drawn by well-known artists such as Norman Rockwell, tended, as Smith explained, to be "striking images of handsome men and very beautiful women…really idealized and almost like Greek gods.…The posters showed women at work and servicemen in battle. They often showed very menacing caricatures of Hitler, Hirohito, and Mussolini [the leaders of Germany, Japan, and Italy, respectively]."

Posters also cautioned against discussing troop movements with such slogans as "Don't Tell Secrets" and "The Enemy is Listening." Smith noted that to reinforce the danger, some posters depicted the fearful image of "a dead soldier lying on a beach or in a bombed-out shelter."

T.L. "Sonny" Berry remembered that discussions about troop movements were so secretive at Camp Polk that no ceremonies were held to honor soldiers leaving for combat. As a boy of eight or nine, he spent Sunday afternoons watching films in the local theater. Suddenly, "the movie would go off and they would turn on the lights. Some guy would come in and tell all members of certain units to report to their headquarters." This was often the only indication that particular troops were about to go overseas, he said.

Imminent threats close to home occasionally captured everyone's attention. Residents recalled hearing their parents discuss blackouts in Galveston, Texas, where German submarines lurked offshore. Others remembered families planning escapes into the woods if the Germans or Japanese

Four Freedoms Worth the Fight

Franklin D. Roosevelt spoke of "four freedoms" during World War II to explain the need for Americans to join the effort and to set goals for the postwar world. Popular illustrator Norman Rockwell depicted these ideals in four paintings, which the government reproduced on thousands of posters and distributed across the nation. When people recall morale-boosting efforts from the era, they often mention the Rockwell paintings.

Freedom of Speech shows a tall man, looking somewhat like a young Abraham Lincoln, speaking to fellow citizens as everyone listens respectfully.

Freedom from Want pictures a large family, from grandparents to grandchildren, joyfully gathered for a feast. Norman Rockwell joked that the roasted turkey in the scene was the only model he ever ate.

Freedom of Worship represents different races and cultures united in prayer.

Freedom from Fear depicts two adoring parents tucking their children into bed for the night.

invaded. Many remarked on a common resolve. As professor Smith noted, "The war years and post-war period now provoke a powerful nostalgia for most Americans who remember it as a time when their country was filled with a fighting spirit of togetherness and a forward looking hope for a better future.…There was this feeling of patriotism and pride."

In central Louisiana and throughout the nation, war bond rallies and dances were immensely popular as tens of thousands of citizens turned out to buy bonds sold by the federal government to finance the war. Local residents, to boost sales, sometimes dressed in Minutemen uniforms to resemble the Revolutionary War soldier printed on the bonds. Children participated by raiding their piggy banks to buy 10- and 25-cent stamps to paste in bond booklets. A filled booklet earned the child a U.S. savings bond, awarded by a teacher or principal.

Celebrities boosted bond sales by traveling around the country making public appearances and participating in radio broadcasts. In one notable, sixteen-hour program, Kate Smith, renowned for singing Irving Berlin's *God Bless America*, inspired listeners to buy $40 million in bonds.

According to historian Smith, "By 1945, eighty-five million people, more than half the population of the United States, held war bonds….Some people

This parade in 1942 celebrated Leesville's incorporation from a village to a city. Louisiana Governor Sam Houston Jones and Colonel Otto Wagner, Camp Polk Commander, sat in the reviewing stand.

Film actress Joan Blondell, who lived in Leesville before she became a movie star, greets Sergeant John Keglon of the military police motorcycle squad at Camp Polk in 1942.

never cashed in their bonds, viewing the money they gave as a personal sacrifice for defense purposes."

Across the nation, some twelve million people volunteered for civilian defense duties, serving as auxiliary fire and police officers, air-raid wardens, and monitors in bomb squads. Air-raid drills were held in Leesville and in towns across the country to help everyone prepare for an attack. "Civil Defense Corps air-raid wardens, wearing their metal hats and arm bands, patrolled the darkened streets, making sure lights were out and blackout curtains were drawn in every house," Smith said.

Nothing was wasted. Women carefully strained cooking grease and fat into cans to be used over and over again, then finally taken to the butcher shop or other "official fat collecting stations," where they received credit to buy rationed food. Industry converted the used kitchen fats into glycerine to manufacture military explosives.

Grocery shoppers had to plan their purchases carefully according to what their government ration books allowed them to buy. The books held perforated stamps organized into categories for rationed commodities, such as meat, coffee, sugar, butter, tea, and milk. National magazines printed articles explaining why rationing was essential, Smith said. An article, for example, in the July 1942 issue of *The Ladies Home Journal* stated, "Sugar cane is needed to make molasses. Molasses is needed to make industrial alcohol, which is used to

make explosives. Explosives are needed to sink the Axis [Germany, Italy, and Japan]. So by depriving yourself of that extra spoon of sugar in your coffee in the morning, you are helping to sink the Axis."

New shoes were rare. Consumers instead would have their old shoes repaired. Ladies' stockings were also scarce since the government rationed nylon. Women donated damaged nylon and silk stockings, dropping them in collection barrels, to be reprocessed into parachutes, tow ropes, and other items needed by the military. Seams in stockings were fashionable, so some women created an illusion by drawing fake seams with eyebrow pencils on the back of their bare legs. Others choose to wear cotton socks or slacks instead.

Communities frequently held scrap drives, collecting cans, foil, old tires, and other materials that could be converted into war products. "Car fenders, metal bars, old pipes, and oil barrels" were all saved, melted, and transformed into "planes, ships, guns, and tanks," Smith said. Children donated their metal toys and helped collect newspapers and magazines for wartime conversions. Some children even paraded through the streets with banners promoting recycling. A spirit of self-sacrifice pervaded almost all aspects of American life.

At Camp Polk, the pace quickened as troops prepared for war. Through much of 1941 and the first half of 1942, the 3rd Armored Division drilled intensely. Troops spent long hours on firing ranges, shooting, examining targets, then firing again to improve their aim. Tanks and artillery crews blasted away on Camp Polk's remote areas, the shock waves from their weapons reverberating for miles. Repeatedly, they practiced loading, sighting a target, then firing. Instructors emphasized repetition and discipline to build rapid response. The goal was for the men to become so proficient they could hit targets in the midst of great danger, with only seconds to act and under any circumstance.

A tank crew might practice shooting alone or in coordination with other tank crews. Officers emphasized that paying attention to what was happening all around them and cooperating with each other were crucial to survival. Besides operating the tanks, crews had to learn how to maintain them when miles away from the nearest mechanics. Officers also reminded troops to camouflage themselves and their weapons whenever possible. Being shielded from prying eyes in the air or on land could mean the difference between life or death.

Everyone practiced speeding from one location to another then, without pause, rushing into battle. To avoid slowing momentum, tank crews and truck drivers practiced rapid refueling, halting only briefly. Officers learned to maintain order, even when tanks and trucks were dispersed over many miles. Troops often maintained radio silence, which would be essential in real battle where secrecy, stealth, and surprise are crucial.

Reconnaissance units were deployed far ahead of the main forces to practice maneuvering near enemy positions without being detected. By observing opposing divisions, they learned to extract vital information regarding troop movement and size.

Officers at Camp Polk spent hours in classrooms as well, studying German and Japanese battle tactics. They discussed leadership issues, such as when to delegate authority or seize initiative. All the while, they were evaluating one another, gauging whom they could trust when lives were at stake.

The tanks, armored cars, artillery, and troops operated in every kind of weather. Soldiers established camps while battling fierce winds and learned to scrounge for wood and build fires, even when everything was wet. When Camp Polk staged reviews, more than 15,000 soldiers might parade during driving rainstorms.

Through it all, the 3rd Armored Division learned to function cohesively. Over and over again, officers repeated to soldiers the importance of pride in themselves, their units, and their division.

By the time the 3rd Armored Division left Louisiana in July 1942, soon to join in the retaking of Normandy, the 7th Armored Division had already moved into Camp Polk. The 11th Armored Division arrived soon after. In subsequent months, the 8th and 9th Armored Divisions, the 95th Infantry Division, and the 11th Airborne Division all called Camp Polk home. Every division participated in rigorous training, coalescing into powerful fighting forces. Not a moment of training was wasted, considering the awful tests ahead.

10. Troops Tested in a Famous Battle

Army units once based at Camp Polk fought in some of the most difficult and well-known battles of World War II. Many of these units displayed the pinnacle in skill, sacrifice, and devotion at one of the lowest ebbs for American troops, the Battle of the Bulge. The engagement derived its name when the German Army launched a surprise attack, creating a swelling bulge or blister in what had been the relatively straight American military lines near the German border. Some of the bloodiest fighting to occur in western Europe followed, with heavy involvement by the 3rd, 7th, 9th, and 11th Armored Divisions, all of which trained at Camp Polk. While accounts of the events come from several sources, the soldiers' comments herein were collected by Gerald Astor in his 1992 book *A Blood-Dimmed Tide*.

It is well that war is so terrible—lest we should grow too fond of it.

— General Robert E. Lee
Confederate States of America

The Battle of the Bulge began in mid-December 1944 when many Allied strategists and most American troops mistakenly assumed the war was near an end. From their point of view, Germany's power was so diminished that the only option for German soldiers was to remain crouched behind barricades to try to delay their inevitable annihilation. British Field Marshal Bernard Montgomery confidently declared, "The enemy is at present fighting a defensive campaign on all fronts; his situation is such that he cannot stage major offensive operations."

Long months had passed since June 6, 1944, when Allied forces waded through the surf onto Normandy's beaches into heavy German gunfire, then spent weeks painfully edging forward a few yards at a time, suffering heavy casualties. The 3rd Armored Division, the first division based at Camp Polk, participated in fierce battles near the French town of St. Lo as the Americans finally punched through the German defensive perimeter.

As Arnold Albero with the 3rd Armored Division recalled, "St. Lo was my introduction to enemy artillery fire. The intensity of those barrages, the shells screaming through the air, the piercing sound when one came in close, I cannot forget. I was stunned by the ferocity of it all.…"

The Germans had launched a furious counterattack to staunch the rupture of their defensive perimeter as the Americans broke out of Normandy. The 3rd Armored Division met the German counterattack near the French town of Avranches, winning the battle and helping secure the advance. According to historian Max Hastings, by the time the Allies finally conquered Normandy, almost thirty-seven thousand American and other Allied soldiers had been killed.

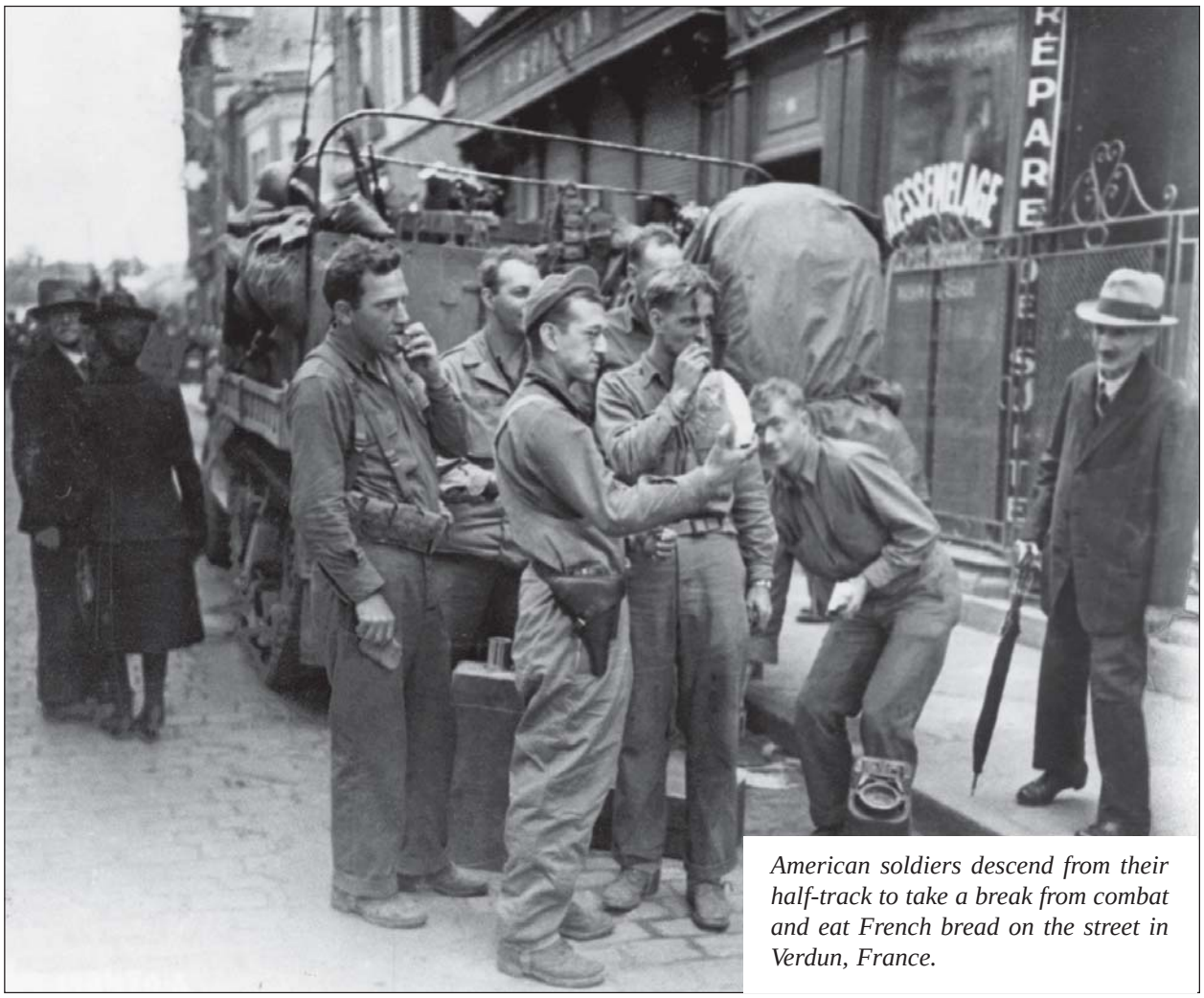
Allied forces then swept across France, chasing the Germans into disorganized retreat. General George S. Patton's tanks raced ahead of other Allied forces, with Army Air Corps fighter bombers helping to clear their way. By the last week in August 1944, the Allies paraded triumphantly under Paris's *Arc de Triomphe* to the cheers of the grateful French.

By mid-September 1944, however, the euphoria evaporated as the seemingly unstoppable advance of the Allies ground to a halt at the German border. Already slowed by inadequate fuel and supplies, the Allies confronted the formidable German fortifications known as the West Wall or Siegfried Line. This series of concrete pillboxes and other gun emplacements crisscrossed the countryside, allowing German soldiers to pin down in withering crossfire anyone who approached. The Germans also strung miles of barbed wire, erected hundreds of concrete tank barriers, dug deep ditches, and buried thousands of land mines, placing these defenses near rivers. For three months, Allied troops bat-

Right: On February 25, 1944, before the Normandy invasion, Generals Dwight D. Eisenhower and Bernard Montgomery, commander of British forces, visit 3rd Armored Division troops in England.

Above: In September 1944, the 23rd Engineer Battalion prepared to blow up "dragon's teeth" tank obstacles along the Siegfried Line.

Right: Gathered beneath a World War I memorial near Verdun, France, where heavy fighting occurred during both world wars, soldiers with the 7th Armored Division cook a meal on an apparatus called a GI stove.



American soldiers descend from their half-track to take a break from combat and eat French bread on the street in Verdun, France.

Half-track vehicles, with rear wheels resembling a tank's, were widely used during both the 1941 Louisiana Maneuvers and World War II.

tered the West Wall, making little progress and suffering many casualties.

Finally, the Allies penetrated the fortifications and forged short distances into Germany, lifting hopes that the stalemate would soon end. Along Germany's outskirts, Allied forces were extended some five hundred miles from far north in the Netherlands, south through Belgium and Luxembourg, and into France, abutting Switzerland's soaring Alps.

Toward the center of this long line, along Germany's borders with Belgium and Luxembourg, was the Ardennes Forest. American strategists assumed that if Germany somehow managed to mount an offense, it would not be there. The scene of major World War I combat, the region was sparsely populated with small villages wrapped in dense forests on undulating terrain with few good roads. Steep gorges and roaring streams bisected the rolling, wooded landscape, making the place seem untenable for German-style tank warfare, especially in the dead of winter. Allied strategists had siphoned away forces from the area for assaults planned elsewhere along the West Wall. Thus, a comparatively small number of American troops were gathered there, according to historian Donald Goldstein. Many of them, fresh reserves brought in to replenish the diminished ranks, had never experienced

combat. The hardened veterans among them were survivors from outfits hard hit by losses who had been sent to this ostensibly quiet region for a well-earned rest.

The Germans, however, used the weather to their advantage. The low clouds and brutal cold helped them conceal their assault preparations, while forcing the Americans and British to curtail their surveillance flights. The German high command ordered the army to camouflage thousands of tanks and trucks in the forests. As they moved a massive array of soldiers and armored vehicles into place, the sounds were muffled by dumping hay on the roads. The Germans were also broadcasting misleading messages about their intentions, should the Allies be listening. In fact, some Allied intelligence officers did detect signs of impending enemy action, but their findings were mostly ignored due to overconfidence among the Allies and erroneous assumptions.

Then, with blistering efficiency, Germany attacked along a seventy-mile front early Saturday morning on December 16, 1944. Approximately one hundred thousand German troops took part in the attack at the outset; the number eventually grew to nearly one-half million. The Americans, caught off guard, were vastly outnumbered. The Germans held a six-to-one advantage in troops and a two-to-one advantage in tanks, according to the West Point History Department. Some seventeen German divisions swarmed an area occupied by only five American divisions.

During the final stages of World War II, the weather in Europe turned brutally cold.

Left: With so much snow on the ground during the Battle of the Bulge and the early assault on Germany, some U.S. soldiers donned skis to get around.

Below: The 40th Tank Battalion of the 7th Armored Division, formerly based at Camp Polk, fired on enemy positions with Sherman tanks near the vital crossroads town of St. Vith, Belgium, during the Battle of the Bulge.

Germany's powerful thrust was fortified by three armored divisions equipped with high-powered tanks. The Americans at first fought back with only one comparable outfit, the inexperienced 9th Armored Division, which, until then, had not participated in any major combat, only random patrols and some small engagements along the West Wall. In the face of a fearsome onslaught, the novices depended on their training at Camp Polk to fend off the enemy.

At the time, the 9th Armored Division, with more than ten thousand soldiers, was divided into three sections dispersed throughout the Ardennes Forest. Combat Command A camped in the south along the Luxembourg-Germany border. Combat Command R occupied the middle of the region near the Belgian town of Bastogne. Combat Command B patrolled further north in Belgium close to the village of St. Vith. Both Bastogne and St. Vith were vital because the few good roads in the area intersected in these communities. To make significant gains, the German Army would have to pass through these two villages.

Foul weather socked in the entire region on December 16, 1944. The poor visibility, created by a combination of fog, low clouds, rain, and snow, kept the Allied bombers and fighter planes on the ground. In some areas, snow had piled up hip deep in what local residents described as the worst winter in almost forty years. American soldiers tried to keep warm by wrapping themselves in blankets as they slept in their tanks or huddled together in the foxholes they had dug in the frozen earth. Soldiers patrolling the area radioed to headquarters that they had sighted hundreds of lights flickering in the dark on the German side. The officers, however, did not seem to be overly alarmed by the news.

Training in all types of weather at Camp Polk helped prepare soldiers of the 3rd Armored Division for the harsh conditions they faced in Belgium.

Then an artillery barrage abruptly shattered the predawn quiet. Hundreds of German cannons began to boom in rapid succession at about 4 a.m. Bright flashes lit up the forest as a blizzard of shells showered the Americans. Trees burst into flames and were transformed into giant torches, while fiery branches broke off and crashed to the earth. Armor-penetrating shells smashed into the trunks of other trees, shearing them in half and sending towering giants thudding to the ground. Explosions erupted in rapid succession, sending flames and hot metal shards knifing through the air. The jolted American troops tried to shield themselves as best they could.

The Germans did not launch the bombardment throughout all of the Ardennes Forest simultaneously. Far to the south along the Luxembourg-

A U.S. soldier examines what remains of St. Vith, Belgium, after the Battle of the Bulge. Units trained at Camp Polk were involved in defending, then retaking the town.

German border, they waited until about 6:15 a.m to start sending artillery blasts. Lieutenant Colonel George Ruhlen of the 9th Armored Division recalled shells of 105, 150, and 170 millimeters "whistling into Haller," a small town. He said an estimated eight hundred to nine hundred rounds fell within a single hour, with shrieking *Nebelwerfer* rockets, which the American troops called "screaming meemies," landing near American gun positions.

Someone, Ruhlen remembered, saw about sixty Germans crossing the river on a small pontoon bridge and assumed they were surrendering because, in the heavy fog, he saw no weapons visible in their hands. But the Germans were not surrendering, and their number swelled into hordes who soon were flinging grenades and firing rifles, machine guns, and mortars.

Similar advances occurred all along the seventy-mile front. The Germans sometimes used searchlights to pinpoint their American targets. Simultaneously, German soldiers illuminated their foes by switching on the powerful lights that had been mounted onto their tanks, trucks, and other vehicles. German troops then rushed forward, many wearing white camouflage to blend in with the snow. Hundreds of German tanks advanced at the same time. American troops often heard the clanking machinery well before they could see the tanks, which

The 9th Armored Division Saves the Bridge

After the Battle of the Bulge, the Allies clawed their way through Germany's formidable West Wall defenses, but a major obstacle remained—the Rhine River. Stitched into German consciousness as a historical barrier, strategists feared that the fabled river would not be easy to conquer and the effort would cost many lives. An undeclared competition broke out among Allied commanders to be the first to cross the river. The 9th Armored Division, once based at Camp Polk, earned the distinction through sheer luck and grit, according to historian Merle Miller.

On March 7, 1945, soldiers from the 9th Armored Division arrived at the Rhine at about one o'clock in the afternoon. Stretched out before them, at a place called Remagen, stood the Ludendorff Bridge. This massive structure measured one thousand feet long and supported two railroad tracks, as well as footpaths. The German soldiers had destroyed every other structure spanning the river. Having already attached explosives to the support pillars, they were hastily retreating across the bridge before demolishing it as well. Despite the imminent danger, the 9th Armored Division infantry charged across the Ludendorff Bridge after the Germans. The enemy's artillery zeroed in on them, with near misses shooting geysers of water high above the river. Meanwhile, German war planes dove at them, dropping bombs and spraying bullets. German frogmen eventually managed to ignite the explosives, causing the structure to tremble. The blasts seriously weakened the framework, but the bridge held. Although American tanks could not safely cross until engineers completed repairs, the 9th's infantry continued to surge to the other side. Soon other divisions followed. A sign rigged at the foot of the bridge reminded them who had won the race. It read, "Cross the Rhine with dry feet, courtesy of the 9th Armored Division."

The Germans continued to bomb and shell the bridge, which held for ten crucial days. Finally, on March 17, a main section collapsed, tumbling into the river and killing several American engineers attempting to reinforce the structure. By then, the Army had built other bridges nearby. American soldiers were moving deep into Germany, eight miles beyond the Rhine, and fanning out in an arc some twenty miles wide. The surging tide of Allied troops could no longer be stopped. Unable to face defeat, German leader Adolph Hitler and his bride Eva Braun killed themselves in Berlin on April 30, 1945. A week later, on May 7, German officials formally surrendered.

had been painted white. Some American troops threw down their guns and surrendered, others tried to escape. Many more fought back, despite the overwhelming odds against them.

The Germans could afford few delays if they were to reach Brussels and Antwerp, one hundred miles away, and succeed in their goal of opening a wide corridor through the Allied lines. Combat Command B of the 9th Armored Division was positioned about a dozen miles back, on the northern end of the advance. A handful of division soldiers gathered in the small village of Ligneuville, Belgium, and pointed their few tanks and antitank guns in the direction of the approaching Germans. Soon

Antitank units first came to prominence during the Louisiana Maneuvers. Here a tank-destroyer crew searches for German tanks in Belgium during World War II.

enough, the Germans barreled down on Ligneuville in a fifteen-mile-long caravan of tanks and armored vehicles that formed the spearhead of a lethal offensive.

German Lieutenant Colonel Jochen Peiper, age 29, commanded the force of some four thousand soldiers. Peiper, who rode just behind the lead tank, was one of Germany's preeminent battlefield commanders, an SS officer whose troops had garnered a reputation for their viciousness. As Peiper's tank rounded a bend in Ligneuville, he spotted his lead tank already in flames. An American antitank weapon, a 76-millimeter gun operated by 9th Armored Division soldiers, had unloaded into the German tank at almost point-blank range. On seeing the American cannon swing his way, Peiper commanded his tank crew to quickly reverse direction and take cover behind a Belgian house, just as another German vehicle, a half-track, rounded the bend. Before Peiper could warn the driver, the Americans fired, hitting the German vehicle, which exploded.

More German tanks arrived and began shooting at the 9th Armored Division soldiers. Thick clouds of smoke wafted through the quaint village, now shattered by close-quarter fighting. The German numerical superiority soon took its toll, eliminating much of the American firepower, blowing apart two Sherman tanks, the 76-millimeter cannon, and another assault weapon. German infantry then rushed forward, firing rifles at the Americans who continued to resist. Without more powerful weapons, however, the Americans eventually had to flee. A lone soldier, Sergeant Lincoln Abraham, covered their retreat. Abraham, a cook and one of the 9th Armored Division's mess sergeants, swung his machine gun to and fro, spraying bullets to keep the Germans at bay as his fellow soldiers retreated.

Later, American soldiers returned to the scene and found Abraham's body. Belgian civilians said SS troops had lined up Abraham and seven other prisoners and shot them.

In stalling the Germans, the 9th Armored Division posed the first of many delays for Peiper. His confident prediction that he would reach the Meuse River, about fifty miles away, in just two days now seemed unlikely. American forces, however, despite brave stands at Ligneuville and elsewhere, were in disarray. Much of the 106th Infantry Division, with no combat experience, was forced to make a stand on a high ridge called Schnee Eifel, about six miles from St. Vith. The soldiers fought off repeated German assaults, but soon were surrounded. Running short of food and ammunition, some seven thousand men surrendered.

By nightfall on the first day of the offensive, Combat Command B of the 9th Armored Division, led by Brigadier General William Hoge, tried to mount another defense against the flood of German soldiers. Captain Glen L. Strange, a division infantryman, recalled that the Germans used buzz bombs and that both sides fired many artillery shells. Lieutenant Demetrius Paris, who commanded a platoon of fifteen light tanks with the 9th Armored Division, said, "When we moved to the St. Vith area, we didn't know what was happening. We were confused. We'd be sent one place to defend a road junction, then later to another place to clear a town."

The confusion caused by the German attack spread to the highest ranks. Officers, also taken by surprise, found themselves far from the action. General Dwight D. Eisenhower, Allied Supreme Commander, was attending a staff member's wedding in the opulent mirrored hall at the Versailles Palace on the outskirts of Paris. General Omar Bradley,

As U.S. soldiers trudge through the snow near St. Vith, Belgium, some stop to examine a destroyed German tank.

General George S. Patton addressing soldiers of the 5th Infantry Division in Ireland during World War II.

Eisenhower's most trusted subordinate, was escorting film actress Marlene Dietrich as she sang for the troops. General Courtney Hodges, commander of the 1st Army (which included many soldiers who had trained at Camp Polk), spent the previous day shaking hands with professional baseball players visiting from the United States to cheer on the armed forces. While the German attack unfolded, British Field Marshal Montgomery played golf. Far to the south in France, General George S. Patton prepared his soldiers to charge the West Wall.

All the generals, except Montgomery, had participated in some way in the Louisiana Maneuvers in the early days of Camp Polk and had used those experiences to mold an efficient military machine, which now faced an unprecedented challenge. Allied communications were so poor that commanders failed at first to comprehend the full extent of the German offensive. Within twenty-four hours, however, by December 17, 1944, the generals understood the dire situation thousands of Allied troops faced. According to historian Merle Miller, Eisenhower and Bradley, who were among the first to perceive the scope of the peril, ordered the 7th Armored Division into the Bulge.

The 7th Armored Division, just prior to this time under Patton's command and now led by Brigadier General Robert Hasbrouck, had months earlier fought intense battles around the French town of Metz near the German border. Afterwards, the division, which had at one time been based at Camp Polk, headed north into the Netherlands. By December 1944, the division served as a reserve unit behind the front lines. Many of the soldiers were on leave when officers began summoning them to prepare for battle.

On December 17, 1944, the day following the initial German attack, the 7th Armored Division

began a remarkable drive through war-torn territory over unfamiliar roads toward St. Vith, Belgium, some sixty miles away. As Captain Jerry Nelson, a Sherman tank gunner, recalled, "We started out in the afternoon and drove till dark, slept in a column on the side of the road. In the morning it was rainy and dark. I remember this clearly because every so often I had to flip down my periscope to the position where a rubber blade would wipe off the raindrops."

Nelson rode in the lead vehicle of a company of fifteen tanks. In mid-afternoon on December 18, 1944, just as Nelson's tank jutted into a clearing, an artillery shell exploded nearby. Nelson's tank sped across the clearing and darted into the next patch of forest. As a second American tank followed Nelson's, more German cannon fire erupted, but all the 7th Armored Division tanks managed to cross the clearing safely. They were now in the area called the Bulge.

After conferring, the American officers ordered three tanks to scout ahead. Nelson's tank led the way as the small convoy moved forward on a narrow Belgian road. Nelson's tank halted about a mile up the road near an intersection where a few buildings stood. The tank commander, Sergeant Truman Van Tine, ordered Nelson to swing the turret and its long 75-millimeter gun so that the weapon pointed away from the tank's right side. A deafening explosion suddenly rocked the tank as an en-

Pvt. Paul Tomlinson from Nelsonville, Ohio, and Pfc. S.J. Buona from Ganfield, New Jersey

Soldiers from the 7th Armored Division opening their rations and trying to warm up after standing guard at an outpost in the woods near St. Roche during the struggle to gain control of Belgium.

American soldiers patrol warily through the charred ruins of a European town during World War II.

emy artillery shell hit. The gun spun from the impact, Nelson recalled. He heard his commander order him to fire. But at what? He saw no target. Van Tine, who had climbed up on the turret, was shooting the .50-caliber machine gun. Meanwhile, Nelson trained the tank's big gun on a nearby structure and fired where he suspected German infantry might be hiding.

Nelson stood and peered outside, trying to get a better look. Bullets pinged off the tank and the ammunition storage box next to his head. He ducked inside, but, concerned about his commander, within seconds he lifted back up to take another look. Van Tine lay sprawled on the side of the tank, close to the edge. Fearing the wounded sergeant might fall off, Nelson took charge. He shouted to the tank driver to count to six, then get the tank moving in retreat. Nelson scrambled outside to rescue Van Tine, but he was dead.

That night, Nelson's vehicle and fourteen other American tanks clustered in the forest surrounded by the Germany Army. Sounds of battle rumbled throughout the night. Bright lights flashed, then vanished. The Americans took turns standing two-hour guard duty until daybreak. Finally, a gray dawn spread across the horizon and the tank crews were suddenly alert. Three ominous shapes appeared atop a knoll. They were tanks, Nelson realized, with soldiers walking beside them. "On an overcast day and in a wooded area, it can take awhile to identify vehicles," he explained. "We didn't have time to decide what kind of tanks these

were, but in a war the decision to shoot comes from the direction people are going. There were not supposed to be any friendly forces in front of us. So when people and machines started coming at us, they had to be the other guys. Uniforms and helmets don't always count. Uniforms get dirty and we were too far away to make out the shape of a helmet, at least a half a mile or so."

Nelson fired, his tank recoiling from the force. He shifted the big gun, targeted a second tank, and fired again. In rapid succession, the two distant tanks exploded, while a third raced to get away. Nelson fired again. The distant vehicle lifted off the ground, as if picked up by an unseen hand, then crumpled in a heap. The rest of the German force scattered.

Nelson and others from the 7th Armored Division moved on to St. Vith. Most of the soldiers arrived within about twelve hours. Their journey to the town was exceedingly difficult. Frantic Belgian refugees clogged the roads, trying to outrun the German juggernaut, while American military vehicles raced in different directions, creating snarled traffic jams. German artillery plastered St. Vith and the surrounding territory with huge guns, some mounted on railroad cars miles away. They lobbed shell after shell into the town. Many buildings caught on fire. As the 7th Armored Division fought its way into St. Vith, it simultaneously began deploying a wide, horseshoe-shaped defensive perimeter around the town.

Brigadier General Bruce Clark, leading the 7th Armored Division's Combat Command B, took charge in the midst of chaos, somehow organizing coherent defenses. By December 20, 1944, Clark had positioned two hundred tanks and approximately twelve thousand men around the town of St. Vith. Most of the troops came from the 7th Ar-

Troops with the 5th Infantry Division edge around a hill in Luxembourg. During the winter of 1944–1945, American soldiers had to battle both a resourceful enemy and the elements.

GIs recuperate at Vise Island, Belgium, during World War II.

mored Division, but the 9th Armored Division and other units also participated. Although the exact number of German soldiers that attacked St. Vith is difficult to document and thus uncertain, the Americans were unquestionably vastly outnumbered. Hour after hour, they fought off the German assaults. Heavy armor from both sides pumped out shells, enveloping the area in a thunderous tumult.

The gunfire continued after sunset. Staff Sergeant John Collins was attached to an engineering unit that was fighting beside the 7th Armored Division. He remembered lying awake and shivering throughout the cold night along with other troops who had no blankets. All were unnerved by the constant shelling.

By December 21, 1944, the shortest day of the year, the Americans had no choice but to pull back, reluctantly surrendering St. Vith to the Germans just after midnight. The troops immediately established new defensive positions just west of the village and kept fighting. Finally, on December 23, 1944, after holding off the Germans for six days, American commanders ceased resistance. The 7th Armored Division and its supporting units began retreating west.

What looked like a defeat at the time, however, proved to be a stunning turning point. By holding out so long, the Americans kept some two hundred thousand German troops bottled up and unable to enter the Bulge. The Americans at St. Vith pro-

vided reinforcements with more time to advance on the other important Belgian town, Bastogne.

Germany's plans to conquer St. Vith within forty-eight hours were now in tatters. American units, many trained at Camp Polk, accomplished one of the most spectacular defensive stands in United States military history. The soldiers' skill, courage, and sacrifice provided Eisenhower time to move more fresh troops into the Bulge, a tactic that would eventually stem the German tide.

II. A Bleak Christmas Befalls Soldiers

As the 7th Armored Division and other units staged a fighting retreat from St. Vith, Belgium, on December 23, 1944, masses of German troops surged east, deeper into the area called the Bulge. The 7th Armored Division soldiers, calling on their training at Camp Polk, summoned what remained of their flagging energy as they fell back. Some of the retreating men were overwhelmed by the sheer number of the enemy and had to separate from one another to survive.

Author Gerald Astor compiled many recollections of soldiers who had fought in the Battle of the Bulge. Sergeant Glenn Fackler, a machine gunner with the 7th Division's 38th Armored Infantry Battalion, was fighting north of St. Vith when his unit split apart. Accompanied by only one other soldier, Milton Baxter, the two trudged cross-country through the snow-blanketed forests. As Fackler told Astor, "We held hands to keep together.…It was so black you literally could not see a hand in front of your face.…We groped through the woods all night. We bumped into a sergeant just beyond St. Vith.…I argued with the sergeant we should head to the right, while he wanted to move left. I was sure the Germans were there. We split up and as far as I can figure, he was captured." Some time later, Fackler successfully skirted the enemy and found others from his unit who had also escaped. "Where is everybody?" he asked. "You're it," he was told. The loss of troops was devastating, he said. "It would take a lot of replacements to rebuild our unit."

> *In every battle, there comes a time when both generals think themselves licked. Then he who is fool enough to keep on fighting wins.*
>
> *— General Ulysses S. Grant*

Orders went out to other 7th Division units to dig in and make another stand. Edgar Kreft, an ammunition holder, was with an antitank platoon of about forty soldiers who halted their retreat from St. Vith and prepared to face the onrushing Germans. Kreft remembered watching other Americans streaming by them. One soldier in a Sherman tank yelled a warning that no one remained between them and the Germans. Soon, German troops emerged in overwhelming numbers. Kreft's platoon fired four, three-inch guns, eliciting a swift and withering response from the enemy. A barrage of artillery and mortar shells rained down on the Americans. Almost half the platoon was killed, wounded, missing, or taken prisoner. Kreft was captured as the Germans swarmed the American position.

At about the same time, the veteran 82nd Airborne Division entered the fray. Led by acting commander Brigadier General James Gavin, they tried to hold open a narrow corridor of escape for troops retreating from St. Vith. Advancing beside the 82nd, the 3rd Armored Division, which had fought so fiercely in Normandy, rammed straight into the powerful German *blitzkrieg*.

Having had the distinction of being the first unit out of Camp Polk, the 3rd Division's extensive training in the Louisiana mud helped prepare the men for the terrible conditions in the Bulge. As rifleman Arnold Albero remarked, "I think it must have been the coldest winter in my life. The roads were icy, muddy, the weather foggy in spots and always numbing cold. We lost vehicles that became stuck in the mud and all we could do was just push them to the side.…We picked up stragglers from other outfits, which had been overrun.…When dawn came we were relieved to have daylight, but still confused about where we were and what was happening."

The 3rd Armored Division, organized into semi-independent task forces of about four hundred soldiers each, engaged in fierce firefights while trying to slow German momentum toward Belgium's Meuse River. Task Force Kane, commanded by

Right: Major General Hasbrouck, commander of the 7th Armored Division, confers with his officers in the recently captured town of Westenfeld, Germany.

Below: 7th Armored Division infantry near Eisborn, Germany.

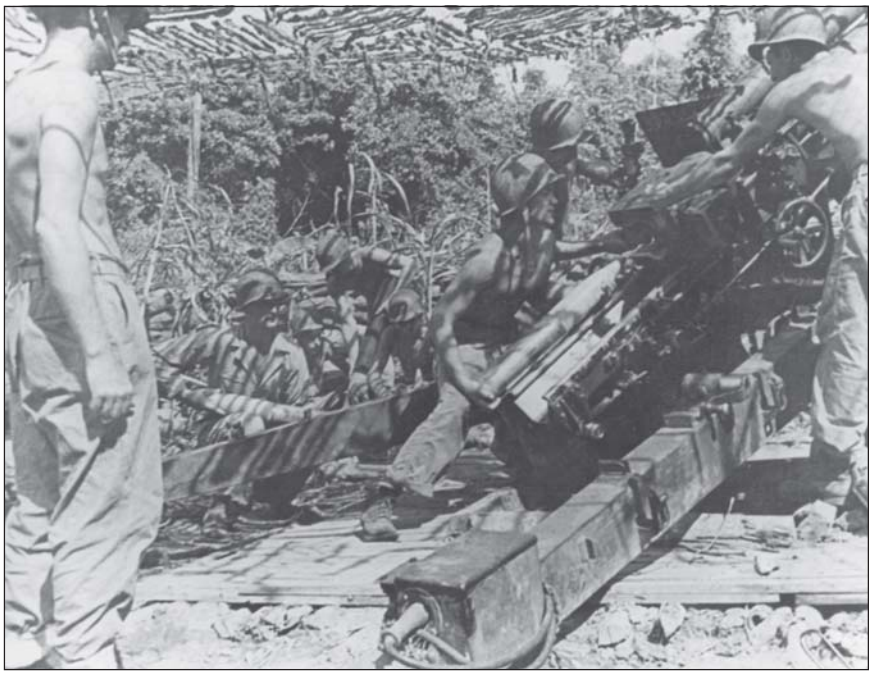
Colonel Matthew Kane, dispatched some troops to link up with paratroopers defending the small village of Lamormenil, north of Bastogne. It was Christmas Eve 1944, and the weather had cleared but remained cold. The Americans, numbering about 150, waited behind defensive positions along the town's perimeter. Paratrooper Captain Charles LaChaussee explained that the Americans first fired their machine guns when the Germans charged. The results were deadly. "We could see Germans drop-

Left: Soldiers with the 3rd Armored Division examine a German Tiger Royal tank just knocked out of action from behind by a tank destroyer gun.

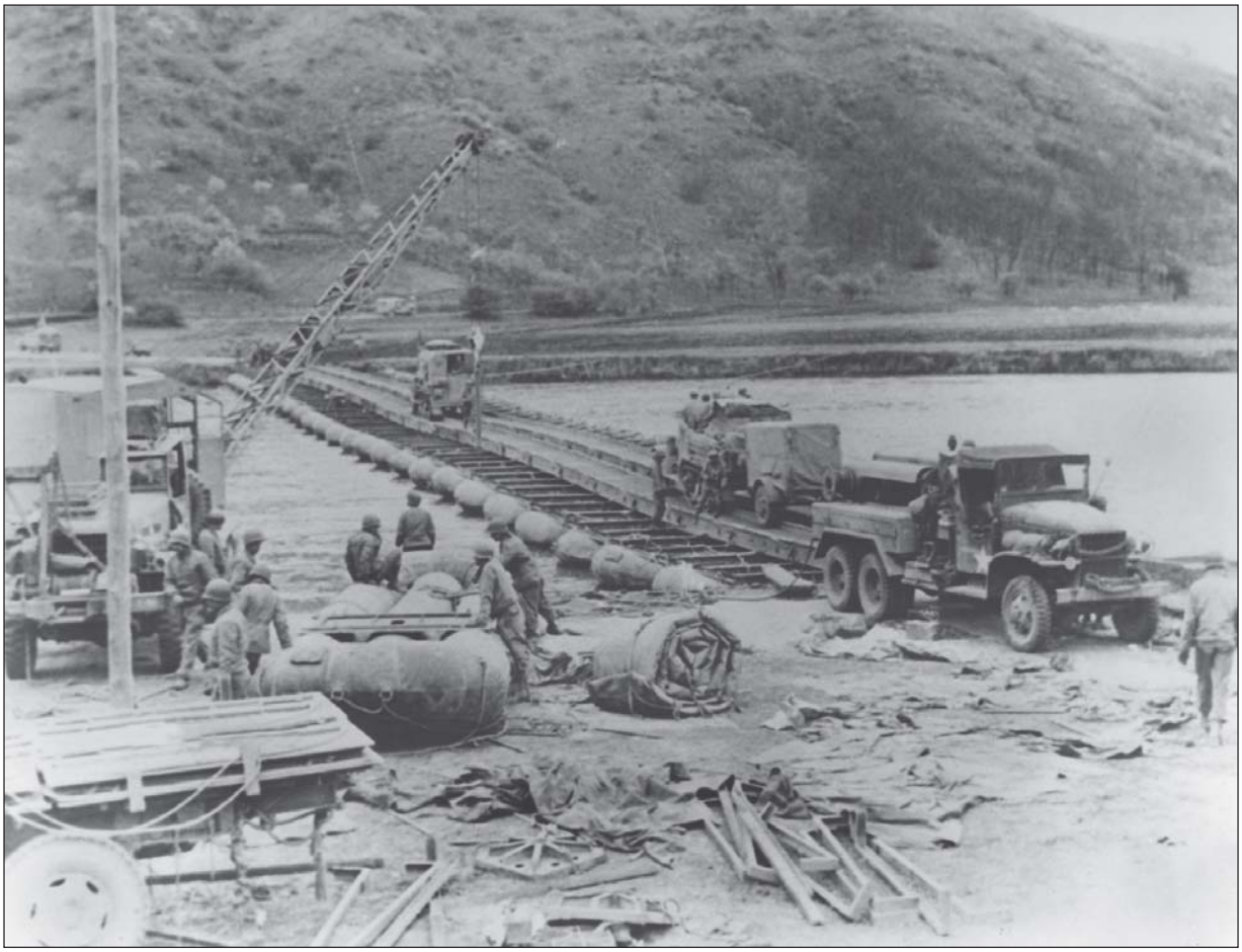
Below: Troops endured frigid conditions in Europe during the brutal winter of 1944–1945.

ping. Eight machine guns, each firing 150 rounds per minute, totals 1,200 bullets arriving within a small area each 60 seconds."

American war planes flew in to help, dropping bombs and shooting at the German forces. Plumes of thick smoke drifted as the bombs exploded. When German war planes arrived to drive away the American fighter bombers, all eyes watched the sky as the aircraft darted at each other. "A truly epic dogfight took place," LaChaussee said. "Ground



Soldiers from the 3rd Armored Division, the first unit to be stationed at Fort Polk, handle heavy artillery beneath camouflage (left) and work on a pontoon bridge in Europe (below).



action came to a halt. German infantry was as engrossed in watching the air battle as we were. Planes from both sides were going down, but the Americans seemed to be getting the better of it." The action quickly ended and the aircraft departed, leaving the ground forces to resume shooting.

As evening shadows lengthened on the snow, the Americans heard the ominous sound of German tanks moving into position. Some tanks edged to within six hundred yards of the village and began firing. The ear-splitting blasts crumpled buildings as if they were a child's toys. The longer-ranged Mark IV tanks far outpowered the handful of tanks the 3rd Armored Division had to defend the town. Because the Mark IV shells traveled faster than the speed of sound, the Americans saw and experienced the destructive impact of the shells before they even heard the German tanks fire.

Just as they had practiced at Camp Polk, the 3rd Armored Division soldiers used cunning and guile to survive the assault. Lieutenant Eldon MacDonald directed tank commanders to remain close to buildings and wood piles and stay out of sight for as long as possible. The American tanks ventured from behind buildings only when the Germans came within range. Then, once they had fired, the American tanks dodged back behind cover. "By dark, the southern part of the town was reduced to burning rubble," LaChaussee recounted. "Power lines had been shredded and hung from the poles

The 3rd Armored Division crosses a pontoon bridge spanning the Weser River at Eiselwerder, Germany. Engineers built the bridge next to an older span that had been bombed.

Left: Third Armored Division troops fire a machine gun atop a tank at snipers hiding next to the Autobahn near Dassau, Germany.

Below: Military authorities question German civilians while 3rd Armored Division troops continue down the road toward more battles.

Above: A 3rd Armored Division tank roars by the burning debris of a bombed factory near Marburg, Germany. Below: American soldiers cross a Baily (portable metal) bridge over the Sauer River, en route from Weilerbach, Luxembourg, to Germany on February 19, 1945. Crossing bridges was always perilous because it left soldiers exposed to enemy fire.

like spaghetti. Each of the remaining buildings had been hit at least once. One tank was damaged beyond repair. Five paratroopers and eight tankers had been wounded." House after house in the town became a battleground. Slowly and methodically, the Germans inched forward, blowing up one building at a time. "They first fired armor-piercing shot to break down the walls, then high-explosive ones to burst within the houses," LaChaussee said. "One by one houses caught fire, became untenable. As each [house] began to crumble, the riflemen [and American tanks] fell back to the next one." The two opposing forces each occupied parts of the town and continued fighting until late in the evening when an uneasy quiet fell.

The Americans, for all practical purposes, were cut off from reinforcements. Some 3rd Armored Division troops strung wires from a tank generator to illuminate the inside of a building designated a command post. A few tired, dirty soldiers huddled inside around a radio, listening to a German station broadcasting Christmas carols. No one spoke as "Stille Nacht" ("Silent Night") played. After a while, the soldiers tuned in to the BBC (British Broadcasting Corporation), where they heard General Eisenhower, their Supreme Commander, deliver a holiday message. Eisenhower seemed overly optimistic to the 3rd Division soldiers trapped in the Belgian village. He professed to be pleased that the Germans had left their West Wall fortifications

The 3rd Armored Division enters the town of Altenkerchen, Germany, along with elements of the 104th Infantry Division during the later stages of World War II.

Members of Task Force Hogan, 3rd Armored Division, finally reach friendly forces after slipping through the German Army lines on Christmas night 1944.

and predicted that the enemy had opened themselves up for destruction. He ended by telling the American troops, "Good luck! Good hunting!"

To the soldiers stranded at Lamormenil, it seemed as if they were the ones being hunted. Nearby, other 3rd Armored Division soldiers were also trapped. Task Force Hogan, consisting of some four hundred troops commanded by Colonel Sam Hogan, had slammed into the German Army on December 20. "The enemy [the 116th Panzers] engaged us with tanks and infantry, supported by artillery and mortars," recalled Arnold Albero. The Americans fell back, then hurriedly threw up defensive barricades on high ground above the Ourthe River in the Belgian village of Marcouray.

Albero spent days and nights in a hole behind a crumbling building, leaving at intervals to help excavate other earthworks to protect artillery pieces and tanks. Digging in the frozen ground was exhausting. "We made deeper and bigger pits," Albero recalled. "My fear occasionally made me nauseous. I drank a lot of water, ate the snow. The thing was, there was no place to run and hide.…We knew that the Germans had sent a surrender ultimatum to Colonel Hogan and he rejected it. We didn't expect to surrender. We'd picked up rumors that the Germans were shooting their prisoners at random.… To me, the most terrifying moment was a [German] attack with armored vehicles that broke through a road block where our tank's gun was

frozen and couldn't shoot. Once they passed beyond that point, they [the Germans] started shooting like crazy while driving through the town. However, one of our other tanks knocked them out, scattering German soldiers all over the place. We captured the ones who weren't wounded.…"

The Germans continued to pound Task Force Hogan with artillery. Explosions shook the ground, day and night. The 3rd Armored Division grimly awaited another German charge, knowing chances of surviving a major assault were slim. Ammunition and gas were dwindling quickly. Twice, the Americans tried to airdrop supplies, but the parachutes drifted instead into eager enemy hands.

Generals Dwight D. Eisenhower and Maurice Rose confer. Rose, who commanded the 3rd Armored Division during the closing days of the war, died from combat wounds in Germany.

The American ground forces then attempted to fight through the German Army to save Task Force Hogan, but failed because the Germans had more soldiers and firepower. American artillery units then tried to shoot shells loaded with supplies over the enemy troops to Task Force Hogan. This attempt failed as well. The situation continued to deteriorate. On Christmas Day, orders finally came through by radio that there would be no more rescue attempts for Task Force Hogan. The soldiers would have to fight their way out on foot.

The troops began demolishing their equipment so it would be of no use to the Germans, something none had ever practiced at Camp Polk. They put dirt in the gas tanks and dismantled and buried the weapons too big to carry.

Shortly after nightfall, December 25, the four hundred American soldiers began slipping away into the dark, with small groups leaving every ten minutes. One by one the soldiers fled in single file across the snow. "We were told that friendly troops were in the north. I looked up into the black, dark sky trying to find the North Star," Albero recalled. "The march through the woods and hills was rough, and I mean rough."

Albero crawled through open fields and waded across icy streams. From time to time, he glanced back to see if the soldier trailing him was still following. Each soldier was supposed to remain about thirty to fifty yards behind the man in front of him, but Albero was relieved that his companion hung closer. If the two lost visual contact, Albero was supposed to drop a cartridge belt or some other article so his partner would find it and be able to follow. Albero had no clear idea where they were headed. He prayed that the man leading them, a lieutenant somewhere far out in front, knew the right direction "because I did not. The success of our infiltration rested on our lead man, whom I did not know."

Albero needed to be constantly vigilant. He walked all night, passing so close to German troops that he heard them talking and singing Christmas carols. Finally, after fourteen hours, he slipped through the German lines and reached friendly troops. Amazingly, all four hundred members of Task Force Hogan, in addition to an American pilot who had crashed while trying to drop them supplies, made it to safety.

The 3rd Armored Division troops who defended Lamormenil also escaped by driving their tanks along an abandoned logging trail that bordered enemy positions.

Troops from the 5th Infantry Division's 10th Infantry Regiment battle German soldiers on a European street during World War II.

To the south, however, at the Belgian town of Bastogne, other American units remained trapped. The Bastogne defenders included elements of the 9th Armored Division, which was stationed at Camp Polk before going overseas. A 9th Armored Division task force was northeast of Bastogne soon after the Germans launched their surprise attack. Major Eugene Watts and the seventy soldiers he commanded attacked and stopped a German convoy, sending the enemy troops fleeing. Other German soldiers, however, circled behind them and directed rockets, artillery, mortars, and tank fire at their positions.

Watts and his troops hunkered down, staying concealed until nightfall when they emerged to sneak by the encircling enemy. After two nights of slow, cautious scrambling, Watts and his troops emerged from the woods and walked into Bastogne, having covered only about four miles. They joined other American soldiers preparing for a final stand in the town where six key roads intersected. The German Army, which had now pushed about thirty miles into the Bulge, could not avoid Bastogne if they wanted to continue their advance.

In addition to commanding the 9th Armored Division, Watts was ordered to take charge of the American soldiers who were streaming into Bastogne from other units devastated by German attacks. Watts's new disparate group was tagged Team SNAFU (situation normal all fouled up). "We collected about 175 [soldiers], including guys from the 106th and 28th Divisions. As more and more

Troops Trained at Fort Polk Help End the War

Without question, divisions trained at Camp Polk were instrumental in winning World War II in Europe. The ***3rd Armored Division***, for example, took part in some of the earliest fighting in France, participating in the St. Lo breakout and helping destroy the German 7th Army at Falaise Gap. Both engagements were critical to conquering Normandy. Later, this division slammed into the German advance in the Battle of the Bulge in Belgium. Some of the units pulled off astonishing escapes, despite being surrounded and outnumbered. The division also fought intense battles in the closing days of the war. Its colorful leader, Major General Maurice Rose, known for flashy riding pants, shiny cavalry boots, and a penchant for rushing to the front lines, died from enemy gunfire on March 31, 1945, near the German town of Paderborn. Soon after, the 3rd Armored Division captured Paderborn.

Before the Battle of the Bulge, the ***7th Armored Division*** helped capture various French towns, including Château-Thierry and Verdun. After its skillful defense of and retreat from St. Vith, the 7th fought its way back to capture the town on January 23, 1945. Following the Battle of the Bulge, the 7th, commanded by Major General Robert Hasbrouck, fought intense battles that helped seal off Germany's industrial Ruhr Valley. In the process, the division captured Germany's 53rd Panzer Corps.

The ***8th Armored Division***, led by Major General John Devine, arrived in France in January 1945 and almost immediately had to speed 350 miles to help save Strasbourg, France, from a German assault. When they arrived, other units had already assured victory, so the 8th Divisions's first combat did not occur until late January. Part of the 8th joined Patton's 3rd Army in its drive into southern Germany. Soldiers from the 8th also moved into the Netherlands and launched a successful assault near Roermond on February 19, 1945. The 8th participated in battles sealing off Germany's industrial heartland, the Ruhr Pocket.

Commanded by Major General John Leonard, the ***9th Armored Division*** distinguished itself despite having almost no combat experience. Depending on their training at Camp Polk and elsewhere in the United States, these men repeatedly proved themselves at St. Vith, Bastogne, and other battle sites in the Bulge. An important triumph late in the war was when the 9th captured the Ludendorff Bridge, gaining passage over the Rhine River. The 9th also helped conquer the Ruhr industrial region and later encircled Leipzig, Germany.

The ***11th Armored Division***, commanded by Brigadier General Charles Kilburn, experienced its first intense combat during the Battle of the Bulge and helped free Bastogne. Afterwards, the 11th became one of General George S. Patton's most trusted divisions, participating in a sweep through Bavaria. The division freed starved prisoners in German concentration camps. Private Seymour Blank told historian Gerald Astor that he was stunned by the "stark awful reality when we [the 11th Armored Division] overran first the camp at

(continued on next page)

Troops Trained at Fort Polk Help End the War (cont.)

Flossenbürg and then Dachau. The examples of barbarism we saw go beyond my ability to describe." The 11th also fought off fanatical, last-ditch efforts by German troops near Linz, Austria. In the closing days of the war, the 11th was Patton's first division to meet Russian soldiers advancing from the east.

The ***95th Infantry Division***, commanded by Major General Harry Twaddle, did not land in France until mid-September 1944. The division, however, was soon engaged in brutal winter combat near the French-German border, where it captured steel-enforced concrete forts on the outskirts of Metz. On November 22, 1944, the 95th helped evict the Germans from this French town. Later, the 95th fought major engagements in the Netherlands and Germany, fighting house-to-house and seizing important bridges.

men came through, they downed a hot meal, cleaned themselves up, and became part of SNAFU," Watts explained.

While temperatures plummeted to zero, SNAFU troops dug foxholes near Bastogne. At night, they huddled in these holes in the ground as German artillery and air strikes blew apart much of the nearby town. Watts refused to allow his soldiers to occupy the warm houses. "It was safer in a hole. There were hundreds of people killed in Bastogne and a lot of them because they stayed in houses."

The SNAFU troops regrouped with a larger force of more than ten thousand soldiers, dominated by the 101st Airborne Division, that had settled into Bastogne. Seven tanks driven by 9th Armored Division crews also arrived and, significantly, helped stave off one of the first major German ground assaults against the town. Bastogne's defenders also included 10th Armored Division tank crews and two African-American engineering units.

Outnumbered and surrounded, the Americans at Bastogne soon found themselves with dwindling food and ammunition, but they were defiant nonetheless. When German soldiers arrived with a white, ceasefire flag and demanded that the Americans surrender, the acting commander of the 101st Airborne Division, Brigadier General Anthony C. McAuliffe, wrote a one word reply, "Nuts." The departing Germans asked an American paratrooper to translate the cryptic message and were told the expression meant "Go to hell." This American bravado has become a celebrated footnote in what, at the time, seemed destined to be an impending crushing defeat.

The dire situation brightened somewhat on December 23 when skies cleared and American airplanes bombed enemy positions and dropped vital supplies near Bastogne. Still, the conditions on the ground remained punishing. American soldiers took turns traveling to the defensive perimeter where they helped keep fellow troops from falling asleep and freezing to death. Soldiers in these outposts were cold, wet, hungry, and exhausted, according to historian Donald Goldstein. Boots were not waterproof. Some men wrapped their feet in burlap found in a Bastogne building. Trying to keep their toes from freezing and warding off trench foot became common preoccupations when the men weren't facing direct assaults. Some jumped rope to stop shivering. Others searched for food by foraging through bombed buildings. Every available soldier, including cooks, radio operators, chaplains, clerks, even patients from the temporary military hospital, carried rifles and took up defensive positions.

Shortly after midnight on Christmas Day, the Germans launched a furious attack, penetrating the

Members of the 5th Infantry Division's 11th Regiment trudge through the bombed streets of Bitburg, Germany, on February 28,1945.

lines close to Bastogne. Soldiers fought hand-to-hand before the Americans repulsed the assault. German offensive activities slackened afterwards, but the American defenders could not hold out much longer. Their survival depended on whether the forces commanded by General George S. Patton could break the German siege.

Patton attempted a vast troop movement similar to the tactic he successfully used during the Louisiana Maneuvers. This time, however, the conditions were far worse than anything Patton had experienced in the simulated combat in Louisiana. According to historian Carlo D'este, Patton disengaged three divisions, more than thirty thousand troops, that were battling toward the east and spun them around ninety degrees toward the north. With almost no advance notice, these troops set out toward Bastogne some 150 miles away.

Just as he did in Louisiana, Patton guided his subordinates in a flawlessly coordinated undertaking to supply the distant columns that were advancing nonstop, a logistical feat that still awes military scholars. Day and night, the troops rode toward the Bulge, making rapid progress despite encountering fresh snow and icy roads. No rest stops were allowed for any reason. When a vehicle malfunctioned or became stuck, soldiers hurriedly pushed it off the road so they could continue their relentless push north.

Reminiscent of his behavior during the Louisiana war games, Patton, again seemed to be everywhere, encouraging and prodding his soldiers for-

American soldiers established primitive-looking communication facilities in Europe during World War II. Here a soldier with the 5th Infantry Division, which had participated in the Louisiana Maneuvers, operates a switchboard.

ward. Riding in an open jeep, he sped by convoys, his face frozen in a menacing glare. He led by example, sitting rigidly, arms folded across his chest, implacably enduring bitter winds. He wore a pistol strapped outside his parka and another gun tucked in his waistband. "Destiny sent for me in a hurry when things got tight. Perhaps God saved me for this effort," Patton later wrote.

Troops, heartened when he drove by, responded wildly. Despite the cold and their fatigue, they shouted and cheered until a roar swept along the speeding columns. Years later soldiers fondly reminisced about the rescue mission and their encounters with the *Old Man*. One soldier recalled, "I only saw him once. We was stuck in the snow and he came by in a jeep. His face was awful red and he must have been about froze riding in that open jeep. He yelled to us to get out and push, and first I knew, there was General Patton pushing right along side of me. Sure, I knew him; he never asked a man to do what he wouldn't do himself."

Patton, keeping his promise to Eisenhower, advanced his troops about one hundred miles in less than three days, launching an attack on the Germans on December 22. It was the first time in seven days that American forces in the region took the offensive instead of defending their positions. The combat spread across a twenty-mile front, as Patton continued to urge everyone to keep advancing. By December 23 and 24, the men pushed to within four miles of Bastogne. There the attack stalled when German resistance stiffened. When some of Patton's troops were forced to retreat, the outlook dimmed for the Americans hemmed in at Bastogne.

On Christmas Day, the Bastogne soldiers radioed a forlorn message: "We're still holding out." Left unsaid was their ever deteriorating situation. McAuliffe, the Bastogne commander, grumbled, "We have been let down."

Patton gloomily accepted responsibility for his troops' reversals. "It is probably my fault because I had been insisting on day and night attacks. This is all right on the first or second day of the battle and when we had the enemy surprised, but after that the men get too tired. Furthermore, in this bad weather, it is very difficult for armored outfits to operate at night."

Patton, however, also observed that he had to "push people beyond endurance in order to bring this war to an end." His troops responded by never quitting. On December 26, just as the sun set, six of Patton's Sherman tanks began a final charge.

Near the end of World War II, German civilians hurry past a 7th Armored Division tank with its gun pointed at a local business.

With machine guns blazing and cannons belching out shells, the tanks raced through the gathering darkness at thirty miles per hour, followed by half-track vehicles carrying troops. They sped into Bastogne, partially lifting the siege.

But the battle for the town was far from over. Except for a small corridor, German forces still held threatening positions in every direction. Patton and Eisenhower now threw fresh forces into the battle, according to historian Merle Miller, including the 11th Armored Division that had recently arrived in Europe from Camp Polk.

Known as the Thunderbolt Division (identified by a shoulder patch with a lightning bolt contained within a triangle), the 11th advanced slowly toward Bastogne, frequently engaging in pitched battles. Private Seymour Blank explained that, "like many Jewish soldiers, I took off my dog tags, which had my religion stamped on them, in case I was ever captured." Because of the Nazis' hatred of the Jews, many soldiers were wary of reprisals.

Blank recalled that his fellow soldiers seemed fatalistic as they headed toward Bastogne. "I didn't analyze my fears at the time. Most of us had a feeling that we would make it, somehow, that all those awful statistics [reports of the high number of troops killed in the Bulge] involved other, nameless soldiers. This changed radically when the real thing became a 24-hour-a-day part of our lives and we dug the deepest foxholes, blacked out everything in sight at night, gave no exceptions to someone who didn't know the proper password. We became very careful soldiers who were looking at lots of death around us and were scared witless. I don't believe I had ever seen a dead body until some of my closest buddies were killed our first day of combat. I really cannot describe some of the awful things we saw as we got closer [to Bastogne]. I still, al-

most fifty years later, am unable to bring myself to put into words what I saw and smelled and touched."

Patton was dismayed at the appallingly high casualties suffered by the 11th Armored Division. He was also unnerved when told that the new arrivals had executed some sixty German prisoners, apparently because they had misunderstood orders. "I hope we can conceal this," Patton commented in his dairy.

Despite the setbacks, the 11th Armored Division pushed to the outskirts of Bastogne by December 31, helping end the siege. During the next few weeks, the 11th became a spearhead and one of Patton's most reliable units in the drive to evict the German Army from the Bulge.

By January 3, 1945, all American units in the Bulge began counterattacking. The Germans, low on fuel, food, and other supplies, retreated, but continued to contend forcefully for every inch of ground. Some of the bloodiest fighting was still ahead in weather that continued to be dismal. Patton observed that he could not comprehend how human beings could endure "this continuous fighting at sub-zero temperatures."

Throughout January 1945, the American Army battled in the Bulge. The 3rd, 7th, 9th, and 11th Armored Divisions, all trained at Camp Polk, were heavily involved and gradually retook lost ground. On January 23, the 7th Division retook St. Vith, which it had so stoutly defended one month before. Soldiers could not fully savor the triumph as they walked through bombed out streets, warily searching the ruins for German snipers.

By January's end, other American troops also returned to about the same positions they had held

On May 18, 1945, near the end of World War II, members of the 5th Infantry Division meet Russian soldiers for a decoration ceremony at Protivin, Czechoslovakia.

One Soldier Can Make a Difference

During the 5th Armored Division's time at Camp Polk in the 1970s and 1980s, the Army opened a Noncommissioned Officers (NCO) academy to teach leadership and advanced technical skills. Wiley Clark served as the school commandant. "We had soldiers who specialized in mortars or artillery or were tankers, and so forth. Their courses would center around leading soldiers in that particular job," he recalled. Clark, a student of military history, said one important lesson about war was that the tide of battle often depends on only a few individuals. "In the course of our nation, in almost every battle that's been fought, no matter how many soldiers were involved, if you really take a close examination, it was only a few good men who caused the day to go the way it did, like [Joshua] Chamberlain at Little Round Top at Gettysburg [during the Civil War]. His small unit from Massachusetts was at the right place at the right time under the right commander, doing the right thing."

Clark continued, "We had whole units that surrendered at the Battle of the Bulge, by the thousands, but other units didn't [including many trained at Camp Polk]. And the 101st Airborne Division didn't surrender [at Bastogne]. It stopped a whole Panzer corps, a whole armored unit right in its tracks. Patton's maneuver, to be able to extract himself from a front miles away and then move parallel across the battlefield, is almost unprecedented. Any military historian will tell you that to place your flank against the enemy and move laterally across the battlefield is probably the most dangerous thing you can do. It was just sheer audacity. He denied his flanks [left them unprotected] and said, 'Let's go there,' and they [his troops] did."

six weeks before. The victory was costly, with some 81,000 Americans killed, wounded, or captured, according to historian Max Hastings. About 19,000 of the casualties died.

Official German statistics reported 81,834 casualties of which there were 8,607 deaths. Various experts, however, believed the German losses were probably much higher. Perhaps some 100,000 to 250,000 Germans suffered serious wounds, were killed, or captured. While three more months of combat lay ahead, Hitler's military machine was in shambles, incapable of mounting a credible offense.

Eisenhower said of the Battle of the Bulge, "On a smaller scale, Bastogne was repeated in thousands of little places, hamlets and bridge crossings and road bends, where handfuls of men might for hours hold up a Nazi column.…Now, of course, this was not the biggest battle that ever was, but for me it always typified one thing—the dash, the ingenuity, the readiness at the first opportunity that characterizes the American soldier."

12. German POWs Arrive at Camp Polk

While primarily a training facility, Camp Polk also served as a military prison for Germans captured during World War II. The first prisoners of war (POWs), who began arriving in Louisiana in July 1943, were from the Africorps, Field Marshall Erwin Rommel's proud troops who fought in North Africa. They were housed in a large fenced-in compound in the area now encompassing Honor Field, Fort Polk's parade ground. Finding themselves captured, transported across the ocean, and imprisoned in the middle of summer in the southern United States must have been tremendously unnerving.

> *Maybe the GI hates discipline, but only until he learns that's what makes a winning soldier.*
>
> *— General George S. Patton*

Estimating exactly how many German POWs spent time at Camp Polk is difficult. Separate statistics were not kept for the Louisiana prisons, which included facilities at Camps Livingston and Claiborne, as well as Camp Plauche near New Orleans. In addition, prisoners were often moved, sometimes to other POW facilities or to one of some fifty work camps in Louisiana, many of which were under the supervision of Camp Polk officers. Work camp inmates, in turn, could be sent to farms, plantations, and businesses to perform a variety of jobs.

The POWs "picked cotton around Red River country. They cut cane and rice at Billeaud Plantation at Broussard and on the prairie around Jennings," writes Matthew Schott, history professor at the University of Southwestern Louisiana. "They were lumber men at Oakdale, and they cursed the humidity like the natives.…And when they sandbagged the rampaging Red River in the summer of 1944, the POWs were cheered as saviors around Natchitoches."

The number of German soldiers in Louisiana peaked at about fifteen thousand shortly after the war ended in 1945, according to Schott, but far more POWs than that spent some time in the state. As many as four thousand German prisoners may have been sent to Camp Polk, according to David Bingham, Fort Polk Military Museum director.

Camp Polk prison facilities were substantial, according to local resident John Guy, who worked on the post during the war. "It [the POW compound] was all single-story buildings. The prisoners had their own mess hall, their own cooks. They had their own medical people. If they worked, they got three meals a day." Prisoners were not forced to work, and some refused. Those who worked earned scrip for their labor, with which they could buy such necessities as toothpaste or snacks at their own Post Exchange (PX).

Every morning, prisoners marched in formation from the compound to their jobs under the watchful eye of guards armed with shotguns. The morning parade involved some seven hundred to eight hundred prisoners, according to Guy, who remembered hearing them sing marching songs as they passed along Louisiana Avenue. "They were in a mass formation when they came by, but the formation was so arranged that when they would get to certain points, those who were supposed to work there split off. It would be one group going to work one place and another group going to work somewhere else. There must have been 150 of them working at the quartermaster laundry.…That was a big contingent. I liked to listen to them sing.… Anybody who liked to hear good music liked to hear them sing because they sang really well." Perhaps the prisoners' performance excelled because Gotthold Richter, a Berlin music professor, was among them. He organized a POW choir and directed Johann Strauss operettas at Camp Polk.

Seventeen-year-old Guy, who had just graduated from high school and was too young to be drafted into military service, got a job in the small-

Barbed-wire barricades fenced in the German prisoners-of-war compound at Camp Polk in 1943.

engine repair shop on the post. Each of the six civilian employees there worked with two German POWs. The pair of prisoners Guy worked with proved resourceful and intelligent, he recalled. "Heinz Hoot was an architect. He had a [college] degree and was from Frankfurt [Germany]. He always said 'Frankfurt on the Rhine.' Fritz Gorgas was raised at a dam on the Elbe River. He was a welder by profession. At the time, they were both in their early twenties." Neither spoke much English and Guy did not speak German, but they learned to communicate using gestures and awkward phrasing.

The three developed a smooth working relationship, which was not uncommon among the POWs and Americans, according to professor Schott. "Their personalities were good," Guy reminisced. "They were good workers. They were very content because they weren't being shot at. In fact, Fritz told me, 'I'll do anything they want me to because my war is over.' "

While working at Camp Polk, Guy also met other German prisoners, including a man known to everyone as "Footz." Older than the other POWs, Footz was a professional Prussian soldier, a Hessian. Hessians dominated the German military until Adolph Hitler installed his hard-core followers. Perhaps because of his military experience and age, the Hessian could bridle at perceived insults, Guy learned.

One day the shop supervisor told the teenage Guy to deliver work orders to Footz in an adjacent office. The POW was to repair some equipment. "I don't know what his [full] name was, and I don't even think that his comrades knew what his name was. But I carried these two work orders out there

Sergeant Bill Scott of the 5th Infantry Division, 10th Infantry Regiment, guards two German officers who were among the estimated seven thousand prisoners captured in the Ruhr Valley. Many German POWs were shipped off to Camp Polk.

and I said, 'Footz, the supervisor said you do these.' He turned his back on me. Well, I walked around in front of him and I handed him the work orders again and I said, 'This is your work for this morning, your work orders.' He turned his back on me again. Well, they started laughing, these [other] German prisoners. So I took the work orders back to the supervisor and said, 'Footz won't take these.' The supervisor said, 'Well, give them to me.' "

Guards carrying shotguns stood outside the building, but there were none inside to enforce work orders. The supervisor, a man in his sixties, walked over to Footz and threw the papers down on a desk, Guy recalled that the supervisor "kind of stuttered, and he said, 'You, take these now,' and Footz just looked at him. He [the supervisor] called the interpreter and he said, 'Find out what's wrong with that old man.' This interpreter asked him what happened, and Footz said, 'I don't take orders from boys.' So, from then on, I never did have to take Footz nothing."

Over time, Guy became friends with Heinz Hoot and Fritz Gorgas. They taught him how to play soccer in the parking lot on his lunch hour. "They taught me some pretty nifty moves," he recalled. He also remembered kidding the Germans. If Guy became slightly peeved with Gorgas, for example, he would call him a Nazi. Gorgas, in response, said, "No Nazi, German soldier, just like you fixing to be," referring to Guy's impending military draft.

On a darker note, Guy recounted the day a new German prisoner, only seventeen or eighteen years old, entered the shop. He was assigned to repair kitchen stoves. From the start, the young man was insolent, indicating he had no intention of cooperating with the Americans. "The interpreter showed

Sunday Hobby Turns Up Ancient Artifacts

John Guy, who worked with German prisoners of war on Camp Polk as a teenager, later helped pioneer archeological research in the area, earning him the unofficial title of Fort Polk's "father of cultural resources." Guy had joined the United States Navy near the end of World War II and served on transport ships. He later returned to Fort Polk, accepting a job managing the heating shop. In his spare time, he searched for stone tools and pottery left behind by prehistoric Native Americans.

Archeologists who studied prehistory in Louisiana during the Great Depression, with funding largely from the federal government, contended that most early inhabitants lived in major river valleys to the east and north of Fort Polk. These prehistoric residents assembled massive mounds of earth, burying their dead inside the earthworks or building structures on top to house their chiefs and sacred temples. In the early 1960s, when Guy was looking for artifacts, many researchers still believed that the soils in Vernon, Beauregard, and Sabine Parishes were too poor to support prehistoric people. Guy disagreed with this prevailing view. He remembered working in the fields as a young boy, when "...you had to carry a file in your pocket to keep your hoe sharp because when you were plowing you kept running into ceramic pots. A whole ceramic pot will do a job on a plow." Later, as an adult, he uncovered proof that early Native Americans had indeed occupied the Fort Polk area.

Guy explained that on Sundays he, his wife, and four sons would attend early church services. "My wife fixed a picnic lunch and we'd put in a change of clothes in our vehicle for everyone. When we got out of church, we hit the roads. The land companies were building all-weather roads in the area." The family used a method called "ride and tie." This harkened back to the time of early pioneers traveling on horseback. If two people had but one horse, one would walk, the other would ride ahead a few miles, tie up the horse, then continue on foot. The first walker, on reaching the horse, would ride until he met the second walker, and the process would be repeated. Thus the two could travel farther than if both were on foot. The Guy family rode in a car, rather than on horseback. Guy's wife and a couple of their sons would drive ahead and park, while Guy and the remaining sons walked along freshly graded roads. They combed the ground with their eyes, looking for artifacts, until they reached the parked vehicle. "We'd pick up the vehicle and drive past them and park it. Then we'd start walking on up the road.…My wife and I and the boys collected a terrific amount of projectile points [arrow heads and spear points] that were churned up when they [construction companies] were grading. It would rain and the points would wash out."

At the time, their artifact search on the post was largely restricted because soldiers were training to fight in Vietnam. "Every range was active every day. They were either firing rifles, throwing hand grenades, or shooting their missiles." Today, the United States Army and Fort Polk finance extensive archeological research enabling scientists to piece together the area's early history. John Guy helped lay the foundation for this important work.

Americans guard prisoners of war as they march on a street in Burenbruch, Germany.

him to his table," Guy remembered. "He kept standing back there, all puffed up. Fritz nudged me. I said, 'What do you want?' Fritz said, 'That's a Nazi.' I said, 'What do you mean?' Fritz said, 'You always hollering Nazi. That's one. You watch him.' "

Everyone began working, except the new prisoner. "That little dude started mouthing off and chomping at his bit and carrying on something terrible. The supervisor said, 'I got to go get the interpreter because I can't stand that in here.'" At that point, Footz, the older Hessian, said he'd handle it. Footz walked briskly toward the new POW and "reached across the table and grabbed him by the collar." Guy continued, "He yanked him across the table and hit him. I don't know how many times he hit him because I didn't want to know. I just turned around.…But I do know that he had him by the collar and he backhanded him and knocked him away. Then he pulled him back towards him, and he'd slap him again. That old timer kept talking to that little dude [all the time he was slapping him]." The young prisoner said nothing the rest of the day. Guy said, "The next morning he didn't come back. So I imagine they punished him back at camp.…I never saw him again."

Harsh punishment meted out by fellow POWs apparently was not uncommon. "There were kangaroo courts at night. A lot of the POWs ended up hanging from rafters or trees," according to Bingham of the Fort Polk Military Museum. He explained that the German prisoners maintained a strict hierarchical rule within their compound.

Schott agreed, explaining that a minority of Germans, who controlled life inside the military prisons, murdered their fellow captives or drove them to suicide if they failed to conform to a draconian behavior code. "Ten percent of them [the prisoners] formed a diehard, bullying hard core who bored the majority of their comrades with incessant anti-Americanism and pronouncements about Hitler's secret weapon and how the Axis victory was around the corner. POWs often lived in terror of them, of the kangaroo courts they conducted, and of what were called 'walks of the holy ghost' when anti-Nazis were brutally beaten.…"

The 7th Armored Division, which trained at Camp Polk, collects prisoners of war and the tanks from a Panzer division captured in Germany's Ruhr Pocket.

According to Schott, "If the term Nazi might describe the average young POW, inspired by the Hitler Youth movement, stirred like Americans to do their duty, not to challenge the values instilled by family and school…then the majority of the first arriving POWs in Louisiana were Nazis. Their faith, however, quickly withered in the reality of their own surrender as soldiers and on hearing the news of the defeats overseas.…" Ultimately the prisoners were a diverse group. In the words of Schott, they were "choir boys and Communists, politicians and priests, Christians and atheists, saints and sinners alike…sociologically and ideologically representative of an ancient and complex history and culture."

Guy remembered respecting most German prisoners he met, describing them as "very civilized human beings." He continued, "They were the same as our soldiers. They were trained by professional generals.… Maybe there were some cases when they didn't get along too well with the people they worked with, but I didn't hear of it. In our shop, they got along well, even [with] our janitor.…The only ones you had to fear were the brainwashed young troopers of the SS."

Despite armed guards, some prisoners escaped. Guy talked about two POWs who had slipped away from a work camp only to return to Camp Polk three or four days later. Interrogators asked them why in the world they escaped. According to Guy,

"they didn't want to go back to Germany having to say they'd never seen none of the United States. So they just caught freight trains, and what have you, and banged around till they got hungry. Then they came back."

One POW escape in Louisiana gained notoriety when the incident was discussed on a nationally syndicated radio program. Walter Winchell, a popular commentator, talked about the escape and stoked up "resentment in relating the details of an alleged POW orgy" at a seafood restaurant. According to Schott, "There was hell to pay for Louisiana's military command, from the Polk commander to the lowly guard at the camp."

Far more often, exchanges between prisoners and local women were much more chaste. For instance, Schott described how an admiring German soldier would toss messages wrapped around spools of thread to Marguerite Hudson at the tailor shop where they worked. The young woman, embarrassed and worried that supervisors might accuse her of consorting with the enemy or even engaging in espionage, sneaked into a restroom stall to unfurl the notes, which simply requested that she smile at him. As she read his entreaties, then carefully disposed of them, Hudson worried that she would be whipped or arrested if she were caught. Day after day, she refused to smile whenever the German caught her eye, until her last day at Camp Polk. Just before she left, she looked at the prisoner and smiled.

Artwork found throughout Louisiana today can be traced to the artistry of German POWs. Some of the works hang in private residences, gifts from the artists thanking landowners for their kindness during a work detail. The paintings, according to Schott, portray a remarkable variety of subjects, such as "Swiss chalets, Egyptian pyramids, Hollywood stars Lana Turner and Marlene Dietrich, the Madonna and Baby Jesus, the sugar field and big house, the mistress and child of the plantation."

Some local residents contend that a large mural that once covered an entire wall of a Camp Polk service club was painted by a German prisoner, but Guy attributed the work to an American soldier. "There was no mural that I know of on post that was done by Germans."

Guy and others, however, said one or more of the POWs who were housed in the old Leesville Hotel were painters. Some of their artwork now hangs in Leesville's Museum of West Louisiana in the converted train station. "The Army kept some POWs bivouacked at the hotel. They'd do work during the day around town and they [guards] would lock them up at the hotel at night," explained Mary Cleveland, museum director.

Most POWs were apparently relieved to find they would be treated humanely and that the United States Army tried to scrupulously follow the rules of the Geneva Convention. However, goodwill toward the POWs was not universal, according to Guy. He recalled hearing stories about guards taunting Germans on work details, saying, "Hey, why don't you run? I don't know whether this gun will shoot or not." But, for the most part, relations between the Germans and Americans were good.

While allowed to paint and play soccer, the POWs also faced prohibitions. They were not allowed, for example, to read American newspapers. Nevertheless, when a civilian employee brought a paper to work and left it unattended, the prisoners often eagerly tried to digest the news. One day the Germans who worked with Guy saw a story about the D-Day invasion of Normandy. They reacted with disbelief. Guy remembered them grabbing the paper and saying "No way!" They couldn't believe it could be done and thought it was just propaganda.

Not long after, a new prisoner arrived at Camp Polk. The two Germans asked him where he had been captured. "Europe," he replied. "See, I got all my arms and all my legs. I got as deep in a hole as I could get," indicating how he had survived the intense American bombardment. Now, perhaps for the first time, Guy's two German prisoners understood that American forces actually were in France and realized how powerful they were. Still, the POWs thought the German Army could hold off the invaders at the West Wall defenses. "Then, they [the U.S. Army] broke through the Siegfried Line, and that was a different situation. Heinz and Fritz began to want to go home," Guy explained.

After Germany surrendered, but while the U.S. war against Japan continued, Guy and the two POWs began working in the tank shop. Before then,

Germans had been barred from working on American weapons. Guy's prisoners volunteered for tank repairs because they now wanted to help the United States win the war. "They knew they couldn't get home until the Japanese had surrendered," he explained. One prisoner's welding expertise was especially welcome. "The Army had just come out with this new steel and none of their welders could handle it, but Fritz could," Guy said.

Shortly after he turned eighteen, Guy received his draft notice to join the military. He saw Fritz Gorgas one final time on the day before he left his job at Camp Polk. Guy recalled telling Fritz he was going to the induction center. Fritz replied, "I told you so." Heinz Hoot presented Guy with a silver flat ring with his initials *HH* on the front. He said to Guy "Here's a memento." Guy never saw the two Germans again.

13. Angels Fall into Prison

Camp Polk continued to serve as the largest training center in the nation for armored divisions during the last two years of World War II. Soldiers could be seen at all hours speeding tanks over roads and open country and operating other armored vehicles, often towing artillery. Long lines of military vehicles splashed into creeks and raced toward the next maneuver. Everywhere on the post the pine woods reverberated with the sounds of weapons and machinery.

> *I have known a few men who were always aching for a fight when there was no enemy near, who were as good as their word when the battle did come. But the number of such men is small.*
>
> *— General Ulysses S. Grant*

The soldiers' days were a blur of activity, beginning early as they lined up in vast rows for physical training, then rushed off in all directions to undergo various types of instruction. Troops seemed to be always on the move, running, drilling, and marching, despite searing heat or chilling rains. They jabbed bayonets at imaginary foes, practiced rifle and pistol shooting, and staked down netting to camouflage cannons. They built bridges in record time, paraded in formation, and gathered around to study maps on the hoods of their jeeps. Officers explained their objectives, pointing to diagrams on blackboards propped up against tanks. They stressed that learning to outflank and outwit the enemy could determine everyone's survival.

Amid the deadly serious preparation for combat, Camp Polk's size and importance attracted celebrities seeking to demonstrate support for the soldiers and the war. Actors, including Bob Hope, Jerry Colona, and Cary Grant, came to meet and entertain the troops. Leesville's USO (United Service Organization) on Oak Street—backed by the Women's Civic League, Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA), and Jewish Welfare Board—joined in the support by opening up comfortable lounges, offering library books and free motion pictures, and sponsoring bingo games and dances.

Leesville bustled with the influx of troops and enjoyed a flush of prosperity from their spending. The local post office, for example, which took in about $16,000 in 1939, before the war began, was taking in over $177,000 by 1943. With all the military in the area, there was enough business to support three bus companies, with buses departing for DeRidder every fifteen minutes during peak periods. The Camp Polk Bus Company alone transported some ten thousand passengers daily, doubling the number on weekends. The Leesville train depot was also often packed.

A new, unpredictable element plunged into all this activity in January 1944 with the arrival of the 11th Airborne Division. The paratroopers poured into Leesville aboard twenty-two separate trains. They soon settled into Camp Polk. From all accounts, they had mixed feelings about their new location. In some ways, Camp Polk seemed luxurious to them. Previously, in North Carolina, they had been housed in makeshift shacks covered in tar paper. The Camp Polk barracks were sturdily built and well heated, welcome features in the dead of winter. The barracks also had latrines and showers, absent in the paratroopers' former quarters. The food at Camp Polk was much better, with mess halls set up for small groups of one or two companies. The paratroopers also discovered that the PXs carried more and better items than they were accustomed to, and that the service clubs were the best of any they had experienced.

Surrounded by armored division soldiers, many of the paratroopers felt like outsiders from the start. One quote from an 11th Airborne Division publication read, "We found ourselves not too welcome. Our intense pride as airborne troops immediately clashed with the pride of that other proudest and

General Otto Wagner greets film actor Cary Grant at Camp Polk during World War II. The movie star was one of many celebrities who visited the post to boost troop morale.

most arrogant branch of the Army, the Armored Force.…There is no doubt that the armored troops regarded us as interlopers.…We felt and acted like hostile dogs."

Some Leesville residents disliked the paratroopers because they perceived them to be arrogant and always spoiling for a fight with the armored troops, who were only too happy to oblige. Spotting the paratroopers was easy. They wore distinctive uniforms of pants bloused at the legs, shiny and highly polished jump boots, and berets fixed at a jaunty angle. Armored troops sometimes mimicked the paratroopers and especially enjoyed wearing jump boots, which frequently sparked brawls. The paratroopers prided themselves on how often they pinned down the offenders, yanked off their boots, and left them shoeless and sometimes battered.

Albert Dunn, who was in high school at the time, remembered that not everyone in Leesville frowned on the paratroopers. "They were real cocky and they looked good. Each one of them believed they could whip five or six other people. That's what they were taught. They were kind of like the *Three Musketeers*, 'one for all and all for one.' They might fight among themselves and have problems, but the minute something happened they all joined together." Dunn, who wanted to stand out from the crowd himself, admired the paratroopers so much that he applied to become one when he joined the military.

The 11th Airborne, smaller than most divisions with only about eight thousand soldiers, underwent rigorous training at Camp Polk from early January to May 1944. Veterans cite the flag maneuvers, where flags represented the enemy, as being especially demanding. Camping near Hawthorn, Louisiana, the 11th began the maneuvers, which were held in the swamps along the Calcasieu River, on February 5, 1944. The sun shone that day, but rarely afterward during the two weeks of exercises. Day after day, cold rain fell. Veterans recalled being drenched, day and night. Caked in mud, they fought mock battles, built roads through bogs, and struggled to dislodge stuck vehicles from the muck. The soldiers also dismantled artillery pieces that had sunk into the mud up to their wheel hubs, then reassembled them on planks. After only a few days of this, everyone was exhausted.

During the first stage of the exercises, the division advanced toward the enemy, represented by the flags. As the men trudged forward, they periodically halted to erect defensive fortifications in the mud. They were forbidden to burn campfires and ordered to maintain blackout conditions, which barred lights of any kind. After three days, they paused to sleep, get warm, and eat better food. During the second, three-day phase, the troops launched an attack. In the third phase, they played a defensive role. Finally, in the last phase, the enemy flags supposedly broke through the division's lines. The airborne troops had to escape, plunging through the swamps, mostly at night.

Near the end of February, once the flag maneuvers had finished, the division returned to the Camp Polk barracks. The soldiers were then further tested to determine their combat readiness. Some exercises measured the artillery troops' knowledge about the deployment of different types of weapons. Infantry soldiers were tested on their skills at building defenses, approaching fortified positions, and withdrawing while under attack.

Army inspectors checked that every unit had the necessary equipment in working order. Meanwhile, officers reviewed medical records to verify that everyone had sufficient inoculations against any diseases they might be exposed to overseas. These last steps were irrefutable evidence that the troops would soon be shipping out, but no one seemed to know when or where.

The eight thousand soldiers of the 11th Airborne were separated into three, roughly equal regiments. Two regiments were trained to fly gliders, the third consisted of parachute specialists. Division Commander Major General Joseph Swing wanted every soldier to be comfortable using both parachutes and the flimsy gliders. He established a jump school at the DeRidder Army Airbase for cross training. The division also included ancillary units of artillery battalions, headquarters staff, medical personnel, engineers, and a signal company.

The 11th's imminent departure became apparent by April 15, 1944, when officers restricted the entire division to Camp Polk and cautioned everyone to keep silent about their activities. The pace quickened as soldiers began packing their gear and removing the identifying red, white, and blue airborne patches from their uniforms. Doctors administered a final round of shots. Troops spent more time than usual exercising, as officers tried to keep the men busy while they waited for orders. Finally, on April 20, 1944, the 11th Airborne Division bid Camp Polk goodbye and boarded trains bound for California. There the young solders transferred to transport ships and soon sailed beneath San Francisco's Golden Gate Bridge. They were the only troops trained at Camp Polk to travel to the Pacific Theater to fight in the war against Japan.

The paratroopers first sailed to New Guinea. There, according to historian Shelby Stanton, they practiced parachute jumps and became acclimated to the tropical weather. Then, in November 1944, they moved to the Philippines and plunged into their first combat in the rugged mountains ribbing central Leyte, a large island. Rain fell almost daily, often in drenching downpours, leaving the terrain muddy and slippery. The vigorous training at Camp Polk proved valuable, as the troops struggled to climb the steep winding paths under difficult conditions. The force groped through the nearly impenetrable tropical jungles, guided by sketchy and often inaccurate maps.

As they hacked through thick underbrush, the men had to stay constantly alert. The Japanese

proved to be tough, wily, and elusive, schooled in how to vanish in an instant. According to historian John Costello, many of the enemy soldiers preferred death to capture and mounted terrifying, screaming attacks called *banzai* charges against the Americans. The American and Japanese soldiers sometimes fought bayonet-to-bayonet duels that ended with quick fatal thrusts of sharp steel.

As the 11th delved deeper into the jungle, some units became separated from the larger body of troops and were cut off for days. Unable to replenish their food supplies, the soldiers lived on whatever they could scrounge from the jungle. Low hanging clouds and incessant rain socked in supply planes and added to a sense of being trapped in oblivion. Worse was the omnipresent danger of being shot by a Japanese sniper camouflaged in a tree. The sharp crack of a rifle could announce death at almost any time. Private Elmer Fryar spotted one such sniper and deliberately stepped in front of his platoon leader to shield him. The automatic rifle fire killed Fryar, who was honored with the Congressional Medal of Honor for this sacrifice and other heroic acts.

After successfully combating the Japanese at Leyte, the 11th traveled to Luzon in the northern Philippines. Some units scrambled ashore from amphibious boats, while others leaped from airplanes, floating down onto Tagaytay Ridge in the center of the island. Dispersed over seventy miles, the force again struggled with steaming jungles teeming with the enemy. The division linked up and swept toward Manilla, the Philippine capital. They met heavy resistance at the Genko Line, a web of concrete pillboxes defended by six thousand enemy troops wielding artillery, mortars, and machine guns. The Japanese had also liberally laced approaches to the fortifications with land mines.

Some of the 11th Division troops battled into southern Manilla, occupying one house at a time. They would shoot their guns, reload, then dodge enemy fire while sprinting to the next building to begin the dangerous process all over again. A command post had been established in one of the houses, where, on February 11, 1945, the division's top officers were gathered to plot strategy. According to historian Edward Flanagan, a storm of Japanese artillery slammed into the building. One shell from a 20-millimeter antiaircraft gun crashed through a small window and exploded. While most of the occupants escaped injury, Colonel Orin "Hard Rock" Haugen, commander of the 511th Parachute Infantry Regiment, was hit by a shell fragment that ripped into his chest, causing a gaping wound. He died on the flight to a New Guinea hospital.

The Americans also fought across open fields near Manilla toward Fort McKinley, a Japanese-controlled redoubt. When part of the advance stalled, blocked by two well-protected Japanese machine guns, Private Manuel Perez circled through and behind the enemy. Crouched and silent, he edged to within twenty yards of the machine gun nest, shooting four surprised Japanese soldiers. He then yanked a firing pin and flung a grenade into the fortification. The Japanese who survived the blast fled into an escape tunnel, but Perez met them near the exit and began shooting. He emptied his rifle, but managed to reload and single-handedly hold the enemy at bay. Suddenly, one of the enemy soldiers sprinted toward Perez and threw his rifle like a spear at the American. The razor-sharp bayonet smashed into Perez's rifle, knocking it to the ground. Perez scooped up the Japanese gun and began firing, apparently killing the man who had charged him. When Perez either ran out of bullets or the Japanese gun jammed, he clutched the weapon and ran at a cluster of Japanese soldiers, stabbing one with the bayonet. Then he swung the rifle like a club, bashing heads with the butt. When the fighting finally ended, and his fellow troops surveyed the carnage, they realized Perez alone had killed eighteen enemy soldiers and somehow survived. His superiors recommended him for the Congressional Medal of Honor. Perez never learned of the honor. He was killed one week later in another battle.

In February 1945, American intelligence picked up disturbing reports that some two thousand civilians imprisoned at Los Baños were in desperate straits, perhaps near starvation. The 11th Airborne Division began planning a rescue that would require daring, split-second timing, and a great deal of luck, since the prison was located twenty-five miles deep in hostile territory. Officers split the division into four task forces for the mission.

Soldiers with the 11th Airborne Division's 511th Regiment, 187th Combat Team, surge ashore in the Pacific, practicing an invasion landing on October 7, 1945, just after World War II ended. The 11th Airborne Division first trained at Camp Polk.

On February 23, 1945, a handful of Americans accompanied by Filipino guerillas began slipping into the jungle hours before the planned assault, arriving outside the Los Baños prison in the early morning darkness. Concealed in the vegetation, they awaited daybreak and the signal to attack. Other troops were simultaneously moving across a nearby bay in fifty-one amphibious craft called amptracs. They had begun their water journey many miles away near Manilla, and by dawn had approached the beaches some two miles from the prison. A third, larger paratrooper force moved into position some distance from the prison after a strenuous march through enemy territory. These soldiers prepared to fend off any Japanese troops who might be sent to reinforce the prison.

With everyone in place on the ground, the rescue required one last crucial element. At 7 a.m., paratroopers began leaping from C-47 transport planes. The sky above the prison filled with billowing parachutes, as men floated down, the wind whistling in their ears. The descent must have seemed agonizingly slow until the final few seconds when the ground rushed up to meet them. The men hit the earth hard, then scrambled to their feet, struggling to release their parachutes and hold their rifles. Landing in a drop zone several hundred yards from the prison, the paratroopers found the battle already underway. They rushed forward, joining the others to storm the prison.

The swift attack, carried out without warning, caught the Japanese off guard. The Americans and their Filipino allies quickly captured the garrison and began freeing the 2,122 emaciated prisoners. The danger was far from over, however. Hundreds of battle-hardened Japanese soldiers were in the immediate vicinity, and no one could predict how much time would pass before they organized a retaliatory raid. Quickly getting everyone safely away was paramount.

The amptracs arrived at the prison about an hour after the initial attack, having traveled overland some two miles from the shores of Laguna de Bay. Soldiers hustled the freed captives aboard. The drivers then wheeled the amphibious vehicles around and drove back toward the bay. They were soon plowing through the water again, heading toward Manilla and American-held territory more than twenty miles away.

Not everyone, however, could cram into the vehicles on the first run. Some soldiers had to wait at the prison for what must have seemed an agoniz-

Members of the 11th Airborne Division practice an amphibious landing in Japan on October 2, 1946.

ingly long time. Finally, the amptracs returned to retrieve the remaining soldiers. By day's end, everyone had safely returned. That night in Manilla, the former prisoners savored life inside American-held territory as they ate their first hot meal in days. The 11th Airborne Division, trained at Camp Polk, had executed one of the most successful rescues in American military history.

When the Catholic nuns who were among the prisoners at Los Baños saw rescuers parachuting toward them, they reportedly exclaimed that the soldiers resembled "angels coming from heaven to deliver us." However, the division's nickname, the Angels, apparently originated earlier. At some point, perhaps on the Pacific Island of New Guinea, the 11th Airborne Division garnered a reputation for stealing supplies they couldn't legitimately obtain through the military bureaucracy. Their commander, Joseph Swing, reportedly became indignant at the charge and claimed, "My angels would never get involved in such illegal shenanigans."

The 11th Airborne Division continued to fight in the Philippines almost to the end of the war. More than six hundred were killed, and nearly two thousand wounded. Reflecting his deep respect, General Douglas MacArthur selected the 11th Airborne to provide his honor guard as he moved to occupy Japan. MacArthur and the Japanese representatives signed the official surrender aboard the battleship *USS Missouri* on September 2, 1945. Later that day, in a radio address broadcast around the world, MacArthur announced, "Today the guns are silent. A great tragedy has ended."

The bloodiest war in history, which imperiled the existence of democratic governments in several countries, ultimately cost sixty million lives.

14. Peace, Then Another War Erupts

As World War II drew to a close, optimism pervaded Leesville, Louisiana, along with the rest of the country. People began to worry less about their relatives and friends dying in far-off lands and focused more on the future. The country had survived a great economic depression and was beating powerful enemies abroad. Good things seemed possible again.

Toward the war's end, the Leesville-Vernon Parish Chamber of Commerce printed a booklet, edited by Dr. Willis Baxter Boyd, extolling Louisiana and the local area in a bid to capitalize on the expected postwar boom."Today our boys fight an incredible war steeped in blood and mud to preserve home and country," the booklet stated. "Tomorrow we plan for these boys and for all of us to live in peace and to build new homes, to achieve and to invest time and talent, to expand and to profit by thrift and toil.…This publication is dedicated to the worthy task of heralding abroad the story of a growing City and Parish deep in the heart of Dixie and to extend a cordial welcome to home seekers and investors when the war is over.…We feel that we are at The Dawn Of A New Day. We look to the future with confidence and expectation."

The publication described the area's many assets: a new hospital under construction; multiple street improvements, including the widening of parts of Third Street; a new sewage disposal plant capable of serving three times the existing population; an addition to the local high school; the construction of 120 houses, financed by the federal government; six established local churches where two thousand people could worship; and numerous renovation and decoration projects, especially in local hotels and restaurants. The publication showcased a community on the verge of a major expansion. The hoped-for prosperity, however, never materialized.

The American public, grown weary of tragic carnage, began focusing on peace and prosperity and the speedy return of the servicemen and women from overseas. The victorious United States Army, the most powerful on earth, rapidly began disarming. Some twelve million Americans wore military uniforms at the height of World War II. Within a few years, the Army had cut back to a size similar to that prior to the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor.

> *You give a good leader very little and he will succeed. You give a mediocre leader a great deal and he will fail.*
>
> *— General George C. Marshall to Senator Harry Truman*

While Camp Polk continued to function, by 1946 the installation was designated a medical training center and only a skeleton force remained, primarily caretakers.

Leesville's population dwindled as the military presence faded. Soldiers no longer flocked to Third Street looking for fun and relaxation. The USO stopped holding dances, and Saturday nights grew quiet. Gone were the festive parades, crowded with dignitaries, soldiers, tanks, and horses. Diners who frequented local restaurants often never appeared again, as Camp Polk's civilian employees lost their jobs and moved away. More and more businesses were shuttered forever.

Finally, in December 1946, military officials declared Camp Polk inactive, although the installation opened briefly during the summers when National Guard and reserve troops arrived for encampments. The rest of the time, the once bustling Camp Polk resembled a ghost town, with empty barracks gathering dust. Workers even dismantled the Claiborne-Polk Military Railroad (CPMR), and sent the steel rails to north Florida to build a rail line on Eglin Air Force Base.

Trees Grow Jobs . . . For a Time

As Camp Polk became a major source of jobs during World War II and the war in Korea, another industry was dwindling in Louisiana—tree harvesting. Howard Blackburn, born in 1919, grew up in a place known as the Louisiana Logging Camp located about twenty-five miles from Leesville. In an interview for this book, he explained that when federal officials decided to open a post office there, they said, "We can't give you a post office named 'Louisiana Logging Camp,' so they changed the name to La Camp." Over time, the community and surrounding area just north of Fort Polk came to be known as LaCamp.

Like many of his neighbors, Blackburn worked for a logging company as a young man, often driving a tractor, dragging the felled trees behind him. In deep forests inaccessible to the big machines, oxen and mules pulled the cut trees. The ox herder, called a *bull puncher*, walked beside the oxen carrying a long stick with an attached whip. The oxen were usually yoked together in pairs. Sometimes four oxen were harnessed with two wooden yokes, or six oxen with three yokes. Bull punchers talked to the oxen in an idiosyncratic manner that few people remember today. In Blackburn's words, they told the oxen "what to do and not do in their own language." If the oxen failed to respond, the bull puncher would reach out with the long whip and flick one of the yokes. Blackburn's father, a lumber crew foreman, strictly forbid whipping the animals. If a bull puncher "broke skin he was fired right then. Because if they broke that skin, screw worms would get in the wound," Blackburn explained.

Mule skinners carried a short stick and rode the mules, instead of walking beside them. They also had their own method of communicating with the animals. Blackburn remembered some of the words. Besides the expected phrases, such as *get up* for go and *whoa* for stop, there was *gee* for veer right and *haw* for go left. Lumber crews tended to favor mules over horses for several reasons. "A mule takes his time and a horse tries to get done in a hurry. Whenever you unharness a mule and put one in the corral, it will just eat what he needs. A horse will eat so much it will make itself sick," Blackburn explained.

A typical woods crew had thirty to forty men, at times fifty to sixty if old logging railroads were being torn up and new tracks laid. The two men cutting trees with a six-foot-long saw were called *flatheads*, Blackburn said. *Swampers* cleared pathways for timber roads. To level roadways and railroad pathways, *slip teams* filled in low spots with carted-in dirt. *Steel gang crews* laid train tracks, then retrieved the rails when the tracks were no longer needed. Dynamite specialists blew up stumps. "The man who did the dynamiting, he worked alone because you didn't want to get around him," Blackburn said. The dynamite worker would cut fuses to different lengths in order to time blasts to ignite stumps sequentially.

Blackburn lived in a company-owned house. Every day, at 4 a.m., a worker would start a generator to produce direct-current electricity for the residents. The electricity was available only "when that dynamo was running. When daylight came, the engine would shut

(continued on next page)

Trees Grow Jobs . . . For a Time (cont.)

down. Then you started that engine up again late in the afternoon, and at 10 o'clock at night [when residents went to sleep], it would shut down," he explained. Blackburn's house had hot water heated by a pipe routed through the wood stove. A hydrant on the back porch provided water for washing clothes. "That was the extent of the plumbing. The bathroom was outside." There were no electric refrigerators, only boxes cooled by chunks of ice.

Blackburn said loggers earned 25 to 30 cents an hour. "I got 45 cents an hour for driving a tractor. Starting in September, you worked seven days a week, ten hours a day, through February. Then you went back to eight hours a day, six days a week the rest of the time." He bought one- or five-dollar cards from his employer to purchase food, shoes, clothing, and other supplies at the company store. The price of the card "was put down on your time sheet and then, on payday, you would have it deducted.…The store clerk punched out numbers on the card, showing you'd spent 5 cents, 10 cents, 25 cents or 50 cents. When the card was punched out, you couldn't buy anymore. There was no such thing as overspending."

Festering international troubles, however, would rekindle the need for Camp Polk. Tensions steadily accelerated between democratic nations led by the United States and Communist dictatorships influenced by the Soviet Union. British Prime Minister Winston Churchill traveled to Missouri in 1946 to warn that the Soviet Union sought "indefinite expansion of its power and doctrine." Churchill declared that an "iron curtain" had fallen in central Europe, creating a dangerous barrier between nations with freely elected governments and regimes that were forced on the populace.

Churchill's words proved prophetic when in 1948 the Soviet Union tried to seal off and starve 2.5 million residents in the portion of Berlin, Germany, that was occupied by troops from the United States, Great Britain, and France. President Harry Truman ordered an airlift of tons of supplies to the trapped residents and forced an end to the blockade. But with this crisis over, another erupted in 1949 when the Soviet Union exploded its first nuclear bomb. Now both the Soviet Union and the United States possessed weapons capable of destroying a large city and killing tens of thousands of inhabitants in mere seconds.

The threat that led to renewed activity at Camp Polk did not come from the Soviet Union, at least not directly. In the early morning hours on Sunday, June 25, 1950, more than one hundred thousand North Korean soldiers, heavily armed with Soviet-made artillery and tanks, surged across the 38th Parallel to invade South Korea. They quickly overwhelmed the poorly equipped and trained South Korean forces, who retreated in disarray.

President Truman and other U.S. officials were taken by surprise. No one in the State Department nor in the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) had given the slightest hint that such an invasion was possible. The President worried that the Korean offensive indicated that the Soviet Union was spoiling to start World War III, according to historian David McCullough. As President Truman pondered what to do, he wrote, "I remembered how each time that the democracies failed to act [before World War II] it encouraged the aggressors to keep going ahead.…If the Communists were permitted to force their way into the Republic of Korea [South Korea] without opposition from the free world, no small nation would have the courage to resist threats and aggression by stronger Communist neighbors."

Truman decided to order the American military to assist the South Koreans in their desperate struggle to repel the invaders. Within two weeks, about ten thousand U.S. soldiers were in Korea facing disaster. Fighting in temperatures soaring to one hundred degrees, beneath drenching monsoon rains, nearly one-third of the troops in some American units died or were wounded as they retreated beside the overpowered South Korean soldiers.

After enduring one retreat after another, the 8th Army and South Korean forces were finally pushed back to a small slice of land at the coastal city of Pusan. With their backs to the ocean and no help in sight, General Walton Walker ordered the troops to fight to the death. Walker, like so many other Army leaders, had spent time at Camp Polk during World War II when he was an officer in the 3rd Armored Division, the first unit to be based at the post.

As American forces clung to their small toehold in South Korea, President Truman abandoned plans to activate only limited numbers of reserve troops and ordered more soldiers into the fray. The United States found itself dragged into another major war at a point when the ranks of active military personnel were seriously depleted. The President, according to historian John Toland, notified four National Guard divisions to prepare to be nationalized. The 45th Infantry Division (the Oklahoma National Guard) reported for duty in August 1950. This was the first unit in the nation to be called to active duty. The 45th began arriving at Camp Polk in September 1950, settling into barracks on the South Fort.

Camp Polk soon shook off the dust accumulated from disuse and once again bustled with soldiers training for war. The tasks facing the 45th Infantry Division were formidable. Seventy percent of the troops who first reported to Camp Polk in 1950 had served in World War II, but thousands of other recent draftees or volunteers soon arrived. With no previous combat experience, these new soldiers had to quickly learn enough at Camp Polk to wage war and survive.

As the 45th Infantry Division marched and drilled at South Fort, North Fort also gradually filled with a diverse array of National Guard and reserve units. "We had a lot of units that were not assigned to a division. They were separate battalions, primarily artillery and tank units," recalled

Tanks line up at Camp Polk's North Fort during the Korean War era.

Sonny Berry, who later served as a civilian aide to the Secretary of the Army. Berry had just graduated from high school and had recently joined the Louisiana National Guard when the North Koreans invaded South Korea. "We went through Camp Polk for our summer training at North Fort and then were federalized shortly after that," Berry told interviewers at Fort Polk in 1990. "I was in the 773rd Heavy Tank Battalion, Louisiana National Guard. We went on active duty in October of 1950.…We stayed at Camp Polk from October to August 1951." Berry's unit, like most at Camp Polk, included National Guard trainees, World War II veterans, and recent inductees.

At the time, the Army was facing shortages of equipment and supplies. What hadn't already been destroyed following World War II had been put into storage. So too, the federal government's reductions in deficit spending left the military strapped for funds, which limited the development of new weapons. Consequently, many American soldiers training for and fighting the Korean War were using secondhand weapons that had been produced for the previous war.

Camp Polk soldiers were luckier than some, Berry recalled, "We did have enough equipment with which to train. I started out as a driver on the M4E8 tank. The Army brought those things out of mothballs." He and his fellow soldiers practiced tank gunnery. "We'd go out to Pitkin on those ranges and fire." Berry's unit also spent time in maneuvers at Peason Ridge, an important site for World War II exercises. "We would convoy to Peason in

Above: Lieutenant General Walton H. Walker, photographed in Japan on October 7, 1948. Walker served at Camp Polk during World War II and commanded the U.S. 8th Army during the early stages of the Korean War.

Left: Children visiting Camp Polk during the 1950s enjoyed climbing on tanks.

our vehicles. The only bad thing about it was, back then the road wasn't blacktop. It was gravel. You ate a lot of dust. There were not any tank trails. We'd use Highway 117 and what was called Kurthwood Road, but that road was gravel."

While the war raged in Korea, social change back home in the United States was having an impact on the military. Americans were wrestling with segregation—the separation of blacks and whites often sanctioned by law. In the southern United States, discrimination against African-Americans was especially widespread and deeply ingrained. Restrictions included banning blacks from certain restaurants, forbidding them from bathrooms used by whites, requiring them to use separate water fountains, and relegating them to the back seats of buses and to the balconies in theaters. Moreover, housing was segregated. African-American children were forced to attend inferior schools, while their parents were barred from better paying jobs, including many civilian positions at Camp Polk. "I tried everything to get a good job on Camp Polk," James Martin told the Fort Pork *Guardian* newspaper in 1990. "But a Negro in those days could only get dirty work, like shoveling horse manure in the stables."

President Harry Truman, recognizing the heroic actions during World War II of African-American units, such as the Tuskeegee Airmen, ordered the military to desegregate just before the Korean War, according to historian David McCullough. The process of bringing black soldiers into formerly all-white units occurred slowly and met considerable

Typists with the 510th Heavy Tank Battalion during the Korean War.

Pilots with the 332nd Fighter Group, 15th Air Force, are briefed before their mission in Italy during World War II. The heroics of African-American pilots and troops during the conflict led President Harry Truman to sign an executive order in 1948 with the intention of ending segregation in the armed forces.

resistance. The 45th Infantry Division, stationed in Japan after training at Camp Polk, became the first National Guard unit to integrate.

During the Korean conflict, some units consisting almost entirely of black soldiers continued to be stationed at Camp Polk's North Fort, recalled Harry Fisher, a Louisiana resident interviewed for this book. Fisher arrived at Camp Polk as a young black soldier in 1952. "I was in the 509th Heavy Tank Battalion. I was at Camp Polk, roughly speaking, about eighteen months.…Training was automatically hard, but I could take it because I was a young man, seventeen years old. You learned how to march and I went to the firing range.…I could disassemble a .50 caliber machine gun blindfolded, and all the people in our tank battalion carried a pistol, a .45 [caliber]."

Part of Fisher's training required retrieving unexploded shells from the firing range. "They [other recruits] were firing [artillery] over our heads, 105-millimeter howitzers.…They had us searching for duds, a shell that didn't go off. The black soldiers had to walk inch-by-inch in a line formation to pick up duds." Fisher learned night-fighting techniques and practiced aiming and shooting the 90-millimeter tank gun. He also served as an assistant tank driver. "We would go through North Camp and enter the woods. They had a training area, a course for military personnel [where he drove the tank]."

Fisher described significant tension between the white officers who commanded his unit and his fellow black soldiers. He also recalled some lower-level black officers. Some post facilities, including the swimming pool, were off limits to the black troops, and he and the other black soldiers were forced to ride in the back of the bus between North Fort and South Fort. "If you had to tend any business in personnel, you couldn't ride in the front of the military bus. It's hard to believe, but it's the truth."

Fisher remembered being frequently stopped by the military police (MPs). One time the MPs took him to the post stockade for flirting with a white woman, Fisher said. "After they got me in the stockade, they beat me.…In the stomach, they kicked me.…[They] stripped me buck naked, dumped cold water on me, and beat me.…They told me to 'Go back and tell them niggers we whooped you to let those black people know to stay in their place.' I had to be hospitalized."

By the time Fisher left Camp Polk, the post was undergoing full integration. He next trained as a tank leader at Fort Knox, Kentucky, where he was promoted to sergeant first class. He went on to serve in Germany, retiring after five years of military service. Many black soldiers, Fisher said, some of them his friends from Camp Polk, "went to Korea and fought for their country."

Soldiers training at Camp Polk during the Korean War years learn to fire a .45-caliber pistol.

Conditions for black soldiers gradually improved, he said. "It's a lot different now. Everyone is treated on an equal basis." Today, Fort Polk's commanders and the rest of the Army work to ensure that everyone, regardless of race or gender, is treated fairly and has equal opportunities for advancement. Women, however, by federal regulation, are still barred from serving in frontline combat units.

Many black officers have served with distinction at Fort Polk and are achieving high ranking positions in the Army. For example, retired general Colin Powell, former Army Chief of Staff, helped lead the United States during Desert Storm, the 1991 war against Iraq. In 2000, President George W. Bush chose Powell as his Secretary of State.

While soldiers were training at Camp Polk, the situation brightened somewhat in Korea. After a grim beginning, the balance now seemed to tilt in favor of the forces fighting for South Korea. The U.S. Army officially fought on behalf of the United Nations (UN), which strongly condemned the North Korean aggression. The U.S. Congress never formally declared war against the North Koreans. Instead, the government called the conflict a *police action*.

A promising turning point came when the Americans staged a daring amphibious landing behind enemy lines at the South Korean city of Inchon on September 15, 1950. Despite the treacherous high tides, the troops successfully clambered ashore. As

predicted by General Douglas MacArthur, commander of the UN forces, the landing surprised the North Koreans and the city fell within twenty-four hours.

Simultaneously, further south, the 8th Army commanded by Walker surged north from Pusan, catching the North Koreans in a vice. Repeatedly bombed and machine gunned by U.S. Air Force and Navy planes, the Communist troops retreated in a rout.

American and other UN troops pursued the enemy across the 38th Parallel into North Korea, despite ominous warnings that Communist China would react with hostility to such an invasion. MacArthur, enjoying the height of his career and fame, dismissed concerns about China and divided his forces as they neared the Chinese border. This proved to be a serious miscalculation. On November 25, 1950, a Chinese Army of a quarter of a million soldiers slammed into the flanks of the UN forces and poured through exposed gaps in their lines. The attack coincided with the arrival of the coldest Korean winter in more than one hundred years. Temperatures plunged to twenty-five degrees below zero. Retreating UN forces, caught in heavy snows, were buffeted by ferocious winds. Casualties were heavy.

Another blow to American morale was the death of Walker. On December 23, 1950, his jeep skidded on an icy Korean road and crashed into a truck,

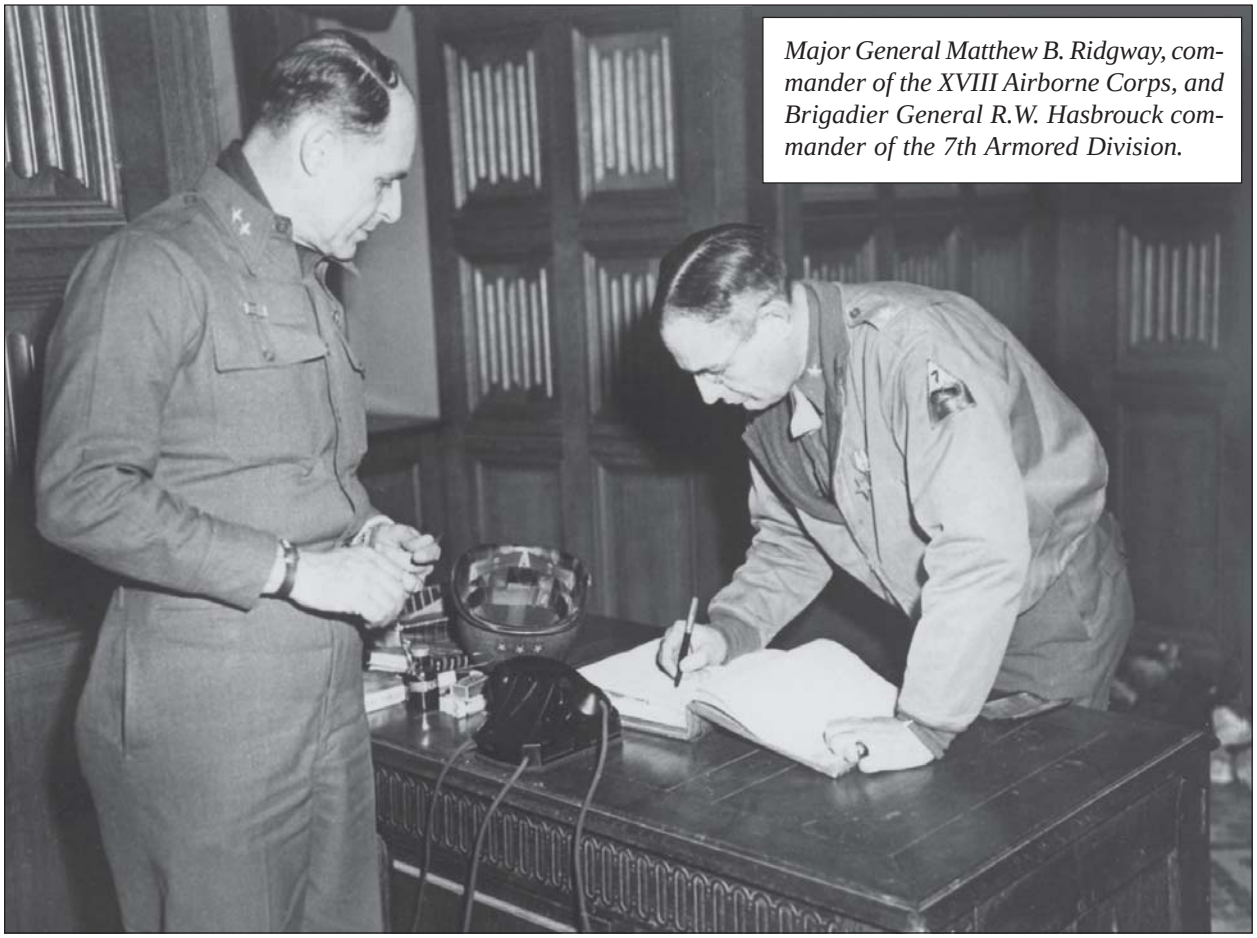
Mock battles startlingly similar to actual combat were staged at Camp Polk in the 1950s.

killing him. By January 1951, UN forces had been pushed back some three hundred miles. It was the longest retreat in American military history.

At this bleak moment, however, American troops began winning battles and pushing the North Koreans and Chinese back toward North Korea. Meanwhile, at Camp Polk, the 45th Infantry Division finished training, received orders, and became the first major National Guard unit to be deployed to the war zone. In March 1951, the 45th left Camp Polk to board transport ships in New Orleans. The troops then passed through the Panama Canal and ultimately arrived in Japan, just as the U.S. military faced yet another crisis.

A bitter public conflict was brewing between President Truman, the Commander in Chief, and General MacArthur, who was supervising the war. According to historian McCullough, MacArthur advocated dropping thirty to fifty atomic bombs on China and flooding radioactive waste into the Yalu River, the North Korea–China boundary. Concerned that widening the effort would lead to World War III, Truman wanted to limit the conflict to Korea's borders. MacArthur made no secret that he disagreed. Incensed by MacArthur's repeated insubordination, Truman removed him from command of the UN troops in April 1951.

Secretary of Defense George C. Marshall, who as an Army general helped organize the Louisiana Maneuvers and was so important to Camp Polk's early history, was soundly in favor of dismissing MacArthur, as was General Omar Bradley, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, another important figure involved in the Louisiana Maneuvers.



Major General Matthew B. Ridgway, commander of the XVIII Airborne Corps, and Brigadier General R.W. Hasbrouck commander of the 7th Armored Division.

Brigadier General Hasbrouck signs the guest book of Major General Ridgway after Hasbrouck received the Silver Star for gallantry at the defense of St. Vith, Belgium.

MacArthur, despite his great popularity with the public and many members of Congress, was replaced by General Matthew Ridgway, a World War II hero and a prominent guest at the dedication of the Claiborne-Polk Military Railroad. Now, in addition to overseeing the Korean War, Ridgway's responsibilities included protecting Japan.

The Soviet Union, bolstered by its possession of nuclear weapons, had become increasingly belligerent. Soviet-built MiG-15 jets roamed the sky over Korea, engaging in high-speed duels with American Sabre jets. Although North Korea owned the aircraft, evidence indicated that some of the pilots flying the jets were Russians. Soviet support was also evident on the ground, where the Communists provided North Korean and Chinese forces with tanks, artillery, and military advisors. At the same time, the Soviets conducted their own massive military maneuvers in Siberia. These involved more than a quarter of a million heavily armed troops. American authorities feared these soldiers would be used in an amphibious assault on Japan.

Historian Clay Blair wrote that Ridgway was ill-equipped to defend against such a Soviet attack if one occurred. He had at his disposal only a paltry Japanese force carved from police reserves and two National Guard divisions, including the 45th Infantry Division trained at Camp Polk. The 45th prepared to blunt an invasion by building up defenses on Japan's northern island Hokkaido. Ridgway, meanwhile, conducted strained negotiations with the Joint Chiefs of Staff over the extent of his authority to withdraw forces from Korea to defend Japan.

As the 45th Infantry Division prepared for what might be the opening shots of World War III, troops who had been training at Camp Polk's North Fort began leaving their units to replace the killed or wounded in outfits already stationed in Korea. Sonny Berry was among these replacements, joining the 89th Tank Battalion of the 25th Infantry Division. "Luckily, when I went overseas, my unit was the only one left that still had an M4E8 tank so I didn't have any adjustment to make to another tank." Berry, a tank commander, earned the Bronze Star for valor in Korea. "Ours were a lot of defensive battles because, at that time, the war had become more stable, not a real full-scale assault type thing, a lot of mortar and artillery.…Some of the area we worked on is today pretty famous, like Heartbreak Ridge."

As the danger of a Soviet invasion of Japan seemed to diminish, American commanders ordered the 45th Infantry Division into Korea. The troops arrived in December 1951 and began replacing the 1st Cavalry Division on the front lines. Cavalry troopers, withdrawing from their positions, left artillery and other equipment in place. The soldiers of the 45th then slipped into those positions and began using the weapons left behind in a smooth transition that was soon tested. Almost immediately, Chinese soldiers attacked, but the inexperienced American troops managed to repulse them, proving the value of their training at Camp Polk.

For the next year and a half, the 45th occupied trenches and fortifications along the front line, which wound like a snake above and below the 38th Parallel, the boundary between North and South Korea. American and other UN forces, with about 350,000 troops, were outnumbered by the combined troops of the Chinese and North Koreans, with about 490,000 soldiers.

The war reached a stalemate. The front line rarely moved far as the combatants showered each other with artillery and bombs. Periodically, each side instigated deadly offensives, trying to maneuver for more territory while negotiators conducted on-again, off-again discussions for a ceasefire. During the summer of 1952, the 45th Division's 189th Field Artillery delivered intense fire in battles at T-Bone Ridge and Old Baldy. The division's infantry endured terrible hardships in the struggle to secure strategically important positions, including Heartbreak Ridge, Pork Chop Hill, and Luke's Castle.

On the night of November 30, 1952, a small raiding party from the 45th Division snuck out of their positions and began climbing a rugged slope—the no-man's land between the two powerful armies. The soldiers were ordered to engage the enemy and, if possible, capture prisoners to interrogate about North Korean and Chinese strategies.

The darkness suddenly flashed with mortars and machine-gun fire and boomed with explosions. Several American soldiers were hit and fell. The rest

of the raiding party surged ahead, charging into enemy trenches where they fought hand-to-hand.

When an American officer ordered the raiders to pull back to their own lines, Private First Class Charles George and two others remained behind to cover the withdrawal. As the three began climbing out of the trenches to make their own retreat, a live grenade rolled between them. George shouted a warning to one of his buddies and pushed the other aside, then fell on the grenade just before it exploded. His two uninjured companions dragged and carried him back to the American lines and a first-aid station, where he soon died. The citation accompanying the Congressional Medal of Honor awarded to him posthumously stated that his "indomitable courage, consummate devotion to duty, and willing self-sacrifice reflect the highest credit upon himself and uphold the finest traditions of the military service."

President Truman decided not to seek reelection, and in November 1952 American voters elected Dwight D. Eisenhower, who first came to national prominence during the Louisiana Maneuvers. Eisenhower had campaigned with a vow to end the war in Korea, a promise that resonated with a public weary of the bloody battles and stalemate.

Shortly after his election, President Eisenhower visited Korea to bolster troop morale and see for himself if a solution could be found to stop the fighting. Like his predecessor, the new president rejected advice to use nuclear weapons or to expand the war into China, but his reputation as a tough military leader perhaps helped push Chinese and North Korean negotiators to a settlement. The agreement, however, did not come until after more battles were fought in the spring and summer of 1953, as the foes continued to grapple for positions. Finally, on July 27, 1953, negotiators signed an armistice in the city of Panmunjom, South Korea, that left the boundary between North and South Korea along the 38th Parallel, roughly where it was when the war began. The 45th Infantry Division remained along the front lines to enforce the peace when the fighting stopped.

In the end, the high toll from this long military engagement accomplished very little for the aggressors. An estimated 33,629 Americans were killed, along with some three hundred thousand South Korean soldiers. About one-half million North Korean soldiers and an estimated one million Chinese lost their lives. Perhaps two million Korean civilians also died.

Most Americans wanted to put the conflict behind them quickly. Few parades or other ceremonies celebrated the homecomings of soldiers returning from Asia. The rousing welcomes that greeted returning World War II troops were not repeated. Sonny Berry recalled that when he arrived in Seattle, Washington, "We got off the boat and they fed us a steak and some french fried potatoes and a glass of milk, and sent us where we were to go. There wasn't any band playing, so it was kind of like Vietnam.…Maybe 100 or 200 of you came back [together], but you all went different ways. There were no flags or anything like that."

When Berry arrived back in Leesville, Camp Polk still bustled with the presence of the 37th Infantry Division. Most of the troops in this National Guard unit from Ohio were draftees, Berry recalled, although some were also Korean War veterans.

The mood at Camp Polk relaxed as the fighting in Korea abated. Edward Flanigan from Orange, Texas, was among those who returned to Camp Polk near the end of the war. He arrived in June 1953 and joined the 37th Infantry Division's 147th Infantry Regiment. In an interview for the Fort Polk *Guardian* newspaper in 1990, he said, "I was a truck driver and a squad leader for Service Company. I traveled many miles of roads on the Camp Polk reservation, taking troops to and from training areas, to rifle ranges and artillery firing ranges at Pitkin, and on maneuvers." Flanigan enjoyed his stay on the installation. "I spent a lot of my time during the week in Leesville at night, and most of the weekends." In 1954, his regiment left Camp Polk for maneuvers at Fort Bragg, North Carolina. Soon after, the rest of the 37th Infantry followed, and Camp Polk's future was uncertain once more.

15. Fort Polk: A New Name, A New Mission

Camp Polk closed again in 1954 after the war in Korea ended. With no imminent threat abroad, national leaders paid heed to economists' warnings that deficit government spending should be reduced. Once more, Leesville, Louisiana, went into a tailspin, losing residents and businesses. The impact on the community, while not quite as devastating as it was after World War II, was still damaging. One difference was that fewer civilians moved to Leesville during the Korean conflict than during World War II when, in the midst of a national economic depression, an abundance of newly created jobs attracted droves of workers into the area.

> *The plan may not be worth a damn, but planning is everything.*
>
> *— General Dwight D. Eisenhower*

"A lot of those who came back to work during the Korean War at Camp Polk had lived here previously," Sonny Berry told military interviewers in 1990. Berry, former civilian aide to the Secretary of the Army, said many returning workers were "hometown natives, home parish people" who had family or a residence in the area. "So when the post opened, they came back and they were pretty well set." When the installation closed again, this time more employees stayed, although the area "still lost a lot of people."

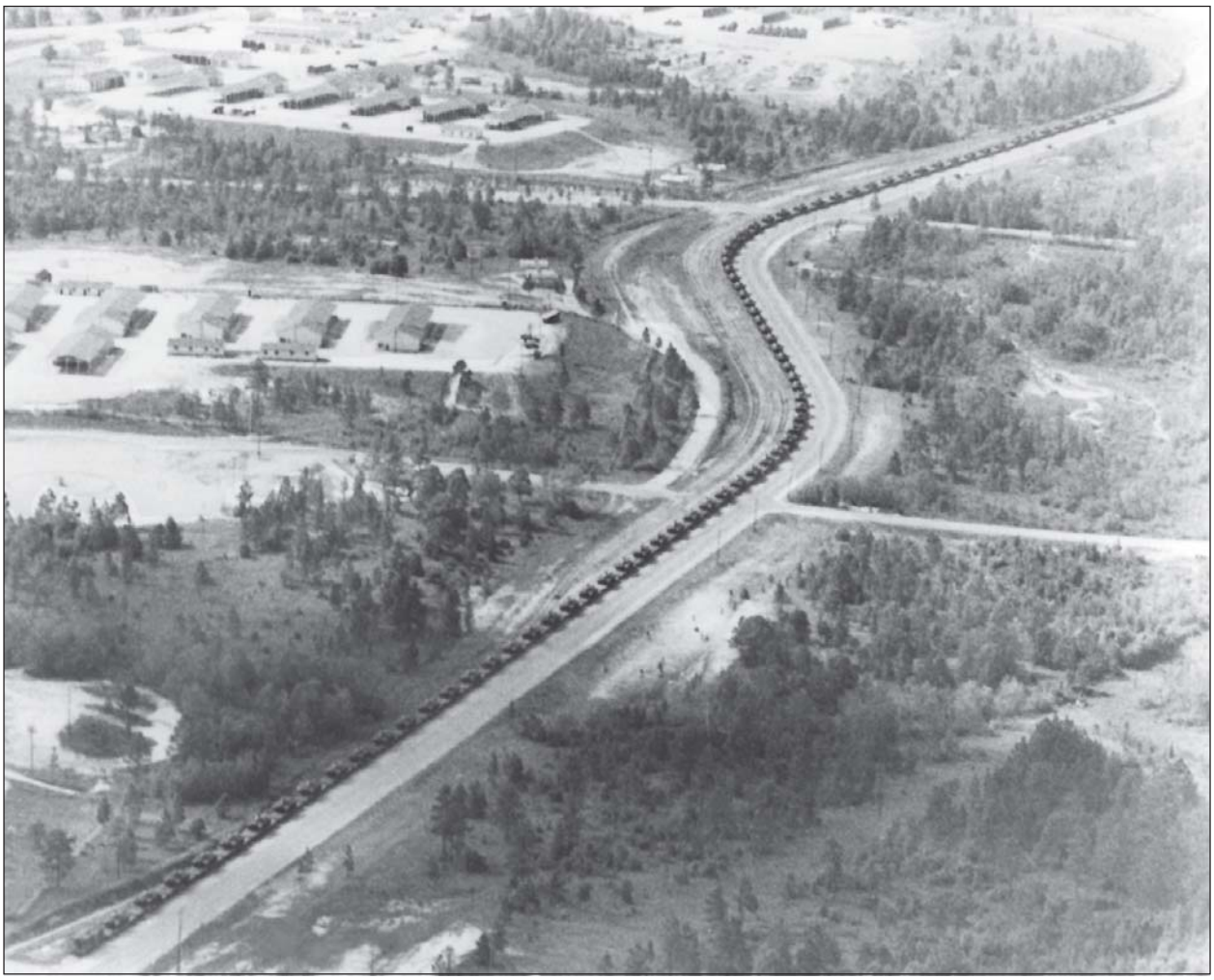
Losing an active Camp Polk after the Korean War was a blow in particular to Leesville's government, which, in anticipation of continued prosperity, had incurred $750,000 in bonded debt to build a swimming pool, golf course, playground, and two new schools. Mayor R.J. Fertitta said ruefully of the projects, "…we need [them] now like I need rocks in my head." He added, "The Army led us to believe that Polk would remain active, and to show our appreciation and concern for the men, we built all this. I don't know what we'll do with it [the projects] now."

The mayor angrily disputed the Army's contention that finances prompted the shuttering of Camp Polk. "Economy, heck! There's nothing to that. I'll tell this, if it's economy they want, then tell me why they had to have a new appropriation of several million dollars for Fort Riley [Kansas] just to take care of the men from [Camp] Polk?" He also pointed out that the federal government had recently spent millions of dollars on new facilities at Fort Hood in Texas. "In Polk and Leesville, we have enough water and enough sewerage means and enough housing to accommodate two divisions. And they closed it down for economy?"

With the closing of the military post, the town's population, in a matter of weeks, plummeted from fourteen thousand to six thousand. Some eight hundred houses stood empty, and business activity dropped by two-thirds, according to the *Leesville Daily Leader*. Camp Polk's annual payroll of $54 million vanished almost overnight.

According to *The Shreveport Times*, "The soldiers marched away—all 10,000 of them—and suddenly the nickels plunked less freely in the juke boxes at the roadside drive-ins and they 'set 'em up again' much less often at the Pink Elephant and the Broken Drum saloon."

George M. Frasher, editor of the *Leesville Daily Leader*, wrote in a 1990 article that local residents thought the closing "ironic" because President Dwight D. Eisenhower was in office at the time. Many Leesville citizens credited him with approving the location of Camp Polk after riding through the area on horseback prior to World War II. Presi-



M48 tanks wind for miles at Fort Polk. The 1st Armored Division rode tanks in long convoys through Fort Polk in the 1950s.

dent Eisenhower's connection to the post offered some hope that Camp Polk would reopen. As one businessman said, "Ike [President Eisenhower] helped pick it out. I can't believe he'll let it rot down. I just don't think he will."

Whether the President's fondness for a place that helped propel his military career ultimately impacted Camp Polk is hard to assess, but mounting international tensions were undoubtedly a factor. The Soviet Union had been aggressively increasing its military strength, in some respects surpassing every other nation including the United States. Both the Soviets and the United States now possessed hydrogen bombs twenty to twenty-five times more powerful than the atomic weapons dropped on Japan to end World War II. In these heated days of the arms race, the United States produced two nuclear weapons a day, according to historian Stephen Ambrose. The Soviets worked feverishly to match the growing American atomic arsenal.

Fear of nuclear war spread across the United States, prompting many families to build bomb shelters in their basements. In schools, worried teachers herded students under their desks to practice *duck and cover* drills, naively hoping to save them from the effects of a possible nuclear blast. A phenomenon called the *Red Scare* spread, causing thousands to lose their jobs and be blacklisted from universities, film studios, state and local governments, public schools, and private companies. In-

dividuals were targeted based on mere suspicion that they might harbor dangerous ideas or Communist sympathies. At the same time, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) tracked webs of bona fide Soviet spies operating in the United States.

Tensions between the U.S. and the Soviet Union grew to alarming proportions. On five occasions in 1954 and 1955, advisors advocated dropping nuclear bombs in Asia in response to events surrounding France's loss of Vietnam, Communist China's threats to invade the Nationalist Chinese Islands of Quemoy and Matsu, and Communist China's refusal to release thirteen American prisoners from the Korean War. President Eisenhower refused in every instance.

With the world seemingly once again on the brink of world war, the Army began searching anew for a place to conduct maneuvers. Camp Polk, less than a year after closing, became a prime candidate. "The Army said they needed seven million acres.…The governor of Louisiana told President Eisenhower that we could do it.…Even the great state of Texas, where the 1st Armored Division was now based, could not raise that [amount of land]," Berry remembered.

Local leaders called a community meeting at the Vernon Parish courthouse in June 1955. With standing room only, some 350 people packed the building to hear Winford Morris, president of the chamber of commerce, and Mayor R.J. Fertitta say they had the military's written assurances that Camp Polk would be permanently reopened if residents would sign the necessary maneuver agreements to allow the military to use their property.

Once again, as they had done before World War II, civic and local government leaders and influen-

Soldiers unload an M48 tank from a railcar at Fort Polk while local citizens watch.

tial citizens fanned out into Vernon Parish to ask landowners to sign the documents, assuring them of compensation for any damage caused by the military. Soon enough land was committed to conduct military exercises. Louisiana Senators Russell Long and Allen Ellender subsequently announced that the Army would reopen Camp Polk permanently. In a telegram to the local newspaper, the senators also announced that Camp Polk would now be known as Fort Polk, reflecting its new status.

The 1955 war games held at Fort Polk were called *Operation Sagebrush*. Some eighty-five thousand troops participated, significantly fewer than the four hundred thousand involved in the 1941 Louisiana Maneuvers that helped advance the careers of Eisenhower and Patton. More confined than the 1941 maneuvers, which extended over a large area of Louisiana and Texas, the Sagebrush exercises still covered a substantial portion of Louisiana, stretching east-west from Alexandria to the Sabine River, and north-south from near Shreveport to between DeRidder and Lake Charles.

Many of the participating soldiers were formerly stationed in Texas. Stephen Black, for example, served with the 61st Engineer Group based at Fort Hood, one of the first units to report to Fort Polk in the summer of 1955. Black told the Fort Polk *Guardian* in 1990 that when his unit arrived, Leesville was bustling as business owners pried open doors and windows that had been boarded up for months. "My first Saturday night in Leesville was spent sitting in a dance hall–tavern collecting dirt and dust in my hair that was falling from a large collection in the ceiling rafters. People dancing were of course shaking the dust loose from its

In November 1955, during the Operation Sagebrush exercises, soldiers maneuver a 105-millimeter recoilless rifle.

Right: During Operation Sagebrush in November 1955, Sergeant Harley Brooks and Private Herbert D. Farris call in artillery fire for the 7th Infantry Battalion.

Below: Second Lieutenant Charles H. Hipper, 1st Platoon, Company A, 7th Battalion, 3rd Infantry Division, leads a combat patrol in a cautious advance during Operation Sagebrush.

long inactivity. My comrades and I felt like liberators." Black added, "I was discharged shortly thereafter back at Fort Hood, and missed out on the war games in the fall. Thank God! As it was too hot."

Audie Murphy was possibly the most famous soldier involved in the Sagebrush exercises. *Life* magazine dubbed him the most decorated soldier of World War II. His heroism in Italy, France, and Belgium earned him the Congressional Medal of Honor and other distinctions. Film actor James Cagney guided Murphy into a movie career after the war, and he eventually appeared in forty-six films. While he was in Louisiana, Murphy's autobiography, *To Hell and Back*, was a bestseller, helping cement his popularity with soldiers and local residents. People craned their necks for a glimpse of him and regaled friends with tales of encounters with the famous hero. Murphy conducted combat training for the 36th Infantry Division, a National Guard unit, during his time at Fort Polk. He also fought in simulated battles on Peason Ridge, where so many earlier practice skirmishes occurred.

Operation Sagebrush lasted fifteen days. A provisional army, formed around the 1st Armored Division from nearby Fort Hood, represented U.S. forces during the exercises. The "aggressor force" included the 82nd Airborne Division. Ground commanders on both sides coordinated activities with fleets of Air Force bombers and fighter planes. Powerful jet aircraft, afterburners operating at full throttle, roared over Fort Polk during the two weeks, stirring great interest among local citizens.

Privates Edward Griggs, Charles Blovin, and Patrick Kavanaugh of the 7th Infantry Battalion fire an 81-millimeter mortar during the Operation Sagebrush maneuvers in 1955.

When the Sagebrush exercises ended, the 1st Armored Division began establishing new headquarters at Fort Polk. Participation in the 1941 Louisiana Maneuvers had helped prepare the division to fight across North Africa and on to Italy and the liberation of Rome during World War II. With their arrival in 1955, Fort Polk again reverberated with the sounds of cannons, machine guns, and soldiers marching in cadence. Lines of M-18 Patton tanks, much heavier than their World War II counterparts, raced across training areas. Tanks were often accompanied by helicopters, evidence of the modernizing Army. The military's highest echelons chose Fort Polk and the 1st Armored Division to test mobility and combat strategies for the nuclear age.

The division also provided the nearby community with lighter moments, courtesy of the military band that performed while riding in a fleet of jeeps. There was something stirring and amusing about the spectacle. The vehicles, lined up four across and four rows deep, rolled forward with windshields folded down and headlights illuminated. The musicians played their instruments, keeping their eyes on the conductor who stood facing them in the back of the lead jeep, his baton gyrating. The musical entertainment helped maintain cordial relations between the Army and Vernon Parish residents.

Civic leaders, after their successful sign-up campaign for maneuver agreements, thought they had an ironclad guarantee that Fort Polk would remain open permanently. Many of them gathered to unveil Fort Polk's new main gate. "Dignitaries pressed a button and there was the new Fort Polk sign," recounted Sonny Berry. One afternoon in 1957, however, Leesville residents received their first inkling that Fort Polk might cease operations yet again. "The telegraph office used to be on the north end of Third Street and the mayor's business was on the south end," Berry recalled. By the time a courier delivered a telegram to the mayor's business, "just about everybody on Third Street knew what was in the telegram. He got this telegram from the Congressional delegation that the Capehart [a housing project slated for Fort Polk] was going to be halted. Boy, you know, that kind of sent some signals—that was just a bolt out of the blue. The civilian community had begun to make some investments. That [the housing project cancellation] kind of shut that down, too."

Confirming local fears, most of the 1st Armored Division troops soon left. Part of Combat Command A remained for a while, but in June 1959, Fort Polk shut down completely. "When the installation closed, that put a real damper on growth and development," Berry commented. "We didn't really become depressed. Things kept going, but not like they had. A lot of businesses closed. A lot of people left."

Once again, the only military activity at Fort Polk occurred during National Guard summer encampments. Louisiana officials, however, refused to give up on the post. Political horse-trading helped boost the chances for yet another reopening, according to Berry, who had become one of Leesville's civic leaders. Berry explained that Chep Morrison, then mayor of New Orleans, was an Army Reserve brigadier general and friend of President John F. Kennedy, who was elected in 1960. "President Kennedy was trying to get a bill through Congress and needed some help very badly. Mayor Morrison told the President that he knew a senator [Russell Long] who would like to have an Army installation opened in his area." Berry continued, "The President asked his military adviser, who I think was General Maxwell Taylor, to go down and look at Fort Polk. We know for sure that a team of officers, headed by Colonel C. A. Anderson, came here from the Pentagon to assess the suitability of Fort Polk as a training post.…Senator Long supported the bill and President Kennedy opened the installation, or had it opened." A training division began arriving at Fort Polk in 1961, Berry said. "I think it was the 30th Infantry out of Kentucky."

Then Berlin, Germany, again became an international flashpoint as world tensions flared. In a bold bid for control, the Soviet Union threatened to force soldiers of the United States, Great Britain, and France out of the city. President Kennedy, who vowed to wage war if necessary to prevent the loss of Berlin, began mobilizing the U.S. military.

As Berry explained, "The advanced party [of the training division] had already arrived at Fort Polk and started getting ready for their [the

New arrivals reach Fort Polk to begin basic training during the Vietnam War.

division's] arrival, but because of the crisis in Berlin, our senior [military] leaders apparently thought they needed an armored division at Polk. So the 30th, I think, went to Fort Chaffee." In their place, the 49th Armored Division began rolling into Fort Polk.

The armored troops stayed about a year. Then in June 1962, Fort Polk became an Infantry Training Center. Unlike before, when the post hosted armored divisions or paratroopers, the installation's new mission was to provide basic training for individual soldiers, most of them draftees. Fort Polk provided their introduction to the military, and most would never forget the experience.

The number of soldiers who trained at Fort Polk grew in correlation with the increased Army presence in Southeast Asia, where the United States was propping up the non-Communist government of South Vietnam. The South Vietnamese were being attacked by guerrillas trained by Communist North Vietnam. The North Vietnamese, in turn, were supported and supplied by the Soviet Union and China.

U.S. involvement in Southeast Asia went largely unnoticed by most Americans until August 2, 1964, when it was reported that North Vietnamese torpedo boats had attacked the *USS Maddox*, an American destroyer, in the Gulf of Tonkin. President Lyndon Johnson, sworn in after President Kennedy's assassination in 1963, began a major military escalation. Within a year, more than 180,000 U.S. soldiers were fighting an enemy in South Vietnam under conditions far different from those experienced in World War II and the Korean War. For example, there were no front lines of battle in Vietnam. Instead, fighting would flare up in one part of the country, then the enemy would disappear until fighting erupted somewhere else, sometimes many miles away.

Triple-canopy jungles hindered U.S. pilots from providing adequate air support for ground troops. Identifying the enemy was also complicated. The Vietnamese, including women and young children,

might appear to be friendly noncombatants one moment, then toss grenades at the troops the next. Also, unlike in World War II when U.S. pilots routinely bombed enemy homelands, President Johnson restricted air strikes in North Vietnam, fearing to ignite a nuclear battle with the Soviet Union.

Training American soldiers how to fight in difficult jungle conditions became a top priority, and once more Fort Polk's environment fit the requirements. The responsibility for seeing that young soldiers reached a high level of readiness lay mostly with drill sergeants. One of them, Wiley Clark, was stationed at Fort Polk in December 1964 after serving the first of three tours of duty in Vietnam. "It was sort of a humble beginning," he recalled in an interview for this book. "We were the second company [with 220 soldiers] to activate [at North Fort]. The buildings weren't even finished inside. We were very short on staff. Livestock still ran in some areas. We had to shoo them out, cows and horses. People came to claim the cattle because they were valuable, but a horse, when it gets wild, no one seems to want it. There are still some trespass horses on Fort Polk in some of the training areas."

From the beginning, he explained, every drill sergeant and instructor had to have a combat infantry badge, indicating his service in World War II, Korea, or, increasingly, Vietnam. "We had actually fought face-to-face with an enemy," Clark explained. "We understood the difficulties of being in combat. I think that was really the key to the training [at Fort Polk] because we made it as difficult as we could. Our total focus was on training those young men to survive."

A Vietnam-era model for an Army recruitment wagon. Later, with the advent of the all-volunteer Army, recruiting became essential for a strong military.

Row after row of barracks on Fort Polk during the 1960s.

Within a relatively short period of time, thousands of troops were at Fort Polk preparing for war. "Everywhere you looked there was nothing but soldiers, and everywhere someone was moving, marching, doing drills, firing on those ranges," Clark recalled.

Bruce Mann, Fort Polk's forester at the time he was interviewed for this book, arrived for basic training in 1971. Like all new arrivals, he spent several days at a reception center, filling out forms, going through orientation, and receiving his military gear. "Then they herded us into cattle trucks, that's what they were termed, cattle trucks. It was an eighteen-wheeler and it was like you were cattle being transported on an open highway. They had wooden benches along the side. We were packed in there like sardines with our duffel bags and all our necessary equipment," Mann said.

When the truck rolled to a stop, an officer called out for Mann's company, Bravo 1-2, to disembark. "There were about six drill sergeants and they were yelling, 'Get off this truck!' I won't use the exact language [they used], but I remember saying to myself, 'Man, I'm in for it now," Mann stacked his belongings, as ordered, inside a barracks built during World War II. This would be his home for the next two months. "My first day there, come night fall, a drill sergeant walked in and said, 'Report to me—you, you, and you—for fire guard!" Mann's first thought was, "What's fire guard?" He soon learned that he was responsible for patrolling the hallways, back and forth, every two hours through-

Pushups and other exercises were standard elements of basic training at Fort Polk.

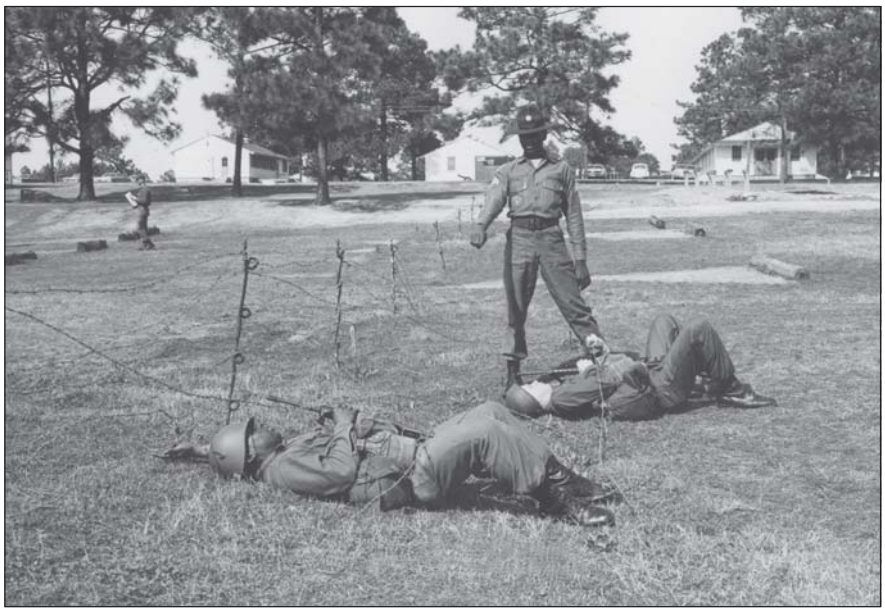
out the night, checking to make sure that the wooden buildings were not ablaze.

Mann recalled that most days, even without pulling fire-guard duty, soldiers slept little. Lights were extinguished at 9 p.m., although troops often still had many tasks yet to do. "You better make sure your uniform is ready, better make sure your boots are polished, better make sure everything is ready for the next day. So you were really lucky to get really to sleep by midnight," he explained. "Then you were up again at 4 or 5 a.m., waked up by a drill sergeant who would come in and would take a trash can and he would beat it. It would be very loud." Going without sleep was just one of the many stresses.

Soldiers were trained to eat quickly in the field and under combat conditions.

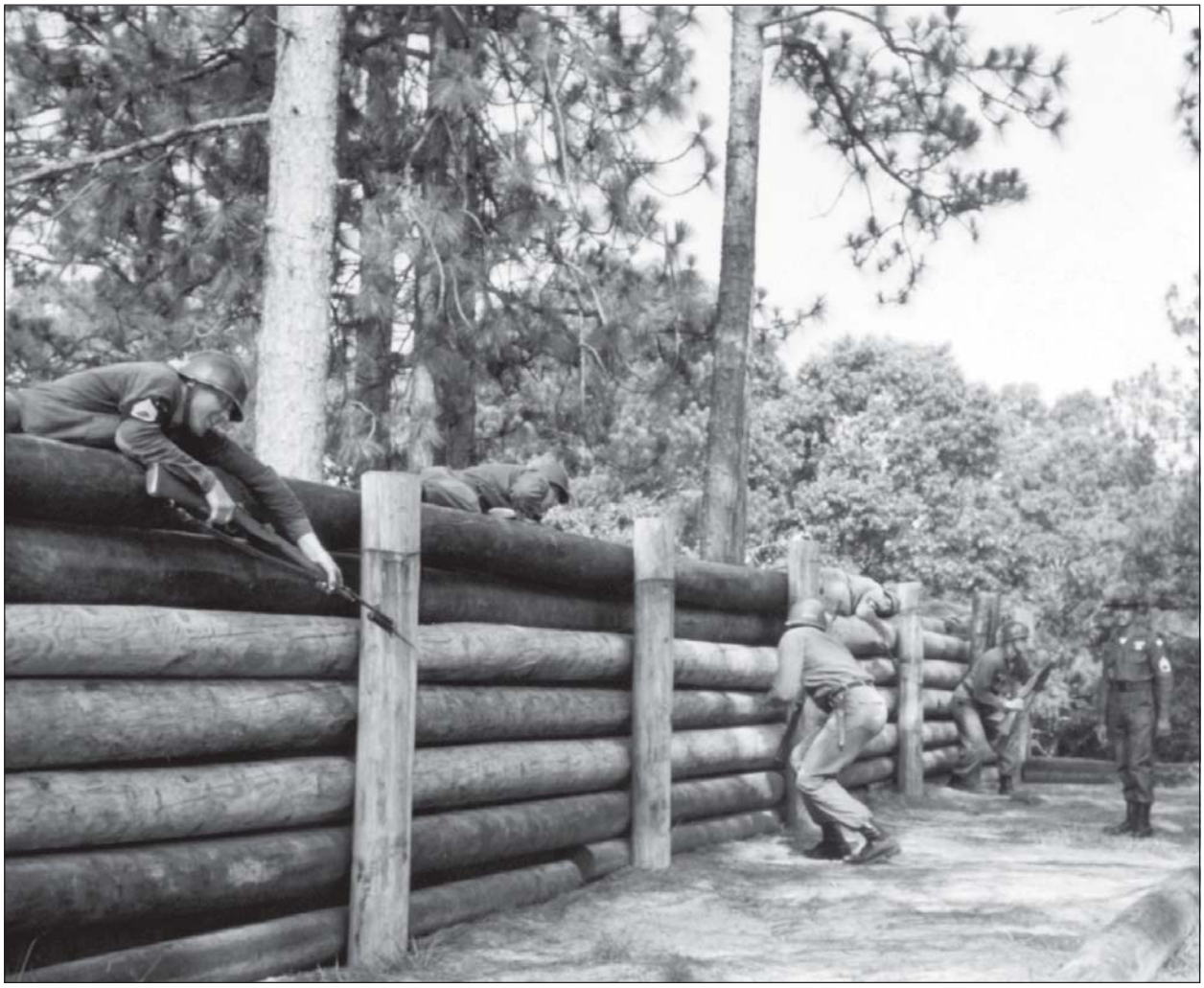
Left: A drill sergeant instructs recruits in the basics of using a machine gun.

Below: Soldiers trained intensely, often running many miles, to stay in good physical condition.



Right: A Fort Polk drill sergeant instructs a soldier on how to move beneath barbed wire on March 4, 1970.

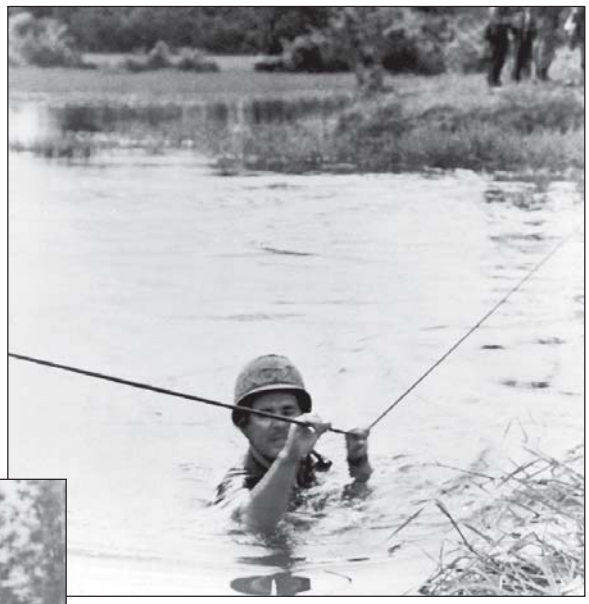
Below: Trainees scramble over a log barricade.



Above: Cadets at the Fort Polk Academy Drill Sergeant School, May 4, 1971.

Right: A drill sergeant instructs soldiers in hand-to-hand combat, May 3, 1971.

Left: Staff Sergeant Wilbur Rogers, a Fort Polk drill sergeant, demonstrates a proper jab for hand-to-hand combat to Private Raymondo Rodriques in 1971.



Right: Between 1962 and 1976, when Fort Polk served as a military training center, soldiers learned how to cross deep waterways quickly and silently.

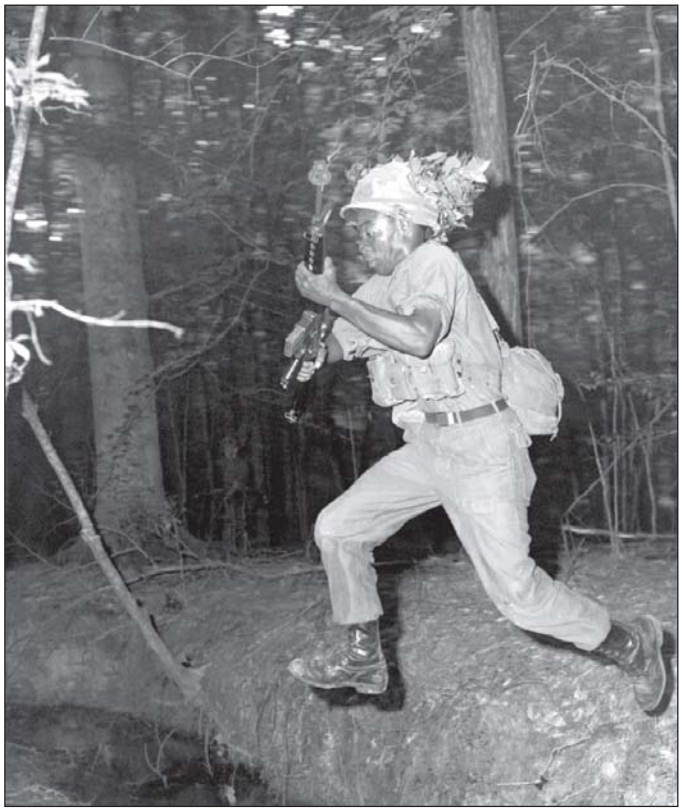
Below: Staff Sergeant Raymond Williams advises a soldier on a sight adjustment at a firing range.

Below: Soldiers at Fort Polk in the 1970s trained to fire many types of weapons, including the bazooka.

Left: Training at Fort Polk during the Vietnam era included testing plastic explosives.

Right: During the 4th Army field exercise, basic combat trainees at Fort Polk learn how to aim and shoot a machine gun.

Below: Soldiers with Company C, 2nd Battalion, 3rd Training Brigade, prepare to defend a position with an 81-millimeter mortar at Fire Base One on Fort Polk's Peason Ridge.



Above: During the Vietnam era, a soldier learns the importance of camouflage.

Right: A soldier leaps over a ditch on a training course.

Left: A pop-up target on the quick-reaction course helps soldiers learn to distinguish in seconds between combatants and civilians.

Tear Gas and Little Sleep Greet Troops

In preparing for the rigors of round-the-clock combat, soldiers at Fort Polk during the Vietnam War slept little during their eight weeks of basic training. In the first two weeks they learned such skills as assembling and disassembling weapons, reading maps, and administering first aid. "There was lots of classroom stuff, then they had a test," explained Wiley Clark, a former drill sergeant. "We would take them to class all day and then up till 10 o'clock at night. We would also be going through rote drills until, no matter what fog they were in, they could go through that drill."

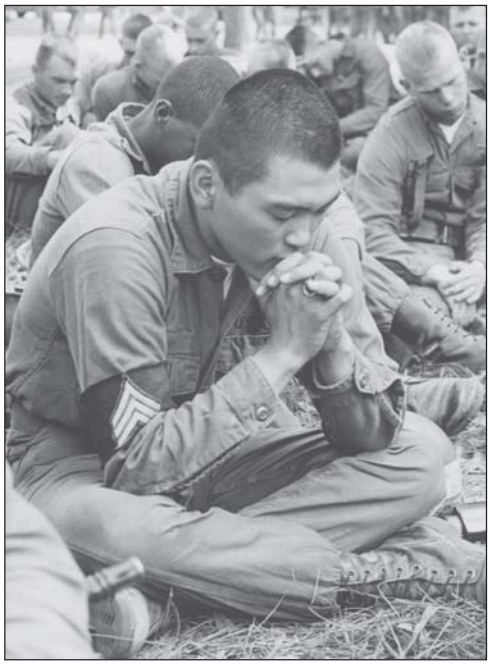
According to Clark, in the following few weeks, the trainees practiced firing weapons at different ranges by both day and night. Most had never fired an automatic weapon or machine gun before, and a significant number had never held a rifle. They learned to sight weapons accurately and clean them after every session. The next day the soldiers would be up and at it again. Bruce Mann, Fort Polk's forester who also did his basic training at the post, remembered that "There were drill sergeants from one end of that firing range to the other, and they watched you like a hawk. You would shoot so many rounds, then make sure the gun was unarmed, then you walked down and looked at the target with the drill sergeant." He continued, "They had you fire from all kinds of positions—standing, prone, foxhole. They had holes in the ground and you had to get in and shoot." Mann remarked that the time spent at the firing range, despite the constant crack of guns and bullets whizzing through the air, was actually calmer than other periods when drill sergeants were constantly yelling.

One memorable exercise was the "confidence course." Mann explained that "there was barbed wire stretched across an open field a long ways. Up above you, at the front of the range, was a machine gun that shot real bullets. You had to go through this course on your back, from one end to the other. A voice kept yelling, 'Don't stand up, because you will get shot!' The point of that adventure was to give you a sense of combat with…real live bullets going over your head." Mann learned later that the guns were deliberately aimed so that "no matter how high you stood up, there was no way the bullets would hit you.

Trainees also learned how to use hand grenades, patrol in an enemy-infested forest, and respond to being targeted by gunfire. They bivouacked in Fort Polk's remote areas, setting up tents, living without campfires, and participating in maneuvers. Throughout, drill instructors continued to emphasize physical conditioning and unit cohesion. One particularly difficult activity, Mann said, was the gas chamber. Soldiers waited their turn, watching as others entered the building five at a time. "I got to witness a bunch of these people walk out, tears just running down their faces. So I knew I was in for a treat," Mann recalled. "They used tear gas. You go inside that chamber [wearing a gas mask] and the drill sergeant is in there. They make you take the mask off. The instant it comes off, your eyes are immensely burning and you're gagging. I mean it is unbelievable, and they ask you to say your name, rank, and serial number. Fortunately, he [the drill sergeant] didn't detain you in there. When he sees you are in distress, you come out."

Left: Fort Polk has a long history of teaching troops how to detect and protect against poisonous weapons. Here Sp/4 James Pounkett of the 60th Army Band (left) and Sergeant First Class Carson E. Vincent of the HQ 2nd Brigade isolate an unknown gas on September 16, 1970.

Below: A difficult training exercise during the 1960s and 1970s involved removing gas masks in a room filled with tear gas. ROTC cadets, undergoing a two-week summer camp at Fort Polk, exit the gas chamber clutching their masks on July 21, 1976.



Left: Trainees participate in silent meditation at a bivouac site for the 1st Brigade at Fort Polk on May 14, 1970.

Below: Red Cross nurse Jo Dell Johnson checks Private Donald Woolory's blood pressure as he prepares to donate blood at Fort Polk in 1971.

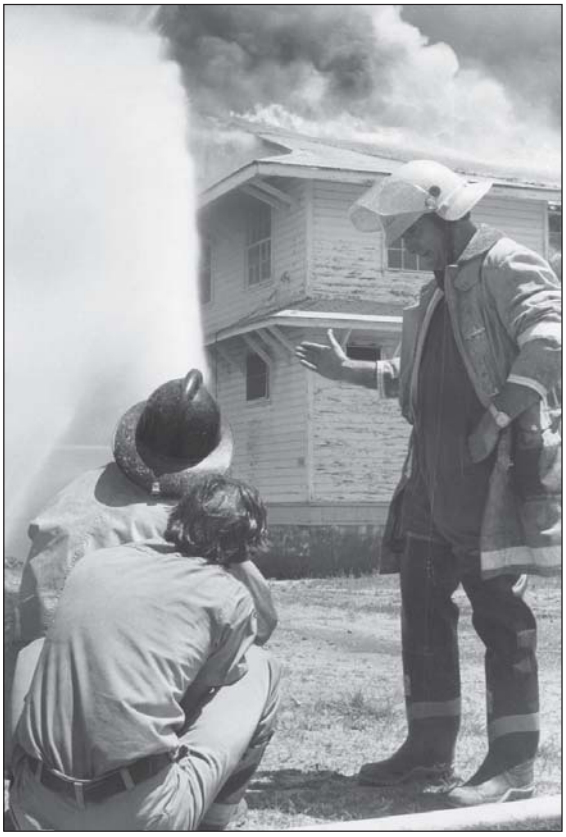
Below: Soldiers in formation are inspected by a Fort Polk drill sergeant on February 26, 1971.

Soldiers learn to carry out their tasks regardless of the weather.

Barely awake, the troops filed outside to exercise. "You were running, and not in any tennis shoes like it is today. You ran in your boots," Mann said. "Then you come back and you don't have but just a few minutes for thirty people to go in and shower and clean up. All the time, a drill sergeant is just raising cane at you. Before you go to breakfast, you've got to do more PT [physical training]. They had, they called them monkey bars, which is where you swing from one end to the other. You get through with those and then there was a canvas mat laid out. You had to low cross. That's where you get down on your belly and use your elbows to pull forward. A drill sergeant was down at the other

Above: Trainees learned to use many different types of weapons including flamethrowers, as demonstrated by this soldier on September 17, 1970.

Right: Local fire departments participated in a training exercise sponsored by Fort Polk in April 1976.



end, and when you got up, he would look at your name tag. If it wasn't scraped up, because the canvas mat would make a scratch, then you had to go back and do it again. It was pretty tough. Then you were able to go to breakfast."

The sign over the mess hall door read: "Take all you want, eat all you take." The food was good and varied, but there was little time to eat, according to Mann. "The unfortunate thing is you had a drill sergeant there, just raising cane at you, 'Hurry, hurry, hurry,' and you were virtually running through the line. Then you sit down and he's standing over you [yelling] 'You not through yet? Get out of here!' "

Breakfast over, the day's training began in earnest. Soldiers participated in various activities and

Left: During training at Fort Polk, a litter team loads a patient with simulated wounds into a helicopter on October 2, 1968.

Below: A soldier treats a simulated wound in the field.

Fort Polk, long a training site for military engineers, housed the 588th Engineer Battalion, seen here installing a culvert in 1978.

drills, such as marching in unison, setting up tent camps, and studying weapons or practicing firing them. They marched nearly everywhere, including to the firing range some six miles away.

Clark, the former drill sergeant, explained that, as with all the basic training activities, there was a purpose to marching. "You are creating, it isn't automatons, because that's not what you want. You cannot make automatons out of the American soldiers, but you can weld them into a smoothly oiled machine. That's why you are marching. Since the beginning of time, from the Greek to the Roman formations, marching has been a matter of discipline and cohesion and being able to move large bodies of soldiers and place them where you want them, even if the situation is dangerous."

The soldiers learned to carry out their duties regardless of the weather. Clark explained that during warfare soldiers have to adapt to survive. "You never light fires no matter how cold it gets. You can't extract yourself from the environment. When it's raining, you can't go inside. If it's hot, you can't find the shade." The weather rarely interfered with troop instruction at Fort Polk. On one particular day, Clark recalled that he was the senior drill sergeant for a company of soldiers preparing to march at Honor Field. "It was raining, and we were in our khakis [uniforms], and we were already soaking wet. The buses came. We rode to Honor Field and we lined up, one thousand men. Then an announcement came that the parade was being canceled. I moved to the front of the formation and I told my

company commander to take the reviewing stand. 'We've come to march and we will march.' We passed in review with our commander standing in the reviewing stand, and the men were proud. Rain doesn't mean anything. And that's the attitude they had to have. You're not worried about personal hardship. You need to have pride in yourself and your unit, and you won't let your buddy down."

Mann recalled that in basic training, "Any sign of disrespect [to an officer] met swift punishment. If one person messed up, the whole platoon, thirty people, were down on the ground doing pushups. They were teaching you to work together as a group."

Every soldier in basic training had to be on guard against violating the rules because punishment, such as kitchen patrol (KP) or added physical exercise, would be meted out. "For KP, you got up at one o'clock in the morning. Then about 10 or 11 the next night you finally were off duty after having washed pots and pans and more pots and pans, the whole nine yards," Mann said.

"And don't chew gum, oh no. I found that out," Mann continued. "I walked into my orderly room one day, well, you don't walk, it seems like you run everywhere. A captain, he looked up at me and he says, 'Mann, are you chewing gum?' 'Yes, Sir.' 'Get down! Get down right now! Give me one hundred [pushups]!' And I'm struggling. He got down with me on the floor and he did his [pushups] with one hand.…They were trying to instill, I suppose, discipline in the soldier, respect for authority."

Clark recalled that the soldiers who struggled through basic training grumbled about the long hours, but many of the drill sergeants had to work even harder. "There were whole months where I would see my family only on Sundays. Nobody complained. You didn't mind working all those extra hours. We [the drill sergeants] knew what these young men were going to have to face [in Vietnam]. Everyone wanted to make sure that everything that could be done to train them was done. There was no personal gratification [for the drill sergeants]."

Private Charles Morris and Staff Sergeant Doug Fleming watch as Private First Class James Williams sights a mortar during training at Fort Polk's Peason Ridge on June 23,1976

Clark's motivation was, in part, instilled in him as a young soldier by his own drill sergeant. "He'd learned to load his rifle [only] after he was in the Battle of the Bulge, when he was seventeen years old. He spent the rest of his life making sure that [lack of training] wasn't going to happen to others. And after he fought in World War II and Korea, he was just serious about training. I guess I took it [training others] just that seriously. And I was not the only one." But drill sergeants had unexpected rewards, Clark said. "We had soldiers come all the way back here [from Vietnam] to say, 'Thank you.' Or, they would write letters thanking us. And sometimes they would say, 'I wish it had been harder.' "

16. "Tunnel Rats" Roam Beneath Tiger Ridge

More than one million soldiers trained at Fort Polk during the Vietnam War. "There was always someone graduating. There was a parade every week out here on Honor Field," recalled Wiley Clark. This former drill sergeant, highly decorated for his service in Vietnam, is now a civilian employee at Fort Polk in charge of scheduling training.

> *Remember that these enemies, whom we shall have the honor to destroy, are good soldiers and stark fighters. To beat such men, you must not despise their ability, but you must be confident in your own superiority.*
>
> *— General George S. Patton*

Jimmy Wyatt, another decorated Vietnam veteran, was trained at Fort Polk in the mid-1960s. By Valentine's Day, February 14, 1966, he was in South Vietnam with the 25th Infantry Division. Wyatt recalled patrolling an abandoned rubber plantation early that morning. "It was nothing but a pure minefield and booby traps and an area completely overgrown. Our mission was to 'search and destroy.' That's all we ever heard. 'Find the enemy and destroy them.' "

The soldiers kept their weapons ready to fire as they scanned the dense vegetation and listened intently for anything out of the ordinary. Waiting in the underbrush, fully camouflaged and perfectly still, some Vietnamese guerilla soldiers watched Wyatt and his companions. Suddenly, without warning, the guerillas opened fire, the sharp crack of their rifles shattering the quiet. The startled Americans crouched and returned fire. The guns blazed for a short while, then the shooting tapered off as the enemy fled deeper into the jungle, chased by Wyatt and his fellow troops. "We were involved in what we called a running firefight," Wyatt recalled. "We'd have a little gun battle and all of a sudden it would break off and move, and we were actually running." Charging through the underbrush, they soon ran into a trap, and the jungle exploded in gunfire once again.

"They ambushed us and I got hit," Wyatt said. "I got the back of my right hand blown out. I got shot through the left lung. I got shrapnel in both legs. I got shot all to pieces. I'd been over there [South Vietnam] only about a month and a half." Carried to safety by his fellow soldiers, he spent the next four months in a hospital recuperating. Then Wyatt went back to combat duty. "It was not by choice. I was a good American and I did what they told me."

In May 1973, after serving a second tour in Vietnam, Wyatt returned to Fort Polk to train troops as a staff sergeant. At the time, Army draftees and volunteers underwent eight weeks of basic training. Then, most of the trainees also received nine weeks of advanced infantry instruction. Fort Polk, beginning in 1966, offered both levels of preparation. South Fort was the basic training center, while North Fort housed troops undergoing advanced training. The advanced instruction focused on realistic simulated combat in settings designed to resemble those the soldiers would face in Vietnam. The instructors, Wyatt said, encouraged the soldiers to take their training seriously and grasp "all the knowledge that we're trying to impart.…We used to just basically beat into their heads, 'You are going into a life and death situation.' "

To capture the attention of advanced trainees, the instructors, after a relatively quiet reception, often used a strategy similar to one employed during basic training. According to Clark, "When they first got off the buses [at North Fort], they had

already been to basic training for eight weeks. They would come [to North Fort] and no one would yell at them at all." Drill sergeants showed the new arrivals to their barracks, took them to eat in the mess hall, and escorted them to an orientation session. The soldiers were treated politely throughout all these activities until the orientation session ended, then the loud browbeating began. Clark said, "I turned the drill sergeants on them and just started treating them badly. You have moral ascendancy over these soldiers so they will obey you no matter what. This [harsh treatment] lasted seventy-two hours. Then I explained to them, 'It's not necessary [to have drill sergeants shouting]. Now, you can live like that or you can do what we tell you.'"

After this jarring initiation, most trainees paid close heed to their instructors. The incessant drilling that followed was intended to prepare soldiers to react automatically under enemy fire. Even so, no amount of training can fully steel someone for

Right: Soldiers beginning advanced infantry training at Fort Polk receive new uniforms.

Below: Arriving at their Fort Polk barracks, soldiers are greeted by drill sergeants.

Right: During advanced infantry training, a soldier, with rifle ready to fire, runs through a forest on Fort Polk, October 26, 1973.

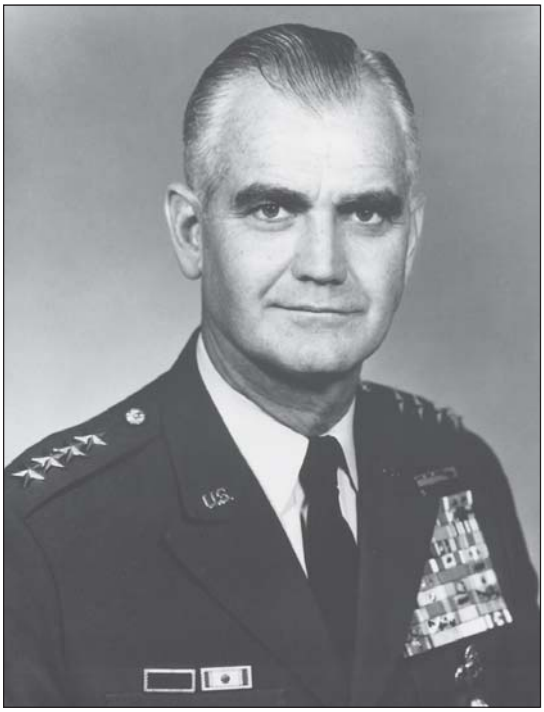
Below: Trainees assigned to Company C, 4th Battalion, 3rd Advanced Infantry Training Brigade, charge during a day attack on Fort Polk's Training Area 3, October 1, 1973.

war. Clark emphasized that "You can train them as hard as you want. You can make a person physically fit. You can have them undergo drills until it becomes automatic, but until they have actually looked the elephant in the eye, they just don't know.…Some people say [of combat], if you can live through the first twenty-four hours, then you are kind of okay. You are past the fog and now you really understand the reality of it."

Wyatt remarked that part of advance training was intended to help soldiers overcome instinctual reactions when confronted with danger. For ex-

ample, a soldier being fired upon is often inclined to shoot back first, then seek cover, putting himself at greater risk. "The first thing is to seek cover, then return fire. You don't return fire and seek cover. If I'm here and I get fired on, and that stump is there, I get behind the stump and take up my firing position. I don't lay down right away in a wide open area and let the other guy shoot at me."

Wyatt conducted most of his instruction at Tigerland (also known as Tiger Town or Tiger Ridge), a meticulous replica of a South Vietnamese settlement constructed on Fort Polk. "You would not believe the detail that went into building that village and making it as close as possible in the Louisiana swamps to emulate an actual village in Vietnam," Wyatt explained. "There were just hundreds of hours that went into planning and constructing it and the surrounding training area."



General William Westmoreland, an important leader during the Vietnam War, visited Fort Polk where soldiers trained for the conflict.

Fort Polk maintained two simulated Vietnamese hamlets. The first was a small village near Artillery Road on the main post, where soldiers learned to patrol. The second, Tigerland, was a more complex facility on Peason Ridge. Tigerland featured earthen berms, sharpened bamboo stake defenses, and booby-trap simulations. "If my memory serves me right," Wyatt said, "I believe the village had about thirty huts, what the GIs called *hooches*, with thatched roofs. There were also trap doors in the floors, similar to storage areas in Vietnam that were camouflaged. The Vietcong [guerillas] or the NVA [North Vietnamese Army] would hide in there or they would hide weapon caches or ammunition.…The Vietnamese were good engineers. They could cut a hole in the floor, and you could walk over it and never see it."

Fort Polk officers were dedicated to ensuring the authenticity of Tigerland. They even stocked the village with live farm animals. Even a school building and a typical Southeast Asian religious shrine were incorporated into the site, according to Patrick Angelle, a curator of the Fort Polk Military Museum. Interviewed by the Fort Polk *Guardian* in 1990, Angelle also remembered the large painted sign at the village entrance, which read, "Tigerland—Home of the Vietnam Combat Soldier." Two large tiger drawings bracketed the words. The mock village covered about three to four acres, Wyatt estimated, but the surrounding area, filled with bunkers and trench lines, took up considerably more ground. "Some people will dispute this, but I think we had about one hundred acres [of training areas] out there."

Colonel Jim Anders, Fort Polk's Chief of Staff, organized the construction of the village, recalled Sonny Berry, a former civilian aide to the Secretary of the Army. "A tremendous number of dignitaries visited Fort Polk and, almost without exception, went to visit Tiger Ridge. General [William] Westmoreland, who later became Chief of Staff of the Army, came and visited Tiger Ridge."

Army and civilian engineers and many other workers helped build the complex, Wyatt said. "I believe our 46th Engineer Battalion, which is back here now, worked on it before they shipped out to Vietnam. I know they did some road work going into that training area."

The completed replica required regular maintenance. "Soldiers and civilian employees worked on it during the holidays," Wyatt said. "We used to have what they called the Christmas Exodus, where

This black-and-white scanned image of artist Martin Pate's painting of Tiger Ridge shows the village layout. The original painting was based on an aerial photograph of the site.

we'd shut down [training] for about three weeks." A fleet of buses would transport the trainees to the airports for flights home. Those who stayed for whatever reason would be taken to the training areas to work on the villages. At other times, instructors and drill sergeants made the repairs. "We'd be rethatching the roofs, refurbishing the villages, working on the bunker complexes and the trench lines and barriers."

How to slip past booby traps and other enemy defenses to get inside the village was, according to Wyatt, one of the most important lessons taught at Tigerland. "We would teach how to assault the complex. Once they [the trainees] had gained access, they would go into the trenches and bunkers, each working with a buddy, to clear those, using smoke hand grenades and small arms." Learning to trust and depend on other soldiers was crucial to survival in combat, he said. "When you've got bullets flying and artillery and mortar fire coming in, the whole nine yards, this guy who's on your left flank over there may see something that the squad leader may not see, maybe a machine gun position."

Trainees also learned how to drop into underground tunnels to root out the enemy. The Vietnamese, adroit tunnel builders, dug a maze of labyrinths stretching like spiderwebs beneath the jungle. They would emerge silently from the tunnels to make sneak attacks against American soldiers. Wyatt taught troops how to penetrate the tunnels based on his own experience in Vietnam, where he volunteered as a *tunnel rat*, crawling through dark, cramped, underground warrens. "In Vietnam, in 1965, we set up our base camp at a place called Cuchi [headquarters for the 25th Infantry Division]. The enemy had constructed tunnel entrances right

Audacity Pays Off

Bruce Mann, Fort Polk's civilian forester, went through basic training at the post in 1971. Officers chose him, along with three other trainees, to try to invade Tigerland, the replica of a Vietnamese village. "We were picked to be the Vietcong. We donned the applicable garb with the big hat, and our mission was to infiltrate the camp and blow it up. Of course, they gave us smoke grenades, which won't hurt anybody."

Mann remembered being dropped off far from the village, then walking with his three fellow soldiers toward their objective. They decided their best chance of getting to the village was to head through the forests. "We eluded capture for quite a while," Mann recalled. For some reason, however, the group became separated, and the others were picked up by guards. Mann was all alone. "Why I didn't get captured, I don't know. But I was still off on my mission to blow the place up. And I said, 'Well, shoot, I will just walk right down this road.' So, here I was in this full Vietcong gear. I was walking down the road and here were all these emplacements set up with American soldiers, the trainees. And I was walking right by them. It was like two o'clock in the morning. I am just strolling down the road and nobody challenged me." Mann walked directly into the village command center, somehow managing to pass by without anyone questioning him. "I pulled this smoke grenade and I threw it down and it blew up [ignited]. Then they caught me."

The day he stormed Tigerland all by himself stands out for Mann as a pleasant diversion during a period of deadly serious training. "It was fun," he said, smiling at the memory.

in the middle of where we had our base camp. Snipers would actually come up inside the base camp and fire at you. We would go down inside the tunnels and clear them. It was very scary."

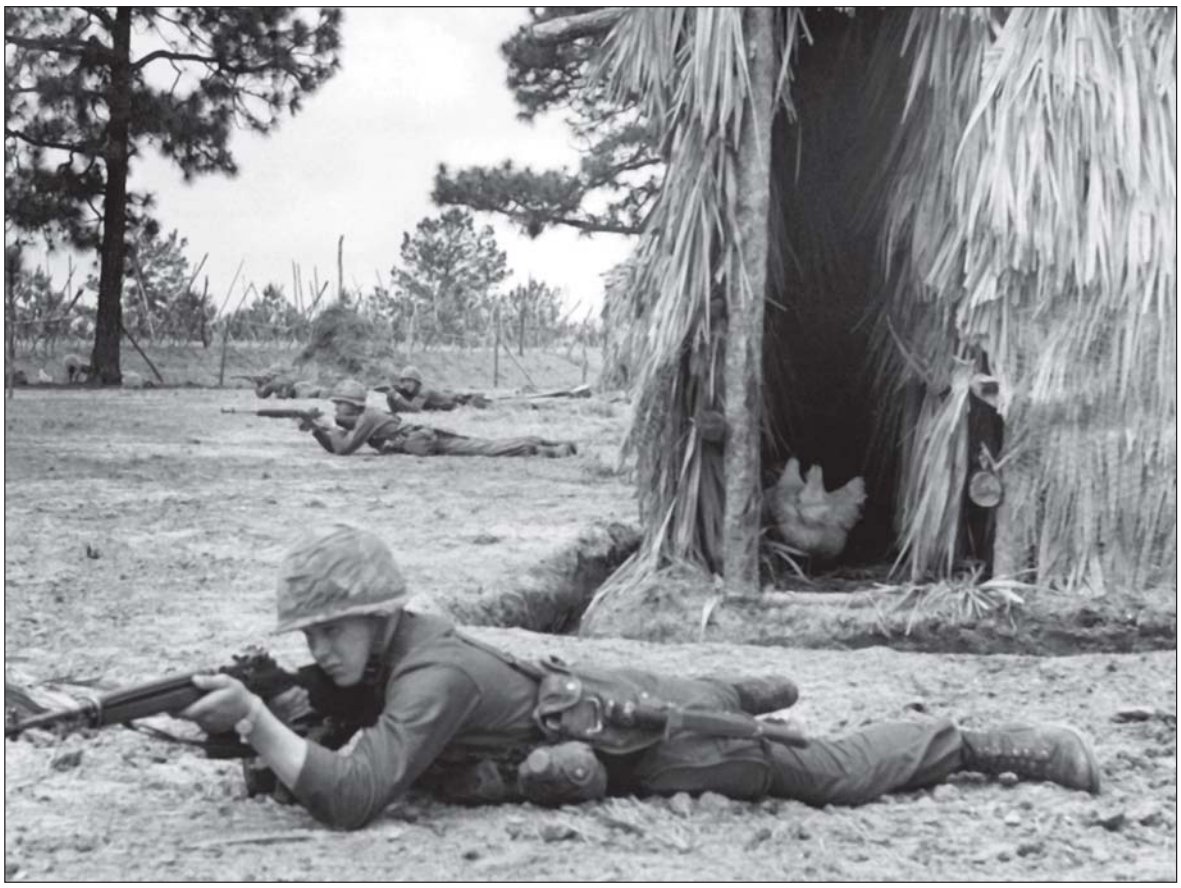
Wiley Clark also served as a tunnel rat at Cuchi. "I was an advisor to a Vietnamese battalion in 1964 before the U.S. 25th Division arrived. I was just young and it [going into the tunnels] was the thing to do. The tunnel system, which we didn't know until after the war, was probably the most extensive in the world, covering hundreds of square miles, tunnels that went all the way from Vietnam to Cambodia."

Wyatt cited his own experience to explain how elaborate the Vietnamese tunnels could be. "We found a headquarters and a hospital underground. They had rooms that were ten by twelve feet and had seven to eight foot ceilings. But you had to understand that most of the tunnels were much smaller. Some of them weren't two-and-a-half to three feet tall. You couldn't stand up in them, it was so bad."

Based on accounts of what soldiers saw in Vietnam, Fort Polk engineers designed a tunnel system beneath Tigerland. They included a main entranceway hidden in the school building, which was typically a community gathering spot, as well as other camouflaged exits in some huts, the pigpen, and the cemetery. Wyatt taught soldiers how to squeeze through the narrow passageways, to repress their claustrophobia, and to gain an advantage over foes who lived like moles. When a soldier, crawling in the dark, reached a sharp bend or tunnel intersection, he was trained to reach around the corner with a .45-caliber pistol and fire, luring any Vietnamese to shoot back and reveal themselves.

Right: On August 26, 1970, seasoned veterans teach young soldiers at Fort Polk how to recognize a Vietcong camp while on patrol.

Below: GIs train at Tiger Ridge, the mock Vietnamese village replete with livestock.



Left: Native Vietnamese role-playing at Tiger Ridge made the training more realistic. Using nationals from various countries to role-play in mock villages continues today, as soldiers train for missions around the world.

Below: Trainees learned that the Vietcong would often hide weapons and equipment in the water. Here advanced infantry trainees at Fort Polk search a water hole at the mock Vietnamese village.

Right: In July 1967, trainees of the 3rd Brigade practiced rapidly exiting helicopters under simulated battle conditions near Fort Polk's Tiger Ridge.

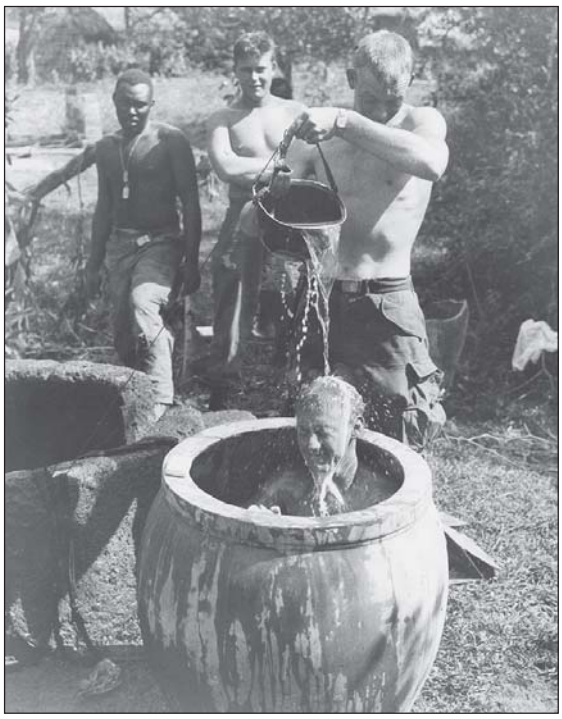
Below: Trainees patrol near a hut at Tiger Ridge. The use of live farm animals added to the realism.

Left and below: A soldier waits for the Vietcong guerilla forces to strike.

Left: A soldier with the 1st Cavalry Division uses a field phone during an assault against Vietcong and North Vietnamese troops at the edge of a rice paddy in the An Lao Valley.

Right: U.S. and Vietnamese soldiers in Vietnam.

Below: A wary soldier patrols in Vietnam. Thousands of U.S. troops who served in Vietnam underwent basic training and advanced infantry training at Fort Polk.



Left: Soldiers in Vietnam enjoy their first bath in ten days after being pulled back from combat patrol. Soldiers in training at Fort Polk learned to survive outdoors for long periods of time with few conveniences, steeling them for the hardships they would endure in the future on distant battlefields.

Below: Two GIs on patrol in Vietnam.

In December 1972, officers at Fort Polk dedicated a plaque for Honor Field, the site of many meaningful ceremonies, marches, and demonstrations over the years.

Wyatt said he also tried to show trainees how to ignore fear. "You can't dwell on fear. It will overtake your mind. If you let fear take over, you really can't concentrate on what you're doing." The best tunnel soldiers were warriors, unflappable in combat, he said. They tended to have "ice water running through their veins." And, as was true in other military operations, Wyatt said that the key to defeating the enemy underground was cooperation. "Always have a buddy. Always send two people down. One guy would be the point [lead] guy and the other guy would have the telephone [or radio]."

By 1969, Fort Polk had dispatched more soldiers to Vietnam than any other military post in the nation. For veteran Wiley Clark, some of the most difficult memories were of boot ceremonies. "It [the ceremony] started in World War I, where you lay the bodies [of dead soldiers] out before they started to bury them. In Vietnam, though, you didn't bury them, they were taken away in body bags, [but] you still have a ceremony. You, the survivors in a unit, have a memorial for them. You take their rifles and stick them down [in the ground] by their shined boots and put their helmets on the rifles. I've been to more than one of these, but there was one particular one. We'd all been strangers just three days before and, all of a sudden, most of us were dead. That's just the nature of war."

As the war escalated, so did the controversy over American involvement. With the battles and their aftermath broadcast daily on television, protests mounted. The antiwar movement, which was especially strong on college campuses, dominated public discussion throughout the country. The disapproval of the military action, although far from unanimous, reached a level unseen since the Civil War. Public sentiment at times soured to the point

that some returning soldiers faced derisive protesters. Many in the military felt reviled or ignored after having risked their lives for their country. "When my soldiers came back, there were no flags, no parades," said Wiley Clark. Some soldiers, he said, "were spat at in airports and called baby killers by people who really didn't have a clue of what they'd done."

Some fifty-eight thousand Americans died serving in Southeast Asia, and the psychological wounds have been slow to heal. Time has not ended the debate about the war. Some contend the United States was on the verge of victory when troops were withdrawn; others say the nation never should have committed the U.S. military to the conflict. Apart from these differences, however, objective analysts agree that American troops who fought in Vietnam displayed extraordinary skill, dedication, and bravery, standards that Fort Polk was instrumental in fostering among thousands of soldiers.

Support for the troops and the Army never wavered in Leesville and Vernon Parish, according to Sonny Berry, who headed the local Chamber of Commerce during much of the war. He, along with other local residents, often attended the weekly graduation ceremonies of soldiers at Honor Field. As Berry put it, "We honored the distinguished graduates."

17. Cold War Dictates New Preparations

Fort Polk underwent major changes as the Vietnam War neared an end. The entire Army was being transformed into an all-volunteer force, as President Richard Nixon orchestrated elimination of the military draft. Among the biggest changes at Fort Polk was the arrival of women to train beside men.

Bruce Mann, who joined Fort Polk's military police after serving in Vietnam, recalled some of the troops' reaction to women soldiers. "I was in the 258th MP Battalion, which is here now.…The military police patrolled, just like they do here now, in a police car, enforcing traffic laws, stopping speeders, and catching drunk drivers. One thing that was a bit of a challenge was when the first women started training here. The women came in the early 70s, seems like it was 1973, sometime in that neighborhood. It was a challenge keeping the males away from that area [the women's barracks located on Mississippi Avenue]. The male soldiers were curious, men being what men can be."

> *In every dark hour of our national life a leadership of frankness and vigor has met with that understanding and support of the people themselves which is essential to victory.*
>
> *— President Franklin D. Roosevelt*

Boot camp for individual soldiers at Fort Polk began tapering off by 1974 when the post took on a new role housing the 5th Infantry (Mechanized) Division. The 5th boasted a distinguished history dating back to World War I. It also participated in the Louisiana Maneuvers before being sent to France to fight at St. Lo, Chartres, and Metz during World War II. After the war, the outfit was dismantled, only to be reactivated during the Vietnam War. Then, as the United States' presence in South Vietnam dwindled, the division was again deactivated. Its colors were retired at Fort Carson, Colorado, until 1974 when the outfit's flags were sent to Fort Polk and the Army once again began drawing in soldiers to reactivate the division.

There was only a skeletal staff at the start, according to Jimmy Wyatt, a platoon leader. "I was the thirteenth man to sign into the division when it was activated," he recalled. "At that time, it was just called the 1st Brigade of the 5th Division because that was all that was activated. We had no weapons, no equipment. We had nothing. Then we started drawing equipment, getting the weapons and supplies, and began a very intense training program."

Wiley Clark, having just completed studies at Sergeant Major Academy, also became an officer in the division early on. "The build-up of the division evolved slowly. We [the 1st Armored Brigade, 1st Battalion, 61st Infantry] moved into the first new barracks [on Georgia Avenue], near where there's now a service station."

The 5th Division had attracted enough soldiers by early 1977 to be considered complete. At about the same time, the basic training functions at Fort Polk ended. For the next several years, the 5th Division's numbers fluctuated between eight thousand and fifteen thousand troops, evolving into a modern mechanized force using heavy M-60 tanks, powerful antitank weapons (including TOW rockets), helicopters, and mobile infantry.

Meanwhile, the Soviet Union, along with its allies in the Warsaw Pact (the military and political security alliance between the Soviet Union and its satellites, created in 1955 to counteract NATO), was deploying massive armies with soldiers and tanks in numbers far surpassing that which the United States could muster if war erupted. As a result, the 5th Division spent considerable time preparing for war in Europe. "We were training to fight the Russians in mechanized war in a very fluid,

Company E, 7th Engineer personnel (top and bottom) practice building a pontoon bridge at Camp Polk's Engineer Lake in 1976.

highly intense battle," Jimmy Wyatt recalled. "Often, we had someone playing an opposing force. The big thing in a Warsaw Pact battle scenario was engaging at maximum range and breeching [tank] barriers. We did a lot of intensive training on barrier breeches and building barriers, too."

Soldiers of the 5th Infantry had to prepare to be outnumbered by two to one, sometimes more, Wyatt said. "Your tank crew and the TOW [rocket] crew have got to get a first-round hit. If you fire at a tank and you miss, the tank you fired at is going to kill you. So, you trained so that everything became second nature. When your TC [tank commander] says, 'Target at two o'clock at 3,000 meters,' you're automatically whipping that tube around and laying on the target. 'Target identified,' you say, and

Above: Tanks line up for the 5th Infantry (Mechanized) Division's activation ceremony on September 22, 1975. Below: General Bernard Rogers, commander of FORSCOM (U.S. Army Forces Command), addresses the 5th Infantry (Mechanized) Division.

that tank commander is giving orders to the loader, and then he says, 'Fire.' Then, you've got a dead tank."

The mobile infantry soldiers who operated the armored personnel carriers received similar training. "We had small antitank weapons with a maximum range of 400 to 500 meters [roughly 440 to 545 yards]. We [the infantry] are depending on our artillery, our air strikes, our tanks, and our TOW crews to keep some of the enemy away from us. Normally, before they [the enemy] would get to us, our tanks and other forces have got them disorganized. They are in some sort of disarray. Their command communications are going to be degraded, disrupted. When they get within range, we resort to those infantry antitank weapons."

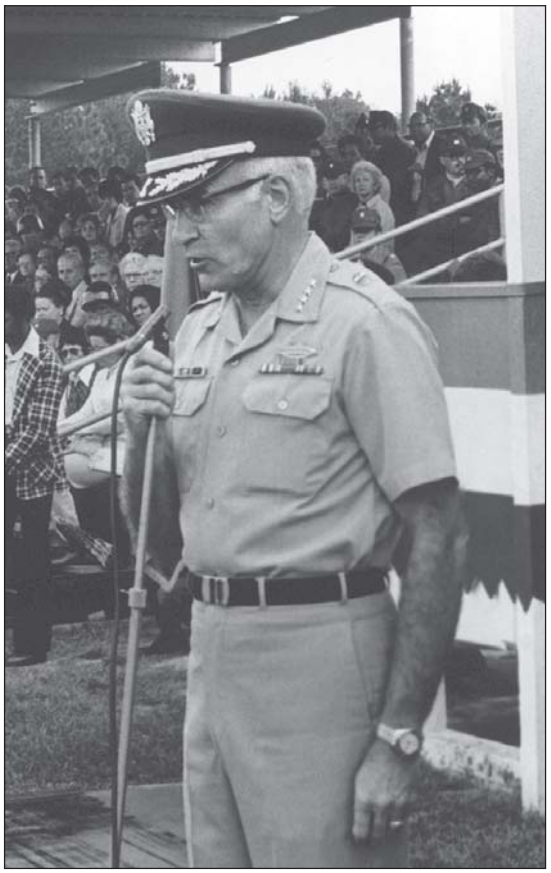
Training for the 5th Armored Division also included preparing for possible nuclear, chemical, or biological attacks. Wyatt explained that the trainees were outfitted with chemical suits, protective masks, and other protective equipment. "When we had what we called Mock 4, we would go to the highest level of protection, and when we were wearing those suits, it got very hot, in Louisiana especially."

Many of the exercises that were led by the tanks took place on Peason Ridge. The simulated battles there soon destroyed the replica Vietnamese village so important to troop training a few years earlier. "The 5th Division tore it [Tiger Ridge] down," Wyatt explained. "When the division started training out there, it decimated Peason Ridge, so it

During activation ceremonies for the 5th Infantry (Mechanized) Division, Andrew Jennings drives General Robert Haldane (left), commander of the 5th, and General Bernard Rogers (right), commander of FORSCOM.

Above: A group of soldiers wearing Revolutionary War–era uniforms take part in the May 1976 ceremonies marking the closing of Fort Polk's basic training facilities.

Above: In 1976, Major General Robert Haldane, Fort Polk commander, participated in ceremonies at Honor Field to mark the phase-out of basic training at the post.



Right: General Bernard Rogers, FORSCOM commander, addresses soldiers at Fort Polk during the ceremony activating the 5th Infantry (Mechanized) Division on September 22, 1975.

Above: Tanks roll at Fort Polk on November 1, 1976, during ceremonies marking the change of command for the 5th Infantry (Mechnaized) Division from Major General Robert Haldane to Major General William B. Steele.

Below: The 5th Infantry Division worked diligently to foster cordial relations with nearby communities, sometimes providing its band for local parades.

During a break in the NATO Reforger Exercises in Europe, a 5th Infantry (Mechanized) Division soldier honors those who gave their lives during World War II. (Photo first appeared in the Kisatchie Guardian, *May 25, 1979.)*

doesn't look anything today like it did during the Vietnam era. We brought tanks and the mechanized infantry out there. If something stood in the way, we ran over it.…The other [Vietnamese replica] village, which was a bit smaller, the last of it rotted totally away. It's kind of sad to see them all gone."

Like all soldiers stationed at Camp Polk, the 5th Division troops trained no matter what the weather and took their turns negotiating the sticky mud that had so bedeviled troops since the Louisiana Maneuvers in the 1940s. "I've seen tanks stuck on the top of a hill in the dry season because of the water level," Wyatt said. "The water table is so high. That is why we tore up Peason Ridge so bad, and what we call the Fullerton training area. It was cut all to pieces because of that."

Not all the 5th Division's training took place at Fort Polk, however. The troops struggled through swamps at Eglin Air Force Base in Florida, participated in the 1984 NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) Reforger Exercises in Europe, and experienced military exercises in the desert at the Army's National Training Center at Fort Irwin, California. The division units frequently excelled in mock battles staged in California against highly trained opposition forces that represented the Soviet Army. "The 5th probably had the best success of any division that's gone out there [to the National Training Center]," Wyatt said proudly. "It was one of the most cohesive divisions I've ever seen. We did a lot of good things. There was a lot of competition between the battalions and different

Left: Housing under construction for soldiers and their families. Over the years, many housing styles have evolved on Fort Polk.

Below: In July 1976, building debris is cleared near Fort Polk's Youth Activity Center to make way for new construction.

units. Everyone was trying to be better than everyone else. In all the intense training, everyone wanted to do it right and make the division the best they could. There was a lot of camaraderie among everyone here at Fort Polk."

The time the 5th Division spent at Fort Polk coincided with yet another major building program. In just a little over a decade, the post was transformed from a site with structures mostly dating to the World War II era to one of the most modern Army posts in the country, according to Jim Kelly who was Fort Polk's chief of engineering, plans, and services in 1990. The Army had invested approximately $700 million in new post facilities between 1975 and 1990, Kelly told the Fort Polk *Guardian.*

In the mid-1970s, a new Main Post chapel, barracks, and one thousand family housing units were built. In 1976, new motor pool buildings were completed. The old motor pools, originally built for the smaller tanks used in World War II, couldn't house

In an ongoing effort to ensure quality health care, the Army built the Chester Dental Clinic at Fort Polk in 1976.

the M-60 tanks. The new facilities allowed the mechanics to work on the larger tanks inside instead of having to park and maintain them outdoors.

Fort Polk opened its first modern dental clinic in 1976 and, in 1982, dedicated the Bayne-Jones Army Community Hospital, which cost $43 million according to Sonny Berry. "When you look back, the hospital cost more than the whole fort did when it was built in World War II [for $22 million]." The new hospital attracted more veterans to the area, Berry said. "There had been [Army] retirees before, but you could see an increase after the hospital. That's understandable because it is easily accessible in a fifty-mile radius."

Fort Polk provides many avenues for relaxation and recreation, such as this bowling center.

The inside of a Fort Polk PX store, January 8, 1968. The U.S. Army offers goods to troops and their families at better prices than those available to civilians.

Other construction projects completed in the 1970s and 1980s included a new Main Post exchange, warehouses, classrooms, athletic complexes, improved gunnery ranges, and the Magnolia House for post visitors. As a result of this building boom, Leesville and nearby communities saw an increase in private investment. The permanent status of the post reassured business owners that they would not face another abrupt loss of customers with yet another unexpected closing.

While the post had previously accommodated mostly single soldiers going through basic training, with an all-voluntary Army, soldiers began settling in the area with their families. "We had probably some 150 to 200 taxi cabs in the area when we had a [basic] training center," Berry said. "On Friday, they [the cabs] would take all these troops to Houston, Shreveport, New Orleans, or Alexandria—wherever they could catch a plane. So, at the time, that [the taxi service] was a big industry. When the training center closed, that [service] dropped and business went back to a different type of service.…Everything just changed, so we started getting a lot of fast food chains, hotels, and retail outlets, and [business] people locally began to modernize and renovate to be able to compete and give the soldier and his family a place to go."

According to Berry, the leadership of the 5th Infantry Division worked hard to cultivate good relations between Fort Polk personnel and the lo-

cal community. "General Robert Haldane was the commander during the transition from the training center and he became the first commander of the 5th upon its reactivation. General Haldane, Bob and his wife Elise, were very supportive of the community. He got out and mixed with the people. He had a lot of friends. In my opinion, that was the beginning of a new era, as far as we were concerned. More emphasis was placed on a quality relationship between the local community and the military."

Fort Polk's top officers frequently invited members of the chamber of commerce to "visit the different units in the field, drive the tanks, fire the weapons, and that type of thing," Berry said, adding that Haldane also took an active interest in education, working closely with the local school board. During the 5th Infantry's stay, Fort Polk built an elementary school on post and opened other post buildings to teach military children.

Relations between Fort Polk and the community were so cordial that residents protested when Haldane was transferred. "We sent a petition to the Secretary of the Army," Berry said, but to no avail. The 5th Infantry's subsequent commanders, however, also nurtured goodwill with the community. "All the past commanders and their wives established more than just a relationship, we became friends, close friends," Berry said.

In another demonstration of goodwill, the 5th Division units all "adopted" a nearby town, Wyatt said. "Every holiday or every local festival a community had, a unit would go in and put on a big parade and have an equipment display."

In 1989, events outside the United States once again affected Fort Polk. Manuel Noriega, military dictator of the Central American nation of Panama, had been accused of providing safe haven to international narcotics dealers, abusing his own citizens, and escalating tensions along the strategically important Panama Canal. When President George H. W. Bush ordered American troops airlifted into the country, units from the 5th Infantry Division took part in the invasion and helped capture Noriega's headquarters. A stuffed alligator, once owned by Noriega, is now displayed in the Fort Polk Military Museum.

On returning home to Fort Polk, the entire 5th Infantry Division paraded at Honor Field. Many local residents watched, including veterans who had been wounded in previous wars, Berry recalled. "That day, when those guys all stood up out of wheel chairs, who would have been a lot more comfortable sitting, and stood at attention during the ceremony on crutches, that was overwhelming, that and the reaction of the crowd who stood up as the whole division marched by. Everybody stood and applauded every unit that came by."

For Berry, the emotional moment unleashed a flood of memories that took him back to the days of his youth. "As an eight or nine year old kid, sitting on Highway 171 when it was just a two-lane road, I watched trucks pass that had 'tank' written on the side because we [the Army] did not have [many] tanks. I saw tanks pass that had logs sticking out of them where the gun tube should be because we didn't have the guns to put in the mount. You saw soldiers walking with tree limbs instead of rifles."

Fort Polk saw the end of an era when, in 1992, the Army ordered the 5th Infantry (Mechanized) Division to once more deactivate and retire its colors. The 5th's soldiers and equipment were transferred to Fort Hood, Texas, to become part of the 2nd Armored Division.

18. The Second Armored Cavalry Triumphs

In one respect, the mission of Fort Polk today is not that different from what it was during the Louisiana Maneuvers. In preparing soldiers for combat, a commitment to excellence still permeates all the training programs, just as it did in the days of Camp Polk and during World War II and later military engagements. The manner in which modern Fort Polk achieves this mission, however, has undergone some startlingly changes.

Soldiering itself has been transformed. Once primarily a civic duty that was, at times, imposed on young men through conscription or the selective service, today it is considered a profession. In addition to better pay and more regular hours, soldiers in the new all-volunteer Army receive many benefits similar to those of some major corporations. Living quarters have also improved. Accommodations for unmarried troops now resemble college dormitories that are far more comfortable than the old World War II barracks. At extensive athletic facilities, troops can work out, swim, and play intramural sports. Gone are the mess halls of old, replaced by modern dining facilities. Even the term *mess hall* is disappearing from the Army lexicon. Most important, military maneuvers and firing ranges have become safer and the training more realistic thanks to today's highly sophisticated technology. In recent years, many different units, including some of the Army's most elite, and troops from many other nations have trained at Fort Polk. European soldiers with the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), for example, have joined in complex maneuvers on several occasions.

> *Be for all of us, troopers, a wise counsel in keeping peace and a strong shield for us against our enemies. Oh heavenly Father, give us the determination that the peace and freedom won at such a high price be lasting!*
>
> *— From official prayer, 2nd Armored Cavalry Regiment*

The day-to-day activities of Fort Polk involve the 7,500 resident troops who largely define the post's contemporary character. About four thousand of these soldiers belong to the 2nd Armored Cavalry Regiment, the oldest continuously serving regiment in the Army. The outfit's illustrious history traces to 1836 when the 2nd Dragoons rode their horses into battle against the Seminole Indians in Florida.

The 2nd Dragoons also played a role in early Louisiana history. In the 1840s, they patrolled the United States border at the Sabine River, only about twenty-five miles from their headquarters at the lonely Fort Jesup outpost. Today, Fort Jesup, a State Commemorative Area near the town of Many, gives visitors a sense of what life was like for the 2nd Dragoons long ago.

Scott DeBose, an interpreter at the site, explained that in 1842, to save money, the U.S. Congress dismounted the 2nd Dragoons. The troopers stationed in Louisiana were predictably disgruntled by the politicians' decision. Some important Washington officials shared their displeasure and argued that eliminating the Dragoons' horses saved the national treasury little. Congress ultimately bowed to the pressure and reversed course. By 1843, the regiment received word at Fort Jesup that they were to be remounted. "The 2nd Dragoons staged a boisterous celebration, fueled by extra allotments of whiskey and a day off for all the soldiers to mark the occasion." DeBose continued, "Some of the officers got the bright idea they should fire a salute in honor of their new horses. So the officer corps moved as a body out to the parade ground where they had a 24-pound cannon which was fired every morning and evening for raising and lowering the colors." The officers decided that merely firing a cannon was not enough of a celebration to mark

their victory, so two of them mounted the cannon and pretended to ride the weapon. "One of the officers scooted back just a little too far and got his rear end over the touchhole," DeBose said. "When they fired the cannon, flame came out of the touch hole and caught the seat of his pants on fire." Other dragoons rushed to aid the hapless fellow, rolling him on the ground to snuff out the flames searing his backside.

Such lighthearted moments were soon overshadowed by events unfolding in Texas in 1845 that put the soldiers at Fort Jesup on alert. Occupying land long claimed by Mexico, Texans had revolted nine years earlier, defeating an army led by Mexican President Antonio Lopez de Santa Anna at San Jacinto near modern-day Houston. Santa Anna, captured by the Texans, signed a treaty granting the settlers independence and establishing a southern border for the new nation of Texas at the Rio Grande River. The Mexican government, however, claimed the treaty was invalid because Santa Anna signed under duress. They also argued that Texas's traditional boundary was not the Rio Grande, but was further north along the Nueces River near the town of Corpus Christi. Amid this dispute, the vast area between the two boundaries became a no-man's land, inhabited by a few settlers, lacking any recognizable law, and roamed by bandits.

The question of Texas's border became intertwined with the ambitious expansion policies of the United States. President James Polk, elected in 1844, implied that unless Mexico sold the United States vast western territories encompassing much of present-day Arizona, New Mexico, and California, the U.S. Army would invade. President Polk rooted his stance in *Manifest Destiny*, a popular belief that the United States was destined to stretch from the Atlantic to Pacific Oceans. The Mexican government, however, refused to give up any more land. Mexico had only recently agreed to recognize Texas as an independent nation, and only then on the condition that Texas would not join the United States. Predictably, when the United States annexed Texas, tensions mounted even higher. In fact, President Polk hoped to provoke armed conflict by ordering U.S. troops into the no-man's land north of the Rio Grande. But, facing stiff political opposition to the war, Polk wanted the Mexican soldiers to fire the first shots.

Many U.S. troops destined for Texas, including the 2nd Dragoons, used Fort Jesup as a staging ground for training. General Zachary Taylor, who had supervised the fort's construction, commanded the military expedition into Texas in 1845. Taylor used his time at Fort Jesup to produce "one of the most effective American fighting forces of the nineteenth century," according to DeBose.

The troops split up when they left Fort Jesup in July 1845. The infantry took the more leisurely route, marching to the Mississippi River, then sailing south by steamboat to New Orleans. The soldiers enjoyed themselves in New Orleans for two weeks before resuming their journey to Corpus Christi. In stark contrast, the 2nd Dragoons made a far more difficult, five-hundred-mile trip on horseback that lasted thirty-two days. They "rode overland through Texas, in summer, in wool uniforms. They lost a lot of horses and some troopers," DeBose said.

In the spring of 1846, the soldiers regrouped in the disputed territory between Texas and Mexico. Taylor immediately began using the Dragoons and the Texas Rangers for dangerous scouting missions. On April 25, 1846, two companies of Dragoons, consisting of sixty-three soldiers on horseback, searched the Texas side of the Rio Grande for any Mexican soldiers who might have crossed the river. They were trotting through an opening into a field surrounded by thick brush when some two thousand Mexican cavalrymen suddenly appeared and sealed off the only exit. As shooting erupted, the U.S. soldiers mounted a disjointed and futile charge, then galloped frantically in all directions, trying to escape. The battle ended quickly, leaving eleven Dragoons dead and almost all the remaining force captured, including Joseph Hardy, later a prominent Confederate general during the Civil War.

President Polk now had his desired provocation to declare war against Mexico, and the Mexicans did not shy away from the conflict. Soon, a Mexican Army forded the Rio Grande from Matamoros and surrounded Fort Texas, a six-sided earthen stronghold still under construction. Some five hundred troops and about one hundred women and chil-

Fort Jesup: Steeped in Military History

Fort Jesup played an important role in the early history of the 2nd Dragoons, the predecessor of the 2nd Armored Cavalry Regiment now based at Fort Polk. Remnants of this historic site can still be found in the area where some major battles were fought during the various Louisiana Maneuvers. In 1941, during the largest of these exercises, tanks commanded by General George S. Patton passed through the Fort Jesup area, participating in a fierce simulated battle that Patton's side eventually lost. According to Scott DeBose, an interpreter at the Fort Jesup State Commemorative Area, "One of his [Patton's] men drove a tank around a sharp curve in front of what is now the park, and the driver tried to take the curve a little fast and knocked a chunk out of one of our monuments."

The Fort Jesup State Commemorative Area features exhibits on life in the mid-1800s, when the 2nd Dragoons occupied the outpost. The staff is also preparing an exhibit about how the Louisiana Maneuvers impacted the site.

dren found themselves in the fort, besieged by thousands of Mexican troops bombarding the structure with cannon shells.

At the time, Taylor and most of his troops were on the Gulf of Mexico coast about twenty-five miles away. Even so, they could hear the thundering booms of the Mexican cannons and the answering U.S. artillery from inside Fort Texas. Ulysses S. Grant, young and untested in battle, was with Taylor and heard the distant rumbling. He later wrote, "…for myself, a young second lieutenant who had never heard a hostile gun before, I felt very sorry I had enlisted."

Taylor hastily began moving his 2,300 soldiers, including the 2nd Dragoons, toward Fort Texas to break the siege. Anticipating what the American general would do, Mexican General Mariano Arista positioned his four thousand men in a line, stretching about a mile on either side of the road leading to Fort Texas. They soon saw Taylor's troops approaching from a distance across the flat salt prairie. Taylor's convoy was almost within firing range when he halted. The American soldiers paused to fill their canteens, then took up battle formations, advancing to within about eight hundred yards of the Mexican positions before stopping.

For about two hours, the armies warily eyed each other across a field of tall grasses in a place called Palo Alto. There were few sounds, only that of horses and men shifting uneasily under a blistering sun. Then, about 2 p.m., loud explosions ripped through the quiet as the two sides began shooting cannons. It soon became apparent that the Mexicans, despite their far greater numbers, were at a distinct disadvantage. With outdated weapons, they depended primarily on single-shot cannon balls that often fell short of their targets. Even when covering the desired distance, the volleys traveled so slowly that the targeted American soldiers simply sidestepped them.

In contrast, the U.S. guns fired case projectiles that exploded on impact and canister shells packed with multiple shots. The combined effect of these two weapons was catastrophic. Cannon fire tore huge gaps in the Mexican lines, with hot shards of flying metal maiming or killing many. Yet the Mexican forces stood their ground and did not panic. Arista even ordered several cavalry charges, but the muddy ground, dotted with small pools of water, slowed the horses' momentum, and the U.S. soldiers successfully fought off these attacks. Some of the fiercest fighting involved the 2nd Dragoons.

In the midst of the conflict, sparks from the cannons ignited grass fires, and smoke enveloped the battlefield for quite a while. When the air cleared and the fighting finally ceased, the Mexican Army had retreated a short distance. By day's end, the two forces were roughly back to their original positions. When darkness fell, the Mexican Army seized the chance to withdraw to new positions along a lagoon called the Resaca de la Palma, a former channel of the Rio Grande. Arista stationed his soldiers on both sides of the lagoon where tall banks would shield them from the U.S. artillery. Dense bushes and small trees provided additional defenses. According to DeBose, the Mexican Army, which still outnumbered U.S. forces despite the casualties, heavily fortified the landscape. "The terrain was extremely rough, very rocky, and had plants with a lot of sharp thorns. There was almost every kind of cactus known to man." Arista, positioning his heavy artillery in the midst of his army, aimed straight down the one road crossing the lagoon. He believed that concentrating the cannon fire in this small corridor would be most effective.

Taylor, meanwhile, divided his infantry into small units and sent them into the dense underbrush near the main road. Skilled in frontier fighting, these soldiers soon engaged Mexican soldiers in fierce hand-to-hand combat. Taylor knew, however, that if his forces were to succeed, they had to knock out the Mexican cannons. For this task, he selected the 2nd Dragoons. General Charles May led the Dragoons on horseback directly down the main road into the range of the Mexican cannons. The thundering hooves, clouds of dust, and May, his long, black hair whipping in the breeze, created an indelible impression. In the open and extremely vulnerable, the cavalry furiously rode forward despite the blizzard of bullets buzzing around them. They galloped right into the main strength of the Mexican Army and somehow captured the soldiers firing the cannons, along with a general. Their success was a humiliating blow to the Mexicans and helped turn the tide in the Americans' favor.

Arista led his own daring cavalry charge, but it came too late. The Mexicans began retreating, streaming toward the Rio Grande, which was swollen by spring rains. Many drowned trying to swim to safety. In all, more than three hundred Mexican soldiers died in the engagement, while the United States suffered forty-five casualties.

Taylor's Army went on to invade Mexico where the 2nd Dragoons continued to distinguish themselves. Finally, Mexico surrendered and was forced to give up an enormous sweep of land, allowing the U.S. to expand all the way to the Pacific Ocean, as President Polk desired. Among the most important moments in the war was May's charge when he instructed his soldiers to "remember your regiment and follow your officers." May's order lives on today as the motto of the 2nd Armored Cavalry stationed at Fort Polk.

After the Mexican-American War, the 2nd Dragoons engaged in many confrontations with Native Americans, who resisted encroachment by settlers on their traditional lands and refused to be confined to government reservations. Renamed the 2nd U.S. Cavalry Regiment, the former 2nd Dragoons went on to fight in the Civil War at Fredericksburg, Antietam, Chancellorsville, Gettysburg, and other bloody engagements elsewhere.

During the Spanish-American War, the 2nd Cavalry joined Teddy Roosevelt's Rough Riders in Cuba for the battle of San Juan Hill. They also fought in World War I as the only American unit on horseback. Ironically, the regiment was forced to dismount for a second and final time after participating in the 1941 Louisiana Maneuvers when the war games made clear that, in battle, horses could no longer keep up with machinery. Renamed the 2nd Cavalry Group (Mechanized), the soldiers fought in both the Pacific and European Theaters during World War II.

Most of the 2nd Cavalry Group served under General George S. Patton, carrying out daring reconnaissance raids. The German high command labeled the unit the *Ghosts of Patton's Army* because the men would unexpectedly appear behind enemy lines, then seem to disappear. The troops helped break the Bastogne siege and, near the end of World War II, staged a risky raid to liberate Austria's world-renowned Lippizaner stallions. The soldiers resurrected some of the outfit's former mounted glory by riding, herding, and trucking the highly trained performance horses to safety.

On September 11, 1975, during the Cold War, a soldier practices firing TOW (tube launched, optically tracked, wire guided) missiles in preparation for possible battle with the Soviet Union.

During the Cold War, the unit, renamed the 2nd Armored Cavalry Regiment, spent extensive time in Europe preparing to fight the Soviet Union. The regiment patrolled more than 450 miles along the Iron Curtain, where menacing barbed-wire fences, concrete walls, and heavily armed guards barred Soviet citizens from leaving Communist-controlled areas.

The 2nd Armored Cavalry Regiment's next major deployment was to the Middle East. In 1990, in response to the Iraqi invasion of neighboring Kuwait, President George H. W. Bush declared that Iraq's aggression against Kuwait would not be allowed and guided strongly worded condemnations through the United Nations. At the same time, Bush and Secretary of State James Baker were organizing a coalition of nations that would soon assemble a powerful military force. Some four hundred thousand troops, among them the 2nd Armored Cavalry Regiment, were deployed to Saudi Arabia as part of a massive defensive operation called Desert Shield. The rationale was that heavily armed Iraqi soldiers posed a threat to Saudi Arabia, Kuwait's oil-rich neighbor and an American ally. If they ever conquered Saudi Arabia, the Iraqis would control half the world's known oil reserves and pose a serious threat to the economy of the United States and other nations.

The Saudi royal family was uneasy about allowing so many non-Muslim soldiers on Saudi soil, which was considered sacred because of Muslim religious sites. Furthermore, the many women in the American military challenged the Saudi institutionalized subservience of women, who are banned from many public activities including driving. Believing that Iraq was menacing their borders with a far superior military, the Saudi rulers felt compelled to overcome their reluctance and permit the foreign troops to enter their country.

The threat seemed real enough. Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein had built his army into the world's

fourth largest, with some two hundred thousand battle-hardened troops occupying Kuwait and many more waiting in reserve in Iraq. The invading army was also reported to be well equipped with more than five thousand tanks, some eighteen hundred surface-to-surface Scud missiles, and about five hundred aircraft, including top-of-the-line jets built by the Soviet Union and France. Iraq's antiaircraft defenses, supplied mostly by the Soviet Union, were also substantial, consisting of seventeen thousand surface-to-air SAM missiles and ten thousand guns. Along the Kuwaiti/Saudi border, Iraqi troops built enormous defensive structures of barbed wire and sand berms twenty feet tall. They dug deep ditches that could be flooded with burning oil, planted thousands of land mines, and buried their tanks in the sand until only the heavy guns were visible.

In response to UN condemnation and warnings from President Bush, Hussein defiantly boasted that his army would not be pushed from Kuwait. He promised to inflict ten thousand American casualties, predicting that the American public, in the aftermath of the Vietnam War, would not tolerate a large number of deaths and would demand a quick end to the hostilities.

The U.S. military leaders took Hussein's threats seriously. General Norman Schwarzkopf, commander of coalition forces, wrote, "I didn't know how bloody the ground war would be. I could conjure up a dozen scenarios in which the Iraqis would make a victory extremely costly.…In the past, Saddam had used nerve gas, mustard gas, and blood-poisoning agents in battle.…My nightmare was that our units would reach the barriers in the first hours of attack, be unable to get through, and then be hit with a chemical barrage." Some intelligence agents also speculated that Hussein had nuclear weapons.

As part of a massive troop movement, the 2nd Armored Cavalry Regiment took up positions along the Saudi-Iraq border in mid-February 1991. Every soldier was aware that war was imminent. For about a month, coalition aircraft systematically destroyed military targets in Kuwait and Iraq. Flying fifteen hours from Barksdale Air Force Base in Louisiana, B-52 bombers hit Iraqi command posts and communication centers with AGM-86C cruise missiles. These technologically advanced weapons struck without warning, leaving the Iraqis with no defense against them. Thirty-one of the first thirty-five cruise missiles hit their marks. Four Navy ships also launched Tomahawk cruise missiles.

F-117 stealth fighters attacked by air, the pilots so skillfully evading radar that Iraqi gunners fired blindly after them into the night skies, creating memorable light shows over Baghdad, the Iraqi capital. The Iraqis' futile attempts at defense were broadcast on television worldwide. Fleets of F-15 and F-16 fighters and other coalition jets plastered Iraqi targets with laser-guided bombs and other "smart" weapons in an attempt to minimize the number of civilian casualties compared to those caused by bombing campaigns in earlier wars. The destruction severely damaged Iraq's communication systems, armaments, and supply routes, but Iraqi forces stubbornly clung to Kuwait.

With coalition forces amassed on Saudi Arabia's borders with Iraq and Kuwait, everyone was on edge. Schwarzkopf recalled feeling "increasingly jumpy." He placed a quotation from General William Tecumseh Sherman on his desk, "War is the remedy our enemies have chosen. And, I say let us give them all they want." Meanwhile, the soldiers rechecked their equipment and reviewed their plans while waiting for the order to advance.

Military commanders took other precautions. Anticipating large numbers of wounded, they established sixty-three field hospitals, some of which were staffed by Fort Polk personnel. Two hospital ships waited nearby in the Persian Gulf. In all, some eighteen thousand beds were available. Hospital staff were prepared to treat injuries from chemical and biological weapons. The soldiers' only protection from these were clumsy suits lined in charcoal and gas masks that dangled from their belts.

The line of coalition forces stretched for miles, with the 2nd Armored Cavalry positioned in the center. To the west, along the Saudi-Iraq border, the VIII Airborne Corps, including the 24th Armored Division, was prepared to sweep around Iraqi forces and seal off their escape routes into the Euphrates River Valley. To the east, two divisions of U.S. Marines and troops from a mix of Arab nations, including Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Syria, and

Kuwait, were in position. These forces, led by the Marines, were supposed to storm the defenses in Kuwait and beat back frontline Iraqi troops.

The 2nd Armored Cavalry had been bolstered with extra artillery, sixty-four Apache assault helicopters, and engineers skilled in destroying tank barriers. The 8,500 soldiers in the regiment were part of the Dragoon Battle Group of the larger VII Corps, which included the 1st and 3rd Armored Divisions, the 1st Infantry Division (the Big Red One), and the British 1st Armored Division. With approximately 146,000 soldiers, some 1,600 heavy tanks, and 800 armed helicopters, the VII Corps was the most powerful ground unit in the entire army.

President Bush announced in a television address on Friday night, February 22, 1991, that the Iraqis had until noon the following day to withdraw unconditionally from Kuwait or face the consequences. The deadline came and went. By early morning on Sunday, February 24, many American soldiers were catching brief snatches of sleep in their tanks or armored vehicles or dozing on the sand while waiting to receive their final orders. Most of the VII Corps were ordered to hold their positions once ground fighting began and wait until dawn on the second day of battle before bursting through the defensive barricades and driving north, deep into Iraq. If all went according to plan, the VII Corps would then wheel around and smash into the Republican Guard, Hussein's elite troops held in reserve well behind the Iraqi front line.

Coalition air strikes reached peak intensity in the early morning hours of February 24. At the same time, thousands of coalition artillery pieces, pumping out thousands of rounds, blasted shells into Iraqi positions. The battleship *Missouri* in the Persian Gulf steamed close to Kuwait's shores and unlimbered its 16-inch guns. Inside Kuwait and Iraq, small clusters of Special Forces troops, who had dropped behind enemy lines the day before, were now prepared for battle. The 2nd Armored Cavalry had also entered Iraq the day before, after slicing through ten-foot-tall berms. The soldiers were now poised just over the border, waiting for the ground invasion to begin. So far, they had not engaged any enemy troops.

A cold, steady rain fell in the dark as the Marines surged into Kuwait. M-60 tanks and Cobra helicopters led the charge, while 155-millimeter Howitzer shells arched overhead, tumbled down into Iraqi positions, and exploded with earthshaking booms. Engineers driving lumbering bulldozers and other armored earthmoving machines advanced, shoving aside tons of sand and opening passageways in the massive berms for the tanks. With other types of machinery, they dropped down portable bridges to span ditches and allow the tanks to rumble across. Not far behind the tanks, thousands of Marines followed in Humvees and armored personnel carriers. Waiting further back, fleets of tanker trucks, loaded with fuel to resupply all the vehicles and equipment, began edging forward. Operation Desert Storm was officially underway.

By 6 a.m., Saudi time, President Bush announced to the world, "The liberation of Kuwait has now entered the final phase." The Marines had punched through the first line of Iraqi defenses, progressing faster than expected despite fierce counterattacks launched by the Iraqis. Some three hundred miles to the west, the 24th Mechanized Infantry Division sped into the vast desert wastelands. Nearby, troops from the French 6th Light Armored Division and the U.S. 82nd Airborne Division advanced on Iraq's Al Salman Airbase. Far to the west, the 101st Airborne Division prepared to launch the largest helicopter assault in history. Rain and fog caused delays, but soon the helicopters began lifting off. Some three hundred Apache, Cobra, Black Hawk, Huey, and Chinook helicopters, piloted by both men and women, flew fifty miles inside Iraq, hauling trucks, armored personnel carriers, troops, and tons of fuel and ammunition. As the helicopters landed, soldiers leaped out and raced across the sand. Soon they were building a forward base from which helicopters could launch swift strikes to anywhere in the war zone.

In response to the coalition offensive, Iraqi troops set ablaze oil wells and petroleum storage facilities inside Kuwait. The orange flames released acrid, thick smoke that blackened the sky for days and even blotted out the sun and the moon. In Kuwait City, Iraqi troops began pillaging, a sign they were preparing to flee.

The invasion was proceeding so well that Schwarzkopf, after consultations, decided to launch the VII Corps attack early. Instead of a planned two-hour artillery barrage, the VII Corps received only thirty minutes preparatory cannon fire. Then, about 3 p.m., they began crossing into Iraq led by the 1st Infantry Division. Tanks poured through more than a dozen breaches in the enemy's defensive berms. Meanwhile, with scout helicopters overhead, the 2nd Armored Cavalry sped across the desert in front of the rest of the VII Corps.

The VII Corps, commanded by General Fred Franks, was further back, driving the heavy tanks through the breaches. In an interview for the Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) program *Frontline*, Franks later told a reporter, "You could hear artillery, you've got aircraft flying, you could hear the sharp crack of tank cannons and the pop of 25-millimeter Bradley cannons, so a lot of fighting still going on.…There was also the prisoners who had been captured.…[giving] a sense of early success."

After sunset, however, the first of several errors in communications between Schwarzkopf and Franks jeopardized the entire mission. Schwarzkopf, hoping to take advantage of the rapid progress of his troops, urged commanders to press forward throughout the night. But Franks, after consulting a Schwarzkopf subordinate, instead thought he had permission to halt the VII Corps' advance. He feared that the tanks would become entangled in traffic jams in the confined breach openings and mistakenly fire at one another in the dark. Franks was also concerned that the 2nd Armored Cavalry would get too far in front of the rest of the VII Corps and end up fighting the Republican Guard alone. "I told the units to conduct local reconnaissance, continue the artillery fights.…and to resume full-scale operations at first light the next morning."

By early the next day, Monday, February 25, the 2nd Armored Cavalry was some fifteen miles inside Iraq. Along the way, they had captured hundreds of Iraqi prisoners, most of whom surrendered without a fight. There were soon so many prisoners that the military police unit accompanying the 2nd Cavalry struggled to round them all up and fly them out of the war zone. As the weather worsened with more cold rain, the regiment began to meet Iraqi resistance in the form of small-arms fire. The 2nd Armored Cavalry, however, continued to make good progress. By late afternoon, they were about twenty-five miles inside Iraq, while major portions of the VII Corps still lagged behind.

The foul weather blocked aircraft surveillance equipment, preventing anyone from determining if the Republican Guard troops remained close to their bunkers near Kuwait's northern border or were on the move. Schwarzkopf, frustrated by what he considered the slowness of the VII Corps, ordered Brevet General Barry McCaffrey to halt his 24th Mechanized Division's sweep deep inside Iraq. Schwarzkopf did not want the division to be vulnerable to a flank attack by the Republican Guard.

Then came the somber news that an Iraqi surface-to-surface Scud missile had struck barracks occupied by American soldiers at Al Khobar, Saudi Arabia, killing twenty-eight and wounding many more. Schwarzkopf wrote, "It was a terrible tragedy—this terror weapon launched into the sky that by sheer fate happened to fall where we had a concentration of troops. And it brought home once again to our side the profanity of war.…I was sick at heart."

The coalition's offensive continued to advance, with the Marines and Saudi soldiers closing in on Kuwait City. Then, after just forty-six hours of ground warfare, Baghdad radio began broadcasting orders for Iraqi troops to abandon Kuwait. The Iraqis appeared to be conceding defeat. Coalition commanders, however, were nagged by the concern of whether the VII Corps could catch and cripple the Republican Guard and discourage future threats against Iraq's neighbors. Storms persisted, interfering with surveillance cameras and making it difficult to determine the disposition of the Republican Guard. Sketchy intelligence indicated that Hussein's elite troops had not budged from their bunkers. Schwarzkopf found this encouraging, since much of the VII Corps had not moved either. The Americans then began picking up garbled radio messages that seemed to indicate that two of the three Republican Guard divisions were fleeing. The Republican Guard's third element, the Tawakalna Division, apparently remained to protect the retreat.

While the Iraqi government did nothing to indicate compliance with the UN resolutions, Russian diplomats worked behind the scenes for a ceasefire. Time was running out on the war and on any chance to significantly punish the Republican Guard. The 2nd Armored Cavalry Regiment continued their rapid advance, fighting skirmishes with outlying Republican Guard soldiers and continuing to capture prisoners. Much of the VII Corps' heavy armor, however, still straggled behind. Heavy rains continued, filling the desert river beds, called *wadis*, with rushing water. By mid-morning, Tuesday, February 26, the rain finally stopped, but was followed by fierce winds and dust clouds swirling around.

"I began to worry that the weather would bog down VII Corps still more," Schwarzkopf wrote. He ordered McCaffrey's 24th Mechanized Division to resume its sweep around Iraqi forces to block retreats into the Euphrates River Valley. "We can't wait around for VII Corps anymore," Schwarzkopf concluded. "But make sure the 24th has plenty of protection from the air and helicopter support from the 101st. They're gonna be out there all by themselves."

General Colin Powell, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, called Schwarzkopf to express his concern. "Tell them [various commanders] the chairman is on the ceiling about this entire matter of VII Corps," Powell said. "I want to know why they're not moving and why they can't attack an enemy that has been bombed continually for thirty days. They've been maneuvering for more than two days and still don't have contact with the enemy.…I know I shouldn't be second-guessing anyone in the field, but we should be fighting the enemy now."

Schwarzkopf agreed. As he later wrote, "The long-term success of Desert Storm was now riding on VII Corps. I was confident they could destroy the Republican Guard, if only they could get there before the war ended." Out in the desert, the VII Corps' powerful tank divisions advanced toward where the 2nd Armored Cavalry was already skirmishing with Republican Guards, who would not surrender without first offering stiff resistance.

As the rest of the VII Corps moved forward, Franks kept his various divisions in well-organized formations so they would not mistakenly target one another. "I wanted to mass when we hit the Republican Guards," Franks told a *Frontline* reporter. "We would go in at full speed…massed into a fist. I didn't want to poke at the Republican Guard with some extended fingers or hit them piecemeal. It required some intense coordination and synchronization of forces. You're talking about tank cannons that fire a projectile at a mile a second at ranges in excess of 2,500 meters, 3,000 meters, and whatever they hit at that range, they're going to destroy.…[This was] in a relatively confined piece of real estate that isn't rolling, but is flat, and where the possibilities of units running into each other, of fratricide, is very probable if you don't maintain a coherent direction of attack."

Besides concerns that his four divisions would slam into each other, Franks also worried that his troops were rushing across an area crowded with eleven Iraqi divisions still capable of mounting an ambush. Schwarzkopf later conceded that Franks's concerns and strategies could be justified if the enemy were making a stand, but he argued that such caution should be abandoned when a foe is fleeing. "We've got to get…contact with the enemy and maintain contact to hold them there if we're going to destroy them and we don't want them to escape across the border prematurely." Schwarzkopf added, "It was probably, in hindsight, the fact that nobody had bothered to explain to them [the VII Corps leadership] that this was exploitation now, and that they had to get up there and get hold of the enemy."

On the afternoon of February 26, the 2nd Armored Cavalry, still in the lead, smashed into Republican Guard defenses. A horrendous firefight ensued, marking the start of what became known as the Battle of 73 Easting. Cannons flashed and tanks erupted in fireballs. Almost all the 2nd Armored Cavalry was involved in heavy combat. The intense dust storm at first limited air support, but the regiment's thermal sights and laser rangefinders worked perfectly, allowing troops to inflict heavy casualties on the Iraqis. As the winds ebbed, helicopters began hovering overhead, shooting rockets trailing smoke. Then aircraft swooped in, the roar of jet engines adding to the din. Even though out-

The Vulcan 22-millimeter air defense weapon.

numbered, the 2nd Armored Cavalry began breaking through the Republican Guard's main defenses. Air Force strikes now hit targets less than two miles in front of the 2nd's armored vehicles. The 2nd's Howitzers were spitting out thousands of artillery rounds. With Iraqi T-72 tanks erupting in flames, the combined air and ground attacks were taking a toll.

That afternoon, as the 2nd Armored Cavalry engaged the Republican Guard in ferocious fighting, Franks called Schwarzkopf to say he wanted to delay a full-scale attack by the entire VII Corps. He explained that his divisions had bypassed many Iraqi units that might assault his flank. He wanted to turn most of his tanks south to hit the bypassed Iraqi units before heading east to attack the Republican Guard. Schwarzkopf disagreed and ordered him east, not south. Schwarzkopf told Franks, "Go after 'em!"

Later that day, the entire VII Corps, now including the 1st Cavalry Division, caught up with the 2nd Armored Cavalry Regiment and slammed into the Republican Guard. Schwarzkopf called the engagement the largest tank battle in military history. "Seven months after they'd invaded Kuwait, the hour of reckoning was upon the Republican Guard," he wrote. The Republican Guard fought back hard. The tank battle continued throughout the night, with the American and British soldiers repeatedly trading fire with the Iraqis. The coalition soldiers, however, were taking control, Franks explained, because of their ability "to fight day and night, fight in bad weather, [with a] capability to reach out and hit the Iraqi forces before they even knew we were coming." The firing range of American weaponry was crucial, he added. One of their prisoners said, "Hey, the tank to the right of me blew up, the tank to the left of me blew up. I couldn't even see what was firing at us."

During the night, the 1st Infantry Division and its heavy tanks began passing through the ranks of the 2nd Cavalry Regiment, relieving them of frontline responsibilities. The complex maneuver occurred entirely in the dark while both units were

The M-1 Abrams tanks, which have covered many miles of modern Fort Polk, influenced the outcome of the 1991 Gulf War against Iraq.

still under fire, although the fighting was subsiding. The distant eastern horizon was lit up by burning Iraqi vehicles when, by 2 a.m., the 1st Infantry Division had fully replaced the 2nd Cavalry Regiment. The cavalry then became the VII Corps' reserve.

Dawn revealed wrecked and charred Iraqi tanks littering the desert. Reports coming to Schwarzkopf showed "the Tawakalna Division [of the Republican Guard] had been almost completely destroyed, while we hadn't lost a single tank." Franks gave special praise to the 2nd Armored Cavalry because of its foray into Republican Guard defenses. The 2nd's success against the Republican Guard showed "where their main battle positions were and the fact that we had caught them by surprise."

After the VII Corps defeated the Tawakalna Division, it began pursuing the other two Republican Guard Divisions. The 1st Armored Division caught part of the Medina Division and destroyed many of its tanks. Throughout the war zone, Iraqis rushed to escape. American and other coalition aircraft seemed to be everywhere, shooting and bombing any Iraqi vehicle that moved. "We bombed the hell out of every convoy we could find," Schwarzkopf said, "but between air strikes we flew over the battlefield with Black Hawk helicopters equipped with loud speakers. We kept telling the Iraqis in Arabic, 'Get out of your vehicles, leave them behind, and you will not die! We will let you go home.' "

In Kuwait City, cheering crowds applauded liberating troops, many of whom were from nearby Arab countries. Television images broadcast around the world showed hundreds of gutted Iraqi vehicles strewn along a road someone labeled the *Highway*

of Death. Many in the United States, along with various international leaders, began calling for an end to the killing. Having achieved the goal of pushing the Iraqis out of Kuwait, President Bush announced a ceasefire. The ground war, lasting only one hundred hours, ended with the VII Corps encircling and preparing to destroy or capture the rest of the Republican Guard. The ceasefire allowed the Iraqis to escape.

The American military reportedly suffered twenty-eight dead, eighty-nine wounded, and five missing during the conflict that has come to be known as the Gulf War, as well as Desert Storm. There has never been an accurate accounting of Iraq's losses. Schwarzkopf quoted intelligence reports estimating that twenty-seven of the forty-two Iraqi divisions were overrun or destroyed. He added, "At least six more [divisions] were considered 'combat ineffective' or no longer able to offer real resistance." The coalition also captured some eighty thousand Iraqi prisoners.

One of the outstanding performances of the war came from the 2nd Armored Cavalry Regiment. As its commander Colonel Don Holder wrote, "Few units could have done what you did; nobody could have done it better." The regiment traveled more than 150 miles and cracked through Republican Guard defenses, capturing more than 2,000 prisoners and destroying at least 159 Iraqi tanks. In the process, seven soldiers of the Dragoon Battle Group were killed and nineteen wounded. The 2nd Armored Cavalry Regiment was one of only two units given the Valorous Unit Award for actions during the war. Colonel Douglas MacGregor of the 2nd Squadron received the Bronze Star for valor for his participation in the Battle of 73 Easting.

19. The JRTC and New Roles for Fort Polk

Fort Polk dispatched nine support groups totaling some eight thousand soldiers to the Middle East during the Gulf War. These specialists, many of them associated with the National Guard or Army Reserve, were important to the rapid victory, although many never fired a shot.

Fort Polk "is a projection point for Reserve and National Guard units," explained Wiley Clark. "Support units, like field hospitals, engineers, and transportation specialists, are often part of the National Guard. During the Gulf War, they'd come here [to Fort Polk] to fire their weapons, draw equipment, and then ship out from here. They were constantly leaving Fort Polk, especially during the first phase, which was operation Desert Shield [troop build-up prior to Operation Desert Storm]."

All the real heroes are not storybook combat fighters, either. Every single person in the Army plays a vital part. Every little job is essential to the whole scheme. What if every truck driver suddenly decided that he didn't like the whine of those shells.…and jumped headlong into a ditch?…Every department, every unit, is important.

— General George S. Patton

Fort Polk continues to serve as a base for a number of support units, most falling under the umbrella of the Warrior Brigade. "It has a field hospital, a bath and shower unit, an engineer/construction battalion, an EOD [Explosive Ordinance Detachment], and other units," Clark explained. "So if someone off in Bosnia needs a hospital, they call it down [to Fort Polk], and the 115th Field Hospital cranks up and heads to Bosnia. If someone needs a bath and shower unit, the call comes down here [to Fort Polk]."

The Warrior Brigade includes sufficient support personnel to back up an entire corps consisting of two or three Army divisions. Under most circumstances, however, the Warrior Brigade dispatches just a few support units or small groups of specialists at a time wherever they are needed. In recent years, these specialists served in Somalia, Haiti, Kosovo, and other trouble spots. On any given day, Warrior Brigade personnel attached to various Army units can be found around the world. On finishing their tours, the specialists report back to Fort Polk and await their next assignments.

Temporary housing for soldiers on assignment has been vastly improved from the sparse tent camps of World War II. Troops sleep, eat, and relax in air-conditioned modules with many conveniences, including laundries, kitchens, dining areas, chapels, showers, and latrines. The modules also feature physical fitness rooms, libraries, snack areas with popcorn machines, lounges with wide-screen TVs, and game rooms with Ping-Pong tables and video games. The 488th Quartermaster Company, part of the Warrior Brigade, has erected module tent facilities on Fort Polk's North Fort. Here the 488th, with some ninety specialists, tests new ideas and equipment that could improve temporary quarters for soldiers abroad. The specialists also train others how to organize and manage such facilities.

The 83rd Chemical Battalion of the Warrior Brigade deploys experts skilled in detecting nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons, which are increasingly becoming part of the arsenals of many nations. Chemical Battalion specialists are also skilled at decontaminating the residues left by such weapons.

Experts with the 142nd Corps Support Battalion are adept at moving masses of troops and efficiently scheduling the necessary railroad cars, airplanes, and ships. Other administrative specialists with the Warrior Brigade are schooled in dispatching sufficient supplies to support large numbers of troops in distant locations.

Left: Sergeant John R. Hacheca demonstrates a repair technique in an automotive mechanics class at Fort Polk.

Below: Besides combat training, soldiers at Fort Polk learn skills to support troops in the field. A staff sergeant instructs a trainee in the operation of a mess hall during the Vietnam War.

Military engineers often carry out some of the most difficult and dangerous tasks in war. They were essential, for example, in the storming of the Normandy beaches in World War II and in bursting through Iraq's formidable barriers on the Saudi-Kuwait border. The Warrior Brigade today includes the 46th Engineer Battalion. Capable of building bridges and roads and blowing up fortifications, engineers from the 46th served in the Gulf War.

The 115th Field Hospital also dispatched personnel to the Gulf War to treat wounded and injured soldiers. Field hospital personnel tended many Iraqi prisoners as well, along with women and children refugees. The 115th Field Hospital includes a preventive medicine detachment, an ambulance company, and a veterinary section. Surgeons, psychiatrists, anesthesiologists, radiologists, social workers, physical therapists, pharmacists, laboratory clinicians, and other specialists attend to the medical needs of the troops.

Warrior Brigade support specialists, like the combat troops, regularly hone their war survival skills in Fort Polk's remote areas. The men and women of the 115th Field Hospital, for instance, may practice first aid while learning how to protect themselves in battle. Their faces smeared with black and green camouflage paint, these soldiers scrutinize compasses and learn to plot courses through unfamiliar forests. At any moment, they may be ordered to put aside their compasses to help victims simulating the effects of shock. Later, still

in the woods, they listen to loud, recorded battle sounds, training their ears to discern the types of weapons being used and learning to anticipate the possible resulting wounds. At other times, they scramble through the underbrush, learning evasive movements that could someday help them avoid enemy gunfire.

Fort Polk is also home to the 519th Military Police Battalion, which can be sent quickly overseas. In 1991, for example, the 519th helped establish a refugee camp for Haitians at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. This same battalion was dispatched to Panama in 1994 and participated in peacekeeping missions in Haiti, Bosnia, and Kosovo. The battalion has also provided relief for hurricane victims within the United States and has an ongoing responsibility to secure Fort Polk and enforce the law on the post, from speed limit infractions to serious criminal offenses.

In addition to the services just mentioned, Fort Polk maintains a detachment for dental care, a weather forecasting station (managed by the U.S. Air Force), and the Noncommissioned Officer Academy that trains military leaders. An Air Assault School prepares soldiers to parachute into combat. On any given day, visitors to Fort Polk's Main Post may see long columns of trainees scrambling up high platforms to take breathtaking leaps.

Fort Polk has a long history of preparing troops for overseas duty at the Joint Readiness Training Center (JRTC), which specifically trains light infantry and special forces for battle. The term "light" can be misleading, however. The 2nd Ar-

Fort Polk trains personnel for every aspect of war. In a medical training exercise, soldiers load a patient with simulated wounds onto a C-130 transport plane.

Left: A soldier learns to use night-vision goggles.

Below: Another soldier trains with sophisticated laser-guided missile weaponry.

mored Cavalry Regiment, for example, uses Howitzer artillery and TOW (tube-launched, optically tracked, wire-guided) missiles, which are sometimes considered heavy weaponry. The regiment is classified as a light force because the troops can move rapidly and fight without tanks. Rapid deployment, a hallmark of the JRTC, has become indispensable because of both the military's increased global responsibilities and the circumstances that often preclude spending months organizing a military build-up.

The 2nd Armored Cavalry, based at Fort Polk since 1994, is prepared to fly anywhere in the world within forty-eight hours and immediately engage in combat against numerically superior foes. The 2nd trains in multiple ways at Fort Polk. Crews speed along ranges in rugged Humvee vehicles with TOW missile tubes attached. They learn to spot an enemy tank, fire the wire-guided missile, then reload, all in a matter of seconds. The TOW missile crews practice firing in all types of weather, in daylight and darkness, concentrating on accuracy and speed. Artillery crews conduct similar training, while other 2nd Armored Cavalry troops practice helicopter assaults.

The regiment's scouts use stealth in Fort Polk's wilds, as they stalk potential foes while they conduct reconnaissance out in front of other friendly forces. Scouts need steel nerves as they sneak behind enemy lines, moving silently to avoid detection. Small groups of soldiers use different types of formations to cloak their movements, depending on the environment and whether they are operating during the day or night. Maintaining radio silence, scouts use hand signals to communicate with one another as they gather information about the enemy force's size, strength, and disposition. As Specialist Lynn Morris of the 2nd Armored Cavalry recently told the *Guardian*, "Our job is to be the eyes and ears of the Army. It is an important job and it is up to us to let the troops behind us know of the dangers that may lie ahead."

The 2nd Armored Cavalry Regiment regularly participates in War Fighting Exercises conducted by the JRTC. The War Fighting Exercises occur annually and revive Fort Polk's long tradition of holding maneuvers. Thousands of light troops from across the country and some of the most elite military forces, including airborne troops, Rangers, and

Left: An Op Force (opposition force) soldier outfitted for modern war games. The buttons on the harness are part of the Multiple Integrated Laser Engagement System (MILES). One of the buttons will blink if the soldier is hit by a laser in mock conflict.

Below: Blowing up targets provides Fort Polk troops with realistic training, sometimes resulting in spectacular explosions.

Special Forces travel to Fort Polk for the exercises.

Because the JRTC specializes in training highly mobile soldiers and emphasizes teamwork among different military branches, the U.S. Air Force often participates in Fort Polk maneuvers. F-16 and F-15 jets streak overhead, sometimes faster than sound, while paratroopers leap from slower transport planes. Heavy tanks also occasionally join in Fort Polk maneuvers because light forces often cooperate with armored divisions.

As a prelude to the War Fighting Exercises, Clark explained that planners create elaborate stories for the simulated battles. "There is some sort of scenario, where a [fictitious] country, like Cortini, is being invaded [by another country]." Planners provide officers with a general outline of what will transpire,

Soldiers discuss strategy before war maneuvers at Fort Polk. The boxes on their backs are part of the Multiple Integrated Laser Engagement System (MILES), which sets off an alarm when the wearer is hit by a laser in simulated combat. Only the umpires have keys to turn off the sound.

telling them which forces will be involved and when various outfits will enter the fray.

The Fort Polk War Fighting Exercises, besides preparing soldiers for combat, also serve other purposes. Army commanders, for example, staged a maneuver at Fort Polk in September 2001 to test futuristic equipment. Various Army units waged a simulated battle that also involved Marine and Navy personnel, Clark said. "They were trying out all these new whiz-bang gadgets."

Soldiers from Fort Bragg, North Carolina, parachuted onto Fort Polk during the exercises. Miniature cameras attached to their helmets broadcast live television images to a control center. According to Clark, such cameras could conceivably allow the President of the United States in the White House or a general in the Pentagon to see what an individual soldier sees. Small screens that used satellite positioning technology were attached to the soldiers' helmets at eye level. The locations of everyone on the team could thus be pinpointed, allowing scattered paratroopers in unfamiliar territory at night to find one another and assemble.

To facilitate War Fighting Exercises, Fort Polk maintains a permanent opposition force (OP Force), the 509th Parachute Infantry Regiment, which has equipment and weaponry resembling that used by the Russian Army and is well-versed in Russian military tactics. The OP Force even flies Russian helicopters. Clark explained that even though Rus-

sia is no longer an enemy, "if there is a threat anywhere in the world, it usually will come from someone who was trained by and equipped by the old Soviet Union." Sometimes the 2nd Armored Cavalry Regiment or, occasionally, units based at other posts serve as part of the opposition force in Fort Polk maneuvers.

Fort Polk and the JRTC conduct other types of training that draw soldiers from around the country. For instance, live-fire exercises are held at the Peason Ridge training area. Armed with fully loaded automatic weapons, troops walk through a course where they suddenly confront life-size replicas of potential enemies. "They will be going through the woods and you may have a Mister Terrell over here with his cows that pops up," said Bruce Mann, Fort Polk's forester. Soldiers must learn to make split second judgments whether to fire or not.

The live-fire exercises are one way Fort Polk and the JRTC prepare soldiers for peacekeeping missions. This relatively new role for the Army is an important way to help prevent local conflicts from escalating into major wars, which could cost many lives. Peacekeeping often requires separating warring factions, a difficult task when dealing with people whose conflicts might be generations old. Stamping out smoldering passions requires time, patience, skill, and courage, but can at times promote democratic traditions and societal change.

Peacekeepers learn to carry out varied duties, including searching buildings for weapons to confiscate. They develop respectful relations with native populations, operate checkpoints for inspecting identification, and patrol hostile streets where someone with a gun may be behind every door. The peacekeeper must be prepared to defend himself and fellow soldiers, yet not be too quick on the trigger. A mistake could kill the innocent and further inflame hostile crowds.

The JRTC has built several villages on Fort Polk to resemble communities where American soldiers currently serve as peacekeepers. Army units from all over the country, including the National Guard and Army Reserve, visit Fort Polk to participate in Mission Rehearsal Exercises (MREs) before heading to other lands. According to Clark, "The 2nd ACR [Armored Cavalry Regiment] went through an MRE right here at Fort Polk and then went to Bosnia. Before the 115th Field Hospital went to Bosnia, it also went through the training. The 519th MPs [Military Police] were in Kosovo, and they did the training here."

Clark explained that in training soldiers going to Bosnia, for example, "They try to make it [the village] just as realistic as they can. They actually give the soldiers missions they would be doing over there.… They actually bring Bosnian speaking folks from Chicago, men and women, and they play roles." The role players may act as mayor, police officer, or villager bent on destruction, Mann said. "You, as a soldier, have to deal with various scenarios, and it all seems very real." Special laser equipment identifies anyone shot during simulated gun battles. Mann continued, "If you are dead, you must lay right there, and somebody has got to come get you. So it's absolutely real world." Soldiers trained to be "observer controllers" monitor the exercises in the replica villages, carefully analyzing participants' reactions. When an exercise is completed, the observers assess performance in detail, as they do at the conclusion of War Fighting Exercises.

Fort Polk continues to adjust to new challenges in a complex world. On any given day, soldiers on the post may be learning how to fight in battle, while others are training to enforce the peace. Whatever the activity or training, Fort Polk maintains the highest standards of excellence, continuing the proud tradition begun years ago when the Army decided the pine forests and open country of west central Louisiana would be an ideal place to train America's soldiers.

20. Years Pass, but the Spirit Remains

More than sixty years have passed since tanks clattered through Leesville's streets to wage a pitched mock battle, delighting residents who watched from their porches, windows, and roofs. To some who saw the event, it seems like only yesterday when their quiet town erupted in the thrilling display. Firing blank shells, spinning around, kicking up pieces of sidewalk and dust, the tanks appeared menacing at the time, but in reality they were already hopelessly outdated. Public indifference and lack of preparedness had rendered the Army's equipment obsolete. Even so, observers of the Leesville battle witnessed a significant turning point for the United States military, a moment when the fault lines of history shifted.

> *Our doubts are traitors, and make us lose the good we oft might win by fearing to attempt.*
>
> *— William Shakespeare*

Tank performance during the 1940 Louisiana Maneuvers was an important factor in the modernization of the U.S. military and in the expanded use of armored equipment. Foresighted Army officers risked their careers by meeting secretly to exchange ideas they hoped would salvage the American military. Their clandestine gathering led to proposals that Army Chief of Staff General George C. Marshall ultimately adopted to forge the nation's first armored divisions, which fittingly led back to Louisiana and the establishment of Camp Polk. This forerunner to Fort Polk became a pivotal setting for the changes to come that would defy accepted military truths.

The self-effacing and underestimated Colonel Dwight D. Eisenhower moved into one of Camp Polk's new barracks. With a mix of authority and candor in his dealings with army staff and reporters alike, he gained recognition as he orchestrated new tank and antitank divisions in the 1941 maneuvers. Eisenhower and Major Walter Krueger shifted pieces of their large army in Louisiana with the craft and ingenuity of chess masters, anticipating their opponents' moves and surprising them with daring tactics.

In the same exercises, the middle-aged Brigadier General George S. Patton, his career seemingly near the end, instead leaped to the forefront in the changing military. Audacious and impatient, sometimes wounding himself with astounding gaffes, Patton proved in Louisiana that he was also a powerful motivator, adept organizer, and, most important of all, a master of the tank. His daring sweep around and behind his foes, reminiscent of the bold efficiency of Civil War generals J.E.B. Stuart and Stonewall Jackson, presaged Patton's stunning accomplishments during World War II. The Louisiana Maneuvers at Camp Polk also enabled many other Army leaders, such as Omar Bradley, Mark Clark, Courtney Hodges, and Joseph Stilwell, to hone the skills that make a superior battlefield commander, converging creativity and caution. Even if only indirectly involved in the maneuvers, these officers observed how to coordinate land forces with air power and manipulate multiple military components. For the first time in large-scale war games, convoys of fighter planes and bombers swept over the state, irrevocably altering traditional warfare strategies.

Perhaps just as important as the shift in tactics was the transformation experienced by thousands of young men gathered in Louisiana from across the country to take part in the maneuvers. A vast and disparate collection of former clerks, lawyers, farmers, loggers, factory workers, college students, and others found themselves engaged in a bold experiment requiring them to quickly learn the value of teamwork under fire. Storming into tiny hamlets with only a church, a store, and maybe a

The Fort Polk Military Museum displays an extensive collection of artifacts and exhibits illustrating the post's role during various military conflicts.

house or two, they screamed war cries, dodged cemetery headstones, and fired blank shells. Even the youngest, least experienced soldiers began to understand something of the terrible demands of actual combat. Withstanding pelting rain and sweltering heat, they soon grew accustomed to thinking and acting like disciplined troops, even when the earth shook beneath their feet with the reverberations of the big guns and when acrid smoke labored their breathing and fogged their vision. As they adapted, they also learned that a battle victory is rarely secure, that war requires constant wariness. Those who relaxed their guard or grew careless were stunned by sudden explosions as fighter planes dove at them, raining down panic and chaos.

Soldiers mastered these lessons throughout World War II as armored divisions took their turns practicing in north-central Louisiana for the conflict in Europe. While no training could fully prepare anyone for combat's horror and confusion, the Camp Polk experience improved the odds of survival. Many of the troops soon faced the numbing terror of the Battle of the Bulge. There, vastly outnumbered by the German Army, they refused to yield, fighting night and day. Scared, exhausted, and cold, these heroes often had no idea where they were or if they could count on any military support. Yet they managed to slow, then stop Adolph Hitler's powerful last grasp to control Europe.

Soldiers trained at Camp Polk during World War II also braved the steaming jungles of the Pacific Islands where they fought Japanese enemies who preferred death to capture. Young Americans, some of whom were brash brawlers in the streets of Leesville a mere few months earlier, became the grim warriors of the devastatingly effective 11th Airborne Division. The paratroopers grew proficient enough to parachute behind enemy lines in the Philippines and pull off one of the most daring prison rescues of the entire war.

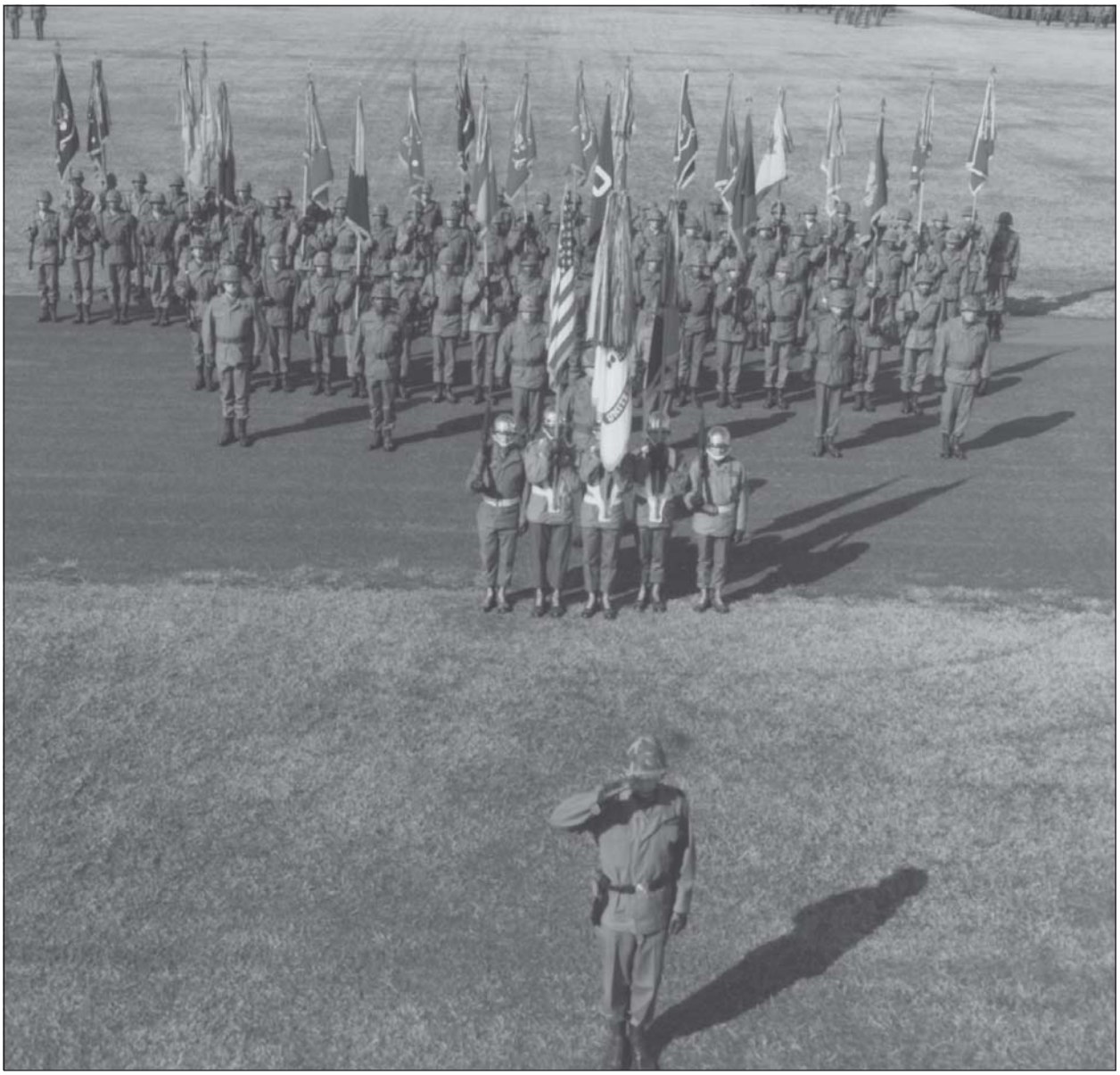
Left: General Ralph E. Haines Jr., commander of CONARC (Continental Army Command), visits the Fort Polk Military Museum on December 13, 1972.

Soldiers during the Korean War era experienced similar transformations during training at Camp Polk. The 45th Infantry Division and various other National Guard troops arrived at the post largely unprepared for combat. Although veterans formed the backbone of some of these units, most were comprised primarily of untested troops who would soon travel halfway around the world to fight. Their intensive Camp Polk training helped them battle hordes of Chinese and North Korean forces to a standstill in a ruggedly beautiful, but hostile land.

The story repeated itself during the Vietnam War, the Cold War, and the struggles in the Middle East, as Fort Polk welcomed mostly untrained individuals and molded them into confident soldiers. Like their predecessors of earlier decades, these soldiers left Louisiana prepared to withstand hardships abroad that most might not have been able to endure without the arduous training.

A woman soldier examines an outdoor exhibit at the Fort Polk Military Museum in 1976.

From years past to the present, Fort Polk, like every military installation, has had its own distinctive spirit. There are many contributing factors, including the unusually close ties between the post and nearby communities. Since before World War II, a cross-section of citizens,



Troops on parade at Fort Polk on January 11, 1980, at the 5th Infantry (Mechanized) Division's 62nd anniversary.

rich and poor, have responded favorable to Army requests. Repeatedly, local leaders and residents have voluntarily surrendered their land for the military's use. They have stepped forward to organize dances and other activities for lonely soldiers, and they were there welcoming the Army back after periodic base closings. During the Cold War, Vernon Parish residents, in a standing-room-only meeting, made plans to fan out across Louisiana and ensure widespread cooperation with the returning Army. The broad-based local enthusiasm was an important factor in Camp Polk becoming Fort Polk and a permanent post.

During the contentiousness of the Vietnam War and later the brinkmanship of the Cold War, local residents stood shoulder to shoulder behind the troops and Fort Polk. Post commanders and individual soldiers alike nurtured cooperation by participating in parades, providing entertainment, making speeches, and joining in the community in a

variety of ways. The response from residents has been their steadfast support. On returning to Fort Polk from Panama, where they helped oust dictator Manuel Noriega, soldiers of the 5th Infantry (Mechanized) Division were moved by the number of residents, including many veterans of past wars, who turned out to welcome them home.

Fort Polk's spirit is further exemplified by the post's civilian employees, including veterans formerly stationed at the installation. Decorated soldiers who fought in Vietnam, for example, returned to teach troops about the rigors of war from their own experience, then settled in the area after retiring from the military. Many other veterans have also chosen to live near the post, and their presence enhances community support.

Tradition plays a significant role in the Fort Polk spirit as well. The 2nd Armored Cavalry Regiment, prominent in the post's recent history, traces its roots back to the Louisiana frontier and a blistering hot day in Texas in 1846. The regiment's General Charles May, long black hair streaming like a flag as he rode on horseback, charged Mexican cannons in the early days of the Mexican-American War. This tradition of courage continued in the 1991 Gulf War when the 2nd Armored Cavalry ranged far ahead of the Army's more powerful tank units to engage Iraq's elite Republican Guard.

Few at Fort Polk, however, spend much time reveling in past glories. They are far too busy focusing on present and future challenges facing the nation. The post continues a long history of being in the forefront of adapting to the changing demands of an increasingly complex world. The Joint Readiness Training Center, exemplifying one of the shifts in the military's role, prepares soldiers not only for combat, but also to maintain peace in countries where ancient grudges are handed down from one generation to the next like family heirlooms.

A willingness to embrace change, along with proud traditions and ever loyal local support, helped establish Fort Polk's prestigious reputation. The responsibility to carry the standard forward now falls to each new generation that passes through its gates. If the past is a guide, these men and women will always be ready to meet the challenge.

Bibliography

Ambrose, Stephen E.
1990 *Eisenhower: Soldier and President*. Simon and Schuster, New York.

Anderson, David G.
1990 The Paleoindian Colonization of Eastern North America: A View from the Southeastern United States. In *Early Paleoindian Economies of Eastern North America*, edited by Kenneth B. Tankersley and Barry L. Isaac, pp. 163–216. Research in Economic Anthropology, Supplement 5. JAI Press, Greenwich, Connecticut.
1999 *Prehistory and History in Western Louisiana: A Technical Synthesis of Cultural Resource Investigations at JRTC and Fort Polk*. Southeast Archeological Center, National Park Service, Tallahassee.
1999 *JRTC and Fort Polk Historic Preservation Plan: Cultural Resources Action Plan/Planning Manual*. Southeast Archeological Center, National Park Service, Tallahassee.

Anderson, David G., J.W. Joseph, and Mary Beth Reed
1988 *Fort Polk Historic Preservation Plan: Technical Synthesis of Cultural Resource Investigations, Fort Polk, Louisiana*. Interagency Archeological Services Division,* National Park Service, Atlanta.

Astor, Gerald
1992 *A Blood-Dimmed Tide: The Battle of the Bulge by the Men Who Fought It.* Donald I. Fine, New York.

Barr, Robert
2000 Dunkirk Vets Commemorate Heroic Rescue for Last Time. *The Associated Press*, 4 June.

Blair, Clay
1987 *The Forgotten War: America in Korea, 1950–1953.* Doubleday, New York.

Bookman, Jay
2000 Army Testing 'Computerized' Soldiers. *The Atlanta Journal–Constitution*, 19 March:A1, A14–A15.

Boyd, Willis Baxter
1943 *The Dawn of a New Day*. The Leesville–Vernon Parish Chamber of Commerce, Leesville, Louisiana.

Brokaw, Tom
1998 *The Greatest Generation*. Random House, New York.

Church, William T.
1968 GI Rails Took Their Basic Training on the Crime and Punishment. *Trains*, October:36–40.

Cook, Terri
1999 Scouts: Army's Eyes and Ears at Work. *Guardian*, 3 December:17.

Czerwenka, Adolph
1999 A Deadly Sunday Morning. *Newsweek*, 8 March:42–43.

Davis, Jingle
2000 Georgia Guard Units Are Heading to Bosnia. *The Atlanta Journal–Constitution*, 2 December:G4.

D'este, Carlo
1995 *Patton: A Genius for War.* Harper Collins, New York.

Doherty, George (editor)
1992 *Voice of the Angels*. 11th Airborne Division Association, Anaheim, California.

Eisenhower, David
1986 *Eisenhower at War, 1943–1945*. Random House, New York.

Flanagan, Edward M.
1990 *USA Airborne: 50th Anniversary*. Turner Publishing, Paducah, Kentucky.

Gibson, Jon L.
1999 *Poverty Point: A Terminal Archaic Culture of the Lower Mississippi Valley*. Louisiana Department of Culture, Recreation, and Tourism, Baton Rouge.

Gilbert, Martin
1999 *A History of the Twentieth Century, Volume Three, 1952–1999*. William Morrow, New York.
Glover, Charles
1994 Tanks Became Rhinos with Teeth to Chew Terrain. *The Atlanta Constitution*, 17 July:D3.
Goldstein, Donald M., Katherine Dillon, and J. Michael Wenger
1994 *Nuts! The Battle of the Bulge*. Brassey's, Washington.
Griess, Thomas E. (editor)
1989 *The Second World War: Europe and the Mediterranean*. The West Point Military History Series, Avery Publishing Group, Wayne, New Jersey.
Halberstam, David
1969 *The Best and the Brightest*. Fawcett Crest Book, Greenwich, Connecticut.
Harris, Norma J., Joseph Meyer, and L. Janice Campbell
1999 *Evaluation of Building 44*. Prentice Thomas and Associates, Fort Walton Beach, Florida.
Hastings, Max
1985 *Victory in Europe: D-Day to VE Day*. Little Brown, Boston.
Hoyt, Edwin P.
1988 *The GI's War: The Story of American Soldiers in Europe in World War II*. McGraw-Hill, New York.
Hudgins, Harold
1997 Railroad Anniversary. *The Town Talk*, Alexandria, Louisiana.
Hughes, Thomas Alexander
1995 *Overlord: General Pete Quesada and the Triumph of Tactical Air Power in World War II*. The Free Press, New York.
Jelinek, Pauline
2001 Army Draws Bead on Green Bullets. *The Atlanta Journal–Constitution*, 4 May:A11.
Jennings, Peter, and Todd Brewster
1998 *The Century*. Doubleday, New York.
Joyner, Tammy
1999 Patton Was the Consummate CEO. *The Atlanta Journal–Constitution*, 7 November:R1, R5.
Kane, Sharyn, and Richard Keeton
1993 *Southern National Forests*. Falcon Press Publishing, Billings, Montana.
1994 *Fort Benning: The Land and the People*. United States Army, Fort Benning, Georgia, and Interagency Archeological Services Division,* National Park Service, Atlanta.
1994 *In Those Days: African-American Life Near the Savannah River*. Interagency Archeological Services Division,* National Park Service, Atlanta.
Keeton, Richard, and Sharyn Kane
1994 *Beneath These Waters: Archeological and Historical Studies of 11,500 Years Along the Savannah River*. 2nd ed. Interagency Archeological Services Division,* National Park Service, Atlanta.
1999 *Fiery Dawn: The Civil War Battle at Monroe's Crossroads, North Carolina*. United States Army, Fort Bragg, North Carolina, and Southeast Archeological Center, National Park Service, Tallahassee.
Martz, Ron
2000 Richard Haskill, 79, A Survivor of the Bataan March. *The Atlanta Journal–Constitution*. 23 March:C6.
McCormick, Angela
1989 First USO Built. *Beauregard Daily News*, special section, 8 December.
1989 Towns Burgeon During Pre-War Maneuver Days. *Beauregard Daily News*, special section, 8 December.
1989 Camp Polk Construction 'Mad Rush.' *Beauregard Daily News*, special section, 8 December.
McCullough, David
1992 *Truman*. Simon and Schuster, New York.
Miller, Christina E., and Susan E. Wood
1997 *Oakland Plantation: A Comprehensive Subsurface Investigation*. Southeast Archeological Center, National Park Service, Tallahassee.
Miller, Merle
1987 *Ike the Soldier: As They Knew Him*. Putnam's Sons, New York.

Neuman, Robert W.
1984 *An Introduction to Louisiana Archaeology*. Louisiana State University Press, Baton Rouge.
Neuman, Robert W., and Nancy W. Hawkins
1993 *Louisiana Prehistory*. Louisiana Division of Archaeology, Baton Rouge, Louisiana.
Omicinski, John
1999 The Military Draft: Casualty of New Kinds of Warfare. *USA Today*, 3 December:22A.
Parker, Craiger C.
1990 Oral History of Fort Polk with T.L. "Sonny" Berry. Unpublished ms. on file, Fort Polk Military Museum, Leesville, Louisiana.
Perret, Geoffrey
1991 *There's a War To Be Won: The United States Army in World War II.* Random House, New York.
Pickens, Jennifer
1999 Weather Folks Get Green Light. *Guardian*, 3 December:10.
Pollacia, Nick, Jr.
1994 *The Third Army Maneuvers, May 1940: The First of the Great Louisiana Maneuvers.* Northwestern State University, Natchitoches, Louisiana.
Robertson, Ricky
1991 The Great Louisiana Maneuvers: Part 1, Prelude to Training and Battle. *Army Motors* (Journal of the Military Vehicle Preservation Association) 65:3–6.
1991 The Great Louisiana Maneuvers: Part 2, The Battle of Louisiana. *Army Motors* (Journal of the Military Vehicle Preservation Association) 66:18–23.
1991 The Great Louisiana Maneuvers: Part 3, Then and Now. *Army Motors* (Journal of the Military Vehicle Preservation Association) 67:16–20.
1991 America's First USO Building. *Army Motors* (Journal of the Military Vehicle Preservation Association) 82:29–30.
Sanson, Jerry Purvis, Terry L. Jones, Christopher R. Gabel, Anna C. Burns, and Matthew J. Schott
1994 *Camp Beauregard and Central Louisiana, 1940–1945.* Louisiana National Guard, Alexandria, Louisiana.
Schiebout, Judith
1997 *Paleofaunal Survey, Collecting, Processing, and Documentation at Two Locations on Fort Polk, Louisiana.* U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Fort Worth, Texas.
1998 When Elephants and Rhinos Roamed Louisiana. *Phi Kappa Phi Journal*, Winter:26–29.
Schlesinger, Arthur M., Jr.
1965 *A Thousand Days: John F. Kennedy in the White House*. Houghton Mifflin, Boston.
Schwarzkopf, Norman H., and Peter Petre
1992 *It Doesn't Take a Hero*. Bantam Books, New York.
Smith, Steven D.
1999 *A Good Home for a Poor Man: Fort Polk and Vernon Parish, 1800–1940.* Southeast Archeological Center, National Park Service, Tallahassee.
Steen, Harold K. (editor)
1992 *The Origins of the National Forests*. Forest History Society, Durham, North Carolina.
Stone, Andrea
2000 Army's New High-Tech Laser Is Right on Target. *USA Today*, 8 June:3A.
Sulzberger, C.L.
1966 *The American Heritage Picture History of World War II*. American Heritage, New York.
Toland, John
1991 *In Mortal Combat, Korea, 1950–1953.* William Morrow, New York.
Toner, Mike
2002 *The Past in Peril.* Southeast Archeological Center, National Park Service, Tallahassee. (Articles originally published in *The Atlanta Journal–Constitution*.)
Warrick, Trish
1999 Post Gains One-of-a-Kind Company, Facility. *Guardian*, 3 December:7.
1999 Special Forces, Special Bond. *Guardian*, 3 December:16.

2000 Military Skills Week at 115th. *Guardian*, 2 June: 9.

Whitaker, W. Denis, and Shelagh Whitaker
1989 *Rhineland: The Battle to End the War*. St. Martin's Press, New York.

Whorton, James
1989 1939: WWII Buildup Begins. *Leesville Daily Leader*, special section, 8 December.

Williams, T. Harry, Richard N. Current, and Frank Freidel
1960 *A History of the United States since 1865*. Knopf, New York.

---

* *In March 1996, the Interagency Archeological Services Division (IASD) moved from Atlanta to Tallahassee and merged with the National Park Service's Southeast Archeological Center. The name of the division changed to Technical Assistance and Partnerships.*

Articles and Pamphlets with No Identified Author

- *1st Armored Division: Old Ironsides*. Public Affairs Office, Fort Polk, 1956.
- *50 Years of Fort Polk*. A Fort Polk *Guardian*, *Beauregard Daily News*, and *Leesville Daily Leader* supplement, June 1, 1990.
- *Ancient Mound Sites of Louisiana*. Louisiana Division of Archaeology.
- *Base Guide to Fort Polk*. Public Affairs Office, Joint Readiness Training Center and Fort Polk, 1994.
- Big Maneuvers Test U.S. Army. *Life Magazine*, October 6, 1941.
- *Fort Jesup State Commemorative Area*. Louisiana State Parks.
- *Fort Polk–A Brief History*. Public Affairs Office, Joint Readiness Training Center and Fort Polk.
- *Fort Polk–More Than a Military Reservation*. Department of the Army.
- *History, Customs and Traditions of the 2nd Armored Cavalry Regiment*. Department of the Army and Fort Polk.
- *Marksville State Historic Site*. Louisiana State Parks.
- *Tour Guide to Historic Fort Polk*. Public Affairs Office, Joint Readiness Training Center and Fort Polk.

Exhibits of Interest

- Fort Polk Environmental Office Exhibit
- Fort Polk Military Museum
- Museum of West Louisiana
- Marksville State Historic Site
- Second Armored Cavalry Museum

World-Wide-Web Sites of Interest

- army.mil
- homeofheroes.com (Medal of Honor winners)
- jrtc-polk.army.mil
- maxwell.af.mil
- teachvietnam.org

Lecturers, History of Fort Polk Seminar

- DeBose, Scott, interpreter, Fort Jesup State Commemorative Area, Many, Louisiana
- Marler, Don, historian, Hemphill, Texas
- Pollacia, Nick, Jr., historian, Natchitoches, Louisiana
- Robertson, Ricky, historian, Florien, Louisiana
- Sanson, Jerry, professor, Louisiana State University, Alexandria, Louisiana
- Smith, Kathleen, professor, Northwestern State University, Leesville, Louisiana
- Smith, Steven D., historian, South Carolina Institute of Archaeology and Anthropology, Columbia, South Carolina
- Wise, Erbon, (Major General, U.S. Army, retired), author, Sulphur, Louisiana