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The Home Front: The Experience of Soldiers and Civilians in the Louisiana Maneuvers of 1940 and 1941

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The Home Front:
The Experience of Soldiers and Civilians in the Louisiana Maneuvers of 1940 and 1941

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
University of New Orleans
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts
in
History

by

John D'Antoni

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Table of Contents

Abstract	iv
Introduction.....	1
Historiography	2
The History Behind the Louisiana Maneuvers	6
The Soldiers Behind the Louisiana Maneuvers	13
The Citizens Behind the Louisiana Maneuvers	20
The Louisiana Government During the Maneuvers	30
Problems During the Maneuvers	32
Conclusion	37
Appendix I	39
Bibliography	40
Vita.....	42

Abstract

In the years before and during World War II, the United States Army conducted a series of military maneuvers in north-central Louisiana. The two biggest maneuvers occurred in May 1940 and September 1941. The Louisiana Maneuvers are credited with helping to prepare the U.S. armed forces for World War II. Previous studies of the 1940 and 1941 maneuvers have focused on the day-to-day activities during the maneuvers or the generals behind the maneuvers. This study will focus on the impacts of the maneuvers on the soldiers themselves and on the citizens of north-central Louisiana who lived in the maneuver area. This study will also focus on how the Louisiana state government worked with the U.S. army to get the maneuvers.

Keywords: World War II, Louisiana, U.S. Army, citizens

Introduction

The Louisiana Maneuvers were a series of military exercises held in north-central Louisiana in May 1940 and September 1941. The United States Army held the Louisiana Maneuvers in order to prepare for World War II. Historian Patrick Murray argues that the Louisiana Maneuvers were “the biggest war games undertaken by the army prior to World War II and were the culmination of the army’s large unit training exercises before the war.”¹ The United States Army used the Louisiana Maneuvers to gauge the effectiveness and readiness of their troops in the run-up to World War II. The Louisiana Maneuvers of 1940 lasted from May 9 to May 23 and involved about 70,000 troops. The Maneuvers of 1941 lasted from September 15 to September 28 and involved over 450,000 troops. Both maneuvers took place across thirty-one of the sixty-four parishes in Louisiana. A number of famous American generals participated in the Louisiana Maneuvers, including Dwight Eisenhower, Omar Bradley, George Patton, Mark Clark, and Joseph Stillwell and they were organized and led by George Marshall, the Chief of Staff of the U.S. Army.

Historians and reporters have studied and reported the effects of the Louisiana Maneuvers on the U.S. Army for the last seventy years. The Maneuvers helped train a generation of officers and left the U.S. Army better prepared for the Second World War. Several historians have already researched the Louisiana Maneuvers. What historians have not researched is the local economic impact of the Louisiana Maneuvers of 1940 and 1941, the individual soldiers’ perspective of being in Louisiana, and the relationship between local Louisianans and soldiers present in the maneuvers. This study is principally based on local newspaper research addressing these issues.

¹ Patrick Murray. "The Louisiana Maneuvers: Practice for War." *Louisiana History: The Journal of the Louisiana Historical Association*, Vol. 13, No. 2 (Spring, 1972): 117-138.

Historiography

One work on the 1940 Louisiana Maneuvers is Mary Kathryn Barbier's 2003 article "George C. Marshall and the 1940 Louisiana Maneuvers."² The article starts off as an extensive overview of Marshall's career prior to World War Two, but the rest of the paper gives a detailed history into the logistics behind the maneuvers. Barbier notes that criticisms over shortages of weapons and manpower influenced Marshall's logistical decisions on the Louisiana Maneuvers. After a series of maneuvers along the Pacific Coast, the Caribbean, the Panama Canal, Georgia, and Texas in early 1940, Marshall began looking for an area for the maneuvers scheduled for May 1940. According to Barbier, Marshall and his staff began searching for an "economically feasible, underpopulated site that could sustain the damage the maneuvers would produce."³ He finally chose an area in Louisiana east of the Sabine River, although it seems the primary choices for maneuver sites did not work out. The sheer amount of soldiers made the 1940 Maneuvers the first large scale peacetime army maneuvers in American history.

Barbier's analysis of the 1940 Maneuvers is very effective. She first addresses the logistics behind the events before, during, and after the maneuvers occurred. Barbier extensively details the establishment and execution of the maneuvers. She focuses on Marshall's career and

² Mary Kathryn Barbier, "George C. Marshall and the 1940 Louisiana Maneuvers," *Louisiana History: The Journal of the Louisiana Historical Association*, Vol. 44, No. 4 (Autumn 2003): 389-410.

³ *Ibid.*, 400.

notes how much effort Marshall spent on the maneuvers, and she covers him at the conclusion of the maneuvers.

Barbier also discusses the 1940 maneuvers in her 1994 article “The 1940 Louisiana Maneuvers.”⁴ Like “George C. Marshall and the 1940 Louisiana Maneuvers”, this paper includes detailed analysis of the Louisiana Maneuvers. Unlike “George C. Marshall and the 1940 Louisiana Maneuvers”, she does not go into much detail on Marshall’s role in the maneuvers. The only real difference between this article and her earlier work involves a more detailed account of how the 1940 Louisiana Maneuvers came about. Most of the information, especially on how the 1940 Maneuvers played out, can also be seen in her previous work.

For a detailed analysis of the 1941 Maneuvers, G. Patrick Murray’s 1972 article “The Louisiana Maneuvers: Practice for War” is an excellent resource.⁵ Most of the research that Murray conducts is about the Maneuvers from the perspective of the generals, such as Dwight Eisenhower, George Patton, and George Marshall. Murray covers the logistics that led to the Louisiana Maneuvers and the movements of the Second and Third Army during the Louisiana Maneuvers. According to Murray, few officers had any combat experience in 1941 and many lacked confidence in their own leadership abilities at the time of the 1941 Maneuvers. Murray also notes that “Marshall hoped the Louisiana Maneuvers would rivet national attention on the

⁴ Mary Kathryn Barbier. “The 1940 Louisiana Maneuvers.” *Southern Studies: An Interdisciplinary Journal of the South*, Vol. 5, Issue 4 (Fall and Winter 1994): 69-82.

⁵ Patrick Murray. “The Louisiana Maneuvers: Practice for War.” *Louisiana History: The Journal of the Louisiana Historical Association*, Vol. 13, No. 2 (Spring, 1972): 117-38.

weaknesses of its army, especially the equipment shortages.”⁶ This analysis would be important, as public knowledge of the Army’s weaknesses might spur the federal government and military leaders to make the necessary logistical and budgetary changes to correct those equipment shortages.

Murray discusses how the Maneuvers unfolded. Krueger’s Third Army launched an amphibious “invasion” on the Louisiana and Texas Gulf Coasts, and Lear’s Second Army would try to stop them during the two-week long maneuvers. Murray notes that by the time the fighting stopped on September 28th, “the Third Army had virtually surrounded Shreveport and seized the city's waterworks.”⁷ Murray and Barbier both show the effects of the Louisiana Maneuvers on the U.S. Army as a whole.

The 1940 Louisiana Maneuvers are the subject of Nick Pollacia, Jr.’s 1994 thesis “The Third Army Maneuvers, May 1940: The First of the Great Louisiana Maneuvers”. Pollacia goes into a lot more detail about the 1940 maneuvers than Barbier. He covers Marshall’s role in the planning of the maneuvers and even notes the various Army commanders who helped Marshall plan them out. Pollacia also has a day-by-day account of the 1940 maneuvers. He also mentions the effects of the German offensive in the Low Countries and France of May 1940 on the maneuvers. He describes a “sobering atmosphere of grim reality and a stunning silence” over

⁶ Murray, “The Louisiana Maneuvers,” 121.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 133.

Camp Beauregard as word comes in of the German invasion of Belgium. As interesting as the subject matter is, the thesis is extremely dry and difficult to read.⁸

The land that the maneuvers took place on is another aspect of the maneuvers that must be addressed. The Kisatchie National Forest in central Louisiana saw a lot of action during the maneuvers. Its' role in the maneuvers is part of Ashley Bonnette's article "Multiple Use Management of Public Forest Land: Kisatchie National Forest and the Military." Bonnette traces the entire history of the Kisatchie National Forest from its origins in 1930 to the present day. She focuses primarily on the military's use of the forest, including how the present day military uses one-fifth of the land in the forest. For the Louisiana Maneuvers, Bonnette notes the damage the 1940 maneuvers had on the forest.⁹

Several books explore the generals who participated in the Louisiana Maneuvers. The role of the maneuvers on the Army's High Command cannot be overstated. Forrest Pogue discusses Marshall's role in both the 1940 and 1941 Maneuvers in *Ordeal and Hope, 1939-1942* of his multi-volume Marshall biography.¹⁰ In *Eisenhower*, author Stephen Ambrose notes the effect that Dwight Eisenhower had on the Louisiana Maneuvers.¹¹ General George Patton's role in the 1941 Louisiana Maneuvers is the subject of two books: *Patton: The Man Behind the Legend:*

⁸ Nick Pollacia Jr., "The Third Army Maneuvers, May 1940: The First of the Great Louisiana Maneuvers," M.A. Thesis, Northwestern State University, 1994.

⁹ Bonnette, Ashley, "Multiple Use Management of Public Forest Land: Kisatchie National Forest and the Military." *Louisiana History: The Journal of the Louisiana Historical Association*, Vol. 40, No. 4 (Autumn 1999): 433-443

¹⁰ Forrest Pogue. *George C. Marshall: Ordeal and Hope: 1939-1942, Volume 2* (New York: Viking Press, 1966).

¹¹ Stephen Ambrose, *Eisenhower, Volume 1: Soldier, General of the Army* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1983).

1885-1945, by Martin Blumenson¹², and *A General's Life: An Autobiography by General of the Army Omar N. Bradley*, by General Omar Bradley and Clay Blair.¹³

For a look at how the Pelican State's people dealt with the Louisiana Maneuvers, Jerry Sanson's *Louisiana During World War II: Politics and Society, 1939-1945* is an excellent resource. Sanson spends the first half of the book analyzing Louisiana's politics during the war and the second half probing the effects the war had on Louisiana's civilian population. Although the majority of the book explores the politics of World War II-era Louisiana, Sanson effectively analyzes the influences the war had on Louisianan society.¹⁴

Although the aforementioned historians have focused on a general history of the maneuvers and the generals who led them, they have not focused on the maneuvers' economic impact, the relationship between the citizens of Louisiana and the soldiers, or the soldiers' perspectives. Those stories and impacts will be told in this paper.

The History Behind the Louisiana Maneuvers

As World War II ramped up across Europe and Asia, U.S. Army Chief of Staff George Marshall wanted to make sure that the United States Army had the preparations necessary to wage war. Even as early as 1938, "Marshall focused on preparing the Army for national defense, as well as for the possibility of development overseas."¹⁵ Field exercises in Virginia in 1939 were staged "with very disappointing results"¹⁶ and led to the set-up of more rigorous maneuvers

¹² Martin Blumenson, *Patton, The Man Behind the Legend: 1885-1945* (New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc, 1985).

¹³ Clay Blair and Omar Bradley, *A General's Life: An Autobiography by General of the Army Omar Bradley*. (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1983).

¹⁴ Jerry Sanson, *Louisiana During World War II: Politics and Society, 1939-1945* (Baton Rouge: LSU Press, 1999).

¹⁵ Barbier, "George C. Marshall and the 1940 Louisiana Maneuvers," 395.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

in 1940 and 1941. The 1940 maneuvers allowed troops to test, among other things, two new tactics. The first tactic involved engaging “the enemy on a front with a small force” and “surround and overwhelm the enemy.” The second involved a variation of the German blitzkrieg.¹⁷

Marshall and his advisers undertook planning for the maneuvers. According to Barbier, Marshall and his team picked north-central Louisiana for several reasons. The area the maneuvers took place in contained few people. The terrain of north-central Louisiana contained and resembled various land types that the U.S. Army could encounter in Europe.¹⁸ In fact, “several army officers referred to the location as ideal for the implementation of the exercise.”¹⁹ The 1940 Louisiana Maneuvers took place from May 5 to May 22 in the Sabine Forest area. The 1940 Maneuvers involved 70,000 soldiers divided into a “Red” army and a “Blue” army, with most of those soldiers coming from the Third Army. The Red Army, based out of Texas and commanded by Major General Walter Krueger, would be the invading army and the Blue Army, based out of Georgia and commanded by Major General Walter Short, would be tasked with defense. According to the *Shreveport Times*, the purpose of the maneuvers was “to train the two corps in concentrating over long distances against a mobile enemy and maneuver under combat conditions while operating with combat aviation and mechanized forces.”²⁰

¹⁷ Barbier, “The 1940 Louisiana Maneuvers,” 71.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 71-72.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 72.

²⁰ “Maneuvers ‘Zero Hour’ is Reached,” *The Shreveport Times*, May 5, 1940. All subsequent newspaper citations were accessed through Newspapers.com in Fall 2017.

After nine months of training for both armies in other parts of the state and country, the maneuvers began with a series of “bombings” by the Red Army over Vicksburg, Mississippi and New Orleans. The first few days of combat involved mostly air campaigns between the Red and Blue armies. By May 9, the Red Army launched an attack near Alexandria that the Blue Army halted. The second part of the war games commenced with the Blue Army trying to push the Red Army out of Louisiana. After two days of fighting, the Blue Army successfully pushed the Red Army back into Texas. The final battle of the 1940 maneuvers involved a three-day battle along a sixty-mile front near the Louisiana/Texas border that ended with the defeat of the Red Army by the Blue Army.

The U.S. Army debated the effects of the 1940 maneuvers. Barbier notes that the initial reviews from the Army commanders involved with the maneuvers were generally positive. However, Generals Stanley Embick and H.R. Brees, who were in Alexandria to observe the maneuvers, were “forced to concede the Army’s deficiencies upon the conclusion of the exercises.” Those “deficiencies” included a lack of artillery support and air support for the army and the use of animal drawn vehicles instead of motorized ones. According to Barbier, “the Louisiana Maneuvers had long term consequences, because the Army, after beginning to address issues raised by the analyses of the war games, recognized the importance of exercises like the 1940 maneuvers.”²¹

²¹ Barbier, “George C. Marshall and the 1940 Louisiana Maneuvers,” 409.

In 1941, another set of maneuvers had been scheduled for north-central Louisiana. The Second World War had intensified in Europe during the period between the two maneuvers. America had moved closer to war with both Germany and Japan during this time. Few Army officers had any combat experience in 1941 and the majority of officers had serious doubts in their own leadership abilities.²² Marshall thought of the maneuvers as the best way to train the Army outside of actual combat. The role of the maneuvers in addressing deficiencies in the Army was evident by an exchange that Marshall had with an unnamed senator. The senator wanted to know why so much money was spent on maneuvers where so many mistakes were being made. Marshall replied “My God, Senator, that’s the reason why I do it. I want the mistake down in Louisiana, not over in Europe, and the only way to do this thing is to try it out, and if it doesn’t work, find out what we need to make it work.”²³ Murray even notes that Marshall hoped the 1941 maneuvers focused “national attention on the weaknesses of the army, especially the equipment shortages.”²⁴ The *Shreveport Times* noted that “we can’t test guns in a maneuver war. But we can test men-officers and privates and we’re doing it on a scale never before attempted.”²⁵

The logistics of setting up the 1941 maneuvers were enormous and planning for the maneuvers took place throughout 1941. State and local officials teamed up with the Army to coordinate most of the logistics. In order to ensure that the maneuvers were conducted as orderly

²² Murray, “The Louisiana Maneuvers: Practice for War,” 121.

²³ Pogue, 89.

²⁴ Murray, “The Louisiana Maneuvers: Practice for War,” 121-122.

²⁵ “Speed! Speed! Is The Motto of the 2nd Army,” *Shreveport Times*, September 17, 1941.

as possible, the Army brought in two thousand umpires. These umpires ensured that both sides conducted themselves fairly and that certain rules were followed.²⁶ Once the Maneuvers began, they were the single largest peacetime maneuvers in American history, taking place across most of north-central Louisiana. The 1941 Louisiana Maneuvers took place between September 15 and September 28, 1941. Over 450,000 soldiers from the Second and Third Armies. General Walter Krueger commanded the Third Army, while General Ben Lear commanded the Second Army.²⁷ In the maneuvers, the Third Army would invade Louisiana from a bridgehead on the Texas and Louisiana Gulf Coasts and the Second Army would try to push them back to the Gulf.²⁸

Despite the Third Army's numerical superiority, the Second Army won the first day by capturing Alexandria, Louisiana. The capture of Alexandria gave the Second Army the biggest city in north-central Louisiana. The Second Army captured a critical piece of terrain, Pearson Ridge, on the first day and won air superiority on the second day of fighting. By the end of the first week of fighting, the Third Army successfully pushed the Second Army back west and even forced Lear to abandon his command post.²⁹ Between September 19th and 24th, the two armies "shifted positions, celebrated, and rest."³⁰ By the second week of the fighting, the Third Army pushed the Second Army back to Shreveport. Despite a hurricane making the roads impassable,

²⁶ "Maneuvers May Be Army's Last," *Monroe Morning World*, September 14, 1941.

²⁷ Murray, "The Louisiana Maneuvers: Practice for War," 117.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid: 129.

³⁰ Ibid, 131.

the tanks of the Second Army under General George Patton encircled the Third Army. Patton wound up parking his tanks on top of a ridge overlooking the Third Army headquarters. Patton had to withdraw due to the objections of the umpires over his move.³¹ By September 28, the Third Army had surrounded Shreveport, Louisiana's third largest city.

The 1941 Louisiana Maneuvers are famous for the inclusion of important World War II top generals, including Generals Dwight Eisenhower, George Marshall, and George Patton.

Blumenson claims that during the maneuvers, “[General Charles] Scott’s I Armored Corps headquarters directed the 1st and 2d Armored Divisions, and Patton and his men were the stars. Scott displayed a lack of command control, Patton a sure touch.”³² According to Bradley and Blair, “Patton broke all the old-fashioned rules, smashing his mechanized forces ever onward with dazzling speed and surprise.”³³ Once the Maneuvers ended, Patton became a commander of I Armored Corps.

At the time of the 1941 Maneuvers, Eisenhower was a colonel in the IX Corps and chief of staff under General Walter Krueger. When the military action of the Maneuvers began, Eisenhower moved his headquarters into the field near Lake Charles. Eisenhower drew up plans for Krueger’s Third Army that allowed it to force the retreat of General Ben Lear’s Second Army. When Eisenhower got praised in the press, he “professed to be unaware of why he

³¹ Murray, “The Louisiana Maneuvers: Practice for War,” 133

³² Blumenson, 157.

³³ Bradley and Blair, 99.

received the credit, which he said should have gone to General Krueger.”³⁴ Eisenhower also took time during the Louisiana Maneuvers to frequently talk to soldiers, officers, and reporters. His 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.”³⁵ From these sessions, Eisenhower noticed that how much better his officers worked and he subsequently “made a sympathetic ear an essential part of his leadership technique.”³⁶ The 1941 Maneuvers also had an immediate impact on Eisenhower’s career. In late September 1941, Eisenhower was promoted to brigadier general. The publicity that Eisenhower gained from the Maneuver led to more promotions, eventually resulting in him becoming Supreme Allied Commander in Europe in 1943.

The 1941 maneuvers had a mixed success. Some officers, like Eisenhower, received promotions, but others received demotions. Reflecting on the Maneuvers, Murray noted that “the morale of the troops improved during the maneuvers. The attempts at ground-to-air support, in conjunction with tank and anti-tank warfare, greatly added to flexibility and mobility. The supply system was impressive, particularly as directed by Lieutenant Colonel Lutes in the Third Army, and showed signs of further improvement.”³⁷ Also, in retrospect, the maneuvers served “far more than a purely military purpose. Of major political importance, their psychological aspects were also significant.”³⁸

³⁴ Ambrose, 130.

³⁵ Ambrose, 130.

³⁶ Ibid, 129.

³⁷ Murray, “The Louisiana Maneuvers: Practice for War,” 135-136.

³⁸ Ibid.,137.

The Soldiers Behind the Maneuvers

Previous academic work on the 1940 and 1941 Louisiana Maneuvers focuses on the maneuvers themselves and the officers who led them. To date, little to no work addresses the soldiers who took part in the maneuvers. We already know some general aspects of the soldiers from the 1940 and 1941 maneuvers. The 1940 and 1941 maneuvers used soldiers from across the United States. The median age for the soldiers in the 1940 maneuvers was 20.³⁹ The soldiers of the 1940 maneuvers trained at Fort Benning, Georgia, and in East Texas. The 1941 maneuvers gained notoriety for its' use of paratroopers, specifically the 501st Parachute Battalion based out of Fort Bragg, North Carolina. The 1941 maneuvers also used troops from the 1st and 2nd Armored Divisions, based out of Fort Bliss, Texas and Fort Benning, Georgia respectively.⁴⁰ Troops from the VII Army Corps, Seventy-Fifth Field Artillery Division, 107th Cavalry, Fifth Division, Fourth Cavalry, Fortieth Coast Artillery Brigade, and Second Tank Air Force also participated as members of the Second Army.⁴¹

Perhaps the most consequential action that took place before the 1941 maneuvers was the passage of the Selective Service Act. Passed by Congress and signed by President Franklin Roosevelt in September 1940, the Selective Service Act established the first peacetime draft in American history. By the time of the 1941 maneuvers, close to one and a half million men had

³⁹ "Mother's Day Recess Taken in War Games," *The Shreveport Times*, May 13, 1940.

⁴⁰ Murray, "The Louisiana Maneuvers", 126.

⁴¹ "Here Are Data on Lear's Army," *Shreveport Times*, September 14, 1941.

joined the army.⁴² Before the start of the 1941 maneuvers, intelligence officers of the Second Army put together a “detailed description of the habits and economies of civilians in the central Louisiana maneuver area” as a way to train themselves on how to put together similar descriptions in Europe or Asia.⁴³ The descriptions included geographic features of each parish in the maneuver area, climate, major cities, major industries, average income, average salaries, and average farm size, the number and type of stores, newspapers, railroads, rivers, highways, and airlines.⁴⁴ Second Army commanders saw and used that information to help them “find a more receptive attitude from people in the area.”⁴⁵ The newspaper correspondents who travelled with the soldiers during the maneuvers tried to pass on useful information to the troops. At one point before the 1941 maneuvers, reporters sent warnings to the soldiers about the numerous kinds of snakes that they would find in the Ouachita, Saline, and Red River valleys of Louisiana. However, the *Shreveport Times* reported that the “myth [of the area’s snakes] had become a legend” and that “the snakes seem to have gone into hiding” during the 1941 maneuvers.⁴⁶ At one point before the 1941 maneuvers, chiggers, or parasitic small bugs, became such a problem for the troops that the army used an experimental cure to repel them. According to the *Monroe*

⁴² Robert Citino. “The Louisiana Maneuvers.” *National World War II Museum*.
<https://www.nationalww2museum.org/war/articles/louisiana-maneuvers> (accessed December 15, 2017).

⁴³ “Second Army Makes Study of La. People,” *Shreveport Times*, September 14, 1941.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ “Warnings Aplenty, But Reptiles Few,” *Shreveport Times*, September 16, 1941.

Morning World, the soldiers that “used the medicine went virtually chigger free,” while those that did not were still covered with the bugs.⁴⁷

Private Norman Alan Hyams, a Minnesota native, volunteered for the army in the spring of 1941. He reported to Camp Claiborne near Alexandria in late April, 1941 and became a member of the 164th Infantry Division. During the 1941 maneuvers, Hyams served in the Third Army like the rest of his division. He details this in “The Endless Bivouac: The Reminiscences of a Foot Soldier of the Louisiana Maneuvers of 1941,” an unpublished and detailed account of the maneuvers found at the Louisiana Maneuvers Museum at Camp Beauregard. From this account, one can infer a lot about the experiences of the soldiers who participated in the 1941 maneuvers. Both the 1940 and 1941 maneuvers appear to be the first time that the majority of the soldiers who participated were seeing combat. Hyams pointed out how his basic training took place at Camp Claiborne in August, 1941. The other thing that became evident is the large number of soldiers that took place in the maneuvers. Hyams says that on his first day in Alexandria, the city “was positively inundated with khaki.”⁴⁸ Local first-hand accounts confirm this. On the seventy-fifth anniversary of the maneuvers, an Alexandria resident who had participated in the maneuvers stated that the soldiers “were everywhere” and that they “covered from Winnfield to Fort Polk to Alexandria,” a distance of over 150 miles.⁴⁹ On that first Saturday the soldiers visited Alexandria, they participated in hijinks as reporting false fire alarms, getting into fights,

⁴⁷ “Army About to Repel Chiggers,” *Monroe Morning World*, September 14, 1941.

⁴⁸ Norman Hyams, “The Endless Bivouac: The Reminiscences of a Foot Soldier of the Louisiana Maneuvers of 1941” Louisiana Maneuvers and Military Museum, 2.

⁴⁹ “Remembering the Louisiana Maneuvers,” *Alexandria Town Talk*, September 15, 2017.

bending street signs, skirmishing with military police, and vomiting in the street. There is no indication whether or not incidents such as these were not common before the maneuvers, nor do any local accounts before the maneuvers mention these incidents. What is clear is that incidents such as these mostly vanished once the maneuvers commenced. While soldiers did get some free time during the maneuvers, their behavior in Alexandria appears mostly peaceful during both the 1940 and 1941 maneuvers. *The Alexandria Town Talk* remarked during the weekend of May 11th and 12th, “every roadside establishment within the local area was crowded with troops, out for ‘Saturday night entertainment.’”⁵⁰ Notably, those same soldiers “were sprinkled through the congregations at virtually all church services in the city Sunday.”⁵¹ Hyams notes extensive detail about what he did during the maneuvers and a lot of it does not appear to be extraordinary. This includes Hyams fighting, marching, camping, and talking with his fellow soldiers.

Hyams does not mention any problems between the soldiers and the people of north-central Louisiana. He does mention the support citizens gave the troops. He wrote that despite any impositions on the residents of north-central Louisiana, “they [the residents] were all uniformly friendly and gracious to us.”⁵² The only problems Hyams mentioned that he had with Louisiana came from the late-September climate, which he described as “midsummer heat, late September cold, and frequent rains,” and its’ “more obnoxious plant and animal denizens.”⁵³ At one point, Hyams notes that while during a trip through Alexandria, “soldiers shouted greetings to the

⁵⁰ “Soldiers Swarm Over City During Weekend,” *Alexandria Town Talk*, May 13, 1940.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² Hyams, “The Endless Bivouac,” 99.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

civilian pedestrians and exchanged wisecracks with the girls.”⁵⁴ That same morning, the division had to pull off the road outside of Alexandria when Red Army planes appeared in the air. When this happened, “ubiquitous ice cream vendors in their little vehicles magically appeared.”⁵⁵

Hyams also mentions a few instances when soldiers obtained assistance from locals. He noted that at one point three squad members had snuck off and visited a bar during the maneuvers. “After tending to their thirst, they then located a Negro cabin where they had been able to buy a chicken dinner.”⁵⁶ Instances such as these seem to indicate the high level of regard that the soldiers had for north-central Louisiana and the people who lived there. This high level of regard is also noted by Sanson, who writes that “the men in the ranks have taken to Alexandria as though it were their home-and have received a royal welcome.”⁵⁷ While Hyams does note some details about life in 1940’s Louisiana, but he does not give many details or commentary. For example, he briefly notes the appearance of African-American sharecroppers along the route of the maneuvers. These scenes were common given the time period and the fact that the state was fifteen years away from the start of the civil rights’ movement. How those soldiers felt about the systemic racism and segregation that they saw in everyday life in Louisiana is unknown.

Evidence suggests that the soldiers were treated well during the maneuvers. In addition to the support the citizens of Louisiana gave them, the Army went to great lengths to take care of the soldiers under their command. During the 1940 maneuvers, the Army regularly reminded the

⁵⁴ Ibid., 72.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 81.

⁵⁷ Sanson, 222

soldiers about the upcoming Mother's Day holiday for a week in advance. The *Shreveport Times* noted that the troops had been "well-reminded in advance by their regimental chaplains and a note sent annually by the war department."⁵⁸ The soldiers had also spent the week sending letters home to their mothers, with the 'Blue' army's fourth corps' post office noting a fifty percent increase in the number of letters sent out that week.⁵⁹ Soldiers also had some entertainment between furloughs, such as a boxing match between a member of the Fortieth Armored Regiment and a member of the Thirty-Sixth Armed Infantry at Camp Polk, Louisiana on the Friday before the 1941 maneuvers began.⁶⁰

The Army regularly communicated to the citizens of north-central Louisiana during the 1941 maneuvers. On September 15, 1941, the Army handed out notices asking motorists in north-central Louisiana to adhere to a speed limit during the maneuvers, noting that the presence of over 15,000 additional military vehicles and thousands of troops along the road would "create a very serious traffic hazard."⁶¹ The next day, Emery Winn, an *Alexandria Town Talk* reporter, went out to see how bad the traffic was on Louisiana Highway 165. He filed a report in the September 16, 1941 edition of the *Alexandria Town Talk* about the extremely heavy traffic he encountered between Alexandria and Lake Charles. He emphasized this traffic by proclaiming that "it's nothing short of miraculous that I lived to tell the story, and from now on when the

⁵⁸ "Mother's Day Recess Taken in War Games," *The Shreveport Times*, May 13, 1940.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ "Boxers of 40th Armored Outfit Beat Infantrymen," *The Shreveport Times*, September 16, 1941.

⁶¹ "Motorists Are Requested To Cooperate With the Army," *Alexandria Town Talk*, September 15, 1941.

army asks that highways be kept clear of useless traffic, my car won't be cluttering things up.”⁶²

A similar warning for citizens to avoid highways had been spotted in the September 28, 1941 edition of the *Shreveport Times*. The notice advised citizens that travel along highways between Shreveport and Lake Charles should be avoided and that “travel by army units will be particularly heavy and dangerous for civilian motorists.”⁶³

At the end of the 1941 maneuvers, the soldiers involved went back to their home bases within days. On September 28, the day the 1941 maneuvers ended, the 10 thousand soldiers of the Second Army were “ordered to go to concentration points from tomorrow [September 30] through Thursday [October 2] to clean equipment and prepare for an immediate return to their home points throughout the United States.”⁶⁴ In addition, the Second Army soldiers would immediately get a fifteen day furlough once they returned to their home bases.⁶⁵ Some soldiers were not able to return home. For example, the First Armored Division had to report to Leesville to join the Third Armored Division for an additional three week long special maneuvers at Camp Polk.⁶⁶

⁶² “Town Talk Reporter Finds It’s Good Advice to Give Army Clear Highway,” *Alexandria Town Talk*, September 16, 1941.

⁶³ “A Highway Warning,” *Shreveport Times*, September 28, 1941.

⁶⁴ “Soldiers To Start Trip Back ‘Home’,” *Shreveport Times*, September 29 1941.

⁶⁵ “Soldiers to Get 15-Day Furloughs,” *Shreveport Times*, September 30, 1941.

⁶⁶ “The First Rolls ‘South’ to Camp Polk,” *Shreveport Times*, October 2, 1941.

The Citizens Behind the Maneuvers

The people of north-central Louisiana played a key role in the 1940 and 1941 maneuvers. First, the maneuvers were important to the region, as shown by the local newspapers at the time. The daily *Alexandria Town Talk* featured front page news about the maneuvers over the two weeks that they took place in 1940 and 1941. When Alexandria found itself under “threat” from the Red Army, the *Alexandria Town Talk* included a headline on May 9: “ ‘Red’ Army Trying to Capture City.”⁶⁷ The newspaper continued reporting with the headline on September 15: “ Blues Take Alexandria.”⁶⁸ The *Shreveport Times* had similar headlines during the 1940 and 1941 maneuvers. The *Times* covered the maneuvers from the perspective of those living in the Sabine River valley that marked the boundary between Louisiana and Texas. Both newspapers gave extensive day-by-day accounts of the 1940 and 1941 maneuvers. The ability of these newspapers to cover the maneuvers this way was due to the accreditation of journalists to one army or another during the maneuvers. Such accreditation came from the war Department in Washington, D.C.⁶⁹ Headlines such as these indicate the level of interest that Louisianans enjoyed in both maneuvers. Coverage of aerial “bombings” over the city by the Red Army would gain the most mention within the newspaper. Monroe’s two newspapers, the *Monroe News-Star* and the *Monroe Morning Talk* covered the 1940 and 1941 maneuvers, but not with the same attention that its’ fellow newspapers in Alexandria or Shreveport gave them. *The Times-Picayune* in New

⁶⁷ “Red Army Trying to Take the City,” *Alexandria Town Talk*, May 9, 1940.

⁶⁸ “Blues Take Alexandria,” *Alexandria Town Talk*, September 15 1941.

⁶⁹ “It Will be a Real War, the Army Warns,” *Shreveport Times*, September 14, 1941

Orleans covered the 1940 and 1941 maneuvers to a certain extent. From May 5 to May 11th, 1940, the *Times-Picayune* mentioned the maneuvers on the front page. While the New Orleans paper did not cover the maneuvers in the way that the local papers *Alexandria Town Talk* or the *Shreveport Times* did with extensive stories about the different people involved with the maneuvers, it did give some day-by-day accounts of the maneuvers, especially in the first week of the 1940 maneuvers. Following a brief notice on the second page of the May 13, 1940, paper, the *Times-Picayune* would not report the 1940 maneuvers again. The *Times-Picayune* would go on to mention the 1941 maneuvers for some time. The *States-Times* newspaper in Baton Rouge would also go on to mention the 1940 and 1941 maneuvers much in the same way that the *Times-Picayune* did. The maneuvers of 1940 and 1941 even made the front page of newspapers outside of Louisiana. The *Enterprise-Journal* of McComb, Mississippi, covered both the 1940 and 1941 maneuvers in this way. The *New York Times* also covered the 1940 and 1941 maneuvers, although the coverage was more general than has been seen in local coverage. Little attention was paid to the soldiers and the civilians in the maneuvers area. The only *Times* article that paid any attention to the civilians came in the September 23, 1941 edition. The article mentioned how few farmers in the maneuvers area were making claims on the damage that soldiers caused on private lands.⁷⁰ Those claims will be discussed below.

In an article in the *Alexandria Town Talk* dated May 10, 1940, on the arrival of tanks to Camp Beauregard, the author states that “from the time of their arrival here [in Alexandria] until shortly

⁷⁰ “Few Claims Are Made on Army in Louisiana,” *New York Times*, September 23, 1941.

after 11 p.m., officers in charge of the tanks were kept busy answering questions of Alexandrians who went to the scene.”⁷¹ Notably, “the officers did it [answered questions] willingly and cheerfully-seemingly glad to have civilians as conversationalists.”⁷² Other examples of this curiosity included the “hundreds of local residents” who went to Camp Beauregard to greet the recently arrived troops and to watch the sometimes daily spectacle of troops marching through their town. At one point during the 1940 maneuvers, the Fifth Division, a part of the Blue Army, were greeted “by cheers and the waving of flags as it rolled along the highway from Morgan City to St. Martinville” as hundreds of people gathered to watch them.⁷³ Upon seeing the soldiers marching through town during the 1941 maneuvers, one Alexandrian remarked that “we’re just glad it’s a make believe war.”⁷⁴ The *Alexandria Town Talk* also helped lost soldiers find their units from time to time. In an article dated September 16, 1941, the newspaper stated that several soldiers from the Third Army had contacted them asking for help to find their units. The *Alexandria Town Talk* told a few of the men the exact location of their units, but did not publish them.⁷⁵

Northern portions of Louisiana also saw the same level of curiosity in the maneuvers as the north-central portion. The September 16, 1941, edition of the *Shreveport Times* covered numerous maneuvers activities that occurred in and around Shreveport on the previous day. The

⁷¹ “Sleepy Eyed Citizens Here Watch Tanks Go By,” *Alexandria Town Talk*, May 10, 1940.

⁷² *Ibid.*

⁷³ “Louisiana’s “Home” Troops Due Today,” *Alexandria Town Talk*, May 11 1940.

⁷⁴ “Alexandrians Watch Soldiers Go to ‘War’,” *Alexandria Town Talk*, May 9, 1940.

⁷⁵ “Lost Soldiers Ask Town Talk for Aid in Locating Units,” *Alexandria Town Talk*, September 16, 1941.

Shreveport Times noted that “the war came close to home for thousands of Shreveporters who lined the curbs to watch the Red armored columns roll by and put cricks in their necks watching planes of all descriptions which droned overhead from the early morning hours.”⁷⁶ In Monroe, the *News-Star* reported how half of the Seventh Cavalry passed through the town on May 7, 1940. According to the *News-Star*, “thousands of curious onlookers swarmed the railroad yards to see first hand what these gigantic maneuvers were all about.”⁷⁷ In addition, the Army invited the public to inspect the newest line of dive bombers on the Sunday the 1941 maneuvers started as “a gesture of courtesy to Monroe people for their kindly entertainment and cooperation with the troops while in the city.”⁷⁸

Most of the news about the citizens of Louisiana during the maneuvers detail the amount of support that they gave the maneuvers’ participants. The people of north-central Louisiana welcomed the nearly half a million soldiers to their area and made them feel at home. Hyams mentioned how business owners and ordinary citizens opened up their businesses and homes to cater to soldiers of the maneuvers. An article written for the seventy-fifth anniversary of the 1941 Louisiana Maneuvers written for the *Alexandria Town Talk* noted that the soldiers “bathed in creeks and camped among farmers’ crops.”⁷⁹ During their stay, the contributions of local Louisianans did not go unnoticed either. Louisianans supported the troops in a variety of ways, including bringing soldiers water during the maneuvers, and taking the soldiers home for dinner

⁷⁶ “Shreveport Sees Troops Go To ‘Front’,” *Shreveport Times*, September 16, 1941.

⁷⁷ “Monroe Host to Many Army Units Today,” *Monroe News-Star*, May 7, 1940.

⁷⁸ “Public Invited to See Bombers,” *Monroe Morning World*, September 14, 1941.

⁷⁹ “Remembering the Louisiana Maneuvers,” *Alexandria Town Talk*, September 15, 2017.

or to church for Sunday services. A picture in the *Shreveport Times* from September 17, 1941, showed a twelve year old, Talbot Manning, delivering some pastries to a tank crew from the 1st Armored Regiment whose tank broke down in front of his house in Mooringsport, Louisiana.⁸⁰

Ralon Williams, a native of Vernon Parish and a twelve-year old at the time of the 1941 maneuvers claims that “I have to say that the people of Louisiana really welcomed those soldiers. I’ve lived all over, and I can tell you that’s not the case everywhere.”⁸¹

The welcoming attitude of the local population did not stop them from trying to make money during the maneuvers. According to Sanson, during one weekend during the 1940 maneuvers, “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.”⁸² Ralon Williams made money by selling the soldiers candy and soft drinks that he purchased at small local stores. Other citizens made money by selling the soldiers newspapers, baked goods, bootleg liquor, and pre-inspection shoe shines.⁸³ Gas stations along the many highways of north-central and western Louisiana reported heavier than normal business during the maneuvers. An attendant at a gas station outside of Lake Charles reported that she had made more money filling up “grasshoppers,” planes used by the Army to relay messages and conduct reconnaissance, than she made by filling up cars. The opportunities for the people of the area to make some money intensified during weekends where the soldiers had time

⁸⁰ “Lucky Breakdown for Tank Crew,” *Shreveport Times*, September 17, 1941.

⁸¹ “Remembering the Louisiana Maneuvers,” *Alexandria Town Talk*, September 15, 2017.

⁸² Sanson, 222-223.

⁸³ Sanson, 222-223.

off and could go to town. Hyams mentioned how busy Alexandria got in the week before the maneuvers. This remained the case during the maneuvers. The *Alexandria Town Talk* remarked that during the weekend of May 17 through the 19, 1940, “boys in khaki were in evidence in every section of the city and at every ‘night spot’ in the area.” Groups of soldiers were spotted in numerous restaurants in the area and went out with many of the local women.⁸⁴ The troops did not just stay in the Alexandria area. The *Shreveport Times* noted on Sunday, May 12, 1940 that so many soldiers had begun trickling into Leesville, Louisiana since that previous Saturday that it brought a “prosperity such as the community had seldom seen.”⁸⁵ While in Leesville that weekend, the soldiers “thronged such bars as the Red Hound and the Silver Dollar.”⁸⁶

At one point during the 1941 maneuvers, soldiers on furlough visited Shreveport during the weekend of September 20-22. The *Shreveport Times* interviewed a military policeman on the Thursday before the estimated 50 thousand troops were supposed to arrive. The police officer said that he “wouldn’t at all be surprised if the entire 50,000 should show up.”⁸⁷ Incredibly, the fifty thousand expected troops equaled about half the population of Shreveport in 1941.⁸⁸ According to the September 21, 1941, edition of the *Shreveport Times*, estimates of the number of soldiers in Shreveport that weekend ranged from five to ten thousand men.⁸⁹ The soldiers took advantage of all Shreveport had to offer. The *Times* mentioned that the soldiers filled restaurants,

⁸⁴ “All Quiet on Local Front,” *Alexandria Town Talk*, May 17, 1940.

⁸⁵ “Red, Blue Soldiers Welcome Day’s Rest,” *Shreveport Times*, May 12, 1940

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷ “Tired Troops Will Throng Shreveport,” *Shreveport Times*, September 20, 1941.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

⁸⁹ “Soldiers Fill City Streets on Weekend,” *Shreveport Times*, September 21, 1941.

theatres, hotels, and even the local Y.M.C.A. to capacity during their visit.⁹⁰ Those soldiers made a final visit to downtown Shreveport for rest and relaxation following the end of the 1941 maneuvers. A report in the *Shreveport Times* estimated the number of troops in the city to be anywhere from 45 to 100 thousand men. The soldiers visited restaurants, theatres, and various other places. The *Times* also noted eighty-five military policemen available kept the soldiers in line.⁹¹

The most noteworthy aspect of the soldiers' stay involved a program by the local Service Men's Information Center where local citizens could treat a soldier to dinner during that weekend.⁹² While it is unknown how many citizens or soldiers took advantage of that program, the Shreveport Service Men's Information Center made significant contributions to the 1941 maneuvers. It was founded by members of the local American Legion post for "the use of the armed forces of the United States with various recreational facilities."⁹³ The support that the center gave was significant enough for it to get a letter from Red Army General Ben Lear himself. Lear stated that he was "extremely appreciative and gratified at such splendid patriotic attention which your city is giving to the men in the service."⁹⁴

The city of Ruston had a noteworthy experience with furloughed soldiers during the 1941 maneuvers. During the weekend of September 5-7, 1941, thousands of soldiers visited the city.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ "Largest Throng of Soldiers Fill Downtown Section," *Shreveport Times*, September 30, 1941.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ "Lear Thanks Shreveport for Center," *Shreveport Times*, September 25, 1941.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

The influx of soldiers into the city was so great that on Sunday, September 7, the city suspended its blue laws that forced stores to close on Sundays. According to the *Shreveport Times*, “the picture shows...were opened on Sunday for the first time in history as military authorities and town officials sought to provide adequate recreational facilities as well as necessities for the service men.”⁹⁵ Grocery shops, hardware stores, ice cream stores, and other shops were also reported opened that Sunday. There were even performances that day by several military bands.⁹⁶

The 1940 and 1941 maneuvers led to an increase in defense spending throughout north-central Louisiana. According to Governor Sam Jones, the U.S. Army spent over 500 million dollars in Louisiana during the 1941 maneuvers. This money included thirty-seven million dollars for ship-building contracts, twenty-three million dollars for defense public works contracts, and seventy million dollars dispersed throughout the four army camps that played a crucial part of the maneuvers. Camp Beauregard’s payroll during this period was twelve million dollars. Sanson also mentions that the 900 thousand dollar army payroll that was processed in Shreveport’s Commercial National Bank was “the largest processed in Shreveport up to that time.”⁹⁷ According to the *Shreveport Times*, there were over 500 thousand dollars in the

⁹⁵ “Ruston Blue Laws Ignored for Day,” *Shreveport Times*, September 8, 1941

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

⁹⁷ Sanson, 224.

Commercial National Bank for the Blue Army's 45th Division's payroll at the end of the 1941 maneuvers.⁹⁸

The total amounts mentioned above do not account for local spending by individual soldiers. Sanson noted that the 1940 maneuvers cost the Army over 1.8 million dollars, 700 thousand of which went to pay and allowance for the soldiers. An account in the *Shreveport Times* shows that as of May 15, 1940, the Army had spent over twenty-six thousand dollars on campsites for the seventy thousand soldiers who participated in the maneuvers and another three hundred and thirteen dollars on gasoline and oil for the maneuvers in the Sabine River area of western Louisiana.⁹⁹ As Sanson put it, "the portion of that money that found its way into the local economy whetted the area's appetite for more."¹⁰⁰ According to Sanson, "one study of the [1941] maneuvers estimates that the maneuvers were worth about \$25 million to the state."¹⁰¹ Most of this amount came from spending by the soldiers. While some of the soldiers were on leave, they'd buy a store "out an entire stock, especially of tobacco, candy and refreshments." Some stores "reported selling as much in a day as they normally sold in a year."¹⁰² Theatres and restaurants also reported increased business during the maneuvers. There's no doubt that the state and its' citizens earned a considerable amount of money during these maneuvers.¹⁰³

⁹⁸ "Soldiers To Start Trip Back 'Home'," *Shreveport Times*, September 29 2017.

⁹⁹ "Third Army Troops Means Big Money to Sabine River Area," *Shreveport Times*, May 15, 1940

¹⁰⁰ Sanson, 223.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 225.

¹⁰² Sanson, 225.

¹⁰³ "Address of Governor Sam Jones: Flag Raising Exercises-Baton Rouge-September 28, 1941," Speeches 9/1/1941-10/31/1941, William Walter Jones collection of Sam Houston Jones papers,

The support that Louisianans gave the Army during the maneuvers also extended to local and state government support. The support during the 1940 maneuvers was so significant that General Stanley Embick praised the people of Alexandria, claiming that he “could not want better cooperation from any community than that shown by Alexandria in the army’s preparations for its war maneuvers here.”¹⁰⁴

Civilian support tended to take many different forms. For example, support included helping the Army purchase land for the maneuvers. Before the 1940 maneuvers, a group of private citizens, public officials, and civic organizations in the Sabine River Valley signed 6,500 separate maneuvers agreements that gave the Army the right to move or camp troops over the land that those entities owned. On the eve of the 1941 maneuvers, the State Superintendent of Police, Steve Alford, asked citizens to cooperate with local officials during the maneuvers. In a statement published in the *Shreveport Times* on September 14, 1941, Alford said “the army is going to endeavor to make its giant war games as realistic as possible. We must insist that citizens not living in the 30,000 square mile designated maneuver area keep out of the section for the time being and citizens living therein co-operate to the fullest and remain in their homes during the maneuvers.”¹⁰⁵ To aid in this endeavor, over 150 state troopers were used alongside

Manuscripts Collection 409, Louisiana Research Collection, Howard-Tilton Memorial Library, Tulane University, New Orleans, LA.

¹⁰⁴ “Embick Praises Alexandria For Its Cooperation,” *Alexandria Town Talk*, May 10, 1940.

¹⁰⁵ “Alford Urges All-Out War on Accidents,” *Shreveport Times*, September 14, 1941

the military police to “keep civilian traffic from the road network”¹⁰⁶ that the Army would be using.

The Louisiana State Government and the Maneuvers

Louisiana Governor Sam Jones became one of the foremost proponents for both maneuvers and constantly strove to make Louisiana an integral part of the nation’s defense network. Almost immediately after the 1940 maneuvers, Governor Jones wrote a letter to Secretary of War Harry Woodring offering Louisiana as a spot for future maneuvers. Among the many reasons that Jones mentions are the state’s climate, terrain, network of roads and access to water and rivers, military installations, railroads, and mineral deposits. He also mentions the “civilian cooperation” aspects, stating that “the civilian population of Louisiana and of this area have a patriotic consciousness and cooperative attitude which is especially desirable around a large Army installation.” Furthermore, Jones states that “this is concrete evidence of the cooperative attitude of the State.”¹⁰⁷ Jones would reference the 1941 maneuvers in multiple speeches while the maneuvers took place. In one speech in New Orleans on September 21, 1941, Jones remarked that when the soldiers went home, “they will bear tidings of Louisiana. I believe that most of them will sense in their bones the promise of this state and will want to come back as civilians. I

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ “Letter from Governor Jones to Secretary of War Woodring: May 31, 1940,” Secretary of War Collection, William Walter Jones collection of Sam Houston Jones papers, Manuscripts Collection 409, Louisiana Research Collection, Howard-Tilton Memorial Library, Tulane University, New Orleans, LA.

believe that many of them will want to come and make their home with us.”¹⁰⁸ In a speech given in Baton Rouge on the last day of the 1941 maneuvers, Jones stated that “Louisiana has had the rare privilege in recent weeks of being the testing ground of America’s armed forces” and that “the Louisiana Maneuvers, as they were known throughout the world, constitute the concrete manifestation of a determined Democracy on the March.”¹⁰⁹

For the 1941 maneuvers, the state government helped the Army purchase land that they needed. Right as the 1941 maneuvers began, the Army made arrangements with the city of Eunice to use the city’s elementary and high schools and the agricultural building on the city’s fairgrounds as a base for the Third Army, provided that the Army returned the grounds and any equipment used back in good condition by October 1.¹¹⁰

Problems During the Maneuvers

Issues came up between soldiers and the communities that they were a part of for a few weeks. For example, the September 16, 1941 edition of the *Shreveport Times* confirmed that night flights out of Shreveport had to be cancelled during the 1941 maneuvers. The latest flight out of Shreveport was in the late afternoon.¹¹¹ As noted above, the Army had to issue restrictions on travel during the maneuvers. These restrictions did not prevent a collision between a civilian automobile and an eleven-ton army tank near Many, Louisiana, on May 14. Fortunately, the car’s

¹⁰⁸ “Address of Governor Sam Jones: Flag Raising Exercises-Baton Rouge-September 28, 1941,” Speeches 9/1/1941-10/31/1941, William Walter Jones collection of Sam Houston Jones papers, Manuscripts Collection 409, Louisiana Research Collection, Howard-Tilton Memorial Library, Tulane University, New Orleans, LA.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ “1,100 Soldiers at Eunice Post,” *Alexandria Town Talk*, September 16, 1941.

¹¹¹ “Delta Shifts Flight Times,” *Shreveport Times*, September 16, 1941.

occupants escaped with little injury. The *Alexandria Town Talk* also noted that during furlough weekends, the soldiers filled up all the parking spots around Alexandria's business district. The lack of parking spots made parking for residents in that area difficult. In Ruston, a sudden influx of troops during the week before the maneuvers saw a local block party and street dance cancelled.¹¹² Furthermore, crimes committed by soldiers against civilians occurred, but not very often. For example, on May 19, 1940, three soldiers from Camp Beauregard held up a cab driver and stole his taxi outside Columbia, Louisiana.¹¹³ The September 8, 1941 edition of the *Shreveport Times* reported that soldiers got into three fights in Shreveport during the weekend of September 5-7. The fights wound up breaking three windows in downtown Shreveport.¹¹⁴

Accidents during the 1940 and 1941 maneuvers did occur. At one point before the 1941 maneuvers, an army bomber plane had to escape a crash by flying through some high-tension electric wires over the Red River.¹¹⁵ A few days later, another bomber sliced a main power line over the Red River. This accident cut off the electricity to seven northern Louisiana parishes for almost twenty-four hours.¹¹⁶

Businesses in the maneuver area were also accused of price gouging during the 1941 maneuvers. According to the *Shreveport Times*, the 45th Division began investigating charges of overcharging of soldiers in several stores, restaurants, and hotels throughout central Louisiana in

¹¹² "Sudden Troop Influx Postpones Ruston Party," *Shreveport Times*, September 6, 1941.

¹¹³ "3 Soldiers Held After Cab Taken and Driver Robbed," *Alexandria Town Talk*, May 20, 1940

¹¹⁴ "Troops Bring 'War' to Town," *Shreveport Times*, September 8, 1941.

¹¹⁵ "Bomber Slices Electric Wires in Daring Attack," *Shreveport Times*, September 9, 1941.

¹¹⁶ "Bomber Dive Darkens Part of 7 Parishes," *Shreveport Times*, September 10, 1941.

early September 1941. The commanding general of the 45th Division, Major General William Key ordered the division's morale officer, Captain Tom Johnson to investigate those complaints. The complaints came "not only from soldiers in [Key's] command, but from civilians who related instances of seeing soldiers charged more than they themselves were paying for the same articles."¹¹⁷ The overcharging seemed to center in the towns of Leesville, De Ridder, and Many.

The maneuvers also had an impact on the amount of traffic in the maneuver area. As an example of how much traffic there was during the 1940 maneuvers, 375 trucks carrying members of the Blue army traveled from Monroe to Alexandria.¹¹⁸ Sanson notes that the "the average vehicular traffic in the maneuver zone rose from 40,762 vehicles per day in 1940 to 95,023 in 1941."¹¹⁹ The increase in traffic grew so exponentially that the state had to request funding from the federal government in August 1941 to "improve highway markings for nighttime driving."¹²⁰ The state also had to bill the federal government for over two million dollars' worth of road damage the army caused in the maneuver area.¹²¹ The damage caused by the maneuvers did not begin to be repaired until February 1, 1942, due to "bureaucratic red tape and shortages of labor and material".¹²² During the five-month delay in repairs, people experienced trouble reaching their jobs or obtaining supplies from stores. Doctors had trouble

¹¹⁷ "Army Probes Price Raises to Soldiers," *Shreveport Times*, September 7, 1941.

¹¹⁸ "Officers, Men in 375 Trucks Pass Monroe," *Monroe News-Star*, May 6, 1940.

¹¹⁹ Sanson, 225.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*

¹²¹ *Ibid.*

¹²² *Ibid.*

seeing their patients and farmers had trouble bringing their produce to market.¹²³ This increase in traffic also impacted school districts in the maneuver area, which had trouble busing children to school on roads crowded with military vehicles.¹²⁴

Schools in the 1941 maneuver area wound up having to delay the start of school. The length of the delay depended on the parish. For example, Bossier Parish delayed the start of school until September 15, a week after school would have normally started.¹²⁵ The start of school was delayed by a week in Caddo Parish for white schools. African-American only schools would not start the 1941-1942 school year until November 1, 1941.¹²⁶ Webster Parish delayed the start of the school year until September 22.¹²⁷ In some of the western parishes of the state, the start of the school year was delayed until early October as a “precaution against accidents to children going to and from their classes.”¹²⁸ The delay in the start of the school year also caused issues with how to pay teachers in the affected area. According to Sanson, local school boards wanted to pay teachers at the start of the delayed school year, while local teachers’ unions wanted the teachers to get paid beginning on the day school would have normally started on. The Louisiana State Board of Education stepped in and ordered the school systems to pay the teachers on the day the

¹²³ Ibid., 172

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ “Bossier Will Open Schools September 15,” *Shreveport Times*, September 6, 1941.

¹²⁶ “School Calls 21,000 in Caddo Early Monday,” *Shreveport Times*, September 14, 1941

¹²⁷ “Opening of Schools in Webster Set,” *Shreveport Times*, September 18, 1941.

¹²⁸ “La. Schools Opened After Delay,” *Shreveport Times*, October 7, 1941.

school year normally would have started on.¹²⁹ Local parent-teacher association, or P.T.A, meetings were also postponed in the maneuver area until October 1941.¹³⁰

In addition, several Louisiana parishes cancelled their parish fairs because of the 1941 maneuvers. According to the *Shreveport Times*, “because of the army maneuvers, several of the parishes have canceled the [parish fair]. Among these are Natchitoches, West Monroe, Red River, and Grant parishes, and the Interstate Free fair which is held at Logansport.”¹³¹ All of those parishes were later represented at the 1941 Louisiana State Fair, which was held in Shreveport from October 18 to 27.¹³²

Several soldiers lost their lives during both the 1940 and 1941 maneuvers. A look at the *Alexandria Town Talk* and the *Shreveport Times* from both maneuvers can give one a look at which soldiers died and why. By May 13, at least four soldiers had died as a result of the 1940 maneuvers.¹³³ The *Shreveport Times* explained that one soldier had been hit by an army truck while walking along a road between Red River and Natchitoches. Another soldier drowned near Georgetown, Mississippi, and another died while parachuting from a damaged plane.¹³⁴ According to the *Shreveport Times*, a total of sixty-two soldiers had died before and during the 1941 maneuvers as of September 24.¹³⁵ Of those sixty-two soldiers, seventeen had died during the maneuvers themselves. The remaining forty-five soldiers had died during the previous

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ “Parent-Teacher Meets Postponed,” *Monroe Morning World*, September 14, 1941.

¹³¹ “Louisiana Citizens Start Looking to Parish Fairs,” *Shreveport Times*, September 15, 1941.

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ “Toll in War Games Rises,” *Shreveport Times*, May 13, 1940.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ “17 Dead in Maneuvers,” *Shreveport Times*, September 24, 1941.

month's preliminary maneuvers. A look at the number of deaths during the first week of the maneuvers can give a clue as to the cause of death during the maneuvers. During the week of September 15-21, the *Shreveport Times* had seven soldiers dying in vehicle accidents, five in air accidents, two from disease, two drownings, and one suicide.¹³⁶

Very little has been written about the level of support for World War II in Louisiana before Pearl Harbor. A look at the newspapers during the time can give us some indication of public support during the maneuvers. The *Alexandria Town Talk* and *Shreveport Times* were filled with generally glowing reviews about the maneuvers. While the newspapers did talk about the delays and accidents that accompanied the maneuvers, most of the news about the maneuvers and about the army itself was positive. For example, the *Shreveport Times* walked their readers through a step-by-step day of Kitchen Police, or K.P. Duty.¹³⁷ Interviews conducted with citizens during and after the maneuvers indicated a broad level of support for the soldiers and the maneuvers themselves. For example, farmers in north-central Louisiana permitted the government to use sixteen million acres of land without charge during the 1941 maneuvers.¹³⁸ The soldiers wound up damaging some property, mostly in the form of destroyed pine trees and stolen farm animals. Although the Army sent investigators to assess the damage and file claims, most farmers did not react negatively to the damage. One farmer told the *Shreveport Times* that when the Army offered him compensation for the damage, he reportedly told them: "Forget it. I may have \$10 or

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ "Here's How Soldier Feels on K.P Duty," *Shreveport Times*, September 21, 1941.

¹³⁸ "Army Claims Men Praise La. Farmers," *Shreveport Times*, September 22, 1941.

\$15 due me, but I'd rather let the government keep the money. It's all part of national defense."¹³⁹ In fact, another farmer even wrote a letter thanking the soldiers who passed through his field for "clearing my land of grass and weeds (and probably red bugs)."¹⁴⁰ In addition, both *The Town Talk* and *Shreveport Times* did not publish accounts of any lack of support from Louisianans during the maneuvers. It should also be noted that Louisianans have generally been and still are supportive of the armed forces. Louisiana is home to several military bases, including Camps Claiborne, Beauregard, and Polk in the vicinity of the 1940 and 1941 maneuvers. Being able to make money off of the maneuvers probably created a level of support as well.

Conclusion

Louisiana played host to several more Army maneuvers until 1944, but the maneuvers of 1940 and 1941 remain the most famous of those maneuvers.¹⁴¹ Once the maneuvers ended and the soldiers left, life went back to normal across north-central Louisiana despite the interruption of daily life that came with the maneuvers. During World War II, German POWs housed in nearby Camp Polk repaired some of the damage caused during the 1941 maneuvers.¹⁴² The Louisiana Maneuvers of 1940 and 1941 are still remembered by the citizens of north-central Louisiana over seventy-five years after they took place. In an article in the *Alexandria Town Talk*

¹³⁹ Ibid.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ "Remembering the Louisiana Maneuvers," *Alexandria Town Talk*, September 15, 2017.

¹⁴² Ibid.

on the seventy-fifth anniversary of the maneuvers, Ralon Williams noted that “I never saw anything like it.”¹⁴³

The Louisiana Maneuvers of 1940 and 1941 would have not had the impact on the army’s effectiveness if it had not been for the actions of the people of Louisiana. This would include the actions of the people and the local and state government. Overall, the people of Louisiana made immense contributions to the Louisiana Maneuvers of 1940 and 1941. The state government gave financial and material support to the Army for the maneuvers and the people donated their time and energy toward helping the soldiers out and the soldiers generally walked away from their experiences with the Louisiana Maneuvers with a positive outlook of the state. In addition, the state and its citizens made millions of dollars off of the maneuvers. What is the most interesting aspect about the maneuvers is the support of the public. During the entire process of staging the maneuvers, from their planning by local, state, and federal officials, to their execution and their aftermath, the maneuvers were generally supported by the public. Throughout this entire research process, no evidence of any public opposition could be found in any of the local, state, or national newspapers. The support of the public and the state is a key reason why the 1940-1941 Louisiana Maneuvers were so successful.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

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Vita

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