



M2 MEDIUM TANK DURING THIRD ARMY MANEUVERS IN 1940.

## 1940 Louisiana Maneuvers Lead to Birth of the Armored Force

by John Cranston, Armor Center Historian

Cited as "the longest and most pretentious troop concentration since the World War," the Louisiana Maneuvers of May 1940 marked the first peacetime use of combined arms at the division and corps level, and prepared the way for the development of the Armored Force.

The creation of the Armored Force also owed much to the persistent efforts of a small cadre of U.S. Army officers that had been active in armor's behalf for over a decade.

In 1928, Secretary of War Dwight F. Davis had urged the creation of "an experimental armored force." A mixed brigade of tanks, infantry, and artillery was subsequently established at Fort George Meade, Maryland. In October 1930, an independent mechanized force of 15 tanks and 10 armored cars was transferred to Camp Eustis, Virginia. In 1931, the dream of a united and mechanized force came to an end, when existing equipment and military personnel were split between Fort Benning (infantry) and

Fort Knox (cavalry). The dedicated efforts of COL Daniel Van Voorhis, commander of the mechanized force at Camp Eustis, and later at Fort Knox, and of LTC Adna R. Chaffee, his executive officer, kept the mechanized force concept alive throughout the 1930s. In spite of the efforts of both infantry and cavalry to keep tanks as a mere supporting arm to these two existing service branches, the two officers, winning the support of others, labored unceasingly, especially in practice maneuvers, to develop a strong

mechanized force. These maneuvers grew in scale during the decade, emphasizing the speed and mobility of tracked vehicles. Considerable public fanfare, including troop movements in or near major urban centers, strengthened the hand of Van Voorhis, Chaffee, and their growing band of supporters.

The first lap in the long race to create a separate mechanized took place at the end of 1932 and early 1933, at the regimental level, when COL Van Voorhis took his Detachment of 1st Cavalry (Mechanized) from Fort Knox to Fort D.A. Russell (near Marfa), Texas, to "unhorse" the 1st Cavalry Regiment there. The 1st Cavalry Regiment was transferred to Fort Knox by truck.

The detachment went through Memphis and San Antonio on the way to Texas, returning via Dallas and Little Rock. Van Voorhis led with his sedan, with trucks following. Crowds applauded all along the way. One truck was lost, slipping off the icy road on the way to Bowling Green, immobilizing the barber and his equipment. (The truck was hidden from public view in a ravine and towed back to Fort Knox.)

In 1934, the 1st Cavalry traveled to Kansas for the "Riley Maneuvers." The new "Armored Car, M1" (in reality a tracked vehicle), led the way. A machine gun troop followed the tracked vehicles in halftracks. Motorcycle scouts swarmed up and down the column, arousing the interest of populations in large and small towns, who lined the highway fences and city streets to watch the impressive sight. At Fort Riley, the tanks and halftracks performed brilliantly against the horsed units of Fort Riley's Cavalry School Brigade. Van Voorhis could claim victory on three other counts: Publicity from



M3 SCOUT CAR CREWS TRAIN IN 1939

the road march was universally favorable. Tracked vehicles at the regimental level had proved their mettle on the battlefield. Finally, an emerging cadre of infantry officers, including COL Bruce Magruder, LTC Alvan G. Gillem, and LTC Guy V. Henry, all very much on the scene at Fort Riley, took up the cause of tracked vehicles in a strong mechanized force.

The M1 tracked vehicle, teamed with artillery, air, radio, ordnance, and quartermaster support, again proved itself in the Allegan (Michigan) road march and maneuvers of mid-1936. The unit band went along, summoning troops to do their best and increasing popular interest and enthusiasm. The mechanized regiment made the journey from Fort Knox to Michigan with much fanfare. When a number of the rubber tires on bogey wheels proved defective and disintegrated, soldiers drove the tracked vehicles on the rims. Bags of ice, often provided by sympathetic onlookers, mitigated the harshest effects of fuel "vapor lock" in the blazing summer sun.

The equipment performed well once it arrived in the cool environs of Michigan. The 1st Cavalry returned to Fort Knox without serious mishap, owing to lessons learned on the warm trip northward. Upon the return to Fort Knox, Van Voorhis and Chaffee requested a mechanized cavalry division, but their request was denied. However, the 13th Cavalry Regiment now joined the 1st Caval-

ry at Fort Knox, creating the nucleus of a mechanized brigade. The 13th Cavalry was the last existing cavalry regiment to be "unhorsed" until January 9, 1942. With the newly-formed 7th Cavalry Brigade, Van Voorhis and Chaffee were better able to make their cause of a separate mechanized force known in Washington.

In August 1939, the 7th Cavalry Brigade took part in the First Army maneuvers at Plattsburg, New York – the largest such peacetime maneuver ever held in the United States. Tracked vehicles went to Plattsburg by rail. The soldiers went by truck. In mock combat between two corps, Brigadier General Adna R. Chaffee used an envelopment maneuver. The brigade traveled more than 120 miles, at night, without lights, and took the major road center of Peru by surprise. Sending the message, "I occupy Peru. Chaffee," the general ended the maneuvers.

The brigade then made a detour to the New York World's Fair, to applauding crowds. Mayor Fiorello LaGuardia welcomed Chaffee and his soldiers as guests of the city. On 30 August 1939, the brigade bivouacked on grounds near the United States Military Academy at West Point. Many cadets inspected tracked vehicles and talked about tank strategy and tactics for the first time with experienced officers and NCOs. Upon returning to Fort Knox, Chaffee renewed his request for a separate mechanized division – only to be refused again by the Chief of Staff. As before, however, he received compensation. The 6th Infantry Regiment was transferred to Fort Knox from Jefferson Barracks, Missouri. Unfortunately, motorized equipment for the 6th Infantry did not become available until 1940, just four days before the

7th Cavalry Brigade left for maneuvers in Louisiana.

The Louisiana Maneuvers, conducted at corps level, constituted the largest such peacetime maneuvers ever held by the United States. They were the result, at least in part, of the German invasion (six armored divisions) of Poland the previous September. Polish cavalry, fighting bravely on their horses, had utterly failed to stop the tracked German juggernaut. At the request of General George C. Marshall, newly-appointed Chief of Staff, Major General Stanley D. Embick, 3d Army Commander, drew up the plan for the maneuvers.

Embick's interest in armor and mechanization dated from at least 1930. In part because of Embick's interest in mechanization, the maneuvers were oriented toward mobility, rather than combat. Three new "triangular divisions" (each with three regiments, which consisted of three battalions) in IV Corps, fought four "square" divisions in IX Corps.

The 7th Cavalry Brigade, with the 6th Infantry Regiment (Mechanized), was attached to IX Corps throughout the maneuvers. From Fort Benning, a Provisional Tank Brigade under BG Bruce Magruder, was attached to IV Corps for the first maneuver phase, and to IX Corps in the second, or final, phase. In Phase I, the two tank brigades were used against each other. Then, in Phase 2, they fought together. On 48-hours' notice, Chaffee and Magruder prepared an offensive across a 75-mile area, successfully carrying out the goals of speed, mobility, and tank-infantry coordination in the offensive. Despite late receipt of its equipment, the 6th Infantry Regiment (Mechanized) performed well

in its support role. Mechanized brigades emerged as clear winners over the horsed cavalry units in Phase 2.

New converts to the cause of a separate mechanized force included COL George S. Patton, Jr., who served as an umpire during the maneuvers. Writing to his fellow cavalry officer, General Kenyon Joyce, Patton urged his friend to take up the cause of the tracked vehicle and the mechanized force. Joyce stubbornly refused, thereby damaging his career. Patton's training memoranda, intended for Joyce, later appeared in an issue of *Cavalry Journal*.

Immediately after the maneuvers, Patton, Chaffee, Embick, Magruder, and other officers committed to a mechanized force met behind closed doors in an Alexandria, Louisiana schoolhouse. Their "Alexandria Recommendations" endorsed an armored force to embrace all existing mechanized cavalry and infantry tank units (essentially the forces present at the maneuvers), and the creation of four armored divisions, separate from cavalry, one for each field army. These were similar to the recommendations made by Chaffee the year before, after the Plattsburg maneuvers.

General Marshall may have decided in favor of Chaffee before the Louisiana Maneuvers began. He certainly did so after they had ended. Writing to Embick in mid-June 1940, he commended General Embick on the success of the maneuvers, adding that the performance of Chaffee's and Magruder's brigades meant that the Army could press on with the armored division concept.

Over the opposition of Major General John K. Herr, the last chief

of cavalry and the advocate of the "horsed" cavalry regiment, Chaffee left for Washington to confer with Marshall. With Marshall's endorsement, he worked for the creation, by 15 April 1941, of four armored divisions. On 10 July 1940, two weeks after the fall of France, General Chaffee became commander of the Armored Force and I Armored Corps. The goal of a strong, separate mechanized force had finally been attained.

Two recommendations made by Chaffee as a result of the Louisiana Maneuvers were also carried out. The first was increased production of medium, rather than light, tanks. The second was substitution of halftracks for supporting infantry forces.

The term "armored force" stemmed from the Infantry Branch's resistance to the word "mechanized" and Cavalry's scorn of anything using the word "tank." It has proved an enduring term.

By 10 July 1940, the hour for the creation of the Armored Force was very late. France had fallen. England shuddered in the shadow of German ground and air forces. The time for a strong American armor force had come.

John Cranston, Armor Center Historian since 1983, taught at Rust College and West Texas State University. He holds an M.A in Russian History from Columbia University's Russian Institute and a Ph.D. in German History from the University of Wisconsin-Madison.