

From the Editor

The Long Road — A Lesson Learned

The General Headquarters Maneuvers of 1941 were part of a rigorous self-examination that the United States Army undertook during the months preceding America's entry into World War II. The mobilization that President Roosevelt had ordered early in September of 1939 had set the Army on the long road to recovery from years of neglect. General George C. Marshall had little cause for optimism, however, as he reviewed the comments on the final phase of the maneuvers. Small unit training had not received the attention it deserved; doctrine had not kept pace with the development of the tank and the dive bomber; such basic lessons as noise, light, and communications security had been neglected or forgotten; and lack of attention to safety—yes, even in 1941—was causing needless injuries to soldiers.

The materiel situation was little better; much of the Army's equipment was of an earlier generation. As an example, the cover of our last issue depicted a soldier of the 165th Infantry, 27th Infantry division, in the Gilbert Islands in 1943; he was armed with a Model 1903 Springfield rifle, our principal infantry weapon until 1939. Springfields were common in the Pacific Theater in the early years of the War, until soldiers were issued the replacement M1 Garands. As production of the M1 caught up with demand, units were issued the new rifles in training and deployed overseas with them. This issue's cover is based upon a combat photograph of 7th Infantry Division soldiers clearing enemy positions on Kwajalein Island in 1944; by then these units were equipped with both the M1 Garand and the M1 Carbine.

Weapons development and production shifted into high gear, and as information became available on the design and effectiveness of our enemies' weapon systems, the American industrial base used some of the Axis powers' own technology to improve our weapons even further. The United States was fortunate; there was still time to recover from a poor start and achieve victory. But the cost was high; delays in the development of armor-defeating munitions and tank armor cost American lives when rounds failed to destroy German tanks with the first hit, while German high-velocity rounds easily penetrated early U.S. tanks, with catastrophic results. Likewise, the 37mm antitank gun used by U.S. forces early in World War II was effective only against the most lightly

armored vehicles; it was eventually replaced by a heavier weapon. In spite of early setbacks, the United States and her Allies were able to overcome their disadvantages and defeat the Axis powers.

Fifteen years later an unprepared American force went into action in Korea, with disastrous results. This time it was only after tremendous sacrifice on the part of the United States and other United Nations' forces that peace was restored.

Recent history presents a more positive picture of our preparedness; in the Gulf War, the United States enjoyed the technological advantage. The catastrophic losses of the Iraqis clearly show the cost of finishing in second place on the modern battlefield. We do not know where the next significant threat to our national interests will emerge, nor do we know what form that threat may take, but we cannot afford to become complacent. A technological advantage is a fleeting thing, and in today's world of rapid force projection, quantum improvements in weapons development, and political instability, we must be able to react quickly and decisively against any threat.

Maintaining our technological preeminence lies in the domain of the research and development community, and in the hands of our senior leaders who must communicate the need for the funding to sustain the development and testing of the systems we will rely upon in the future. But the responsibility for training and leading the soldiers who must effectively use that equipment lies in our own hands. Significant improvements are being made today through the commonsense decisions of innovative leaders at all levels. In his comments on the maneuvers of 1941, Lieutenant General Leslie J. McNair had this to say about the role of unit leaders:

The coming months of . . . training are a challenge to leadership. It is not pep talks and verbose programs which will count, but rather skill in the practical conduct of training, based on solid knowledge on the part of both commissioned and noncommissioned leaders.

Sound familiar? You bet! Innovation and information-sharing are no less important today than in 1941, and INFANTRY Magazine is one way to share your experience with the combined arms community. Give us a call or send a letter outlining an idea you think is worthwhile, and we'll give you feedback. Check out this issue; you will see that your peers are already seizing the opportunity.