



Soldiers of Headquarters Company, 23rd Infantry Regiment, 2nd Infantry Division fire a 37 mm gun through the Argonne Forest in the fall of 1918 during the Meuse-Argonne Offensive, where American soldiers fought their most difficult battle in World War I and proved that the American Army had come of age. (Photo courtesy of the U.S. Army)

Bringing Order to Chaos

Combined Arms Maneuver in Large-Scale Combat Operations

Lt. Col. Peter J. Schifferle, PhD, U.S. Army, Retired

Large-scale combat operations are at the far right of the conflict continuum and associated with war. Historically, battlefields in large-scale combat operations have been more chaotic, intense, and highly destructive than those the Army has experienced in the past decades. During the 1943 battles of Sidi Bou Zid and Kasserine Pass in World War II, 5,000 American Soldiers were killed over the course of just 10 days; during the first three days of fighting the Army lost Soldiers at a rate of 1,333 per day.

—Field Manual 3-0, Operations

Two days after the losses at Sidi Bou Zid and Kasserine Pass, the 1st Armored Division and other elements of the U.S. Army's II Corps began the counteroffensive that would destroy the vaunted *Panzergruppe Afrika* (formerly known as the *Afrika Korps*) and would net several hundred thousand German and Italian prisoners of war. This green U.S. Army unit, in its first major combat against a veteran opponent in which it would lose five thousand soldiers and then launch a series of counterattacks, could be a textbook definition of resilience.¹

Our Army today may not be fully ready to display this type of resilience or win in this type of combat. As a result, we may need to adjust our cultural values to understand the verities and changes in the nature of conventional operations since 1945, come to grips with the impact of significant U.S. casualties, and become more comfortable with the sheer violence of modern combined arms battle. The bottom line is that we need to alter our perception of future war and embrace the training and

readiness requirements of modern conventional operations, and we must be prepared to deal with the attendant horrors of mass casualties and the likely destruction of entire units along with the effects of air parity and being outgunned by the enemy artillery, at best.

The last times the U.S. Army conducted joint multidivisional offensive campaigns using combined arms maneuver were in Afghanistan in 2001 and Iraq in 2003, which then resulted in seventeen years of the Army attempting to master stability and counterinsurgency operations while fighting a deadly enemy.² These seventeen years of combat experience, while valuable for our smaller tactical unit leaders, have not been without their own challenges.

The definition of combined arms maneuver is the application of the elements of combat power in a complementary and reinforcing manner to achieve physical, temporal,

or psychological advantages over the enemy to preserve freedom of action and exploit success.³ As our Army continues to prepare for an unknown future regarding large-scale combat operations (LSCO) against a peer or near-peer adversary, we must prudently assume that our combined arms maneuver formations will most likely be

outnumbered, the enemy may be technologically more advanced in some areas, and—for the first time since World War II—the enemy may have air superiority. Our mindset, our values, and our culture on training, education, and unit readiness must continue to adapt to the changing operational environment. Our path to future victories includes an Army that is a globally engaged, regionally responsive force providing a full range of capabilities to combatant commanders to



U.S. Army artillery crew in action February 1943 at Kasserine Pass, Tunisia. (Photo courtesy of the U.S. Army Center of Military History)



conduct offensive, defensive, and stability tasks to seize, retain, and exploit the initiative, consolidate gains, and win.⁴

The second volume of the LSCO series, *Bringing Order to Chaos: Historical Case Studies of Combined Arms Maneuver in Large-Scale Combat Operations*, provides ten case studies written by a diverse group of military historians. All of the chapters focus on some element of command and control of combined arms from 1917 through 2003. These case studies—ranging from multiple U.S. Army Corps in their first combat operations to divisions fighting on the far end of culmination—provide strong lessons in the major issue of combined arms warfare whether victory is determined by maneuver or fires, or a combination of both.

As Richard M. Swain points out in his excellent history of the Third Army during the Persian Gulf War, theorists, historians, and commentators frequently align themselves in one of two camps of explanation.⁵ Swain calls them the romantic school and the realist school. Romantics believe that maneuver can be so adroit that a discerning enemy will admit defeat at the hands of an operational master and will surrender to the brilliance of the enemy's operational art. The realist school—occupied primarily by practitioners, especially those of an artillery heritage—believe that the end result of military operations is death from indirect fire. The more you shoot, the less damage the enemy can do. Victory happens not through psychoshock or silk scarves in the air but from 155 mm and larger artillery fires.

Infantrymen of the 27th Infantry Regiment take advantage of cover and concealment in tunnel positions 10 August 1952, forty yards from the communists near Heartbreak Ridge in North Korea. (Photo by Feldman via National Archives, 111-SC-410716)

A second major issue, but one beyond the limits of this book to offer sufficient case studies, is the role of casualties in LSCO and the relative lack of casualties in the last seventeen plus years of stability operations.⁶

In addressing the issue of adroit maneuver—or the simple need to kill the enemy in large numbers to gain victory—this book presents two chapters from experiences in World War I: one on the German experience late on the eastern front; and the other about U.S. V Corps operations, also very late in the war. It then goes on to discuss case studies from World War II in three essays: Buna, crossing the Moselle, and the reduction of Manila. The book goes on to provide two essays on Korea, one that discusses the U.S. approach to the start of the stabilized period and a second that discusses the People's Liberation Army, inclusive of the mythology of People's volunteers (in the same period). Finally, the Vietnam War, the 1973 Arab-Israeli War, and Operation Iraqi Freedom I in 2003 are all explored in single chapters.

Each chapter analyzes the necessity of tactical and, even occasionally, operational combined arms in LSCO against peer-threats since 1917. The focus is on the U.S. Army's approach, but the German, Chinese, Egyptian, Israeli, and South Vietnamese approaches are explored as well. These chapters are not all strictly chronological since the editors selected particularly noteworthy assessments of U.S. actions in Operation Iraqi Freedom I and at the start of the stabilization period in Korea to start the discussion. From those assessments, a common language emerged; the remainder of the chapters are organized chronologically. In all the chapters, the issues of Swain's romantic and realist versions of modern combat are debated—given the lessons revealed through these case studies, each reader will make his or her own assessment.

Chapter 1 is written by retired Gen. William Wallace, former V Corps

commander during Operation Iraqi Freedom I in 2003, and retired Col. Kevin Benson, a former J5 (strategic plans and policy) Coalition Forces Land Component Command (CFLCC) planner during the invasion. The authors explain the planning effects leading to the production of the CFLCC/Third Army major operations plan COBRA II and its execution in combat. The focus is on the major developments of the planning effort during wargaming and plan revision, and how the V Corps commander adjusted his execution as the combat conditions changed.

In chapter 2, Col. Bryan Gibby, the military division chief of the Department of History at the United States Military Academy, analyzes the 2nd Infantry Division's assault on Korea's Punchbowl in 1951 to include the assaults on Bloody Ridge and Heartbreak Ridge. He investigates how combined arms affected the Punchbowl operations through the preliminary attacks to seize Hill 1179 and establish a forward patrol base, a hasty attack to eliminate the North Korean forces at Bloody Ridge, and follow-on operations on Heartbreak Ridge. Gibby also assesses each of the field commanders on the ground in his analysis of the doctrine and fighting in a large-scale combat environment, and the honest results of the leaders who failed to be adaptive in a large-scale war. Gibby's cautionary

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note primarily addresses the difficulty of achieving great things with less than overwhelming resources. His narrative should enable further discussions of life under heavy and sustained enemy artillery bombardment, something we have missed, thankfully, in most actions in Afghanistan and Iraq.

In chapter 3, Maj. Mike Kiser, an instructor in the Department of History at the U.S. Military Academy, examines the Chinese use of maneuver to achieve operational and strategic objectives of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) from October 1950 to June 1951. Kiser demonstrates how Chinese officers understood their advantages against the United Nations forces and created superiority through maneuver *and* firepower.

In chapter 4, J. David Pressley II, a history graduate student from the University of North Texas, analyzes the German utilization of combined arms operations at Riga and the Baltic islands in the final months of the eastern front during World War I. He discusses several tactical and operational innovations witnessed during these German attacks, which were promulgated into official German doctrine and quickly transferred to the Italian and western fronts. This return of movement to the battlefield was actually based primarily on overwhelming firepower—indirect and direct fire—at the point of penetration, not on some romantic notion of adroit operational art, mystical psychoshock of the enemy command-and-control systems, or getting inside his OODA (observe, orient, decide, and act) loop. Today's doctrine writers, senior leaders, and those who would become senior commanders and staff officers would do well to read this chapter, especially if they believe they have found the magic keys to the kingdom in some new technology.

In chapter 5, Maj. John Nimmons, an armor officer and recent School of Advanced Military Studies (SAMS) graduate, provides a case study of the V Corps' operations in the Meuse-Argonne Offensive, charting the obstacles to adaption as well as the social and cultural impacts that affected the V Corps' actions and decisions. This chapter details the early struggles of V Corps to link their artillery and intelligence systems at the corps level with the tactical innovation of combined arms maneuver at the division level. The challenge of dividing the multiple tasks on the modern battlefield between echelons to maximize both effectiveness and efficiency is rarely the focus

of historians' work, but it is a critical component of battlefield competence. Nimmons describes the steep learning curve of the U.S. Army in the fall of 1918 and finishes the chapter with a clear depiction of what victory looks like—the clear coordination of fires, maneuver, tanks, combat aircraft, effective logistics, and an effective level of coordination from the corps to the divisions.



A Sherman tank passing a burning Japanese medium tank during World War II in Luzon, Philippines. (Photo courtesy of the U.S. Army Center of Military History)

In chapter 6, Dr. Robert Young, a history professor at the American Military University, explains the effect of the just-in-time, or *almost* just-in-time, support of elements of a hastily mobilized U.S. Army division during World War II in the Southwest Pacific Area (SWPA) in 1942 and early 1943. Equipped with only one howitzer of sufficient firepower to destroy Japanese bunkers, inadequate ammunition for that one artillery piece, initially no tanks worthy of the name, and woefully short infantry front-line strength, the early fighting in Buna and elsewhere in the SWPA was not a story of success. Learning, however, did occur, and subsequent offensives, using more artillery, many more tanks, and some Allied combat-experienced soldiers, rapidly turned the course of these battle against the Japanese.

In chapter 7, Maj. Paul Cheval, an infantry officer and a recent graduate of SAMS, discusses the 80th Infantry Division that engaged the German army in August 1944 at Argentan, France, and again in September 1944 when crossing the Moselle River. His analysis of the division's ability to employ combined arms reveals that, although it eventually achieved its objective, the division fought too often with separate arms. More

an explanation of the challenges of attaining useful levels of combined arms than a rousing success story, this is an important perspective on the difficulty of even the simplest things in combat. In this case, Cheval reminds us of the difficulty of anything when engaged in LSCO with an opponent who refuses to give up.

In chapter 8, Capt. James Villaneuva, an instructor in the Department of History at the United States Military Academy, discusses Gen. Walter Krueger's Sixth Army, which landed 9 January 1945 on the island of Luzon in the Philippines with initial operations focusing on the seizure of Manila. He analyzes the adaptive combinations of infantry, tanks, tank destroyers, and mobile artillery that allowed the 37th Infantry Division and 1st Cavalry Division to drive south to seize Manila. A story too infrequently told in our histories, the clearance of Manila may very well be a forecast of combat in megacities.

In chapter 9, retired Lt. Gen. Dan Bolger discusses our operations in Cambodia, from the political realities of the Nixon administration to the machinations

at the four-star headquarters and down to the fighting soldiers, both the South Vietnamese and American. Bolger, a University of Chicago-trained PhD historian, a former division combat commander, and a fellow instructor at the United States Military Academy's History Department, contributed a smoothly narrated but incisive history of the operational, sometimes tactical, incursion into Cambodia that brought powerful strategic results, although not quite as intended. Strong on the assessment of the South Vietnamese army's contribution and the sometimes silly, but frequently fatal political micromanagement of squad-level details, Bolger's piece establishes the right tone for assessments of future U.S. Army operational art in a combined arms LSCO environment.

In chapter 10, Dr. Tal Tovy, an associate professor at Bar Ilan University in Israel, discusses the Egyptian and Israeli armies in combat during the October 1973 war. Adding significantly to the relatively well-known analysis of the 1973 War, Tovy provides a double-level assessment of the use of combined arms by the Egyptians and the late discovery of this old concept by the Israelis. Tovy then adds to the discussion by linking the lessons

learned, or imagined, by the U.S. Army from this war as the Army entered the operational art period of American doctrine. Useful in several aspects, he adds appropriate complexity and subtlety to what

has usually been a somewhat sterile recitation of changes to Field Manual (FM) 3-0, *Operations*, or FM 100-5, *Operations*, as it was designated in the late 1970s.

In the concluding chapter, Lt. Gen. Michael D. Lundy, commander of the Combined Arms Center, presents a vision of the future in combined arms maneuver, and expands the discussion in this set of books, and possible future books, by identifying some of the unresolved issues of peer-competitor combat operations where divisions and corps are mere tactical formations. Our complacency (Lundy does not specifically use

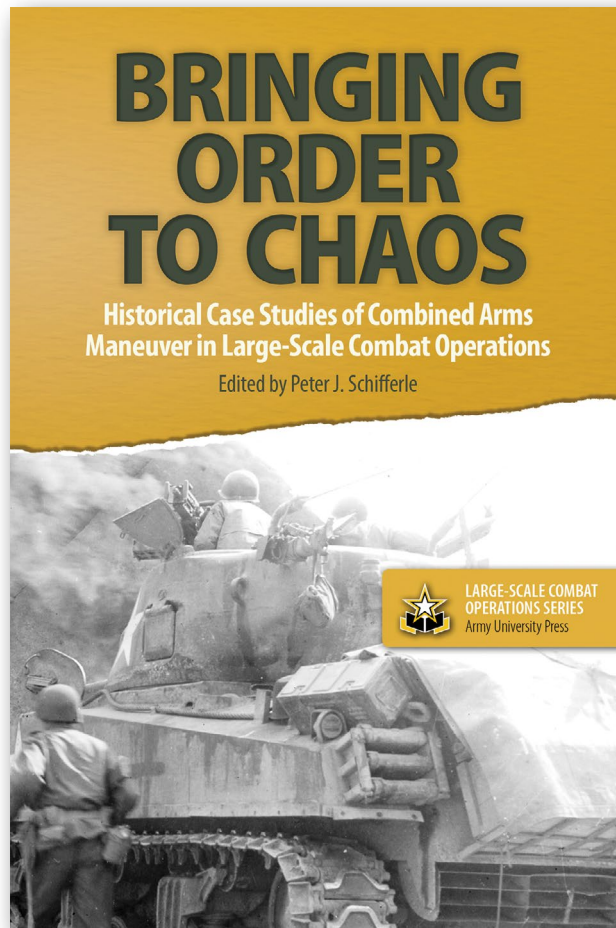
this word in his chapter), resting on the valorous actions of the last seventeen years—and a sense of the new culture of the Army inculcated by those seventeen plus years of stability operations—implies that preparation for more stability operations is enough and is as much the enemy of the future as the Russians, North Koreans, Chinese, or Iranians. Lundy argues that we must fight now to regain our ability



Engineers supported by a M551 Sheridan Tank from the Blackhorse Regiment clear mines 31 December 1969 in Cambodia. (Photo courtesy of the U.S. Army)

to deter, engage, deny, defeat, and win against any and all competitors. He argues persuasively that the Army needs to reorient on LSCO; it must remember the lessons and the ability to conduct stability operations but also quickly and drastically improve the Army's capabilities for training and preparation for LSCO, and deployment into immature theaters—these are the hallmarks of future conflict. ■

Additionally, I owe thanks to the staff at Army University Press for putting this book into physical and electronic form as part of the U.S. Army Large-Scale Combat Operations Series. Special thanks to Col. Paul E. Berg, the book set general editor (Welcome to Leavenworth and the joys of coordinating instant



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Notes

Epigraph. Field Manual (FM) 3-0, *Operations* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Publishing Office [GPO], 2017), para. 1-3.

1. Peter J. Schifferle, *America's School for War: Fort Leavenworth, Officer Education, and Victory in World War II* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2010). This book takes a different view of the Kasserine battles. This view, that it was a minor tactical defeat on the road to operational capability, is shared by Gerhard L. Weinberg in his epic history of World War II, *A World at Arms: A Global History of World War II* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 443, 1044n104.

2. FM 3-0, *Operations*, ix.
3. Army Doctrine Publication 3-0, *Unified Land Operations* (Washington, DC: U.S. GPO, October 2011 [obsolete]), 6.
4. FM 3-0, *Operations*, 1-38.
5. Richard M. Swain, “Lucky War”: *Third Army in Desert Storm* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: U.S. Army Command and Staff College Press, 1994), 72–73.
6. Schifferle, *America's School for War*, 180, 202n38. For this author's view of combined arms, stabilized fronts, and operational exploitation and pursuit, and the operational similarities of the two world wars, see pages 182–87.