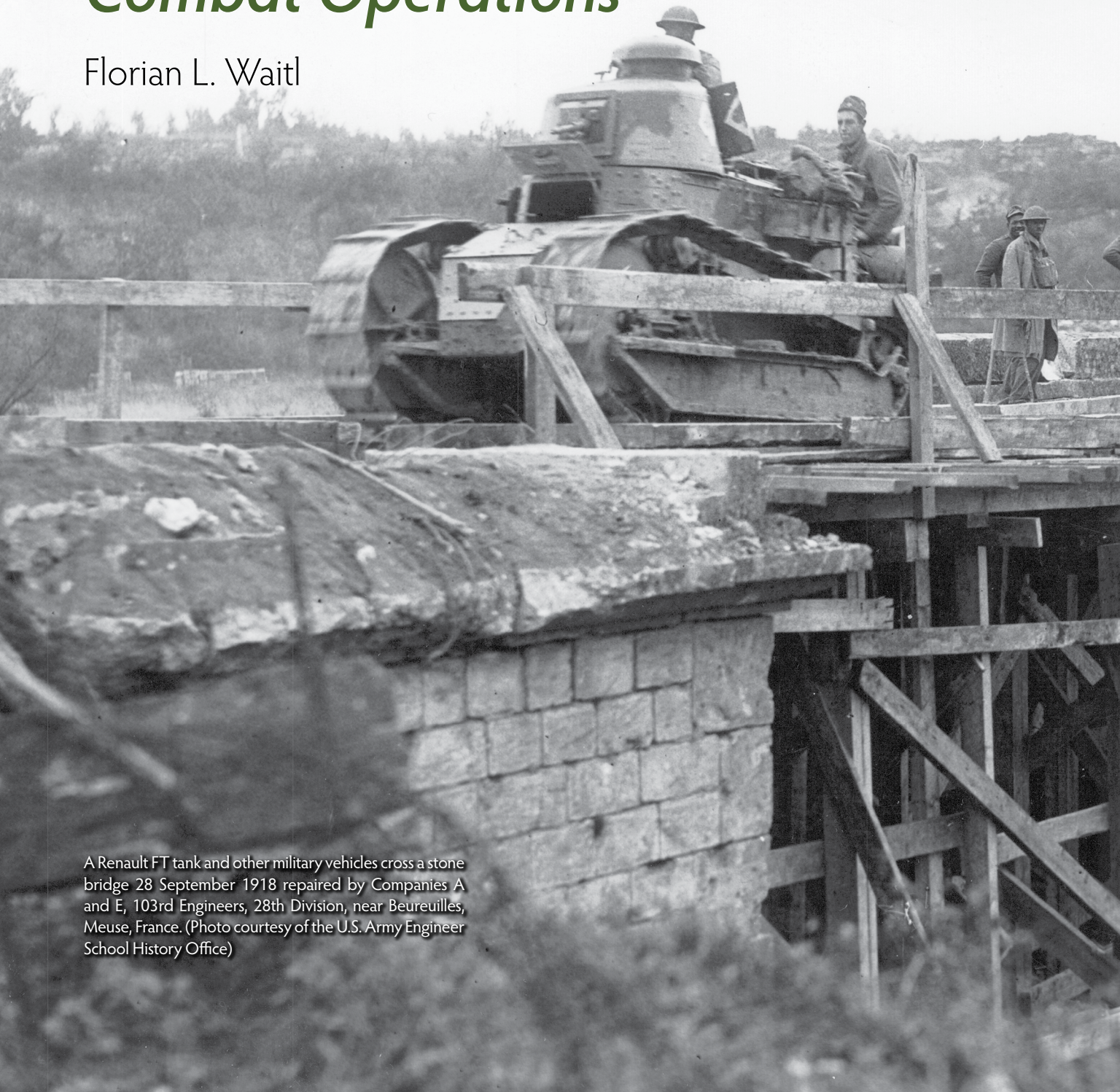


Into the Breach

Historical Case Studies of Mobility Operations in Large-Scale Combat Operations

Florian L. Waitl



A Renault FT tank and other military vehicles cross a stone bridge 28 September 1918 repaired by Companies A and E, 103rd Engineers, 28th Division, near Beureuilles, Meuse, France. (Photo courtesy of the U.S. Army Engineer School History Office)

*Once more unto the breach, dear friends, once more;
Or close the wall up with our English dead.
In peace there's nothing so becomes a man
As modest stillness and humility:
But when the blast of war blows in our ears,
Then imitate the action of the tiger*

—William Shakespeare, *Henry V*

The operational environment the U.S. Army faces today has changed significantly from that of recent years. Emerging regional threats like Russia, China, North Korea, and Iran have

resulted in a need to shift the U.S. Army's doctrine to address possible future large-scale combat operations (LSCO) against peer or near-peer competitors. While the U.S. Army has been "bogged down" in counterinsurgency and stability operations in Iraq and Afghanistan for the last seventeen years, our potential adversaries have studied our existing doctrine and capabilities with the intent to develop means to counter our once-guaranteed land domain overmatch.¹ As a result, for the first time since the end of the Cold War, the U.S. military and coalition forces face adversaries that have the ability to compete and in some instances even outmaneuver and overmatch our forces.



The U.S. Army's recently published Field Manual (FM) 3-0, *Operations*, provides a doctrinal approach for theater armies, corps, divisions, and brigades to address the challenges associated with large-scale ground combat. The FM mentions that "historically, battlefields in large-scale combat operations have been more chaotic, intense, and highly destructive than those the Army has experienced in the past several decades."² Large-scale exercises, as were seen in the 1980s in Europe, have not been conducted for decades. The skills to participate, lead, and fight in such large-scale combat operations as described in FM 3-0 have atrophied and, as a consequence, the Army needs to rebuild itself and foster institutional

and cultural changes to successfully fight tomorrow's multi-domain operations.

Fortunately, the U.S. Army is a learning organization that is proud of its history and heritage, and capable of adjusting rapidly to meet new challenges and threats. To achieve the necessary adjustments, we can gain valuable insights through the study of history, which is why Lt. Gen. Michael D. Lundy, commander of the U.S. Army's Combined Arms Center, specifically instructed the Army University Press to produce the Historical Case Studies in Large-Scale Combat Operations book set. The purpose of this initiative is to introduce Army commanders and their staffs to some of the challenges one might encounter



in LSCO, to teach situational critical thinking, and to open the discussion of warfighting issues of mutual interest to the Army and joint community.

Due to the simple reason that without mobility, maneuver forces would go nowhere, the LSCO book set would not be complete without a volume specifically addressing mobility operations. As the command historian for the U.S. Army Engineer School, I immediately volunteered to lead this endeavor and bring home this project to the Maneuver Support Center of Excellence (MSCoE) at Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri. MSCoE consists of the U.S. Army Engineer School; the Military Police School; and the Chemical, Biological, Radiological, and Nuclear

School, which all have their place in mobility operations in LSCO.

Into the Breach: Historical Case Studies of Mobility Operations in Large-Scale Combat Operations is a collection of ten historical case studies of mobility and countermobility operations drawn from the past one hundred years with insights for modern LSCO. It is organized chronologically to include World War I, World War II, the Korean War, the 1973 Arab-Israeli War, and Desert Storm.

Andrew Huebner starts the book with a closer look at the Gorlice-Tarnow Offensive on the eastern front during World War I. Even though the offensive is seen as one of Germany's greatest feats in the war,

Traffic crossing a treadway bridge over the Rhine River south of Wesel, Germany, in 1945. (Photo courtesy of the U.S. Army Engineer School History Office)



it is still one of many understudied topics by military historians of the West. Huebner follows a dual perspective, considering both sides involved in the maneuvers of pursuit and retreat that characterized one of the largest frontline shifts in World War I. His insights about the stalled German advance after gaining major tactical victories time and time again is an eye-opening experience that underlines once again the need to understand the culminating point of victory when planning and conducting mobility operations in LSCO.

Florian L. Waitl is the command historian at the U.S. Army Engineer School at Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri. He received his master of arts in military history from Norwich University and has an extensive background in military history, leadership development, team building, and lessons learned programs. He served both as an enlisted and an officer in the U.S. military and deployed as an Army civilian on two different occasions to Afghanistan. He facilitated leadership seminars at dozens of universities and at various prestigious military leadership institutions such as the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, the U.S. Army Engineer School, the British Land Warfare Centre, and for the Führungsakademie der Bundeswehr (Military Academy of the German Armed Forces). He has been previously published in several Army publications and military history publications around the world.

The next three chapters shift to the western front of World War I. Scott Znamenacek takes a closer look at how U.S. Army engineering efforts ensured freedom of movement to operational and tactical forces during the Meuse-Argonne Offensive. In his conclusions, he connects the historical lessons to observations of contemporary operations and exercises that have been collected by the Center for Army Lessons Learned. Even though a full century has passed since the Meuse-Argonne Offensive, many of the engineer roles, responsibilities, and capabilities are still needed today to fight and win on the multi-domain battlefield.

Christy Lindberg continues the examination of the Meuse-Argonne Offensive through the lens of the then newly established

Chemical Warfare Service. Today's Chemical Corps traces its creation back to 28 June 1918 when the 30th Engineer Regiment (Gas and Flame) was transferred and redesignated as the 1st Gas Regiment. The Meuse-Argonne Offensive marked the 1st Gas Regiment's "baptism by fire" after having been created only ninety days prior. Lindberg points out the invaluable lessons and insights from how the chemical support enabled mobility operations during the campaign that still influence the Chemical Corps today.

Dan Runyon finishes the examination of World War I by shifting the focus to Germany's need to develop new doctrine while at war. He highlights the strategic situation of Germany and examines the importance of being a learning organization similar to what the U.S. Army is attempting today with the introduction of the new FM 3-0 and its shift to peer and near-peer threats in a multi-domain arena. He accomplishes this task by examining the history of the Hindenburg Line from its conception up to its breach in 1918.

Paul Munch keeps our focus on the western front and takes us through the interwar years to Germany's invasion of France. He chooses to concentrate on the importance of terrain and compares the actions that took place during the invasion of France through the Ardennes in 1940 to Germany's counteroffensive commonly known as the "Battle of the Bulge" in December 1944. Munch's discussion is followed by Brett Boyle's account of the conquering of the Rhine by the U.S. Army in 1945 in which he discusses the roots of current doctrine and how specifically the lessons of the 1945 Rhine crossings influenced and shaped current wet-gap crossing doctrine. Lastly, mobility and countermobility operations in a megacity are explored in Walker Mills's chapter when he discusses the block-by-block fighting that occurred in Berlin in the last days of World War II.

Ron Miller focuses on lessons from the Korean War when he examines enemy prisoner of war and refugee control operations essential to sustaining a high level of operational tempo and maintaining a successful battle rhythm while conducting LSCO.

Miller is followed by George Gawrych, who shifts the focus to the Middle East and discusses the 1973 Arab-Israeli War, during which Egyptian engineers crossed the Suez Canal and were able to breach the Bar Lev Line in record time. The last historical study examines the actions of Operation Desert Storm and

how engineer support enabled maneuver units in the “100-Hour Ground War” against Iraq.

Maj. Gen. Kent D. Savre, commanding general of the Maneuver Support Center of Excellence, closes the book with a look at future mobility and counter-mobility developments that the U.S. Army will face on the multi-domain battlefield of tomorrow.

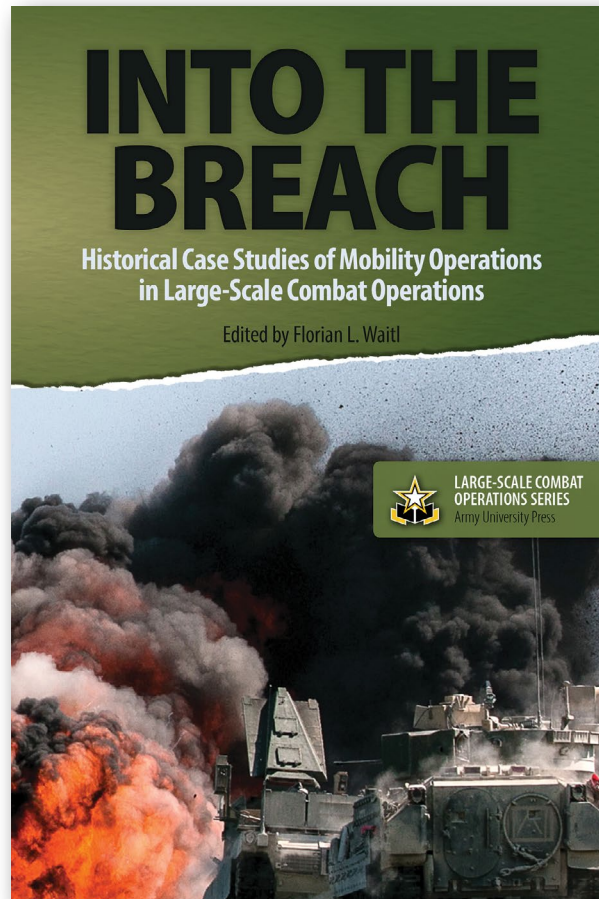
This collection of essays seeks to shed some light on the last one hundred years of mobility operations in LSCO. It also highlights several recurring themes and patterns in the accounts that current commanders and doctrine developers must be aware of when discussing or conducting mobility operations. Though this book is by no means a comprehensive treatment of the subject, we hope professionals and instructors alike will gain a better understanding of the historical context of mobility and appreciate the importance of history when looking at the future through the lens of the past. ■

This work would not have been possible without the voluntary time and work of the authors who have spent countless hours researching, writing, and taking my constructive criticism

to make the volume what it is today. They are the experts in their individual fields of study. I would also like to thank their families, and especially my own family, for supporting us in this endeavor, which is a work of love for many of us. Furthermore, the support received from MSCoE and the U.S. Army Engineer School leadership has been exceptional.

I also owe thanks to the staff of Army University Press for putting this book into physical and electronic form as part of the Historical Case Studies in Large-Scale Combat Operations book set. Special thanks to Col. Paul Berg, book set general editor; Dr. Donald Wright for production; Ms. Robin Kern for graphics; and Ms. Diane Walker and Dr. Lynne Chandler Garcia for layout and copyediting. As

the general editor of this project, I am alone responsible for the errors, omissions, or limitations of this work.



Notes

Epigraph. *Henry V*, 3.1.1–6. References are to act, scene, and lines.

1. U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC), *Multi-Domain Battle: Evolution of Combined Arms for the 21st*

Century (2025-2040), version 1.0 (Fort Eustis, VA: TRADOC, December 2017).

2. Field Manual 3-0, *Operations* (Washington, DC: Government Publishing Office, 2017), 1-2.