

Away All Boats:

The Army-Navy Maneuvers of 1925



Marines unloading field piece from "Beetle Boat."

Courtesy of Leo J. Daugherty III

By LEO J. DAUGHERTY III

During the interwar years the services believed, as one naval officer wrote in 1924, that effective joint operations could be conducted "without regard to whether or not there is actual physical cooperation in the conduct of operations."¹ Successful cooperation depended only on the War and Navy Departments formulating a joint operating plan and upon "loyalty" to the plan by land and sea component commanders.² The Winter maneuvers of 1925 off Oahu in the Territory of

Hawaii demonstrated that this concept of effective cooperation was inadequate. In fact, the maneuvers provided a stiff lesson in how not to conduct joint operations.

Background

The Winter Maneuvers of 1925 must be considered from the vantage point of the post-war distribution of missions carved out for the War and Navy Departments by the Plans Division of the General Board of the Navy. The division's proposals were the "most important statement on American defense policy relating to the Pacific during the three years following World War I [1919–22]."³ The division, serving under Admiral

Leo J. Daugherty III is currently completing a doctoral dissertation in military history at The Ohio State University.

Battleships off Hawaii, 1925.



Naval Historical Center

Albert Winterhalter, commander of the U.S. Asiatic Fleet and the board spokesman, sought to devise a compromise plan that would appease the Army and Navy. When formalized by the Joint War Board in late July 1920, the recommendations of the Plans Division became the national defense policy.

The Plans Division selected Pearl Harbor as the principal outlying fleet base. It also called for constructing additional bases at Cavite in the Philippines and on Guam and using San Diego as the major fleet operations and maneuver base in the Pacific. San Francisco would be the main domestic base on the west coast. The plan foresaw the Army protecting Navy facilities on Guam and Oahu through vigorous defense of the entire islands while providing security to Cavite “to the extent of the capabilities of the Philippine garrison and the fortifications of Manila Bay.”

*This entailed completing defenses at Manila Bay and Oahu and erecting works at Guam. The total forces believed necessary by the board to garrison the defenses at Hawaii, Guam, and the Philippines was 185,000 men, about double the existing field army.*⁴

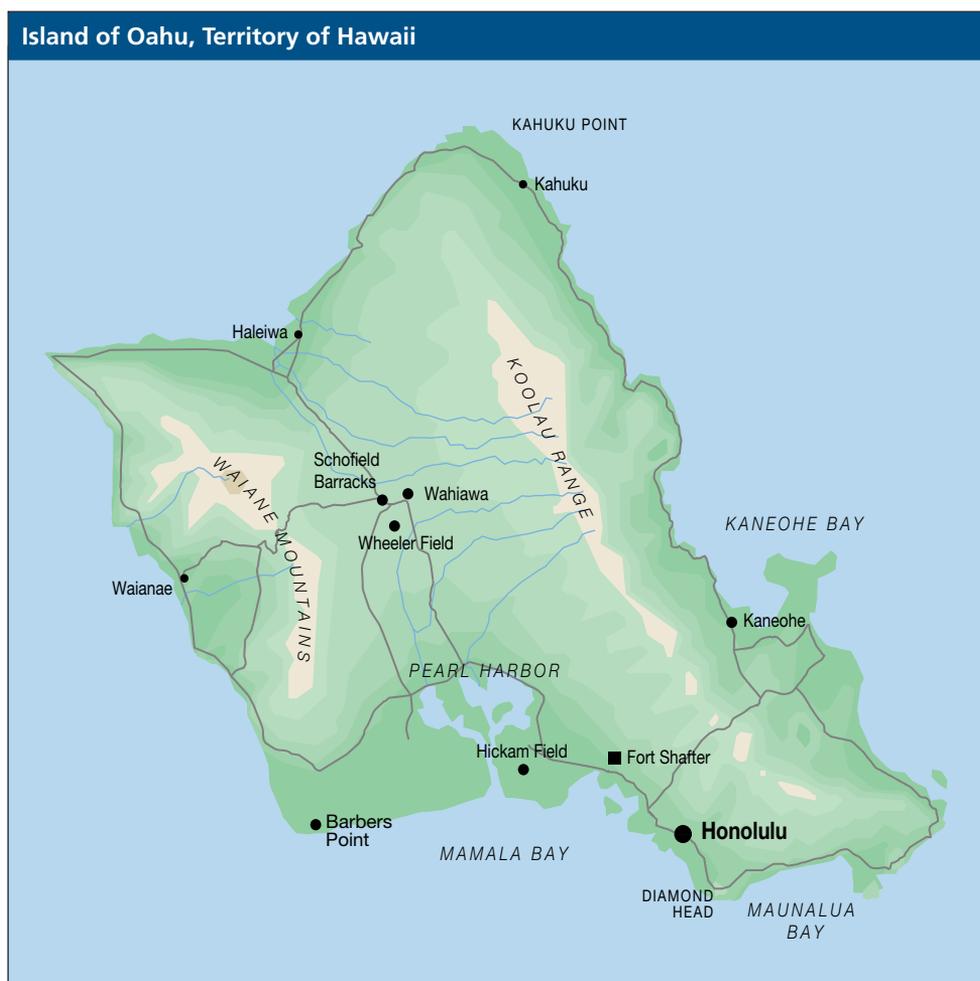
However, the austerity imposed by Congress on the War and Navy Departments in the 1920s, and the nonfortification clause that the United

States, Japan, and Britain sanctioned at the Washington Naval Conference effectively forced the United States to concentrate on building up the defenses at Pearl Harbor, thereby massing its main striking power there for any Pacific contingency. Without a sufficiently large base on any other outpost (Wake, Guam, the Philippines, or the Aleutians), Oahu and the Panama Canal Zone became focal points in the 1920s and 1930s of a series of joint Army-Navy fleet exercises dubbed “flexes,” which the War and Navy Departments used to test Army and naval aviation, naval gun-fire, coastal defense, and several amphibious landings that focused on base seizure and defense.⁵ The Winter maneuver of 1924, off Culebra, Puerto Rico, examined the defense of the Canal Zone. The Winter maneuvers of 1925 would test the other great bastion of continental defense, Pearl Harbor.

Defenses in Hawaii

By the turn of the century Oahu had become one of the largest and best equipped overseas Army facilities. Garrisoned shortly after Hawaii was annexed in 1898 and continually reinforced following the decision in 1908 to select Pearl Harbor as the principal naval base in the

the Plans Division selected Pearl Harbor as the principal outlying fleet base



strengthened, an enemy force of 100,000 could take the island. In fact, to both protect Pearl Harbor and provide a defensible bastion as a forward base for extended fleet operations, the garrison was enlarged and in 1913 became the separate Hawaiian Department accounting for 11 percent of Army manpower.

The Army mission as defined in the National Defense Act of 1920 embraced the defense of Pearl Harbor “against damage from naval or aerial bombardment or by enemy sympathizers . . . and against attack by enemy expeditionary force or forces, supported or unsupported by an enemy fleet or fleets.”⁹ It was a formidable task. The main group of islands extends some 400 miles from Hawaii, the island with two-thirds of the total land mass. Oahu, one of the four principal islands, is 604 square miles of volcanic rock and lush jungle with a subtropical climate and two natural harbors along its southern shore (see map at left) as well as the largest city, Honolulu, and a shallow lagoon several miles west. The Navy, with perhaps its best base outside the continental United States, realized at Pearl Harbor everything it lacked in Manila: an excellent harbor that was defensible and accessible in case of war

Pacific, the outpost was maintained in a state of readiness as tension with Japan intensified. Oahu became the “springboard” where American military power would be assembled and deployed in the event of war.

In 1911, after a naval reconnaissance by the Commander in Chief of the Pacific Fleet, Rear Admiral Chauncey Thomas, determined that Oahu should be protected from all sides, an Army board

the Army warned that unless the defenses were strengthened, an enemy force of 100,000 could take the island

under Brigadier General Montgomery Macomb decided the garrison should that be strengthened to six infantry regiments with supporting guns. It also established the “defensive lines on Oahu, beginning at the beaches [nearest to Schofield Barracks] and shortest line capable of covering Pearl Harbor and Honolulu.” The Army warned, however, that unless the defenses were

with Japan. In fact, as a result of the Washington Naval Limitations of 1921 as well as a revision in War Plan Orange in 1924, the Pearl Harbor facilities took on increased importance.

Schofield Barracks—ten miles from Pearl Harbor in northwest Oahu—housed troops who would repel any amphibious landing to seize naval installations. Two Army airfields flanked Pearl Harbor: Hickam Field with bombardment aircraft was located on the Honolulu side and Wheeler Field with pursuit and fighter aircraft was adjacent to Schofield Barracks. The latter was the center of the Winter Maneuvers in 1925.

Black and Blue

The Winter Maneuvers of 1925—better known as fleet problem 5—began with the Pacific (or black) Fleet under Admiral Samuel Robinson conducting maneuvers off southern California. Emphasis was placed on refueling at sea, antisubmarine operations, and in-fleet screening. At the same time, the Atlantic (blue) Fleet, commanded by Admiral Josiah McKean, sailed from Atlantic

bases to Panama to “defend” the Canal Zone from the black fleet. The most notable aspect of the exercise was participation by the carrier *USS Langley*. Admiral Robert Coontz, the Chief of Naval Operations, impressed by the carrier’s role as a scout for the entire fleet during the exercise, ordered two more carriers built.⁶

The Pacific Fleet then moved to Hawaii to participate in a joint operation with Army forces on Oahu under Major General John Hines. The Marine Corps, although beset by severe shortages due to manpower ceilings and overseas deployments, supplied 120 officers and 1,500 enlisted men who were collectively designated as 1st Provisional Brigade—largely drawn from the 4th Marines at San Diego and the 10th Marines at Quantico. Despite his modest force (the brigade was meant to represent 42,000 men), the Commandant, Major General John Lejeune, “welcomed the chance . . . to refute the Army contention that the Marines were incapable of conducting any operation larger than regimental size.”⁷ He also hoped the exercises would serve as a laboratory for Marine observers from the Field Officers School at Quantico.

The Commandant saw the maneuvers as indispensable in stimulating interest in the study, development, and refinement of amphibious tactics. He made the exercise part of that year’s curriculum and had three of the most senior officers (Major General Wendell Neville, a future Commandant; Brigadier General Logan Feland, a combat veteran of World War I; and Colonel Robert Dunlap, a pioneer in developing amphibious warfare) attend with students from the Field Officers School to digest the lessons of the landings.⁸

With Hines’ soldiers in the defense, the plan included an assault on Oahu to seize Pearl Harbor and Honolulu as the fleet screened the amphibious force, provided air and naval gunfire support, and conducted antisubmarine and mine sweeping operations. Army (black) forces totalled 16,000 men and were comprised of the regular garrison on Oahu as well as members of the Army Reserve and Hawaiian Army National Guard. They were assigned to repel landings and bombard enemy ships using aviation assets from Oahu and adjacent islands. The naval force assigned to assist the Army had 30 scout and torpedo-bombing aircraft, 20 submarines, and a few mine sweepers, mine layers, and light auxiliary craft. In addition to a small black fleet, the main fleet carrying the Marines consisted of a scouting force, *USS Langley*, the main body of battleships, cruisers, destroyers, and transports, and the fleet train consisting of supply, repair, and maintenance ships.

Across the Beach

As preparations advanced, *USS S-26* landed a reconnaissance team on April 25 to scout black defenses from Barbers Point to Honolulu Harbor. On coming ashore from the submarine the marines spotted a small flotilla of sampans that had been searching vessels entering and leaving the harbor. Avoiding the sampans and Army searchlights scanning the night sky over Pearl Harbor and Schofield Barracks, they penetrated the defenses of Honolulu as well as those of Fort Shafter before being spotted by soldiers from a field artillery battery.

The main exercise began on the same day with marines from the blue force landing to seize the airfield on Molokai Island. The force was comprised of the 4th and 10th Marines together with various ship detachments and supported by a battleship and 84 constructive (or hypothetical) aircraft from the Carrier *USS Langley*. Even before the planes took off, however, the umpires grounded them for the duration of the exercise, thereby denying sufficient air cover for the landing, and creating a source of contention between the Army and Navy in reviewing the event. The blue fleet arrived on station off Oahu at twilight on April 26. After feinting a landing at Maunaloa Bay near Diamond Head, the ships took up position to land the embarked marines. With the major effort scheduled to take place along the northwest coast of Oahu, a secondary landing was planned at Barbers Point on the southwest corner.

As marines prepared to make a night landing, battleships, destroyers, and cruisers moved to bombard black defenses. Beams from searchlights



Courtesy of Marine Corps Historical Center

simulating heavy artillery filled the darkened sky as ships and shore batteries engaged in a mock counterbattery battle. In a replay of the Winter Maneuvers of 1924 off Culebra, Puerto Rico, marines—loaded in whale and ship's boats—awaited orders to go ashore. With waves pounding the sides of the ships, the Navy postponed the landing until first light. By then the surf and wind had calmed to permit a flawless landing.

Aircraft from both Wheeler and Hickam Fields sprayed the beaches with machine gun fire but failed to stop the Marine landing. The blue air

force did no better. A few carrier based aircraft provided sporadic, ineffectual support for the landing force. During the post-exercise critique observers commented on the lack of cooperation between Army and naval aviation forces. The lack of a unified air command severely hampered proper employment of black air assets during the maneuvers. For several hours, *USS Langley* and its aircraft remained undetected and therefore free to position themselves against Oahu's defenses, giving blue forces an unfair advantage over black in employing air assets. Likewise, the umpires' grounding of blue air assets from the car-

rier severely hampered that force from properly reconnoitering and providing air cover for the fleet and marines ashore. This resulted in a terse letter from Admiral H.L. Yarnell, commander of Aircraft Squadron One, Scouting Fleet, to the commandant, 14th Naval District, on the absence of unified air command and proper notification and assignment of air missions.

Meanwhile, the Marines successfully assaulted the main defenses despite spirited resistance. At the same time, while the main force consolidated positions ashore and proceeded inland, the Army managed to repel the secondary blue landing at Barbers Point, inflicting "heavy casualties." Nevertheless, the feint drew sufficient enemy strength away from main landing areas. After marines penetrated inland near Schofield Barracks and Wheeler Field, Hines halted the exercise. The outcome was surprising and devastating from a strategic perspective: surprising in that the assaulting force could penetrate strongly-manned Army defenses despite its lack of numbers and airpower; devastating in that combined land, sea, and air forces demonstrated that Pearl Harbor,

Oahu, and the surrounding islands were indeed vulnerable to a determined enemy landing.

Lessons Learned

The original intent of the exercises—to test the approved joint operations plans and special Army and Navy plans as well as new operational and tactical concepts—met with success. But the maneuvers also demonstrated that the services, notably the Army and Navy, had failed to implement the lessons of previous exercises. In addition, the fact that the blue forces could not effectively utilize carrier air assets reflected the ongoing conflict between the Army and Navy over coastal defense and aviation-related issues. Moreover naval commanders can be faulted for not understanding the necessity of better coordination and a unified air command.

The fact that the Navy could not bring its air assets to assist in the initial Marine landing and subsequent support pointed to the want of Army understanding of the value of the aircraft carrier in a naval campaign. Despite this last point, however, the Army can be forgiven since the concept of projecting airpower from the sea was in its embryonic stage. The Oahu maneuvers nonetheless highlighted often acrimonious disagreements over naval and Army aviation areas of responsibility. Army and Navy leaders consistently disagreed over such questions as whether the Navy should operate reconnaissance and strike aircraft from land bases and whether Army aircraft should operate against targets far out to sea.

For the Marine Corps and amphibious warfare, the exercise was only a slight improvement over the Culebra maneuvers of 1924. The lack of suitable landing craft, adequate communications, and expertise in loading and disembarking equipment again plagued the landing. Marine Brigadier General Dion Williams, in summarizing the exercise, emphasized that the most essential factor in an amphibious landing was to "get men and matériel . . . on the beach in the shortest possible time with the least confusion and in the best condition for immediate action. . . . It is therefore vital that every effort should be made to provide beforehand suitable means. . . ." ¹⁰

Williams pointed out that despite many landings by the Marines (and Army), whale and ships' boats were not suitable and that "during the last twenty years numerous plans have been made for special craft, but so far little has been done. . . ." Hines told students at the U.S. Army War College he held "no doubt that highly-trained, well-led infantry can establish a beachhead once the troops are ashore—but getting ashore, there's the rub."



Courtesy of Leo J. Daugherty III

Dion Williams, father of Marine amphibious reconnaissance.

Marines and soldiers disembarking.



Courtesy of Leo J. Daugherty III

another lesson of the maneuvers was the necessity to carry a large air force with the fleet

Another lesson of the maneuvers was the necessity to carry a large air force with the fleet to support landings and engage defending air forces, which could be a serious threat to troops coming ashore, especially during early stages of the landing. The fact that the blue force had been denied use of carrier air assets before the amphibious assault would have meant disaster in combat. Navy officials claimed the Army sought to sabotage aircraft from *USS Langley* to prove the efficacy of land-based airpower at the expense of naval aviation with its potential for coastal defense.

The need to train personnel to disembark from transports on open and choppy seas as well as from landing craft once ashore was also demonstrated. Williams stressed that there would “be great confusion and delay in carrying out landing operations on a hostile coast against strong enemy opposition, especially at night when such landings will have to be made in time of war.”¹¹

Another lesson was the need for better communications and the importance of radio, field telegraph, and telephones during both ship-to-shore and land operations. General Williams wrote that such devices must be portable and that “every effort should be made to provide apparatuses of this nature of such weights and sizes that will allow of easy transportation in the boats and after a landing. . . .”

The Oahu Maneuvers, dubbed the grand joint Army-Navy maneuvers, demonstrated the necessity of closer inter- and intraservice cooperation. Despite the stormy Army-Navy relationship during the post-war battle over roles and missions, particularly in regards to coastal defense and aviation, the fact that two services could come together in what was only one of several joint exercises in the 1920s and 1930s proved that the services complemented one another—the Navy at sea and the Army on land as well as the ongoing Marine Corps interest in amphibious warfare. This recognition was codified in *Joint Overseas Expeditions* (1927) and iterated in subsequent joint publications. Nonetheless, budget constraints and inter- and intraservice disputes over missions nearly derailed the cooperation and spirit of jointness which existed briefly during the mid-1920s.

The maneuvers also revealed ongoing unresolved questions in forging an effective amphibious warfare doctrine. The fact that the services had failed to learn the lessons of the Canal Zone and Culebra pointed to both a lack of awareness on the needs for properly landing an amphibious force and a failure to rectify problems from previous exercises. This can be seen in the need for suitable landing craft and boats. While the 1925 maneuvers were far more successful than those at Culebra a year earlier (due primarily to better surf

and landing conditions), the fact that troops again landed in ships' boats and that there had been no movement toward developing proper landing craft pointed to an institutional failure on the part of the Marine Corps and Navy. This problem continued until the mid-1930s when the Marines, free from expeditionary duty and with the prospect of war, were able to concentrate on the lessons of the 1920s. Through these failures the Marine Corps and belatedly the Army and Navy developed amphibious doctrine. According to General Holland Smith, the events gave an impetus to writing the *Tentative Landing Operations Manual* in 1934. Its ideas "not only carried us through Tarawa, Normandy, and Iwo Jima, but still stand, to this very day, as the basic amphibious methods of the United States."¹²

For the Army, the exercises pointed to the requirement for increased manpower on Oahu. Hines stated that "7,000 more men were needed to adequately defend Hawaii."¹³ Ironically, that figure was in line with a report published by the U.S. Army War College in 1915 which called for a full division of 23,000 men. The exercise indicated that more had to be done to strengthen Oahu against an amphibious assault and forge better ties with the Navy. As the events of 1925 revealed, such matters were only initially being addressed at the time of the maneuvers.

In sum, the Oahu Maneuvers of 1925 pointed the services in the right direction despite the bitter interservice relations of the first half of the decade. The fact that the Army and Navy could forge an effective joint doctrine in the wake of the controversy over coastal defense and roles and missions in defending outposts in Hawaii, Guam, the Canal Zone, and the Philippines, as well as in presenting doctrine in a series of joint publications on overseas expeditions, gives credit to forward-looking officers in both the War and Navy Departments.

Yet affairs among the services were not harmonious after the Hawaiian maneuvers. It was obvious to all participants that more had to be done to achieve cooperation on the strategic and operational levels in defense of Oahu. Indeed,

after the maneuvers and fleet exercises in the late 1920s and early 1930s it was apparent that the lessons of 1925 had been all but forgotten. It was only because of personal persistence and institutional necessity that a working relationship could be achieved at all as the Nation drifted towards war in the late 1930s. **JFQ**

NOTES

¹ W.S. Pye, "Joint Army and Navy Operations—Part 1," *U.S. Naval Institute Proceedings*, vol. 50, no. 12 (December 1924), p. 1963.

² *Ibid.*, p. 1964.

³ William Reynolds Braisted, *The U.S. Navy in the Pacific, 1909–1922* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1971), p. 482.

⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 207–08.

⁵ See Robert G. Kaufman, *Arms Control During the Pre-Nuclear Era: The United States and the Naval Limitation Between the Two World Wars* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990).

⁶ J.E. Kaufman and H.W. Kaufman, *The Sleeping Giant: American Armed Forces Between the Wars* (New York: Praeger Publishing Company, 1996), p. 41.

⁷ Kenneth W. Condit and Edwin T. Turnbladh, *Hold High the Torch: A History of the 4th Marines* (Nashville: Battery Press, 1989), p. 105.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 106; Clifford, *Progress and Purpose*, p. 35; Millett, *Semper Fidelis*, p. 327.

⁹ Braisted, *The U.S. Navy in the Pacific*, pp. 42–43.

¹⁰ Dion Williams, "Blue Marine Expeditionary Force: Joint Army and Navy Exercises, 1925," *Marine Corps Gazette*, vol. 10, no. 2 (September 1925), p. 87.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 88.

¹² See Holland M. Smith, *Coral and Brass*, 3rd ed. (Quantico, Va.: Marine Corps University, 1989), pp. 55–63. One of the more controversial memoirs of World War II, it is biased and displays the same controversies that characterized Smith's tenure as V Amphibious commander in the Central Pacific during 1943–45.

¹³ Kaufman and Kaufman, *The Sleeping Giant*, p. 42.