
The Round Tablette

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Welcome to the second March meeting of the Dr. Harold C. Deutsch World War II History Round Table. Tonight's speaker is Professor Mark T. Calhoun from the United States Army School of Advanced Military Studies. He will discuss the little known contributions of a true World War II hero and native Minnesotan, who transformed the fledgling US fighting force to a victorious mechanized army.

Historians are often called upon to also be detectives if a historical figure does not leave neatly accessible files, diaries, and correspondence. This was the case of General Lesley McNair, whose personal papers were presumably destroyed by his grieving wife after his death. By digging through different archives new light has been shed on the life of McNair who was known as one of "Marshall's forgotten men."

Born in Verndale, Minnesota, McNair lived there until he turned 14. The family moved to Minneapolis so the children could go to high school, McNair graduated from South High in 1897. While waiting to start at the US Naval Academy, McNair attended and graduated the Minnesota School of Business in Minneapolis, studying mechanical engineering, woodworking, bookkeeping, and statistics. He grew frustrated with waiting for the Naval Academy and instead applied to the US Military Academy at West Point and was accepted immediately and graduated in 1904.

McNair began his career in the artillery branch of the Army but his earlier studies in mechanical engineering and statistics also made him valuable in the Ordnance Department. Throughout his career McNair alternated between various staff positions in artillery, logistics, and ordnance. During the World War I, McNair was part of the 1st Division and was in charge of pre-deployment training. When the 1st Division deployed to France McNair was on the American Expeditionary Forces command staff in charge of artillery training and tactics. He impressed his superiors so much that at age 35 he became a brigadier general, the youngest at the time. En

route to France on a transport ship, he bunked with and formed a lifelong friendship with George C. Marshall.

After the war, McNair was reduced to the peace-time rank of major and like many in the military at the time went from post to post. He continued his military education at Fort Leavenworth and then later at the Army War College (1928-29), was posted in Hawaii (1921-24) and reviewed the Army's War Plan Orange, and worked on coastal artillery plans, and served as a ROTC professor at Purdue University (1924-28). In 1934-35, he commanded District E of the Civilian Conservation Corps at Camp Beauregard, LA and gained practical experience at inducting, housing, feeding, organizing, training, and directing thousands of men. In 1935, he became executive officer for the Army's Chief of Field Artillery and was promoted brigadier general in January of 1937. He served as commander of the 2nd FA Brigade 1937-1939, and then became commandant of the Command and General Staff College before becoming a major general and chief of staff of the General Headquarters, US Army, 1940-1942.

After America entered World War II, McNair, in March 1942, became a Lieutenant General and commanded the Army Ground forces; he was in charge of organization, training, and preparation of combat troops for overseas service. However, because of the urgent need for troops overseas much of the basic training had to be abbreviated and McNair was roundly criticized for this, even though an infantryman is never fully trained until they engage the enemy.

During Operation COBRA, on July 25th, 1944, McNair was at the front, near St. Lô, France, to observe the troops in action to better determine training needs. Aerial support had been called in to break through the German lines, and an American bomb landed on McNair, who was in a front line trench.

Twelve days later, McNair's only son, Colonel Doug McNair was killed by a sniper on Guam. It was then that legend had it that his wife burned all his papers, but she did not. McNair's papers were sent to the National Archives, and much like McNair himself passed into history. McNair was one of four

If you are a veteran, or know a veteran, of one of these campaigns – contact Don Patton at cell 612-867-5144 or coldpatton@yahoo.com

lieutenant generals to be killed in the war. He and LTG Simon Buckner were posthumously promoted general (4 stars) in 1954.

Having spent most of his career as staff officer, McNair did not shine in the spotlight of history like a George Patton, or Omar Bradley, but without his organizational and training skills the Army would not have been as effective for those in the headlines.

FURTHER READINGS:

Mark T. Calhoun, *General Lesley J. McNair: Unsung Architect of the US Army* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2015).

Peter R. Mansoor, *The GI Offensive in Europe: The Triumph of American Infantry Divisions, 1941-1945* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1999).

Williamson Murray and Allan R. Millett, *A War to be Won: Fighting the Second World War* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap, Press, 2000).

Edward G. Miller, *Nothing Less Than Full Victory: Americans at War in Europe, 1944-1945* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2007).

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).

Announcements:

Twin Cities Civil War Round Table - 16 May 2017 – “Overrun with Free Negroes” Reconstruction & Resettlement - www.tccwrt.com - info@tccwrt.com

St Croix Valley Civil War Round Table - 27 Mar. 2017 – *Hughes of Hudsons in 4th Wisconsin* - 715-386-1268 - rossandhaines@comcast.net

Cannon Valley CWRT - 20 Apr. 2017 – *Embalming in CW* – dnl1.peterson@gmail.com

Fort Snelling Civil War Symposium - 8 April 2017 - info@tccwrt.com

Minnesota Military Museum, Camp Ripley, 15000 Hwy 115, Little Falls, MN 56345, 320-616-6050, <http://www.mnmilitarymuseum.org/>

Minnesota Air Guard Museum - www.mnang-museum.org 612-713-2523

World Without Genocide, 651-695-7621, <http://www.worldwithoutgenocide.org/>

Fagen Fighters WWII Museum, Granite Falls, MN, 320-564-6644, <http://www.fagenfighter-swwiimuseum.org>.

Airshow - Eden Prairie - 15-16 July 2017 www.wotn.org 952-746-6100

Military History Book Club, Har Mar Barnes & Noble: - Zetter, *Stuxnet and Cyberwar* - 19 Apr. - sdaubenspeck52@gmail.com

Honor Flight - Jerry Kyser - crazyjerry45@hotmail.com - 651-338-2717

See our programs on YouTube at <http://youtube.com/ww2hrt>

CAF - Commemorative Air Force - www.cafm-n.org 651-455-6942
Friends of Ft. Snelling, www.fortsnelling.org

We need volunteers to drive our veterans to and from meetings. Please contact Don Patton at cell 612-867-5144 or coldpatton@yahoo.com

Round Table Schedule 2017

13 Apr Last Mission of the 93rd Bomb Group
6 PM Pre-session on *Last Stand at Khe Sanh*
11 May Corps Commanders of the Battle of Bulge



MG Omar Bradley explains maneuvers to LTG Lesley McNair during Third US ARMY Maneuvers in Louisiana (1942?) *Library of Congress*



BG Dwight D Eisenhower and LTG Lesley J. McNair in a Willys Jeep (?)



LTG McNair being greeted upon arrival in Washington DC, after being wounded in North Africa while inspecting troops in the front lines. *Joint Force Quarterly 84* (2017).