Switzerland's mountain barriers against aggression

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SWITZERLAND'S MOUNTAIN BARRIERS AGAINST AGGRESSION.

(This is the larger part of an article which has appeared in the "Sheffield Telegraph" and other provincial dailies and is contributed by Mr. Herbert Kell from Basle who is stated to specialise in military questions.)

Is Switzerland in a position to resist if Germany attempts to force a way through her in order to fall on the Allied flank?

Can this tiny country of 4,200,000 souls stand against the 20-fold numerical superiority of Germany?

These are questions which are uppermost in the minds of all European military and Government authorities.

Switzerland may have a small population, but the fates have endowed her with a formidable natural defence.

Three-quarters of the country consists of mountains rising to above 12,000 feet.

Mountains bar the way from Austria into Eastern Switzerland, and in the West the Jura — a mountain chain nearly 200 miles long and rising to 5,500 feet — bars the way to a French invasion.

The Alps constitute a natural base for a flank operation on an invasion from the north.

There are no fewer than ten lines of defence throughout the country, beginning at Lake Constance in the north-east and running through a network of natural and fortified obstacles to the mighty Jura in the West.

A German army invading Switzerland in the region of Constance would be faced between the south bank of the lake and the curve of the Rhine with the first organised Swiss line of defence, where mountains and forests form an obstacle which would enable the Swiss to hold up the offensive at the very frontier.

The farther to the south the offensive came, whether through violation of the Principality of Liechtenstein or across the former Austrian frontier, the higher would be the mountain barrier and the more difficult a flank drive against Switzerland.

If the enemy did penetrate, the greater their advance into the country the more insurmountable would be the difficulties in their way, until they finally encountered the strongest defensive barrier of all — the line from the Linth to the mouth of the Aar.

In its upper reaches from the Glarus Alps this line would compel the aggressor to undertake the most difficult campaign of all — in the High Alps — as far as the Lake of Zurich, which constitutes an impassable obstacle 15 miles long.

This natural line, which covers the rear of the Swiss Army, would permit of the concentration of practically the whole of the Swiss forces in the short sector extending from Zurich and Baden to the bridgehead of Coblenz-Waldshut, where the Aar flows into the Rhine.

The possibility of concentrating 10 Swiss soldiers per yard in this sector would make the wrecking of this barrier improbable, even in a long war.

The next natural line of defence, following the gorge of the Reuss to where it ends in the Aar, is just as solid.

Running due north from the 10,000-foot-high mountain system of the St. Gotthard, this traditional key-position and centre of Switzerland's defensive organisation has been transformed into a fort which could resist for years.

Subterranean casemates cut deep into the rock and protected by rock walls 6,000 feet thick are impervious to air or artillery bombardment.

The fort has its own power stations, waterworks, enormous stocks of victuals and ammunition, and automatically operated batteries. It could not be stormed by a frontal attack.

Further west, the enemy would encounter mountain labyrinths which are unchartered regions to anyone not knowing the country.

A mountain gradient of 45 degrees would be a dangerous undertaking for the German troops, who are trained to cope with gradients of barely 30 degrees, while the atmospheric conditions of Switzerland would make the crossing a very dangerous business.

Even if the enemy succeeded in passing through all these lines, they would still have other defences to face — the Aar line, the line beginning at Grand Eau and following the Saane and the Sarine, which is the last important defensive system of Western Switzerland, and the Bienne - Neuchâtel - Thiale line, which

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The restrictions imposed on the posting to neutral countries of all printed matter (including Xmas cards) prevent individuals from forwarding same in the ordinary way. This can only be undertaken by firms holding a licence from the Postal Censor.

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constitutes, with the Jura, the last great line of defence against and towards France.

Even the route from Switzerland to France with its tortuous vinyards and valleys would offer the defender numerous opportunities to control the roads from Geneva to St. Cergue.

Mountains alone would be sufficient to delay an advance. The roads could not be used by mass formations — in some regions they could not be used at all for military purposes. The mountains canalise movement.

The sole arm which could pass these natural barriers is the infantry. But here the decisive factor would be the better mountaineer. The Swiss is a climber from his childhood. He is early trained to know his country. He must also pass a difficult apprenticeship in marching and climbing.

Only when hardened by long marches in heat, mist, and snow does the young Swiss receive permission to attack the mountains. But marching and climbing are not enough; he must be able to live day and night on the mountains, sometimes for many months, to suffer from heat, hunger, and thirst, to endure cold and snow. Trenches must be dug and shelters built under the ice.

Modern arms have changed nothing in this situation. The use of the modern mechanised army is extremely difficult in the mountains, and the great tactical advantage of a rapid advance is eliminated.

SWISS MINISTER'S RETIREMENT.

I feel sure that every good Swiss who wishes to pay homage to our esteemed Minister, M. C. R. Paravicini, after his twenty years of arduous work for us Swiss, has now made up his mind to participate at the dinner which is taking place at the Monico on Friday next, the 15th December, at 6 o'clock for 6.30 p.m.

Applications are coming in fast, and I am afraid that the "house-full" notice must definitely go up during the week-end. No seats therefore can be guaranteed if the applications are not in my hands by Monday morning at the latest.

Will you please make sure that you have booked your ticket, and also make sure that all those of your friends who you feel wish to attend have ordered theirs.

A quantity of the tickets have already been sent out, and the balance will be sent out on Monday. Subscriptions towards the donation — maximum 2/6d. — can be received until Thursday next.

It is the earnest hope of the Organizing Committee that every Swiss in Great Britain will participate in this, and particularly those who are unable to attend the dinner. Now please fill up your forms to-day, and post them *now*, and if you have no form just drop me a note enclosing your subscription, and the amount of the dinner tickets (7/6d. each) also giving me your wishes as far as seating is concerned. These will as far as possible be complied with.

WILL YOU PLEASE WRITE NOW.

H. Bingguely, Organizing Secretary,
Bulle House,
187a, Tottenham Court Rd., W.1.

THE LAND OF THE STORK.

(*Translation by J. J. S.*)

A traveller lost his way in a remote valley, where he heard no other sound but croaking of frogs; he could not go any further as everywhere round him was swamp. But before retracing his steps he asked a frog, why everything about here was croaking. The frog replied "Our happy land like no other is organised to the furthest corner for our king." "And who is then your King?" asked the stranger. "The stork," replied the frog.

Heinrich Pestalozzi 1746-1827.

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