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France: Its National Defense

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come a great climatic change. The region is so low and is nestled down between such elevated mountain chains that it is very warm and also very dry, but it is slowly being filled up by the wash from the sides; and the time can not be far away, physiographically speaking, when Death Valley shall not be below sea level, but perhaps many feet above. As this grading-up process advances, the extreme heat will be reduced and a valley trench leading out may be established, so that the saltiness can be reduced and then possibly some agricultural use can be made of the place.

Its chief interest today centers in the fact that its floor lies farther below sea level than any other ground in America. But aside from this fact, Death Valley can be duplicated by scores of valleys, perhaps equally large and equally interesting, throughout the Great Basin.

FRANCE: ITS NATIONAL DEFENSE*

By Onesime Reclus

Translated by Dr. A. N. Winchell, University of Wisconsin

THE situation of Europe requires that France should be strong, neither attacking nor provoking any country. She has no one to fear. In order to carry out this program, she counts on the valor of her army and navy and on the strength of her frontiers. Secondarily, she counts on her allies and her friendships.

In spite of the variations in sentiment and interests which sometimes unite the powers and sometimes arm them against one another, the national defense need not consider all the possibilities of conflict nor be prepared for defections. At the present time France is supported by the Russian Alliance and the English friendship, and directs her efforts against the strongest and most dangerous power of the Germanic-Italic-Austrian Alliance—the German Empire. Assuming the conflict between the forces of the Triple Alliance and those of the Triple Entente, we should have to contend with not only the German active army of 876,000 men, but the 300,000 men of the active Italian army, and the 400,000 men of the active Austrian army. On our side we could count upon the 1,470,000 of the active army of Russia, but upon those only, because it is not probable that England, if it was brought into the conflict, would consent to divert its army of 425,000 men against Holstein or Hanover or even Flanders (in case Germany should violate the neutrality of Belgium) and create there a diversion. With its fleet it may be able to do more or less; its superiority, still undisputed, over anyone of the European fleets would assure us freedom on the seas.

After 1870, French strategy had at first no other objective than the protection of its territory against a new invasion of Germans, and to accomplish this used only the one method of the construction of lines of forts between

*From an article by Onesime Reclus published in the "*Atlas de la Plus Grande France*," a short time before the present European War.

the northeastern frontier and the French capital, blocking the road to Paris. The adhesion of Italy to the Triple Alliance, the monopoly of Luxemburg by Germany, and the fear of the violation of the neutrality of Belgium and of Switzerland, have forced us to fortify our frontiers from Dunkirk all the way to the Mediterranean Sea. In the meantime military strategy has undergone some evolution. It has conserved the lines of fortification, but, counting more on the movements of the army, it has directed its efforts toward the construction of entrenched camps suitable to furnish strong bases of operations. At the same time it has multiplied railroad lines with vast terminals destined to concentrate rapidly large bodies of troops at points to be protected or attacked. From this conception an army organization results which may be described in general as follows:

THE FRENCH SYSTEM OF DEFENSES

In the fortified towns near the frontiers permanent garrisons are established destined to receive or to give the first blows of the war. On the frontier itself fortifications guard the principal railroads. Back of this region, on what one may call the military frontier, entrenched camps are connected by lines of fortifications and separated by intervals where the natural topography limits the field of action of the enemy. Here and there are several series of new entrenched camps. Still farther from the frontier are the great central points of our national defense, Paris and Lyons. Four army corps form the garrison of the northeastern frontier. They are on war footing and can enter upon a campaign a few hours after a declaration of war.

The natural configuration of France apparently determines four possible zones of military operations. 1. Lorraine, Champagne, Burgundy and Breese. 2. Artois, Flanders and Piccardy. 3. The valley of the Rhone and Provence. 4. Guyenne and Gascoygne. Here again the present conditions of foreign politics intervenes. They permit us, in view of our relations with Spain and also in view of the formidable barrier of the Pyrenees Mountains, to neglect this fourth zone and to concentrate our attention on the three others, which are in more or less direct contact with Germany and Italy. The first and the third, those of the northeast and of the southeast, are protected in whole or in part by mountains, rivers, hills and forests, and have received from military engineers additional fortifications at strategic points. The second, to the north, is destitute of natural fortification and must be fortified artificially.

On the northeast frontier, which is protected by the Jura Mountains, the Vosges Mountains, the Meuse River and its tributaries, the Meurthe and the Moselle, and secondarily by the Saone and the Marne, military genius has completed the works of nature by fortifying the exposed points. The Alpine frontier, naturally more easy to defend in spite of the relatively easy crossing of its passes, is fortified at numerous points, and secondarily by the great entrenched camps of Lyons and Toulon. The northern frontier is left open to the enemy by nature. The neutrality of Belgium, which covers it from a point northwest of German Lorraine to the north sea, should be sufficient to

protect it; but, in fact, no one believes that neutrality is a sufficient protection, not even the Belgians, who have multiplied on the Meuse defensive works and have strongly fortified Liege, Namur and Antwerp. All of the forts made by Belgium to repel invasion are so much added to the defense of France. Assuming an invasion which, crossing Belgium would try to penetrate our country, our armies would find it necessary to engage in battle immediately. They would be supported by the fortified points of Dunkirk, Lille, Maubeuge, Charlemont, and secondarily by Fere, Laon and Rheims.

If all the lines of defense of the frontier were broken, Morvan and the central plateau would see the final supreme efforts of national resistance.

If we consider the extreme difficulty of invading France through the Alps or the Jura Mountains, the considerable difficulty of army operations in the Vosges Mountains or in the Ardenne covered by forests and swamps, and if we consider on the other hand the natural battle fields formed by Lorraine and the Palatinate, the fields of the Moselle, the Meuse and the Sarre, or the vast plain of Flanders, we must conclude that the probable theatre of future hostilities is in these latter regions. Here also a neutrality intervenes—that of Luxemburg. But through its railroads the country is already in German control, and military strategists count so little upon the neutrality of Luxemburg that they accord to the adjacent plains of the Woevre the sad and glorious privilege of supporting the first shock of the war.

THE DEFENSE OF THE NORTHEAST FRONTIER

The French frontier between Longwy and Belfort is divided into three parts which are distinguished by the nature of the country and the strength of the fortifications. The first part between Longwy and Nancy includes the plains of Woevre. The second, extending to Donon, faces the gap of Charmes. The third extends along the Vosges Mountains from Donon to Ballon.

The Woevre, a large plain whose valleys and roads give access to the Meuse and the important railroad which follows its course, is open to invasion. * * * We may readily suppose that the invading army will attack by preference on the plains of Woevre. Furthermore the formidable way in which the German troops are massed on the front near Metz ready for the attack on the plains of Woevre is the principal but not the only point of danger along the northeast frontier. Before 1870, and even after that date, Moltke made of it the invariable plan of a war against France. The former Marshall, military writers, and officers discussed the plan, noted its inadequacy and supported it by a complimentary movement, a flanking movement through the gap of Stenay and a simultaneous more widely flanking movement through Belgium. They showed the advantage of attacking the French forces in front and on the flank at the same time, and also the difficulty of attacking our forces on a front too narrow to enable the Germans to profit by their numerical superiority.

The neutrality of Belgium is of little weight, but will the Germans expose themselves by violating it to a new enemy whose forces are not to be dis-

dained? Will they have recourse to a flanking movement by the gap of Stenay together with the direct attack, or taking lessons from the last wars and recognizing the necessity of renewing an attack with fresh troops and having recourse to troops arranged deeply on Enechelon, will they revert to the plan of Moltke and adopt only the direct attack? That is the secret of tomorrow.

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Reclus goes on to describe the disposition of the various parts of the German army on the three assumptions of (1) A direct attack on the plains of Woivre. (2) A direct attack together with a flanking movement through the gap of Stenay. (3) A direct attack together with an attack through the gap of Stenay and a wide flanking movement through Belgium. Finally he argues that both preparations in Switzerland and railroad construction in Germany make a flanking attack through Switzerland very improbable.

Translator's Note: It is an interesting fact that the Germans in the present war have respected the neutrality of Switzerland, and have violated the neutrality of Belgium, as predicted by Reclus. They have adopted the third one of the modes of attack described by him, because it was the plan which enabled them to make full use of their numerical superiority in men. As suggested by Reclus this violation of Belgian neutrality has resulted also in bringing England into the war, not only with her powerful navy, but also, contrary to his prediction, with a formidable army.

THE PRESENT STATUS OF HIGH SCHOOL PHYSICAL GEOGRAPHY

IN the April *School Science and Mathematics*, Mr. Charles E. Peet of Lewis Institute, Chicago, publishes the first installment of the report of his committee's investigation of Physical Geography. He says:

"The impression has been abroad for some time that high school physiography is on the decline, that it has failed to make good and is either being displaced by other subjects or the course is being shortened to make place for other subjects. Your committee was appointed to ascertain the facts. The first effort of the committee was to learn how many schools have dropped the physiography in the last few years. Correspondence with the State Superintendents of Public Instruction of Iowa, Minnesota, Wisconsin, Michigan, Illinois and Indiana, brought out the fact, that with one exception, there are no statistics in their possession bearing on this point. From the Minnesota superintendent we learn that the number of high schools in that state offering physiography have been practically constant in the last four years. Without taking a census of the high schools by mail, we have seen no way of getting the complete facts. In Iowa, Miss Alison E. Aitchison, a member of this committee, examined the entrance credentials filed by 473 students, representing more than 250 Iowa high schools and found that only 32 did not present physiography as an entrance credit. It is the opinion of one of the geologists of