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A CITADEL OF NEUTRALITY

THE SWISS CITIZEN ARMY

I.—FROM THE PERIOD OF THE PIKE

From Our Military Correspondent

Recent events have awakened a new interest in the Swiss Army and the Swiss military situation. The rearmament race and the accompanying tension of international relations have inevitably affected all small countries in the danger area, and called into question their capacity to maintain their neutrality inviolate, while the building of the Maginot line along the French frontier has conjured up the picture of a fresh detour through a neighbouring country to avoid the barrier.

The development of mechanization, with its great extension of the range of movements, has strategically reduced the margin which separates an invader from potential objectives of importance. It has thus suggested that, to a mechanized invading force, a circuit through Swiss territory might no longer be so slow to affect the situation as it would have been in 1914-18. There is also the possibility, if an inroad succeeded, of air bases being established on that flank from which



an attack could be delivered against various industrial centres in France, at present securely remote. From a British point of view, any renewed contemplation of intervention on the Continent must now consider the defences of Switzerland as well as of Belgium, because of the possible reaction on steps we might take. Beyond all these contingencies some measure of public interest here has been directed to the Swiss Army by the suggestion from certain quarters that this country might adopt the Swiss military system of short-time compulsory service at least for the recruitment of its Second Line forces. To gain some light on all these questions I took a recent opportunity of examining them on the spot while on a visit to Switzerland.

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II.—MOUNTAINS AND MOBILITY

NEW MILITIA PLAN FOR SWITZERLAND

From Our Military Correspondent

The danger to a country in Switzerland's situation arises less from direct hostility than from the possibility of a clash between her large neighbours, and the attempt by one of them to use her territory as an avenue of approach to the other. In examining a defence problem of this kind it is necessary to take account, if only from a technical point of view, of the countries whose geographical location provides the strategic hypothesis.

Intent on the maintenance of their neutrality, the Swiss are properly concerned with the possibility of a French as well as a German attempt to use their territory for a turning movement. Leaving aside the political doubts, the former is much the less likely on military grounds. The conquest of Switzerland would still leave it faced with the Rhine, and beyond that the Black Forest; no important objectives in German territory would be within reach even when the frontier was gained. There is a better case comparatively for a German attempt, as the penetration of the French frontier would bring an invader into the wide basin of the Saône; it would turn the mountain barrier of the Vosges and the main fortified line; alternatively, it would threaten Lyons and the main communications with Provence and the Mediterranean. The prospects of any such strategic flank move would depend first, however, on its success in overcoming the resistance which the Swiss could offer in defence of their territory. What are the chances?

THREE FACTORS

Any estimate must take account of three principal factors: the nature of the country to be traversed, the normal superiority of the defensive under modern conditions of warfare, and the readiness of the Swiss forces at the moment such a stroke was delivered. The first is unalterable; the second shows little sign of being modified by recent developments in armament, so that the chances of the attack depend more than ever on the possibility of surprise; the third can be improved, to the reduction of an invader's chances of surprise. I have motored the whole length of the Rhine frontier from Lake Constance to Basle, and over much of the hill country behind it, as well as a large part of the Jura frontier between Basle and Geneva. On the map the former sector may look a lesser obstacle, but closely examined its difficulties become formidable. While the belt of hills south of the Rhine are not high—only at a few points rising more than a thousand feet above