

cuesta is the dissected edge of the Lorraine Plateau which Germany owned before 1914. This time there is a big difference because France sits on the edge of the Lorraine Plateau—which means one more obstacle for German attackers to cross. Now, in addition to the cuestas, the Paris Basin is defended by the man-made Maginot Line, which extends not only along the Rhine, but the full length of the Belgian border to the sea.

Like spokes extending beyond the rims of the Paris Basin are its military gateways. From the Paris Basin: (1) the Belfort gap leads to the upper Rhine; (2) the Lorraine Gateway—a gap between the Vosges and the Slate Mountains—to the so-called Rhine Graben; (3) the Flanders Plain opens to the Netherlands and North Germany. Armies have poured through all these gateways in both directions. And sometimes Paris has fallen, as in the Franco-Prussian War of 1870. Generally speaking, the advantages of fighting in the Paris Basin lie with the defence.

In 1914 the Germans outflanked the obstructive cuestas by slipping into the Paris Basin from the Flanders Plain, where the stony outcroppings tend to disappear. This Flanders Plain is an extension of the Baltic Plain that runs all the way from the North Sea to Russia. There Winston Churchill's great ancestor, the first Duke of Marlborough, won his victories of Ramillies (1706) and Malplaquet (1709). There the French, under the great Marshal Saxe, defeated the British and the Dutch at Fontenoy in 1745. There Waterloo was fought and Napoleon finally defeated in 1815. The Flanders Plain is protected to the East by the Belgian hills and fortresses of Liege and Namur. It is protected to the north-east by Belgium's new Albert Canal, built as much

This article is a summary of one that appeared in "Time." By special permission of that magazine we print on Pages 28 and 29 a map illustrating the points raised in this article.

for defence as for commerce, and beyond that by low-lying Dutch country that can be flooded if necessary. But even with fortresses and canals and emergency breaches in the dikes, the Flanders Plain offers the least difficult road to Paris and the French channel ports. It is a road that should be captured in summer. Flanders mud is a potent delay during the sloppy months of the West European winter.

Bloody Plains

Germany contains two major theatres of war, although for more than a hundred years no big war has been fought on German soil. In 1914 this was due to German possession of Alsace and Lorraine, which kept the French from pouring through the Lorraine Gateway and the Belfort gap. In 1870, when the French owned the border provinces, the stupidity of Marshal Bazaine, who shut himself up in the fortress of Metz and refused to stir, deprived France of the opportunity to push into the South German Basin.

General Gamelin knows all about Bazaine's blunder and he knows also the history of the first Napoleon, who never made such mistakes. Napoleon frequently carried his eagles through the Black Forest into Southern Germany. Ulm, Ratisbon and Hohenlinden in the South German Basin were all sites of Napoleonic victories against the various coalitions of Austria, Russia and England. A few miles from Ulm, at Blenheim, the Duke of Marlborough won his "famous victory" in 1704—the victory over the French that so nonplussed the grandfather of Little Peterkin in Robert Southey's poem. To prevent a new war from being carried into the South German Basin or to the western end of the Baltic Plain the Nazis have built the Siegfried—or Limes—line. At its vital segment (between the Lorraine Gateway and Luxemburg) where the French might penetrate into the German concentration areas on the Rhine, this "line" is not a mere chain of forts, but a network organised in depth.



IN 1815 Flanders was the easiest—and the muddiest—road to Paris for the eastern armies of the Coalition, hastening to the assistance of Wellington at Waterloo

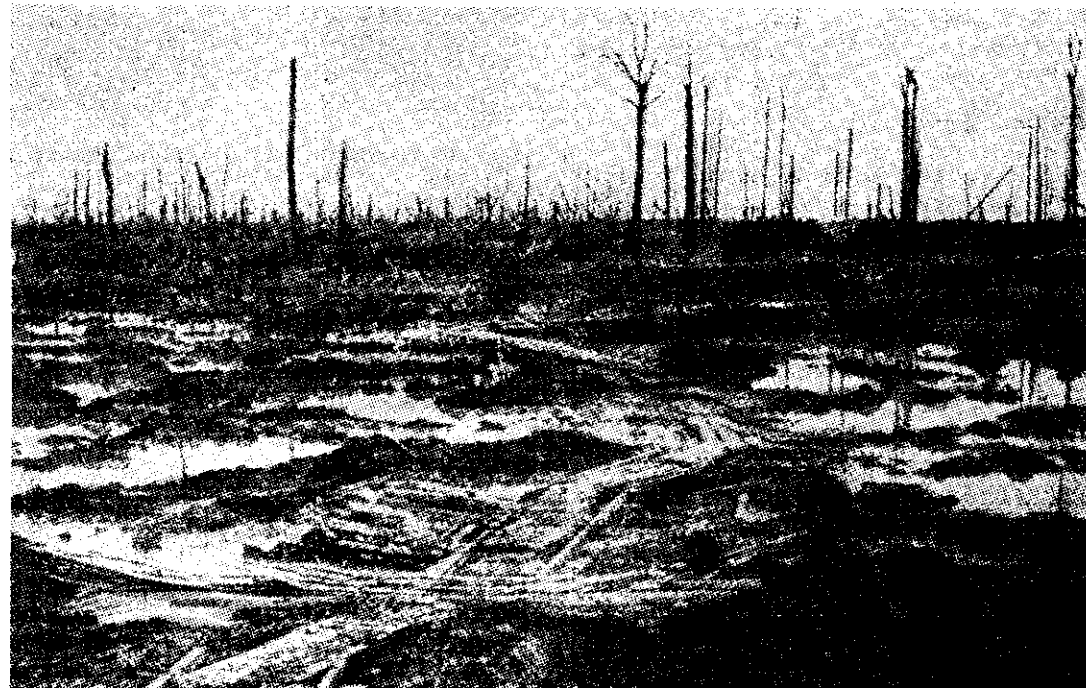
Opposite the corner of the South German Basin which is entered by the Belfort gap lies the Moravian Gateway (where Napoleon fought Austerlitz in 1805), and the Moravian Gate leads to the Baltic Plain, to Breslau, Warsaw and Danzig (which Napoleon entered in 1807).

The Balkan Swirl

South of the Carpathians, Germany and her opponents face another geography. Four centuries ago when the Turk was rampant in south-eastern Europe, he scared the life out of Christendom by pushing north-west, up the few narrow lowland channels through the mountains of the Balkans to the Hungarian Plain and the walls of Vienna itself. In World War I the Allies hoped to emulate the Turk but failed at the start in failing to force the Dardanelles. Lacking support from British and French troops, the

Serbians and Rumanians found themselves penned up between the German and the Austro-Hungarians on one side and Bulgarians and Turks on the other. The Germans, under Falkenhayn and Mackensen, had little difficulty in storming the passes in the Transylvanian Alps and the Iron Gate to over-run Rumania. They might try it again.

Strategically, the Allies are better fixed for World War II. With Turkey, Rumania and Greece on the Allied side, expeditions could be sent against a German-Hungarian alliance through the Vardar River valley from Salonika, along the so-called Diagonal Furrow that reaches from Istanbul through Bulgaria to Belgrade, up the valley of the lower Danube from Rumania, and over the passes of the Transylvanian Alps, which are a southerly extension of the Carpathians. All this could be done provided the Allies are sure of Italy.



IN 1915, Flanders was still the muddiest road to Paris, but the Allies barred it effectively against the westering armies of an earlier Reich, to the watch-word of "Ils ne passeront pas!"