

IF SWEDEN WERE ATTACKED A Survey of Her Military Strength

WHAT of Sweden? Now that the Allies have withdrawn from Southern Norway, that question must naturally arise, for the long Norwegian-Swedish frontier contains no forts except natural ones of mountain pass and deep lake. For years man-made forts guarded that long frontier, but in recent years, by agreement between the two countries, they have been demolished.

In the light of recent events in Norway, people are asking: How long could Sweden defend herself? This article, in the War Weekly, gives some facts about the country and its defences.

Sweden, sandwiched between Germany in the south and Russia in the north and east, is in a dangerous situation, but she considers her military position by no means hopeless.

In many respects, her defences and terrain correspond to those of her neighbour, Finland. Sweden has her "Mannerheim Line" in the south, although she does not call it by that name. In the north, she has her hills, bleak expanses and marshes which present difficulties to an invader.

Further, Sweden is almost self-sufficient, even in the matter of oil. At Kinneulle, in Central Sweden, is an oilfield upon which Sweden relies to provide the larger part of her military requirements in the event of outside supplies being cut.

Sweden has two main dangers to envisage. A landing on her southern or south-eastern coast in the event of German aggression, or an attack in the north from Russia, in those provinces loosely grouped under the name of Norrland.

Norrland is vulnerable from the Finnish frontier or from the coast of the Gulf of Bothnia.

In winter, the Gulf of Bothnia is frozen, rendering naval operations by a hostile Power impossible. Attempts to effect a landing on the Swedish coast without naval support would be extremely hazardous for the invader, as powerful coastal batteries are installed at Hemso (near Harnosand), and other vital points, notably opposite the Aaland Islands.

An invader from the direction of Finland would have first to overcome the fortress of Boden and the defensive lines around it. Boden, the gun emplacements of which harmonise with the solid rock in which they are sunk, and whose green-painted guns are scarcely distinguishable amid the pine-covered mountain slopes, is one of the most jealously-guarded and powerful fortresses in Europe. It is rightly called "The Gibraltar of the North." Even the commander of the fortifications has to identify himself when entering and leaving the zone, but there have been many cases of espionage.

Norrland is garrisoned from an Army Corps stationed at Östersund, but Boden, which guards the great iron ore district around Lulea, has its special fortress troops and artillery regiments.

Norrland, even without its man-made

defences, would present very great natural obstacles to invasion, and in winter warfare, Sweden's soldiers, who are all trained in the use of skis, would have great superiority in mobility over an invader.

Invasion From the South

Sweden has a second Army Corps stationed at Stockholm, which is also defended by heavy coastal batteries at Vaxholm and other points. Air attack is the chief danger envisaged for Stockholm in the event of war.

South of Stockholm is the richest part of Sweden, an area of well-to-do farmers, fine homesteads, intensive agriculture and fine ports, including Gothenburg, through which £75,000,000 worth of Swedish butter, iron, eggs, steel and other products pass annually to all parts of the world.

To protect this territory, Sweden has two Army Corps and an excellent line of artificial and natural defences. The Army Corps are stationed at Skofde on the main Gothenburg-Stockholm railway and Christianstad respectively. To the Army Corps at Christianstad is assigned the defence of Scania. Sweden's most southerly territory. Skofde supplies the troops of Sweden's "Maginot Line," running approximately from Halmstad in the Kattegat to Kalmar on the Baltic.

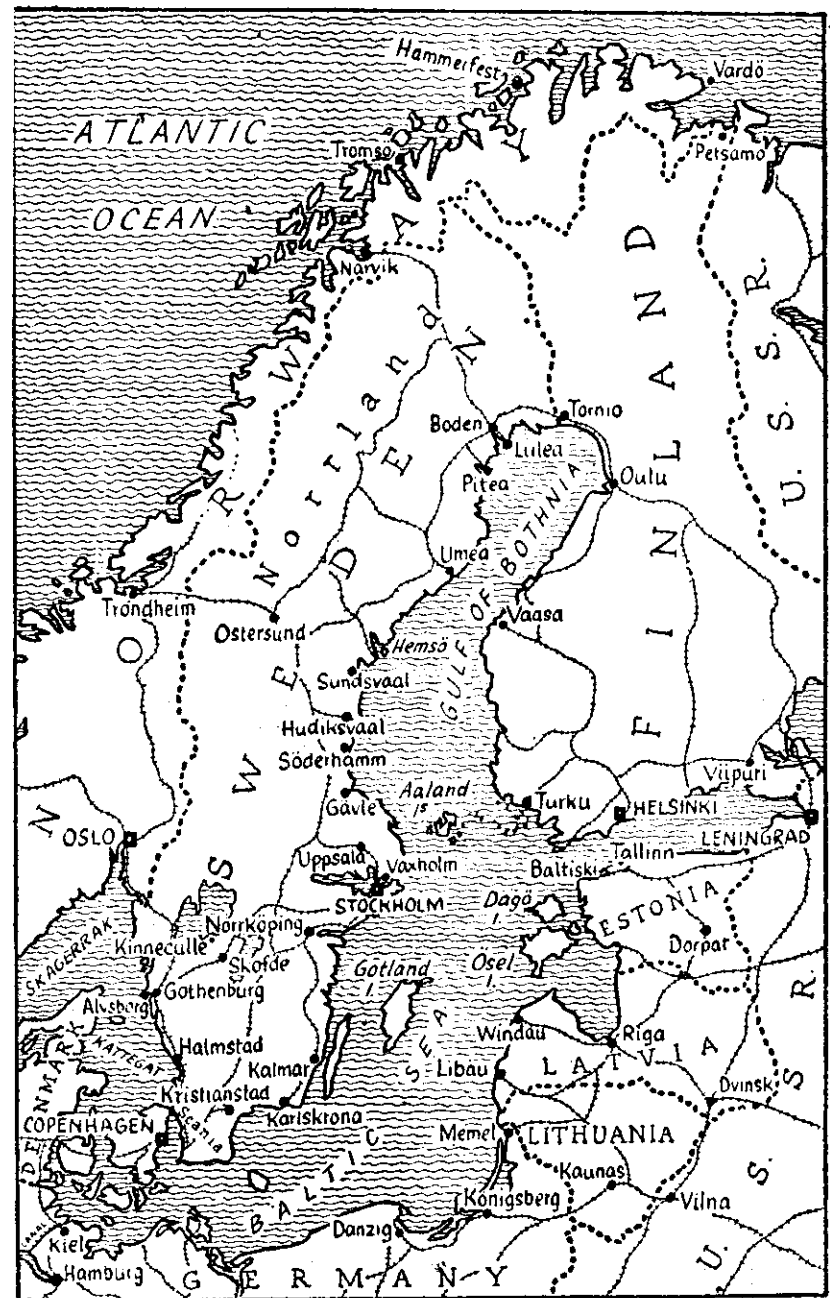
At one time, indeed, the Swedish Higher Command envisaged the abandonment of territory south of this line, owing to the lack of natural obstacles to an invader. But recent additions to Sweden's coastal defences, notably on the Island of Gotland, at Karlskrona and Alvsborg (outside Gothenburg), lend support to the belief that Sweden, in the event of invasion from the south, would make her first strenuous stand on the coast itself.

Most of Sweden's coastal guns are of a calibre and range sufficient to keep the most modern warships of a likely aggressor at a respectful distance. Sweden's coastal artillery is attached to the navy, and special importance is given to the defence of the Island of Gotland, the capture of which by an enemy would bring most of Sweden's great towns, including Stockholm, within half an hour's flying of hostile bombers.

An Extension of Conflict

The defences of Gotland were the first to be put in a state of preparedness when Russia's invasion of Finland opened up possibilities of an extension of the area of conflict.

Sweden's navy is small but efficient. It is based on three main harbours, Karlskrona, Stockholm and Gothenburg. The largest guns in her navy are of 8.3-inch calibre, mounted on four 3415-ton coast defence ships, built at the beginning of this century. The most modern of her ten coast defence ships is the 4775 tons cruiser Gotland, built in 1933, which has six 6-inch guns. In addition, the navy has a number of useful auxiliary craft, including 14 destroyers and an equal number of submarines.



THIS MAP of Sweden shows her principal strategic centres, and their proximity to Germany. The long Norwegian frontier is no longer fortified.

Sweden could put more than 500,000 first-class troops in the field, and her C-in-C, Lt.-General Thoernell, while he has never taken part in actual warfare, has studied on the spot, in Galicia in 1917, and in France, the military dispositions of other powers.

Sweden's greatest danger would appear to come from the air. Although good in quality, being composed of the best types of British, U.S. and German machines, her air force numbers only 500 'planes.

Russian 'planes based on Baltiski and the Islands of Dago and Osel leased to Russia by Estonia, are within an hour's flight of Stockholm, while Russian bases at Windau and Libau in Latvia have added dangerously to Sweden's defence problems.

The flight from Germany's Baltic coast, where she has some of her largest

aerodromes, to Sweden, is less than half of that from her North Sea coast to Britain.

But Sweden, with her population of six million people, is a great armaments producing nation, and her Bofors A.A. guns are in use in most countries of the world, including Britain. The evacuation of large towns, which has already been arranged for an emergency, and strong A.A. defences may enable her to cope with this menace.

The Swedes are, in any case, confident that they would give a good account of themselves, if attacked by Russia, Germany or both, and as they are descendants of the Vikings, whose blood flows in the veins of many British seamen of to-day, their courage cannot be questioned.