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NEW SWISS PLAN TO DEFY INVASION.

By FERDINAND TUOHY.
(*Irish Independent.*)

A statement by the head of the Swiss Military Department on how it is proposed to maintain the national independence in the event of war sweeping across Europe has passed almost unnoticed, although it foreshadows the war of air-lifts and redoubts, radar screens and guided missiles, which any future conflict is bound to engender.

The statement says baldly that, if attacked, the Swiss Army will destroy roads, bridges and production centres before retiring to the Alpine fortress. The rest of the country — as good as saying all of it in the population sense — will have to put up with occupation as best it can pending a decision in the general struggle.

The Redoubt area is the same as that chosen by General Guisan during the late war, but has been reshaped and strengthened in the light of possible atomic and guided-missile bombardment. The national bastion lies many thousand feet above the St. Gotthard and Simplon Tunnels.

The time-honoured practice of manning the frontiers at periods of external menace was rendered obsolete by the precipitate armoured penetration of May, 1940, in neighbouring France. Switzerland's frontiers equal the distance from London to Tunis, and hostile armour could pierce them at many points, and take the rest of the army in the rear.

So an entirely new battle plan has been evolved, first of its kind since the fortress-cities of the Middle Ages. It is a policy of two objectives: the deterring of an aggressor by holding out a bleak prospect for him, and ensuring that, if he does attack, operations shall devolve in the best conditions for the Swiss Army.

What must be the immediate goal and prize of an invader? What else but the two tunnels on which the strategy and economy of Switzerland depend, and without possession of which an invader might be better advised to stay at home.

A national Redoubt commanding all usage of the Simplon and St. Gotthard Tunnels accomplishes each of the set objectives. As an ultimate deterrent, the Army will not shrink from blowing up the tunnels, even when such action would mean great loss to Switzerland for years afterwards.

Strictest secrecy is maintained concerning the small, inner mountainous zone enclosing the two tunnels, but it is known that something like the activities of wartime Gibraltar's huge caves and tunnels have been reproduced, and that military training has been revolutionised.

The number of defenders listed for the Redoubt is, of course, also secret. Figures have varied from twelve to thirty thousand — not a large slice of a conscript army, but the relatively small total is explained by the fact that quality only it sought, and that each man will be something of a specialist.

It took many months to haul up the requisite huge quantities of food and munitions for storage in caverns cut in the Alpine peaks. Outposts have been built as

high as 10,000 feet, and works and sturdy military buildings reach down to the tunnel entrances.

Cable railways are freely in evidence, and hospitals have been hewn beside the winding mountain roads. Air strips have been laid, and ways of countering radio-activity are being developed inside the Redoubt which covers many square miles.

The barricaded area has to be entirely self-sufficing and prepared for only difficult contacts with outside should hostile troops cross the Swiss frontiers. Indeed, the Swiss population of over 4,000,000 has been advised that in the event of invasion it would have to "stay put," and that any mass attempt to enter the Redoubt would be forcibly prevented.

Switzerland's five chief towns and all her industries lie outside the national bastion and the use that might be made of them, should the worst come to the worst, has given rise to speculation.

It is a Nazi-authenticated fact that the reason Hitler did not invade Switzerland was because he preferred to draw on her industries without giving offence; he got more that way. These industries turn out war wagons material of the highest consequence. Supposing a new tyrant were to practise a similar "hands off" policy to that which repaid Hitler so well?

This issue is not posed in criticism of the Swiss from 1940 to 1945. They were in a very difficult position, cut off as they were and in the centre of the Nazi *Drang nach Westen*. Despite that they did much to ease the lot of stricken neighbours.

The Karl Kobelt plan lays down that centres of production will be destroyed if the Army has to take to the mountains. A great deal must depend upon how much is read into the words "centres of production."

Wholesale destruction would be a grievous step for the Swiss to take. They might be made to suffer cruelly for it. Yet if their factories were to roll out high production of war-waging material and goods to the benefit of eastern aggressors as they did in the recent years of conflict, Switzerland would not be helping other West Europe nations fighting for their lives, but the reverse.

Karl Kobelt might enact the role of an Above the Tumult retreat for the Army, but would that compensate neighbouring victims sufficiently?

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