

# PARIS IS GERMAN'S REAL OBJECTIVE

## Opening of Enemy's Third Operation Directed Against Paris on June 9 Between Montdidier and the Aisne Makes Clear That German Offensive for 1918 Is Aimed at French Capital.

By FRANK H. SIMONDS

ON Sunday, June 9, the Germans opened on the front west of the Oise and between that river and Montdidier, their third operation directed toward Paris of the present campaign. The first was included in their greatest attack, that of March 21; their second led to the passage of the Aisne and the arrival at the Marne, following the assault of May 27. Two weeks separate the last two, while the March stroke was followed after a little longer delay by their attack in Flanders.

It is the view of French military writers, now accepted in the allied world generally, that the ultimate objective of the German offensive for 1918 is Paris. Some time before the end of the present campaign it is assumed to be the expectation and the plan of the German high command to reach the walls of the French capital, and as a final threat to enforce their peace terms, give the French the choice between the destruction of their capital and a surrender on such conditions as Germany may then choose to offer.

Such an objective presupposes the decisive defeat of the French military establishment between Paris and the present front, the permanent immobilization of the British on the western front, the Somme and the sea, and the failure of the Americans to arrive in numbers and in condition to change the situation and a surrender on such conditions as Germany may then choose to offer.

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Most Terrible Campaign. But, recognizing the apparent soundness of the French appraisal of German purpose, it is essential to point out at the outset that it is hardly likely that the Germans will henceforth occupy all the time and effort upon the front which we may now call the Parisian front; on the contrary, we are almost certain to see other blows, like that which was struck in Flanders on April 9, designed to hold allied forces away from the main field of action and to achieve local successes which might contribute materially to the general weakening of the allied armies and the more complete weakening of allied morale.

Bearing in mind this necessary qualification, I mean in the present article to discuss the campaign for Paris as it is now viewed by the various military commentators of the allied nations and devote some space to a consideration of the geographical and other circumstances of what promises to be the greatest and the most terrible campaign of the history of human history, a campaign on the outcome of which will turn the immediate fate of our civilization and the future of the things that we believe in and love. I say immediate because I do not believe that even a German victory in the present campaign, a thing in itself almost inconceivable, would for any long time put the domination of the world into the German hand. But for a time and for Europe this result from a victory on the new advance upon Paris. So, in a sense, the campaign must recall the rush of other Germanic hordes upon Rome.

System of Frontier Forts. To begin at the beginning, French military commanders had in the period following the Franco-Prussian war carefully fortified the frontier of France against German attack. The historic routes of invasion, those leading through Verdun to the Champagne plain, through Nancy to the valley of the Moselle to that of the Marne, through Belfort to the Seine, were barred by a system of entrenched camps and detached forts with a single exception, survived the four years of war. Only between Verdun and Toul, on the front where some of our American troops are now on duty, have the Germans been able to take even one fort in the French system, that of Fort Camp des Tomains, above St. Mihiel, and that narrow gap made here was quickly closed.

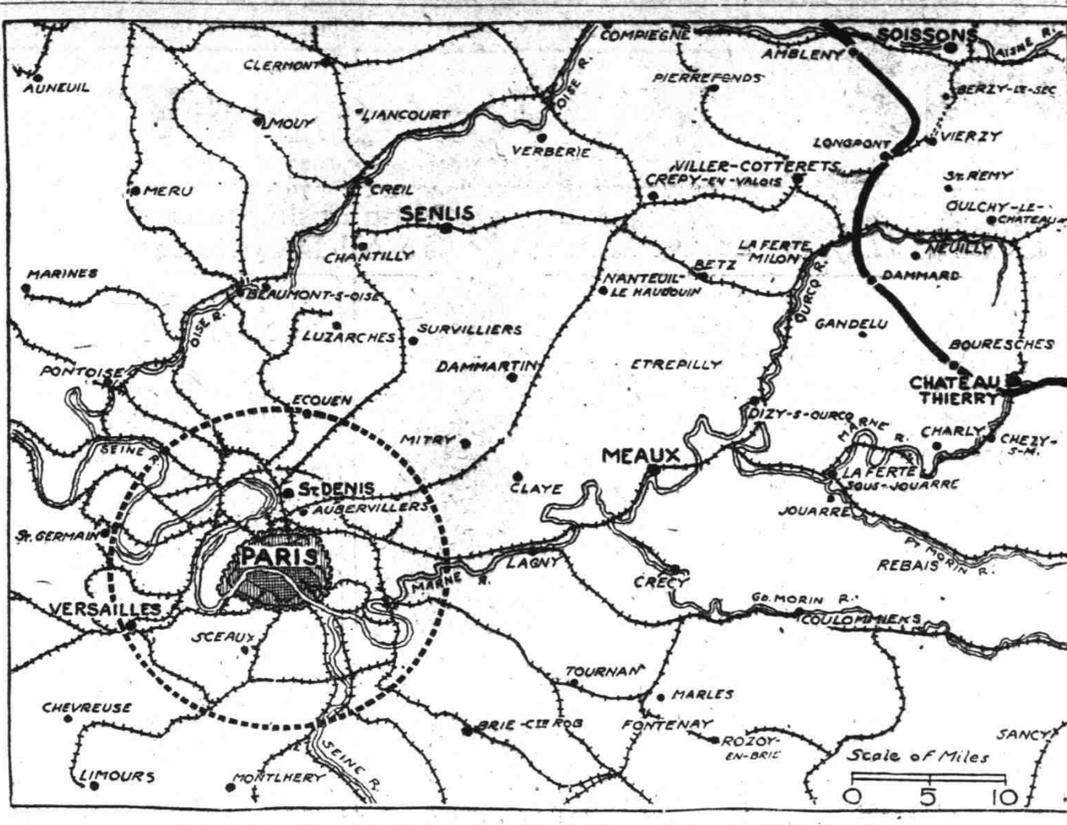
On the north, on the contrary, the situation has been quite the reverse. Theoretically, the northern and eastern road to France was to be guarded by a series of forts and entrenched camps, wholly comparable to the eastern system. Lille, Maubeuge and Metz were to be the centers, as Verdun, Toul and Epinal are on the east, and between them detached forts were to cover other roads and railways passing between the main centers of population and of resistance. And on any military map you may still see these forts and camps marked as existing, but, in reality, they existed only on the map, save in the case of Maubeuge, when war came four years ago. In the time of Louis XIV Vauban, his great engineer, had erected a series of fortifications covering the French frontier from the North sea to Switzerland, and, in all the period of his wars, Paris had been defended at the frontier. This continued to be the case in the early wars of the French revolution, and these fortifications corresponded to the Maubeuge-Lille-Metziers line, which was intended to be the bulwark of French defense in the north in later times. But actually the enormous cost of modern fortifications and a reliance upon treaties which declared Belgian soil neutral led French parliaments into the capital blunder of leaving the northern frontier unguarded.

Second Line of Defense. Thus, in August, 1914, when Germany chose to advance through Belgium, she was able to reach and pass the frontier defenses with practically no difficulty, once she had won the opening battles of Neufchateau, Charleroi and Mons. The point of fact, the French made no stand on the frontier, and Maubeuge, after a gallant but hopeless resistance, fell while the battle of the Marne was in progress. Thus the barrier which had saved Paris at the time of the revolution played absolutely no part in protecting the capital in 1914.

Behind the frontier system, which existed only on paper, the French had sketched a second line of defense. This rested upon the cities of Rheims, Laon and La Fere and was prolonged to the sea by the Somme river west of St. Quentin. Actually it rested upon certain natural defenses, namely, the high ground between the Oise and the Aisne, in the center, the Somme river on the west and the high ground and forts of Rheims. This high ground between the Aisne and the Oise is a great obstacle that all the important railways and highways pass east or west of it, coming south either by the Oise valley or by the depression between Soissons and Rheims. And, in theory, the Oise valley was covered by the forts of La Fere, the gaps between Soissons and Rheims by the depression between Soissons and Rheims and the detached camp of Rheims and the detached forts between these two cities on the high ground north of the Aisne, but again, in fact, these forts were obsolete; they were survivals of another age and without contemporary value.

The Marne Is Crossed. Accordingly, when the Germans came south, in August, 1914, they passed the second line of defense of Paris almost without resistance; Rheims and Laon were evacuated; the line of the Somme was not defended, and the Germans were thus able to advance east and west of the high ground between the Oise and the Aisne without opposition and ultimately to reach and pass the Marne.

# WHERE GERMAN OFFENSIVE FOR 1918 IS CENTERED



Region between Oise and the Marne against which the German strategy for 1918 is directed.

front, because the French had brought up reserves and possessed admirable interior communications, while the Germans had to march into a country whose communications had been destroyed and had out their reserves and supplies. Thus, while it was possible that the German might first strike in some side show, comparable with his Flanders venture after his March push in Picardy, it was reasonably plain that when he resumed his drive for Paris he would attack upon the west bank of the Oise and on the front between Montdidier and Noyon, and this is exactly what he did last Sunday. By this time he had had two months to repair his communications west of the Oise and collect the munitions and supplies for a new attack.

Battling Toward Compiègne. Now, roughly speaking, the situation as it existed when the German attacked June 9 was this: His immediate objective was the high ground just in front of his south of the Oise, the last considerable elevation between himself and Paris. But his ultimate objective was the bank of the Oise, where the main road crosses that stream north and south of Compiègne. If he could force a crossing of the Oise between Compiègne and Creil, then the French center would be retired not merely out of all the high ground between the Oise and the Aisne, but out of the wooded ground about Compiègne, south of the Aisne, which extends along the north bank of the Nonette about Soissons and offers the last but one of the natural obstacles to an invader approaching Paris from the north. The last of the great German right flank attacks, the great attack of the Nonette, but from the north bank of the Nonette the Germans would be within range of Paris with their siege guns and their heavy artillery.

Paris the New Verdun. The allies have put a price upon Paris. In a word, they have decided that Paris is worth so much to the allied cause that it must be defended to the limit. And this means that the allies will oppose their main strength to German advance between the present front and the French capital. They have accepted the gaze of battle and obviously intend to make a supreme effort to hold the city.

This decision recalls the Verdun episode, the episode in which the French had the choice between evacuating the hills east of the Meuse and accepting battle in the restricted territory between the Douaumont plateau and the east bank of the river. They chose the latter alternative and Verdun became a decisive battle, continued over six months, during which the Germans strove to destroy French military power by annihilating the divisions and corps which were steadily poured into the furnace. They failed, Verdun was saved and the German defeat was complete. Now the allies are accepting the battle once more within fixed limits, with their backs to the rear of Paris, not to any river. Meanwhile the Germans are following the Verdun parallel, attacking first on the right wing and then on the left, as they attack the retirement of the French center about Port le Vaux on the hill and then continue to Paris through Soissons, borrowing the gap between Rheims and Soissons. At the close of these two attacks the French wings had been thrust wholly off the second line of defense of the French capital and only the French center, between Soissons and the Oise below Noyon, still held on to a small but vital fraction of this defensive position.

And with this attack, begun June 9, the Germans undertook to turn the French center out of its position by advancing down the main roads to Paris west of the Oise and endeavoring to force the crossings of the Oise in the rear of the French center. Meantime the German forces which had made the drive across the Aisne from Laon contented themselves with holding their gains and organizing their strength for a new thrust, when their comrades west of the Oise had temporarily shot their bolt.

complete possession of the necessary facts on which to base their answer to German strategy. This could not be the case as long as it remained open to question whether the German objective was the channel or the French capital. The moment when the assailant's true and full purpose is disclosed is the moment when the defender really begins his operations.

Advantages All With French. Originally the French high command expected an attack where the blow of May 27 fell, namely, between Rheims and Soissons, and against this it was prepared. When the blow fell west of St. Quentin it had to transfer its reserves to Compiègne to Picardy. Then the German struck in Champagne. But he cannot continue to mystify his opponent, and the moment his plan is disclosed Poch can keep pace with each German concentration. He can calculate within a narrow range exactly where the next blow is to fall and have his reserves ready.

As the situation stood June 9, the French possessed all the best of the French position. Paris is surrounded by a series of circular railroads, built with the defense of the city in view, and these lines remained substantially intact, while the Germans were divided by the French center and the flank between Chateau-Thierry and Soissons was practically without road or railway communication. On the German side, the obvious then, when the German attack was beginning, that no material advance could prove anything but serious, and the attack of the German right flank on the Oise between Creil and Compiègne would produce a situation of utmost gravity.

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# COMPIEGNE, FRANCE, CITY OF INTEREST

## Town Notable as Place of Welcome of Marie Antoinette, as Point Where Joan of Arc Was Caught and Birthplace of "Ace of Aces."

(From the National Geographic Magazine.) Compiègne, the most important city along the line of the attempted advance of the Germans on the Noyon-Montdidier front, is situated on the southeast bank of the River Oise, just a mile below its confluence with the Aisne. The city, with a population of 17,000 at the outbreak of the war, is 52 miles by rail northeast of Paris on the Paris-St. Quentin railway, 45 miles southeast of Amiens and 25 miles west of Soissons. It is one of the most interesting cities in this part of France, having been known as Compendium in the days of Clovis. Its beautiful location, on the northwestern slope of the plateau east of Compiègne, made it a favorite country residence of many French monarchs. The forest, which contains more than 35,000 acres and is 68 miles in circumference, was for centuries a great royal hunting preserve.

It was Louis XV who commissioned Gabriel to build the magnificent palace which is still well preserved, and it was that monarch who here welcomed Marie Antoinette, the ill-fated daughter of France, when she was at the age of 15 she became the bride of the dauphin, the future Louis XVI. It was here, also, that that other Austrian princess, Marie Therese, spent her brief but happy honeymoon with Napoleon I. As an evidence of the emperor's infatuation for his bride (an infatuation which caused utter ruin to France) "he is so evidently in love with her that he cannot conceal his feelings and all his customary ways of life are subordinate to her wishes" there is still to be seen in the park surrounding the palace an iron trellis which he ordered built to remind the 19-year-old empress of her favorite trellis at Schonbrunn. This incident is reminiscent of the devotion displayed by the Babylonian king who built one of the seven wonders of the world—the hanging gardens. Order that his bride might not be without her native mountain scenery even on the plains of the Euphrates.

It was at Compiègne that one of the saddest episodes in French history occurred—the capture of Joan of Arc by the Burgundians in 1430, followed by her martyrdom at the stake just 12 months later in Rouen. Before the war Compiègne was an industrial town of considerable importance. Its chief activities being boat building, rope making, distilling and the manufacture of chocolate, machinery, socks, chemicals and hats. It also carried on a thriving river borne traffic in timber and coal, and its apparatus farms were famous. In 1814 Compiègne offered a stern resistance to the Prussians, and in the Franco-Prussian conflict of 1870-1871 it was one of the headquarters of the German army.

Now and for all time to come, Compiègne will be dear to the hearts of the French people, not because it was once a favorite residence of Louis XV, Louis XVI, Napoleon I, Louis Philippe and Napoleon III, but because on Christmas Eve, 1894, there was born here Georges Guynemer, "Ace of Aces," the foremost ace in circumstance, who for centuries a great royal hunting preserve.

Author of "My Dawg" Song Gets Married. Kansas City, Mo., June 22.—J. Frank Neighbors, 47, business man and author of the song that almost made Champ Clark president, is married. Mr. Neighbors, who is connected with a Miami, Okla., mining company, went to the courthouse, and, after securing a license to wed Edna Brooks, 33, a bookkeeper, handed the marriage license clerk a sheet of paper.

"You may release this to the Kansas City papers," said Neighbors. "I have already written the story." The article was headed: "Miami, Okla., Business Man Secured Kansas City Bride."

Jailed for Frivolity. Amsterdam, June 22.—An American artist named Schaffer, his wife, and two Germans have been sentenced to six weeks' imprisonment at Munich, according to a telegram to the Frankfurter Zeitung, for "frivolity" in holding a fancy-dress ball during the first days of the offensive in the west. The ball was largely attended by the members of the aristocracy and officers.



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