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EPISODE OF THE GREAT WAR.

THE LIMBURG MANOEUVRE OF AUGUST 1914.

A STUDY OF THE STRATEGIC POSITION OF DUTCH-LIMBURG

BY

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WITH THREE SKETCHES.

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The Limburg Manoeuvre

A Study of the Strategic Position of Limburg [1]).

With Three Sketches.

I. Railway Map: 1 : 750,000.
II. Survey Map of the Operations in Belgium up to Aug. 23, 1914: 1 : 750,000.
III. The Limburg Manoeuvre: 1 : 500,000.

I. Introduction.

At 10 a.m. on August 4th, 1914, the post of the Dutch Landweer Frontier—Guard stationed at the „Vierlanden Punt" (point of four countries) at the extreme South-eastern corner of Limburg reported as follows:

> „A German Cavalry patrol supported by a squadron and cyclists is marching into Belgium in the direction of Gemmenich. They are at present a short distance from the Dutch frontier."

The fuse was lit! The first advance preparatory to the open warfare which reached its climax in the battle of the Marne had started. From Hill No. 90 near the Dutch hamlet of Mesch, the first and not the least touching scene took place on August 5th and 6th. Cavalry Brigades of von Garnier's Division, encamped near the foot of the Hill near the Dutch frontier between Posts 32 and 35, were engaged in crossing the Belgian Meuse between Navagne and Lixhe under fire at distant range from the Fort of Pontisse. The village of Mouland was in flames, Berneau enveloped in fire and smoke! How many more villages would suffer the same fate! Poor Belgium! Now, as heretofore, the battle field of jealous neighbours! Belgium is once more attacked by the fury of war.

Had it not been for the country of Dutch Limburg lying like a protecting barrier before North Belgium, the fate of Belgium and its Allies might have been entirely different. This strip of territory had forced the Germans to turn aside. It caused them loss of time by reducing their area available for operation. The German General Staff had, as we shall see, tried hard by an accurate regulation of the marching of its armies, to meet this difficulty, but time and distance,

1) This study has appeared in the Dutch Military publication „De Militaire Spectator".

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from a North-easternly direction by executing a turning movement to the left and at the same time, by a frontal attack 1).

The manner in which the first objective, namely the French main force, was attacked, permitted the aggressors to march along the shortest route from the lower Rhine to Paris, the second objective while conducting their first grand campaign. As a matter of fact, Paris no more than the channel ports might have been „The" objective. The day of operating against geographical locations is over.

It cannot, however, be repeated often enough that an operation on interior lines such as the German General Staff had devised against France and Russia, had to take place very rapidly and had to be in the nature of a surprise if there was to be any chance of success. Every day, every half-day that was lost, had to be considered as an obstacle in the way of the German plan which jeopardized the entire campaign.

This is the reason why the strategic position of the Netherlands was to exercise (by its latent strength) a decisive influence on the outcome of the entire war.

The German General Staff calculated that France would be beaten, or at least put on the defensive, between forty and fifty days after mobilization 2). In other words, figuring that the first day of mobilization for the German Army was Aug. 2nd, France should have been reduced between September 10th and 20th.

In the plan of operations the Germans had further counted upon the eventual support of their left wing in Alsace by the 3rd Italian Army, the transportation of which was to take place through Brennerpas and which had been carefully worked out by the Austrian Staff in time of peace 3).

No plan of operation goes further than the first decisive meeting between hostile main bodies. No human astuteness allows further planning. The first great shock can immediately change the entire situation. In view of the above, Napoleon's statement: „Je n'ai jamais eu un plan d'operations" can be understood.

The German plan of operation reckoned not only with the French and Belgian Armies but also with the manner in which the British Expeditionary Force could be made to play its part in the war. This force might land at any one of several different points and its influence on the operations would depend to a great extent upon the place or places of debarkation 4).

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1) Militär Wochenblatt No. 70 of 1918.

2) Militär Wochenblatt, No. 133, of 1919.

3) Militär Wochenblatt, No. 131, 133 of 1919.

4) Viscount French of Ypres: „1914" from which it is evident that there was still much difference of opinion about it in the Council of Ministers, English and French officers, held in London, Aug. 10, 1914.

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Boulogne and Le Havre had been thought of by the Germans as ports from which the British Expeditionary Force could be transferred by railway to Maubeuge and Le Cateau with a view of strengthening the left wing of the French Army. This actually took place in 1914. A landing at Antwerp which would menace directly their lines of communication had also been thought of by the Germans. The latter eventuality had been thought of by Schlieffen as the most probable. His plan of operation, however, was sufficiently elastic so that when the landing actually took place some where else, it did not necessitate a modification of the essential ideas in his plan 1).

From this it is clear that the possibility of an English force landing at Antwerp was an influence in the massing of German troops on their left wing.

B.

The German plan of operation foresaw the concentration of three armies on the Northern wing of the Western front. They were in the following order from North to South:

1st Army: Colonel-General von Kluck.
II Army Corps, 3rd & 4th Divisions.
III Army Corps, 5th & 6th Divisions.
IV Army Corps, 7th & 8th Divisions.
IX Army Corps, 17th & 18th Divisions,
(The 9th Army Corps belonged to the 2nd Army until August 17th).
III Reserve Corps, 5th & 6th Reserve Divisions.
IV Reserve Corps, 7th & 22d Reserve Divisions.
10th, 11th & 27th Landweer Brigades.

Besides the above, the 9 th Reserve Corps followed at two or three days march in the zone of the 1st Army.

2nd Army: Colonel-General von Bülow.
Guard Corps 1st & 2nd Guard Divisions.
VII Army Corps, 13th & 14th Guard Divisions.
X Army Corps, 19th & 20th Guard Divisions.
Guard Reserve Corps, 3d Guard Div. & 1st Guard Res. Div.
VII Reserve Corps, 13th & 14th Reserve Divisions.
X Reserve Corps, 2d Guard Reserve Division and 19th Reserve Division.
25th, 29th } Landweer Brigades.
5 Battalions Heavy Artillery, etc.

3rd Army: Colonel-General Frhr. von Hausen.
XI Army Corps, 22d & 38th Divisions.
XII Army Corps, 23rd & 32nd Divisions.
XIX Army Corps, 24th & 40th Divisions.
XII Reserve Corps, 23rd & 24th Reserve Divisions.

1) Militär Wochenblatt, No. 103 of 1918.

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47th Landweer Brigade.
1 Battalion Heavy Artillery, etc.

The following troops were at the immediate disposal of the German Supreme Command:

I Cav. Corps, von Richthofen (Guard & 5th Cav. Div.)
II Cav. Corps, von der Marwitz (2d, 4th & 9th Cav. Div.)

On the evening of August 17th, the 1st and 2nd Armies and the 2nd Cavalry Corps were placed under the command of Colonel-General von Bülow and on August 20th, the 1st Cavalry Corps was also placed at his disposition.

The strength of this force was as follows:

1st Army in full:	230,000	men
After Aug. 17th: 270,000 men		
2nd Army in full:	310,000	„
After Aug. 17th: 270,000 „		
3rd Army in full:	175,000	„
1st & 2nd Cavalry Corps in full:	25,000	„
IX Reserve Corps	40,000	„
Total	780,000	men.

The plan of operations anticipated the complete concentration of these three Northern Armies on the evening of the sixteenth day of mobilization, i. e., August 17th, on the following points:

1st Army: with advanced detachments West of the line Hasselt—St. Truyen.
2nd Army: with its right wing near the Western Forts of Liège and its left wing near Ferrières.
3rd Army: with right wing near Vielsalm, west wing east of Bastogne (See Sketch II).
4the & 5th Armies: massed south of the 3rd Army as far as Diedenhofen (Thionville).
6th Army: was in Lorraine.
7th Army: was in Alsace.

The 1st and 2nd Cavalry Corps were thus drawn up in echelon with the right wing advanced.

On the 17th day of mobilization the general advance of the Northern Armies was to commence 1)

The 1st and 2nd Armies were assigned the task of forcing the Belgian (c.q. English) forces away from Antwerp. By August 20th their advance troops were to be crossing the Brussels—Namur Railway lines with the left wing covering Namur, the 1st Army to be in echelon opposite Antwerp. The 3rd Army was to march to the Meuse on the section Namur—Givet exclusive of Namur.

The 4th and 5th Armies, adapting their march to that of the

1) Lüttich—Namur, Pg. 68.

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right wing, were to swing around as far as the line Brussels—Diedenhofen on which the five Armies would converge. The pivot of this manoeuvre to the South and South-west being Diedenhofen.

In this plan of operation the most striking thing indeed, was that a strategic envelopement was aimed at for the purpose of cutting off the Belgian Army from Antwerp and of turning the left wing of the French Army[1]), but this movement was to take place from a rectilinear base of operations.

In the history of war, strategic envelopements start from what might be termed an enveloping base, that is, a base which allows the menacing of the enemy's connections without causing the offense to wholly abandon its own line of communication: (for example: Napoleon in Italy 1800, at Ulm 1805, at Jena 1806). The geographical position of the Netherlands north of Belgium prevented the Germans from starting their movement from such an enveloping base. They were thus deprived of the great advantage attached to a curved base of operation which could extend far West into Brabant which would necessarily be of great assistance to the Army of millions which was destined to envelope the Eastern French front. This rectilinear base from which the Germans started in their own territory, and which extended as far North as C r e f e l d and K e m p e n (See Sketch 1), could not be used to full advantage because the zone of concentration in Belgium of the Northern Army did not lie directly in front of it but 70 kilometers South where the line of frontier guards in D u t c h L i m b u r g ended.

III. The influence of the German railway system on the general operations (See Sketch No. 1).

In order to execute the plan of operation, the Northern Army wing had to be conveyed to its destination by rail as far as the Northern part of the Rhine Valley, i.e., to that part of the German territory closest to Antwerp (See end of II—A). The distance between these two points over various railway routes is as follows:

Goch—Boxtel—Breda—Antwerp	165 k.m.
Dalheim—Roermond—Hamont—Antwerp	138 k.m.
Aix—La-Chapelle—Liège—Antwerp	200 k.m.

Consequently, the focus of concentration for this movement would be East of Dalheim. As a matter of fact, the debarkation of the 1 s t A r m y took place in this district. In carrying out this concentration and debarkation, it was also taken into consideration that the Netherlands might join the cause of the Entente. In this case, strong detachments of the 1 s t A r m y would have to be detached and remain in position so as to protect the German Northern flank against the Dutch, while the remaining part of this force took the shortest route to Antwerp.

1) Lieutenant-Colonel D e T h o m a s s o n: „Le Revers de '14 et ses Causes". Pg. 126.

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As the Netherlands remained neutral, the German General Staff did not dare to avail itself of the advantage which the shortest route across Dutch Limburg gave them in their immediate advance on Antwerp because of the disastrous effect such an act would involve.

In view of this action on the part of the General Staff, the chances of cutting off the Belgian Field Army from the Fortress of Antwerp, if this Army should be in position at some distance from the Fortress, was practically nullified.

What opportunity did the network of railways in Northern Rhineland offer for the transportation of a large army, the debarkation of troops, the shunting and returning of empty trains? It is essential to consider this question. In Northern Rhineland the network of railways has been very extensive for a long time. This of course, is due chiefly to the necessities of commercial traffic. In this district the improvisation of an extraordinary military transport for the execution of Von Schlieffen's plan would not have been difficult. Later on we shall also examine the situation in Central Rhineland because of the direct effect that this would have in North Rhineland 1).

Soon after 1891 provisions were made to extend the railway system in the entire Rhineland, but especially in the central part of this Province. The scale upon which these extensions were made indicated that it could only have been done after mature military consideration. Extensive stations were erected at small places. Permanent platforms for unloading troops from long trains were built between existing stations. New lines were constructed and old iines double-tracked. The frontier station Dalheim is an eloquent example of the reconstruction of these roads for military purposes. In 1896 this was an insignificant station with a single track road. When the war broke out it was a three track rail-head, equipped with an extensive yard with some fifteen side-tracks, numerous unloading platforms, four powerful cranes, „water-tanks, engine supplies, etc. etc., The lines Neusz—Duren, Neusz—Dalheim, Crefeld—Goch, Cologne—Grevenbroich—Reydt, and others, were all either newly constructed or recently double-tracked. Railroad crossings on these lines had been reconstructed so that they became extensive junction points. (See Sketch 1). In 1914 there were eight main lines across the Rhine between Wesel and Cologne. This railroad system did not attract very much attention in foreign military literature probably because it appeared to he merely an extension of existing lines and the importance of these lines from the military view was

1) Krijgswetenschap 1904—'05, bl. 942.
Hendschels Telegraph, 65 Jahrgang.
Fortnightly Review, Febr. 1910.
Militaire Spectator, Nov. 1914, bl. 790 a. f.

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not as obvious as in the cases of those lines in Central Rhineland. As a matter of fact, Aix-la-Chapelle was generally mentioned as the most northern railroad terminus. 1)

This idea misled the French General Staff to presume that the German main force was operating South of the Meuse.

In June 1914, two months before war broke out, general Fournier, the Military Governor of the French forces of Maubeuge, (See Sketch 2) had the foreboding of a coming German attack West of the Meuse and which would be directed against Maubeuge. He spoke of his fears to General Joffre, the then Chief of the General Staff, who answered his objections by saying: „Soyez optimiste, je me charge de Maubeuge, je vous enverrai en Allemagne faire le siège de Metz avec vos 30,000 hommes." 2) — (See further under VII, Sub. 2 below). The attention of the French General Staff had been concentrated chiefly on Central Rhineland.

Indeed an entire railroad system appeared, especially after 1901, in this district where until 1890 there was only one line crossing this part of the Eifel between Cologne and Trier. As a matter of fact, lack of industry in this district did not justify the existance of other lines (See Sketch). Yet in 1914 the capacity of this railroad system East of Belgium for any extraordinary military transportation was much less than that of the corresponding railroad system East of Dutch Limbourg. A glance at Sketch no. 1 makes this evident. This was an additional reason why the Germans should consider Limburg as an obstruction which prevented them from deriving the full benefit from a well-organized railway system for troop concentration. Moreover it would prevent future use of their railway terminus for transport in both directions, and for direct supply of an advancing army in Belgium.

IV. The rail movement of the German northern armies.

A.

Sketch no. 1 indicates where the three armies forming the Northern wing were detrained. The travel for the corps which had to be conveyed over the greatest distance, lasted about fifty hours. This railway transportation can be briefly cutlined about as follows. 3)

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1) Others: Col. A. Boucher: „l'Allemagne en péril.
XXX: „La Concentration Allemande."
Commandant Culmann: „La Couverture."

2) Commandant P. Cassou: „La Vérité sur le siège de Maubeuge."

3) One hundred fifty railroad trains are necessary for the transport of one army corps with complete trains, etc. It takes three or four days to dispatch the trains to which the duration of the journey must be added at the rate of not more than 22 k.m. per hour.

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Staff 1st Army	: Stettin—Grevenbroich Aug. 10th.
II Army Corps	: Stettin & Bromberg—Gladbach & Viersen, Aug. 10th—12th.
III Army Corps	: Frankfort a/Oder & Brandenburg—Grevenbroich, Aug. 9th—11th.
IV Army Corps	: Halle & Magdeburg—Julich & Neusz, Aug. 9th—11th.
III Reserve Corps	: Berlin—Crefeld, 10th—12th Aug.
IV Reserve Corps	: Magdeburg & Cassel—Dusseldorf, Aug 11th—13th.
10th / 11th Landweer Brigade:	Calau & Potsdam—Crefeld, Aug. 14th—15th.
27th Landweer Brigade:	Münster—Dusseldorf, Aug. 14th.
Staff 2nd Army	: Hanover—Montjoie, Aug. 8th.
VII Army Corps	: Dusseldorf—Münster—Eupen, Aug. 7th—10th.
IX Army Corps	: Schwerin & Flensburg—Aix-la-Chapelle, Aug. 8th—11th.
X Army Coros	: Hanover—Montjoie, Weismes & Malmedy, Aug. 8th—11th.
Guard Corps	: Berlin-East of Weywertz.
Guard Reserve Corps	: Berlin & Spandau, probably Stadtkyll.
VII Reserve Corps	: Dusseldorf & Münster probably Stolberg.
X Reserve Corps	: Berlin & Hanover—Vettweis 10th & 12 th Aug.
25th & 29th Landweer Brigade:	propably at Düren.
Heavy Artillery.	
Staff 3rd Army	: Dresden—Prüm.
XI Army Corps	: Cassell & Erfurt-St. Vith & other.
XII Army Corps	: Bautzen & Dresden—Lommerswei- : ler—Pronsfeld—Waxweiler.
XIX Army Corps	: Chemnitz & Leipzig—Neuerburg, Speicher & Other.
XII Reserve Corps	: Dresden & Leipzig—Kyllburg.
47th Landweer Brigade:	Wurzen—Gerolstein.
1st Cavalry Corps	: to Erdorf near Trier & North, 5/6 Aug.
2nd Cavalry Corps	: to Aix-la-Chapelle—Malmedy, 3rd—5th Aug.

The detraining 1) was effected, therefore, in two zones, one behind

1) Zie o.m. E. Bircher: „Die Schlacht an der Marne."
von Kosz: „Mit den Brandenburgern in den Kampfen um Belgium" Luttich-Namur, t.a.p.
Dr. Rammelt: „Meine Feuertaufe."

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the other. The cavalry corps and army corps of the active army used the advance zone, the reserve corps and landweer brigades used the rear zones. The first troops detrained were to push forward in the direction of the frontier as far as possible in order to make room for the organizations which were to follow.

The necessity of using the area between the western part of Aix-La-Chapelle and Malmedy, for the benefit of the advance guard units of the second army, and to make it possible to move troops by railroad up to the frontier, made it very desirable to mask the Liège position. The zone of concentration for the active army corps of the first army was north of the line Aix-la-Chapelle—Stolberg—Düren Not one unit of the first army could cross this line before the concentration zone to the south had been evacuated by the second army. As the neutrality of Dutch Limburg had to be observed, the following consequences ensued:

a) The zone in which the first army was detrained had to be withdrawn to the north and to the east in order to provide on the south of this zone a place where the first army could take up its temporary station.

b) The army corps of the first army were forced to wait until the second army had advanced towards the west.

With reference to paragraph (a) above, the map demonstrates clearly that the front of corps in the first line and that of corps in the second line, were oriented on an east and west line across the railroad base. Had the shortest line across Limburg to the heart of Belgium been chosen, the line on which these corps were located would have run from North to South.

In the latter case the second corps would have detrained for example at Kaldenkirchen; the fourth at Dalheim, and the third at Geilenkirchen, with the reserve corps and landweer brigades in the rear. They would then have been carried by railroad **twenty five, forty** and **forty** kilometers respectively, closer to the frontier. In other words, they would have been closer to Antwerp, closer to the Belgian Army, and closer to the left wing of the French Army. This would have been equivalent to an advance of about two days on the Allied forces. Besides, the German troops would have been spared the fatigue of two days marching. While, as a matter of fact, the big frontier stations, such as Bal and Dalheim, which were not used, were only of importance as manoeuvering yards. After August 10th numerous empty trains arrived. They were, made up differently and were supplied, especially

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Prof. Dr. E. Wolbe: „Alexander von Kluck."
Biernatzki: „Als Pionier in Frankreich"
Nordschleswigsche Soldatenbriefe.
Delbrück: „Der Deutsche Krieg in Feldpostbriefen."

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with water, and then sent to the rear to mobilization garrisons for the purpose of bringing up more troops.

B.

But there is still more.

On account of the inviloability, which their position in Dutch territory gave, the following principal railroad lines were not used by the Germans:

(*a*) Wesel—Kempen—Goch—Boxtel, Tilbourg, and the single track to Turnhout.

(*b*) Crefeld—Kempen—Viersen—Kaldenkirchen—Venlo—Eindhoven, and the single track to Hasselt.

(*c*) Dalheim—Roermond—Weert—Hamont.

(*d*) Aix-La-Chapelle—Maestricht—Hasselt.

(*e*) And as a more or less lateral route: Wesel—Venlo—Maestricht—Liège.

Line *a* above is the main international trunk line between the cities of the Rhine and Flushing and Antwerp; line *c* between Cologne, Dusseldorf or Crefeld to Antwerp, which lines *a*, *b*, and *c* would have been of the greatest importance in the installation of enveloping bases, which the Germans needed so badly for their operations. (See Note II B). The lines *c*, *d*, and *e* would furthermore have been of great assistance for the purpose of transporting reserves, rations, munitions, and for the evacuation of wounded, etc.

In this connection, attention need only be drawn to the fact that one of the reasons for the German defeat on the Marne was the cutting off of the lines of communication. As early as the latter part of August it was sometimes impossible to supply the horses with oats, and the troops were often without meat and bread and existed on what was found in the fields and along the road. The greatest energy and force were necessary on the part of the German officers in order to compel the troops to accomplish all that the state of war demanded 1). In Belgium and France the railway lines had been completely destroyed. All the railroad crossings signaling apparatus, water-towers, telephone connections, and railway stations had been made unfit for use. In the beginning, the railroad engineers went no further than the line Hasselt—Louvain—Namur—Marche. Military trains of fifty wagons carrying rations and munitions, which were necessary to the combatants, had to follow one another on a single track road with only an interval of fifteen minutes between trains 2).

Furthermore, not being able to use the lines in Limburg as lateral communication, the Germans must have been greatly inconvenienced

1) Major-General Baumgarten-Crusius. „Die Marneschlacht 1914" (From official sources). Pg. 71.

2) See Frhr. v. Steinaecker, „Die Eisenbahnen im Weltkriege."

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when, after September 9th, parts of the 6th and 7th Armies and, early in October, other Corps of the 6th Army, were moved from Lorraine via Liege and Namur to the Western flank of the Army (Cambrai, later on Douai, Valenciennes, St. Ghislain) 1).

V. The manoeuvre.
(See Sketch 3).

A.

During the period in which the Army Corps of the 1st Army were transported and detrained, the attack on the Liege posstition preceded general operations. On the morning of Aug. 4th, six brigades, at three-quarters war strength, supported on the flanks by two strong Cavalry units, crossed the Belgian frontier between Gemmenich and Malmedy. The same day the Meuse was reached below Liège. One battalion of Belgian troops, 400 strong, evacuated the Western bank of the Meuse after having lost two men and ten wounded, notwithstanding the fact that their left flank was resting on the Dutch frontier near Lixhe, and consequently could not be turned 2). By evening of Aug. 5th, a German Infantry Brigade had already crossed the Meuse and reconnoitering squadrons were on the road towards Tongeren.

Where is the greatly vaunted Belgian defence of the Meuse? The defence of which they were so proud that they now feel it their duty to defend not only the Belgian Meuse, but also that part of the river between Maestricht and Venlo. As a matter of fact, on Aug. 4th, 1914, it was impossible for them to hold the Meuse along the few kilometers between the Fort of Pontisse and the Dutch frontier. After a small skirmish, they retreated, leaving the Meuse at the disposal of the enemy. As for the position of Liege itself, the operations were briefly as follows:

On Aug. 6th, a Brigade commanded by General Ludendorff had already pierced the defenses north of the Fort de Fléron. Soon afterwards, General Leman, the Military Governor of Liège, ordered the retreat of the entire 3rd Belgian Division from the Meuse. From that moment on, the forts were left to take care of themselves and became isolated defenses. The Belgian Field Army of five Divisions, numbering some 80,000 men, was drawn up behind the Gette at two days march from the Meuse, and remained quiescent. This Army did not even try, by an offensive action from this position, to defend indirectly the basin of Liège and of the Meuse, but calmly awaited the developments until Aug. 18th.

On Aug. 8th, the 2d and 4th German Cavalry Divisions, numbering

1) See amongst others: Dr. Wessel: „Von der Maas bis an die Memel." R. Volderauer: „Neun Monate Westfront." O. Rutz: „Bayernkämpfe" — Hauptman v. Hugo: „Unser Korps 1914/5". — Baumgarten-Crusius, l.c.

2) See Mil. Spectator July and Aug., 1917 and Baron Buffin's „Récits de Combatants," Reports of the Officer in command at this place.

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7200 carbines and 24 field pieces, bivouacked near Tongeren without being molested.

The Belgian Calvary Division retired in the meantime from Waremme on St. Truyen, and from there on Diest and Haelen, where, on Aug. 12th, an offensive reconnaissance made by the German Calvary was repulsed 1).

Once more we ask: „On what historical deeds do the Belgians base their demands that the Meuse River, which runs through Limburg, should be defended by other than Dutch hands- in short, by Belgian hands? Where are the proofs of their superiority in this matter?"

The important bridge near Maaseyk was defended by some few civilians armed with rifles. The fortress of Huy was evacuated without firing a gun. Namur, with all its forts, fell into the German's hands within four days, while, in contrast to this, the old French Fort of Maubeuge held out fifteen days. Nevertheless, it is now thought important to reprint such pamphlets as the one by E. Banning (Political Consideration on the Defence of the Meuse), and to provide them with prefaces by so-called Historical authors. In this, Banning's work, edited in 1881, one reads charges such as „Holland is incapable of defending the Meuse in Limburg, opposite Dusseldorf", page 85. What happened to the Belgians in 1914?

On the evening of Aug. 13th, when the advance guards of the Ist German Army were still at a day's march from the Meuse, the Fort of Pontisse and all the Eastern forts of the Liege position, except Fléron Fort which fell Aug. 14th, were out of action. On Aug. 14th, at. 9.40 a. m., the Fort of Liers surrendered. Thus the resistance at Liege did not cause the slightest delay to the I Army, whose three advanced colums were to cross the Meuse on Aug. 15th, north of Liege (See Map. 3). The same thing applied to the 2nd. Army, because on Aug. 16th at 9.30 the last Liege fort fell, and on Aug. 18th, the general forward movement, which started from the Western line of Liege forts, had begun. The only delay which the Germans suffered was caused entirely by the manoeuvering which was necessary for them to execute around Limburg.

If, in view of the above evidence, any one cares to maintain that the defenses of Liege forced the Germans to cross the Meuse on a very narrow front north of this position, he should be consistant and acknowledge that pressure is always caused by two forces acting against each other. If the German forces were pushed into a narrow opening by the position of Liege on one side, the only possible power which acted as an opposing force, was the **intact barrier Dutch Limburg.**

B.

While the way was thus cleared for the manoeuvre of the Ist Army,

1) „The Operation of the Belgian Army", Report of the Army Commander, pages 17 to 20).

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this manoeuvre was already in full swing well to the front. Starting form the line Brüggen—Gladbach—Dusseldorf, this force had to reach the line Hasselt—St. Truyen by marching. In executing this march the 1st. Army had a very narrow space at its disposal south of Limburg, because the 2nd. Army was deployed well to the North. The fact that the 1 Army was squeezed into a narrow front during this movement could not help but retard its march.

Units of the 2nd. Army, namely the 17th and part of the 18th Divisions, which were in the zone of march of the 1st. Army, had to be directed toward the Meuse on Oct. 13th, in order to make more room (See Map. 3). A good strategic rule to go by is one which gives an independent marching zone to each of the two divisions of an Army Corps, when in proximity to the enemy. It is equally undesirable that two Army Corps should march one behind the other, unless one is a part of a special reserve Army. Armies should move independently of each other on a broad front, with a manoeuvering interval sufficiently large so that neither army will be interfered with in its movements. The conditions, under which the manoeuvre around Limburg was made, were exactly the reverse. During the march, narrow deep formations were necessary. In order to make this clear, an approximate position of the 1st. Army, which shows the position it was on Aug. 13th, while executing the movement which lasted several days, is indicated in Sketch 3. On Aug. 13th, the IX Army Corps (17th. Div.) crossed the Meuse on its march from Berneau to the south-east of Tongeren 1). Behind this Division, three Army Corps (II Army Corps, with divisions at extended, distance, IV Army Corps and III Army Corps) were marching at very short intervals and on a total front of 6 k.m.

These Army Corps were followed by two Reserve Corps, the III and IV Reserve Corps, and finally by the Landweer Brigades. If one considers that an Army Corps (40,000 men) with its baggage, ammunition and supply trains, covers a distance, while on the march, of 56 k.m. (or in other words, a distance corresponding to 11 marching hours), one has an exact idea of the situation (indicated on the map) during the evening of Aug. 13th. It is evident that it was necessary for the German forces to wheel around as nearly as possible to the south-east of Limburg (Vaals) in order to diminish the effect of the swinging movement around Holland, and in order to remain outside of the marching space assigned to the 2nd. Army (See march of the VII Reserve Corps, as approximately indicated).

On Aug. 13th, the Army Commander, General von Kluck, left Grevenbroich for Aix-la-Chapelle, in order to inspect his marhing columns 2). The columns of the II Army Corps, the III Reserve Army Corps, and the Brigades of Landweer, following each other with pratically no

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1) Lüttlich-Namur, l. c.

2) Wolbe, l. c.

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interruption, were marching on the other side of the frontier, at a short distance from the Dutch villages of Kerkrade and Vaals.

On the 15th of Aug., while the advance columns of the 1st. Army were crossing the Meuse (See Map), the divisions of the III Reserve Corps were obliged to wait at Aix-la-Chapelle 1) until the III and IV Corps had cleared the roads.

It was not until Aug. 17th that the III Reserve Corps continued its march, by way of Gemmenich, towards Berneau, and the IV Reserve Corps toward Julemont 2). And on Aug. 18th, the Landweer passed Gemmenich (See map 2 which indicates the situation on the evening of Aug. 17th).

The position of the heads of the columns of the III and IV Army Corps, wich entered the same zone where two days before, the IX Army Corps was still marching, shows clearly the chaotic condition and the numberless columns which would have crossed each other if a very careful march-table had not been worked out in order to make the manoeuvre possible.

VI. Variation in the manoeuvre in case Limburg had been Belgian territory in 1914.

In order to realize the importance of the German decision to respect Dutch territory, let us suppose for a moment that Limburg was Belgian and that the Germans had had the use of this province in 1914, and further, that the Meuse was as insufficiently defended in Limburg as it actually was in Belgium in 1914.

Sketch 3 demonstrates clearly the great advantages that the Germans would have enjoyed from this situation. The following routes would have been open to them:

1. Viersen—Roermond—Weert—Neerpelt—Moll.
2. Heinsberg—Maeseyk—Peer—Quaedmechelen.
3. Geilenkirchen—Sittard—Asch—Diest.
4. Herzogenrath—Maestricht—Bilsen or Tongres.
5. Aix-la-Chapelle—Maestricht—Bilsen or Tongres.

They would have been able to concentrate on the heights between Moll—Quaedmechelen—Diest on the flanks of the Belgian positions of the Gette River and at the shortest distance from Antwerp. (See Sketch 2).

In order to prevent themselves from being cut off from Antwerp, the Belgian Army would under these conditions have had to post itself thirty kilometers further north. Therefore Brussels would have been uncovered 3), and the distance which separated the Belgian Army

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1) Von Kosz, l.c.

2) Bircher, l.c.

3) The position of the Belgian troops on the front Jodoigne — to the North-west

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rom its Allies, would have become thirty kilometers greater. Moreover, the march of the first army on a broad front and over separate routes would have become possible. Instead of marching from the district of Viersen via Heinsberg and Aix-la-Chappelle towards Bilsen, the second army corps could have attained, by way of Roermond and Weert, the important road crossing of Moll and a march of **sixty** kilometers at least would have been saved. The fourth army corps by marching from Neusz via Heinsberg, Maeseyck—Quaedmechelen would have gained **forty-two** kilometers, and the third army corps by taking the route Grevenbroich—Geilenkirchen—Sittard—Asch—Diest would have cut down its march by **forty-five** kilometers.

These routes would have saved at least three days marching for the Northern army corps and least two days for the Southern army corps. For the army corps in the rear, that is in the second line, the gain in time would have been practically the same. They could also have been directed further to the South via Maestricht.

In transferring the terminal stations in the manner indicated at the end of paragraph IV, A above, the IVth corps would have gained in addition, thirty-six kilometers by replacing the Neusz—Heinsberg march by that of Dalheim—Heinsberg and the third army corps would have gained in addition, forty-two kilometers by using the railroad between Grevenbroich and Geilenkirchen. Then the Southern army corps would have gained between one and one-half, to two days march **and the first army would have been advanced a total of three days.** This calculation does not take into consideration the delays which were provoked by the difficulty in manoeuvering the Third and Fourth Reserve Corps which were held up two days at Aix-la-Chapelle and vicinity. From the preceding as well as from that which is explained in paragraph IV, it results that Maestricht is of importance from the view point of military geography, but this importance is less than the strategic importance of central and northern Limburg.

During the conference on May 20, 1919, of the Foreign Ministers of the Seven Powers at Paris, M. Hymans, the Belgian Minister, intended in the résumé of his speech, „to draw the particular attention of the conference on the city of Maestricht—Mosae Trajectum — which for centuries has been the gate for German invasions of Western Europe, and a point of great importance in the defence of Belgium." Considering the preceding notes, we can consider that this superannuated statement was given out „to help the cause." In this connection, we should like to ask the following question: Wy didn't the Germans make use of their traditional door of invasion in 1914? 1)

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of Tirlemont was moreover for the purpose of covering Brussels. See „l'Action de l'Armée Belge" — Pg. 18.

1) See the answer to paragraph VIII following.

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VII. The consequences

Of what inestimable advantage to the Germans would have been this three days gain together with a better enveloping position from which the First Army could start!

At present von Bethmann-Hollweg, the former chancellor of the Empire, as well as the great German General Staff, are severely criticized because the order for a general mobilization was not given before August 1, 1914. By this fact alone, two days were lost. It was said that this delay had a decisive effect upon the entire campaign.

Judging from the progress of events during the first phases of the war, that is, the period of movement on the Western Front, it appears that the strategic position of Limburg handicapped the Germans to the following extent:

(1) The isolation of the Belgian Army from Antwerp miscarried. Observations on this subject have already been made. The Third and Fourth Reserve Corps, and afterwards the Ninth Reserve Corps were retained in front of the Antwerp position by the vehement sallies of the Belgian Field Army and this at the most critical moment in the Battle of the Marne.

(2) The encircling of the British West wing near Condé miscarried. It should be noted, by way of explanation, that the French Supreme Command had reckoned with the possibility of a German attack through Belgium 1), and with this in view had revised the plan of concentration and had extended the position of the North Army wing as far as Hirson (60 kilometers South of Mons). „But the invasion of Belgium (by way of the left bank of the Meuse) certainly was a surprise to the French High Command" 2).

As late as Aug. 14, 1914, General Joffre said to General Lanrezac, the Commander of the Fifth French Army who was worried over the thought of a German operation on the Sambre, „Nous avons l'impression que les allemands n'ont rien de prêt par là 3)." The Fifth French Army which had been concentrated from August 3rd to 11th behind the Meuse between Mouzon (Exclusive) and Mezieres (Inclusive) was not ordered to occupy the Meuse section near Dinant, and the Sambre west of Namur, until 7 p.m. August 15th. On August 20th this very difficult troop movement, the 120 kilometer „Marche en crabe" was completed. This march could not be executed

1) The Reports of Marshal Joffre for the Commission of Inquiry on the Briey Basin (Echo de Paris, July 6, 1919). See also De Thomasson, pg. 140, passage quoted.

2) Hanotaux: „The Manoeuvre on the Marne, (Revue des Deux-Mondes of Mch 15, 1919. The bold face type is Hanotaux's. See also article by same author, „Revue des Deux-Mondes, 1917, pg. 744 and following.

3) De Thomasson, passage quoted, pg. 193.

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without troops and train columns crossing each other in the zone of operation 1).

However, because of the delayed action of the German First Army, Joffre had time to modify his initial concentration in the above manner.

The English Army had to operate on the French left. Nevertheless, as late as Aug. 21st, it was still drawn up behind the French forces and west of Maubeuge.

In case of a German attack, the French Army Command intended to march to the attack from the general line, Mons—Dinant. (Attack orders of Aug. 20th.) with the left wing of the 5th Army on Charleroi, the British in echelon would attack from Mons to Nivelles. General Lanrezac ordered that this attack should take place on Aug. 22d, or if need be, on Aug. 23rd 2). On Aug. 22d, the British left wing extended as far as Condé. General von Bülow, commanding the combined 1st and 2nd German Armies, intended in cooperation with the 3rd Army, to envelope the 5th French Army from the east and the British from the west (double strategic envelopement, See note, Chapter II). In order to carry out this movement, the German High Command had ordered the 3rd Army to cooperate closely with von Bülow. Thus von Bülow meant to prepare a second „Sedan" for his opponents.

Because of the absence of an enveloping base in Dutch territory, (See above), and because of the delayed march of the 1st Army in manoeuvering around Limburg, von Bülow, though he had reached the Sambre on Aug. 21st with the VII and X Army Corps, was compelled to hold up his attack until the 1st Army had changed direction, starting from the general line reached on Aug. 20th. This is the Ninove—Gembloux line. On Aug. 21st, he was compelled to issue the following order 3):

„No attack will take place today. I intend to continue the turning movement to the South with the 1st and 2nd Armies, in order to fight in combination with the 3rd Army the hostile forces which are drawn up South of the Sambre and west of the Meuse. Signed: von Bülow"

At 11, 10 pm., Aug. 21st, von Bülow ordered the attack to take place on Aug. 23rd only.

The factor of surprise was no longer present. Besides, engagements. not intended by the commanders in question, had already taken place between the left wing of the German 2nd Army and part of the French 5th Army.

The French and the British could evade the menacing envelopement on Aug. 23rd. The II and IV German Army Corps did not reach

1) De Thomasson, passage quoted, pg. 196.
2) De Thomasson, passage quoted, pg. 204.
3) Baumgarten-Crusius, l. c. Pg 22.

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the battlefield with their main forces before the night of August 23—24. They arrived too late.

In the brochure entitled. „Quatre Mois de Guerre" the great French Headquarters admit that this timely evasion on the Sambre of the enemy's grip enabled them to effect their manoeuvre on the Marne. What a disadvantageous position the British and the French would have been in if the German 1st Army had only had the benefit of two marching days!

(3) The 5th French Army found itself in similar position when it changed front, in order to face the enemy, in the basin of the Oise near Guise and east of St. Quentin. General von Bülow attacked with a front of Four Army Corps on Aug. 28th and 29th. But the enveloping of the French left by two of Von Kluck's Divisions was no longer possible. The French slipped out of the German grip.

(4) Because of the fatigued condition of the Germans, the pursuit of the retreating English and French Armies did not reap its full benefits. At this point, the Allies were menaced by great dangers, as the French General Cherffils writes in the „Echo de Paris" of July 21, 1919, „Si la magnifique cavalerie intacte et fraîche de Marwitz et de Richthofen avait fait son devoir si elle avait harcelé nos colonnes haletantes, notre manoeuvre de repli aurait pu se changer en un desastre."

The General ascribed the fact that this disaster was prevented to the counter operations of the exhausted French Cavalry. However, the German cavalry was not as fresh and intact as the General assumes, the horses were utterly exhausted by underfeeding and by the enormous distances which they had covered. This is proven by the war diary accounts 1).

On Aug. 25th and 30th the horses of the 4th Cavalry Division were reported to be utterly exhausted. On Sept. 2nd, the two cavalry divisions which had already been sent in pursuit of the enemy were recalled because the horses were completely worn out. Not long ago General Lanrezac himself in an article in the French Press threw some light on his perilous position during the first days of September 1914. Circumstances similar to those above mentioned influenced the pursuing army corps. On Sept. 3rd, the German main command expressed the view that the First and Second Armies should isolate the French from Paris and drive them in a Southeasternly direction 2).

In general, during the entire movement from the lower Meuse to the Marne several armies on the German marching flank tried to disperse their opponents with a will power which knew no stopping and „by smashing everything".

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1) Major-General Von Poseck in the „Militär Wochenblatt" No. 150 of 1919

2) Baumgarten Crusius, passage quoted, pg. 68.

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There were three reasons why these tactics did not succeed:

First, the efficient French leadership;

Second, the effective long range action of the excellent French rear-guard artillery, and

Third, and not the least important, because of the exhausted condition of the German troops and the inconveniences which they suffered through the lack of a good enveloping base for the Northern armies to start from, and the complicated strategic deployment which his deficiency entailed.

The necessary extra marching could not be endured by the Pomeranian, Brandenburg- and Hanseatic troops. In its orders for September 5th, even before the battle of the Marne had begun, the German Supreme Command had to admit „it is no longer possible to push the entire French Army in a south-eastern direction against the Swiss frontier" 1).

VIII. Conclusions.

A,

After considering the preceeding, the following question suggests itself: „Why did the German High Command decide to respect the territory of Dutch Limburg, when the drawbacks entailed by this decision were so evident?" Neutrality seemed to worry this Command very little, as evidenced by Belgium and Luxemburg.

Napoleon was confronted by an analogous situation in 1805, and despite the protests of the King of Prussia, marched four Army Corps through the neutral Prussian Ansbach (The strategical envelopment of the Austrian Army under Mack near Ulm). It was due to this action that his strategical envelopment succeeded. At that time he had little to fear from the Prussians, and he risked the blow.

The Prussian General Staff, of our day, had, during its long peace preparation, plenty of time to consider the arguments for and against the passage through Limburg. It decided against violating this territory.

Now, what could have been the consequences had a contrary decision been reached?

Holland would have immediately ranged itself on the side of Germany's enemies. The Dutch Army, starting from an uniquely favorable position, with respect to the German troops marching on Paris, would, beyond the shadow of a doubt, have launched itself on the German flank and rear.

Even the menace of a Dutch offensive caused the Germans to take extensive precautionary measures. This offensive, had it been undertaken, would have been based on the then existing formidable defensive works called the „Holland Position" (Vesting Holland). This posi-

1) Baumgarten Crusius, passage quoted, pg 73.

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tion extends from the Helder along the coast of the North Sea to the Haringvliet, thence along the entire Hollandsche Diep, and from there following the new Holland Water Line as far as Naarden, turning along the coast of the Zuyder Zee and back to the Helder.

The perimeter of this position measures 430 k m., as against 85 for the fortifications of Paris, and 110 for the position of Antwerp.

Starting from the Holland position, operations could have been undertaken with a minimum of three Dutch Divisions, which would be equal in strength to at least two German Army Corps. It is quite true that the Dutch regiments assigned to the duty of protecting the Meuse crossings in Limburg would have retreated before this force, but the Germans would have constantly felt the Dutch Field Army menacing them on their strategically weakest points.

In this respect Holland was ready and vigilant. **Holland was ready before any other one of the belligerent powers.** By 3 p. m., Aug. 3d, the Dutch Army, 203.657 strong, had taken up its positions, and the Field Army had taken up its provisional concentration posts. 1)

Some days before the German manoevre around L i m b u r g had started, the 4th Division of the Dutch Army had already been moved by railroad into northern B r a b a n t: from that moment on, a strong group of Army Divisions remained in this district. 1)

Holland was defending Limburg, not with a force in that country, not on the Meuse itself, but indirectly-from a particularly favorable flanking position (the advance terrain of the Holland position). All the resources of the kingdom, men capable of bearing arms, railroad and waterway operations, raw-materials, provisions, etc. were all placed under a single direction, in view of concerted action. The entire Dutch nation was then fighting with Belgium (for Limburg).

And .... as long as the nation's heart beat behind its numerous and practically impregnable water defenses, nothing was lost. Destiny always decides the victory: The Belgian Meuse was reconquered on the Yser.

The sea-ports Amsterdam, Rotterdam and Dordrecht, being in Dutch hands, would have given the Allies an opportunity (by landing British auxiliaries, for example) of conducting very favorable operations against the Germans. Hard, telling, blows could have been struck from these positions. The Belgian sorties from the Antwerp position on Aug. 25th and 26th, and especially the one in the 2nd week Sept. 1914, which prevented two German Reserve Corps from throwing their weight into the conflict on the Marne and of deciding the conflict, clearly show the advantages to be derived from such flanking positions.

As soon as the German Army Command had decided to cross Limburg, it would have been immediately obliged to detach strong con-

1) Report of the Dutch Army Commission, page 7.

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tingents for purposes of observation in Brabant and Limburg, as well as north of the Rhine at the Yssel. This would have weakened the forces operating against France by three or four Army Corps at least. In the end, the German Command would have been obliged to make those dispositions necessary for the capture of the Dutch Rhine and Meuse ports, with a view of annihilating, at one blow, the strategic importance of Holland.

This operation across a system of fortifications which were defended by broad inundations would have necessitated even more troubles and the result would have been very uncertain. The heroic resistance of the Belgians on the Yser is an example of the value of broad inundations and the first operations of the Austrians across Servia illustrate the uncertainty of this sort of auxiliary operations.

The possibility of Dutch intervention on the side of the Allies in August, 1914 in itself, had a retarding influence on the movements of the First German Army. The Second Army Corps especially had rested its flank against the frontier of Limburg in order to protect itself.

All these disadvantages must have considerably influenced the decisions of the German General Staff when they considered the great advantages which (would have been theirs) by a violation of Dutch neutrality. The great thing, of course, would have been the rapidity and liberty of movement which they would have enjoyed in the execution of their plan of operations. This General Staff, however, saw itself forced to keep out of Dutch territory and by this action to accept all the disadvantages which it entailed.

B.

Would the situation have been better for Belgium, if, on the first of August, 1914, Limburg, as far as and including Venlo, had been Belgian territory? The considerations above mentioned, answer this question decidedly in the negative.

Besides, if Maastricht, Roermond, and Venlo had been provided with expensive fortificationsystems on the style of the one at Liege, where would the Belgians have found the troops necessary to garrison these works? Did not the Third Division of the Belgian Army have to retire as early as August 6th from the Meuse in order to act as reserve for the Field Army? The resistance on a greatly extended Meuse frontier would have of necessity been even weaker than it was in 1914. The increase in the forces which the Belgian Army would have had to supply had the Limburg section of the Meuse been incorporated in their front could, by no means, have been drawn from the population of Limburg alone 1).

1) Limburg's proportional quota for the Belgian Army of 1914 would have been 4,500 men. This is much less than the number of Dutch forces actually in Limburg in 1914 for the sole purpose of directly defending this province.

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C.

The crossing of the Meuse by the German troops at Maestricht and down stream from this city, would have been in this case, simply and solely a Belgian affair of absolutely no interest to Holland.

The Netherlands in this case would not have thrown themselves into the battle with all their force, nor with their ready field army, nor with all their rich resources.

If the facts were examined in a cold-blooded and candid manner, it is impossible to understand on what strategic reason Belgium bases her claim to Dutch territory. This claim is simply the result of thoughtless dilettantism. Professor Struycken, Councillor of State, states that „indistinct, unjust and incorrect statements of an historical and juridical character" are used to answer, in a confusing way, the questions concerning the legal position of the Netherlands with respect to the revision of the Treaty of 1839 1).

„Indistinct, unjust and incorrect statements" are also used in a confusing way to set forth the Belgian view of Limburg's strategical importance.

If another great war breaks out some time in the future just as it did in 1914, Dutch Limburg from the point of view of the Western Powers, will possess the same strategical value that it did in 1914.

This is the lesson to be drawn from „The Limburg Manoeuvre".

If this lesson is understood, then the present political Limburg manoeuvre which is being carried on in certain quarters, is quickly recognized as being a serious mistake.

FINIS.

1) Nederland, België en de Mogendheden. pg. 6.

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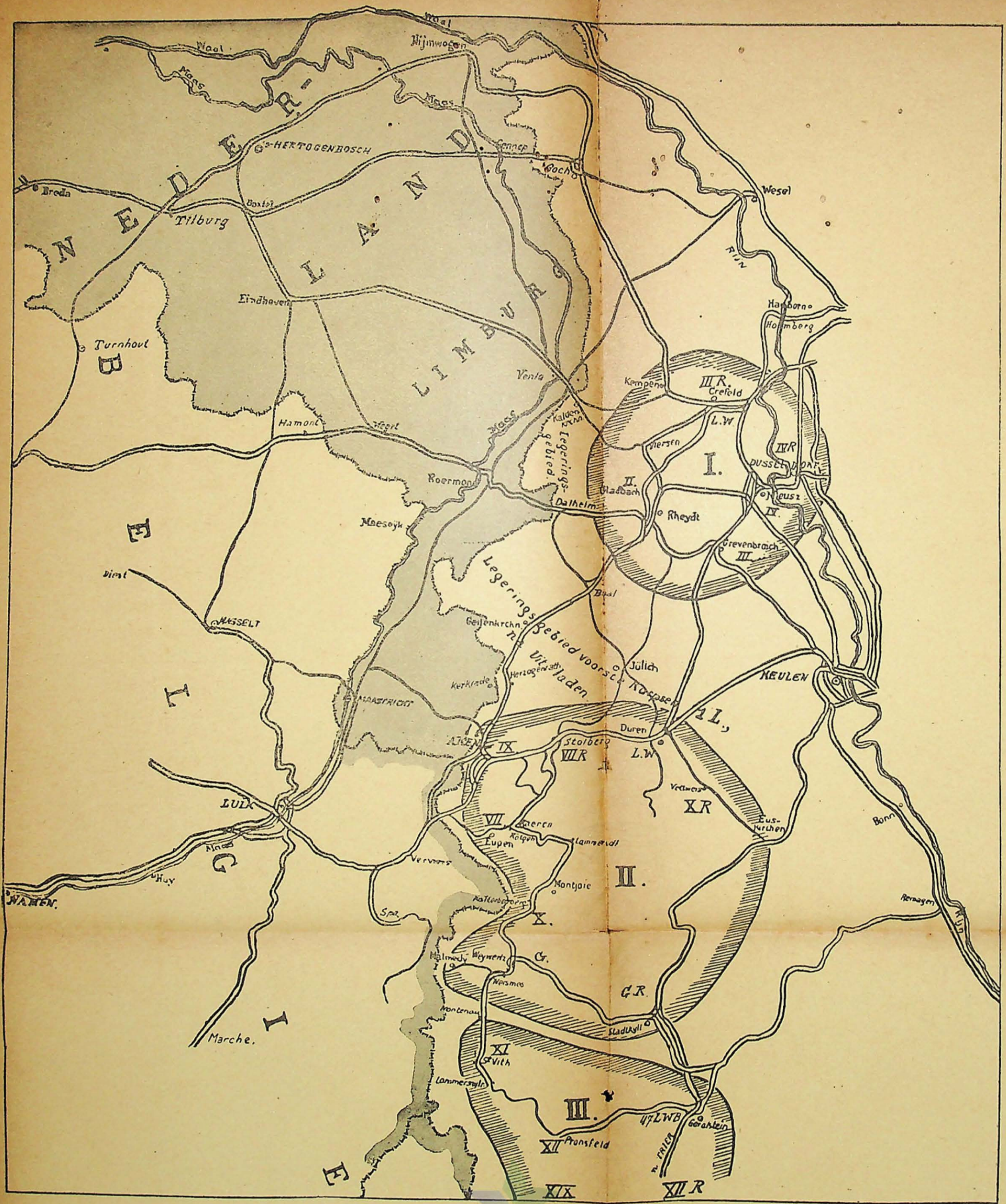

SKETCH I.

Scale 1 : 750.000.

Legend.

Double Track Road.

Single Track Road.

I. Approximate zone of detraining points of 1st German Army.

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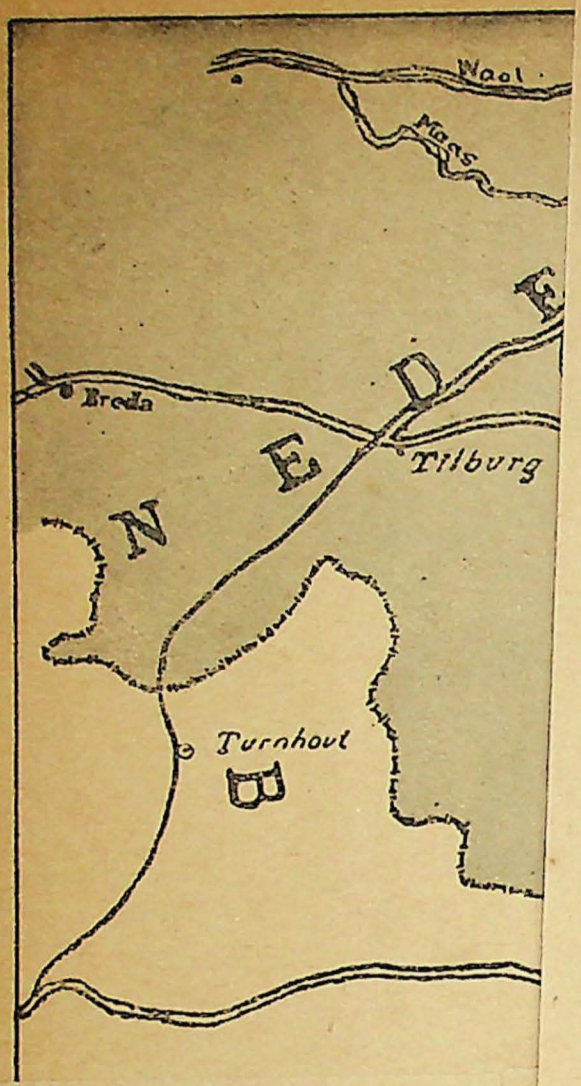

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Indirect defense of Limburg by an attack on German flank, and by menacing the communications with at least three Dutch Army Divisions (equal in strength by at least two German Army Corps).



SKETCH II.

Scale 1 : 750.000.

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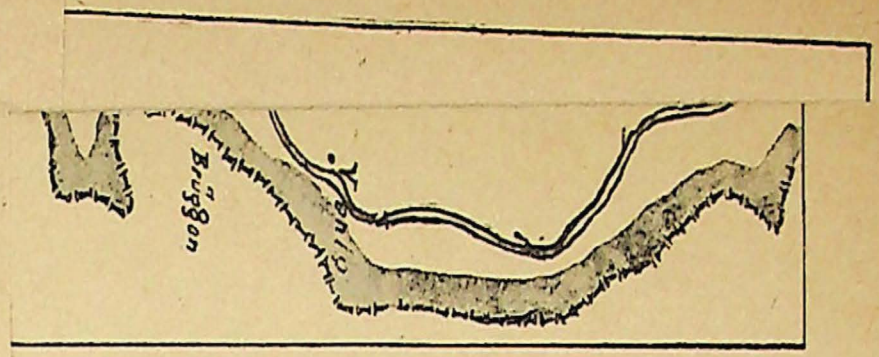

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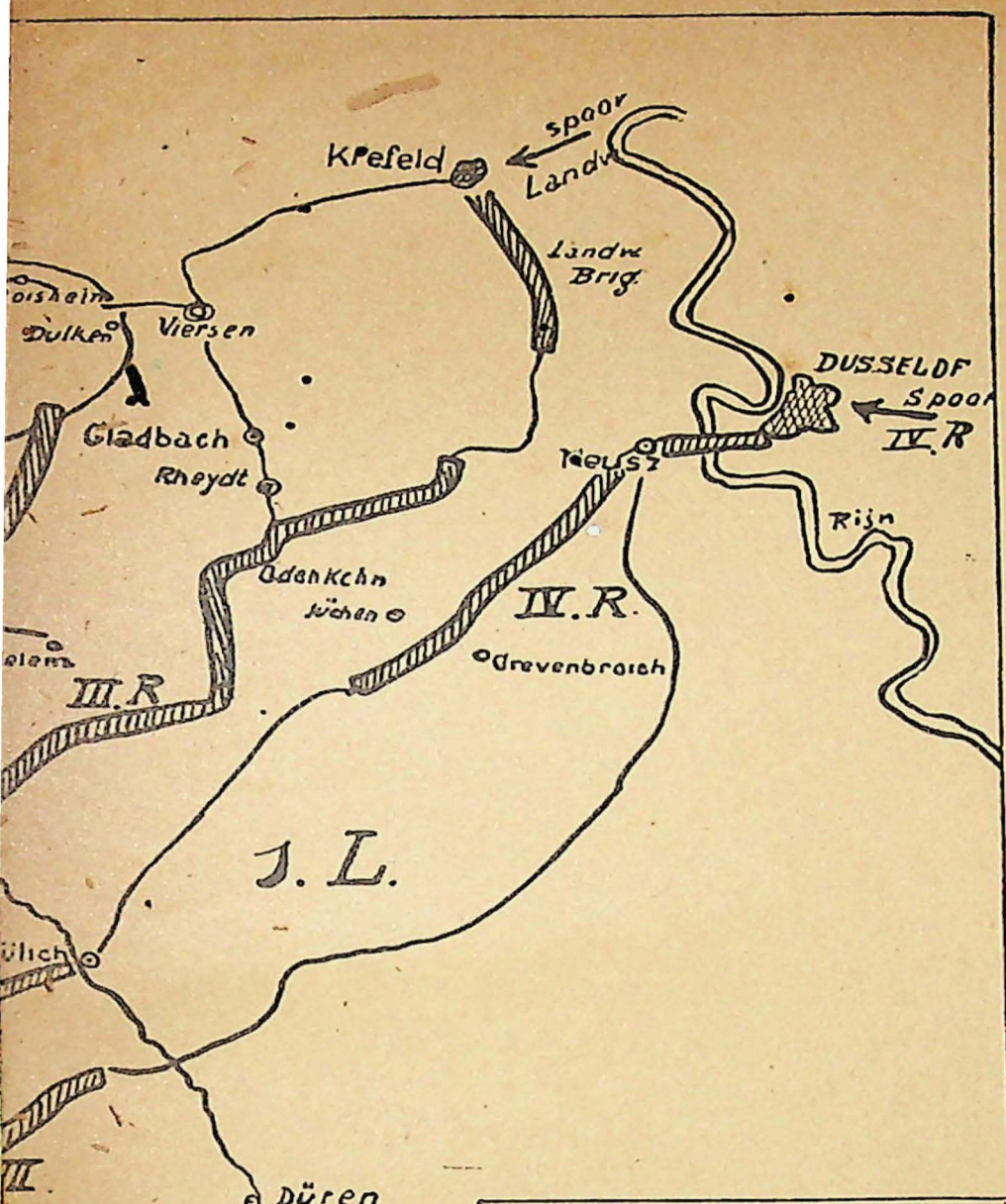
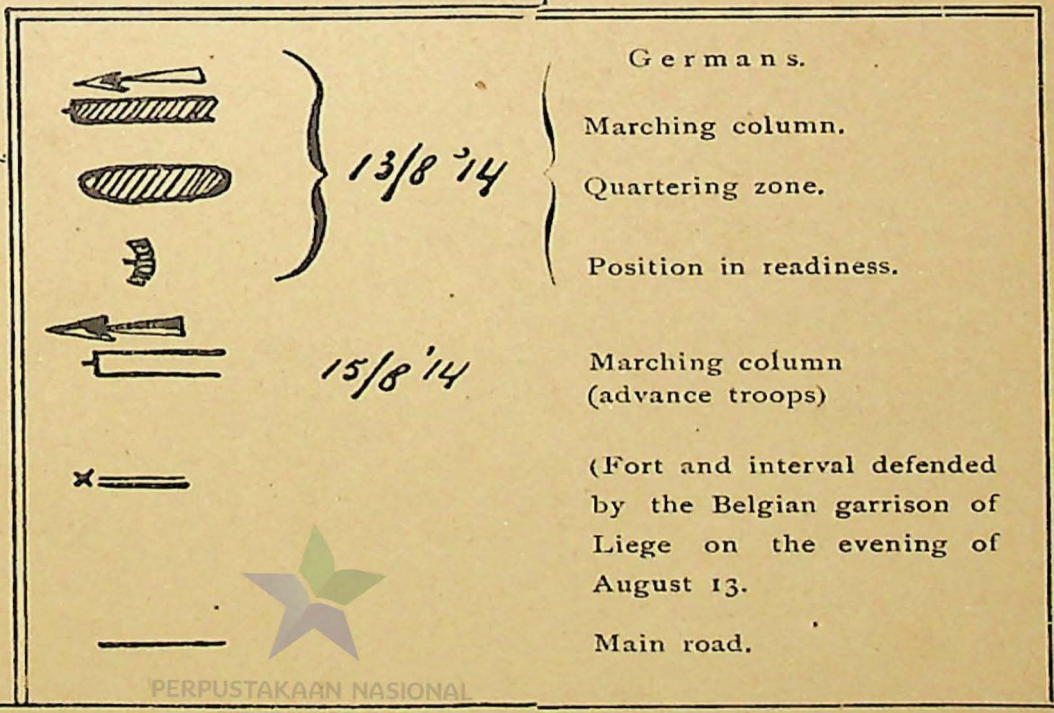
SKETCH III. *The Limborg Maneu*





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