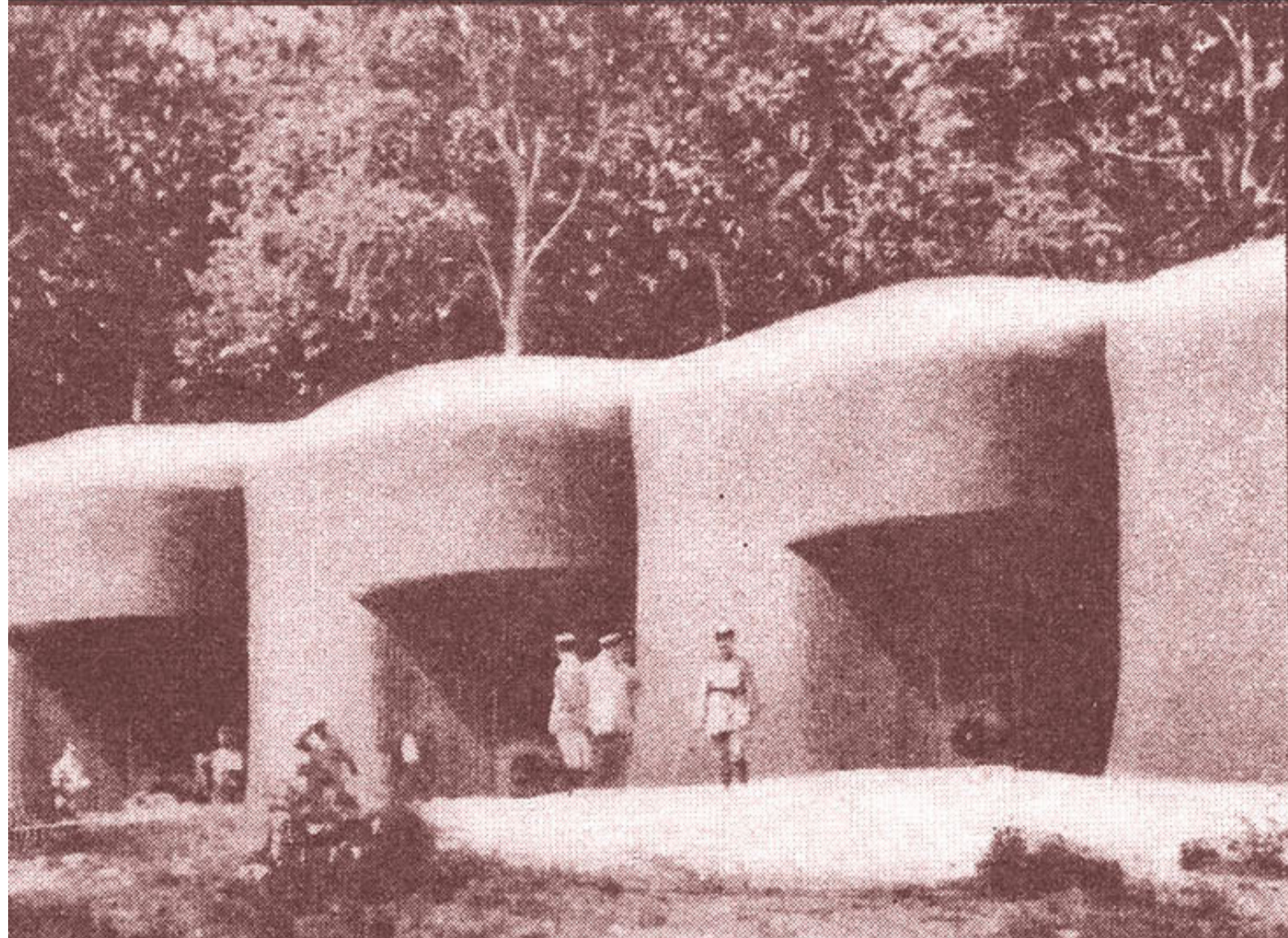


# THE LITERARY DIGEST

January 29, 1938: p. 17

## UNDERGROUND FORTS

from "Through Turbulent Years"



**FEAR OF INVASION** has caused France to construct a series of the world's most impregnable underground forts—the Maginot Line. Almost 100,000 men are stationed along this frontier, which will be used as a mobilization point in a crisis

**O**NE million Frenchmen can live underground for three months in comparative comfort. That seems to me to be the most significant fact in France today. They can be sheltered in the amazing Maginot Line fortifications which are as close to impregnable as modern military science has been able to devise.

The Maginot Line, which is nearing completion, will guard all France's land frontiers, except the natural barrier of the Pyrenees. When the treaty between France and Belgium was abrogated in 1936, French military authorities decided not to depend on the strength of Belgian fortifications on the Belgian-German frontier. Another factor influenced French military experts.

It was learned that one theoretical military plan of Germany involved invasion of France through Switzerland. The Maginot Line has been therefore extended to include the entire Franco-Swiss frontier.

Already 100,000 men are in these underground forts near Verdun, Metz, Mulhouse, Strassburg and Thionville. The French Ministry of War emphasizes that this is not a mobilization. It is merely one measure in the development of frontier defense.

The Maginot Line will permit calm French mobilization, experts say, in the event of a crisis. It may be noted, from a study of these forts on a map, that the chief point of concentration is approximately opposite the reoccupied Rhine zone.

The Paris daily newspaper, *Le Soir*, says that no army can break down the Maginot Line; that no heavy artillery can smash in the forts. *Le Soir* recently published the most detailed article yet to appear in print describing these fortifications, and presumably this has been authorized by the highest military authorities in order that Germany may have a clear picture of the difficulties she would encounter in any aggression westward.

The line of forts is very much unlike a World War trench system. There are about 14,000 isolated, semi-obscured pill-boxes of steel and concrete. Along the 600-mile frontier they may be seen sticking up out of hedges, fields, ponds and underbrush.





The obtruding pillboxes are of a rotating type. There is no above-ground entrance or exit. Each has two stories—one above ground and the other sixty feet below. Above the lower chamber there is at least forty feet of concrete.

Three men constitute the "garrison" of each miniature fortress and one of the three men is always on duty. In the lower chamber there are two folding-beds, a radio receiver, a latrine, an air-cooled provision box, ammunition, tools and two spare guns.

It is not necessary for a man to be in the upper chamber in order to fire the gun. It is possible for the gunners below to spiral the weapon up the sixty feet until it reaches the surface turret. By an ingenious periscopic device it then can be fired from below and the recoil starts the gun spiraling down again.

The French believe that the Maginot Line will prevent any possibility of invasion. Military authorities admit that enemy airplanes may wreck French cities and other industrial centers, but they maintain that no hostile force can occupy their territory until the Maginot Line is destroyed. They believe this Line to be inviolable, but if they are perchance mistaken they still have another device which is to prevent its capture.

About twenty miles back of the Maginot Line there is located, well underground, a secret chamber, the location of which is known to very few men in the country. If an enemy should capture and occupy considerable portions of the Maginot Line—inconceivable to the French—the pressing of a single button in this secret chamber would blow up, with thousands of tons of dynamite and TNT, the entire 600 miles of fortifications.—*Vernon McKenzie* (Robert M. McBride and Co., \$2.75)