

# GAMELIN STRESSES MAGINOT DEFECTS

## Fortifications' Weakness Kept From People, He Asserts in Detailed Analysis

This is the third in a series of articles by the man who commanded the French armies for five years before and during the war.

By Gen. MAURICE-G. GAMELIN  
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PARIS, July 18—I have a passion for definition before discussion. Therefore I ask: "What was the Maginot Line exactly?"

On this point there are still some serious ambiguities. There are many people even in France who believed that the country lay sheltered behind "la ligne Maginot" and that it protected all our dangerous frontiers. To calm public opinion and to give confidence, our Governments never thought it necessary officially to correct this error. Our propaganda itself permitted the misconception to be uttered and believed, even though it fell to me finally to protest.

The name "Maginot Line" was given after his [the designer, André Maginot] death, a regrettable loss for us, to a system of permanent fortifications erected between 1929 and 1934 on our eastern frontier. Not that M. Maginot was the originator of it. It was worked out by a military commission headed by General Guillaumat, one of our most remarkable leaders in the first World War. His proposals were approved by Marshal Pétain, who also partly influenced the preliminary work, not so much in the installations themselves as in the drawing of the line; and by President Painlevé, who was then Minister of War. But it was M. Maginot who in 1929 and 1930 obtained from Parliament the necessary appropriations.

### Connected Installations

From a technical point of view the system was composed of a series of installations—that is, forts—of varying strength connected by casements. There were two "fortified fronts" between the Rhine and the Luxembourg border that we called "the fortified zone of the Lauter River" and "the fortified zone of Metz."

The first fortifications were extended from the Rhine at the same level as the southeastern horn of the Haguenau Forest, as far as the eastern slopes of the Vosges, west of Bitche. The second extended from the upper valley of the Nied toward Faulquemont up to the old town of Thionville on the Moselle. A wide gap, therefore, remained between the two. On the Rhine no forts were built but only two lines of pillboxes widely spaced, one on the bank itself and consequently in full view of the German bank, and the other on the level of the first villages of Alsace.

In 1931 M. Maginot obtained approval to extend the works from Thionville to Longuyon—that is, to the Belgian border. In 1932 arose the question of beginning in the same way the organization of the defense of our northern border, where there was only a series of pillboxes on the edge of the forest between Maubeuge and Condeur-Escaut. But Pétain torpedoed the plan in circumstances that I could describe in detail, having been closely linked with the affair.

From 1934 onward it was decided to develop the system, first by creating to the west of Longuyon a bridgehead north of Chierres at Montmédy and then by closing the gap between the two fortified zones. After 1935, when I succeeded General Weygand as supreme commander, it appeared to us that it was very late to begin the large-scale building of new installations, the completion of which would require several years. War might break out at any moment, and besides all the appropriations available had to be put into works that needed to be quickly modernized. Therefore we decided:

To complete our "Maginot Line" by erecting obstacles, including a network of iron wires, fields of rails and anti-tank mines and by building blockhouses to give depth to the position.

To close gaps in our system of fortifications and progressively to extend it up to Dunkerque on the left and to the Jura Mountains on the right by merely creating what I called "a bony framework for the battlefield" composed of pillboxes and blockhouses and other barriers of various types that could be finished at the moment of mobilization by troops destined to occupy the positions.

In these circumstances, it can be understood that the Maginot Line, properly speaking, did not cover even a sixth of our northeastern border. Nor did it cover our northern frontier, in case the Germans violated the neutrality of Belgium. On that side we had to be contented with modernizing the northeastern installations and with building three small strong points east of Valenciennes.

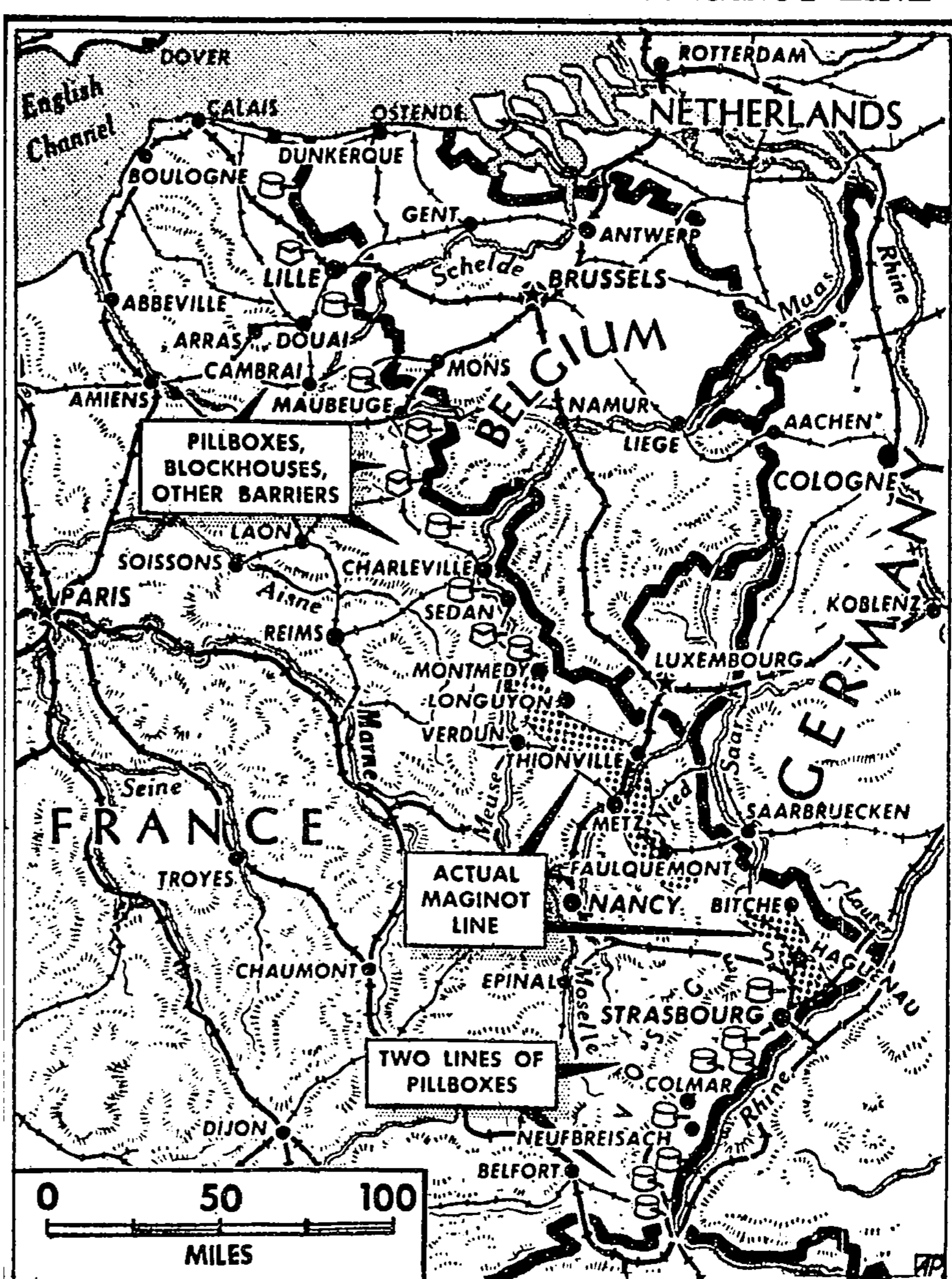
### Attacked West of Montmédy

Now, as everyone knows, it was from west of Montmédy that the Germans exerted their main effort in May, 1940. They did not attack the Maginot Line. One might say that they were kept from attacking it. They confined themselves to the western extremity of the Montmédy bridgehead, where they stormed the whole of the system that we called the "little strong-points" of Ferte, flanking these positions and taking them from the rear.

In June, they attacked us on our eastern frontier in the gap between the fortified zone of Metz and that of the Lauter River and on the Rhine, where they forced a passage at Neufbresach. These sections of the front were thinly manned then, since it had been necessary to send a number of divisions toward the Aisne and the Somme.

The Maginot Line in 1940, therefore, rendered us the same service in our general strategic planning that the forts of Belfort, Epinal, Toul, Verdun, etc., had rendered us in 1914. It had deflected the initial German attack from our eastern frontier. We profited from this in 1914, since we smashed the German offensive on the Marne. But in 1940 we could not stop them.

## WEAKNESSES OF THE FAMED MAGINOT LINE



July 19, 1945

The map shows the gaps in France's defense wall as described by General Gamelin, wartime chief commander.