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News from Switzerland

MISFORTUNE AND TRAGEDY

There have been so many recent happenings of a serious nature, in some cases bordering on catastrophe, in Switzerland and the following brief reports cover some of them.

Soon after a fire at the **Hottingen Telephone Exchange**, which disconnected 30,000 subscribers, a "Mirage" fighter **crashed** into the Lake of Lucerne near Ennetbuergen. One of the two pilots lost his life. This is the first crash with a "Mirage" after 11,000 flights. Another military plane, a "Vampire", **crashed** near Samaden in the Grisons, and the pilot lost his life.

One of the worst **explosions** ever occurred at **Dottikon**, a village on the road Lenzburg-Bremgarten in the Aargau. This is the sixth serious explosion in Switzerland in the last two decades, with a total loss of 36 lives. At Dottikon, the catastrophe cost 17, possibly 18 lives. It occurred at the Federal Explosives Factory. Everything within a diameter of 200 metres was destroyed, and a huge, 40-metre wide crater filled with water was in the place of the explosives washing shop where the explosion occurred, the fourth at this factory, though the previous ones were on a minor scale.

A heavy **mountain slide** in the Waeggital near Siebnen (Schwyz) killed six people. The road where the accident occurred is 105 years old, and this is the first time anything like this has happened. The Army helped to recover the bodies and to clear the road from rocks, earth and tree trunks.

Four people were killed early in April in **avalanches** in the Grisons, and three soldiers lost their lives in the same way in the Upper Engadine at the end of the month.

Fifteen mountaineers were **snowed up** for five days at the Hollandia Hut in the Loetschental, at an altitude of 3238m. A helicopter finally transported the stranded party to safety. The Valais Cantonal M.P. Michel Rouvinez has not yet been found — he disappeared in the heavy snowstorm which forced the alpinists into the hut.

A terrible **murder** was committed at the Sanatorium for Tuberculosis "Adelheid" at Unteraegeri (Zug), when a porter (employed there for the past 24 years) shot four women, three sisters and a maid, killing two of them and dangerously injuring the others.

Two bad **collisions** took place on the Lyss-Lausanne line within a few hours, causing loss of five lives. Both accidents happened on a level crossing, one with a lorry, the other a timber transport.

FINE ACHIEVEMENT OF THE SWISS ROLLING STOCK INDUSTRY

In Switzerland, there are a great many small narrow-gauge railways on steep inclines, where cutting down deadweight becomes of vital importance in any attempt to modernise them. For the small line from Aigle to Champéry, for example, the Vevey Engineering Works have built ultra-light carriages, of an entirely new conception, in which the weight has been reduced as far as possible, both in the bodywork and in the bogies, with modern means based on aeronautical techniques. These coaches weigh only 7450 kg. gross weight and can carry a load of 9000 kg., i.e. 130 passengers, 52 of them seated. The reduction in weight has not however been achieved at the expense of strength or endurance, by reducing the thickness of the aluminium sheets for example.

The second point of interest about the new coaches is their bogie with primary pneumatic suspension, autovarying depending on the load. In fact, for a carriage whose weight empty is lower than half its weight when fully loaded, it was necessary to adapt a constant height suspension. In this particular instance, the suspension is equipped with adjustable air cushions, the pneumatic bellows being fitted directly on the axle-boxes. Compared with other systems, this leads to a considerable decrease in the non-suspended weight and other advantages too. The compressed air needed for the pneumatic suspension is supplied by the braking system; in addition, the valves of the suspension system make it possible to adapt braking according to load.

Combining extreme lightness with high suspension comfort, the new railway coaches produced by the Vevey Works are bound to meet with great success and be adopted by other lines. (osec)

FLIMS HAS THE LONGEST AERIAL CABLEWAY

The longest aerial cableway in the world, built by Habegger of Thun and recently put into service in the Grisons tourist resort of Flims, between Flims-village and Startgels, is just over 2½ miles long with a difference in altitude of 1614ft. This new aerial cableway can carry 700 passengers an hour to the skiing slopes of Nagens-La-Siala. (osec)

EMPLOYMENT OF FOREIGN WORKERS

Another cut has been ordered by the Government in the number of foreign workers to be employed in Switzerland. The expected stabilisation was not reached last year; the number went up by 3% in 1968 (over 16,000) and by 4.3% in the number of foreigners, which reached 933,000 or 15.3% of the total foreign population. Firms are now to cut their foreign workers' quota by another 2% by the end of the year.