

Zeitschrift: Helvetia : magazine of the Swiss Society of New Zealand
Herausgeber: Swiss Society of New Zealand
Band: 23 (1960)
Heft: [2]

Rubrik: Swiss spotlight...

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HELVETIA

Monthly Publication of the Swiss Society of New Zealand (Inc)

GROUP NEW ZEALAND OF THE NEW HELVETIC SOCIETY

23rd Year

FEBRUARY 1960

Hamilton



Swiss Spotlight . . .

by PIERRE BEGUIN

For the last two or three years, various units of the Swiss Army have engaged in an interesting innovation. During the periods of military service, they now publish journals which strive to establish a contact with the soldiers and the population. This novel scheme, testifies to a wish to modify the relations between the superior officers and their subordinates, and this in a spirit of greater democratisation.

For a long time past, our army, just like most of the armies in the world, has been dominated solely by the principle of authority. There was no question of giving any explanations to the subordinates, regarding the exercises to which they were subjected and the manoeuvres in which they took part.

Since about twenty years ago, an evolution has taken place in this domain, which is due to the circumstances of the Second World War. At that time, when our army was living in a state of expectation, an institution was born, in the spring of 1940, called "The Army and the Home," which sent lecturers to the troops, lecturers who exerted themselves in justifying Swiss neutrality, in explaining the international situation and in recalling the reasons for which the Swiss Army remained in readiness to defend the national independence.

The activities of this organisation made it possible to give a spiritual basis for military defence—which is, after all, a measure of a technical order. The men, incorporated in the various units, learnt to know, better than during the previous periods of military service, why it was that they were taken away from their homes and their jobs.

The "Army and Home" organisation, however, merely constituted a stage. Time has passed and new requirements have arisen. It was recognised that it was not sufficient to merely cultivate those general value which justified Swiss independence and the existence of our Army. A number of commanding officers admitted that it was necessary for the soldier, during the periods of instruction, and more particularly during the manoeuvres, to know the meaning and the aim of the action expected from him. On the military chess-

board, the soldier is no longer looked upon as being merely a pawn. It is now intended to substitute for what used to be called formerly a manoeuvrable mass, a gathering of individualities, of which each one is conscious of the part it is playing in the general plan.

And, that is the reason why, one after the other, the principal Army units have now started to publish, during the manoeuvres, journals which have been edited and produced by men, editors and typographers, who have been taken from among the troops. They explain what is taking place and vindicate the efforts demanded from the men. And, what is still better, these journals encourage a dialogue between the commanding officers and the ranks, questions and answers which are absolutely free and which are useful to the "brass," as they show the morale prevailing among the men, and useful also to the soldiers as they help them to understand the decision of the military authority. These journals are also disseminated among the population of those regions in which the troops are manoeuvring. In this way, the population also understands the reasons for the exercise which sometimes cause them certain inconveniences. In short, the Swiss Army has, at last, understood the necessity for what are called "public relations." This is certainly progress and it is a means for making the military system conform to psychological data, whilst at the same time justifying the principle of authority.

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