

Zeitschrift: The Swiss observer : the journal of the Federation of Swiss Societies in the UK
Herausgeber: Federation of Swiss Societies in the United Kingdom
Band: - (1936)
Heft: 758

Artikel: Flying adventures
Autor: Mittelholzer, Walter
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-692472>

Nutzungsbedingungen

Die ETH-Bibliothek ist die Anbieterin der digitalisierten Zeitschriften auf E-Periodica. Sie besitzt keine Urheberrechte an den Zeitschriften und ist nicht verantwortlich für deren Inhalte. Die Rechte liegen in der Regel bei den Herausgebern beziehungsweise den externen Rechteinhabern. Das Veröffentlichen von Bildern in Print- und Online-Publikationen sowie auf Social Media-Kanälen oder Webseiten ist nur mit vorheriger Genehmigung der Rechteinhaber erlaubt. [Mehr erfahren](#)

Conditions d'utilisation

L'ETH Library est le fournisseur des revues numérisées. Elle ne détient aucun droit d'auteur sur les revues et n'est pas responsable de leur contenu. En règle générale, les droits sont détenus par les éditeurs ou les détenteurs de droits externes. La reproduction d'images dans des publications imprimées ou en ligne ainsi que sur des canaux de médias sociaux ou des sites web n'est autorisée qu'avec l'accord préalable des détenteurs des droits. [En savoir plus](#)

Terms of use

The ETH Library is the provider of the digitised journals. It does not own any copyrights to the journals and is not responsible for their content. The rights usually lie with the publishers or the external rights holders. Publishing images in print and online publications, as well as on social media channels or websites, is only permitted with the prior consent of the rights holders. [Find out more](#)

Download PDF: 13.08.2025

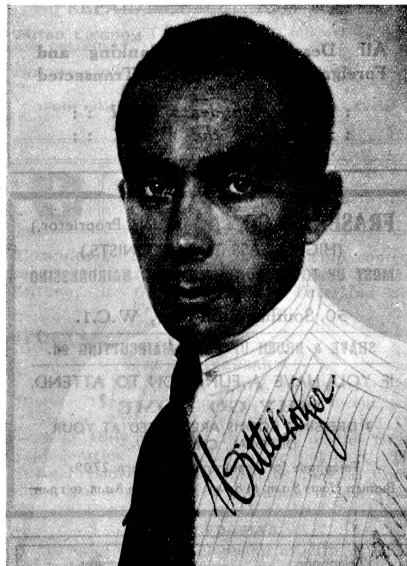
ETH-Bibliothek Zürich, E-Periodica, <https://www.e-periodica.ch>

FLYING ADVENTURES

BY

Walter Mittelholzer

(Blackie 10/6).



From times immemorial books of adventure have stirred generation after generation; tales of conquest in the four quarters of the globe have spread like wild fire from one corner to another of this universe. Names like Livingstone, Scott, Nansen, Stanley, Amundsen, Sven Hedin, etc., to name only a few, have become household words, and have kindled in the hearts of thousands a longing for adventurous exploits. —

I have before me Walter Mittelholzer's latest book, "Flying Adventures" published by Blackie and Son, Ltd., a book which I have read with the greatest interest and pleasure. —

The author, who ranks amongst the giants in the sphere of aviation, has been flying aeroplanes for the last twenty years, and is to-day undoubtedly the outstanding pilot in Switzerland.

His various flights into the vast and forbidden lands that circle the North Pole, his flight along the Nile and over the great territories of Africa down to the Cape read like fairy tales; and are a striking example of the immense progress of aviation.

M. Mittelholzer is not only an expert in handling the "joystick," but also a master in handling his pen, and his book from beginning to end never fails to grip; he is also a fine photographer, and his views taken from the air, of cities, mountains, jungles and deserts, with which the book is illustrated add greatly to its attractiveness. —

Lord Beaverbrook has written a Preface, in which he says:

Walter Mittelholzer is one of the most intrepid and skilful air pilots in the world. His intrepidity is not based on rashness, however, but on cool calculation and a profound knowledge of the science of flying.

Many and many a mile have I travelled with him, and many more I hope to travel in days to come. For when you journey on high with Mittelholzer you grow confident, that in spirit and character he is the embodiment of the great English seamen of the sixteenth century. —

One day a historian of the air will arise who will make his own name and fame by describing the grand career of Mittelholzer. In the meantime, we are fortunate to have, in his own words, some chapters from the life of this remarkable man. —

Surely a fine tribute coming from a layman. Those who expect to find in this book accounts of stunt performances will be sadly disappointed, because Walter Mittelholzer is foremost a pioneer and a scientist, and not a mere performer of hair-raising aerial circus stunts.

In his introduction the author acquaints his readers with the fact that he learned flying in Switzerland and that, at the outbreak of war he joined up in the Swiss military Flying Corps, which, as he says, had at that time only a few

machines. Switzerland being a non-combattant he has no tales of heroic aerial combats to relate, but he says: "our combat was the unceasing battle of our frail, imperfect aeroplanes against the forces of Nature." He closes his introduction with the prophetic words: "Man is unchallenged victor over space and time."

The first chapter deals with "Alpine Flying," and contains a thrilling account of a flight from Milan over the Alps to Zurich; where he met with a severe accident which nearly cost him his life.

"The Alps," he writes, "taught us thoroughly, but they were a terribly severe master." All through his flying career the glittering mountain tops lured him; not only has he flown over almost every important peak in the whole 900 miles range from Vienna to the Mediterranean, but he has circled over the towering heights of Mount Kibo and Mount Kenja.

A no less interesting chapter takes us to the Arctic regions. It was in 1923, when he was on a visit to Berlin, that he was asked to take part in the Junkers Spitzbergen Expedition, which was to be an auxiliary expedition to R. Amundsen's first Polar flight. He accepted the proposition with enthusiasm, and his epoch making flight to Spitzbergen surpassed Jules Verne's fantastic visions of the future. A description of crossing the Vermland chain and over the Esmark glacier is almost awe-inspiring.

A further chapter takes us to Persia. Before, the Persian Government made an agreement with the Junkers Company for the organisation of regular air services, the journey from the Persian Gulf up to Teheran, the chief town, involved a wearying caravan journey of at least four weeks. To-day an aeroplane carries passengers and mail over this vast distance in a single day. A flight across the premier mountain in Persia, the ice-crowned Demavend, which towers to a height of 18,600 feet, was the culminating achievement of this Persian flight. Never before was this mountain flown over, and this feat left an indelible impression on the author. Some involuntary *rencontres* with Turkish soldiers and officials on his flight to Persia, are described in this chapter and make amusing reading.

The next chapter is entitled "The First Seaplane Flight over the Length of Africa." It was in February 1926, that the idea of a Swiss aviation expedition to Africa, along with René Gouzy, the well-known author of travel books, seemed to offer a fulfilment of his dreams, and he managed to raise the necessary funds in a comparatively short time. By May he received an official intimation from the British Colonial office and from the Air Ministry in London, that both would afford him every facility and support on his flight. It was December when he left the Lake of Zurich on his first 300 mile lap over the Alps, across Northern Italy, and down the Mediterranean coast to Marina di Pisa. From Pisa he flew to Naples on an eight hours' hop to Athens. Alexandria, 720 miles away across the Mediterranean, was his next aim, he accomplished this flight in 8 hours. Three days later he left for Cairo, where he landed smoothly on the Nile, just above the Semiramis Hotel.

From Cairo he continued the journey up the Nile to Luxor, and thence, after a brief halt, on to Assuan. Here he was forced to wait a few days for two cases of material. The flight of the "Switzerland" was then continued to Dongola, 430 miles away. In Khartoum he was hospitably entertained by the officers of the R.A.F. mess, who congratulated him warmly on his 800 mile day's journey. It was really only from Khartoum that the actual "tropical flight" began. The next landing stages on this long and tedious journey, were Malakal, Mongala, Butiaba, Jinja, Kisumu, Muansa on Lake Victoria, Uvira (Belgian Congo), Kasanga, Karonga, Mponda, Beira, Lourenco Marques, Durban, East London. This chapter is rich with descriptions of the life of the natives and the ever varying views of the country flown over. Some interesting animal studies are a welcome addition to this chapter.

How he left Zurich almost three years later on a big Aerial Game Expedition to Central Africa with Baron Louis v. Rothschild the well-known Austrian sportsman, is described in chapter V.

The flights over Mounts Kenja and Kilimanjaro (never before flown over) are effectively related. This chapter is followed by the one dealing with a journey across the Sahara to Lake Chad.

The subsequent chapter narrates "The First Direct Flight to Abyssinia," and that country, being now so much to the forefront, is one of the most interesting chapters of this remarkable book. The Emperor, Haile Selassie, to whom he delivered an aeroplane, received the author in special audience, surrounded by his ministers and the dignitaries of state.

The following chapter, entitled "A narrow Escape with a High-Speed Plane," is only one of the many exciting incidents of which this book is so rich:

"Swiss Air Lines was the first commercial aviation company to introduce America's fastest passenger plane, the Lockheed, to Europe in 1932, and I was called upon to demonstrate to an admiring crowd the flying capabilities of the 'red devils,' as the planes were popularly nicknamed.

Whereas at that time the air service from Basel to Paris took an average of three and a half hours, I carried out a flight over the same route one bright May morning, with four passengers, including the President of the Swiss Confederation, on board, in the remarkable time of one hour twenty-three minutes, at an average speed of 195 m.p.h. The news of this flight burst like a bomb-shell in France's aviation circles. The Press loudly proclaimed the alarming fact that civil planes were now in existence, which could fly unimpeded throughout France, and not a single fighting plane in the whole French air force would be capable of following them. For the first time French aviation experts out at Le Bourget witnessed a plane flashing past them like a projectile, with retracted under-carriage, at a top speed of 220 m.p.h.

But although the speed of the planes was everywhere readily admired, serious doubts were expressed as to the possibility of these single-engined machines standing the strain of regular air services. We were repeatedly and urgently warned of the dangers which would result from doubling our speed. But all this expert advice proved to be entirely unfounded. For two years we carried out the regular air service Zurich-Munich-Vienna in an average of two and a quarter hours, as compared with our previous five-hour time-table. Our two planes did 160,000 miles without the slightest mishap.

One very ticklish moment right at the beginning, however, nearly cost me my life. It was on the 5th of June, 1932, at Basel airport, where a large crowd of eager spectators had gathered to witness a flying display. After explaining the peculiarities of the Lockheed, and having revealed the smooth perfection of its lines to their critical eyes, I entered the plane, accompanied only by a journalist, and at once took off. The under-carriage was retracted flush with the wings, and then I swooped down over the centre of the landing-ground from an altitude of 2,000 feet. I was just about to flatten out at 200 feet, when I suddenly felt that the plane was not responding to my steering. I tugged the control stick up towards me with all my strength, but the green turf and the serried rows of spectators loomed up before me at appalling speed. I wrenched at the rudder, it obeyed, and the right wing tipped skywards. But now I was almost grazing the ground. I realized the situation in a flash. I had had the control lever prolonged, to enable me to sit higher, and thus obtain better visibility. This elongation was made of soft aluminium, which had bent under the strain of the powerful tug, so that the elevator was prevented from functioning. At the last moment, in the fraction of a second, I seized the original control lever, and with a superhuman effort, pulled it upwards with all my might. Our right wing-tip grazed the ground, shattering the green position light. But the plane now soared upwards, and shot rocket-like a mere five or six feet over the heads of the spectators, and only one or two feet above the roof of the hangar, until I reached 1,500 feet.

It was only when I had attained a safe height, that I was able to reconstruct the whole incident. It had all taken place at such tremendous speed, that there had not even been time for any sensation of fear. I was pleased to note that I was completely calm, and thanked Heaven that I had not for a moment lost my nerve. I now carefully unscrewed the auxiliary lever, which had almost proved my undoing, from the original steel shaft, let down the under-carriage, and landed five minutes later, amid the applause of the crowd, who regarded my feat as an intentionally thrilling display of aerial acrobatics.

Not even my passenger had realized the danger. However, my colleagues were fully aware of the fact that I would never deliberately carry out so perilous a feat as to touch the ground with my wing tip, at a speed of 220 m.p.h. They were still pale to the lips and trembling with excitement, as they congratulated me on the safe termination of my flight."

There are other smaller chapters suitably illustrated.

These thrilling tales of flights over wide oceans, over ice-clad peaks, vast forests, desolate deserts and wild jungles, kindle one's imagination and love for adventure, without which this world would be a poor place to live in.

Walter Mittelholzer is not only a great explorer and scientist, but also a shrewd observer of nature in all its aspects.

"Flying Adventures" is a delightful book and I have thoroughly enjoyed reading it; it should be a coveted acquisition to any library, however small same may be.

ST.

FOOTBALL.

What is wrong with Swiss Football? The results of the International games played in the season 1934-35 were decidedly encouraging, 2 wins, 2 draws and 4 defeats, goals for 14, against 18; after three successive defeats the famous W formation or third back game was adopted. Whether that be the reason or not, Switzerland triumphed over Hungary by 6 goals to 2 and finished the season by beating Ireland 1:0 and drawing with Belgium away 2:2.

Season 1935-36 started in promising fashion; France bit the dust in Geneva 2:1 and Norway in Zurich 2:0. Anyhow, these were victories, though the opposition was perhaps not exactly top class. Then followed Hungary's revenge in Budapest by 6:1, and that proved the turning point. Ireland wins in Dublin 1:0; Italy wins in Zurich 2:1; Spain, after having suffered three successive defeats against Germany, Austria and Czechoslovakia, wins in Zurich 2:0. And in these three games our forwards did not find the net once! The solitary point (against Italy) was the result of a penalty kick, taken by the centre-half. A defence that loses but two goals against the elite of Italy and Spain is entitled to put the blame on the forwards. There lies the weakness. Yet, in club games we have plenty of marksmen. As soon as they play in the national eleven you cannot recognise them any more. Is it the W formation? I am sure of it. All very well to try and imitate the Arsenal. If you have not got the clever, scheming inside forwards, two speedy, full-blooded wings who can and are not afraid to shoot, and a centre forward with brains and pertinacity, all blended together into a well balanced, homogeneous whole, you had better leave it alone and play internationally as you are wont to play in your league games. Such are the ideas which have gradually come to the fore again. With what result we shall soon see. Switzerland is to play Belgium, flushed with their success over the might of England, next Sunday in Basel. The whole of the forward line has been scrapped; whether the system has also gone by the board I do not know. However this may be, it does not require any confidential inside information to know, what risk you have to insure against. By the way, the sports results are broadcast from Beromünster at 7 o'clock and from Sottens at 7.15 p.m. British Summertime. Tune-in on Sunday if you have a set that will get you these stations in daylight.

M.G.

LAEBESFROHEIT.

Mit Fründ "Friede" as Begleiter
Und a Stäcke i der Hand,
Wandere mer still und heiter
Früh am Morge über Land.

Grün igräht si alli Wäge,
D'Matte bunti Blumebett
Jede Blick g'seht Gottes Säge
Gottes Kraft die alles weckt.

D'Sunne strahlet tief i d'Wälder
Lachet z'einsamst Plänzli a-
Schynt id's Härz üs u wie, vo sälb-
Steit im Nu "Fründ Frohsinn" da.

Und ganz hübscheli, Schritt und Tritt
Wandere i aller Ruch,
No zwo neu Begleiter mit-
Glück und Dankbarkeit derzue.

Freudig möchte me juble, singe
Dass i alli Egge tönt —
Ewig Lob dem Schöpfer bringe
Der die Welt het gmacht so schön.

H.E.

THE ONLOOKER'S WINDOW.

I had twelve bottles of Kirsch in my cellar and my wife made me empty the contents down the sink. I withdrew the cork from the first bottle, poured the contents down the sink with the exception of one glassful which I drank.

I then withdrew the cork from the second bottle and did likewise, with the exception of one glassful which I drank. I extracted the cork from the third bottle, emptied the good old "stuff" down the bottle except a glass which I sank. Pulling the cork from the fourth sink I poured the bottle down the glass when I drank some. After pulling the sink out of the next cork I poured the bottle down my neck. I drew the next bottle out of my throat and poured the cork down the sink. Pulled the next cork from my throat, pouring the sink down the bottle.

When I had them all emptied, I steadied the house with one hand and counted the bottles which were 24. I counted them again when they came round and this time I made 74. As the houses came round I counted them and finally had all the houses and bottles counted. I then proceeded to wash the bottles, but I could not get the brush in the bottles, so I turned them all inside out and washed and wiped them and went up stairs and told my other half all about it and — Oh Boy — have I got the wifist little nice in the whole world!

THE ONLOOKER.

MISCELLANEOUS ADVERTISEMENTS

Not exceeding 3 lines:—Per insertion 2/6; three insertions 5/-
Postage extra on replies addressed c/o Swiss Observer.

LEARN ENGLISH under experienced tutor, pension optional. Diploma on completion of studies. Language-School, C. Kaeser-Jay, University diplômé, 1370, London Road, S.W.16.

FREEHOLD £850 bargain for quick sale. Attractive well-built residence best position, 5 mins. walk Hendon Central Tube, 3 bedrooms, usual offices, 2 reception rooms, large kitchen, ideal boiler, exceptionally large well-laid-out garden. Write Box 66, c/o Swiss Observer, 23, Leonard Street, E.C.2.

FOR FLATS, Shops, Houses, Hotels, Guest Houses and Property Investments in the Metropolitan and Greater London, consult Baldwin & Co., 296, Uxbridge Road, W.12. (Tel: SHE: 3206.)

EASTBOURNE: Café Rest, Pastry, facing Sea, 3 min. from theatre, accommodation seating 40, 7 rooms, good living, long lease, mod. rent, quick sale, due to ill health £600, Prop. Swiss. 11, Cornfield Terrace.

COMFORTABLE Board-residence in private family. Five mins. from station. Terms moderate, 53, St. Andrews Road, Coulsdon.

WANTED young lady, experienced, willing help generally, small family, most modern house. Finchley, N.3. Personal references. Reply C.H.F., c/o Swiss Observer, 23, Leonard Street, London, E.C.2.

HOTELS UNDER SWISS MANAGEMENT.

BRIGHTON. Malvern Private Hotel, Regency Square, facing West Pier. H. and c. water. 24/3 Gns., weekly. Tel: Brighton 4517. Apply for Tariff, Emile Martig.

S. DEVON. DARTMOOR HOTEL, BOVEY TRACEY. Ideal sit., sea and moors. Golf, riding, fishing locally; excellent cuisine; h. and c. running water. Under personal supervision of propr. Jacques Dubs. Phone: Bovey Tracey 11.

FORTHCOMING EVENTS.

Saturday, May 23rd — Swiss Sports — at Herne Hill.

Saturday, May 23rd — "Schweizerbund" (Swiss Club) Special Gala Dance — at 74, Charlotte Street, W.1.

Tuesday, June 2nd — City Swiss Club — No Meeting.

Tuesday, June 16th, at 7.30 p.m. — City Swiss Club — Réunion d'été — at Brent Bridge Hotel, Hendon. (See Advert.)

Thursday, June 18th — 67th "Fête Suisse" at Central Hall, Westminster.

SWISS BANK CORPORATION,

(A Company limited by Shares incorporated in Switzerland)

99, GRESHAM STREET, E.C.2.

and 11c, REGENT STREET, S.W. 1.

Capital Paid up £6,400,000

Reserves - - £1,560,000

Deposits - - £39,000,000

All Descriptions of Banking and Foreign Exchange Business Transacted

: : Correspondents in all : :
: : parts of the World. : :

FRASER & CO. (P. BRUN, Proprietor.) (HIGH CLASS TOBACCONISTS.)

MOST UP TO DATE GENTLEMEN'S HAIRDRESSING SALOON.

50, Southampton Row, W.C.1.

SHAVE & BRUSH UP 6d. — HAIRCUTTING 9d.

IF YOU HAVE A FUNCTION TO ATTEND,
WHY GO HOME?

3 DRESSING ROOMS ARE PLACED AT YOUR DISPOSAL, CHARGE 1/-.
Telephone for appointment Holborn 2709.

Business Hours 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. — Saturday 8 a.m. to 1 p.m.

Telephone :
MUSeum 2982

Telegrams :
Foysuisse London

FOYER SUISSE

12 UPPER BEDFORD PLACE
RUSSELL SQUARE,
LONDON, W.C.1

Quiet position in centre of London.
Central heating and hot & cold water
throughout.
Continental cooking.

Management :
SCHWEIZER VERBAND VOLKSDIENST.

Divine Services.

EGLISE SUISSE (1762).

(Langue française).

70, Endell Street, Shaftesbury Avenue, W.C.2.

(Near New Oxford Street).

Dimanche 24 Mai 11h. — Confirmation — M. R. Hoffmann-de Visme: Actes IX, v. 15.

Th. — Prédication, M. Santy.

Sh. — Répétition du Choeur.

Dimanche 31 Mai — Pentecôte — Ste Cène matin et soir.

Lundi 1er Juin. Promenade — Rendez-vous 10h. Marylebone Station.

SCHWEIZERKIRCHE

(Deutschsprachige Gemeinde).

St. Anne's Church, 9, Gresham Street, E.C.2.
(near General Post Office.)

Sonntag, den 24. Mai 1936.

11 Uhr morgens, Gottesdienst. Confirmation.
Sonntagsschule.

7 Uhr abends, Gottesdienst.

8 Uhr Chorprobe.

Anfragen wegen Religions-bezw. Confirmanden-
stunden und Amtshandlungen sind erbeten
an den Pfarrer der Gemeinde: C. Th. Hahn,
43, Priory Road, Bedford Park, W.4 (Tele-
phon: Chiswick 4156). Sprechstunden:
Dienstag 12-2 Uhr in der Kirche; Mittwoch

Printed for the Proprietors, by THE FREDERICK PRINTING CO.,
LTD., at 23, Leonard Street, London, E.C.2.