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The Swiss Observer

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NEWS AT RANDOM

On two nights during the past week a number of Swiss towns — Berne, Zurich, Basle and Geneva — had air raid alarms. The first alarm sounded shortly before mid-night on August 13th when foreign planes flew over Switzerland. The alarm in Berne lasted from 11.45 p.m. to 12.21 a.m. and in Geneva from 11.41 p.m. to 12.41 a.m. According to the Swiss General Staff's report quoted by Reuter and the Geneva correspondent of the "*Times*," about 30, probably British, aircraft flying at a height of 10,000 feet, passed over Swiss territory when proceeding to Italy and returning from there. A few isolated machines were heard in the Jura and Ticino regions, but no bombs were dropped.

The Swiss General Staff announced on August 15th that in future foreign aircraft flying over Switzerland would be fired at. The same communiqué added that no black-out would be imposed for the time being but that the population was advised to go to shelters during air raid alarms.

During the night of August 15th/16th foreign aircraft again flew over Switzerland on their way to and from Italy and the sirens sounded in several places in northern and central Switzerland. The third violation of Swiss territory by foreign aircraft occurred in the night of August 18th/19th when the alarm was again given in various places. It was announced by the Swiss radio on August 19th that bombs had been dropped in the Canton Thurgau at Diessenhofen and Schlatt between mid-night and 1 o'clock in the neighbourhood of a railway line. Telephone and telegraph cables were put out of order, but no serious damage was done to the railway line.

The Federal Council instructed the Swiss Minister to protest against these repeated violations of Swiss territory with a view to obtaining assurances against further incidents of the same kind.

This was done at the end of last week and a satisfactory reply has since been received.

The Committee of the Catholic Conservative and Liberal Parties have decided to explore ways and

means for a more intimate co-operation between the political parties in Switzerland.

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The enlargement of the Rhine port Birsfelden near Basle, which was suspended for some time, has been resumed.

* * *

The Swiss radio announces that the frontier between Alsace and Switzerland has been re-opened and that all Swiss who were domiciled there before the war have been able to take up their residence again.

The Postal authorities announce that postal services between Switzerland and the French Mandates and Colonies have been resumed. As from August 21st onwards, telephone communication between Switzerland and unoccupied France will again be possible.

* * *

A new film, produced by the Swiss Military Film Service, entitled "Fête Nationale" was accorded a warm welcome on its first presentation this week.

* * *

It is with regret that we announce the death of the recently retired Federal Councillor Obrecht, who passed away in Berne. Hermann Obrecht was born on the 26th of March, 1882, at Grenchen (Solothurn). Originally intended to be a schoolmaster he soon took a keen interest in local public affairs and occupied important posts in the cantonal government; for a few years he was in charge of the political side of the Solothurner Zeitung. He was elected to the National Council in 1917. His wide experience and business acumen brought him in contact with many of our large industrial and financial undertakings; amongst others he was on the board of the Swiss Bank Corporation. He joined the Federal Council as recently as 1935 but during the last few years he had been in failing health and when our magistrates were sworn in last December he was absent from the ceremony owing to illness. Federal Councillor Obrecht resigned his high office last July and Dr. Walter Stampfli, another Solothurner, was subsequently elected to fill the vacancy.

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On July 25th, General Guisan called a meeting of all Commanders of Army Corps Divisions, Brigades, Regiments, Battalions and Companies, at the Rütli and gave then an order to keep on the alert. The General's order mentioned amongst other points that defence against attack from outside and readiness to meet dangers such as defeatism and loss of confidence in the value of resistance, was of supreme importance. He went on to say "I wished to meet you in this

historic spot, which is the symbol of our independence, to let you know my thoughts and to talk to you as soldier to soldier. The preservation of Switzerland is at stake. Soldiers of 1940, in this very place let us vow not to forget the teaching and the spirit of our history while trying to grasp the significance of the present and endeavouring to visualise the future of our country! If there is one place where we can hear the voice of the Past, it is surely here, and if we try to look into the future with a clear eye, we should be able to overcome the difficulties of to-day as we overcame the trials and obstacles of bygone days. Difficulty is not new to us; the authors of the Charter of the Confederation of 1291 had similar trials in mind when they spoke of the craftiness of their times."

At the same time the General read the following Ordre de Jour to his Officers, which was to be given to the Army on August 1st:

"On August 29th, 1939, the Federal Council called the troops to arms, and a few days later ordered general mobilisation. As the same time the Government handed over to the Army the task of protecting the long-established independence of Switzerland. This independence has been respected by our neighbours up till now and we shall see to it that this is the case to the very end of this war.

... As long as millions of armed men fight each other in Europe and as long as huge forces may at any moment attack Switzerland, the Army has to remain at its post. Whatever may come the fortifications you have built will constitute a measure of defence, and our sacrifices will not have been in vain because we still keep our fate in our hands.

... Do not lend your ear to those who, out of sheer ignorance or vile intention, publish defeatist reports and try to sow the seeds of doubt. Do not lose faith in our right to live our own life, in our own way. Do not lose confidence in our strength to resist, should this become necessary.

... Soldiers! On this 1st of August, 1940, remember that the positions which have been allotted to you are those where your arms and your courage may best be used to the advantage of our country."

REPATRIATION OF SWISS.

Unfortunately a last-minute hitch prevented the departure of this "convoy" last Tuesday. It is still hoped — and all possible efforts are being made — to overcome the difficulty so that the party may leave by the end of this week.

Swiss news in the English press is this week mainly occupied with the regrettable incidents caused by the indiscretions of British aircraft.

An article in the "*Economist*," August 17th, presents a somewhat gloomy picture. We have not received any papers since the French collapse so that we cannot say whether the supposed "muzzling" of the Swiss press is apparent.

After the Franco-German armistice, the President of the Swiss Confederation broadcast a message which appeared to foreshadow the establishment of something approaching an authoritarian regime, as the only means of dealing with the new situation. So far, however, no great changes have taken place, except that the Press, in compliance with the wishes of Berlin, no longer criticises the Nazi regime, but expresses admiration for Germany and contempt for Britain. The publication of news of British origin, even when official, is cut down to almost nothing. The only drastic economic measure has been the passing of an Act providing for a capital levy ranging from $1\frac{1}{2}$ to $4\frac{1}{2}$ per cent.

The anxiety which was felt about the food supply at first has been diminished by the maintenance of Italy's friendly attitude. Imports through Genoa are, however, impeded by lack of rolling stock. Imports through France, after an interval of several weeks, are being slowly resumed. Meanwhile stocks are said to be sufficient for a year and food rationing has so far only been applied to edible oils.

The fuel situation is a much greater cause for anxiety. The petrol ration has been reduced by two-thirds and the price is double that of a year ago. Domestic coal rationing is extremely drastic and the use of hot water is only allowed once a week. By this means industrial supplies are fairly well maintained.

There was at first a tendency to hoard bank notes, and a consequent rise in money rates, but an appeal to the public has met with a very satisfactory response and large sums have been returned to the banks.

The older men, representing about one-fifth of the army, who have already been demobilised, have for the most part been absorbed into industry, but it is feared that, as demobilisation proceeds, a severe economic crisis may arise. Export trade is at a very low level, since Switzerland is cut off from most of her markets. Italy has concluded a trade agreement with Switzerland, and negotiations are being opened with Germany, with a view to readjusting the system of payments, transfers and commercial exchanges. These are likely to be accompanied by German demands for the delivery to the Reich of goods imported into Switzerland and for an artificial rate of exchange. The Swiss, however, are confident that they have certain bargaining advantages which they intend to press home to the full. The Germans, on the other hand, who are watching the difficulties of the Swiss with interest, feel that it is only a matter of time before Switzerland will so far lose her economic dependence that she will be compelled to "join the new European

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