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## SWISS NATIONAL DEFENCE.

(The following is a translation of two talks in a series of 12 broadcasts on the Swiss Short Wave service last December, to the direction of which we are indebted for the present publication. The talks were given by Captain Walter Altgöwer of the Swiss Army General Staff).

### Principles of our military organization.

Our military organization is based on compulsory service. Unlike other States, we did not introduce this system only during the last century. Already at the time of the old federations, every able-bodied man had to take an active part in the defense of the country. For our small State of free men, this was considered to be the only way of obtaining a sufficient military power. This, probably was the continuance of the old Celtic tradition according to which every free man and his servants belonged to the army. However, in those old days, this obligation was applied only to young men between 17 and 25 years of age. Agreements between the Confederates determined the number of men each canton had to raise. But it was only during the last century that this tradition was fixed by a constitutional law. It says: "Every Swiss citizen is obliged to serve in the army." This obligation was applied to all citizens between 20 and 50. In this war, it was found necessary to call up all men from 19 to 60 years of age. For the time being, even women are doing military service, but on a strictly volunteer basis. Quite a lot of them are engaged in auxiliary work. Special regulations also make them liable to be called up for work in armament factories.

This general obligation to do military service turns the whole Swiss population into an army, so that everyone has his share of responsibility in the nation's defense. We have no caste of professional soldiers responsible for the up-keep of military interests. We know nothing other than an unified Swiss militia. With the exception of the highest commanders and instructors, all officers, commissioned and non commissioned, and privates are militiamen. They all have a profession in civilian life. For all Swiss, military duty is an additional task. Previously, this task was fairly easy to perform, but nowadays it is quite different. The military obligation requires greater sacrifices. On the one hand, periods of service have been greatly lengthened for all ranks. On the other hand, high officers have to follow special courses and study constantly in order to keep up to date and improve their efficiency. The air force and the tank corps need continuous training; we have to have professional soldiers to guard our frontiers and fortifications,

and so on; therefore, the basic militia principle cannot always be maintained in full. Nevertheless, we intend to stick to the militia character of our army, as we are convinced it answers its purpose. A militia officer who holds a responsible position in civilian life and is conversant with tactical matters will be an efficient leader in combat. The militia principle corresponds to our political structure and guarantees best the full utilization of our military strength.

In view of the fact that every Confederate takes an active part in the construction and in the defense of our State, and that we fear no internal troubles, we are able to organize quite a special form of mobilization. When demobilized, every officer and man keeps his uniform, arms, ammunition and other equipment, and is responsible for their up-keep. Only collective weapons and vehicles are kept in arsenals. On mobilization day, all ranks, fully equipped, gather at a fixed place, which means that all units are ready for service in a very short time. Mobilization centres are scattered all over the country. Should means of transportation be destroyed by the enemy, they can easily be reached either on foot or on bicycles by the majority of the men. Well controlled alarm systems guarantee the timely transmission of mobilization orders. In case of a sudden invasion, every soldier is to join his unit, even without having received special orders. If it were impossible for him to do so, he would join the nearest unit, or even the Home Guard, and fight straight away. This is the reason why every man keeps at home a certain supply of ammunition for his own weapon. Therefore, we think we can be ready in time to meet even the modern methods of surprise.

Along the frontier, we have special troops whose organization, according to their special mission, is slightly different. In this zone, the danger of a surprise attack is particularly great, and troops must be ready to fight at the shortest notice. Their mobilization is most carefully organized, and in case of alarm, they march directly to their post of combat and not to a mobilization centre. Further, all along the frontier, and especially where it is difficult to defend, we have built light and heavy fortifications capable of resisting a long time even against the most modern methods of attack. By this means, the main body of the army is able to mobilize and to take up its positions without being disturbed. In view of the fact that the enemy could drop paratroops in the interior of the country or put his fifth column into action, we have created emergency corps behind the lines. In every locality, all men not belonging to the army itself form the Home Guard. Their job is to defend their own town or city, to capture saboteurs, to avoid destructions, and to help

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the army by information or the digging of trenches. For a long time, this organization was laughed at, on the other side of the frontier; but, to-day, those who laughed most have themselves been compelled to create a so-called "Volkssturm," which is the exact equivalent of our Home Guard. Every locality of some importance has an A.R.P. corps, which is organized militarily, and which, in case of bombardment, acts as a fire-brigade, gives first aid to the wounded, and so on.

The main weight of the fighting is borne by the field army. It is formed of all able-bodied men between the ages of 20 and 48 years, organized in mobile units; whereas men between 49 and 60 are entrusted with guard duties. All military and civilian auxiliary units support the field army in its task. The field army is divided into divisions and army corps, composed and used according to circumstances. It does the mobile fighting in all parts of the country, according to all tactical forms of attack, defense and retreat. Our main military effort is concentrated on the development of the field army. Weapons are improved and supplied in ever larger quantities. Tactical mobility is bettered by constantly increasing motorization. Training is continuously improved by numerous exercises in large and small units. Technical development also continues, though certain limits are set for us by the fact that for more than four years we have been cut off from the world's raw material sources.

In war and in active service—that is when foreign political tension necessitates a larger mobilization of troops—all military forces are placed under a commander-in-chief. He is the only officer invested with the rank of a general. He is elected by Parliament, and receives from the Federal Council general instructions for the tactical use of our forces. In war, the General is the head of all the country's forces which can participate in some way or other in the nation's defense. He thus possesses a power which, in our democratic State, we grant to no one else. In peace time, we have no commander-in-chief at all. The army corps commanders, under the presidency of the head of the Federal Military Department, form the National Defense Commission, which decides on all matters regarding the army.

#### Our fighting methods.

Until the first World War, battles were fought on relatively small areas, and no real direct damage was done to the countries where the war took place. But, since then, the geographical extension of the fighting is unbounded; strategic lines of defense have become quite questionable. No State can rely any more on the protection of its difficult terrain, for technical means make it possible to carry the fighting everywhere. There remains only the strategical judgment of the aggressor on the importance of certain areas or routes in the general fighting operations. If he thinks they are important, tactical means will allow him to overcome the most difficult terrain. As we do not know how the neighbouring great powers judge our country from a strategical point of view, we have to be prepared to fight in all parts of it.

Roughly speaking, Switzerland is divided into three main geographical regions: the Jura Mountains, the Midland Plateau and the Alps. The Jura is a hilly region with wooded heights, plateaus, precipices, and narrow valleys which often terminate as mere

gaps. In this region, the aim of the fighting would be the possession of the few roads and passes. These would be of the greatest importance for the bringing up of heavy war equipment and reinforcements. In the Midland Plateau area, we find numerous hills, rivers, lakes, towns and roads. There are few plains of importance. In this part of the country, fighting can be carried on everywhere, and does not necessarily depend on communication lines, as motorized units can operate in most places. The Alps are composed of mountain massifs, as high as 13,000 feet, some of which are separated by deep cut valleys. These massifs are steep and difficult to cross. Lines of communication are generally limited to the valleys and to a few passes. Localities being scarce, there is a lack of good accommodation for the troops. In the Alps, fighting centres around roads, passages, bridges, and positions on peaks. The use of technical means is limited; the main fighting element is mountain-trained infantry.

As a small State, we possess a limited space for war operations, and we cannot afford to waste any of it. Therefore, we must start fighting right on the frontier. Of course, the whole army will not be lined up there; it will be distributed in deep echelons, with mobile units and numerous fortifications. In many border regions of the Jura Mountains and the Alps, the terrain favours our defense, and with carefully drawn up plans, we shall be able to resist for a very long time. In other places, an enemy break through is to be reckoned with sooner or later. On the other hand, airborne troops could encircle the frontier sector. Therefore, even if strong elements of our frontier forces succeeded in holding up the aggressor, we should be obliged to fight on the Midland Plateau. There, the enemy would first meet our barrage and shock-troops. Behind their protection, other forces would take up positions favourable for defense and counter-attack. The enemy's advance must be stopped by destruction of communications, preventive blows at concentrations, counter-attacks and partisan actions. This being done, we can start effective defensive operations with all the means at our disposal.

We know that on the Midland Plateau we could not indefinitely withstand the assault of a big army. We could only hold out with some chance of success where our technical means and forces are equal to those of the enemy. These possibilities are offered to us by the mountains. This is why we have paid the greatest attention to mountain warfare, especially during this war. The people of our mountains are used to the difficult conditions of their region. Besides, many people from the plains, especially from towns, do a lot of mountain climbing or skiing, and know the Alpine terrain well. But the ability to move about in the mountains is not sufficient for military purposes. All ranks have to follow special courses in the Alps and the Prealps. This kind of fighting requires much more from the men than fighting in the plains. To the difficulties of the battle are added those of the terrain and of the weather. Therefore, everyone must be trained not only in the use of the terrain and in the knowledge of tactics, but also to support lack of food, poor accommodation, rain, fog, snow and ice. To-day, we can say, without boasting, that we have at our disposal a sufficient number of guides and soldiers who are equal, if not superior, to any foreign mountain troops.

When in 1940, after the collapse of France, we were completely surrounded by one single military power, we were left entirely on our own. There was nothing left for us to do but to withdraw into our mountains. Had we remained on the Midland Plateau, where our army had been mobilized in 1939, an enemy might have easily out-manoeuvred and encircled the greater part of our forces. Withdrawing into the mountains was a serious decision for us to take, for we had to abandon more than half the country, including its most populated parts and its richest agricultural areas. Nevertheless, it was our General's order to do so. Indeed, because of the circumstances then prevailing, this was our only way out. So we marched into the Central Alps and established ourselves there. The Alpine passes had to be held at all cost. At various points, we built fortifications deep into the rocks. Such fortifications are much harder to overcome than those in the plains, as they are out of reach of aircraft and armour. On the heights and in the valleys, we kept mobile forces ready to counter-attack in case of an enemy break through. For a very long period, all necessary stocks and army supplies were stored deep under ground. During the last four years, this "Réduit National"—as we call it—has been unceasingly fortified; it is, and it will remain for years to come, of the greatest importance.

However, we cannot possibly just sit down in our "Réduit National" and wait for things to happen; this would be much too simple. This year, the military situation has already changed completely. We again have the armies of two different sides at our frontiers. If we are to prevent either of them from marching through our country, we must, again, keep strong forces in the Jura Mountains and on the Midland Plateau. Besides, in the future, we may have to receive as internees foreign troops or political groups. This we have already done on quite a large scale. In order to be able to intern all that come and to maintain order under all circumstances, we must keep sufficient forces on the border. When the war is over, our neighbours may make a readjustment of their frontier lines; in that case, our military situation would be modified. Therefore, we have to be ready for all possibilities. Our "Réduit National" will remain, should bad become to worse, a strong operational base. Of course, this does not mean that our army is not prepared to fight in other parts of the country.

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## THE SWISS CONTRIBUTION TO WESTERN CIVILISATION.

This is the title of a 92pp 8vo pamphlet just received which has conferred upon us a delightful evening of instructive reading. The author who is a busy and learned medical practitioner has gone to the trouble of collecting the names of those of our compatriots who during the last five centuries have made a "definite original contribution to knowledge or have left the world a happier, a better or more beautiful place than they had found it." From the list of over 650 names, pastmasters of statecraft or warfare and fashionable pursuits are rightly omitted. The publication is intended to reform the average Englishman's notion that Switzerland is exclusively a country for mountaineering, skiing, T.B. treatment and watch-making; we doubt whether a conversion is possible or even desirable as few of us will harbour scruples about this one-sided impression. We believe that the booklet is of far greater interest to the majority of Swiss, who, in their schooldays have been forced to absorb ancient history and memorize battle-dates. To those of us over here, who during the last five years have been impregnated by the numerous, mostly academical dissertations of the aspects and application of neutrality, the booklet will supply a welcome distraction and healthy tonic, and the last few chapters dealing rather fully with the protagonists in biological and physical sciences are an indispensable "who's who" brought up to-date.

It is not easy to extol the merits of a few hundred celebrities without an agglomeration of tiresome superlatives but the author has achieved it. Here is the odyssey of a minor celebrity and we very much doubt if any of our readers have ever heard of the famous "Balois": "Perhaps the most colourful Swiss that ever lived was Johann August Sutter (1803-1880), who was born at Dornach by Basle, where now stands the colossal Goetheanum. He emigrated to the United States, where he made the first discovery of gold in California, built that State's economic prosperity, introduced the wine industry, became as rich as Croesus and finally died a pauper through no fault of his own."

It is intended to publish the work in German and French; we think the first few chapters might be revised with advantage. On page 24 for instance the reader is informed that "there are 22 cantons . . . of which 19 are undivided" and on the following page the "initiative" is incorrectly elucidated. We also believe that the author would be well advised to place a work of this kind on the market through an established publishing firm thus making use of their counsel, experience and connection. The price of the booklet is 5/- and is obtainable from Dr. R. E. G. Armattoe, 7, Northland Road, Londonderry.

## OUR NEXT ISSUE.

We hope to go to press again on Friday, 29th June, 1945, and take this opportunity of thanking the following subscribers for their enlarged subscription rates: Mrs. S. Barff, E. Steiner, L. Jobin, A. Renou, J. J. F. Schad, M. Gysin, W. Gysler, E. Montag, M. E. Lichtensteiger, Mrs. H. Ellison, F. E. Brunner.