

"Chasseral", the first Swiss ship to enter a U.K. Port

Autor(en): **[s.n.]**

Objektyp: **Article**

Zeitschrift: **The Swiss observer : the journal of the Federation of Swiss Societies in the UK**

Band (Jahr): **- (1946)**

Heft 1055

PDF erstellt am: **28.04.2024**

Persistenter Link: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-692137>

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s/s "CHASSERAL," THE FIRST SWISS SHIP TO ENTER A U.K. PORT.

The port officials in London shook their heads on October 3rd when the papers of the steamer "Chasseral" were submitted to them for clearance purposes. "A Swiss ship? Never heard of such a thing!" they remarked. Had the mythical "Swiss Navy" come to life, after all? Well, they smilingly examined the beautiful Swiss-made registration certificate which Captain Henrotin, a Belgian, had handed to them, and the fact had to be recognised that for the first time in history a ship flying the flag of little alpine Switzerland called at a port in Great Britain. She had quietly crept up the River Thames to load a cargo of 3,500 tons of cement for Rio de Janeiro and another Brazilian port.

It will be remembered that the Federal Council, when the shipping situation became serious in 1941, hurriedly brought into being, by decree, a maritime law to allow the national flag to be used on the high seas. The Government purchased four ships, the smallest being the "Chasseral" which was formerly the Honduran fruit carrier "Tegucigalpa," trading in the West Indies and the Gulf of Mexico.

Captain Henrotin has served on the "Chasseral" since she was bought in 1941, though at first not as Master. Among his crew of twenty-nine are only two Swiss! The majority of his officers and ratings are Italian, with a sprinkling of Belgians and Portuguese. The mess boy is a smart lad from West Africa. The Captain speaks six languages fluently. He is very satisfied with the men he commands. "The more nationalities on board, the better!" he says.

Unfortunately, urgent duties prevented Monsieur Ruegger from accepting the ship's managers' invitation to visit the steamer, but Mr. Baehler, Mr. Weibel and Mr. Rothenbuehler, Legation officials, went on board to enjoy the Italian cook's supper-lunch (roast turkey, etc.!) and to be conducted over the vessel, including the engine room.

The "Chasseral" has rendered valuable service to the Confederation during the war. In the latter part of 1941 she carried two cargoes of foodstuffs from U.S.A. to Genoa, in transit for Switzerland, and nearly a thousand tons of Swiss export goods to New York, while in 1942 and 1943 she was employed in the shuttle service between Lisbon and Genoa/Marseilles/Toulon, for the Greek ships under charter to the Swiss War Transport Office were not allowed to enter the Mediterranean and therefore had to discharge their cargoes at Lisbon. In 1944 she brought two cargoes of coffee and other produce from Central America, and a shipload of wheat from Philadelphia. She was nearly sunk in April of that year when belligerent planes bombed her outside Sète. Her engine room and holds were flooded and she had to be beached. One member of the crew was killed. After effecting provisional repairs at Sète, she was put into excellent condition at Lisbon, and throughout 1945 she helped to tranship the huge Swiss stocks of grain and other commodities which had accumulated at Lisbon.

This year the "Chasseral" has carried Swiss imports from Brazil, West Africa and U.S.A., and after her present outward voyage for foreign account, she is expected to load grain in South America for Switzerland.

Captain Henrotin loves his ship, which in spite of her fifty years presents a fine appearance. Large sums of money have been spent on her to make her sound and strong from mast to keel. The Master wonders, somewhat sadly, what is going to happen to the "Chasseral" when the shipowning department of the Swiss Government closes down, as sooner or later it certainly will.


TO THE SECRETARIES OF THE LONDON SWISS SOCIETIES AND CLUBS.

We should like to impress the Secretaries of the Societies and Clubs in our Colony the necessity of advising us in good time of any fixtures their respective Societies are arranging. Experience has amply showed that co-operation in this direction is very desirable, several gatherings during the last season having met with little success, mainly on account of the dates clashing.


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