

Swissair, operator of Switzerland's commercial air services

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

Objekttyp: **Article**

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

Band (Jahr): **- (1948)**

Heft 1090

PDF erstellt am: **28.04.2024**

Persistenter Link: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-691497>

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SWISSAIR, OPERATOR OF SWITZERLAND'S COMMERCIAL AIR SERVICES.

Origin and development.

June 1st, 1922, saw the inauguration of the first passenger air service passing beyond the frontiers of Switzerland. On that date the then "Aad Astra" Company of Zurich — which later, at the time of the founding of Swissair, amalgamated with the "Balair" Company of Basle — started operating the Geneva-Zurich-Nuremberg service.

The development and extension which air traffic in general has undergone since that day should be sufficiently common knowledge. Technically, this development was destined to progress, as a result of the Second World War, by leaps and bounds to an extent exceeding all expectations.

Swiss commercial aviation, which, through Swissair (founded in 1931), had provided first-rate services even before the war, resumed operations shortly after the cessation of hostilities. And Swissair proceeded step by step with the *extension of its entire organization*, an extension which not only involved an increase in the share capital from 1 to 20 million Swiss francs (with a total of about 2,700 shareholders), but also, thanks to the fact that public authorities (the Confederation, the cantons and the communes) took up a third of this share capital, paved the way for the development of Swissair into the *national airways corporation*.

During 1946/47 the development curve of Swissair rose rapidly in all respects, not only in regard to the size of its fleet, but also as regards *number of staff*. Whereas in August, 1939, Swissair employed a total of 179 persons, this figure had risen to 789 at the end of 1946, and by the end of March, 1948, their ranks had swollen to 1,370.

In enlarging its *fleet of aircraft*, Swissair remained true until 1947 to the Douglas machines which had rendered such splendid service in the past. After the war the Corporation purchased a few further machines of this type which is the military equivalent of the DC-3 (C 47-B) from U.S. Army stocks, had them converted into passenger 'planes and put them into service on their various routes side by side with the other DC-3's. In the summer of 1946 it was decided to acquire in addition a number of DC-4 type heavy four-engined craft, the first of which landed at Geneva on November 24th, 1946, after the first U.S.A.-Switzerland non-stop flight. The remaining three were delivered here in February and April, 1947. Thus, at the end of March, 1948, the Swissair fleet comprised, apart from six smaller machines, twelve DC-3's, two DC-3 freighters and four DC-4's with a total passenger payload of 428 and accommodation for 6 tons of freight. In July, 1947, Swissair further ordered from the Consolidated Vultee Aircraft Co. of San Diego (U.S.A.) four two-engined Convair Liners each accommodating forty passengers, these machines being intended for service on the European routes. These machines will be delivered in the summer of 1948. The acquisition of faster four-engined aircraft such as DC-6's, Constellations or others is still under consideration.

With the arrival of the DC-4's there began a new era for Swissair, who, by acquiring these modern passenger 'planes, definitely *linked up with the world system of air communications*, breaking the shackles

which had hitherto restricted the Corporation's activities to the European sector. First came a direct flight to Cairo and Palestine, which as early as March and April, 1947, led to the establishment of a regular service; and then, on May 2nd, a day that will go down in the history of Swiss commercial aviation, a Swiss aircraft for the first time flew from Geneva to Washington. This first Atlantic flight to the United States of America was followed by several others in 1947.

It is not yet clear to what extent these transatlantic flights will, in the future, become a regular feature of Swissair's *plan of operations*, but these flights and the routes flown are being subjected to exhaustive study from all angles by the competent authorities. Thus in August, 1947, Swissair carried out for study purposes, with a part of their crews, a survey-flight over all the North Atlantic routes.

Another stage in the development of Swissair began on August 3rd, 1947, when a first special flight to Johannesburg, South Africa, was undertaken. It was followed by a number of further flights to this same destination, and these have generally been repeated twice monthly so far during 1948. A regular service to the Near East was also inaugurated, Istanbul being the destination. The connection to U.S.A. took on a fairly regular character, further special flights to New York being definitely arranged in the spring of 1948. There is one other special flight deserving of particular mention, namely, that which Swissair carried out from October 10th to 21st, 1947, from Geneva to Buenos Aires and back. It cannot as yet be stated with certainty whether the White Cross of Switzerland is likely to be seen regularly flying over the South American continent. The decisive question in regard to the establishment of regular intercontinental services by Swissair will be whether or not such flights pay, for it should again be emphasised here that Swissair is a private corporation receiving no state subsidies.

The general development which has taken place, and the enlargement of Swissair's fleet of aircraft, have compelled the Corporation progressively to enlarge their *staff of pilots and wireless operators*. Whereas before the War ten trained crews were available, six new pilot trainees were engaged in 1944, these men completing their training during the summer and winter of 1946/47. And in the autumn of 1946 ten further pilot and wireless operator trainees were ad-

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P. A MOEHR,

Hon. Secretary.

mitted to the Corporation's service, all of whom it was possible to employ on the regular service routes in the course of the autumn of 1947. On February 1st, 1947, all the crews of the "Alpar" Company entered the service of Swissair; on November 1st, 1947, the Corporation took on twelve further pilot-trainees and a number of navigators, and by 1949 should have rather more than fifty fully-trained crews at their disposal. It is noteworthy in this connection that Swissair employ *Swiss nationals only* as pilots, and then only those who are able to produce evidence of having had the necessary aeronautical training. In regard to their pilots Swissair attach the utmost importance to that principle which, especially abroad, has again and again won for the Corporation the unlimited confidence of the public, the principle of quality which, in Swiss air services, is always a primary consideration.

Swissair Traffic Statistics.

	1938	1946	1947
Number of flights (incl. supplementary flights)	4,608	3,943	6,225
Number of flight hours	6,329	9,482	15,536
Km. flown	1,483,794	2,473,413	4,106,208
Passengers carried ...	35,249	62,378	95,519
Freight carried kg. ...	136,309	414,266	878,610
Mail carried kg. ...	341,318	259,141	379,092
Baggage carried kg.	504,395	1,187,697	1,885,988
Utilisation	55.54%	85.44%	70.10%
Regularity	98.61%	99.31%	99.23%

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