

Switzerland's merchant fleet

Autor(en): **Bell, E.A.**

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SWITZERLAND'S MERCHANT FLEET.

By E. A. BELL

(The following article is reprinted from the May issue of the "Shipping World" by courtesy of the Editor.)

April 17th, 1941, marked the date of the decision taken by the Swiss Federal Council authorising Swiss maritime shipping under the Swiss flag. The idea of Swiss maritime shipping originated as far back as 1864, but the plan then formulated failed, mainly, it has been stated, due to the opposition by France and Prussia, both countries which looked with disfavour on the idea of seagoing vessels owned by non-maritime countries. Not until 1921, when the principle of maritime shipping by non-maritime countries was laid down by the Barcelona Conference, did the Swiss plan, still lingering through the years, become a feasible proposition. Advantage of the Barcelona declaration was taken in the interwar years also by other Continental countries located far from any sea coast, such as Czechoslovakia (with her ships based on Hamburg), Austria (Trieste) and Hungary, the latter country developing a special type of combined Danube-seagoing vessel.

As far as Switzerland was concerned, only the dire necessity brought about by the war prompted the creation of a seagoing fleet under the Swiss flag, although preliminary steps in that direction had already been taken before the outbreak of hostilities. The two first seagoing ships to be owned and operated by a Swiss shipping concern (the Swiss Shipping Company), s.s. *Calanda* (built 1913) and s.s. *Maloja* (built 1906), were bought from a Panamanian concern in January 1940, at a price of Swiss Frs. 3,570,000 for both vessels. This price subsequently met with much criticism when it became known that only four months earlier both ships had been available for Swiss Frs. 750,000. Under the circumstances prevailing during the war, however, Switzerland was fortunate in having secured these ships. Their purchase had been proposed by the Syndicate of Swiss Gas Works with a view to securing tonnage for the transport of coal from Great Britain, Poland and France to Rotterdam, thence by way of the Rhine to Basle. The Syndicate entrusted the realisation of this scheme to the Swiss Shipping Co., a mixed-economy Rhine and sea shipping company in which the Swiss Confederation, the Swiss Federal Railways, various Cantons, the Zurich municipality, as well as a number of Swiss industrial undertakings, also participated.

State-owned and Chartered Ships.

Although proposals submitted by private interests for the creation of a larger fleet of Swiss seagoing vessels found little support at first from the authorities, the Swiss War Transport Office was not slow in taking the steps required to secure neutral seagoing tonnage for the carriage of essential and vital overseas commodities to certain maritime ports and thence by other means to Switzerland. In the reverse direction that tonnage, placed under the Swiss flag, would enable the Swiss export trade with overseas countries to be maintained. Hence the chartering by the Swiss War Transport Office at the beginning of the war, for the duration, of 15 Greek vessels (all owned by one concern) totalling 120,000 tons d.w. They were em-

ployed on trans-Atlantic and Mediterranean routes, with Genoa and Savona as their European terminals. Europe-bound, the ships were intended to carry mainly cereals and coal.

This plan worked fairly well until October 1940 when Italy involved Greece in war. As a result of this and the collapse of France a few months earlier, the Greek ships under the Swiss flag had to discontinue their operations, a state of affairs which lasted for various months. After prolonged negotiations with the Allies and their opponents, Lisbon was conceded as port of discharge of the Swiss-owned commodities carried by the Greek vessels. An agreement concluded between Spain and Switzerland enabled the goods discharged at Lisbon to be taken to Genoa by certain Spanish vessels. In addition, a number of Portuguese sailing ships with auxiliary motors were also chartered for this trade. An expensive, though imperatively necessary, overland route enabled this precarious shuttle service to and from Genoa to be supplemented as a result of a further Spanish-Swiss agreement, concluded on March 27th, 1941, whereby Swiss-owned and operated convoys of motor lorries were allowed to convey Swiss overseas imports and exports between Barcelona and Bilbao on the one hand (from or to Lisbon) and Switzerland (through France) on the other. Furthermore, 200 Spanish railway wagons, wrecked during the Spanish Civil War, were repaired by the Swiss for their exclusive use between Lisbon and the French frontier, the difference in railway gauge necessitating transfer at the French frontier.

This precarious and extremely costly transport system prompted the Swiss War Transport Office to proceed with the purchase of vessels to establish its own shipping services, despite the decreasing availability of tonnage on the market. The legal side was settled by the passing early in April, 1941, of the Swiss legislation relating to maritime shipping, and the efforts made by the War Transport Office jointly with private interests resulted in the purchase of nine vessels. These, in addition to the *Calanda* and *Maloja*, totalled approximately 62,000 tons d.w. Four of these, shown in Table I, were owned and operated by the Swiss War Transport Office, while the other seven were privately-owned and operated.

This odd collection of vessels, apart from those on charter, was fitted, with reciprocating engines of between 2,000 and 3,000 h.p. (with the sole exception of the twin-screw motorship *Saentis*). Developing 8 to 9 knots only, and having an average age of about 36 years, it suffered substantial losses during the war, not exclusively through war damage. By the end of 1946, only seven of the Swiss-owned ships, including the four State-owned ones, were left. By this time, however, the War Transport Office, considering its rôle terminated, offered its vessels for sale before going into liquidation on January 1st, 1948. The *Eiger* was purchased by the Swiss Shipping Co. in the spring of 1947. Renamed *Cristallina*, she was passed on to a Panamanian concern in December 1948. The other three vessels have been acquired by the Nautilus concern.

Redevelopment and Plans for the Future.

The taking over of the four State-owned ships by Swiss private interests confirmed the latter's intention

to continue maritime activities in peacetime and, possibly, to expand them. What was needed, however, was a rejuvenation and modernisation of the fleet, along with an increase of tonnage. Conditions during the war had fully justified the existence of the Swiss seagoing fleet, and the private interests concerned saw no reason why that fleet should be disbanded after the war. In normal times, Swiss imports of cereals, fodder, sugar, rice, edible fats and oils, and of colonial produce generally, from overseas countries total about 1,200,000 metric tons per annum (in addition to imports of industrial raw materials from overseas), and it was thought that a part at least of that volume could profitably be carried in Swiss bottoms, with the additional advantage of saving some of the freight otherwise payable to foreign carriers. Before the war, this annual outlay amounted to some 40 to 50 million Swiss francs (then £2,000,000 to £2,500,000). The operation of passenger services was, however, considered to be outside the scope of Swiss shipping, although some of the vessels added in recent years have accommodation for a limited number of passengers.

Additional shipping companies have been formed in Switzerland in recent years, and the total of seagoing ships under the Swiss flag numbered 19 units aggregating 100,989 tons d.w. by the end of 1950. It has been stated that, acting on the initiative of the Confederation, various Swiss owners have placed orders for new ships totalling about 60,000 tons d.w., which would increase Swiss tonnage to some 160,000 tons d.w. in due course. Most of the vessels in service and ordered are of the shelterdeck type. The expanding interest in maritime shipping has recently been

confirmed by the formation of a joint Swiss-Italian shipping company reported simultaneously from Antwerp and Genoa early in the current year.

TABLE I. — SWISS MERCHANT SHIPPING IN 1941.

Owners and Name	Built	Tons gross	Tons d.w.
Swiss Shipping Company :			
s.s. <i>Calanda</i>	1913	4,163	7,470
s.s. <i>Maloja</i>	1906	—	2,650
s.s. <i>Albula</i>	1910	1,220	2,030
Maritime Suisse S.A. :			
s.s. <i>Generoso</i>	1896	1,437	2,260
s.s. <i>Zurich</i>	1893	1,928	2,808
Suisse Atlantique S.A. :			
s.s. <i>St. Cergue</i>	1937	4,260	7,600
Nautilus S.A. :			
s.s. <i>Lugano</i>	1898	6,941	9,183
State-owned vessels :			
s.s. <i>St. Gothard</i>	1911	5,461	8,340
s.s. <i>Chasseral</i>	1897	2,928	4,206
s.s. <i>Eiger</i>	1929	4,386	8,137
m.v. <i>Saentis</i>	1915	4,349	6,690
Greek vessels under charter :			
s.s. <i>Helene Kulukundis</i> ...	1938	5,500	10,000
s.s. <i>Marpessa</i>	1919	5,500	8,732
s.s. <i>Master Elias Kulukundis</i>	1938	5,500	10,000
m.v. <i>Kassos</i>	1939	5,200	9,535
s.s. <i>Mount Aetna</i>	1929	4,200	7,933
s.s. <i>Thetis</i>	1930	4,100	7,600
s.s. <i>Nereus</i>	1937	5,205	9,500
s.s. <i>Stavros</i>	1925	4,900	9,214

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Prix du billet : 20/- par personne

TABLE II. — SWISS SEAGOING FLEET IN 1950.

Owners and Name	Built	Tons gross	Tons d.w.
Swiss Shipping Co. :			
m.v. <i>Cristallina</i>	1949	2,351	3,000
m.v. <i>Carona</i>	1949	2,351	3,000
Suisse Atlantique S.A. :			
m.v. <i>General Guisan</i>	1938	5,142	9,140
s.s. <i>Lausanne</i>	1948	4,904	8,920
s.s. <i>St. Cergue</i>	1937	4,260	7,600
Nautilus S.A. :			
s.s. <i>Chasseral</i>	1897	3,128	4,064
m.v. <i>Sacntis</i>	1915	4,349	6,690
s.s. <i>St. Gothard</i>	1911	5,461	8,339
s.s. <i>Ticino</i>	1920	6,527	9,841
s.s. <i>Certenago</i>	1920	6,404	10,300
Transports Maritimes Suisse-			
Outremer S.A. :			
m.v. <i>Anunciada</i>	1948	5,370	9,300
San Giorgio S.A. di Navigazione :			
s.s. <i>Generoso</i>	1913	1,595	2,755
Keller Shipping S.A. :			
m.v. <i>Laupen</i>	1948	468	800
m.v. <i>Murten</i>	1942	511	670
Brag Maritime S.A. :			
m.v. <i>Misox</i>	1949	616	800
Lloyd Seeschiffahrt A.G. :			
m.v. <i>Simplon</i>	1944	455	470
Soc. Auxiliaire de Transports			
S.A. :			
s.s. <i>Ville de Geneve</i>	1915	1,255	1,700
Marivins S.A. :			
s.s. <i>Leman</i>	1947	320	440
Galea A.G. :			
s.s. <i>San Moritz</i>	1920	5,168	9,000
Roger de Perrot :			
s.s. <i>Neuchâtel</i>	1930	9,555	14,500

FESTIVALS AND EXHIBITIONS IN SWITZERLAND.

August. Month of August, Ascona: Brissago Islands, Lake Festival "Il Verbano in Festa"; August 5th, Grindelwald: Alpine Festival at the Maennlichen; August 5th, Saanen: Alpine Festival on the Hornberg; August 5th, Gstaad: Alpine Festival on the Wispillen; August 5th, Villars-Chesières: Mid-summer Festival at Taveyannaz; August 9th-10th, celebrations of the 450th anniversary of the entry of Schaffhausen into the Swiss Confederation; August 10th-12th, Geneva: Festival of Geneva, with battle of flowers, fire-work display; August 12th, Villars-Chesières: Mid-summer Festival at Anzeindaz; August 12th, Nideroetz: "Hornuss" (a Swiss ball game), Festival of Aargau and Central Switzerland; mid-August, Champéry: "Journée de Champéry", costume procession, folk music and dancing.

September 8th-9th, Lucerne: Swiss Costumes Festival; September 8th-10th, Albisguetli, Zurich: Boys' Shooting Competition; September 29th-30th, Neuchâtel: Wine harvest festival and procession; October 7th, Lugano: Wine festival and procession; October 21st, Châtel-St. Denis: Public Harvest Festival of the Bénichon.

TO MOTHER.

What would we give —
For one brief hour again —
To smile, to wait, to read —
And give a cup of tea — to Mother.

A comfy bed to make each day —
A cheery fire to light —
Flowers arrayed the special way —
To give delight — to Mother.

Give now your best —
Wait not another day —
Give violets to the parent heart —
They all belong — to Mother.

The days fleet swiftly by —
Are lost in daily cares —
A query — then a humble sigh —
Too late — to give — to Mother.

Mary Brandwood.

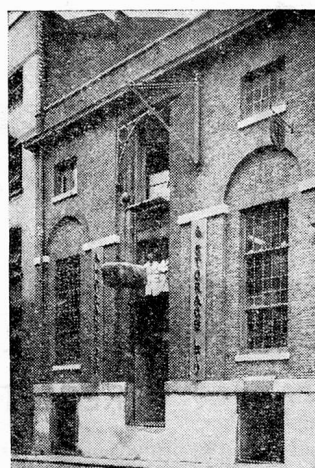
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