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SWITZERLAND STRENGTHENS HER DEFENCES.

General Staff's New Tactics.

(The following is reprinted from the May 29th issue of "The Times" by courtesy of the Editor.)

Since the Hungarian revolution and the beginning of the Suez crisis Switzerland has increased her rearmament effort which was started three years ago but allowed to slow down slightly last year. The two outstanding events of last year brought home to the Swiss with new emphasis their country's exposed position. Switzerland is only 300 miles from the Hungarian border, and western Germany and Italy are too preoccupied with their own wide fronts to cover Switzerland's flanks were her neutrality to be threatened in another war. These considerations gave the defence of Switzerland a new urgency.

Switzerland being neutral, her Army's task is purely defensive. Its mission is to protect the country against trespass. There is no reason to suppose that one of her neighbours would attack her, but in a clash between two groups of Powers along the Swiss border one of them might try to turn the other's positions by passing through Switzerland.

National Redoubt.

As recognized by the treaties of Vienna, Swiss neutrality involves the guarding and neutralization of the Alpine passes and their approaches on behalf of all the European Powers. For this purpose during the last war the General Staff not only erected strong fortifications along the frontiers but also transformed the Alpine region into a "national redoubt". This highly fortified system is based on the three powerful groups of underground mountain forts at Sargans, in the east; Saint Gothard, in the centre; and Saint Maurice, in the west. All these fortifications have small permanent garrisons.

In an invasion the general plan was to fight delaying actions in the lowlands known as the "Plateau suisse" and gradually to withdraw and resist in the "redoubt". It was estimated that the field forces and Alpine brigades could hold out in this area for a year at least, using the numerous underground forts, galleries, food, fuel and ammunition dumps, workshops, barracks, electric power plants, aerodromes, and hospitals hewn in the live rock, even in the glaciers. The drawback of this plan was that it meant abandoning the bigger towns — Zürich, Basle, Berne, Lausanne, Geneva — early in the operations and sacrificing the main industrial region with one-third of the population.

The General Staff has now evolved new defence tactics to hold the plateau longer. The new plan is twofold. Its first phase is the active defence on the

plateau, by attacking and harassing the invader with field units, guerrilla detachments, and armour. In the second phase, once the plateau became untenable, the field forces would progressively retreat into the "redoubt", join the Alpine brigades, and resist to the last. This plan involved a reorganization and redistribution of Army units and the supply of weapons adequate to their new task.

Atomic Weapons.

The rearmament effort has been concentrated mainly on conventional weapons, but the importance of atomic warfare has not been overlooked. Protection against atomic devices and measures to counter them are being thoroughly, but secretly, studied. Experts believe that while atomic weapons may be employed in the lowlands, their use in the mountains would be improbable or much reduced.

The Swiss infantry is well supplied with excellent modern light and heavy machine guns, mine throwers, mortars, and light artillery, and is now receiving "roquettes" or bazookas of an improved type, as well as grenades capable of piercing a 12in. steel plate at 40 yards. The Army workshops have produced a remarkable new assault rifle which can be used both as an ordinary or an automatic rifle or for firing grenades, the transition from one operation to the other being rapidly made by two control levers. Both heavy and light armour have been developed. British Centurion tanks have already been purchased and some more are to be delivered.

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The artillery, which is almost entirely motorized, has been equipped with the newest and most efficient guns of all models, including anti-tank and anti-aircraft. The A.A. guns have a new Swiss-built electric range-finder and sighting instrument of great precision, which is easily handled. Owing to the difficulty of using heavy bombers among the mountains, the Air Force has concentrated on fighter-bombers and fighters, among them Swiss-built Moranes and British Vampires and Venoms. Special tactics have been evolved for mountain warfare. Vampires and Venoms are particularly useful for this kind of operation, in which a squadron suddenly bursts from behind a mountain ridge or from an Alpine pass to attack the target and disappear behind another ridge in a moment.

Though her population is just over five million, Switzerland now has the strongest Army in central Europe and can, within 48 hours, put in the field 500,000 combatants in 20 divisions. At the end of the war, when conscription began at the age of 18, the Swiss Army could muster just under one million men, including home guards, auxiliary, and other services.

Every Swiss citizen is required to serve in the forces from the age of 19 to 60. If physically unfit for active service, he is enrolled in a non-combatant service or else pays a special "military tax". Called up at 19, he is sent to "recruits' school" for seven to nine months, according to the branch of service. The recruits are assigned to one of the units of their home Canton. From 19 to 36 the militiaman serves in the *Elite*, or first line force, and during these 17 years he takes part in eight refresher courses and manoeuvres.

If necessary, the Government can increase the number of these periods. From 36 to 47 he belongs to the *Landwehr*, formed of second line units, which also have refresher periods every three years or oftener if necessary. From 48 to 60 he is in the *Landsturm* or reserve. This consists of units which guard roads, bridges, and railways and cover the mobilization of the Army.

Recruits' School.

N.C.O.s selected from the rank-and-file attend a special 27-day course, after which they drill recruits during their "recruits' school." Officers picked from the n.c.o.s undergo a training course of from 62 to 104 days. They are then put in command of recruits during a "recruits' school". Before attaining the rank of captain an officer must undergo another series of three special courses of one month each. One course is for training in tactics, another in shooting, the last in the command of a unit in a "recruits' school".

Every year soldiers of the *Elite* and *Landwehr* carry out rifle and pistol practice. Each man keeps at home his uniform, arms, equipment — his horse if he is a cavalryman — and a sealed packet of war ammunition. The Army can thus mobilize very quickly.

Military service involves a sacrifice for the Swiss. The pay does not compensate for losses in salary, but these are now made good by special compensation funds. A private gets 3s. 4d. a day, a lieutenant 13s. 8d., while the highest pay — 30s. — is a colonel's, the highest rank in peacetime. In case of emergency or of war Parliament — on the recommendation of the Government — elects a Commander-in-Chief, with the rank of general. During the last 100 years Switzerland has had four generals — in 1847, General Dufour, one of the founders of the Red Cross; General Herzog during the Franco-Prussian War of 1870-71; General Wille during the First World War; and General Guisan during the Second World War.

Reactions to Hungary.

The Swiss Army is not permanent and there are only a few Regular officers, who are entrusted with the task of instructing the troops. Only the General Staff, its auxiliaries, and the garrisons of the three big fortified systems are on permanent service. After the October rising in Hungary special courses in anti-tank defence tactics were organized, in response to public demand, at which both men and women learnt various methods of destroying armour.

To the question whether such an Army can defend Switzerland, the opinion of Field-Marshal Lord Montgomery may be quoted. "The Swiss", he told your Correspondent, "can very well defend their neutrality, but they must be sure of it and devote all their energy and enthusiasm to reinforcing their power of defence materially and morally."

The cost of Swiss defence, including the accelerated rearmament programme, is not excessive. During the past three years nearly £125m. were spent on rearmament and an appropriation of a further £50m. is to be made during the present year. The ordinary defence budget for 1957 amounts to £58,107,000, about £11 10s. a head of the population, or 3.1 per cent. of the national income.



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