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FROM WALTER MITTELHOLZER TO THE JET CAPTAIN OF THE 'SIXTIES

Some Reflections on a Swissair Pilot's Career

On 9th May, at a monument near the Swiss Airport at Kloten, some 25 men and women gathered to pay tribute to one of Switzerland's aviation pioneers, Walter Mittelholzer, who had died 30 years before. Among the members of the management of Swissair and old friends was his mechanic, Werner Wegmann. A wreath was deposited, and in a moment of silence, the party remembered a great man.

Walter Mittelholzer was born on 2nd April 1894, son of a master baker in St. Gall. He was apprenticed in photography, and in 1915, he applied to fly as photographer with the Swiss Flying Corps. Exactly 50 years ago, he became a pupil of Alfred Comte, the *Chevalier de l'air*, at the pilots' training school. Two months later already, he started on his first solo flight and became one of the most daring and efficient aviators of the time.

In 1919, he and his instructor founded the first Swiss aviation company, "Comte, Mittelholzer & Co". A year later, it merged with "Avion Tourisme S.R." and "Frick & Co." and became "Ad Astra Aero". Walter Mittelholzer took over the photographic department.

With a series of sensational flights abroad, Mittelholzer made a name for himself all over the world. No wonder, for his exploits included flights to Teheran and the Persian Gulf, from Cairo to Cape Town, the first air crossing of Kilimanjaro, a study tour of South America in 1934 and the maiden crossing of U.S.A. (California to New York) in 1936 — all exceptional flying achievements.

When Swissair was founded in 1931, Mittelholzer and Balz Zimmermann took over its management. Even then he did not relax; he underwent special training as a navigator and was later appointed Chief of Swiss Navigation by the Federal Council. As far back as 1936, "The Aeroplane" wrote that Mittelholzer "has trained his pilots to use only the precise radio-navigation methods which are becoming recognised as the only precise safe technique for European air transport in the future".

Walter Mittelholzer left some 30,000 photos and 40,000 films. He had written eleven books which — translated into six languages — totalled 196,000 copies. He had 9,000 flights on forty different types of aircraft to his credit. And then, tragically, he was killed on a mountaineering expedition in the Austrian Alps. Switzerland lost one of its greatest aviators, and many mourned an upright and fine friend.

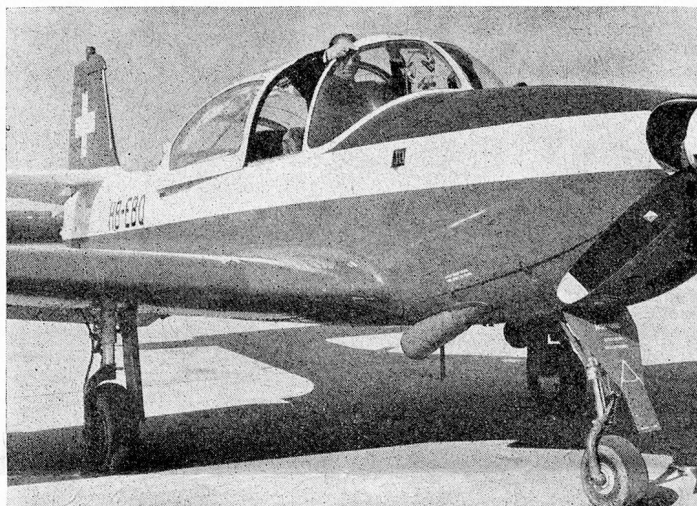
Bueckers, Piaggios and DC-3s

Two months his instruction lasted back in 1915 before he started on his first solo flight. The training of the modern jet pilot is far more complex. On 3rd April, the first term of a new pilots' training course began at the Swiss Aviation College SLS (*Schweizerische Luftverkehrsschule*). The school is operated by Swissair on behalf of the Swiss Government. The Confederation promotes the training of new blood in the pilot's profession. On 1st February 1959, a Federal Decree became law, whose aim is to secure plenty of young men for military and civil aviation.

The 20 young pilots-to-be who started their training at the SLS in April, had one month devoted to theory, followed by 1½ months of flying instruction on Buecker aircraft at Hausen on the Albis. Mid-June, the pupils took their private pilot's test. Now the group is divided, and the two sections alternately train in *Kunstflug* on

Buecker planes at Hausen and in general flying on five-piston engined Piaggio planes at Kloten, about 200 hours altogether. These training fields may have to be left for some others, possibly abroad, where aircraft noise is less important, for instance on an old, disused military airfield in Belgium.

In 1966, 2,032 hours of theory were taught to pilots at the SLS, 3,365 hours were spent on the Link trainer, 3,810 hours on school planes (12,994 landings) and 1,319 hours on DC-3s (5,042 landings).



Piaggio Training Plane

(Swissair)

In the second term, the students convert to DC-3s. They are trained in blind and night flying and learn the principles of basic navigational flying. By the middle of October, a one week's flight abroad will bring that phase of their training to an end. They then qualify for a professional pilot's licence.

The requirements for the professional pilot of today are manifold. He is instructed in such complicated subjects as electro- and radio technique, basic instrument knowledge, aircraft construction materials and fuel, navigational aids as a basis for Link training, navigation, meteorology, rules of air traffic, radio-telegraphy and its accepted rules, high frequency communication, flight restrictions, the English language and specific medical instruction. In the final term, his theoretical knowledge and flying time are brought up to the standard to qualify for a commercial pilot's licence.

Up the Ladder

And when he has passed successfully that part of the training, he is still a long way off his aim as an airline pilot. But it is a great day when he can accompany an experienced co-pilot as a second officer on short flights (for about two months). Then follows some more training, during which the young aviator is made familiar with the "basis" aircraft, a Convair Metropolitan today, but already a jet plane in a few years from now. Once he has mastered all the knowledge, theoretical and practical, and is versed also in international rules and internal Swissair regulations, he will be made independent co-pilot.

Several years of flying is needed for the young man to gather the necessary practical experience which is his

equipment to advance to Captain. By the time he has the required number of flying hours behind him, he will be granted a line pilot's licence, prerequisite for passing the Captain's Course. Once again, he goes through an apprenticeship, but at the end of that he will proudly wear the four wide gold stripes on his sleeve. He now takes full responsibility for his actions and decisions. He is at last his own master, but with it, he also carries the heavy liability for the human lives entrusted to him and the extremely costly aircraft.

From then onward, the pilot has to pass exacting test flights every six months in order to satisfy the examiners that he is on top of his form and fully capable also in emergencies specially contrived and simulated for the purpose of the check up. And if successful, he is entrusted with larger and more complicated aircraft and on longer routes. With the rapid technical development of aircraft, the modern pilot has to be an alert and adaptable pupil again and again in the course of his interesting career.

Short of Men in a Fine Profession

Swissair requires about fifty pilots a year, and the number is likely to increase in the near future. About forty join the SLS annually, but as about a quarter fail to qualify, the total number of new airline pilots is nowhere near the required number.

The young pilot needed today is not the adventurous hero type, the "joy-stick crusader" of Mittelholzer's time. In fact, largely due to Walter Mittelholzer's initiative, all Swissair machines were equipped with navigational aids in the 'thirties, and the tremendous technical advances made during and since the war, have made of flying a science which requires intelligent and utterly reliable men. To be a pilot is no longer an extravagant vocation, but an everyday occupation like many others.

Initial educational requirements to start a pilot's training, are 3 years of secondary school and vocational apprenticeship or *Mittelschule* with matriculation. Age limits are between 20 and 25 years, except for military pilots who can join up to 28. Candidates must be physically fit and have some knowledge of English.

Any airline training in Switzerland is linked with military service, for all Swissair pilots who are of Swiss nationality spend up to six weeks a year on compulsory military service. Youths between 17 and 20 can apply for a preliminary training scheme for flying, run by the Swiss Aero Club on behalf of the Swiss Federal Air Office, and the Swiss Government pay the whole cost. If selected, the youngsters attend two 14-day courses in successive years. Theoretical instruction is given, and the boys are initiated into gliding and powered flight. These preliminary courses, however, are not essential.

With the exception of the military pilot, all applicants then begin a preparatory course with the SLS, and then, their main training begins at the school. Military or qualified civil pilots spend one year only at the SLS.

Backed by Future Employer

Most students who attend the SLS are sponsored by an airline before they set out, and this amounts practically to the whole intake of students being reserved for Swissair. They are given a guarantee of employment as line pilots if they qualify, and they in turn agree to serve with the company. They even get a small salary from Swissair during their training, and they pay fees of Fr.200.— for a 6-month term, plus insurance.

Experts are agreed that airline pilots have to be chosen most carefully. Modern aviation makes big demands because of the physics of flying, the technological complexities of the large advanced aircraft. To meteorological and climatic conditions are added the rules of the game in an ever-increasing air traffic. Not every pilot student reaches the top. The training is of an extremely high standard, not least because it is in Swissair's own interest to get as many top-class pilots as possible.

Swissair is the national airline of Switzerland, yet it is run as an independent company based on private law. But its prosperity is important to the country's economy, and Swiss air transport policy is kept under constant review, for to stand still means decline. Swiss aviation is faced with new problems, increasing costs, lower tariffs on the North Atlantic routes, keener competition, delays in the delivery of aircraft and, last but not least, a shortage of pilots. Already today, a large number of regular line pilots in command of Swissair planes are foreigners (though they, too, have to undergo the stringent training at the SLS — their professional flying licence is not sufficient on its own).

Master of the Skies

Prospects for a pilot are excellent. If successful, his career takes him to the top all along the range from small to the largest type of aircraft. As a Captain he can earn as much as Fr.65,000.— a year, and when he retires between 55 and 60, he has a pension. He and his family enjoy sizeable reductions on air travel. He starts with three weeks holidays increasing to six weeks after the ninth year of service. And above all, it is the profession which brings to life a boy's dream to be master of the air. Perhaps it is no longer as romantic as it was in the days when Walter Mittelholzer took to the air, but now he has the responsibility of transporting scores of passengers. He flies unscathed in all weathers and reaches heights and speeds the pioneer of 50 years ago never dreamed of. Or did he?

MM

VADUZ — WEDDING 30th JULY 1967

On the occasion of the wedding festivities for the marriage of Crown Prince Hans Adam to Countess Kinsky, the principality of Liechtenstein expects to receive between 20,000 and 40,000 visitors from all over the world. The 800 official guests include representatives of the nobility and Governments of the neighbouring States. The festivities start on 22nd July with a reception given at the Castle of Vaduz and terminate on the last Sunday in July with a popular festival. The occasion will also be marked with the issue of a special postage stamp and cancellation mark.

[S.N.T.O.]

COMPETITIONS FOR MUSICAL PERFORMERS

From 1939 to 1966, 5,256 candidates from 68 countries participated at 28 Competitions for Musical Performers held in Geneva. 101 first, 256 second and 14 third prizes have been awarded, representing 294,925.— Swiss francs (special prizes not included). More than 1,100 inquiries and numerous applications have already been made at the Secretary's office for the Competition which will take place from 23rd September to 7th October. Applications for the Competition of 1967 will be accepted until 1st July. For information and prospectus apply to the Secretary of the Competition, new address: Palais Eynard, 4 rue de la Croix-Rouge, CH-1204 Geneva.

[S.N.T.O.]