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# 'HIGH FLIER' WITH FEET ON THE GROUND

A Compatriot in profile

For many years it was an established fact that Switzerland was engaged in the export of more than her traditional goods such as watches, quality machinery, insurance and chocolate. That other invisible commodity was people. Many of our fellow citizens left the homeland to settle in distant lands. Some made their fortunes and returned home to retire, others stayed where they were. Sometimes this export trade was self-generated, in other cases the man was sent abroad by his Swiss multi-national employer. As often as not such a man became a voluntary exile, returning only rarely and briefly to the mother country. He made his home wherever he found himself. To be able to do this a man would have to be highly adaptable and versatile. And it probably just these qualities, among others, that would typify a senior airline executive.

And that is what the subject of this profile is. He is Louis Nart, Swissair's General Manager for the United Kingdom and Ireland. From his office in London's Swiss Centre Mr. Nart was kind enough to reminisce for the *Swiss Observer*. The results were interesting . . . but read on and see for yourself.

Louis Nart was born in 1925 in Cairo where his father was employed by Sulzer Brothers (yet another valuable Swiss export). He remained there until 1930 when his family returned to Switzerland due to his father's failing health.

## Conventional start

His early life in Switzerland was conventional. He attended the normal primary, secondary and commercial schools which resulted in his obtaining a commercial diploma in Zürich. Very soon afterwards, in 1947, he realised that a knowledge of English could only be an asset to him so he came to London. "What a different place it was then" he reflects "with severe food rationing and austerity the order of the day".

After nine months at the Berlitz school and the Swiss Mercantile College he returned to Switzerland at Christmas. His first and effectively only job began when he joined Swissair in their travel office at Zuerich's Hauptbahnhof in February 1948.

He remained there for some two years but, as he put it "I felt I had perhaps inherited the urge to travel from my father". So without further ado he requested a transfer which was granted.

## 'Factotem'

In February 1950 he came to Manchester in the role which he describes as a "general dogsbody" — an all round general clerical assistant. At that time there were only three or four Swissair flights per week in and out of Manchester. So, having done his routine duties in town, he made his way to the airport — but not until he had put on his uniform.

In course of time Louis Nart became number two (out of not many, he adds with a smile). When his then boss was transferred in 1952 Mr. Nart became district manager for Northern England at the relatively young age of 27. "But", he says, "things were different then — Swissair's organisations abroad were



Mr. Louis Nart, Swissair's general manager for the United Kingdom and Ireland.

small so we were all thrown into the melting pot where we either sank or swam".

But Louis Nart obviously swam. He stayed in Manchester, from where he covered Northern England, Ulster and the Irish Republic, until 1953. This relatively large territory had to be covered by public transport. "There were no company cars in those days but we still managed to visit every travel agent in our area". His 'modus operandi' would probably seem bizarre by today's standards. He travelled with two suitcases, one contained his clothes and the other his publicity material. At the station he would fill his briefcase with publicity leaflets, visit several agencies by bus — having left the remainder of his baggage in left luggage — and then return to catch a train to the next port of call.

He likes to recall a visit to one particular agent in Ireland. When he

arrived at about 10 a.m. he found the doors locked — the place was a pub and it was not yet opening time. After a good deal of knocking he gained admission to find that the "travel agency" was a table at the end of the bar, with a notice "Book your travel here". Louis Nart was the first Swissair man this agent had ever met. He plied him with copious draughts of Irish Whiskey. To add to Mr. Nart's discomfiture, the man knew Switzerland better than he did. But he got the business.

## Wedding Bells

In 1953 he was transferred to Munich as district manager for Bavaria. He stayed there until 1959 and it was there that he met and married his Bernese wife Nelly.

Next came Bangkok and a stint as area manager for South-East Asia. His territory was now enormous, covering as it did Thailand, Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam. Swissair's services to the Far East had begun in earnest only in 1957 so this was a period of his life which Louis Nart describes as "particularly interesting but one which still causes me great sadness when I read of the tragedies which have now overtaken the gentle people of parts of this area."

## Africa bound

In 1964 he and his family were on the move again — this time to Johannesburg, South Africa to prepare for the introduction of Swissair services there. He had to prepare everything from scratch for the whole of Southern Africa stretching into Zambia, Rhodesia and beyond. Finally all was more or less ready and, in April 1968, the first weekly DC8 flight was operating. He stayed in South Africa for 10 years by which time there were three DC10 flights per week and offices in Johannesburg, Durban and Cape Town.

In 1975 he relocated straight from South Africa to London. After 15 years overseas he says it was "almost a traumatic shock to have to settle back into Europe". But he already knew London and the British (whom he likes very much) so he soon got to grips with his new challenge. He likes London but still has not become accustomed to commuting which he considers a considerable waste of time.

Louis Nart describes his latest job as interesting and demanding and it is easy to detect that this easy easy-going but hard-working man

would not have it any other way. He is delighted with the good rapport he enjoys with his almost 200 strong staff (a far call from his first spell of duty here) and is proud of the fact that there has never been a major industrial dispute in all Swissair's history of operations in the United Kingdom.

### Growth record

So Swissair, considered by many to be one of the best airlines in this highly competitive business, continues to grow. There are now over 70 flights per week between Switzerland and the UK including cargo services. Swissair, still privately owned, is today one of the few national flag carriers of the world to consistently make a profit. The company still believes that it is in business to provide a service — a philosophy very much in line with Louis Nart's own way of thinking.

But there are problems. The hardness of the Swiss franc against other major currencies will mean a drop in revenue of as much as Sw.Fr. 300 million — and that is a lot of money by any standards. The drop so far this year is of the order of 17 per cent so he firmly hopes that the corrective measures recently announced by the Swiss authorities will be effective.

### Family man

Louis and his wife have two sons. The first, Louis-Andreas, was born in Munich while the second, Daniel-Christoph, was born in Bangkok. Both boys attended high school in Switzerland and the older one has already completed his military service, something of which Mr. Nart strongly approves.

In what little time he has available for leisure Louis Nart is a keen philatelist and chess player. He also likes to play golf — if and when he can find the time. He does not yet turn his thoughts to retirement (he is still only 53) and sums up his attitude by saying "my home is where I like it and where I feel happy."

### The "old breed"

If it were possible to summarise a man as adaptable as Louis Nart in a sentence one would have to describe him as rather typical of that breed of Swiss who have carried on the old tradition of regarding the world as their oyster.

In thanking Mr. Nart for devoting some of his valuable time to the *Swiss Observer* we also wish him many more happy years in London — or wherever Swissair and fortune may take him.

George Sommer

### SWISSAIR TO OPEN SERVICE TO JEDDAH

The opening of a twice-weekly service to Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, is the main innovation of Swissair's winter schedules effective from November 1. Jeddah becomes the 93rd destination on Swissair's network.

One flight, by DC-8, will operate Zürich-Jeddah nonstop on Monday, returning via Geneva on Tuesday. The second, by wide-body DC-10, links Switzerland with Jeddah on Thursday and continues to Dar es Salaam, returning from Dar on Friday evening and from Jeddah early on Saturday. Together with Dhahran, Swissair will now serve Saudi Arabia five times weekly.

In general, the summer timetable is being continued system-wide in the winter.

### Europe

On the UK-Switzerland routes, four flights daily will be available between London and Zürich as the midday flight to Zürich and the evening departure to London are being maintained on a daily basis. No changes take place in the services from London to Geneva and Basle, or from Manchester to Zurich.



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