

Zeitschrift: The Swiss observer : the journal of the Federation of Swiss Societies in the UK
Herausgeber: Federation of Swiss Societies in the United Kingdom
Band: - (1981)
Heft: 1782

Artikel: One man's fight against the enemy
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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-689235>

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One man's fight against the enemy

WHILE I must agree with Gottfried Keller's assessment of the intentions of the USSR, one cannot assume that China will always be a deterrent or that the situation will never change for the worse. The military commission of the Swiss National Council would be failing in their duty if they did not try to anticipate and provide for every eventuality.

I imagine that every Swiss knows the story of "The General" and how he saved Switzerland from invasion by the surrounding Axis powers. The difficulties and hardships endured by the beleaguered nation are well documented, even if they are not appreciated by those who did not experience them.

That painful compromises had to be made in order to survive is accepted, but although the rules had to be bent, they were never broken and Switzerland emerged with honour from this tragic era.

However few people know how unprepared Switzerland was and how lucky she was to remain unscathed. Today espionage is an international disease, but even in the thirties the major powers were busy spying on each other and attempting to pervert and subvert the course of events in their own favour. Switzerland was alone in her ignorance of the machinations of the Nazis, having virtually no secret service of her own.

It was left to one of Switzerland's citizen-soldiers, Major Hans Hausamann, to step into the breach and repair this omission. He realised that Germany could not be trusted to respect the nation's neutrality and that it was vital to Switzerland's security to know what the Nazis were planning.

Luckily the major was not only a wealthy man and a great patriot but he also had friends and colleagues who thought as he did. He was therefore able to persuade a number of ex-officers and other military friends from the Lucerne section of the Swiss forces to join him in establishing a private intelligence service, the 'Buro Ha'.

Naturally, as with all intelligence matters, the details of the organisation and its operation are extremely hazy, but the Buro Ha gradually built up a network of agents in adjoining countries and soon Switzerland was able to learn for the first time what her potential enemies were planning.

So successful was the organisation that by mid-1939 the Buro Ha even had a direct line into the 'Oberkommando der Wehrmacht' - Hitler's headquarters.

Such an organisation required resources that were beyond the reach of any single individual and it is possible that the British and probably other governments were involved in some way. Whatever the truth, at the end of August 1939, when Colonel Henri Guisan was made a general and put in command of the Swiss armed forces, he was delighted to find a ready made and well organised intelligence service at his disposal.

The General decided to keep such a valuable asset intact and Major Hausamann was posted to the Service de Renseignement, or SR, under the command of

Colonel Roger Masson. His Buro Ha was incorporated as a branch of the official secret service.

Contrary to the views of some members of the Swiss government, General Guisan did not regard neutrality as either passive or defeatist. In his opinion it was not in Switzerland's interest to allow Europe to be dominated by any single power and, like so many great national heroes, he was known to forget to get prior permission for his actions if the nation's welfare demanded it.

The General's bias in favour of the Western allies and his unorthodox methods help to explain some facets of the highly convoluted modus operandi of the Buro Ha.

The story of Rudolf Roessler, alias Lucy of Lucerne, and his involvement with the Buro Ha is typical. Roessler hated the Nazis and all that they stood for. He was perfectly willing to provide intelligence to anyone who opposed them, and he seems to have worked officially for the USSR but to have also passed information to the British and the Swiss as well.

Major Hausamann used Roessler as a sort of liaison officer for the Buro Ha and was able to keep the Swiss authorities informed of Hitler's intentions within 24 hours of their being known in Berlin.

An indication of the complexity of the situation can be gained from the fact that when the Bundespolizei (BUPO), who were responsible for counter-

espionage, arrested an Englishman, Alexander Foote, on the night of November 19, 1943, they discovered to their amazement that he had been working for Switzerland. He almost certainly worked, like Roessler, for anyone who was against the Nazis.

Further enquiries led the BUPO to Roessler, who by now had become the chief military evaluator of the Swiss General Staff in addition to working for the Buro Ha and being the leading military commentator for the Swiss press. When he was arrested early in 1944, together with a member of the Buro Ha, it took the General Staff three months to get him released.

Roessler was finally tried in October 1945 for infringements of Switzerland's code of neutrality. Although he was found guilty, he was not deported "because of his great wartime services to Switzerland."

It was only because of this ad hoc mixture of patriotic Swiss and Nazi-hating foreigners that Switzerland was able to survive intact when she could so easily have been obliterated by her powerful neighbours.

Therefore I agree with Mr Keller that it would be wrong to create "an atmosphere of pessimism and gloom," but I am sure that he would agree with me that it would also be wrong to allow a similar state of unpreparedness to that which existed in 1939.

There may not be a Major Hausamann to save the day the next time. **Peter E. Slater**



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