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Memories stirred by death of an alpine assassin



ONE COLD, crisp January day in 1936 a young medical student at Berne University walked out of his lodgings, leaving behind a note: "I won't be back tonight. You will soon know more."

A few days later the whole of Switzerland knew more. Yugoslav-born Jewish student David Frankfurter had travelled to the popular ski resort of Davos and shot dead one of the most controversial figures in Switzerland at the time. His victim was Wilhelm Gustloff, German head of the Nazi movement in Switzerland.

Memories of the pre-war Davos drama – and the events surrounding it – have been revived in Switzerland by the recent news from Tel Aviv of the death of David Frankfurter at the age of 71.

The then 25-year-old student, described by Swiss who knew him as shy and reserved, caused a sensation when he shot Gustloff in what was considered as one of the first acts of Jewish revenge against the Nazis.

Angered by anti-Jewish repression in Germany – and distressed to discover considerable support for the Nazi movement in officially neutral Switzerland – Frankfurter booked a one-way ticket to Davos, called at Gustloff's home on the evening of February 4 and shot him through the head and chest. Half an hour later he gave himself up to local police, explaining his deeds and motives.

Frankfurter was tried by a Swiss court and sentenced to 18 years in prison, followed by expulsion from Switzerland for life. But he served only half this time, being released soon after the end of the war and emigrating to Palestine in 1945.

With the birth of Israel as a state in 1948, he obtained an administrative post in the

Defence Ministry and lived quietly in Tel Aviv, where a street was named after him.

He obtained permission to return to Switzerland in the early 1970s to assist producer Rolf Lyssy in the making of "Confrontation", a film on the Frankfurter story. He again returned in 1978 to participate in a documentary programme in Swiss television's "Destiny" series.

The death of David Frankfurter this summer attracted such extensive media coverage in Switzerland that Swiss TV re-ran its 1978 "Destiny" programme. Even The Times of London devoted considerable space in their obituary column to the man "who assassinated a personal representative of Hitler."

The shots that rang out in Davos in 1936 brought to a climax the controversy over Wilhelm Gustloff's activities in Switzerland. They also heralded a time of tension between the Swiss authorities and Nazi Germany.

Gustloff, a long-time resident of Switzerland, had formerly worked at the Swiss Meteorological Research Institute in Davos, and was later appointed leader of the country's Nazi Party. At that time some 130,000 Germans were resident in Switzerland, and some Swiss even became Nazi supporters.

Gustloff was careful to keep ostensibly within Swiss law. But there was widespread disapproval of his actions, some of which were considered highly insulting to his host country. It was even said that he sometimes enjoyed more authority than the German legation in Berne.

Some Swiss members of parliament complained that his actions were "an insolent

provocation" to the democratically-minded Swiss. The official view of the Swiss government, however, was that there were insufficient grounds for Gustloff's expulsion.

The problem of Gustloff himself was solved by his violent death. But Germany immediately launched an anti-Swiss campaign, demanding Frankfurter's extradition and claiming that Swiss media criticism of Nazism had incited the murder.

Gustloff's body was taken back to Germany in a special train – an indication of his high standing in the Nazi hierarchy – and even Hitler himself praised Gustloff as a man who had died "a holy martyr."

David Frankfurter, who lost several members of his family in Germany's concentration camps, told Swiss television viewers nearly 40 years later that his actions had been directed not so much against Gustloff the man but against the movement he represented.

He added: "I think the Swiss government of the time was well aware of the dangers posed by Gustloff and the Nazi movement in Switzerland. But the government failed to make a decision. It failed to act."

TWO of Switzerland's seven government ministers have announced that they will retire at the end of this year.

Economics Minister Fritz Honegger, 65, and Interior Minister Hans Hürliemann, 64, said in a joint statement that their decision was based on "the need to ensure government continuity and stability."

Other retirements are expected next year, and the two men said they wanted

to avoid too many ministers leaving at a time when the government is faced with such pressing major issues.

These include current economic problems, rising unemployment and the government's controversial campaign to win public backing for Switzerland's planned membership of the United Nations.

Under Switzerland's four-party coalition system, the government members – often referred to as the seven wise men – are traditionally chosen according to their party's strength in parliament and the linguistic regions of Switzerland they represent.

The Presidency of Switzerland rotates annually among the seven ministers, with Mr Honegger currently serving his year as President.

Mr Honegger has been a government minister for five years, and Mr Hürlimann for nine. Their successors will be elected by a joint session of both houses of parliament in December.

★ ★ ★

THE Swiss soccer season has opened with Grasshoppers of Zurich taking seven points from their first four games and an early championship lead in their bid to retain the league title they won last year.

With victories of 4-1, 5-1 and 6-0 followed by a 0-0 draw, Grasshoppers currently top the table on goal average.

Among the goalscorers already is a name familiar to soccer fans in Britain – Raimondo Ponte, who played for Nottingham Forest two seasons ago, then went on to Bastia in

France and has now returned to his old Swiss club.

Grasshoppers have been by far the most successful club in Swiss soccer history, winning the championship title 18 times, the cup on 13 occasions and achieving the coveted cup-and-league double six times – all records far from being equalled by any other Swiss club.

In addition, they have competed in European tournaments for the past 12 successive seasons.

Incidentally, some readers – Swiss and British – have written to ask how the Zurich club got its rather strange, non-Swiss name.

According to the records, the club was formed in 1886 by a group of students in the city, many of whom were from Britain. It was agreed to give the club an English-sounding name – and "Grasshoppers" has been retained ever since.

SWISS SOCCER

Football League tables up to and including September 3.

'A' Division

	Pl	W	D	L	Gls	Pts
Grasshoppers	4	3	1	0	15	2 7
Zürich	4	3	1	0	11	4 7
Young Boys	4	3	1	0	7	4 7
St. Gallen	4	2	2	0	9	4 6
Servette	4	3	0	1	5	2 6
Sion	4	1	3	0	3	2 5
Vevey	4	2	1	1	7	6 5
Basle	4	2	0	2	7	5 4
Xamax	4	2	0	2	10	9 4
Lausanne	4	1	1	2	6	7 3
Lucerne	4	1	1	2	5	8 3
Wettingen	4	0	2	2	4	6 2
Aarau	4	1	0	3	5	8 2
Bellinzona	4	1	0	3	3	14 2
Bulle	4	0	1	3	5	10 1
Winterthur	4	0	0	4	1	12 0

'B' Division

	Pl	W	D	L	Gls	Pts
Nordstern	2	2	0	0	8	2 4
Chaux-de-Fonds	2	2	0	0	6	1 4
Biel	2	2	0	0	5	2 4
Laufen	2	1	1	0	5	2 3
Baden	2	1	1	0	2	0 3
Mendrisio	2	1	1	0	6	5 3
Chiasso	2	1	1	0	2	1 3
Grenchen	2	1	1	0	1	0 3
Fribourg	2	1	0	1	3	2 2
Chênois	2	0	1	1	1	5 1
Lugano	1	0	0	1	3	4 0
Locarno	1	0	0	1	0	2 0
Bern	2	0	0	2	1	4 0
Monthey	2	0	0	2	1	4 0
Ibach	2	0	0	2	2	6 0
Rüti	2	0	0	2	2	8 0

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