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Sitting out the Afghan war ... in Switzerland



FIVE Soviet soldiers captured by guerillas in Afghanistan are sitting out the war in neutral Switzerland, and more could be on the way.

The men are the first to benefit from an agreement negotiated by the International Committee of the Red Cross with Soviet authorities, the Afghan government and Moslem guerillas.

They have been transferred to Switzerland after spending months in the hands of the guerillas and facing the constant fear of execution.

Three of the men arrived here in May and two other soldiers were flown to Switzerland in August. All the men are between 19 and 22 years old. They are visited regularly at a Swiss military prison farm near Zug by diplomats from the Soviet Embassy in Berne. Separate visits are made by representatives of the International Committee of the Red Cross.

It is believed to be the first time that soldiers taken prisoner have been interned in a neutral country by agreement of all those involved. Under the agreement, the soldiers will remain in Switzerland for a maximum of two years or until hostilities in Afghanistan end.

But despite the relative luxury of their Swiss detention, after months of rebel captivity in Afghanistan, not all the Soviet soldiers have settled down well in their new surroundings. There have been several short-lived escapes, and one man recently wrecked his cell. Two of the soldiers were transferred

temporarily to a tighter security prison because of "disciplinary difficulties."

How many more Soviet prisoners are likely to sit out the Afghan war in Switzerland is unclear, but a senior Swiss army spokesman said the Zug prison could probably handle "up to about 30".

★ ★ ★

THE International Committee of the Red Cross has sacked one of its delegates for writing a book about his Red Cross experiences.

In what is the first known case of its kind in the 119-year history of the International Red Cross movement, delegate Dres Balmer has been dismissed for writing a book about his work in El Salvador.

The ICRC has also won a Swiss court order forbidding him from giving interviews to the media about his book. Another court order has been served on the Swiss publishers of the book, ordering them to withdraw several thousand copies already distributed to book shops.

An ICRC spokesman said Balmer had violated the organisation's rules on discretion.

"Discretion is the basis of the International Red Cross being able to conduct its work, such as visiting political prisoners," said the spokesman. "It is not a question of the contents of the

book but a question of principle. All our delegates sign such an undertaking when we engage them, and Mr Balmer has gone back on that undertaking."

But the publishers of the book are contesting the ICRC case, claiming that the author "has in no way contravened Red Cross regulations on discretion."

Dres Balmer, who is 33, had previously worked in Zaire, Thailand and Cambodia. The Geneva-based ICRC employs nearly 300 specially trained delegates, all of them Swiss, throughout the world. Most are currently engaged in such crisis areas as the Middle East, Latin America and Poland.

Last year they paid visits and delivered relief supplies to more than 40,000 political prisoners and prisoners of war in 40 countries.

★ ★ ★

AN increasing number of motorists in Switzerland are defying a controversial new law which requires drivers and front seat passengers to wear safety belts.

Latest statistics here show that only 72 per cent of motorists are now obeying the new law to belt up compared with 82 per cent soon after the legislation was introduced last year.

As might be expected, the most law abid-

ing motorists are those in German-speaking Switzerland. The worst offenders are the French-Swiss and Italian-Swiss.

For example, states an official report, more than 80 per cent of Lucerne's motorists wear their safety belts when driving within city limits, compared with only 17 per cent in Geneva. And in Ticino, less than half the drivers are obeying the new law outside city limits.

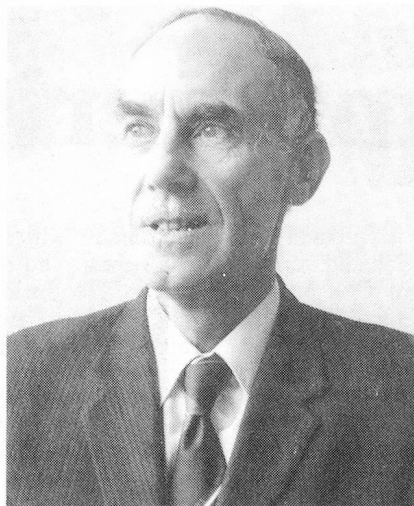
Geneva police have now announced a new public information campaign and increased road checks. Nationwide, the fine for lawbreakers will remain at Sfr. 20 (nearly £6) although persistent offenders risk stiffer punishments.

Insurance companies can also refuse to pay settlements in full if it is proved that crash victims were not wearing safety belts at the time of the accident.

★ ★ ★

ONE of British Rail's longest serving employees has just retired after 43 years' service with the organisation, 36 of them in Switzerland.

Reg Burnell, who was based at British Rail's Basle office, was acting manager for



Switzerland on his retirement. A Channel Islander, he joined the then Southern Railway in Jersey in 1939 as a clerk "earning 30 shillings a week and spending 25 shillings on food and lodging."

He lived for five years under German occupation, and after the war worked for the Southern Railway in London and Paris

before moving to Basle in 1946.

Reg has devoted much of his free time here to furthering Anglo-Swiss relations. Soon after arriving in Basle he joined the city's Anglo-Swiss Club and there met his future wife, a Lucerne girl working as a secretary at the then Ciba pharmaceutical company.

The Burnells are still active members of the Anglo-Swiss movement, Reg having been the Basle club's president for 10 years and later being elected honorary president. For the past 11 years he has been treasurer of the Federation of Anglo-Swiss Clubs. The couple will continue to live in Switzerland.

Among Reg Burnell's souvenirs of his 36 years with British Rail in Switzerland is one of the meal coupons issued by the Swiss authorities for tourists holidaying here in the immediate postwar years.

"It was impossible to buy a restaurant meal in Switzerland without a coupon," he recalls.

"Many British tourists had coupons left over at the end of their holiday and gave them to me. I had so many I could have eaten every hour of the day - if I'd had the appetite and the money."

SWISS SOCCER

Football League tables up to and including October 4.

'A' Division	Pl	W	D	L	Gls	Pts
Servette	8	6	1	1	14	3 13
Neuchâtel Xamax	8	6	0	2	19	13 12
Young Boys	8	5	2	1	10	9 12
Grasshoppers	8	5	1	2	21	9 11
Zürich	8	5	1	2	17	11 11
St. Gallen	8	4	2	2	19	8 10
Basle	8	5	0	3	16	9 10
Vevey	8	4	2	2	15	15 10
Sion	8	3	3	2	12	7 9
Lucern	8	4	1	3	17	13 9
Lausanne	8	3	2	3	15	12 8
Wettingen	8	1	3	4	12	14 5
Bellinzona	8	1	1	6	7	29 3
Aarau	8	1	0	7	6	15 2
Bulle	8	0	2	6	7	26 2
Winterthur	8	0	1	7	4	18 1

'B' Division	Pl	W	D	L	Gls	Pts
Chaux-de-Fonds	7	7	0	0	23	2 14
Chiasso	7	6	1	0	21	6 13
Biel	7	5	0	2	15	6 10
Laufen	7	3	4	0	14	6 10
Nordstern	7	4	1	2	14	10 9
Lugano	7	3	2	2	14	12 8
Grenchen	7	2	4	1	5	6 8
Chênois	7	2	3	2	7	10 7
Fribourg	7	2	2	3	11	11 6
Baden	7	1	4	2	8	8 6
Mendrisio	7	2	2	3	11	18 6
Bern	7	1	2	4	8	14 4
Ibach	7	1	2	4	7	14 4
Monthey	7	0	3	4	6	14 3
Rüti	7	1	0	6	9	22 2
Locarno	7	0	2	5	2	16 2