Walter Mittelholzer †

Autor(en): [s.n.]
Objekttyp: Obituary

Zeitschrift: The Swiss observer: the journal of the Federation of Swiss Societies in the UK

Band (Jahr): - (1937)
Heft 810

PDF erstellt am: 15.03.2024

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Walter Mittelholzer

By ST.

Walter Mittelholzer was born on the 2nd of April, 1894, in St. Gall, where he received his schooling at the "Schule fuer Schweizerisch Kantonssehne," later on he made his apprenticeship as a photographer. From his early days he was an enthusiastic mountain climber, and his military career started with a mountain regiment.

In 1935 he was transferred to the Swiss Flying Corps, first as a photographer, and later on as an observer, after a while he received a promotion, and from that moment he became one of the most daring and efficient military pilots of the Swiss Air Force.

Shortly after the war he founded, together with Alfred Comte, the "Aero," this while it was still a small flying club. In 1937 Mittelholzer began his career as an Air photographer; which in later years made him known as a pilot but especially as the producer of wonderful views taken from the Air in all parts of the world, among his most remarkable was the Swiss Observer (in the last three Anniversary numbers).

Two years later the "Aero" concern was amalgamated with the "Ad Astra" Company from which the "Swissair" emerged of which he was technical Manager and Chief Pilot.

In 1939 he undertook the Junkers Spitzbergen Expedition, which was an auxiliary expedition to Roald Amundsen's first Polar flight, he accepted the proposition with enthusiasm and on this occasion the mountains, glaciers and fjords of Spitzbergen were flown for the first time.

Soon after his return from the successful Spitzbergen expedition, he was invited by the Persian Government to carry out a survey, with a view to introducing regular aerial transport to that country. On this occasion he crossed the Laristan mountains, glaciers and fjords of Spitzbergen were flown for the first time.

During the years 1926-27 Mittelholzer undertook his first Seaplane flight over the length of Africa landing at Cape Town where he received an official reception from the Mayor.

Two years later he was invited by Baron Louis de Rothschild, the well-known Austrian sportsman, to fly him in as short a time as possible from Cairo to the Serengeli Plains, in the Sudan. He managed to do so in his biplane and for 12 days and 12 nights, this was the culminating achievement of the Persian flight, as he was the first to do it.

During the winter of 1932-33 Mittelholzer flew across the Sahara to Lake Chad (15,000 miles).

History was made by his one-day flight from Zurich to Africa and back on May 26th 1933, covering 2,900 miles in 15 hours, which corresponds to a straight line distance from London to Johannesburg without the sun, and with only a little time he landed in Lagos and flew to Nigeria, his average flying speed was 187 m.p.h.

A year later, he flew to Abyssinia landing at Addis Ababa covering a distance of 4,500 miles, where he was personally received by the late Emperor of Abyssinia, Haile Selassie.

These are only the more important flights which he undertook and events from mentioning the two thousand miles which he flew otherwise and especially on the routes of the world, such as a pilot of the "Swissair" Mittelholzer was both a pleasure and an education.

Perhaps mention should also be made of his flights, carrying mail from Paris to Naples, Athens, Istanbul and Belgrad, and the many flights over the Swiss Alps; on one of the latter occasions he nearly lost his life when his machine crashed into the mountain side on a return journey from Berne to Zurich, and the next time he was hospitalized for fifteen days and his fingers and doubly fractured the bone were sufficiently healed to permit him to undertake further flights.

During the last few years he gave many lectures both at home and abroad, relating his experiences during his sensational flights. Up to the end of 1936 Mittelholzer had covered nearly a million miles during which he had taken over a thousand photographs.

A number of countries showered honours on him: he received the gold medall of the "Aero Club de France," the "Fidil Area of Aviculteurs," the "Swissair's Aero-Clubs," the "Oesterreichische Aero-Club," etc., he was also a honorary member of the Swiss Institute of Photographers.

In reading through the obituary notices in the English Press, I found that his merits as the founder of aerial photography were not sufficiently appreciated, undoubtedly owing to the fact, that most of the scientific instruments so necessary for efficient navigation purposes have been until recently almost unknown here.

Yet, it was Mittelholzer who was in this branch of aviation, in the real sense of the word, the founder, and this side of his work will undoubtedly receive general appreciation in the future.

As for his book "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. The up-to-date equipment for navigation purposes installed in all "Swissair" machines were largely due to his initiative based on years of experience and experiments; thanks to him the flight-captain has to-day such a diversity of auxiliary appliances at his disposal, according to his capability and his experience, each flight accomplished by him said to involve the solution of a problem.

The days of the impossible hardihood of the "joy-ride croissers" are definitively a thing of the past for commercial aviation, Mittelholzer's work in this direction will secure for him a name for ever an honoured name in the world of aviation.

Mittelholzer was equally efficient with his pen as with his camera for his three dozen books, some of which were translated into foreign languages; in addition he was the author of a great volume of articles on technical matters in connection with aviation.

And now that is all ended, those hands which gripped the joy-stick through hundreds of flights have grown cold, those keen and very friendly eyes will remain closed for ever, that faithful heart has ceased to beat; far away in Persia, where he loved with all his might, they carried him in his wooden coffin down the mountain side down to the little church of St. Jigen, where he waited for his last journey home.

A moving tribute and his many friends in all parts of the world mourn, but also his country of which he was such a distinguished son.

The memory of this really great man will remain deeply engraved in the hearts of all those who have known him.

SWISS EXCHANGE TRAINS.

As everyone knows a considerable number of our English friends go to Switzerland each year for their holidays. This summer, owing to the more favourable exchange value of the £ and the better conditions in Great Britain, the number of English visitors to Switzerland will probably reach record figures. Our Transport Undertakings, both Federal and private, and the "Fremdenindustrie" as a whole are looking forward to better times. They need and deserve them.

It lies in the nature of things that holiday traffic is rather unseasoned. Whilst there is a steady flow, and at times even a rush, of English visitors to Switzerland, the number of Swiss folk coming on this country is relatively not very small. For some years past, the Commercial Service of the Swiss Railways have made a commendable effort to improve the balance. In order to "reap the compliment" to our visitors from abroad, and well that "Travel should be both ways," they are periodically arranging so-called "Exchange Trains." (Ausstauschzüge) from Switzerland to other European countries, including England. Their purpose is to make known in this way of showing our English consuls that we take an interest in their land and appreciate them, not only as good clients, but also as our hosts in their own country. Then, these trains give the Swiss people themselves an excellent chance of seeing and "doing" this truly great Metropolis