Walter Mittelholzer †

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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 "Stadtschule" and "Kantonschule," 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 1915 he was transferred to the Swiss Flying Corps, first as a photographer, and later on as an observer, after a while he received a commission, 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 first commercial air transit concern in Switzerland, the "Aero," this while he was forty. 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, many of his pictures were published in 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 1923 he financed the Junkers Works if he would take part in the Junkers Spittalbergs Expedition, which was to be an auxiliary expedition to Roald Amundsen's first Pole flight, he accepted the proposition with enthusiasm and on this occasion the mountain glaciers and peaks of Spittalbergs were flown over for the first time.

Soon after his return from the successful Spittalberg 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 Persian mountains in Persia, the ice-crowned Demavend, which towers to the height of 19,109 feet, this was the culminating achievement of the Persian flight, as he was the first to do it.

During the years 1920-27 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 Serengi Plains, in the Tanganyika, Mananrajus regarded to do some big game hunting. On this expedition he covered 2,123 miles in a total flying time of 126 hours, and for the first time he and his biplane (17,000 pounds) landed among some of the most picturesque wonders taken on this occasion.

In December 1930 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 2,500 miles in about fifteen flying hours, which corresponds to a straight line distance from London to Cape Town 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 received by the late Emperor of Abyssinia, Haile Selassie.

These are only the more important flights which he undertook; events me from mentioning the many thousands miles which he flew otherwise and especially on the routes of the Swiss air service as a pilot. Walter Mittelholzer was both a pleasure and an education.

Perhaps mention should also be made of his flights, carrying mail from back to Naples, Athens, Istanbul and Belgrad, and the many flights over the Swiss Alps; on one of the latter occasions he narrowly lost his biplane and machine crashed into the mountain side on a return journey from Zagreb, where he was helpless in bed until his frozen 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 honoured him on; he received the gold medals of the "Aero Club de Paris" and "Aerodromes Aviateurs", the "Schweizerischen Aero Clubs," the "Oesterreichischen Aero Clubs," etc., he was also a honorary member of the Swiss Academy of Science.

In reading through the obituary notices in the English Press, I found that his merits as the founder of his Air Experimental school(14,13),(992,995) 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 un-known here. Yet, it was Mittelholzer who was in this branch of aviation, in the real sense of the word, the first and this side of his work will undoubtedly receive general appreciation in the future. As an English translation of 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 command according to his capability and his experience, each flight accomplished to the Swissair will henceforth be an honoured name in the world of aviation.

Mittelholzer was equally efficient with his pen as with his biplane. He was the author of dozens books, some of which were translated into foreign languages; in addition he was the author of a great article on the subject of technical matters in connection with aviation.

And now that is all ended, those hands which grip the joy-stick through hundreds of flights have grown cold, those keen and yet friendly eyes will remain closed for ever, that faithful heart has ceased to beat; far away, not far, which he loved with all his might, they carried him in his brother's mantle, to his own side down to the little church of St. Jegen, where he waited for his last journey home.

Amongst family and his many friends in all parts of the world mourns, 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 Swiss Exchange Transports, 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 nonsensical. Whilst there is a steady flow, and at times even a rush, of English visitors to Switzerland, the number of Swiss folk coming to this country on pleasure is very small. For some years past, the Commercial Service of the Swiss Railways have long since 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 organizing special "Swiss Exchange Trains" (Auslandsreise) from Switzerland to other European countries, including England. Their purpose, in a word, is simply a 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