Walter Mittelholzer

BY ST.

Walter Mittelholzer was born on the 2nd of April, 1894, in St. Gall, where he received his schooling at the "Schweizerische Kantonsschule," later on he made his apprenticeship as a photographer. From his education he was an enthusiasm 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 service.

Shortly after the war he founded, together with Alfred Comte, the first commercial Air Transit concern in Switzerland, the "Aero," this while he was working with mountain flying specialists at the time in Air Photography.

In 1919 he founded a Junkers Works if he would take part in the Junkers Spitzbergen 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 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 Persia. On this occasion he crossed the immense high mountains, the ice-crowned Demavend, which towers in a thousand feet, this was the culminating achievement of the Persian flight, as he was the first of any kind to do it.

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 by Major G. H. Scott.

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 Suez Canal, in the hope of being the first to do it and to have a few days' game hunting. On this occasion he covered 2,253 miles in a total flying time of 120 hours, and for the first time he landed in Libya, and Cairo (17,000 feet), over some of the most wonderful pictures were taken on this occasion.

In December 1936 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 fifteen flying hours, which corresponds to a straight line distance from London to Alexandria to Egypt, 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 greeted by the late Emperor of Abyssinia, Haile Selassie.

These are only the more important flights which he undertook, events from mentioning the thousands of miles which he flew otherwise and especially on the routes of the Service des Postes as well as in the private life, his most notable experience was the twofold Mrs. Mittelholzer was both a pleasure and an education.

Perhaps mention should also be made of his flights, our country and back to Naples, Athens, Istanbul and Belgrad, and the many flights over the Swiss Alps; on one of the latter, he on one occasion lost his joy-stick and machine crashed into the mountain side on a return journey from Nice to Zürich, which as 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 showed honours on him: he received the gold medals of the "Aero Club de France" and the "Deutscher Luftfahrt-Club," the "Schweizerischen Aeroclubs," the "Osterreichischen Aeroclubs," etc., he was also a honorary member of the Société des Explorations Aériennes, a "Swiss籍" at him.

In reading through the obituary notices in the English Press, I found that his merits as the founder of the Swiss aeroclubs 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 true sense of the word, and this side of his work will undoubtedly receive general appreciation in the future. As long as 1936 "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 "Swiss籍" 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 that, according to his capability and his experience, each flight accomplished by him is said to have solved the solution of the problem. The days of the uncomfortable hardship of the "joy-stick crossers" are definitely numbered; the machine of the future for commercial aviation, Mittelholzer's work in this direction will secure him a name for ever an honoured name in the world of aviation.

Mittelholzer was equally efficient with his pen as with his machine. He was the author of dozens, books, some of which were translated into foreign languages; in addition he was the author of a great pencil sketch and many artistic 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 yet friendly eyes will remain closed for ever, that faithful heart has ceased to beat; far away in Jurej, which he loved with all his might, there carried him in his old wooden cottage, the side down to the little church of St. Jigen, where he waited for his last journey home.

Among his 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 for tourists 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 on-sided. 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 made a commendable effort to improve the balance. In order to "reap the compliment" to our visitors from abroad, and also to "Travel should be both ways," they are periodically organising so-called "Swiss Exchange Trains."