

Swiss could mobilise 700'000 Men in three Days : Strongest Army of Continental Europe

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SWISS COULD MOBILISE 700,000 MEN IN THREE DAYS.

Strongest Army of Continental Europe.

FROM ERNST BIERI.

(We reproduce herewith an article which has appeared in the April, 16th issue of the "Manchester Guardian" by courtesy of the Editor.)

Switzerland to-day has the strongest army of Continental Europe. This astonishing situation is due to the fact that the Swiss did not suffer from the material damage and the psychological shock of the Second World War, and that they never believed in utopian schemes of disarmament. On the contrary, after the last war Switzerland not only maintained its military system but began the work of modernising its army in proportion to the growth of international tension.

Switzerland can mobilise in three days a well-equipped army of about 400,000 fighting men and 300,000 in the auxiliary services. No other country of the world can compete with the rapidity of mobilisation and the relative strength of the Swiss Army.

A sinking birth rate made it necessary to reform the divisional organisation, but the increasing fire-power of the units resulting from the rearmament programme nevertheless guarantees high quality. The army consists of the Field Army (nine divisions, three mountain brigades and three light brigades), the frontier-covering brigades, the fortress brigades, and the so-called "réduit" (redoubt) brigades. In addition there exists an organisation for dealing with the problems of the civilian population in war-time, the "Territorial Service," which includes civil defence against air attack.

Rearmament.

A considerable rearmament programme is in progress. New anti-tank weapons, new machines for engineers, and new wireless sets for signallers are either in the hands of the troops or being manufactured. Tanks for supporting the infantry are deemed indispensable. Parliament has voted £130,000,000 especially for the rearmament programme, which it is hoped to carry out by 1955.

Yet even now the Swiss Army is well equipped, and it can stand comparison with the armies of the Great Powers. Compared with the population the Swiss Army is numerically strong; the frontiers along which battles could be fought are rather short; the intersected terrain, with its valleys and mountains, not to speak of the Alps, is the army's best ally.

During the last war Nazi Germany enclosed Switzerland on all sides, and it was therefore necessary to draw back into the Alps. The "réduit" was built, a sort of fortress wherein we could expect to resist as long as possible. Now the strategical scheme has changed, and the army will fight at the frontiers and in the country where the big centres of industry and population are situated. The method of "elastic defence" demands a strong and mobile field army as its weapon, and the infantry is and remains the main pillar of the Swiss forces. There is no need for an offensive strategy, but both equipment and organisation will allow a tenacious war of defence which, of course, includes tactical attack.

Refresher Courses.

Preparedness for war is secured by the annual refresher courses, by placing of the personal equipment in every soldier's home, and by the organisation of quick mobilisation. The first task is to prevent the enemy succeeding by surprise attack. Once the army is called to the colours it should be possible to give a long-lasting and obstinate battle to any aggressor.

The army is deeply rooted in the tradition and in the heart of the people. By law every citizen must be called to the colours; people not able to fulfil their service pay a special exemption tax, and nobody can become a commissioned officer without beginning as a recruit in the same training school as boys aged 20 from all ranks of society. The Swiss people is proud of its army and strongly hopes that the continual modernising of arms may exercise a restraining influence upon foreign general staffs in preventing them from considering an attack against Switzerland.

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