

Swiss defence in the atomic age

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SWISS DEFENCE IN THE ATOMIC AGE.

An N.S.H. Lecture.

On November 20th Lt.-Col. W. Koch, Military Attaché at the Swiss Legation, gave a fascinating discourse on the Swiss Army in the present age at a meeting of the Nouvelle Société Helvétique at Park Lane House. The new weapons of incalculable power and effect in the hands of potential aggressors present the defenders of our country with infinitely more difficult tasks than heretofore. Not being in possession of such weapons, so far as can be foreseen, our Army must make do with the best of conventional weapons it can obtain, combined with a skilful exploitation of the natural aids for defence afforded by the mountainous configuration of Switzerland intersected by numerous lakes and rivers.

It does not seem unreasonable to assume for the purpose of planning our defence that the aggressor, whoever he may be, is unlikely to use the big destructive atom weapons meant for much bigger concentrations of industries and inhabitants than are met with in our country. Even so it is difficult to visualise beforehand where and how the attack is likely to come and develop. Our defence will therefore have to adapt itself to the aggression when it comes. It requires above all a wide distribution of forces and arms to be brought up promptly at the point of attack. The light units, formerly covering the outer regions of Switzerland beyond the lines regarded as

tenable, are today largely replaced by armoured units and light tanks. Even merely tactical atomic weapons could breach defensive lines over areas of 6 — 8 square-kilometers. Only large and highly mobile reserves could seal and later fill the gap thus created. In order to minimize the danger of surprise attacks also the watch on the frontier must be reinforced and amply furnished with RADAR apparatus. This might at least assure sufficient time to mobilise the frontier forces, the armoured units and the civil defence.

Regarding the disposition of troops and arms a compromise solution might be decided on, covering the country with a web of small observation and action units, establishing barriers and blocking forces wherever possible routes of attack converge, and holding highly mobile tactical reserves ready in basic areas for deployment in any direction required to counter the enemy moves. The Swiss army is relatively well supplied with armour and 100 Centurion tanks. But at all times the people's will and courageous determination to resist attack by all means remains the most essential condition for an effective defence by our people's army. The world situation is perhaps more serious than ever. To stint on defence expenditure seems to be the most foolish economy imaginable. It should not have needed the agony of the Hungarian people to kill the Chevallier initiative, misguidedly seeking to deny our Army the indispensable tools to make our democracy's will to survive in freedom and peacefulness effective.

Lt.-Col. Koch's thoughtful lecture, of which these few lines can only give some inadequate indications, was received with warm applause of the large gathering of compatriots and evoked a lively discussion. Subsequently a film of the development of our Army since the first world war was shown. The lecturer and Mme Koch were afterwards entertained to dinner by the N.S.H.

G.

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