

Cessation of active military defence in Switzerland

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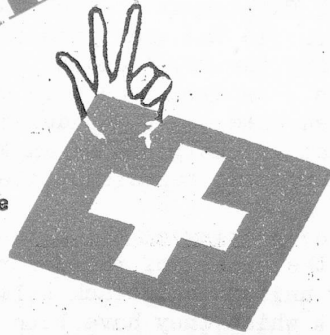
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CESSATION OF ACTIVE MILITARY DEFENCE IN SWITZERLAND.
(Documentary Records).

INTRODUCTORY REMARKS:

In great moments in history, the nations and their leaders by their actions, reactions and demonstrations afford the students of history and spectators a genuine picture of the spirit of a country. Thus the spontaneous statement of the late Prime Minister of New Zealand, the Rt. Hon. Michael Savage, at the outbreak of the war: "Where Britain goes we go" is recorded for posterity in the history of New Zealand. This - now famous - statement, which was universally acclaimed by the people of New Zealand without distinction of class, race, creed or political party, was an impressive eye-opener to many foreign spectators. During the past war, events of lasting memory in the life of the Swiss nation have likewise occurred. It is the purpose of this Bulletin to record - for the benefit of those who are interested and have patience to read through these pages - one such impressive event in Switzerland, namely, the OFFICIAL CEREMONY MARKING THE END OF ACTIVE MILITARY DEFENCE.

At Berne, on the 19th August, 1945, at 10 a.m., religious services were held in the Cathedral for the Protestants and in the Trinity Church for the Catholics. There was not enough room in either church for all the worshippers who desired to attend. In the afternoon, in the public square in front of the Federal Building, a large crowd assembled to witness the final parading of the flags of all the military units.

Ernest Zang, an American journalist, attended the ceremony and writes: -

"This afternoon in the square in front of the Swiss Parliament Building, the Swiss people celebrated the demobilization of the Swiss Army and the return of the Swiss soldier to civilian life. The Swiss soldiers have been standing guard over the borders of their small mountain republic while cities and nations around them have sunk into ruin and defeat. Now, the Swiss men can return to their farms and businesses, to their wives and children, with the proud feeling of duty done. My impression of the Swiss people during these ceremonies is that here amidst the Alps and plains and busy factories live one of the happiest and most contented people in all Europe. I have just returned from the ruined cities of Germany and Austria. I have seen people amidst the ruins waiting in bread lines, hungry and ragged. I have seen refugees wandering over the highways, tasting the bitter fruits of war and defeat. In Switzerland, people are clean and well fed. Their government and economy run with the precision of a Swiss watch. They owe their condition in no small part to the strength of their army and the loyalty of their soldiers.

Those of you who know the pretty little City of Berne, the Swiss Capital, can picture to yourselves the ceremony which I witnessed. The people lined the streets for several hours before the official parade and speeches. A grandstand

had been erected for the Federal Parliament. The windows of the houses were decorated with flowers and flags. In the courtyard of the Parliament, the Federal Council of seven, including the President, Mr. de Steiger, gathered with the highest Government officials. As civilians they were dressed in black dress suits with top hats. Then came the Commander-in-Chief General Guisan and his staff. Together they marched to their places in the grandstand. Near them stood the foreign military attaches and representatives of the Allied governments.

The ceremony opened with the playing of the Swiss national anthem. The troops marched past to receive the salute of the General. First the cavalry, then the infantry in their gray uniform and black helmets, and finally the air corps. They carried the banners which they have been guarding for five years, their beloved white cross on a red field. The soldiers then formed a block in front of the Parliament to hear the farewell speech of the General, who in time of peace returns to the rank of the soldiers. After the General's speech, Federal President de Steiger expressed the thanks of the Swiss Government and people to the army and its General. "Today", he said, "the banners are neither torn nor covered with blood as in previous battles in Swiss history. Nor have they seen their guards sink beside them. Almighty God has preserved us from the horrors of war. Other armies have this time led the fight against tyranny and paid the price of freedom. This we must not forget." Glancing into the future, President de Steiger said: "Great tasks await us. The Swiss democracy, small as it is, will try to be a useful, independent and valuable member of the family of nations. When the victors assume new tasks for the well-being of a shaken world, our little country will show itself worthy of the respect of the nations." After the ceremony the flags of the Swiss army were deposited in the Parliament building. The crowd sang the national anthem and cheered the General as never a departing official has been cheered in this undemonstrative country."

ENGLISH TRANSLATION OF GENERAL GUISAN'S SPEECH:

"Today, August 19th, 1945, in the presence of all the flags of the army, we solemnly observe the end of active military service. We live again in memory those dramatic days of August and September 1939 when in the presence of these same flags we took the oath by which we pledged ourselves, body, soul and spirit to the service of the country. At a time when I am returning to the Federal Assembly the High Command with which I was entrusted six years ago, I can say with both pride and gratitude that the army has not failed in the accomplishment of its task. To be sure, we are not so presumptuous as to think that because of our merit alone we have been respected by the belligerent armies. This very morning we have rendered thanks to Him in whom the Swiss from the first day of their alliance have found their supreme safeguard. But we do not wish to forget the efforts made by the entire Swiss people, both to be ready in each successive phase of the war, and to affirm by force of arms their will to independence.

September, 1939, saw the first general mobilization. The horizon was hidden, the future full of uncertainty and indefinite dangers. Our army which had been reorganised with farsightedness just a few years before, but which was still insufficiently trained for the task, took up its first position. This marked the commencement of feverish preparations throughout the length and breadth of the land. Everywhere were signs of a firm determination to defend not only the nation's soil, but also the ideals of our venerable Swiss Confederation.

In May, 1940, came the second general mobilization. The war was approaching its most desperate phase. Switzerland was on the brink of being dragged into the conflagration. At that tragic moment the army was not yet the perfect instrument of war I desired it to be, but at least its moral cohesion was sure. And through the ensuing years that moral cohesion was to be more necessary than ever. Surrounded by the forces of one belligerent group, we had to make ourselves ready to fight alone, under most difficult conditions. To fight, if need be, to the point of total sacrifice. Then it was that we experienced something which must never be forgotten - that close solidarity which united all the inhabitants of the homeland. The soldier was no longer the sole defender of our liberty. The worker, the peasant, the public employee, who were not affected by the call to arms, multiplied their efforts in order to meet the vital requirements of the country. As for the women of Switzerland who remained in our homes, they assumed alone the major part of the material cares, and their ability was reassuring to their husbands and their sons, absent in the service of country.

In the world we have been confronted with the spectacle of total war. Very evidently the defence of a nation implies the summoning of all the nation's resources. The nation responds with common consent to this summons. The General is duty-bound to proclaim this and to thank on this day all those who were not called upon to take the oath asked of the troops, but who, nevertheless, served the same flag. These flags assembled before me are the outward sign of the unity of the nation. The solidarity which sustained us during the war must remain our strength throughout the years to come. To ignore this, to deny it, would be to put out to sea unguided despite the tempest which is still raging across the world. To prolong this solidarity is to assure ourselves the maximum chance of overcoming our difficulties. Soldiers of 1939 to 1945, the end of active service does not mean rest for you. It means, on the contrary, manifold problems to solve. In other forms the fight for the nation's existence continues and requires the same fervor and the same faith. Your General now returns to his place in the ranks of the army; but the army remains ready. Recruits who are here for this ceremony and who, tomorrow, will take the place of your elders, receive from their hands the order which they have so faithfully carried out; for these flags will one day become your sacred trust. Farewell noble banner; today I entrust you intact to the authorities of the land. May those who have served under my orders during the past six years never swerve or tire."

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DIVIDING THE CHEESE AN IMPORTANT EVENT IN THE JUSTIS VALLEY.

Not many things happen in the quiet little Justistal which reaches from Merligen, on the right shore of the lake of Thun, up to the mountains which keep watch over it in the background. The valley is only 8 kilometers long and true to its destination dairying is its chief occupation. Geographically the valley belongs to the community of Sigriswil, but the villages of Oberhofen and Beatenberg also have pasture rights. Up to 400 head of cattle find excellent grazing in these parts where the altitude has a pleasant average of 4,100 feet a/s.

Big events in the Justistal are the Alpaufzug, or departure of the herds for the summer pastures, early in June, and the Alpabfahrt, at the end of September. This descent to the winter homes is preceded by the all-important "Kästeilet", the dividing of the cheese that has been made during the season.

On a given day, after grazing of the pastures has been completed, the superintendent of this dairying district summons all owners of cattle on pasture to attend this function. "Kästeilet" has for many centuries been a festive day. It starts soon after dawn, when entire families set out - according to their affluence - with wooden crates, handcarts and horse-drawn vehicles for the far end of the valley. The Beatenberg farmers have the most tedious journey for in order to reach the Justistal cheese cellars they must proceed over a narrow trail which winds around the Niederhorn.

Throughout the summer all the cheeses made in the different alpine huts are brought to the cheese cellars at the "Speicherberg". A cow produces about 800 litres of milk (1 litre - 1 3/4 pint) during an alpine summer and from this about 70 kilograms of cheese are made (1 kilo - 2 1/5 lbs.). In order to have a 100% correct distribution of cheese, a careful daily account is kept of the milk obtained from each cow. The chief dairyman has charge of these calculations and is admittedly an expert at it. Thus, when the peasants arrive on Kästeilet day for their cheese, each can ascertain for himself to how much he will be entitled. The more cows he owns, the more cheese he will receive.

Before the dividing ceremony starts the cheeses, weighing approximately 12-15 kilos, are passed in chain fashion from the cellars to improvised long tables. Here they are neatly arranged in piles of five or six, with a generous portion of butter or cottage cheese as a crowning feature. When all this preparatory work is done, the head dairyman begins to draw small wooden tags from a bag, each bearing the name of a farmer belonging to the Justistal pastoral cooperation. Carefully the tags are placed on different piles of cheeses and presently starts the happy hunt of ownership. However, many small farmers are only entitled to a half or even a quarter of one pile. More calculations are necessary and in such instances the superintendent of the Justistal pastures stands by to settle any possible disputes.