

**Zeitschrift:** Helvetia : magazine of the Swiss Society of New Zealand  
**Herausgeber:** Swiss Society of New Zealand  
**Band:** 14 (1949)  
**Heft:** 1

**Artikel:** "Swiss National Defence - today and tomorrow" [continued]  
**Autor:** Dürrenmatt, Peter  
**DOI:** <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-942868>

### **Nutzungsbedingungen**

Die ETH-Bibliothek ist die Anbieterin der digitalisierten Zeitschriften auf E-Periodica. Sie besitzt keine Urheberrechte an den Zeitschriften und ist nicht verantwortlich für deren Inhalte. Die Rechte liegen in der Regel bei den Herausgebern beziehungsweise den externen Rechteinhabern. Das Veröffentlichen von Bildern in Print- und Online-Publikationen sowie auf Social Media-Kanälen oder Webseiten ist nur mit vorheriger Genehmigung der Rechteinhaber erlaubt. [Mehr erfahren](#)

### **Conditions d'utilisation**

L'ETH Library est le fournisseur des revues numérisées. Elle ne détient aucun droit d'auteur sur les revues et n'est pas responsable de leur contenu. En règle générale, les droits sont détenus par les éditeurs ou les détenteurs de droits externes. La reproduction d'images dans des publications imprimées ou en ligne ainsi que sur des canaux de médias sociaux ou des sites web n'est autorisée qu'avec l'accord préalable des détenteurs des droits. [En savoir plus](#)

### **Terms of use**

The ETH Library is the provider of the digitised journals. It does not own any copyrights to the journals and is not responsible for their content. The rights usually lie with the publishers or the external rights holders. Publishing images in print and online publications, as well as on social media channels or websites, is only permitted with the prior consent of the rights holders. [Find out more](#)

**Download PDF:** 08.07.2025

**ETH-Bibliothek Zürich, E-Periodica, <https://www.e-periodica.ch>**

1521

qpl 6.

# HELVETIA

Pg 9131

MONTHLY  
PUBLICATION  
OF THE



SWISS BENEVOLENT  
SOCIETY IN  
NEW ZEALAND (INC.)

GROUP NEW ZEALAND OF THE NEW HELVETIC SOCIETY.

WELLINGTON N.Z.  
JANUARY 1949.

Volume 1.  
14th year.

"SWISS NATIONAL DEFENCE - TODAY AND TOMORROW."  
By: Peter Dürrenmatt.

111. WHY SHOULD THERE BE AN ARMY REFORM?

Since the war ended, somewhat lively discussion has arisen, from time to time in Switzerland as to whether or not the Army stood in need of reform. The reasons for these discussions are manifold. For one thing, there are the new and impressive technical resources which played such a decisive role in the last war. Switzerland, a small country, very poor in raw materials, must decide which of these new war machines are the most suitable for the defence of her country, and which are not. She must also examine the forms of her own manner of conducting a war, in order to be able to minimise as much as is possible the effects of an attack with these modern weapons. As no one in Switzerland even thinks of abolishing the Militia, it will be necessary henceforth to obtain as good results as possible from the short training period, which is peculiar to the Swiss Army system. For all these reasons a clamour is going up, demanding certain reforms and urging that only those forms of military training which are of essential utility be retained, whereas all that serves the superficial purpose of external smartness be abandoned.

A remark which could be heard repeatedly during these discussions was that the Army must be made more democratic. This expression - which as a matter of fact rapidly disappeared from these arguments, as nothing could be more democratic than a Militia - really meant that care should be taken by the authorities in order that the Army should remain a true people's Army as it was during the war. It must not - as has been the case frequently in peace-time - be imbued with a spirit redolent of the barracks, but must maintain the spirit of an active relation between the citizen and the soldier, which corresponds to the true character of the Swiss Militia. In order to satisfy both these demands - that of a simple and practical form of military service, and the other pertaining to the maintenance of close relations between the citizen and the soldier - a decision was made to revise the Service Regulations of the Swiss Army. A Commission composed of officers of all ranks, Non-Commissioned Officers and men, drew up a new project, which is to form the basis of the work of revision.

The question as to the extent to which armament, strategy and tactics must be changed to meet the requirements of the new conditions is - and this is quite comprehensible - much more ticklish. It cannot be answered as easily as that concerning new Army Regulations. It is now being carefully examined by some of the leading Army Authorities. One or two ideas were made public a couple of months ago when the Federal Government issued a complementary Report to that prepared by the Commander-in-Chief of the Swiss Army on his Command during the second World War years. From this complementary report it can be gathered that in any war that might occur in the future, Switzerland has decided upon an "area defence" with the aim of putting up a fight, based on an infantry which is thoroughly well trained in technical guerilla tactics. Concerning our future

armament, certain decisions have already been taken; Switzerland has given up the initial plan for the organisation of an Armored Command, but intends to do her utmost to make her anti-tank defence as effective as possible,

A word might not be out of place regarding the open way in which these discussions took place in public, in Switzerland. Press articles and lectures in the various military and political associations deal extensively and with the greatest keenness with the subject of the Army Reform. The opinion prevails in Switzerland that such publicity is necessary, as it can only promote the spirit of resistance of a small country; people like to know quite clearly what they are fighting for and what they have to fight with. Open discussion on the subject of Army reform tends to educate the people, in the sense that they learn to take a thorough interest in vital questions affecting the existence of their country and to discuss them in a serious manner. The Swiss citizen has not only his uniform, his arms and - on a number of occasions - his ammunition in his home. He also wishes to participate with his head and his heart in any decision concerning the future defence of his country.

#### IV. LOOKING BACK AT THE WAR PERIOD 1939 - 1945.

Can the War of 1939 - 1945 have exercised an effect on the Swiss Army, in spite of the fact that this Army did not participate in the fighting? This question is a justifiable one, but it also shows that the person who puts it does not yet possess a clear picture of the Swiss idea of defense. During the whole of the six war years, the Swiss Army stood in a permanent state of readiness. It is true that it did not take any offensive, but, daily and hourly, it was faced with the thought that it might be called upon to undergo the supreme test. If the Swiss Army was to fulfil its purpose, it had to be something more than a mere symbol of liberty. It had to represent a definite defensive strength with which any would-be aggressor would have to reckon and to include in the calculation of his operational plans. Therefore, it was in no way sufficient to merely have the Army in a state of preparedness, so that as soon as there was an attack, it could be fetched out of the barracks. What the situation really demanded from the military leaders and from each, individual soldier was that they should follow the development of events with the greatest care; they must not allow themselves to drift into any manner of carelessness or imagine that it would be time enough to put things on a war basis when War became a reality.

This six years of preparedness on active service, required the following two things from the country; in the first place, it was necessary to establish a proper relation between the number of men taken away from their jobs for military service and the requirements of the country's economy. It was impossible for us to belong to only one or the other of two categories - civilians engaged in work or soldiers ready for battle; no, each one of us was continually being called up for both purposes. It can thus be said that the experience gained throughout the war served to make still closer the relations between the civilian and the soldier, as emphasized by the particularity of our militia system. The Swiss is first of all a civilian, but he is transformed into a soldier just as soon as any attempt is made from outside to interfere with his right to arrange his public and social life in accordance with his own ideas. As a soldier, he submits voluntarily to discipline and to a hard physical training. At the same time, however, he expects to be given the consideration due him as a citizen by those in command. This recognition became general as a result of the active service lasting throughout the long war years, and it should, wherever possible, be strengthened and applied to an extent greater than even heretofore in our Army training methods.

The second lesson the war taught our Swiss Army was that mentally it must remain flexible to the highest degree. This we realised acutely, more especially during the middle phase of the war from the time when France collapsed until the capitulation of Italy, when we were surrounded on all sides by the Axis armies and knew that in case of an attack we would have to fight against enemy forces greatly superior to our own. It was



imperative for us to organise our country and our material possibilities in such a way that it would be necessary for the attacker to employ large numbers of troops if he wished to gain a speedy victory over us; and our infantry had to be trained in such a way that, in spite of our inferiority in the air and our entire lack of an armoured command, it would be able to inflict the maximum amount of damage to the invader. In other words - the plan for defensive measures against an enemy so greatly superior in force must be envisaged from the standpoint of how to make this attack as costly and as ineffective as possible. Such a defensive plan was elaborated and worked upon continually.....The procedure for mobilisation was adapted to modern requirements and de-centralised. Battalions, and sometimes even individual companies, were often mobilised in the vicinity of that sector in which they would be called upon to fight should the invasion take place. The troops were continually reminded of the possibility of an attack in order to accustom them to the idea, and they were trained to be able to fight independently, in small, isolated groups, by night as well as by day. The training of the Infantry was carried out on a new basis, which provided for the instruction of the men in the technique of close combat and small engagements. From these few examples taken from the war period, we can see that the notion of a purely defensive army and that of the Militia system are quite compatible with the maintenance of an active and prepared Army. The determination to possess mental flexibility in this connection, may be considered to be a valuable asset inherited from active military service during the war.

---

XXX  
X THE RAILWAYS OF SWITZERLAND. X  
X X  
XXX

Wheels on rails means transportation. There is romance, history, progress and pleasure in the most popular and necessary form of transportation - the railroads. For all people live on the broad lands of five continents; they must be supplied with food and the necessities of life, and the people want to travel about for many reasons. Despite the ships and the air-planes, most people are dependent on the service of the railroads. This goes for all countries and for most parts of the world; in the great United States as well as in little Switzerland. The 19th century saw the establishment of railroads everywhere; their further expansion and development is still a great job for the present century.

To bring railway transportation to Switzerland has presented some of the biggest problems in railway construction. The mountainous character of the alpine country, the limitations in space, and other great and new difficulties have demanded from the Swiss railway builders much interprising courage, long studies and perseverance in constructing railway lines across the Alps, or through the Alps in long tunnels. Other lines had to be laid along lakes and narrow valleys, or even up steep mountain sides.

Thus, Switzerland, like few countries, presents to the traveller the greatest variety of all types of railway transportation, and all this in an alpine region of unmatched scenery. Several of these mountain railways were built in the late 1890s, and therefore are now half a century in operation. The Gornergrat, the Stansstad-Engelberg and other railways began operation in 1898, and the spectacular Jungfrau Railway opened up the first section, Scheidegg-Eigerjoch, of its ascent to the Jungfraujoeh, the highest railway station in Europe (11,340 feet).

Most travel in Switzerland is still made by railroad, and as you get around the country you really find them everywhere; convenient, and most comfortable, with frequent schedules and courteous service. Best of all, practically all lines are now electrically operated, so the trains are fast, give smooth riding and the cars are clean. The Swiss are mighty proud of their railways, and with good reason. "ALL ABOARD!"

---