

Air defence in Switzerland

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AIR DEFENCE IN SWITZERLAND.

For a small country like Switzerland which is resolved to defend its neutrality and integrity by force of arms, the question of the air defence is one of the most difficult problems of national defence. The great sums of money which since the World War have been spent by Switzerland to provide air protection prove how seriously air-defence has been studied and developed. Names such as that of Bider, who first conquered the Alps and the Pyrenees, or of Mittelholzer, who made flights in the interest of trade and discovery, give evidence of the pioneer spirit which this small nation has brought to the task.

In fact, in no country more than in Switzerland are the young men more enthusiastic for the sport of flying and preparatory instruction for military aviation. Throughout the whole country there are numerous air-clubs whose glider sections familiarise our young men with the basic principles of flying. The receipts from a public collection throughout the country were devoted to this endeavour and in addition the State encourages it with regular subsidies. And for other reasons the army finds it easy to obtain a suitable supply of recruits for flying. The students of the Universities and the world-famed Federal Polytechnical University in Zurich, as well as those of the numerous Technical Schools form a source of supply, which in relation to the strength of the army amply provides for its need of air trainees. This is one reason why Switzerland so far has graded all her trained pilots as officers.

As regards air-craft, Switzerland has obtained first-class foreign licences and is building enough machines in her own factories to supply her requirements. We can reckon approximately that the stock of first-line material is sufficient to cover the possible front of war operations with one service machine for each kilometer. This is a figure which in the opinion of foreign experts is enough to provide for adequate defence and to inspire any opponent in the air with respect for the defence. We must also in this connection observe that in aviation more depends on the quality of the human element than in any other service. Switzerland is working steadily to create new supplies of material as well as to train pilots.

As for protection against air-raids, which is being organised by the army, towns and industrial centres have been ordered to provide for their own defence and receive state help. Since all able-bodied males in Switzerland have already received military training in the militia, it is a simple and easy matter to train men from this reserve to man the new appliances.

What helps the most, however, in the air defence of Switzerland, is the mountainous nature of the country, on the one hand, and weather conditions on the other. Blind flying in cloud and fog, in storm or at night among mountains up to 12,000 feet high has already resulted in fatalities among many heroes of the air and many stout crews. Only one who is acquainted with the peculiarities of the weather in the high ranges can truly realise what difficulties may at any moment be presented to the attack by the sudden gathering of cloud masses, the violent downpours and great variations in temperature. The following meteorological data give an idea why the Swiss air defence may rely on the weather as a powerful ally: on the average you can count on only 60 days per year on which neither precipitation nor cloud formation is observed in the ranges. In fact even the sunniest districts have at the most 180 days free from precipitation. But of these a good number are clear winter days on which as much as 30 to 35 degrees Celsius below zero can be read. - Thanks to the careful choice of air material specially suited for defence and thanks to the successful training of her pilots, Switzerland is convinced that in the air she can offer a stout resistance to any possible attack.

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