

Alpine nation still most armed and most free

Autor(en): **Fleck, Fiona**

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*News from Switzerland about criminal activities (theft) by Swiss Army Captain **Dino Bellasi**, have recently made headlines in the European press. - In England it has caused 'THE TIMES' to analyse the Swiss military institution in word and picture as copied below; ↓*

Alpine nation still 'most armed and most free'

(By Fiona Fleck)

Nearly 500 years ago Machavelli wrote: The Swiss are the most armed and the most free. - His words are still relevant in Switzerland, which owes 400 years of neutrality to the traditional core role of the army, as well as its mountainous terrain. The Swiss military reaches deep into civilian life and arguably into the Swiss psyche. Gun fanatics such as Dino Bellasi are not unique. - Created as a nation in arms, Switzerland is proud of its heritage of Alpine liberty, based on the legendary figure of William Tell, who is said to have liberated the Swiss from aggressive Austrians in 1291.

- Switzerland has one of the largest land-based armies in Europe. It has a small professional army of about 3,300, with a pool of about 360,000 conscripts. - Britain has an army of 109,000 and the French around 230,000, including 130,000 conscripts.

- Charles Heyman, editor of *Jane's World Army*, said: 'The Swiss have a very large defence establishment and it tells you straight away how Switzerland managed to avoid the First and Second World Wars'.

- According to Article 18 of the Constitution, every Swiss male is subject to military service. In 1992, this was amended to allow alternative civilian service. When a Swiss conscript enters military service, it will engage him virtually his whole life.

-Until 1995, conscription lasted a period of 30 years, from age 20 to 50. Since then, it has been reduced to 22 years.

- Every conscript must now serve two to three weeks every two years. Companies must take the financial burden. Soldiers keep equipment at home, including uniforms, weapons, live ammunition and other supplies. They are also legally and financially responsible for maintenance and may use the weapon in civilian life as long as it is ready when he is called up.

- The army also determines social and class distinctions in what might appear to be an otherwise classless society.

FRITZ BRAEM

1934 - 1999



Requiem Mass was recently celebrated in St. Patrick's Catholic Church Okaihau, for Fritz Braem. Together with his Wife Rita he came to New Zealand in 1961 and hailed from Canton Aargau.

A much respected couple, Fritz and Rita farmed in the Waikato for a few years before moving north where Fritz worked on the farm-labour-scheme and later advanced to farm ownership at Okaihau. During their time in the Waikato, Fritz, his Wife Rita with son Roger and daughter Wendy, were active members of the Hamilton Swiss Club. Fritz's farming career encompassed dairy and goat-farming as well as dry-stock-farming in latter years. After a sudden and serious illness Fritz died on July 15th. - May He rest in peace!

Members of the Hamilton Swiss Club and Swiss Society extend sincere condolences to Rita Braem and her family.

MANY BLADES IN SWISS ARMOURY

While often caricatured as a nation of bankers and cuckoo clock makers, the Swiss are amongst the most heavily armed in Europe. Switzerland's passion for defending its neutrality means it can mobilise one of the Continent's largest forces.



Source: Jane's World Armies, International Institute for Strategic Studies

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