

News at random

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NEWS AT RANDOM

Federal

At the end of the June session of the Federal Chambers, Federal Councillor Pilet, chief of the political department, received a motion signed by members of all fractions, which invites the Federal Council to initiate negotiations with all the interested states for a plan to help the children of Europe. The assistance is to be extended to all the children suffering through the ravages of war without distinction of the nationality. The representative of the Federal Council accepted the motion and promised it a favourable consideration, but with the proviso that the principle of absolute neutrality must be preserved. The movement would be started "in scrupulous recognition of actual possibilities, with the firm principle not to transgress them, in order not to lose them foolishly, yet with a fervent will to realize them."

A new avenue of assistance has been opened by the committee of the International Red Cross, in helping to bring into being a "Foundation for procuring transports in the interests of the Red Cross" with seat in Basle, which has entrusted the running of the ships to a Swiss shipping company. The interstate negotiations about buying and usage of the ships are carried on by the International Red Cross Committee. Already a Belgian freighter of 4,000 tons has been bought and renamed "Charitas I." The boat is now being refitted in Lisbon and when ready will immediately sail. A few days ago a small mission consisting of doctors and nurses returned from Greece, which under the patronage of the Swiss Red Cross has distributed medicine and strengthening food stuffs there and has reviewed what further help can be given.

A statement by Federal Councillor Kobelt complains that occasionally some of our youths are still tempted to secretly cross the frontier and enlist for foreign military service; the dangerous effects of foreign propaganda and the glorification of military successes are luring young citizens to become mercenaries.

The death penalty which so far operates in a very few cantons only may be decreed generally for high

treason if a bill approved by the Federal Council is passed by the two Chambers.

Spain and Switzerland have concluded a number of new economic agreements, with Switzerland agreeing to supply basic chemicals and machinery, and Spain reciprocating with resinous products, hides, wines, cork, pyrites and other commodities.

The statistics of Foreign Trade in June show a further decline in imports. In 1938 the average monthly imports amounted to 61,000 truck loads and have now receded to 45,000 which, however, is still higher than last year's average. Prices are continually soaring thus while in 1938 we paid 134 million frs. for 61,000 loads the cost of the 45,000 loads is now in the neighbourhood of 190 million francs. On the export side the picture is about the same. The 3,000 truck loads exported in June compare with about 5,000 pre-war but the value has risen from 109 million francs to 128 million francs for the smaller quantity. In normal times our exports represent 15-20% of the imports but in value the ratio is not unfavourable. The great disparity in quantity is explained by the fact that we import bulky raw materials and export manufactured wares including a large proportion of small precision goods.

It should be borne in mind that at present no detailed statistics are published as in common with other countries it is not deemed judicious to issue detailed information affecting our economic situation.

Just a hundred years ago the first Federal banner was unfurled at an inspection of the Bernese battalion No. 1. The Federal diet in July 1840 decided to introduce a Federal standard instead of the old cantonal banners and accepted the design of Colonel Zimmerli from Brittnau. He designed the beams of the white cross on the red ground three feet long and one foot wide. The cloth was nailed to the red and white painted staff with nails of gold, and bore on both sides in golden letters the name of the canton. To the point was attached a bow in the cantonal colours. The originator of the uniform banner for the then still cantonal troupes was General Dufour, who for many years insisted a common standard. In the course of the century several small alterations took place, the last one in 1912 when the square of the cloth was reduced from 1.35m. to 1.10m.

Another 100,000 hectares (1 ha = 2.471 acres) of land are to be put under the plough in the coming autumn and spring in order to continue the great plan to increase agricultural products for food and fodder to an unheard of amount. The total of ploughed-up land will reach an area of 400,000 ha. In order that

the extension of agriculture is not overdone, as otherwise the production of meat, milk, butter and cheese would drop below a tolerable minimum, the Federal Council has decreed that only 50,000 ha. of meadow land are allowed to be broken up and the other 50,000 ha. have to be obtained by the clearance of forests, acceleration of draining and the breaking-up of favourably situated mountain pastures. A fresh credit of 50 million francs has recently been voted for the continuation of soil improvements already started. Great things have already been achieved in this field. Up to the 1st April of this year 1078 schemes at a cost of 78.4 million frs. and a Federal subsidy of 36.2 million frs. have been launched. To-day the number of projects dealt with and subsidised amounts to 1,265 at a cost of 108.8 million frs. including a Federal subsidy of 50 million frs. The area of meliorations comprises 22,600 ha. drainage, 28,500 ha. small holdings, 2,300 ha. forest clearance and 700 ha. otherwise improved.

Apart from the melioration program for the increase of agriculture, there exists a plan for providing work in case of extensive unemployment in industry. This scheme consists of over 4,600 undertakings at an estimated cost of 700 million frs. and includes 52,000 ha. of drainage, 264,000 ha. of re-arranging and joining small estates, and 6,000 ha. of forest clearance. This would provide work for 50,000 men during three to four years.

Cantonal

Dr. Max Petitpierre, a lawyer and notary in Neuchâtel, has been elected a member of the States Council in place of Erneste Béguin; he belongs to the radical-democratic party.

The house and office shortage in Berne still continues. The constantly increasing staff of the Federal administration finds it difficult to secure accommodation. In an official statement Federal President Etter declared that the transfer or decentralisation of some of the administrative departments while welcomed in their new quarters was not altogether accompanied with satisfactory results. In the first instance additional expense was incurred in allowances to personnel for removal and installation costs; the separation from the administrative centre entailed delay and caused increased correspondence while personal contact with the whole country was not so easily maintained from local offices as from the capital. For these reasons no further official "evacuations" are likely to be contemplated and the Federal Council has accepted an estimate of over 1½ million francs for the erection of office-camps (Baracken) in the Marzilimoos. This temporary encampment will be ready by the end of September and will contain 284 small offices calculated on a floor space of 3 by 4½ metres each. It will be reserved for the War, Industry and Labour Office which at present employs a staff of about 450 which is likely to be increased to 600. So far the staff was stationed in 26 different places of Berne, mostly in private houses.

The festivities in connection with the 2,000th anniversary of Geneva's foundation began on Saturday, July 4th, with a historic pageant and procession in which three thousand people took part. A feature of the parade was a Red Cross Car, carrying 62 children

with the flag of Geneva, symbolising the 62 societies of the International Red Cross throughout the world.

The principle of preventive imprisonment has been introduced in the canton Fribourg as a war measure. People of suspicious character who may become a danger or a nuisance to the community can be arrested on an order from a local magistrate who must show justification for his action though there is no actual trial; the victim has the right of appeal to the Conseil d'Etat. The internment may be for one to five years.

The canton of Lucerne has carried out a census of livestock, which showed a great reduction in numbers owing to the increased expansion of agriculture. The number of cattle showed a reduction of 13.7% in two years the cows being reduced by 12%. The number of pigs fell by 31.4% and laying hens, for which the feed is particularly short, dropped by 28.8%. These figures are similar to those in other agricultural cantons and are a true reflection of the position of the stock breeding side of farming which is becoming steadily more severe.

In order to reduce current consumption, the timetable of all Zurich tram services has been re-arranged and the services run now every eight minutes compared with every six minutes as before. It is also reported that Sunday services have been considerably restricted, while the tramways of Berne and St. Gallen have ceased to run on Sundays.

The elementary school children of Lausanne who in the spring of each year celebrate a forest festival, had to renounce these festivities this year on account of retrenchments of all kinds, particularly the textiles and soap rationing which makes it too difficult for many a family to fit out their children for this occasion. The sum which has been set aside in the municipal budget for this purpose will, however, revert to youth. Frs.2,000. will be handed over to the "Help the Children's Fund" of the Red Cross and Frs.1,000 will be used to give necessitous children warm clothing for the winter.

The big alp pasture on the Urnerboden, the scene of the legendary race between the runners of Uri and Glaris had up to the present not had a proper water supply nor electric light. The "radio comrades," a group of young and willing radio listeners, have undertaken to erect a water and light installation. For this purpose they have collected amongst themselves an encouraging sum of money and together with the herdsmen of the Urnerboden are building during their summer holidays a small power station and water supply system. A few years ago they built in a similar manner the power works in the Bisistal in the canton of Schwyz.

A disquieting discovery has been made on the Schinenalp, one of the largest alpine grazing areas in the Emmenthal. Bare patches had appeared in the grass and a mysterious caterpillar was subsequently found. Agricultural experts from Berne were called in; they located 100/150 larvae in various states of evolution in every square metre of soil. A further examination at the Bernese laboratory proved the

visitors to be the larvae of the grassowl (Graseule), a species entirely unknown in our country but an occasional pest in the north particularly Finland. This caterpillar utterly destroys the grassland; further observations are being carried out and it is hoped that the parts so attacked can be localised and by proper treatment freed from further ravages. All the farmers have been warned and instructed; some of them will have to remove their cattle to lower regions.

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During the Carnival festivities at Basle a Chinese student and a Japanese journalist came to blows, the latter getting the worst of the "incident." The courts sentenced the Chinese to three weeks imprisonment and the Japanese is claiming from his opponent Frs.42,000 damages for disfigurement.

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The census comedy of Chiasso may be cleared up after all. Following the official census last December it was established from reliable local records that the population of Chiasso had been returned a good few hundred in excess of the actual number of inhabitants. Exactly the same phenomena manifested themselves at the national census of 1920 and 1930 but our venerable rulers at Berne have not yet located this mysterious expansion. During the last twenty years Chiasso has therefore benefited by an increase in financial allocations to which it was obviously not entitled but as the issue of 469 ration cards to persons who only exist officially has been discovered an enquiry has been ordered. It is clearly a grave offence against our democratic principles that the lucky people of Chiasso should prosper and grow fat at the expense of the other confederates and we hope that by 1950 when the next official census takes place we shall know what is the actual population of that town.

Army

The General Staff has advised all Civil Servants to take their holidays rather early this year. Reason given is that the establishment of a Second Front in Europe in the autumn may make necessary the full mobilisation of the Swiss Army.

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According to a report telegraphed by the D. T. correspondent, General Guisan has issued a warning not to forget the dangers that "may arise overnight."

He thinks that a sense of false security might be engendered by the geographical remoteness of the present fighting fronts.

"To-day," he states, "training is of cardinal importance." Swiss citizens must expect this year to continue to be called up for strenuous military training.

Gen. Guisan reveals that he is paying special attention to the task of preparing the army against surprise attack.

Special importance is attached to night manoeuvres. Citizens joining the colours for their term of service might be confronted within a few hours with problems which would arise if war broke out here.

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In contrast to the last war the cases of conscientious objectors for whatever reasons, either religious, ethical or political are almost unknown. It is impossible to speak of anti-militarists on religious or political grounds. Consideration is given already at the

examination of recruits to those who for honest religious convictions refuse to be incorporated into a combatant branch of the army and they generally are attached to the Army Medical Corps. Of those who are punished for refusing to serve and whose punishment consists of a lengthy term of imprisonment and loss of civil rights for a certain time, only a very small proportion deserves commiseration. This statement was made by a delegate of the Evangelical Churches Federation of Switzerland after a careful investigation of all the cases.

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Two flying officers lost their lives in an accident while trying out military aircraft near Kirchdorf (Berne); their names are: Capt. Jean Roubaty (Wabern) and Lt. Hans Enderli (Berne).

Economical

According to the Federal census of live stock in April last the number of cattle in the whole country has been reduced by 91,000 heads or 5.8% and stands now at 1,492,500 heads. This is 38,000 heads less than in 1918, at the end of the first world war. The number of cows has fallen by 4.5% to 823,700, but increased breeding has already been recorded. Pigs at 670,000 is 12.1% less than last year and fully 30% below the number of 1939. The number of horses (144,300) is about the same as last year. Poultry keeping has dropped from 5.5 million heads in 1939 to 3.03 millions. Due to a desire for self-sufficiency the owners of hens and rabbits have considerably increased. The whole tendency shows that the shrinking of stocks and import of foreign feeding stuffs will reduce breeding to a level consistent with the inland fodder production.

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The increase in prices has attained various heights according to origin, war importance and provisioning position. Over 400% rise is recorded for tin, cocoa beans, paraffin, gas oil, oil of turpentine. Wholesale prices have risen by 300-400% for lead and machine oil; oats, barley, coffee, beans, nickel, silk, coal tar oils and peas, show an increase of 200-300%, whereas foreign wheat, maize, tea, lentils, rice, sugar, malt, iron, zinc, copper, cotton, linen yarns, wool, rubber, coal, coke, benzine, methylated spirit, fodder oats and feeding potatoes have risen by 100-200%. Only 50-100% rise is recorded for cattle, pigs, potatoes for human consumption, margarine, leather, brown coal briquettes, firewood, fodder barley, fodder maize and oil cake. There are however, a few items which have not soared 50% and these are milk, butter, hops, cement, lime, gipsum, aluminium and hay.

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Cherries have been extremely plentiful throughout our country, in fact a record year has been registered. By leaflets and insistent articles in the daily press the people have been instructed how best to conserve or dry them. In order to facilitate a quick distribution of this perishable fruit special trains were run to industrial centres. The rich strawberry crop from the canton Valais was distributed similarly: strawberries picked in the afternoon were offered for sale early the next morning in the markets of central and northern Switzerland.

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From the beginning of June eggpowder has been added to the ration card; it is stated that two ounces

(50 gr. to be exact) is equivalent in nutritive value to five new-laid eggs.

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The meat ration which has already been reduced twice to the present level of about 2lbs. per month is to suffer a further drastic cut by the occasional imposition of meatless weeks. The first period of this unsolicited vegetarianism was from the 7th to the 21st of this month and the Swiss press has accepted the measure as an unavoidable war-expedient without much comment. *The Times*, July 9th, has published the following commentary which throws some light on this extraordinary development:

"The news that on Tuesday Switzerland began a two-week period of vegetarian diet will be of more than passing interest even to people in this country who have their own difficulties and disappointments with food these days. Before Hitler's war Switzerland was famed not less for its rich pastures than for its grandeur of mountain and lake, and the superabundance of its varied fare was remembered as agreeably as the hospitality of its freedom-loving and friendly people. It was indeed a land flowing with milk and honey. To-day it is on short commons. The ration of meat of 2lb. a month has been found too generous and vegetarian meals have been introduced. It is only the latest of many limitations on good living.

The vegetarian may applaud the decision in the interest of saner feeding, but the harsh necessity which has imposed it on the Swiss is not to be mitigated so easily as that. The nation's cattle herds are shrinking and are now 38,000 head below the lowest figure reached in 1918. In part this has been due to German fleecing of the country, for Germany has an economic stranglehold on Switzerland, which, landlocked and surrounded by covetous and hostile régimes, has no choice but to cut down her standard of life so that her big neighbour may fare better. Most Swiss, our friends and hosts of other years, know full well that, if sometimes the working of the blockade presses hardly on them, its one intention is to ensure that the Germans beyond the frontier shall not use their country for getting more than they do of the things that sustain existence or keep the war going. Life on a neutral island in a sea of war is not easy. Of the mass of the Swiss it can be said that, although their herds may go into the Reich, their hearts are elsewhere."

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The bread problem seems to be within reach of a satisfactory solution. Before the war, our people were average consumers of bread, with about 250 gr. per person daily. In the Italian and French part of Switzerland consumption was slightly higher, but the north and centre of our country gave preference to potatoes. Switzerland's wheat requirements amounted to 63,000 ten-ton wagon loads annually of which only 20,000 loads were home-grown. Import difficulties after the outbreak of war compelled the introduction of measures to reduce bread consumption. But consumers, faced with the rise in the price of vegetables, the scarcity of rice and macaroni and restrictions on meat, began eating more bread. The authorities therefore acquired shipping. The Government now owns ten freighters, which bring wheat from North and South America. The quantities imported are far from equal to those of pre-war days. Home wheat production has been considerably intensified since the spring of 1940,

but unfavourable weather during the last two years has kept production down. Nevertheless, the number of wagon-loads of home-grown wheat has been increased by 20 per cent., and a further increase can be reckoned with at the end of this year. Switzerland and Portugal are the only countries on the Continent where bread is not rationed.

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By a recent decree of the Federal Council apprentices of both sexes in commerce, trade and industry at the ages of between 16 and 20 are obliged to assist for a time in the work on farms. These young people are to be so occupied for at least two weeks this year without losing their legal right to holidays.

Traffic

The railways in the neighbouring countries being used for military purposes and unable to handle the traffic destined for Switzerland, the Swiss railways have been forced, as in the last war, to collect goods with their own rolling stock. For this purpose there are several thousands of goods trucks rolling along on foreign rail-road systems. For the transport of coal and to bring in the arrears of last year from Germany, about two dozen Swiss steam locomotives are at present used. These measures serve exclusively to safeguard the transport of goods essential for the life of Switzerland.

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M. Jaquet, the director of the Swiss Shipping Company, recently stated that Switzerland now owns about 50,000 tons of merchant shipping and still needs more ships. He said that it was very difficult in present circumstances to procure any further tonnage. An old 8,000-ton steamer which might have cost between 500,000 and 800,000 Swiss francs before the war was now sold as seven or eight million Swiss francs. Our authorities had no intention of monopolising the sea transport of goods for Switzerland, and they realised that their activities in the field of shipping must be economically justified. But he believes that even after the war we should have a merchant marine of our own. Its size would depend upon the volume of Switzerland's overseas imports. Twenty-five ships with an aggregate tonnage of 200,000 would be sufficient for the country's needs. A large number of Swiss sailors are already serving on these ships.

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Last winter a big avalanche so heavily damaged the bridge over the Kùhmatt on the Brienzler Rothorn Railway that it could no longer be used. Recently a wooden bridge has taken the place of the iron structure. This new bridge can easily be taken down and put into a safe place when the traffic is suspended in autumn. At the end of June the first train took again lovers of the mountains across the new bridge up to the world renowned view point.

Humanitarian

The recent exchanges of civil internees have all been prepared and carried out thanks to the insistent efforts of our political department at Berne; Spain and Portugal have co-operated in these schemes. Thus the Swedish steamer *Drottningholm* (since reported sunk) carried U.S. diplomats back to New York and returned with diplomatic representatives of European belligerent countries; Lt.-Col. de Steiger, a Bernese lawyer was in charge of the exchange. An-

other similar arrangement was concluded between Japan and the U.S.A., the Swiss Consul at Lourenço Marques acting as mediator; the ships from Japan and the U.S.A. carrying also Swiss officials will meet at the latter place where the actual exchange will be effected. At the same port British and Japanese personnel will change ships in September next under the personal supervision of Lt.-Col. de Steiger. All these ships have been granted free passage by the belligerents and the word "diplomats" is prominently displayed on them and at night time they are fully illuminated. Our Foreign Office was also instrumental in securing the repatriation of 36,000 women, children and old people from East Africa 9,500 of whom have already safely arrived in Italy.

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The Hotel "Carlton Parc" in Geneva which for a time was the home of the International Labour Office has been transformed into a home for children from the war ravaged countries. Under the name of "Centre Henry Dunant" it will in future be the receiving station for those children who, from the war ravaged part of western Europe arrive at the main railway station of Geneva and where they will be distributed all over the country.

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Trainloads of children are rolling into our country from all parts of Europe. At the beginning of this month over 400 emaciated child refugees arrived in the Ticino from Yugo-Slavia; eleven hundred from northern France and the Paris region were received at Geneva. On the 16th July, 700 happy and recovered youngsters were returned to the occupied zone to make room for another batch of a thousand from the south of France.

Another centenary has been celebrated these last few days; it is a hundred years ago that in Aarau the Eidgen. Sängerverein was founded. The old town on the Aare is therefore the birth place of the three great patriotic associations: the singers, the gymnasts and the riflemen.

When the male choir of Aarau — then numbering only 12 singers — sent out an invitation to the choral societies outside their own canton to a first all-Swiss singers' day, the call created everywhere great enthusiasm. On all kinds of vehicles did the songsters arrive in Aarau from all parts of the country with song and bands playing. Instead of the 1,000 expected there were 1,500, besides a large number of people of all classes. After the delegates had decided on the formation of a Federal choral Society, the first concert took place at the Stadtkirche, the people filling the surrounding streets listening to the strains of choruses never heard before.

In the past hundred years the tree planted at Aarau has grown immensely and has extended its branches into thousands of valleys all over the country, yes even into the whole world where Swiss gather together to sing a common song. On the first Federal choral festival in Zurich in 1843 already 80 societies with 2,100 singers took part. At the last choral festival in Basle in 1935 there were 166 societies with 13,000 members represented and had all affiliated societies arrived, the largest halls in Basle could not have accommodated them.

The secret revival of the communist party which was dissolved by a Federal decree has led to the arrest of most of the former leaders. In several places, notably Zurich, Geneva and Winterthur, regular meetings were being held camouflaging these assemblies as chess club, hiking society, etc. Apart from a large quantity of the usual literature and propaganda matter a secret code for communicating information between "cells" has been confiscated. Among those under lock and key are H. Dietz (a German in Geneva), Otto Brunner, Jules Humbert-Droz and Edgar Woog (all three in Zurich).

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The heavy thunderstorms at the beginning of June and the recollection of last year's hailstorms which in the Bernese districts of Wangen and Aarwangen alone caused damage to over one million francs, have induced the farmers of the threatened zones of the Oberaargau to combine with scientists into the forming of research committees. These committees have the task to study how to combat the formation of hail clouds by an extensive use of hail rockets. The customary firing of hail-guns which used to prevail in several vine growing districts gave only doubtful results. Now rockets are used which rise to a height of 1000 m. the explosion of which will cause a concussion of the air of 800 m. round. By a timely firing of these rockets in a wide district it is possible to prevent the formation of hail clouds.

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From January 1st this year to the end of May last no less than 12,103 new wireless licences were taken out, the total number to the latter date amounting to 692,409.

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The "Radio Schweiz," a limited company for wireless telegraphy and telephone, has published its report for the year 1941. It was founded in 1922 when it handled about 100,000 dispatches; in the last year with 1,670,780 it easily beat all former records. The number of employees has risen from 34 to 261 and the company is in regular wireless communication on behalf of clients with Japan, China, U.S.A., Syria, Egypt, Great Britain, Spain, Portugal, Denmark, Russia, Sweden and Turkey. A short time ago transmissions have been instituted with ships flying the Swiss flag. The total receipts amounted to about 4.8 million francs and a dividend of 5% has been paid.

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The well-known printing firm of Courvoisier S.A. in La Chaux-de-Fonds, which has printed stamps for many countries, has produced this year's First of August stamps. The 10cts. stamp shows the picture of the old Geneva harbour and recalls the 2,000th anniversary celebrations. The 20 cts. stamp bears on a red ground the bronze flame of the soldier monument on the Forch near Zurich, showing in the background the undulating heights of eastern Switzerland. Both stamps carry an additional 10cts. in favour of "Nationalspende" and the Swiss "Samariterbund."

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Two Swiss agricultural experts on an official mission to Germany for the purpose of devising common means for destroying the Colorado beetle (Kartoffelkäfer) were killed in a motor accident on their return journey. They are Dr. G. Defago from the Mont Calme laboratory near Lausanne and Dr. Roos from the Oerlikon laboratory.