

The Swiss Merchant Navy

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THE SWISS MERCHANT NAVY.

(from "Fairplay," May 4th, 1944.)

The present war has affected the economy and over-sea routes of neutral States far more seriously than did the last Great War. Switzerland, a neutral Continental country without a seaboard, is feeling the effects of the war far more than countries having their own seaports and mercantile marine. Both Switzerland's exports and imports have to pass through a double blockade, and her oversea trade can only be maintained with great difficulty, owing to the lack of tonnage on world markets. Switzerland is exerting every means in her power to overcome the ever-increasing obstacles she has to face in this respect.

The object of this article is to examine more closely what oversea routes still remain open to Switzerland, the means whereby that country can still hope to satisfy the requirements of its national economy, both as regards the import of essential raw materials and commodities and the export of manufactured goods, and, thirdly, the circumstances which led to the founding of a Swiss merchant fleet.

On the basis of experiences made in the last World War, and the difficulties caused by the tonnage shortage which Switzerland had then to face in order to obtain national supplies, the Swiss Government decided, as soon as the war broke out, to secure the services of a certain number of large merchant vessels for the duration, so that by this means the nation's most pressing needs might be met. A contract was signed for the duration of the war with an important Greek shipping firm for 15 modern merchant ships of a total tonnage of 115,000 tons; it was, of course, assumed at the time that Greece would not be involved in the conflict.

From the end of 1939 to the autumn of 1940 these ships were mostly used to carry corn and fodder imports and to ensure regular sailings between the Argentine and Genoa and Marseilles. The result of Greece's being involved in the war was that these boats could no longer sail the Mediterranean; their cargoes had to be unloaded in Portuguese ports and shipped in other neutral vessels to Genoa. Other essential imports from overseas were carried on various neutral ships chartered from time to time for single voyages. As the war spread to Yugoslavia, the United States and several South American States, the possibility of obtaining tonnage on world markets grew increasingly restricted.

Under the circumstances, the Swiss Government decided, in the spring of 1941, to purchase its own ships. According to the 1921 Barcelona International Convention, Continental States have the right to fly their own flags at sea. Acting on the basis of this Convention, and to afford Swiss ships a maximum of security, the Swiss Federal Council decreed, on 9th April, 1941, that a Swiss maritime code should be drawn up and the Swiss flag flown at sea. Switzerland thus became the youngest recruit in the ranks of seafaring nations.

With the collaboration of private Swiss firms, the Confederation was able, in a relatively short time and in the face of many difficulties, to build up a small Swiss merchant fleet, which at the moment is

composed of eleven units, as follows: s.s. *St. Gotthard*, 8,339 tons; s.s. *Eiger*, 8,137 tons; m.v. *Saentis*, 6,690 tons; s.s. *Chasseral*, 4,206 tons; s.s. *St. Cergue*, 7,600 tons; s.s. *Calanda*, 7,470 tons; s.s. *Maloja*, 2,640 tons; s.s. *Albula*, 2,030 tons; s.s. *Lugano*, 9,300 tons; s.s. *Generoso*, 2,360 tons; and s.s. *Zurich*, 1,928 tons. These Swiss ships, together with the eight Greek vessels still sailing in the service of Switzerland, namely: s.s. *Helene Kulukundis*, 10,000 tons; s.s. *Master Elias Kulukundis*, 10,000 tons; m.v. *Kassos*, 9,535 tons; s.s. *Marpessa*, 8,732 tons; s.s. *Mount Aetna*, 7,933 tons; s.s. *Nereus*, 9,500 tons; s.s. *Stavros*, 9,214 tons; and s.s. *Thetis*, 7,600 tons, are registered as Swiss supply ships and recognised as such by both groups of belligerents.

Along both flanks of these ships is painted the name "Switzerland," and, when sailing at night, they are ablaze with light. Their dates of sailing and routes are announced beforehand to all belligerents; they carry only Swiss import and export goods, to the exclusion of all others. Thanks to these precautions, and to agreements concluded with both belligerent groups, all loss at sea through operations of war has been avoided.

As the North American route is the shortest, and in order to utilise the tonnage at Switzerland's disposal in the most rational manner possible, imports of bread cereals are mostly obtained from the United States. A rather less busy traffic is being carried on with Central America, the Argentine, Brazil and Portuguese East and West Africa, for the importation of sugar, coffee, rice, oils, fats, cocoa, etc. Very soon after regular lines were opened by neutral shipping firms, the Federal War Transport Department which is charged with the control of all maritime transport routes to and from Switzerland, devoted particular attention to the transport of Swiss merchandise to various places overseas.

Early in 1941, direct sailings from Genoa to New York and Philadelphia/Baltimore were organised. These direct lines were completed by a service running between Genoa and Lisbon, where the goods are transhipped to Spanish and Portuguese vessels for the United States, Central and South America.

Swiss exporters have exploited this opportunity of maintaining their commercial relations with the United States and other overseas markets to the utmost. Up to now, every Swiss ship sailing from Genoa to the United States has carried valuable consignments of Swiss merchandise on board. As long as the United States remained out of the war many consignments of Swiss goods for Central and South America, South Africa, India, the Far East and other overseas territories, were sent first to New York and shipped thence on American vessels to their

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The aggravation of conditions ruling the utilisation of United States ships for the transport of goods of neutral origin unfortunately rendered the transshipment of Swiss goods in United States ports so difficult, that the Federal War Transport Department was obliged to employ Swiss ships for the transport of Swiss merchandise to Central and South America and British India. Regular sailings of Swiss ships to the main ports in these territories have now been organised.

The maintenance of regular direct lines to Switzerland's main oversea markets is of vital importance to that country. The Federal War Transport Department will, therefore, do everything in its power to prevent an interruption in Swiss merchant ship sailings.

INTERFERENCE WITH RECEPTION.

There are three main causes of interference: atmospheric disturbances, electrical interference from apparatus in the listener's neighbourhood, and the transmissions of other stations.

Atmospheric disturbances are not as a rule severe in this country except during thunderstorms, and cannot be prevented. Electrical interference is usually heard as a more or less continuous crackling or buzzing noise with clicks when the interfering apparatus is switched on or off. It may be caused by trams, trolley-buses, motors, fans, vacuum cleaners, lifts, etc. The services of the Engineering Branch of the General Post Office are given, free of charge, when available, to all wireless licence holders in tracing the source of interference and advising on its suppression. Listeners requiring assistance should complete the electrical interference questionnaire ("Report of Interference"), which can be obtained from any head Post Office.

The precaution which a listener should take against electrical interference is to erect an efficient outdoor aerial, if necessary, one of the "anti-interference" type, now manufactured by several firms.

Interference from other Stations. — If a receiver is deficient in the property of selectivity, other programmes may be heard as well as the wanted programme even if the latter is at good strength. At times when the home programmes are received weakly the listener may perhaps find increased interference from Continental stations working on adjacent wavelengths. It may even seem at times as if a foreign station is operating on a BBC wavelength, when, in fact, it is keeping strictly to its own.

This kind of interference is more likely to occur after sunset than in the day-time, for then a quite distant Continental medium-wave station will generally give steadier reception than that obtained from a quite moderate, though not close, range. Unless the receiver has gone out of adjustment since it was first installed, there is little that can be done to overcome this type of interference, because the selectivity of a receiver depends on its fundamental design. In the case of interference in the form of a permanent background to one of the BBC programmes, which sometimes happens in the case of a very simple or unselective receiver, the unwanted programme can generally be excluded by making a small addition to the receiver in the form of a 'wave trap.' Particulars of this inexpensive and very simple addition will be sent to any listeners who are so troubled.

Installation. — The efficiency of every receiver is improved by the provision of a good aerial and earth system. Although a modern receiver gives sufficiently loud reception with only a few feet of wire for an aerial and no earth at all, it is then working all the time near its most sensitive condition and noises due to electrical interference may become prominent. The aerial is advisable — one as high as possible within the limits stated on the back of the wireless licence. The down-lead enters the house. The earth connection should be short and direct and may be taken to a metal plate or wire netting buried in the earth, to an earth tube, or to a main water pipe. Gas pipes should not be used. If an indoor aerial must be used, it should not run parallel to electric lighting or telephone wires which may be embedded in the walls or ceiling.

Reception in Wartime. — The following suggestions are made in order to meet the special conditions in areas where reception may be poor as a result of the wartime system of broadcasting. These measures are palliative only, and the degree of their success depends on various factors. Where the trouble exists, however, they are worth a trial.

(1) Use a short vertical aerial without flat top portion or long horizontal leads, spaced a few feet away from the house if outside. Where the programme is strong, notwithstanding distortion, the short aerial should be put inside the room and suspended vertically above the receiver.

(2) Disconnect the aerial, and connect the earth wire to the aerial terminal of the receiver instead of to the earth terminal. For battery-operated sets not of a self-contained portable type, but using an aerial with earth connection, try reversing the positions of the aerial and earth wire leads on the terminals of the receiver. In general, this remedy is only successful where the programme strength is always good although distorted, and where some distortion occurs in daytime as well as after nightfall.

(3) Use an extemporized frame aerial made by winding about ten turns of insulated wire round the edges of a cardboard or wooden box (with sides say about two feet square), the ends of the wire being connected with the aerial and earth wires. The box should be stood on edge and turned in various directions until the best results are obtained. This method is only suitable with a modern receiver of high sensitivity, but where the strength of the programme is good at all times although distorted, it has been found to give satisfactory results in certain localities both in daytime and after dark.

The first two of the above methods are not possible with a self-contained portable set which includes within it a small frame aerial, but this type of receiver works in the same way as an ordinary receiver to which the third method has been applied. With such receivers, an improvement may be obtained by turning the receiving set to a position giving the best results.

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The above which will dispose of several queries which we have recently received is reprinted with acknowledgment from the "B.B.C. Year Book," 1944.