

In Memory of a great pioneer of the air : Walter Mittelholzer 1894-1937

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mérité ces éloges? En tout cas, ce respect des opinions d'autrui est bien loin de nous être inné, et nous ne pouvons que gagner à écouter un homme qui a scruté le fondement profond de cette liberté. Les guerres de religion obscurcissent trois siècles de notre alliance confédérale. En 1824, le canton de Vaud rendait une loi contre les "mômiers" qui a provoqué les scènes les plus tristes (et c'est à elles que nous devons Vinet). Ensuite, il y a eu les injustices du *Kulturkampf*; ensuite de honteuses persécutions contre l'Armée du Salut. Avons-nous, depuis, appris la leçon de Vinet? A suivre les débats auxquels vient de donner lieu l'institution d'un Service civil pour objecteurs de conscience, il ne le paraît pas.

La vie de Vinet est triste. A vingt-trois ans déjà, il est un valétudinaire qui passera à peine quinze jours de sa vie sans souffrir. De ses deux enfants, sa fille mourra à dix-sept ans; son fils, sourd et épileptique, lui sera une cause de constant souci. Il a une femme admirable; il a de très bons amis; il est hautement apprécié comme critique littéraire — et de nos jours encore. Berne, Neuchâtel, Montauban, Paris veulent l'arracher à Bâle d'abord. Genève, Bâle, Neuchâtel lui offrent une chaire, quand Lausanne semble lui être devenu impossible. Mais son sentiment d'incapacité en face de tout ce qu'on lui présente ne le quitte pas: il ne s'est jamais senti capable d'être pasteur; son humilité le convainc qu'il n'est jamais à la hauteur des tâches qu'on lui propose.

Et pourtant, sur la voie du service, il fait de grandes choses, que Wartenweiler a admirablement résumées dans la publication qu'il a donnée en 1931 au peuple suisse pour lui expliquer pourquoi le portrait de Vinet figurait sur les timbres-poste de la fin de l'année.

"Il est au service des étudiants. Il ne leur enseignera pas seulement la "théologique pratique;" c'est une étincelle de vie supérieure qui jaillira de son âme sur la leur.

Au service de la femme: il lui conquerra (par la fondation d'une école qui aujourd'hui porte son nom) le droit à la culture, et lui en fournira l'accès.

Au service de l'Eglise — de celle qui n'est pas une institution humaine, mais le corps même du Christ.

Au service de l'Etat: par son obéissance, tant que sa conscience le lui permettra; par son opposition et sa résistance, quand l'Etat demandera de lui ce contre quoi sa conscience regimbe. Il lui rendra le plus grand des services en le ramenant dans les bornes de ses compétences.

Au service de l'humanité: il dénoncera les idoles du temps et la soustraira au bruit des masses pour la ramener à écouter dans le silence la voix de la conscience individuelle.

Et tous ces services, ce maître les rendra parce qu'il ne cessera jamais d'apprendre lui-même le plus haut usage que l'homme puisse faire de sa liberté: l'obéissance, le service de Dieu."

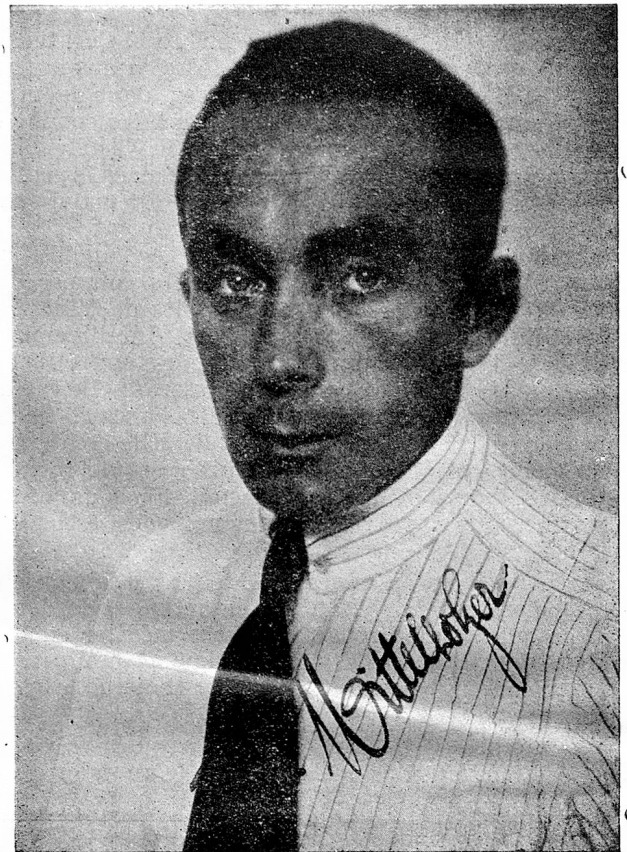
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IN MEMORY OF A GREAT PIONEER OF THE AIR



WALTER MITTELHOLZER

1894-1937.

On the 9th of this month it was ten years since Walter Mittelholzer, the great pioneer of the air, has lost his life, in the "Styrian" mountains, not as an aviator but as an alpinist.

To honour his memory we re-produce herewith extracts from the obituary notice, published in the issue of the "*Swiss Observer*" of May 22nd, 1937 (No. 810) by "ST."

"Like a thunderbolt from a blue sky came the news of the death of Walter Mittelholzer, our famous compatriot.

He, who had looked death in the eye on innumerable occasions when flying over the four continents of the earth, has become the victim of an accident in the Styrian Alps (Austria) when on a mountaineering expedition. To the mountain he wended his way whenever he was in need of a rest from his daily toils, there in the Alpine splendour he found solace, and in the stillness and vastness of the mountain world he received new inspiration and new vigour for his great exploits. The plans for many a new venture were thought out on these expeditions, and it is therefore all the more tragic that he should have found his death amongst the mountains which he loved so much. It seemed almost as if they had taken their revenge on him, for having conquered them on so many occasions by flying over their glittering peaks. They have embraced him on his last wanderings and claimed him; perhaps he would not have wished for a better end, but alas it

came all too soon, there was so much more for him to do.

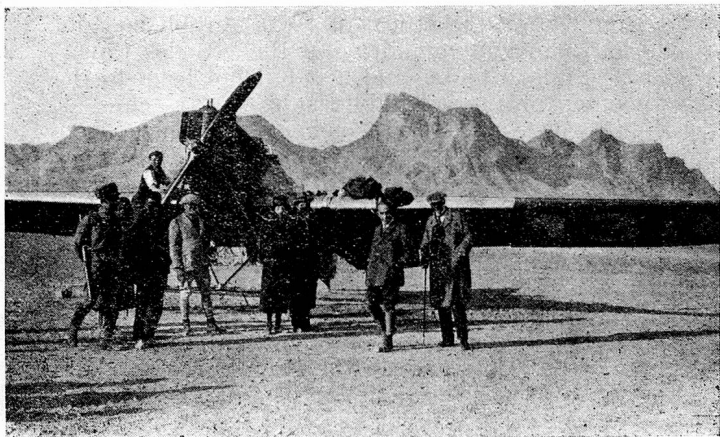
I met Walter Mittelholzer, for the first time some four years ago, when I had the privilege to lunch with him at Croydon. This first meeting left a great and lasting impression on me; although small in stature and unassuming in his bearings, one was at once struck by the dynamic force which seemed to possess him, his eyes were the eyes of a conqueror." —

Walter Mittelholzer was born on the 2nd of April, 1894, in St. Gall, where he received his schooling at the "Volks" and "Kantonsschule." From his earliest years he was an enthusiastic mountain climber; during the Frontier-Occupation 1914-18 he started, at the age of twenty-one, his career as a military airman.

Shortly after the first world war he founded, together with Alfred Comte, the first commercial Air Transit concern in Switzerland, the "Aero," this company, which undertook passenger flights, specialised at the same time in Air Photography, and it was there, where Mittelholzer began his work as an Air photographer; which in later years made him not only famous as a pilot but equally so as the producer of wonderful views taken from the Air in all parts of the world.

Two years later the "Aero" concern was amalgamated with the "Ad Astra" company from which the "Swissair" emerged of which he became technical Manager and Chief Pilot.

In 1923 he was asked by the Junkers works to take part in the relief expedition for Amundsen as a photographer, he accepted the proposition and on this occasion the mountains, glaciers and fjords of Spitzbergen were flown over for the first time.



Walter Mittelholzer landing at Addis-Ababa

1924/25: Invited by Junker Works and Persian Government to carry out a survey, with a view to introducing regular aerial transport to Persia. On this flight he flew over the premier mountain in Persia, the ice-crowned Demavend (18,600 feet).

1926/27: First seaplane flight Zurich-Capetown, where he received an official reception by the Lord Mayor.

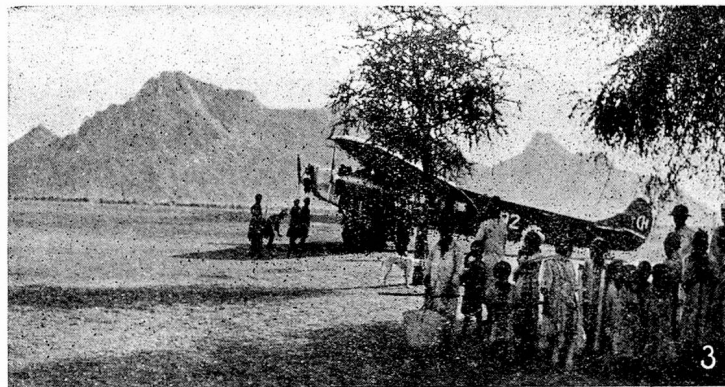
1929/30: Invited by Baron Louis de Rothschild, the well-known Austrian sportsman, to fly from Switzerland to East Africa. On this expedition he covered 12,213 miles in a total flying time of 126 hours, and

for the first time the Kilimanjaro (19,320 feet), and Mount Kenya (17,000 feet), were flown over.

1930/31: Flight Switzerland-Morocco, across the Sahara to Lake Chad.

1933: One-day flight from Zurich to Africa in a Lockheed-Orion machine.

1934: Flight Zurich-Abyssinia, where he landed at Addis-Ababa, and where he was personally congratulated by the Emperor of Abyssinia, Haile Selassie.



Addis-Ababa 1934.

These are only the more important flights which Mittelholzer undertook, and only space prevents from mentioning the many thousand miles which he flew otherwise and especially on the routes of the Swissair as a pilot.

Perhaps mention should also be made of his flight carrying mail from Zurich to Naples-Athens-Istanbul and Belgrade, and the many flights over the Swiss Alps; on one of the latter he nearly lost his life when his machine crashed into the mountain side on a return journey from Milan to Zurich; for three months he was helpless in bed until his frozen fingers and doubly fractured thigh-bone were sufficiently healed to permit him to undertake further flights.

Mittelholzer was equally efficient with his pen as with the joy-stick, he wrote at least half a dozen books, some of which were translated into foreign languages, in addition he was the author of a great number of articles on technical matters in connection with aviation.

A number of countries showered honours on him; he received the gold medals of the "Aero Club de France," the "Ligue Internationale des Aviateurs," the "Schweizerischen Aero-Club," the "Oesterreichischen Aero-Club" etc., etc.

With Walter Mittelholzer we honour the memory of a Pioneer, in the real sense of the word, our country has lost in him one of its great sons, and his work and achievements in the sphere of aviation will live and will never be forgotten.

ST.

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