

Swiss spotlight

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SWISS SPOTLIGHT.

By PIERRE BÉGUIN.

Switzerland gives up the idea of building her own type of military aircraft.

Although Swiss industry and technique enjoy honourable appreciation, they have not engaged in the building of large commercial or military aircraft. It is true that we possess some firms which build aeroplanes for tourism; but our requirements in aircraft are too restricted for there being any question of starting any large scale production.

The fact remains, however, that it had been hoped, both in the Army and in certain industrial circles, that it would prove possible to elaborate a Swiss type of fighter plane. For one thing, our national defence — that of a small neutral country, and one, moreover, having very mountainous territory — has a particular character; thus, it may seem right, in theory at any rate, to build a machine which is adapted exactly to our exigencies. For another thing, in the military domain, it is perhaps a good thing not to be entirely dependent on purchases from abroad, as one runs the risk of foreign firms delivering aircraft which are becoming out-of-date. One also runs the risk of finding one's sources of supply cut off should there be a war elsewhere, as the belligerents would then have very good reason for covering their own requirements and not satisfying those of their customers.

That is why in Switzerland a great deal of work has been devoted during the last few years to the

elaboration of an original type of military aircraft which went under the name of P.16. These efforts, however, were not rewarded. Some years ago a first prototype crashed into the Lake of Constance during its test flight. Last March, having apparently forgotten this misadventure, the Federal Chambers voted an appropriation of 400 million francs for the construction of a first lot of P.16s. However, a few days later a *new* prototype went down into the waters of Lake Constance. The subsequent inquiry revealed that the hydraulic system of controls had not functioned and that a revision of this system would take too long, so that the terms of delivery could not be adhered to. Thereupon, the Swiss Government decided to annul the order which had been given to the Swiss manufacturers three months previously.

There is nothing to be done — one must face the facts. A Swiss plant, however well it may be run by its specialists, will never be able to work as efficiently as a big foreign concern which manufactures various types of aircraft and which, as a result, multiplies its research work and its experiments. That was the reason why certain members of the Swiss Parliament, as well as certain experts, were opposed to the order given for the P.16. One now sees that they were right.

In this particular field, therefore, we shall remain narrowly bound, as customers of foreign aircraft manufacturers. However, the Swiss aeronautical industry could very well devote itself to the building of foreign models, under licence, which could be adapted to our original requirements. It is in this direction that our Army authorities will now turn their attention.

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