

The Milan-Corsair dossier

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THE MILAN—CORSAIR DOSSIER

"If we chose our passenger jets in the same way as the Military Department is selecting the new combat aircraft, we would still be operating DC-3's" once remarked Mr. Baltensweiler, Swissair's General Manager.

The long series of mishaps that accompanied the order and building under licence of the "Mirage IIIS" fighter, which eventually cost nearly three times more than planned, has obviously had a traumatic effect on Switzerland's military chiefs. In order not to make the same mistake again, they have exercised exemplary caution and have been busy choosing the new aircraft for the past six years. The special commission set up to select the successor to the Air Force's ageing "Venoms" started work in 1966.

By August 1969, it had shortlisted two aircraft: the "Fiat" and the American "Corsair". These two machines were submitted to a series of theoretical evaluation tests at the Institute of Technology in Zurich so that in June 1970, the Military Department was in a position to spend the 1.3 billion francs earmarked for the new aircraft, and demanded further testing of other possible candidates.

Renewed evaluation work was carried out on the two main contenders as well as on the "Fiat", the "Saab 105" and the "Skyhawk". The French-built Dassault "Milan" was added to the list as a "possibility" and the Federal Council insisted on the evaluating of the British "Hunter-S". Although the Government had asked for a report on these studies before the year's end, it was only on 21st June, 1971 that the evaluators came out with their findings: The Government should choose between the "Corsair" and the Mirage "Milan".

At the end of November 1971, the Federal Council asked the Military Department for a final report, presenting costs, tenders and the results of physical evaluation, to be

completed by the middle of June. A "Corsair" and a "Milan" were flown to Switzerland with French and American test pilots and during April and May performed an intricate and complete series of tests over valleys, lakes and mountains.

The Federal Council was so deeply concerned about the combat plane issue, that it interrupted its regular sittings, and flew over to the Emmen Air Force base with the General Staff in a fleet of five helicopters. The tests were officially completed at the end of May, with "informed sources" stating that the "Corsair" had been the easy winner.

A grand Press demonstration was held at Payerne Air Base on 31st May.

The Military thus appeared to have opted for the "Corsair", but their decision was expected to be fought impassionately in Parliament. The whole selection procedure was rich in events and will certainly be the theme of an "insight study" by a future historian.

In a four article report on the whole case, the Geneva daily "La Suisse" claims that the evaluation process was warped by unshakeable anti-Mirage pressures among the higher spheres of the Military establishment. Recalling that the combat plane's original brief was: 1) to serve as a ground assault fighter; 2) to defend itself; and 3) to protect other slower aircraft, the paper stresses that all but the first of these three specifications have been ignored, thus giving the "Corsair" a distinctive edge. The "Corsair" which is a subsonic and heavier machine, came out first in the ground assault tests. It was better at striking small targets, it could operate at night, it could fly slower and had a higher payload of bombs and rockets. However, the Mirage-Milan, which can fly at twice the speed of sound, was distinctly superior to its competitor in satisfying the last two specifications.

The French machine has other advantages: It is considerably cheaper, it is more recent (production of the Corsair will end in 1973), it is highly manoeuvrable for a delta-wing design thanks to its retractable forward fins, it can be housed in underground caverns. Another considerable advantage is due to the experience already acquired in Dassault aircraft. In buying the Mirage-Milan, the Air Force would make considerable savings in staff training and spares stock building since the model is in close parentage with the Swiss-built Mirage IIIS.

"La Suisse" doesn't fail to point out that the Corsair has been temporarily withdrawn from operations over Vietnam because of engine trouble. Moreover, the Corsair is never sent on Vietnam missions without the protection of faster aircraft.

The two main advantages of the Corsair are its remarkable payload of five tons of bombs (the Mirage-Milan has a payload of 2.9 tons) and more elaborate electronics enabling it to hit targets with considerable accuracy. The question is: can it reach those targets without first being knocked down by either ground-fire or by a faster aircraft? Anti-Corsair circles claim that it is safer to buy more of the cheaper Milan aircraft, presenting less certainty of lobbing a smaller bomb load on target, but with more certainty of returning to base unscathed, than to buy a small number of jets that could be destroyed before they had accomplished their mission.

It is impossible to be sure of the merits of an aircraft without testing it in the circumstances for which it is designed. This of course is impractical, since these conditions are actual warfare. The next best thing is to play at "tactical games" with the aid of a computer. This is what mathematical dons have been doing at the Institute of Technology in Zurich, with the apparent result that the "Corsair" is the more suitable aircraft.

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COMMENT

VOTING HOLIDAYS

According to Article 45bis of the Federal Constitution, voted by the people in 1968, the Confederation may, taking account of the special situation of the Swiss living abroad, enact regulations determining their rights and duties, in particular with respect to the exercise of political rights, the carrying out of military obligations and to assistance.

Four years later, nothing practical has been undertaken to realise the political aspect of these provisions. It is well nigh impossible, for a host of technical reasons, to allow the 300,000 Swiss citizens abroad to take part in federal votes, let alone on cantonal ones. In fact, this is officially out of the question. When three Swiss societies in Great Britain were called to debate this issue two years ago, they overwhelmingly rejected the idea, mainly on principle (it was not fair that people exempt from Swiss taxation should be fully privileged voters) and also because it was feared that political strife would have been thus induced in the Swiss Colony.

However, to please the Swiss living in France and to a lesser extent those living in Germany, who miss their national political rights, new proposals are currently being worked out in Berne to institute an *Aufenthaler-stimmrecht*. According to this scheme, a Swiss abroad would be entitled to vote after having remained for three weeks in Switzerland. They would thus be given the privilege of mixing holidays and politics.

Such a proposition is rejected with even more vigour than the former prospect of full political rights by several members of the Swiss societies who have studied this problem because of its added disadvantage of geographical inequality. It is obvious that only the Swiss living in neighbouring countries, above all in France and Germany, would be able to avail themselves of this new right. The representatives at the Commission of the Swiss Abroad in Berne will pull their full weight to fight the scheme. There is no doubt that the majority of residents in this country, many of whom have survived without voting for forty years or more, would not feel particularly despoiled if the idea were abandoned. But Article 45bis would remain a dead letter as far as its political aspects are concerned.

(PMB)

The Americans have sufficient means to have two or three types of aircraft satisfying the original specifications laid down by the Military Aircraft Commission. The Swiss Air Force could never afford having two different jet fighters on a single mission, one being used to protect the other. Engineers will readily point out that the original specifications were contradictory, because manoeuvrability and high payloads are in conflict with the high speeds and acceleration required for self-defence or interception. It is likely that engineers will also agree that the model which approaches these all-round qualities is the Mirage-Milan.

Many observers believe that the evaluators have not only been motivated by technical reasons. Many Air Force chiefs are biased against the Mirage, either because it reminds them of the trouble of the IIS version, or because of possible anti-Gallic or pro-American feelings. This should be more apparent, for cultural reasons, among German-speaking officers.

The leader of the pro-Corsair faction, Mr. Heiner Schultess, Head of the Arms Supply Division, has worked for many years as an engineer in the American aerospace industry. According to an article in "La Suisse", this has influenced his decision and introduced emotional elements in the selection process. The paper also says that the Head of the Political Department may be inclined to please the Military.

One of the firmest supporters of the competing Milan is Mr. Nello Celio. His reasons are political: Asking for a large order in a Common Market country would be a good way to start Swiss-E.E.C. co-operation.

(PMB)

SWISS EVENTS

FEDERAL

Stalled progress in E.E.C. negotiations

Switzerland's negotiations with the Common Market are due to be completed by the end of July. Her efforts to work out a free-trade agreement that would not be disadvantageous in the agricultural field have been somewhat frustrated by the E.E.C. Executive Commission while it met in Luxembourg during a special session on the agricultural aspects of the future agreements with the three non-candidate countries.

The original difficulties standing in the way of a free-trade agreement have not been completely resolved. They are threefold. First, the Common Market would like to obtain unilateral agricultural concessions. Switzerland, Sweden and Austria are thus asked to import more Common Market wine, vegetables and fruit without the compensation of an expanded market for their own agricultural production. Switzerland has excess dairy products

which it would like to sell to her Common Market neighbours, and Austria has too much meat. Yet the E.E.C. is adamant on this point, and considers that the industrial advantages already awarded are a sufficient sop to please the three non-candidates.

The second point relates to the "safety clauses". Should a disagreement occur between the E.E.C. and one of the three future associates over the implementation of an agreement clause, then the two parties can either voluntarily discuss the matter, or the "injured party" can unilaterally disrespect the contentious clause, pending an enquiry by a joint commission. The Swiss feel that they could too easily be the victims of such an arrangement and insist that consultation (a kind of cooling off period) should be made mandatory before the event of a dispute.

The third point concerns the "origin" of the industrial products which the associate countries will or will not be allowed to export and of tariffs into the Community. This subject is highly technical and has been debated at considerable length, parti-