

Vintage Switzerland

Autor(en): **Hornby, Frank**

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Frank Hornby

On my way back last Spring from what has become an annual pilgrimage to Switzerland, I recalled with something of a shock that it was no less than 54 years since I had my first experience of that delightful country.

At that time, in the Spring of 1946, I had just completed a year's service with the Royal Signals in Italy and Austria and my unit was preparing to move to Egypt. To my great

SBB Ee3/3 No. 8507 at Luzern Depot. 23/6/59

Photo: Frank Hornby



VINTAGE SWITZERLAND

Maritime. Here we boarded a waiting 'Medloc' troop train of run-down Italian stock with a 'Nord' Pacific at the head end. The 'Medloc' service operated post-war over several routes between Calais and Italy, Austria and Southern France, conveying men home on demobilisation or to and from leave.

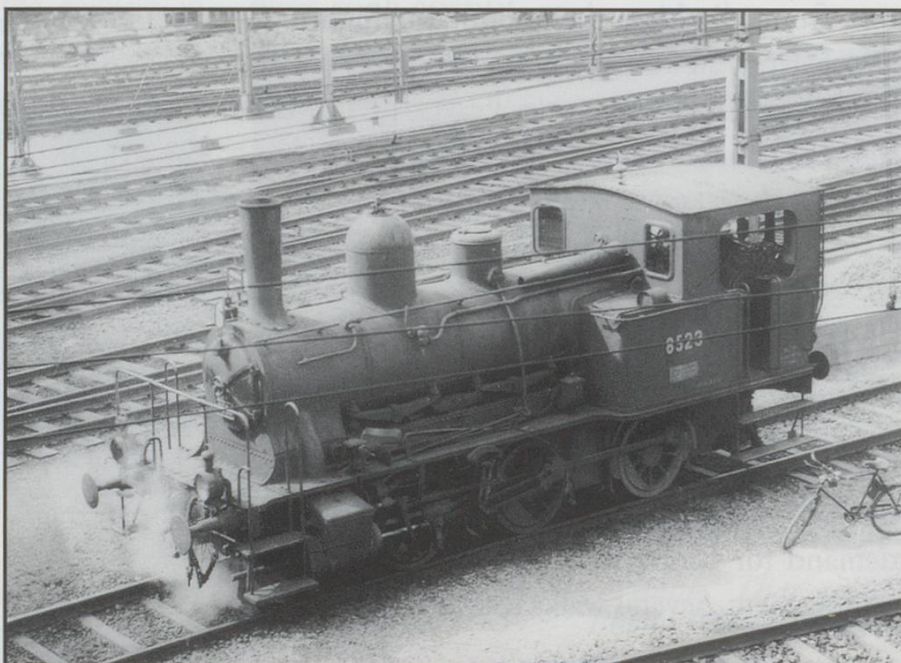
We set off in the afternoon, by-passing Paris by the Grand Ceinture, and daybreak found us on the PLM main line through Dijon where, after an engine change, we continued at a leisurely pace to Vallorbe. By now I hadn't the slightest idea where we were until I saw carriages lettered 'SBB/CFF' and green electric locomotives with brass number-plates and headlamps, and it dawned on me that we were in SWITZERLAND!

The next few hours were sheer magic and, although note-taking in a crowded troop-train was somewhat inhibited, I recorded that a '4-8-2 electric' No. 10984 had backed on, coupled to a steam-heating van. I

SBB Ee3/3 No.8523 built by SLM in 1910 at Luzern. 23/6/59

Photo: Frank Hornby

delight I was informed that I had qualified for home leave before transfer to 'Middle East Forces', and within days I was aboard the troopship 'Chitral' bound from Naples to Southampton. Three weeks after reporting back to the transit camp at the end of my leave, and expecting to return by the same route, a contingent of us were sent back by train to Waterloo, then from Charing Cross to Dover, and across the Channel to Calais





SBB Fe4/4 No. 807 and EBT no. 106 at Luzern Depot. 23/6/59.

Photo: Frank Hornby

noted several more Ae4/7s, and other sightings included Ae3/6s at Lausanne and Brig, Be4/6I No. 12301 and Ce6/8 II No. 14274, both at Lausanne - I learned the class designations years later. At that time these were rather overshadowed by the steam locomotives seen around the depot at Lausanne, where 4-6-0 Nos. 795/98, 808 and 2-6-0 No. 1367 were hastily scribbled down. Oh for a camera!

All of us, lining the corridors, were mesmerised by the scenery and by the pristine neatness of the towns, contrasting with the war-ravaged scenes as all too evident in Northern France and in Italy. Doubtless working these troop-trains was a welcome source of revenue to the SBB at that time, but it is pleasant to record that, during our lengthy stop at Lausanne, we were warmly greeted by the local populace who handed up gifts of much-appreciated chocolates.

After a stop at Brig in the fading light we were soon through the tunnels and into FS territory at Domodossola, where a 4-6-2 No. 691.010 - the only one of its class I ever saw - took over for the last stage to Milan Central. The continuation of the journey from Milan to Naples and by sea to Port Said is another

story in itself, and it was a good many years before I achieved an ambition to return to Switzerland. It came about in fact in July 1959 when my parents and I booked up for an eight-day marathon coach tour of Europe, "If it's Tuesday it must be Belgium!". The high spot was a two-night stay in Luzern, and I equipped myself with a permit for the depot, where the last

remnants of steam traction lingered on. I noted 2-10-0 No. 2965, 2-6-2T No. 5811 and 0-6-0Ts 8505/07 on shed while No. 8523 and a Brünig line 2-6-0T No. 207 were shunting in the yards. Equally memorable was Ae8/14 No. 11801 on a Gotthard line train, while other veteran electrics on the depot were Be4/6 No. 12338 and Be3/5 No. 12201 of 1919 vintage. Four motor-luggage vans Nos. 803/04/06/07 seemed unexciting at the time, but they had disappeared before my later visits, and I surmise that they might then have been employed on the Seetalbahn.

My only rail journey during that holiday was a short one on the Brünig line as far as Alpnachstad, where I transferred to the Pilatus Bahn and rode to the summit, descending by the two-stage cable cars to Kriens. Since then I have covered most of Switzerland's rail network, dutifully recording in my notebook and on film much of the variety of standard and narrow-gauge traction to be seen thereon. But nothing can quite match the thrill and excitement of that wholly unexpected 'Medloc' trip in 1946. For a short time I was actually glad to be in the army!



GFM Be4/4 115 at Montbovon - 6/8/69.

Photo: SRS Collection

PAST TIMES - Some photographs from the archives



BLS De4/5 796 at Goppenstein. 24/8/67

Photo: SRS collection