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SWISS DOORS: European War-Scare Leads "Isle of Peace" to Fortify Its Frontiers



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Switzerland: "Isle of Peace" rehearses for battle

Little Switzerland will not be caught as Belgium was in 1914. The "Isle of Peace," home of the League that was to forge all nations of the world together into a chain of amity, is fortifying her frontiers to the tune of war-rumbles. The army and air forces are being expanded in preparation for that "inevitable" war Europe seems to be resigned to. She realizes that the only way to preserve her peace is to be prepared to fight for it.

Whoever moves the opening gambit will find Switzerland no easy checkmate. She does not intend to let her small, perpetually peaceful country be used as a door through which warring dictators can move their armies and disrupt her neutrality. Yet she knows that she has been measured for a door by the countries who may any day leap at one another's throats.

"To-day," President Albert Mayer told his countrymen, urging them to subscribe to a national defense fund, "Switzerland's independence and neutrality are in greater danger than in 1914. Our militia is the flower of our people, but armaments are necessary for our defense. As an example, Ethiopia speaks eloquently."

Taxes—Two years ago, the first funds—\$7,000,000—were allocated to build fortifications along the German border. In April of last year, the peace-loving Swiss were limping under a tax for an emergency appropriation of \$100,000,000 for the same purpose. In a country where the population is little better than 4,000,000, that is a terrific slice out of any one's income to pay for preparations for some one else's war.

Switzerland

And that was not the end. With the physical protection against Germany almost completed, Swiss citizens are being asked to subscribe \$76,375,000 more for a defense loan. From this, \$55,000,000 will be spent on new defenses, with \$16,000,000 going for antiaircraft defenses and \$18,000,000 on air-force expansion.

Switzerland has seen the insidious value of propaganda in other countries and is following their example. Spring and fall, when the tourist trade has departed, the Government floods the country with air propaganda. The most ardently pacifist farmers and urban dwellers gladly practise air-alarm drills, since German military planes have been making frequent flights over Swiss territory.

Staff—But fortifications and war-in-the-air are only a part of the protection Switzerland has undertaken to preserve her seven hundred years of peace. Only when war threatens and a general mobilization gets under way does the Swiss Army have Generals. Then the National Council appoints a commander and a permanent Chief-of-Staff. Switzerland has not denied that discussions for such appointments already have taken place in the Federal Palace in Berne. Informed sources insist that selections have been decided.

Actually, Switzerland offers hostile armies not one door, but many—westward to France, northward to Germany, eastward to Austria and southward to Italy. Taking a square look at the grimmest reality—complete annihilation—Switzerland believes that she would know her future in ten days after the first pistol popped.

Reich Guns—In an article in the *Military and Naval Digest*, Gordon Reud explains the ten-day problem by quoting a member of the Swiss General Staff:

“When war comes, we will be unable to mobilize our entire Army. The Germans will probably destroy our strategic railroad centers, Aarau and Olten, within forty-eight hours. Hence, for our border defense, we shall have to rely strongly on the native population, and we are therefore preparing them for just such an emergency. It is utterly impossible for us to defend the city of Basel, because it is right under the guns of the new German fortress Isteiner Klotz. Our entire strategic problem boils down to this: Can we hold the line for ten days? After that, the French will have moved up and closed the gap. If we can't hold out that long, we are lost.”

Switzerland

A Swiss statesman, in an interview with correspondents, summed up his individual reaction, which probably holds good for the majority of the population, when he said:

“War will come. We will try to stay out at any price, save our liberty. The moment a foreign soldier crosses our border, we will fight.

“And you may rest assured that we shall fight to the last man.”