

**Zeitschrift:** Helvetia : magazine of the Swiss Society of New Zealand  
**Herausgeber:** Swiss Society of New Zealand  
**Band:** 5 (1939-1940)  
**Heft:** 9

**Artikel:** The mobilisation of the Swiss Army (September 1939)  
**Autor:** [s.n.]  
**DOI:** <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-943259>

### **Nutzungsbedingungen**

Die ETH-Bibliothek ist die Anbieterin der digitalisierten Zeitschriften. Sie besitzt keine Urheberrechte an den Zeitschriften und ist nicht verantwortlich für deren Inhalte. Die Rechte liegen in der Regel bei den Herausgebern beziehungsweise den externen Rechteinhabern. [Siehe Rechtliche Hinweise.](#)

### **Conditions d'utilisation**

L'ETH Library est le fournisseur des revues numérisées. Elle ne détient aucun droit d'auteur sur les revues et n'est pas responsable de leur contenu. En règle générale, les droits sont détenus par les éditeurs ou les détenteurs de droits externes. [Voir Informations légales.](#)

### **Terms of use**

The ETH Library is the provider of the digitised journals. It does not own any copyrights to the journals and is not responsible for their content. The rights usually lie with the publishers or the external rights holders. [See Legal notice.](#)

**Download PDF:** 14.03.2025

**ETH-Bibliothek Zürich, E-Periodica, <https://www.e-periodica.ch>**

COMMUNICATIONS FROM THE SWISS CONSULATE AT WELLINGTON,  
P.O. BOX 386.

NACHRICHTEN DES SCHWEIZERISCHEN KONSULATS IN  
WELLINGTON, P.O. BOX 386.

The Swiss Consulate at Wellington is greatly interested in receiving clippings of any New Zealand newspapers and magazines, bearing on any Swiss topics, not including, of course, cable and radio news which appears through the whole New Zealand press.

The members of the Swiss Benevolent Society of New Zealand and other readers are requested to kindly mail any clippings of the described nature to the Consulate of Switzerland, which will greatly appreciate such help. Postage will be refunded by return mail.

-- +++++ --

Das Schweizerische Konsulat in Wellington ist den Mitgliedern des Schweizerischen Wohltätigkeitsgesellschaft in Neuseeland sowie anderen Landsleuten und Lesern dankbar fuer die Zustellung von jeglichen Zeitungsartikeln in neuseelaendischen Tages-, - Wochen- und Monatszeitungen und Zeitschriften ueber die Schweiz oder schweizerische Dinge, fuer welche es grosses Interesse hat. Ausgenommen sind natuerlich die ueblichen Telegramm- und Radio-nachrichten aus der Schweiz, welche in allen Tages-zeitungen erscheinen. Portospesen werden den Einsendern umgehend verguetet.

+++++

THE MOBILISATION OF THE SWISS ARMY (SEPTEMBER 1939).

Switzerland has no standing army, only militia. She must therefore have and employ a special system for mobilisation, whenever the danger of war is threatening.

At the beginning of the present European war the Swiss Federal Council ordered the mobilisation of the whole army for the 2nd September. Exactly 10 minutes before the proclamation of the British declaration of war against the German Reich the whole Swiss army stood fully equipped ready to move. The mobilisation was really a miracle of precision. Still it does seem a riddle to anyone not acquainted with Swiss conditions how an army can be called up for a given day on the eve of which every officer and man of that same army is going about his civil business, and how by noon of the day indicated half a million men can march, with horse and cart, an army compact and ready, and how at the very same moment all the frontier gaps are manned and put in a state of defence.

The apparent mystery of this precision and speed is no secret to the Swiss soldier, but just a tradition centuries old. Every soldier has his complete equipment, uniform and weapons at home, year in and year out.

Similarly the commanders of every rank have not only the registers, but all orders down to the slightest detail. The men detailed to guard the frontiers have even the ammunition necessary for the first days of fighting. In time of peace also an exact register is made of motor vehicles and serviceable waggons and horses, often with the estimated price of the same, so that the troops as they appear at the points of assembly find these means of communication and of transport ready to the minute for their use.

All the railways run according to the war time-table from the first hour of the day of mobilisation onwards, and the timetable is planned among other things to effect smoothly the transport of the masses of men travelling in. The mobilisation, being extremely decentralised, makes the use of the railway frequently unnecessary, since hundreds of thousands reach the assembly point

within 2 or 3 hours on foot or on bicycle or with the horses and communal vehicles. For one should not forget that a small country possessing such modern means of communication and excellent railway and road systems can carry its soldiers very speedily to the place of mobilisation and take its troops just as quickly to the border, because after all the frontiers are nowhere very distant.

Another special feature which favours a speedy mobilisation is the dense network of telephones, telegraphs and wireless-stations. In Switzerland with a population of only  $4\frac{1}{2}$  millions, there exist round about half a million telephone and radio subscribers. This means in practice that in almost every home there is means for the speediest receipt of news from a distance. As a matter of fact, the telegram ordering mobilisation, couched in the four languages of Switzerland, takes only half an hour to reach the most remote villages in the high ranges. And there the President of the Communal Council sets about using the means at his disposal to inform the militia-men that their country is calling them. Last September the oldest and most venerable means were used to call the sons of Switzerland to arms: beacons on the peaks and wild pealing of church bells in the valleys - and 10 minutes before the first declaration of war the Swiss army stood ready to march, while the frontier guards already had manned the gates giving entry to their land.

---- +++++ ----

#### RATIONING IN SWITZERLAND.

During the war of 1914-1918 neutrals were frequently accused of enriching themselves at the expense of the belligerent nations. Whereas a few individuals in industry and commerce made rapid fortunes, soon enough decimated by special taxes, fixed on a sliding scale, the Swiss Confederation had to pay the cost of the mobilisation of the army and meet other heavy expenses. Its national debt increased considerably. For the middle classes of Switzerland and for the Swiss public economy the Great War was an extremely heavy burden.

The Swiss nation cannot exist without importing a great part of its food stuffs and of the raw materials needed by its industry. Even though power is furnished largely by electricity, Switzerland has to import all the coal needed for heating and for the making of gas. The extremely diversified soil of Switzerland is poor in ores. It produces salt, but none of the metals that are used by the very important machine-making industry. Modern Switzerland needs importations as a living being needs air to live. This small country is situated very far from the sea.

During the 1914/1918 war Switzerland experienced very great difficulties in obtaining supplies. From 1917 onwards, the situation became very critical. The railways were then still not electrified. The train services were gradually reduced to a minimum; expresses and all Sunday travelling were suppressed; pine wood had to be used for engine firing. The population of Switzerland suffered still more from a rationing of food which, even though introduced late, was none the less severe. Mouthfuls of bread and cups of milk had to be counted and we had to do without fat. Ration cards, increasing in numbers every month, granted increasingly reduced rations. The health of many children and adults suffered from these privations. Many belligerent nations, sorely tried in other respects, were not aware of this fact.

Like all the states of Europe, Switzerland, having learnt the lesson of experience, was better prepared in 1939 than it was 25 years ago to meet the difficulties involved in a new war between its neighbours. But geography cannot be altered. And, if it is