

# A famous Vaudois : General Henri Guisan

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## A famous Vaudois: General Henri Guisan

To this day Guisan has something of a cult status. His presence is everywhere; just check the maps of major Swiss cities: Almost all have a Guisan Street, an Avenue General Guisan or a Place General Guisan. And it is very probable that the general's portrait still hangs prominently in some old village bars.



Guisan Inspection Jura 1940

No fewer than 300,000 people attended the general's funeral in Lausanne in 1960, the biggest attendance at a funeral in Swiss history. Swiss television broadcast the funeral live and in its entirety.

To mark the anniversary of the Swiss army chief's passing, a 55-minute film, simply entitled "The General", was shown in all four language regions last year.

The film did not attempt to rewrite Switzerland's role during the Second World War, but to show the journey of a man. Some of the material featured is unique, using unpublished archives. "The General" retraces the footsteps of Henri Guisan on a path from a country bumpkin from the canton of Vaud to that of army chief and legendary Swiss figure.

The image of the general emerging from this documentary is overwhelmingly positive. It is that of a man close to his troops at a time when military commanders still preferred to keep a certain distance from their subordinates.

Politically, it is also the image of a patriot determined to defend his country against the Nazi threat. To this end, he came up with the "Réduit" strategy, a concept of using the Alps as an impregnable defence and a way of controlling transalpine roads and rail links.

However, the documentary is not a eulogy to Guisan's glorious past. Historians and eyewitnesses also pick apart his actions during this turbulent period.

Documents found by the Germans during the defeat of France in spring 1940 put Switzerland in a delicate position. Research has shown that risky secret agreements between the general and the French side were in place. And in March 1943 he would meet Walter Schellenberg, head of espionage against the SS, on Swiss territory without informing the government.

*from swissinfo*

## Lavaux – a UNESCO World Heritage Site

The Lavaux Vineyard Terraces, stretching for about 30 km along the south-facing northern shores of Lake Geneva from the Chateau de Chillon to the eastern outskirts of Lausanne in the Vaud region, cover the lower slopes of the mountainside between the villages and the lake. Although there is some evidence that vines were grown in the area in Roman times, the present vine terraces can be traced back to the 11th century, when Benedictine and Cistercian monasteries controlled the area. It is an outstanding example of a centuries-long interaction between people and their environment, developed to optimize local resources so as to produce a highly valued wine that has always been important to the economy.



Lavaux Vineyard Terraces

Now a UNESCO World Heritage Site, the region encompasses 14 municipalities and six certified winemaking sites - Lutry, Villette, Saint-Saphorin, Epesses&Calamin, Dezaley and Chardonne. Lavaux greatly contributed to the development of the city of Lausanne and its surrounding areas. Yet, this creeping urban sprawl would leave the region vulnerable. The measures that were introduced to protect Lavaux and the committed backing which they received from the local community were exemplary.

*internet*

