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THE COMING OF AGE OF SWISSAIR.

Twenty years ago, in the spring of 1931, the two rival Swiss airlines "Ad Astra Aero" and "Balair," amalgamated and the *Swissair* was born. In commemoration of the event, a special illustrated birthday edition of the *Swissair Journal* has been published in which the story of Swiss civil and commercial aviation from its inception to the present day is told.

It is a story of gallant enterprise and dogged perseverance in the face of heavy odds and many disappointments. The beginning of civil flying in Switzerland goes back to the year 1919 and is due to the initiative of Oskar Bider whose tragic death, in an air crash on the eve of his intended journey to Italy where he was to take delivery of the first aeroplane, was a great loss to both his country and the cause of aviation. He was succeeded by Fritz Rihner and Henri Pillichody, who, in the same year, founded the "Ad Astra" Company. Soon after, two other airlines were started, the "Avion Tourisme S.A." of Geneva and the "Aero Gesellschaft Comte, Mittelholzer and Co." of Zurich. In 1920 these three companies, which had been in keen competition, merged into the "Ad Astra", one of the parents of *Swissair*. The other parent company, the "Balair" was founded 1925 by a number of Basle businessmen and operated with an initial capital of 100,000 francs and a single-engined Fokker plane. In 1926 the capital was increased threefold and a further five Fokkers were purchased.

Before the introduction of the fast and modern "Douglas" types, the Swiss airlines experimented with other American makes of aircraft, the "Clark", the "Curtiss Condor" and the "Lockheed-Orion" all of which, though found to be an improvement on the earlier Dutch and German models, were easily surpassed by the later "Douglas" machines. With these well-equipped modern planes, the *Swissair* was able to build up a vast and world-wide network of air services. The measure of progress achieved is revealed in the fact that during 1950 no less than 312,000 passengers were safely flown across the Atlantic.

It is a far cry from the luxurious comfort of present-day air-travel to those early days when the passenger, wrapped in a leather coat and his eyes protected by huge goggles, squeezed as best he could into the front-seat, next to the pilot, in the primitive single-engined plane then in use. Before the take-off, he was

made to sign an agreement in which he waived his right to any damages; he travelled at his own risk. The fare from Zurich to Geneva was 110 francs. The flight, not infrequently, ended in a forced landing amidst a heard of frightened cattle or in a ploughed field whereon the final destination had to be reached by train.

The vicissitudes of the Swiss air-lines included periods of considerable financial loss. More than once — in fact quite recently — Government intervention and subsidies became necessary to keep the lines going. But financial difficulties were not the worst misfortunes that befell them. Far heavier blows were experienced by the toll of valuable human lives lost in the earlier stages of flying. Fortunately the number of accidents was, in relation to the mileage flown, quite small, but those that did occur were all the more keenly felt and the victims deeply mourned.

The companies were most fortunate in the men who directed and served them. Outstanding among them was the great Walter Mittelholzer, one of the early pioneers who unfortunately did not live to see the full expansion of the schemes he had initiated. Mittelholzer was an airman of international repute, a brilliant pilot as well as an able administrator. Lord Beaverbrook, a frequent passenger of his, paid him a glowing tribute in which he described Mittelholzer as one of the foremost conquerors of the air.

There is something inherent in the Swiss character — steady nerves, mental stability and a highly developed sense of duty — which makes for efficiency and reliability and renders the Swiss eminently suitable for the tasks an air-company demands from them. Like the Alpine guides, the Swiss airmen, from the Directors down to the ground staff, are at all times essentially dependable and admirably fitted for their job.

For a small country like Switzerland, with its obvious limitations and the geographical and technical handicaps that beset it, to have built up and developed a great international air-service such as the *Swissair*, is no mean achievement. It must not be forgotten that, unlike the belligerent countries, Switzerland did not directly benefit from the tremendous impetus the war gave to aviation. The Swiss, after the war, had to begin afresh from scratch and the highest praise is due to all concerned in the management and working of the *Swissair* for the remarkable progress it has since made.

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The *Swiss Observer*, happy in the knowledge that it voices the feelings of every reader, offers the *Swissair* on the occasion of this twentieth birthday, the warmest congratulations and best wishes for the future.

J.J.F.S.

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FOUR IN A JEEP (A)

Like previous films produced by Preasens Films, Zurich — among them *Marie Louise*, *The Last Chance*, and *The Search* — Leopold Lindtberg's *Four in a Jeep* deals with one of the most burning problems of our time. In this case it is the conflict between East and West in Central Europe, and its consequences in terms of human suffering. The film is set in Vienna — the only area in the world where a joint four-power administration is still functioning — and its story centres on the relations of the personnel of a four-power military police jeep with each other and with the people of Vienna.

Four in a Jeep approaches its controversial subject in a humane and objective spirit, without sentimentality or facile optimism. In contrast to the spate of propaganda films from Western as well as Eastern Studios, which portray the situation completely in terms of black and white, *Four in a Jeep* represents a plea for a little sanity and humanity in the behaviour of nations towards each other.

An international cast, headed by the Swedish

Hollywood star Viveca Lindfors, was assembled in Vienna for this film. Miss Lindfors gives a terribly moving and sincere performance in the part of Franziska, the simple Viennese girl who becomes the unwilling object of attention on the part of the four occupying powers. There are convincing and incisive performances from Ralph Meeker, Michael Medwin and Dinan, as the American, British and French sergeants respectively, and an outstanding portrayal from a new-comer, Yeseff Yadin, in the part of the Russian sergeant caught in the conflict between duty and human sympathy. Special attention must be drawn to Richard Schweizer's brilliant script, which achieves the unique feat of making a film in four languages comprehensible to English audiences without the aid of sub-titles.

Four in a Jeep has already aroused a considerable amount of interest all over the world, and its showing at Cannes gave rise to a minor international incident. After the screening the Russians lodged a protest against the film with the Festival Committee. Having viewed the film once more, the Committee stated that it contained nothing that could be regarded as derogatory to the Soviet Union or the Red Army, and the Russians then declared themselves satisfied with this decision. The famous Russian film director Pudovkin, who was a member of the Russian delegation at Cannes, even went so far as to praise Lindtberg's handling of his actors in the highest terms.

Four in a Jeep will commence its première run at the Academy Cinema on Thursday, 7th June, in the same programme with *Hue and Cry*.

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