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SWITZERLAND — THE CROSSROADS OF THE AIR.

By John Elliott, Press Officer — SWISSAIR.

For many years now the great international express trains have stopped in Switzerland, setting down and taking aboard tourists and business men bound for every country in Europe. Twenty or thirty years ago their most distant starting points were London or Stockholm, Istanbul or Budapest. To-day travellers arriving in Switzerland after about the same time spent on their journey come from Sydney, Tokyo, Bombay, Johannesburg, New York, Buenos Aires or Rio de Janeiro. But to-day they come by air, in luxury and comfort.

Just as the train passenger from London can, on arrival in Basle or Lausanne, pick up a connection for Vienna, Rome or Belgrade, so a passenger from Australia en route for South America or another from South Africa bound for the United States will find a direct air connection in Zurich or Geneva.

Switzerland owes this role of international crossroads to three main factors, its geographical position, its economic importance and its natural beauty. Geographically, the country is situated not only in the heart of Europe, but also in the centre of the more densely populated hemisphere. If, on a map of the world, one draws a circle whose centre is Switzerland and whose radius is exactly half the distance from Switzerland to its antipodes, the hemisphere so obtained includes the whole of Europe, Asia, Africa, North America, Central America and a part of South America — i.e. about 94 per cent of the entire world population.

Three of the regions in this hemisphere — Asia, Europe and North America — have an extremely high density of population. It is, therefore, natural that the bulk of the world's trading activities should take place between them, and more particularly between Europe and the United States, which together account for about 60 per cent of world trade and about 70 per cent of the world's industrial production.

Switzerland's importance as commercial and financial centre has long been established. The repu-

tation of the products of its watchmaking, engineering and textile industries has spread throughout the world. Its stable currency is freely convertible and thus a very popular medium of international exchange. Geneva is not only the European Headquarters of the United Nations, but houses also the head offices of many other international organisations. As a venue of the world's statesmen for international conferences the city's name has become part of the political vocabulary of our times.

The country's natural beauty and its unique opportunities for summer recreation and winter sports have for decades attracted tourists in their millions. Many people from all over the world come to Switzerland's health resorts to become well again in the pure mountain air. Every year many children from Royal Houses and good families of every nation enter Swiss finishing schools and other educational establishments to receive a first class education.

All this has also attracted to Switzerland the international airlines, for they too follow the trade routes. In the space of a few years, the country has become a bustling crossroads of commercial aviation.

The first international air services to Switzerland started in 1922 and their number, despite the interruption of the Second World War, has grown phenomenally since. Three large intercontinental airports have been built at Zurich, Geneva and Basle. To-day they are regularly used by 18 foreign airlines as well as by Swissair, the national airline of Switzerland. During the summer of 1955, 330 flights a week were

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flown to Zurich, 200 to Geneva and 50 to Basle. Together with Swissair's, the number of these airlines' passengers arriving at or departing from Swiss airports in 1954 totalled 666,598 (not counting passengers in transit). The figure for 1953 was 512,948. For this year it is expected to reach three quarters of a million.

If we include in our figures passengers in transit, Zurich Airport handled nearly 600,000 passengers last year alone and thus advanced to the position of sixth largest airport of Europe. Its share of commercial air traffic on Swiss airports was 55.6 per cent, with Geneva accounting for 37.5 and Basle for 5.9 per cent.

The great number of foreign airlines operating into and out of Switzerland is evidence not only of the country's importance from the commercial and tourist point of view, but also of the Swiss Government's liberal policy in the field of air traffic. Switzerland has always opened her doors and her airports to any carrier wanting to fly there. In this, the Government's policy has been guided by the desire to establish as good and as many connections as possible in every direction. It is also in keeping with Switzerland's tradition as the oldest democracy in Europe. Nor are the Swiss authorities likely to forget that air transport has freed the country from its dependence on its neighbours in the sphere of communications, thus bringing untold advantages to its relations with the outside world.

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These are the considerations on which Swissair bases its network and its time-tables. Its aims are to benefit the Swiss economy and tourist industry and to offer visitors an efficient and fast means of travel. Therefore, the company has tried to establish the greatest possible number of direct services with few or no intermediate stops. Situated in the heart of Europe, Switzerland forms the centre from which all of Swissair's lines radiate outwards to cover the Continent with a dense network serving almost every important city. Here the overseas visitor will find a convenient air connection to anywhere else in Europe and to all the other Continents as well.

Switzerland is especially proud of her transatlantic air services to the United States. They started in 1946 when Trans World Airlines inaugurated flights from the United States to Geneva, which already then had a concrete runway capable of taking the largest commercial aircraft. In the following year Swissair added its regular services to New York via Shannon. The ever-increasing passenger and cargo traffic across the Atlantic is convincing proof of the friendly relations between the two countries. While only about 39,000 North Americans visited Switzerland in 1938, their number had risen to over 125,000 in 1954. Air transport, its speed and convenience, played no doubt a large part in this development.

And yet air transport is still in its infancy; soon larger and faster aircraft will fly the Atlantic from Switzerland non-stop and provide many more and speedier connections to all parts of the globe. Traffic on this crossroads of the air is likely to go on increasing steeply, to the mutual benefit of Switzerland and her friends all over the world.

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