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A Swiss Tradition for Marksmanship (S.N.T.O.)

THE SHOOTING FESTIVAL AT THUN

One of the rather unique sporting events in the world is the Swiss National Shooting Festival. The 49th of these four-yearly events has been conducted on a grand scale. 83,000 shooters competed in the traditional 300,100 and 50 metre disciplines and fired three and a half million cartridges worth over half a million francs.

The Festival started on Monday,

7th July, with the military contests. On the 10th, the flag of the Shooting Federation was ceremoniously carried through the emblazoned streets of Thun by the delegation from Zurich. Thun has been the confederal military centre and parade-ground for 150 years. For the occasion of the Festival, an exhibition in the town presented photographs, documents and museum pieces

illustrating the traditional importance of the gun in the life of the Swiss and their love of marksmanship.

July 15th was the official day, and President Von Moos was present to make a patriotic speech. Every day was devoted to a distinct delegation. There was a day for Western Switzerland, another for North-Western Switzerland, one for Central Switzerland, one for the Veterans, one for Youth Associations, one for the Swiss abroad. The contest ended on July 28th with a cantonal match confronting the finalists of the previous days. It was won by Theo Dizler, of Oberwil, who reaped 571 points out of a total of 600 and was crowned King of the contest. He still had some way to go to beat the American Olympic crackshot Gary Anderson, who, attracted to the Festival, realised the amazing result of 688 points.

In order to carry such a populous contest through without hitch and injury, three thousand guards and flag-holders were kept busy. Five rifle ranges were in constant use, including that of Guntelsey, the most modern of Switzerland.

Some interesting conclusions could be drawn from this contest. It was proved, that the army's assault rifle, now universally introduced among the elite troops, was as precise as the carbine of a sharpshooter. The contest showed that civilians could be as good marksmen as police officers, army instructors and other uniformed public servants. The plastic targets used for the first time proved themselves far longer-lived than the jute ones normally used. Conclusive experiments were carried through with a few electronic targets, which, displaying the results automatically on a panel, could do away with both markers and "stickers". Result cards were computer-punched. The general organisation of the event was so smooth that it set foreign observers a-marvelling.

The Swiss short wave radio service organised a shooting festival for the Swiss abroad who could not make the journey to Thun. About a thousand compatriots on the 5 continents fought for the St. Martin's cup (a group event) and took part in the Tacoma Match (named after the American town of Tacoma, whose Swiss rifle club won the 1954 contest) and in the Individual Contest.