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COMMENT

Choosing an aircraft

The Federal Council has arrived at a decision on its military-aircraft procurement policy. It has recently approved a Military Department report calling for the purchase of a new interceptor fighter in 1980.

Ever since Switzerland completed its own Mirage fighters at almost four times the budgeted cost, jet fighter procurement has been a particularly sensitive issue. It took six years for military experts to shortlist two aircraft, the new generation of Mirage and the "Corsair", as replacements for the Venoms and eventually the Hunters of the Air Force. This hesitation was due in part to the absence of a definite strategy. The need to replace machines older than the pilots who manned them was generally accepted but the Air Force had to find a compromise between strike and ground-assault capabilities, costs, performance in Alpine conditions, and adaptability to existing infrastructure. The choice was a difficult one to make and depended to a great extent on the personal conceptions of the evaluators and also to their national likings. Thus the American-built Corsair found more favour among the Swiss-German military hierarchy whereas the Dassault-built Mirage attracted specialists among the other linguistic groups. There was disagreement all round on the results of the extensive tests carried out on both

aircraft over Lake Lucerne. The official report said that the Corsair had earned better marks, but this was disputed by many. In fact, Swiss experts were so unsure of the correctness of their choice, which eventually fell on the Corsair, that they were looking at other possible contenders until the purchase and results of six years of sophisticated evaluation were scrapped. Thus one of the last aircraft to be examined was the Harrier jump-jet, which a Swiss test pilot managed to crash earlier this year, barely escaping alive.

Although the Government's indecision was widely criticised by Army circles – the Chief of armaments procurement resigned – it was perhaps the right attitude since a decision involving the expenditure of 1.3 billion francs at a time when the State should have shown the example of thrift could not be taken half-heartedly. Prompted by Mr. Nello Celio, who was known to be strongly opposed to the purchase of a new aircraft, the Federal Council decided to forget the Mirage and the Corsair and start the whole evaluation process afresh.

At this stage, no potential aircraft has been named but it has been decided to keep the 18-year-old Hunters flying until 1980 as a ground assault and tactical aircraft. What with revised electronics, refurbished guns and new engines – including deliveries of re-conditioned Hunters from Hawker Siddeley – Switzerland hopes to have a credible tactical weapon until 1980. The protection of Swiss air space, which requires a fast interceptor jet-fighter will be guaranteed

by the Mirage 111 of which Switzerland has built 55. By 1980, the Mirage will have lost some of its modernity and will be used for ground assault. The aircraft can be used for both ground assault and air attack as the Israelis have shown. The Mirage will therefore be the mainstay of the ground-assault strike power during the 1980s and seems likely to be used for as long as the Venom (about 25 years!). This leaves the military free to fix their choice on an interceptor aircraft and thus change the original purpose of the evaluation process.

The accent is therefore laid on the defence of Swiss air space and no longer on the protection or assault of ground troops. This helps evaluators to know what they must look for. When the Corsair and the Mirage F1 were in the balance, the experts were faced with the difficult choice of a plane that had shown superb ground-assault ability (Corsair) and a machine which might not prove such a good specialist but be more versatile and able to defend itself better (Mirage).

The Swiss will now have to select a new supersonic fighter. The choice seems very limited now that they have exhausted a vast list of potential machines. They have even had a look at the Anglo-French *Jaguar*, a Mach 1.4 fighter which can also be used for ground-assault and which will replace the Phantom in Britain. Another possibility is to buy the Multiple Role Combat Aircraft (MRCA) being developed by Britain, Germany and Holland. But this, too, is a dual purpose aircraft which will start the same ground-assault or interceptor debate anew. They

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could settle for the F.15 under advanced development in America but it will probably be considered far too expensive. They could buy the Mig 23 – assuming the Soviets were ready to sell it – but Swiss neutrality is not universal to that

point.

Despite the Government's agreement to look for a fighter jet, more controversy can still be expected on the combat plane issue.

P.M.B.

CHRISTMAS APPEAL

As in past years, the SWISS BENEVOLENT SOCIETY and the SWISS CHURCHES IN LONDON are endeavouring to prepare the little extras, which most of us associate with Christmas, for those compatriots who, for reasons of age

or illness, are not able to provide them for themselves and their families.

Cash donations or cheques and postal orders may be sent to the following address: SWISS BENEVOLENT SOCIETY, 31 Conway Street, London W1P 5HL.

SWISS EVENTS

CANDIDATES TO THE FEDERAL COUNCIL NOMINATED

The successors to the three retiring federal councillors – Hans Peter Tschudi, Roger Bonvin and Nello Celio – have been designated by their respective parties. They are Mr. Arthur Schmid, a Socialist from Aarau, Mr. Enrico Franzoni, a Christian Democrat from Ticino and Mr. Henri Schmitt, a Radical Democrat from Geneva. The three men had to overcome strong opposition from other leading politicians. Thus Mr. Franzoni only scraped through in front of Mr. Leo Schurmann, the Swiss "Prices Watchdog" and three ballots were required before Mr. Schmitt could emerge ahead of Mr. Andre Chevallaz, former Mayor of Lausanne, who had been tipped as winner. Although the standing and record of the three candidates were a major consideration, it is possible that linguistic and regional factors were the determinant factor in the end. Thus it is likely that Mr. Franzoni was chosen among the Christian Democrats so as to keep a representative from Ticino at the Federal Council after the departure of Mr. Celio. Mr. Schmitt, from Geneva, probably won over Mr. Chevallaz because Geneva has not been represented at the Executive for 57 years and because Mr. Pierre Graber, though a Socialist and a Neuchatelois, had made his career in Vaud, and also been mayor of Lausanne.

The Federal Assembly, which brings together both the National Council and the Council of States was to ratify the nomination of the three men on 5th December. They will step into office on 1st January. Mr. Schmid, 45, is a former member of the State Council of Aarau, a former lawyer and a former judge. Mr. Franzoni, 53, a lawyer by profession, has had a long career in cantonal politics and has been active in several parliamentary commissions. He has been Speaker of the National Council for the past two years. Mr. Schmitt, 47, is also a lawyer by

profession but most of his career has been in local and federal politics. He has been involved in the reform of the Swiss criminal code.

DETERMINED MEASURES TO SAVE PETROL STOCKS

The Swiss authorities have reacted to the petrol crisis as drastically as any other country in Europe. Switzerland is the only country that has introduced speed limits, a ban on Sunday driving and statutory restrictions. These are only a step, depending on how the situation develops, to full rationing. The measures taken so far were gradual. On 8th November, the Federal Council called on the people to save fuel by reducing the temperature of their homes, using less hot water, controlling their heating appliances, etc. (Switzerland uses more petrol for heating than for motoring). On 14th November, it imposed a 100 kmh speed limit on all roads, and on 21st November it decreed a ban on driving during the three following Sundays and fuel supply restrictions. The ban was effective from Sunday at 3 a.m. to 3 a.m. the following night and corresponded with the German Sunday ban so as to avoid traffic hold-ups at the border.

At the time of writing, there were eight "prohibitions":

- no driving above 100 kmh
- no storing of petrol
- no Sunday motoring (certain exceptions for doctors, ministers, etc.)
- cut-down in the Army's fuel consumption
- quotas on fuel importers
- supplies to petrol stations reduced by 20 per cent
- supplies to domestic fuel dealers reduced by 25 per cent
- strong lowering of temperature in federal buildings

The Swiss people were asked to

limit the temperature of their houses to 20° by day and 17° by night.

ANGRY FARMERS DEMONSTRATE FOR INCREASED AGRICULTURAL PRICES

About ten thousand farmers, two-thirds of whom appeared to come from the French-speaking parts of the country, staged a demonstration on Federal Palace Square to demand a 20 per cent increase of the price of their products. A beating rain didn't deter the demonstrators from hearing their leaders accuse the Government of not having protected their income. They carried a wide variety of banners and streamers complaining of "slavery", "exploitation from the middlemen" and "famine". One also complained of Army exercises on farmland. All these placards were piled against the closed entrance of the Federal Palace as the demonstrators dispersed without incident after an hour.

Swiss peasants feel they have been left behind in the prosperity stakes. Federal support has remained stagnant during the past three or four years. Although subsidies are expected to reach almost a billion francs this year, farmers find that rising costs and pre-emptive foreign competition have prevented them from obtaining a fair reward for their efforts.

SWISS WRITER WINS FRENCH LITERARY PRIZE

For the first time ever a Swiss has been awarded France's most coveted literary prize, the *Prix Goncourt*. The laureate was the Vaudois writer Jacques Chessex whose novel *L'orgre* earned him six out of ten votes at the fifth ballot by the Goncourt Academy. The only other Swiss ever considered as a candidate for the Goncourt was C. F. Ramuz (also a Vaudois), for his novel *Aline*. The fact that a Swiss should have been thus honoured by the French literary world shows that writers of French expression have won growing recognition across the Jura. So far, Switzerland has been known in Paris for its films, its artists, and especially its literary critics. Now, the French are becoming aware of the literary performance of a people who, although belonging to a different country, partake of a same culture. Chessex, whose picture was even in the *Evening Standard*, had already established his reputation at home by his poems and his "Confessions du Paster Burg" (1967). His work shows him vying with a sense of guilt inherited from a rigid Protestant background so as to break into the open spaces of sensual experience. In his last book, the "Ogre" is the dominating father of the Hero, Jean Chalmet, who fights throughout his life to regain his own identity and detach it from the overwhelming personality of a father whom he both adored and hated. The book is written in a tough but elegant style with the imagery and poetry which the author had already been noted for.