



**Calhoun: The NPS Institutional Archive**

---

Theses and Dissertations

Thesis Collection

---

1994-06

**Civil-military relations in low-intensity conflict:  
Switzerland's territorial defense during World War II**

Wegmueller, Hans.

Monterey, California. Naval Postgraduate School

---

<http://hdl.handle.net/10945/28028>



Calhoun is a project of the Dudley Knox Library at NPS, furthering the precepts and goals of open government and government transparency. All information contained herein has been approved for release by the NPS Public Affairs Officer.

**Dudley Knox Library / Naval Postgraduate School  
411 Dyer Road / 1 University Circle  
Monterey, California USA 93943**

<http://www.nps.edu/library>



DUDLEY KNOX LIBRARY  
NAVAL GRADUATE SCHOOL  
MONTEREY CA 93943-5101





Further distribution only as directed.

**CIVIL-MILITARY RELATIONS IN LOW-INTENSITY CONFLICT:  
SWITZERLAND'S TERRITORIAL DEFENSE DURING WORLD WAR II**

by

**Hans Wegmueller**  
Colonel, Swiss Army  
PhD, University of Zurich, 1978

Submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of

**MASTER OF ARTS IN NATIONAL SECURITY AFFAIRS**

from the

NAVAL POSTGRADUATE SCHOOL  
June, 1994

**REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE**Form Approved  
OMB No. 0704-0188

Public reporting burden for this collection of information is estimated to average 1 hour per response, including the time for reviewing instructions, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing the collection of information. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden, to Washington Headquarters Services, Directorate for Information Operations and Reports, 1215 Jefferson Davis Highway, Suite 1204, Arlington, VA 22202-4302, and to the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reduction Project (0704-0188), Washington, DC 20503.

**1. AGENCY USE ONLY (Leave Blank)****2. REPORT DATE****3. REPORT TYPE**

June, 1994

Master's Thesis

**4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE**CIVIL-MILITARY RELATIONS IN LOW-INTENSITY CONFLICT: SWITZERLAND'S  
TERRITORIAL DEFENSE DURING WORLD WAR II**5. FUNDING NUMBERS****6. AUTHOR(S)**

Wegmueller, Hans

**7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAMES(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)**Naval Postgraduate School  
Monterey, CA 93943-5000**8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION****9. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)****10. SPONSORING/MONITORING  
AGENCY REPORT NUMBER****11. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES**

The views expressed in this thesis are those of the author and do not reflect the official policy or position of the Department of Defense or the U.S. Government.

**12a. DISTRIBUTION/AVAILABILITY STATEMENT**

Further distribution only as directed.

**12b. DISTRIBUTION CODE****13. ABSTRACT ( Maximum 200 words )**

Switzerland's experience in the Second World War differs markedly from that of any other European nation and offers a unique historical opportunity to study civil-military relations in a democratic environment under the strain of a long-lasting existential threat. Entirely on its own and surrounded by an extremely aggressive enemy block, Switzerland had to struggle in that hazy, difficult-to-define situation between war and peace, which in modern terms would be referred to as "low intensity conflict". Thus military and civilian authorities were literally forced to think in terms of modern national security policy and to adopt a holistic security philosophy. It became apparent that the disproportionate role of the military component did not measure up to the threat and was at odds with a modern, overall security policy. The results were not limited to the serious, practically insoluble conflicts between military and civilian authorities, the preparedness and the dissuasive power of the army itself was thus called into question. The historical experience showed clearly that modern territorial defense requires first and foremost a balance between the individual components of security policy carefully adapted to the political, economic, and psychological realities of the nation. The military component, on the other hand, can only fulfill its mission if it can concentrate the personnel and material resources at its disposal on its original task of military defense; in the terminology of World War II, the army is responsible for "warfare", not "national defense".

**14. SUBJECT TERMS****16. PRICE CODE****15. NUMBER OF PAGES**

171

**17. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION  
OF REPORT**

Unclassified

**18. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION  
OF THIS PAGE**

Unclassified

**19. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION  
OF ABSTRACT**

Unclassified

**20. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT**

UL

## ABSTRACT

Switzerland's experience in the Second World War differs markedly from that of any other European nation and offers a unique historical opportunity to study civil-military relations in a democratic environment under the strain of a long-lasting existential threat. Entirely on its own and surrounded by an extremely aggressive enemy block, Switzerland had to struggle in that hazy, difficult-to-define situation between war and peace, which in modern terms would be referred to as "low intensity conflict". Thus military and civilian authorities were literally forced to think in terms of modern national security policy and to adopt a holistic security philosophy. It became apparent that the disproportionate role of the military component did not measure up to the threat and was at odds with a modern, overall security policy. The results were not limited to the serious, practically insoluble conflicts between military and civilian authorities, the preparedness and the dissuasive power of the army itself was thus called into question. The historical experience showed clearly that modern territorial defense requires first and foremost a balance between the individual components of security policy carefully adapted to the political, economic, and psychological realities of the nation. The military component, on the other hand, can only fulfill its mission if it can concentrate the personnel and material resources at its disposal on its original task of military defense; in the terminology of World War II, the army is responsible for "warfare", not "national defense".



10515  
V.13345  
c.1

**TABLE OF CONTENTS**

- I. INTRODUCTION ..... 1
- II. OPERATIONAL FREEDOM ..... 10
  - A. APPROACHES TO SECURITY POLICY ..... 10
    - 1. The Supreme Swiss Commander's Fundamental Duty ..... 10
    - 2. Neutrality Considerations ..... 14
    - 3. Operational Process and Readiness ..... 19
    - 4. Material Limitations ..... 33
  - B. THE PHILOSOPHY OF DISSUASION ..... 41
    - 1. Retreat to Dissuasion ..... 41
      - a. The Limmat Line ..... 41
      - b. The National Reduit ..... 44
    - 2. Imbalance in Security Policy ..... 49
- III. PRESENCE AND READINESS ..... 57
  - A. CONFLICTS OVER SCOPE OF AUTHORITY ..... 57

B. CONFLICT OVER TROOP CALL-UPS .....	61
C. MOBILIZATION .....	72
D. CLOSING THE BORDERS .....	82
IV. COMBAT VALUE .....	86
A. THE CONFLICTING GOALS OF MILITARY AND ECONOMIC DEFENSE .....	86
B. THE PERSONNEL-EXCHANGE SYSTEM .....	91
1. Situation-Based Troop Reductions and Regular Relief .....	91
a. General Relief Planning .....	91
b. Frontier Guards .....	98
2. The Leave System .....	103
3. The Dispensation System .....	114
a. Basic Model .....	114
b. Dispensations in the Pasturing Sector .....	120
4. Deferments .....	123
C. THE LIMITS OF MILITARIZATION .....	125
1. Signs of Exhaustion .....	125
2. Critical Low Points in Military Preparedness .....	137

V. CONCLUSIONS .....	148
BIBLIOGRAPHY .....	159
INITIAL DISTRIBUTION LIST .....	164

## I. INTRODUCTION

The character of human society, and with it the phenomenon of war, has undergone significant changes since Clausewitz defined war as "an act of force" in the sense of a "physical duel."<sup>1</sup> The rapid mechanization of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries eventually permeated all spheres of human existence. Societal structures became increasingly complex, and today are characterized by a multifaceted interdependency between regional and national societies. This interdependency has also become increasingly subtle and dense. As a disadvantage, it has simultaneously increased the vulnerability of modern, industrial society. Particularly important for strategic planning, it has increased the possibility of outside interference and harm through the use of force.

Technological advances have had particular impact on the area of warfare. The potential effects of the machinery of modern warfare have reached immeasurability, leading to radical changes in operational planning and thinking. The consequences of this transformation became apparent suddenly and brutally in the First World War. As a rapid military breakthrough was not forthcoming and the traditional art of strategic maneuvering died on the killing fields of Flanders and France, the struggle deteriorated into bloody trench warfare. This development had the effect of shifting strategy from

---

<sup>1</sup> Clausewitz, *On War*, p. 75.

traditional military victory over the opponent's forces to an effort to break down the opponent's resistance with all possible means, leading directly to the tragedy of Verdun.

As warfare spread and gained in intensity, it became increasingly necessary to mobilize all of society and all national resources. Non-military aspects were thrust into an increasingly important role in strategic decisionmaking. Modern strategy increasingly pushed warfare beyond the military realm, forming the basis of total war.<sup>2</sup> This concept has survived in some form to this day, though it has undergone major changes. The absurdity of nuclear war, coupled with the increasing vulnerability of modern society, called for finely differentiated and more subtle use of force. The fragility of modern industrial nations has made aggressors feel more and more that it is both more promising and more economical to forgo the final step of using brute military force and instead rely on the wide variety of means short of war which may be used to influence their enemies. Today the tools of "low-intensity conflict" offer the opportunity to achieve the traditional objectives of war in accordance with the vulnerability of modern society. Nonetheless, the British Admiralty's conclusion on the First World War still captures the essence of modern conflict, whether or not it reaches the point of open war:

Nothing can be clearer than the fact that modern war resolves itself into an attempt to throttle the national life. Waged by the whole power of the nation, its ultimate object is to bring pressure on the mass of the enemy people, distressing them by every possible means so as to compel the enemy's government to submit to term.<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Geyer, "German Strategy in the Age of Machine Warfare, 1914-145," in: Paret, *Makers of Modern Strategy*, p. 527 ff.

<sup>3</sup> Cited in Bond, *War and Society in Europe 1870-1970*, p. 144.

Although Switzerland escaped military aggression in both the First and Second World Wars, it was certainly not able to avoid this general trend in modern warfare. In the Second World War, in particular, Switzerland faced threats which initiated and sometimes anticipated postwar developments.

Switzerland's experience in the Second World War differs markedly from that of any other European nation. Since Switzerland's historical experience is different, so too is the historical consciousness of its people, the nation's historical legacy. Often key historic events perceived as a positive collective experience tend to congeal into a national myth, while negative ones become a national trauma. If a nation does not deal properly with historical facts and situations, myths and traumas may have repressive or even disastrous consequences in the continued life of that people.

The acute threat to Switzerland during the Second World War is perceived by the Swiss people as one of the key historic events of the twentieth century, and historic myths have grown up around the National Reduit.<sup>4</sup> The Reduit is the point on which the myths have crystallized, but its historic outgrowths in the last fifty years extend far beyond it. They have clouded the historical view of related issues, such as the operational freedom of the commander-in-chief<sup>5</sup> and the readiness, strength, and combat ability of the Swiss Army during active duty. Switzerland's remarkable escape from military attack and the

---

<sup>4</sup> The *Réduit National*, or national stronghold or redoubt. See Minott.

<sup>5</sup> The Swiss Army has only one full general, who is the commander-in-chief of all Swiss forces and is elected by the nation's parliament in emergency situations such as war or border deployment. His German title is thus simply *Der General*.

uniqueness of the strategic situation the country was forced into in the Second World War have done much to strengthen the myths surrounding the National Reduit.

No other nation of Europe experienced the Second World War in a situation that could even be called comparable. Although the results are rosy in hindsight, it is a fact that in the summer of 1940 Switzerland was in a quite hopeless situation, a situation that was unique for Europe at that time. Entirely on its own and surrounded by an extremely aggressive enemy block, Switzerland lived under a constant military threat for nearly five years and had to struggle for its very survival as an independent nation. Switzerland was in that hazy, difficult-to-define situation between war and peace, facing a threat that often verged on war and which in modern terms would be referred to as a "low intensity conflict."<sup>6</sup> It was a situation of conflict which not only lasted half a decade: In addition to the military threat it involved a broad spectrum of non-military threats.

It was in this situation that Switzerland had its own, special "experience of war." It was spared from war "only inasmuch as it was not subject to outright military attack. However, it did not avoid war in its entirety."<sup>7</sup> This special experience is remarkably unique in history. Once freed from any distortion stemming from the myths surrounding the National Reduit,<sup>8</sup> this experience is of inestimable value for today's Swiss security.

---

<sup>6</sup> The *Field Manual* 100-20 of the Headquarters Department of the Army and the Air Force contains the following definition of *low-intensity conflict*: "Low intensity conflict is a political-military confrontation between contending states and groups below conventional war and above the routine, peaceful competition among states. It frequently involves protracted struggles of competing principles and ideologies. Low intensity conflict ranges from subversion to the use of armed force. It is waged by a combination of means, employing political, economic, international and military instruments".

<sup>7</sup> "Igel im Krieg - ein Trugbild," *Friedenszeitung* 61/86, p.25.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Schaufelberger, *Das "Réduit national" 1940, ein militärhistorischer Sonderfall*; Odermatt, *Zwischen Realität und militärischem Mythos: Zur Entstehung der Réduitstrategie im Jahre*

The experience is not limited to the military question of warfare, but involves practically all aspects of modern defense policy. In this way it is far more fruitful and valuable than traditional war experience gained on the battlefield.

The High Command of the Swiss Army, on which this study will mainly focus, was literally forced to think in terms of modern defense policy by the unique threat of the Second World War. Although some aspects of overall defense had to be considered from time to time, there was little consciously holistic thought in the military leadership. The need to maintain military readiness during five politically, economically, and psychologically difficult years forced of all aspects relevant to defense to be considered. As a result, it was impossible for the High Command to concern itself with only the traditional sphere of warfare, particularly as traditional warfare fortunately never came into play. In this situation, it was only by including all relevant political, economic and psychological factors that intelligent, realistic military decisions could be made--if at all. This shift in the highest military decisionmaking echelons away from purely military considerations toward "civilian" considerations was relatively well-noticed and articulated. Without today's defense terminology, the somewhat confused concept "national defense instead of warfare" was used. The hidden conflict between these two terms shows that warfare was far from being recognized as one component in an overall defense policy at that time.

---

1940; Meyer, *Die schweizerische Réduit-Strategie im Zweiten Weltkrieg*, and "Das Réduit - ein militärischer Mythos", *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, May 8, 1984.



Switzerland's fundamental defense objective, then as now, was to guarantee peace in freedom and independence.<sup>9</sup> This goal led logically to a quite traditional military posture practiced since time immemorial and contained in Syrus' "si vis pacem, para bellum:" Prevention of war through readiness. The technical term for the corresponding Swiss concept, *dissuasion*, is derived from the Latin word *dissuadere*, 'advise against, prevent, discourage,' and was introduced by French author General André Beaufre in the strategic discussion of the nuclear age.<sup>10</sup> This "handy" French term was used by Switzerland to designate its strategy of "preventing war through readiness and a strong territorial defense."<sup>11</sup>

From the beginning, Swiss strategic thinking in the Second World War showed a certain adherence to "dissuasive" principles. This approach can be detected in the structuring of the first line of defense, the "Limmat Line," and becomes quite obvious in the discussion of the Rduit strategy. The ultimate goal of concentrating military forces in the Alps, in the "National Rduit," was dissuasion. One purpose was to show a potential enemy that if it attacked Switzerland, it would have to contend with a drawn out, tenacious mountain battle, with little chance of gaining the key Alpine passes so important for the Axis.

Dissuasion also requires credibility, which is much more than a purely military question. There is a close interrelationship between dissuasion and overall defense

<sup>9</sup> Cf. *Schweizerische Sicherheitspolitik im Wandel*, p. 30.

<sup>10</sup> Däniker, *Dissuasion*, p. 11. The Swiss/French term has been used throughout this document, although the concept shares many features with *deterrence*.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 22.

policy. First, a potential aggressor must recognize that it faces heavy losses in return for any potential gains. Second, it must realize that the defender is practically guaranteed to use its potential to cause losses. If either of these basic conditions is not fulfilled, the dissuasive argument is severely damaged, if not eliminated entirely.<sup>12</sup>

Switzerland's perilous situation in the Second World War showed quite clearly that dissuasion can only be effective in combination with the political, economic, and psychological components of defense policy. Consciously or not, the constant criticism of the National Reduit was always based on insufficient integration of the Reduit strategy into an overall defense concept. This discrepancy is shown by the pointed remarks of Lieutenant General Prisi, Commander of the Second Army Corps: "There is no point defending mountains and glaciers while the Central Plains, with its substantial economic assets and a majority of the population, is simply handed over to the enemy."<sup>13</sup> In fact there is some doubt whether the morale of the troops in the National Reduit would have held out and the strategy prevailed, had the Germans resorted to terrorist acts against the civilian population in the weakly defended Central Plains.<sup>14</sup> Moreover, Prisi's statement reveals a complete lack of awareness of the dissuasive component of the Reduit strategy.<sup>15</sup> Dissuasive strategy and overall defense complement one another to form a

---

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., pp. 16-17.

<sup>13</sup> Minutes of the meeting of July 6, 1940, p. 10. BA R E 5795/145.

<sup>14</sup> According to Odermatt, British Field Marshall Montgomery called the Reduit concept "impracticable nonsense" because German terrorism in the Central Plains could have quickly broken the morale of the troops in the Reduit. Odermatt, *Zwischen Realität und Mythos, Zur Entstehung der Reduitstrategie im Jahre 1940*, Part 2, p. 551.

<sup>15</sup> Even the German Alpine Reduit existed only in the fears of the Allied High Command, it had a noticeable dissuasive effect at the end of the war [cf. Minott, *The fortress that never was*, p. 87].

single unit. An intense desire for independence and self-assertion, an economic defense, a foreign policy aimed at defending independence, and social homogeneity are absolute prerequisites not only for an effective dissuasive strategy, but for territorial defense in general. This has never been shown more clearly in recent Swiss history than during World War II.

In fact, the problem of "national defense versus warfare" harbors an immense potential for conflict. A conflict that became more significant and painful as the war wore on and national resources were increasingly exhausted. Whatever was invested in maintaining military readiness through material and personnel means was an unavoidable drain on other areas of overall defense, particularly the economy and supply. Moreover, the freedom for military measures was increasingly restricted by other aspects of overall defense and often disappeared entirely. In World War II, the Swiss military leadership was trapped in a triple bind between the requirements of an overall defense policy, the principles of dissuasion and territorial defense of a small state, and the principles and requirements of conventional warfare valid at that time. No adequate concept or leadership structure for such a situation yet existed, and the Army High Command was forced into a leadership role in terms of defense policy. The stress was such that in May, 1941, the Chief of the Supreme Swiss Commander's Personal Staff made the resigned observation that the problem of national defense had become a matter of squaring the circle and was insoluble despite the utmost efforts of those involved.<sup>16</sup> As far as military

---

<sup>16</sup> Chief of Staff, May 1941, p. 2. BAr E 5795/86. Major Barbey was the Supreme Swiss Commander's Chief of Staff from June 11, 1940. [Gautschi, *General Henri Guisan*, p. 151].

defense, the operational freedom of the Army leadership, the military's readiness, its reaction time to emergencies, and the strength and training of the Army were constantly threatened.

## II. OPERATIONAL FREEDOM

### A. APPROACHES TO SECURITY POLICY

#### 1. The Supreme Swiss Commander's Fundamental Duty

The "directives"<sup>17</sup> the *Bundesrat*<sup>18</sup> issued to the Supreme Swiss Commander on August 31, 1939, were based on the Military Organization Law of 1907. The law instructed the *Bundesrat* to inform the Supreme Swiss Commander via the *Bundesversammlung*<sup>19</sup> of the objectives it felt he should accomplish using troop call-ups. The *Bundesrat* was to inform the Supreme Swiss Commander by means of specific "instructions" and "directives".<sup>20</sup> This formulation, dating to 1874, was based on a philosophy from the Franco-Prussian war of 1870-71 and the resulting border deployment. At that time the waging of war, the sum of all necessary military measures, was quite distinct from all other responsibilities of the government in wartime.<sup>21</sup> Waging war was still considered an independent, special area of governmental self-assertion in an emergency situation.

---

<sup>17</sup> The French text uses the term *instructions*. Cf. directive by the *Bundesrat* to Mr. Henri Guisan of August 31, 1939. BAr E 5795/193.

<sup>18</sup> The Swiss *Bundesrat* or Federal Council is the nation's council of ministers or cabinet. The term is also used as a title before an individual *Bundesrat* member's name.

<sup>19</sup> *Bundesversammlung* is the collective name for the two houses of parliament.

<sup>20</sup> Kurz, *Der schweizerische General*, p. 4.

<sup>21</sup>

*Ibid.*, p. 5. In "Die Bedeutung des Berichtes General Guisans über den Aktivdienst 1939-1945 für die Gestaltung des schweizerischen Wehrwesens," p. 93, Hofer reports that "the Army had to assume another active responsibility in 1939 without the experience of the First World War being validated. The original text of Part V of the Military Organization Law of 1907 was still in force, with the exception of Article 211. The deficiencies of this text had already been demonstrated between 1914 and 1918."

During the General Mobilization of 1939, this approach was revealed to be hopelessly outmoded. The beginnings of a comprehensive defense policy begin to become discernible in the *Bundesrat's* "directives"<sup>22</sup> to the Supreme Swiss Commander: "It is your duty to use any appropriate military means to guarantee the nation's independence and defend the territorial integrity of the nation."<sup>23</sup>

The second part of the directive, to defend the territorial integrity of the nation, can be understood in the strict military sense of defending an area, but this is not the case with the first part of the directive. Guaranteeing the nation's independence is without doubt an overall strategic goal, touching on other areas relating to the complex domain of defense policy. However, the *Bundesrat* seems to have foreseen the problem of limitations between military defense and other defense-related tasks. It instructed the Supreme Swiss Commander to use "military means," but avoided the clear defense-policy objective of "safeguarding the freedom of the people," as had been suggested by Colonel von Erlach.<sup>24</sup> Von Erlach saw the duty of the Supreme Swiss Commander as "defending the independence of the nation and the freedom of the people by any suitable military means."<sup>25</sup> No doubt the *Bundesrat* had its reasons for replacing "the freedom of the

---

<sup>22</sup> For the legal force of the instructions see Siegenthaler, *Der Oberbefehlshaber nach schweizerischem Staatsrecht*, p. 86 ff, and the report on the position of the Supreme Swiss Commander, author unknown, of October 9, 1940. BAr E 5795/193.

<sup>23</sup> Report by the Supreme Swiss Commander, p. 241.

<sup>24</sup> Von Erlach, a Colonel in the General Staff, headed the Operations Division from August 28 to December 31, 1939. The division was headed from January 1 to January 15, 1940, by Colonel Germann, from January 15 to June 8, 1940, by Colonel Strüby, from June 8, 1940 to December 13, 1943, by Colonel Gonard, and from January 1, 1944, to August 20, 1945, by Major Züblin (report by the Chief of General Staff, p. 174).

<sup>25</sup> Colonel von Erlach to Supreme Swiss Commander, August 30, 1939. BAr E 5795/193. Colonel von Erlach noted in signing: "I produced the below instruction to the Supreme Swiss Commander based on the instruction of 1914 after discussing it with Colonels Frick and Kissling. It will be translated into French by Captain Sordet and will be delivered by Kissling to the *Bundesrat*

people" with the more militarily meaningful "territorial integrity." Though this change may appear, on its surface, to be insignificant, it seems to indicate the *Bundesrat's* efforts to shift military defense and the Supreme Swiss Commander from the overall realm of strategic defense to a purely military focus.<sup>26</sup>

No one, neither the Supreme Swiss Commander nor the *Bundesrat*, was able to predict in 1939 that the war would last more than five years and that Switzerland would be placed in an unprecedented, hopeless military situation. It was even harder to predict that defending the independence of Switzerland would extend far beyond the use of military measures and would require cooperation and coordination between all available defense resources. The seeds of the resulting conflict between the demands of waging war and those of a comprehensive defense policy had already been planted in the *Bundesrat's* "directives" to the Supreme Swiss Commander. The independence of the nation could certainly not be defended exclusively through military means during the difficult times of the Second World War.

The Supreme Swiss Commander only disagreed with his basic duty as it was formulated inasmuch as he believed he detected a discrepancy between the formulation of Article 210 of the Military Organization Law (in French) and the formulation in the first paragraph of the instructions in German.<sup>27</sup>

---

for preparation of *Bundesrat* document 0800. 8/30/39, 18:30."

<sup>26</sup> This statement contradicts Gautschi, *General Henri Guisan*, p. 81, who claims that von Erlach's text was "fully adopted as to its material contents."

<sup>27</sup> Report by the Supreme Swiss Commander, p. 243.

Guisan always understood his duty in the broad sense of dissuasion and associated overall defense. This is clear from the introduction to his Report to the *Bundesversammlung*. He interpreted the role of the Army as providing a military argument that could be used in addition to political and economic arguments to dissuade any attack being considered and guarantee the nation the greatest possible security.<sup>28</sup>

The longer the war continued and the more the intellectual, psychological, and material resources of Switzerland were exhausted, the more distressing grew the discrepancy between the requirements of a comprehensive defense policy designed to guarantee the overall independence of Switzerland and the demands of constant strategic military preparedness. Two schools of thought developed among Army leaders, one focusing on overall defense policy and the other focusing steadfastly, if not always consistently, on military strategy. The latter group felt that the duty of the Army leadership was "warfare" and not "national defense."<sup>29</sup> It correctly recognized that "the concept of national defense (in the sense of the overall defense-policy view) "had replaced the elementary laws of waging war."<sup>30</sup> For Lieutenant General Wille,<sup>31</sup> more a proponent of the military school, neutrality concerns had no place in the military

---

<sup>28</sup> Report by the Supreme Swiss Commander, p. 6.

<sup>29</sup> Minutes of the meeting of July 6, 1940, p. 13. BAr E 5795/145.

<sup>30</sup> Wille, personal memo, May 31, 1940. BAr E 5795/85.

<sup>31</sup> Lieutenant General Wille was pushed into the administrative position of a head of training of the Swiss Army at the beginning of active duty. He remained there until his retirement at the end of 1942. According to Kreis, *Auf den Spuren von La Charite*, p. 163, the Wille family was known for being pro-German. "Ulrich Wille, warned of in French reports in 1917 because he supposedly exercised a bad influence on his father, General Ulrich Wille, had an undoubtedly German-oriented military philosophy which earned him, particularly among Swiss-French elements, a reputation as a rather Prussian general excessively fond of drills and formality. He was the son of a Countess von Bismarck and the father of three daughters who had married Germans. In 1937, the youngest married the son of the German Foreign Secretary, von Weizsaecker."



decisionmaking process at that time and represented undue interference: "The Confederation's neutrality policy must not be allowed to prevent the Army command from quickly massing all available means of combat wherever the danger of violation of our neutrality is greatest at a given moment, depending on the situation of the European war."<sup>32</sup> A few weeks later, however, Wille, too, showed support for foreign-policy measures *vis-à-vis* Germany.<sup>33</sup>

## 2. Neutrality Considerations

After Poland was overrun and German troops marched into Western Europe, the Supreme Swiss Commander decided to concentrate the bulk of Swiss forces in the North. This operation to amass troops brought to light basic differences between the Army commanders. The Chief of General Staff at the time had serious doubts. He admitted that "the unpredictability of Nazi Germany" might appear more dangerous than "France, which is more stable," but considered it a fatal error to give away an operational position by taking corresponding military measures. He believed that the security of the nation was equally dependent on "a military policy of neutrality" and strategic actions.<sup>34</sup> This is truly a remarkable statement coming from the nation's highest-ranking military planner.<sup>35</sup>

<sup>32</sup> Personal memo from Wille to the Supreme Swiss Commander, May 31, 1940. BAr E 5795/85.

<sup>33</sup> Minutes of the meeting of June 22, 1940, p. 4. BAr E 5795/145.

<sup>34</sup> Chief of General Staff to Supreme Swiss Commander, December 28, 1939, p. 2. BAr E 5795/301.

<sup>35</sup> According to the Report by the Chief of General Staff, p. 11, the following were his duties and powers: Procuring documents for decisions by the Army Commander (intelligence on the enemy, status of the Swiss Army, supply situation of the Swiss Army), receiving the Supreme Swiss Commander's decisions and carrying them out through orders and instructions, monitoring implementation thereof, organizing communication and mediation, answering for the preparedness of the Army (organizing transport and reinforcements), and organizing training and leadership for maneuvers.

Not only the planned troop concentration was rejected by Labhart: The foreign-policy component was so important to him that he was also against obtaining the financial means for erecting the defensive structures associated with the personnel concentration: "If we want to avoid the accusation of taking sides, we must not use almost all our financial means in the North. Otherwise, our minor efforts in the West will look like diversions intended to demonstrate just how neutral we are; they will look exceedingly suspicious."<sup>36</sup>

The Supreme Swiss Commander seemed to qualify his position somewhat in his reply. He pointed out that he certainly did not exclude the possibility of attack from the West and South, but simply considered the North the highest priority. He had no plans to transfer additional troops to the Northern and Eastern parts of Switzerland. By leaving one Army corps there and creating a fourth corps,<sup>37</sup> he wanted to show his determination not to neglect this front. The corps in the west would include three units and the corresponding frontier troops.<sup>38</sup> Obviously, the Supreme Swiss Commander thoroughly considered the foreign-policy angle in his strategic considerations, but without giving them supremacy as the Chief of General Staff did. In this way, Guisan consciously ran

---

<sup>36</sup> Chief of General Staff to Supreme Swiss Commander, December 28, 1939, p. 2. BA R E 5795/301.

<sup>37</sup> The Supreme Swiss Commander's order creating the Fourth Army Corps under the command of the former Chief of General Staff, Lieutenant General Labhart, came on December 16, 1939. [Gautschi, *General Henri Guisan*, p. 107]. After being given command of the Fourth Army Corps, Labhart officially remained Chairman of the General Staff Division until he left active duty, which led to constant frictions. As Head of the General Staff Division, he remained in close contact with the Minister of Defense, who had been his Chief of Staff before being elected to the *Bundesrat*. This conflicting arrangement led to lasting frictions [Ernst, *Die Konzeption der schweizerischen Landesverteidigung*, p. 458, note 13].

<sup>38</sup> Supreme Swiss Commander to Chief of General Staff, December 30, 1939, pp. 1-2. BA R E 5795/301. For the strained personal relations between the Supreme Swiss Commander and the Chief of General Staff see Gautschi, *General Henri Guisan*, p. 104 ff.

the risk of violating Item 2 of the *Bundesrat's* "directives." These "directives" had given him a clear duty to include neutrality considerations in all military measures "so long as our frontiers and our independence are not threatened by a foreign power."<sup>39</sup> The Supreme Swiss Commander reported to the *Bundesversammlung* that he was quite aware of the fact that despite precautions such as reduced unit size, an intelligence apparatus such as the one the Germans maintained in Switzerland could detect at least six of the nine divisions between Sargans and Basel. Moreover, the deployment of certain units of the First Division near Dietikon on the Limmat might betray the presence of an additional division, bringing the number of divisions that might show foreign nations the structure and deployment strength of the northern Army position up to seven. The risk was thus twofold: Military, inasmuch as preparations would be betrayed, and political, since the strategy showed that Switzerland was less worried about the West and less well-prepared there, as well.<sup>40</sup>

The Supreme Swiss Commander ignored neutrality issues only in principle here, opting for the clearly North-oriented "Limmat Line." In practice, he declined to occupy the Army Position with all available forces because of these very foreign-policy considerations<sup>41</sup> and only transferred in troops step by step.<sup>42</sup> Thus, for reasons of neutrality, a totally "inefficient distribution of the Army along the entire length of the Army Position" was adopted.<sup>43</sup> Even when the German military attacked France and the

---

<sup>39</sup> Report by the Supreme Swiss Commander, p. 242.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., p. 23.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., p. 21.

<sup>42</sup> Gonard, Samuel. "Die strategischen Probleme der Schweiz im Zweiten Weltkrieg," in: Kurz, *Die Schweiz im Zweiten Weltkrieg*, p. 46.

<sup>43</sup> Situation Report, July 10, 1940, p. 2. BAr E 5795/304.

second General Mobilization of the Swiss Army occurred on May 11, 1940, the deployment still did not serve "purely the complete implementation of the operational plan developed for the 'Northern scenario.'" This was precluded by the neutrality of Switzerland.<sup>44</sup>

In October of 1940, Lieutenant General Labhart, now commander of the Fourth Army Corps, tried to dissuade the Supreme Swiss Commander from erecting more artillery casemates in the area defended by the Fourth Army Corps, citing "financial, tactical, and, mainly, political considerations."<sup>45</sup> He referred to a poor opinion about Switzerland in Germany, and linked these observations to the tactical level. For this reason, he suggested erecting infantry blockades on the streets, which would not cause as much fuss in Germany.<sup>46</sup>

In his response, the Supreme Swiss Commander thoroughly addressed Labhart's objections and then sharply opposed the idea that the Army leadership should concern itself with "what the Germans may think about our structures:"

We shall conduct our national defense as we see fit, without concerning ourselves with the opinions of other countries. Otherwise, we would have no right to speak of national defense or independence. We will be more respected the stronger our will to resist.<sup>47</sup>

---

<sup>44</sup> Report by the Supreme Swiss Commander, p. 28.

<sup>45</sup> Supreme Swiss Commander to Commander of the Fourth Army Corps, November 15, 1940, p. 1. BAr E 5795/142.

<sup>46</sup> Commander of the Fourth Army Corps to Supreme Swiss Commander, October 30, 1940, p. 3. BAr E 5795/142. A review of the plans for constructing artillery casemates in the central region requested in September by *Bundesrat* Kobelt was limited to financial and strategic considerations relating to their military utility.

<sup>47</sup> Supreme Swiss Commander to the Commander of the Fourth Army Corps, November 15, 1940, pp. 4-5. BAr E 5795/142.

With the overwhelming victory of German troops in France, the entry of Italy into the war, and the complete surrounding of Switzerland by Axis powers in the early Summer of 1940, neutrality concerns logically moved to the background in strategic decisionmaking. Switzerland's single neighbor would either seek war or live in relative peace with the nation.<sup>48</sup> Nevertheless foreign-policy concerns did continue to appear on various occasions. For example, in the preliminaries to the Redit decision, new foreign-policy concerns were voiced, this time by the Supreme Swiss Commander himself. On the day of the cease-fire in France, the Supreme Swiss Commander requested that the possibility of partial demobilization be included in the upcoming strategic conferences. He felt that it was better to undertake such demobilization unilaterally before the Germans demanded it.<sup>49</sup> Commander Wille, who would plead at another meeting just a few days later for "warfare" instead of "national defense," now pointed out that the number of troops mobilized would be "very closely watched" by Germany, which sooner or later would lead to inquiries, if not outright demands. Given this situation, he favored "an inconspicuous reduction of troop strength" along the Army Position. Taking up positions in the Alpine area would be postponed until later. Wille suggested that for reasons of preparedness and security, the Army troops deployed should remain "as a cleanup detachment to complete activities they had begun." He defended this position by alleging that "this way, keeping troops in the Army's deployment position will no doubt be accepted by Germany as well."<sup>50</sup>

---

<sup>48</sup> Minutes of the meeting of June 24, 1940, p. 6. BA r E 5795/145.

<sup>49</sup> Minutes of the meeting of June 22, 1940, p. 3. BA r E 5795/145.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., p. 4. BA r E 5795/145.

Foreign-policy concerns on the part of the Army leadership were considered in relation to the reduction of troops, particularly in conjunction with mobilization policy, such as when ways were being sought to avoid the *Bundesrat* dragging its feet on mobilization due to foreign-policy concerns. Arguments based on neutrality and foreign policy gradually began to lose their significance for military decisionmaking and were overshadowed by other defense-policy concerns, particularly by worries about the mood of the people and the morale of the troops.

### 3. Operational Process and Readiness

At a meeting of the National Defense Commission<sup>51</sup> on March 20, 1939, the Minister of Defense voiced his concern that the real danger to Switzerland might lie in defeatism and in the public's mistrust of the *Bundesrat* and the Army leadership.<sup>52</sup> However, there was little sign of this during the General Mobilization of September 2, 1939. The beginning of active service proceeded much as planned for the Army and public officials. The sequence of events during the announcement of frontier deployment a few days before the General Mobilization, the election of the Commander in Chief by a joint session of parliament, the *Bundesrat's* neutrality declaration, and the call-up for the General Mobilization on September 1, 1939, took place largely in the sequence that had been planned for.<sup>53</sup> Switzerland's politico-military situation also differed little from that of the summer of 1914. Once again the country's two neighbors, France and Germany,

---

<sup>51</sup> The Minister of Defense's advisory council on military defense questions, consisting of the commander of each corps.

<sup>52</sup> Minutes of the National Defense Commission, March 20, 1939. BAr E 27/4060.

<sup>53</sup> Cf. Bonjour, *Geschichte der schweizerischen Neutralität*, Volume IV, p. 19 ff.

were at war and Switzerland was "highly susceptible to the fallout from this 'duel.'" As at the beginning of World War I, it was also expected, in the summer of 1939, that Swiss territory might become "the target of first strikes" by the warring neighbors.<sup>54</sup> After the General Mobilization of September 2, 1939, the Swiss Army initially adapted a standby position.

The rapid victory of the Wehrmacht in Poland and the reinforcement of German troop strength along the Rhine and in the German-Swiss frontier region forced the Army High Command to shift from the initial "mobilization position"<sup>55</sup> to a defensive posture aimed toward the north. This line of defense, known as the "Limmat Line" followed the natural barriers of Lake Walen and Lake Zurich and the Limmat River to the heights of the Basler Jura south of Basel.<sup>56</sup>

The conflict between military defense and other areas of defense policy was apparent in this early operational decision by the Army High Command. The Chief of General Staff, Lieutenant General Labhart, reminded the Supreme Swiss Commander of "the repeated official protests to the *Bundesrat* by the eastern cantons and its assurances that the frontier would be defended." He noted that any other operational solution would place the *Bundesrat* in "a most difficult situation."<sup>57</sup> The Supreme Swiss Commander was fully aware of the psychological difficulties, and therefore did not agree to reduce the

---

<sup>54</sup> Report by the Supreme Swiss Commander, pp. 11-12.

<sup>55</sup> Report by the Supreme Swiss Commander, p. 13.

<sup>56</sup> Cf. Gonard, "Die strategischen Probleme der Schweiz im Zweiten Weltkrieg," in Hans-Rudolf Kurz, *Die Schweiz im Zweiten Weltkrieg*, p. 43 ff.

<sup>57</sup> Report by the Chief of General Staff, September 22, 1939. BA r E 5795/300.

front even more, as was suggested in part. This would mean militarily surrendering half the nation.<sup>58</sup>



Figure 1. The Limmat Line.

The discussion about the standby position was suddenly interrupted by the rapid events in the west and quickly overshadowed by far more significant problems. After Germany's invasion of France on May 10, 1940, the Swiss Army was called up again, in a second General Mobilization. The unexpected speed of the French defeat threw Switzerland into a completely new, desperate strategic situation. Looking back at the

<sup>58</sup> Situation Report, July 10, 1940 p. 2. BA R E 5795/304.



moment that Switzerland was completely surrounded by Axis powers, the Supreme Swiss Commander described it as the only situation during the war "that we were never able to imagine beforehand in all its brutality and far-reaching consequences."<sup>59</sup> It not only called for new operational decisions, as were subsequently expressed in the Reduit strategy, but also changed the entire military climate of Switzerland in a decisive fashion.

In his *Geschichte der schweizerischen Neutralität*, Basel historian Edgar Bonjour describes the mood in Switzerland after the collapse of France under the revealing title "Despondent and Ready to Surrender."<sup>60</sup> Though the mood shortly before the invasion of France was characterized by occasional outbreaks of displeasure, revealing more of a carefree self-interest than any profound, widespread uneasiness,<sup>61</sup> the mood after France's spectacular fall shifted to total uncertainty, despondency, anger, and despair.<sup>62</sup>

After the German-French armistice was signed, the mood was characterized partially by unjustified relief over the supposed end of the war in Europe<sup>63</sup> and partially

---

<sup>59</sup> Report by the Supreme Swiss Commander, p. 10.

<sup>60</sup> Bonjour, *Geschichte der schweizerischen Neutralität*, Vol. IV. p. 141 ff.

<sup>61</sup> On March 4, 1940, some thirty soldiers of the oldest age group submitted a petition to the *Bundesrat* expressing their dissatisfaction with renewed deployment, saying that the new deployment was very unpopular all across Switzerland. [BAr E 27/14245, Vol. 9]. In a letter to the Commander of Mountain Brigade 11, the Zermatt Spa and Tourist Association complained about the hindrance military measures placed on tourism. The complaint culminated in the spiteful and idiotic phrase "if we can no longer trust the tourists, then we really are ready to be ravished..." [BAr E 27/13184]. Cf. Commander of the Eighth Division to the Commander of the Third Army Corps, May 2, 1940 [BAr E 5795/139] on the poor morale of Mountain Rifle Battalion 45.

<sup>62</sup> When the Swiss Consul General in Munich traveled in Switzerland in his diplomatic car, which bore German license plates, soldiers both on and off duty cursed him with derogatory terms for the Germans [Memo by the Supreme Swiss Commander, May 24, 1940. BAr E 5795/160].

<sup>63</sup> The Union Romande du Tourisme complained on July 8, 1940, about "the strict military controls on Swiss citizens in certain Alpine regions, which severely damage tourism" [BAr E 27/13184]. The Chamber of Commerce of the canton of Geneva asked the cantonal government to use all its influence to keep the restricted military areas in the canton of Geneva from being

by defeatism,<sup>64</sup> as documented in a letter from the Swiss Noncommissioned Officer's Association, a quite patriotic organization. The letter describes a war between the Swiss Army and a modern, well-equipped, experienced enemy as completely senseless. It recommends offering no resistance at all, which would at least prevent the destruction of the nation.<sup>65</sup> The closer to the frontier, the more demobilization was favored among certain sectors of the population.<sup>66</sup>

It was in this extremely fragile and unpredictable situation of civilian "morale crisis," "which affected the civilian population and, to a certain extent, the Army after the armistice in France,"<sup>67</sup> that the Army High Command was forced to reevaluate the situation. The Supreme Swiss Commander described this decisive military move in his report to the *Bundesversammlung* with the accurate but very un-military term "mental housecleaning." Here he made it clear that what was occurring was not only a military process, but one that also had to "address the psychological needs of the populace."<sup>68</sup>

After the fall of France and Italy's entry into the war, the all-round defensive front amounted to a total of 670 km. The available means would have provided for only "a very thin defensive line" which would have little chance of withstanding the onslaught of a modern enemy.<sup>69</sup> Thus the Army's commanders had to face the basic question of

---

enforced too strictly, since the effects on farmers and winegrowers would be unbearable [BAr E 27/13184, November 25, 1940].

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., p. 208.

<sup>65</sup> Bonjour, *Geschichte der schweizerischen Neutralität*, Volume IV, p. 141.

<sup>66</sup> Cf. Supreme Swiss Commander to the President of the Government of the canton of Vaud, where he addresses two letters on regarding the civilian population's apprehension about the reduction in frontier troops (demobilization of the middle and older age classes in Mountain Brigade 1), July 26, 1940. BAr E 27/13180.

<sup>67</sup> Report by the Supreme Swiss Commander, p. 34.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

whether to discard the expense "in terms of both time and money" invested in developing the Army Position and spread the forces along the entire frontier instead. Among other grounds, there were important psychological reasons against giving up the existing Army Position, even if it meant that a large portion of the country would be handed over to the enemy practically without a struggle. Thus the Supreme Swiss Commander initially opted for a compromise and divided the Army into three groups: The frontier troops maintained their previous task of guarding the frontier and "were expected to sacrifice themselves fully for the Army, even in hopeless situations." The strongest-defended areas of the existing Army Position were to serve as a "stalling resistance" and eventually join parts of the Army to defend the Alpine area. According to the Supreme Swiss Commander, this would allow the areas of particular economic importance in the central part of the country to maintain their usefulness at least during the initial phase of the battle.<sup>70</sup> After time, the central position would be reinforced and the part of the Army earmarked for stalling resistance would be reduced.

After 1941, only the reinforced light troops and a few infantry and Territorial Units remained to repulse an enemy attack on the Central Plains, while the bulk of the Army, consisting of four army corps, would defend the Alpine area.<sup>71</sup> Finally, all the troops deployed in the Central Plains were replaced by the Light Brigades.<sup>72</sup>

---

<sup>69</sup> Deputy Chief of Staff for Operations to Chief of General Staff on suggested actions, p. 1, June 22, 1940. BAr E 27/14231.

<sup>70</sup> Situation Report, July 10, 1940. BAr E 5795/304.

<sup>71</sup> Report by the Chief of General Staff, pp. 36-37.

<sup>72</sup> Report by the Supreme Swiss Commander, p. 44.

The defense of the Reduit was given its final form in Operational Order No. 13 of May 24, 1941: The frontier troops held the frontier; in the Central Plains were the "stalling" Light Brigades; the bulk of the Army (four corps) were kept in the Alpine area. However, it still took some two years until the National Reduit was fully prepared for combat, with the defensive structures at its gateways completed and the necessary supplies of ammunition, rations, and military equipment in place.<sup>73</sup>



Figure 2. The National Reduit

<sup>73</sup> Bonjour, *Geschichte der schweizerischen Neutralität*, Vol. IV, p. 176.

The Supreme Swiss Commander ordered all commanders of combat troops and the Territorial Units<sup>74</sup> from the battalion level upward to attend the now legendary Rütli Conference on July 25, 1940, to explain the significance of the new operational plan.<sup>75</sup> In this way, the Supreme Swiss Commander again showed that the political dimension of restoring and maintaining the people's will to resist was extremely important to him. Operational decisions were made in relation to psychological defense considerations, if not entirely subordinated to them.

Reports on troop morale after the Rütli Conference reveal little positive effect. Hausammann's report of August 13, 1940, said that 75% of the men no longer believed that an order to fight would be given if an attack came. Another 15% did not care. Only 10% believed it "steadfastly," but they did not believe they could win.<sup>76</sup> A report on increasing the Army's strength in its central position also referred to a defeatist attitude in some military circles. The impression was that "the old Army Position was only being held by frontier troops and a few Territorial Units while the good defensive structures

---

<sup>74</sup> The course of events in Norway, Denmark, Belgium, Holland, and France showed that a nationwide resistance organization had to be created in addition to the front-line troops. The territorial organization already existing in skeletal form was fleshed out. The territorial militias consisted of territorial battalions, which were generally not the equals of Army battalions, in terms of both training and equipment, auxiliary guard units, industrial guards, local militias, civil-air protection, motorized dragoons, and basic-training units. At the end of May, 1940, the troop strength was listed as 44,000 men (not including industrial guards and local militias). Their task was mainly to hinder sabotage, to fight airborne troops or tanks breaking through the lines, and to prevent the civilian population from fleeing in panic [Report by the Chief of General Staff, p. 243 ff.].

<sup>75</sup> Report by the Supreme Swiss Commander, p. 210 ff.

<sup>76</sup> Report by Major Hans Hausammann, August 13, 1940. BA R E 5795/124. Hausammann was the founder and director of Ha Bureau, a privately operated news service with close ties to the responsible sectors of the Army High Command.

built with an investment of much money and much effort would not even be used for preliminary defense."<sup>77</sup>

However, the withdrawal to the National Reduit seems to have had a positive effect on the morale of at least some of the troops. According to Lieutenant General Miescher, the men of the Eighth Division displayed a "much more confident and greatly improved mood" after being moved to the Central Area, but the men still arrived with poor morale in general. The Commander of the Second Army Corps had no doubts about the will to resist of the officers, but the campaigns conducted thus far by the German Wehrmacht did have a negative impact on the enlisted men's will to resist.<sup>78</sup>

Once the basic strategic reorientation had taken place, the struggle to obtain the means held to be militarily necessary for carrying out the Reduit plan became increasingly visible. The less the military aspects of national defense were visible to the general public, the more the Army High Command had to concern itself with "national defense" instead of "warfare." The longer the war went on, the more difficult it was for the Army leadership to obtain the necessary means. As the years passed and the military threat was not constantly apparent to the public or to the troops, military duties and the need for reinforcements were perceived as more of a strain: They became increasingly difficult to understand or to support.<sup>79</sup>

---

<sup>77</sup> Report concerning further strengthening of the Central Position, September 23, 1940, p. 3. BAr E 27/14321.

<sup>78</sup> Minutes of the Meeting of October 19, 1940. BAr E 5795/145.

<sup>79</sup> Report by the Supreme Swiss Commander, p. 227.

Even the best plans are of little help if they are not implemented in a militarily intelligent fashion and supported by motivated troops with good morale. At the end of 1941, the Supreme Swiss Commander reported to his Army Unit Commanders on this problem, noting that "the value of a field Army" not in active battle "was put to a severe test of morale." There was no point "in completing training and making great material sacrifices if the engines of morale were not fired up" to provide peak performance at all times.<sup>80</sup> Maintaining the will to fight and the morale of the troops was extremely important.<sup>81</sup> The necessity of this is made apparent by a memo from the head of the Wartime Nutrition Office to the Supreme Swiss Commander, pointing out the worsening morale of many of the troops. The changed military situation in Europe no longer made "the maintenance of a strong military machine" appear necessary, and the shortage of manpower made it extremely difficult to harvest the crops.<sup>82</sup>

The Army leadership also seemed to be concerned about this development. An opinion of Deputy Chief of Staff for Operations in the summer of 1941 stated that "if the (well-grounded) demands of the economy...were not satisfied within a reasonable period," there would be a danger that the mood of the people would deteriorate and turn against the Army.<sup>83</sup> In this climate, military entities needed to display great tact in their interactions with the people, which of course was not always the case. Particular

---

<sup>80</sup> Minutes of the meeting of December 5-6, 1941, p. 14 ff. BAr E 5795/146.

<sup>81</sup> Cf. Gautschi, *General Henri Guisan*, p. 618 ff.

<sup>82</sup> Head of the Wartime Nutrition Office to the Supreme Swiss Commander, September 4, 1940, p. 2. BAr E 5795/522.

<sup>83</sup> Deputy Chief of Staff for Operations to Chief of General Staff, June 19, 1941. BAr E 27/5653.

attention had to be paid to the psychological effects of official letters, particularly when denying some request or responding to an appeal. Correspondents had to be polite without losing their authority and military writing style should not be characterized by curtness--this according to a memo from the Swiss High Command.<sup>84</sup>

There were countless complaints about "wasted time" in military service. What took six weeks "could be done in two with proper distribution of labor." The general mood of the men on military duty worsened constantly because the soldiers could not see any point in what they were doing.<sup>85</sup> Criticism of the Army brought considerable political pressure on the Army leadership and led to a rather acrimonious correspondence between the Supreme Swiss Commander and the Minister of Defense, particularly when it came to dealing with anonymous complaints to the *Bundesrat*. The Minister of Defense felt that it was his duty to read such complaints and investigate the charges leveled in them. Since they were mainly based on true facts, the Minister of Defense was not completely misguided in this endeavor. Thus at a meeting with the Supreme Swiss Commander in mid-December, 1941, the Minister of Defense gave the Supreme Swiss Commander an anonymous postcard complaining about inhumane treatment of recruits, supposed mutinies, overcrowded hospitals, and the "torment" caused by the soldiers.<sup>86</sup>

---

<sup>84</sup> Minutes of the meeting of September 19, 1942, p. 8. BA E 5795/87. Throughout the war, the Supreme Swiss Commander suffered from the trauma of the General Strike of 1918, and this affected his military decisionmaking. When ending the wartime status of some transport firms was being discussed in the spring of 1942, the Supreme Swiss Commander argued against the plan, noting that in 1918 the employees of the demilitarized streetcars had formed a sort of red militia, hindering anti-strike measures [Supreme Swiss Commander to Minister of Defense, July 7, 1942. BA E 5795/155].

<sup>85</sup> Minister of Defense to Supreme Swiss Commander, December 12, 1941. BA E 5795/155.

<sup>86</sup> Supreme Swiss Commander to Minister of Defense, January 3, 1942, p. 1. BA E 5795/155.



The commanders of the troops in question were irritated by the investigations ordered by the Supreme Swiss Commander and made no secret of their indignation. The Supreme Swiss Commander forwarded the responses, unedited but with a sharp commentary, to the Minister of Defense. He agreed with the Minister of Defense that "the no doubt well-meaning complaints" should not be simply ignored, but pointed out that "the unjustified criticisms and accusations had increased noticeably" of late, revealing not well-meaning comments but "spiteful outbursts" and "slanderous excesses." The Supreme Swiss Commander perceived "certain tendencies in the growing criticism of the Army" and wished to avoid encouraging them. He noted in closing that he counted on the Minister of Defense's understanding if he ignored such anonymous letters in the future.<sup>87</sup> *Bundesrat Kobelt* "protested strongly" against the criticism that he simply passed on citizen complaints to the Army unsolved. He believed that it was his duty to pursue such complaints and felt that for this reason, he could expect the Supreme Swiss Commander to not let them go unnoticed.<sup>88</sup>

Stress and weariness became increasingly visible, so much so that some men maimed themselves to avoid military service.<sup>89</sup> The Army leadership tried to counter this with increased communication and openness towards the troops, systematically analyzing morale and evaluating reports on rumors that were making the rounds. In early 1943 the Army leadership canceled call-ups, giving rise to numerous rumors. The Personnel

---

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

<sup>88</sup> Minister of Defense to Supreme Swiss Commander, January 19, 1942. BA R E 5795/155.

<sup>89</sup> Gautschi, *General Henri Guisan*, pp. 620-21.

Division evaluated and categorized these rumors, "to provide an overview of the morale of the citizenry."<sup>90</sup>

The following were the main rumors as analyzed by the Personnel Division:

- ♦ Canceling the call-ups had its roots a betrayal of the previous relief plan. This rumor reflected the near-hysterical fear of spying that had been fueled by several arrests in recent days.
- ♦ Pressure from Germany once again served to explain the unexplained. Among workers, in particular, it was said that Germany had demanded reductions in the active troops so that there would be more workers to produce for Germany. This showed a lingering mistrust in the will to resist of the authorities, dating back to 1940.
- ♦ Throughout Switzerland, people tried to explain the cancellation of call-ups by saying that a general mobilization of the Swiss Army would become necessary in the spring. Because of this, the theory went, the Army leadership wanted to allow soldiers a chance to rest beforehand. It is worth noting that the reason for this General Mobilization was supposed to be the collapse of the Axis and chaos outside Switzerland's frontiers.

---

<sup>90</sup> In his report to the Supreme Swiss Commander, the Army Personnel Director expressed the following opinion on the interdependence between troop morale and the morale of the civilian population: "Once it became apparent that active duty would last longer, it became as important to analyze the mood of the civilian population as to monitor the morale and discipline of the soldiers. This is part of the nature of a militia-type army: It would be a vain enterprise to attempt to positively influence the will to resist of the population during only the brief periods of required service or to leave the soldiers' morale to fate and the many defeatist influences during the better part of the year, that is, during their civilian activities." [Report by the Chief of General Staff, p. 226.]

- ♦ The rumor most widespread throughout the population, according to reports, said that the danger for Switzerland was over for good thanks to developments on the Eastern Front. Peace would not be long in coming. The Army leadership and the Bundesrat had quickly and happily seen the consequences and thus begun the demobilization. In farming circles it was also said that this "demobilization" was due to the influence of farmers' associations.

No doubt the last rumor was the most dangerous for Swiss readiness, since it led the people to fall back into "carelessness and passivity." After all, it could be assumed that new call-ups that the people were not psychologically prepared for would prompt renewed, harsh discord.<sup>91</sup> The commanders' reports of "little understanding for the necessity for the calling up troops, increased influence of civilian opinions, war-weariness, and mushrooming efforts to evade military service through means short of disfigurement," showed no sign of stopping.<sup>92</sup> In the French-speaking areas of Switzerland towards the end of the war an unhealthy mood developed which harmed the morale of the troops, particularly frontier troops.<sup>93</sup>

The dimensions of an integral national defense became visible even if the security-policy terminology was still unclear. Given the fluctuations in morale, the

---

<sup>91</sup> Head of the Psychological Section to Chief of Army Personnel, February 4, 1943. BAr E 27/ 14245, Vol. 44. The War Log of the German Navy even reports of a mood swing "of broad sectors of the Swiss population toward favoring German' s to save Europe" from Bolshevism. The pro-German rally anonymously organized in Switzerland is reportedly one of the proofs. Some even spoke out publicly in favor of Switzerland joining the war on the German side. The prestige of the English reportedly "declined substantially" [War Log of the German Navy, March 11, 1942, p. 189. BMA RM 7/34].

<sup>92</sup> Cf. "Enlisted Quarterly Report," 1944. BAr E 5795/90.

<sup>93</sup> "Etat d' esprit de la population suisse dans certaines régions," November 20, 1944. BAr E 5795/129.

operational decisionmaking process increasingly succumbed to the influence of internal politics and was no longer able to do justice to the external threats with the necessary flexibility. The psychological limits of military actions increased, and variations in any area of overall defense impacted more and more directly the military's freedom of action. This was true in the material arena, as well.

#### 4. Material Limitations

Until mid-February, 1940, a custom was practiced in the construction industry whereby companies had the right to call back from the Army those expert laborers necessary to keep their business alive. For the following months, the Chief Army Engineer demanded a fundamental change to give priority to the Army and allow it to "pull in the skilled construction workers it needed from private industry." Also, all unemployed persons who could not find a job in private industry would be used in the construction of Army fortifications and roads, so as "to use all the country's labor capacity."<sup>94</sup> In the spring of 1940 the Supreme Swiss Commander suggested to the *Bundesrat* that it cut back public works to save productive labor for military construction projects. He said the rapid decline in unemployment in the preceding weeks threatened to preclude work of fortification-building being carried out "as the military and political situations require" because of a shortage of labor.<sup>95</sup> The request was not dealt with until one month later, at the *Bundesrat* meeting of May 17, 1940. At that time the *Bundesrat* decided to first carry out comprehensive studies on the effects of such an action.<sup>96</sup> At the

---

<sup>94</sup> Chief Army Engineer to Supreme Swiss Commander, p. 6, February 16, 1940. BAR E 5795/521.

<sup>95</sup> Supreme Swiss Commander to Minister of Defense, April 16, 1940. BAR E 5795/524.

beginning of June the Chief Army Engineer again pointed out to the Chief of General Staff that work on the Army Position was far behind. Under the impression of the dramatic breakthrough of German tank forces in the West, he also demanded more rapid construction of tank barriers, which could only be done using civilian labor, since the Army was totally occupied with building combat positions and dugouts.<sup>97</sup> The Supreme Swiss Commander again recurred to the *Bundesrat*, this time demanding that "the entire productive labor force of the country be placed in the service of national defense."<sup>98</sup> Because of the anticipated shortage of building material, the Supreme Swiss Commander asked the *Bundesrat* to review the following measures:

- ♦ Placing construction materials, particularly supporting steel, under a controlled economy and releasing them only for projects that were in the interest of the national defense, until further notice.
- ♦ Making civilian projects contingent on approval from the officials responsible for controlling the war economy. Civilian construction projects would only be approved if they met an urgent need, did not require any supporting steel, and could be carried out by labor not used for building fortifications.
- ♦ Reviewing measures to ensure the ability to smelt Swiss ore and produce steel on short notice.

The labor shortage was the only hindrance to the emergency construction of tank barriers. For this reason, "the entire Swiss construction industry not required for other

---

<sup>96</sup> Chief of General Staff to Supreme Swiss Commander, June 1, 1940. BA R E 5795/521.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

<sup>98</sup> Supreme Swiss Commander to Minister of Defense, June 1, 1940. BA R E 5795/153.

defense tasks such as air-raid shelters, war-industry construction, etc.," should be placed in the service of "fortification building."<sup>99</sup>

Typical of Guisan's holistic thinking of is the fact that the concept of "national defense" used here also includes other areas of overall defense, such as the military industry and protection of civilians. However, it must be added that increased construction of fortifications was not allowed to proceed at the expense of workers already in the Army. Instead, the construction industry was to be maintained to complete military assignments with its own personnel without resorting to leave for soldiers. This would have served only to shift, not to increase, construction performance.<sup>100</sup> In mid-June 1940 the War, Industry, and Labor Office had a meeting on restoring civilian construction and the general obligation to work.<sup>101</sup> This meeting appeared effective,<sup>102</sup> but there was little benefit for the Army Position, and the discussion was overtaken by events. At a meeting on July 6, 1940, Lieutenant General Wille noted that the Army Position could no longer be maintained under the existing conditions "according to the applicable laws of warfare," and that no more money should be invested in it in the

---

<sup>99</sup> Supreme Swiss Commander to Minister of Defense, June 18, 1940, pp. 2-3. BAr E 5795/153.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3.

<sup>101</sup> After the obligation to work was implemented by regulation on September 2, 1939, a new regulation was issued on February 11, 1941: Traditional farm laborers were definitively tied to their place of work and persons subject to the obligation to work could be dispatched to serve in agriculture. [Maurer, *Anbauschlacht*, p. 117 ff.] In addition, the unemployed were used for Army work [cf. "Bildung von Arbeitsdetachementen für die Landesverteidigung," *Bundesrat Minutes*, May 21, 1940, BAr Vol. 397, p. 880, and memo from the Commander of the Fourth Army Corps to Supreme Swiss Commander reporting good experiences with the use of unemployed labor, January 12, 1940. BAr E 5795/142].

<sup>102</sup> Chief of General Staff to Supreme Swiss Commander, June 20, 1940. BAr E 5795/521.

future.<sup>103</sup> Shortly thereafter the Supreme Swiss Commander made a fundamental decision to withdraw the bulk of the Army into the Alpine area.<sup>104</sup>

Until 1941, the individual Army units were granted a short-term, lump-sum construction bond series for fortifications, what became known as a "time bond." But this system seems to have promoted a certain lack of planning, and bonds were requested in the same way. In addition, the Reduit decision introduced a new stage of construction, with several large projects to be built by civilian construction companies, whereas Army units had previously built many makeshift structures themselves.<sup>105</sup> The National Reduit was based on three main forts, at St. Maurice, Gotthard, and Sargans. The latter was practically built during active duty, and the other two were renovated and expanded. The southern and eastern limits of the National Reduit were combined with the frontier defenses, but the corridors leading in from the North had to be completely fortified and closed off.<sup>106</sup>

In the spring of 1941, the *Bundesrat* suggested to the Army leadership that it switch from "time bonds" to bonds for a specific project. The Army leadership leaned more towards the viewpoint that Army unit commanders should be allowed complete operational freedom in the building of fortifications. But this solution was inevitably tied to reduced consistency, which also resulted in increased costs.<sup>107</sup> Here again, a conflict with civilian authorities was predestined. At a meeting on September 8, 1941, the

---

<sup>103</sup> Minutes of the meeting of July 6, 1940, p. 13. BAr E 5795/145.

<sup>104</sup> Cf. Odermatt, *Zur Genese der Reduitstrategie*, p. 74 ff.

<sup>105</sup> Report by the *Bundesrat*, pp. 48-49.

<sup>106</sup> Report by the Chief of General Staff, p. 209.

<sup>107</sup> Report by the *Bundesrat*, p. 48-49.

Minister of Defense recalled again that the only projects that should be undertaken were those that were "absolutely and urgently necessary" and had to be available in the shortest time possible. Moreover, no projects should be undertaken for which there was currently no crew. *Bundesrat* Kobelt also did not hesitate to state his opinion on the military usefulness of large projects, saying that in areas of forests and cliffs it was preferable to build many small fortifications than to build a system of large, extremely vulnerable structures.<sup>108</sup> Days later the Supreme Swiss Commander requested that the matter of fortification-building be reevaluated by the Army Corps and a clear order of priorities produced.<sup>109</sup>

In early 1941, the *Bundesrat* approved a bond series for building fortifications.<sup>110</sup> That April, the Supreme Swiss Commander submitted the request for the first issue of the "major fortification bond series," which was approved on May 7, 1941. This first issue consisted of 104 million Swiss francs for building permanent facilities for the Army Command and defensive units and 38 million francs for artillery defenses in the Alpine area.<sup>111</sup> When the Supreme Swiss Commander requested the second issue, or some 75 million francs, there was resistance on the part of the *Bundesrat*. The bond issue was fully approved,<sup>112</sup> but the *Bundesrat* demanded a new review of the entire fortification plan. There was little it could say against expanding the three large forts at Sargans, Gotthard, and St. Maurice. Instead it criticized the planned artillery fortifications, which

---

<sup>108</sup> Minutes of the meeting on the relief plan 1941/42, September 8, 1941. BAr E 5795/146.

<sup>109</sup> Minutes of the meeting of September 9, 1941, p. 3. BAr E 5795/146.

<sup>110</sup> Minister of Defense to Supreme Swiss Commander, September 24, 1941, p. 1, E 5795/521.

<sup>111</sup> Minister of Defense to Supreme Swiss Commander, September 15, 1941, p. 1, E 5795/521.

<sup>112</sup> Minister of Defense to Supreme Swiss Commander, September 24, 1941. p. 1, E 5795/521.



cost an average of four to eight million francs each and took more than three years to build. The *Bundesrat* believed that this type of structure would not be useful in this war and should not be funded. "Given the massive sums that would have to be invested in these structures," the *Bundesrat* felt that a new review of these plans was "urgently necessary."<sup>113</sup> The Supreme Swiss Commander reacted indignantly that he was not aware of any new evaluation criteria and asked the *Bundesrat* to please indicate them to him.<sup>114</sup> The technically very polite response of the Minister of Defense also contained some digs at the Supreme Swiss Commander, such as when Kobelt stated that he had previously discussed the question of the permanent facilities with various commanding officers, including some Army unit commanders, and they had confirmed his view that "the value of the large permanent facilities was not great beyond doubt." Experience in this war so far had also been unable to dislodge this belief. For this reason, he wanted the following questions resolved:

- ♦ Was there really a justified need?
- ♦ Did the expected long-term benefits justify the up-front costs?
- ♦ Were there sufficient materials and labor?
- ♦ Could the weapons required be delivered within a feasible period?
- ♦ Could the officers, noncommissioned officers, and enlisted men required be provided without excessively weakening the other units?<sup>115</sup>

---

<sup>113</sup> Minister of Defense to Supreme Swiss Commander, September 15, 1941. BAr E 5795/521.

<sup>114</sup> Supreme Swiss Commander to the Minister of Defense, September 20, 1941. BAr E 5795/521.

<sup>115</sup> Minister of Defense to Supreme Swiss Commander, September 24, 1941, E 5795/521.

The Supreme Swiss Commander pointed out that he had already made cuts in the planned fortifications before submitting the requests.<sup>116</sup> Still, nearly 400 million francs were invested in fortification building in 1941 with the approval of the bond series requested.<sup>117</sup> The government expended a total of some 550 million francs in fortifying frontiers and terrain by the end of 1942. The overall military expenditures for 1942 amounted to a princely 1.02 million francs.

The Parliament also increasingly tried to curb expenses for national defense. At the end of 1941, the Senate Select Committee<sup>118</sup> concerned with the matter "urgently" asked the *Bundesrat* "to push on energetically with its efforts to sharply reduce military expenditures without weakening the morale or readiness of the country." The financial prospects for Switzerland were causing "great concern."<sup>119</sup> In mid-October, 1942, the Senate Select Committee decided to reduce expenditures on civil air protection, the women's auxiliary, and mobilization and to not make bonds used retroactive.<sup>120</sup> So it is no surprise that in 1943 the *Bundesrat* again asked the Supreme Swiss Commander to economize. Although the *Bundesrat* had never doubted the "necessity and appropriateness" of the fortifications, the country's tight financial situation and the

---

<sup>116</sup> Supreme Swiss Commander to the Minister of Defense, November 11, 1941. BAr E 5795/521.

<sup>117</sup> Minister of Defense to Supreme Swiss Commander, 24.9.1941, p. 3. BAr 5795/521.

<sup>118</sup> At the beginning of the war, Parliament gave the *Bundesrat* special emergency powers which allowed it to make decisions independent of other Swiss councils and the constitution with only subsequent parliamentary approval. However, Parliament insisted on creating a select committee representing both houses which the *Bundesrat* was to consult before important decisions whenever possible.

<sup>119</sup> Resolution of the Senate Select Committee on spending cuts in the Army, November 3, 1941. BAr E 5795/155.

<sup>120</sup> Resolution of the Senate Select Committee, October 16, 1942. BAr E 5795/156.

increasing shortage of building materials forced it to request "the greatest possible economy" from the Supreme Swiss Commander. The *Bundesrat* also asked the Supreme Swiss Commander to review carefully the troop commander's requests for construction tasks, "to see if the same goals could not be achieved with more modest means"<sup>121</sup> The *Bundesrat* still had nothing against expanding fortifications recognized to have lasting geostrategic value, such as St. Maurice, Gotthard, and Sargans, or against building defensive gateways into Switzerland. What it wanted to abstain from building were structures of "temporary value," and it refused in principle to consider of lasting value any fortification built in the National Reduit.<sup>122</sup>

Strengthening fortifications was not only a major component of the defense philosophy at the time, but was also an important part of dissuasion. This is visible from documents later recovered from the German High Command, dated September, 1942, and stating that "fortification" by the Swiss Army would allow it "to give an invader serious resistance at the frontiers and to maintain itself in the National Reduit for a lengthy period."<sup>123</sup>

---

<sup>121</sup> *Bundesrat* to Supreme Swiss Commander, January 12, 1943, p. 4. BAr E 5795/88.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>123</sup> *Kleines Orientierungsheft Schweiz*, German Wehrmacht, Foreign Armies West department, September, 1942, p. 34, BMA RH D 18/173. See also Halder, *Kriegstagebuch*, Vol. II, p. 127, where he reports that Swiss frontier positions in the Jura mountains are strong.

## B. THE PHILOSOPHY OF DISSUASION

### 1. Retreat to Dissuasion

#### a. *The Limmat Line*

The first signs of dissuasion began to become visible in the debate on operational use of the Swiss Army in the Second World War. In requesting expansion of his Corps' permanent position at the end of 1939, the Commander of the Third Army Corps, Lieutenant General Miescher, said he believed that seven stages of construction could develop a northern fortification, a "région fortifiée," that would "keep the country from war as a result of its strength." He rejected the criticism that expenses for such fortifications were too high and would impinge upon the equipping and the maneuverability of the field Army, saying that more important things were at stake, such as protecting the country and keeping it out of war, thereby achieving untold "material and emotional savings." For this reason, he believed everything should be concentrated on "preventing the violation of our nation as well as is humanly possible."<sup>124</sup> Like other members of the Army High Command,<sup>125</sup> he feared the tremendous psychological and economic consequences of losing one sixth of Swiss territory and one third of its population. Miescher felt that the greatest lesson of modern wars was the fact that the theater of war itself was the most expensive seat in the house. For this reason, Miescher saw that it was necessary to make a potential attack appear pointless from the very

<sup>124</sup> Commander of the Third Army Corps to the Supreme Swiss Commander, December, 6, 1939. pp. 20-22. BAr E 5795/301.

<sup>125</sup> In an operational study dated November 2, 1939, the Chief of General Staff summarized the problem in a single observation: "No matter how painful it may be to give up both Northeastern Switzerland and Southeastern Switzerland from the very beginning, attempting to defend them with inadequate means would be highly perilous for the nation as a whole." [BAr E 5795/301.]

beginning.<sup>126</sup> The reason for Miescher's dissuasive viewpoint appears to be the quite legitimate hope that strategic decisionmaking could avoid an attack and its fateful consequences. Thus Miescher's attitude appears to be more an after-the-fact shift to a dissuasive philosophy than a fundamental strategic position with the goal of "achieving such a high degree of readiness and defensive ability through civilian and military efforts that a potential enemy is kept from attacking."<sup>127</sup>

Later the Army High Command also credited the Army Position with dissuasion. A situation report dated July 10, 1940, highlighted the dissuasive effect of the Army Position probably based to some degree on optimism and rationalization. "Given our choice of the Army Position, its being occupied by the entire Army, and the expected aid of an ally [France], plus the good performance of the troops, we not only can count on a strong resistance in case of attack, but also a dissuasive effect in that on consideration, an attacker would decide not to make war on our country. There have been repeated signs that the disappearance of the threat is due in large part to the growing impression abroad of our will to resist and our ability to resist."<sup>128</sup> This ability to resist was shown at the beginning of the war in the deployment to the Army Position. Chief of General Staff Labhart was not foreign to such thoughts,<sup>129</sup> which the Supreme Swiss Commander also accepted and supported when he expressly referred to the necessity to do everything possible to keep Switzerland from being drawn into the war.<sup>130</sup>

---

<sup>126</sup> Commander of the Third Army Corps to the Supreme Swiss Commander, December 6, 1939, p. 3/4. BA E 5795/301.

<sup>127</sup> Däniker, *Dissuasion*, p. 39.

<sup>128</sup> Chief of General Staff to Supreme Swiss Commander, draft situation report, July 10, 1940, p. 2. BA E 5795/304.

<sup>129</sup> Cf. Chief of General Staff to Supreme Swiss Commander, 28.12.1939. BA E 5795/301.

These examples show that the philosophy of dissuasion took hold in the Army leadership early in the Second World War. When Major General Huber<sup>131</sup> developed the philosophical foundations for future strategy, which had to be adapted to totally different circumstances after the fall of France, he, too, used an approach clearly based on the principle of dissuasion:

Under the current circumstances, Switzerland will only be spared direct attack by Germany if the German General Staff's estimation shows that any fight with us will be long and difficult and that war with us will create a new source of destabilization in the center of Europe which will be a detriment to Germany's long-term plans. Thus the goal of our national defense consists of convincing our neighbors that we will offer a tough resistance and that it will take much time and great resources to defeat us.<sup>132</sup>

This not only laid the basis for future strategic actions, but also made it clear that the only acceptable defense philosophy would be one that included *all* aspects of defense. Indeed, this is the only way a small nation can do justice to the concept of dissuasion. In dissuasion practiced by small nations, "the sum of all means for defending or regaining national freedom and independence" must be the source of convincing dissuasion.<sup>133</sup> The conflict between overall defense and military readiness that was first hinted at in the *Bundesrat's* "instructions" to the Supreme Swiss Commander had now entered the realm of military-strategic decisionmaking.

<sup>130</sup> Supreme Swiss Commander to Chief of General Staff, December 30, 1939, p. 1. BAr E 5795/301.

<sup>131</sup> Major General Jakob Huber followed Lieutenant General Labhart as interim Chief of General staff at the beginning of 1940.

<sup>132</sup> Chief of General Staff to Supreme Swiss Commander, draft situation report, July 10, 1940, pp. 3-4. This argumentation was adopted almost word for word by the Supreme Swiss Commander in his "Note concernant le nouveau dispositif de défense" of July 12, 1940, informing the Minister of Defense of the Reduit decision. See p. 2. BAr E 27/14321.

<sup>133</sup> Däniker, *Dissuasion*, p. 38.

### ***b. The National Reduit***

The lines of thought that later converged into the Reduit strategy were apparent as early as the spring of 1940, during the search for a fallback from the "Limmat Line." At that time, the Supreme Swiss Commander sought to find a position in the Central Plains to which the Army could be withdrawn if the Army Position were penetrated.<sup>134</sup> A study by the Chief of General Staff came to the conclusion that the best area was not the Central Plains, but the foothills of the Alps and the mountains themselves.<sup>135</sup>

Given Germany's spectacular entry into France, Colonel Germann<sup>136</sup> was assigned "to study the possibility of withdrawal to a Reduit position if there is an unstoppable breakthrough in the Army Position." In his study, Germann came to the conclusion that once fighting began, it would be impossible to withdraw the necessary number of men to defend those areas to a rear position in the Alps and foothills. So the only alternatives would be either to continue fighting on the Army Position without possibility of withdrawal or to place sufficient forces in the central part of the country "to build the core of a tough Reduit Position" beforehand. It is noteworthy that Germann, who normally made a strictly military presentation of his argument, here slipped into a

<sup>134</sup> Schaefelberger, *Das Réduit National 1940, ein militärhistorischer Sonderfall*, p. 210.

<sup>135</sup> Study by the Chief of General Staff on a fallback position for the northern scenario, July 17, 1940. BAr E 5795/303.

<sup>136</sup> Colonel Adolf O. Germann, who had been a professor of criminal law at the University of Basel since 1930, was the militia commander of Infantry Regiment 32 and served as Chief of Staff of the Second Army Corps. When the Second World War broke out, he first served in Operations, where he was heavily involved in preparing the North and South invasion scenarios. After a brief interlude as Head of Operations, he was placed directly under the Chief of General Staff in April, 1940, to work on strategic problems [Odermatt, *Zur Genesis der Réduit-Strategie*, p. 25, Note 35].

sort of dissuasive argument as soon as he touched on the subject of the National Reduit: "The purpose of the Reduit Position would be to prove the right of a free Swiss People to exist..."<sup>137</sup>

The Reduit concept was nothing new. As a symbol of the Swiss desire for freedom and independence, it was anchored so firmly in Swiss national, historical heritage that it was always associated with resistive capacity, even with dissuasion. When France collapsed and Switzerland found itself surrounded by the Axis, new dissuasion issues arose: It had to be made clear to the Axis powers, who now depended more than ever on the Alpine passes, that these routes would be wiped out for a long time if Switzerland were attacked, and that any attacker would also have to contend with a "stubborn resistance" including "drawn-out guerrilla warfare in the Alps." Thus a military attack on Switzerland could only appear worthwhile to the Axis if they could count on gaining control of transit routes, the industrial infrastructure, and other assets more or less unharmed. For this reason, it was essential for Switzerland to make it clear to the Axis early on that if attacked, it would make its infrastructure, particularly the transit routes through the Alps, unusable enough that "they could not be restored within a foreseeable period."<sup>138</sup> However, the defense efforts would only be credible and the dissuasion for a potential enemy effective if military actions were convincing from a strategic-operational viewpoint and if determination and self-assertiveness were apparent. This aspect must have been particularly important for Switzerland and reduced its room for maneuvering in

---

<sup>137</sup> Colonel Germann to Chief of General Staff, June 22, 1940, p. 4. BAr E 27/14321.

<sup>138</sup> Deputy Chief of Staff for Operations to Chief of General Staff, June 22, 1940, pp. 2-3. BAr E 27/14321.



the summer of 1940, given the defeatist mood of the country after the fall of France. The Deputy Chief of Staff for Operations also pointed out in no uncertain terms in a study submitted to the Supreme Swiss Commander that he believed there was no question of simply giving up the previous lines of defense (frontier areas and Army Position). Not only would this prompt the public to see the difficulty constructed "Limmat Line" as "a rather shortsighted national-defense measure:" It would also have a devastating effect on the will to resist of both the civilian populace and the Army. For this reason, Strüby suggested leaving the frontier troops in their existing areas, continuing to occupy the strongest segments of the Army Position with parts of the Army at least during an initial phase, and using the bulk of the Army to set up a Central Position in the Alps.<sup>139</sup> Here Strüby, too, was clearly thinking in terms of dissuasion.<sup>140</sup>

Strangely enough, the concept of dissuasion was given no significance in a preparatory meeting attended by all five corps commanders and the Chief of General Staff and led by the Supreme Swiss Commander. While Wille, Miescher, and Labhart basically supported setting up a Central Position, the Commander of the Second Army Corps and the Chief of General Staff wanted to maintain the Army Position with reduced forces and develop a Central Reserve made up of three units. Lieutenant General Lardelli wanted to wait for the outcome of the *Bundesrat* decisions.<sup>141</sup> Meanwhile, former Chief of General Staff Labhart had expressed his own ideas on a Central Position in a personal

<sup>139</sup> Study by the Deputy Chief of Staff for Operations submitted to the Supreme Swiss Commander, July 1, 1940, p. 5 ff.. BAr E 27/14321.

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.*, p.3.

<sup>141</sup> Minutes of the meeting of June 22, 1940, p. 11. BAr E 5795/145.

letter to the Supreme Swiss Commander the day before the meeting. He discussed the dissuasive effects on the political arena of what he saw as an Army credibly deployed. Labhart believed the Army was the only trump card Switzerland had "to face down extensive German demands." He felt that Switzerland could appear quite ready to negotiate, but also had to make it clear that "we will respond with force to demands that affect our honor or our integrity, even if we have no hope of winning a military battle." If anything could contribute to controlling excessive demands, it would only be "this martial attitude on the part of the people, who are prepared to make any imaginable sacrifice for freedom." Labhart believed that the prerequisite for this was a defensive position corresponding to the Army's strength: "An Army...spread thin does not provide any bargaining chips that can be taken seriously at the bargaining table."<sup>142</sup>

Even though the modern term *dissuasion* was still not commonly employed at the beginning of the Second World War and the concept had not yet been understood in all its complexity, dissuasive tendencies were still quite visible in the thinking of various commanders. The Army leadership also repeatedly succumbed to the very understandable temptation of smothering thoughts of possible armed conflict and concerns about the obvious weaknesses and inadequacies of Swiss preparations with a belief in the dissuasive effect of the military's indisputably remarkable efforts. A "Note sur l'organisation défensive" in the summer of 1941 attempted to draw lessons from the experience of the War thus far. It came to the very depressing conclusion that the only

---

<sup>142</sup> Personal letter from the Commander of the Fourth Army Corps to the Supreme Swiss Commander, June 21, 1940, p. 4. BAr E 27/14321.

chance for a small country like Switzerland was to make military intervention by the attacker as expensive as possible, that is, to inflict a maximum of damage on him. The report noted that Switzerland held the trump card of railroad routes through the Alps, which it had to keep at all costs, or it had to destroy the routes so that they would not be usable within a foreseeable time period.<sup>143</sup> The less the Army leadership was convinced of the lasting dissuasive effect of the strategic positions as a whole, the more it concentrated (with good reason) on the Alpine crossings. In the Supreme Swiss Commander's view, the main threat at the end of 1941 was that Switzerland might have to reject an effort by the Axis to transport troops and materiel through Switzerland, leading to a surprise attack. But as the Supreme Swiss Commander wrote, "it is well known abroad that such a move would have little or no chance of success due to the heavy monitoring and defense of the railroad lines, so the enemy will probably not make such an attack."<sup>144</sup>

This claim was not supported by reality. Besides the Cavalry, only four reinforced infantry regiments were on active duty at the time, so it would have been a misstatement "to say that part of the Swiss Army was still mobilized." In this situation, the Supreme Swiss Commander believed that it was important not to give the impression abroad that "our words cannot be backed up by deeds."<sup>145</sup> The discrepancy that had developed between Switzerland's true military readiness and the logic of dissuasion was

---

<sup>143</sup> "Note sur l'organisation défensive," May 24, 1941, p. 2. BAr 5795/86.

<sup>144</sup> Supreme Swiss Commander to the Minister of Defense and the *Bundesrat*, December 10, 1941, p. 1. BAr E 27/14253.

<sup>145</sup> Report on the general military-political situation and its effect on Switzerland, December 9, 1941, pp. 3-4. BAr E 27/14253.

growing wider. But still, dissuasive viewpoints cropped up more and more in the High Command's argumentation. This continued when the German Army was fighting the allies within Europe. As the Supreme Swiss Commander stated, the risk of escalation into military battles was lower "the more the fighting ability and the training level of our Army are respected abroad."<sup>146</sup> The lack of an overall security concept became increasingly visible.

## 2. Imbalance in Security Policy

During the meeting of June 22, 1940, Prisi criticized the idea of withdrawing the bulk of the Army to the Alpine area. He said that giving away three fourths of the country was not a way to defend the nation, but simply a way "to defend the Army."<sup>147</sup> At the July 6 meeting he repeated his basic criticism of the Reduit strategy.<sup>148</sup> While Wille, Miescher, and Labhart continued to support something resembling the subsequent Reduit plan, the Commander of the Second Army Corps was of a decidedly different opinion, which he added to the minutes in a written statement one day after the meeting.<sup>149</sup> Like his immediate subordinates,<sup>150</sup> Prisi saw no workable strategic

---

<sup>146</sup> Supreme Swiss Commander to the Minister of Defense, June 21, 1944, p. 1. BAr E 27/5653.

<sup>147</sup> Minutes of the meeting of June 22, 1940, p. 7. BAr E 5795/145.

<sup>148</sup> Hofer is mistaken when he states that the first criticism of how the Army was being used was leveled "as early as 1942" [Hofer, *Die Bedeutung des Berichtes General Guisans über den Aktivdienst 1939-1945*, p. 116]. Actually, criticisms began when the Reduit decision was first made.

<sup>149</sup> Commander of the Second Army Corps to Supreme Swiss Commander, July 8, 1940. BAr E 5795/304.

<sup>150</sup> Cf. minutes of the meeting between the Commander of the Second Army Corps and the Division Commander, June 24, 1940. BAr E 27/14321.

alternative to the Army Position and was opposed in general to the dissuasive philosophy underlying the Reduit strategy:

The Swiss Army has never been an end in itself. It has always been a military means of national defense. A strategy with the sole objective of bringing the Army into safety is complete nonsense under today's circumstances [sic]. It can only be considered as a provisional measure when expecting a change in situation within a reasonable period. However, there is no such situation affecting our national frontiers today.<sup>151</sup>

Criticism of the Reduit strategy never really ceased before the end of the war. In the summer of 1941, the Minister of Defense gave the Senate Select Committee his opinion on criticism of the Reduit strategy, answering in the affirmative the question of whether the National Reduit was a proper military position.<sup>152</sup> This did not keep *Nationalrat*<sup>153</sup> Major General Eugen Bircher from sending the Ministry of Defense a critical report a year later, in which he made derisive statements about the Army High Command's Reduit strategy. Bircher largely echoed Prisi's view, saying that the Army had become an end in itself and could no longer fulfill its duty to the government.<sup>154</sup> These examples show quite clearly that the dissuasive philosophy was still far from universally held among the Army leadership at that time.

In fact, it was difficult to justify the Reduit strategy without referring to its dissuasive features. Otherwise, it was easy from the military and psychological

---

<sup>151</sup> Commander of the Second Army Corps to the Supreme Swiss Commander, re: operational deployment of the Army, July 8, 1940, p. 2. E 5795/304.

<sup>152</sup> Oral report by the Minister of Defense to the Senate Select Committee, July 10, 1941. BA E 5795/154.

<sup>153</sup> The *Nationalrat* is the equivalent of the American House of Representatives. *Nationalrat* is also the title of its members.

<sup>154</sup> Bonjour, *Geschichte der schweizerischen Neutralität*, Vol. IV, p. 178, note 22.

viewpoints to list good arguments against the Reduit, which numerous critics constantly did.

In the summer of 1941 the Supreme Swiss Commander asked General Staff officers of all ranks to participate in the planned military reform by making their own suggestions "based on their experience on active duty and keeping in mind the techniques of modern warfare." Over thirty General Staff officers and instructors, mainly young men, responded to the Supreme Swiss Commander's request,<sup>155</sup> but only twenty referred explicitly to military reform. The rest limited themselves to specific issues or discussed strategic matters.

Here, too, there were two fundamentally different schools of thought: One demanded "a return to a mobile field Army capable of any action."<sup>156</sup> A "new, mobile, responsible Army should be sent into the Central Plains instead of the old, depressed Army that retreated to the Reduit in 1940."<sup>157</sup> Representatives of this school of thought believed the National Reduit was definitely an emergency solution, "a strategy based on a moment of abject weakness," and likened it to Weygand's defense of France in the summer of 1940.<sup>158</sup> In fact, the Reduit strategy can quite justifiably be called an emergency solution, one that included several serious disadvantages:

- ♦ Giving up the most valuable parts of the country
- ♦ Splitting up the forces, spreading the fronts too far apart

---

<sup>155</sup> Critical summary of the suggestions solicited by the Supreme Swiss Commander, May 6, 1942, p. 1. BAr E 5795/260.

<sup>156</sup> Ibid., S. 14.

<sup>157</sup> Ibid., S. 30.

<sup>158</sup> "Studie über Arbeiten der Generalstabs- und Instruktionsoffiziere zur Reorganisation der Armee," May 15, 1942, p. 30. BAr E 5795/260.

- ◆ Sacrificing unnecessarily a large portion of frontier troops
- ◆ Sacrificing the Territorial Units of the Central Plains with very little in return
- ◆ Difficult mobilization
- ◆ Poor situation for facing enemy bombings
- ◆ Poor accommodations for men and horses
- ◆ Morally unsatisfying warfare, with no possibility of wiping out the enemy

For the representatives of this school of thought, this meant that the Army was actually not carrying out its constitutional role.<sup>159</sup> According to Captain Züblin,<sup>160</sup> one representative of this school of thought, the fundamental task of national defense was to protect the land and people from foreign domination, destruction, and plundering. Purely from the viewpoint of the principles of warfare, dissuasive considerations would seem to have no place here, which is clearly expressed in Züblin's opinion. Züblin could see no point in handing over valuable terrain "just to make it difficult for the enemy to attain its goal, the Alpine crossings."<sup>161</sup>

The other school of thought wanted to reduce the Army to a single purpose and organize the defensive forces accordingly.<sup>162</sup> An articulate proponent of this idea was Captain Alfred Ernst,<sup>163</sup> who believed there was no chance for successful military

---

<sup>159</sup> Critical summary of the suggestions solicited by the Supreme Swiss Commander May 6, 1942, pp. 10-11. BAr E 5795/260.

<sup>160</sup> Captain A. Züblin, attorney and officer in the General Staff of the Eighth Division, was the brother of the career officer and future Lieutenant General of the same name.

<sup>161</sup> "Studie über Arbeiten der Generalstabs- und Instruktionsoffiziere zur Reorganisation der Armee," May 15, 1942, p. 32. BAr E 5795/260.

<sup>162</sup> Critical summary of the suggestions solicited by the Supreme Swiss Commander, May 6, 1942, p. 14. E 5795/260.

<sup>163</sup> Later Commander of the Second Army Corps and editor of *Die Konzeption der schweizerischen Landesverteidigung 1815-1966*.

assertion of independence against an enemy with superior forces<sup>164</sup> and was no doubt correct in inferring that the Swiss military in the Second World War was not designed for active duty lasting several years.<sup>165</sup> He saw the purpose of fighting in "defending our honor and thereby attaining the preconditions" for regaining the nation's freedom if the overall political climate changed. This philosophy rejected the idea of building "hermetic fronts," instead suggesting a network of "fortified strongholds supplied with munitions and rations."<sup>166</sup> Unlike the other school, this school of thought was satisfied with fighting to win time and sap the enemy's strength.<sup>167</sup> Although their viewpoint was based more on national defense in the modern sense of overall defense and was less critical of Reduit strategy, it is noteworthy that the proponents of this school also paid little attention to the dissuasive background of the Reduit strategy. This confirms the suspicion that the dissuasive aspects of the Reduit strategy were not yet firmly anchored in the strategic thinking of the Swiss Army leadership. The Supreme Swiss Commander hung onto his dissuasive philosophy, as is seen in his response to a request by the Commander of the Fourth Army Corps: Based on the results of strategic maneuvers by the staff of the Fourth Army Corps, Labhart had asked for the Fourth Army Corps' share of the National Reduit to be reduced. In responding, the Supreme Swiss Commander reminded him of the dissuasive philosophy of the Reduit strategy. If Switzerland were attacked militarily by a major power "with strong enough means," it was practically inevitable that Switzerland

---

<sup>164</sup> Ibid., S. 6.

<sup>165</sup> "Studie über Arbeiten der Generalstabs- und Instruktionsoffiziere zur Reorganisation der Armee," May 15, 1942, p. 9. BAr E 5795/260.

<sup>166</sup> Critical summary of the suggestions solicited by the Supreme Swiss Commander, May 6, 1942, p. 15. E 5795/260.

<sup>167</sup> Cf. Ernst, *Die Konzeption der schweizerischen Landesverteidigung*, p. 200 ff.



would lose. For this reason, it had always been the basis of Swiss neutrality "to use the training, armament, and deployment of our Army to make an attack on our country appear so difficult that the enemy would see that it would not be worth the means that would have to be invested and the sacrifices it would involve." He pointed out that this was the goal of the Swiss Redit strategy.<sup>168</sup> For this reason, the Supreme Swiss Commander was not willing to grant precedence to military considerations. Psychological considerations moved him to reject the changes suggested by the Commander of the Fourth Army Corps, which he found perfectly understandable from a tactical point of view. Continual reassignment of positions would shake confidence in the Army leadership. The Supreme Swiss Commander believed it more important "to stick to a decision already made" than to approve changes, no matter how well-founded they might be from a military point of view. The threat of defeatism could only be countered by emphasizing the will to resist, and confidence in the Army leadership was very important to this end. But this confidence would be at risk if the people were given the feeling "that the Army leadership itself is not sure of the appropriateness" of the measures previously decided upon. The Supreme Swiss Commander felt that repeatedly changing assignments would serve to strengthen this impression, even if such changes were quite justified from a purely military standpoint.<sup>169</sup> Here we see national defense taking precedence over warfare.

---

<sup>168</sup> Supreme Swiss Commander to the Commander of the Fourth Army Corps, June 12, 1942, p. 1. BAr E 5795/144.

<sup>169</sup> *Ibid.*, S. 2.

The Reduit strategy as a whole was also repeatedly discussed. For example, the question of whether the National Reduit should be maintained was a topic for operational maneuvers.<sup>170</sup> Moreover, the Reduit strategy was marked until the end of the war with all the disadvantages of improvisation despite all the efforts to expand and strengthen it. As late as October, 1944, the Commander of the First Army Corps said the National Reduit "showed signs of hasty improvisation" and traced the shortcomings in cooperation between the different troops in the National Reduit back to the rushed development of the position in the summer of 1940. There had been no "overall plan" for the operational decision at the time, nor had there been a "unified approach."<sup>171</sup> The editor of the remarks on Züblin's "critical summary" was no doubt right when he stated that the Reduit strategy had, in fact, been an emergency solution, but had not been undertaken lightly. Moreover, it had required some courage to implement the plan consistently "without the Army or the nation suffering any harm."<sup>172</sup> However, harm could only be avoided if other aspects of security, such as supply and the willingness of the people to fight, were given precedence over purely military considerations. For as an emergency solution to the desperate strategic situation of the summer of 1940, the Reduit strategy not only was impossible to justify as part of an overall security policy; in fact it was a substitute for the complete lack thereof. The unceasing criticism of the Reduit strategy and the growing conflicts

---

<sup>170</sup> Report on lessons from operational maneuvers, June 11, 1943. BAr E 5795/401.

<sup>171</sup> Commander of the First Army Corps to Supreme Swiss Commander, October 12, 1944. BAr E 5795/134.

<sup>172</sup> Notes by Captain Züblin on the critical summary of the suggestions solicited by the Supreme Swiss Commander, November 3, 1942, p. 1. BAr E 5795/260.

between civilian and military authorities were also ultimately rooted in this imbalance in the area of security policy.

The criticism of the Redit strategy shows clearly that the strategy only made sense in terms of dissuasion. Dissuasion, in turn, means credibility at all levels. This can only be achieved if the military defense strategy is based on an overall defense philosophy. If it is not, as was the case of the Swiss Redit strategy in the Second World War, the strategy inevitably goes awry: Neither the rules of warfare, nor "civilian" security-policy demands, nor the principle of dissuasion are done justice.<sup>173</sup> One of the most important dissuasive aspects of military defense is doubtless the continuous presence of a sufficiently ready army.

---

<sup>173</sup> At a meeting on January 26, 1943, the Army Chief of Personnel said that for certain reasons it must be concluded "that Switzerland's ability to resist cannot be regarded as positively" as desired. There was an impression that Switzerland was mainly concerned about Swiss businesses and its high standard of living [Minutes of the meeting of the Dispensation Commission, January 26, 1943, p. 3. BAr E 5795/147].

### III. PRESENCE AND READINESS

#### A. CONFLICTS OVER SCOPE OF AUTHORITY

The relations between the *Bundesrat* and the Army leadership during the nearly six years of active duty were not always smooth and free of conflict. In his biography of the Supreme Swiss Commander, Gautschi reports "crisis-scale disagreements due not only to questions of fact but also to personal rivalries."<sup>174</sup> This observation is no doubt valid, but we will only discuss factual differences and their effects on military readiness here. One question that gave rise to disagreements between the *Bundesrat* (or individual members thereof) and the Supreme Swiss Commander was the scope and the timing of troop call-ups. The seeds of this conflict were planted in the *Bundesrat's* directives to the Supreme Swiss Commander, in the following passage, to wit: "It is incumbent upon you, in particular, to determine if and when the *Bundesrat* should call up other parts of the Army or the entire Army."<sup>175</sup> There was also a French version, but the German version, in particular, allowed for different interpretations.<sup>176</sup> The statement appeared to qualify the Supreme Swiss Commander's primacy in troop call-ups in accordance with Article 210 of the Military Organization Law.

Shortly after the General Mobilization at the beginning of September, 1939, the Supreme Swiss Commander asked the Minister of Defense at that time, *Bundesrat* Rudolf

---

<sup>174</sup> Gautschi, *General Henri Guisan*, p. 424.

<sup>175</sup> Report by the Supreme Swiss Commander, p. 241.

<sup>176</sup> Gautschi, *General Henri Guisan*, p. 81.

Minger, to clarify the meaning of the first paragraph of the *Bundesrat's* directives with regard to Article 210 of the Military Organization Law, which stated: "If the Supreme Swiss Commander requests that additional parts of the Army be called up, it shall be ordered and carried out by the *Bundesrat*."<sup>177</sup> A chronological summary of all of the Supreme Swiss Commander's moves relating to this matter contains a laconic comment on the above query: "There is no trace of an answer; the question was the subject of various oral consultations."<sup>178</sup> In the summer of 1941, the Supreme Swiss Commander asked the Chief of General Staff to have a lawyer determine the boundary of authority between the *Bundesrat* and the Supreme Swiss Commander. He said that the *Bundesrat* had obviously forgotten that it was its duty to carry out any troop call-ups requested by the Supreme Swiss Commander. For this reason he found it appropriate to "remind the *Bundesrat* of the full scope of the authority of the Supreme Swiss Commander."<sup>179</sup> Colonel Adolf Germann, a General Staff Officer and Professor of criminal law at the University of Basel, came to the following conclusion in his brief legal opinion on the matter: "It is only due to significant political considerations that the *Bundesrat* may fail to grant immediately the Supreme Swiss Commander's request to implement a call-up;" the *Bundesrat* would be undertaking a serious responsibility for any lost time. In the case of lengthy periods of active duty, he said, the *Bundesrat* would have to name significant political grounds, but it must also be remembered that calling up troops during active duty "was always significant to the survival of the nation," and therefore only political

---

<sup>177</sup> "Commentaires," 1941, p. 1. BAr E 5795/89.

<sup>178</sup> "Repertoire chronologique," p. 1. BAr E 5795/193.

<sup>179</sup> Supreme Swiss Commander to the Chief of General Staff, July 13, 1941. BAr E 27/5658.

considerations that also might affect the survival of the nation could justify the *Bundesrat's* refusal.<sup>180</sup> Colonel Logoz, legal advisor of the Army Staff and Professor of Jurisprudence at the University of Geneva,<sup>181</sup> found even more clearly that the Supreme Swiss Commander alone was responsible for determining the necessity and "military opportuneness" of calling up troops. In the case of a difference of opinion, the *Bundesrat* had only two possibilities at its disposal: Modify its instructions to the Supreme Swiss Commander or have recourse to the authority that elected the Supreme Swiss Commander, the *Bundesversammlung*. Another legal opinion concurred with these two about the Supreme Swiss Commander's authority and said that any other interpretation, "particularly any opinion allowing the *Bundesrat* to not implement a call-up," constituted constraint of the text of the Military Organization Law.<sup>182</sup>

After further correspondence on this subject between the Supreme Swiss Commander and the Minister of Defense,<sup>183</sup> the Supreme Swiss Commander sent a letter to the Minister of Defense in October, 1941, in which he said "I am pleased to report that as of your letter of September 24, 1941, there will be no further uncertainties on the scope of Article 210 of the Military Organization Law."<sup>184</sup>

However, at the beginning of 1944 the Minister of Defense presented the Supreme Swiss Commander with a legal opinion from the Head of the Justice Department. The opinion states that the legislator assumed "that the cooperation between the entities

---

<sup>180</sup> "Commentaires," 1941, p. 1. BAr E 5795/89

<sup>181</sup> Gautschi, *General Henri Guisan*, p. 81.

<sup>182</sup> Commentaires, 1941, S.2/3. Bar E 5795/89.

<sup>183</sup> Cf. Supreme Swiss Commander to Minister of Defense, August 6, 1941; Minister of Defense to Supreme Swiss Commander, September 24, 1941. BAr E 5795/193.

<sup>184</sup> "Répertoire chronologique," p. 2. BAr E 5795/193.

representing the highest political and military authority" was imperative. The rule was an outgrowth of the militia system and intended to divide responsibility between the civilian and military authorities. The opinion culminated in the statement that the *Bundesrat* was not required by law "to follow any request by the Supreme Swiss Commander to call up troops." "One might conclude this from the wording of Article 210, but if this were the case it would make no legal sense to involve the *Bundesrat* at all and not simply declare the Supreme Swiss Commander alone fully responsible for call-ups."<sup>185</sup> The Minister of Defense agreed fully with this viewpoint and noted that the division of authority between military and political entities had always caused difficulties and there had never been any definitive resolution of the problem. He recalled the experience of the active duty between 1914 and 1918, which still applied: "Experience...has shown how difficult it is to determine to what point the Army leadership has complete freedom in its decision, a boundary that the Army may not overstep if it does not wish to infringe on the area reserved for the political authorities, an area which they may not give up." The *Bundesrat* correctly pointed out that cooperation depended as heavily on personalities as on the regulations. Kobelt was happy to recall that during the previous active duty it had always been possible "to clear up differing opinions about this division of authority through personal contact between the two parties" and was confident that this would also be the case in the future.<sup>186</sup>

---

<sup>185</sup> "Commentaires," 1941, pp. 4-5. BAr E 5795/89.

<sup>186</sup> "Répertoire chronologique," p. 4. E 5795/193.

In his response, the Supreme Swiss Commander endorsed this statement, but reiterated his basic opinion on the issue without changing it. In his view, the legal provisions were clear. He believed he had not only the "right to request," but also the "right to order." Guisan even went so far as to say that depending on the military-political situation of the country, the Supreme Swiss Commander might have to undertake independently the duty "which he had obligated himself to perform when chosen for his position."<sup>187</sup> The discussion then waned with a retort by the Justice Department to the Supreme Swiss Commander's opinion, only to come to the fore again on the question of the scale of troop call-ups.

## B. CONFLICT OVER TROOP CALL-UPS

The first test of strength between the *Bundesrat* and the Supreme Swiss Commander over troop call-ups came at New Year's 1942/43, when the Supreme Swiss Commander attempted to update the 1943 relief plan to counter the increased threat. In changing the relief plan submitted only a few weeks before, the Supreme Swiss Commander asked for an increase in military readiness by adding a mobile reserve and calling up "eight specially-armed infantry regiments" to secure mountain passes and the gateways to the National Reduit. The purpose was to close the gaps in the relief plan recently approved by the *Bundesrat* for the months of December, January, and February.<sup>188</sup> The economic needs of both agriculture and industry had to be placed

---

<sup>187</sup> Supreme Swiss Commander to the Minister of Defense, February 8, 1944, p. 3. BA R E 27/14253.

<sup>188</sup> Minutes of the meeting of November 23, 1942, pp. 1-2. BA R E 5795/146.



second to military defense in this situation.<sup>189</sup> The Army Personnel Director described the facts of the matter as follows:

Switzerland faces the dilemma of either producing food, which will place us in a good supply situation but increase the threat of attack, or reducing our standard of living by, say, 20%. That would still be above the standards of other countries, and we will have the security of a stronger national defense.<sup>190</sup>

The *Bundesrat* did agree with the early call-up and extra service for light troops, but did not come to a decision on the infantry regiments for some time. Instead it called a meeting with the Army leadership to lay the foundations for a decision to be drafted at the next regular *Bundesrat* session. At the meeting with the Army leadership, it became clear that the *Bundesrat* and the Army leadership read the situation quite differently. The *Bundesrat* considered the current military threat much less dangerous than did the Supreme Swiss Commander, but it found the economic situation of the nation more precarious than he.<sup>191</sup>

The Supreme Swiss Commander believed that according to the existing relief plan, there were enough troops on duty before early December 1942 and after mid-February 1943, but there would be a large gap from late December until mid-February, which the potential aggressors were no doubt also aware of. The increased service of light troops approved by the *Bundesrat* was far from sufficient to fulfill the Army's three main

---

<sup>189</sup> Instructions for drafting the service plan to take effect March 1, 1943, January 30, 1943, p. 3. BAr E 27/14245, Vol. 44.

<sup>190</sup> Minutes of the Meeting of the Dispensation Commission, January 26, 1943, p. 3. BAr E 5795/147.

<sup>191</sup> Minutes of the Meeting of November 23, 1942, pp. 1-2, BAr E 5795/146. The meeting was attended by the heads of the Military, Economy, and Political Departments, the Supreme Swiss Commander, the Chief of General Staff, and the Ministry of Defense department secretary.

objectives of protecting the Alpine passes, the airfields, and the gateways to the National Reduit. In the Supreme Swiss commander's view, the light troops could protect the airfields, but not the gateways to the National Reduit and the Alpine passes. Only auxiliary watch companies were available for these tasks, which was totally insufficient.<sup>192</sup> Lacking one element would mean throwing into question the entire security deployment, which the Supreme Swiss Commander considered "an inseparable whole." Accepting a temporary solution would mean sacrificing a certain share of security.<sup>193</sup> The *Bundesrat's* delegation believed that "reductions can be found if the Army leadership revises its figures," and asked the Supreme Swiss Commander to "review the question of additional military readiness independent of the approvals already granted for light troops." The Supreme Swiss Commander was not convinced by the *Bundesrat* members' arguments, but said he was not only willing to undertake the review, but, surprisingly, also declared somewhat prematurely that he estimated that at least four regiments were needed.<sup>194</sup> This was then the extent of the troop call-up approved by the *Bundesrat* several days later.<sup>195</sup>

On December 22, 1942, the Supreme Swiss Commander submitted to the *Bundesrat* the relief plan to take affect in March 1943. Based on known German troop movements into Italy and the occupation of Alpine crossings, the Supreme Swiss Commander considered the danger of a German attack on Switzerland to have increased.

---

<sup>192</sup> Ibid.

<sup>193</sup> "Eléments de discussion pour la conférence du 23.11.1942," p. 1. BAr E 5795/87.

<sup>194</sup> Minutes of the Meeting of November 23, 1942, p. 4. BAr E 5795/146.

<sup>195</sup> Cf. *Bundesrat* to Supreme Swiss Commander, January 12, 1943, p.2.. BAr E 5795/88 and Gautschi, *General Guisan*, p. 435 ff.

For this reason, he asked the *Bundesrat* to increase the troops called up to 11 regiments as of March, 1943.<sup>196</sup> According to the Supreme Swiss Commander, the necessary degree of safety had been reached only when all possible airstrips were guarded and the railroad lines and the gateways to the National Reduit were sufficiently protected that mobilization in the Alpine area could be carried out promptly.<sup>197</sup> This notion led to the conclusion that the current relief plan "not only needed modifications as to details; its basic principles had to be scrapped." Accordingly, the troops should be called up for two months with, at most, 20 days' leave, and the numerical strength of units could not be allowed to go below 65% of normal. The Supreme Swiss Commander admitted that this would make increased agricultural production difficult, but recalled the central question of whether the people could be expected to withstand "certain restrictions" in the interest of security or whether economic considerations should be the sole determining factor.<sup>198</sup>

At the end of 1942 the Supreme Swiss Commander presented the *Bundesrat* his annual report on Army activities.<sup>199</sup> In the report, he referred again to the unsolved problem of timely call-ups during future mobilizations. He said that the Army's readiness

---

<sup>196</sup> Supreme Swiss Commander to the Minister of Defense, December 22, 1942. BAr 27/14245, Vol. 44. When the Minister of Defense asked why English airplanes making night raids on Southern Germany had not been fired upon by Swiss air defenses, the Supreme Swiss Commander answered that the air defenses had been withdrawn to protect the Alpine passes [Supreme Swiss Commander to Minister of Defense, December 2, 1942. BAr E 5795/156].

<sup>197</sup> Minutes of the meeting of January 19, 1943, p. 2. BAr E 5795/147.

<sup>198</sup> Supreme Swiss Commander to Minister of Defense, December 22, 1942. BAr E 27/14245 Vol. 44.

<sup>199</sup> "Exposé au Conseil Fédéral sur l'activité de l'armée 1942," December 24, 1942. BAr E 5795/156. In his *General Henri Guisan*, p. 434, Gautschi reports that "from 1941 on the Supreme Swiss Commander presented annual reports summarizing the Army's activities in the past year and the problems yet to be resolved. His reason for presenting these written reports was that since May, 1941, he had not had a chance to appear in person before the *Bundesrat*. For this reason, he was moved to submit written summaries on pressing issues that needed to be resolved for the benefit of all."

was based above all else on speedy call-up of the necessary personnel, on the timing and conditions under which the Army leadership had sufficient mobilized and concentrated forces.<sup>200</sup> A note by the Supreme Swiss commander's personal staff states that the report was written in a very polite, conciliatory style. When on January 6, 1943, the *Bundesrat* had not yet answered the request regarding the relief plan to be implemented that March, the Supreme Swiss Commander reiterated his requests in a situation report.<sup>201</sup> The *Bundesrat* took 21 days to respond to the various reports by the Supreme Swiss Commander. Unlike the Army High Command, the *Bundesrat* saw no increased threat for Switzerland in the landing of allied troops in North Africa and Germany's occupation of the previously unoccupied part of France. It did not see any major change in the situation since November of 1942. It even dared to predict that if Germany were really reconsidering an attack on Switzerland, "a factual comparison of the advantages and disadvantages...could hardly result in anything that did not favor the maintaining the *status quo*." Therefore the *Bundesrat* also saw no reason to rule favorably on the Supreme Swiss commander's suggestion of completely rewriting the military-service plan and revising the deferment and leave system. However, the *Bundesrat* did agree with the Supreme Swiss Commander that in cases of immediate threat of war, rapid mobilization and a well-ordered call-up of the Army would be of "the greatest significance." In a somewhat cynical postscript the *Bundesrat* expressed its expectation that the Army leadership would take all necessary preparations to this end.<sup>202</sup> Obviously, it would be a

---

<sup>200</sup> "Exposé au Conseil Fédéral sur l'activité de l'armée 1942," December 24, 1942, p. 13. BAr 5795/156.

<sup>201</sup> "Attitude du Conseil Fédéral; Suite chronologique de quelques faits," p. 1. BAr E 5795/88.

very tactless interference in the Supreme Swiss commander's area of authority if the *Bundesrat* spoke out in detail on the appropriateness of troop call-ups and their military usefulness, as it in fact did in a memo dated January 12, 1943. In this memo, it told the Supreme Swiss Commander that the initial suggestion to increase in the number of regiments from four to eight and to use them to occupy the gateways to the Reduit "was no guarantee of safe mobilization and calling-up of troops." Moreover, the *Bundesrat* suggested considering whether it might prove better as far as protecting mobilization and troop call-ups if frontier fortifications were better occupied and the sensitivity of the mine structures along the frontier were increased or even if the frontier troops were mustered.<sup>203</sup>

At a meeting of the Army leadership to discuss the 1943 relief plan, the corps commanders' opinions on the scope of the troop call-up varied, but most of them agreed with the Supreme Swiss Commander's situation report. The Commander of the Second Army Corps suggested eliminating fixed relief plans entirely in view of the rapidly changing threat and issuing "a general order" on how much military service each man must perform each year. He found fixed relief plans dangerous for psychological reasons; there was no room for half-measures. About one third of the entire Army would have to be called up to guarantee the required amount of security.<sup>204</sup> For the Commander of the First Army Corps, the troops on duty were hardly even a symbolic gesture. But the Commander of the Fourth Army Corps favored maintaining the current system. He

---

<sup>202</sup> *Bundesrat* to Supreme Swiss Commander, January 12, 1943. BA R E 5795/88.

<sup>203</sup> *Ibid.*, p.2.

<sup>204</sup> In his memo to the *Bundesrat*, the Supreme Swiss Commander countered this extreme example with his own solution of 11 Regiments [Supreme Swiss Commander to *Bundesrat*, January 19, 1943, p. 4. BA R E 27/14253].

warned against returning to the old system of leave for one third of those in each unit: "It is better to have fewer units with a full complement than to have a massive Army where everyone is on vacation." The Chief of General Staff noted that it was time to shift from the 1942 principle of training service to a principle of readiness service.<sup>205</sup>

In unusually blunt language and an obviously angered tone,<sup>206</sup> the Supreme Swiss Commander then once again presented his opinion, referring in a postscript to the unpredictability of the German High Command, which had often chosen "radical solutions instead of apparently more obvious alternatives." If they had to withdraw to the Alps, the Germans would hardly be prepared, he said, to leave one third of this Alpine Front to the Swiss Army. The ability of the Swiss Army was indeed well-esteemed, but this esteem applied only to the case of deployment of the Army. The most important consideration was to ensure that men, horses, and vehicles could reach the Reduit in time. The Supreme Swiss Commander believed that any enemy attack would be aimed at this weak point, "that any attack would be based on surprise, on destroying mobilization and preventing the troops' marching into the National Reduit," while the hills and flat areas leading to the Reduit would be the first occupied.<sup>207</sup> He protested particularly the *Bundesrat's* opinion that signs of increased danger could be recognized early: "On the

---

<sup>205</sup> Minutes of the meeting of January 19, 1943. BAr E 5795/147.

<sup>206</sup> The tensions between the *Bundesrat* and the Supreme Swiss Commander were doubtless also fueled by the controversy over the Supreme Swiss Commander's son's promotion to colonel in early 1943. The promotion was opposed by the *Bundesrat* and was soon reversed. Cf. Gautschi, *General Henri Guisan*, p. 437 ff., and Braunschweig., *Geheimer Draht nach Berlin*, p.182 ff. The fact that the letter from the *Bundesrat* of January 12, 1943, was signed only by the Chancellor and was not marked "secret" or personally addressed also caused misgivings in the Army High Command.

<sup>207</sup> Supreme Swiss Commander to *Bundesrat*, January 19, 1943, p. 2. BAr E 5795/151 and E 27/14253.

contrary, I believe that it is precisely this mistaken security and trust that is one of the most important preconditions for an enemy attack." He said that if nothing were to be learned from history, there would be no point in the Army's task and "we would be better off to simply dismiss the few troops still on duty." It would be better to show their strength than be forced to actually use them.<sup>208</sup> Along with most of his direct subordinates, the Supreme Swiss Commander believed that 11 regiments were "the absolute minimum" to ensure mobilization of the Army in the case of a surprise attack. For this reason, he resubmitted his request to muster up to 11 regiments in addition to the guard troops as of March, 1943. If the threat allowed it, the troop strength could then be reduced to aid agriculture. However, the soldiers in the regiments would be placed on active duty for one month only. The existing rules on leave and deferment would be tightened and soldiers would be granted up to 10 days' leave in emergencies so long as at least 80% of the total men remained at their posts.<sup>209</sup>

In its response the *Bundesrat* first expressed "shock regarding the style and tone of this memo" which deviated markedly from the convention "for correspondence between the Commander of the Army and the nation's highest executive branch." The *Bundesrat* protested particularly against the accusation that it paid more attention to economic considerations than to military security. It was well within the scope of the national interests the *Bundesrat* was sworn to protect to pay due attention to other, equally important questions for maintaining Swiss independence, such as feeding the people and

---

<sup>208</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3.

<sup>209</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4.

keeping the economy alive. It was quite understandable that the Army should be focused on its military duty, but the *Bundesrat* could and would not be swayed in its all-encompassing duty, which included the military as well.<sup>210</sup> The *Bundesrat* held firm to its earlier position of refraining from large troop call-ups so as to allow agriculture sufficient labor. Moreover, the Supreme Swiss Commander was asked to not call troops of every age from the same geographic area at the same time, except for frontier troops.

A meeting between the Minister of Defense and the Chief of General Staff seems to have produced some rapprochement. Consequently, it was decided "not to call up twenty or more regiments during February and March." It was planned to postpone these troops' service until April, May, or June and not to call up more troops than the call-up plan stated for the period from February to June.<sup>211</sup> In his response, the Supreme Swiss Commander once again highlighted the difference between a situation report and the *Bundesrat's* report and added that the old military principle of "une mission, un chef, des moyens" was not being adhered to if he were denied the necessary troops to carry out the mission assigned to him in August, 1939. He also complained about the egoism of the Swiss people, who read daily news reports about the suffering in the countries at war, yet were not prepared to make even the smallest sacrifice.<sup>212</sup> Leaves were then limited to 20% of the total troop strength and relief service was limited to 34 days.<sup>213</sup> The *Bundesrat* distanced itself somewhat from its situation report, saying that certain

---

<sup>210</sup> *Bundesrat* to Supreme Swiss Commander, January 22, 1943, p. 1. BAr E 5795/151.

<sup>211</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4.

<sup>212</sup> Supreme Swiss Commander to *Bundesrat*, January 27, 1943. BAr E 27/14253.

<sup>213</sup> Minutes of the meeting of the Dispensation Commission, January 26, 1943, p. 5. BAr E 5795/147.



elements of the Army High Command's situation report it was based on had not been available to it. Increased alertness was no doubt needed, but too much preventive positioning of troops should also be avoided, the *Bundesrat* said.<sup>214</sup> The Supreme Swiss Commander once again objected to a passage of the draft announcement to the *Bundesrat* on relief duty, the leave system, and deferments. He said that the formulation "increased efforts are necessary to defend the nation's security in addition to assuring supplies and maintaining the economy" made military defense look like a secondary purpose.<sup>215</sup>

There was a similar disagreement between the *Bundesrat* and the Supreme Swiss Commander in the summer of 1944, when the Allies landed in Normandy. The Supreme Swiss Commander asked for all frontier troops, the Light Brigades except for the Light Cavalry, and the antiaircraft and civil-air units.<sup>216</sup> The *Bundesrat* refused to mobilize the frontier troops and only approved calling the Light Brigades and the air and air-defense units. Then the Supreme Swiss Commander again reminded the *Bundesrat* that its behavior was in violation of Article 210 of the Military Organization Law and constituted interference by civilian agencies into the authority of the Army Commander in Chief.<sup>217</sup> The Supreme Swiss Commander insisted on his demands but it was not until June 10 that the *Bundesrat* agreed to call up the frontier troops. It still did not do it in the way the Supreme Swiss Commander wanted, by posting public notices: It used the discrete, time-taking method of sending out call-up cards.<sup>218</sup> After this new conflict on troop

<sup>214</sup> Notes on the February 1, 1943, meeting between the Minister of Defense, the Supreme Swiss Commander and the Chief of General Staff, pp. 1-2. BAR E 5795/147.

<sup>215</sup> Major Bracher to Minister of Defense, March 8, 1943. BAR E 27/14245, Vol. 44.

<sup>216</sup> Supreme Swiss Commander to Minister of Defense, June 6, 1944. E 27/14245 Vol. 69.

<sup>217</sup> Répertoire chronologique, p. 5. E 5795/193.

<sup>218</sup> Report by the Supreme Swiss Commander, pp. 59 ff. and 247.

call-ups, the Supreme Swiss Commander pointed out that it had caused several days' delay in implementing the planned security measures. He said that it had shown quite clearly the dangers of ineffectual limits between the authority of the *Bundesrat* and the Supreme Swiss Commander.<sup>219</sup> The *Bundesrat* said it had considered the landings in Normandy a positive development and thus did not want to worsen the supply situation in Switzerland by calling up troops. However, psychological considerations had also been involved in addition to these economic concerns. An emergency call-up with public posters could be expected to cause substantial worry among the civilian population.<sup>220</sup> The correspondence between the Minister of Defense and the Army High Command on this topic continued in the same style.<sup>221</sup> It was ironic when, one month later, the *Bundesrat* announced that it would release some of the troops called "with the proviso that if there is a renewed threat, we will use yellow posters, not just postcards, to call them up again."<sup>222</sup>

On July 6, the Senate Select Committee joined the controversy over troop call-ups. It not only asked the *Bundesrat* the reasons for such a massive troop call-up, but also brought up the possibility of amending Article 210 of the Military Organization Law. To forestall a disagreement with the Army High Command, the *Bundesrat* declined, saying that with the releases, the reasons for such an action had ceased to exist. The *Bundesrat* informed the Supreme Swiss Commander that it had done this "even though it would

---

<sup>219</sup> Répertoire chronologique, p. 5. BAr E 5795/193.

<sup>220</sup> *Bundesrat* to Supreme Swiss Commander, June 23, 1944, p. 2. BAr E 5795/89.

<sup>221</sup> Cf. Répertoire chronologique, pp. 5-7, BAr E 5795/193, and Supreme Swiss Commander to Minister of Defense, June 27, 1944. E 5795/158.

<sup>222</sup> "Répertoire chronologique," p. 6. BAr E 5795/193.

have been easier to let him explain his justification for going against the opinion of the *Bundesrat* by himself."<sup>223</sup>

### C. MOBILIZATION

Before the War, it was impossible to predict the situation that would develop for Switzerland. Any preparations that were made were intended for a high-intensity conflict. This was also the case when it came to mobilization. For this reason, the original structure of the Army Staff did not include a separate section that could have dealt with mobilization issues on a regular basis. When Switzerland did not enter the war and low intensity conflict, or, as the Chief of General Staff put it, "armed neutrality" remained the order of the day, a section had to be created immediately to deal with "the logistics of troop call-ups and releases." The newly-created Mobilization Section not only had to prepare for mobilization in case of war, but was also responsible for the mobilization and demobilization of relief forces.<sup>224</sup>

Just before war broke out, on August 28, 1939, the *Bundesrat* decided to call up the frontier troops<sup>225</sup> the next day as a precaution. However, it refused to simultaneously place the Army on standby, as the Chief of General Staff had requested.<sup>226</sup> The General Mobilization of September 2, 1939, placed some 430,000 Army troops on active duty<sup>227</sup>

<sup>223</sup> "Repertoire chronologique," p. 7. BAr E 5795/193.

<sup>224</sup> Report by the Chief of General Staff, p. 273.

<sup>225</sup> According to Gautschi, p. 72, the number of frontier troops called up was 50,000, "and the staffs of the military units, the mobilization organs, the anti-aircraft and air-raid services, and the mine service were also called up, as part of a 'total mobilization.'"

<sup>226</sup> Meeting of the General Staff, August, 28, 1939. BAr E 5795/348. See also Bonjour, *Geschichte der schweizerischen Neutralität*, Vol. IV, p. 19 ff, and Gautschi, *General Henri Guisan*, p. 84 ff.

and prepared over 40,000 horses and 10,000 vehicles for action.<sup>228</sup> Mobilizing the entire Army generally proceeded without incident. Only minor frictions are reported. For example, the mobilization of some troops in the Second Division was delayed due to late trains. In some places there were not enough horses, or volunteers not required to serve fell in.<sup>229</sup>

There were two methods for calling up troops. The first was public, using the available means of propagation, such as posters, radio, the public telephone and telegraph network, the railway's transmission network, loudspeakers in train stations, pamphleting from airplanes, etc. The second method was the "silent call-up:" The men being called were mailed cards with their marching orders. Public call-ups used general call-up posters and yellow posters for mobilization of specific units, for example frontier troops. Both the public and "silent" methods had advantages and disadvantages. The public call-up allowed the authorities to call specific units, not the entire Army, for short periods, while using postcards took more time. The advantages of this method were greater secrecy including the ability to keep hidden the scope of the call-up. This method was often used, not only for relief duty, but also for partial mobilizations.<sup>230</sup> To spare

<sup>227</sup> Although the figures on p. 53 of the Chief of General Staff's report do not include auxiliaries, it is doubtful whether the number of mobilized men in September, 1939, should also include the 200,000 drafted auxiliaries and the other 250,000 mobilized in May, 1940, as it does in Gautschi [Gautschi, *General Henri Guisan*, p. 84 and p. 184]; cf. Bonjour, *Geschichte der schweizerischen Neutralität*, Vol. V, p.153, note 29, and Rösch, *Bedrohte Schweiz*, p. 68, note 21. According to the report by the Army Chief of Personnel, p. 245, the strength of the Army, including auxiliaries and local militias, was some 400,000 in 1939 and approximately 500,000 in May, 1940, and increased to 850,000 during the course of active duty.

<sup>228</sup> Report by the Chief of General Staff, p. 52 ff.

<sup>229</sup> Chief of General Staff to Supreme Swiss Commander, report on mobilization of troops, September 5, 1939. BA R E 5795/348. See also Gautschi, *General Henri Guisan*, p. 84, and Bonjour, *Geschichte der schweizerischen Neutralität*, Vol. IV, p. 53 ff.

<sup>230</sup> Report by the Chief of General Staff, pp. 275-76.

agriculture, relief service and partial mobilizations were not allowed to use horses and men from the same area, as was allowed during General Mobilizations. This requirement involved major disadvantages, but had to be maintained.<sup>231</sup>

At the beginning of November, 1939, the Supreme Swiss Commander asked the *Bundesrat* to grant him the authority to make small troop call-ups numbering less than a regiment himself. The *Bundesrat* responded only partially to the request and maintained that when calling up bodies of troops, the Supreme Swiss Commander had to submit a request.<sup>232</sup> The Supreme Swiss Commander strongly protested this statement and said that according to Article 210 of the Military Organization Law, the *Bundesrat* was required to approve the troops he requested.<sup>233</sup> Two days later the Minister of Defense assured him that Article 210 of the Military Organization Law would be respected.<sup>234</sup> However, the Supreme Swiss Commander considered the authority conceded to him by the *Bundesrat* to be far from sufficient and "insignificant for our national defense."<sup>235</sup> The recent experiences of Austria, Czechoslovakia, Poland, Denmark, and Norway had "shown as clearly as can be" that the Swiss mobilization system would not be sufficient in the case of a surprise attack, despite constant improvements: "The military will only be able to properly do its duty if everyone subject to the draft can be called up immediately at the same time," according to the Minister of Defense.<sup>236</sup> The Supreme Swiss Commander suggested formally issuing instructions on the duty of every man subject to

---

<sup>231</sup> Ibid., pp. 277-78.

<sup>232</sup> *Bundesrat* minutes of November 3, 1939. BAr, Vol. 391, p. 2084.

<sup>233</sup> Supreme Swiss Commander to Minister of Defense, November 7, 1939. BAr E 27/14245.

<sup>234</sup> "Répertoire chronologique," p. 1.. BAr E 5795/193.

<sup>235</sup> Report by the *Bundesrat*, p. 252.

<sup>236</sup> *Bundesrat* minutes, April 18, 1940, p. 1. BAr, Vol. 396, p. 646.

military service ahead of time in case of a surprise attack. Accordingly, the *Bundesrat* should authorize the Supreme Swiss Commander to implement an emergency mobilization immediately "within the bounds of the directives issued to him."

The *Bundesrat* did in fact agree to mobilization in the case of surprise attack, but did not fully implement the Supreme Swiss Commander's suggestion. It disagreed in particular with the idea "that...the Supreme Swiss Commander would receive a *carte blanche* he could use any time and under any circumstances" in case of attack. It insisted on the following wording: "If the circumstances require it, the Supreme Swiss Commander is authorized to implement mobilization himself immediately."<sup>237</sup> The *Bundesrat* explained in a cover letter to the Supreme Swiss Commander that its interpretation was that he could not use his authority until hostilities had commenced.<sup>238</sup>

On the same day, the Supreme Swiss Commander and the *Bundesrat* issued instructions for action by military men not currently on active duty in the case of surprise attack.<sup>239</sup> The sheet was glued into the service folder of each of the men and was supposed to be reviewed whenever soldiers went off duty.<sup>240</sup> The instructions said that off-duty soldiers had to report immediately to their mobilization grounds or their unit if a mobilization due to surprise attack were called. Parachutists, airborne troops, and saboteurs were to be attacked "mercilessly."<sup>241</sup> To head off defeatism, the instructions said "if news that questions the will to resist of the *Bundesrat* or the Army leadership is

---

<sup>237</sup> Ibid., p. 2.

<sup>238</sup> Report by the Supreme Swiss Commander, p. 253.

<sup>239</sup> Report by the *Bundesrat*, p. 29.

<sup>240</sup> Chief of General Staff to Supreme Swiss Commander, September 18, 1940. BA R E 5795/98.

<sup>241</sup> Report by the Chief of General Staff, p. 279.

broadcast by radio, flyers, or other means, it is to be considered the invention of enemy propaganda. Our nation will defend itself to the utmost by any means necessary.<sup>242</sup>

During the course of the War, two general mobilizations and some 80 partial mobilizations were carried out.<sup>243</sup> The greatest troop strength was reached during the Second General Mobilization in May, 1940.<sup>244</sup> All in all, the successful conduct of the two general mobilizations made a positive impression at home and abroad and raised the morale of both the troops and the civilian population.<sup>245</sup>

At the end of 1941 the Supreme Swiss Commander reported to the Minister of Defense on the general situation and noted that the threat for Switzerland had increased so much recently that preventive actions for Army readiness would probably have to be taken for the sake of the readiness of the Army. To this end, he had the General Staff determine what measures needed to be taken immediately to guarantee timely destruction of the Alpine railroad connections in case of attack by airborne troops. He also had them determine how large the initial troop call-ups would have to be to ensure step-by-step mobilization. The General Staff came to the following conclusions:

- ♦ The mines then guarded on railroad lines not only had to continue to be guarded: They also required tactical protection.
- ♦ Mobile reserves needed to be placed along the major North-South routes.
- ♦ Flights over the important railroad routes had to be prevented.

---

<sup>242</sup> Report by the *Bundesrat*, p.29. The Commander of the Third Army Corps had requested keeping only one type of mobilization, i.e., mobilization in response to surprise attack [minutes of the Army corps commanders' meeting, May 26, 1941. BAr E 5795/86].

<sup>243</sup> Report by the Chief of General Staff, p. 274.

<sup>244</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 53.

<sup>245</sup> Minutes of the meeting of November 12, 1941.

- ♦ The airstrips located near railroad lines had to be defended tactically to prevent enemy troops from landing.

Preparations for General Mobilization included a general call-up of the air-force and antiaircraft troops and troops residing in frontier areas where mobilization might be threatened by an invasion. For this reason, the Supreme Swiss Commander presented the *Bundesrat* with the following "Draft National Policy on Preventive Measures for Army Mobilization:"

The Commander-in-Chief is authorized to call up the extra troops necessary for guarding the Gotthard and Lötschberg-Simplon line, for guarding main gateways to the Central area, and those needed to guard the general mobilization itself as a preventive measure prior to General Mobilization when the situation warrants it. This is particularly the case for air-defense troops and the air-force. He is also authorized to call up those troops whose evacuation from exposed frontier areas is necessary because their mobilization is threatened.<sup>246</sup>

The *Bundesrat* found that there was no reason for a general, anticipatory authorization,<sup>247</sup> although mobilization had become a *sine qua non* for the success of the defense strategy.<sup>248</sup>

With the Redit decision and the withdrawal of the Army into the Alps, the mobilization plans also had to be updated. Previously, the mobilization centers were located in the Army's recruiting facilities, mainly outside of the Central Plains. They

---

<sup>246</sup> Supreme Swiss Commander to Minister of Defense, December 10, 1941. BAr E 27/14253.

<sup>247</sup> Minister of Defense to Supreme Swiss Commander, December 16, 1941. BAr E 27/14253.

<sup>248</sup> Minutes of the meeting of November 12, 1941. BAr E 5795/86.



were now moved to the duty areas within the National Reduit. This basic change in the system presented the Army High Command with major difficulties.<sup>249</sup> It was now extremely important to quickly mobilize men, horses, and vehicles in an area served by only a few, relatively exposed, access routes. The gateways to the National Reduit now became the Achilles heel of Swiss defense strategy. It was only if mobilization in the Alpine area could be carried out successfully, only if it were possible for the arriving troops to be mobilized on time in the National Reduit, that the preconditions for a long, tough struggle in the Alps could be met. A situation report by the Supreme Swiss Commander's Personal Staff stressed the previous history of this war, which illustrated the great significance of the mobilization process. Almost everywhere, but particularly in Poland, Norway, Belgium, Holland, and Yugoslavia, mobilization had come too late. In the tense atmosphere prior to a military attack, the decision to mobilize could always be seen as a provocation by the German Army and simply precipitate the worst consequences. The examples showed that the governments in such situations generally ordered the necessary military actions only grudgingly and therefore too late.<sup>250</sup> This could not be expected to be different in Switzerland, so it was important to learn from these other cases at both the tactical and strategic levels. The only way to respond to a "lightning war" was with a "lightning defense." The report even went so far as to call for eliminating the mobilization process altogether: Admitting that timely mobilization was not politically or militarily possible led to the conclusion that mobilization should be

---

<sup>249</sup> Report by the Chief of General Staff, p. 275.

<sup>250</sup> Memo on defense organization, May 24, 1941. pp. 1-2. BAr E 5795/86.

entirely eliminated. The report did admit that this thought might appear revolutionary, or simply crazy, because mobilization had always been the first military action in the war thus far.<sup>251</sup> Still, the report recommended that Switzerland should concentrate in the future on the two most important Alpine crossings, Gotthard and Lötschberg, and place so many troops in these two foci of the National Reduit that a stubborn resistance could be put up at any time. This "permanent garrison" should be relieved periodically but always have a full complement.<sup>252</sup> For psychological reasons, the report continued, the frontier must remain guarded, but there was no need to set up a resistance front in the Central Plains.<sup>253</sup>

In order to at least halfway meet the problem of mobilizing the troops needed to defend the National Reduit, the Supreme Swiss Commander considered conducting larger mobilization exercises. Under this scheme, massive troop call-ups in times of danger were to be camouflaged credibly as routine exercises to avoid provocation and to avoid the expected difficulties in having the *Bundesrat* approve a troop call-up in the tense political situation.<sup>254</sup> An example of the fact that it was rather necessary to practice the difficult process of mobilization is found in criticism by the Minister of Defense of a mobilization on the Southern Front, citing streets clogged with commandeered vehicles and crowds and a lack of organization.<sup>255</sup>

---

<sup>251</sup> Ibid., pp. 4 and 6.

<sup>252</sup> Supreme Swiss Commander, May, 1941, p. 5. BAr E 5795/86.

<sup>253</sup> Memo on defense organization, May 24, 1941, p. 5. BAr E 5795/86.

<sup>254</sup> Supreme Swiss Commander, May, 1941, p. 4. BAr E 5795/86.

<sup>255</sup> Minister of Defense to Supreme Swiss Commander, October 1, 1943. BAr E 27/14320. See also Minister of Defense to Supreme Swiss Commander, September 15, 1943, BAr E 5795/308, where the Minister of Defense cites incidents such as vehicle drivers bringing their whole families with them.

Surprisingly, the Chief of General Staff was against conducting mobilization exercises, since they would still not "illustrate all the disruptions that can be expected in a real mobilization."<sup>256</sup> According to the Supreme Swiss Commander's report, the purpose of such exercises was to "review the mechanism of mobilization of each unit right up to the point of going into battle." He said it was important to practice mobilization particularly for some of the new mobilization grounds "that had been established in the Central Plains since the Reduit decision, in the gateways to the National Reduit, and inside the National Reduit itself."<sup>257</sup> The first exercise of the Seventh Division took place in February, 1942. The second was planned for March, but the *Bundesrat* objected, citing in particular the costs<sup>258</sup> and the waste of materials involved. The *Bundesrat* also pointed out that the exercise coincided with the planting season. Besides, the *Bundesrat* said, the lessons from the first exercise could not be applied so soon. The Supreme Swiss Commander insisted on carrying out the exercise, which he said was based on a completely different concept. The *Bundesrat* approved it "despite serious reservations."<sup>259</sup> The differences of opinion echoed for a long time.<sup>260</sup> In early 1943, the *Bundesrat* once again attempted to justify its position, citing an impressive list of considerations that the military leadership had to keep in mind while performing its duties:

---

<sup>256</sup> Notes on a conversation of February 1, 1943, p. 3. BAr E 5795/147.

<sup>257</sup> Report by the Supreme Swiss Commander, p. 140.

<sup>258</sup> The costs of mobilization exercises were approximately one million francs per division [minutes of the meeting of September 1, 1943. BAr E 5795/147].

<sup>259</sup> Report by the *Bundesrat*, pp. 35-36.

<sup>260</sup> Cf. Minister of Defense to Supreme Swiss Commander, May 21, 1942. BAr E 5795/155.

The *Bundesrat* agrees with you that a rapid mobilization and orderly deployment of the Army it is extremely important to meet an immediate threat of war.... For this reason, the *Bundesrat* gave its approval, in early 1942, to conducting two mobilization exercises. These two exercises should have been sufficient, not because of fear that the enemy could see a challenge in these actions, as you seem to presume,<sup>261</sup> but because it could be assumed that after two large exercises the necessary conclusions could be made to govern the preparations for mobilization. Also, the high costs of such exercises (one million francs for each division mobilization exercise) and the usage of fuel and other materials require certain restrictions. A third mobilization would have fallen during the spring planting season, having a negative impact on agriculture and souring the mood of the civilian population. More important was the not-unjustified fear that too-frequent mobilizations would offer our enemy and its spy organization the opportunity to sniff out our mobilization, deployment, and defense plan.<sup>262</sup>

Whatever the *Bundesrat's* reasons may have been, the Supreme Swiss Commander was probably not concerned first and foremost with purely military considerations, but more with overall strategic/defense considerations. The expected political resistance against large troop call-ups, which had occurred repeatedly in the past, was supposed to be avoided by making large-scale mobilizations routine for both domestic and foreign observers. As the war continued and the populace grew increasingly weary of it, it

---

<sup>261</sup> At the meeting of February 1, 1943, *Bundesrat* Kobelt confirmed that the *Bundesrat* had discussed the problem of provocation [note on meeting of February 1, 1943, p. 2. BAr E 5795/147].

<sup>262</sup> *Bundesrat* to Supreme Swiss Commander, January 12, 1943, p. 3. BAr E 5795/88.

became increasingly difficult for the Army High Command to maintain sufficient presence and readiness among the troops.

#### D. CLOSING THE BORDERS

The conflict of "national defense versus warfare" was not only played out on the stage of government versus Army. It encompassed all areas where civilian and military interests ran up against each other. One example was the nation's frontiers. Here military activities naturally affected normal frontier activities and sometimes even suppressed them. During times of lower tensions, it was not the Army, but the Frontier Guard Corps of the Swiss Finance and Customs Department that was responsible for policing the frontiers. It was only after initiation of hostilities<sup>263</sup> or after the borders were sealed that the Army took charge. In this case, the regulations on the use of frontier police proved themselves inflexible.<sup>264</sup>

The question of the permeability of the frontiers was a source of conflict from the very beginning. Commercial and political considerations favored more lenient frontier enforcement, while military considerations favored more restrictive frontier enforcement. Regulations for security if the frontier needed to be occupied were laid down before the war in the "border-deployment regulation"<sup>265</sup> approved by the *Bundesrat* in November, 1939. The appendix of that document contained instructions on how soldiers should

---

<sup>263</sup> Guidelines for cooperation between frontier guards and the Army, November 10, 1939. BAr E 27/13180.

<sup>264</sup> Report by the Chief of General Staff, pp. 183-184.

<sup>265</sup> "Vorschriften für Sicherheitsmassnahmen im Falle einer Grenzbesetzung," August 25, 1939. BAr E 5795/348.

manage neutrality based on a *Bundesrat* policy distributed to all active troops, frontier guards, and police organizations.<sup>266</sup> Shortly after the war began in the autumn of 1939, the Army leadership was forced to adapt a special policy to handle small violations of the frontiers stemming mainly from a lack of awareness of the actual boundaries. The goal was to avoid trifles escalating out of proportion to the actual incident and leading to diplomatic protests.<sup>267</sup>

This addressed the tactical level of frontier security, but by no means solved the basic question of permeability in the face of a constantly changing threat. There were differences of opinion on this problem even within the Army High Command.<sup>268</sup> The Supreme Swiss Commander initially did not share the opinion of the Chief of General Staff that certain things could be relaxed. Instead he explicitly criticized the unauthorized decision by the Commander of the Seventh Frontier Brigade to open up a customs post in Eastern Switzerland for agricultural traffic. He was particularly displeased because the decision was made under strong pressure of German civilian authorities who were not beyond threatening reprisals.<sup>269</sup> The demands for easing frontier passage were supported by the customs authorities, who asked for more frontier crossings (Tägerwilten, Rheintal,

---

<sup>266</sup> Report by the Chief of General Staff, p. 183.

<sup>267</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 60. See also p. 61 ff.

<sup>268</sup> Some issues regarding frontier security came up that can only be described as grotesque. One example was in Fall, 1939, when farmers demanded that the Army return the vehicles and equipment that had been used for auxiliary frontier barricades. [Chief of General Staff to the Army High Command's direct subordinates, October 19, 1939. BA R E 27/13178]. Another case was when *Bundesrat* von Steiger requested a barbed-wire barricade be erected along the entire Swiss frontier and a Catholic battalion be deployed to strengthen frontier security in Geneva canton, since it was well known that Protestant troops were much more pliable with refugees and internees [Head of the Operations Division to the Chief of General Staff, October 8, 1942].

<sup>269</sup> Supreme Swiss Commander to Chief of General Staff, April 1, 1940. BA R E 27/13178.

Schaffhausen, Rafzerberg) in view of the threatened German reprisals, since there was much more Swiss property in Germany than vice-versa.<sup>270</sup> In point of fact, many exceptions were granted, for agricultural activities such as cultivating Swiss-owned land beyond the frontier, for importing gravel and sand from quarries beyond the frontier, for transporting milk and lumber, for marketing, for transporting materials for power plants, for trips by doctors and pastors, and for transporting patients.<sup>271</sup> Not only troop commanders, but also customs officers ordered frontier crossings opened, clearly overstepping their authority. Because of this, the Supreme Swiss Commander asked for a general relaxation and a clear regulation of which restrictions and relaxations for special cases were within the Army leadership's authority.<sup>272</sup> Some flexibility was required to be able to react to sudden changes in situation in a militarily appropriate way. For this reason, the Chief of General Staff strongly opposed efforts to make actions to reduce frontier traffic or close the frontiers dependent on pre-approval by the *Bundesrat*. "In emergency situations," the Army leadership "had to be able to take purely military action under its own responsibility." The ministers, including the Minister of Defense, agreed.<sup>273</sup> The *Bundesrat* was still inundated with requests for exceptions to closed frontier crossings.<sup>274</sup> Cantonal governments also pressured the Army leadership. For example, the government of Basel spoke out "most resolutely" against the closure of two bridges

---

<sup>270</sup> Chief of General Staff to Supreme Swiss Commander, April 25, 1940. BAr E 27/13178.

<sup>271</sup> Head of Swiss Finance and Customs Department to Deputy Chief of Staff for Operations, May 22, 1940. BAr E 27/13178.

<sup>272</sup> Supreme Swiss Commander to Minister of Defense, May 29, 1940. BAr E 27/13178.

<sup>273</sup> Minister of Defense to the Head of the Swiss Post and Rail Service, June 21, 1940. BAr E 27/13178.

<sup>274</sup> Swiss Finance and Customs Department to the *Bundesrat*, June 29, 1940. BAr E 27/13178.

over the Rhine.<sup>275</sup> At the end of July, 1940, the *Bundesrat* decided to allow more frontier crossings by reversing its previous decision on partial frontier closure. At the same time, it authorized the Army leadership to tighten the controls under its own authority "for pressing military needs," but only after informing the *Bundesrat*.<sup>276</sup>

The issue of the limits of authority between the Army and civilian authorities in the matter of frontier crossings is quite symptomatic of the basic conflict between the military and civilian components of national defense. However, its significance for military readiness went far beyond that of disputes having to do with preserving the basic military substance of the Army. There was a constant struggle against a creeping process of erosion in this area.

---

<sup>275</sup> Chief of General Staff to Supreme Swiss Commander, May 31, 1940. BAr E 5795/303.

<sup>276</sup> *Bundesrat* Resolution, July 23, 1940. BAr E 27/13178.



## IV. COMBAT VALUE

### A. THE CONFLICTING GOALS OF MILITARY AND ECONOMIC DEFENSE

The conflict between the goals of military and economic defense became apparent in the First General Mobilization in the summer of 1939. The General Staff had established guidelines for requisitioning motor vehicles for the Army, but not for the war economy, for which it was also responsible in accordance with a regulation of March 3, 1939. During the mobilization, this hindered transport of very important supplies (such as milk and flour) and shut down industrial plants essential to supply nationwide.<sup>277</sup> While the Army was able to help out to some extent with its own means of transport, it was clear that there was no way to avoid dividing up the existing transport between the Army and the war economy. It was then agreed that the motor vehicles the Army did not require should be grouped into regional transport pools, with the Army delegating, so to speak, its requisition authority to the war economy for this purpose. However, this was not sufficient to meet the increasing need for transport, and the Army leadership was soon beyond its capabilities.<sup>278</sup>

Though the military authorities clearly took precedence during the mobilization, this was soon to change. In his report to the *Nationalrat* on December 6, 1939, *Bundesrat*

---

<sup>277</sup> Supreme Swiss Commander to Minister of Defense, March 9, 1940, p. 1. BAr E 5795/526.

<sup>278</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 1-2.

Minger, the Minister of Defense, stated that the military defense of the country came first, but then pointed out that defense problems could not be solved by the Army leadership alone. The Army and its leadership were responsible for military defense, he noted, and their involvement in economic affairs was therefore "naturally somewhat limited."<sup>279</sup> In this statement, Minger broached a problem which would remain unsolved until the end of the war: During mobilizations, the Army High Command controlled the lion's share of the nation's potential in terms of labor, means of transport, draught animals, and machines, and was charged with using these means for purposes of warfare. This position of power, the lack of an overarching political philosophy with a corresponding leadership, and the circumstances and duration of the Second World War, placed the Supreme Swiss Commander in the role of coordinator of overall national defense. His inarguable charisma and his temperament seem to have practically preordained him to fill the power vacuum in defense leadership. This trend corresponded fairly closely to the Army leadership's opinion that the Supreme Swiss Commander was responsible not only for military, but also for the other areas of defense. In a report on the Supreme Swiss Commander's position in October, 1940, his room for maneuvering was described as being correspondingly great. The natural authority of the Supreme Swiss Commander was described as including "measures to guarantee the material and psychological readiness and strength of the Army." The authority of the Supreme Swiss Commander, thus expanded to overall defense, was seen as a basic precondition for a modern Army leadership and for mobilizing "the economic and psychological energies of the people."

---

<sup>279</sup> Minutes of *Nationalrat* session of December 6, 1939, p. 1. BA R E 27/5653.

What was needed was a single, determined national-defense organization that represented all the people and was free "from inopportune civilian hindrances."<sup>280</sup> This situation gave rise to a conflict between the Supreme Swiss Commander's responsibility for the military sphere of overall defense and his overriding duties of coordination and leadership. According to *Bundesrat* Minger, the duty of the Army leadership was "to keep the economy afloat without harming our military defense."<sup>281</sup> The disagreements on this problem continued until the end of the war and were conducted by both parties with great determination and sometimes bitterness.<sup>282</sup>

Besides promoting domestic production, the focus of government supply efforts by the end of 1940 was clearly turned to providing the nation with imported food for both human beings and livestock.<sup>283</sup> The collapse of France, the entry of Italy into the war, and the subsequent surrounding of Switzerland by Axis powers led, in the summer and fall of 1940, to the first major disruptions in deliveries of goods within Switzerland. Efforts to make the country self-sufficient in food production were immediately redoubled.<sup>284</sup> These efforts converged in the Wahlen Plan,<sup>285</sup> which was based on the following principles:

- ♦ Economical management of supplies
- ♦ Exploitation of all resources (planting and recycling)

---

<sup>280</sup> Report on the Supreme Swiss Commander's position, October 9, 1940. BAr E 5795/193.

<sup>281</sup> Minutes of *Nationalrat* session of December 12, 1939, p. 1. BAr E 27/5653.

<sup>282</sup> Cf. Hafner, *Walther Stampfli*, p. 220 ff.

<sup>283</sup> Maurer, *Anbauschlacht*, pp. 29-30.

<sup>284</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 50 ff.

<sup>285</sup> Friedrich Traugott Wahlen was Head of the Section for Agricultural and Home Production in the Swiss Wartime Supply Office, beginning in 1938. He was also Director of the Oerlikon Agricultural Experimentation Station and was responsible for increased production.

- Organized use of the means of production where they would be most effective
- Well-organized use of human labor, particularly in the area of food production, consciously restricting all nonessential activities.<sup>286</sup>

Agriculture was thus largely based on providing the necessary labor; use of mechanized means was, of course, severely restricted.

In contrast to other forms of defense, the Swiss militia system with its universal military service mobilized nearly every "half-capable" man, removing them from the economy.<sup>287</sup> This substantially increased the conflict between military and economic defense and between military and other areas of overall national defense.

The *Bundesrat* had already resolved to expand acreage by some 25,000 hectares in October, 1939. Switzerland needed to reach another level of increased production after the fall of France. But most farms in the traditional agricultural areas were already at the upper limit of their capacity. Agriculture had to be extended increasingly to the fringes of farms and into grazing areas. Many of the farms in these areas, some 10,000 of them, were "one-man operations."<sup>288</sup> These farmers had neither the necessary experience nor the infrastructure for large-scale farming. Also, they were very often in the lower age group and therefore spent longer periods in military service. If a significant increase in food production was to be achieved in the coming years, these small farms would have to make a major contribution and would have to be provided with the necessary labor and

<sup>286</sup> Wahlen, *Bundesrat F.T. Wahlen*, p. 43.

<sup>287</sup> Letter from the Army Personnel Chief to the Supreme Swiss Commander, January 27, 1941. BAr E 5795/370. Walde speaks of 80% of the male population between ages 20 and 50 [Walde, *Generalstabschef Jakob Huber*, p. 81].

<sup>288</sup> Wartime Supply Office to the Army High Command, September 4, 1940, pp. 1-2. BAr E 5795/522.

draught animals. This, in turn, would only be possible at the expense of military potential. The Head of the Wartime Supply Office recognized clearly that the scope of the increased production expected from agriculture "was limited to a large extent by other military actions."<sup>289</sup>

The total acreage devoted to cultivation in Switzerland had been approximately 180,000 hectares at the start of the war, but by mid-1941 it increased to approximately 275,000 hectares. This expansion was substantially dependent on increased labor, since cultivation demanded two-to-three times more labor per hectare than pasture.<sup>290</sup> By 1943, some 360,000 hectares were being cultivated, almost double the surface area available before the war. Experts calculated approximately 50 labor days per hectare of increased cultivation. This resulted in 8,750,000 more working days than before the war. Due to weather, only 150 days a year were actually available, leading to a need for some 58,300 people fully able to perform work.<sup>291</sup> There was no way of obtaining such a massive amount of extra labor without a flexible and economical national defense. The demands made on such a system were complex. First, the momentary military threat and certain structural principles of Army organization had to be dealt with. In order to be able to fight at any time, the Army required structured units, not units thrown together every which way. The Army had to ensure a sufficient level of training for the entire Army, not just scattered units. This required a more or less equal division of service periods.<sup>292</sup> The

---

<sup>289</sup> Ibid., pp. 2-3.

<sup>290</sup> Wartime Supply Office to Commanders of Divisions and Brigades, June 17, 1941, p. 1. BAr E 27/5653.

<sup>291</sup> Report by the Head of the Wartime Supply Office on the state of the food supply, September 19, 1942, pp. 16-17. BAr E 27/14245.

<sup>292</sup> Report by the Chief of General Staff, p. 176 ff.

economy, however, had to constantly call on certain laborers with certain expertise. Agriculture required manpower in certain seasons of the year with wide regional differences. If we also take into account special interests, we can only underscore the Supreme Swiss Commander's statement that no relief plan could meet the needs of the Army, industry, and agriculture at the same time. All three sides would have to make some concessions.<sup>293</sup> The system for exchanging personnel between the Army and the economy developed during the course of the war to an extremely complex organization, where specific, situation-based troop reductions, regular relief for specific units, leave and dispensation schemes, and deferments overlapped and shaped one another.

## **B. THE PERSONNEL-EXCHANGE SYSTEM**

### **1. Situation-Based Troop Reductions and Regular Relief**

#### *a. General Relief Planning*

The Army leadership was forced as early as the fall of 1939 to take measures to relieve the government's finances. In view of the coming fieldwork, the entire Light Cavalry was placed on leave on September 26, 1939. On October 4, half of the Territorial Units were relieved, and two weeks later most of the troops on the Southern Front were also sent home. At that point, only the frontier police (frontier guards supplemented by mountain machine-gun battalions) and four battalions of barrage detachments were left in that area. The Supreme Swiss Commander believed that no more reductions could be tolerated from a military point of view. But recognizing his

---

<sup>293</sup> Minutes of the meeting of September 19, 1942, p. 2. BAr E 5795/146.

responsibility for overall defense policy, he added that if troop reductions had to be made for other reasons, it was important "not to seriously impact" the Army's combat strength.<sup>294</sup>

At the beginning of 1940, the Supreme Swiss Commander said he was willing "to consider generously the needs of agriculture and even release entire regiments and divisions if special conditions require it." The percentage of farmers was very uneven from unit to unit, he reported. The Seeland Regiment contained only 27% farmers, while the number of farmers in Mountain-Infantry Regiment 7 was 70%.<sup>295</sup> At the end of February, various factors prompted the Supreme Swiss Commander to consider increasing the readiness of the Army essential. But since some troops on duty had to be relieved for reasons of the economy, new call-ups were required. This was particularly true for the Frontier Troops, where the older age classes<sup>296</sup> had to be called up again, and the Bicycle Troops, who replaced the younger two age classes in the Light Cavalry.<sup>297</sup> But in an urgent letter to the *Bundesrat*, the chief executives of the cantons Obwalden and Nidwalden pointed out that it would present an extreme hardship for agriculture in their Cantons if Territorial Riflemen Battalion 145 were called in up mid-May, as planned. Since Mountain-Riflemen Battalions 108 and 47 were already on duty, all the Nidwalden units would be on duty at the same time.<sup>298</sup>

---

<sup>294</sup> Supreme Swiss Commander to Minister of Defense, November 26, 1939, pp. 1-2. BAr E 27/14245.

<sup>295</sup> Supreme Swiss Commander to Minister of Defense, February 17, 1940. BAr E 27/14245.

<sup>296</sup> The Swiss military, a militia, is strictly divided into three age classes, called, from oldest to youngest, *Landsturm*, *Landwehr*, and *Auszug*.

<sup>297</sup> Supreme Swiss Commander to the *Bundesrat*, February 19, 1940. BAr E 27/14245.

<sup>298</sup> Governing Council of the Obwalden/Nidwalden canton, July 17-18, 1940. BAr E 27/14245.

Relief plans were instituted in September, 1940, for the entire Army and maintained until June 10, 1944. The great advantage was that the scope of service and entry and release date were now known ahead of time, allowing businesses to plan their use of labor more effectively. The disadvantage was that the plans were repeatedly disrupted by the military situation and thrown into confusion.<sup>299</sup> According to the Chief of General Staff, the situation prior to the invasion of the Balkans<sup>300</sup> would have allowed two thirds of the Army to be relieved. Before the order could be given, the German troops rolled back and the renewed heavy military occupation of the frontier areas was the subject of a heavy press campaign by the Axis powers against Switzerland. For this reason, the system of two "shifts" of men per division, with one on and one off, was kept.<sup>301</sup> According to this system, half of the men in each division or mountain brigade were normally on duty for nine weeks and then received an equivalent period of leave.<sup>302</sup>

After Germany invaded the Soviet Union, the Supreme Swiss Commander reacted immediately by cutting down the number of men on active duty. In a letter of June 25, 1941, he asked for immediate implementation of a new leave plan. Two types of troops should be called up: 1. Surveillance troops and 2. Troops for occupying the National Reduit and for training.<sup>303</sup> The Supreme Swiss Commander told his direct subordinates that he was taking this measure for financial and economic reasons, but was

---

<sup>299</sup> Report by the Chief of General Staff, p. 179. See also Chief of General Staff to Supreme Swiss Commander, March 22, 1940, BA R E 5795/96, which discusses a possible shift to a relief system.

<sup>300</sup> Germany began its attack on Yugoslavia and Greece on April 6, 1941.

<sup>301</sup> Minutes of the meeting of May 19, 1941, p. 2. BA R E 5795/145.

<sup>302</sup> Minutes of the meeting of corps commanders, May 8, 1941, p. 2. BA R E 5795/145.

<sup>303</sup> Supreme Swiss Commander to Chief of General Staff, June 25, 1941, p. 1. BA R E 5795/99.



fully aware of its military drawbacks. He said he was very unhappy to have to change a position established only recently, and he was conscious of the difficulties it would impose on troop commanders.<sup>304</sup>

The pressure from the economy and from political authorities did not subside. In his response to the proposed relief plan for the winter of 1941-42, the Minister of Defense called for further troop reductions. The Supreme Swiss Commander did add more troop reductions to his second draft, but he pointed out that "the Army census in the winter of 1941-42 was completely insufficient for holding off a surprise attack for even the shortest period of time." He said the troops on duty represented "only the barest necessity for guarding the frontier, for guarding the interior of the country, and for providing training within the Army."<sup>305</sup> When the Minister of Defense said he feared that the planned troop reductions might not be enough for the economy, the Supreme Swiss Commander calculated that only about 79,000 men could truly be considered to be on active duty. The recruits that entered active duty on November 11, 1941, could only begin to be counted as active-duty troops once they had completed their Army training. Only then could a noticeable reduction in battle troops that would aid the economy be carried out.<sup>306</sup> As a matter of fact, only four reinforced infantry regiments and the Cavalry were on active duty at the end of 1941.<sup>307</sup> Meanwhile, the Army leadership

---

<sup>304</sup> Supreme Swiss Commander to commanders of air-force and anti-aircraft troops, June 28, 1941. BAr E 27/14245, Vol. 22.

<sup>305</sup> Supreme Swiss Commander to Minister of Defense, Attn.: *Bundesrat*, September 5, 1941, p.1. BAr E 27/14245 Vol. 22.

<sup>306</sup> Supreme Swiss Commander to Minister of Defense, November 3, 1941, p. 2. BAr E 5795/155.

<sup>307</sup> "Die allgemeine militärisch-politische Lage und ihr Einfluss auf die Schweiz, 9.12.1941," p. 3. BAr E 27/14253. According to a letter from the Minister of Defense to the Supreme Swiss

sought further improvements for the sake of the economy. A report on changing the relief system said that the following measures should be taken to meet the needs of the economy:

- ♦ Reduce relief duty and be more strict as regards leave and dispensations. The younger two age classes should have two one-month relief duties every 18 months. Territorial Units should have only one relief duty every 18 months, with no leaves or dispensations.
- ♦ No additional service for older men, even if this were at the expense of training. Service by these men was one of the main sources of the economic difficulties and resulting morale problems caused by military service. Soldiers under 25 were generally less tied down to a job and did not yet have families.
- ♦ Earlier mailing of call-up cards so that both employers and employees could better plan.<sup>308</sup>

When the relief plan to be implemented January, 1943, was prepared, the military-political situation gave no cause for immediate concern. For this reason, besides trainers, only a certain number of troops were called up for sentry duty at major frontier crossings and for guarding internees and military targets. A small number of special forces were also on duty. Given the increase in unemployment, it was even planned to replace some regulars with the unemployed. When drawing up the relief plan, the Army

---

Commander, the Cavalry's morale was poor because so many officers compared to troops were called up, which left many officers without enough to do. This morale problem was spreading increasingly into agriculture [Minister of Defense to Supreme Swiss Commander, December 12, 1941. BAr E 5795/155].

<sup>308</sup> Report on new relief system, November 17, 1941. BAr 27/14245, Vol. 42.

leadership was guided by great care for the needs of business and agriculture. This led to unwanted peaks in February and March and October and November that had nothing to do with the military threat. The mobilized troops were also reduced by 60 to 40 percent of their normal census by deferments, which had to be granted liberally during the planting and harvest seasons in accordance with Order No. 215.<sup>309</sup> Even the Wartime Supply Office acknowledged the Army leadership's great consideration for business. It said that the Army had made a major contribution to ensuring the food supply in the spring of 1943, so that the planned total acreage was nearly achieved and the harvest was quite satisfactory.<sup>310</sup>

After the serious disagreements on the relief plan for 1943,<sup>311</sup> when the length of relief duty was reduced, the Supreme Swiss Commander planned to lengthen service periods from 32 to 46 days in the summer of 1944. Here he met with the resistance of the *Bundesrat*, which protested changing the established procedure which "the people have gotten used to" for reasons that were mainly psychological. It said that lengthening service periods would also encourage calls for leave and dispensation.<sup>312</sup> The argument of fairness in duty allocation was aired more frequently. In a letter to the Army Personnel Director, the Supreme Swiss Commander reported that a mistaken conception had taken root among the troops that every man, whatever his assignment, rank, or type of duty, had to perform the same number of days. In addition, many workers from large firms sought

---

<sup>309</sup> Minutes of the meeting of the Dispensation Commission, January 26, 1943, p. 2. BA R E 5795/147.

<sup>310</sup> Head of the Wartime Supply Office to the Minister of Defense, August 24, 1943. BA R E 27/14245 Vol. 43.

<sup>311</sup> Cf. p. 36 ff.

<sup>312</sup> *Bundesrat* to Supreme Swiss Commander, May 16, 1944. BA R E 27/14245.

longer leaves and dispensations "so that they would not lose ground against their coworkers who were not required to serve." These were no scattered cases, but a widely observed phenomenon which could have had major repercussions on the Army."<sup>313</sup>

When the *Bundesrat* refused again in the autumn of 1944 to call in the Light Cavalry, the Supreme Swiss Commander chose a new tack. He said that not calling in the Light Cavalry was not only not understood by the motorized units and bicycle units; the Light Cavalry themselves were surprised and puzzled. There were even rumors that the Light Cavalry felt ashamed to be left out at a time when the Light Brigades were receiving new responsibilities. Even the proponents of the Cavalry must have had misgivings when the impression was afoot that it was unable to provide the expected military service in times of active duty. In addition, there were complaints that two classes of farmers were being created: A minority of large farmers who stayed home because they could afford to provide a cavalry horse,<sup>314</sup> and a majority of small or medium-sized farmers who had to make a larger contribution to national defense. There were also reportedly no agricultural reasons for not calling in the Cavalry, because it was precisely those farmers who could afford a cavalry horse that were among the more privileged and had other horses, or even tractors.<sup>315</sup>

At first, the *Bundesrat* stood its ground, but the Supreme Swiss Commander insisted and submitted an opinion by the Chief of the Light Troops favoring a call-up for

---

<sup>313</sup> Supreme Swiss Commander to Chief of Army Personnel, August 11, 1944, pp. 1-2. BAr E 5795/129.

<sup>314</sup> The horse was normally the personal property of the Light Cavalry.

<sup>315</sup> Supreme Swiss Commander to the Minister of Defense, September 9, 1944. BAr E 5795/158.

psychological reasons. Eventually, the *Bundesrat* gave in, "to avoid conflict with the Supreme Swiss Commander." However, it did make the proviso that the entire horse population could not be used.<sup>316</sup> On October 18, 1944, Light Brigades I through III were replaced by a group of Light Cavalry from all the Light Cavalry squadrons of these brigades.<sup>317</sup> Even more difficult than those of the rest of the Army were the problems with relief for the frontier guards.

### ***b. Frontier Guards***

To understand the difficulties of the Frontier Guards, we must first recall how they came into existence. Until 1918, guarding the frontier was the responsibility of those living near the frontier in oldest age group subject to military service. Although this type of frontier guard was now far from sufficient to meet the military demands placed on it, little modernization was attempted until well into 1930. In 1931 it was decided that in cases of military threat all age groups subject to military service in the area affected should be alerted and brought together into *ad-hoc* militias. It soon became apparent that this method was subject to all the lackings of improvisation.<sup>318</sup> It was then decided only to call up permanently organized groups. The new solution again related to all men subject to military service living in frontier regions, but this time in all age groups. This was the only way of guaranteeing that the Frontier Guards could be alerted and mobilized quickly.<sup>319</sup> The *Bundesrat* also approved the creation of a permanent

---

<sup>316</sup> Report by the *Bundesrat*, p. 38.

<sup>317</sup> Minister of Defense to the *Bundesrat*, October 3, 1944. BAr E 27/14245, Vol. 60.

<sup>318</sup> In late 1937, an article on "the scandalous state of the Swiss frontier guards" appeared in the magazine *Die Tat*. It was then echoed in the press and among the authorities [BAr E 27/13175].

<sup>319</sup> Report by the Chief of General Staff, p. 71. ff.

frontier-guard company made up of 200 volunteer unemployed men. It was later decided to create eight additional companies, but financial concerns allowed only five companies, with fewer men, to be created.<sup>320</sup> By May of 1939, there were some 3200 men in 14 volunteer Frontier-Guard companies.<sup>321</sup> On August 29, 1939, the total of some 50,000 Frontier Guards were called up<sup>322</sup> to ensure that the entire Swiss Army could be mobilized "with calm and order."<sup>323</sup> When the threat allowed for troop numbers to be reduced, the Frontier Guards were also included in the relief-duty system. This allowed the field Army to be relieved of frontier security. Guarding the frontiers turned out to be a constant task throughout the entire war, but there was only a small number of Frontier Troops available to that end, recruited exclusively from areas along the frontiers. This led to inordinate pressure on the inhabitants of frontier regions. For example, in May, 1941, the "Middle-Rhine-Valley Working Group," an association founded to look after the economic interests of the region, expressed its displeasure with the fact that frontier brigades recruited almost exclusively from the Rhine Valley were not released, complaining that these men were almost exclusively small businessmen, freelance workers, and low-ranking employees who did not enjoy the generous leave system allotted to farmers and those employed in the war economy. Everyone had been called up at once, "from the youngest soldiers to the older troops and the auxiliaries," resulting in a severe economic impact on the Rhine Valley. The Supreme Swiss Commander was

---

<sup>320</sup> Kreis, *Auf den Spuren von La Charité*, pp. 21-22.

<sup>321</sup> Minutes of the National Defense Commission, May 16, 1939. BA R E 27/4060.

<sup>322</sup> Gautschi, *General Henri Guisan*, p. 72

<sup>323</sup> Bonjour, *Geschichte der schweizerischen Neutralität*, Vol. IV, p. 53.

therefore asked "to give his attention to economic, political, and psychological considerations in addition to the military considerations."<sup>324</sup>

The proximity of home and work, which constantly reminded soldiers of the many things they had to do there, was an added psychological burden for the frontier troops. This, along with the fact that frontier duty was generally monotonous, provoked general poor morale among the frontier guards.<sup>325</sup> This problem threatened to take on critical proportions in the later years of the war in particular. This is seen in a letter from an officer in the French-speaking area voicing his concern over an unusual amount of dissatisfaction in all spheres of the civilian population. He said the dissatisfaction was rooted in the long service period of the frontier troops. Alarming news came in from all around, and the recently-released frontier troops received new marching orders, even though the Supreme Swiss Commander had sent a personal letter to the women in the area promising "to relieve the frontier troops for a longer period." The officer reported that the morale problem was "thus not simply a flagging of the military will to fight, but a hopeless dissatisfaction with the relief schedule used." He said that he feared "ominous events" if steps were not taken, particularly since "the majority of the officers, right up to the highest commanders, were publicly expressing their dissatisfaction."<sup>326</sup>

---

<sup>324</sup> Rhine-Valley Working Group to Supreme Swiss Commander, May 16, 1941. BAr E 27/14245. Such moves were also attempted by members of parliament [see the inquiry by *Nationalrat* Gressot regarding a just relief system of June 5, 1941 (BAr E 27/14252) and the parliamentary inquiry by Grossrat Terrier on service by frontier troops of May 14, 1941. BAr E 27/14252].

<sup>325</sup> Cf. *Ständerat* Schmucki to Minister of Defense, May 27, 1941. BAr E 27/14245, Vol. 23.

<sup>326</sup> Letter from Direktor H. Fritzsche to Captain B. Frei, November 7, 1944, pp. 1-2. BAr E 5795/129.

The Army leadership was flooded by reports from the canton authorities on widespread morale problems among the Frontier Troops because the latter did not see the reasons for their heavier load relative to other troops.<sup>327</sup> *Bundesrat* Kobelt expected the matter of Frontier Troops to be the object of discussions in the upcoming session of parliament. His questions for the Supreme Swiss Commander included a reference to relief for two Frontier Brigades whose continued service he found particularly unhealthy for the economy.<sup>328</sup> The unpopular 14-day relief cycle had only been carried out at Frontier Brigade IV, the Supreme Swiss Commander answered, "so that all soldiers could finish their winter preparations before the arrival of the frost." He said that during October the Brigade Commander had consulted his men on a two-week or four-week relief cycle and a vote in Riflemen Battalion 246 had resulted in an equal number favoring each solution, with the farmers and small businessmen favoring shorter duty periods and those in industry and construction favoring longer duty periods. The commander then opted for a three-week cycle.<sup>329</sup> The Chief of General Staff said it was understandable that soldiers should make comparisons with other units, but the military standpoint had to consider the organization of troops when issuing orders.<sup>330</sup>

The members of the younger age class serving as Frontier Troops were assigned to core units called *Stammverbände*, with organization and armament

---

<sup>327</sup> Various reports by cantonal military offices, October 1944-January 1945. BAr E 27/14245, Vol. 59.

<sup>328</sup> Minister of Defense to Supreme Swiss Commander, November 4, 1944. BAr E 27/14245, Vol. 59.

<sup>329</sup> Supreme Swiss Commander to Minister of Defense, November 16, 1944. BAr E 27/14245, Vol. 59.

<sup>330</sup> Chief of General Staff to Minister of Defense, November 5, 1944. BAr E 27/14245 Vol. 59.



corresponding to those of the other troops of the youngest age class. If these *Stammverbände* were used for other assignments, such as for guarding the gateways to the National Reduit, the structure of the Frontier Troops was then incomplete. Moreover, the method was impracticable because there was insufficient transport. It could only be used for Frontier-Police activities,<sup>331</sup> and hindered the leave cycle for the Frontier Troops, worsening the situation. By the summer of 1943, the need for Frontier Troops had grown so much that the *Stammverbänden* could only be relieved to perform other duties with difficulty. For this reason, the *Stammverbänden* used thus far to guard the gateways to the National Reduit had to be replaced by other troops. To avoid additional call-ups, the Supreme Swiss Commander suggested using recruit regiments for this task. According to this plan, recruit schools should spend their final month, that is, their field-training period, in the gateways to the National Reduit, which resulted in expanding recruit training by two and one-half weeks.<sup>332</sup>

The canton of Graubünden, most of whose men were assigned to Frontier units, had things particularly difficult. The canton's business and agriculture were under a particularly heavy load. For many local men, service meant "that the economic existence of their families was being put at risk." The decision in late 1944 to assign the regiment of the youngest age class from the canton of Graubünden regiment to duty in the canton of Ticino provoked "particular discontent" among the older generation. The chief executive of the cantonal government then wrote to the Army High Command, saying

---

<sup>331</sup> Report by the Chief of General Staff, p. 74.

<sup>332</sup> Minutes of the *Bundesrat* meeting of May 4, 1943. BA r E 5795/157.

that there had been widespread hope "that these three battalions of the youngest age class would serve turns relieving the Frontier Guards in the canton of Graubünden during the winter."<sup>333</sup>

Economic concerns made it necessary to treat the different age classes differently as regards relief duty.<sup>334</sup> The reasons for the poor morale, which was particularly noticeable among the Frontier Troops near the war's end, were many: Boredom and monotonous service in familiar frontier areas, near the place of residence and work; a feeling that the service was useless; fraternization between officers and men, which had a negative affect on discipline; different amounts of work to be done in the various sectors; different treatment in terms of leave; long service periods; and difficulties between the different age groups among the frontier guards. All ages of men, from young soldiers fresh out of recruit training to 55-year-old *Landsturm* soldiers, were represented in the Frontier Troops. This led to problems of compatibility, particularly when there was no threat. In this climate, errors in leadership on the part of military superiors were often the straw that broke the camel's back. The motto of one company of frontier troops was "if attacked, don't fire."<sup>335</sup>

## 2. The Leave System

If troops dismissed were later recalled, they had to be "remobilized:" They reported again to their mobilization grounds, picked up their equipment, deployed to their

---

<sup>333</sup> Chief of executive of the canton of Graubünden to Army High Command, November 18, 1944. BAr E 27/14245 Vol. 59.

<sup>334</sup> Report by the Chief of General Staff, p. 76.

<sup>335</sup> "Etat d' esprit de la population suisse dans certaines régions," November 20, 1944. BAr E 5795/129.

service areas, built the required infrastructure, and assumed battle positions. This process lasted several days, days that could be decisive for the fate of the nation. Furthermore, mobilizing troops were at risk of enemy attack. For this reason, the Supreme Swiss Commander spoke out at the end of 1939 in favor of a universal leave system instead of relieving entire troop units. He planned to grant leave to 35 to 50% of the full complement of troops. Because their local organization allowed rapid remobilization, the Frontier Troops could be dismissed *en masse* where appropriate. The same is true of the Territorial Units and the Bicycle Troops, since these troops required relatively little equipment, in particular, no horses.

The main military advantage of universal leave was that returning troops did not report to mobilization grounds, but reported directly to their place of service. This basically maintained the readiness of the units in question. However, their readiness for actual combat was impacted, since numbers of horses were also reduced and took several days to restore.<sup>336</sup> Economically, too, the system of individual leave appeared advantageous at first glance. It seemed more flexible in that business could actually be given those individuals what it needed most urgently.<sup>337</sup> However, if military readiness was to remain unchanged, more leaves could result very quickly in larger troop call-ups. From a military standpoint, granting leave to entire bodies of men was somewhat preferable, since reducing the strength of a unit by up to 50% practically made it

---

<sup>336</sup> For logistical reasons, horses and their riders could only be mobilized at the mobilization grounds.

<sup>337</sup> Supreme Swiss Commander to Minister of Defense, November 26, 1939. BA R E 27/14245.

impossible for many units to carry out their mandates and made efficient training extraordinarily difficult. It was a problem of squaring the circle.

Before 1939 was out, a leave system was introduced which allowed a certain percentage of the men assigned to a unit to be granted leave for a shorter or longer time. Moreover, business was given the use of personnel for longer periods of time by means of dispensations. According to the Commander of the Fourth Army Corps, however, this would not be enough to meet the needs of the economy. After all, during the winter some 170,000 to 180,000 men were still on duty,<sup>338</sup> at a daily cost of 3-4 million francs. By mid-1940, the total costs for the military presence had amounted to some 2.5 billion francs.<sup>339</sup>

At the end of February, 1940, the Army High Command reduced leave rates for individual units from 35% or 50% to 20%, with the 20% not calculated by unit, but by battalion. The entire leave and relief system was rethought and set down in new rules. To address the needs of agriculture, the new leave system provided that agricultural leaves should "normally" be granted for at least three weeks.<sup>340</sup>

At a meeting of unit commanders on July 6, 1940, the Supreme Swiss Commander once again called for a review of the question of whether a universal percentage leave system or a system of granting leaves to entire units at a time should be followed.<sup>341</sup> Lieutenant General Miescher got to the heart of the matter when he said that

---

<sup>338</sup> According to a report, the total troop census on December 31, 1939, was 168,000 men.

<sup>339</sup> Commander of the Fourth Army Corps to Supreme Swiss Commander, April 6, 1940, p. 2. BAr E 5795/142.

<sup>340</sup> Order from the Commander of the Ninth Division on leave for soldiers, March 1, 1940. p. 1. BAr E 5795/303.

<sup>341</sup> Minutes of the meeting of July 6, 1940. BAr E 5795/145.

it was exceedingly difficult to please everyone, whether through individual or battalion leaves. In one division the battalion system of leaves was reported to be functioning well, but the cantonal government of Schwyz wanted individual, not battalion, leaves for the Ninth Division. The government of the canton of Nidwalden wanted leaves by battalion for the Eighth Division and also protested a new call-up of Territorial Units. It said that it was most unfortunate that the politicians were not conscious of the seriousness of the situation.<sup>342</sup>

In the beginning of 1941, the Army High Command considered two other variants: First: Simultaneous call-ups of a total of eight divisions in their full numbers and leave for the soldiers depending on the needs of agriculture. If the number of men on leave exceeded 50% of the total men, the other half of the unit in question should also be sent on leave. Second: Maintaining the current practice of relief by turns by unit. According to this system, the various divisions were called up alternately with the number of leaves granted kept as low as possible. For units that included a large percentage of farmers, service had to be postponed until after the "main planting season."<sup>343</sup>

The Supreme Swiss Commander opted for maintaining the current practice with some modifications, which gave the following numbers for the first half of 1941:

- ♦ March 1: 88,000

---

<sup>342</sup> Minutes of the meeting of April 29, 1940, p. 12. BAr E 5795/145.

<sup>343</sup> Excerpt from minutes of the *Bundesrat* meeting of January 24, 1941, p. 1. BAr E 27/245, Vol. 20. The share of farmers in the infantry regiments was between six and 74% [report by the Chief of General Staff, p. 178].

- ♦ April 1: 120,000
- ♦ May 1: 128,000
- ♦ July 1: 155,000

The number of men actually on duty was much lower, since the leave rates sometimes reached 50%. The Supreme Swiss Commander pointed out that the relief plan suggested called for the smallest possible troop strength and he reserved the right to take additional steps should the threat worsen.<sup>344</sup> At a meeting on January 17, 1941, Lieutenant General Miescher was extremely critical of further concessions by the Army to agriculture:

Personally, I have the embarrassing impression that the Army is being weakened irresponsibly in the effort to win the "agricultural battle." The tendency is to try to win the "agricultural battle" using soldiers, without using additional civilians. This is a very dangerous tendency indeed. The Army must make it quite clear that all possibilities of using the civilian population must be exhausted before the armed forces are called in. We must not continue for another year with the same comprehensive leave plan that serves only the interests of agriculture. Those who are not farmers are already anxious that a single class should receive privileges without similar leave privileges being granted to workers and small businessmen.<sup>345</sup>

Subsequently, the "leaves for farmers during the 1941 planting season" in Personnel Order No. 172 were completely revised. The Army High Command made a

---

<sup>344</sup> Excerpt from minutes of the *Bundesrat* meeting of January 24, 1941, p. 4. BAr E 27/245 Vol. 20.

<sup>345</sup> Minutes of the meeting of January 17, 1941, p. 2. BAr E 5795/145.

militarily fateful concession by ceding the authority to decide on the length of leaves to a civilian authority, the Local Farming Office.<sup>346</sup> According to a directive by the Army Personnel Director implementing Order No. 172, this reduced troop commanders' authority in questions of leave to practically zero. The company commander, he said, not only had to approve the request by the head of the Local Farming Office--"except in the case of superior military needs," but also had to agree with keeping the duration and date of return open and having them set by the Local Farming Office in cooperation with the military representative of the community. The Chief of Army Personnel's directive gave the following justification: "The exact duration of the leave cannot be set at its beginning because of weather. For this reason the communal military representative and the head of the Local Farming Office have been charged with determining the return date. If there are extended periods of bad weather, leaves may be interrupted."<sup>347</sup>

This made efficient planning of training and military routine nearly impossible. Troop commanders' resistance to Order No. 172 was accordingly heavy and even went as far as open obstructionism.<sup>348</sup> Numerous abuses also added to the ill feelings.<sup>349</sup> The Army High Command and many troop commanders felt that the generous leave system

---

<sup>346</sup> Order No. 172, January 20, 1941. BAr E 27/5653.1. The Local Farming Office was responsible for supervising and coordinating agricultural work in a local area.

<sup>347</sup> Directive for implementing Order No. 172 of January 20, 1941, regarding vacation for farmers during the 1941 planting season, February 12, 1941. BAr E 27/5653.

<sup>348</sup> A letter from the Chief of General Staff to Commander of the First Army Corps reports that the orders of the Commander of Frontier Brigade III on vacation for farmers "were in flagrant contradiction to Order No. 172 of the Army Chief of Personnel [April 24, 1941, BAr E 5795/132]. In the case of the Commander of the Sixth Division, the Supreme Swiss Commander wrote to Commander of the Fourth Army Corps that there should be no punishment for failure to follow Order No. 172, since it had since been lifted [Supreme Swiss Commander to Commander of the Fourth Army Corps, June 5, 1941, E 5795/143].

<sup>349</sup> Cf. minutes of the meeting of corps commanders, May, 8, 1941, p. 2. BAr E 5795/145.

led to "neglect of discipline" and to displeasure among small businessmen-soldiers and soldiers in freelance professions, and also caused severe difficulties for unitary training.<sup>350</sup> In fact, many training problems were caused by the fact that commanders rarely had over 60% of their full complement of troops.<sup>351</sup> Inquiries by the Army Personnel Director had shown that the number of men actually on duty during the 1941 planting season "taking into account all possible leaves" sank to 40%. This meant that only 40% of the men formally on duty were immediately available. Whereas the ups and downs of international tensions did not lead immediately to military measures during times of higher numbers of troops, the lower census now meant that there had to be a reaction to even minimal fluctuations in the military situation.<sup>352</sup>

After his first experiences with it, the Supreme Swiss Commander also noted that "from a military standpoint, Order No. 172 went too far." He said he had only approved the order because the threat at the time had allowed troops to be reduced somewhat. He felt that the "militarily highly questionable situation" had to be changed "via strict application of the leave system by the Army leadership."<sup>353</sup> From a military point of view, a decent level of battle-readiness in the Army had to be ensured. If this limit was violated for any reason, military defense would have to be given up on entirely, as the Army Personnel Director pointedly said: "If it is believed that the 500,000 hectares cannot be planted without the Army and the food supply is therefore in jeopardy, it is

---

<sup>350</sup> Minutes of the meeting of May 19, 1941, p. 1. BA R E 5795/145.

<sup>351</sup> Report by the Chief of General Staff, p. 176.

<sup>352</sup> Supreme Swiss Commander to Minister of Defense, January 31, 1941, p. 1. BA R E 27/5653.

<sup>353</sup> Supreme Swiss Commander to Minister of Defense, January, 27, 1941, p. 1. BA R E 27/5658.



better to demobilize entirely. Nothing is more dangerous than allowing the people to believe that the Army is prepared when this is not the case."<sup>354</sup>

Order No. 172 was "a failed attempt"<sup>355</sup> to harmonize the needs of the nation's military defense with those of the economy, and from a military viewpoint, it had to be repealed. As the Supreme Swiss Commander said during the meeting with the Corps commanders on May 26, 1941, he believed that "the people from the Wartime Nutrition Office" were basing their actions on completely false suppositions when they assumed that the war was over and the Army could be relieved. The *Bundesrat* might be forced from one day to the next to appeal to the Army if the enemy made "inconceivable demands; for this reason, we must remain at the ready and may not allow inordinate concern for other interests to destroy the Army."<sup>356</sup> By the end of May, Order No. 172 was replaced by Order No. 190, which severely tightened up the leave rules in favor of the Army. The leave limit was set at 15% for troops whose regular relief service did not last more than two months. For those serving longer, the limit was set at 30% of the full complement. However, unit commanders were given the authority to exceed these limits for the sake of agriculture according to their own judgment. A particularly strong new restriction was that leaves exceeding 14 days had to be made up by serving an equal amount of time in another unit.<sup>357</sup>

<sup>354</sup> Minutes of the meeting of May 19, 1941, pp. 3-4. BAr E 5795/145.

<sup>355</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2; quote from the Chief of General Staff, Lieutenant Huber.

<sup>356</sup> Minutes of the meeting of corps commanders, May 26, 1941, p. 2. BAr E 5795/145.

<sup>357</sup> Order No. 190, May 13, 1941. BAr E 27/14245. Lieutenant General Lardelli believed that 14 days was a generous period; he believed that, at the most, eight days should be allowed without makeup. [Minutes of the meeting of May 26, 1941, p. 3. BAr E 5795/145].

A veritable storm of anger and criticism broke out when Order No. 172 was lifted and replaced by Order No. 190. The Head of the Wartime Nutrition Office said that the solution was completely unacceptable for the nation's food supply, that "under these conditions he was obliged to accept no responsibility for future food supply." He suggested revising Order No. 190 "closely following Order No. 172."<sup>358</sup> The Swiss Farmers' Association also entered the fray and urgently requested that the system set at the beginning of the year under Order No. 172 be maintained for the summer and autumn months.<sup>359</sup> After it had reviewed the new system, the Farmers' Association said it had serious objections to newly-issued Order No. 190.<sup>360</sup> When this did not provide results, it presented examples of the alleged failings of the new system:

We have since had experiences in seeing Leave Order No. 190 as implemented. The Order has disappointed Agriculture by and large..... Some men of the oldest age class who do not have any assistants and cannot have any because of considerations granted to keeping the industry of their area running well were called up to serve as street guards immediately before hay-gathering. One man had his only horse confiscated because he supposedly violated a military rule last winter. In the Gürbetal region in the canton of Bern not only the youngest age class, but also the older two, are currently on duty. In fact, even the auxiliary detachments are on duty, so that the whole valley is without able-bodied men. At a 23-hectare farm in Ruswil, three men had to report for duty, including the foreman and two milkers. Back home, facing the hay season alone, were a father aged seventy and a handicapped boy aged sixteen.<sup>361</sup>

<sup>358</sup> Head of the Wartime Nutrition Office to Chief of Army Personnel, May 20, 1941. BA R E 27/14245.

<sup>359</sup> Letter from the Swiss Farmers' Association to Chief of General Staff, May 5, 1941, p. 2. BA R E 27/5653.

<sup>360</sup> Letter from the Swiss Farmers' Association to Chief of General Staff, May 21, 1941. BA R E 27/5653.

<sup>361</sup> Letter from the Swiss Farmers' Association to Chief of General Staff, June 16, 1941. BA R E 27/5653.

The Swiss Farmers' Association also used other channels to bring pressure on the Army leadership, such as the Minister of Justice and Police. He referred the Supreme Swiss Commander in accusatory tones to a letter from the Swiss Farmers' Association in September, when the fruit, potato, and grape crops were harvested and when vegetables should be planted for the next year, but all age groups on the right bank of Lake Zurich had been called up.<sup>362</sup> Various cantonal governments also wrote to the Minister of Defense, expressing their "regret for the shoddy" replacement of Order No. 172 by Order No. 190. They reported that the available farmers were insufficient for achieving the increased production and the successes attained through Order 190 had been undone. The mood of the farmers was reported to be poor, since they had to bear the full burden of the increased production and could expect little help from citydwellers. The Secretary of Agriculture of Ticino complained that Ticino's farmers were having to perform the work that was previously done by 2,500 to 3,000 "guest workers" from Italy, and the War Economy Office of the canton of Zurich reported that "further support for increased production without ensuring the availability of local labor" would be strictly rejected "as an unreasonable demand."<sup>363</sup> An office for coordinating agricultural work in the Zurich area (Ackerbaustelle) passed resolution protesting the fact that a leave lasting more than 14 days would have to be made up, while laborers in companies involved in the war economy "could be simply dismissed for a whole year with no further ado." This

---

<sup>362</sup> Letter from the Head of the Swiss Justice and Police Ministry, September 9, 1941. BAr E 27/14245, Vol. 28.

<sup>363</sup> Letters from various cantonal governments to Minister of Defense, May 16-18, 1941. BAr E 27/5653.

complaint came to a head in the question: "Which is more important: The food supply or the war industry?"<sup>364</sup> This echoes the question of national defense versus warfare.

In a letter to the Head of the Swiss Nutrition Office, the Zurich Farmers' Association demanded that "the ratio of military-service requirements and increased-agricultural-production duty for 1941/42" be clearly explained. The farmers had to be able to plan ahead. This meant that they needed clarity on their military duties "for the entire growing season, including the harvest and subsequent processing." The farmers did not want agricultural production depending on leave orders that changed every few months and "were modified after their issue by numerous explanations, instructions, and supplements." The farmers believed that depending on military orders in this way harmed agricultural production. They demanded that farmers, who were serving their country by providing an increased food supply have a system which would "free them from the mercy of company commanders and deliver them from the favor or disfavor of military authorities." They said that there was a widespread but unclear notion that people active in public administration or the war economy were freed without much fuss, even for long periods of time, while farmers, who needed "a couple days of leave" to do their civilian duty of growing food "were subject to accusations from all sides: Agriculture has had enough of broken promises."<sup>365</sup>

The Army leadership had no intention of returning to Order No. 172.<sup>366</sup> But Order No. 190 could not be kept in its original version, either. By May 29, the new order

---

<sup>364</sup> Resolution by the owners of local acreage, June 15, 1941. BA R E 27/5653.

<sup>365</sup> Zurich Farming Association to Head of the Swiss Nutrition Office, July 11, 1941. BA R E 27/5653.

had been watered down by supplemental instructions from the Army Personnel Director. The requirement to make up missed duty was severely weakened.<sup>367</sup> At a meeting of the corps commanders on June 3, 1941, it was found that the storm of protest against Leave Order No. 190 was continuing and a "general offensive by the parliament" in the near future could not be ruled out. For this reason, the Supreme Swiss Commander asked his subordinates to strictly follow the instructions from the Chief of Personnel.<sup>368</sup> The Supreme Swiss Commander also issued an order on June 20 that all leave requests related to the current hay harvest "should be granted immediately, even if this meant a serious temporary reduction in troop strengths." Troops in training and in construction work should also be reduced to a minimum so that the men could help bring in the hay.<sup>369</sup>

The constant struggle over using the available work force was not only apparent in the constant haggling over regular leave numbers; it was also apparent in the discussions on dispensations. Here, too, the Army showed great consideration for the economy.

### 3. The Dispensation System

#### a. *Basic Model*

In the autumn of 1939, the Army leadership expressed emergency needs for materiel, which resulted in a flood of emergency-leave requests<sup>370</sup> from those in the war

<sup>366</sup> Chief of General Staff to Swiss Farmers' Association, June 21, 1941. BAr E 27/5653.

<sup>367</sup> Instructions for implementation of Order No. 190, May 29, 1941, p. 1. BAr E 27/5653.

<sup>368</sup> Minutes of the meeting of corps commanders, June 3, 1941, p. 9. BAr E 5795/145.

<sup>369</sup> Army Order on bringing in the hay crop, June 20, 1941. BAr E 27/5658

<sup>370</sup> In this document, *dispensation* basically means exemption from active duty for the common good, as compared to ordinary leave, which was a release for personal reasons [report by the Chief of Army Personnel, p. 231]. In practice, however, it was often difficult to distinguish clearly between personal needs and the public interest, particularly in agriculture.

economy and materiel-procurement industries. Since little recognition had been given to dispensations in all their significance before the war, the emergency-leave system was by no means up to the situation.<sup>371</sup> According to a report of the Head of the Section for Evacuations and Dispensations in the Defense Ministry,<sup>372</sup> the Section had issued over 50,000 dispensations by the end of 1939, mostly to younger soldiers and many to the most capable men in the Army.

An attempt in late 1939 to approve only emergency-leave requests that had been submitted based on the nation's general economic well-being did not ease the situation.<sup>373</sup> This loss of personnel also immediately led to resistance on the part of the troop commanders: The Evacuation and Emergency-Leave Section was accused out of hand of incompetence by many troop commanders, who then refused to dismiss soldiers who had received a dispensation. One regiment commander even went so far as to order his company commanders to return emergency-leave documents to the Evacuation and Emergency-Leave Section.<sup>374</sup> Employers and the Swiss War Industry and Employment Office also complained about the difficulty of the emergency-leave procedure.<sup>375</sup> The

---

<sup>371</sup> Report by the *Bundesrat*, p. 17. See also the report by the Chief of Army Personnel, p. 230, reporting that preparations for the emergency-leave system "had been absolutely insufficient" and some 10,000 dispensations would be sufficient to handle the first shock to the economy.

<sup>372</sup> According to a rule dated January 4, 1938, on responsibilities and organization of the Ministry of Defense after the Army was called to active service, the Section for Evacuations and Dispensations was under the Minister of Defense. The Supreme Swiss Commander had already been responsible for evacuation since the beginning of mobilization [rule on evacuation of July 13, 1937]. At the request of the Minister of Defense and the Supreme Swiss Commander, the Section for Dispensations was also placed under the Army High Command, by virtue of a *Bundesrat* decision of May 3, 1940 [Supreme Swiss Commander to Minister of Defense, June 27, 1941. BAr E 27/5658].

<sup>373</sup> Report by the Chief of Army Personnel, p. 232.

<sup>374</sup> Orientation report for the meeting of January 17, 1940, with a foreword by the Swiss Chamber of Commerce and Industry and the Central Association of Swiss Employer Organizations, January 16, 1940, p. 4. BAr E 5795/522.

<sup>375</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1.

issue was also brought up in parliament, where members requested a faster and simpler emergency-leave procedure.<sup>376</sup> According to a *Bundesrat* circular, dispensations should only be granted for extremely urgent cases and should not harm the readiness of the Army, because dispensations were of more decisive importance for the Army than temporary regular leave for soldiers.<sup>377</sup>

The peak of dispensations was reached in July of 1940, when 38,000 Army troops were granted leave from military service. The Supreme Swiss Commander then saw himself forced to reduce the number of laborers on leave for providing Army materiel to 8,000.<sup>378</sup> In late May, 1941, the Chief of General Staff asked the Section for Evacuations and Dispensations to decide whether leave for the export industry could be eliminated. In his response, the Section Head pointed out the significance of exports for military readiness in particular:

Facilitating a healthy export business is in the highest national interest. This includes exports both within Europe and overseas. It cannot be emphasized enough that without exports overseas, it would not be possible for our country to obtain the necessary amounts of grains, feed, and raw materials from overseas.... Export within Europe, particularly to the Axis powers, is also absolutely essential if we want to guarantee the

---

<sup>376</sup> Cf. minutes of the *Bundesrat*, Melly's inquiry, June, 1940. BAr Vol. 398, p. 991. There were also speeches in parliament in favor of limiting dispensations. One example was *Nationalrat* Holenstein, who called on March 26, 1941, for employees of Federal, cantonal, and local governments who had dispensations to provide relief service to their units [BAr E 27/5661].

<sup>377</sup> Orientation report for the meeting of January 17, 1940, with the Swiss Chamber of Commerce and Industry and the Central Association of Swiss Employer Organizations, January 16, 1940, p. 4. BAr E 5795/522.

<sup>378</sup> Report by the *Bundesrat*, p. 18. In early August, the Department of the Interior requested tax auditors be granted leave to process the new war-profits tax [Supreme Swiss Commander to Head of the Department of the Interior, August 5, 1941. BAr E 5795/522].

extraordinary supply of coal, steel, iron pyrites, sulfur, bauxite, liquid fuels, and agricultural products such as fodder, seeds, fertilizer, etc., that we need, and to secure something of vital importance for our country: The right to transit through it. This is important to our national defense in the broadest sense of the word....

A workable arrangement for our foreign-trade relations is only possible if we can reciprocate foreign nations through exporting. This is of the greatest significance for our military situation, regardless of the fact that thus far we have been able to protect our country from severe unemployment, mainly through exports to the Axis powers. It is indisputable that the possibility of large-scale employment is of decisive importance for our people's moral and physical force to resist.<sup>379</sup>

On May 31, 1941, only an estimated 2,000 to 2,500 of the 23,500 men who had been granted dispensations were occupied in the export sector, as far as this could be determined. With the express support of the Army Personnel Director, the Head of the Section for Dispensations pressed for the existing practice to be maintained.<sup>380</sup>

The signing of the German-Swiss economic accords on July 18, 1941, seemed to give the Army High Command an additional difficulty in the area of dispensations. One of Switzerland's obligations stemming from the accords was as follows:

The Swiss government shall specifically, neither directly nor indirectly, nor through special measures, prevent the signing or execution of any requests for

---

<sup>379</sup> Letter from the Section for Evacuations and Dispensations to Chief of General Staff, June 19, 1941, pp. 1-2. BAr E 27/5659.

<sup>380</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3.



loans, nor shall it tolerate any rules which would infringe upon the use of Swiss industrial capacity for filling orders placed by Germany.<sup>381</sup>

As the Director of the Trade Section stated in his letter to the Minister of Defense on July 23, 1941, this obligation was "of course also relevant for military measures." He said that it must "absolutely be possible to use call-ups and emergency-leave granting" such that "industrial orders placed in Switzerland by the German Reich could be filled with as little disturbance as possible."<sup>382</sup> The Supreme Swiss Commander protested strongly against the obligations being undertaken without prior consultation with the Army leadership. He said that if this passage actually read the way reported by the Director of the Trade Section, it would have "extraordinarily serious consequences" for which he could no longer take responsibility in the military arena. He said that even indirect interference by Germany in Swiss military preparations had to be rejected in the strongest possible terms. The Army's Technical Division also had serious reservations regarding Switzerland's arms production to meet its own needs, if it were actually possible that the country's own urgent armament needs were going to be considered an infringement against making Swiss capacity available for Germany.<sup>383</sup> The vague assurances by the Swiss Economics Minister that national defense "basically was not seriously affected" by the German-Swiss economic treaty did not satisfy the Supreme

---

<sup>381</sup> Letter from the Director of the Trade Section to Minister of Defense, June 23, 1941, p. 1. BAr 27/5659. Swiss arms shipments were only some .5% of the German armament, but they were of special importance due to specialized technical production [Fink, *Die Schweiz aus der Sicht des Dritten Reiches 1933-1945*, p. 163]. According to the diary of the Chief of General Staff of the German Army, Swiss exports were even specially needed for transport for the attack on the Soviet Union [Halder, *Kriegstagebuch*, Vol. II, p. 256].

<sup>382</sup> Letter from the Director of the Trade Section to Minister of Defense, June 23, 1941. BAr E 27/5659.

<sup>383</sup> Deputy Minister of Defense to Swiss Economics Ministry, August 13, 1941. BAr E 27/5659.

Swiss Commander at all.<sup>384</sup> Given the newly elaborated relief plan, which included substantial troop reductions, he had to be certain that the Army's readiness could be guaranteed in any situation.<sup>385</sup> At a meeting, the Minister of Defense personally assured the Supreme Swiss Commander that according to the Director of the Trade Section, the text of the trade treaty was authoritative and did not contain any allusions to military matters.<sup>386</sup> But this was diametrically opposed to his interpretation of July 23. Although *Bundesrat* Kobelt explained that "any fears in this regard were totally ungrounded," the Supreme Swiss Commander asked for a written confirmation.<sup>387</sup>

In general, those who had unlimited dispensations had to serve 34 days per year relief duty. Those who had a limited dispensation did no duty during their leave time if the leave lasted no more than eight months.<sup>388</sup> These arrangements were in effect much longer than any orders regarding regular leaves, but here, too, the Army leadership was unable to avoid trying to find special solutions for some professions.<sup>389</sup>

---

<sup>384</sup> Letter from the Swiss Economics Minister to Minister of Defense, August 13, 1941. BAr E 27/5658.

<sup>385</sup> Supreme Swiss Commander to Minister of Defense, September 3, 1941. E 27/5659.

<sup>386</sup> Minutes of the meeting on the Winter 1941/42 Relief Plan, September, 8, 1941, p. 2. BAr E 5795/146.

<sup>387</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3.

<sup>388</sup> Minutes of the meeting of the Dispensation Commission of January 26, 1943, p. 5. BAr E 5795/147.

<sup>389</sup> When active duty came to an end, the following were the dispensation categories: Unlimited war dispensation, in which case the soldier in question did not have to report for duty during general mobilization, but had continue to fulfill his civilian functions; Unlimited and limited active-duty dispensation under special orders, in which case the soldier had to report for general mobilizations, but not for partial mobilizations; Unlimited and limited active-duty dispensation without special orders, in which the soldier had to report for both general and partial mobilizations, but did not have to perform routine active duty [report by the Chief of Army Personnel, p. 233].

### *b. Dispensations in the Pasturing Sector*

The example of the Pasture sector is intended to also represent other sectors of the economy where more extensive dispensations were necessary. This was one of the sectors enjoying a special emergency-leave system. In 1941, some 5,500 dispensations were granted in the Pasture sector, divided among 3,845 different pasturing operations.<sup>390</sup> There were serious difficulties, particularly for units from mountain areas, if they were called up in the summer months.<sup>391</sup> In the spring of 1942, "the question of how to plan for soldiers involved in the pasturing and dairy industries" was again raised. However, the Army High Command refused to restore the system of limited dispensations. The rules currently in effect required that those on dispensation in the pasturing sector had to return on the fifth day of general mobilizations, but did not have to return for partial mobilizations.<sup>392</sup> It left open the question of what would happen to cattle left in Alpine pastures during a General Mobilization. The Army Leadership suggested that the mountain communities affected "should create an emergency organization that could replace pasturemen who had to serve within a few days in the case of a General Mobilization."<sup>393</sup>

---

<sup>390</sup> Chief of Army Personnel to Chief of General Staff, November 12, 1942. BAr E 27/5653.

<sup>391</sup> For example, Brigade 11 had served only 47 days of active duty by the end of March, 1940, and had to be called in for additional service. Given the fact that Brigade 11 was recruited from areas heavily involved in pasturing, livestock raising, and the tourist industry, it should have been called up in mid-April and dismissed after two months [Supreme Swiss Commander to Minister of Defense, March 30, 1940. BAr E 27/14245].

<sup>392</sup> Letter from the Section for Milk and Milk Products of the Swiss Nutrition Office to Chief of Army Staff, October 6, 1942. BAr E 27/5653. See also Chief of Army Staff to Section for Milk and Milk Products, August 17, 1942, p. 1. BAr E 27/5653.

<sup>393</sup> Army Chief of Personnel to Section for Milk and Milk Products, August 17, 1942. BAr E 27/5653.

A detailed examination by the Alpine cantons revealed almost without exception that the communities in question were not able to make such an arrangement. The military leadership of the canton of Bern believed that creating such an organization was simply "impossible," because there were simply no capable men left in these Alpine communities. Investigations had shown, among other things, that one community with approximately 30 medium to large-sized pasturing operations could not find a single man suitable for replacement. In another town with some 50 large operations requiring 120 to 150 men, only 22 men were available.<sup>394</sup> A similar reply was received from the Employment Office of the canton of Schwyz. Already, during the General Mobilizations of 1939 and 1940, it had been very difficult there to provide the valley farms with the essential personnel. The planned substitutes, those subject to auxiliary service, were increasingly assigned to antiaircraft, destruction detachments, or the Home Guards, and were thus unavailable for service in their communities.<sup>395</sup> To find substitutes for the pasturing sector, too, in this situation was "simply impossible."<sup>396</sup>

---

<sup>394</sup> Section for Milk and Milk Products to Chief of Army Staff, October 10, 1942. BA R E 27/5653.

<sup>395</sup> In 1939, the Army leadership had considered the idea of creating an *Ortswehr*, comparable to the British "Home Guard." The events of 1940 in Norway, Denmark, Holland, Belgium, and Luxembourg showed very clearly "that only total defense will serve against total war." In May, 1940, the *Bundesrat* authorized the Supreme Swiss Commander to create a home guard. These bodies of men, made up entirely of volunteers, replaced the Army for certain activities (defending the home town, performing sentry duty, fighting airborne troops and tanks which had broken through the lines, taking over internment camps, etc.), "preventing splintering of front-line troops, as had been the case in the aftermath of the airborne actions behind the front in the other countries." By 1943, the Home Guard, numbering over 100,000 men, consisted mainly of older men, around 50% of them between 50 and 70 years of age. Promotional recruiting of young men from age 16 to 19 was intensified, to gain appropriate men for observation and communications duty [report by the Chief of General Staff, p. 253 ff].

<sup>396</sup> Section for Milk and Milk Products to Army Chief of Personnel, October 6, 1941, p. 2. BA R E 27/5653.

The Agriculture Office of the canton of Nidwalden found that the existing arrangement "already met with disbelief and resistance everywhere" and was not understood, and believed that it would be quite impossible to carry out the proposed plan. It was impossible to replace the reporting pasturemen within the planned five-day period, the Employment Office of the canton of Glarus added. The Employment Office of the Military and Finance Department of the canton of Graubünden believed that bringing all cattle down from the Alps to the valleys in case of remobilization as inevitable under the suggested system, and would result in a serious shortage of feed in the valley. Since "nearly every last man has been called for military service" and the few who were exempt from military service were needed to keep valley farms going,<sup>397</sup> almost all the Alpine cantons affected said that the solution suggested by the Army leadership was impracticable.<sup>398</sup>

The solution proposed by the Army leadership was discarded. In accordance with the instructions of the Chief of General Staff, the arrangement for 1943 should be based on the following principle: Pasturemen and cheesemakers subject to auxiliary service should be first in line for dispensations. Second in line should be men of the oldest age class. Dispensation should only be granted to men in the middle age class as an exception. The other men absolutely necessary for pasturing should still receive limited dispensations and required to return by the fifth day after any General

---

<sup>397</sup> See also letter from the Office of the War Commissary to Army High Command, December 3, 1942. BAr E 27/5653.

<sup>398</sup> Section for Milk and Milk Products to Chief of General Staff, October 6, 1941. BAr E 27/5653.

Mobilization. In case of conflict between Home-Guard service and civilian pasturing activities, the man in question should conduct his civilian activity during the summer and do his Home-Guard service during the winter.<sup>399</sup> This called the attention of the canton of Valais to the plan, since for military reasons, they did not wish any unlimited dispensations for those subject to auxiliary service. In the canton of Valais, these were mainly in the Frontier Troops and Guard Companies of Mountain Brigades, which were already short of personnel. The Army Personnel Director, however, held fast to the system set up for 1943 and said that the wishes of the canton of Valais might be met by the 1944 plan for pasturing assignments.<sup>400</sup>

The disputes on assignments for pasturing show clearly just how complex the interrelationships between the needs of the military and of a functional economy were and how little room for maneuvering the Army High Command had for carrying out its military duties.

#### 4. Deferments

The Army High Command continued to try to find a formula for personnel exchange which would be suitable for both sides. With the 1942 relief plan, the Supreme Swiss Commander responded to the principle, favored by several parties, of smaller call-ups and a very restrictive leave practice.<sup>401</sup> Now that relief duty was shorter and less frequent, a deferment system similar to the one practiced in peacetime was instituted with

---

<sup>399</sup> Chief of General Staff to Army Chief of Personnel, January 25, 1943. BAr E 27/5653. See also the position paper from Colonel Trachsel to the Chief of General Staff, June 16, 1943. BAr E 27/5653.

<sup>400</sup> Army Chief of Personnel to Chief of General Staff, July 23, 1943. BAr E 27/5653.

<sup>401</sup> Maurer, *Anbauschlacht*, p.111.

Order No. 215.<sup>402</sup> According to a supplement to Order No. 215 on May 4, 1942, requests for deferments between March 1 and October 31 had to be granted. However, the categories to which this requirement applied were strictly delimited.<sup>403</sup> As was the case with Order No. 172, this system had unforeseeable results from a military point of view. The Commander of the Sixth Division complained that the requests for deferments submitted had taken on such proportions that it was completely impossible "to put together a body of troops halfway capable of fighting a war." Of the 800 deferment requests, 240 had been submitted within the last eight days before service began, and 120 were even submitted after duty had begun. Under the existing system, "dirty and dangerous nonsense" was being practiced, which led to doubts about the earnestness of service and damaged the posture and discipline of the troops.<sup>404</sup> In mid-year, the Supreme Swiss Commander said that "something had to be done urgently to rectify the referral system." So far, 11,572 deferments had been granted in the First Army Corps, 6,000 in the Second Army Corps, and 5,283 in the Third Army Corps. Something had to be done about these excesses.<sup>405</sup>

In early 1943 this system was dropped and Order No. 235 took effect, lasting until the end of the war. This Order eliminated deferments and limited releases from duty to simple leaves for the troops.<sup>406</sup>

---

<sup>402</sup> Report by the Army Chief of Personnel, p. 235.

<sup>403</sup> Maurer, *Anbauschlacht*, p. 112.

<sup>404</sup> Commander of the Sixth Division to Commander of the Fourth Army Corps, June 29, 1942. BAr E 5795/140.

<sup>405</sup> Supreme Swiss Commander to Minister of Defense, August 17, 1942. BAr E 27/14245, Vol. 43.

<sup>406</sup> Maurer, *Die Anbauschlacht*, p. 112; see also report by the Army Chief of Personnel, p. 235.

## C. THE LIMITS OF MILITARIZATION

### 1. Signs of Exhaustion

Haggling over leaves of absence, rules for being excused from service, relief plans and reductions in Army call-ups started shortly after the first General Mobilization in September, 1939. Of course, the criticism and expressions of discontent were isolated and sporadic and seemed to derive more from opportunistic and egotistical thinking, special interests and political gain than from any real emergency situation. Nevertheless, they were symptoms of a latent conflict between military defense and overall national defense policy. Expressions of discontent by those required to perform military service and political maneuvers by those representing special interests were already commonplace at the start of the war. In November, 1939, a member of parliament demanded that the age groups that had served during the time of World War I be the first to be released from service.<sup>407</sup> A second parliamentarian wanted to reduce active-service periods for fathers of families with many children.<sup>408</sup> In March of 1940, 36 members of the conscripted militia from the region of Neuenburger Jura submitted a written petition to the *Bundesrat* complaining about being conscripted for frontier-guard duty. They claimed that they had already put in enough active service and that men in this age group from other parts of Switzerland had already been released from duty. They subsequently added the following significant statement: "We also would like it to be known that this

---

<sup>407</sup> Minutes of the *Bundesrat*, Parliamentary Inquiry by Fenk, November 19, 1939. BAr Vol. 391, p. 2204.

<sup>408</sup> Minutes of the *Bundesrat*, Question by Gressot, January 16, 1940. BAr Vol. 393, p. 62.



form of conscription is highly unpopular among the general public."<sup>409</sup> In May 1940, *Nationalrat* Briner posed a parliamentary inquiry asking whether the *Bundesrat* was aware of the fact that entire school buildings in the city of Zurich had been continuously occupied by the military since early September, 1939, resulting in drastic reductions in classes and a long walk to school. Claims were also made that the military presence would result in "severe neglect of school children," because fathers would languish in military service while mothers had to work to supplement their income. The response of the *Bundesrat* was unambiguous in pointing out that billeting troops on active service would have to be based on different principles than during peacetime service, and that the sole determining factor would be tactical requirements. This would also apply to the occupation of the school buildings in Zurich.<sup>410</sup>

It was not until France collapsed in June, 1940, and Switzerland was completely surrounded by Axis powers, that the regulations at the disposal of the Army High Command were subjected to the full brunt of the heavy, "politically organized" pressure and the criticism voiced by the general public, first and foremost from the agricultural sector. On September 2, 1940, *Nationalrat* Roman Abt, agricultural representative and prominent member of the lower house of parliament, protested to the Chief of Light Troops against the call-up of the entire cavalry during the harvest season. He said this action sparked great unrest among the populace, and even he himself could not comprehend such a move. Moreover, he said there was a rumor that the call-up was the

---

<sup>409</sup> Memo to the *Bundesrat*, March 4, 1940. BA R E 27/14245, Vol. 9.

<sup>410</sup> Minutes of the *Bundesrat*, Parliamentary Inquiry by Briner, May 1940, Vol. 397, p. 740 ff.

result of a personal initiative on the part of the Chief of Light Troops, whose personal ambition was to lead a light division himself. Major General Jordi, Chief of Light Troops, angrily rejected the accusation, but considered "the entire problem to be so symptomatic" that he forwarded the letter to the Army High Command. The Supreme Swiss Commander then pointed out to *Nationalrat* Abt that the cavalry, in contrast to all other troops of the youngest age class, had more than three months of leave each year of active service. He also stated that the call-up was based solely on military factors: He said that the events that had occurred at the Swiss frontier since the second General Mobilization of the Army on May 11, 1940, had forced him to take additional measures.<sup>411</sup> As a result, he said, the Light Troops had been assigned new duties in new sectors that had made an immediate call-up appear necessary. In particular, he said, the field fortifications associated with the new order would have to be erected before the onset of bad weather. He also claimed that the corn harvest during the period of the call-up had basically been completed and that plans were in place to release the cavalry for fall planting. Unfortunately, he said, certain groups lacked a sufficient understanding of the most urgent activities of national defense.<sup>412</sup> Abt presented his own assessment of the situation, which contrasted quite extensively with that of the Army High Command:

I wish to take this opportunity to express to you with absolute candor the same opinion I gave to the Minister of War before the Select Committee: . . . as matters currently stand, the scope of the military call-ups is not primarily a military question but a political one for which the Bundesrat should bear responsibility and not the Army High Command; . . . I do not feel that there is currently any serious

---

<sup>411</sup> For information regarding the acute threat to Switzerland in summer 1940, see Urner, *Die Schweiz muss noch geschluckt werden!* ["Switzerland must still be swallowed up!"].

<sup>412</sup> Supreme Swiss Commander to *Nationalrat* Abt, September 9, 1940. BAr E 5795/398.

foreign threat. consequently, call-ups should be reduced. Two or three divisions less those on leave for the economy plus the unemployed should suffice. An advantage of this is that the economy would be put back on track and isolated industries and livelihoods would not be ruined, and the willingness to military duty would remain intact; . . . in any event, even if a major call-up is left to stand, more attention should be given to providing the country with vital goods than has been the case up to now. The Army does not place enough importance on maintaining agricultural production, a position that cannot be justified in view of the current supplies of food.<sup>413</sup>

The longer the war continued and the more pressure that was put on the labor force and the national resources, the more acute became the conflict between the military and civilian interests and needs. Inquiries that the coordinator for increased agricultural production carried out in approximately 60 communities in early 1943 revealed a sobering picture. They suggested that if a new General Mobilization was undertaken it would not even be possible to guarantee that cows would be milked "even using all the civilian labor force and demanding the utmost from all those who have stayed behind."<sup>414</sup> In view of this almost complete level of militarization, all military and civilian options for fulfilling the tasks at hand were legitimately exhausted. Thus, the civilian authorities tried to make full use of active troops for agriculture during the periods critical to planting and harvesting. Requests to relocate troops because of economic factors were made, for example, by the Head of the Economics Department of the Canton of Solothurn. He asked the Supreme Swiss Commander to house the "troops of the Seventh Division amassed in the Olten area in the various communities of the Olten and Gösigen regions by company if possible" so that they could spend half a day bringing in the

---

<sup>413</sup> *Nationalrat* Abt to Supreme Swiss Commander, September 16, 1940, p. 2. BAr E 5795/153.

<sup>414</sup> Army Chief of Personnel to Supreme Swiss Commander, March 17, 1943. BAr 5795/524.

harvest on a systematic basis."<sup>415</sup> In response, the Supreme Swiss Commander once again referred to the priority of operational factors in relocating troops, but stated that he was willing to look into whether or not the request "could be fulfilled at least partially."<sup>416</sup>

The sensitivity and irritability on both sides grew. In fact, the military department of the canton of Neunburg felt it was necessary to issue a memo to the Ministry of Defense protesting the remarks of a company commander who had furiously responded to an interruption during a heated feedback session with the troops, "Du plan Wahlen, je m'en fous!" [I don't give a damn about the Wahlen Plan!]<sup>417</sup> In November, 1944, a petition was made to the cantonal legislature of Bern emphasizing that the nation's supply situation would grow increasingly difficult as a result of the precarious import conditions. Barely half the seeds had been planted, and other work was still far behind schedule. The petitioner concluded that the Army had underestimated the significance of the needs of the agricultural sector. He asked the cantonal government to lodge a complaint with the proper office to ensure that the Army gave more consideration to the economy in the future. In justifying his request, the petitioner not only complained bitterly that the recent partial mobilizations had siphoned off a large part of the work force from the economy, particularly agriculture, but he also scoured the injustices of the system. He said he knew of industrial firms with "influential men on their boards" whose employees were excused without any reason being sought. He said civil servants

---

<sup>415</sup> Memo of the Department for Economics of canton Solothurn to Supreme Swiss Commander, October 11, 1944. BAr E 27/14245, Vol. 57.

<sup>416</sup> Supreme Swiss Commander to Minister of Defense, October 12, 1944. BAr E 5795/158.

<sup>417</sup> Supreme Swiss Commander to Minister of Defense, December 19, 1944. BAr E 5795/158.

and employees of federal firms were also largely excused from service without being required to make up for it. He substantiated his claim that too little consideration was given to agriculture by providing various examples of hardship cases, of which there were undoubtedly many; one is presented here to illustrate the conditions in the agricultural sector:

A small farm operation had two sons that spent the entire fall in the service. The 70-year-old mother had to do all the work alone with one assistant, particularly the barn work. Both sons had received no more than six days of leave. Outcome: The mother is now sick, overworked; most of the apples have fallen off the trees; the fields are not planted. The older of the two sons explained: In the spring, we sow only what we need for ourselves. When asked why, he responded: People have so little understanding of us that apparently they no longer need us.<sup>418</sup>

A wide array of groups shared the opinion that the Army gave too little consideration to farming even though economic national defense is said to be the prerequisite for military national defense. Rather than using the troops to support agriculture, the people complained, the commanders conducted alarm exercises. A division commander reportedly recommended that the entire division be used to harvest fruit and potatoes on, of all days, a rainy one.<sup>419</sup> The petitioner quoted a unit commander

---

<sup>418</sup> Inquiry by Burren, without date, pp. 1-2. BAr E 27/14245, Vol 44-57.

<sup>419</sup> The fact that this accusation of a lack of understanding was not merely a concoction is confirmed, for example, by the collection of letters compiled by E. Wehrli, which on page 74 describes one such deployment of a detachment for civilian tasks: "The regiment ordered me to assign 15 men to the "Goldbrunnenbucht." Once again it is apparently a matter of some projects for civilian purposes, like we are always having to do. We do not like doing this work." The orders were then carried out reluctantly and with as many obstructive tactics as possible; the letters also provide interesting insight into how faithful the commanders were to the orders they received.

he had approached who serenely asked "whether military exercises could be canceled if the weather was favorable for farming duty."<sup>420</sup>

After more than five years of war, Switzerland's material, economic, manpower, and psychological resources of were either stretched to their limit or already largely exhausted. It is true that cultivation considerably increased the level of self-sufficiency<sup>421</sup> in the food supply. However, despite a doubling in the acreage used for farming, despite the modernization in agriculture and increases in yield, Switzerland did not reach a state of complete self-sufficiency with regard to food as the Wahlen Plan had originally forecast. Nevertheless, even though some signs toward the end of the war indicated that some population groups were nearing the physiological minimum for existence, the supplies in stock were still designated as satisfactory when compared to the rest of the world.<sup>422</sup> In the spring of 1944, substantial quantities of grains could still be imported and also compensated for in the event of interruptions in imports. However, imports came to a complete standstill starting in early 1944. In early 1945, the head of the Swiss Grain Administration emphasized that the level of grain production would have to be at least equal that of the preceding year to ensure the Army's bread supply. Consequently, he warned against concessions in the area of cultivation commitments. Additional output was demanded from agriculture in the seventh additional cultivation stage of the war in 1945.<sup>423</sup> "Physical exhaustion and a shortage of labor, the absence of mass industrial

<sup>420</sup> Inquiry by Burren, without date, pp. 3-6. BAr E 27/14245, Vol. 44-57.

<sup>421</sup> The literature reveals major differences in the calculation of the percentage for Switzerland's level of self-sufficiency, depending on the conditions that were used as a basis. Maurer uses a cautious figure of over 50% but points out other computational variations [cf. Maurer, *Die Anbauschlacht*, p. 100 ff.].

<sup>422</sup> Maurer, *Die Anbauschlacht*, p. 100 ff.

unemployment, and the lack of complete deliveries despite some breakthroughs were the main reasons additional cultivation stagnated at 350,000 to 360,000 hectares and was not expanded to 500,000 hectares as originally forecast.<sup>424</sup>

Agricultural production for 1945 was also made more difficult by the "convergence of unfavorable conditions:" Farmers were once again put under additional strain by the military service in the second half of 1944, and the weather conditions in the fall were so bad that farm work fell far behind schedule. 40,000 to 50,000 hectares in winter seeds could not be sowed and 260,000 hectares in farm land remained to be tilled and planted for spring 1945. This would have required 100,000 to 130,000 men and 100,000 to 120,000 horses.<sup>425</sup> The chief executive of the Basel-Land canton sought support from the Minister of Economics:

As a result of the bad weather and the partial mobilization of many troops and military horses in our canton, agricultural work has fallen way behind schedule.... We are not able to do the work with the resources available to us. The obligation to work cannot make up for the manpower shortage, because the labor force at the factories and businesses has been drastically reduced by call-ups for military duty. Organizing streamlined use of draught animals will become impossible if the majority of the horses fit for military service are called up. We have communities in which more than half the horses are in service....

In the interest of the nation's food supply, we feel it is necessary that a general Army command be issued that provides for a quite massive deployment of troops in agriculture as long as the frontiers are at peace. This is the only way it will be possible to

---

<sup>423</sup> Minutes of the 11th session of the Expert Commission for Handling Issues of Additional Planting and the main cantonal offices for agriculture, January 9, 1945, p. 3. BAr E 27/5653.

<sup>424</sup> Maurer, *Anbauschlacht*, p. 79.

<sup>425</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 4-5.

complete the agricultural work on time. If only 10% of the troops and military horses are made available, as has been allowed in one unit in our region, it would not be sufficient today. Military readiness will certainly not be compromised if the troops temporarily perform service in agriculture.<sup>426</sup>

This same sentiment was heard throughout the country toward the end of the war, and emphasis was always placed on the claim that "the military demands placed on those in the agricultural sector" were the main cause of the difficult situation.<sup>427</sup> The main issues to be solved were "finding an adequate leave system, hesitating to call up auxiliary units, putting internees to better use, and restricting construction projects during the planting season." Agricultural representatives demanded "specific assurances" with regard to military leaves and being excused from service. If these could not be granted,

---

<sup>426</sup> Letter from the chief executive of the canton of Basel-Land to the Minister of Economics, October 9, 1944. BAr E 27/14245, Vol. 57.

<sup>427</sup> The petition for a deferment in service by the tenant of the chief executive of the canton of Appenzell-Auserrhoden is presented here as an example of the prevailing mood: The petition for a deferment in service by a rifleman was rejected by the company commander in charge due to the following passage: "I permit myself in all modesty to express the opinion that, at present, the economic national defense, i.e., supply, is more urgent and to point out that farmers are excused from service even in the countries waging the War so that the Army and the people will receive the necessary food supplies and so that these supplies can be ensured. However, this is not the case if the agricultural sector is summoned for military service at the busiest time of year when they all have their hands full. Pasturemen are granted leave as a matter of course, while we must explain our situation each time that we are called for military service at an inopportune time." Rather than a revised petition, the company commander received a sharp challenge from the chief executive of the canton Appenzell-Auserrhoden, who informed him that he himself had written the petition for his tenant and that such a rejection must not be allowed to occur. The company commander then informed his division commander, who pointed out in his response to the chief executive that the military superiors of the Appenzell troops faced no easy task in "making the essential nature of military duty credible to their people when the soldiers could refer to the opposing opinion put forth by their highest cantonal magistrates." The Supreme Swiss Commander handed the correspondence over to the Minister of Defense on the assumption that the latter would perhaps have an opportunity in the next session of Parliament to make a representative of the canton aware of the questionable actions of the canton's chief executive [Commander of the 7th Division to Cantonal Chief Executive Hofstetter, June 5, 1944. BAr E 5795/158].



agriculture would have to "capitulate." The existing orders and their use would no longer suffice and would have to be replaced by a system such as the one put into place with Order Number 172. Economic readiness for war had to be made as important as military readiness, and the civilian bodies could not be placed under the authority of the military ones.<sup>428</sup> Of course, the Chief of General Staff assessed the situation differently: He said that out of an available 113,000 horses, the Army used only 10,000, with many of them used as delivery horses, and agriculture could certainly withstand that number.<sup>429</sup> In addition, the approximately 80,000 men who were in service made up only about 5% of the male farm population and the farm managers who were performing military duty were still able to stay home one day a week.<sup>430</sup> In contrast, however, the Framing Coordinator, *Ständerat Wahlen*,<sup>431</sup> was still of the opinion that the Army was consuming too much of the available manpower.<sup>432</sup>

There is no doubt that the Army had access to the largest pool of labor in the country, so it was no surprise that the labor in short supply was sought there first. Of course, troop call-up depended on the level of possible danger, and this could be neither predicted nor controlled. Relief plans could only be adhered to insofar as the military-political situation in Europe did not require any fundamental change in the

---

<sup>428</sup> Minutes of the 11th session of the Expert Commission for Handling Issues of Additional Planting and the main cantonal offices for agriculture, January 9, 1945, p. 6 ff. BAr E 27/5653.

<sup>429</sup> According to Dr. Wahlen's calculations, 145,000-150,000 horses would have been needed to plant 300,000 hectares [Report by the Chief of General Staff, p. 306/307].

<sup>430</sup> Minutes from the meeting on Measures by the Army to Ensure Planting, February 2, 1945, p. 8. BAr E 5795/147.

<sup>431</sup> The *Ständerat* corresponds most nearly to the American Senate. *Ständerat* is also the title of its members.

<sup>432</sup> Supreme Swiss Commander to Minister of Defense, January 30, 1945. BAr E 27/5653.

Army's activities and any increase in the level of threat could be dealt with merely by increasing the number of troops called up. The Army High Command no longer let itself get involved in discussions about reviving a system modeled after Order Number 172. Rather, it sought a solution based on the following principle: The smallest number of call-ups possible, but with full outfits, i.e., few leaves of absence.<sup>433</sup> The Supreme Swiss Commander was quite aware of the difficulties in the agricultural sector and attempted to further reduce the number of troops in service. At the beginning of 1945, he first reduced the number of troops in guard units, reducing them by 10 battalions or about one third of their total strength. Subsequently, the scheduled relief released a large number of farmers and farm workers. For example, the 18 squadrons making up the entire cavalry brigade were discharged without being replaced, and the total number of Frontier Troops was reduced to a minimum.<sup>434</sup>

Nevertheless, the Economics Minister issued "an urgent plea" to the Minister of Defense, asking him once again to "emphasize a more flexible structure for the system governing leaves and dispensations." He said he could not accept responsibility for insufficient domestic production and dwindling supplies. Furthermore, he said that when attacked by the legislature and the public, he would publicly state "the real reasons the agricultural program had not been fulfilled."<sup>435</sup> The Supreme Swiss Commander then

---

<sup>433</sup> Minutes of the 11th session of the Expert Commission for Handling Issues of Additional Planting and the main cantonal offices for agriculture, January 9, 1945, p. 17. BAr E 27/5653.

<sup>434</sup> Supreme Swiss Commander to Minister of Defense, January 24, 1945. BAr E 27/5653.

<sup>435</sup> Minister of Economics to Minister of Defense, January 6, 1945. BAr E 27/5653.

proposed placing greater numbers of internees in "farm camps" and using them for agricultural purposes.<sup>436</sup>

Just as the Army required a minimum number of troops, it also needed a certain number of horses. One reason for this was that motor vehicles could no longer be used due to a shortage of fuel, and even motorized troops were obliged to use horses. Another reason was that the infantry was no longer sufficient to transport even just the military equipment of the troops.<sup>437</sup>

At the end of February, 1945, only about 65,000-70,000 men were still in service--quite a substantial cutback in light of the fact that approximately 100,000-120,000 were in service at the start of the year and that approximately 200,000 men were in service the previous year. Leave quotas were limited by the deployability of the units. Yet, the Supreme Swiss Commander stated that he was ready to discuss greater flexibility in this area also.<sup>438</sup> This was done at a meeting on "actions by the Army to ensure planting" on February 2, 1945, led by *Bundesrat* Kobelt. The basic purpose of this meeting was also "coordination of needs between military and economic national defense." It was not just by chance that the Minister of Defense stated at the outset that the meeting would promote "a *peaceful* [emphasis by the author] discussion of concrete actions that would be fair to both military and economic interests."<sup>439</sup> Just as

---

<sup>436</sup> Supreme Swiss Commander to Minister of Defense, January 30, 1945. BAr E 27/5653. Even the Army employed increasing numbers of internees, particularly for highway construction and for clean-up activities [report by the Chief of Army Personnel, p. 289].

<sup>437</sup> Minutes of the session of the Expert Commission for Handling Issues of Additional Planting and the main cantonal offices for agriculture, January 9, 1945, p. 17. BAr E 27/5653.

<sup>438</sup> Supreme Swiss Commander to Minister of Defense, January 24, 1945. BAr E 27/5653.

<sup>439</sup> Minutes of the meeting on the Measures of the Army to Ensure Planting, February 2, 1945, pp. 1-2. BAr E 5795/147.

stereotypically as those responsible for supply stuck to the argument that military defense was far too dominant and the level of militarization was too high, the military leadership stubbornly pointed to the insufficient fighting power and lack of readiness.

## **2. Critical Low Points in Military Preparedness**

Despite the experiences of the First World War, Swiss military defense was still based on an enormously high level of militarization and was basically geared towards "high intensity conflict"--a level of militarization that could be maintained only for extremely short periods of time. The first symptoms of this dilemma occurred shortly after the first General Mobilization, in the fall of 1939, when commanders began to issue warnings about a far too rigorous downsizing of the military presence and a creeping erosion of fighting power. One of the first was the Commander of the Second Army Corps, Lieutenant General Prisi. As early as November, 1939, he sent a memo to the Personnel Division pointing out the increasing discrepancy between military readiness and the effects of the system of leaves and dispensation. Apart from the fact that the troop commanders could no longer fulfill their fighting duties, "the entire system of issuing leaves of absence and excusing men from service on a mass scale" undermined the morale of the troops. The low number of troops even further reduced the possibility of those on duty obtaining leaves of absence, giving them the impression they were being treated unfairly. This does not even take into account the other advantages of those who had been excused from service or granted long leaves of absence, who were able to enjoy not only their "domesticity" but also their civilian service.<sup>440</sup>

<sup>440</sup>

Commander of the Second Army Corps to Army Chief of Personnel on the dispensation

A study of Frontier Company I/255<sup>441</sup> revealed that 85 to 90% of the members were farmers who periodically had to be given leaves of absence. In addition, 17 of the employees of an industrial firm who lived in the Company's intake area were excused from service for the entire time. This was done at the request of the Army Technical Department, even though a memo from the Company Commander stated that only one sixth of the production of this firm went directly to the Army. The majority of the production was sold to private business.<sup>442</sup> Lieutenant General Prisi saw this as a severe lack of monitoring as to "whether those excused from their military obligations actually work for the Army" or whether they were used "to help profit-hungry companies under the cloak of 'Army deliveries' to flourishing private businesses."<sup>443</sup> On the qualifying day, the Company, which was supposed to have a total of 150 men, actually had only 86 men. This was only because a high state of readiness was in effect at the time of the study, and all leaves of absence had been interrupted. As soon as the leaves of absence went back into effect, the company lost approximately 15% of its actual complement, i.e., another 12 or 13 men. This was not even 50% of the officially mandated number. If a surprise attack had occurred, these men would have been expected to defend an area 2.4 km wide.<sup>444</sup>

---

system and level of readiness among the troops, November 24, 1939. BAr E 27/5650.

<sup>441</sup> This company was under the command of the son of the Commander of the Fifth Division, Major General Bircher; according to Lieutenant General Prisi, the company was randomly selected for the study.

<sup>442</sup> Commander of the Second Army Corps to Army Chief of Personnel on the dispensation system and level of readiness among the troops, Attachment 4, November 11, 1939. BAr E 27/5650.

<sup>443</sup> Commander of the Second Army Corps to Army Chief of Personnel on the dispensation system and level of readiness among the troops, November 24, 1939, p. 1. BAr E 27/5650.

<sup>444</sup> *Ibid.*, Attachment 1.

The extraordinarily heavy burden placed on the frontier troops reflected large military shortages practically everywhere, as confirmed by the Commander of Frontier Brigade 6:

As a result of the demands of the guards, the high rate of leaves of absence and partial releases, no uniform progress has been made in training. We must not let occasional large or small exercises with troops put together ad hoc deceive us as regards the fact that only a small part of the youngest men in the brigade was involved. Both the individual men and the platoons and companies of the frontier battalions need to have basic battle training, based on the war thus far. This implies that some changes in thinking will be necessary. All the Frontier Brigades should be called up for any future relief duty, not just the number of troops necessary for the guard duty.<sup>445</sup>

The Commander of Frontier Brigade 6 felt that the training for the troops slated for external defense of the bunkers was particularly urgent. After extensive wire barriers had been set up or completed, defense forces would have to be given practical training under the new conditions.

The frontier brigade could not be deemed ready for war until it had met the following requirements:

- ♦ Battle training for officers and enlisted men
- ♦ Battle training for fortress personnel
- ♦ Refurbishing dilapidated or partially obsolete field fortifications
- ♦ Delivery of scheduled weaponry (machine guns and infantry cannons)

Although it was apparently possible to maintain the good spirits of the troops, the soldiers on duty were so few in number that they were completely absorbed by the

---

<sup>445</sup> Commander of Light Brigade 3 to Commander of the Second Army Corps, December 3, 1940, p. 1. BAr E 27/13180.

guards. The Commander of the Second Army Corps confirmed that, unfortunately, this same state of affairs also applied to all other frontier brigades within the corps.<sup>446</sup>

In April, 1940, the Commander of the Fourth Army Corps declared the applicable regulations for discharges and recalls "no longer possible to follow" both militarily and economically. Negative consequences became apparent first and foremost in the spirit, discipline, and "civility" of the troops. Many soldiers began having problems due to the long-lasting periods of service and the uncertainty that accompanied this situation. The unequal demands for service experienced by the various troop segments were increasingly perceived as unfair, making discipline even more of a problem.<sup>447</sup> Lieutenant General Labhart also harshly criticized the dispensation system. There was some doubt as to whether the more than 30,000 dispensations that had been granted for a long time without consulting the troop commanders were all "essential:"

In various parts of Eastern Switzerland, a sense of discord is rife among the population, because for some companies men holding the lowest professions were excused from service, while small businessmen and those in the trades, who mostly have to rely on themselves, had to make do with short leaves. Even station trainees in the Swiss National Railway had to be excused from service as being "essential" to operations.<sup>448</sup>

---

<sup>446</sup> Ibid., p. 2.

<sup>447</sup> Commander of the Fourth Army Corps to Supreme Swiss Commander, April 6, 1940. BAr E 5795/142.

<sup>448</sup> Ibid., p. 4.

Thus, the existing system seemed to contain more disadvantages than advantages for training, because the commanders never had a full troop of soldiers at their disposal. The Commander of the Fourth Army Corps proposed discharging "most of the Army that was on standby," and leaving only two or at most three Army units in a "position reflecting neutrality." This was not only for economic reasons, but also very much for military ones. As a result of the leave system and continuing relief, units became so mixed that there was almost no guarantee of smooth remobilization. In addition, materiel was once again urgently in need of maintenance. The military felt that the original position was being returned to after all.<sup>449</sup> In light of the permanent fluctuations even among the guard units of important demolition targets, the Commander of the Fourth Army Corps suggested creating "permanent commands." Because they would be the most familiar with the local conditions and the security measures to be taken, they would guarantee an expert and smooth program for training the constantly changing guard troops.<sup>450</sup>

Negative effects were noticed primarily in the area of training, in work on building fortifications and fortifying terrain, and in troop morale.<sup>451</sup> Non-permanent structures (e.g., dugouts, trenches, infantry barricades, etc.) largely had to be built by the troops themselves. Without sufficient manpower, it would not have been possible to complete fortification-building to the extent desired and militarily necessary. Particularly

---

<sup>449</sup> Ibid., p. 4 ff.

<sup>450</sup> Minutes of the meeting of January 19, 1943, on the relief plan for 1943, pp. 3-4. BA R E 5795/147.

<sup>451</sup> Memo on the relief plan for the first half of 1941, p. 1. BA R E 5795/86.



in the mountains, a large body of men would have been required during the summer months. Furthermore, the fact that the troops had to spend so much of their time on construction projects drastically cut into the time they could spend on training.<sup>452</sup>

According to a press release on the meeting of canton agricultural directors dated January 23, 1941, the increase in agricultural production should be the responsibility of the Army, a proposal that elicited "severe displeasure" from the Army leadership. The Supreme Swiss Commander protested against such any such tendency in a letter to the head of the military department.<sup>453</sup> He was of the opinion that people were going too far with "propagandistically exaggerating the 'battle for agriculture'" and demanded that all civilian options first be exhausted before turning to the Army.<sup>454</sup> "Belittling of the importance of the soldier would have a negative effect on morale. People should not say that resistance is not possible without food. More emphasis should be placed on the opposite, because even the best-laid agricultural plans will not ensure the nation's independence without the Army."<sup>455</sup>

An assessment of the situation did not permit any further reduction in readiness for the second half of 1941. The risks that the Army leadership had faced in spring of 1941 in order to make more manpower available for agriculture could no longer be taken. In addition, an intensified expansion of the fortifications was imposed. As a result of the generous leave of absence system practiced in the first half year, not only was troop

---

<sup>452</sup> Session minutes, May 1941, pp. 5-8. BAr E 5795/146.

<sup>453</sup> Supreme Swiss Commander to Minister of Defense, January 1, 1941. BAr E 27/5653.

<sup>454</sup> Minutes of the meeting on credit conditions in the Army, January 21, 1941, p. 9. BAr E 5795/145.

<sup>455</sup> Supreme Swiss Commander to Minister of Defense, January 27, 1941. BAr E 5795/524.

discipline " dangerously undermined," but the "strike power" of the Army was weakened to an "irresponsibly low level," and the training of the troops had "suffered severely due to the constant coming and going."<sup>456</sup> As mentioned earlier, the troop commanders had to deal with the devastating consequences of the deferments that were a result of Order Number 125. According to the Commander of the Second Army Corps, training and readiness suffered "quite heavily" from leaves and deferments. The best training programs were of no use if the constant changes in personnel meant that training always had to start over from the beginning. Lieutenant General Prisi noted that "it is an illusion to think that we can obtain well-trained troops by means of replacement service under the current leave of absence system."<sup>457</sup>

According to a letter the commander of the Sixth Division sent to his military superior, Lieutenant General Labhart, the requests for deferments had reached such a level by mid-1942 that it appeared impossible "to create a fighting force that was even moderately ready for battle." He also claimed that the number of men available in the summer was far too low for effective training, while it was too high in the winter. On the other hand, the morale of the troops was being undermined:

The Army understands quite well that it is necessary to shift service by those men required for national supply to the worst time of year. It also understands that men employed in certain manufacturing industries and commercial enterprises that are involved in this endeavor or that contribute to our national defense should receive deferments. However, it does not understand why merchants, business owners, civil servants, bookkeepers, clerks, salesmen, bank tellers, teachers,

---

<sup>456</sup> Supreme Swiss Commander to Minister of Defense, May 21, 1941. E 27/14245, Vol. 22.

<sup>457</sup> Minutes of the meeting held January 19, 1943, regarding the relief plan for 1943, p. 16. BAr E 5795/147.

bartenders, bakers, barbers, butchers, drivers, etc...should receive deferments in service.

The Army is correct in thinking that the reduction of the service time to four weeks and the timely announcement of the date makes it possible to manage so long as good will is maintained....<sup>458</sup>

The commander of the Sixth Division believed that these negative experiences with deferments in service represented "negative symptom of the will of the people, the Army, and the authorities to fight for self defense."<sup>459</sup> The Army High Command clearly understood that units weak in number or units that had a large number of soldiers from other units that had deferred their service were "not sufficiently ready for battle." That is because soldiers who did not serve their time with their primary unit usually did not know the special tasks of the other unit in the war.<sup>460</sup> The 1943 relief plan led to such manpower bottlenecks from April through September that at times there were no regiments available to guard the Alpine railway crossings, and battle positions had to be adapted.<sup>461</sup>

The Supreme Swiss Commander placed great importance on maintaining the level of training in the Army to sufficient degree that "its striking power would be respected abroad." Therefore, he considered training programs that mandated two four-week stints for the youngest age class and one four-week stint for the Territorial

---

<sup>458</sup> Commander of the Sixth Division to Commander of the Fourth Army Corps, June 29, 1942, pp. 1-2. BAr E 5795/140.

<sup>459</sup> Commander of the Sixth Division to Commander of the Fourth Army Corps, June 29, 1942, p. 2. BAr E 5795/140.

<sup>460</sup> Minutes of the Meeting of the Dispensation Commission, January 26, 1943, p. 1. BAr E 5795/147.

<sup>461</sup> Minutes of the meeting of January 19, 1943, p. 14, BAr E 5795/147. Cf. the disagreement between the *Bundesrat* and the Supreme Swiss Commander on the relief plan for 1943, pp. 68 ff.

Units the "absolute minimum requirement." No one could be excused from this service regardless of profession or the number of days already served, because, when face to face with the enemy, all that mattered was the skill of the soldier, which, in turn, was determined "not by the civilian profession but by having completed duty in military training."<sup>462</sup> There is no question that great progress was made in, above all, the areas of technical handling of weapons and equipment and in the combat behavior of the Army by the end of the war. However, the Head of Training discerned that "fundamental problems" were still present toward the end of active service, such as "amassing of resources highly vulnerable to loss, insufficient use of terrain coverage, insufficient scouting and combat reconnaissance, and inappropriate behavior during air attacks." Tactical training was in part burdened by rigid defense thinking up to the end of active service, a way of thinking that was rooted in the First World War; it concentrated far too much on organizing the war and not enough on how it was to be conducted.<sup>463</sup> It became clear time and time again that the militia officers experienced far fewer difficulties in preparing for war than in actually conducting it. The reason for this is no doubt the fact that conducting a war is much farther removed from the normal activities of civilian life.<sup>464</sup>

The object of the previously mentioned meeting on "actions by the Army to ensure planting " revealed how deeply the military leadership was involved in

---

<sup>462</sup> Supreme Swiss Commander to Minister of Defense, July 20, 1942. BAr E 27/14245 Vol. 21-43.

<sup>463</sup> Report by the the Head of Training, pp. 360-61.

<sup>464</sup> Ibid., p. 364.

nonmilitary areas of overall defense during the last year of the war. Once again, various participants referred to the desirability of reinstating Order No. 172, but the Supreme Swiss Commander avoided dealing with this matter. Rather, he countered with the principles of the new relief plan:

- ♦ In keeping with the motto "all farmers to the fields," all farmers should dedicate themselves to work in the fields during the month of April "when at all possible."
- ♦ The troops called up for the end of March should come from urban areas or mountainous regions, where planting started later, without regard for structure of the military.
- ♦ All troops in service were expected to assist in the farm work where they were stationed.
- ♦ The artillery was provided with trucks as far as possible so that most horses and tractors could be freed up for agricultural use.
- ♦ The horses the Army had to keep should come not from one region of the country but from various regions.
- ♦ During the month of April, farmers were expressly given priority for leaves of absence that seemed necessary above and beyond the above measures.
- ♦ During the planting season, no training exercises were to be initiated. There should also not be any local militia training during the spring, and the restricted areas for internees should be relaxed so that their efforts could be used more broadly in the agricultural sector.

The Supreme Swiss Commander emphasized, however, that the number of divisions ready for combat must never fall below two at any time.<sup>465</sup> These two battle-ready divisions also probably indicated the level of militarization that could be maintained over a longer period of time (though with great difficulty) at the end of the war.<sup>466</sup> The Commander of the Second Army Corps brilliantly summarized the precarious position of military defense in his pointed statement: "We know...what the military requirements are but are unable to translate them into fact."<sup>467</sup>

---

<sup>465</sup> Minutes of the meeting on the Measures of the Army to Ensure Planting, February 2, 1945. BAr E 5795/147.

<sup>466</sup> Interestingly, both *Nationalrat* Abt and Lieutenant General Labhart spoke of two to three divisions [cf. pp. 114 and 126, respectively].

<sup>467</sup> Minutes of the corps commanders' meeting, March 6, 1943, p. 6. BAr E 5795/147.

## V. CONCLUSIONS

Even though Switzerland never became seriously involved in the events of World War II, it found itself, at least from a psychological viewpoint, clearly on the side of the victors. Given its hopeless strategic position in the center of the long-contested power region of the aggressive Axis powers, Switzerland was unquestionably successful in preserving a remarkable level of independence. At the end of the war, it stood intact in the middle of a completely devastated, socially shattered Europe. It is no wonder that the debate over the reasons for this beneficent course of recent Swiss history has not yet subsided and has often played a role in political argumentation for or against strong territorial defense. Actually, there were many reasons why Switzerland was spared from the war. The various political camps each have their own, e.g., the military integrity and readiness of Switzerland, the incontestable and often-deplored economic cooperation with the Axis powers, the skillful diplomacy, the importance of Switzerland as a financial and espionage hub, etc. A one-dimensional interpretation would without question be incorrect and unrealistic, and would not reflect the historical facts. But it will probably never be possible to prove conclusively just how dissuasive the Swiss "trump cards" listed above were on the aggressiveness of the German dictator in particular, so it is pointless to argue about it. The historical truth is probably described best by the foreign observer who stated:

It is certainly true that various factors contributed to the success of the Swiss deterrent strategy--including economic factors, geopolitical factors, vigorous democracy, wise diplomacy, and the organization of the nation under a state of emergency. Yet without the self-assertive will of the Swiss, without their military integrity and their Army, without the threat of destroying transport routes and industry, this success is hardly conceivable.<sup>468</sup>

In reality, the dissuasive effect was even more significant than is suggested by the lowest common denominator of military preparedness described, to the extent this can be ascertained today from the files. To find the clearest reason for this, perhaps it is better to look not at the purely military opinion of the Germans but at their recognition that the will of the Swiss people for independence and freedom could never be completely broken despite everything that took place in the war. In all military reservations that the German General Staff makes with respect to the strength of the Swiss Army, the assessment ultimately boils down the following observation: "The resolve of the government and people to defend Swiss neutrality against any attacker is indisputable."<sup>469</sup>

It cannot be denied that there were exceptional acts of valor in all areas relevant to security, including the military, under the most difficult of conditions. The question, however, is whether the positive outcome of the war, the blessing of being spared, also represents a justification of the military order imposed at that time and the security

<sup>468</sup> Duic, *Die Schweiz 1939-1945: Erfahrungen in der Sicherheitspolitik und umfassenden Landesverteidigung*, Part II, p. 544.

<sup>469</sup> *Kleines Orientierungsheft Schweiz*, German Wehrmacht, Foreign Armies West Department, edition of September, 1942, p. 49, BMA RH D 18/173.



measures that were taken. If a country is on the "winning side," there is always great danger that the eyes of those who try to analyze the issue will be clouded. The creation of the myth around the National Reduit is a sign that the Swiss, too, have fallen prey to this syndrome.

Even if Switzerland was largely spared military acts of force during the Second World War, it was nevertheless subjected to another sort of "act of force" that lasted for several years. As a result of its strategic location, Switzerland survived a conflict situation during the Second World War that in some ways resembled a modern "low intensity conflict." Encirclement by the Axis powers impacted the nation's behavior, whether from purely hostile or even just egotistical motives, having a sweeping, "warlike" effect on the survival of the country. Under these circumstances, the actions of the Axis often threatened "to throttle the national life."<sup>470</sup>

This comprehensive threat could only be met through defense measures that covered the entire spectrum of areas relevant to security. In addition, the duration of the situation of conflict forced both the military and the civilian leadership to develop long-term strategies for survival and to create the apparatus for surviving. Switzerland saw itself--though only due to the shock of the events--thoroughly caught up in a Europe-wide trend that had already taken hold in other countries after the First World War. It was in Germany, more than any other country, that two strategic schools of thought developed after the frightening experiences and horrible losses of the First World War. One of these schools looked for an integral, security-related comprehensive view of

---

<sup>470</sup> See note 3.

a future war, while the other focused on the idea of a new conventional approach to using military resources. Yet, in contrast to the traditional military conflicts suffered by most European countries even in the Second World War, Switzerland was challenged not primarily in military terms but above all in other areas having to do with national survival. Thus, it became painfully clear that the military component of overall defense, i.e., the Army, was still geared to the perception of war in the 19th century with respect to its basic structures and its prioritization of security within the framework of the nation as a whole.

As an organization that relied on universal military service, the Army occupied most of the available manpower and material resources of the nation. The Army leadership, and the Supreme Swiss Commander in particular, were forced early on into a leadership role with respect to total defense that surpassed the status of the military in the concrete conflict situation of the Second World War. Not only Guisan's charisma and his remarkable understanding of security but also the directives and actions of the *Bundesrat* contributed to the natural way in which the Supreme Swiss Commander grew in this role. However, the discrepancy the true status of the military component of the overall defense and the Supreme Swiss Commander's leading role in national security contributed substantially to intensifying the conflict between overall "national defense" and the requirements of conventional warfare during the Second World War.

In keeping with the militia system, the way the nation's defense was designed, as well as the structure and organization of the Army, was tailored to the number of men

required to perform military duty. Moreover, the Swiss militia army of the Second World War was poorly equipped with respect to materiel, and it was cumbersome and inflexible. In his report to the Supreme Swiss Commander, the Chief of General Staff bluntly stated at the end of the war that the conditions brought about "by years of insufficient bond issues for war preparations would have led to a catastrophe if Switzerland had entered the war in 1939"<sup>471</sup> Under these conditions, it was impossible to consider waging war in a flexible manner;<sup>472</sup> the only option considered was relatively static: either linear (Limmat Line) or an area defense (Reduit while maintaining the Frontier Guard and the forces for stalling resistance in the interior).

From the start, the Chief of General Staff pointed out the personnel intensity of such an area defense: "The need for defending the area of the entire country rules out the option of dismissing entire Army units. Either the situation will progress to a point where the entire Army can be demobilized, or all Army units must be kept armed in their new combat zones, and only some of them (regiments) can be granted leave on a rotating schedule," he wrote to the Supreme Swiss Commander on July 2, 1940.<sup>473</sup> One of the most important advantages of a militia army is its large manpower resources, which

---

<sup>471</sup> Report by the Chief of General Staff, p. 418. In another place, the Chief of General Staff described the arming of the Army at the beginning of the war as "generally insufficient and antiquated." Above all, there was a lack of anti-tank and anti-aircraft weaponry, and the artillery in part still had obsolete guns from the previous century. [Report by the Chief of General Staff, p. 111]. The tank troops consisted out of just three tank companies with eight Praga tanks each [Kurz, *Die Schweiz im Zweiten Weltkrieg*, p. 186].

<sup>472</sup> Draft situation report, July 10, 1940, p. 1. BAr E 5795/304. Even the former Chief of General Staff and future commander of the Fourth Army Corps confirmed this: "We do not have any infantry battalions and regiments that are thoroughly trained for battle. We are completely ill-equipped for mobile warfare as it has been witnessed in this war" [Commander of the Fourth Army Corps to Supreme Swiss Commander, June 21, 1940. p. 3. BAr E 27/14321].

<sup>473</sup> Chief of General Staff to Supreme Swiss Commander, July 2, 1940. BAr E 27/14321.

should be used in an optimal manner. The basis for the philosophy and organization of the Army was the mass army. Under these conditions, extensive downsizing of the Army meant not merely a thinning of the military presence, but also quickly touched on the principles of the conception of the area defense and the fighting power of the units. In his response to the reorganization of the Army in May, 1942, Captain Ernst correctly pointed out that the Swiss military could not manage the long-term military readiness that was expected, "because the Swiss military is not designed for active service lasting years at a time."<sup>474</sup> The Army leadership would have to choose a defense strategy that accounted for material deficiencies and could optimize the use of the a large infantry Army that was relatively poorly equipped and inflexible. Thus, even at the outset, the military's operational freedom was extremely limited. At the time, there were sound military reasons and even better non-military reasons to opt for both the Limmat Line and the National Reduit. Both deployment plans were based on the overall military resources of Switzerland, and both could achieve their full military potential only under this condition. Both were based on military philosophies that placed heavy emphasis on great manpower.

On top of this were the components of dissuasion, which was accepted as inviolable from the beginning. Dissuasion stipulated the permanent maintenance of a militarily credible readiness, because this was the only way to achieve the desired dissuasive effect. However, the increasing difficulties of ensuring suitable military

---

<sup>474</sup> Study of the efforts of the General Staff Officers and Instruction Officers to Reorganize the Army, May 15, 1942, p. 8/9. BAr E 5795/260.

presence and readiness led to a state where the credibility of the defense efforts depended more and more on the process of mobilization, which was extremely tricky in nature and susceptible to interference. Political and economic resistance to this process mounted. Mobilization became, from a military perspective, the Achilles heel of all war preparations. The Supreme Swiss Commander was probably correct in pointing out that an enemy would seek first and foremost to use this weakness to its advantage. The enemy would attack when the "demands of our authorities and our people"-- who were primarily interested in their economic well-being and questions regarding leave--were yielded to and the military presence was inadequate.<sup>475</sup>

With the exception of the immediate assumption of the battle, various aspects of national survival were always important when troops were called up. It was by no means a strictly military matter, but instead a political one and, "in a quite eminent sense, an economic one." This last factor became increasingly important the more the war effort became a matter of maintaining general readiness as a means of protecting Swiss neutrality over a long period of time. If the *Bundesrat* represented the opinion that these decisions could not be left up to the Army High Command, then this was certainly fundamentally correct,<sup>476</sup> but possible only if a comprehensive security policy and the corresponding leadership structures were in place. Both were completely lacking during the Second World War.

---

<sup>475</sup> Supreme Swiss Commander to *Bundesrat*, January 19, 1943, p. 2. BAr E 5795/88.

<sup>476</sup> Report by the *Bundesrat*, pp. 23-24.

However, the manpower and material resources that were militarily indispensable for the reasons discussed above were extracted from civilian life, particularly the economy, on the basis of the militia system's heavy demands for manpower, which were not bearable over a long period of time. However, military survival could only be ensured if the economy were secured. Thus, there was no way to avoid splitting up the manpower and material resources of the country between the military and essential civilian areas, and this held true not only for an intense short-term effort but over a period of several years. The prerequisites for doing this were not met at the start of the war, neither with regard to the economy nor--notably--with regard to the military. Instead, Swiss military defense rested on the planned use of all human and material resources that the militia system made available to the Army leadership. Thus, the conflict was inevitable and could not be resolved within the time that mattered, i.e., the Second World War.

This study is not intended to examine who won out by presenting themselves and their position best, be it the *Bundesrat*, the Supreme Swiss Commander, economic interests, the agricultural sector, or political parties. Rather, what is depicted here is the basic inevitability of conflict and its effect on military defense. This study has shown that, despite the unrelenting efforts of the Supreme Swiss Commander and the Army leadership, it was not possible to maintain indisputable military readiness for the duration of active duty. According to military experts and the Supreme Swiss Commander himself, readiness actually fell far below the critical threshold at times and was nothing

more than symbolic in character. It also became clear that the mobilization, which became the most crucial military operation due to the insufficient military presence, was increasingly placed in jeopardy. This is because the political and economic obstacles became too high during the tense and exhausting years of active service. Haggling over personnel also severely damaged the sense of spirit among the population and the Army, and the extreme fluctuations in manpower strained the military fabric. Under the conditions in effect, it was simply impossible to find a system of military/civilian manpower sharing that satisfied everyone, because the manpower to which the Army laid claim via universal military service was completely unrealistic in light of the historical developments. Yet the demands were due to the system itself, and the Army leadership was fatally caught up in the system as well, because it did not have the operational freedom to act on its own, nor the labor-saving weapons, the flexibility in calling up troops, or the authority for mobilization. The conflicts of World War II clearly showed that the prevailing defense structure did not meet modern security requirements, which were placed on Switzerland precisely during World War II. As a result, military readiness suffered severe deficiencies. The major contribution of the Army leadership under Supreme Swiss Commander Guisan can probably be found in the--possibly intuitive--fact that military national defense was possible only in the overall context of security and in the notably successful acceptance of the leadership role in the area of overall defense. Guisan was both an apolitical, nonpartisan father figure and a leading political figure in the battle against the latent tendency toward capitulation.<sup>477</sup> Thus,

---

<sup>477</sup> Kreis, *Auf den Spuren von La Charité*, pp. 199.

General Henri Guisan came very close to meeting the criterion that Crevelde sets for military greatness in his book *Command in War*: "To know what one can do on the basis of the available means, and to do it; to know what one cannot do, and refrain from trying; and to distinguish between the two--that, after all, is the very definition of military greatness, as it is of human genius in general."<sup>478</sup>

Switzerland's pioneering experiences during the unique conflict of the Second World War forced both civilian and military authorities to adopt a holistic security philosophy. The years of threat to the nation's very existence made both the necessity and the absence of a comprehensive security philosophy bluntly and painfully clear. It became apparent that the disproportionate role of the military component, largely caused by the authoritarian militia system practiced at that time, did not measure up to the threat and was at odds with a modern, overall security policy. The results were not limited to the serious, practically insoluble conflicts between civilian and military authorities: The preparedness and dissuasive power of the Swiss Army were also called into question. The fact that Switzerland survived the Second World War unscathed allowed the nation to quickly forget the hard lessons it had learned. They were replaced by the mythos of the Reduit and a faith in the Army lasting well into the 1960s.

Nonetheless, the historical experiences of the Second World War speak clearly: Modern territorial defense of a small nation requires first and foremost a balance between the individual components of security policy, not a blind numerical reduction in military forces. Instead, the military defense philosophy must be carefully adapted to the political,

---

<sup>478</sup> Van Crevelde, *Command in War*, p.102.



economic, and psychological realities of the nation. The mission of territorial defense must be at the center of the military component of security policy and must not be threatened by fashionable demands for multifunctionality or subordinated to the principle of universal military service, and the advantages of a differentially applied militia must be kept in mind. The experiences of the Second World War showed clearly that the Swiss Army can only fulfill its military mission if it can concentrate the personnel and material resources at its disposal on its original task of military defense of the Swiss territory when this becomes necessary. In the terminology of World War II, the Army is responsible for "warfare," not "national defense."

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Bericht des Bundesrates an die Bundesversammlung zum Bericht des Generals über den Aktivdienst 1939-145 vom 7.1.1947, Bern 1947 [Report by the Bundesrat].
- Bericht des Kommandanten der Flieger- und Fliegerabwehrtruppen, des Generaladjutanten der Armee, des Chefs der Ausbildung der Armee, des Chefs des Personellen der Armee an den Oberbefehlshaber der Armee über den Aktivdienst 1939-1945. [Reports by the Commander of Air Force And Antiaircraft Troops, the Head of Army Personnel, the Head of Training, etc.]
- Bericht an die Bundesversammlung über den Aktivdienst 1939-1945 von General Henri Guisan, Lausanne 1946 [Report by the Supreme Swiss Commander].
- Bericht des Chefs des Generalstabes der Armee an den Oberbefehlshaber der Armee über den Aktivdienst 1939-1945. [Report by the Chief of General Staff].
- Bond, Brian. *War and Society in Europe 1870-1970*. Oxford University Press, 1984.
- Bonjour, Edgar. *Geschichte der schweizerischen Neutralität, Vier Jahrhunderte eidgenössischer Aussenpolitik*, Volumes IV-VI. Basel/Stuttgart, 1971-1980.
- Böschenstein, Hermann. *Bedrohte Heimat, Die Schweiz im Zweiten Weltkrieg*. Bern, 1965.
- Braunschweig, Pierre-Th. *Geheimer Draht nach Berlin, Die Nachrichtenlinie Masson-Schellenberg und der schweizerische Nachrichtendienst im Zweiten Weltkrieg*. Zurich, 1989.
- Bucher, Erwin. *Zwischen Bundesrat und General, Schweizer Politik und Armee im Zweiten Weltkrieg*. Zurich, 1993.
- Bundesrat Rudolf Minger*. Bern 1981.
- Couchepin, Louis. *Das Réduit, Wie unsere Armee die Schweiz verteidigt*, Translated into German by Major Fritz Hummler. Zurich, 1943.
- Däniker, Gustav. *Dissuasion, Schweizerische Abhaltestrategie heute und morgen*. Frauenfeld, 1987.

- Däniker, Gustav, and Andre Aloys Wicki. *Die Armee im Rahmen der Gesamtverteidigung*. Zurich: Verein zur Förderung des Wehrwillens und der Wehrwissenschaft, 1969.
- "Die Entwicklung des Kriegsbildes im Westen vom Ersten zum Zweiten Weltkrieg." *ASMZ* 2, 1980.
- Duic, Mario. "Die Schweiz 1939-1945: Erfahrungen in Sicherheitspolitik und umfassender Landesverteidigung." *Oesterreichische Militär Zeitschrift* 5-6, 1985.
- Erinnerungsbuch Gebirgs-Infanterie-Regiment 16, herausgegeben in Zusammenarbeit von Offizieren, Unteroffizieren und Soldaten*. Burgdorf, 1946.
- Ernst, Alfred. *Die Konzeption der schweizerischen Landesverteidigung 1815 bis 1966*. Frauenfeld, 1971.
- Field Manual 100-20/Air Force Pamphlet 3-20, Headquarters Department of the Army and the Air Force, Washington D.C., 1990.
- Fink, Jürg. *Die Schweiz aus der Sicht des Dritten Reiches 1933-1945*. Zurich, 1985.
- Frick, Hans. "Die Schweiz als strategisches Problem," in *Die Schweiz im Notstand der Gegenwart, Kultur- und staatswirtschaftliche Schriften*, Volume 79. Zurich, 1952.
- Fuhrer, Hans Rudolf. *Spionage gegen die Schweiz, Die geheimen deutschen Nachrichtendienste gegen die Schweiz im Zweiten Weltkrieg 1939-1945*. Frauenfeld, 1982.
- Gautschi, Willi. *General Henri Guisan, Die schweizerische Armeeführung im Zweiten Weltkrieg*. Zurich, 1989.
- Hafner, Georg. *Walther Stampfli, Bundesrat im Krieg, Vater der AHV*. Olten, 1986.
- Halder, Franz. *Kriegstagebuch, Tägliche Aufzeichnungen des Chefs des Generalstabes des Heeres 1939-1942*. Stuttgart, 1962-1964.
- Hilty, Hans Rudolf. "Aus den Papieren einer Unperson der schweizerischen Zeitgeschichte." *Weltwoche*. March 24, 1976.
- Hofer, Viktor. *Die Bedeutung des Berichtes General Guisans über den Aktivdienst 1939-1945 für die Gestaltung des schweizerischen Wehrwesens*. Basel/Stuttgart, 1970.

- Jenni, Peter. "Basel im Zweiten Weltkrieg." *Doppelstab*. September 14, 1974.
- Keegan, John. *The Face of Battle*. Penguin Books, London, 1976.
- Kimche, Jon. *General Guisans Zweifrontenkrieg, Die Schweiz zwischen 1939 und 1945*. Berlin, 1962.
- Kreis, Georg. *Auf den Spuren von La Charité, Die schweizerische Armeeführung im Spannungsfeld des deutsch-französischen Gegensatzes 1936-1941*. Basel/Stuttgart, 1976.
- Kriegstagebuch des OKW (Wehrmachtführungsstab), ed. P.E. Schramm, four volumes, Frankfurt 1961-1965. [War log of the Army High Command.]
- Kurz, Hans-Rudolf. *Die Schweiz im Zweiten Weltkrieg, Das grosse Erinnerungswerk an den Aktivdienst 1939-45*. Thun, 1959.
- Kurz, Hans Rudolf. "Der schweizerische General." *Schweizer Soldat* 7, 1984.
- Lezzi, Bruno. "Das Réduit--ein militärischer Mythos, Standortbestimmung der Gesellschaft für militärhistorische Studienreisen." *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*. May 8, 1984.
- Liss, Ulrich. *Westfront, Erinnerungen des Feindbearbeiters im Oberkommando des Heeres (OKH)*. Neckargemünd, 1959.
- Luder, Fritz. *Die Gebirgs-Füsilier-Kompanie I/32 im Aktivdienst 1939-45*. Thun, 1975.
- Maurer, Paul. *Anbauschlacht, Landwirtschaftspolitik, Plan Wahlen, Anbauwerk 1937-1945*. Zurich, 1985.
- Meyer, Rudolf. "Die schweizerische Réduit-Strategie im Zweiten Weltkrieg." *Schweizer Soldat* 6, 1993.
- Minott, Rodney G. *The Fortress that Never Was: The Myth of Hitler's Bavarian Stronghold*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1964.
- Müller, Hans. *Bundesrat Karl Kobelt 1891-1968, Eine Gedenkschrift*. Bern, 1975.
- Odermatt, Franz. *Zur Genese der Réduitstrategie, Die Reaktion der schweizerischen Armeeführung auf einen strategischen Sonderfall im Sommer 1940*. Bern, 1983.
- Odermatt, Franz. "Zwischen Realität und militärischem Mythos: Zur Entstehung der Réduitstrategie im Jahre 1940." *ASMZ* 8-9, 1987.

- Paret, Peter. *Makers of Modern Strategy from Machiavelli to the Nuclear Age*. Princeton University Press, 1986.
- Rösch, Werner. *Bedrohte Schweiz, Die deutschen Operationsplanungen gegen die Schweiz im Sommer/Herbst 1940 und die Abwehrbereitschaft der Armee im Oktober 1940*. Frauenfeld, 1986.
- Rosenkranz Paul. "Réduit und Rütli-rapport, Die Schweiz nach dem Fall von Frankreich." *Bündner Tagblatt*. May 11, 1981.
- Schauvelberger, Walter. "Das 'Réduit National' 1940, Ein militärhistorischer Sonderfall." Zurich, 1992.
- Schweizerische Sicherheitspolitik im Wandel, Bericht 90 des Bundesrates an die Bundesversammlung über die Sicherheitspolitik der Schweiz*. Bern, 1990.
- Schweizerische Vereinigung für Militärgeschichte und Militärwissenschaften. *Neutrale Kleinstaaten im Zweiten Weltkrieg*. Münsingen, 1973.
- Schweizerische Dissuasionsstrategie im Zweiten Weltkrieg, in: Bindschedler, Schwedische und schweizerische Neutralität im Zweiten Weltkrieg*. Zurich/Aarau, 1945.
- Senn, Hans. *Die Entwicklung der Führungsstruktur im Eidgenössischen Militärdepartement. Gesamtverteidigung und Armee*, Vol. 9. Frauenfeld/Stuttgart, 1982.
- Siegenthaler, Paul. *Der Oberbefehlshaber nach schweizerischem Staatsrecht*. Bern, Zofingen, 1946.
- Tanner, Jakob. *Bundeshaushalt, Währung und Kriegswirtschaft, Eine finanzsoziologische Analyse der Schweiz zwischen 1938 und 1953*. Zurich, 1986.
- Urner, Klaus, *Die Schweiz muss noch geschluckt werden! Hitlers Aktionspläne gegen die Schweiz, Zwei Studien zur Bedrohungslage der Schweiz im Zweiten Weltkrieg*. Zurich, 1990.
- Van Creveld, Martin. *Command in War*. Boston, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985.
- Vetsch, Christian, *Aufmarsch gegen die Schweiz, Der deutsche "Fall Gelb"-Irreführung der Schweizer Armee 1939-1940*. Olten, 1973.

- Von Clausewitz, Carl. *On War*, edited and translated by Michael Howard and Peter Paret. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976.
- Von Lossberg, Bernhard. *Im Wehrmachtführungsstab*. Hamburg, 1949.
- Wahlen, Hermann. *Bundesrat F.T. Wahlen*. Bern, 1975.
- Walde, Karl J. *Generalstabschef Jakob Huber 1883-1953*. Aarau 1983.
- Warlimont, Walter. *Im Hauptquartier der deutschen Wehrmacht 1939-1945. Grundlagen, Formen, Gestalten*. Frankfurt, 1962.
- Wehrli Edmund. "Vom zaghaften zum wehrhaften Réduit, Anmerkungen zu General Guisans operativen Überlegungen." *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*. February 5 and 11, 1987.
- Wehrli, Edmund. *Briefe aus dem Aktivdienst 1939-1940, Heft 12 der Schriftenreihe der Gesellschaft fuer militaerhistorische Studienreisen (GMS)*. Zurich, 1993.

## INITIAL DISTRIBUTION LIST

1. Library, Code 52 2  
Naval Postgraduate School  
Monterey, California 93943-5000
2. N511 H 1  
Chief of Naval Operations  
The Pentagon, Room 4D562  
Washington, District of Columbia 20350-2000
3. Dr. Thomas Bruneau, Code NS/Bn 1  
Chairman, National Security Affairs Department  
Naval Postgraduate School  
Monterey, California 93943-5000
4. Dr. Donald Abenheim, Code NS/Ah 1  
Naval Postgraduate School  
Monterey, California 93943-5000
5. Dr. Rodney Kennedy-Minott, Code NS/Mi 1  
Naval Postgraduate School  
Monterey, California 93943-5000
6. Dr. Hans Wegmueller 2  
Amselweg 22  
CH-3110 Muensingen  
Switzerland











DUDLEY KNOX LIBRARY  
NAVAL POSTGRADUATE SCHOOL  
MONTEREY CA 93943-5101



DUDLEY KNOX LIBRARY



3 2768 00310899 4