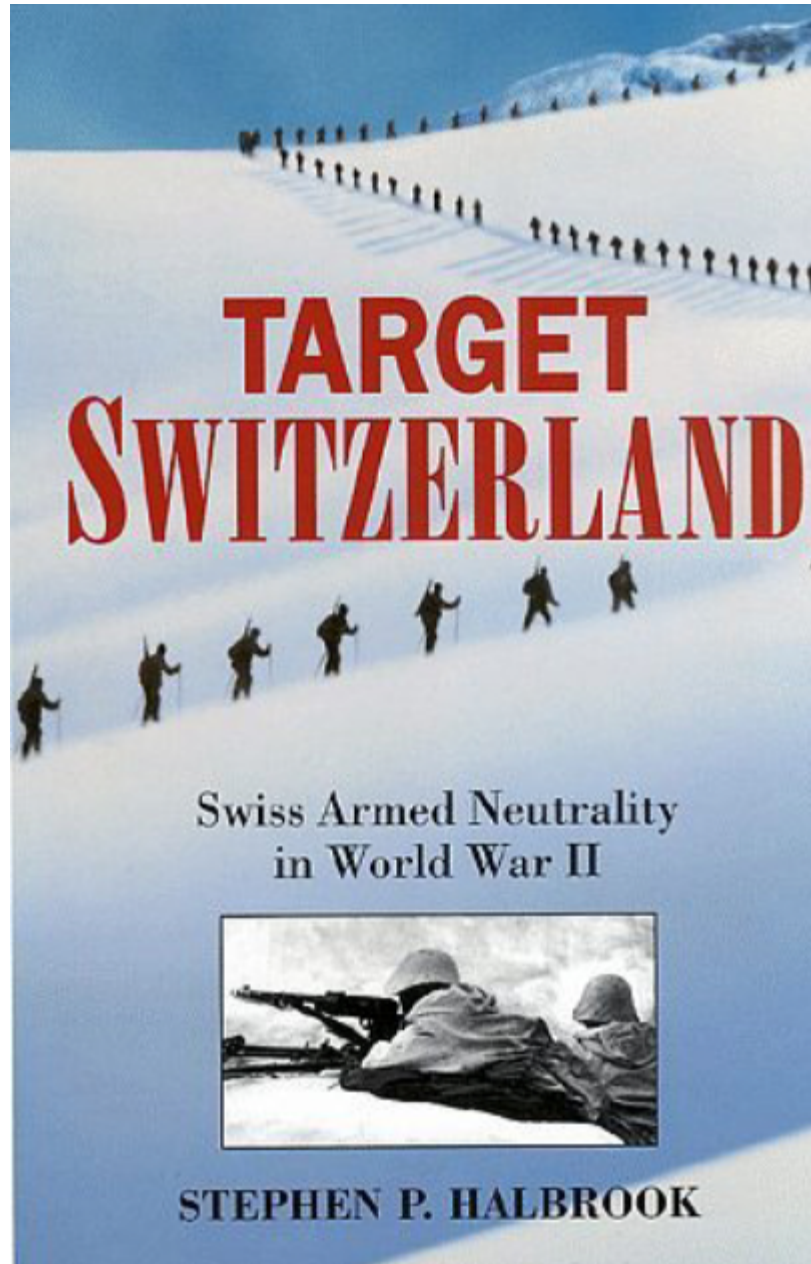


# Target Switzerland

By Stephen Halbrook



An excerpt of *Target Switzerland* by Stephen Halbrook

## Chapter I: From 1933 to the Eve of War

ADOLF HITLER WAS NAMED CHANCELLOR OF GERMANY ON January 30, 1933. Immediately, a reign of terror began. The Nazis attacked Social Democrats, Socialists and Communists. Their animosity toward Jews, Slavs, gypsies, homosexuals, the mentally ill and persons with birth defects or handicaps quickly became evident. The rights to assemble and to a free press were taken away.' As an essential component of preventing any armed resistance, the Nazis searched homes and seized firearms from private citizens on a wide scale.

After the fire at the Reichstag (Parliament) in Berlin the following month, random massive searches and seizures were authorized; "serious disturbances of the peace" were punishable by death. Nazi thugs attacked members of the democratic parties and hauled them off. By early March, Hitler was an absolute dictator. The Parliament had ceased to exist as a true legislature and the regional German states were taken over by the central authority. The government became an instrument of terror.

In neighboring Switzerland, the press reacted negatively against the new German regime with such articles as "The Dangers of the Hitlerite Dictatorship" in Geneva's leading newspaper, the Journal de Genève. The journal began to run a regular column on the subject of Nazi Germany featuring snippets about police actions against political opponents, who seemed invariably to be described as "Communists." From early in the Nazi regime, the military threat to Switzerland was plain to see. Ewald Banse, a Nazi military theorist and geographer who advocated barbaric methods of warfare, had published *Raum und Volk in Weltkriegen* (Space and People in World War) in late 1932. The Nazis appointed him Professor of Military Science in February 1933 and in July established the German Society for Military Policy, in part to promote Banse's ideas.

Banse frankly asserted that a war against France, Germany's historic enemy, could be favorably waged only by attacking through the neutral nations of Belgium and the Netherlands in the north and through Switzerland in the south. A key invasion path led through the Jura range and the Bellegarde (Geneva) Gap. "Swiss neutrality, in fact, is of service only to the French, and not to us," Banse asserted.

Banse rightly anticipated, however, that Switzerland would be a far harder nut for any foreign enemy to crack than the Netherlands. Topographically, the Jura contained lower mountains and valleys; even the central plateau, with its hills, streams and lakes, afforded "the chance of a stubborn defense against foreign invasion." As for the Alps, these were high mountains full of great rock masses, precipices and valleys-all watered by rushing torrents and topped by snowy pinnacles. Such terrain would impede the movement of large forces.

Despite its majority German-speaking population, Banse used Nazi racial theories to describe the Swiss as an inferior amalgamation: "Like Belgium and the United States of America, Switzerland has no people, but merely a population made up of different races." There were Germans, French, Italians and Rhetians. As for the majority:

The German Swiss imagine that in conjunction with the three other racial elements which speak foreign languages they constitute a single nationality, and they dig an artificial trench between them and ourselves, which is deeper and wider than Lake

Constance [part of the German-Swiss border]. This conception, which they uphold with all the impartiality of the Eastern race, is the intellectual basis of the Confederation, which would otherwise have no reality, since the Latin elements have no such deep convictions

Banse expressed great resentment against the German-speaking Swiss for what he rightly perceived as their dislike of the kind of Nazi political ideology he espoused. He wrote:

From the military point of view, therefore, the character of the German Swiss is the decisive factor. . . . Its decisive features, however, are a calculating materialism, unlimited self-reliance and a tendency to criticism, not to say faultfinding. The latter tendency is directed mainly toward their German kinsfolk across the Rhine, and reminds us of the pelican which pecks its own breast...

This childish dislike needs to be taken very seriously indeed and is an important fact fraught with possible military consequences, being of itself equivalent to a strong army corps, and much more dangerous than the anti-German feeling of the Alsatians, since it is based upon the belief, doubtless justified in the Middle Ages but long since obsolete, that liberty and equality those most sacred of human possessions are at stake.

While most of the world paid little attention to the disturbing nature of the new German regime, the Swiss were repelled by Nazism. On May 12, 1933, the Swiss Federal Council (the collective government of the country, from whose membership one Federal Councillor is selected to serve as Federal President each year) prohibited the wearing of "Hitlerite" uniforms and insignia and subjected violators to imprisonment or deportation. On July 9, Federal Councillor Rudolf Minger, a farmer who headed the Military Department in the years from 1930 to 1940, declared in the ancient Roman amphitheater at Windisch in northern Switzerland:

Never will our people agree to weaken our democracy; it will defeat dictatorial ideas from whichever side they come. Never will our people accept a German-style Gleichschaltung [conformity]. In Swiss fashion we will hold in order our Swiss house. For this purpose we do not need extra shirts nor extra flags; the white cross in the red field will suffice. The Swiss will also defend the right to utter his opinion freely... We will ever hold dear our federalist attitudes and be happy our people encompasses different languages and races. This is the best guarantee that our nation will, in times of war and of great international tensions, not be seduced by irresponsible political temptations.

For the Swiss, the "armed" in armed neutrality was not merely a matter of maintaining a strong national defense force, but imposed responsibilities on the individual citizen. The 1933 edition of the manual issued with the rifle given to every Swiss male on reaching military service age stated:

In combat, I have my rifle to overcome the enemy. It is the symbol of the independence and force of my fatherland, Switzerland, which I love and which I want to defend all the way to the last drop of my blood.

The Swiss rifle "bible" went on to explain that a man must make it a pleasure to maintain his rifle. It was to be stored in a closet at home. One was to practice constantly in both prone and kneeling positions and should be an active member of a shooting society. These voluntary shooting societies were considered an important element in the defense of the country.

To fire accurately, the manual asserted that one should not shoot fast. Instead, one should pull the trigger slowly, using intelligence and judgment, and remember: "The conqueror always has another cartridge in his rifle." The trigger was to be pulled only if the target would be hit. After each shot in combat, one should pause and observe. One had to shoot more accurately than the enemy and skillfully use the terrain. Furthermore, each soldier was required to be engaged in marksmanship activities outside service until past age 40. This was a military duty one was obliged to fulfill each year with his own rifle and in a shooting society.

The SSV, or Swiss Shooting Federation, was the backbone of the armed citizenry, which the New York Times termed in an August editorial "the army in civil life." The SSV's strong opposition to totalitarianism of both right and left was clear: "We want to think Swiss and to remain Swiss. Away with all foreign behavior. We need no brown, green or red uniforms or shirts; we marksmen know only one uniform and that is our field-gray, our honorary dress."

While Swiss rifle shooting matches were conducted at the standard 300 meters, soldiers were trained in marksmanship at 50 to 300 meters and even shot at 400. These were very long distances compared to the relatively short ones from which infantrymen typically fired at one another during the world wars. But the ability to snipe at such distances in mountain terrain would have given the Swiss a great advantage in combat with the Germans, who were only trained to shoot at 100 meters.

Hugh Wilson, American Ambassador to Switzerland from 1927 to 1937, described the Swiss citizen soldier: "The Swiss citizen retains his uniform and rifle at home, ready for instant mobilization; and he spends many of his Sundays qualifying for marksmanship awards with his friends in his community as men of other nationalities spend their leisure at golf, fishing, or other recreation."

Hitler would in time be able to conquer most of Europe and much of Russia, but the armed Swiss population was an unappetizing potential conquest for the much larger German Army. In Switzerland, every man was trained with a rifle and was used to shooting accurately at 300 meters. No other European country offered this kind of disincentive to aggression.

On August 9, 1933, Nazi police trespassed on Swiss soil at Basel to search for Communist leaflets. Nazi demonstrations near the border later that month were making the Swiss very uneasy. Large crowds gathered in support of Swiss democratic institutions and the army. Nazi meetings, though well advertised in the German-speaking Swiss cantons, drew few enthusiasts. The New York Times observed the political climate in Switzerland:

The decline of Hitlerism can be ascribed to two main causes. First, there has been a revival of Swiss patriotism as a consequence of psychological

errors in the German Nazi propaganda. The Swiss also feel that the Nazi movement may at any moment threaten their independence."

In its September 12 issue, the Journal de Genève reported Swiss sentiment as follows: "The attitude of Berlin toward Vienna proves to us that Hitlerism is an article of export.... Swiss independence counts for no more beyond the Rhine than does Austrian autonomy. No one need therefore be astonished if Swiss opinion remains agitated and anxious in the presence of the evolution of the Third Reich."

The Petit Parisien published an article in September by the English journalist "Augur" (the pen name for M. Poliakov) entitled "A Plan for the Invasion of Switzerland Preferred by the German General Staff.." It created a sensation in the international press and was, of course, carefully analyzed in the Swiss newspapers. Augur was described as a well-informed political commentator.

The theme of the plan was "Geneva, Doorstep to France." It expressed a low opinion of the ability of the Swiss Army to resist, arguing that its soldiers were good but lacked training in modern armaments and equipment. Arms and munitions factories were located predominantly in the north, near Germany, and could be readily destroyed. To avoid a decisive defeat as early as the first day, therefore, the Swiss Army would withdraw to the mountains of central Switzerland, where it would be cut off from France. The wives and children of the battalions from the northern districts would remain in the hands of the Germans as hostages, which would undermine the troops' morale, for fear of reprisals.

Without encountering any serious opposition in the northern Swiss plain, the German Army would then march right to the Jura. The German forces would rush to the south of Belfort, France, under its fortifications, and the main army would quickly march alongside the Jura, its right flank protected by the Lake of Neuchâtel. The initial goal to reach was the Léman Line, close to Geneva. Geneva was the gateway to France and particularly important for the seizure of Lyons, France, with its surrounding arms and munitions factories.

Augur asserted that the precise information contained in the aforementioned German plan established its authenticity. The Journal de Genève commented, however, that even if the plan were real, it could be merely a technical study such as general staffs would routinely compose, as opposed to a plan intended for actual use. The plan could also have been a fabrication intended to incite hostility against Germany and its rearmament or to create support in France for fortifying the region of Lyons.

Two conclusions were in order, according to the Journal. First, the Swiss people had the right to know if this invasion plan, which threatened their security and independence, was real. The Federal Council was urged to investigate the subject thoroughly. Second, the very fact that an eventual violation of Swiss neutrality was being publicly discussed showed the necessity of maintaining a strong national defense. In 1914, no army invaded Switzerland because her army was sufficient to deter every belligerent. In 1933, all precautions had to be taken so that the troops received modern equipment that inspired confidence in their capacity to resist.

In Germany, Reich Defense Minister von Blomberg called the article by Augur "highly imaginative nonsense. On September 26, at a League of Nations meeting in Geneva,

Swiss Foreign Minister Giuseppe Motta "categorically explained to Nazi Propaganda Minister Goebbels that such an idea would be totally absurd. In Germany, no rational person would have in mind jeopardizing the existence of the Swiss Confederation." Goebbels reassured him that Germany wanted nothing more from the Swiss than friendship.

Despite Goebbels' lack of credibility, the French did have an interest in publicizing the supposed invasion plan, because their Maginot Line stopped near the Swiss border. Any improvement in Swiss defenses would in effect become an extension of the Maginot Line and further secure the French southern flank. Subsequent Swiss defensive preparations, combined with the rugged Swiss terrain, would, in 1940, encourage the Nazis to attack more vulnerable armies and easier terrain. In fact, it could even be said that the Swiss in essence extended the Maginot Line eastward from its southern tip near the French-Swiss border all along the border with southern Germany to Austria. The fortifications and infantry positions essentially reached all the way from France to the Sargans fortress in eastern Switzerland, which pointed its guns toward Austria.

On October 10, 1933, Swiss Defense Minister Rudolf Minger cited the reported German invasion plan to justify increased appropriations for armaments. The Parliament voted a credit of 15 million francs (\$4.5 million) as the first installment of a multi-year budget of 100 million francs (\$30 million). This was a sharp upward turn. For years, following the horrors of the Great War, and with the Socialist Party's opposition to militarism, military budgets had steadily declined.

On October 14, Hitler announced that Germany intended to withdraw from the League of Nations and the Disarmament Conference. The Journal de Genève asserted: "The thunderbolts hurled on Saturday by Berlin have quite naturally provoked an explosion everywhere. It is an explosion of indignation, of inquietude . . . and of distrust toward Germany."

On October 18, the Federal Council responded to Germany's withdrawal from the League by resolving that "there should be no doubt anywhere concerning the will of Switzerland to defend her neutrality and her capacity to do so." The Council was expected to adopt Minger's proposal to increase appropriations to purchase arms for the infantry, as well as airplanes. On November 16, the equivalent of \$39 million was appropriated for new rifles, machine guns and artillery.

Swiss commanders planned increased defenses at the German border, just as Belgium was instituting along its own border with Germany. In view of their military preparations, it was questioned whether the two countries were truly neutral; however, the more important question was whether Adolf Hitler would respect the international treaties under which their status was guaranteed. According to an article in the New York Times, the Germans would attack France through Switzerland, "crossing the Rhine upstream from Basel and penetrating to France along what tacticians call the Corridor of Belfort." While the route through Belgium was easier, analysts observed, the Swiss route would offer a greater element of surprise.

The issue of Swiss defense, said the Times, was "singularly acute since the advent of Hitlerism, and there are numerous Swiss nationals who are asking whether Switzerland's neutrality would be respected if her territory became strategic to another conflict." Fortifications were being constructed on the Rhine. Federal President Edmund

Schulthess stated, "Our people are schooled by the ages in democracy and do not allow themselves to be greatly influenced by propaganda."

As the war scare continued, on December 14 the Federal Council approved 82 million francs in military spending. Defense Minister Minger stated:

The 300,000 Swiss subject to mobilization will hold from valley to valley, from mountaintop to mountaintop, from river to river ... Whoever raises the slightest doubt about this fools himself badly. Any belligerent who tries to cross Switzerland will have to reckon with the entire Swiss Army.

Besides Switzerland, there was another German-speaking nation in Europe: Austria. On the first page of *Mein Kampf*, Adolf Hitler had declared that "Common blood must belong to a common Reich" ("Gleiches Blut gehört in ein gemeinsames Reich"). He referred to Austria and Germany as "two German states which we of the younger generation at least have made it our life work to reunite by every means at our disposal."- Hitler told the Reichstag on January 30, 1934, in a speech marking his first year in power, that what was happening in Germany "will not halt at the frontier posts of a land which is German not only in its people but in its history as well, and which was for many centuries an integral part of the German Empire."

Switzerland would be Hitler's goal after he conquered Austria, argued G.E.W. Johnson in the June 1934 issue of *North American Review*. He wrote that a "slugging contest that is now being waged between the two Austrian-born Chancellors: Hitler, the 'little corporal' of Berlin, and Dollfuss, the 'Millimetternich' of Vienna, to decide whether or not Germany is to eat Austria for breakfast." The Swiss feared that if Austria were "served up for breakfast, it will be Switzerland's turn to furnish the lunch." After all, the Nazis claimed to "voice the aspirations not alone of the sixty-five million Germans who live in Deutschland, but of the eighty million 'Germans' who comprise *Deutschtum* [the greater German Empire]."

Like a "restless swarm of termites," wrote Johnson, the Nazis "bored from within," to subvert regions with a German-speaking majority: Danzig, the Saar, Austria and Switzerland. Their intentions, based on kinship of blood and speech, were to incorporate Switzerland within a Greater Germany by an appeal to the historic past. During the Middle Ages, Switzerland had been part of the Holy Roman Empire, the "First Reich" in Nazi terminology, of which Hitler's was the Third.



*"Greater Germany" as typically depicted in Nazi propaganda in 1935. Most of Switzerland was to be absorbed into the Third Reich with smaller portions being swallowed up by Italy and France. (Adapted from Rings, Schweiz im Krieg)*

The Nazis now were proclaiming that they intended to "expand Germany's boundaries to the farthest limits of the old Holy Empire, and even beyond." None other than Professor Ewald Banse, responding to Swiss criticism of his geographical textbook expounding German claims to Switzerland, stated:

Quite naturally we count you Swiss as offshoots of the German nation (along with the Dutch, the Flemings, the Lorrainers, the Alsations, the Austrians and the Bohemians) . . . .Patience: one day we will group ourselves around a single banner, and whosoever shall wish to separate us, we will exterminate!

Sentiment in Switzerland held that "the moment that Austria succumbs to the Nazi boa constrictor, Switzerland is marked as the next victim to be strangled in the coils.

In contrast with the beginning of the Great War, when many Swiss were divided along ethnic lines-French and Italian speakers leaning toward the Entente and German speakers sympathizing with the Central Powers-the Swiss were remarkably united from 1933 on in their distaste for the racist and anti-democratic bent of the Nazis. Switzerland proved that French-, German-, and Italian-speaking citizens could live together harmoniously. Almost alone among the European nations, Switzerland remained immune to what Johnson termed "the infective virus of Pan-This and Pan-That." Zurich's



leading newspaper, the Neue Ziircher Zeitung, admonished its readers that the National Socialist revolution in Germany demonstrated the need for "the spiritual defense of our country."

At this time, the views of Nazi sympathizers could also be heard, if only from a tiny number of Swiss. Theodor Fischer, who headed the pro-German League of National Socialist Confederates, stigmatized Switzerland as a "vassal state of France under Jewish control. " That group called for abolition of the Swiss Parliament and cantons and a centralization of all power in the hands of the President.

Jean Marie Musy, Swiss Minister of Finance, warned in a May 10, 1934 speech in Geneva that "Switzerland will either remain a democracy or cease to be Switzerland! ... The racial ideal can never be the basis of Swiss nationality!" Two days later, the Federal Council banned the wearing of uniforms by all political parties.

As Hitler's rule continued, the Swiss became increasingly repelled not only by National Socialism's rhetoric but by its actions. "The Night of the Long Knives," on June 30, 1934, during which one Nazi paramilitary organization, the SS, assassinated the leadership of another, the SA, further revealed the regime's criminality. Hitler was consolidating his personal power through murder. The democratic Swiss, always wary of German strength, particularly abhorred what the swastika had come to represent. German-speaking Swiss, perhaps because they could more easily understand exactly what the Nazis were saying, became more vehemently anti-Nazi than the French Swiss, and a war of words took place in Swiss and German newspapers. While the Swiss press criticized the Nazis and their domestic actions in Germany, the Nazi press attacked the Swiss, who, they claimed, were too inferior or self-absorbed to appreciate the benefits of the New Order.

On July 25, 1934, Austrian Nazis murdered Austrian Chancellor Engelbert Dollfuss, leader of the clerical-fascist government. Supplied with arms and explosives from Germany, Nazis terrorized Austria and blew up buildings. After the murder of Dollfuss, Italian troops moved into the northern Italian Alps near the Swiss border. Switzerland served notice that she would not tolerate violations of her neutrality.

On July 26, at the Fribourg marksmanship competition, Federal President Marcel Pilet-Golaz reaffirmed that Switzerland was determined to defend her frontiers and that "the capacity of defense is the first condition of our security." Defense Minister Minger told the competitors:

Events abroad have reawoken Switzerland's old defiance and the feelings for justice and liberty have been renewed. The Swiss people will never allow themselves to be robbed of the right to freedom of expression and will never bow to a dictatorship, from whichever side it may come. In target shooting outside military service all marksmen strive towards the same aim: the promotion of our defense in the interests of all the Swiss people ....

It was reported on July 27 that the annual maneuvers of the First Division of the Swiss Army would be advanced due to the recent seizure of explosives being smuggled from Germany to Austria on Lake Constance.

In mid-November 1934, four Swiss Nazis, members of the National Socialist Confederates, stood trial in Bern for promoting racial hatred. They had circulated the "Protocols of the Elders of Zion," a notoriously anti-Semitic document originally produced by Tsarist Russian intelligence, which the Swiss Federation of Jewish Communities, suing as a complainant in the action, noted was a complete fake and was subject to confiscation. The trial strained relations between Switzerland and Germany. The testimony at trial and the trial court's decision confirmed the fraudulent character of the "Protocols."

The largest German-speaking Nazi group in Switzerland was the National Front, which approved of Hitler's liquidating Socialist and Communist groups but distrusted what it believed to be the Third Reich's aggressive designs. To oppose Nazism, Swiss socialists and left liberals organized a "Kampfbund" ("Fighting Group"). More broadly, in response to the influence of fascist ideas throughout Europe, a public debate was proceeding about whether federal power should be curtailed. Some Swiss believed the power of the executive, the Federal Council, should be extended; others wanted more influence vested in the voters' legislative meetings on the local level, like the centuries-old Landsgemeinden.

Fear of the German Nazis soon prompted increased military preparations, including enhanced fortifications at the Rhine. Now even the Socialists were voting for military appropriations. Also, Parliament extended the recruits' first year of basic military education by 23 days for infantrymen and 13 days for artillerymen. In a vote on February 23, 1935, the referendum against this bill initiated by the Communist Party was rejected by a majority. Along with other political parties, many Socialists favored the extended service as a necessity to defend democracy against the Nazi threat. Rumors of German plans for sweeping through Switzerland near Basel to attack France south of her line of forts helped to defeat the referendum.

Even if the primary intention of a belligerent nation was only to "pass through" Switzerland to attack its enemy, the Swiss were under no illusion that such a move would be less dangerous than an actual occupation. According to the SSV marksmen's organization, what could have happened in the Great War served as a warning for the present: "If the Germans had come, we would not have been able to expel them from our country again.... Had a French invasion occurred, the Germans would have played the 'rescuer' of Switzerland. As a gesture of thanks they would have demanded that we become a part of the German Reich." In just a few more years, Hitler would indeed "rescue" a number of small countries.

During this period, the small countries of Europe were making sharply varied expenditures for military purposes. This table sets forth average annual military expenditures in selected countries in the years 1934-35:

### **Military Expenditures, 1934-35**

<b>Country</b>	<b>Expenditures</b> (in millions of Swiss Francs)
Belgium	162
Denmark	53
Finland	92
The Netherlands	132
Norway	52
Austria	95
Switzerland	95

As these figures show, there would not necessarily be a direct relation between high expenditures in this period and the ability of the small neutrals to resist Nazi attack a half decade later. The figures for Denmark and Norway were the lowest, and predictably these countries would fall easily to the Nazis in 1940. But so would Belgium and the Netherlands, both of which spent more than Switzerland.

However, comparisons of the raw expenditures do not tell the full story. Spending on defenses modeled on World War I tactics would not help much in the 1940 blitzkrieg era. Moreover, expenditures for ordinary standing armies would be inherently higher per soldier than those for the Swiss-style citizens army because of the full-time pay to the soldiers, barracks and other costs. By contrast, because her army was primarily comprised of citizen soldiers receiving little or no pay and living at home, Switzerland's expenditure figure is deceptively low.

On March 16, 1935, Hitler renounced the Versailles Treaty and announced the rearming of Germany. On May 21, he gave a speech in which he promised peace; the borders of France and Poland would be considered inviolate, and Germany would never interfere in the internal affairs of Austria, much less undertake an Anschluss.

During this period, Germany tripled its guards along the Swiss frontier and strictly controlled travelers and goods. Giuseppe Motta and Johannes Baumann, members of the Federal Council, drafted additional measures to suppress Nazism in Switzerland for submission to the Federal Parliament at its upcoming June session. Meanwhile, Switzerland began regular air raid drills.<sup>90</sup> Bern considered protesting to Berlin about violations of Swiss air space by Luftwaffe squadrons in training.

On June 1-2, the Swiss voted against an initiative to adopt New Deal-type programs like those enacted in the United States. The measures were intended to fight the depression with governmental borrowing, spending and centralization. Although Switzerland, along with the rest of Europe and America, had fallen into grave economic difficulty in the

1930s, the people voted overwhelmingly against the measures, agreeing with the Federal Council that they might lead to a socialist state. The proposal had also been opposed as something that would transform grass-roots Swiss democracy into a parliamentary dictatorship.

In 1935, a member of the National Front -Robert Tobler, from Zurich -was elected to Parliament for one year. He was the only Nazi elected to Parliament for the entire period of the Third Reich. A country wary of the potential for a "dictatorship by a parliament" was not a fertile field for National Socialist ideals.

United States President Franklin Roosevelt reacted to the rise of Nazism with the policy preference, expressed at the beginning of 1936, of "a well-ordered neutrality to do naught to encourage the contest." The Swiss had the same policy of neutrality but, unlike the Americans, were already doing everything possible to prepare for what they perceived as the coming onslaught.

During 1936, Defense Minister Minger continued to gain approval for major rearmament programs. Also, the Federal Council established the Federal Police to counter pro-German and Italian fifth column activity. Before that time, criminal enforcement had been a matter solely for the cantons. Although fifth column activity in Switzerland was surprisingly small for a country with a majority Germanic population-less, in fact, than in any other country targeted by Nazi Germany-there was still a small number of Nazi sympathizers. (Switzerland also had a small Communist Party, which followed the Soviet line.) The pro-Nazis needed to be watched closely in the event that they attempted to facilitate espionage.

On February 4, 1936, Wilhelm Gustloff, the official leader of the German Nazi Party in Switzerland, was shot to death with a revolver by David Frankfurter, a Jewish medical student who wanted to "strike a blow at the regime of Adolf Hitler" and "avenge persecution of Jews in Germany." Germany gave Gustloff a state funeral and demanded an investigation that would identify Frankfurter's possible co-conspirators. The German Foreign Office found that "Switzerland is incapable of maintaining political order within her boundaries," and a semi-official German paper blamed the deed on "the anti-German baiting by the Swiss press." Hitler's own newspaper in Berlin demanded the death penalty, but the Swiss Constitution prohibited execution for political crimes, and the canton of Grisons, in which the crime took place, had long since abolished the death penalty.<sup>101</sup> Frankfurter was sentenced to only 18 years imprisonment. He was pardoned after the war and emigrated to Israel.

On February 18, 1936, the Federal Council ordered the immediate suppression of all Nazi organizations in Switzerland. This measure had great popular support. Hitler's organ in Berlin, the Volkischer Beobachter (People's Observer), reacted: "The government at Berne has struck at German-Swiss relations in a most painful fashion." German Nazis blamed the Swiss law on Jews and leftists. . The German Foreign Minister lodged a formal protest, and the German embassy took over the task now banned by the Swiss: developing a network of agents. The Swiss Parliament sought legislation to withdraw citizenship from naturalized foreigners who failed to sever political connections in their former countries. The possibilities for fifth column activity in Switzerland would continue to be restricted by every legal means at the government's disposal.

Hitler had long been planning the reoccupation of the demilitarized Rhineland, along Germany's border with France. This took place on March 7, 1936. In reaction to the remilitarization of the Rhineland, Switzerland began construction of a line of blockhouses on her northern border and readied for a surprise attack by a motorized force along the Rhine. Swiss leaders anticipated that the coming war would involve new methods of aggression; for instance, the SSV marksmen's group advocated increased shooting skills so that as many paratroopers as possible could be shot and killed while still in the air.

Meanwhile, Americans were caught in the dilemma of whether to stay out of Europe's troubles or recognize the unique nature of the Nazi threat. On July 9, addresses were delivered in Charlottesville, Virginia, by Brigadier General John Ross Delafield of New York and Hugo E. Prager of Zurich. General Delafield warned:

It is fundamental in all fighting that he who strikes first wins, unless his opponent is prepared. Democracies seldom strike first. The case of dictatorships is very different. They can and do. They can plan and prepare for attack in secret, until the blow is about to be struck. The American people do not realize this distinction.

Prager responded that Switzerland "realized the distinction only too well, "noting that neither the Alps, " a great ally in the past, " nor the traditional, "almost sacred" neutrality of his country could any longer be relied upon under conditions of modern warfare and the prevailing state of mind in Europe. "What counts," he said, "is the certainty that a possible aggressor will encounter real obstinate resistance."

President Roosevelt, in remarks on August 14, urged that "we shun political commitment which might entangle us in foreign wars; we avoid connection with the League of Nations." While the United States and Switzerland were co-neutrals, the critical difference was that the former was large and an ocean away from Germany; the latter was small and bordered Hitler's dictatorship.

Swiss Federal President Albert Meyer urged the public to purchase subscriptions to a national defense fund, noting that the country's neutrality and independence were more endangered now than in the Great War. He added: "Our militia is the flower of our people, but armaments are necessary for our defense. As an example, Ethiopia speaks eloquently." Italy had attacked and conquered poorly armed Ethiopia in 1935 to begin an occupation that would last until 1941. Mussolini's Fascist regime in the south, in addition to Nazi Germany to the north, threatened the Swiss democracy. In response to Meyer's call, the national defense fund was oversubscribed by more than 40 percent!

Switzerland's preparations for war were analyzed by The Literary Digest in early 1937. Seeking to avoid being overrun like Belgium in 1914, the "'Isle of Peace' . . . is fortifying her frontiers to the tune of war rumbles," the article began. When the inevitable war comes, "whoever moves the opening gambit will find Switzerland no easy checkmate." A Swiss general staff member was quoted, giving a frank analysis:

When war comes, we will be unable to mobilize our entire Army. The Germans will probably destroy our strategic railroad centers, Aarau and Olten, within forty-eight hours. Hence, for our border defense, we shall have to rely strongly on the native population, and we are therefore preparing them for just such an emergency. It is utterly impossible

for us to defend the city of Basel, because it is right under the guns of the new German fortress Isteiner Klotz. Our entire strategic problem boils down to this. Can we hold the line or ten days? After that, the French will have moved up and closed the gap. Ironically, it would be the French who were defeated easily while the Swiss held out the entire war.

In March 1937 it was reported that Geneva would soon test its air raid defenses. The same newspapers which a few days before had printed Hitler's promise to respect Swiss neutrality were now filled with advertisements for items needed for the house and car during war. A new Swiss law required that all buildings and autos be prepared by April 1 for a blackout, that roofs be made safer against incendiary bombs, including the removal of combustible materials from attics, and that cellars be readied with living and emergency supplies. The League of Nations palace and the world headquarters of the International Committee of the Red Cross (known as the ICRC) in Geneva were included in the preparations.

An analysis of Europe's neutrals in the Christian Science Monitor in April noted: The more one gazes at contemporary Europe, with its diplomatic rivalries, embattled nationalisms, oppressed minorities, class struggles and militant dictatorships, the more one is constrained to render homage to the success of Swiss ideals. Here is a staunchly united land comprising not merely 22 self-governing units but also inhabited by a population of diverse racial origins, speaking four distinct languages and professing two traditionally antagonistic faiths.

A Zeppelin airship flew over Swiss troops during maneuvers near Schaffhausen on the Rhine on April 28, 1937. The Swiss considered it an intentional provocation by the Germans.

On June 13, the canton of Geneva voted to outlaw the Communist Party and authorized the government to outlaw other parties affiliated with foreign organizations. Such laws would be applied to Nazis as well. A minister in Bern was quoted in August as stating: "The Germans are already treating Switzerland as if she were conquered territory. Switzerland is to come within the Nazi Gleichschaltung [forcing into line]. This is the Nazi aim, and by devious methods the Nazis are trying to familiarize the Swiss with the idea." By then, there were allegedly some 500 Gestapo agents in Switzerland conducting espionage to obtain Swiss military secrets and spying on German refugees.

In 1935 a new rifle, the K31 carbine, was introduced into the Swiss army, even as the Germans were adopting a new design of their own, the Mauser 98k, which became their standard service rifle throughout the war. Not surprisingly for a nation in which marksmanship was (and is) the national sport, the Swiss design was far superior to the German in terms of accuracy, weight, handling and ease of loading. The advantages of the Swiss model became more evident at longer distances, and even the Swiss 7.5mm bullet had a better aerodynamic shape and weight combination than its German counterpart, giving it more accuracy and a greater range. Almost 350,000 units were produced by 1945, and the K31 remains in wide use today in target matches. Had the Germans attempted an invasion during World War II, they would themselves have been the targets of Swiss snipers armed with this superior rifle, firing from rugged mountain terrain.

More important than material preparations was the cultivation of the Swiss national spirit, expressed with the term *geistige Landesverteidigung* (defense nationale spirituelle in French), meaning spiritual, ideological, or moral national defense. Federal Councillor Philipp Etter even authored a book with that title. The primary attributes of this philosophy were "united community, the intrinsic value of democracy, and reverence for the dignity and freedom of the person." National defense was seen as wholly dependent on the virtue and character of each citizen:

The armed defense of the country is a primary and substantial task of the state. The mental defense of the country falls primarily not on the state but on the person, the citizen. No government and no battalions are able to protect right and freedom, where the citizen himself is not capable of stepping to the front door and seeing what is outside.

The meaning of "spiritual national defense" evolved as the threat to Switzerland's existence grew. This concept of moral dedication to defense of the homeland and democratic ideals was Switzerland's answer to National Socialism, and the term applied to the distinctly Swiss military, economic, political, and cultural philosophy.

Beginning in 1933, Switzerland expended large sums of money and human effort to arm herself and to have the capacity to resist a Nazi invasion. Though many Swiss spoke German, they had no desire to give up their unique Swiss liberty to join Hitler's increasingly menacing Reich.