

Renewal of the army command in Switzerland

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RENEWAL OF THE ARMY COMMAND IN SWITZERLAND.

By Dr. HERMANN BÖSCHENSTEIN.

The appointment of a new Army Corps Commander, of two new Commanders of Divisions and of two new Commanders of Brigades in the Swiss Army is a very unusual event in a country which only possesses four Army Corps Commanders, nine Divisional Commanders and four Commanders of Army Units with the rank of a Brigadier, and people will therefore be asking themselves what this means. The highest ranking officers in the Army are career officers and the age of retirement is fixed at 65 years, in accordance with the age limit prescribed by law for Government employees. This age limit has now been reached by one of the Army Corps Commanders and he is to be replaced by a Divisionary Colonel who is ten years younger. This will leave one Division free and a further vacant post is furnished by a 59 year old Divisionary Colonel resigning voluntarily. Thus, there were two Divisionary Commands to be filled: one of the new Divisionary Colonels is 48 and the other 46 years old. The last mentioned is the youngest officer of that rank in the Army. In 1949, a 48-year old Divisionary Colonel was appointed and a 53-year old Corps Commander. There would appear to be a strong tendency towards pensioning off Divisionary Colonels at the age of sixty and, whenever possible, of giving high commands to men of between 40 and 50. The example set by the belligerent armies, naturally, did not pass unperceived in Switzerland. On the other hand, one knows only too well how dangerous it is to generalise and there are many experienced officers who combine maturity with great physical and mental activity. A case in point — when General Henri Guisan took over the post of Commander-in-Chief of the Swiss Army in 1939 he was already 65 years old, and in 1945, when he retired, he was over seventy, but still full of youthful vigour and mental alertness. The Swiss recruit is in his twentieth year when he first attends his School of Recruits, and he rarely becomes a Lieutenant before he is 21. At 30 he attains the rank of Captain, at 37-38 that of Major, and at 44, at the earliest, that of Colonel. Then, he must command a Regiment for some time before he can become a Divisionary Colonel. On an average, at the beginning of a New Year, the Divisionary Colonels are 53 years old and Army Corps Commanders 57 years old.

As regards high ranking Officers, such as the Chief of the General Staff and the Director of Training, who are approaching the sixties, one must not fail to take into account the fact that they have specialised in their particular jobs and that whenever a change occurs, complications cannot be avoided. General Guisan used to entrust the young General Staff officers who were in the Army Command, and who very often were not yet forty years old, with extraordinarily important operational and organisational studies. He also introduced a highly successful blending of different age categories and temperaments among his officers. At present there is a further tendency towards rejuvenating the cadres of the Instructor officers, who form the backbone of our Militia Army, and pensioning, whenever possible, those who have attained the age of sixty. They must be physically fit and, for example, those who are attached to the

Mountain Troops must be able to ski and move about agilely in difficult mountain country. The position of those Instructor Officers who are Captains has greatly improved in comparison with what it used to be, as, formerly, it was only when they had reached the rank of Lt.-Colonel or Colonel that their situation could be considered anything like satisfactory. This policy of rejuvenation brings with it very heavy financial burdens on the Confederation. A lot has already been gained by the fact that as a general rule the command of a Regiment is only given to a man in his early forties. In the 19th Century, when Divisionary Colonels and Army Corps Commanders were still Militia officers, it was possible to obtain the command of an Army unit prior to attaining 40; however, such comparisons should be made with the greatest care in view of the fact that the enormous mechanisation of the Army and the complicated armament now in use renders leadership very much more difficult than in former years and makes it imperative that the requisite conditions for assuming a high Command be weighed very carefully. Periods of training have become longer and it has become almost impossible to rise from a recruit to the rank of Lieutenant within one year. On the other hand, in wartime, a Staff Officer could rise very rapidly from the rank of Major to that of Colonel.

APRIL, 1951 — SWISS INDUSTRIES FAIR IN BASLE.

In order to obtain a clear idea of the productive capacity of Switzerland, a nation obliged by the nature of things to export goods in order to be able to import goods of vital necessity, it is useful to pay a visit to the the Swiss Industries Fair in Basle. Over 2,000 exhibitors, whose stands cover floor space in excess of 1,000,000 sq.ft. take part in this important economic exhibition which contributes towards promoting the exchange of goods in both directions. Any information desired on this subject can be readily obtained from the offices of the official Swiss representatives in foreign countries.

CITY SWISS CLUB

MONTHLY MEETING

on

Tuesday, February 13th, 1951,

6.30 for 7 o'clock,

at

The Dorchester Hotel, Park Lane, W.1.

Mr. A. L. PALMER, Manager of the Anglo-American Oil Co., Ltd., will speak on:

“Britain's New Industry.”

THE COMMITTEE.