

# The Swiss in the Himalayas

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## THE SWISS IN THE HIMALAYAS.

The conquest of Mount Everest, the highest mountain in the world, and that of the neighbouring peaks of the Himalayan range, has been the ambition of many climbers. Since 1921 no less than eleven major expeditions had tried it and a number of lives were lost in attempts to reach these lofty summits. It was not until 1953 that John Hunt's expedition achieved the conquest of Everest when Hillary and Sherpa Tenzing set foot on the peak, 29,000 feet high, about twice the height of Montblanc.

A year before, in 1952, a Swiss team headed by Lambert were forced back, defeated by unusually severe climatic conditions and at the limit of human endurance, when within sight of their goal and no more than 1,000 feet from the summit. Theirs was the second Swiss attempt.

Undeterred by this setback and though deprived of the chance to be the first in the field, the Swiss Foundation For Alpine Research decided on yet another attempt. The leadership of this, the third, Swiss expedition was placed in the hands of Albert Eggler, in private life a lawyer from Berne. It set out at the beginning of 1956 and succeeded not only in reaching the summit of Everest twice, but also in conquering the adjacent Lhotse which, though some 1,000 feet lower, proved to be more difficult of access and more dangerous than Everest. The Foundation's persistence thus became amply vindicated.

The choice of Mr. Eggler as leader of the expedition was a wise one. A skilful climber with 20 years' experience in the Alps and, during the war years, in command of an Alpine brigade in the Swiss army, he possessed every qualification for the difficult task with which he was entrusted. His team, selected with care, consisted of eleven men, all experienced mountaineers, their ages ranging from 28 to 48 years. Among them was a medical practitioner from Zürich whose services, as it turned out, were invaluable.

The preparation of the necessary equipment and commissariat occupied many months. The experience gained in earlier expeditions was to some extent a guide, the problem of nutrition for example had been studied by British experts down to the last detail for the John Hunt expedition and their methods were followed by the Swiss with but small alterations. Apart from food and drink the most important and altogether indispensable item was oxygen to enable the men to breathe in the rarified atmosphere of these high altitudes. The breathing appliances with specially designed masks were the lightest ever used on the Himalayas. Footwear made by Bally, wool and fur caps, nylon-fur gloves, tents, ground sheets, ropes, ladders, steel cables, tools, explosives and a hundred more articles were assembled. Everything was ready for dispatch by January 1956. An idea of the size and weight of all this baggage is conveyed by the fact that it took 400 porters and 22 bullock carts to transport it from the rail terminus to the first base camp. Incidentally, the cost of the expedition was £30,000.

The party arrived in Bombay on 13th February after an uneventful sea voyage and then proceeded by rail — a 1,600-mile journey — to the Nepalese frontier. Thereafter followed a period of acclimatisation and oxygen-practice. Up to this point all had gone well, but now they ran into trouble. Luchsinger

developed appendicitis and Diehl, the deputy leader, contracted pneumonia. To add to their troubles the Sirdar of the Sherpas was taken ill. Thanks to the skill of the Doctor and the patients' tough constitution, the latter recovered but the timetable which had been prepared with an eye on the coming monsoon was badly upset.

Before the final assault could be carried out a number of intermediate camps had to be built up and provisioned. One of the most important factors for a successful ascent is the establishment of such carefully spaced camps, the highest as near as possible to the summit so as to reduce the distance to be traversed by the final assault party.

By the middle of May the preliminaries, an exhausting and back-breaking job, were completed and the stage was set for the final effort.

Lhotse was the first peak to be attacked. Luchsinger (he who had recovered from appendicitis) and Reiss were detailed for the attempt. They reached the ultimate camp at dusk and spent an uncomfortable night in their exposed tent which they had to dig out of the snow before they were able to crawl in. Early next morning, the 18th May, with a fierce gale raging, they began the final climb. The going was difficult, hundreds of steps had to be cut, the cold was intense and the last bit terribly steep. They reached the summit six hours after starting from the last camp. The top ridge was as sharp as a knife and there was room neither to sit nor to put a rucksack down. The descent took less time but was if anything more dangerous. However, they safely reached the lower camp, exhausted but happy to be the first Swiss to conquer an 8,000-metre peak.

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Everest was tackled a few days later. The men selected for the ascent were Schmied and Marmet who went first, and Reiss and von Gunten who followed a day later. The monsoon was due to break and all further delays had to be avoided. Fortunately the weather was fine and the snow conditions favourable. But for the intense cold, the climb might have been in the Alps. Both parties reached the summit in good time and were able to enjoy the wonderful view in bright sunshine and windstill conditions. The descent also was carried out without untoward incidents.

By the end of May the whole expedition had safely returned to the main base where, to their surprise and delight, they received via the B.B.C. a congratulatory message from Sir John Hunt, Hillary and Tenzing. The faithful Sherpas, these hardy and cheerful hill people, were honourably discharged and by the end of June the Swiss members of the expedition, elated by their success, were home again.

On his return to Berne Mr. Eggler wrote the story of his expedition, calling it *Gipfel über den Wolken*. The book was translated into English by Hugh Merrick and is now being published by George Allen & Unwin Ltd. under the appropriate title *The Everest-Lhotse Adventure*, at the price of 25/- net.

Beautifully illustrated, the book is much on the lines of John Hunt's classic "The Ascent of Everest" but shorter and less technical. The author modestly disclaims all literary pretensions: he has, in fact, written a straightforward account, clear, absorbing and often exciting, and very readable throughout. It is a magnificent story of its kind and deserves to find a worthy place in the annals of mountaineering achievements.

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**DIE RECHNUNG DES BUNDES.**

**Ergebnisse des 1. Semesters 1957.**

Die Finanzrechnung des Bundes im 1. Semester 1957 verzeichnet bei 783 Millionen Ausgaben und 1,182 Millionen Einnahmen einen Einnahmeüberschuss von 399 Millionen.

Die Fiskaleinnahmen erreichen 1,065 Millionen. Die wichtigsten Posten ergeben verglichen mit den zwei Vorjahreszahlen folgendes Bild:

*1. Semester*

	1955	1956	1957
	Millionen Franken		
WEHRSTEUER ... ..	154,6	244,9	123,9
VERRECHNUNGSSTEUER	110,1	101,1	111,1
STEMPELABGABEN ...	74,5	81,8	80,8
WARENUMSATZSTEUER	264,5	277,9	295,1
LUXUSSTEUER ... ..	11,0	9,9	10,9
TABAKSTEUER ... ..	36,3	37,8	41,6
EINFUHRZOEELLE ...	211,7	233,2	265,8
TREIBSTOFFZOEELLE ...	71,3	83,1	81,2
TABAKZOEELLE ... ..	22,8	23,6	24,3
ZOLLZUSCHLAEGE ...	7,1	8,2	9,6
UEBRIGE ... ..	18,4	19,3	20,3

TOTAL 982,3 1,120,8 1,064,6

Die Ausgaben halten sich mit 783, Millionen auf der Hoehc derjenigen des Vorjahres, wihrend die Einnahmen im gleichen Zeitraum um 55 Millionen zurueckblieben.

[A.T.S.]

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