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CATERING BEHIND CUSTOMS BARRIERS

A Visit to Swissair's Board Service Centre

Zurich's International Airport at Kloten is owned by the Canton of Zurich and is administered by the Cantonal Office of Aviation. The hangars, offices and other buildings belong to the "Flughafen Immobilien Gesellschaft", of whose shares 50% are held by the Canton. The Confederation is responsible for postal, telephone and telegraph communications and, together with the Canton, for flight safety.

For Swissair, Kloten is the home airport. It houses their training centre where the whole flying personnel is trained and rigorously supervised while on flying service. It is at the Kloten technical works that the aeroplanes undergo constant strict overhaul. Swissair pay rent and considerable charges for the use of the airport amenities. Each DC 8 landing, for instance, costs Fr665.—, that of a Coronado Fr525.— and that of a Caravelle Fr.184.—. In addition, there is a charge to be paid per litre of fuel and oil — to fuel a DC 8 fully, costs nearly Fr.30.000.—.

One of the buildings Swissair had erected at their own expense, is the "Borddienstgebäude", the large building where everything concerning the comfort of the passengers is taken care of.



Aerial view of Swissair's Passenger Flight Service building at Zurich Airport. It clearly shows the one-way road leading through the centre of the building under a covered drive-way.

In 1934, when a DC 2 aircraft had accommodation for the then unheard-of number of 14 passengers, Swissair introduced the first air stewardesses in Europe. The 4,340 Swissair passengers travelling that season enjoyed a surprise extra: "Refreshments served in the air". A far cry from those days to the jet planes and multi-course dinners served to first-class passengers today!

Competition in the air has its limits. Fares and luggage allowance are fixed by international agreement, and the aircraft types available on comparable routes don't vary enough to influence the passengers in his choice of airline. The factor which is decisive, however, is the service and treatment he gets on board. And it is in this that Swissair excels.

This is not idle boasting — figures support it. And it is not accidental that Swissair received gold medals at the international exhibitions of culinary art at the HOSPES in Berne in 1954 and at the IKA in Frankfurt in 1956, again

in 1960 and at the Swiss National Exhibition in Lausanne in 1964.

Furthermore, 28 of the foreign air companies using Zurich airport, have their food prepared at the Swissair kitchens at Kloten, the largest catering establishment run by Swissair, others being in Geneva, Basle, New York, Karachi and Tokyo (in collaboration with SAS).

It was on a brilliant May morning that I was driven out to Kloten Airport for a visit to the Swissair catering establishments. The building of the "Board Service Centre" was planned by the Swissair company itself with a view to maximum efficiency and rational operation. The building is in two parts connected by a covered loading hall. The block facing the roadside houses the stores in the cellar, the catering halls on the ground floor and offices above. In the part backing on to the airfield, the ground floor is taken up by the non-culinary service, with a modern laundry on the first floor.

The empty food and drink containers and the dirty linen unloaded from the aircraft are lifted by mobile platforms to the loading hall connecting the two buildings. There the containers with cutlery and crockery are delivered to the cleaning department, and the other things are taken in by the equipment sector where papers are sorted out and blankets and soiled pillow slips sent to the laundry. The empty truck rolls on to be loaded again from the right with fresh food and drink, from the left with clean linen, papers, toys, etc. Each trolley receives exactly the material which is needed for "its" aircraft and which has been carefully planned according to a system eliminating any errors.

When I visited the Swissair Board Service, I first had to pass a Swiss customs official on my way in. For the kitchens, laundry and other departments, except the office buildings, are outside Swiss territory, as it were. This simplifies matters, for if strawberries come by air from Cyprus and are later consumed *en route* for New York, or beef arrives from Holland to be consumed on the way to London, or chickens from Denmark or butter from the Netherlands — they all can pass to the kitchens free from customs duty, and the finished meals may be taken out of Switzerland again without having to pass customs barriers. On the other hand, all food arriving by land, i.e. from inside Switzerland, and all the staff have to pass through customs control. Nothing may be consumed in the kitchens, though, and the canteens, for instance, are "inland".

First, I visited the modern bakeries, a relatively new venture. I saw the latest dough mixing, pastry rolling and roll shaping machines in operation, I was told that these machines were English, German, Swiss. Hundreds of rolls were being put on a kind of stretcher from which they were transferred to the modern ovens. I saw pastry cooks busy preparing delicious looking flans and sweet dishes.

Next, I was shown the kitchens. Ruled over by Swiss chefs and assisted by Swiss and other nationals, the mixed staff work in shifts 24 hours a day, seven days a week. These kitchens were a revelation to me. The latest gadgets, the most up-to-date machinery, huge tip frying pans and swivel cauldrons, sparkling casseroles and containers let in the floors to take the waste — nothing was

missing. Great efficiency and cleanliness and a very happy working atmosphere struck me everywhere.



Preparation of main course dishes.

The amount of food used in the three Swissair catering centres, Zurich, Geneva and Basle in 1964 was 217,000 kg. of fresh meat, 69,000 chickens, 7,900 kg. dried meat, 8,600 kg. sausages, about 780,000 eggs, 33,460 boxes of cheese, 67,300 kg. of fruit, 133,800 tins of beer, and 52,200 bottles of wine (7 dl) and 115,000 bottles (2 dl).

Fresh Food Freshly Cooked

While most airlines have a meal system based on deep-frozen food, Swissair serves only fresh food freshly cooked. The airline has always thought the additional expenditure worth while in order to satisfy the standards its passengers have come to expect.

Under Swissair's method, meat and vegetables used on long distance flights are cooked three quarters ready and put in small china dishes, each dish containing side by side an individual portion of both. The dishes are then placed in a cooling chamber but the food is not allowed to freeze. They are transported to the aircraft in special boxes and the cooking process is completed in electric ovens in the aircraft galley. The temperature of the ovens can be regulated according to the type of meat to be served.

Hot meals for short distance flights are loaded hot. Containers are kept at the right temperature in specially charged units. All cold meals are put on trays and put in refrigerators on trolleys. Containers of cold meals have ice added to keep the food fresh. The department where the cooked food is dished out and where the containers are got ready is a model of rational planning. Heavy plastic curtains serve by way of doors. There are ice cubing machines, safes and fridges of every description, coffee and orange juice machines (coffee is made on board only on long distance flights).

There is a special room for non-tray food, such as fruit baskets, cheese boards, jame, etc. In another room, again airy and with attractive potted plants on the wide window sills, I watched a *confiseur* at work making chocolates and confectionery, including specialities for sale on board aeroplanes. The temperature in that room is kept constant to ensure the right consistency of the liquid

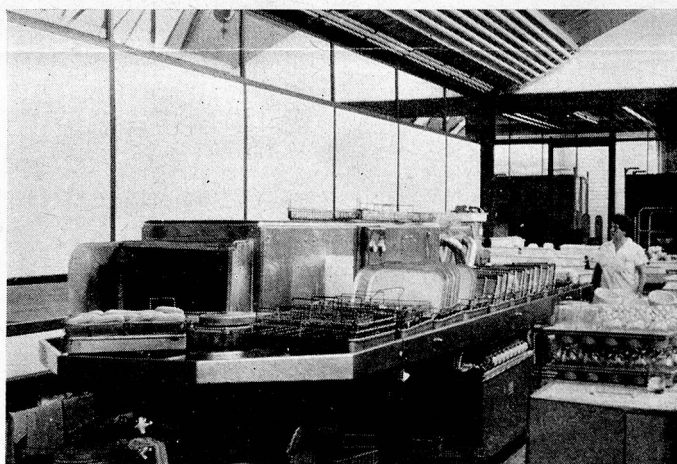
chocolate from which the much-sought-after specialities are made.

There is a special place in the building where salt, pepper and sugar are filled into small individual paper bags and toothpicks wrapped. In one room stacks of menus are pigeonholed, varying from Swiss postcard type to handkerchief, from large folders adorned with reproductions of the famous SILVA roses to huge illustrated *à la carte* menus from which passengers may order luxury meals in advance.

Next, I was shown the loading hall. I saw containers being loaded, some hot, some cold, holding 7, 14 or 24 trays each. Blankets and newspapers, forms and toilet articles were got ready with a maximum utilisation of space.

In the sorting hall I saw the dirty dishes being taken away for soaking and washing — again the most up-to-date machinery, partly working on the conveyor belt system. I saw a silver polishing machine which was fed a special powder worked out by a Swissair chemist. There was an English burnishing machine in which cutlery was highly polished by means of thousands of tiny steel balls and soft soap. Incidentally, Swissair is the only air company which still uses porcelaine and silver ware on *all* its services — not plastic and steel.

For foreign companies, special equipment and food may have to be prepared, like chopsticks and green tea for China. Special diets can be catered for if notified in advance, vegetarian or kosher food may be ordered.



Swissair's catering operations are highly mechanised: here is a section of the washing-up facilities at the Geneva flight kitchens.

The next department I saw was the office of the Chief of "Bereitstellung", who is in charge of the service plan. The cash office looks after the takings for sales on board, and there is the duty free shop, not available to crews, however. First Aid equipment is an important item on any flight. Blankets used on routes from the Far East have to be disinfected.

The laundry was my next port of call. Thirty people are employed there, and 100 kg. of linen is handled every day. Overalls and hostess blouses are washed and ironed, and on a special American steam machine, four women do sixty shirts in an hour.

In the cabin service department, antimacassars, blankets, disinfectants, flannels, soap, toys and baby kits, papers and customs forms are prepared and arranged in standard units.

I was most interested to see the stores where three to four weeks' stocks are kept. There is a deep freeze cellar, locked containers for spirits, Dior scent, stockings and cigarettes. I saw the incinerator where the garbage is burnt and the cookers where all the pig swill is boiled for reasons of hygiene. I was shown the water softening machine, and finally the technical station, the ventilation rooms and the heating and cooling systems.

That brought my visit to an end, and I left with my curiosity satisfied but my imagination fired, and I could hardly wait for my next meal in the air.



Swissair first class meal, showing the special crockery and cutlery designed for the jet age.

The aim of the special Swissair "Passenger Flight Service" is to provide exemplary service for the travellers. First-class passengers should be given the equivalent to luxury hotel service, and an economy or tourist class passenger should have a service akin to a good middle-class ("bürgerlich") hotel. A staff of 900 are devoted to this task, including 450 hostesses and 180 stewards. The study of the passengers' comfort, the planning of meals and equipment, organisation and production, is no mean task. It is being tackled with the utmost efficiency.

Today, Swissair flies to every corner of the globe, and the meals range from a snack or breakfast on a short tourist night flight to a multi-course dinner on first-class long-distance travel. If you travel from Switzerland to Argentina, you may have refreshments between Geneva and Dakar, a delicious lunch on the way to Rio or a luxury dinner with caviar or *Foie gras*, from Rio to Montevideo a "Buffet Coronado" with Swiss specialities, and more refreshments before your arrival at Buenos Aires. Every kind of alcoholic drink, cocktails, wines, champagne and spirits are thrown in for good measure. No wonder Swissair spends as much as seven million Swiss francs on food and drink per annum!

Swissair catering keeps up the traditional good reputation of Switzerland as a holiday paradise. To the excellent food carefully prepared is added efficient and courteous service by specially trained stewards and

hostesses. That is what makes a Swissair flight a specially memorable experience.

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DISCOVERING MÜRREN

The Bernese Philosopher and author, Prof Johann Wyss, is considered the discoverer of the scenically incomparable mountain terrace of Mürren as a place of rest and refuge from the everyday. In his two-volume work "Travels in the Bernese Oberland" he wrote of his visit to Mürren in 1815 that, at the sight of this "tranquil, treeless, spring-rich place" he was overcome by "sweet, harmonious feelings" and that it was a spot where a magnificent mountain panorama opens itself to the eyes of the astounded wanderer, inhabited by "People in an ideal natural condition, who approach their fellow-men of trust" — for, concluded the Bernese professor, "the ways of the place are not demeaned by the presence of a single tavern". Today there are eleven hotels in Mürren, as well as two *pensions* and two restaurants. 150 years after its touristic discovery, this highest community in the Canton of Berne (alt. 5,445 feet) is a modern resort, flanked on the north and south by new funicular and cablecar stations. It is still inaccessible to automobiles; as a "natural preserve" for walkers and hikers, Mürren sits loftily above the 2,640-ft. rock wall of the Mürrenfluh (the name Mürren comes from the word "muiri" which, in the dialect spoken in the Lötschental, means "wall"). It is well-protected and well-removed from the busy everyday world.

[S.N.T.O.]

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