

TO INFORM, EVEN IN DIFFICULT CIRCUMSTANCES...
How Switzerland plans to do this

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ABSTRACT

In a democratic state, such as Switzerland, censorship of the media is unthinkable. The Swiss government decided to shape an 'Informations Regiment' to act if circumstances would disturb the normal activities of press, radio and television. This paper describes the history, task and organisation of this regiment.

INTRODUCTION

In the years before and during World War 2, difficult political circumstances influenced efforts to keep the population and the armed forces informed. German institutions were conducting a propaganda battle at an increasing scale, even towards Switzerland. The majority of the Swiss press actively countered this propaganda, reflecting the freedom and autonomy of the country. The government and the army tried, by direction and control, to prevent severe provocations against Germany. At the outbreak of War, this led to censorship of the media. An army directive in autumn 1939 created the Section 'Heer und Haus' (Army and Home).¹ This organisation was to inform the members of the armed forces. Very soon its task included informing the population on questions of national defence. It was all about strengthening national resistance and the will to preserve national identity.² A network of more than 100.000 trusted representatives and some 7000 correspondents in the whole country were active to inform Swiss nationals in the different languages. In this way it was also possible to measure the feelings of the population. This certainly had a positive effect on the concept of resistance. Another activity, 'Action National Resistance', a private enterprise, not connected to any party supplemented 'Heer und Haus'. The activities of these institutions were co-ordinated with the Intelligence Service and the Office 'Press and Radio' of the Government. Early after WW2 a new private organisation is founded: the Swiss 'Information Service' ('Schweizerische Auflärungsdienst') (SAD). 'Heer und Haus' falls apart. A new 'Truppeninformationsdienst der Armee' (TID) has to answer the need of the armed forces for information. Company Commanders have to inform their subordinates, on the so-called 'total defence' and the military defence of Switzerland.³

In the years before WW2 the Swiss General Staff prepared precautionary measures, such as control of the press. As war broke out in September 1939, the army determined that there should be preliminary censorship. Swiss government, the 'Bundesrat' prohibited this ruling and decided that there was to be censorship only after publication.⁴ After discussions with media representative's regulations were given, in accordance with constitutional law for circumstances of war. In the beginning Army Command was responsible for this censorship and the enforcement of those regulations. Thus, the Department 'Press and Radio' (Abteilung für Presse und Rundfunk - APF) in the Army Staff was, in order to safeguard the inner and

outer security of the country and its neutrality, ordered to monitor the publication and transfer of messages and opinions, particularly by post telegraph, telephone, through press and other agencies, by radio, movie and pictures, and to take all necessary arrangements. The Commander-in-Chief of the Swiss Army, General Guisan, did not see press censorship as a military task, but more as a political affair. As a consequence in 1942, the APF was subordinated to the Director of the Swiss Department of Justice and Police. This did not affect the way in which censorship was practised. The military organisation of the ADF was preserved. It was no easy task for the journalists of those days to get through the trellis of rulings without pain. Especially reports and comments on foreign policy were scrutinised. Editors were warned and some editions of newspapers were seized by offices of the APF. The 'Bundesrat' could, if and when further offences would occur, prohibit the publication of a newspaper, either partly or completely. Almost sixty times such strong measures were applied during WW2.

INFORMATION REPLACES CONTROL

In a democratic state, such as Switzerland, censorship of the media was unthinkable after WW2. The lessons of this war and the new potential threats of the 'cold war' materialised however in what would be indicated as 'total defence'. The concept also included communications. They should be secured if war, terrorist actions or catastrophes would occur. The APF was given a new task. This Department should - as civil and private media could not, or only partly could act as planned, function as an information medium of the 'Bundesrat' to inform the population. This new and complex task soon demanded 2500 men and women. Officers, NCO's and soldiers of APF normally were active within the media. As today those men and women were mobilised during exercises. In 1982 a first serious situation occurred. It concerned the occupation of the Polish Embassy in Bern. In this situation the 'Bundesrat' was focused on getting so-called 'open' information. The APF supported those efforts. Officers of the 'APF' also were active from October 1998 till May 1999 on behalf of the Ministry of Refugees. At the same time, the primary task of APF, the control of publicity and communications, was withheld during peacetime.

A REAL TEST

The preparedness of 4 Army Corps, elements of the Boarder Guards ('Grenzwachtkorps) and of the Air Force was tested in 1986. This was realised within the framework of a 'total defence exercise' 'Dreizack', in combination with large scale manoeuvres. Civil staffs, civil emergency organisations and elements of public transport took part in the exercise. Some 250.000 members of the armed forces and civilians actively participated for some two weeks at a stretch. The APF, with a thousand uniformed men and women, was ordered to realise its information function, using all available means. A theoretical crisis situation was used as scenario.⁵ APF in fact officially counted 2800 people. All participants, as well as the population, in the villages, in cities, in factories and schools were confronted with an imaginary dangerous situation. To give an example: sirens would be activated. At the same time the radio would warn for radiation danger as the result of ' an enormous disaster in France, not far from Basel'. Trained to do so, people went to the shelters they were told to use. The voices on the different senders got weaker. In the end even foreign broadcasts fell silent,

telephones did not function. Finally, after some hours of distress, a voice is heard on transistor and other radios: 'Attention, this is a broadcast of APF, the Department for Press and Radio. The APF is the information instrument of the 'Bundesrat'. 'Trust our voice ...'. The powerful broadcasts of APF-senders even penetrate the concrete of the shelters. Thus or in similar ways the APF had to prove that it could inform the population in difficult circumstances. Operation 'INFOSUISSE' included the use of radio, television and press.⁶ APF-television presented three times a day a thirty minutes programme in the three languages that are spoken in Switzerland. For almost five days APF-radio transmitted clock round on FM. The program included news, special announcements, as well as music for the population and soldiers. The speakers, both men and women, generally were well known from 'normal' radio and television. They were reservists and were activated to be trained as members of APF. The idea was to build confidence on the fact that they were known and people enjoyed listening to them. The final goal of this Media Units was, though within the limits of an exercise in time of peace, to meet the psychological demands that come with informing a population. In a real dangerous situation APF should strengthen solidarity and the will of the individual to survive, should reduce uncertainty and should keep up trust in its own government.

The public positively accepted APF-Radio and TV. The organisation of left-wing journalist and editors of so-called 'left' newspapers were quite critical in their comments. The public appearance of 'State media' which were planned to be used during an information crisis was not popular in those circles. During 'Dreizack' mobile radio stations were used. TV operated from fixed locations. Press detachments used civil printing facilities, most of the time during night hours. The employment of APF during this exercise was worthwhile. One had passed the test. Since this exercise APF personnel never again operated so publicly. Within a few years they would be militarily reorganised into Informations Regiment 1.

Figure 1: The INFOSUISSE Paper is also distributed via civil kiosks

INFORMATION IN EXTRAORDINARY CIRCUMSTANCES.

For special circumstances the Swiss 'Bundesrat' has at its disposal a separate staff the 'Stab Bundesrat, Abteilung Presse und Funkspruch' (Stab BR APF) to inform the population. Responsible for this Department Presse and Radio still is the Department of Justice and Police, the 'Eidgenössische Justiz und Polizei Departement' (EJPD). Activation only follows if and when the civil institutions are no longer able - partly or completely - to perform their information tasks. Truth is the guiding principle for all activities. Only with a credible information policy trust in political and military leadership can be maintained. On top of that, information should be accurate, relevant and understandable. Not in the least because of the principle of truth, this staff is no instrument for psychological warfare.

The 'Stab BR APF' has a managing board chaired by the Secretary General EJDP. A subordinated body is responsible for political-publicity guidance, the so-called 'Politisch-Publizistische Leitung' (PPL) and has to advise the government on information policy. The military organised Information's Regiment 1 leads the media activities and realises the broadcasts. Personnel of 'Stab BR APF' belong, with a few exceptions, to the conscript army.

INFORMATION REGIMENT 1

The Information Regiment 1 got its present structure on January 1, 1997.⁷ It consists of a Staff and five 'Abteilungen', comparable with battalion level. One to support the staff and the Regiment, four - numbered 10, 20, 30 and 40 - are operational elements. The 'Input Abteilung 10' (three companies) is responsible for obtaining and processing information, with the help of foreign language specialist. Those specialists are recruited from Swiss living abroad or from naturalised Swiss citizens.

Radio and TV

The 'Radio-Abteilung 20' has five Radio-companies. They have to ensure that the Government and military command can quickly inform the population all over the country. Their high power FM radio stations, which are spread across the country, transmit national programmes in three languages. Those programs can even be heard in the third level of protective shelters. They may include an alarm in case of an emergency or catastrophe. Information may be broadcasted in other (foreign) languages in order to reach target groups in- and outside Switzerland.

The 'TV-Abteilung 30' (with three TV-companies) is able to produce emergency programmes in three languages. Thus they spread messages and directives of national or regional authorities.

The companies and detachments of both the Radio- and the TV-'Abteilung' can operate from prepared locations underground. They can also activate mobile elements.

Figure 2: The Radio Companies broadcast their programmes in German, French and Italian all over the Nation

Press

Finally, there is the 'Press-Abteilung 40'. This unit produces papers, leaflets and posters in the three national languages. Their products are distributed from special 'pick up places' to the population, the military, and civil emergency units. The companies and detachments use production facilities of press and publishers all over Switzerland. At this moment the Regiment counts for 1640 military.⁸ Many of them are active in a civil job with the media. They all had basic military training, as an infantry soldier, an artilleryman, a medic, etc. Because of their civilian (media) background, they are employed within this regiment. Further electronic advances would make it possible to reduce the strength by a 1000 functionaries.

Figure 3: The editing room of the Press Company

ADDITIONAL REMARKS

For this regiment the regular recurrent courses as used within the army are not applicable. Almost every year officers, NCOs and soldiers serve for a week or a period of ten days. Usually a member of a media company changes into uniform and acts more or less according to his civilian occupation. A soldier at a maximum could serve three hundred days till the age of 40. Officers and NCOs could serve more days. In case of a crisis, the 'Bundesrat' decides when and how many personnel of the regiment are required. If there should be a catastrophe, detachments of platoon equivalent could be activated immediately for special tasks of orientation. For radio transmissions such detachments could be brought into action within a few hours.

Training for the most part consists of exercises to test readiness after mobilisation under difficult circumstances.⁹ The staffs, command elements and the individual 'media-soldiers' are trained in different crisis scenarios. These exercises include effective media operations, in spite of special dangers and security measures. Staffs and elements of this regiment are, in part, called up every other year for a period of two weeks.

In 1997, to give an example, exercise¹⁰ 'Alpha' included elements of the Regimental Staff and of the 'Input-Abteilung 10' as exercise staff. Training is focussed on the staff of 'Radio-Abteilung 20' (with two of its companies) and the staff of 'Presse Abteilung 40' with elements of all of its four companies. The exercise takes 72 hours. The scenario is based on fictitious developments in the Balkans. In this situation the regiment has to support the remaining civil media. Operating new transmitters, using new technology and printing machines are part of regular training.

This regiment has a special responsibility. Exercises demonstrate the value of conscription, as specialist knowledge and experience are needed. The 'media soldiers' know their business, as it is their profession. It will be very difficult indeed to replace these professionals.

The Information Regiment 1, a special unit with a unique responsibility.

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NOTES

- ¹ Ernst, pp. 20 and 22.
- ² Gautschi, pp. 264, 329-336, 338, 351-353
- ³ Ernst, pp. 86, 87 and 95.
- ⁴ Gautschi, pp. 568-579.
- ⁵ Langenegger, pp. 27-34.
- ⁶ Forster, pp. 77-94.
- ⁷ Behelf für die Führung und der Einsatz der APF.
- ⁸ INFOSUISSE INTERN.
- ⁹ Hofstetter, pp. 12-13.
- ¹⁰ Hoffstetter, pp. 12