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B A S E L.

The Royal Navy pays Basel a courtesy visit.

Thousands of spectators were crowding about the Schifflande and the Centre Rhine Bridge in the late forenoon on Thursday, waiting patiently for the arrival of nine control boats of the 'Royal Naval Rhine Squadron', which is based near Cologne in the British Zone of occupation. One passed the time by observing the huge dirty-yellow looking high tide waves forcing themselves through below the arch piers of the Centre Rhine Bridge with numerous tree branches and underwood swinging on their backs, giving proof that the Rhine or one of its branches had gone over the banks. One was also interested in the immense condensation lines left behind by a foreign jet fighter in the blue skies about 6,000 metres overhead, and enjoying at the same time the warm autumn sunshine which one had missed for days. Likewise the gunners of the "Artillery Union" were standing inactively around their gun which had been driven to the landing stage for the salute.

The patience of the waiting crowd was set a hard trial, the harder when occasionally it was broadcast by a police car that the arrival of the visitors would be delayed by one hour. The one hour, however, became two! Only when Councillor BRECHBUHL had entered the fast police boat and was going down the river in her, one knew that the craft were making their way to Basel. In the meantime it was learnt that they were making their way up the Rhine in two divisions, that the second division consisting of four craft had by error turned into the old Rhine bed at the lower end of Ottmarsheim and had had to turn round again. At 1145 the Rhine Squadron passed the Memsler sluice, going up the Rhine in excellent order. However it took the spectators another hour of waiting before they came in sight. Meanwhile Councillor Brechbuhl had embarked in the command craft from the police boat, going in the lead, and joining the other Swiss V.I.Ps.

Exactly at 1250 the "Prince Charles", the command craft, escorted by police and customs boats reached the international border by the Centre Rhine Bridge and at that moment there came the first gun salute, followed by the other 21. During this time the neat grey-blue boats were remaining motionless in excellent order stemming the river, the crews on the deck and the Commanders on their bridges standing to attention and saluting. When the last gun salute had died away, the flotilla turned round and went off in the opposite direction. The high tide made it impossible for them to go alongside the landing stage and therefore they had to anchor in the turning-around bay in the Kleinhuningen Rhinehaven.

The Rhine Squadron is commanded by Captain Jewell. In the Squadron are Lt. Cdr. Evans, Lt. Cdr. Harcourt-Smith, Lt. McCrae, Lt(S) Finch, Lt. Thompson and the two sub Lts. Power and Farley as well as S.C.C.O. Jones. Aboard the "Prince Charles" were also Lt. Col. Cliffe and the two Belgian Officers, Aspirant Larent and von Schoubroek.

For the welcome of the British and Belgian guests - (they had submitted their request to visit Switzerland first to the Confederate Political Department) - there had assembled the District Commandant, Colonel R. Saladin, the Garrison Commandant, Colonel R. Richenbacher, the Town Commandant, Lt. Col. F. Huber, the Director of the Rhine Shipping Office, Werner Mangold, his assistant Dr. K. Waldner, the Local British Consul Mr. A.A.E. Franklin and the British Military Attache in Bern, Colonel Hutches.

At 3 o'clock in the afternoon the guests visited the Basel Rhinehaven plant. One hour later they were guided around the town by experienced guides and at 1730 they were guests of the Basel Authorities in the cellar of the "Blue House".

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British Embassy,  
BERNE.

Despatch No. 305.

October 13, 1954.

Sir,

With reference to Mr. Jackson's telegram No. 202 of the 20th of September, 1954, I have the honour to transmit herewith a copy of a despatch dated the 5th of October, 1954, from Her Majesty's Consul in Basle, on the courtesy visit paid to that city by the Royal Naval Rhine Squadron.

2. It will be seen from Mr. Franklin's report that the visit proved a distinct success and that the flotilla received a generous welcome from the local Swiss authorities. In the event the various factors described in my telegram No. 187 of the 3rd of September did not operate adversely and the visit received the full support of the Federal and Basle governments despite the risk of embarrassing criticism based on the argument of Switzerland's traditional neutral status. It would appear that the authorities had taken special care to prevent provocative comment on this contentious aspect and that the press responded with admirable restraint. Even the hostile journals, it would seem, contented themselves with comparatively harmless ridicule rather than indulge in political invective.
3. The successful accomplishment of the visit may be attributed to the concurrence of a number of factors, ranging from the particular esteem which our country enjoys in Switzerland, and the degree to which the persons and conduct of Captain Jewell and his men enhanced it, to the existence of a special political climate momentarily favouring such a visit.
4. In this last connection I have since been informed that only recently the Federal authorities refused permission to the Swedish Government - a fellow neutral - for a courtesy visit by the Swedish Air Force to this country. Mr. Jackson was given to understand, however, that in the present instance the Federal Political Department were more favourably disposed as the result of the two-stage approach authorised in your telegram No. 152 of the 9th of September, which revealed a welcome understanding of their difficulties. It was in fact Federal Councillor Petitpierre himself who telephoned to the Basle authorities, recommending a fair wind for the project. Moreover, so Mr. Jackson was specifically informed by Dr. Schaller, who as shown in paragraph 7 of Mr. Franklin's despatch played a prominent part in the proceedings, the visit had come at a time when the German authorities were showing signs of reverting to their earlier restrictive and truculent attitude towards freedom of navigation on the Rhine and had therefore served as a public demonstration that Switzerland was not alone in her attitude towards that freedom. I understand that many people in Basle were even disposed to believe that the visit had been timed to coincide with the London Conference on European Defence, and that future British commitments in Europe would perpetuate the existence of the Royal Naval Rhine Squadron.
5. Another favourable factor in the situation was the current active policy of the Federal and local authorities of developing and publicising the Port of Basle as an international maritime centre. I have no doubt, from the mood of slightly anxious elation discernible both in Basle and in the Federal Political Department, that it was decided that any possible inroad on Swiss neutrality would be more than compensated for by the extent to which a visit by the Royal Navy would serve to put the Port of Basle on the map. As will be seen from paragraph 3 of this Embassy's telegram No. 202, the Federal authorities have closed their eyes to the question of precedent, and will cross that bridge when they come to it.
6. In addition to the general absence of political commentary the fact that news of the visit was not released until it was almost due further suggests a desire to forestall awkward public discussion.

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The Right Honourable  
Anthony Eden, M.C., M.P.,  
etc., etc. etc.

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7. There can be no doubt of the favourable impression created by the impeccable turn-out and behaviour of the ratings and other ranks of the Royal Navy and the Royal Marines, and to their modest and unselfconscious pleasure in their reception. The news of Captain Jewell's navigational achievement was soon widely known, and the fact that the Navy had reached their destination on a river closed to normal traffic, brought him a mild portion of hero-worship. Captain Jewell showed a dexterity in public relations, and in his handling of Swiss notabilities, which was no less than his skill as a seaman. His task was facilitated by the energetic and efficient action in the preparatory arrangements of Mr. Consul Franklin, whose indispensable part in it deserves warm commendation. Cooperation with the Belgian element of the squadron and between our two missions in Berne was throughout complete.

8. I have the impression that the success of this visit may well have initiated a useful and pleasant tradition. I agree however with Franklin's conclusion that such visits could not be repeated except on very rare intervals and with the utmost regard for the peculiar conditions and problems involved. The reaction of the Swiss authorities with regard to any future projected naval visit would largely depend upon the circumstances of the time, and might well be less accommodating. It would thus be expedient to keep in mind the technique of approach which on this occasion proved so effective. In view of the last sentence of your telegram No. 152 of the 9th of September I have not mentioned these impressions to my United States Colleague, though I feel that it might be useful to the United States authorities if they could be informed of them in confidence.

I have the honour to be,

With the highest respect,

Sir,

Your obedient Servant,

(L. T. Lamb)

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