

# Total resistance – A 1950s manual to guerrilla warfare for Mr and Mrs Swiss

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In 1957, while the American Strategic Air command was initiating a 24/7 nuclear alert in anticipation of a plausible Soviet intercontinental ballistic missile attack, and a couple of months after the Soviet Union crushed down the Hungarian uprising, Swiss Army officer Hans von Dach was writing a manual providing instructions for passive as well as active resistance against any foreign invasion, with tips for sabotage, going underground, concealing weapons, and the organisation of surprise attacks. Closer look into *Total Resistance (Der totale Widerstand: Kleinkriegsanleitung für Jedermann)*, a 1950s manual to guerrilla warfare for Mr and Mrs Swiss.

Switzerland is certainly a lovely little country. Year after year Switzerland is acknowledged for its advanced commitment to keeping green. Land of the greenest grass, of a milky and tasty chocolate, Switzerland is also internationally known for its policy of neutrality. Switzerland is neutral, but has one of the largest armies on a per capita basis and all militia soldiers take their guns home – one could say Switzerland has an almost national paranoia about defence.

## A particular Paranoid Spirit

Switzerland might be a small country but it has mandatory military service for all able-bodied male citizens and has countless mountains hidden bunkers and airbases with hangars carved out of the mountains. It is said that

Swiss highways can be converted into landing or take off runways by quickly removing the grade separations in between the lanes. Any Swiss could tell a story or two about their own experience of military service, walking in the mountains, fully equipped with gas mask on the face and loaded guns, rehearsing again and again to be fully prepared in case of an invasion. If anyone were to invade Switzerland, they would find a nation armed to the teeth: *Die Schweiz hat keine Armee, die Schweiz ist eine Armee* (Switzerland does not have an Army, Switzerland is an Army). Switzerland is also unique in having enough nuclear fallout shelters to accommodate its entire population, should they ever be needed[1]. When the systematic construction of fallout shelters began in Switzerland in the second half of the 1950s, it was a reflection of widespread fear of a nuclear strike and the spectre of a Soviet invasion[2]. It is precisely in this context that Major Hans von Dach published his 257 pages-long manual on how to resist and fight back if Switzerland was to be invaded by the “Commies”. *Der totale Widerstand: Kleinkriegsanleitung für Jedermann* – literally *Total Resistance, a Small War Manual for Everyone* – has been written in 1957 and published for the first time in 1958 by the Swiss Association of Non-Commissioned Officers ( *Schriftenreihe des Schweizerischen Unteroffiziersverbandes*). Thousands and thousands of copies of *Der Totale Widerstand* have been distributed or sold. It has even been partially translated in English in 1965 by Paladin Press, an American publisher specialised in survivalism, firearms, self-defence, police tactics, explosive and sabotage. Paladin Press’ version (*Total Resistance – A Swiss Army Guide to Guerrilla Warfare and Underground operations* – 188 pages) is still available for \$22 (plus taxes) among other “classics” released by the controversial Colorado-based publisher such as [The Do-It-Yourself Gunpowder Cookbook](#) or the succulent Ragnar’s guide to [Interviews, Investigations and Interrogations](#) (subheading: *how to conduct them, how to survive them*).



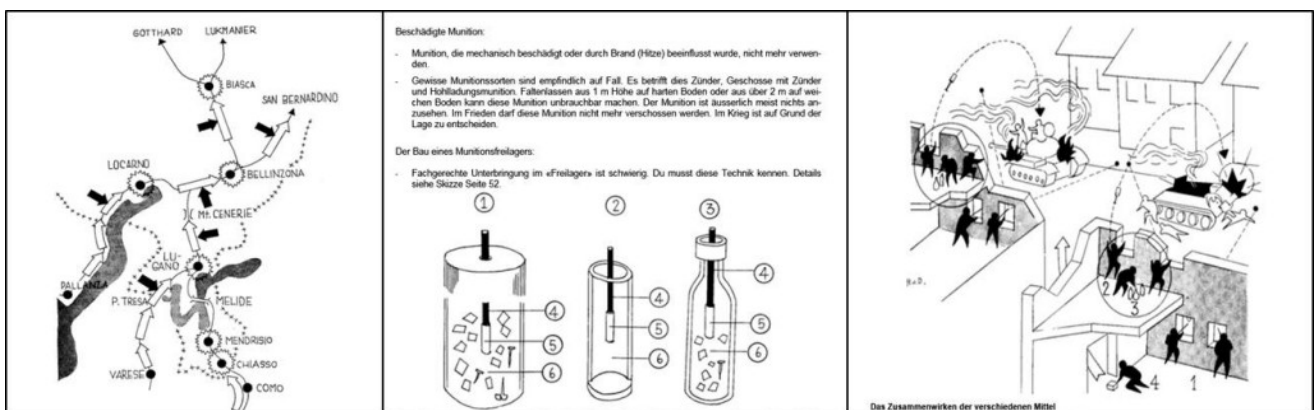
## Irregular warfare for all

*Let us assume the following: Switzerland has become a battlefield. Superior enemy forces have invaded the country. Here and there our troops have been overrun. However, many have succeeded in evading the enemy. They are still in possession of their weapons and equipment. They want to fight, to resist to the last. But how?* [3]

The scenario is set. The very elaborate engineered Swiss landscape defences have been defeated by an outnumbered Soviet enemy. The ingenious mountain tunnels and bunkers have been compromised. The Swiss green pastures have been invaded by disrespectful military boots from a totalitarian regime (“*Unser Gegner vertritt ein totalitäres Regime*”). Democracy has been defeated. Very few Swiss soldiers escaped. Shootings, possible concentration camps and dreadful political re-education: the cruellest battle is left to ordinary Swiss citizens[4]. In this particular grim scenario, Major Hans von Dach steals the famous rallying cry of Dolores Ibarruri, the Basque left-winger better known at home and abroad under her battle name, “La Pasionaria”. Even if outnumbered and defeated militarily, the wholeheartedly Swiss people will not give up and certainly not surrender:

Nie kapitulieren! Es ist besser stehend zu sterben, als kniend zu leben!  
- Never capitulate! It is better to die on your feet than to live on  
your knees!

In the event of such a dreadful Soviet invasion, ordinary citizens should be prepared to fight in a last, extreme and perhaps desperate battle, a “resistance to the end” (*Widerstand bis zum äußersten*). The future of Switzerland certainly depends on the inherent courage of its citizens in arms, but more importantly on their knowledge of unconventional warfare and on their intimate acquaintance with the practices of chiefly raids and ambushes. In a distrustful and insecure Cold War climate over the world, Hans von Dach *Total Resistance* aims at exposing in a rigorous and comprehensive manner all the fundamentals of passive and active resistance. It is, in one word, a manual for partisan warfare for Mr and Mrs Swiss based on an old military doctrine: In time of war (or invasion), head for the hills!



With maps, charts and diagrams, *Total Resistance* is a clear roadmap to all the operational, tactical and technical fundamentals of irregular warfare in the event of a worst-case defence scenario. Everything one needs to know on how to build-up, organise a guerrilla warfare, maintaining an efficient civilian resistance movement, manipulating explosive devices and optimising their deadly effects or shooting down and helicopter, doing sabotage and even killing someone in one go is detailed in the manual. Surprisingly enough considering the quite *direct action* recipes exposed in the manual, these paramilitary instructions for everyone are headed with the notice that any of these actions must respect the terms of the *Hague Treaty on the Laws and Usages of National War* and the 1949 *Geneva Accords* [5]. Without the shadow of a doubt this is more a legalistic (Swiss) precaution rather than a simple contradiction in terms.

Every drawing is quite clear and straightforward. The lessons on how to resist interrogation and torture are explicit and can be turned the other way around. The descriptions of the right weaponry to be used in every single and possible case are simply eloquent and the survival culinary recipes add a little French nouvelle cuisine *je-ne-sais-quoi* to the clarity of the explanations on how to silently kill a guard with a hatchet:

Frogs: Take the frogs' legs off. Wash them. Salt them and roast them on the fire. Snails: wash them (even better with a little bit of vinegar into the water). Throw them into boiling water for 10 minutes. Cool down. Remove the body from the shell and cook them for 2 hours in salted water. Pour some water from time to time [6].

Are these deliciously tasty frogs and snails to be served with an excellent bottle of this famous white wine from the canton of Vaud? Before or after a sabotage operation? *Total Resistance* is an intriguing mix of Boy Scout tips (nouvelle cuisine in the woods, information on the weather) with SAS guidelines (survival, move quick and kill fast) for Helvetia. But something is rotten in the Swiss Confederation. Spies and traitors are everywhere and the true partisan will have to differentiate between the good and the bad citizens ... Hans von Dach gives some advice and techniques on how to spot spies and traitors and how to deal with them. But he does not develop any further on



the socio-professional categories of the bad (Swiss) apples, ready to embrace the enemy. This is a step that the Swiss paranoid head of Military Intelligence service, Colonel Albert Bachmann, will make later in his 1969 red cover *Civil Defence* booklet (*Zivilverteidigung*, aka ZVB) distributed to the entire Swiss population [7]. Leftists, pacifists and intellectuals are the (usual) internal enemies of true Helvetia.

## Total Resistance's Legacy

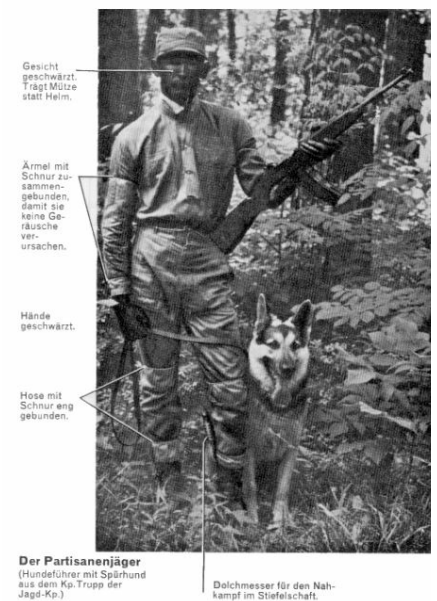
Hans von Dach has written many other documents, amended or produced countless Swiss Army regulations and articles for specialised journals. But he is only known as the author of this *guerrilla manual for everyone*. Despite his efforts to promote his view on the necessity to develop a specific training on unconventional warfare for all Swiss citizens, Hans von Dach's work has been vetoed by the Swiss Army authorities. As such, his professional trajectory is quite similar to many Western irregular warfare strategists and counter-insurgency theorists of the 1950s and 1960s; low intensity conflict was still in the shadow of nuclear deterrence and not to be disclosed publicly.

If compared to other classic insurgency manuals such as James Connolly's *Street Fighting- Summary* (1915) or Carlos Marighella's *Minimanual of urban guerrilla* (1969), *Total Resistance* is not an original theoretical contribution at all. It is almost a banal 1950s practical guide driven by the fear of a Soviet invasion like many others produced during that period. But a manual with – one must say – extremely precise drawings for any wannabe “partisan”.

One of the truly interesting posterity of that manual is that it was widely circulated to European Leftist and revolutionary groups and provides some practical lessons learned [8].

Members of the *Red Army Factions* have been arrested with a copy of the book. As a result, *Der totale Widerstand* is banned in Germany since 1968.

*Total Resistance* is also considered as a fundamental and a classic within the ranks of American survivalists. The American version has been republished many times since its first version released in 1965. That particular fame of *Total Resistance* amongst Right-Wing American militias is not to be found in its “Swissness” – although one could wonder about the effect of Swiss Alpine yodelling in Kentucky. The attraction might be more in the combination of a classic anti-communist tone and of the pastoral masculinity theme one can find in Hans von Dach's manual; a man, his weapon and his friendly dog against the evil foes of the world.



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[1]. <http://www.swissinfo.ch/eng/bunkers-for-all/995134>

[2]. <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/obituaries/colonel-albert-bachmann-swiss-spymaster-whose-paranoid-fantasies-embarrassed-his-government-2315787.html>

[3]. *Nehmen wir an: Die Schweiz ist zum Kriegsschauplatz geworden! Überlegene feindliche Kräfte sind eingebrochen. Da und dort wurden eigene Truppen «überrollt». Es ist ihnen gelungen, sich der Hand des Angreifers zu entziehen. Noch sind sie im Besitze ihrer Waffen und ihrer Ausrüstung. Sie wollen kämpfen, Widerstand leisten bis zum äussersten! Aber wie?*

[4]. *Der Feind wird keine Gnade kennen . Ein Menschenleben, Dutzende, Hunderte, Tausende – er wird sie bedenkenlos und rücksichtslos auslöschen, wenn es seinem Zwecke dient. Der gefangene Soldat hat Deportation, Zwangsarbeit oder Tod zu erwarten*

[5]. *Es versteht sich von selbst, dass sich die schweizerische Landesverteidigung an die Grundsätze des*

Völkerrechts zu halten hat (Haager Abkommen über die Gesetzte und Gebräuche des Landkrieges und die Vier Genfer Abkommen von 1949

[6]. *Frösche: Froschschenkel lösen. Waschen. Leicht salzen. Auf einem Blech über dem Feuer rösten. Schnecken: Waschen (wenn möglich Essigwasser benutzen). In kochendes Wasser werfen und 10 Minuten sieden lassen. Abkühlen. Körper aus der Schale herausnehmen. Zubereiten: im Salzwasser 2 Stunden sieden. Von Zeit zu Zeit Wasser nachgiessen.*

[7]. <http://www.bar.admin.ch/dokumentation/00445/01624/01711/index.html?lang=de>

[8]. <http://www.nzz.ch/aktuell/schweiz/terror-rezepte-fuer-guerilleros-1.18123000>