

An interview with Werner Vogt, the author of our 15th anniversary book

“Accompanying a crew to Bangkok was the highlight for me”

Freelance author Werner Vogt has taken the occasion of last year’s 15th anniversary of our company’s foundation to write a book about the SWISS story to date. The result: SWISS – Die Airline der Schweiz, an entertaining account of those eventful times. We asked him about his own aviation ties, and the highlights of his research.

Reto Hoffmann

Werner Vogt, what does flying mean to you?

Well, in purely rational terms I see it as the quickest and safest way to get from A to B – unless you have a really fast rail link, of course, like the Zurich-Paris TGV. Emotionally, though, it means much more: that thrill when you take off, the elation of being aloft, new views and perspectives, the spring that comes into your thinking and the excitement of new horizons. All that, plus friendly professionals to look after you, a good meal to enjoy and a comfortable and fully reclinable seat if you’re on a long-haul Business Class flight.

How did you approach this book project?

I was happy to be able to count on such a good team in SWISS’s Corporate Communications, who really opened all the doors for me. Those doors brought me dozens of discussions with former and current executives, along with several visits out in the field: to the pilot and cabin crew training, to cargo, to maintenance and even – and this was the real highlight – to accompany a crew on a Zurich-Bangkok rotation. There was a fair amount of less glamorous work, too, of course, from reading various books about SWISS’s predecessor Swissair to hours of researching in specialist databases.

When you were working on the SWISS story, what struck you most?

The tension! The whole story of SWISS’s birth amid all the chaos of Swissair’s demise, and then the new compa-



SWISS book author and historian Werner Vogt.
Photo: Sabina Diethelm

ny’s subsequent fight for its very survival: it’s a genuinely gripping tale. SWISS – and with it Switzerland – were incredibly fortunate that the right decision-making powers were held by the right individuals at the right time. Because if you look at the first five years of the new airline, it’s far from self-evident that we should have such a flourishing SWISS today.

You interviewed a number of key individuals from SWISS’s earlier years in the course of your research. Who impressed you most here, and why?

There were a number of impressive individuals among the almost three dozen people I talked to. But two of them fascinated me in particular: former Federal Councillor Kaspar Villiger and Christoph Franz (who was actually interviewed by my colleague and co-author Jürgen Dunsch). Kaspar Villiger showed vision, courage and drive in a real crisis situation. And it’s thanks largely to him in political terms that SWISS was successfully founded. As an experienced entrepreneur himself, and

as a statesman, Villiger reminded the captains of Swiss industry of their duty to the Swiss economy. Christoph Franz, meanwhile, with his experience in both corporate turnarounds and the airline world, was the ideal person to bring more peace and calm to the former Swissair and Crossair pilot corps. And it was SWISS’s founding chairman, Pieter Bouw, who had a large hand in Franz’s appointment.

You’re a historian by training, and your other writings include a biography of Winston Churchill. How different did you find this SWISS book from writing your previous works?

Well, this SWISS book also has a historical component as well as a present-day one. So I was able to use my historian’s toolbox here. The main difference, though, is that when you’re writing the history of the past 15 years, nearly all the key protagonists are still around – and some of them are even still active within the aviation sector. That means, of course, that your account will be read a lot more precisely, and evaluated more meticulously, than it is when you’re writing about earlier times whose principal players passed away at least half a century ago.

There was another big difference with the SWISS book, too. I know a lot about Winston Churchill, whereas I had to acquire all my aviation knowledge pretty much from scratch. So I decided to approach the book from the perspective of an “interested layman”, and to tell the SWISS story not to the specialists but to the general public. I hope the final product is a good read for both. And I would like to say a very big thank-you to the dozens of people at SWISS who took the time to help familiarize me with the air transport world, with all its rules and peculiarities and above all with their company. ✈️

Available from the end of July

“SWISS – Die Airline der Schweiz”, which is in German and runs to some 200 pages, can be pre-ordered from the SWISS Shop at www.swiss-shop.com/swissbook at a special reduced price of CHF 49 (instead of CHF 58). SWISS employees also enjoy their usual 20% SWISS Shop discount on this reduced price: just be sure to use your SWISS email address when ordering. Books ordered will be delivered at the end of July. As well as the SWISS Shop, the book will also be available from Obstgartenstrasse reception and from the Product Hub in the Operation Center at Zurich Airport.



On-the-job research: with our Technical Division...
Photo: Sabina Diethelm



... and aboard a Zurich-Bangkok flight.
Photo: Reto Hoffmann

