



# Watercraft Philately



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## Celebrating 75 years of the Swiss merchant fleet



Creating a Swiss flag was first raised around 1860 by Swiss expats in the Mediterranean region who no longer wanted to travel under a foreign flag. However, the idea initially floundered. When Prussia and France opposed it, the Federal Council bowed to the pressure. Besides, back then nobody could agree that a landlocked state should be permitted to have its own flag.

It was not until a conference of the League of Nations in Barcelona in 1921 that states without a maritime coastline were granted the right to have their own flags. This right was ratified in 1958 in the Geneva Convention on the High Seas and then again in 1982 in the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea.

During the Second World War, the Confederation was economically reliant on shipping space to supply the country with essentials. The Office of War Transport managed to charter 15 ships under the Greek flag. After Italy attacked Greece in October 1940, the ships were no longer able to sail on the Mediterranean, and so the Swiss flag was born. The

Federal Council entrusted Basel-based Professor Rudolf Haab with the task of establishing a legal basis for the creation of Switzerland's own flag at sea. In the space of six months, the draft was complete. The Federal Council passed the draft in April 1941 under a state of emergency law and, before the month was out, maritime merchant ship *CALANDA* became the first to fly the flag.

Swiss merchant ships are operated not by the Swiss Confederation, but by private ship owners. They remain under the protection of Switzerland; whose flag they fly. In return, the government is entitled to commandeer the ships at times of crisis or emergency to ensure the country's economic needs are met. Thus the flag is motivated not by competition or prestige; rather, Switzerland owes its flag solely to the desire to ensure economic supplies for the nation at times of crisis or in emergencies.

Source: Reto Dürler, Head of the Swiss Maritime Navigation Office SMNO

Issues include:

- 0.85 HCF LAVAUX bulk carrier. (misidentified as SCL BERN)
- 1.00 HCF LUGANO bulk carrier.
- 1.50 HCF MSC LAUSANNE container vessel.
- 2.00 HCF MCT STOCKHORN chemical- production tanker.

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