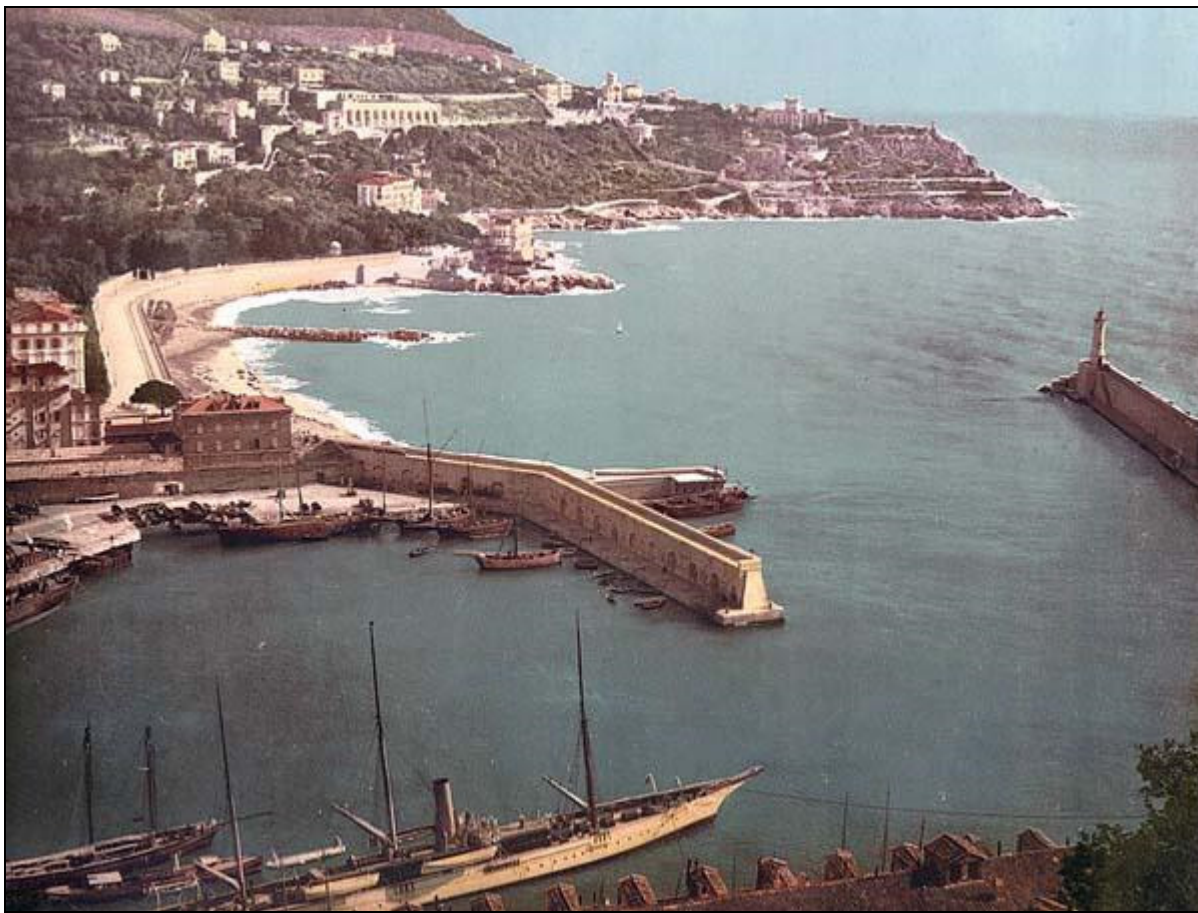




PRE-RACE PARTY GRAND PRIX DE NICE, FRANCE CONSULATE OF SWITZERLAND



The harbor at Nice, just east of the circuit laid out for Grand Prix de Nice.

PART I: Consulate Party & Terrible Weather

As evening fell on Friday, April 20, 1934, the rain began. High winds and waves rose off the Mediterranean, lashing the beaches along the Côte d'Azur. Conditions turned dangerous and the roads were soon closed to local traffic. The race circuit, already lined with bales of straw and light wattle fencing to protect the buildings, lamp posts, and palm trees along the broad avenues of Nice, were no match for the wind.



By 7:00 pm, it was recognized that it would be impossible to bring the circuit back to standard in time to allow a race on Saturday. An early evening meeting of the A.C. de Nice et Côte d'Azur Race Committee, headed by France's Grand Prix Committee Chairman, **Claude d'Etoile**, brought the announcement that the race was postponed to Monday, April 23. At the Swiss Consulate, the decision was made to carry forward with the pre-race party, even though many guests were expected to not attend and others would be forced, of necessity to make a short evening of it given the weather.

The Consul General was relieved when at least four of the drivers arrived, including **Godeschalk Hegkman** of Germany, **Louis de Montignac** of Monaco, **Aristide La Fontaine** of France and **Teide "Volcán" Sorolla**, the new driver hailing from Spain who had taken over the Spanish team. Of the other guests invited, only a handful sent their regrets given the weather, including the Swedish chemical engineering research professor at Lund universitet, **Katrine "Kajsa" Kalleson**; and **Ambassador Joost de Boer**, the Dutch shipping magnate and car collector, who was also the former Netherlands Ambassador to France.

Aristide La Fontaine was the first racing pilot to make it to the Consultate as Nice was his home. He and Maria drove up in a beautiful, deep blue Salmson S4 that shimmered in the rain. He sported a stunning black tuxedo and Maria wore a beautiful golden dress, covered in sequins that reflected the light of the Swiss Consulate's Great Hall and its two, large and red Swiss flags that flanked the covered entryway. The two entered arm in arm through the large double doors that lead in from the street, walking between the flags upon a deep, plush red carpet into the Great Hall. They were immediately greeted by many of the other guests already in attendance.

Godeschalk Hegkman arrived soon thereafter, looking splendid once again in his all white Prussian dress, its high buttons glistening on his chest. His sword hung at his waist like a symbol of medieval power and nobility. Around his neck hung a heavy golden chain with a pendant bearing a black Teutonic cross very similar to the one painted upon his Bugatti race car. Quickly, he made his way to Sr. Carmena-Motta and the two were soon deep in a private discussion – to those who were within earshot, it seemed strange that they were speaking in some sort of dialect of Latin.

Louis de Montignac arrived ten minutes later, having driven from nearby Monaco in a brand new, black and silver Phantom Rolls Royce II provided to him by the Prince. Many other guests from Monaco also arrived with him, despite the heavy rain, having driven over to attend the party and see their new race hero after his win in Algiers. Despite the terrible weather, many others from Monte Carlo stood in the rain and winds along the route to wave as he drove past.



Being an outdoors man, Spain's new racing pilot, **Teide "Volcán" Sorolla**, arrived on foot. He was dripping wet, having taken a walk first along the Baie des Anges to feel the full force of the weather. He made his way to the wardrobe and pulled out a dry suit from his oil cloth, mountaineering backpack. He soon returned to the Great Hall to greet the Consul General with a change of clothes and his hair slicked back – still damp, yet perfectly combed. The "Volcán" immediately walked over to greet **Douglas Douglas-Hamilton**, styled as **Lord Clydesdale**, the Scottish aeroplane pilot who one year ago had made headlines from his flight over the heights of Mount Everest.

Teide Sorolla was overheard to say, "Lovely weather, Sir, and it makes me long for the mountains." He thrust out his hand, calloused from years of mountain climbing, and asked with real interest, "How was Mount Everest?" Soon the two were deep in conversation regarding the mountain and mountain climbing in general. Teide was also overheard to ask if **Lord Clydesdale** had flown over Mont Blanc, which the Spanish driver had already conquered during the spring of 1930, with his ice axe and ropes.

Soon those drivers present were mixing with the guests and exchanging greetings with the Swiss Consul General, the **Prince of Monaco**; France's Grand Prix Committee Chairman, **Claude d'Etoile**; **Douglas Douglas-Hamilton**; **Sr. Carmena-Motta**, the wealthy Italian industrialist; **Onbera Geraxan**, the retired Basque race car driver and engineer; **Amb. Watanabe Tomitani**, Japan's Ambassador to Italy; **Duarte Almadin**, the wealthy Portuguese exporter of port wines, cork and wood products; and the two Algerians, **Khalil al-Wazir**, a businessman and banker, and **Islem ibn-Bilal**, the famous Algerian racing engineer.

A half hour later **Anezka Novakova** arrived. The famous Czech fashion designer entered the Great Hall of the Consulate in a terrible mood due to the weather. She was soon seen drinking excessively of the Consul General's personal stock of *Appenzeller Alpenbitter* and *P. Garnier Abricotine*, which he had had brought down from Paris. The *Abricotine* had won the Prix de 1925 and judged a *Medaille d'Or*. Despite her drinking, which in others might have improved their mood, those who warranted a glance in her direction were met instead with a steely glare, leaving many to wonder why she had bothered to come to the party in the first place.

Bringing the Great Hall to attention, the Swiss Consul General tapped his glass and welcomed them all with a short speech saluting Nice and the drivers as well as a few words to sing the praises of La Grande Épreuve and he raised his glass to make a toast, "To the Race on Monday," which all shared. Even as he finished his glass, the doors at the other end of the hall were opened once again, this time to reveal a common city taxi waiting outside. Through its windows, the assembled guests could catch a glimpse of **Vitez Rychly** and his fiancée, Veronika Vilhelmova, of Czechoslovakia. A second car, a black sedan, smoothly drove up behind and coasted to a stop.



A gust of wind had blown a portion of the canvas from the portico, which would leave the couple exposed to the rain when they exited the taxi. Thus, a moment passed with **Rychly** seeming to argue with VV, who drew back from the weather. Encouragingly, he climbed out and held his umbrella for her, but still she refused to exit the taxi into the rain. Finally, after a few more words in Czech exchanged between them, she cursed and got out of the car, only to grab the umbrella for herself before dashing for shelter. In doing so, she left Rychly standing bare in the rain. He laughed and shook his head. A second gentleman, clearly another Czech, joined him from the second sedan and the two walked into the Consulate together, out of the rain.

Even after entering the Great Hall, VV was visibly upset. She was quite sodden by the downpour driven by the winds, despite her best efforts with Rychly's umbrella. Still, her wet dress was stunning to behold. Ignoring the party and guests, she cursed in Czech at the skies and then headed straight to the powder room to freshen up.

Rychly calmly strode into the party, somehow seeming to have gotten less wet than VV despite not having the umbrella, which he noted, she had thoughtlessly tossed upon the red carpet. After retrieving it, he confidently began to make his way around the room, shaking hands and greeting everyone. His Czech friend accompanied him and was soon introduced as Orlinec Strazny. Rychly stated that Strazny was his new head of security, an important position due to new rumors of sabotage and interference whispered in Nice in recent days.

VV stayed in the bathroom for another half-hour.

Across the room, VV's sudden arrival – and equally sudden absence – appeared to cause great consternation with **Anezka Novakova**. Ever observant, soon **Rychly** made his way over to her. They exchanged a few words in Czech and it was apparent that, despite the amount of *Abricotine* she had consumed, Anezka had made clear that she wouldn't have come had it not been for VV's personal note sent to her earlier in the day – and now, unexpectedly, VV had simply disappeared to the powder room.

Rychly did his best to assuage **Anezka's** mounting frustration at VV's absence, but it became clear that with all the force of a train wreck, the two were soon due to meet on somewhat less than optimal circumstances – VV, soaked from the rain and Anezka somewhat more soaked from the alcohol. In fact, the combination of the *Appenzeller Alpenbitter* and *P. Garnier Abricotine* seemed to be peeling off the last vestiges of civility to reveal a darker side that otherwise quietly had lain dormant in the fashion designer's personality. Soon Anezka had switched back to the Czech language and began shouting at Rychly about his fiancée's behavior.