



Vichy Air Force at War: The French Air Force That Fought The Allies in World War II

Diane Canwell, Jon Sutherland

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At the beginning of World War II the French faced the German invasion with 4,360 modern combat aircraft and 790 new machines currently arriving from French and American factories each month. When the phony war finally ended, some 119 of 210 squadrons were ready for action on the north-eastern front. The others were reequipping or stationed in the French colonies. Of the 119 squadrons France could bring into action only one-fourth of the aircraft were battle-ready.

With France overrun by June 1940, what remained of the French air force was either concentrated in the unoccupied zone or had been hastily redeployed to the colonies. Nonetheless, in retaliation for the British attack on the French fleet in Oran, French bombers, based in French Morocco, carried out retaliatory air raids over Gibraltar. The Armée de l'Air de Vichy was born and would fight to the best of its ability against the Free French's allies in theatres as distant as north-west Africa, Syria, Lebanon, Madagascar and the Far East. Not only would they take to the skies against the British and later the Americans, they would also willingly take part in aerial duels against Free French pilots.

Only a handful of books have been written on French aircraft, but never has there been a complete history of the operations of the Vichy Air Force and its fratricidal war. This title literally spans the globe, examining forgotten air combats. It is also important to note that many of the Vichy pilots that survived the air combats later volunteered to join the Free French and would fight with great courage and distinction alongside the very pilots that they had been trying to kill. This book describes all major theatres of combat, examines the aircraft flown and lengthy appendices cover operational units, victory credits and the Aéronautique Navale.

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