

# The French empire at war 1940-45

MARTIN THOMAS

HONNEUR - PATRIE



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ILS ONT AJOUTÉ DES NOMS GLORIEUX A LA HAMPE DE NOS DRAPEAUX

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## The French empire at war 1940–45

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Martin Thomas

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For Suzy and my parents



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## GENERAL EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

No one has ever doubted the profound effects of the Second World War upon European imperialism. But they have often been studied primarily in political, diplomatic and military terms, an approach which tends to highlight specific events and turning points. Moreover, there has frequently been a gulf between global and regional studies and a time lag in scholarly approaches to the various empires, particularly those of the British and the French. Only comparatively recently has there been a more profound appreciation of the underlying economic and social transformations which were necessarily rooted in the years between the two great wars of the twentieth century, but which were powerfully affected by the intensive demands, disruptions and regional destabilisations of the Second World War period.

This book constitutes a major contribution to this debate. Firmly based on primary research in France and Britain, it offers the first comprehensive account of the turbulent events in the French empire in the 1940s, a time when francophone imperial territories became the setting for strife between the competing claims of the Vichy government and de Gaulle's Free French movement, and various pragmatic positions in between. It explores the manner in which the empire constitutes, in complex and destructive ways, one of the launch pads for the liberation of France, a focal point for the conflicts between and among the Axis powers and the Western Allies, and a setting for the working out of a wide variety of ideological ambitions. The resulting economic and social strains produced much suffering for indigenous peoples, fertile ground for the emergence of many forms of resistance movement.

The scope and depth of Martin Thomas's work enable him not only to range across the French empire from the Caribbean and North America to Africa, the Middle East, the Indian Ocean and Indo-China, but also to deal with the economic and the social dimensions of these processes as much as the political and military. In addition to capturing the idiom and often extreme conservatism of French imperial politics, he demonstrates a profound sympathy for the aspirations, only dimly understood by the French, of colonised peoples. This book will contribute greatly to the study of the impact of the Second World War on greater France and its enforced decolonisation. It should also act as a foundation for further studies of elite and popular reactions to empire in twentieth-century France, as well as the processes of social change and identity formation which disrupted the characteristic French imperial ambitions to assimilation and association.

John M. MacKenzie

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Some of the material contained in the book has appeared within articles published in different form elsewhere. [Chapter two](#) includes a short segment of an article published in *Diplomacy and Statecraft* in 1995. Within [chapter four](#) the analysis of the St Pierre and Miquelon affair summarises some of the points made in an article published in the *International History Review* in 1997. In the same chapter, the discussion of the invasion of Madagascar in

## ABBREVIATIONS

1942 is based upon an article published in the *Historical Journal* in 1996. Full details of these articles are given in the bibliography. I am indebted to these journals for permission to reproduce some of this earlier work here.

Several people have helped me with this project, either reading drafts, discussing details or simply having the patience to listen to tales of the French empire. I am duly grateful to all of them. Kent Fedorowich and Glyn Stone provided valuable criticism of draft chapters. Robert Aldrich, Martin Shipway, Chris Goscha, Alan Dobson, David Woolner and Martin Alexander have all provided valuable insights into French policy-making or its effects on other nations. The British International History Group and the University of London Imperialism Seminar gave me opportunities to air papers on Madagascar and French imperial defence. Chris Hearmon of the UWE Geography Department kindly produced the maps. Finally, my wife Suzy has lent support, indulgence and good humour in equal measure.

M.T.

## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

### *Territories, parties and organisations*

AEF	Afrique Equatoriale Française ((Middle) Congo, Gabon, Oubangui-Chari and Chad)
AFN	Afrique Française du Nord (Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia)
AML	Amis du Manifeste et de la Liberté (Algerian nationalist party, formed 1944)
AOF	Afrique Occidentale Française (Senegal, Mauritania, French Guinea, French Sudan, Côte d'Ivoire (Ivory Coast), Niger and Dahomey)
BCRA	Bureau Central de Renseignements et d'Action (Free French secret service)
CCDC	Comité Consultatif de la Défense des Colonies
CCOS	Combined Chiefs of Staff (AngloAmerican)
CFR	Committee on Foreign (Allied) Resistance
CLI	Corps Léger d'Intervention (Free French commando force for Indo-China)
COS	Chiefs of Staff (British)
EMGDN	Etat-Major Général de la Défense Nationale (post-Liberation General Staff)
ENA	Etoile Nord-Africaine (Algerian nationalist party, formed 1926)
FCNL	French Committee of National Liberation (based in Algiers)
FFI	Forces Françaises de l'Intérieur (French resistance army)
FIDES	Fonds d'Investissement pour le Développement Economique et Social (Colonial Investment Fund)
FLN	Front de Libération Nationale (Algerian nationalist front, formed 1954)
FMF	Forces Maritimes Françaises (Vichy navy)
FNFL	Forces Navales de la France Libre (Free French navy)
GPRF	Gouvernement Provisoire de la République Française (post-Liberation French provisional government)
Istiqlal	Moroccan independence party (formed January 1944)
JSM	Joint Staff Mission (Washington)
Néo-Destour	Tunisian nationalist party (formed 1934)
OSS	Office of Strategic Services (American)
PCF	Parti Communiste Français

## ABBREVIATIONS

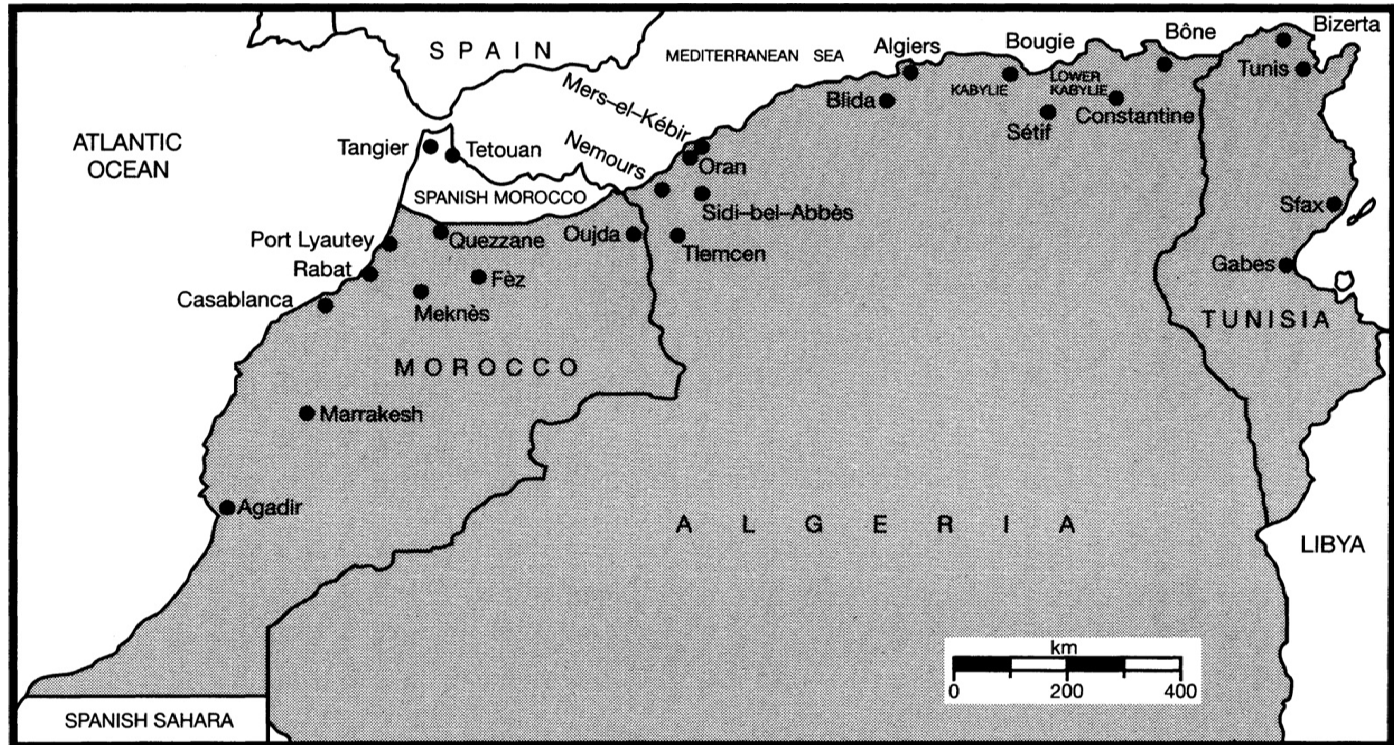
PPA	Parti Populaire Algérien (Algerian (Messalist) nationalist party, formed 1937)
PPF	Parti Populaire Français (fascistic party led by Jacques Doriot)
PSF	Parti Social Français (ultra-right party, hier to the Croix de Feu)
SAA	Syndicat Agricole Africaine (planters' union formed in Côte d'Ivoire, 1944)
SEAC	South East Asia Command (British)
SOE	Special Operations Executive (British)
SOL	Service d'Ordre Légionnaire (Vichyite)
Viet Minh	League for the Independence of Vietnam (coalition, formed 1942)
VNQDD	Viet Nam Quoc Dan Dong (Vietnam National Party, formed 1927)

### *Archives and published documents*

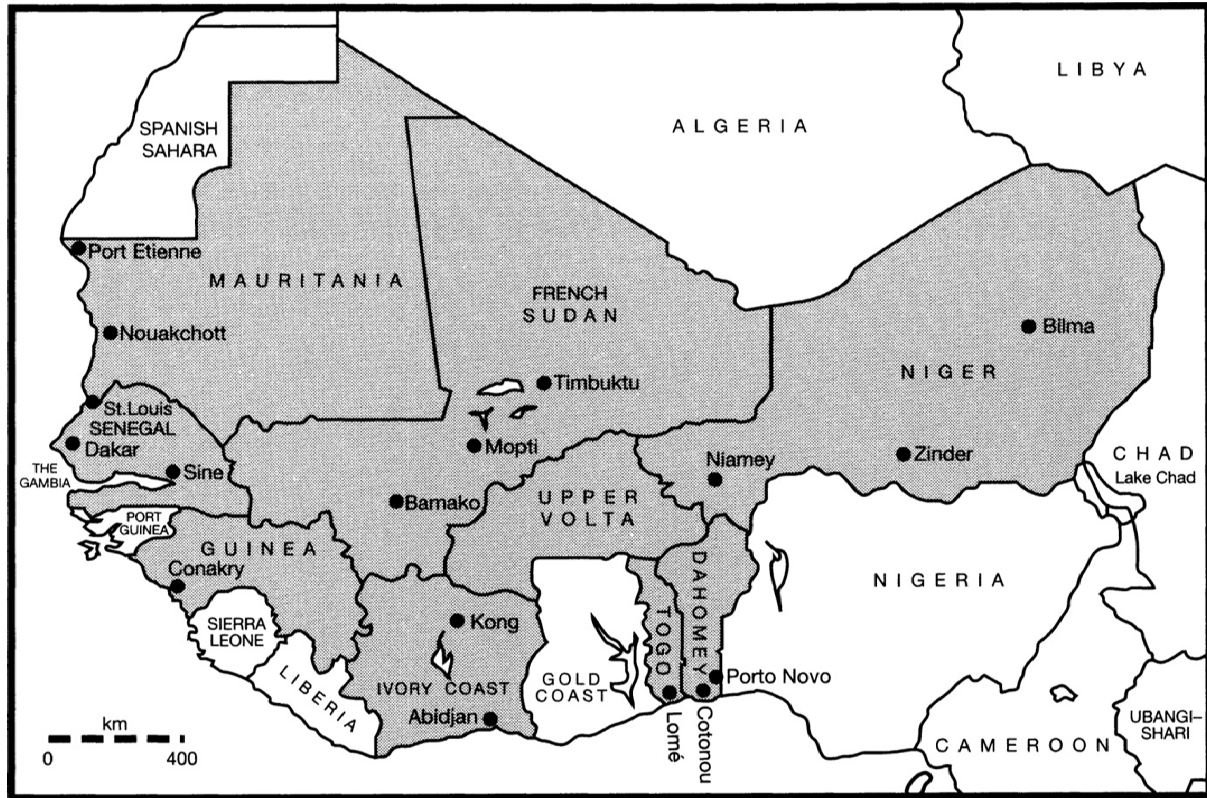
AN	Archives Nationales
ANCOM	Archives Nationales Centre des Archives d'Outre-Mer
<i>DDF</i>	<i>Documents Diplomatiques Français</i>
<i>FRUS</i>	<i>Foreign Relations of the United States</i>
MAE	Ministère des Affaires Etrangères (Quai d'Orsay)
NAC	National Archives of Canada
PRO	Public Record Office
SHAT	Service Historique de l'Armée de Terre
SHM	Service Historique de la Marine

### *Terms and expressions*

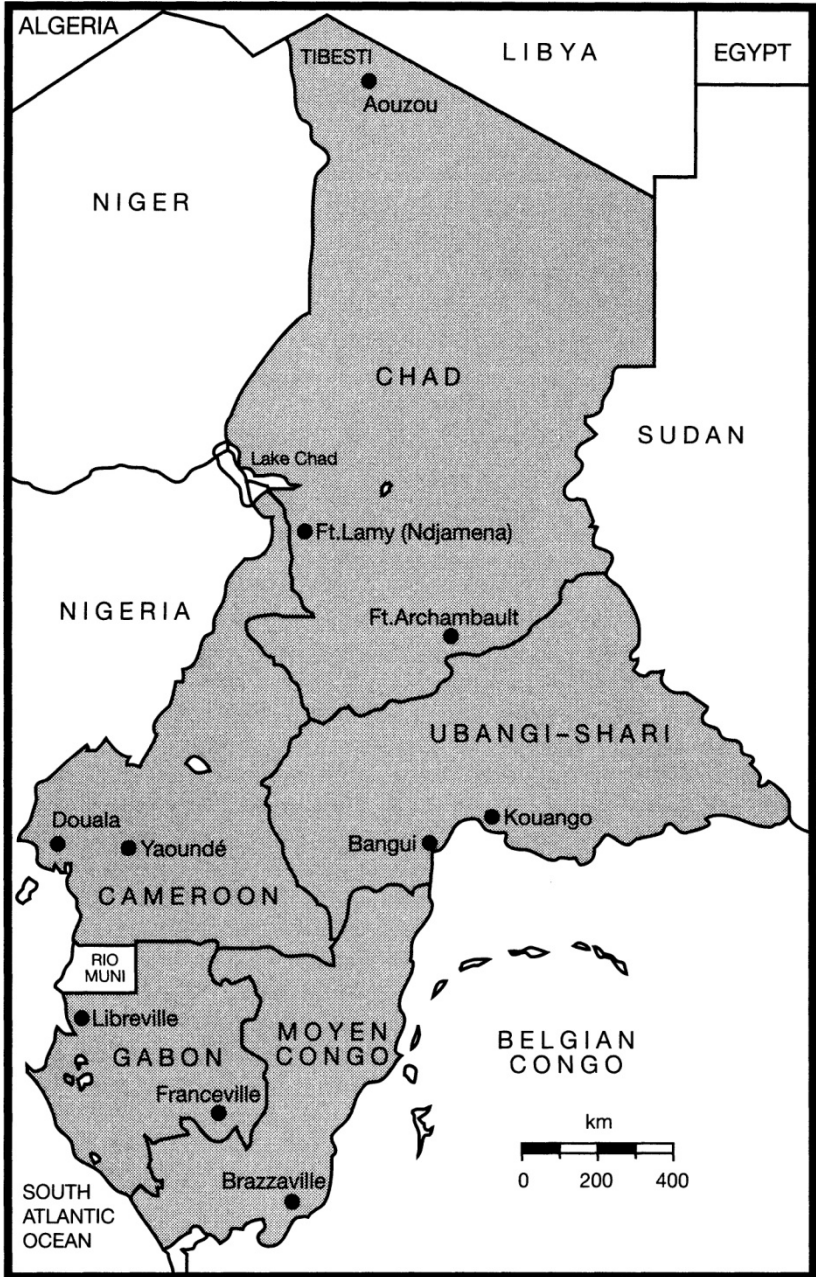
Carlton Gardens	London headquarters of Free French movement/French National Committee.
Free France/ Fighting France	From Bastille Day 1942, Free France (France Libre) adopted the appellation Fighting France (France Combattante). For convenience, Free France is the preferred term in this book, although Fighting France appears in chapters dealing with the latter stages of the war.
Maghreb <i>ralliement</i>	region encompassing the French North African territories. literally, the 'rallying' of territory to Free France.



## 1 French North Africa



2 French West Africa (AOF)



3 French Equatorial Africa (AEF)



#### 4 French Middle Eastern mandates



5 French Indo-China

## INTRODUCTION

Between 1940 and 1945 the French empire divided against itself. To be more precise, the administrative, military and settler elites that ran French imperial affairs became adversaries in the contest between Vichy loyalism and Free French republicanism. Although no colony remained openly committed to the discredited Vichy regime by 1944, vestiges of reactionary 'Pétainism' certainly persisted to war's end: the rediscovered imperial unity of France's colonial rulers and settlers in 1945 was actually a weak reed. France's wartime imperial split was unique. After Germany's western onslaught in May-June 1940, the Belgian Congo and the Dutch East Indies, for example, remained faithful to their respective governments-in-exile, even though these territories were, to a considerable degree, isolated in practice. Although the stresses of war nourished colonial nationalism and protest within several British colonies, Britain's empire none the less contributed significantly to the country's war effort throughout 1939-45. Nationalist organisation in the French colonies was also transformed by the humiliation of the colonial power, vigorous suppression of organised protest and the economic constraints imposed by the Second World War. But for the rulers of France's empire, the Vichy-Free French division was perhaps more significant as a portent of the entrenched settler and military conservatism that would divide France and its empire once more during the Algerian rebellion of 1954-62.

This book traces this period of wartime French imperial division, setting it within the wider international politics of the Second World War. Neither the Vichy nor the Free French imperial authorities were masters of their own destiny. A truism perhaps – under Marshal Philippe Pétain, the Vichy regime established in July 1940 governed only part of a defeated country under the gaze of the fascist powers. Charles de Gaulle's Free French movement, fashioned in London in defiance of Pétain's capitulation, initially derived sustenance from its British patron. Nevertheless, once the extent of France's weakness is recognised, it becomes clear that a history of its wartime empire must be placed within the broader framework of the Second World War. Transfers of imperial authority were frequently the result of events outside French control. Hence the common thread linking such diverse events as New Caledonia's Australian-assisted declaration for Free France in August 1940, the British-led invasions of Syria and Madagascar in 1941 and

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1942, the American landings in French North Africa in November 1942 and Japan's increasing grip upon Indo-China from 1940 onwards.

In consequence, the principal causes of the abrupt changes of French political allegiance across France's wartime empire were more often the product of hostile military intervention than of shifting public attitudes towards Vichy or Free France. Vichy ideology and that regime's acute instinct for self-preservation certainly made their impact upon France's colonial rulers. So, too, the spirit of Free French resistance and the appeal of de Gaulle's rhetoric swayed numerous officials, soldiers and settlers across the empire. But only in 1940 were the conflicts of French politics generally decisive in tipping individual colonial governments one way or the other. As the war progressed, the French empire was increasingly re-fashioned piecemeal by the initiatives of the major combatant powers. Even the nationalist oppositions which gathered their momentum against French authority during wartime derived much of their capacity for action from the manner in which the war affected their particular territory, whether economically, politically or militarily. As a result, the direct intrusion or the close proximity of the war was a major dynamic to longer-term political change within the French empire. Some North African nationalists drew upon the German example in their assertion of Arab national unity and their consequent repudiation of French rights in the Maghreb territories of Morocco, Algeria and Tunisia. Others, such as Ferhat Abbas in Algeria and Habib Bourguiba in Tunisia, saw much to admire in declared US war aims, calculating that the eventual application of the Atlantic Charter would ensure greater freedom for colonial peoples. In the Levant states, the British government was enlisted as accomplice in the reassertion of Syrian and Lebanese treaty rights at French expense. In Indo-China, the Viet Minh nationalist coalition developed its political programme and refined its military skills in opposition to Japan's de facto control. Other Vietnamese nationalist groups judged that Japan's regional supremacy presented an unprecedented opportunity to undermine the French colonial presence in collaboration with the Japanese. In all these cases, the French effort to maintain colonial control was reactive and rarely went unchallenged.

In spite of these common threads, what emerges from the chapters which follow is that there is less overarching unity in the history of the French empire at war between 1940 and 1945 than might be supposed. Certainly, the force of Vichy authority declined over time, much as the Gaullist star rose. Clearly, too, the war did lasting harm both to French imperial prestige and to the credibility of France's distinctive philosophy of colonial assimilationism whereby certain colonial subjects were expected to identify with French cultural values. Whether subject to Vichy or Free French administration, colonial nationalists were

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understandably unenthusiastic about a return to untrammelled French rule in peacetime, not least because it was widely anticipated that a weakened France might actually prove less restrained in its efforts to reimpose local control. Nevertheless, France's wartime imperial history remains inherently fragmentary. Much as individual colonies were to varying extents isolated, so too the historical bonds linking them together were often more imagined than real. The Federation of French West Africa – *Afrique Occidentale Française* (AOF) – is a case in point. Ruled in theory as a homogeneous unit from the federal administrative centre of Dakar, AOF was in fact as unwieldy as it was massive and diverse.<sup>1</sup> While Senegal and Côte d'Ivoire offered the richest economic rewards, the huge landlocked territories in the north of the Federation – from Mauritania in the west, through French Sudan to Niger in the East – provided vital links with Morocco, Algeria and French Equatorial Africa (*Afrique Equatoriale Française* (AEF)).<sup>2</sup> Although subservient to the same colonial authority, many of the subject peoples of AOF were as diffuse in culture, language, religion and economic activity as they were supposedly united by the shared experience of French rule. In short, outside the confines of French colonial administration, there was less substance to the concept of 'federation' than the French cared to admit. As Christopher Harrison puts it in reference to the immediate post-1919 period, at one extreme, 'AOF represented a federation of parochial governments, isolated parish councils whose perception of policy and strategic interest was necessarily limited and for whom the dictates of the imperial bureaucrats in Paris may well have been meaningless.'<sup>3</sup> The Second World War and France's defeat changed many of the rules of colonial governance but it did little to make the empire a more coherent whole.

In writing a strategic and international history of empire, one thus challenges an assumption which underlies much of the French writing on the wartime empire: namely, that competing French elites determined the complexion of colonial loyalties. This is not to suggest that those actors directly involved in Vichy and Free French government were in any way insignificant. Indeed, the decade after 1945 saw the publication of a host of popular memoirs and war diaries written by many of the leading characters in the leadership of both the Vichy state and the Free French movement. From an imperial perspective, this body of work is immediately striking for three main reasons. Firstly, without exception, the recollections of France's wartime leaders pay far more attention to questions of empire than any comparable set of politicians' writings from the preceding era of the Third Republic. Secondly, although the lines of political division are plainly apparent between Gaullists and unreconstructed Pétainists, there is, none the less, a

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remarkable consensus regarding the vital importance of empire to the salvation of French national dignity in 1940, and to the post-war reconstruction of France as a major power. Finally, the great majority of this writing is deeply conservative. There is little treatment of bold imperial reform, far more attention being devoted to the role of colonies within the authors' visions of a resurrected and powerful France. Detailed discussion of colonial populations and conditions is largely confined to the work of Ministry of Colonies administrators, Ecole Coloniale personnel or specialist academics, of whom Robert Delavignette and Charles-André Julien are obvious examples.<sup>4</sup> Among the pro-consuls of the Free French empire, such as Adolphe Sicé in AEF and Georges Catroux in the Levant and North Africa, the challenges of 'native affairs' appear as a distraction from the real business of contributing to the liberation of France. Elsewhere, France's subject peoples, especially in black Africa, are frequently portrayed in stereotypical terms – as loyal, martial and, depending on the politics of the author, either grateful for, or uninterested in, the politics of Gaullism.<sup>5</sup>

It is thus tempting to add a fourth aspect to this body of literature – its strongly metropolitan bias. Empire is presented as a tool in the service of France's revival, or, more broadly, as the arena in which the peculiar French political rivalries of the Second World War were played out.<sup>6</sup> What emerges only occasionally, if at all, from such works is the rising force of colonial opinion and the structural frailties of French imperial control. Put bluntly, few French memoirs convey the popular animosity towards French colonial administration which is writ large within the archival records of the period. In one sense, this is unsurprising. Former Vichyite administrators, like their erstwhile Free French opponents, moved within the narrow confines of a governing elite. The French officers on both sides, often well versed in imperial policing and in daily contact with colonial troops, were not inclined to dwell on more intangible questions of public mood unless it was their job to report on the subject. The exceptions to this are perhaps Morocco, Algeria and Tunisia, where regular administrative assessment of Muslim opinion was already well established by 1940.

It would be remarkable indeed if former governors and colonial generals emerged in their writings as having been enlightened opponents of empire. But what does bear emphasis is that French memoir histories of the empire at war became immersed in the polemics of the Fourth Republic as the post-war regime struggled to come to terms with the Vichy past and with the violence of decolonisation in Indo-China and, above all, Algeria. Conversely, neither the terms of the 1946 French

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Union, nor the human and material costs of the Indo-China war aroused as much debate in post-war France as issues closer to home such as French economic reconstruction and the revival of German power. Instead, the manner in which the wartime empire had first divided and was then reunited under de Gaulle became something of an allegory. Wartime recollections of empire were employed either as an object lesson in the decadence of French Republican democracy and the divisiveness of Gaullism or as proof of the lasting strengths of the Republican ideal and the virtues of inspired leadership.<sup>7</sup>

Control of the French empire was vital to the competing French leaderships of 1940–44. The empire was a physical embodiment of what limited independence remained to the Vichy regime. Preservation of imperial control helped Vichy governments withstand Germano-Italian pressure for concessions in metropolitan France, and was pivotal to Vichy's claim to be more than the mouthpiece of a defeated nation. The national revolution espoused by the supporters of Marshal Pétain was enthusiastically endorsed in many regions of the empire from North and West Africa to the French West Indies. The dual-track nature of the armistice disarmament provisions which distinguished between metropolitan France and Vichy's overseas territories ensured that the *Armée d'Afrique* in French North Africa, and the colonial units stationed in black Africa and elsewhere, became the vanguard of Vichy land forces and a powerful symbol of supposed national and colonial renewal. Furthermore, the Vichy navy, the one service which escaped many armistice restrictions, devoted itself to imperial defence and became the sharpest element of the Vichy armed services. For Free France, too, the empire had a political and symbolic importance which far outweighed its material significance. The early declarations of colonial support – or *ralliements* – underpinned de Gaulle's claim to legitimacy, while the colonies themselves provided the core of Free French forces and a vital source of sterling income. Possession of imperial territory also gave the Free French a greater voice in their dealings with the British government. Much as Vichy-administered territories were supposed to represent the ideal of loyal service to the nation, so too Free French colonies were vital to the Gaullist themes of resistance, republican legitimacy and constitutional renaissance.

Although this study is primarily an international history of the wartime French empire, in order to evaluate the stability, the value and the strength of the empire, consideration is also given to the nature of Vichy and Free French colonial rule and the impact of that authority upon the local populations concerned. In certain territories – the French West Indies, Syria and Indo-China, for example – the manifest shortcomings of French colonial government were instrumental in the

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overthrow of wartime regimes or the growth of nationalist sentiment during the war itself. But it would be simplistic and misleading to attribute gathering opposition to colonial rule to the failures of Vichy as an imperial power. Colonial manpower was vital to both Vichy and Free France and, in many respects, this contribution was better acknowledged by Vichy than by de Gaulle and his followers. More basically, since many Vichy colonies lived under the restrictions of British naval blockade, the incentive to exploit African labour in pursuit of export revenue was sometimes diminished by force of circumstance. By contrast, Gaullist colonial governors strove hard to meet ambitious export targets in pursuit of a Free French 'war effort'.<sup>8</sup> Where it is contended that the fate of individual colonies or groups of colonies was determined by events beyond French control, this is illustrated by discussion of local colonial conditions. In French West Africa, for instance, Governor Pierre Boisson built up a federation of Vichyite administrations which was more cohesive than the far richer territories of French North Africa. Even so, the work accomplished by Boisson in West Africa, Charles-Auguste Noguès in Morocco or, on the Gaullist side, Henri Catroux in Syria, was quickly undermined by the intervention of combatant states whose actions were driven by their strategic requirements.

Prior to the fall of France several Ministries played a role in supervising French colonial administration. The demarcation of authority between the Ministry of Colonies, the Foreign Ministry and the Ministry of the Interior prefigured political divisions which were to emerge after June 1940. The French residency in Tunisia, responsible to the Quai d'Orsay, did not produce the same enthusiastic support for Vichy as was evident among the Algiers administration which reported directly to the Ministry of the Interior. By contrast, Morocco and much of black Africa, though with civil administrations responsible to the Quai d'Orsay and Ministry of Colonies respectively, were in practice largely run as military governorships. But the War Ministry spared little time for imperial matters. Only the Ministry of Marine consistently placed empire at the heart of its strategic planning before June 1940. These points are crucial to what follows in two respects. Firstly, to the army staff the empire was viewed primarily as a vital manpower reserve for use in the defence of metropolitan France. Only later did Vichy exploit the high concentration of colonial troops in the armistice armies in order to represent colonial forces and subject peoples as loyal servants and capable martial races devoted to the defence of imperial territory. Secondly, the navy's broader strategic outlook acquired lasting importance under Vichy as foreign and colonial policy fell under the sway of Admirals Jean-François Darlan, Charles Platon and Henri

## INTRODUCTION

Bléhaut. To the military establishment as a whole, both before and after the 1940 armistice agreements, the empire's anticipated contribution to France was fashioned by memories of the First World War. It is to this earlier period that we now turn.

### Notes

- 1 AOF comprised Senegal, Mauritania, French Guinea, French Sudan, Côte d'Ivoire (Ivory Coast), Niger and Dahomey. The French-administered section of the former German mandate of Togo was also treated as an adjunct to AOF. Upper Volta was partitioned among other AOF colonies in 1912 before its re-establishment in 1948: see Yves Person, 'French West Africa and Decolonization' in Prosser Gifford and William Roger Louis (eds), *The Transfer of Power in Africa. Decolonization, 1940–1960*, (New Haven, Conn., Yale University Press, 1982), p. 141.
- 2 French Equatorial Africa (AEF) was federated in 1910 to include the French (Middle) Congo, Gabon, Oubangui-Chari and Chad. As in the case of Togo and AOF, the former German mandate of Cameroon was sometimes treated as an adjunct to AEF.
- 3 Christopher Harrison, *France and Islam in West Africa, 1860–1960* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1988), p. 5.
- 4 See, for example, Robert Delavignette and Charles-André Julien, *Les Constructeurs de la France d'Outre-mer* (Paris, Presses Universitaires de France, 1946).
- 5 Adolphe Sicé, *L'Afrique équatoriale française et le Cameroun au service de la France* (Paris, Presses Universitaires de France, 1946); Georges Catroux, *Dans la bataille de la Méditerranée. Egypte-Levant-Afrique du Nord, 1940–1944* (Paris, Julliard, 1949). Vichy's Indo-China Governor, Admiral Jean Decoux, devoted only two short chapters to his social policies, see his *A la Bane de l'Indochine. Histoire de mon gouvernement general (1940–1945)* (Paris, Plon, 1949), pp. 384–411.
- 6 Two more recent examples of this trend are: René Cassin, *Les Hommes partis de rien. Le réveil de la France abattue (1940–1941)* (Paris, Plon, 1975); and Gaston Palewski, *Mémoires d'action, 1924–1974* (Paris, Plon, 1988). Cassin was de Gaulle's principal legal adviser in 1940. Palewski supported de Gaulle's call for army reform in the 1930s and served with Free French forces in East Africa in 1941–42.
- 7 Henry Rousso, *The Vichy Syndrome. History and Memory in France since 1944* (Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 1991), pp. 60, 75–80.
- 8 Frederick Cooper, *Decolonization and African Society The Labor Question in French and British Africa* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 147–51.



## **PART I**

### **The inter-war background**

## CHAPTER ONE

# The inter-war empire and French defence

### *The legacy of the First World War*

In the imperial history of inter-war France, memories of the First World War should figure large. The experience of the Great War shaped interwar French attitudes to empire more than any other single event. Once the western front stalemate took shape in the early autumn of 1914, it became increasingly apparent that France's war against the central powers was likely to be long-fought. In spite of the military alliances with Russia and Britain, the French army saw itself in the van of the struggle against imperial Germany. Both during its bloody course and in the twenty years of peace which followed, the Great War was both proof and reminder of France's demographic inferiority next to the German state. Colonial manpower and resources helped to restore the balance. Much as France's nineteenth century colonial *conquistadors*, General Louis Faidherbe and Marshal Joseph Galliéni, saw the potential for employing West African troops in further imperial conquests in the 1890s, so in 1914 the French military staff turned eagerly to black Africans to assist in the defence of France itself. Where West African riflemen (Tirailleurs) had helped conquer Madagascar twenty years earlier, they were later called upon to man French trenches in 1916.<sup>1</sup>

Directed by the Governor-general of Afrique Occidentale Française (AOF), William Ponty, and encouraged by the Senegalese Deputy, Blaise Daigny, French colonial administrators in West Africa pursued ambitious First World War recruitment drives. Infamous within French West Africa as an *impôt du sang* – or blood tax – which prompted tens of thousands of potential conscripts to flee to neighbouring British colonies, and which led directly to three major outbreaks of colonial disorder between 1915 and 1917 (in French Sudan, in Dahomey and in Upper Volta), the colonial contribution to French victory in 1918 was nevertheless remembered fondly in France as a triumph of military and economic mobilisation. Common service in war was portrayed as a testament to the vitality of empire.<sup>2</sup>

In Indo-China, too, similar efforts were made. Here, the colony's *garde indigène* dated its history back to an ordinance of July 1888 which established the first 'civil guard' in Indo-China. After a series of decrees passed between 1895 and 1904, the *garde indigène* was reorganised into formal regiments, officered by specialist French soldiers selected primarily for their linguistic ability. Though criticised in the French Senate between 1911 and 1913 for general unruliness and a doubtful ability to maintain civil order, the *garde* proved highly valuable once war broke out. It remained an effective force although large numbers of its French officers were promptly recalled to the western front. The recruitment of further native troops in Indo-China was strongly supported by Albert Sarraut, appointed Governor-general of the Indo-China federation in 1917.<sup>3</sup>

In total, according to Sarraut, who was made Minister of Colonies in January 1920, the empire provided 587,000 troops between 1914–18. More recently, this figure has been put much higher – at 818,000, including 187,000 war workers in France. In spite of the colonial unrest this stimulated, and the virulent opposition to forced recruitment expressed by the new Governor-general of AOF, Joost van Vollenhoven, in 1917, French West Africa alone produced 56,000 new recruits in 1918. Furthermore, this was an achievement based in large part upon the active co-operation of the traditional indigenous elites in Senegal, French Guinea and French Sudan.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, it has been argued that one of the principal reasons behind the flight of several thousand Africans from Côte d'Ivoire and Upper Volta into the neighbouring British Gold Coast both during and after the First World War was the recognition that the French system of *commandant* administration had entirely co-opted local chiefs, making them enforcers of French demands. But, for all those Africans who fled, far more ended up in French military uniform.<sup>5</sup> Although the empire became fragmented after France's defeat in June 1940, once again the notion of colonies rallying to save the mother country resurfaced as a potent, if unreliable, symbol of imperial loyalty.<sup>6</sup>

In spite of the advances in military technology in the inter-war period, on the eve of the Second World War, French defence planners still viewed the empire in terms reminiscent of the earlier conflict. Although both French civil and military planning for imperial defence became increasingly sophisticated from 1936 onwards, it was none the less assumed that fighting men would constitute the empire's major contribution to European war. Little allowance was made for the possibility that metropolitan French troops might be required to make sacrifices to defend the empire, instead of empire troops arriving in

droves to supplement the home commands. At the Paris military colleges and the newly established Centre for Higher Military Studies, 'imperial defence' scarcely featured on the curriculum for intending senior officers of the French armed services.<sup>7</sup> Echoes of the 1914–18 approach to imperial recruitment reverberated through Colonial and War Ministry planning in 1939–40. In February 1940, the Minister of Colonies, Georges Mandel, conjured an image of recruitment procedures based upon the concept of the 'nation of 100 million' *en marche*,

In French Indo-China, large numbers of young men are leaving the countryside and coming to Saigon or Hanoi to offer their services, and Emperor Bao Dai [of Annam] is actively encouraging recruitment. In Togo and Cameroon, the *indigène* chiefs are organising *levées en masse* within their tribes and are sending [recruits] to Lomé, Yaoundé and Douala, asking that they should begin active service immediately. In A.O.F., several chiefs have sent a formal request to the Minister of Colonies that all young men above fifteen years of age 'be granted the honour to serve under the flag'.<sup>8</sup>

Across the empire, Algeria was first to experience the full impact of France's wartime manpower demands. Although there were limited indications of dissent when French mobilisation measures were extended in Algeria in September 1939, the fact that the call-up received support from both Ferhat Abbas and Dr Mohammed Bendjelloul, the leading supporters of assimilation among Algeria's Muslim elite *élus*, helped prevent any major incident.<sup>9</sup> On 28 May 1940, as the battle for France entered its decisive phase, the Algiers financial delegations – the principal administrative forum for Muslim *élu* representatives – expressed full confidence in a French victory. Six months earlier the delegations had rubber-stamped an onerous 1940 budget of which some 60 per cent was devoted to defence expenditure and recruitment costs.<sup>10</sup> In fact, between 1939 and June 1940 some 300,000 colonial conscripts were raised in French North Africa, 197,300 across AOF and 116,000 within the Indo-China federation. At the point when the armistice agreements were signed in June, a further 313,750 colonial troops had been scheduled for recruitment in 1940–41.<sup>11</sup>

Much as the First World War experience was writ large in Mandel's thinking in 1940, so too it had reinforced the bonds between a certain group of French professional soldiers and their colonial counterparts. Between the wars it became increasingly commonplace for junior career officers to spend several years serving within the empire, not with metropolitan units but with regiments of the French colonial armies in Africa, the French Levant or Indo-China. Many of General de Gaulle's future military subordinates within the Free French movement had a far more intimate knowledge of empire than the General himself. Algeria,

for example, had long been regarded by the officer corps as a forcing ground for French commanders and a training school for the tacticians of France's colonial forces.<sup>12</sup> General Paul Legentilhomme, Governor of Djibouti in June 1940 and, later, Gaullist appointee to Madagascar in 1943, could boast over thirty years of colonial military service, most of it in Indo-China, where he had played a leading part in suppressing nationalist dissent after the Yen Bay mutiny in 1930. Another Free French colonial Governor, General Georges Catroux, had served in the empire for even longer than Legentilhomme. Following his admission to the Foreign Legion in 1900, Catroux also served extensively in North Africa and Indo-China and, like most of his fellow colonial officers, was profoundly influenced by contact with the apostle of French military colonialism, General Louis-Hubert Lyautey. For these men and the regiments they commanded, service in Europe during the First World War was a temporary interruption of their colonial careers.<sup>13</sup> Among their antagonists at Vichy, the range of colonial experience was equally pronounced. Appointed to the Vichy War Ministry in September 1940, General Charles Huntziger had served in Madagascar, Senegal and Tonkin before the First World War, and spent four years in the 1930s as land forces commander in the Levant. Marcel Peyrouton, who as Vichy Minister of the Interior in 1940–41 pioneered much of the legislation which gave the regime its authoritarian character, had entered the Ministry of Colonies *section Afrique* in 1910. His experience in suppressing nationalist dissent as Resident-general in Tunisia and then, briefly, in Morocco between 1933 and 1936 provided a fund of information to draw upon when extending police powers in Vichy France. General Alphonse Juin, armed forces commander in French North Africa from November 1941, was born in Bône, Algeria, and spent his entire youth in the Maghreb before entering a *zouaves* regiment in 1909. By 1939 Juin had accumulated thirty years of active service, most of it – excepting his time in the trenches – in North Africa. Even Philippe Pétain himself was not only hero of Verdun, but also the victor of the Moroccan Rif war in 1925–26.<sup>14</sup>

De Gaulle's military experience, though almost exclusively metropolitan, was no less significant. Promoted to lieutenant in 1914, he served with distinction within the 33e infantry regiment under, then Colonel, Pétain. A prisoner of war between 1916 and 1918, de Gaulle re-entered active service with the French expeditionary force in the Russo-Polish war of 1920–21. On this occasion his immediate commander was Maxime Weygand. In 1927 de Gaulle was confirmed as *aide-de-camp* to Pétain, who was by then vice-president of the Supreme War Council, Army Inspector-general and, indisputably, the pre-eminent soldier in