

# THIRTEEN

*Many Souffran details the Free French pilots that flew during the Battle of Britain*

## Frenchmen



**A TOUS LES FRANÇAIS**

*La France a perdu une bataille!  
Mais la France n'a pas perdu la guerre!*

**Des gouvernants de rencontre ont pu capituler, cédant à la panique, oubliant l'honneur, livrant le pays à la servitude. Cependant, rien n'est perdu!**

**Rien n'est perdu, parce que cette guerre est une guerre mondiale. Dans l'univers libre, des forces immenses n'ont pas encore donné. Un jour, ces forces écraseront l'ennemi. Il faut que la France, ce jour-là, soit présente à la victoire. Alors, elle retrouvera sa liberté et sa grandeur. Tel est mon but, mon seul but!**

**Voilà pourquoi je convie tous les Français, où qu'ils se trouvent, à s'unir à moi dans l'action, dans le sacrifice et dans l'espérance.**

**Notre patrie est en péril de mort.  
Luttons tous pour la sauver!**

**VIVE LA FRANCE !**

*J. de Gaulle*

**GENERAL DE GAULLE**

Every year, on September 15, the Battle of Britain is commemorated in many ways and in many countries. It is an occasion to recall the names of the 2,917 pilots who came from all over the world to defend freedom.

Among 'The Few' were 13 Frenchmen, flying and fighting in exile for their homeland that had fallen to the Nazi juggernaut. The 13 had joined another air force with different equipment, culture and language to conquer. These men felt abandoned, betrayed, bruised – yet they managed to transcend the mourning of defeat and turn it into hope without limits.

The die was cast on the evening of June 7, 1940: any possibility of a French counteroffensive had gone. A week later, Paris fell. On June 16, the government asked the Armée de

l'Air (French air force) to withdraw most of its units to North Africa.

Next day, Marshal Pétain addressed the nation and explained, with "a heavy heart" that the time had come to end the hostilities. Millions of French wandered the streets, in total disbelief at the situation. Anonymous voices within the air force uttered the unthinkable, the treasonable: they wanted to continue the fight. There was only one possible place: England.

### EXODUS

With the instruction to retreat to North Africa on June 16, many men made their minds up. Jean Demozay, an Armée de l'Air interpreter attached to the RAF's 1 Squadron at Château Bougon airfield, Nantes, helped British ground crew patch up a Bristol





**“Anonymous voices within the air force uttered the unthinkable, the treasonable: they wanted to continue the fight. There was only one possible place: England”**



Bombay transport. That evening, he wrote to his mother: “My squadron leaves for England and I am with them. So do not worry if you do not hear from me for a while...”

On the 17th, the last operational Hurricane Is of 1 Squadron departed Château Bougon at 11:45 hours. Demozay was given a rudimentary briefing on the Bombay and a mechanic helped

him start the engines. On board were 16 British ground crew. The big machine lumbered forward, its undercarriage squeaking, the fuselage moaning under the load, then nothing – Demozay and his passengers had left French soil.

He touched down at Tangmere, on the Sussex coast, where fellow pilots called him ‘Moses’, having brought off the impossible and escaped. Several of his passengers

asked if he could fly them to Sutton Bridge in Lincolnshire, so Demozay obliged and two hours later, with the help of a member of ground crew, following railways, he found his way there.

Jean Demozay had kept a secret from the air and ground crews of 1 Squadron. Until that moment of truth at the helm of the Bombay he had never before flown any kind of military aircraft.

That same day, five lieutenants took off from the southwest of France in three Caudron Simoun light aircraft and landed near Yeovil in Somerset. It was the beginning of the departure from France of hundreds of pilots to Great Britain.

Another Frenchman flown to Britain on the 17th was Général Charles de Gaulle who had been stunned and shocked by Pétain’s ‘betrayal’ of his country. He put himself forward as the leader of those who wished to fight on, the ‘Free French’. See the September *FlyPast* for details about the restoration of the Percival Q.6 that almost certainly brought the future President of France to his temporary home.

De Gaulle made a speech on

**Above**

Charles Guérin (left) and René Mouchotte in the cockpit of a Caudron Goeland during their escape from Oran, Algeria for Gibraltar. FAMILLE QUENTIN-MOUCHOTTE

**Left**

François de la Bouchère (left) with other French pilots on the SS ‘Anadyr’ leaving Gibraltar, July 7, 1940. LABOUCHÈRE (SOLANGE MARCHAL)

**Top left**

A pamphlet was circulated following de Gaulle’s second radio appeal of June 22 to rally Frenchmen to the cause. LABOUCHÈRE (SOLANGE MARCHAL)

**Bottom left**

Left to right: Cdt L Challe, Col Dumême, Sqn Ldr ‘Bull’ Halahan, Flt Lt ‘Johnny’ Walker and interpreter Jean Demozay; 1 Squadron France, spring of 1940. FAMILLE DEMOZAY

**Right**

Pierre Blaize, joined 111 Squadron in October 1940. MUSÉE DE L'ORDRE DE LA LIBÉRATION

**Below right**

Xavier de Montbron was posted to 64 Squadron on Spitfires on September 13, 1940. AUTHOR'S COLLECTION

**Below**

Hurricanes of 615 Squadron on scramble at Northolt, November 29, 1940. In the foreground is V6980 'KW-U' piloted by René Mouchotte with his wingman Georges Perrin in V7017 'KW-M' behind. VIA FAMILLE PERRIN

**THE FRENCH THIRTEEN INITIAL UNIT ALLOCATIONS**



An extraordinary photo showing 10 of the 13 'French Few' at Old Sarum, mid-August 1940. Left to right: Brière, Guerin, Choron, unknown, de Montbron, Mouchotte (squatting), Lafont, de Labouchère, Bouquillard, E Lignon (not one of The Few; he departed for Dakar, French West Africa within a few days), Fayolle and Blaize. Perrin took the photo. AUTHOR'S COLLECTION

| Name                   | Date   | Sqn | Base                  | Flying      |
|------------------------|--------|-----|-----------------------|-------------|
| Pierre Blaize          | Oct 9  | 111 | Dyce, Scotland        | Hurricane I |
| Henry Bouquillard [1]  | Sep 12 | 615 | Prestwick, Scotland   | Hurricane I |
| Yves Brière            | Sep 14 | 232 | Sumburgh, Shetlands   | Hurricane I |
| Maurice Choron         | Sep    | 64  | Leconfield, Yorks     | Spitfire I  |
| Jean Demozay           | Oct 16 | 1   | Wittering, Northants  | Hurricane I |
| Emile Fayolle          | Sep 13 | 85  | Church Fenton, Yorks  | Hurricane I |
| Charles Guerin         | Sep    | 232 | Castletown, Scotland  | Hurricane I |
| François de Labouchère | Sep 13 | 85  | Church Fenton, Yorks  | Hurricane I |
| Henri Lafont [1]       | Sep 11 | 615 | Prestwick, Scotland   | Hurricane I |
| Xavier de Montbron [2] | Sep 13 | 64  | Leconfield, Yorks     | Spitfire I  |
| René Mouchotte [1]     | Sep 11 | 615 | Prestwick, Scotland   | Hurricane I |
| Georges Perrin [1]     | Sep 11 | 615 | Prestwick, Scotland   | Hurricane I |
| Philippe de Scitivaux  | Oct 16 | 245 | Aldergrove, N Ireland | Hurricane I |

**Notes:** [1] Bouquillard, Lafont, Mouchotte and Perrin were initially sent to 245 Squadron at Aldergrove, but moved a week later to 615 Squadron. [2] Montbron was sent to 242 Squadron at Coltishall on Hurricanes on September 10, but re-mustered to 64 Squadron.



BBC radio on the 18th and another on the 22nd, and with these rallying calls, the number of exits from France increased.

**MUTINY**

Lt Pinot, who had been a mechanic to Georges Guynemer, France's highest scoring 'ace' of World War One, collected 100 cadet pilots and boarded the trawler Trébouliste at Brittany, bound for the UK. At Bayonne, a Polish unit of 70 men climbed on board the





**“Blaize and Perrin arrived just as the Royal Navy was preparing to open fire at Mers-el-Kebir, Algeria, where the French fleet had gathered”**



**Left**  
Georges Perrin, two days after his arrival at North Weald in October 1940, with the Hurricane-equipped 249 Squadron. VIA FAMILLE PERRIN

Halahan insisted that ‘Moses’ Demozay register with de Gaulle’s administration so that he could be officially incorporated into the RAF. After going to London, Demozay was sent to St Athan in South Wales to await instructions.

With the signing of the armistice on June 22 and Hitler on the streets of Paris, there were even more escapes to Britain. Among these were Sgts René Mouchotte, Charles Guerin and Henri Lafont who, along with three other comrades, took off at dawn from Oran, Algeria, in a Goéland. They were followed four hours later by Sgt Emile Fayolle and a colleague in a Simoun. Both aircraft landed safely on Gibraltar’s racecourse.

In Casablanca, Morocco, in the first days of July two ships took on Polish troops to deliver them to Gibraltar. French pilots, including Henry Bouquillard and François de La Bouchère, hitched a lift on both vessels. Also in Morocco, on July 3 Pierre Blaize, Georges Perrin and three others ‘borrowed’ the personal Goéland of the base commander of Meknes and flew to Gibraltar.

Blaize and Perrin arrived just as the Royal Navy was preparing to open fire at Mers-el-Kebir, Algeria, where the French fleet had gathered. The immobilization of the French warships and the deaths of nearly 1,300 French naval personnel cooled and confused relations with Britain.

A convoy of ships set sail out of Gibraltar on July 7. Among the French personnel on board were ten of the 13 pilots destined to fight in the Battle of Britain: Pierre Blaize, Yves Brière, Henry Bouquillard, Charles Guerin, Emile Fayolle, François de La Bouchère, Henri Lafont, René Mouchotte, Georges Perrin and Philippe de Scitivaux. Jean Demozay was already in England, Xavier Montbron arrived on June 27 aboard the *Arandora Star* and Maurice Choron disembarked from the *Apapa*, on July 8. The convoy from Gibraltar arrived in Britain on the 15th.

### TRAINING FOR ACTION

On July 8, 1940 de Gaulle’s very small air force received its official name; the Free French Air Forces (FFAF) and was officially approved on August 7. Its pilots were the only ones of the European allied nations permitted to wear their own uniforms while serving within the RAF.

Numbering just in excess of

*Président Houdouce*, a fishing vessel converted to hunt submarines; it was routing to French Morocco.

Also embarking was French Navy pilot Lt Philippe de Scitivaux, who had shot down a Junkers Ju 52 on May 10 off the coast of Holland, but was badly wounded and hospitalised. He was determined to re-enter the fight.

With *Président Houdouce* on the high seas, de Scitivaux, another colleague and the Poles agreed that Morocco was not the best way to get back into the war. They staged a mutiny and forced the captain to sail to the British colony at Gibraltar.

A Caudron Goéland twin-engined transport, piloted by Sgt Didier Béguin, landed at Toulouse-Franczal on June 21. Béguin was approached by other five pilots and the following day, all flew to England.

At Saint Jean de Luz, near the Spanish border, the merchantmen *Kelso* and the ill-fated *Arandora Star* arrived to embark more Poles and some French pilots; among them, Xavier de Montbron. It was the same story in the French Mediterranean ports; the *Apapa*

slipped out of Port-Vendres full of Polish personnel but also carrying Belgian and French pilots, among them Maurice Choron.

### FROM ALL QUARTERS

After de Gaulle’s second radio broadcast, a recruiting office was opened at St Stephens House in London on June 23. Four days later, Winston Churchill announced that: “The British government recognizes General de Gaulle as leader in this country of all Free French wherever they are, who join him to support the Allied cause.” By early July the Cross of Lorraine had been adopted as the emblem of Free France.

At Sutton Bridge, Jean Demozay had made a friend in former 1 Squadron pilot, ‘Billy’ Drake, who had become an instructor at the resident 6 Operational Training Unit (OTU). Drake had another friend, Wg Cdr Patrick ‘Bull’ Halahan, CO of 5 OTU at Aston Down in Gloucestershire. Borrowing some money, Demozay travelled to Gloucestershire to begin training, under the tuition of another 1 Squadron veteran, Peter ‘Boy’ Mould.

400 personnel – pilots, cadet pilots, navigators, mechanics and other specialists – the men of the FFAF were gathered at St Athan. Pilots were allocated to OTUs and some of the first to qualify were assembled at Odiham, Hampshire, along with Belgian flyers, on August 7. Many of the French brought to Odiham were destined for combat in North Africa.

Another group was sent to 1 School of Army Co-operation at



**Above**  
Pierre Blaize (left) visiting Georges Perrin at 249 Squadron, North Weald. FAMILLE PERRIN

**Above right**  
Pilots of 85 Squadron celebrating the return of the popular CO Sqn Ldr Peter Townsend (under the spinner). Two Free French pilots flank Townsend, Emile Fayolle in French uniform and François de la Bouchère with the helmet. VIA SOLANGE MARCHAL

Old Sarum, Wiltshire, for intensive training, which was completed on August 10. After this they awaited assignment to an OTU. All the while the Battle of Britain was raging and pilot losses were mounting. To overcome the pilot shortage, OTU training was reduced from four weeks to two.

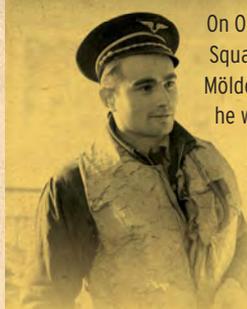
After his false start, the first of the 13 to go to the OTU was 'Moses' Demozay. He arrived at Aston Down on August 5 and again found his friends 'Bull' Halahan and 'Boy' Mould. He was the only French pilot to experience the four-week course.

On the 23rd, Blaize, Bouquillard, Brière, Fayolle, Guerin and Labouchère were assigned to 5 OTU and were declared operational on September 7. Choron, Lafont, Montbron, Mouchotte and Perrin began training on the 24th at 6 OTU, Sutton Bridge, becoming operational on September 9. Béguin and de Scitivaux also attended 6 OTU and were deemed operational on October 13 and 15, respectively.

### INTO THE FRAY

In the first days of September 1940 the first postings of FFAF pilots to operational Fighter Command

### SHOT DOWN BY AN ACE

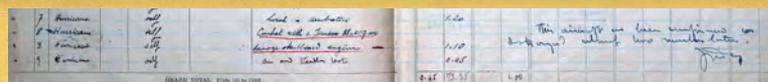


On October 12, 1940 while flying Hurricane I V7313 'GN-F' of 249 Squadron, Georges Perrin was shot down by Luftwaffe ace Werner Mölders. He baled out and spent some time in the Channel before he was rescued.

Hurricane V7313 first entered service with 56 Squadron as 'US-F' at North Weald in July 1940, before transferring to 249. On April 19, 2009 a full-scale model of V7313 in its 56 Squadron colours was unveiled at the main entrance to North Weald to act as a 'gate guardian'. VIA FAMILLE PERRIN



### LOGBOOK CONFIRMATION



Jean Demozay's logbook for November 8, 1940. On the left page he wrote that he damaged the right engine of a Ju 88, while on the right 1 Squadron CO Sqn Ldr Mark 'Hilly' Brown jotted that the 'kill' had been confirmed about two months later. The Ju 88, from III/KG 1 turned around and managed to force land on the Dutch coast. VIA FAMILLE DEMOZAY

units began – see page 44. First into action was Choron, who flew his initial 'op' on September 16, scrambling in Spitfire I R6975 with two other pilots of 64 Squadron from Leconfield, Yorkshire, for an inconclusive patrol.

On the last day of the month, Bouquillard and Perrin left 615 Squadron at Prestwick in Scotland for North Weald, Essex and joined 249 Squadron where action was 'guaranteed'. Another heading south was de Montbron, who left 64 Squadron for 92 Squadron at the famous Biggin Hill in Kent on October 2.

Six Hurricanes of 249 Squadron were surprised by Messerschmitt Bf 109s of Jagdgeschwader 51 (JG 51) just before 10am on October 12. Commanding JG 52 was Werner

Mölders who claimed his 46th victory in the encounter: Georges Perrin who baled out of V7313, wounded. He was transferred back to 615 Squadron on November 25.

Béguin and de Scitivaux arrived at Aldergrove in Northern Ireland on October 16, joining 245 Squadron, which was charged with the defence of Belfast. The Battle of Britain officially began on July 10 and finished on October 31: Béguin's first 'op' did not take place until November 4, so he is not classified as one of 'The Few'.

### 'FRIENDLY' FIRE

At North Weald, the pilots of 249 Squadron had a nickname for the 32-year-old Henry Bouquillard, he was 'Papa'. His age was no handicap for on October 16 he became the first FFAF pilot to



**“All the while the Battle of Britain was raging and pilot losses were mounting. To overcome the pilot shortage, OTU training was reduced from four to two weeks”**



### FINAL VICTORIES

On the last day of October, Blaize flew his first operational sortie, with 111 Squadron out of Dyce in Scotland. Next day, Choron of 64 Squadron in Spitfire P9556 claimed a twin-engined He 115 floatplane as a ‘probable’. Also on November 1, de Montbron shared a Bf 109 with two others pilots of 92 Squadron. This is considered to be the first confirmed victory for the FFAF.

On November 8, Jean ‘Moses’ Demozay took off in Hurricane L1934 and over Sutton Bridge spotted an aircraft coming in from the sea. He recognised a Junkers Ju 88 and shot at it. Being a pessimist, he declared it as ‘damaged’, but two months later it was upheld as confirmed. (The Ju 88 was from III/KG 1.) The day after, de Montbron also claimed a Ju 88 (this one from 2/KG 77) and shared it with another pilot.

Flying Spitfire R6769, Choron, in collaboration with two other pilots of 64 Squadron, shot down a Do 17Z on December 21. This was the last victory of a momentous year for the Free French pilots.

At the end of 1940 there were 15 French fighter pilots in frontline RAF units, 13 of them had participated in the Battle of Britain. With the Belgians having fielded 30-plus pilots, the Czechs over 90 and the Poles over 150, France’s 13 seems a small contribution.

But these pilots wrote the first glorious chapter of the FFAF. As author Gaston Levy-Tilley has written: “These Free French were not many but the trace they have left is immense.” ●

**Above**  
After a long sortie on October 18, 1940 ‘Papa’ Bouquillard belly landed 249 Squadron Hurricane I P5206 when it ran out of fuel. GEORGES PERRIN VIA ERIC SEGONNE

**Left**  
An atmospheric photo taken by Henry Bouquillard with Georges Perrin (standing, centre) in 249 Squadron’s hut, October 1940 at North Weald. VIA ERIC SEGONNE

claim a German aircraft during the Battle of Britain. Shared with Flt Lt Lofts, Dornier Do 17 ‘U5+CC’ of Kampfgeschwader 2 (KG2) was at first only credited as a ‘damaged’ but was upgraded to a ‘probable’.

Two days later, Bouquillard was in trouble. After a long sortie, he had to belly land Hurricane P5206, which had run out of fuel. On October 19 Mouchotte did likewise when his 615 Squadron Hurricane suffered an undercarriage problem.

A little before noon on October 25 Bouquillard, flying V7409 at 23,000ft (7,000m), spotted yellow-nosed Bf 109s 10,000ft below, climbing to engage the Hurricanes of 46 and 249 Squadrons. Bouquillard saw a lone fighter coming up towards him. He was ready to fire, but at the last moment he clearly recognised roundels on its wings.

Believing it to be a ‘friendly’,

Papa turned to port – the usual procedure – thinking the aircraft would follow him, but instead he received a two bursts of fire. Seriously wounded in his left thigh and left arm, Bouquillard made a safe landing at Rochester in northern Kent.

From the hospital in Chatham, he wrote to his CO: “I saw clearly the aircraft that attacked me, having approached to 30m, this is not an Me 109 or a Heinkel 113. I am almost certain that this is a Dewoitine D.520 on which the French roundels were made up.”

[The Frenchman had made a mistake with ‘Heinkel 113’, he may have meant an He 112 which were widely believed to have taken part in the Battle of Britain, but did not do so – ED.] Bouquillard was ready to fly again on December 4, with 615 Squadron, by then based at Northolt, Middlesex.