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The Forgotten Air Force: French Air Doctrine in the 1930s
(review)

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The Journal of Military History, Volume 67, Number 1, January 2003, pp.
264-265 (Review)

Published by Society for Military History

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/jmh.2003.0090>



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The Forgotten Air Force: French Air Doctrine in the 1930s. By Anthony Christopher Cain. Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2002. ISBN 1-58834-010-4. Maps. Photographs. Illustrations. Notes. Bibliography. Index. Pp. xvi, 214. \$34.95.

Although a new book, this has a tradition of sorts, a tradition to which the reviewer has made a small contribution. Anthony Cain and I agree on matters broad and specific; and therefore readers should know that my satisfaction with his work may reflect a measure of self-accord. So much for admission.

This satisfaction has other sources of inspiration. First, the prose is clear. Second, much use is made of the French air archives, in particular the air arm's own, almost immediate, analyses of its failures during the campaign of 1939–40. Third, this book uses narrative for analytical purpose—rather than settling for the lesser accomplishment of salting narrative with grains of analysis. Fourth, Cain understands that historians are not magistrates, and that even failure—especially on the scale of the French collapse—warrants explanations which surpass the simplistic. It is not good enough, he says, to walk away from such *débâcles* with imprecations of stupidity, spinelessness, or treason. Fifth, and more specifically, his inquiry addresses the ways this arm contributed to—not caused—the defeat, and the reasons why it was inadequately prepared for the war that came its way in 1940.

Those reasons are complex, doubly so given their inter-relatedness. Boasting the largest air force in Europe in 1920, those in its service entered the postwar period with great ambitions, ambitions for the role air power would play in subsequent conflicts, ambitions for the stature of the air force vis-à-vis the army and navy. Those ambitions, however, were scotched in the years that followed. It took more than a decade for it to become a separate service, even nominally independent of the army, and at no point was it free to implement the doctrine it favored. While strategic bombing seemed to airmen the best way of fighting an industrialized enemy—as well as of defending its autonomy from the other services—they never escaped the army's expectation that their first priority would be the ground war. It was this tension between ambition and expectation that led to the mid-1930s experiment with the *avion à tout faire*, a plane that aspired to be strategic bomber, fighter, and close-support weapon. Unsurprisingly, it did not work.

Directed by a doctrine that accommodated opposing impulses, and equipped with a resulting, hybrid aircraft, this air force then ran into a host of escalating training problems, failed maneuvers, mobilization troubles and, in 1940, operational failures. All of this Dr. Cain explores: the historical experiences of World War One and the Rif war of the 1920s; the inter-service rivalries; the constant interplay of technology, fabrication, training, and logistical support; the attendant evolution of doctrine; ultimately the trick of having an arm at its peak precisely at the moment of greatest need. As an

“old” airman, and a “new” scholar, Anthony Cain has served this air force well, and this profession.

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Douglas Southall Freeman. By David E. Johnson. Gretna, La.: Pelican Publishing, 2002. ISBN 1-58980-021-4. Photographs. Illustrations. Appendixes. Notes. Bibliography. Index. Pp. 476. \$27.50.

Douglas Southall Freeman was one of the preeminent military historians of the twentieth century. His main works, *R. E. Lee* and *Lee's Lieutenants*, have never been out of print. So thorough was his research that these magisterial volumes have become the standard history of the Army of Northern Virginia. Although other biographers have chronicled Lee's life since Freeman, they all stand in the shadow of the master. Likewise, many books have been written about the campaigns in the Eastern Theater, but every author has found that Freeman had already covered the ground. He made his living, however, as a journalist, putting in a full workday editing the *Richmond News Leader* for over thirty years. During World War I, his editorials analyzing the war in Europe were so thorough that President Woodrow Wilson read them as a source of intelligence. He became famous in World War II by describing the campaigns of the European and Pacific Theaters by drawing on parallels to Lee's Civil War campaigns, and overlaying the terrain of France or the Philippines on Virginia to assist his readers in understanding complex military operations. He kept company with great commanders who valued his prodigious knowledge of warfare: Nimitz, Churchill, Eisenhower, MacArthur, and Marshall.

How did Freeman accomplish so much in one lifetime? As author David E. Johnson so thoroughly illustrates, he lived a dual life by becoming a master of time management through an exercise of enormous self-discipline, making maximum use of what Freeman called “the economy of small idle time.” Everything in his life had its precise place in the day for concentration: rising, eating, work, gardening, family time, reading and study, sleeping. This well-regulated life had its costs, and Johnson examines how those closest to Freeman often paid those costs more heavily than he did. This book greatly benefits from previously unavailable family material that reveals the personal side of this exceptional man. By concentrating on Freeman's literary life, Johnson has provided military historians with a number of valuable insights into Freeman's historical method and approach. Johnson allows the reader to observe the creation in progress, observing how Freeman used sources, made judgments, and crafted his prose. Johnson's narrative skills make this experience both fascinating and satisfying. This solid, well-researched, and engaging biography reveals Freeman as he himself would have wished to be seen. Johnson is content to remain within that