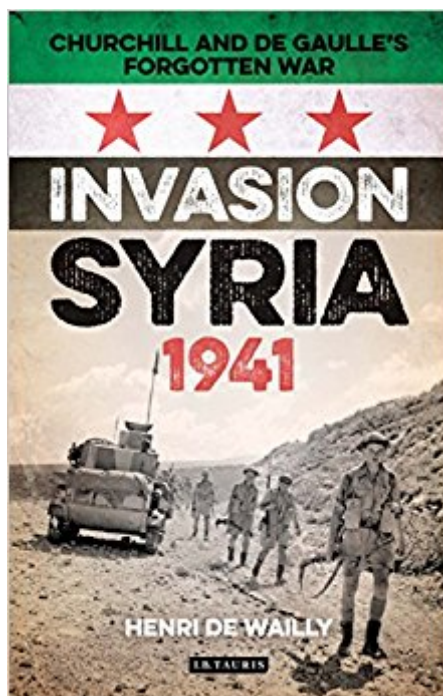


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Invasion Syria, 1941: Churchill And De Gaulle's Forgotten War



Synopsis

At the height of World War II, while the Germans were setting their sights on Moscow, Free French, British and Australian forces launched an assault on the Vichy French army in the Middle East on 8th June 1941. This joint initiative of Churchill and de Gaulle – codenamed “Operation Exporter” – led to one of the most shocking conflicts of World War II. Was this an attempt by the Allied forces to cause mass desertions from the Vichy forces to the Free French? Or were Churchill and de Gaulle motivated to reassert their respective control of the Middle East? The fight caused the loss of 10,000 lives, numerous ships and an estimated 200 aircraft. The Australian forces, under the command of Lieutenant General John Lavarack, carried out the bulk of the fighting and suffered the most casualties. The Vichy Army was overcome, but even during the bitter campaign, the Free French airmen refused to fire on their Vichy compatriots. Henri de Wailly here presents the story of this extraordinary campaign by the British, Australian and Free French forces against Vichy French forces in Syria and Lebanon, the true extent of which has largely been forgotten.

Book Information

Hardcover: 544 pages

Publisher: I.B.Tauris; Sew edition (April 18, 2016)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 1784534498

ISBN-13: 978-1784534493

Product Dimensions: 5.5 x 1.4 x 8.6 inches

Shipping Weight: 1.6 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.6 out of 5 stars 5 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #819,687 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #104 in Books > History > Middle East > Syria #301 in Books > History > Australia & Oceania > Australia & New Zealand #1808 in Books > History > Europe > France

Customer Reviews

Henri de Wailly teaches at the Saint Cyr French National Military Academy. A specialist in military history, he has written several books in French including 1945 l'empire rompu : Syrie, Algérie, Indochine and Liban, Syrie : le mandat : 1919-1940. William Land holds a PhD from the University of Sydney. A retired reserve group captain of the Royal Australian Air Force, he was awarded Officier of the Légion d'honneur in 2015.

Very good read on a side of WWII that is seldom covered in most histories. Lots of information on the composition of the French Army in Syria at the time. The book also explains that the Free French were very far from universally respected by most Frenchmen at the time. Goes into some detail about the various factions within the French Army that would divide it in its next two Wars. The book did take a little time to get to the actual "war" part of the story, but good read none the less.

Invasion Syria, 1941 by French military historian Henri de Wailly is an in depth study into a forgotten chapter in WWII: the battle for the control of Syria by British forces and their Free French allies. A sideshow among the battles raging in Europe and North Africa, the 1941 battle for Syria represented confluence of several competing interests: Nazi Germany's interest in destabilizing the Middle East to undermine British military dominance and influence; Vichy France's effort to maintain control in Syria to validate its existence as an independent French power; Charles de Gaulle's very persistent efforts to establish Free French control and legitimacy in Syria to counter both Vichy France and British influence; and last, but not least, the nascent Arab independence movement that sought a Middle East free of French and British dominance. In the end, Britain solidified its hold on the Middle East by defeating Vichy France in Syria and thwarting Nazi Germany's ambition to undermine the Allied war effort. Although de Wailly is a writer of military history and describes in detail the June - July 1941 military campaign, he puts the campaign into its strategic and political context, thus providing an important document on the political intrigues and maneuvering among the various participants. For Charles de Gaulle, the Syrian conflict was an opportunity to gain recognition for his claims that he represented a truly free and independent France. De Wailly also delves into the dynamics of Vichy France and its dependent status with Nazi Germany, while Vichy worked to assert its tenuous and illusionary independence. He also offers a rare French perspective on the role of both Vichy and Free France during the Syrian conflict. This brief but nasty military conflict put France in "a state of civil war" which is little known outside France. American readers will find this book a window into an aspect of WWII rarely described in most historical WWII studies. Reviewed by Richard Morelli. I received a free advanced reader's copy of this book from the publisher and was under no obligation to grant it a favorable review. My full review can be found at MyShelf.com at: [...]

This book describes a campaign that no one has an interest in remembering. After the defeat of France in 1940, the rump state of Vichy France could only continue to exist if it satisfied its German overlords. Vichy was allowed to maintain armed forces and its colonial presence so long as it

defended itself against all powers. Vichy had a substantial presence in Syria. Churchill insisted on a campaign to capture Syria, although his military advisors opposed it believing their forces should be concentrated in Libya. Churchill retained colonial dreams and probably thought the campaign would be a walk over. De Gaulle also favoured attacking, although his "Free French" had little to offer. He hoped to establish himself in Syria and absorb the French Forces in Syria. Nothing went as expected with the local French Forces obeying their superiors in Vichy and fighting a brave, but hopeless battle. Few of the survivors joined DeGualle. The aftermath saw the British and DeGualle squabbling over the graves of victims of a pointless war. The author has done an excellent job of covering the political and military aspects of a campaign that should never have been.

A very documented approach - although predominantly using strategy and warfare details - of a relatively less or almost unknown episode from the WWII. As in many cases when it comes to the more or less recent history of the Middle East, there are a lot of information we are missing and which can offer better insights for understanding the current situation. A recommended read to anyone with an interest in the Middle Eastern history and particularly the WWII evolutions in this part of the world. Disclaimer: Book offered by the publisher in exchange for an honest review

I only wish to add that the book includes much about the political reasons for the behavior of the participants, helping the reader understand the motivations for what in retrospect seem several questionable decisions. What I had hoped the book would have and it does not are maps and a more detailed account of the battle. A must for anyone interested in World War II in the Mediterranean or Vichy and the French.

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