

French Communist Ministers

LED STRUGGLES IN PARIS

FERNAND GRENIER, new French Commissioner for Air, was born in the industrial north of France in 1901.

He became a national figure when he took over the General Secretaryship of the French Society of Friends of the U.S.S.R. This he built into a body whose influence was felt in every walk of French life.

In 1937, he defeated the renegade Communist Jacques Doriot in the by-election of the century in the constituency held by Doriot for many years—St. Denis, great industrial suburb of Paris.

At the outbreak of war, most of the Communist deputies were arrested at the first session of the Chamber, but Grenier, in the Army, momentarily escaped.

At the next session, he arrived in uniform and protested at the arrests. He was assaulted and thrown out, but again escaped arrest. Demobilised when France fell, he was arrested in October, 1940, and handed over to the Gestapo.

He escaped from Chateaubriant prison camp the day before the massacre of 50 hostages—June 19, 1941.

From then until January, 1943, he worked in Paris with the resistance movement.

Then he was sent to Britain as a delegate from the Communist Party of France to the National Committee of Fighting France in London.

A month ago Grenier turned the tables on Pucheu, executioner of his comrades at Chateaubriant. He tore to shreds the defence of the man who had tried to kill him.

Those who know Fernand Grenier are confident that his ability, courage and tact equip him admirably for the difficult job that he has undertaken.

M. Grenier will be succeeded by M. Joanny Berlioz, also a former Deputy for the Seine, in the capacity of delegate of the Communist Party.

M. Billoux will be succeeded in the French Consultative Assembly by M. Etienne Fajon, former Communist Deputy for the Seine Department, in the capacity of Parliamentary delegate.

FAMOUS YOUTH LEADER

FRANCOIS BILLOUX, Commissioner of State in the French Committee of National Liberation, is not yet 41, but he has spent nearly 27 years in the French working-class movement.

At 16, he joined a trade union, and when 19 joined the Socialist Party. In 1920,



although still only in his 16th year, he was secretary of the Socialist Youth in the town of Roanne when it decided to affiliate to the Young Communist International.

From then until 1930 he was one of the best-known leaders of the French Young Communist League and was general secretary from 1928 to 1930.

A foundation member of the Communist Party, he rapidly rose to the most responsible posts, being elected in 1926 to the Central Committee, of which he has been continuously a member ever since.

In the Parliamentary triumph of the Popular Front in 1936, when the Communists won 72 seats in the Chamber of Deputies, Billoux secured a great victory in Marseilles, where he had been for two years the regional secretary of the party.

He was arrested by the Daladier Government and put on trial with other Communist Deputies in October, 1939, and imprisoned in France and Africa until February, 1943. It was not his first experience of persecution, as he was sentenced to long terms of imprisonment for political offences in 1928 and 1929. He had to go "underground" for three years until amnestied.

In Algiers he has played an outstanding role in the work of the group of Communist Deputies, of which he was secretary.

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This is France's African Army



SPAHI

GENERAL GIRAUD, French Commander-in-Chief and recently appointed successor to Admiral Darlan as High Commissioner in North Africa, when asked last week in an interview the approximate strength of the French Army he contemplated placing on a war footing, replied: "300,000 men."

This is regarded by French experts in London on African military questions as a very moderate estimate.

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The French Colonial Empire, and notably North Africa, has for long been looked upon as a vast reservoir for Army effectives by the French General Staff. Most of the latter have had long years of service in the colonies. General Giraud and General Catroux, who rallied to De Gaulle in 1940, are former collaborators of Marshal Lyautey, the founder of French Morocco, and both were responsible for the final and successful pacification of Southern Morocco a few years before the war. During the Riff campaign General, then Colonel, Giraud commanded the 14th Regiment of Turcos and it was to him that Abd El Krim surrendered.

For the last hundred years or so the North African Army, or "Armée d'Afrique," has taken its full share of military glory wherever France had to fight. Three generations of Frenchmen have seen soldiers from Algeria, from Tunis and Morocco, defend France—with courage and loyalty—against German invasion.

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The Armée d'Afrique does not confine its activity to colonial warfare nor is it recruited solely among the Arabs. It is based on conscription and part of it has, almost from the beginning, been stationed in France.

So, just as Algerian territory is not a colony but part of France, the Armée d'Afrique is an extension in Africa of the French Metropolitan Army.

Colonial troops—the divisions commanded by General Mangin, for example—proved to be such wonderful fighters on European battlefields and did so well during the last war that M. Georges Mendel, Minister of Colonies when the present war broke out, worked out a plan with the General Staff for raising no fewer than 600,000 colonial soldiers, most of whom were to come from Africa.

In Africa, the French will soon have a fine Army of at least 300,000 men. France is proud of her African Army.

Three generations of Frenchmen have seen soldiers from Africa die for France on French soil. These are things no Frenchman can forget.

Many regiments of picked colonial troops were on the front in 1940 when the French military debacle occurred, and, according to military experts, they had not been used properly. Although badly equipped and hopelessly outnumbered they fought as well as ever, the Spahis, on their horses, charging German tanks near Abbeville.

The Zouaves, the "Tirailleurs" or Turcos, the Chasseurs d'Afrique and the Spahis are known all over the world. With their baggy red or light blue trousers, tight embroidered coats and red chechias, the Zouaves and the Turcos have, in a way, won the same place in the French Army, owing to the picturesqueness of their dress and to their fighting qualities, as Highland regiments in Britain.

The Zouaves (infantry) and the Chasseurs d'Afrique (cavalry) are entirely composed of French settlers and of a few Frenchmen from France.

The Turcos (infantry) and the Spahis (cavalry) are Arab regiments. Their officers and N.C.O.s are mainly French, but they have also Arab officers and N.C.O.s, who enjoy, in every respect, the same privileges as their French colleagues.

The Spahis are among the finest horsemen in the world and mean to the Russians. They have the same peculiar tradition as the Cossacks of standing upright in their stirrups when they are on parade. When the King and Queen went on a State visit to Paris in July, 1938, they were given an escort of Republican Guards and of Spahis.

Following the Armistice, and under its terms, the French Army of North Africa was considerably reduced in size to an official figure of 100,000, which the Germans later raised to 120,000.

But, as several senior French officers who came here from North Africa lately, put it:

"Our wonderful North African Army was reduced *officially* but not always in fact. There were many easy means of camouflaging men and material and the Army chiefs did not fail to take advantage of them. For instance, men were needed for the building of the Trans-Saharan railway; and Youth Labour Camps, which were full of young soldiers, continued their training on the quiet by various means.

"When our Disarmament Commission was making inspection tours in Germany after the last war, they never came across any arms and ammunition dumps; the German troops were no longer in their barracks.

Well, we have done the same thing. The south of Morocco and Algeria are very big, and matters were so arranged that the German and Italian Armistice Commission always found everything in order!"

Thus when General Giraud arrived with the Allied Expeditionary Corps on November 8 he found a French Army. True it was small in size, but there were large reserves ready to be called on when equipment and proper modern arms arrived for them from England and America.

Here is an idea of the position of the army in North Africa at the time:

Morocco.—The Germans, who feared an Allied attack or landing in Morocco more than anywhere else in North Africa, favoured a strong defence and let Vichy concentrate there four divisions of between 13,000 and 14,000 men each.

They were composed of Tirailleurs which include 75 per cent of native troops; men of the Foreign Legion, Zouaves, Chasseurs d'Afrique and Moroccan Spahis (both cavalry) and one field regiment (or two reduced regiments) of artillery.

The Zouaves and the Legionnaires were the only purely white troops. The officers and most of the N.C.O.s in the native regiments were white men.

There were two regiments of the Foreign Legion, whose headquarters are at Sidi-Bel-Abbès (Algeria), two regiments of Zouaves, six or seven regiments of Moroccan Spahis and Chasseurs d'Afrique and two regiments of anti-aircraft service. Altogether 12 regiments of infantry and 8 regiments of cavalry.

The troops were stationed at various important centres (Rabat, some 6,000 at Casablanca, Fez), near ports and at a great many posts in the centre and south of the country.

Of the Air Force, all that was left officially was: Two groups of bombers, one group of fighters and one reconnaissance group. Each group was composed of two or three squadrons. The tanks were very few and old types of machines.

Algeria.—Situating in the centre of North Africa, Algeria appeared less dangerous to the Germans, who allowed only three divisions of between 12,000 and 13,000 men each.

Their composition was about

the same as those stationed in Morocco. Their principal quarters were at Algiers, Oran and Constantine. There were also numerous posts, some very important ones, in the south of the country, where camouflage was extremely easy.

A few aviation groups were dispersed on various aerodromes and there was one group of about 50 old tanks at Oran.

Tunisia.—The fortifications—the Tunisian Maginot Line, as it was called—on the borders of Tripoli having been practically dismantled and rendered useless after the Armistice (the Italian Commission saw to that) the Axis considered that Tunisia needed very little defence, and in consequence Vichy was allowed to keep only one small division of 12,000 men in the country.

At Bizerta there was only one regiment of colonial infantry, no tanks and a few planes.

Dakar.—The effectives in June last were: Army and Navy, a total of 60,000 men. The land forces were composed of native troops with French officers and N.C.O.s. The Air Force had 80 fighters and 80 bombers. But since that date some planes

were sent to Dakar from Africa.

With regard to the Air Force possibilities in North Africa, I was told by French experts here that a great many young French airmen were there, all extremely well trained and anxious to resist the fight against the haughty Boches.

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"I have quite recently a British and American officer who have returned from North Africa," one French expert told me. "They were all full of praise and admiration for a remarkable technique of French boys who, although they have been using only old types of machines dating from early days of the war, are to master the most up-to-date British and American plane no time. This is because of a kind of personal initiative left to the men during their early training. This spirit of initiative produces fruitful fighting."

"We assume that the equipment of our French airmen in North Africa—we might perhaps count them by thousands—be one of the first tasks of British and American Allies."



"TIRAILLEUR"



Foreign Legion



Senegalese



Zouave

Henry Storr