



Airshow



CAF French Wing

Monthly Newsletter - Bulletin Mensuel

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EDITORIAL

This is a very special issue of our bulletin (and very late too!). Airsho 2005, because of its importance, deserves to be the star of the show this month. You will learn all about the way it went, and the French Wing members who took part in it, by reading the modest report I made of it.

This report is followed by one of the biggest articles ever written by col. John P. Roeder, and translated by col. Michel Perrin, within the series dedicated to the "American Airplanes in French Colors". It concerns the A-26 Invader.

This series of exceptional articles is coming to an end, unfortunately, but we are preparing another one to take over. It will certainly be very difficult to reach the same level of perfection, but we will do our best. For those who might be interested, we will soon group all these articles on a single CD Rom which will be sold by our PX to our members and friends. This will facilitate their research for a particular plane without having to fan through their collection of printed Newsletters. A publication on paper may be possible in the future for those who don't have a computer, but the cost will be a lot higher than a CD Rom.

You will also find in this issue the list of members of the French Wing who have received a CAF Award in 2005. These exceptional distinctions reward extraordinary initiatives. Therefore, I wish to personally thank these members for the help they have brought to the success of our organisation in 2005. All these Awards represent a sum of work and time that is way above the normal duties of any CAF member and are as many brilliant demonstrations of pure generosity from these members of our Association.

Bernard

AIRSHO 2005 60th ANNIVERSARY OF THE END OF WORLD WAR TWO



TAKING ADVANTAGE OF AN EXCEPTIONALLY GOOD WEATHER, AIRSHO 2005 HAS BEEN A GREAT SUCCESS, ONE OF THE GREATEST SINCE THE CAF MOVED TO MIDLAND.

A BIG THANK YOU TO THE AIRSHO CHAIRMAN, TO ALL VOLUNTEERS, AND TO ALL SPONSORS OF THIS ANNUAL EVENT!

CAF FRENCH WING GENERAL ASSEMBLY ON NOVEMBER 19, 2005: IF NOT ALREADY DONE, SEND IN YOUR FORMS AND YOUR PAYMENT FOR THE DINER AS SOON AS POSSIBLE!



CAF AIRSHO 2005

An article by Bernard Delfino

Photo: B. Delfino

Each trip to Texas by members of the French Wing has a particularity that makes it memorable. 2005 has followed the same rule, especially for col. Jean-Claude Miniggio, Fumiko and myself. Read on...

Having left Paris on Wednesday, September 21, we had to live through an 11 hours flight in a full Boeing 777, which stopped us from sleeping more than 2 or 3 hours.

Arriving in Houston, no information was given to us about the imminent evacuation of the area, in preparation for the arrival of hurricane RITA, similar to its murderous predecessor KATRINA which had wiped out the city of New Orleans some time before (*Photo on the right*).

So, ready to visit the *NASA Space Center* and the *Lone Star Flight Museum* in Galveston, we got on the road with our rental car.

The traffic was not worse than usual, except for the number of cars going North, which we considered as being the end of the day's office time...

Alas, after about 15 miles, as we were approaching NASA, it became evident that all hotels and shops had been closed down and deserted. We stopped at the NASA La Quinta hotel and questioned the manager. He made us clearly understand how serious the situation was. Following the advice of this kind gentleman, we decided to change our plans and go directly to New Braunfels where col. Sandy Sansing was expecting us on Saturday 24.



Katrina arriving over New Orleans. It is the very same and terrifying spectacle that we were expecting while we were hoping for an hypothetical gasoline supply...

Photo: Internet via Barbara Hair

After a quick dinner in a restaurant that was delivering its last meals before closing down, we started driving towards the West and were immediately engulfed in the worst traffic jam one has ever seen, so bad that it made the worst Paris traffic jams look like a charming joke!...

Driving our vehicle became a school of patience that no one can imagine, even the most experimented drivers: Bumper against bumper, hundreds of thousands of cars and trucks were escaping West and North to get as far away as possible from Houston where RITA was supposed to strike 48 hours later. With a strength of 5 on the scale, winds as high as 250 mph, and torrential rains, RITA would be at least as devastating as KATRINA.

Taking turns at the wheel, we drove night and day at a maximum speed of 3 Mph (!), and just managed to get to

the Houston - San Antonio Highway, I10, at Sealy, where we were hoping to find some food, water, and gasoline. Alas, all fuel stations had ran out of gasoline, and a call for help to the local Sheriff turned out to be a failure because his own car had also ran dry!



Photo: J.-C. Miniggio

A long wait started for a hypothetical gas supply (*Above*)... Our situation wasn't dramatic of course, but it was very uncomfortable because food and water had started to be come very scarce in the local shops. The impossibility to wash, when the ambient temperature was as

high as 95 F°, even during the night, was the major inconvenience which made the situation unpleasant.

Powerless, we watched, during the long night hours, the continuous flow of vehicles whose forewarned owners had taken along some extra supply of fuel.

It was over 24 hours later that, around 5 in the morning, we noticed that a long queue of cars had started to form in the direction of a nearby Shell gas station. The Sheriff advised us to get in line as soon as possible.



Photo: B. Delfino

We waited for one hour in this long queue, and our patience was finally rewarded by the allocation of \$40.00 worth of the precious fluid.

We immediately got back on the road in the direction of New Braunfels, distant of about 200 miles, and we reached Sandy's residence early in the afternoon, three days after we had departed from Paris, and we were able to enjoy a shower and some well-deserved rest!

Although he did not show it, our dear Sandy was very worried about us, and our appearance 24 hours earlier than expected reassured him fully. He made



Photo: B. Delfino

a few phone calls to tell all our dear friends, who were also very worried and wondering where the hell we could be, that we were safe and in good shape.

These demonstrations of sympathy went straight to our hearts and immediately turned these three days of struggling into a warm memory and one of the key points of our trip.

Our stay at Sandy's soon gave us the rest and well-being that we had dreamed about during our short periods of uncomfortable sleep in our car. Sandy

made sure that Jean-Claude, who was in Texas for the very first time in his life, saw the hangar and the planes of the Central Texas Wing in San Marcos.

Jean-Claude was able to sit in the B-25 Yellow Rose and the P-39 Airacobra (Top right). His comments while he was sitting there,

revealed how deeply he was realizing the difficulty of the task of these WWII aviators, and the risks they were taking every day, and the difficulty of the mechanics' work who were maintaining these aircraft in the worst climatic conditions, often under enemy fire, and, for most of them, plagued with diseases that they still suffer from, today.

The visit of the superb Centex museum in this hangar that was built in 1943, and the richness of the items that are displayed there, were revelations that made us dream about what our own French Wing museum will look like, one day...

The day after, Sandy took us to Kingsbury, a very small town located about twenty miles South of New Braunfels. There, we met Roger Freeman, a very sympathetic WWI lover who restores airplanes of this era, and builds replicas of aircraft of the same period, better than anything you have ever seen



Photo: B. Delfino

before, in a similar way that Association Memorial Flight produces in Le Bourget (Bottom left).

This visit was a true trip through time, and Roger's enthusiasm for this far away era of the history of aviation was very communicative, to such a point that we had problems to leave. Roger's world is, today, one of the Must-see aeronautical places for any aviation and engineering technique lover.

We left New Braunfels for Midland on Tuesday 26, with a stop at the inevitable Nimitz Museum in Fredricksburg, a real master-piece that keeps on improving year after year, which I highly recommend to anyone who wants to know more about the war in the Pacific.

Like every year, our arrival was the occasion of a multitude of demonstrations of kindness from the members of the CAF which made us feel at home and went straight to our hearts. This way of welcoming us surprised Jean-Claude by its sincerity and its importance.

We spent this day visiting the exciting AAHM museum and we congratulated its members for their hard work which makes this museum one of the best in the world.

Wednesday 28 saw the arrival, by road, from Dallas, of Roy and Irene Grinnell, and col. Claude De Marco. It was then 16h45, just in time for them to drop their bags and join us to go to the airport where our friend Jacqueline Clerc was scheduled to arrive at 17h15 after a flight from Paris to Dallas and Midland.

For those who may have forgotten it, Jacqueline Clerc is the very first paraplegic French woman to get her PPL (cf Newsletter July 2005). She became a friend of Roy as soon as they met in La Ferté-Alais, and Jacqueline heartily accepted Roy's invitation to attend Airsho 2005, then to spend a few days with them at their home in Little Elm, close to Dallas.



Photo: B. Delfino

The difficulty of Jacqueline to move about in a wheel-chair was a problem that we were never confronted with before, but with the help of everyone, it was easy to cope with, which allowed Jacqueline to fully appreciate her stay in Midland and Dallas in the best possible conditions.

Her permanent very good mood and her wish to fully enjoy her trip were a confirmation of the willpower she was gifted with since bad luck deprived her of the use of her legs when she was 6 years old. This determination made us admire her strength and realize, once more, how futile are the little problems we all have to solve every day, problems to which we all give far too much importance than they deserve...

The day after, Thursday 29, more members of the French Wing joined us to take part in the traditional annual Unit dinner: Sandy Sansing, Jim and Nancy Lux, Eric and Dominique Ducreau who



Photo: B. Delfino

had arrived the day before in Austin, Barbara and Aubrey Hair, Orlan Wichman, and many friends, among whom, of course, the faithful organizers of this meal, Jim and Terry Adams.

The speeches were short but very warm, and Sandy (Left) took this opportunity to thank, once more, with a great emotion in his voice, all the members of the French Wing who got involved in the organization of his reunion with the people who made sure he was kept safe while he was on French soil after he had bailed out of his stricken P-51 on June 20, 1944.

The following day, Friday September 30, took place the **Special Show For Special People**, an airshow organized especially for the handicapped of the Midland area by the CAF, and, namely, by our friend Jim Adams.

There was many of them, and this event got a success that it never had before. One even thought of a similar event in France where these unfortunate people could, like those of Midland, see a similar show and receive a few presents, which would improve their life a little. Who knows?... One day may be?...

Jacqueline Clerc and Claude De Marco were introduced to the assistance as a perfect example of winners over adversity since they both represent an incredible amount of willpower and faith in their dreams (Above). They were applauded at length, and the local Press, realizing the importance of their visit, published a long article on the front page of the Saturday's paper!

This Friday carried on with the CAF Annual General Assembly. This great meeting included the vote "for" or "against" the addition of all other conflicts in its Constitution, the election of members of the General Staff, and

the CAF Awards for 2005. The French Wing was, once again, highly honored as shown by the following list of Awardees:

SPECIAL SERVICE AWARD

Col. Roy Grinnell: For his innumerable gifts and services given to the French Wing, and for his work in promoting the CAF and its goals in our country, especially during the two art shows he took part in, in Paris and Le Bourget in 2005.

Ms. Jacqueline Clerc (Non member): For her level of willpower and determination to fight the handicap that she lives with since the age of 6, and for the example she has set for handicapped people throughout the world.

SILVER MAGNOLIA BLOSSOM AWARD

Col. Jacques Leroux: For his professional work of research which allowed the full accomplishment of numerous French Wing projects like Mission 441, the Mosquito in Pujaudran, the B-24 in Ferrières, and Sandy Sansing's accident.

Col. Jean-Claude Miniggio: For the enthusiastic and permanent promotion of the CAF and the French Wing he does with his Morane-Saulnier 315, the only flying authentic warbird in France, and the substantial help he gave to the French Wing during the acquisition of its Piper J-3 and its operation by our Wing ever since.

Col. John P. Roeder: For his remarkably professional series of articles concerning american aircraft in french colors, articles that are translated by col. Michel Perrin and illustrated by Jean Bellis, and for the exceptional enthusiasm he has always demonstrated for the CAF and the French Wing.

CAF LETTER OF COMMENDATION

Col. Eric Ducreau: For his work and research in the project of reuniting Sandy Sansing with the places and people of the towns and villages that helped protecting him from the enemy, and for his positive search of pieces of Sandy's plane.

Col. Philippe Dufлот: For his work in improving our Unit's account, and for his unlimited enthusiasm for the CAF and the French Wing. Col. Philippe Dufлот is a typical example of a CAF member who is made of initiative and "Can Do" attitude, which allow our Unit to move forward.

Col. Roger Gouzon: For his permanent availability and his technical accomplishments which have greatly improved the participation of the French Wing in numerous aeronautical events and airshows, and for his never-ending generosity towards our Unit.

Col. Georges Marcelin: For his remarkable work on poetry and for his exceptional enthusiasm for the CAF and the French Wing, which materializes through the promotion he does of these two organizations with the young generations.

Le Fana de l'Aviation & Les Editions Lariviere: For the important help these two entities have given to our Unit for many years, especially during the annual airshow in La Ferté-Alais where our Unit's booth is accepted free of charge, which allows our Unit to spend this money on the completion of its numerous projects.

Our sincere congratulations to all these members and friends who have demonstrated, during the past year, a level of activity and enthusiasm well above their simple duties as CAF members. A big Thank You to all of them!

In the evening of this Friday, our friends Jacqueline Clerc and Claude De Marco had the chance to participate in the 2005 banquet for the induction of several veterans and Units in the American Combat Airmen Hall of Fame (ACAHO), a ceremony that they greatly appreciated.



Photo: B. Deffino

Saturday, October 1st, started with of Airsho 2005.

the traditional induction ceremony of new CAF Colonels whose patron was, this year again, our friend and Honorary Member of the French Wing, **David Lee "Tex" Hill** of the Flying Tigers (Right).

This ceremony gave way to the usual air display of modern and classic planes, and, of course, WWII warbirds.

Let us take this opportunity to thank the FINA company for its support to our Organization since it allowed, despite the high cost reached by aviation gasoline, a perfect air display.

Without this help, Airsho would not have obtained the same success, and if the aerial demonstrations of individual planes were a bit shorter than the previous years, the show was exceptional,



Photo: B. Deffino

The Sunday was a lot better than the day before, which is often the case, and all our friends enjoyed the Fighter Squadron Chalet which gave them protection from the very hot sunshine, an excellent meal, and some unexpected presents, but, above all, a perfect place for watching this great annual spectacle.

Taking advantage of the "rehearsal" of the Saturday, the show went on perfectly and was even more dense than the day before, which made the public and the members of our Association totally happy.

I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate and thank those who, every year, spend so much time and energy for the success of this event. One can easily forget that this airshow could not take place without the enormous work performed by all these volunteers who demonstrate so much abnegation, for our greatest pleasure, whether they are mechanics, explosive specialists, flight line coordinators, pilots, members of Headquarters, or members who were assigned some obscure and unsuspected tasks like the setting up of chairs and the cleaning of the field after the event. Future visitors, please remember that a simple piece of paper accidentally



Photo: B. Deffino

dropped on the ground will need to be picked up by a CAF member or one of the Midland boy scouts whose job includes this task.

The key points of version 2005 of Airsho were, according to everyone's opinion, the beautiful weather, the great number of planes present despite the high cost of gasoline, the friendly and warm welcome by members of the CAF, the AAHM, and Headquarters.

The busiest pilot was, no doubt, Regis Urschler who flew the P-51 *Gunfighter*

than any prose, therefore, I shall let them give the reader a few impressions taken live during our stay.

I shall end this modest report by thanking Roy and Irene Grinnell for inviting col. Jean-Claude Miniggio, col. Claude De Marco, Jacqueline



Photo: B. Deifino



Photo: B. Deifino

continuously from the Friday to the Sunday, either chasing a Tora Tora Tora Zero or flying formation with an F-15 and an F-4 of the Heritage Flight.



Photo: B. Deifino

As for the French Wing, one must note that its hangar acquisition project received very important gifts during our stay, from Sandy Sansing, Regis Urschler, and Barbara and Aubrey Hair.

These donations allow us today to get close to a total of 10000,00 Euros savings! A very big thank you to all these generous and enthusiastic members!

The few pictures taken during this event published here are a lot more "talking"

were admired by all of us. We will talk about this museum very soon, a museum that anyone stopping in Dallas must go and see.

Regretfully, we all needed to leave and fly back to France, but our bags were full of happy

Clerc, and Fumiko and myself, in their lovely house in Little Elm for a few days.

Their patience was only equalled by the friendship they gave us. It was a happy conclusion for a trip that had started in a rather dramatic way.

I also wish to thank Barbara and Aubrey Hair for the way they welcomed us during our visit at the Cavanaugh Museum in Dallas.

The perfect quality of the aircraft displayed, the great majority of which are flying regularly, is simply incredible! Not the slightest grease particle, not the slightest imperfection in the paint work of the planes, and a cleanliness rarely met in a museum and its workshop,



Photo: B. Deifino

Col. Jake Tryon, great friend of the French Wing and Unit Leader of the Dixie Wing which looks after, among others, the SBD Dauntless and the P-51 Red Nose.

memories, and the hope that we would be back in about a year.

I do hope that our group will be a lot bigger in 2006 than it was this year.

The 2006 airshow is already very promising since the U.S. Navy aerobatic team, the *Blue Angels*, should be there. This alone should attract more than one member to Midland!...



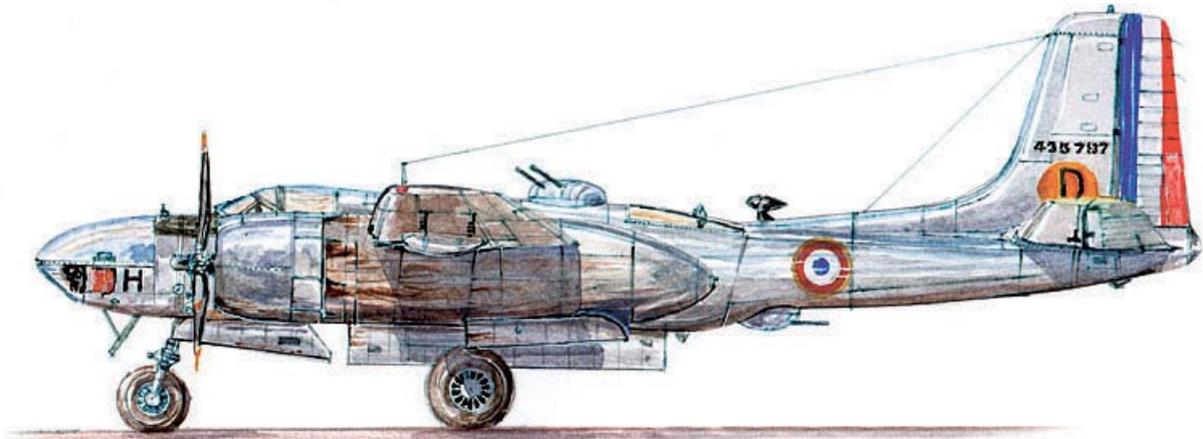
Photo: B. Deifino



American Aircraft in French Colors

DOUGLAS A-26 INVADER

By Colonels John P. Roeder and Michel Perrin - Painting by Jean Bellis



In 1940 Douglas began with project studies for a follow-up airplane to the A-20 Havoc. At the same time the USAAC was working on a requirement for a light bomber capable of fast attack operations at low level as well as horizontal precision bombing from medium altitudes with a powerful defensive armament. The military had in mind an airplane that could fly low, fly fast and carry a big punch including a 75-mm cannon. Installation of the latter was to have a major impact on the Douglas project by leading to a widened fuselage with side-by-side seating of a pilot and bombardier or gun operator.

Impressed by the Douglas proposal the USAAF ordered three prototypes in June 1941 of the aircraft that was to become the A-26 Invader.

The plane Douglas was working on, was a highly innovative machine. Among its advanced features the most important were a laminar, highly loaded wing with double slotted flaps, the use of the new high strength 75S aluminum alloy for most of the structure, the fitting of remote controlled gun turrets above and below the

fuselage operated by just one gunner and the installation of the still new 2,000 hp Pratt and Whitney R-2800 engines with quick feathering propellers.

Development of this machine was a gamble, and to reduce the aerodynamic risks wind-tunnel tests unprecedented in their extent were carried out. Mating the far forward protruding engines and their large nacelles with the relatively small wing was aerodynamically and structurally a major challenge. Also for getting maximum benefit from the laminar airfoil, never before heard of standards for skin smoothness had to be achieved.

The first of three prototypes designated the XA-26 was to be built basically as a bomber with a glassed-in nose. The second, designated XA-26A, was modi-

fied as a night fighter, and the third, the XA-26B, had an attack nose including a 75-mm cannon in its armament.

While development went without major hitches, the late delivery of buyer and subcontractor furnished equipment as well as requests for changes by the Air Corps delayed production of the prototypes. The first flight of the XA-26, initially planned for 15 January 1942, took place on 10 July with armament not yet installed. Problems with engine overheating and also buffeting due to opened bomb bay doors as well as elevated dorsal turret guns could be quickly corrected.

The Invader revealed itself rapidly not only as a decent machine, but it exceeded the specification and it was about 700 lb (318 kg) under weight.



Photo: B. Delfino

High ranked Air Force officers, after flying the prototype, commented "A great airplane: fast - very fast - and close to the Ground", or "Not a thing wrong with this airplane", and General Henry H. Arnold (Hap) called it "A mighty good machine". He was the great supporter of this airplane, which he wanted for low level operations



Photo: B. Delfino

that the Air Force was conducting in the South Pacific.

Even before the XA-26 had flown, Douglas was preparing to produce 500 articles. Arguments over the aircraft's price however were to delay government approval until the end of October 1942. By then the night fighter version had been cancelled, but the manufacturer was authorized to finish the XA-26A, which was first flown in January 1943. Meanwhile Douglas, in cooperation with the Air Force, had developed and tested at least five fuselage noses with different gun arrangements. As a result, the 75 mm and the 35 mm cannons were dropped and a six.50 cal gun installation retained for the A-26B.

The first production A-26B was rolled out at Long Beach in September 1943. Certain weaknesses in the wing, which had shown up in static tests, had however led to some structural reinforcements which were retrofitted to production aircraft from 1944.

Towards the end of May 1944 the new A-26B was brought with great promise into the South Pacific for line combat tests. General George C. Kenney, Air Force commander in the theater, however did not share Hap Arnold's enthusiasm for the A-26. He and his crews found that the A-20s and B-25s, which they had been flying for two years, were doing a good enough job. Nobody could however stop Arnold's baby from coming.

The service pilots confirmed the A-26's excellent flying characteristics and found it a good stable shooting platform. For low level search and destroy missions, they considered it however as not acceptable.

After flying the A-26B for a month in active service, the crews presented a list of 32 changes, which they found man-

datory to make the plane usable for the low level missions for which it had been sent to the South Pacific.

For minimum altitude formation flying necessary for low level bombing and strafing raids the cockpit arrangement was judged unsuited. Due to the low canopy and the big engines with their long nacelles, which extended far forward of the pilot's station his field of vision was restricted. Being seated on the left side of the wide cockpit, the pilots' visibility to the right was further limited, and to the right and below it was practically inexistent. For a pilot used to fly in the fighter-type cockpit of the A-20, this was a nightmare. Another major criticism was inadequate fire power.

The above deficiencies were however of lesser importance when the aircraft was used as a light horizontal bomber dropping from a mean altitude of say 7,000 ft (2,100 m), for which the Invader had initially been designed. The bomber version finally emanated as the bombardier nosed A-26C. A-26Bs, used as bombers, could have reduced nose armament. In missions, flights were led by a glass nosed leader on whose bombs the B's were dropping.

The A-26C went into combat for the first time in early September 1944 after 18 (possibly 20) aircraft had joined the 386th BG in England for service testing. Between the 6th and 19th of September A-26Cs participated with B-26 Marauders of the group in eight medium altitude attacks on Brest and other targets in France with good results.

In early October the 416th BG, then based at Melun (near Paris), was the first to reequip with Invaders. These were the same that had been service tested with the 386th in September. On 6 November 40A-26Bs (no Cs were at the time available) arrived from England, with which reequipment of the 416th was complete. As the A-26Cs, these had a three gun solid nose, which was quite sufficient

for the horizontal bombing role in which they were to operate.

Meanwhile Douglas had made the changes originally requested by the South Pacific pilots, taking into account also experience gained in service testing over Europe.

The Invader got a bigger clamshell canopy, the seats were brought up higher for better visibility and easier emergency evacuation. Also the armament of the A-26B straffer had been increased to 14 fixed .50 cal guns (eight in nose and six in wings). Plus the two in the upper turret which could be locked forward and fired by the pilot this made a total of 16 .50s usable for strafing. In addition, 14 five inch (125 mm) high velocity rockets could be carried under the wing. Maximum bomb load remained unchanged, but actually it was a function of other ordnance carried and the mission range and altitudes. Finally the Invader had become the aircraft that Hap Arnold had been dreaming of.

On 17 November 1944 the 416th flew its first full combat mission with Invaders. The target was a stores depot at Haguenau in Eastern France. As flight leaders served A-20 Havocs, which had been retained by the group. A-20s continued in fact to be used in this function until early February 1945 when sufficient bombardier nosed A-26Cs had been received.



Photo: AA

As more and more Invaders – now of the improved models – had become available, four bombardment groups were finally equipped with the aircraft, the last being the 391st which converted from B-26s to A-26s in early April. One month later, on 3 May, 130 Invaders of the four groups flew their last mission over Europe. Although the Invader's combat career over Europe was short, it was very successful and effective, and it was not to end there.

Since early 1945 the A-26B had already joined the fighting in the Pacific. The A-26C version also made it into the war against Japan. As the Invader was again

beginning to demonstrate nearly daily how great an airplane it was, Japan however surrendered.

Production was stopped subsequent to VJ-Day after the delivery of some 2.500 airplanes. These included 1,355 A-26Bs, 1,091 A-26Cs and a small number of FA-26C photo reconnaissance planes. Also with the end of the war the number of active A-26 squadrons was drastically reduced and many aircraft were transferred to the Air Force Reserve, the Air National Guard and the US Navy. Others were put into storage or sold as surplus to foreign operators.

In June 1948 (one year after the USAAF had become the USAF) the attack category was abandoned, and with the withdrawal of the Martin Marauder from service the A-26 became the B-26.

Two years later, on 25 June 1950 communist North Korea attacked the South Korean Republic and the Invader went to war again.

The B-26 was in fact the first US combat plane to go into action in Korea, and it was the last to drop bombs in the conflict. This was on 27 June 1953, half an hour before the armistice, which had



Photo: AA

been signed at 10:00 am, became effective. Between these events, USAF Invaders carried out heavy and effective interdiction strikes by day and by night, as the following statistics show: 60,098 sorties flown, 39,000 vehicles, 406 railroad engines plus 4,000 cars and 168 bridges destroyed.

It is to be pointed out that at no time there were more than 100 aircraft available serving in six squadrons. The Invader units paid however heavily for their successes. 203 aircraft were lost, with 527 crewmembers killed or missing in action.

In USAF service, the Invader had to wait for more than 10 years before going to war again. In the Vietnam conflict which

began in all earnest in 1964, counter insurgency operations and special missions were the roles in which it was to excel. The age of the aircraft was however soon showing and wing failures became a problem.

The USAF consequently had 40 Invaders reworked, giving them increased structural strength, fitting more powerful engines and once more increase fire power. Initially designated the B-26K, the aircraft became the A-26A in 1966. Finally the USAF retired the old bomber in about 1972 largely because for the lack of spare parts.

From 1951, two years before the end of the Korean war, the French began using Invaders in Indo-China. After the US had decided in 1950 to support France in fighting the Communist Viêt-minh and a Military Aid Program (MAP) had been launched, the B-26 figured high on the list of French requests for help.

The US agreed rapidly to equip a complete French bomber group with the aircraft, although they had themselves a pressing need for Invaders in Korea. By 3 January 1951 the required 25 aircraft (17B-26Bs and eight B-26Cs) had been supplied, and on 6 February the first French Invader Group GB.1/19 "Gascogne" was declared operational.

Then in August 1951 five unarmed RB-26C photo planes for reconnaissance squadron ER.B-26 "Armagnac" were delivered. With G B . 1 / 2 5 "Tunisie" a second group with 16 B-26Cs became operational in April of 1952. Finally in March respectively April 1958

the US supplied eight B-26Bs which were distributed evenly to both bomber groups to make up for losses.

By this time the Invader had for long become the mainstay of the Armée de l'Air's striking force; whether over Tonking, Annam, Cochinchina or Laos. Intensively used as a horizontal bomber or as a close ground support aircraft from the March 1951 fighting at Mao



Photo: AA

Khé to the final battle of Diên Biên Phu in April/May 1954 it kept more than its promise.

While the B-26Bs and Cs were strafing, firing HVARs dropping general purpose, napalm and cluster bombs, the RB-26Cs were illuminating ground targets at night for both photography and offensive actions.

One of the advantages of the Invader was its range capability which enabled it to reach targets deep in Viêt-minh held country, particularly in the North. Offensive missions were not rarely flown by groups of 12 to 16 aircraft.

In the first ten months of operation GB.1/19 Invaders flew some 2,000 combat sorties firing 1,156 million rounds of .50 cal ammunition and dropping or launching 13,000 bombs and HVARs. This was an extraordinary performance,



Photo: AA

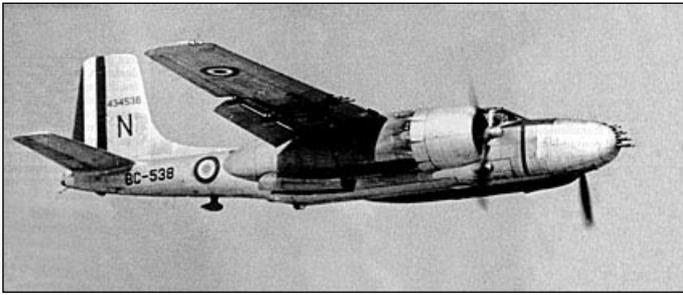


Photo: AA

taking into account that the rain season during which operations are considerably hampered usually begins in February and ends in September/October.

Mention should also be made of the fighting for Na San in upper Laos. In early December 1952 two Việt-minh divisions ran against the French stronghold for several consecutive weeks. Massive attacks by B-26s that flew some 380 missions during the fighting made a major contribution in forcing them back. When in August 1953 Na San had finally to be given up by the French, Armée de l'Air transports succeeded in flying out the garrison largely thanks to the Invaders which covered the operation and kept the Viêts away from the airstrip.

At this point a word should be said about Việt-minh flak. Already in 1952 this had become a serious threat for low flying French aircraft. In that year 17 Invaders were damaged by anti-aircraft fire. In 1953 18 were hit, of which one was lost.

The most important battle of the Indo-China war had its prelude when on 20 November 1953 3,000 French paratroops were dropped in the Việt-minh occupied valley of Diên Biên Phu. The objective was to establish an offensive base in the region, which at first seemed to succeed. Four Việt-minh divisions were subsequently ordered to advance on Diên Biên Phu, which was encircled by the end of December.

To keep the French Invader force up to strength the US supplied 22 additional



Photo: AA

lantly, but its situation was deteriorating incessantly. Diên Biên Phu fell on 7 May 1954 which marked the end of the Indo-China war.

From 20 November 1953 to 7 May 1954 Invaders had flown 2,000 sorties, including 265 at night. From 13 March the French had lost at least five Invaders at Diên Biên Phu and some 40 were damaged by anti-aircraft.

These losses were however more than compensated by another 25 B-26Bs and 3 RB-26Cs, which had been supplied by the US in April. The Bs were intended for a third bomber squadron named GB.1/91 "Bourgogne" which was formed on 1 June 1954, too late to see action in the battle of Diên Biên Phu.

Relatively few Invader missions were flown after Diên Biên Phu until the armistice on August 1954. To be mentioned are however ground attack operations in support of an important mobile force which during its retreat in Annam was twice ambushed at the end of June.

While these missions were successful a third intervention in mid-July failed with disastrous consequences for the ground force. Just two weeks before, an additional 8 B-26Cs had been received from the USAF which obviously remained of

B-26Bs and Cs and one RB-26C in January and February 1954; just in time for the battle of Diên Biên Phu, which definitely began on 13 March. The French garrison fought gal-

was sabotaged and one disappeared for an unknown cause.

After the cessation of hostilities in Indo-China, all remaining B-26s were restituted to the US. Among the last to be returned in October 1955 were 6 RB-26Cs, which appear to have been used as surveillance aircraft for the armistice commission.

Meanwhile (in 1951/52) the French Government had purchased five or six privately owned B-26s in the US for use as test beds by the CEV flight test center at Brétigny. Two other were acquired in Mexico in 1953, the fate of which remains unknown. These were followed



Photo: AA

by a batch of seven aircraft received in November 1954. Three of these went to the CEAM military aircraft evaluation center at Mont de Marsan, and four to the training base at Casaux for use as target tugs.

By then France was gradually slipping into another colonial-style conflict in Algeria. When in late 1955 all attempts for a peaceful settlement with the extremist nationalistic organization FLN had failed, Paris decided to massively build up its military forces in Algeria.

The Armée de l'Air insisted to deploy bombers to the territory, but since France didn't have any, a request for help was put forward to the US. In Mid 1956 agreement was reached that an initial batch of 36 B-26 Invaders were allocated to the MDAP for France. Finally 67 appear to have been supplied, mostly B-26Bs and Cs, but also some RB-26Cs and others.

The first B-26s arrived at Oran in August 1956, where bomb squadrons GB.1/91 "Gascogne" and "Guyanne" GB.2/91 were formed. Both were operational by early 1957 with GB.1/91 moving to Bône in February. It is to be noted that the Group's Invaders ventral turrets if installed had their armament deleted.

no use. With these, the total number of Invaders supplied by the Americans added up to 113 machines.

As to the losses: seven Invaders had been shot down, five were missing in action, 12 were lost in accidents, one

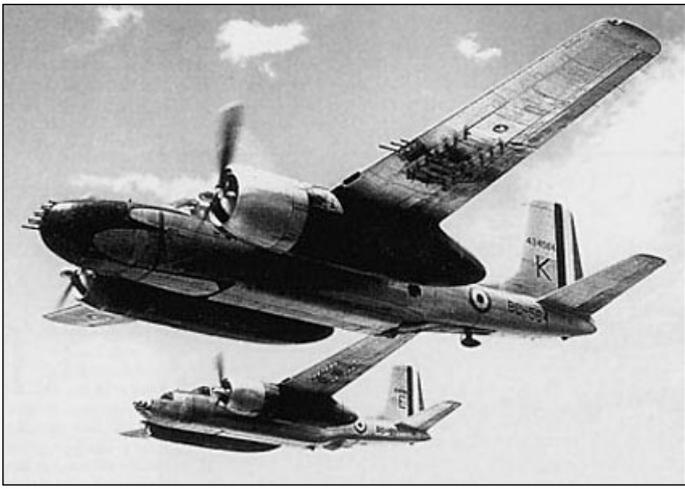


Photo: AA

During 1957 Invaders were much used for bombing, rocket and strafing attacks in support of French ground troops, but also for armed patrols flown over evacuated so called "free fire zones", a role in which they turned out to be very useful due to their endurance.

At times the B-26s were also used for independent as well as interdiction missions as for instance in mid-June, when 19 aircraft bombed suspected FLN positions in North Western Algeria, dropping 154 bombs and firing some 30,400 rounds of .50 cal ammunition.

In May 1957 the bomb groups had also taken responsibility for reconnaissance missions from squadron ERP.1/32, which had been disbanded. The RB-26s were most effective in flying armed reconnaissance along the Western and Eastern borderlines of the territory. Infiltrations and weapons smuggling in particular from Tunisia led to various incidents between French and Tunisian forces.

These led to a retaliatory attack of 11 Armée de l'Air Invaders on military installations in the Tunisian border town of Sakiet. Through collateral damages however some 80 civilians were killed which caused uproar not only in France and which was one of the reasons for the fall of the IVth Republic in April, which brought "Charles de Gaulle" into power. Otherwise, the French campaign along the border line in which Invaders played an important role was largely successful and major infiltration ceased by the end of April.

It must be mentioned, that at the time France had also to fulfill its obligations within NATO, in which context a detachment of Invaders was based at Lahr in West Germany.

transferred from the U.S. Air Depot at Châteauroux.

From late 1959 activities however slowed down due to de Gaulle's policy of seeking a political solution to the Algerian conflict. Concentrated large scale air operations now became rare, but there were exceptions.

At this point mention should be made of the ECN.1/71, a night fighter squadron formed in 1960 to intercept nightly raiders, which the FLN had managed to operate out of Morocco and at times from Tunisia. For this purpose the French had developed the B-26N, a B-26C conversion with Meteor NF.11 radar in the nose and revised armament. In total 8 B-26Cs were converted. Up to January 1961 the squadron had carried out 38 interceptions and 9 enemy aircraft had been forced down. During 1961, night intrusions however declined, and the B-26Ns were frequently used for flare dropping along the Tunisian border or occasional strafing attacks.

The bomber squadrons B-26s also flew but limited-scale strikes in 1961, except in October when formations of up to 29 aircraft participated in a massive pounding of FLN forces with 500 and 1,000 lb (227 and 454 kg) bombs. Reconnaissance and patrol missions continued until May 1962.

One month after Algeria had become independent in July of 1962, the repatriation of the Invader units to France began. While a number of their aircraft were subsequently used for training purposes,

In early 1959, each of the two bomber squadrons in Algeria had 16 B-26s plus 4 RB-26s on strength, but attrition was gradually eating up the reserves and by the end of June 10 Invaders had been lost. Again the Americans helped by handing over the French 26 additional aircraft, most of which were

others flew aerial mapping missions over the Sahara as well as France or were used for other secondary tasks.

The last operational deployment of French Invaders took place in December of 1964, when four aircraft were ordered temporarily to the Chad to assist in subduing rebels opposing the established francophile government.

Meanwhile the process of phasing out the Invaders was in full course, but it was only in July 1968 that the type had disappeared from the Armée de l'Air inventory. Of the five CEV aircraft four seem to have been withdrawn from service also in 1968, four years prior to the retirement of the USAF Invaders from Vietnam.

DATA TABLE B-26B INVADER

Description: Three-seat attack and medium bomber.

Propulsion: Two 2000 HP Pratt & Whitney R-2800-79.

Wing span: 21,34 m (70 ft 0 in.).

Gross weight: 17400 kg (38360 lb).

Maximul speed: ~ 560 km/h (~ 350 mph).

Cruise speed: 415 km/h (283 mph).

Range: 2253 km (1400 mls).

Service ceiling: 6740 m (22100 ft).

Armament: Eight .50 cal. (12,7 mm) guns in nose, and three in each wing, plus two flexible twins in top and ventral turrets each.

Bombload: 1814 kg (4000 lb) internal.

Note: Aircraft used by the French had the ventral turret guns deleted.

Below right: The author a few years ago...



Photo: Coll. John Roeder

The FW P.X.

The following articles are available against a payment by cheque to the **CAF French Wing**. (Note: **Postage is extra** unless stated otherwise).

- Official Wing patch: € 9,20.
- "Gioux" type patch: € 6,10.
- Pins epoxy, various: € 5,50.
- Pins cloisonné, various: € 7.60.
- Painting "Lloyd's Dream" 50x76cm: € 40,00.
- Painting "Lloyd's Dream" 50x76cm. framed: € 55,00.
- 100 sheets of paper with your letter head: € 8,00.
- Color Photos (B17, B25, etc...) 30x45cm: € 9,00.
- T shirt Piper CUB, 170 grams, L or XL € 16,00.
- T shirt cartoon P40, 170 grams, L or XL: € 16,00.
- T shirts: Other sizes available on order.
- T shirts illustrated with the picture of your choice (Maximum size A5): Send in your picture and we will make the Tshirt of your dreams (Warning! Only send pictures that are totally free from any copyrights): € 12,00.
- Color aircraft profiles 15 x 20 cm. pre-framed: *Various*: € 4,00 each.
- Warbird cards by painter Jean Bellis: € 4,00 each.
- Video cassette of sequences filmed in Midland (55mm) VHS PAL: € 16,00 ©
- Large format paintings by Col. Eric Besançon: F4U Corsair and Messerschmitt 262 night fighter: € 31,00 ©
- Poster N°1 of WWII airplanes and N°2 of post-war era, painted by artist Jean Bellis, 61x81cm: € 9,00 (Members) € 10,00 (Non Members) ©
- Prints of the Roy Grinnell paintings - Normandie Niemen, Corsair F4U7, and B26 Marauder - Unsigned: € 40,00 + P&P € 10,00. Signed by veterans: € 60,00 + P&P € 10,00. ©
- Post Cards based on the same paintings (B26 Marauder, Corsair, and Neuneu): € 0,50 each ©
- CD Rom of 36 FSS Newsletters since January 2000, French and English, compatible PC and Macintosh, <.pdf> format readable with Adobe Acrobat Reader: € 10,00 P & P inclusive ©
- CD Rom of 200 warbird photos taken during Airsho in Midland, by B. Delfino: € 10,00 P & P inclusive ©.

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HANGAR

PATRON COMPANIES SUPPORTING THE HANGAR PROJECT

SKY RUNNER - EPSON
AVIATION CLUB DE FRANCE
DIFFUSION SERVICE

GIFTS TO THE HANGAR ACQUISITION PROJECT

We wish to thank the following members for their help to this hangar acquisition project during the past month :

Claude Cardinal, Roger Gouzon, Barbara et Aubrey Hair, Sandy Sanding, Regis Urschler.

These gifts are all made of direct donations. A big Thank You to all of you for this efficient help!

SPIRIT OF LEWIS

During the second half of October, our airplane will move to its new residence. This change will come together with a re-organization of our habits, and will require, from those who deal with this aircraft on a regular basis, an even greater assiduity than ever before.

The owner, mister Philippe Nonat, will need some continuous help that we will be happy to provide.

These tasks will be numerous and varied, and sometimes remote from aviation: Preparation and care of the hangar surrounding area, inside arrangement of the hangar, cleaning, lown-mowing, etc...

There will be work for everyone, and we thank all our members for their active participation.

	€
	70000
	68000
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	64000
	62000
	60000
	58000
	56000
	54000
	52000
Claude CARDINAL	30,00
Regis URSCHLER	249,00
Sandy SANSING	415,00
Nicols LIBIS	32,00
Ron WESP	10,00
Kim TOLFREE	58,00
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Elzéard LIGNEUL	100,00
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Marcel FRANCISCI	310,00
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Aubrey & Barbara HAIR	158,00
Georges MARCELIN	125,00
Bunty BATEMAN	192,16
SKY RUNNER	615,00
Michel DUFLOT	150,00
Événements French Wing	1730,00
DIFFUSION SERVICE	150,00
Intérêts Bancaires Annuels	246,72
TOTAL	9630,35