



# **Tricolor Over the Sahara: The Desert Battles of the Free French, 1940-1942 (Contributions in Women's Studies)**

*Edward L. Bimberg*

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This is the story of the early struggles of an ill-equipped ragtag French force, among the first to pledge its loyalty to General de Gaulle. It fought a lonely, almost secret war against the numerically superior Italian troops deep in the wildest parts of the Sahara, hundreds of miles from the main campaigns along the African coast. These daring Free French raids with their long thirsty treks and small-scale oasis battles have been nearly forgotten, although their path is marked by the graves of many hundreds of French, Italian, and native soldiers. Bimberg details the exotic units that participated in this struggle, including the *Tirailleurs Sénégalaise du T'chad* (African Infantry), the *Compagnies Sahariennes* (Saharan Camel Companies), and the *Groupe Nomade du Tibesti* (a tribal militia recruited in the Tibesti Mountain region of the great desert).

Despite antiquated equipment and some of the world's worst terrain, the Free French were among the most dedicated soldiers in the Allied camp. The backdrop to their fierce fighting includes the barely surveyed Tibesti Mountains with their 10,000 foot volcanic peaks, interspersed with treacherous shifting sands—terrain which would prove to be an enormous challenge to the worn out, patched-together motor vehicles of the Free French. Much of the action takes place in the most remote areas of Italian Libya, the desert province of Fezzan with its fortified oases of Mourzouk and Koufra, each strongly defended by the Italians. While these skirmishes were a sideshow to the epic battles of North Africa, they were immortalized by heroic acts by the French and African troops alike, efforts that ultimately led to success in this far corner of the world.

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