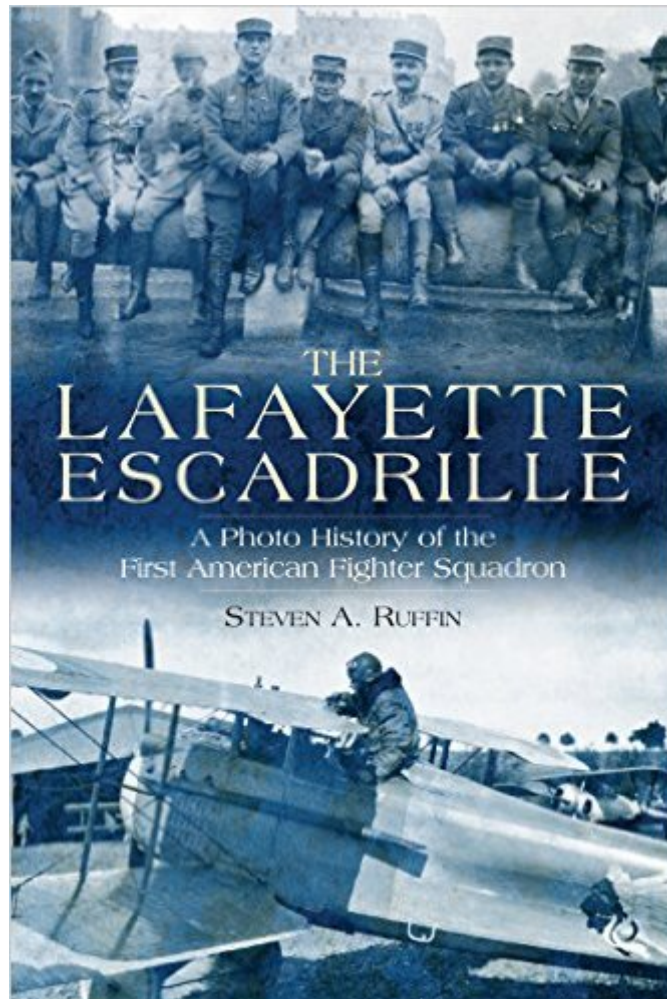


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The Lafayette Escadrille: A Photo History Of The First American Fighter Squadron



Synopsis

The Lafayette Escadrille was an all-volunteer squadron of Americans who flew for France during World War I. One hundred years later, it is still arguably the best-known fighter squadron ever to take to the skies. In this work the entire history of these gallant volunteers—who named themselves after the Marquis Lafayette, who came to America's aid during its Revolution—is laid out in both text and pictorial form. In time for the centennial celebration, this work not only tells the fascinating story of the Lafayette Escadrille, it shows it. Already a student of the squadron, the author spent a full year sifting through university and museum archives in the United States and France for photographs and documents relating to the famed unit. To complement these images, he traveled extensively, taking snapshots of existing markers and memorials honoring the men of the Lafayette Escadrille. In France, he specifically sought out locations where the squadron operated and its pilots frequented. In several cases, he was able to match his present-day color photos with contemporary images of the same scene, thus creating a jaw-dropping then-and-now comparison. To add even more color, the author included artwork and aircraft profiles by recognized illustrators, along with numerous full-color photographs of artifacts relating to the squadron's men and airplanes, as they are displayed today in various museums in the United States and France. The result is undoubtedly the finest photographic collection of the Lafayette Escadrille to appear in print. Along with the expert text revealing air-combat experiences as well as life at the front during the Great War, it is a never-before-seen visual history that both World War I aviation aficionados and those with a passing interest in history will appreciate.

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Customer Reviews

As former managing editor of *Over the Front Magazine*, Steve Ruffin is well qualified to produce perhaps the most appealing treatment of the familiar subject: the Lafayette Escadrille of 1916-1918. The detailed, workmanlike text details the life and times of the Lafayette. From formation of Nieuport Squadron 124 in April 1916, through disestablishment as SPAD Squadron 124 nearly two years later, the author traces the fortunes of all 38 Americans and their French squadron mates. Ruffin earns high marks for objectivity. Not all the Lafayette brothers were valiant, and he addresses the heels as well as the heroes. The postwar fortunes of the survivors include reason for both admiration and gloom. Rare among Lafayette histories, Ruffin places the escadrille in context, acknowledging that it had an average record. Certainly its greatest contribution was in the propaganda realm, as intended. With more than 220 photos (nearly 40 in color) Ruffin's volume contains rare images not only of people and aircraft, but uniforms, artifacts, documents, and memorials. Six aircraft profiles by Tomasz Gronczewski and Alan Toelle provide detailed examinations of Nieuport 11s, 17s, and SPAD 7s. Appendices include bases, a full pilot roster, and a lengthy bibliography. Ruffin's book obviously is a labor of love that will be appreciated by Great War aerophiles for years to come.

The story of the Lafayette Escadrille is one of the best known and enduring sagas of World War I aviation history. It has also drawn many people to this area of interest. For example, at age 15 this reviewer became hooked on Great War aero history after reading the 1929 book "Falcons of France - A Tale of Youth and the Air" by Charles Nordhoff and James Norman Hall. That thinly-fictionalized account of bold and daring young Americans was written by two US-born veterans of service in the French *Aéronautique Militaire* and believably portrayed their exploits. Over the years many books have been written about and by members of this famed escadrille de chasse [fighter squadron], as well as the broader Lafayette Flying Corps, comprised of 269 Americans in various French fighter, bomber and other units. But, for this 100th anniversary year of its founding, Retired USAF Colonel Steven Ruffin took a fresh look at the 38 Americans in the Escadrille Américaine, as it was first called, to produce this voluminous account of the unit. In addition to mini-bios of each member, this narrative is complemented by a superb collection of black & white and color photos and other illustrations gathered during a year-long dedicated search for materials. That quest led to noteworthy discoveries, as the author points out: "I traveled extensively through the United States and France to photograph existing markers and memorials honoring the men of the Lafayette Escadrille. I was pleasantly surprised at the number of these [monuments] and how well

maintained they generally were. The author also visited and photographed old Escadrille airfields and buildings depicted in old post cards and other media. Then and Now comparisons, color views of memorabilia and aircraft, as well as profiles of unit World War I aircraft, add visual dimensions that make this Lafayette Escadrille book a "must have." Steven Ruffin's *The Lafayette Escadrille - A Photo History of the First American Fighter Squadron* is a finely researched, well written and well illustrated book. It is recommended highly.

Steve Ruffin's book offers an excellent new history of the fabled first American squadron. In his book Ruffin shares the findings of his extensive research in U.S. and French archives and in so doing offers a heretofore unknown personal and inter-personal history of the American pilots and their French commanders. Ruffin skillfully blends his expertise in military and aviation history with an interest in human affairs to present a complete history of the celebrated Lafayette Escadrille. The work is more than supplemented with wonderfully well reproduced original photographs that Ruffin carefully captured during his extensive research. A bonus is the additional photographs that Ruffin shares from his travels that serve to connect the images from a century ago to their current situation. For those tempted to retrace these brave American volunteers' steps through France, the book will serve very well. The book thus offers a complete and candid history of the Lafayette Escadrille based on new archival evidence as well as a pictorial work that further brings to life these daring men's experiences. It will be of great interest to those who are new to the subject as well as to those who for decades have avidly followed the story of the celebrated squadron.

I am enjoying this book... great photos. I would love to find out how Mr. Ruffin was able to access a lot of these historical photos. I am a budding author and requesting permission to use historical photographs is costing me a lot of out of pocket funds!!!

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