





The Nieuport 17 retained the 110hp Le Rhône used in the Nieuport 16, differing chiefly from earlier Nieuports in having wings of increased span and area, and was often called the Nieuport '15' or '15-metre', the approximate area of its wings. The Nie 11's single-spar lower wings had been liable to twist when the aircraft was dived or manoeuvred tightly, and a stronger spar was therefore fitted to the Nie 17. In service the Nie 17 became one of the most successful and popular fighting aircraft of the war, both for flying qualities and fighting ability. It was flown by premier pilots including Bishop, Boyau, Guynemer and Nungesser - its own recommendation. It had a fine view from its cockpit, was a firstclass dog-fighter and in the words of Cdr C R Samson, RNAS. climbed 'like a witch'. It also had a reputation for 'balloonbusting' with Le Prieur rockets. Early Nie 17s had a Lewis gun on a Foster mounting over the top centre-section, but a single synchronised Vickers replaced this on later machines. Twin-gun installations imposed an unacceptable performance penalty. First French unit to receive the Nie 17 was Escadrille N57 on 2 May 1916; other French escadrilles included N3, N38, N55, N65 and N103. British Nie 17s were in service within weeks, eventually serving with Nos 1, 2, 3, 6, 8, 9, 10 and 11 Sqdns RNAS and Nos 1, 29, 32, 40 and 60 Sqdns RFC on the Western Front. The type was also used by the RFC in Macedonia. The number in British service is

indeterminate: only 89 known serial numbers (all for RFC machines) apply specifically to Nieuport 17s, but this was a fraction of the overall total. One authority quotes 527 Nieuport 11/17s in RFC/RNAS service, mostly 17s. Macchi in Italy built 150 Nieuport 17s; it was built in and served in Russia; 20 were supplied to the Dutch Army Air Service in 1917; others to the Belgian Aviation Militaire and two to Finland. The AEF purchased 76, as pursuit trainers. In August 1917 there were still 317 Nieuport 17s in front-line French service. Late-production aircraft with 130hp Clerget 9B engines were designated Nieuport 17bis. The Nieuport 21 was a 2-seater trainer conversion with an 80hp Le Rhône: 198 were sold to the USA in 1917-18. The Nieuport 23 had improved streamlining and tail surfaces similar to those that appeared later on the Nieuport 28. Some Nieuport 23s were sold after the war to the Swiss Fliegertruppe and several single- and two-seaters became sporting or privately owned aircraft postwar. The success of the Nieuport fighters, and the Nie 17 in particular, was maintained even against the theoretically superior Albatros DI and early Halberstadt fighters, and it is no small tribute to the French machines that later German fighters were designed on instructions that they should incorporate many of the features that had made the Nieuports so outstanding.

