

# History of French Foreign Legion, Part I

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NEW YORK, NEW YORK, UNITED STATES, February 24, 2020 /EINPresswire.com/ -- What do you know about the [French Foreign Legion](#)? Most folks are familiar with their flat-topped cap, the kepi, and their presence in northern Africa in the first few decades of the 20th Century. The Legion has a thrilling history, however, and so we've decided to share it with you in a series of posts. Read on to learn about how the Legion was formed and its development over the following century.

## 1831: The French Foreign Legion is Born

We have King Louis-Philippe to thank for the French Foreign Legion, for it was he who founded the elite military corps — on March 9, 1831. It was primarily intended to support the conquest of Algeria but served a secondary purpose of putting to good use the plentitude of refugees and unemployed soldiers in France at the time.

Despite the best intentions of the Legion's leaders, this branch of the French Army experienced some growing pains early on. Desertion, difficulties enforcing military discipline, and less-than-qualified officers were just a few of the problems that the Legion struggled through in the coming decades. Nevertheless, it grew to five battalions by the early 1840s, at which time it was split into the 1st and 2nd Foreign Regiments.

## 1850s-1860s: A Rocky Adolescence Coalesces Into a Formidable Force

During the mid-19th Century, the French Foreign Legion found itself embroiled in a variety of battles and other conflicts, including sieges of Zaatcha and Sevastopol, the Battle of Magenta, and France's intervention in Mexico. At this time, the Legion still hadn't yet made a particularly reputable name for itself, comprising as it did a ragtag corps of refugees, erstwhile criminals, outlaws, misfits, and other unlikely candidates for military service. But it was making strides toward respectability, and definitely showed itself, particularly in Mexico, to be a fighting force to be reckoned with.

## Early 1900s: A Golden Age for the Legion

When it comes to imperialism, Britain is often the first nation to spring to mind, but the [French Foreign Legion's](#) most memorable era came about because of that country's imperial reach into Morocco and northern Africa, sub-Saharan Africa, and Indochina. It is this period that gave Hollywood its indelible image of the Legionnaire in his kepi, its khaki fabric protecting him only nominally from the desert sun.

One reason the Legion so captivated moviegoers and novel readers? The anonymat, or the requirement that would-be Legionnaires must enlist under an assumed name. This allowed the members not only to gain a fresh start in life, but to invent for themselves romantic, even tragic backstories with which to entertain and intrigue their compatriots as well as the public.

Between 1871 and 1914, the corps swelled to around 10,000 members. Spread out across the globe, from southeastern Algeria to the jungles of Vietnam, Legionnaires participated in campaigns that saw them sometimes mounted on mules, other times taking the reins from the French Navy. Around the turn of the century, they assisted in the historic conquest and pacification of Madagascar.

In our next installment of the fascinating history [of the French Foreign Legion](#), we'll take a look at its role in World Wars I and II, the French Indochina War, and in conflicts that have taken place in recent memory, including the Persian Gulf War. Be sure to check back frequently or follow us on social media; you won't want to miss that post!

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