

The History of the French Foreign Legion, Part III

NEW YORK, NY, UNITED STATES, March 13, 2020 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Welcome to another installment in our series of articles about the history of the [French Foreign Legion](#). When last we left the intrepid, kepi-wearing warriors, they had come through the first World War, perhaps a little scarred but nevertheless a stronger fighting force than ever before.

The Inter-War Period and Paul Rollet's Influence

As the Legionnaires of the French Foreign Legion returned to France after battles abroad and looked ahead to the new year of 1919, the organization was 30,000 soliders strong. They were now commanded by Paul Rollet, who had led the Marching Regiment of the Foreign Legion RMLE in the final year of the international conflict. Rollet created the position of Inspector of the Foreign Legion, assumed its duties, and would go on to carry out those duties until 1935. His longevity in the military in general, and more specifically the Legion itself, would have been enough to secure him a place in French military history. However, he is also remembered for his role in securing the mythos and mystique of the Legion in the public's imagination.

As we discussed before, the unit's reputation in the French Foreign Legion as a desultory grouping of romantic, if sometimes less-than-savory, characters had already begun to coalesce in the world of entertainment. Rollet wanted to return the Legion to its traditions, including those involving the distinctive uniform. Some of its most notable elements — green and red epaulets, blue cummerbund, buttons decorated with seven flames — had been eliminated when the French Army standardized its uniforms during the war; they were resurrected under Rollet's aegis.

Legionnaires of the French Foreign Legion also have General Rollet to thank for their motto. "Legio patria nostra" is translated as "The legion is our country" and represented yet another attempt to unify a military organization comprising so many disparate nationalities.

Another of Rollet's legacies is the centennial celebration of the [French Foreign Legion held](#) in Sidi Bel Abbès in 1931. This event, in turn, led to to the declaration of the Legion's official feast day, April 30. That date, rather than the anniversary of the Legion's founding on March 9, was chosen to honor the battle of Camerone, which had come to symbolize the Legion's value of honorable sacrifice.

Rollet didn't stop with uniforms and parties, however. He also commissioned a writer to pen "Le Livre d'or de la Légion étrangère" ("The Golden Book of the Foreign Legion"), tapped painters to portray legendary battle scenes featuring Legionnaires in traditional white kepis, and was instrumental in the adoption of its official march. "Le Boudin," or "The Sausage" is an affectionate nod to the bedrolls carried by the soldiers.

The reasoning behind Rollet's multi-faceted public relations campaign? He wanted to quash what he saw as attacks on France in the form of novels, memoirs, and films. In this regard, however, Rollet was unsuccessful. Movies such as *Under Two Flags* (1936) and *Beau Geste* (1939) provided much-needed escapism to Americans suffering the Great Depression's effects on their daily lives. Moreover, they were also instrumental in creating the legendary reputation that the [French Foreign Legion still](#) holds today.

We've just about reached World War II; the next installment of our French Foreign Legion series will look at how the Legionnaires fared in World War II and the Indochina War.

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