THE LEGION

- a name which cracks like gunshot,

- a name which comes up so often in the press or in literature

- a name which conceals a lot of mystery and makes one dream.

THE LEGION

- a crack unit known throughout the world for its war-time achievements, its humanitarian action, and its impressive accomplishments, but what is it exactly?

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This brochure will help to discover the Legion first by presenting its history and traditions, then different facets of the legionnaire's life and career in the Legion, and finally the present tasks and location of the regiments.
HISTORY OF THE FRENCH FOREIGN LEGION

The French Foreign Legion is directly heir from foreign troops who have served France since the middle-ages.

Everyone has heard of the Scottish guards of Charles the VIIth, the Swiss Guards of the Bourbon Kings, Napoleon's Polish Lancers.

Louis Philippe, "King of the French" created the French Foreign Legion on March 10th 1831.

Composed only of volunteers aged between 18 and 40, with or without means of identification, the legion was immediately launched into the conquest of Algeria until passing under Spanish control in 1835.

A second Legion was then created which fought in Algeria, in Crimea (1855), in Italy (1859) and in Mexico (1863). In Mexico, it won one of its greatest titles to fame: on April 30th 1863, in the Camerone Hacienda near Puebla, 3 officers and 62 legionnaires resisted 2000 Mexicains.

After a day of heroic fighting the last five survivors fixed bayonets and charged. This battle, the name of which adorns every Legion's flag, remains the symbol of a mission carried out the bitter end.

1870: the Legion fought in France. It welcomed many foreigners who fought with the legionnaires (the same happened in 1914 and 1939).

Then came unceasing campaigns: Tonkin, Sudan, Dahomey, Madagascar, Morocco.
1914 : 1st World war. After very heavy casualties, the disbanded regiments were amalgamated into one : the Foreign Legion’s « Regiment de Marche » headed by the famous Colonel Rollet « the Father of the Legion ».

The war came to an end in France.

Pacification of Morocco and the Middle-East with the Rif, Atlas and Druze djebel campaigns.

1939-1945 : on the eve of the Armistice, the 11th regiment of the Foreign Legion lets itself be cut to pieces rather than retreat.

— The 13th Half-Brigade of the Foreign Legion makes history at Narvik and Bjervik in Norway, then accomplishes another feat in 1942 at the famous Bir-Hakeim break-through in Libya.

— Then the legion was reunited and had victorious campaigns in Tunisia, Italy, Provence, Alsace and Germany.

— In Indochina, the 5th Foreign Legion Infantry Regiment escaped from the Japanese grip.

End of 1945 : The Indochina war started. Every Foreign Legion regiment was represented on the battle-field, particularly in Phu Tong Hoa, on Colonial Road 4, in Dien Bien Phu where they performed many times a « Camerone ».

1954 : The Legion in its entirety is back in Algeria. Its regiments, which at first were in charge of sector security, are soon sending out major intervention forces. They took an active part in large-scale operations and in border defence duties.
From 1962 up to now: the regiments leave Algeria, and are sent either to the South of France and Corsica or overseas to Djibouti, Madagascar, Tahiti or French Guiana.

In 1969-1970, the Foreign Legion's 2nd Paratroop Regiment and the 1st Regiment take part in the Chad operations.

In May 1978, the 2nd Paratroop Regiment saves from certain death the lives of hundreds of European and African civilians in Kolwezi, Zaire.

The Legion has dearly bought in human lives, combats or pacification operations in which our country has been involved.

Since 1831, 902 officers, 3176 NCOs, and over 30000 legionnaires have died for France; one third of them for the exclusive defence of home land.

Foreigners by birth, the legionnaires have become Frenchmen by the blood they have spilt.
THE FRENCH FOREIGN LEGION'S TRADITIONS

The Legion constitutes an indivisible whole.

From the general to the merest private, all legionnaires have but one purpose: to serve France in a perfect way.

This relationship between those who give the orders and those who receive them comes from a highly developed « esprit de corps » based on a few basic principles:

- a sense of discipline and honour
- a liking for work well done
- an attachment to the past, strengthened by very strong traditions.

The traditions in the Foreign Legion contribute to the upkeep of « esprit de corps »:

- special uniform
- music and songs
- parade (march) at a solemn pace
- celebrations particular to the Foreign Legion
The legionnaire is proud of his uniform: he always wears it with style.

The white kepi

Officially part of the uniform since July 14th 1939, it was at first worn in Africa as a kepi cover with an added neck-protection against the hot sun.

Legion particular badge: the grenade

This badge shows a grenade with a hollow centre bearing seven flames two of them directed downwards.

The colours of the Foreign Legion

Green and red were the colours which the Swiss guard used whilst serving the French kings.

The wide blue Regimental belt

It used to be worn under the clothes as a protection against intestinal disorders. It is only worn with parade uniforms nowadays.

The pioneers' uniform

Includes, for parades, the leather overall and the axe. The pioneers are full bearded.
THE BAND

The Main Band, with about one hundred musicians has gained world-wide fame. It can be told apart from other French military bands by:
- its fifes
- its Chinese Hat
- The way it carries its drums (with the inferior ring at knee level).

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THE FOREIGN LEGION MARCH

The pace of the Foreign Legion’s march at 88 steps per minute, is almost the same as that of the former king’s soldiers.

The Foreign Legion has been marching to the time of the «Boudin» since 1870, when it became its official military march. The name «Boudin» probably derives from the rolled blanket worn across the chest and so nicknamed.

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ANNIVERSARIES

Camerone

The anniversary of the battle of April 30th, 1863, is celebrated in grand style wherever legionnaires or former legionnaires happen to be. The story of the fight is read out during a ceremonial parade. At the main depot, at Aubagne, the articulated hand of Captain Danjou, found on the battle field, is shown before the troops.

The ceremony is sometimes preceded by a vigil of arms on April the 29th.

A fair takes place on April the 30th in the afternoon with carefully prepared stands.

Christmas

This is the family celebration. All persons, officers, NCOs and legionnaires do their utmost to give it a special meaning. The activities on Christmas eve include religious services, presents given all around, a manger decoration contest, a meeting and dinner to which all officers, NCOs and legionnaires are invited.

New Year’s Day

The NCOs receive the officers at their mess and offer them their best wishes.

Twelfth Night

The officers invite the NCOs for the Twelfth Night cake. This tradition dates back to the monarchy.
THE LEGIONNAIRE

THOUGHTS

The Legionnaire

Most often, he has come to the Legion to escape from his past.

Very often, it is because of a personal or family crisis, in his social or political life, that he has joined. Striking examples of this can be found in the mass enlistment of Alsatians after 1871, of Spaniards in 1939, of East Europeans after 1945.

For others still, who are unable to deal with the limitations of a middle class life, the Legion represents a life of adventure.

In the enlistment procedure, selection is very tough. Many candidates are turned down for medical reasons, or after a thorough study of their personal case: the legionnaire seldom is an angel but never is he a criminal.

Once he has joined, under an assumed name if he so wishes, the legionnaire enjoys an unequaled protection, for as long as he serves, because of the anonymity rule. Only he can decide when to break it.

Coming from all corners of the world, with extremely different origins, languages, ideals, it would seem that they have nothing to share.
But they have one thing in common: they refuse to be middle of the road people. Unwilling to take the easy way out, the legionnaire has bravely broken off with his past, his family. Having lost his roots he is now ready to give all he has got, even his life. This ready state of mind binds them together and makes for this unrivaled cohesion sealed in discipline, solidarity and respect of traditions.

The legionnaire is first and foremost a man of action, brave in combat, eager for change and effort; what he fears most is idleness and routine.

He is generous to the point of sacrificing both his money and his life and will never lose trust in his leaders.

This trust brings about attachment; and the ties between the legionnaire and his leader include as much respect and admiration as true and sincere affection. If the leader is alive, he will be followed everywhere, if he dies, never was a dead officer abandoned by a legionnaire. That's how one perceives the large family which the legion constitutes. A man who has broken off with his past, with his social and family background will transfer to the Legion his need for an ideal and his unrequited affections thus equating his idea of the legion with that of a homeland, to the point of sacrificing everything to it with a generosity which has astonished the world. That accounts for the motto on the front of the Legion's Museum:

« LEGIO PATRIA NOSTRA »
The candidate must be at least 18 or 17 if has his parents' permission.

The first contract is usually drawn up in France at anyone of the Foreign Legion's Enlistment Offices. But the candidate may apply to any official service which will direct him to one of these offices.
This first five year-contract may be cancelled by the Command during a 6 month-probation period which may be renewed once.

During his first five years in the Legion, there is a good chance that the legionnaire will be sent overseas to Tahiti, Djibouti, Mayotte, or French Guiana.

Afterwards, during his career in the Legion, he will have the opportunity to serve overseas again on a regular basis.

There are a good number of legionnaires who renew their contract and spend 15 years or even more with the legion.

PROMOTION

After the first few months in the Legion, the legionnaire receives career-counselling. He will be offered several possibilities, depending on his skill and his wishes.

Three alternatives can be offered:

— the fastest makes him an NCO in 3 or 4 years time then a platoon leader or chief of an administrative department before he is 30, the best legionnaires can get a commission by being promoted from the ranks, through an arms school or through the joint military academy (EMIA). (1)

— the standard alternative, slower, offers roughly the same opportunities. One can become an NCO after seven years.

— the third alternative allows a legionnaire to become a senior corporal after a minimum of five years.

(1) EMIA : Ecole Militaire Inter-Armes.
MUTUAL ASSISTANCE IN THE LEGION

Being a crack unit in the French Army the Foreign Legion represents a particular social body which implies specific social action.

Most of the problems which life can pose to individuals can be solved within the family or the social or national framework.

For many legionnaires or former legionnaires, this fundamental framework is usually radically altered or even destroyed, or even if that framework still exists, a legionnaire can meet with overwhelming difficulties, when he goes back to it.

Moreover, for many of them, wounds, or severe diseases, make their entry into civilian life an insolvable problem, in a country they often hardly know.

Providing an answer to all these questions is the responsibility of a specialized department called the Department of Morale and Mutual Assistance of the Foreign Legion at Aubagne. It embodies every means which the command possesses to promote legionnaires' welfare as well as to give material and moral support to anyone who needs it.

Accordingly this department is at the disposal of active duty legionnaires but also of legionnaire who have left the corps.

It includes subdepartment in charge of temporary housing and social readjustment for legionnaires when they are discharged, as well as an Institution for Invalids at Puyloubier near Aix en Provence.
The veterans' associations which are numerous both in France and abroad, are in close touch with the Morale and Mutual Assistance Department.

The Federation of Veteran Legionnaires' Associations owns an old age home at La Balme les Grottes near Lyon.

Set-up the Mutual Assistance Society for the Disabled and Veteran Legionnaires, the Legionnaires' Home, located at Auriole near Aubagne, is another place for veterans.

Finally, and it is important to mention it, once his official papers have been amended, a legionnaire can obtain French citizenship, with an honorable discharge it is usually easy to get the citizenship.
THE FOREIGN LEGION’S REGIMENTS’ LOCATION AND TASKS

Today the Legion numbers 8,000 men, on three continents (Europe, Africa, America), and Pacific and Indian Oceans.

METROPOLITAN FRANCE

THE FOREIGN LEGION’S HQ

Located at the main depot in Aubagne, and placed under command of a Brigadier or a Colonel, this HQ Formation supervises the First, Second and Fourth Foreign Regiment.

It is responsible for the management and training of all foreign legion personnel.

THE 1ST FOREIGN REGIMENT

- Main part at Aubagne Vienot Barracks.

It includes all services shared by the different Foreign Legion’s Regiments. Its three administrative companies can be rapidly built up into intervention units. It is there that the selection process for enlistment (candidates) takes place.
It is the oldest of the Foreign Legion’s Regiments, and therefore it keeps, inside its famous museum, the treasures from the past. It also maintains and houses the Main Band.

Outside Aubagne

- Paris: the Paris’ Foreign Legion Detachment and the Foreign Legion’s Transit Company.
- at Canjuers: the Foreign Legion’s road repair company, a large unit, in charge of improving the road network inside the Canjuers camp.
- in Provence: 4 sections of the morale department at Marseille, la Malmousque, Puyloubier and la Ciotat.
- all across metropolitan France:
  - 3 information offices: Paris, Strasbourg, Marseille.
  - 23 recruitment offices.

THE 2ND INFANTRY FOREIGN REGIMENT

Located in Bonifacio and Corte (Corsica) with
- HQ company
- one scout and support company
- three combat companies
- one specialist training company

All companies, (except the training company) may get involved anywhere, in overseas intervention tasks as part of the Army strike forces, for example, or in metropolitan France as part of the homeland operational defence forces.
This regiment together with D squadron of the First Foreign Cavalry Regiment, provides a company for the tour in Mayotte (Comoro Islands).

It is responsible, through its training company, for the training of all Legion's accounting, motor transport and signal specialists.

THE 4TH FOREIGN REGIMENT
(THE BASIC TRAINING REGIMENT OF THE LEGION)

Created on September 1st, 1977, and located in Castelnau-dary under the name of Basic Training Regiment of the Foreign Legion, he takes the name of 4th Foreign Regiment on June 1st, 1980.

This regiment provides all the legionnaires and NCOs with their basic and advanced training.
— It takes care of the enlisted men as soon as they are selected in Aubagne. It provides then with the legionnaires's basic training.
— It organizes corporals and NCOs cadres.
— It provides special education to NCOs selected for military and technical certificates.

THE FIRST FOREIGN CAVALRY REGIMENT

Located in Orange, it forms the Armoured Reconnaissance Regiment of the 14th Infantry Division.

It consists of:
— HQ squadron
— three A.M.L. squadrons (60 mm mortars and 90 mm guns).
— one motorized company

Its combat units, may, at any time, join the Army intervention forces.

The need to be able to perform such a variety of tasks, using different skills and continuous training, gives a rapid momentum to the regiment's activities.
THE 2ND FOREIGN PARATROOP REGIMENT

Located at Calvi, between the Mediterranean sea and the Corsican mountains, this regiment has an ideal training ground for its tasks.

As part of the paratroop division, it is involved in the missions of this intervention division.

It consists of:
- HQ company
- one Scout and support company
- 4 rifle companies specializing in:
  - anti-tank and night combat
  - mountain operations
  - amphibious operations
  - stay-behind battle (demolitions-snipers)

It achieved special fame at Kolwezi: (May 19th 1978).

THE 61ST MIXED ENGINEERS BATTALION

Stationned since October 1978 at the La Cavalerie Camp this Battalion consists of engineers and legionnaires belonging to:

- a HQ and HQ company
- one Legion pioneer Company and one Engineer unit.

Designed to work on large scale projects, the battalion is now involved in the preparation of Larzac camp.
THE 13TH HALF-BRIGADE OF THE FOREIGN LEGION

Located in the Djibouti Republic, this regiment is made up of HQ company, one motorized Company, one reconnaissance squadron and an Engineer squadron.

These units are stationned in Gabode, near Djibouti and in Oueah.

The regiment is reinforced by a rotating company of the 2nd Foreign Paratroop Regiment, stationned in Arta.

He has an amphibious training camp in Arta beach.

Its tasks are part of those required by the French Forces presence and involve working on the country's infrastruc-
THE 5TH PACIFIC MIXED REGIMENT

Located mainly on Mururoa and Tahiti but also on the Tureia, Totegegie, Tematangi and Reao atolls (outlying garrisons), this regiment is made up mainly of legionnaires but also of sappers.

in Tahiti:
— a transit element and an electrical supply unit

in Mururoa:
— HQ company
— one pioneer company
— one ordnance company
— one water-energy supply company
— one transport and maintenance company

The regiment performs some tasks for the Pacific Experimentation Center: water and power supply, transport and maintenance, building of roads facilities.

The regiment takes also in hands the Comand and the supply of the outside-posts.
THE 3RD INFANTRY FOREIGN REGIMENT

Located in French Guiana.
Main depot in Kourou:
- HQ company
- two rifle companies

in Regina:
- one ordnance company

This regiment is in charge of the Oyapock-Brazil border surveillance, of the Guiana Space Center security and of the building, on the East part, of a road across the jungle. It also has a training centre in the equatorial forest.

It is, along with the « Infanterie-Chars de Marine » regiment, the most decorated French regiment.
THE FOREIGN LEGION DETACHMENT IN MAYOTTE

Located in Dzaoudzi on one of the Comoro Islands, this detachment is composed of a rotating company that is relieved every 6 months (either by a company from the Second Foreign Regiment or by D squadron of the First Foreign Cavalry Regiment.

It carries out assistance and infrastructure work and constitutes a French presence in that part of the world.