



# The French Foreign Legion: A Complete History of the Legendary Fighting Force

*By Douglas Porch*

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## **The French Foreign Legion: A Complete History of the Legendary Fighting Force By Douglas Porch** **Bibliography**

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### **Editorial Review**

#### **From Publishers Weekly**

In spite of its high desertion rate, its fatal preference for frontal assault and resistance to modernization, the polyglot, multinational force known as the French Foreign Legion has maintained a reputation for do-or-die combat ferocity since its founding a century and a half ago. Porch ( *The Conquest of the Sahara* ) describes the Legion's unique recruitment practices, merciless training methods and traditions from which it derives its special character, and also relates how it carved its colorful history in the sands of the Sahara and the jungles of Africa and Indochina. The study includes vivid descriptions of such classic legionnaire battles as the 1848 siege at Zaatcha in Morocco and the valiant last stand at Dien Bien Phu in 1954. This entertaining history captures the romance, mystery and drama of the Legion as well as the iron at its core. Photos.

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#### **From Library Journal**

Porch, a distinguished scholar of France's military experience, has integrated exhaustive archival research with comprehensive, critical use of an extensive memoir literature to produce the definitive history of this unique military formation. Porch analyzes the relationship of the Foreign Legion to the French army and French society. He discusses the legion's role as an instrument of redemption, and its status as an elite fighting force. He evaluates the legion's internal dynamics, throwing new light on such cliché-encrusted issues as the role of desertion in the legion's subculture and the nature of legion discipline. The book also serves as an excellent history of France's colonial wars, with the legion at center stage. Porch's accounts of the conquest of Algeria, the Dahomey and Madagascar campaigns, and the French occupation of Tonkin in the 1880s surpass anything in English. His analysis of the French defeat in Indochina is a model of its kind. Porch's sense of the *mot juste* and the telling phrase make this book a pleasure to read, as well as an exercise in sound history. Recommended for most collections.

- *D.E. Showalter, Colorado Coll., Colorado Springs*

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#### **From Kirkus Reviews**

A thorough account of France's most famous military force, meticulously sifting legend from actual events, by the scholarly chronicler of the French colonial presence in Africa (*The Conquest of the Sahara*, 1984, etc.). Fittingly, in his analysis of primary materials and historical accounts Porch is able to verify that many legends of the Legion contain more than a grain of truth. From its establishment in 1831 it was intended as a catch basin for the malcontents and desperate men of Europe, many of whom were then swarming into France as political refugees. Assigned originally to the French conquest of Algeria, it began to establish a reputation for itself during a subsequent disastrous campaign in Spain in 1835. In the course of its long career, the Legion has served commendably in Russia and Mexico, in the Franco-Prussian and both World Wars, and in Indochina, where its brave but futile struggle to retain Dien Bien Phu against the Viet Minh in 1954 signaled an end to French colonialism in the region. It was to North Algeria, however, that it was most often returned, and in 1961 Algeria almost became its undoing when prevailing Legion sentiments against Algerian independence led to a crisis with the de Gaulle government and a quickly repressed coup d'état. As a result of this colorful history, the Legion emerges here with a life of its own, complemented by assessments of the sociopolitical situation. Stimulating reading for adventurers and serious students alike--an informative, lively view of a unique military presence in modern times. (For a searing first-person account of service in the Legion, see Christian Jennings's *A Mouthful of Rocks*, 1989). (Thirty-two pages of halftones--not seen.)

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