



Nationalizing France's Army: Foreign, Black, and Jewish Troops in the French Military, 1715–1831 by Christopher J. Tozzi.

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Among modern “citizen” armies, the French Army is unusual in including a specifically Foreign Legion comprised of non-French citizens. Founded under King Louis-Philippe in 1831, the French Foreign Legion has often been deployed in (post-)colonial contexts deemed too dangerous for native French troops. In *Nationalizing France's Army*, historian Christopher Tozzi (Howard Univ.) uncovers the backstory of this uniquely French institution. He explores the role of foreigners in the French Army from the birth of the “citizen army” in the early eighteenth century through the revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars and their aftermath. He describes how the troops who fought in this period evolved from a highly cosmopolitan force to a more distinctively French one. Drawing extensively on French military history archives at Vincennes and elsewhere, especially *contrôles de troupes* or regimental registers, he argues that the French army was “nationalized” during the revolutionary period to exclude the many foreigners willing to fight for the French state.

A particular strength of the book is its broad chronological scope, stretching from the Old Regime through the early Revolution and Terror to the Directory, Consulate, Empire, Restoration, and beyond. A brief conclusion sketches the legacy of the “nationalization” of the army in the modern era. To give context to the revolutionary effect of the notion of a “citizen army,” Tozzi devotes his first full chapter to “The Army before the Nation” under the Old Regime, when the French state relied heavily on foreign officers and soldiers. Beginning in the seventeenth century, the monarchy sought to promote diplomatic relations and assert sovereignty over neighboring territories as well as increase the size of its forces by establishing a number of foreign regiments, including the famous Swiss Guards, but also German, Hungarian, Irish, Liégeois, Italian, North American, and even (in a regiment named after Maurice de Saxe) black troops. Comprising a mix of religions and languages, the Old Regime military was remarkably open and diverse. In the “capitulations” that organized these regiments, the foreign troops received certain privileges, including the right to own property and obtain naturalization in France. The cosmopolitan nature of the military did provoke a reaction by the mid-eighteenth century, but all attempts at reforms failed until the revolution.

The revolution of 1789, in which soldiers figured prominently, brought a sharp break in state policy on the military. Unlike previous scholars who attribute the “nationalization” of the army to the Terror and war in 1793–94, Tozzi dates it to the very beginning of the revolution, which linked military service to national identity. He cites Deputy Edmond-Louis-Alexis Dubois de Crance in December 1789: “I take it as a basic principle that in France every citizen must be a soldier, and every soldier a citizen” (3). Hence, even before the Swiss corps was expelled after the attack on the Tuileries Palace in August 1792, the revolutionaries began to reject foreign troops, whom they associated with counterrevolution; for instance, they repudiated the Swiss troops who participated in the Nancy mutiny in August 1790 and nationalized some foreign regiments in summer 1791.

Another chapter concerns early foreign legions, including two American legions that French Ambassador Edmond-Charles Genêt tried to coopt into his plot to promote revolutionary ideals on the

western frontier versus Spain. Tozzi suggests this tactic only increased the alienation of foreigners in the army. Suffering from lack of organization and recruitment, these legions, which never exceeded ten thousand men, were dissolved by early 1794.

The Terror only increased the bias against non-citizens in the French military, producing what Tozzi terms a “hardening” of the definition of nationality (116). Despite a persistent need for foreign soldiers and especially officers to staff the French Army, now at war with most of Europe, the revolutionary government was driven by ideology to purge thousands of foreigners from the ranks of the military. After the fall of Robespierre, such xenophobia was codified in the Constitution of 1795, which made French citizenship a prerequisite for army service, and the Jourdan Law of 5 September 1798, which made non-citizens ineligible for conscription (167). To get around this restriction at the height of the revolutionary campaigns of the late 1790s, the republican government revived foreign legions, creating “free companies” or auxiliary corps, conscripting from sister-republics, and assigning foreigners special roles, especially in overseas expeditions to, for instance, Britain and Ireland, Canada, and the Orient. The most interesting of these special forces were the Polish demi-brigades sent to suppress revolution in Saint-Domingue, where they often deserted out of sympathy with the black rebels. These foreign troops were rewarded by the Haitian Constitution of 1805, which granted them an exception in its general denial of property to white men (158). Despite these counter-examples,

by relegating foreigners mostly to peculiar corps that policed the interior of France or were dispatched to fight the Republic’s brutal overseas wars, as well as by drawing stark distinctions between foreigners and French citizens when applying laws on conscription, the state in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century continued to exclude noncitizens from full participation in France’s military and political institutions. (169)

In the book’s penultimate chapter, on foreign troops in the imperial military, Tozzi shows that this story changed little under Napoleon Bonaparte. To be sure, almost half of the Grande Armée was non-French, hailing from annexed or allied states. With his insatiable appetite for manpower, Napoleon also revived the foreign regiments, especially in the emergency re-mobilization during the Hundred Days. However, especially toward the end of the Empire, concern about political loyalty pushed him to go even further than his predecessors “by not only prohibiting further recruitment of most groups of foreigners, but also rounding up and disarming thousands of those already serving in his army, even at a moment when he needed military manpower and expertise more than ever” (171). As Tozzi concludes, “Napoleon thus finished where the revolutionaries had begun, categorically purging the army of foreigners for the simple reason that their place of birth excluded them from membership in the national community” (193). After Waterloo, the restored Bourbons excluded the few remaining foreign troops in regular forces or foreign regiments from the reorganized royal army. Tozzi has argued elsewhere¹ that, despite their small numbers, these now stateless troops posed a significant problem for governments across Europe.

Besides the new detail it provides on foreign officers and soldiers in the French army of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, this book is a welcome reminder that the cosmopolitanism of the eighteenth century extended not just to art, literature, and diplomacy, but also the military. War encouraged an amalgamation of peoples and cultures from disparate parts of the world (150). Tozzi also cautions us against misapplying the modern stereotype of the “mercenary,” which did not emerge until the attack on foreign soldiers during the French Revolution. Before that, there existed no real

1. “Soldiers without a Country: Foreign Veterans in the Transition from Empire to Restoration,” *Journal of Military History* 80 (2016) 93–120.

bias against foreign troops or officers serving in the same army as citizens. This goes to show how contingent and factitious the notion of a citizen army actually was: “during the late eighteenth century the army was an instrument not just for defending the nation, but for constructing the nation by helping to define, even if imperfectly, who belonged to the national community and who did not” (11). The author makes a significant contribution to both political and military history by exposing the contradictions inherent in the “universal” ideal of citizenship engendered by the French Revolution.

Tozzi gives much needed attention to the role of minorities from French territories in the nationalized army—particularly blacks and Jews. Although born in France or its colonies, blacks were mostly marginalized in the French army, foreshadowing the experience of colonial soldiers during the two world wars. More could have been said on this subject. Although evidence is admittedly scarce, black units like the Royal African Regiment deserve more discussion, beyond the elusive statement that “even relatively recent scholarship has questioned the unit’s very existence” (177). On the other hand, the case of Jews, to whom Tozzi devotes an entire chapter, provides a counter-example to the story of most “foreigners” in the army. Outsiders before the revolution, Jews made soldiering an avenue to integration: following their emancipation in the French Revolution, the military became a paradigm of Franco-Jewish republican citizenship.

The Jewish citizen-soldiers of the revolutionary era demonstrated the centrality of military service in defining the contours of the national community. In contrast to foreigners, whom the state endeavored to exclude from the army precisely because it did not consider them members of the French nation, and unlike blacks, whose opportunities and prestige within the army shifted along with policies on emancipation and slavery, Jews successfully seized upon military service, beginning in some cases even before the emancipation decrees, as a way of reinforcing their inclusion in the nascent French nation-state. (216)

Readers of traditional military histories or war studies may find too little discussion of actual battles in *Nationalizing France’s Army*. But this meticulously researched and engagingly written work exemplifies the (now not so) “new” military history with its focus on the relationship between war and society. It will richly reward readers interested in the history not just of war, but of citizenship, race, and cultural exchange in Europe during the age of revolutions.