

WHY REENACT FRENCH ARMY WWI?

- Ability to “fight” the entire war, from August 1914 to November 1918
- Versatility of our primary impression, late-war (1917-18), means you only need one kit
- Highest authenticity standards among any other nationality portrayed in the WWI reenacting community
- Excellent vendors providing top-notch, easy-to-order uniforms and equipment
- Diversity of French ranks: all races & religions served under the French flag so there's room for everyone
- Tight-knit organization filled with committed, high-quality reenactors

Those individuals who are drawn to portray the French soldier of the “Great War” of 1914-1918 tend to be the type of reenactor who is more thoughtful in the impressions they choose to take up. This might be one of the reasons why they also tend to take a great pride in the accuracy of their impression. In an overlooked war, the French army is often an overlooked army. If you decide to join our ranks, you will be falling in with a group of seasoned reenactors who are seeking an experience as true-to-reality as possible.

The History

- More than any other Allied power in the First World War, France was the most committed to the war effort. After all, it was its soil that was invaded by an aggressor. France mobilized 8.5 million men out of a total population of 40 million – 20% of the nation was under arms at some point during the 52 months of war. Boys as young as 18 and men as old as 50 served in the military together.
- The common French infantryman was called '*poilu*' (pronounced *pwah-loo*), or "scruffy," a nickname derived from the unshaven appearance common to the men serving at the front. He detested pomp and panache but could be relied upon to fight tenaciously.

The Honor

- French soldiers always considered themselves citizens first and soldiers second. While strongly patriotic, they believed firmly in equality, something easily identifiable by Americans of any era.
- The French army paid dearly for their efforts, losing 1.5 million killed and another 3 million wounded in the war. Put in other terms, an equivalent loss in the US today would be 11 million killed and 23 million wounded. The infantry, representing three-quarters of all French forces, suffered a 26% death rate and a 40% wound rate, making a 65% total casualty rate. The sacrifice of these men commands respect and honor.

The Material Culture

- The uniforms, equipment and weaponry of the French army straddled two different eras, with many regulation items unchanged since the mid-19th century. Wearing long greatcoats, kepis and leather harnessing, photographs from the time could be mistaken for the American Civil War.
- Of all the military powers in the war, the French army went through the greatest evolution in uniforms, weaponry and tactics between the years 1914 and 1918. The French infantryman marched off to war in 1914 dressed in a conspicuous uniform, armed with a bolt-action single-shot rifle and instilled with the belief that a bayonet charge would decide the outcome of a war. Yet by 1917, an infantry regiment was equipped with stripper-fed rifles, hand grenades, rifle-grenade launchers, machine-guns, automatic-rifles, 37mm rapid-fire canons, and an assortment of trench mortars. By the end of the war, the French army was the most modern fighting force in the world, and the French soldier a highly trained, multi-armed specialist supported by heavy artillery, tanks and fighter/bomber aircraft.
- In addition to supplying the bulk of the US army's needs for guns, tanks and aircraft, the French army also provided advanced infantry training to US troops.