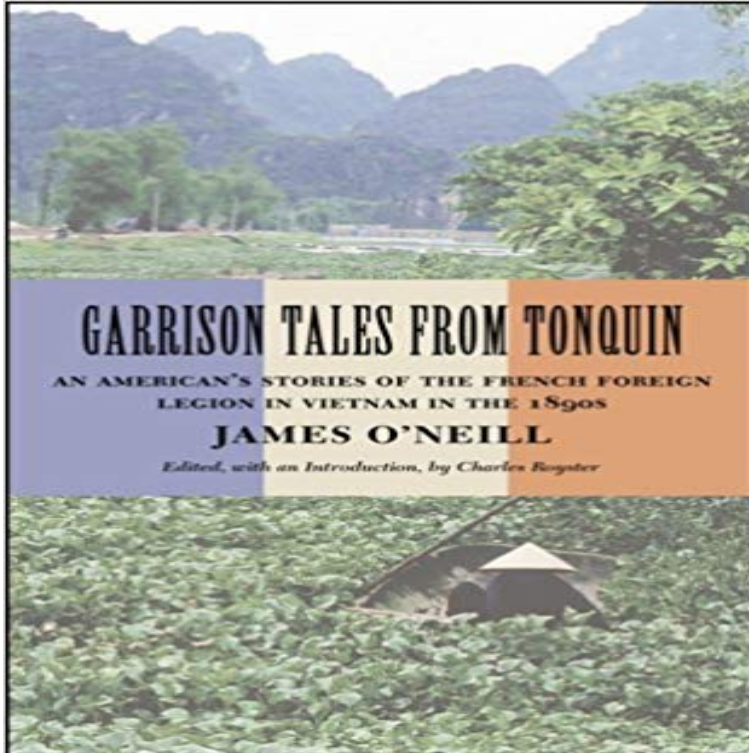


Garrison Tales from Tonquin: An Americans Stories of the French Foreign Legion in Vietnam in the 1890s



The thought of enlisting in the French Foreign Legion held a tantalizing allure for young nineteenth-century American boys in search of adventure. Apart from youthful fantasies few Americans seriously pursued joining the legion. These surprising and extraordinary short stories, written by one young man who did, take us to that time and place. Born in Bridgeport, Connecticut, James O'Neill enlisted in the legion in 1887, at the age of twenty-seven. In 1890, deployed to Tonquin in French Indochina (more familiar today as Tonkin, Vietnam), O'Neill faced tropical heat, infectious disease, and sudden death. Like his contemporary Stephen Crane, O'Neill's ability to tell an engaging story and his keen sense for telling details provide a unique record of his time in this exotic world. In these thirteen tales, O'Neill shows -- with surprising subtlety -- that France's efforts to conquer and govern Indochina were foolhardy. Although the only American in his stories is the narrator, it is clear that the tales are aimed at readers in the United States and are intended to caution against the construction of empires abroad. Far from polemical tirades, these are absorbing, unadorned stories -- remarkably contemporary in both style and substance. Charles Royster provides a short biography of O'Neill, who seems to have vanished into obscurity a few years after these stories were first published in 1895. Royster has also unearthed and included two essays O'Neill published in magazines of the time, one a description of a Buddhist temple in Hanoi and the other an appreciation of the Hungarian novelist Maurus Jokai. Whether read for historical value, literary merit, or political insights, *Garrison Tales from Tonquin* is a true discovery.

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