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Pointe Coupee Artillery, Louisiana

By Brian Costello

One hundred miles north of New Orleans, at the juncture of the Mississippi, Atchafalaya and Red Rivers, lies the Creole Mesopotamia of Pointe Coupee Parish, Louisiana, one of the oldest settlements in the Mississippi Valley. This important agricultural region, equally rich in history, culture and traditions, has been the site of continuous habitation since 1720 and many of its present-day citizens can trace their ancestry to the earliest settlers. Famous sons and daughters of Pointe Coupee include statesman and philanthropist Julien Poydras, Governor Arnaud Beauvais, Judge Charles Parlange, Justice Olivier Provosty, General John Archer Lejeune of United States Marines fame, New Orleans Mayor deLesseps "Chep" Morrison and his first cousin Congresswoman and Ambassador Corinne "Lindy" Claiborne Boggs, novelist Ernest Gaines, General Russell Honore and, the most gallant of all, Captain Alcide Bouanchaud of the celebrated Pointe Coupee Artillery.

Joseph Alcide Bouanchaud, as the name was pronounced during his lifetime, was born on the beautiful oxbow lake of False River, once the main channel of the Mississippi, just west of the town of New Roads, on August 16, 1838. His mother, Charlotte Saizan, was descended from several of the oldest families of False River. His father, Pierre Bouanchaud, sailed from the town of St. Nazaire, near Nantes, France, and was a cotton planter, member of the Police Jury and marguillier (church warden).

Alcide Bouanchaud was the second of four children, all boys, born to the couple. Pierre

Bouanchaud, Jr. was older, Jules, who died as a child, and Emile Bouanchaud were younger. The Bouanchaud boys had an older half-brother, Jean Baptiste St. Cyr, Jr., issue of their mother's previous marriage which had ended in her widowhood.

At the age of 14, Alcide Bouanchaud was placed under the tutelage of Professor Hypolite Didier, headmaster of nearby Poydras College. After two years of instruction, he enrolled in a boys' academy at Elizabethtown, Kentucky, where he remained for two years. At Elizabethtown, he formed a lasting friendship with his professor and principal, General Lafayette Hewitt, a distinguished Auditor of the State of Kentucky. Upon the completion of his studies, young Bouanchaud returned to his native parish and moved with his family to a cotton farm on the Island or opposite bank of False River from where he had been born. He was appointed a deputy in the office of Clerk of Court for Pointe Coupee in 1858. In 1860, he was united in marriage with Amelia Hebert, daughter of Forestin Hebert and Adeline Daigle, natives of Iberville Parish, who had established a sugar plantation in partnership with the St. Dizier family on the Island of False River in 1855. Mr. Hebert was a first cousin of Governor and Brigadier General Paul Octave Hebert and Brigadier General Louis Hebert. Ten months after their wedding, Alcide and Amelia became the parents of the first of their five children: a daughter named Marie Althee.

Althee's birth coincided with the election of Abraham Lincoln to the United States presidency. The Bouanchauds were "uncompromising secessionists" and, when the formation of military units immediately got underway, Pierre, Sr. and sons were among the first to enter the ranks of gray. Pierre, Sr. served in Company H of the Pointe Coupee Regiment, Louisiana State Militia. Pierre, Jr. joined Captain Henri Knaps' company of the Fausse Riviere Guards and later transferred to Captain Severin Porche's cavalry unit, which became Company K of the 2nd Louisiana Cavalry [I had three direct ancestors serve]. Alcide first served as an adjutant in the Pointe Coupee Regiment of the Louisiana Militia, then he and Emile Bouanchaud and their half-brother, Jean Baptiste St. Cyr, cast their lots with the Pointe Coupee Battery, organized by a Mexican War veteran named Richard A. Stewart. Alcide, enlisting on June 20, 1861, was immediately assigned the rank of 1st Lieutenant. On November 7, the men saw their first major action, at the Battle of Belmont. Originally a single battery, the unit was armed with one 10 pound Parrott gun, two 12 pound howitzers and three 6 pound smoothbores by April 6, 1862. Two months later, on June 21 at Abbeville, Mississippi, the unit was increased to battalion strength. The original unit was designated Company A with Alcide Bouanchaud as its captain. New recruits formed Company B, under the command of Captain William Davidson. Company C, was formed from some members of Company A and new recruits under Captain Alexandre Chustz of Pointe Coupee Parish.

The surnames of the young warriors of the Pointe Coupee Artillery Battalion read like a Who's Who of antebellum Pointe Coupee, including among their number Aguillard, Barra, Barrow, Bouanchaud, Carmouche, Chustz, Decuir, Decoux, Fortlouis, Gremillion, Guerin, Jewell, Joffrion, Langlois, LeBeau, LeDoux, LeJeune, Major, Olinde, Patin, Porche, Pourciau, Robillard, Roy, St. Cyr, Samson, Sicard and Vignes. The *Pointe Coupee Democrat* newspaper later recounted: "*This celebrated battery was composed of the elite of the parish. Our representation of young men were the first to join it and our old Creole families had one or more sons to aid in getting it up... From first to last this battery was conspicuous among the Confederate artillery, and no higher honor was asked for by a Confederate than to be recognized as a member of Bouanchaud's Battery.*"

The artillerymen received their baptism by fire in the Battles of Island No. 10 and Fort Pillow. Part of the battalion, under Captain Bouanchaud, fought at Coffeetown on December 5, 1862. Early in 1863, Company C and a portion of Company A led by Captain Bouanchaud reported for duty at Port Hudson, Louisiana, while Company B under Captain

Davidson and the other portion of Company A, under Lt. J.J. Thompson, helped defend Fort Pemberton, Mississippi. Soon, all three companies were dispatched to aid various brigades of Brigadier General William W. Loring's division around Jackson, Mississippi. On May 16, 1863, Companies A and C, with eight guns under Captain Bouanchaud, served in the Battle of Champion's Hill, where his effectiveness as a commander was noted for posterity by Brigadier General Winfield S. Featherston as follows: *"During this skirmish, and, in fact, the entire day, my brigade behaved well. All orders were promptly obeyed, and an eagerness to meet the enemy was manifested during the engagement by the whole command. The three pieces of artillery used by me to protect the retreat belonged to Captain Bouanchaud's battery. They were well served; both skill and courage were shown by the officers and men attached to these guns."*

Company B with two 3" rifles under Captain Davidson, Company C, with two 6 pounder guns and two 12 pounder howitzers under Captain Chustz, and the second section of Company A with two 3" rifles led by Lt. John Yoist, then fell back on Vicksburg and helped defend the garrison during the siege from May 18 until July 4, 1863. The first section of Company A, headed by Captain Bouanchaud, remained with Loring's division as it served in central and eastern Mississippi. The section of Company A at Vicksburg surrendered there, as did all of Company B and all but one section of Company C. Companies B and C, therefore, ceased to exist. Some of the subsequently exchanged and paroled men of the Pointe Coupee Artillery, including John Yoist and James Alfred Morgan, were united in December 1863 with veterans of the 1st Artillery Battery Regulars to form the 6th Battery Volunteer Artillery, renamed the 6th Louisiana Field Battery in November, 1864, but which was popularly known by the nickname of Grosse Tete Flying Artillery.

Captain Bouanchaud and the first section of the Pointe Coupee Artillery Battalion Company A – which had not served at Vicksburg and was with Loring's division – went on to participate in the Meridian Campaign in February and March of 1864. Two months later, in Georgia, they were attached to the Army of Tennessee and fought at Resaca on May 13 and at Calhoun on May 18. Refitted with 12 pound howitzers, Bouanchaud and company accompanied the Army of Tennessee throughout its movements in the Atlanta Campaign, the Battle of Allatoona and maneuvers in the state of Tennessee.

Captain Alcide Bouanchaud and his men were immortalized at the Battle of Nashville, where they courageously held the left flank of General John Bell Hood's army and prevented it from being completely routed on the first day of battle, December 15, 1864. A comrade in arms, John McQuaide of Co. F, 10th Mississippi Infantry, reported: *"The action of Capt. Alcide Bouanchaud's command in front of Nashville, in the two days' desperate battle between Gen. Hood's army and that of Gen. Thomas, was the most gallant, heroic, and brilliant artillery fighting done during the war. The battalion to which Bouanchaud's battery was attached was composed of three companies: Cowan's, of Vicksburg; Capt. Put. Darden's, of Jefferson County, Miss.; and Bouanchaud's, of Louisiana. When the battle commenced on the first day, Cowan's Vicksburg battery was ordered from its strongly entrenched position near Bouanchaud and Darden to support a very weak position near our extreme left. Later, this position being strongly and desperately assaulted by the Federals, the infantry support to Cowan's battery precipitately took flight, leaving Cowan. The latter attempted to save his guns, but the Federals, 3 or 4 columns deep, coming upon him too quickly, shot down all of his horses and captured the guns. Bouanchaud and Darden fought most desperately in their respective positions, but our infantry, not able to withstand the tremendous onslaught of Thomas, was leaving the works. At this critical stage Bouanchaud had the presence of mind to order up his horses from the rear, and that, too, under a most terrific fire. By this time our infantry was flying in all directions, and the Federals were*

throwing themselves against Bouanchaud and Darden in overwhelming force. They had already come over our works to the left of these two batteries, and now swept down upon the batteries, capturing Darden's guns, but Bouanchaud, lion-hearted and undismayed, had limbered up, and was retiring despite them. Under a most terrific, and not improbably the hottest fire that any command ever endured, he retired by sections, fighting columns of the Federals, and thus, unaided and unsupported, Bouanchaud and his battery, single handed and alone, on an open field without protection or shelter of any kind, checked and held back the whole of Gen. Thomas' right. Our infantry, as I have stated, was flying in all directions, and there was not a single company going to Bouanchaud's assistance. Generals, colonels, and captains were cursing and pleading - even crying in vain - to our flying infantry to halt, form, and rally to that battery. An officer cried out: 'Shame, shame, Look at those brave artillerymen; see how calmly the drivers sit on their horses under that awful fire! For God's sake rally to their support, or they will be lost.' The great Gen. Loring is one of the generals who was heard to utter such words, and it was one of his regiments, the gallant little 22nd Mississippi, that went to Bouanchaud's assistance. This timely aid enabled him to get his battery under cover behind a stone wall. The Federals, however, had suffered so much from Bouanchaud's deadly fire, that as night was coming on they discontinued their attack and made no further demonstration upon our lines until the next day. Capt. Bouanchaud and his *Pointe Coupee* battery undoubtedly saved Gen. Hood's army from being overwhelmingly routed in the first day's fight before Nashville. Gen. Loring, who is living at this time, and who was an eye-witness to the circumstances related, can vouch for the correctness of these statements. Bouanchaud was the only captain in our battalion that night who had a cannon left. He had all of his, uninjured and intact, but of his brave little French *Pointe Coupee* boys, many had poured out their blood and given their lives for the honor and glory of Louisiana. On the following day Bouanchaud's position was again fiercely assailed, but the attacks upon him from the front, though desperate, were in every instance disastrously repulsed. Late in the afternoon Hood's line gave way on the left, and the Federals, breaking over the works, came down upon Bouanchaud's battery, left flank and rear."

The popular Sergeant (Cesaire) Landry wrote in his diary, "A poetic incident followed with that successful rush of the charging enemy. It was the battery's fourth gun which fell into his hands. With the capture, the enemy mockingly planted his colors upon it. Not at all disturbed, but rather angered by the growing confusion, not to add the intrusive flag, the cannoneers of the third piece turned their gun directly upon the fourth and fired their last round of ammunition at the colors. After this act of justice, the gunners fled to avoid capture. Our infantry, and the whole army, in fact, was leaving the field, and retreating. Bouanchaud had exhausted all of his ammunition and there remained nothing more for him to do other than attempt saving the few remaining members of his command. He said: 'Men, we can do no more; there is no use remaining here to be shot down or captured. They went out of that hell, as it were, leaving the plain in front of where their guns had stood that day black with the dark blue uniform of the masses of the dead and dying enemy. Gen. Loring has said: 'To have served in either of the batteries of my command is glory enough for any one man. In my opinion, however, Capt. Bouanchaud's gallant conduct, and that of his famous battery, in the first day's fight before Nashville, has never in all the history of war been equaled, and can never possibly be surpassed.'"

A history of the Iowa troops active at the Battle of Nashville stated that on December 15, the Confederate line crumbled, retreated and re-established itself two miles to the rear, during which time the Bouanchaud Battery was nearly captured but succeeded in withdrawing its guns at the last moment. On December 16, the Union forces attacked the Confederates again. Hood's army soon failed and retreated as rain fell over the battlefield. The Bouanchaud Battery remained with its guns until the last moments, and was forced to

surrender. Lieut. Col. Gustavus A. Eberhart, of the 32nd Iowa, reported: “At 3.30 p.m. ... we then moved forward at a double-quick over an open field, under a severe fire from artillery and musketry, and in a few minutes gained the entrenchments, capturing about 50 prisoners and 5 pieces of artillery. Some of the artillerists were killed as they were leaving the guns. Private William May, of Company H dashed forward and captured the battery guidon. The regiment moved forward in pursuit...”¹

After the tragedy of Nashville, Captain Bouanchaud and the remnants of his battery participated in the agony of a two week-long retreat through ice and snow. The survivors continued to fight until ultimately being surrendered by Lt. Gen. Richard Taylor at Citronelle, Alabama on May 4, 1865. Among their number was Emile Bouanchaud.

Of the approximately 346 men who had served in the Pointe Coupee Artillery Battalion, 27 are known to have been killed and 28 to have died of disease. Many ended up in Federal prison camps, such as young Michel Fortlouis, captured near Atlanta and who died at age 27 in the prison camp at Elmira, New York. His brothers Leopold and Theophile, who had served with him, survived the war. On Memorial Day 2006, Elmira historians Diane Janowski and Allen Smith, who happen to count several friends in New Roads, placed Pointe Coupee soil on Michel Fortlouis’ grave in Elmira’s Woodlawn National Cemetery. Six Langlois brothers served under Captain Bouanchaud and were prisoners of war – Louis, Adelard, Michel, Paul Oscar, Pierre and Zenon – of whom Adelard died at Camp Morton, Indiana, Michel died at Chester, Pennsylvania and Paul Oscar, also died a prisoner of war.

The survivors of the Pointe Coupee Artillery Battalion, including the Bouanachauds and their half-brother, eventually made their way back to Pointe Coupee Parish. Oral tradition has it that another of the Pointe Coupee Artillerymen, Villeneuve David, who had been captured near Franklin, Tennessee and imprisoned at Fort Douglas, Illinois, returned home by boat on the Mississippi River at war’s end; when David and companions saw the State Capitol Building at Baton Rouge, they realized that the boat had gone too far south and had bypassed Pointe Coupee, and they had to double back upriver to reach home.

As the war progressed, Captain and Mrs. Alcide Bouanchaud had become the parents of a second child, Marie Delia, about the time of his first battle. Meanwhile, the Captain’s mother had died around the time of the Battle of Nashville. Three more children were born to the Alcide and Amelia Bouanchaud - Joseph Alcide, Jr., Marie Ella and Helene Amelia Corinne - within a few years after the war.

Resuming civilian life, Alcide Bouanchaud registered as a Republican and thereby gained the seat of Clerk of Court for Pointe Coupee Parish in 1866. He served in that capacity until 1868, when he assumed the office of Parish Judge. His decision to join the Republican Party – the party of the North – caused some surprise to his former soldiers. One of them, an old neighbor from the Island of False River named Eustache Bueche, is remembered to have questioned his former officer how he could have done such a thing as join the party of their former enemies. Bouanchaud is said to have replied that he changed his party affiliation in order to take office and help his people, something that would have been impossible if he had attempted to run for office as a Democrat in the days of Reconstruction.

Captain Bouanchaud was repeatedly elected Parish Judge until that office was abolished by the Constitution of 1879. It is said that in one of the elections he received all but one vote, and that being the vote of a close friend.

Alcide Bouanchaud’s wife, Amelia Hebert Bouanchaud, died in 1870. In the following year, he married her younger sister, Eugenia Hebert. From his second marriage, he became

¹ This was a pennant; the actual battle flag was found in Bouanchaud’s valise by Federals, now in the Confederate Museum of New Orleans.

the father of eight children: Joseph Lamartine, named for the French poet; Marie Eugenia; Marie Honorine Ada; Hewitt Leonidas, named for Generals Lafayette Hewitt and Leonidas Polk; Joseph Lafayette, also named for General Lafayette Hewitt; Marie Mabel; Marie Annabelle; and Joseph Wade.

The years following the war were difficult ones in Pointe Coupee Parish, as they were throughout the South. Floods of the Mississippi River in 1865, 1866, 1867, 1874, 1882 and 1884 as well as a shortage of labor spelled disaster for many parish residents. Captain Bouanchaud engaged in several real estate transactions, including the purchase of the former Gremillion plantation on the Island of False River, which he parceled into small tracts and sold to African-American families. In 1873, he entered into an agricultural partnership and invested heavily in the cultivation of sugar cane and cotton with a Creole of color, Alphonse St. Amant. The two operated as "A. Bouanchaud & Co., Star Plantation" on the former Charles Poydras plantation just west of New Roads. The partnership ended in 1878, when the property – including Bouanchaud's livestock and implements – were seized and offered at sheriff's sale owing to St. Amant's debts.

Mrs. Bouanchaud then purchased a farm just east of New Roads to which the family moved. Two Creole cottages were joined end to end to side to create a spacious home, which was to remain in possession of the family until recent years. As the Constitution of 1879 abolished the office of Parish Judge, Alcide Bouanchaud went before the Supreme Court at Opelousas and, after passing an examination, was admitted to the bar and practiced law in New Roads for the remaining years of his life. His father, Pierre Bouanchaud, Sr., died in Alcide's home in 1884.

Following a brief illness, Captain Alcide Bouanchaud himself, surrounded by his family, was called to the halls of Valhalla and fame's eternal camping ground at 11 p.m. on Saturday, August 7, 1886, a few days shy of his 48th birthday. The *Pointe Coupee Banner* newspaper eulogized him as the most popular man of the community and its most noted native-born son. The funeral was held on the following day at 5 p.m. at old St. Mary's Catholic Church, after which his remains were conveyed to the church cemetery a half-mile away. Members of the local Masonic lodge, of which he was a member, offered the final honors. The number of people attending the burial was reported to have been the largest ever in New Roads.

After the funeral, the members of the Pointe Coupee Parish bar, upon motion of the Hon. L.B. Claiborne, a veteran Pointe Coupee Artilleryman, seconded by the Hon. Charles Parlange, offered the following memorial tribute: *"That deceased was endeared to us by the ties of friendship, which had grown strong through long years of close association. That during his career we have known him, as a soldier, the cool-headed, skillful and chivalric commander of the Pointe Coupee Artillery; as the efficient and accommodating Clerk of Court; the impartial and incorruptible Judge of the Parish Court; the earnest advocate and conscientious counselor; the liberal-minded, outspoken and patriotic citizen; the sincere friend; the devoted husband and affectionate father. Further resolved, that we recognize that his death had occasioned a void in our midst which cannot be easily filled, and that his memory deserves to be ever cherished by the people of this parish. Further resolved, that to his widow and orphaned children, we extend the assurance of our deep sympathy with them in their immeasurable sorrow."*

Famed Louisiana historian Alcee Fortier recorded: *"Alcide Bouanchaud, besides being a courageous soldier, a clear headed commander, an impartial and just jurist, and an able advocate also was an upright citizen, always taking an active interest in the public welfare and deporting himself as an accomplished gentleman of suave and pleasing manner, and always gladly welcomed in any society. His genial and charitable disposition made heavy drains upon his finances, and as a consequence he accumulated but little of this world's*

goods.”

Of the 13 children of Captain Alcide Bouanchaud, one died in infancy and only five married: Althee to Jean Baptiste Cazayoux; Lamartine first to Olivia Samson and second to Blanche Roy; Hewitt first to Emma Kearney and second to Eustatia Morrison; Annabelle to George Ross Kearney; and Wade to Rowena Morrison. Three of the maiden daughters, Eugenia, Mable and Ada, were school teachers. Eugenia was subsequently secretary of the Pointe Coupee Parish School Board; Ada, principal of the elementary division of Poydras Academy; and Mabel later, a cashier at Bank of New Roads. Of the sons, Alcide, Jr. and Wade were building contractors, Wade also being a sugar cane farmer; Lafayette was likewise a farmer; Hewitt was an attorney, state legislator, Speaker of the House and Lieutenant Governor of Louisiana; and Lamartine, most versatile of all, began his career as a general merchant, then proceeded to establish the L. Bouanchaud insurance agency, as well as serving as Mayor of the Town of New Roads, the most-beloved Sheriff of Pointe Coupee Parish and President of Bank of New Roads.

Within a 13-month period during 1918-1919, death came to Mrs. Eugenia Bouanchaud, three of her children – Ada, Lafayette and Wade – as well as her step-daughter and niece Ella, daughter of Alcide and Amelia Hebert, no doubt due to the dreaded influenza epidemic of that time.

It is from Alcide Bouanchaud’s son Lamartine and daughter Annabelle Bouanchaud Kearney that his present-day New Roads descendants stem. Succeeding generations have served in political office, the military and the legal, banking and automotive professions; they are devoted members of the Catholic Church; and several have reigned as Kings and Queens of the famous New Roads Carnival, altogether manifesting a love of community and tradition, patriotism, a sense of loyalty and a proverbial hospitality which readily identify them as true sons and daughters of their august ancestor, Captain Alcide Bouanchaud of the Pointe Coupee Artillery.

About the author

Brian J. Costello is an 11th generation citizen of Pointe Coupee Parish, Louisiana, birthplace of Captain Alcide Bouanchaud, and the two are collaterally related through the colonial French families of Saizan and Bergeron. Costello’s direct forebears include three veterans of the 2nd Louisiana Cavalry CSA and three of the 18th Louisiana Infantry CSA, plus several collateral ancestors who served in the Pointe Coupee Artillery, Washington Artillery and other CSA units. He is a graduate of Louisiana State University at Baton Rouge, former editor of the *Pointe Coupee Banner* newspaper and is the founding historian and genealogist of the Pointe Coupee Parish Library Historic Materials Collection. Costello, native speaker of Louisiana Creole, is the sole author of 19 and the co-author of five books and 30 years of feature works on Louisiana and European history, genealogy, culture, linguistics and spirituality. He is Deputy Commander of the United States of America and First Commander of Louisiana of the Imperial Teutonic Order, an Officer of the Military and Hospitaller Order of Saint Lazarus of Jerusalem, and a member of the Association and Order of the Nobility of the Holy Roman Empire in the rank of Princely Count and Baron. He is Liaison for Louisiana for the Confederate Historical Association of Belgium, Founding President of Le Cercle Historique, and a member of numerous lay apostolates and charitable endeavors. Costello has received numerous honors including the Deo Vindice award from the Civil War Study Club of New Orleans. He and wife, nee Mary Julie Langlois, live on False River near the Pointe Coupee Parish seat of New Roads.