



A Belgian family in the Confederate army

by Gerald Hawkins and Serge Noirsain

In 1982, the CHAB co-produced with Michael J. McAfee, Curator of the West Point Museum, a publication entitled "The Civil War Zouaves", which has been out of print since many years. Given that the current article describes in much detail one of those units, it seems fitting to introduce it by a text written by M. McAfee for his booklet "Zouaves ... the First and the Bravest", published by the West Point Museum Bulletin in 1979, and reproduced with his kind permission.

INTRODUCTION

by Michael J. McAfee

Curator of the West Point Museum

The Birth of the French Zouaves

The Zouaves of the French Army were originally recruited from native North African troops. Early in 1830, France launched an expedition into Algeria and in July of that year, the city of Algiers was captured by a French Army. In August, a number of Algerians (mainly Berber Kabyles) of the Zouaoua tribe offered their services to the occupying army. The French general staff, feeling it could be useful in maintaining order and protecting the city, accepted them and on October 1, the Zouaoua were organized into two battalions under French officers. A few French volunteers joined the native contingent at that time, setting

the precedent for further European enlistments. It was not until March 1831, however, that these troops were officially sanctioned by King Louis-Philippe. By 1835, the Zouave corps consisted of two battalions of six companies (two French and four Arabs), which could be increased in size to ten companies.¹ Rapidly however, more and more Frenchmen joined the Zouave battalions.

By 1841, when the Zouaves were reorganized into three battalions, only one company out of nine included native soldiers. Gradually, all North Africans were mustered into independent battalions of sharpshooters until the Zouave companies were all European. In 1852, three regiments of Zouaves were authorized, with each of the three original battalions serving as the nucleus of a new regiment. Filling these regiments presented no problem, for there were many veteran soldiers in North Africa “*eager to be allowed to wear a uniform already illustrated by feats of arms, which (...) had already won for the corps an imperishable renown for bravery*”.² The skills of the Zouave battalions as light infantry and skirmishers had made them invaluable during the conquest of North Africa. They rapidly developed an “*esprit de corps*” which put them apart from other soldiers. By the outbreak of the Crimean War in 1854, the three regiments of Zouaves comprised a body of nearly 10,000 experienced soldiers, well trained and equipped.

It was apparently during the Crimean War however, that the Zouaves received widespread public notice outside France. In 1854, after France’s declaration of war on Russia, two battalions per regiment of Zouaves were mobilized for the war. The remaining battalions of the regiments remained in Africa where the last of the Arab strongholds were being seized and the conquest of Algeria completed. The war battalions, of approximately 2,200 men from each regiment, took three months to organize, the six battalions reaching Constantinople in June of 1854. The Crimean War received wide coverage in the newspapers for it was the first major conflict since the Napoleonic Wars. In addition, this war was brought home as none had ever before because the development of popular journalism had created a vast reading audience that devoured especially the illustrated weeklies of the Victorian era. It might have seemed as though the Zouaves were created for the media. Their gaudy, oriental uniforms coupled with their roguish behavior and unquestioned bravery guaranteed that the Zouaves would gain the public’s attention. Interestingly, the Zouaves themselves had been eager to go to Crimea to win “*greater importance in the eyes of the world*”.³

The Crimean War became especially noted for the hardships endured by the allied soldiers in that inhospitable country. Unprepared for winter, the discomforts of the camps were immense. The battles were as equally demanding and from Alma to the final siege of Sebastopol, the Zouaves were foremost among the brave. One result of the Crimean War was the creation of a regiment of Zouaves within the French Imperial Guard. In 1859, Italian patriots in Sardinia, supported by the promises of Napoleon III of France, triggered a war with Austria. As the French Army sought to maintain the Piedmont and champion Italian independence, the Zouaves were once more in the thick of the fighting. Zouave units won many honors and their gallant conduct at such battles as Magenta and Solferino once more made the headings of the newspapers. In fact, so widespread was the knowledge of the French Zouaves that even in Tucson (Arizona), the following filler was found in the daily paper: “*The Zouaves. Some of the Austrians seem to have been particularly struck at seeing Zouaves come into action with their pipes in their mouths. The German’s love for a pipe is of the number of calm delight, a thing appreciated when he is sitting in the sun besides his*

¹ C. Lienhart & R. Humbert, *Les uniformes de l’Armée française depuis 1690 jusqu’à nos jours*, Leipzig, 1900, vol. III : p. 213.

² J.J. Cler, *Reminiscences of an Officer of Zouaves*, New York, 1860, pp. 10-11.

³ *Ibid.* p. 111.

*cottage door, but a pipe in battle ! Innocent German ! Incomprehensible Zouave !”*⁴

Thus, the Zouave had become a household word. His exploits were universally known and it was to be expected that he would soon find imitators in the New World.

Elmer E. Ellsworth and the American Zouave

Despite the successes of the Zouave in the Crimean War, it was not until 1859 that the first recorded American Zouave unit was formed. Elmer E. Ellsworth, a young idealist with military persuasion, created the United States Zouave Cadets from a moribund Chicago volunteer company. Ellsworth had become acquainted with one Charles A. DeVilliers, a former surgeon in the French Army in Algiers, who had served with a Zouave regiment during the Crimean War. One of Ellsworth's biographers credits this association as being “*the running point in Ellsworth's life*” as it led him to introduce French Zouave uniforms and tactics into this country.⁵

Ellsworth, in his zeal, went so far as to impose the strictest of moral discipline upon his Zouave Cadets. None was allowed to drink, gamble, play billiards or act in any way “*unbecoming to a gentleman*”.⁶ Ellsworth's men, a company of the 60th Regiment, Illinois State Militia, soon became the undisputed champions at local drill competitions. Their military exercises were based on the French Zouave drill, and the gymnastic antics of Ellsworth's Zouaves soon caught the public eye. Newspapers began crying accounts of their feats, and especially, of the brilliant uniform Ellsworth had designed for his unit. So confident was Ellsworth of the abilities of his company that in September of 1859, he issued a challenge to “*any company of the Militia or regular Army of the United States or Canada*” to meet in competition for a stand of Championship Colors.⁷ When none accepted his challenge, he decided to seek out competitors and a great tour of Eastern cities was arranged where he would exhibit the prowess of his Zouave Cadets.

On 2 July 1860, Ellsworth left Chicago with fifty picked men and the first drill was held at Adrian (Michigan) on July 4. From there, the Zouave Cadets proceeded to Detroit, Cleveland, Niagara Falls and New York. The Zouaves reached New York City on 14 July and were met by a detachment of the 6th Regiment, New York State Militia. As the volunteer companies and regiments of the New York City area included some of the best trained and equipped units in the country, this was obviously the high point of the tour. On 17 July, the Zouave Cadets visited Brooklyn where they were the guests of the 13th Regiment and gave drills at Fort Greene. When the visiting Zouaves departed on the 20th, they left with tremendous plaudits and their uniforms and drill were pictured in the several illustrated weeklies published in New York, which did even more to spread their fame throughout the entire country.

The Zouaves then proceeded to Boston, West Point (where they performed for the Corps of Cadets and Lieutenant General Winfield Scott), Philadelphia, Baltimore, Washington D.C., Pittsburgh, Cincinnati, St. Louis, and finally arrived in Chicago on the evening of 14 August 1860, where it seemed as though the entire city was awaiting them. The grand tour of the Chicago Zouaves made Ellsworth a popular hero, but it also spawned dozens of other Zouave companies.⁸ Some of these would become noteworthy in their own right such as the Albany Zouave Cadets of New York and the Salem Zouaves of Massachusetts. However, most would soon be eclipsed by the stature of the volunteer Zouave regiments, which would

⁴ D.B. Sayner, R.P. Hole & M.S. Brett-Harte, *Arizona's First Newspaper, "The Weekly Arizonian"*, Tucson, 1977.

⁵ C.A. Ingraham, *Elmer E. Ellsworth and the Zouaves*, Chicago, 1925, p. 7.

⁶ *Ibid.* p. 26.

⁷ *Ibid.* p. 60.

⁸ *Ibid.* p. 68-79.

be raised within the following year because of the outbreak of the Civil War.

Ellsworth, meanwhile, left the Zouave Cadets and entered Abraham Lincoln's law office. With Lincoln elected as president, Ellsworth hoped to create a Militia Bureau with the federal Government, which he, naturally, would head. Fate intervened, however, and Ellsworth, who had been commissioned a Second Lieutenant in the Regular Army, resigned his commission and left Washington for New York City. There he would create a regiment of Zouaves (with himself as colonel) with the men of the New York Fire Department. Ellsworth was not the only one with such plans, as by 1861, there were many Zouave units competing for recruits.

If it is obvious that Ellsworth spread the fame of the Zouave name, it is equally evident that his tour inspired the creation of many Zouave companies. However, it should be remembered that other Zouave companies existed before Ellsworth's grand tour and were not raised in imitation of his unit. In Pittsburgh, for example, the Pittsburgh Zouave Corps was depicted in a colorful lithograph published in 1860 probably before Ellsworth's visit. Not only had the French Zouaves received popular acclaim in the press, but also the official report on the armies of Europe, prepared by Captain George B. McClellan as a result of the Crimean War, contained a glowing description of the Zouaves.⁹ Thus, the Zouave had found official praise even with the United States Army and, although it is difficult to gauge the effect of this report on the volunteer companies, it is obvious that Ellsworth was not the only American soldier familiar with Zouaves.

COPPENS' FAMILY OF CONFEDERATE ZOUAVES

by Gerald Hawkins and Serge Noirsain

The French Presence in Louisiana

In 1860, 11.4 % of the Louisianans was foreign-born people. Twenty-four nationalities were represented among the 12,000 soldiers who left Louisiana in 1861. According to the original muster rolls of 7,000 of these men, 2,268 men were born outside the United States and belonged to the following countries¹⁰ :

Ireland..... 1,463	Belgium..... 5
Germany 412	Denmark..... 4
England..... 160	Norway..... 4
France 74	Italy 4
Canada 50	Cuba 3
Scotland 31	Brazil..... 3
Switzerland 13	Russia..... 2
West Indies 12	Hungary 1
Sweden 7	Holland..... 1
Mexico..... 6	Spain 1
Poland..... 6	Nassau..... 5

⁹ G.B. McClellan, *The Armies of Europe*, Philadelphia, 1861, p. 61.

¹⁰ Statistics from Bound Volumes 1-10 and 12, in "Association of the Army of Northern Virginia", L.H.A.C. which include the Record Rolls of the 1st, 2d, 6th, 7th, 8th, 9th and 15th Louisiana Volunteers, in T.E. Jones, "The Louisiana Infantry in the Army of Northern Virginia" - Excerpts from "Lee's Tigers", note 18.

Author of *Creole and Puritan*, *Cross Purposes*, *Juny* and other works, Thomas C. DeLeon is a powerful talented writer. As a Southerner, he was a witness of the American Civil War and as a novelist, he proved that he could write a strong and descriptive chronicle of the South at war. His *Four Years in Rebel Capitals* is a significant work on the life behind the lines of the Confederacy. His perception of the French Louisianans is most colorful.

“New Orleans was, at this time, divided into two distinct towns in one corporation – the French and the American. In the first one, the French language was spoken altogether for social and business purposes, and even in the courts. The theaters were French, the cafés innocent of English, and the “very children speak it”. Many persons grow up in this quarter – or did in years back – which never, to their old age, crossed to the American town or spoke one word of English. In the society of the old town, one found a miniature – exact to the photograph – of Paris. It was jealously exclusive, and even the most petted beaux of the American quarter deemed it privilege to enter it. A stranger must come with letters of the most urgent kind before he could cross its threshold. All the etiquette and form of the Ancien Régime obtained here – the furniture, the dress, the cookery, the dances were all French”.

“In the American town the likeness to Mobile was very marked, in the manners and style of the people. The young men of the French quarter had sought this society more of late years, finding in it a freedom from restraint, for which their associations with other Americans in business gave them a taste. The character of the society was gay and easy – and it was not hedged in so carefully as that of the old town. Strangers were cordially – if not very carefully – welcomed into it ; and the barriers of reserve, that once protected it, were rapidly breaking down before the inroads of progress and petroleum”.

“The great hotels – the “St. Charles”, “St. Louis” and others – were constantly filled with the families of planters from all points of the river and its branches, and with travelers from the Atlantic border as well (...). There was much difference of opinion as to the morals of the Crescent City. For my own part, I do not think the men were more dissipated than elsewhere, though infinitely more wedded to enjoyment and fun in every form. There was the French idea prevalent that gambling was no harm (...). From the climate and the great prevalence of light wines, there was less drunkenness than in most southern towns ; and if other vices prevailed to any great extent – they were either gracefully hidden, or so sanctioned by custom as to cause no remark, except by straight-laced strangers (...)”.

“The young married woman monopolized more of the society and its beaux than would be agreeable to New York belles ; but, if they borrowed this custom from their French neighbors, I have not heard that they also took the license of the Italian. Public and open improprieties were at once frowned down, and people of all grades and classes seemed to make their chief study good taste. This is another French graft, on a stem naturally susceptible, of which the consequences can be seen from the hair ribbon of the ‘bonne’ [cleaning woman] to the decoration of the Cathedral (...)”.

“The woman of New Orleans, as a rule, dress with more taste – more perfect adaptation of form and color to figure and complexion – than any in America. On a dress night at the opera, at church, or at a ball, the toilettes are a perfect study in their exquisite fitness – their admirable blending of simplicity and elegance. Nor is this confined to the higher and wealthier classes. The women of lower conditions are admirably imitative : and on Sunday afternoons, where they crowd to hear the public bands with husbands and children, all in their best, it is the rarest thing to see a badly-trimmed bonnet or an ill-chosen costume. The men, in those days, dressed altogether in the French fashion ; and were, consequently, the worst dressed in the world (...). To the natural impressibility of the Southron, the

*Louisianan adds the enthusiasm of the Frenchman”.*¹¹

Many Louisianans were impressed with the Zouave style, especially in early 1861, when a group of itinerant actors who claimed to have served in the French Zouaves during the Crimean War appeared in New Orleans. They attracted vast crowds while touring the State of Louisiana and thrilled everyone with their close-order drill, colorful uniforms, and French drill commands. Later on, they left for Mexico. By March 1861, the French actors had inspired many military groups, notably the four main notorious Louisiana Zouave battalions : Coppens, St. Leon Dupeire, Avegno and Wheat.¹²

Although the colorful dress of the Zouaves attracted many recruits, did the Southern authorities have the means to produce this kind of uniform ?

Essentially rural, the States of Dixie had never bothered to develop any industrial infrastructure and almost all their finished goods were imported. Their small number of mills spun only coarse cotton intended for the agricultural labor force and black slaves. At the same time, in the North, the Howe and Singer sewing machines were boosting the mass production of fashionable clothes. Impaired by their meager reserve of raw materials, the Southern cloth manufacturers and tailors were helpless in responding to the large orders placed for uniforms by the Quartermaster Bureau of the Confederacy.

This Bureau was one of the branches of the War Department. Abraham Myers was fifty years old when Davis put him in charge of it, on March 15, 1861. A graduate from West Point in 1833, Myers had occupied the position of quartermaster in various army posts until his State seceded, in December 1860. Despite his 25 years of service in the Union army, he was fully ignorant of the South’s situation regarding its resources in textiles. To make matters worse, his staff included only a handful of officers to manage the enormous quantity of equipment required by the 100,000 men that the Confederate Congress had just called to arms. His initial budget was 128 million dollars. Upon taking up his new duties, Myers had to move quickly. Since there was no time to conclude contracts with the private sector to equip its troops, the Southern government resorted to a “commutation system” until October 1862, which consisted in allocating initially 21, then 25 \$ to the volunteers for the procurement of their military outfit.¹³

Thus, during the first twelve months of hostilities, the Confederate soldier went to war with a wide variety of clothing. Everyone helped out : civilian and military tailors, depots of the State militia, women associations, family know-how and even prison convicts.¹⁴ The first uniforms did not follow the dress regulations and until spring 1862, the rebel army abounded in lively uniforms. The exotic Zouave and the gaudy black clad hussar coasted with all kind of individuals in green, yellow and even dark blue dress.¹⁵ On the other hand, many plain people had to content themselves with gray or brownish homemade cloths.¹⁶ Of all the colorful units mustered in the Confederacy, the Louisiana Zouaves were by far those who caught the imagination of the Southern population.

Coppens’ First Battalion of Louisiana Zouaves

In his article “*Belgian officers and soldiers in the Confederate army*”, Professor Francis Balace depicts the origin of the Coppens family and its migration to the United States in terms that are needless to paraphrase. “*The Coppens Hondschoot de Norland family came*

¹¹ T.C. DeLeon, *Four Years in Rebel Capitals*, Mobile, 1890, pp. 63-65.

¹² J.D. Winters, *Civil War in Louisiana*, Baton Rouge, 1963, pp. 16-17.

¹³ H.S. Wilson, *Confederate Industry*, Jackson, 2002, p. 5.

¹⁴ *Ibid*, p. 8.

¹⁵ W.H. Russell, *The Civil War in America*, Boston, 1861, p. 30.

¹⁶ F.P. Todd, *American Military Equipage 1851-1872 : vol. IV Armies of the States*, The Company of Military Historians, Providence, 1983.

from the Country of Liège where its presence is established at the end of the XVth century. One of its members settled in Dunkirk, became a city council constituent around 1640, and two of his descendants, Louis-Hippolyte and Laurent Coppens, were granted the title of Baron by King Louis XVIII. Baron Auguste Coppens, the son of Louis-Hippolyte, moved to Louisiana in 1853, arriving from Saint-Pierre of Martinique. The emancipation of the slaves in the French colonies probably explains this emigration and the enthusiasm with which the members of the Coppens family (“de” Coppens since their arrival in America) championed the Southern cause”.¹⁷

The Coppens family was highly regarded by the New Orleans upper class. As of January 1861, Georges Auguste Gaston Coppens, the eldest son and a former graduate of the French Naval College, started to recruit volunteers for his battalion of Zouaves. As Francis Balace remarks, “it was more or less a family enterprise”.¹⁸ Since Louisiana had just seceded from the Union, he offered to raise it for the State, but Governor Moore felt it was premature to create such a unit.¹⁹ Undeterred, Coppens left for Montgomery early in March 1861, and after a personal interview with President Davis, he obtained the authorization to raise and equip his battalion. It was to comprise five companies and consist of not less than 400 and no more than 500 men, with the proper proportion of commissioned and non commissioned officers.²⁰ In the event of war, President Davis promised that the strength of the battalion would be increased to a full regiment.²¹ Back in New Orleans, the Coppens family made preparations for the recruiting of their Zouaves.

George Gaston Coppens had established his headquarters in New Orleans, at 61 Customhouse Street. He apparently managed to find recruits without any problems since by March 24, the first two companies were complete, under the command of Captains Marie-Alfred Coppens and Fulgence de Bordenave. The men were sent out to a tobacco warehouse in the city’s third district. The other companies were also slowly taking shape.²² As the battalion was predominantly non-English - Captain de Bordenave himself could not speak English - the common language in use was French. Such was also the case in Major Avegno’s Louisiana Zouave Battalion.²³ The *Daily Picayune* reported on March 28, that “although there are men of all Nations in the ranks, they appear to have learned quite promptly to obey as soon as the word is given, and do not hesitate more than if they were all French”.

Many seasoned veterans, French and Italian soldiers who had fought in North Africa and in the Crimean War enlisted in Coppens’ Louisiana Zouave battalion. Scores of his men were however recruited from the lawless trash of Louisiana. Some Creoles who did not belong to the State’s gentry were also drafted into the unit. Professors Lee A. Wallace and Ella Lonn wrote that Coppens received permission from the mayor of New Orleans to establish booths within the city jails, giving criminals the choice between prison and military service. Maybe this is an exaggeration, but the lawlessness of the battalion at the

¹⁷ F. Balace, *Officiers et soldats d’origine belge dans l’armée confédérée*, in “*Revue Belge d’Histoire Militaire*”, vol. XVIII, Bruxelles, 1969.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ New Orleans Bee, March 28, 1861. A battalion of two companies under Gaston Coppens appears to have been formed in January, 1861. One company was under Alfred Coppens, the other under Fulgence de Bordenave, in New Orleans *Daily Crescent*, January. 29, 1861.

²⁰ U.S. War Dept. (comp.), *the War of the Rebellion : a Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies* (Washington, 1880-1901), Series I, 1,451. Hereafter cited as O.R. ; unless otherwise stated, all references will be to Series I.

²¹ Gaston Coppens to LeRoy Pope Walker, April 23, 1861, packaged with muster rolls of the unit. See *Battalion of Confederate States Zouaves, Louisiana Commands*, War Records Group 109, National Archives, in L.A. Wallace, *Coppens’ Louisiana Zouaves*, in “Civil War History”, vol. VIII-1962, pp. 269-81, note 14.

²² New Orleans *Daily Picayune*, March 25, 1861.

²³ Edward S. Joynes to Judah P. Benjamin, Sept. 21, 1862, Fulgence de Bordenave Papers, in possession of de Bordenave’s grandson, the Reverend E.A. de Bordenave, Middleburg, Va., in Wallace, *Coppens’ Zouaves*, note 5.

early stage of the war, particularly in Virginia, lends credibility to the claim. Most of Coppens' volunteers were desperate men coming from a variety of countries and guilty of all sorts of crimes. They volunteered not by patriotism, but because they were lured by freebooting.²⁴

Company officers were virtually all of French extraction. Colonel Coppens and his brother, Marie-Alfred, were from Belgium. First lieutenant Jean-Baptiste Souillard was a former engineer and officer of the French army ; Captain Paul Francis De Gournay had fought with Narciso Lopez during the ill-fated filibustering expedition in Cuba in 1851. Captain Fulgence de Bordenave had seen service in the French army in the Crimean War.²⁵ The *Richmond Daily Dispatch* of June 1861, noted that “*twenty or thirty are New Orleans Irishmen, one hundred or thereabouts are Swiss, and quite a number are Germans, but the majority are American Frenchmen*”.²⁶ In addition to these nationalities were Englishmen, Italians, a few Poles and at least one Dane who had fought against the Prussians and Schleswig-Holsteiners. One Italian had experienced various military adventures in South America, and a Polish was a veteran of his country's revolution in 1848.²⁷ The battalion's quartermaster officer, Captain Thompson Harrison, was a U.S. Army veteran, and Ashton Miles had spent ten years as an Assistant Surgeon in the U.S. Navy.²⁸

The spontaneous contribution of foreigners to the ranks of the rebel army lasted only the span of a summer. When the fatal clouds of war wiped out the initial amusing facet of the conflict, many non-naturalized foreigners suddenly recalled that they were not obliged to take part in the struggle. Their harsh recruitment had already created a controversy, well before the first battle of the war. In the *London Times* of June 13, 1861, appeared a letter from William H. Russell, dated New Orleans, May 25. It was published in many other English papers and disturbed the British authorities : “*In no country of the world have outrages on British subjects been so frequent and so wanton as in the States of America. They have been frequent, perhaps because they have generally attended with immunity. Englishmen, however, will still be a little surprised to hear that within a few days British subjects living in New Orleans have been seized, knocked down, carried off from their labor at the wharf and forced by violence to serve in the volunteer ranks ! These cases are not isolated. They are not in twos or threes but in tens and twenties ; they have not occurred stealthily in byways, they have taken place in open day and in the streets of New Orleans. These men have been dragged along like felons, protesting in vain that they were British subjects. Fortunately their friends bethought them that there is still a British Consul in the city who would protect his countrymen (...) Mr. Mure (...) made energetic representations to the authorities, who after some evasion, gave orders that the impressed ‘volunteers’ should be discharged and the ‘Tigers’ and other companies were deprived of the services of 35 British subjects whom they had taken from their usual avocations. The mayor promises it shall not occur again*”.²⁹

The Confederate Congress debated on the advisability of drafting non-naturalized men residing on Confederate soil. In answer to inquiries from the War Department about that matter, Attorney General Thomas H. Watts declared that the foreigners residing permanently in the Confederate States “*owed the correlative duty of defending this*

²⁴ E. Lonn, *Foreigners in the Confederacy*, Gloucester, 1965, p. 102 ; J. McGrath, *In a Louisiana Regiment*, in “*Southern Historical Society Papers*”, vol. XXXI-1903, p. 103.

²⁵ Lonn, *Foreigners in the Confederacy*, p. 102 ; *Richmond Daily Dispatch*, April 1, 1862 ; *New Orleans Bee*, March 28, 1861.

²⁶ *Richmond Daily Dispatch*, June 8, 1861.

²⁷ W.H. Russell, *My Diary North and South*, New York, 1954, p. 119.

²⁸ *New Orleans Daily Crescent*, January 29, 1861 ; *New Orleans Daily Picayune*, March 28, 1861

²⁹ M.L. Bonham Jr., *British Consuls in the Confederacy*, New York, 1967, pp. 172-74 ; J.D. Winters, *The Civil War in Louisiana*, Baton Rouge, 1963, pp. 33-34 ; Jones, *Louisiana Infantry*, note 13 ; Russell, *Diary*, p. 137.

country”.³⁰ On March 19, 1861, in his letter to General Braxton Bragg, the commanding officer at Pensacola, Adjutant General Samuel Cooper, the highest-ranking officer in the Confederate Army, wrote : “*I take the occasion to inform you that the Government has accepted the services of a battalion of Louisiana Zouaves, to consist of not less than four hundred or more than five hundred men, with a proper proportion of commissioned and non-commissioned officers, to serve in the Provisional Army of the Confederate States for a period of twelve months or during the war, unless sooner discharged. One hundred and fifty men of this battalion will be immediately sent to your command, and the remainder of this battalion will follow a few days after*”. On March 25, Cooper added that “*the battalion of Louisiana Zouaves, mentioned in my communication of the 19th instant, will be mustered as they arrive, including the officers who accompany them*”.³¹ In the meantime, on March 20, 1861, he had written George-Gaston Coppens to confirm the incorporation of his battalion in the Provisional Army :

WAR DEPARTMENT,
 ADJUTANT-GENERAL'S OFFICE,
 Montgomery, March 20, 1861.

“Maj. GASTON COPPENS,

SIR : *I am instructed by the Secretary of War to inform you that the Government will receive into the service of the Provisional Army of the Confederate States the battalion of Zouaves tendered by you, to consist of not less than 400 or more than 500 men, with a proper proportion of commissioned and non-commissioned officers, to serve for a period of twelve months, or during the war, unless sooner discharged. Such uniform clothing as may be furnished by the battalion will be hereafter settled for by the Government at the rates and prices to be fixed for the Regular Army.*

I am, very respectfully, your obedient servant,”

“S. COOPER”.³²

On March 28, 1861, Marie-Alfred Coppens' Co. “A” left New Orleans for Pensacola, Florida. The crow's fly distance between New Orleans and Pensacola was relatively short. However, as the rail network of the Confederacy was not very dense, Coppens' Zouaves made a long detour through Jackson and Meridian (Mississippi) with the *New Orleans & Jackson R.R.*, the *Southern Mississippi R.R.* and the *Alabama & Mississippi R.R.* to Montgomery (Alabama). There, the men changed train for the *Alabama & Florida R.R.*, which carried them directly to Pensacola.³³ Upon their arrival, Coppens and his men were mustered into the Provisional Army of the Confederate States for a period of twelve months. Their quarters were established in the Marine Barracks at the Warrington Navy Yard.³⁴ In her “*Foreigners in the Confederacy*”, professor Ella Lonn states that the 1st Battalion Louisiana Zouaves was the first unit to leave Louisiana “*on February 25, 1862, in response to Beauregard's pressing calls for help after the fall of Fort Donelson*”. Unfortunately, Mrs. Lonn confuses Avegno's Zouave Battalion with Coppens' Battalion. Indeed, according to the *Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, and *Mary Chesnut's Diary*, Coppens' Zouaves were already in Virginia since June 1861.³⁵ Moreover, Avegno's Battalion (later the 13th Louisiana Infantry) served in the Army of Tennessee from that time

³⁰ W.B. Years, *The Confederate Congress*, Athens, 1960, pp. 75-76.

³¹ O.R. vol. I : pp. 451, 454-55.

³² O.R. Series 4, vol. I : p. 179.

³³ U.S. War Dept., *Atlas of the Official Records of the War of the Rebellion*.

³⁴ O.R. vol. I : p. 455.

³⁵ *Ibid.* vol. LI-2 : p. 137 ; vol. II : p. 938, 951, 957 ; *Chesnut Diary*, edit. B. A. Williams, Boston, 1949, p. 67.

on.

Coppens had drilled his men secretly and outside the cities in order to prevent his recruits from putting their “talents” in practice at the expense of the local well thinking society. In his haste to organize his battalion, Coppens bypassed Louisiana state officials and appealed directly to President Davis’ authority to raise his unit. Governor Thomas O. Moore disliked this practice because he wanted the regiments to be mustered into Louisiana service first so that he could hold the prestige of naming the field grade officers. Consequently, he was particularly incensed at Coppens and complained of this practice to the Secretary of War, Leroy P. Walker.³⁶

*“EXECUTIVE OFFICE,
Baton Rouge, March 30, 1861”*

*“Hon. L. POPE WALKER,
Secretary of War, Montgomery, Ala.*

I have been informed that authority has been granted by the Government at Montgomery to individuals in the State to enlist men, either by companies, battalions, or regiments, for the service of the Confederate States, and this without official communication having been given me as the Executive of this State. If this be so - and I understand that one or two companies from New Orleans (the Zouaves) have already been mustered under the authority given to a Mr. Coppens - I have to express my astonishment and sincere regret at the course pursued by the Government at Montgomery toward me. Your requisition on me has not been denied, and I have used, and am now using every means to comply with it. I trust you will at once admit that if a demand for volunteers from this State is required, I, as the Executive, should be first called upon. I further understand these companies are to be considered as forming a part of the requisition made by you and not as additional troops. Be that as it may, courtesy, if not right, should require some information of the fact to me. I hope, Sir, you will perceive the embarrassing and perplexing difficulties in which such orders will place our soldiers and the officers who have sacrificed positions in civil life and were the first to answer the call of the State of Louisiana to defend her rights ; that you will take immediate steps to countermand orders which may have been issued to enlist troops in this State, unless emanating from the Executive thereof, which can only interfere with the enlistment of troops authorized by me, and on your requisition, and create great dissatisfaction.

*I remain, with respect, your obedient servant,”
“THO. O. MOORE”.*

On April 4, Captain de Bordenave’s company “B” left New Orleans for Pensacola. The *Commercial Bulletin* reported that “*their dress lends to the Corps a martial and picturesque appearance ... The company was accompanied by two vivandières attired in appropriate uniform*”.³⁷ Four days later, major George-Gaston Coppens took the train for Pensacola. He had placed Captain Nemours Lauve in command of the remaining men in New Orleans with orders to organize another company before April 16.³⁸ On April 17, Captains Zacharie’s Co. “C” and de Gournay’s Co. “E” left the city, “*all uniformed in the free and easy and picturesque dress characteristic of that [Zouave] service, and it would hardly bear improvement*”. Two days later, Lauve’s Co. “D” also left for Pensacola.³⁹

³⁶ O.R., S. 4, vol. I : pp. 194-95.

³⁷ New Orleans *Commercial Bulletin*, April 5, 1861.

³⁸ New Orleans *Daily Picayune*, April 14, 1861.

³⁹ New Orleans *Commercial Bulletin*, April 18, 1861 ; New Orleans *Daily Delta*, April 20, 1861.

On April 23, from Pensacola, Major Coppens advised Secretary of War Leroy P. Walker that his battalion comprised five companies totaling 500 men. In his letter to Walker, Coppens had enclosed a roster of his officers. He was anxious to receive the commissions of his officers because they were placed on an unequal footing with the other officers at Pensacola.⁴⁰ Soon after Coppens' letter to Walker, a sixth company was added to the battalion. By the end of May, the field and staff of the Zouaves consisted of Lieutenant Colonel George Auguste Gaston Coppens ; Major Waldemar Hyllested ; Captain Thompson Harrison, quartermaster ; 1st Lieutenant Frank Zacharie, adjutant ; 1st Lieutenant Charles Mansoni, commissary ; Captain Ashton Miles, assistant surgeon ; 2nd Lieutenant Edouard Pfoendler, color bearer ; and Sergeant Charles Jean Baptiste, sergeant major. Company commanders were : Co. "A", Captain Leopold Lange ; Co. "B", Captain Fulgence de Bordenave ; Co. "C", Captain Howard H. Zacharie ; Co. "D", Captain Nemours Lauve ; Co. "E", Captain Paul F. De Gournay and Co. "F", Captain Marie-Alfred Coppens.⁴¹ Besides the rank and files were a hospital steward, a drum major, a quartermaster sergeant, an armourer, an ordnance sergeant and a *vivandière*. *Vivandières* or *cantinières* was the French designation of women who followed the regiments or battalions on campaign, providing food and drink, and often performing the job of nursing the ill or wounded soldiers. Under French influence, the American Zouave units frequently adopted a woman who served as a *vivandière* or a *cantinière*.⁴² One can see the *vivandière* of the 1st Battalion of Louisiana Zouaves on a photograph illustrating this article.

In his letter of April 23, 1861 to Secretary Leroy P. Walker, Georges Coppens requested the best arms for his troops. "*We are at present using U.S. Government muskets, but if possible it is essential that we should be furnished with the Minie Rifle & Sword Bayonet, as well as accoutrements which were promised to us on our arrival here, and which have not yet been furnished us*". His request and an article of the *Bee* dated March 28, 1861 were probably based on the same information. The newspaper indeed stated that "*5,000 Minie Rifles equipped with sword bayonets were daily expected from the best Belgian Armories*". This detail is of importance because it indicates that George Coppens or a member of his family had contacts with Jules Noblom, vice-consul of Belgium in New Orleans. That they met at one time or another is almost certain. It is indeed difficult to believe that, within the restricted circle of the French-speaking people of this city, a powerful Belgian family never came across the members of the consular body of his country of origin. In his book *L'Armurerie Liégeoise et la Guerre de Sécession*, Professor Francis Balace of the University of Liège (Belgium) meticulously digs into the story of the 5,000 Belgian muskets.

In December 1859, Belgian entrepreneurs and traders, including the arms manufacturer Falisse of Liège, and businessmen of the State of Georgia founded the *Belgian-American Company (sic) for the development of direct trade* to establish commercial links between Belgium and the Southern states. The company kicked off with an exhibition of Belgian products in Macon, Georgia, from December 10 to 22, 1860. The election of Lincoln and the first secessions resulted in the dissolution of the company as soon as the North began blockading the Southern coastlines. Since the Belgian consulates were not remunerated, their staff usually went about their professional occupations that were often business driven. The Belgian vice-consul Noblom was at the time the commercial agent of the *Belgian-American Company* and therefore he had accepted an order for 5,000 Minié rifles of Liège manufacture, which he had received from the *Louisiana Military Board*. The Belgian government notified Noblom that his official function was incompatible with the supply of

⁴⁰ *Coppens to Walker, April 23, 1861*, Records Group 109, in Wallace "*Coppens' Zouaves*", note 14.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² S.L. Hughes, *The Daughter of the Regiment : A Brief History of Vivandières and Cantinières in the American Civil War*, www.civilwarweb.com, 2005.

weapons to the States in rebellion. “*The contract ended up being cancelled*” wrote professor Balace, “*perhaps on the instructions from Brussels, but most likely for financial reasons*”.⁴³

William H. Russell was the correspondent of the London *Times* and he was in Louisiana early in the war. So common were the colorful military dresses of units raised there that he recorded that “*New Orleans looked like a suburb of the camp at Chalons*” because the prevalence of French styles in the Louisiana uniforms. Russell had been a war correspondent in the Crimea and had seen the French Zouaves in action. He saw Coppins’ Zouaves at Pensacola and observed that “*the only troops near us which were attired with a military exactness were the regiment of Zouaves from New Orleans (...). They looked exceedingly like the real article as seen in European armies. Mornings on the sandy beach were uniquely French, as the well-known reveille of the Zouaves, and then French clangors, rolls, ruffles and calls ran along the line. (...) Note for note the calls were the same as heard in the Crimea*”. He however noted that their physical characteristics differed. “*They are, perhaps, a trifle leaner and taller, and are not so well developed at the back of the head, the heels and the ankles as their prototypes*”.⁴⁴ Russell also noticed that their officers had little cause for complaint : “*The battalion’s officers were seated at a very comfortable dinner, with an abundance of champagne, claret, beer and ice*”.⁴⁵

Some people condemned the “*opera-bouffe*” appearance of the Zouaves and warned them of what lay ahead. The issue of the New Orleans *Daily Delta* dated 20 September 1861, wrote : “*We dress our boys too showily and flashily. Their red caps and red pants, and their richly embroidered gold coats may delight unreflecting young girls and children, but they could impede the action and expose the lives of the men who wore them*”. As their trousers were cut in such fashion as to suggest the “*bloomers*” of certain women, the Zouaves from Louisiana were sometimes the victims of jokes from derisive comrades or citizens.⁴⁶

At Pensacola, the monotony of the drills and camp duties quickly bored the young Zouaves. Several wrote : “*I dread the mosquitoes and sand flies more than the black republicans. We became tired of living like flounders and crabs in the deep sands of Pensacola, and the cry was ‘on to Richmond’*. The company was in good health and spirits and eager to get into the fight”.⁴⁷

On June 10, 1861, Assistant Adjutant General J. Withers ordered George-Gaston Coppins, recently promoted to the rank of lieutenant colonel, “*to proceed to Yorktown, Va., and report to Colonel J. B. Magruder, commanding*”. John B. Magruder, later a brigadier general, was at the head of the little Army of the Peninsula.⁴⁸

The departure of the troops for Virginia was accompanied by a monstrous uproar and disorderly behavior. Moreover, the young demons did not leave alone. A New Orleans gazette published that Coppins’ Zouaves “*had the good taste*” to bring women with them to Pensacola to wash, cook, and clean their quarters. The well-thinking writer described them as “*disgusting looking creatures all dressed up as men*”. Rose Rooney, however, won the respect of all her soldier-comrades. She enlisted in the *Crescent Blues* (who later became Co. “G” in Coppins’ Battalion) and served the men as cook and nurse four years.⁴⁹

On June 1, 1861, Coppins’ men left Pensacola for Richmond. Their trip was to be one of

⁴³ F. Balace, *L’Armurerie Liégeoise et la Guerre de Sécession*, Liège, 1978, pp. 91-93.

⁴⁴ W.H. Russell, *Pictures of Southern Life, Political and Military*, New York, 1861, pp. 45-48 and *Diary*, p. 210.

⁴⁵ Russell, *Diary*, p. 119.

⁴⁶ McGrath, *In a Louisiana Regiment*, pp. 103-120.

⁴⁷ William E. Moore *Diary*, April 20, 1861, May 1-8, May 26, 1861, in Jones, “*Louisiana Infantry*”, notes 1 et 16 ; New Orleans *Daily Delta*, May 24, 1861.

⁴⁸ O.R. vol. LI-2 : p. 137.

⁴⁹ Jones, *Louisiana Infantry*, note 17.

the wildest rides in the history of the Confederate railroads. Their journey covered a large part of the Confederate Territory. Because of the poor density of the railroad network, they steamed through Opelika and Montgomery (Alabama), Atlanta, Augusta, Florence (Georgia) and Wilmington (North Carolina). Finally, they had to travel to Goldsboro and Weldon (North Carolina) before disembarking at Richmond.

The journey of the Coppens's Zouaves to Montgomery is a true epic. To describe it, historians generally paraphrase or refer to parts of the account left by one of its participants, the American writer Thomas C. DeLeon. As he reported this episode with an inimitable verve and since his text is no longer available in bookstores, we believe that it deserves a quote "in extenso".

"Some Alabamians, two Georgia regiments, the Chasseurs-à-pied, the "Tigers" and the Zouaves were to go to Virginia ; and through the courtesy of the officers of the latter corps, we got seats to Montgomery in their car. Meantime, all was hum and bustle through the whole camp, and as the limited rolling stock on the still unfinished railroad could only accommodate a regiment at the time, they left at all hours of the day, or night, that the trains arrived. Constantly at midnight the dull tramp of marching men and the slow tap of the drum, passing our quarters, roused us from sleep ; and whatever the hour, the departing troops were escorted to the station by crowds of half-envious comrades, who 'were left out in the cold'. And as the trains started – box cars, flats and tenders all crowded, inside and out – yell after yell went up in stentorian chorus, echoing through the still woods".

"One gray dawn, 600 Zouaves filed out of the pines and got aboard our train. They were a splendid set of animals ; medium sized, sun burnt, muscular and wiry as Arabs ; and a long, swiny gait told of drill and endurance. But the faces were dull and brutish, generally ; and some of them would vie, for cunning villainy, with the features of the prettiest Turcos that Algeria could produce. The uniform was very picturesque and very dirty. Full, baggy scarlet trousers, confined round the waist by the broad blue band or sash, bearing the bowie knife and meeting, at mid-leg, the white gaiter ; blue shirt cut very low and exhibiting the brawny, sun burnt throat ; jacket heavily braided and embroidered, flying loosely off the shoulders, and the jaunty fez, surmounting the whole, made a bright ensemble that contrasted prettily with the gray and silver of the South Carolinians, or the rusty brown of the Georgians, who came in crowds to see them off. But the use of these uniforms about the grease and dust of Pensacola camp-fires had left marks that these soldiers considered badges of honor, not to be removed".

"Nor were they purer morally. Graduates of the slums of New Orleans, their education in villainy was naturally perfect. They had the vaguest ideas of meum and tuum ; and small personal difficulties were usually settled by the convincing argument of a bowie knife, or brass knuckle. Yet they had been brought to a very perfect state of drill and efficiency. All commands were given in French – the native tongue of nearly all the officers and most of the men ; and, in cases of insubordination, the former had no hesitancy in a free use of the revolver. A wonderful peacemaker is your six-shooter. They might be splendid fellows for a charge on the 'Pet Lambs' or on a pocket ; but, on the whole, were hardly the men one would choose for partners in any business but a garroting firm, or would desire to have sleep in the company bedroom".

"Their officers we found of a class entirely above them ; active, bright, enthusiastic Frenchmen, with a frank courtesy and soldierly bearing that were very taking. They occupied the rear car of the train, while the men filled the forward ones, making the woods ring with their wild yells, and the roaring chorus of the song of the Zou-Zous. We had crossed the gap at Garland, where the road was yet unfinished, and were soon at the breakfast house, where we mounted the hill in a body ; leaving our car perfectly empty, save a couple of buglers who stood on the platform. As I looked back, the elder musician was a

most perfect picture of the Turco. He had served in Algiers, and after the war in Italy brought a bullet in his leg to New Orleans. He was long past fifty – spare, broad-shouldered and hard as a log of oak. His sharp features were bronzed to the richest mahogany color, and garnished with a moustache and peak of grizzled hair ‘a cubit and a span’ – or nearly – in length. And the short grizzled hair had been shaved far back to his naturally hard face. Turc was a favorite with the officers, and his dress was rather cleaner than that of the others ; a difference that was hardly an improvement”.

“We were just seated at breakfast – and having a special train we took our time – then a wild scream of the whistle, succeeded immediately by the heavy rumble of cars, came up the hill. We rushed to the windows, just in time to see a column of smoke disappearing round the curve and the officers’ car standing solitary and empty on the road. The Zouaves had run away with the train ! The language the officers used, as we surrounded the ‘sole survivors’ – the two buglers – was, at least, strong ; and short, hard words not in the church service dropped frequently from the lips. It was no use ; the train had gone and the men with it, and the best we could do was to speculate on the intention of the runaways, while we waited the result of the telegrams sent to both ends of the line for another engine. At last it came puffing up, and we whirled at its full speed into Montgomery”.

“Meanwhile the Zou-Zous had several hours’ start. Led by one ardent spirit – whose motto had been similia similibus, until he lost his balance of mind – they had uncoupled the officers’ car and forced the engineers to take them on. On arriving at Montgomery, they wandered over the town, ‘going through’ drinking-houses until they became wild with liquor ; then bursting open the groceries to get whisky, threatening the citizens and even entering private houses. The alarm became so great, as the Zouaves became more maddened, that the 1st Georgia Regiment was ordered out and stationed by platoons, with loaded muskets and fixed bayonets, across the streets where the rioters were. Serious trouble was beginning, when the car with their officers dashed into the depot”.

“The charge of the Light Brigade was surpassed by those irate Creoles. With the cars still in rapid motion, they leaped off, revolver in hand ; and charged into the quarter where their drunken men were still engaged in every sort of excess. The old bugler still trotted at their head, his black eyes gleaming at the prospect of the row, and his bugle occasionally rose to sound the ‘rally’. Into the midst of the drunken and yelling crowd dashed the officers ; crackling French oaths over their tongues with a snapping intonation, and their pistols whirling right and left like slung-shot, and dropping a mutineer at every blow. Habit and the rough usage overcame even the drunken frenzy of the men, and they dropped the plunder from their arms, snatched muskets from the corners they had been whirled into, and rapidly dressed into line in the street”.

“I saw one beardless boy, slight and small, rush to a huge sergeant and order him into ranks. The soldier, a perfect giant, hesitated to drop the handful of shoes he had seized, only for a second. But that was enough. The youth had to jump from the ground to seize his throat ; but, at the same moment, the stock of the heavy revolver crashed over his temple, and he fell like a stricken ox. ‘Roll that carrion into the street !’ said the lieutenant to another soldier near ; and before his order was obeyed the store was empty. In a half hour from the officers’ arrival the battalion was mustered on Main street, and only nine absentees were reported at roll-call ; but many a fez was drawn far down over a bleeding forehead, and many a villainous was lighted by one eye, while the other was closed and swollen”.

“The colonel and I had jumped from the car and run on with our French friends ; but the colonel was not the son of Atalanta,⁵⁰ and by reason of a soupçon of gout his feet were not

⁵⁰ Heroine of the Greek mythology. She was renown for her agility and her swiftness.

beautiful upon Zion or any other place. Neither could he make them 'swift to shed blood'. As we entered the street where the rioters were, I turned and saw him, perfectly breathless, bear his tow hundred and fifty pounds 'avoir du poids' against a door. It was not closed, but had only been slammed by the score of Zou-Zous enjoying the whisky within ; and as I looked I saw a dignified colonel in the C.S. army turn a complete somersault into a group of red-legged devils, who immediately closed around him".

"Gabriel Ravel, though a lighter man, never made a cleaner leap through the third story in the side-scene ; but there was no time to waste and I went back at speed. I had scarcely turned when I saw the colonel's huger form tower among the red-legs. By the time I reached the door my apparition, revolver in hand, completed what he had begun ; and they slipped by and vanished. Luckily the bar of the door had fallen with him, and the old gymnastics of other days coming back like a flash, he had seized it, made two rapid blows and laid as many of his assailants at his feet ; roaring, meanwhile, oaths as thunderous as they were unintelligible. 'Sacré nom !' he shouted as he saw me ; 'shoot' em, me boy ! Poltrons, egad ! Laugh at me ! D-n their eyes ! Canaille !"

"There was a wicked light in my fat friend's eye, and he had recovered his second wind ; so we sallied out, the colonel still clinging to his weapon of chance. 'Good enough for these dogs!' he roared, wrathfully shaking the bar, 'saves the pistol'. That night (...) our French visitors declared that the colonel's bar had done more effective service than their revolvers ; and, as it stood dented and blood smeared in the corner of that vine-clad porch, it did not belie their praise".⁵¹

Their ride from Montgomery to Richmond led them through Opelika, West Point, Augusta, Columbia, Wilmington, and Petersburg. Although stunned by the quelling of their officers, the Zouaves stood unbroken. Several lost their life before arriving in Virginia. At Opelika, a man was killed for an unknown reason and another fell from one of the cars. When they changed train at Atlanta, a company officer shot dead a Zouave who had left the ranks to buy tobacco in the city. At Columbia, the behavior of the men disgusted the local railroad agent when they started shooting cattle and poultry. En route to Wilmington, the train crew was horrified when others began riding on top of the carriages. One man sitting on top of a car was smashed to pieces when the train passed under a low bridge. After leaving Weldon, three Zouaves swung themselves on the couplings between the cars despite warnings of the danger from both officers and conductors. The inevitable followed. The train jolted and the men were crushed to death when the train suddenly lurched.⁵²

On June 7, 1861, the battalion finally arrived in Richmond. Instead of holding a public parade in the city, their officers led them to temporary quarters at the Glazebrooks warehouse near the Petersburg Depot. However, the citizens of Richmond were bewildered by the Gallic dress and the martial look of the men. The *Daily Dispatch* reported that the city *"was yesterday thrown into a paroxysm of excitement by the arrival of the New Orleans Zouaves, a battalion of 630, as unique and picturesque looking Frenchmen as ever delighted the oculars of Napoleon the three (...) They are generally small, but wiry, muscular, active as cats, and brown as a side of sole leather (...) and painfully dirty"*.⁵³ A man was so upset by the Zouaves' appearance that he wrote to a friend : *"The greatest sight I have yet seen in the way of military was a body of about 600 Louisiana Zouaves, uniformed and drilled it was said in the true French Zouave style. Most of them were of foreign extraction, the French predominant, but there were Irish, Italians, Swiss, etc., etc. Their uniforms consisted of loose red flannel pants tied above the ankles, blue flannel*

⁵¹ DeLeon, *Four Years in Rebel Capitals*, pp. 71-74.

⁵² *Muster Roll, Co. "F", June 21, 1861*, Records Group 109, in Wallace *"Coppens' Zouaves"*, note 23 ; *Harper's Weekly*, July 27, 1861.

⁵³ *Richmond Daily Dispatch*, June 8, 1861 ; Wallace *"Coppens' Zouaves"*, note 17.

*jackets, and for headgear a kind of red flannel bag large enough at one end to fit the head and tapering to a point at the other where it was generally decorated with a piece of ribbon. This end fell behind. This cap which, you see, did not protect their faces from the sun in the least, they had been wasting for a month or two in the burning sun of Pensacola, and of course were as brown as they could well get browner than I ever saw a white man. Add to their costume and complexion that they were hard specimens before they left the 'crescent' city as their manner indicated and you may perhaps imagine what sort of men they were. In fact they were the most savage-looking crowd I ever saw".*⁵⁴

In their reminiscences of Richmond during the Civil War, Sallie Putnam and several other inhabitants of the city agree to define the Zouaves as a calamity. *"From the time of their appearance in Richmond, robberies became frequent. Whenever a Zouave was seen, something was sure to be missed. They roamed about the city like a pack of untamed wild-cats, and so clever were they in eluding the vigilance of the police, that few or none of them were brought to justice for the larcenies they committed. It was common with them to walk into saloons and restaurants, order what they wished to eat and drink, and then direct the dismayed proprietor to charge their bill to the Government. Thieving, burglary, and garroting in the streets at night were common as long as the Zouaves were in town. The whole community, both military and civil, drew a long breath of relief when they left".*

In June 1861, the generals in charge of the Virginia forces ordered the 1st battalion of Louisiana Zouaves and a few other units to the defense of Big Bethel. It is there that Northern and Southern troops met each other for the first time (the first true battle, that of First Manassas, took place during the preceding month) and where Federal and Confederate Zouaves narrowly missed the opportunity to fight each other. Big Bethel was halfway between Yorktown and Fort Monroe, at the end of the Virginia Peninsula. In May 1861, General Benjamin F. Butler was sent there with a division to reinforce the garrison of Fort Monroe. On June 10, 1861, on Butler's order, Brigadier General E.W. Pierce with seven regiments (including the 9th New York Hawkins' Zouaves) attacked a Confederate outpost at Big Bethel. The affair was quickly settled as the Federal troops were poorly managed. The Confederates with D.H. Hill's 1st North Carolina in the lead easily repulsed their assault.⁵⁵

During the time it served on the Peninsula, Coppens' Battalion won the reputation as the most feared Louisiana unit. The men openly killed livestock and created havoc in the small towns located near their camps. Speaking about them, a soldier from a regiment of a nearby base declared : *"The pirates are from the dregs of all nations and during the ten days they were here, they killed some eighteen or twenty head of cattle".* Believing that his company was to be transferred to Coppens' Battalion, another soldier swore that he and his comrades *"will shoot first"*. Finally, General Magruder had to take measures to suppress these depredations. One day, during an inspection in June, Magruder approached Coppens' Battalion. An onlooker described the scene : *"The Zouaves sweated profusely while their commanding officer berated them for the rash of cattle killings. Magruder Informed the Zouaves that he had heard of their depredations and that they must be stopped, or every man who was guilty of [such] conduct ... would be shot immediately".*⁵⁶

On June 18, 1861, the officers of the 1st Louisiana Zouave Battalion informed General Magruder of an outburst of dissatisfaction among the officers and men about the abilities of

⁵⁴ H.B. Cowles, Jr., to unknown, June 20, 1861, in John Buxton "Williams Papers", ECU., in Jones, "Louisiana Infantry", note 20.

⁵⁵ O.R. vol. II : pp. 77-80 ; Boatner, *Civil War Dictionary*, p. 63.

⁵⁶ Charles W. Turner (ed.), *Major Charles A. Davidson : Letters of a Virginia Soldier*, in "Civil War History", vol. XXII-1976, p. 20 ; anonymous letter, June 17, 1861, in Carrington Family Papers, VHS, in Jones, "Louisiana Infantry", note 35 ; Manly Wade Wellman, *Rebel Boast : First at Bethel-Last at Appomattox*, New York, 1956, pp. 62-63.

their commander, Lieutenant Colonel George-Gaston Coppens. Consequently, Magruder proposed to Adjutant General Samuel Cooper that he expand the battalion into a full regiment in order to name a new and full colonel at its head.

*“HEADQUARTERS, Bethel Church,
June 18, 1861”*

*“General S. COOPER,
Adj. Gen. C. S. Army, Richmond, Va”.*

“SIR : I have the honor to report that I now occupy this post with the Second Louisiana Regiment, the Zouaves, to which I have attached the York and Warwick companies, two batteries of artillery, and some cavalry, and that the Georgia regiment is so placed in our rear as to be able to watch the Poquosin River, to fall back upon Yorktown, or to support Bethel”.

“I requested in a letter from Grove Landing that Lieutenant Colonel Stuart, Fifteenth Virginia Infantry, might be appointed colonel, and ordered to report to me. I have attached the York and Warwick companies to the Zouaves, partly in order to give the battalion a colonel. In fact, the captains of the Zouaves called upon me in a body, and stated that they would be obliged to resign and serve as privates unless something was done, their lieutenant colonel being, though a brave and good man, entirely without energy or the faculty to command. Whilst reminding them of the impropriety of their course, I saw that they were actuated by no ill or ignoble feeling. I ordered them here, under the command, of course, of their lieutenant colonel, and they obeyed promptly ; but I am most anxious to have a colonel for this battalion - a man of some knowledge of his profession, and firmness - and I have learned it would not be distasteful to Lieutenant Colonel Coppens himself, who will still be lieutenant colonel. Please let this be done with as little delay as possible”.

*“J. B. MAGRUDER”.*⁵⁷

As military advisor of President Davis, Lee answered Magruder’s request as follows⁵⁸ :

*“HEADQUARTERS, Richmond, Va.,
June 25, 1861”*

*“Brig. Gen. J. B. MAGRUDER,
Commanding, & c., Yorktown, Va.”*

“GENERAL : Your communication of the 22^d instant has been duly received. The resignation of the five officers of the Zouave battalion therein mentioned, the dissatisfaction of the men, and the inability on the part of the officers to control in this battalion, as reported by you, have been sources of great regret to me. There are insurmountable obstacles in the way of the promotion of Lieutenant Colonel Stuart, of the Fifteenth Regiment Virginia, to the command of the regiment you propose forming by the addition of two companies of Virginia volunteers to this battalion, nor is there any officer of the Army now available to be assigned to this command. I desire you to direct Lieutenant Colonel Coppens to proceed to Richmond and report to me at these headquarters, and beg to be informed if there is no officer of the Zouave battalion, in your judgment, capable of commanding and managing it”.

“R. E. LEE”

⁵⁷ O.R. vol. II : p. 938.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.* p. 951.

The next day, General Magruder wrote back :

*“HEADQUARTERS, Yorktown, Va.,
June 26, 1861”*

*“Col. GEORGE DEAS,
Assistant Adjutant General, Richmond,”*

“I have the guard-house full of Zouaves, who will also be tried at once, the courts sitting without regard to hours. This will be taken up by Lieutenant Colonel Coppens, whom I send to Richmond in obedience to your orders. Lieutenant Colonel Coppens appears devoted to his duties, and, from my own observations, though I have seen but little of him, I am of the opinion that he will make a very good officer. I could not disband the Zouaves, but let the officers resign, if they chose”.

*“J. B. MAGRUDER”.*⁵⁹

Although the outcome of the meeting between Coppens and Lee remains unknown, Coppens continued to command the battalion and to hop for a colonelcy.⁶⁰ In March 1861, when he met him at Montgomery, President Davis had promised him that the battalion would increase to a full regiment in the event of war. On April 23, 1861, Lieutenant Colonel George-Gaston Coppens wrote Davis : *“I am anxious to know if His Excellency wishes me to proceed and carry out this undertaking, and if so to advise me, as I have been offered organized companies, which I shall accept as soon as I receive your concurrence”.* Davis’ reply is unknown, if it ever existed, but on May 4, 1861, the Confederate Congress passed an act *“Providing for a regiment of Zouaves in the Army of the Confederate States”.*⁶¹ In July, Coppens was happy to learn that the Secretary of War had ordered four companies of Zouaves recently raised in New Orleans to join his command. On July 15, the four company commanders wired Coppens that they could be ready by the nineteenth but only if, in the meantime, the Secretary sent them *“the order to muster by company before leaving”.* The act *“providing for a regiment of Zouaves”* did not profit to Coppens. The four companies aforementioned were apparently the four Zouave companies raised by Major Anatole P. Avegno, which later became the 13th Louisiana Infantry after its amalgamation with R.L. Gibson’s Governor’s Guards Battalion in September 1861.⁶²

In early August, Coppens sent Captain Leopold Lange to New Orleans to raise the four companies necessary to create a complete regiment.⁶³ By the end of the month, Captain Lange succeeded in recruiting sufficient volunteers for about four companies. As published by the *Bee* of New Orleans : *“Instead of the four hundred which he came here for with but slight chances of getting, he will soon return to Virginia with five hundred and could have more than that if he wanted them”.*⁶⁴

The Virginian summer proved devastating for Coppens’ Zouaves as for the other Louisiana units. By early September, of his 600 men, fewer than 100 were still in active service. Death occurring from camp illness became so common that a boy wrote to his family : *“the death of one of our poor soldiers is hardly noticed. One of the bossier boys died the day before yesterday and one of ours yesterday and it seemed to me that it was*

⁵⁹ *Ibid.* p. 957.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.* vol. I : p. 628.

⁶¹ *Ibid.* Series IV, vol. I : 278 ; *Coppens to Walker*, April 23, 1861, Records Croup 109, in Jones *“Louisiana Infantry”*, note 27 ; New Orleans *Bee*, August 23, 1861.

⁶² Bergeron, *Louisiana Units*, pp. 102-105 ;

⁶³ *Coppens to Walker*, July 23, 1861, Records Group 109, in Wallace *“Coppens’ Zouaves”*, note 29.

⁶⁴ New Orleans *Bee*, August 23, 1861.

noticed no more than if a dog had died".⁶⁵ Fortunately, there was no shortage of clothing. One soldier recalled that, in July 1861, a Louisiana regiment received 12 cases of blankets, 872 pairs of drawers, 400 flannel shirts, 400 jackets, 400 pairs of pants, and 22 dozen pairs of socks.⁶⁶ Food was also plentiful. A Louisiana volunteer wrote from Norfolk : "We fare finely here, get more vegetables and strawberries and cream than we know what to do with. I think this is the greatest vegetable market in the world. And besides, we get any quantity of fish of every description. I am living and growing fat on oysters and soft shell crabs".⁶⁷

However, Coppens' Zouaves would not enjoy such an abundance of clothing for very long. Their cotton jackets and loose baggy cotton trousers were made for the deserted plains of North Africa and not for the Virginia brushwood. Moreover, they lost a large part of their reserve of clothing after the battle of Big Bethel. During their retreat, apparently executed in confusion, some officers ordered the men to throw away their blanket rolls containing their extra clothing. In the midst of the chaos, an officer burned Captain Lauve's tent and the clothing of the company officers. At the end of the month, there was a great need of clothing, notably in Captains Lauve's and de Bordenave's companies, where the uniforms were completely worn out and not replaced.⁶⁸ The clothing situation worsened, and it is probable that at the end of the summer 1861, very few Coppens' Zouaves still wore their picturesque uniform. On the other hand, the muster rolls of the battalion show that the arms and accoutrements of the men were reported as being in good order throughout 1861.

Early in September 1861, General Magruder removed company "F" of Captain Paul DeGournay from the battalion to help build the earthwork defenses of Yorktown and later to form the New Orleans Heavy Artillery. Coppens' Zouaves then moved to Williamsburg to avoid the illness occurring at Yorktown. Never would DeGournay and his company return to the battalion.⁶⁹ In his General Order n° 89, General Magruder organized his Peninsula Army into eight brigades. Coppens' Battalion was assigned to the second one, led by Colonel Theodore G. Hunt.⁷⁰ Magruder's General Order n° 105 superceded General Order n° 89 and the 1st Battalion of Louisiana Zouaves was drafted into colonel (later general) Gabriel J. Rains' brigade⁷¹, which formed the second division of Magruder's Army⁷².

In January 1862, on the Peninsula, the 1st Louisiana Zouave Battalion, then reduced to five companies, numbered 23 officers and 420 enlisted men.⁷³ Of these 443, only 169 were present for duty (11 officers and 158 soldiers and non-commissioned officers). Of the men at hand, three of the officers were sick and one was under arrest, while 35 men were sick and 5 in jail. This left 7 officers and 118 enlisted men on active service. Of the 275 missing, 9 officers were on leave and 3 on detached service. Forty-three of the absent enlisted men were sick, 173 on leave and 46 on detached service. No deserter was however reported. In March 1862, the battalion comprised only 3 officers and 118 enlisted present men available.

⁶⁵ Jones, *Louisiana Infantry* note 27 ; C.L. Dufour, *Gentle Tiger ; The Gallant Life of Roberdeau Wheat*, Baton Rouge, 1957, p. 153 ; Bergeron, *Louisiana Units*, p. 149-51 ; R. Taylor, *Destruction and Reconstruction ; Personal Experiences of the Late War*, New York, 1879, p. 15.

⁶⁶ Jones, *Louisiana Infantry*, note 28 ; *Richmond Enquirer*, July 11, 1861 ; O.R. vol. VI : p. 748.

⁶⁷ Wallace, *Coppens' Zouaves*, pp. 275-76 ; Jones *Louisiana Infantry*, notes 28, 29.

⁶⁸ *Richmond Daily Dispatch*, June 8, 1861.

⁶⁹ O.R. vol. IV : pp. 639, 669.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.* vol. IV : p. 668.

⁷¹ In covering the retreat up the Peninsula, G.J. Rains was credited with the first use of land mines and booby traps in warfare. After the battle of Seven Pines he was discharged from active service in order to work further on mines and explosives. Named head of the Torpedo Bureau in 1864, he got the authorization to use land mines in the James River and to defend the approaches of Richmond and several major cities. (M.M. Boatner, *Civil Dictionary*, New York, 1959, p. 676.)

⁷² O.R. vol. IX : p. 37.

⁷³ The Captain carefully preserved the flag through his lifetime, and on November 24, 1948, the Rev. E. A. de Bordenave presented it to the Confederate Museum in Richmond, in Wallace, "*Coppens' Zouaves*", note 33.

Of those absent, 193 were on leave, 78 were on detached service, and 27 were sick.⁷⁴ It was probably during this period that a group of ladies of Williamsburg presented to de Bordenave's Co. "B" a silk and satin flag of the Stars and Bars design. The Captain preserved the flag, and on November 24, 1948, one of his descendants donated it to the Confederate Museum in Richmond.

Such ceremonies were solemn rituals, as illustrated by the DeSoto Rifles flag presentation. Handing the flag to the color guard, the spokeswomen for the seamstresses declared : *"receive then, from your mothers and sisters, from those whose affections greet you, these colors woven by our feeble but reliant hands ; and when this bright flag shall float before you on the battlefield, let it not only inspire you with the brave and patriotic ambitions of a soldier aspiring to his own and his country's honor and glory, but also may it be a sign that cherished ones appeal to you to save them from a fanatical and heartless foe"*. The company's color sergeant and corporals then stepped forward to receive the flag. The color sergeant spoke up : *"Ladies, with high beating hearts and pulses throbbing with emotions, we receive from your hands this beautiful flag, the proud emblem of our young republic (...) To those who may return from the field of battle bearing this flag in triumph, though perhaps scattered and torn, this incident will always prove a cheering recollection and to him whose fate be to die a soldier's death, this moment brought before his fading view will recall your kind and sympathetic words, he will (...) bless you as his spirit takes its aerial flight (...) May the God of battles look down upon us as we register a soldier's vow that no stain shall ever found upon thy sacred fords, save the blood of those who attack thee or those who fall in thy defense. Comrades, you have heard the pledge, may it ever guide you and guard you on the tented field (...) Or in smoke, glare, and in din of battle, amidst carnage and death, there let its bright folds inspire you with new strength, nerve your arms and steel your heart to deeds of strength and valor"*.⁷⁵

Meanwhile, the Peninsular Campaign had begun. After their defeat at First Manassas (July 1861), the Federal authorities understood that they were in for a long war to restore the Union. Since Major General George B. McClellan was successful in his Western Virginia campaign, President Abraham Lincoln named him commander in chief of the Union armies, as the successor to the aging Winfield Scott. McClellan's first task was to organize the gigantic Federal levies into an army. Never had the United States reunited such a large body of men, more than 100,000 under the command of one general. Although McClellan and Lincoln agreed, erroneously, that Richmond was their main objective, the two men disagreed on the strategy to be pursued in capturing it. Finally, when Joseph E. Johnston's Confederate Army withdrew to a stronger line of defense near the Rappahannock, Lincoln permitted McClellan to attack the Rebel capital by making use of the James River and the Peninsula waterways of Virginia. McClellan set forth on 17 March 1862, with 12 divisions to Fort Monroe where General Wool was holding the place with 12,000 men. After the famous duel between the ironclads *Monitor* and *Merrimack* had cleared the bay of Hampton Roads on March 9, 1862, McClellan was confident that the Confederate fleet could no longer destroy the Union transports in the James River and on April 4, 1862, he advanced up the Peninsula.

His first step in the invasion of Virginia was the capture of Yorktown. This defensive position was held by Brigadier General (later Major General) Magruder's whose mission was to delay the Federals as long as possible to give Johnston's Army of Northern Virginia the time to receive reinforcements. Magruder stood firm and after a siege of one month (5 April - 4 May 1862), he withdrew three days before McClellan launched his huge assault. McClellan immediately sent the cavalry division of G. Stoneman and two infantry divisions

⁷⁴ Battalion returns for January and February 1862, Records Group 109, in Wallace, "*Coppens' Zouaves*", note 34.

⁷⁵ Bell I. Wiley, *The Life of Johnny Reb : The Common Soldier of The Confederacy*, New York, 1962, pp. 21-22.

in pursuit of the retreating Confederates. J.E.B. covered the rear guard but he had to be reinforced by James Longstreet's division that belonged to Johnston's Army. A clash took place at Williamsburg (4-5 May 1862) between this rear guard and the advancing Yankees. Longstreet managed to keep the Federals at bay and the next day, he continued his withdrawal up the Peninsula. Coppens' Zouaves had been in the midst of that fight, in R.H. Anderson's brigade (Longstreet's division).

An incident during the Confederate retreat improved the poor reputation the Zouaves had won on the Peninsula. Captured wounded Federals had been laid on the roadside and a young Yankee, shot through the abdomen, was crying on the ground, pleading to be killed in order to stop his suffering. At that moment, seeing men grouped around the poor soldier, several Coppens' Zouaves dropped out of line and mingled with the encircling crowd. Hearing the pleas of the dying soldier, a Zouave asked him : "*Put you out of your misery ? Certainly, sir !*" He then smashed the man's head with a shot of his musket. The crowd then moved back, horrified by the act of this "demon". Undisturbed, the Zouave simply looked at the other wounded men and asked : "*Any other gentlemen here like to be accommodated ?*" As all remained silent, he left the crowd gathered around the dead man. A witness of that incident later wrote about the Zouaves : "*They were the most rakish and devilish looking beings I ever saw*".⁷⁶ This plaintiff had obviously a rosy view of the conflict since the behavior of the Zouave in question was no different than the demeanor of allied troops during the two world wars and those of Korea and Vietnam.

The *Official Records* and the *Battles and Leaders of the Civil War* are not precise about the losses and the part played by Coppens' Zouaves in the battle of Fair Oaks. Fortunately, the works of Terry Jones and Lee A. Wallace's research in the archives of the battalion offsets these gaps. When that battle started, in the early afternoon of May 31, 1862, Coppens' 1st Battalion of Louisiana Zouaves was still in R.H. Anderson brigade of Longstreet division. Longstreet was in unfamiliar country and his brigades attacked in a disorganized assault. At the end of the day, Coppens' men and St. Paul's Foot Rifles lay in the woods under a heavy fire. R. H. Anderson rode to their line and ordered them to take the hill in front of them where the Federals were strongly entrenched. The Zouaves and Foot Rifles silently advanced in the darkness to within fifty yards of the enemy's position, and shouting "*Picayune Butler*", they rushed on two Pennsylvania regiments. The Yankees discovered that very few Confederates had routed them, and they counter-attacked and poured a volley of Minié balls on the first line of the Louisianans. These were on the verge of being overwhelmed when reinforcements arrived to stop the Yankee wave.⁷⁷

At the end of the battle's first day, Union and Confederate generals reorganized their positions in preparation for the next day's clash. Many of Coppens' men used the cover of darkness for more rewarding endeavors. The Zouaves' plundering habits had an impact on the next day's battle. Early on June 1, General George Pickett was riding on the battle line when he met several Zouaves returning from a plundering expedition on the outposts. With their hands full with booty, the surprised men tried to escape the general's anger. Pickett, however, stopped them and demanded an explanation. Coolly, one Zouave answered that the Yankees were right behind them and that they had no time to lose. Thanks to this information, Pickett managed to alert his superiors of the approaching enemy.⁷⁸ After the second day of battle, both sides were battered from the two-day struggle that had accomplished nothing. Coppens, who was seriously wounded, entered the fight with 225

⁷⁶ Stiles, *Four Years under Marse Robert*, pp. 80-81.

⁷⁷ *An English Combatant, Battlefields of the South, from Bull Run to Fredericksburg, with Sketches of Confederate Commanders, and Gossip of the Camps*, New York, 1864, p. 253, in Jones, "Louisiana Infantry", note 61 ; *Confederate Veteran*, vol. XIV-1906, p. 521 ; A. Austin, *Georgia Boys with "Stonewall" Jackson : James Thomas Thompson and the Walton Infantry*, Athens, 1967, p. 27.

⁷⁸ O.R., vol. XI-I, p. 982.

men and left more than half of them dead or wounded on the field, including 11 of his officers.

An unidentified newspaper clipping in the *New Orleans Civil War Scrapbook* claims that St. Paul's 7th Battalion lost approximately 100 of its 196 men. On the other hand, a unidentified newspaper article in the Army of Northern Virginia Papers relates that his three companies lost 57 men, and mentions that Coppens' and St. Paul's battalions were consolidated during the battle, noting that the casualties of the united two battalions were 310 men out of the 380 Louisianans engaged.⁷⁹

Some additional information about the merging of Coppens' with St. Paul's Battalion. The 7th Battalion of Louisiana Infantry (St. Paul's Foot Rifles) was formed in October 1861, in Virginia, by the combination of two Louisiana companies : the *Foot Rifles* and the *Crescent Blues*. A third, the *Catahoula Guerrillas*, was added in November 1862. After the battle of Fair Oaks, the *Crescent Blues* and the *Catahoula Guerrillas* were formally assigned to Coppens' Battalion. Initially, they belonged to Wheat's Tigers, another famous Zouave unit from New Orleans. According to T. Jones : "*The Catahoula Guerrillas, Captain J. W. Buhoup commanding, were largely made up of planters' sons, as being the tamest unit in Wheat's Tigers. Although they were not usually associated with the villainous acts committed by the rest of the battalion, they were referred to as 'Freebooters and Robbers' by one officer when they left their hometown*". Before the battle of Fair Oaks, Captain Buhoup was granted a request to have his company transferred to Henry St. Paul's 7th Battalion. Thus, after Fair Oaks, only two (the *Crescent Blues* and the *Catahoula Guerrillas*) of the three companies of St. Paul's 7th Battalion were merged into Coppens' unit and would become respectively Co. "G" and "H" until August 1862 when the two departed from Coppens' Battalion for the 15th Louisiana Infantry.⁸⁰

After the battle of Fair Oaks, Coppens' 1st Battalion of Louisiana Zouaves was transferred to the brigade of general Roger A. Pryor (Longstreet's division). Thus, Coppens' Zouaves fought in the Seven Days campaign (June 25 - July 1, 1862) as a part of this brigade.⁸¹ Professor L.A. Wallace found in the reminiscences of Mrs. Pryor, a reference to Lieutenant Colonel Coppens during the period just preceding the Seven Days campaign. "*From my windows I witnessed the constant arrival of officers from every division of the army. The Louisiana Zouaves were an interesting company of men. Their handsome young French Colonel Coppens was a fine example of grace and manly beauty. He would dash up to the door on his handsome horse, dismount, and run up the stairs for a word with some official, run down again, vault lightly into his saddle, and gallop down the street. No one was more admired than Colonel Coppens*".⁸²

It is worthy to mention that this campaign can be considered the first major success of R.E. Lee because it ended with the retreat of McClellan forces toward Washington. However, McClellan would later inflict to his opponent enormous losses that no other Federal general would ever equal, except Grant, in 1864. The Confederate and Union armies respectively lost 20,150 and 15,900 men, but if we put aside the missing, the deserters and prisoners, 19,200 Rebels were killed and wounded whereas their foe, although in greater numbers, only suffered about 9,800 casualties, which were quickly replaced. Considering the estimation that was made regarding the total forces in the field, the dead and wounded represent between 21 and 24 % of the Rebel forces and only 9.3 % of those of the Federals. In spite of his strategic defeat - he missed the opportunity of capturing Richmond - McClellan achieved what was overlooked at the time : he bled his enemy to

⁷⁹ Wallace, *Coppens' Zouaves*, 279.

⁸⁰ Bergeron, *Louisiana Confederate Units*, pp. 152-53, 160 ; Jones, *Louisiana Infantry*, notes 8, 57, 71, 73, 76, 83.

⁸¹ O.R. vol. XIV : p. 649.

⁸² Mrs. Roger A. Pryor, *Reminiscences of Peace and War*, New York, 1904, p.172.

death. One will have to wait the arrival of Grant as supreme commander to see his forces concentrate on the destruction of the Southern armies rather than try to seize Richmond. On April 9, 1864, Grant wrote to the commander of the Army of the Potomac : “*Lee’s army will be your objective point. Wherever Lee goes, there you will go also*”.⁸³

In his record of July 29, 1862,⁸⁴ Major General James Longstreet praised the performance of Coppens’ Zouaves at Ellison’s Mill or Mechanicsville, where they lost 42 men and 5 officers.⁸⁵

*“HEADQUARTERS, Near Richmond,
July 29, 1862”*

“I would also mention, as distinguished among others for gallantry and skill, (...) Lieutenant Colonels Marye, Coppens, Royston, and Major Caldwell (both wounded). In this affair at Ellison’s Mill, my command sustained a considerable loss. The battalion of Lieutenant Colonel Coppens and the Third Regiment Virginia Volunteers were especially distinguished”.

On July 25, 1862, President Davis wrote R.E. Lee about the reorganization of the Louisiana troops suggested by General Richard Taylor :

*EXECUTIVE DEPARTMENT, C. S. A.,
Richmond, Va.,
July 25, 1862.*

“General ROBERT E. LEE,”

“GENERAL : Yesterday evening I had a full conversation with General R. Taylor, and also with Major La Sere. General Taylor thinks the best arrangement which can be made of the Louisiana troops will be as proposed, to place the Fifth, Sixth, Seventh, Eighth, and Fourteenth Regiments in a brigade, to promote Colonel Hays to be a brigadier, and assign him to the command of it, and to withdraw the Ninth Regiment from the brigade heretofore commanded by General Taylor, associating with it the First and Second Regiments and the battalions of Coppens and Pendleton ; that the Tenth Regiment, Colonel Marigny, be sent without delay to Camp Moore for operations upon and around New Orleans. The senior colonel of the Second Brigade, Shivers, is thought quite competent to command it, and therefore that General Taylor may be detached and proceed to Louisiana to hasten on recruits for the regiments which are to remain here and attend to the enrollment of conscripts to fill up the skeleton regiments which are to be sent home. General Taylor is decidedly in favor of breaking up Wheat’s battalion [Louisiana Tigers of Roberdeau Wheat]”.

“He thinks the men would voluntarily transfer to other companies in service and that the officers should be disbanded. He reports favorably of Captain Atkins, who has commanded one of the companies, and thinks, if he desires to remain in the service, that he should be made an exception. Imperfect knowledge of the captain, limited to an examination of the evidence of his service in Italy and to observation of him on the field of Manassas, has led me to regard him as worthy of special consideration. The period for active operations at New Orleans by acclimated troops is the next and the ensuing month, for reasons which I need not state to you, and the whole programme is submitted to you that you may take early

⁸³ O.R. vol. XXXIII : p. 828.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.* vol. XI-2 : p. 503.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.* : p. 980.

action on it if it meets your approval”.

“Very respectfully and truly, yours,
JEFFERSON DAVIS”⁸⁶

When he issued his Special Orders n° 163 of July 26, 1862, R.E. Lee was obviously reluctant to adopt the whole plan suggested by Taylor :

“I. The Fifth Louisiana, Semmes’ brigade, and Fourteenth Louisiana, Pryor’s brigade, with Girardey’s light artillery battery, will proceed without delay and report to Maj. Gen. T. J. Jackson at Gordonsville, Va. ; and, in connection with the Sixth, Seventh, and Eighth Louisiana Regiments and Wheat’s battalion, constitute Taylor’s brigade, Army of the Valley District”.

“II. The First Louisiana, Wright’s brigade, Ninth Louisiana, Taylor’s brigade, Army of the Valley District, Fifteenth Louisiana (late Third Louisiana Battalion of J. R. Anderson’s brigade), and Coppins’ battalion of Pryor’s brigade will report without delay to Major General McLaws, to constitute, in connection with the Second and Tenth Louisiana Regiments, a brigade of that division”.

“By command of General Lee :

A. P. MASON, Assistant Adjutant-General”.⁸⁷

After the Seven Days, the Federal Headquarters realized the necessity to gather under one command the three little armies beaten by Stonewall Jackson in the Shenandoah. Major General John Pope was put in charge of the united force. His mission was first to cover Washington and the Valley, then to move east of the Blue Ridge Mountains to draw Lee’s forces from the defenses of Richmond, thus easing the advance of McClellan’s army in Virginia. On July 14, 1862, Pope’s army moved toward Gordonsville (Virginia). With about 80.000 men, Lee’s army became squeezed between Pope’s 50,000 men converging from the North and McClellan’s 90,000 troops moving in front of him. Feeling that Richmond was in no immediate danger, R.E. Lee began preparations for a campaign against Pope. While his main army, Longstreet in the van, marched to Groveton, Lee left the divisions of Majors Generals R.H. Anderson, L. McLaws, J.G. Walker, and D.H. Hill to take care of McClellan.⁸⁸

For that campaign, the 1st Battalion of Louisiana Zouaves was not assigned to McLaws division as aforementioned in the Special Orders n° 163 but to Colonel Leroy A. Stafford’s brigade belonging to Major General W.B. Taliaferro’s division (Stonewall Jackson’s “wing”). Stafford’s brigade comprised the 1st, 2nd, 9th, 10th, and 15th Louisiana Regiments, plus the 3rd Louisiana Battalion. The Louisianans reached Jackson’s army near Gordonsville about August 12. When Coppins’ Battalion joined Jackson, it had been reduced to 27 privates and 4 officers. Its loss in strength probably resulted from the transfer, in August 1862, of the *Crescent Blues* and the *Catahoulas Guerrillas* to the 15th Louisiana Infantry.⁸⁹ The unit was in need of clothing, 14 privates of the battalion had no shoes and could not follow the forced march of Jackson’s “foot cavalry”. After crossing the Rappahannock on August 25, these barefoot troops straggled and were reported missing. Approximately 17 remained to serve with Starke’s (later Stafford’s) brigade through Second Manassas, Chantilly, Harpers Ferry, and Sharpsburg.⁹⁰

⁸⁶ *Ibid.* vol. LI-2 : p. 597.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.* vol. XII-3 : p. 918 ; vol. XIV : p. 656.

⁸⁸ Johnson & Buel, *Battles & Leaders*, vol. II : pp. 499-500, p. 514 ; Boatner, *Civil War Dictionary*, pp. 101-102.

⁸⁹ Bergeron, *Louisiana Units*, p. 152.

⁹⁰ O.R. vol. XVI : p. 549 ; Johnson & Buel, *Battles & Leaders*, vol. II : pp. 499-500, p. 514 ; Wallace, “Coppins’ Zouaves”, p. 279.

Several months later, Colonel L.A. Stafford described the conduct of Starke's Louisiana Brigade and of his Zouaves at Second Manassas as follows :

*"CAMP NEAR PORT ROYAL, VA.,
January 21, 1863"*

"GENERAL :

"I have the honor herewith to submit the following report :

"The brigade, consisting of the First, Second, Ninth, Tenth, and Fifteenth, and Coppins' Battalion Louisiana Volunteers, reported near Gordonsville on or about August 12, 1862, and was assigned to duty in the division of Maj. Gen. T. J. Jackson. Being the senior colonel in the brigade, the command devolved upon me. I had command but one week when Brig. Gen. W. E. Starke reported for duty and took command. Shortly after Brigadier General Starke arrived we took up the line of march and continued it until we reached the ford on the Rappahannock near Brandy Station, on or about August 21, at which point we found the enemy strongly posted on the opposite bank".

"On the morning of the 22^d we resumed the march, and crossed the Rappahannock at Major's Mill, on Hazel Fork, the 25th. Passed through Thoroughfare Gap on the morning of the 27th ; reached Manassas on the same day. That night we fell back and took position near the little farm called Groveton".

"On the afternoon of the 28th, the enemy appearing in sight, we formed our line of battle on the crest of the hill overlooking Groveton and awaited his attack. The battle commenced at 5 p.m. and lasted until 9 p.m., resulting in the repulse of the enemy, we holding the battleground. In this engagement, the brigadier general commanding the division receiving a severe wound, the command of the division devolved upon Brig. Gen. W. E. Starke. The command of the brigade fell upon me".

"On the morning of the 29th, being in reserve, we were not thrown forward until about 12 o'clock, at which time we received an order to charge, driving the enemy before us. We again fell back to our position, remaining in it during the night".

"On the morning of the 30th Brig. Gen. W. E. Starke ordered me to send half of one of my regiments forward and occupy the railroad cut as a point of observation, to be held at all hazards. About 8 o'clock in the morning the enemy commenced throwing forward large bodies of skirmishers in the woods on our left, who quickly formed themselves into regiments and moved forward by brigades to the attack, massing a large body of troops at this point with the evident design of forcing us from our position. They made repeated charges upon us while in this position, but were compelled to retire in confusion, sustaining heavy loss and gaining nothing. It was at this point that the ammunition of the brigade gave out. The men procured some from the dead bodies of their comrades, but the supply was not sufficient, and in the absence of ammunition, the men fought with rocks and held their position. The enemy retreated. We pressed forward to the turnpike road, there halted, and encamped for the night".

"Very respectfully, your obedient servant,

*L. A. STAFFORD, Colonel, Commanding Brigade".*⁹¹

We have no idea of the losses of Coppins' Battalion during the campaign of Second Manassas, but his brigade lost 385 men including 110 killed.⁹²

After defeating general John Pope at Second Manassas, Lee undertook to invade the northern territory. By moving into Maryland, he hoped to draw the people of that State

⁹¹ O.R. vol. XVI : p. 668-69 ; vol. XIX-1 : p. 1014.

⁹² Johnson & Buel, *Battles & Leaders*, vol. II : p. 500.

under the Confederate standards but he was especially convinced that a victory won by his army would strengthen the anti-war movement in the North and threaten a victory of the Republicans at the next election of the legislature. The northern people would have then the choice between the war and the peace party.⁹³ The “Affair of the Lost Order” saved McClellan’s Army. A federal scout found a copy of Lee’s Special Orders n° 191 splitting his army, but McClellan lost the opportunity to take advantage of Lee’s division of strength, because he moved too slowly and also because General-in-Chief Halleck warned him that the affair might be a trickery set by the Confederates. Nevertheless, Lee’s army was stopped at Sharpsburg (Maryland) and lost many men in an indecisive battle.⁹⁴

As Brigadier General William Starke was killed at the battle of Sharpsburg, it was Colonel Stafford who recorded the fighting qualities of his Louisianans :

“On the 31st we took up the line of march, and on September 1 at Chantilly we again met the enemy and repulsed them. We resumed our line of march ; passed through Dranesville, Leesburg, and crossed the Potomac on September 5. Passed through Frederick City, Md. ; encamped 2 miles beyond. Recrossed the Potomac on September 11 at Williamsport ; passed through Martinsburg, thence to Harper’s Ferry ; took part in the reduction of that place. Crossed the Potomac at Shepherdstown September 16. Same evening formed line of battle ; slept on our arms and in position near Sharpsburg, Maryland”.

“Early on the morning of the 17th the engagement became general, continuing throughout the day, this brigade sustaining its part. It was in this battle that Brig. Gen. W. E. Starke fell while gallantly leading his command. Remained in line of battle all night of the 17th”.

“Remained in position on the day of the 18th ; recrossed the Potomac near Shepherdstown on the morning of the 19th ; held in reserve on the 20th ; went into camp near Martinsburg on the 21st ; remained in camps until the 28th, and moved to Bunker Hill on or about October 5. My command (the Ninth Regiment Louisiana Volunteers) was transferred from Starke’s brigade to that commanded by Brig. Gen. Harry T. Hays”.

“No report of casualties has been received from [G.] Coppens’ Battalion, Captains Raine’s and Brockenbrough’s batteries. Enclosed is a list of casualties in First, Second, Ninth, Tenth, and Fifteenth Regiments Louisiana Volunteers”.

*“Very respectfully, your obedient servant,
L. A. STAFFORD, Colonel, Commanding Brigade”.*⁹⁵

According to a single source, the story of the Battalion written by one of his officers, Lieutenant Colonel George-Gaston Coppens was promoted Colonel of the 8th Florida Infantry on the eve of the battle of Sharpsburg and was killed during that bloody engagement. As George-Gaston Coppens had taken with him the archives of his battalion, they were lost after his death. His brother Marie-Alfred succeeded him at the head of his battalion.⁹⁶ Back to Virginia after the disastrous campaign in Maryland, the Zouaves were in rags. Marie-Alfred, their new Lieutenant Colonel, made requisitions for shoes, blankets and uniforms, but the commander of Starke’s brigade refused them on the grounds that the depleted strength of the Zouaves was no longer an independent command.⁹⁷

On November 10, 1862, the Confederate Zouave Battalion was reorganized “for the war” but this restructuring did not get under way until after the battle of Fredericksburg, in

⁹³ Freeman, R.E. *Lee : A Biography*, vol. II, p. 358.

⁹⁴ Boatner, *Civil War Dictionary*, p. 17.

⁹⁵ O.R. vol. XVI : p. 669.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.* vol. XIX-1 : p. 842 ; Wallace, “Coppens’ Zouaves”, note 38.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.* vol. XVI : p. 669.

⁹⁷ Arroyo, “Zouaves”, in Wallace, “Coppens’ Zouaves”.

December 1862. At this time, the battalion went to Richmond in order to build the city's defenses. The recruiting of a few new men and maybe the recovering of its absentees and of the sick and wounded back on their feet strengthened its ranks.⁹⁸ On January 8, 1863, at Brigadier General Pryor's request and backed by Major General Samuel G. French, Coppens' Battalion was sent on the Blackwater River in southeastern Virginia.

*“HEADQUARTERS FORCES AT PETERSBURG,
January 8, 1863”*

*“Captain HATCH,
Assistant Adjutant General :*

“There is now at Richmond a Louisiana Zouave battalion commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Coppens. I recommend that this battalion be sent to General Pryor without delay. They are doing but little service where they are, and can do a great deal on the Blackwater. General Pryor is very anxious to have them, and is confident that if they are ordered to him, he can double their numbers by recruits drawn from within the enemy's lines. I hope that these suggestions will receive the attention and approval of the major general commanding the department”.

*“I am, sir, very respectfully, your obedient servant,
R. E. COLSTON,
Brigadier General, Commanding at Petersburg”.*

*“HEADQUARTERS DEPARTMENT OF NORTH CAROLINA,
Magnolia, N. C., January 20, 1863”*

“I am informed that Lieutenant Colonel Coppens is recruiting his command under General R. E. Lee's orders. If, however, the Adjutant and Inspector General will order them to the Blackwater, where they are much needed, he will add much to the defense of that line, which must not under any circumstances be lost if it can be prevented”.

*“S. G. FRENCH, Maj. Gen”.*⁹⁹

If General Pryor had seen the battalion's morning report of January 3, 1863, it is doubtful that he would have shown further interest in obtaining this unit. With the exception of Lieutenant Charles Arroyo, nobody was present for duty. Sixteen enlisted men were missing, two were sick, and nine absent without leave. One officer was under arrest, another on detached service.¹⁰⁰ One month later, the Confederate Zouave Battalion had however grown to 90 men but 29 were on leave or absent without leave.¹⁰¹ Its task on the Blackwater was to guard outposts, perform scouting tasks, hunt down back conscripts and arrest deserters. On April 13, 1863, the duties of the battalion were interrupted and the men transferred to the army corps of Major General Longstreet who was beginning his operations around Suffolk (Virginia). Once Longstreet's Corps was back from Suffolk, the Coppens' Zouaves returned to their post on the Blackwater. According to the records of Major General Daniel H. Hill, their presence on the banks of that river was most useful.

⁹⁸ O.R. vol. XXI : p. 544 : vol. XXVII-2 : p. 790.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.* vol. LI-2 : p. 669 ;

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.* vol. LI-2, 669 ; *Morning Report*, January 3, 1863, Records Group 109, in Wallace “Coppens' Zouaves”, note 40.

¹⁰¹ O.R. vol. XXIX-2 : p. 906.

“PETERSBURG, VA.
June 18, 1863”

“GENERAL : The Yankees, with ten regiments of infantry, two of cavalry, and sixteen pieces, have been feebly attempting to cross the Blackwater for the last five days. They have been repulsed at all points with ease by the forces of General [M.] Jenkins, Colonel [John A.] Baker, and Colonel [Alfred] Coppens”.

“Respectfully,
D. H. HILL”.¹⁰²

In August 1863, Coppens’ men were first attached to the division of General Matthew W. Ransom’s division of General Arnold Elzey’s Department of Richmond, and then to the Department of North Carolina under Maj. Gen. George E. Pickett. On December 31, 1863, the abstract of return mentions 91 officers and men in Marie-Alfred Coppens’ Battalion, of which 29 were absent without leave. They were next sent on routine patrols as guards at Franklin Depot (Virginia).¹⁰³ In October 1863, Pickett ordered them to round up deserters and conscripts and to be ready to repulse any Federal troops venturing out from Norfolk.

Early in November, Coppens’ Battalion was posted near Murfreesboro (North Carolina). There the Zouaves were welcomed with a pleasant entertainment. Thrilled by the French accent of Coppens’ men, local ladies organized a *Soirée Louisianaise*.¹⁰⁴ By December 1863, when they were stationed at Franklin Depot, Virginia, the Zouave Battalion comprised 19 officers and 43 men present for duty. According to Professor Wallace’s research in Lieutenant Arroyo’s papers, the battalion attacked and repulsed the Yankees near Windsor (North Carolina) on January 29, 1864. In March 1864, it marched against Suffolk under the command of General Ransom and skirmished sporadically with the enemy. On May 9th, 1864, Coppens’ Zouaves reinforced Hicksford (Virginia), an important point on the vital Petersburg and Weldon Railroad. On June 1, Lieutenant Colonel Marie-Alfred Coppens commanded a force comprising 42 men and 12 officers of his own Zouaves, some other outfits on duty at the covered bridge over the Meherrin River and other troops stationed at Hicksford, such as a detachment of Captain Bradford’s Mississippi battery, a company of the 62nd Georgia Cavalry and a few “cradles and graves” of the Virginia Militia. Early in August 1864, Captain Demourelle and a detachment of Coppens’ Battalion, routed, killed and wounded several Negro soldiers during a scouting operation for General Pryor in the rear of the Union army near Fort Powhatan.¹⁰⁵ On November 17, 1864, Marie Coppens retired because of wounds and was succeeded by major Fulgence De Bordenave. Three weeks later, a Federal raid on Hicksford, NC., wounded six Zouaves, and killed another.¹⁰⁶ This action, known as “Hicksford Raid” was the unit’s last engagement of the war.

It is unknown what became of the handful of Coppens’ Zouaves during the evacuation of Richmond or if they were present at Appomattox with the remainder of Lee’s army.

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¹⁰² *Ibid.* vol. XXVIII-3 : pp. 1053-54 ; XXXII-2 : p. 264 ; XXXIII : p. 885 ; XXXIV-1 : p. 12.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.* vol. XXIX-2 : p. 690.

¹⁰⁴ *Invitation to Mattie Pipkin* (who later married de Bordenave), de Bordenave Papers, note 41 in Wallace, “Coppens’ Zouaves”.

¹⁰⁵ Arroyo Zouaves, in Wallace, “Coppens’ Zouaves”.

¹⁰⁶ O.R. vol. XXIX-2 : p. 906 ; XXXIII : p. 1202 ; XXXVI-3 : pp. 892, 906 ; XLII-1 : p. 57, 59, 62-63, 447.