

# LES ZOUAVES

By Col. J. L. Martel

Conservateur, Musée de l'Armée, Paris

Illustrations by Eugène Lelièvre  
Painter to the French Army



A twentieth-century French Zouave and, at left, his American counterpart of the 1860's.

While perusing various works on the American Civil War, one might be astonished to find among the illustrations engravings of combatants dressed in the garb of the French Zouave. The related commentary might go on to identify these soldiers as the 146th Infantry Regiment from New York, volunteers from Pennsylvania or even the "Zouave" regiment from Louisiana. There were Zouave troops in the Union as well as the Confederate armies. Was it, then, merely a question of fashion?

I believe that the answer is much subtler. An article by Doctor H. Finke and Frederick Todd provides another explanation.

In the 1860's, various sporting societies existed in the United States, competing with each other in public contests. In Chicago, one such society folded but was then reorganized by Elmer Ellsworth, a former employee of the now-defunct society. Ellsworth was acquainted

with a French fencing master who had served in the Zouave regiment in the Crimea. The newly formed society thus inherited the drilling principles of the Zouaves as well as their prestigious eastern uniform.

The company of sixty well-disciplined men won every competition they entered and caused a sensation among the populace while traveling across the countryside. Whetted by the martial spirit of this unit, public opinion in America, being favorably disposed to such demonstrations at that time, was won over by the brilliant uniform and new drilling techniques. To this was added the fame of the French Zouaves who

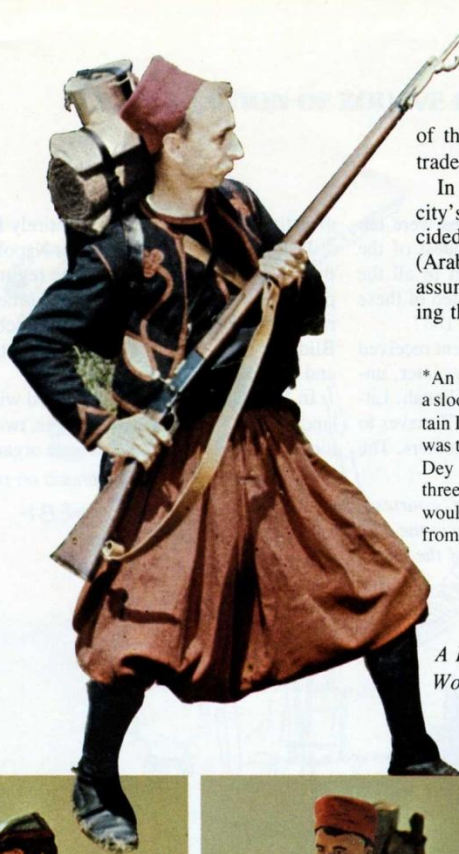
*During the Second World War, Col. Martel, now Conservateur of the Musée de l'Armée, served as a lieutenant in the 2nd Regiment of Zouaves.*

had been covered with laurels in the Crimea as well as in Italy. This is why, during the Civil War, numerous regiments — in imitation of Ellsworth's colorful troupe — took the name "Zouave", while others adopted their uniform or at least the major elements of their costume: the *chechia* or tarboosh, the *bolero*, and the *saroual*.

American soldiers were not the only ones to wear this uniform. From 1860 on, the Papal security guard in Rome, comprised in part of French and Belgian volunteers, was known as the "Pontifical Zouaves". A strange paradox indeed ... soldiers dressed à la Turc guarding the official head of Christianity.

What, then, was the elite corps and how was it assured such widespread renown?

On July 4, 1830, the capture of Staouelli and the subsequent fall of the Emperor's Fort delivered to France the city of Algiers, former abode



of the Barbary pirates who had infected sea trade in the Mediterranean for centuries.\*

In order to maintain order and to protect the city's boundaries, the French general staff decided to use local mercenary troops. The deys (Arab governors of Algiers before the French assumed control) were in the habit of conscripting the Kabyle — a group of Berbers belong-

ing, for the most part, to the Zaouaoua tribe nestled in one of the gorges of the Djurjurah Mountains. Impoverished, yet courageous and loyal, these excellent foot-soldiers found themselves disbanded upon the departure of the dey from Algiers. General Clauzel, following the example set by the Turks, seized them in the name of the French government as indentured soldiers. Organized in September 1830 and sanctioned by King Louis-Philippe's ordinance in March 1831, the first corps of Zouaves consisted of two battalions similar to the regiments of line infantry. The staff officers were French; mixed in with the native foot-soldiers were some Frenchmen. For the most part these latter were Parisians who had taken part in the July Revolution.

\*An American squadron composed of three frigates, a sloop, and three schooners, commanded by Captain Decatur, set sail for Algiers in 1815. Its mission was to free the Union from a shameful tribute that the Dey had imposed on it. The Americans captured three pirate ships. This disconcerted the Turks who would accept even the most unreasonable demands from those who were determined to get their just due.

*A French Zouave of the First World War, from "Soldiers of World War I." Photograph courtesy the West Point Museum.*



*Recent releases depicting Zouaves include a 54mm Pontifical Zouave, one of the three-thousand man force created in 1860. Casting by Amati. At right, a Zouave of the First World War, from the Mokarex series.*



*Though the Franco-Prussian War has received scant attention from war game figure manufacturers, Custom Cast's 30mm Zouaves, from their Confederals range, are easily modified into French Zouaves.*



*Zouave enlisted man and officer. Photograph courtesy the Musée de l'Armée, Paris.*

## LES ZOUAVES

Upon their creation, the Zouaves were engaged in Algeria and as the conquest of the territory augmented they took part in all the principal battles. The most celebrated of these was the capture of Constantine in 1837.

In April 1841, the Zouave regiment received its first flag which, only a few days later, underwent its baptism by fire near Milianah. Little by little, the natives had left the Zouaves to form regiments of Algerian sharpshooters. The

effective force was thereafter entirely French.

In 1852, by decree of Emperor Napoleon III, three regiments of Zouaves, one regiment per province, were created out of the former single regiment. The headquarters for each were: Blidah for the 1st Regiment, Oran for the 2nd, and Constantine for the 3rd.

In 1854, when France, then allied with England, decided on war against Russia, two battalions per regiment of Zouaves were organized to

*Continued on page 54*

*Drawing of a Zouave by A. de Neuville, courtesy the Musée de l'Armée, Paris. Notice the way the rifle is carried, to compensate for the height of the pack.*



*Though technically not a Zouave, Squadron|Rubin's recently released Turco can be easily modified to be painted as a member of any Zouave regiment.*



*The Zouaves of 1900, from a painting by Armand Dumareshq, courtesy the Musée de l'Armée, Paris.*

THE EVOLUTION OF ZOUAVE DRESS FROM 1830 TO 1955, BY EUGÈNE LELIÈPVRE



## LES ZOUAVES

Continued from page 35

take part in the Crimean campaign. They participated actively in the capture of Sebastopol, as did the Zouave Regiment of the Imperial Guard created in the Crimea in 1855. Meanwhile, their Zouave comrades who had remained in Africa were wrapping up the conquest of Algeria by seizing the last of the Kabyle strongholds.

In 1859, the Italian campaign began. France's role was to maintain the Piedmont region and Italian independence. The three Zouave regiments and the Imperial Guard regiment took part in this campaign and there, too, the Zouaves were celebrated. In Magenta, the 2nd Regiment captured the Austrians' colors and became the first Zouave regiment to receive the Legion of Honor decoration.

At the time of its conception, the expedition into Mexico was not considered to be very significant. However, a battalion of the 2nd Regiment of Zouaves was included by the Army Corps. Later, several battalions of the 1st and 3rd Regiments followed suit. In Mexico they fought fiercely and inscribed new victories on their banners: Puebla and San Lorenzo. The Zouaves returned to Africa in 1865, the 3rd Regiment having received the Legion of Honor for the capture of two enemy colors.

Not long after the Mexican campaign, the Franco-Prussian War broke out and from 1870 to 1871 Zouave troops from the three regiments, as well as the Guards, fought on all

fronts. Destroyed in part during the first battles, the Zouave regiments were reformed (in fact, a 4th regiment was created) and continued in the war to its end. During the skirmishes along the Loire, the Pontifical Zouaves, once again in France, gained renown at Loigny and Mans.

At the close of the Franco-Prussian War the Zouaves returned to Africa, later participating in various colonial campaigns: Tunisia in 1881, the Far East from 1885 to 1886, China in 1900, Morocco from 1908 to 1912. In 1914, the four Zouave regiments, to which were added the 8th and 9th Regiments at the outset of World War I, fought in all the major battles of that war: the Marne, Yser, Verdun, the Somme. So numerous were the citations for the already illustrious Zouaves that the 1st and 2nd Regiments received the Military Medal while the 3rd, 4th, 8th and 9th were decorated with the Legion of Honor.

Between the two World Wars, the Zouaves finished the pacification of Morocco. In 1939 and 1940 and finally in 1944 and 1945, they fought bravely with the 1st French Army in the Second World War. With the end of the Algerian campaign in 1962, the Zouave regiments were dissolved.

For one hundred and thirty years the Zouaves distinguished themselves gloriously in battle, taking part in all the campaigns in Europe, Asia, Africa, and America in which the French Army fought. Their colors bear witness to their valor and in their folds are inscribed the names: Constantine 1836, Sebastopol 1854-55, Magenta 1859, Puebla 1863, the Far East

1884-85, Morocco 1908-1912, Champagne-Verdun 1916, Monastir 1916, Berry au Bac 1918, Vosges-Danube 1944-45. All Zouave regiments have been decorated with the *Croix de Guerre* from both World Wars, five out of six regiments with the Legion of Honor, and one with the Military Medal.

One of the most prestigious distinctions belonging to the Zouaves, apart from their legendary courage, was their uniform. This uniform, in use from their auspicious creation to their dissolution, varied little until 1914.

The first Zouaves were natives of Northern Africa and the uniform that was given to them reflected their origins. It was, in fact, a Turkish garb. It consisted of a short buttonless jacket (*bolero*) made of dark blue cloth, simply piped in red. This piping soon developed into a red braid which bordered the jacket and formed a loop in the shape of a false pocket known as a *tombô*. Upon the creation of the 2nd and 3rd Regiments, the Regimental colors were placed in this *tombô* — red for the 1st, white for the 2nd, yellow for the 3rd, and blue for the 4th. The uniform also included a side-buttoning vest in blue cloth trimmed with red braid, wide-legged red breeches called *saroual*, and white gaiters and leg coverings in natural leather. On campaign in Africa and during the summer in France, the Zouaves wore white *saroual*. A wide waist sash of royal blue wool encircles the abdomen. At night and in bad weather, the Zouaves wore a blue hooded cape. Their headgear consisted of a red skull-cap called a *chechia*, topped with a royal blue tassel. A turban, first red, later green, then white, surrounded this *chechia* for full dress. The belt was of black leather worn over the blue sash. A light-infantryman's pouch, later a cartridge box, a scabbard in black leather (worn on the left), and a bayonet sheath (also on the left) completed the uniform. The various rifles used by the Zouaves were the same as those used by the French infantry from 1830 to our own time. Officers wore uniforms similar to those in the infantry of the corresponding period.

During the First World War (in 1915 or 1916), the Zouaves were dressed in khaki, like the other colonial troops, and wore Adrian helmets. They retained this mode of dress until 1943. After the allied debarkment in North Africa, the Zouave regiments were equipped with American gear and fought thus in France and in Germany in 1944 and 1945. A fair exchange, indeed — in 1860-65 American dressed as Zouaves; in 1944-45, Zouaves dressed as Americans. One lone regiment had conserved the *chechia* from the old uniform; the three others wore a French-style forage cap.

The end of the Algerian campaign in 1962 also marked an end to the Zouave regiments.

Many famous persons served among the Zouave ranks. Among others were General de la Moricière, General Cavaignac, Marshal Canrovet, General Chanzy, General Bourbaki and, among the more contemporary military men, Marshal Juin and General Monsabert.

The nickname given to the Zouaves by the Arabs was The Jackals (*les Chacals*) from whence came the Zouaves' battle cry: "Pan pan l'Arbi, les Chacals sont par ici!" ("Bang, bang, Araby, the jackals are we!")

# BROOKHURST hobbies I & II

"IMPORTED MODEL PRODUCTS FROM AROUND THE WORLD"

## NOW HEAR THIS!

### GENERAL QUARTERS . . .

THE ALL NEW WARGAME RULES BOOK FOR NAVAL WARFARE

(using the 1/2400 MICRO FLEET ships)

IS NOW AVAILABLE! (\$4.95)

#### INCLUDES:

- AIR ATTACKS
- HIDDEN MAP MOVEMENTS
- KAMIKAZI
- LOGISTICS
- MINE FIELDS
- MTBS
- NIGHT BATTLES
- RADAR
- SUBMARINES
- SURFACE COMBAT
- WEATHER

AND MUCH MORE!

DEALERS' INQUIRIES INVITED



BROOKHURST HOBBIES I  
12741 BROOKHURST WAY  
GARDEN GROVE, Ca. 92640  
(714) 636-3580

TWO convenient locations to serve you better!

TRY OUR MAIL ORDER SERVICE  
MANY SATISFIED CUSTOMERS

PHONE ORDERS OKAY



COMPLETE CATALOGUE \$2.00  
MINIATURES CATALOGUE \$1.50  
WARGAMES CATALOGUE \$ .75



BROOKHURST HOBBIES II  
18061 MAGNOLIA ST.  
FOUNTAIN VALLEY,  
Ca. 92708 (714) 968-4354