

ZOUAVES

Antietam National Battlefield
National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior



Zouave uniform of the 5th New York Infantry (Duryea's Zouaves)

Some of the most famous Civil War units, and those probably with the most distinctive uniforms, were the Zouaves (pronounced zoo-AHV). Many wore red baggy pants, white leggings, a jacket trimmed in red, and a tasseled red fez or turban. Their uniforms made them stand out on the battlefield, but many of these units also stood out because of their reputations as hard and steady fighters.

ORIGINS

The Zouave uniform of the American Civil War actually had its origins in North Africa in the 1830's. Men from the Zouaoua tribe of Algeria were organized into the French army in 1831, (France had colonized parts of North Africa). They wore this distinctive uniform, and as their fame as fighters grew, more and more French soldiers joined their ranks. By the time of the

Crimean War in 1854, the Zouave units were composed entirely of Europeans. Their exploits in that war added to their reputation gained in North Africa. When newspapers from around the world, including the American *Harper's Weekly*, ran stories and illustrations, their fame spread. In the mid-19th century, it was France that set the tone for military fashion and tactics.

IN THE UNITED STATES



In the pre-Civil War United States, men raised militia and drilling or marching companies. Some of these adopted the uniform and name of the famous French fighters. One of the first were the Zouave Cadets, raised in 1859 by Elmer E. Ellsworth of Chicago, a personal friend of Abraham Lincoln.

He took the unit on a tour of eastern U.S. cities, putting on displays of military exercises and drill. Their intricate and complex marching, flashy uniforms, and the publicity they received, generated even more interest in the Zouaves.

THE CIVIL WAR

With the outbreak of the Civil War, many zouave units were raised on both sides. For example, Ellsworth raised the 11th New York Infantry or "Ellsworth's Fire Zouaves" from the New York City Fire Department. Louisiana, with its French culture and traditions raised the majority of Zouave units for the Confederacy.

Their uniforms and experiences in the war varied greatly, but many served with great distinction and upheld the tradition established by the Algerians and the French. After the first year of the war, most Confederate Zouave units shed their flashy garb. However, many in the Union army kept their Zouave uniforms for the entire conflict.

UNION ZOUAVES AT ANTIETAM

The role of Zouaves at Antietam, as is the case for most of the war, is primarily a Union story. Zouave units with the Army of the Potomac fought in nearly every phase of the battle. Some of them in the traditional Zouave garb complete with turban. Examples include the "Collis Zouaves" or

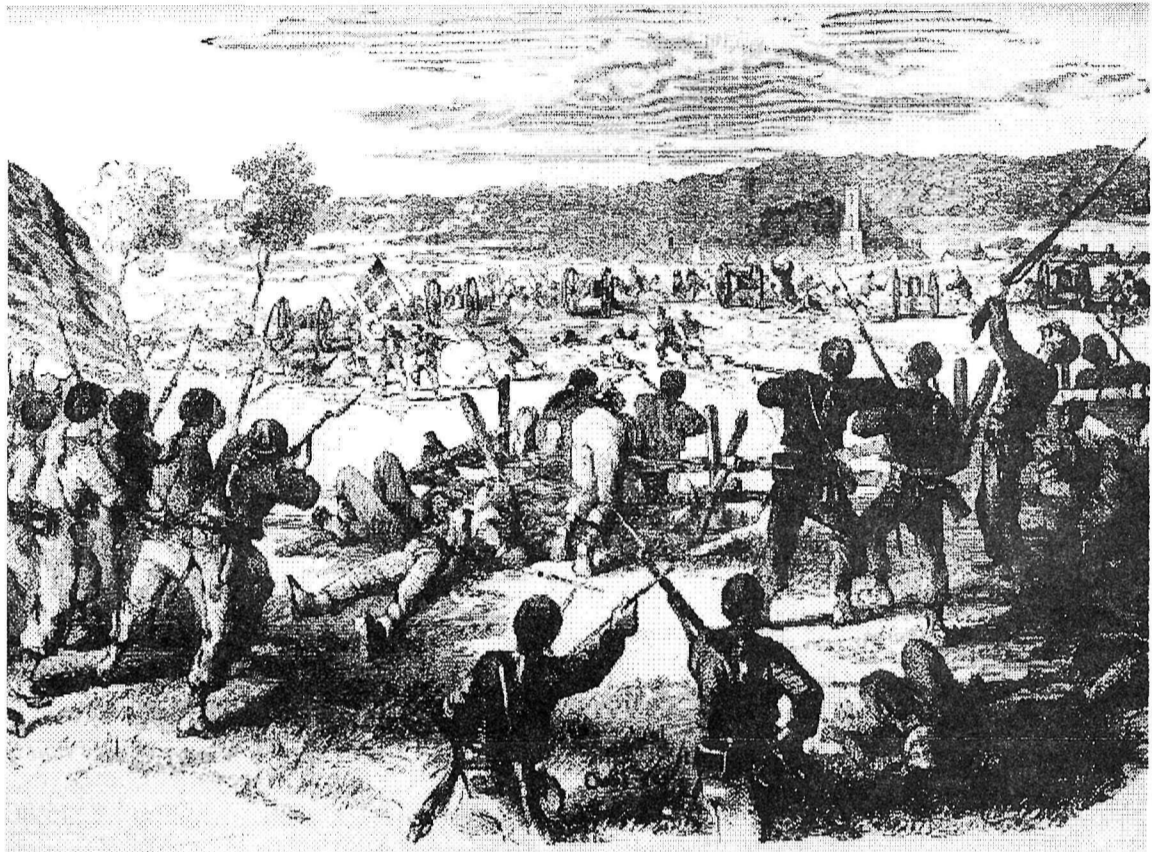
"Zouaves de Afrique" fighting with the 12th Corps in the East Woods. The 5th New York "Duryea's Zouaves," held in reserve during the battle, are depicted in our film "Antietam Visit."

One of the most noted Zouave regiments in the Battle of Antietam was the 9th New York or "Hawkins Zouaves." They

suffered 63% casualties in the final assault toward Sharpsburg made by Burnside's 9th Corps on the afternoon of the battle. Chanting "Zoo-Zoo-Zoo," they broke through the Confederate line of battle on the Harpers Ferry Road just south of town before A.P. Hill's southern counterattack forced Burnside's troops to pull back.

The 9th New York
"Hawkins Zouaves"
advance on
Sharpsburg.

Their monument
is on the park
auto tour.



CONFEDERATE ZOUAVES AT ANTIETAM

The only complete Confederate Zouave command at Antietam was the 1st Battalion "Louisiana Zouaves" also known as "Coppens Zouaves." Initially its members wore Zouave uniforms and even drilled with commands given in French. Beginning the war with over 400 men, their numbers had dwindled to approximately 17 men. They saw heavy action along the

Hagerstown Road in the
"Morning Phase" of battle.

Company E of the 44th Virginia Infantry was known as the "Richmond Zouaves." Their uniform included a blue jacket, orange trousers, and white gaiters. They had been complimented in their appearance and drill by two visiting French Zouaves while the company was training in Richmond early in the war. At Antietam, as part of Early's Brigade, they assisted in

the blunting of the attack of Sedgwick's Division of Sumner's Corps into the West woods, delaying them until other Confederate reinforcements could repulse them.

However, by the time of the Battle of Antietam, except for an occasional hat or coat, Confederate Zouave units with the Army of Northern Virginia had worn out or discarded their flashy garb for standard Confederate gray.

AFTER THE WAR

Zouave units, North and South, served with distinction at Antietam and throughout the Civil War. Their fame resulted in the continuation of the Zouave tradition even after the war ended, mostly in national guard units, in veteran's or fraternal

organizations, and drill teams. An American Legion drill team in Zouave uniforms even appeared on T.V.'s *The Ed Sullivan Show* in the 1950's. They continued a tradition that extended back beyond the American Civil War to 1830's North Africa.