

# ZOUAVES !

by Terry A. Bryan

*Vignettes of exotically dressed Civil War soldiers were used on money and financial documents.*

Early in the movie *Gone with the Wind*, Scarlett attends a ball at the Wilkes' plantation. The aristocratic young men are excited about the prospect of war, eager to join up, and certain that the conflict will be brief and victorious. This was



Authentic Algerian Zouaves are pictured on the cover of French sheet music in 1840.

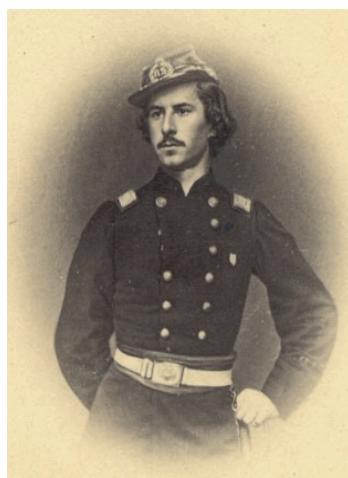
the attitude of most of the country during the mounting hostilities of the late 1850s and early 1860s.

Ambitious or wealthy men on both sides organized and equipped militia companies, assuming rank and command status. Naiveté about the brutality of war was soon replaced by awareness of the awful cost. Appearance and tactics of these private military units varied greatly. Early Civil War uniforms were not standardized. Some private units were dressed distinctively by their patrons; none were more distinctive than the Zouaves.

Young men were drawn to colorful uniforms, heroic ideals and companionship of service. Parades, mock battles and drills drew large crowds. Uniforms associated with fierce fighters were thought to intimidate the enemy, raise cohesiveness and morale of the soldiers and endear the units to the folks back home.

No single person epitomized the gallant, naïve, theatrical and charismatic spirit of the times than Elmer Ephraim Ellsworth (1837-1861). His military aspirations overcame his desire to be an attorney in Rockford, Illinois. Command of a militia company gave him freedom to show off the drills and tactics derived from his study of U.S. and European manuals-of-arms. A clerkship in Springfield, Illinois introduced him to Abraham Lincoln. He studied

briefly in Lincoln's law office. Soldiering drew him away. As a major of militia, he drilled his men before admiring crowds by mid-1859.



Colonel Elmer E. Ellsworth was a patriot, zealot, drillmaster and protégé of Lincoln.

The Zouaves that Ellsworth emulated were inspired by North African light infantry which the French battled in war with Algeria. After



The Ellsworth Cadets presented drill shows and competitions in major cities togged out in colorful uniforms, here on an 1860 polka cover.

pacification of the region, the French army organized ethnic troops into Zouave units commanded by French non-coms and officers. Units in other armies became organized with the appearance and tactics of the Algerian fighters. The United States, the Confederacy, Poland, Russia, Spain, Brazil, and the Vatican all had Zouave units.

Most of these groups were clad in short open jackets, baggy pants, a sash and a kepi (flat cap). Some units wore a more authentic fez with a turban wrap, but this was found not to be practical in battle. A few regiments continued into World War One and Two. The unusual uniforms persisted for dress occasions. The author was privileged to attend a Legion of Honor ceremony

at Les Invalides where French units in historic uniforms paraded. Zouaves were prominent, exotic and showy. In the United States, Zouave units gave way to standard uniforms and tactics as militias were replaced by the National Guard.

Zouave drills were characterized by athletic exercises, prone firing and loading, utilizing cover, speed, and wide spacing of men in battle line. Firing from ground level increased field of vision in the rising smoke of battle. Fire, roll face up, reload, roll back and fire was an effective tactic borrowed from the Algerians.

Descriptions of Ellsworth's public shows sound like routines by the Rockettes in their precision, speed and formations. At their drills, mock battles could take place around theatrical prop obstacles. French field manuals were used. Colorful flags and uniforms added to the appeal of these troops. Elmer Ellsworth was the ideal man to promote enthusiasm for war among the public. He was admired for his energy, moral uprightness, temperance, ideals and organizational ability. He was a poster boy for military preparedness, an expert marksman and swordsman. He set high standards for membership and imposed rules of behavior on his men. His Zouaves were seen off for their multi-city tour by a crowd of 10,000 in Chicago in July of 1860. They drilled for President Buchanan at the White House. Their popularity spawned other Zouave units, something of a craze even before hostilities.

Modern reenactments by Zouave units take place. Many videos appear on the Web. One unit drilled on The Ed Sullivan Show and in a Danny Kaye movie.

Major Ellsworth achieved national fame for his unit's drill shows and competitions. Back in Springfield, he also became one of Lincoln's young men, stumping for the Presidential election. The President-elect's train to Washington included Lincoln's secretaries Hay and Nicolay, and Elmer Ellsworth as chief of security.

After disbanding the Chicago unit, Ellsworth, now a Colonel in the regular army, organized the 11<sup>th</sup> New York Volunteer Infantry. Most of the men were drawn from New York City fire companies. The unit was variously known as Ellsworth's Zouaves, First Fire Zouaves, First Regiment New York Zouaves and the United

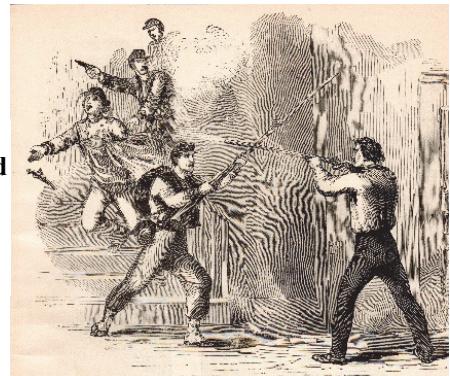
States National Guards. They were equipped in New York, and went to Washington by ship, thus avoiding the sectional unrest in the city of Baltimore. Their first barracks was in the halls of the House of Representatives. The Fire Zouaves even had an opportunity to extinguish a major blaze in downtown Washington.

Ellsworth became a valued protégé of Lincoln's. He received his mail at the White House, and he often met with the President in informal hours of conversation. He was short and young-looking. He was occasionally mistaken for one of Lincoln's sons, and grew facial hair to appear mature. The newly-sworn-in 11<sup>th</sup> New York Volunteers entertained the Lincoln family in their second camp along the Potomac.

Virginia had not voted to join the Confederacy until April 17, 1861. Even before that, a large Confederate flag hung over the Marshall House Hotel in Alexandria. The flag could be seen from the room where Lincoln relaxed with his young staff. Ellsworth was particularly incensed by this insult. When Virginia seceded, dashing Elmer requested the lead for the invasion of Alexandria. The 11<sup>th</sup> New York crossed the Potomac without resistance to tear up train track and cut telegraph lines. Ellsworth led six troops and a newspaper reporter into the Marshall House to take down the hated flag.

As the party descended the stairs with the flag, Ellsworth was concentrating on folding the massive piece of fabric when the innkeeper appeared with a shotgun. Ellsworth was shot in

**Ellsworth's death in April of 1861 shocked the Nation. (Harper's Weekly illustration)**



the chest and the hotel man was immediately killed by the troopers. Elmer Ellsworth was probably the first U.S. officer killed in the Civil War. His death was a terrible blow to Lincoln and the Nation. Lincoln wept. The body lay in

state at the White House and in New York. The shock hastened the process of the public's losing the "innocence of war". Memorials, songs and Ellsworth's picture were widely distributed.

The 11<sup>th</sup> New York was taken out of service in July, 1862, but many more Zouave units were organized, both North and South. Many of the new regiments had Ellsworth's name attached. The 9<sup>th</sup> New York Regiment (Hawkins' Zouaves, New York Zouaves) was formed while Ellsworth was recruiting firemen. They participated in more battles than the 11<sup>th</sup> NY Regiment. The 5<sup>th</sup> New York Regiment, another early Zouave unit, received the largest fatality in a single battle of any militia unit at Second Manassas.

Among many images of Zouaves' gallantry were popular lithographs, cabinet photos of proud men in uniform and engraved vignettes for financial documents. Prolific illustrator Felix O. C. Darley provided artwork for two vignettes.



**Darley's painting of a fierce Zouave was rendered into a vignette by National Bank Note Company. (Carol & Murray Tinkelman collection)**

Original art for "The Zouave" still exists. The vignette was used on a United States Treasury Certificate of Deposit for \$10,000 (interest bearing) in the 1860s (Hessler HX134E), and



**The Zouave appeared on an 1860s Treasury Certificate of Deposit for \$10,000. (Heritage Auctions)**

found on an \$50 Treasury Department-Register note (only a paste-up essay known). [The latter instrument was apparently to be used like a state Comptrollers' Warrant, approving payouts to contractors and possibly to circulate in limited fashion.] These rare items were engraved by J.L. Pease. The fierce Zouave guards the flag with bayonet poised.



**A proposed Treasury Register's Certificate for \$50 was to have featured Darley's Zouave. (Newman Numismatic Portal)**

The National Bank Note Company "Scouting Party" has been attributed to Darley artwork. It shows a watchful Zouave unit approaching tents guarded by an abatis or fence.



**The Scouting Party vignette by Darley appears in a NBNCo. die proof on the storage envelope for the steel die. Troops approach a tent encampment.**

Only two Obsolete Notes are listed with this vignette: \$10, Salem Bank, Massachusetts (Haxby MA-1120 G156a)



**The Salem, Massachusetts Bank \$2 note used the scouting Zouaves vignette. (Stacks Bowers Gallery)**

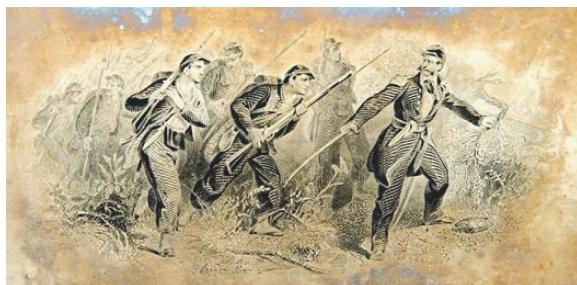
and \$2 of the Hampden Bank, North Castle, New York (Haxby NY-2015 G8a).



**Hamden Bank of North Castle, New York \$2 was only the second known use of the Zouaves vignette.**

Roger Durand suggested that this vignette showed the 9<sup>th</sup> New York Regiment (Hawkins' Zouaves) at the Battle of Roanoke Island. Darley did a composition of the Roanoke event for publication in a periodical. That picture is entirely different from the bank note vignette. National Bank Note Company entitled the vignette "The Scouting Party", and it appears to show troops advancing in brushy country with no enemy resistance. It looks more like scouting *for* enemy units than an actual bayonet charge. No particular engagement or unit appear to be represented in the vignette. After all, there were about 70 Zouave units in the Union Army.

The "Scouting Party" die, envelope, file folder and transfer roller were all sold in various ABNCo. auctions. ABNCo. loaned the



**This steel die for the Scouting Party image was on loan from ABNCo. when it was used to print the vignette for a Post Office souvenir card.**

#### References:

Durand, Roger H. *Interesting Notes About Vignettes*. 2001.  
 Epstein, Daniel Mark. *Lincoln's Men*. HarperCollins, 2009.  
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 Newman Numismatic Portal, Heritage Auction Galleries, Stack's Bowers Auctions,

die to the Bureau of Engraving and Printing for the 1998 USPS American Commemoratives<sup>®</sup> series page about the Stephen Vincent Benét 32¢ stamp. This souvenir collectible is the most available way to own the beautifully engraved vignette.



**T**his 32-cent commemorative stamp honors American poet Stephen Vincent Benét, the 1998 member of the U.S. Postal Service's Literary Arts series. Benét gained renown for his book-length poem *John Brown's Body*, about abolitionist John Brown and the Civil War. The stamp shows Benét in front of an image of marching soldiers. He wears wire-rimmed spectacles and a trim, small mustache.

The stamp was illustrated by award-winning artist Michael Deas, who created other beautiful stamps in the Literary Arts series: Tennessee Williams (1995), F. Scott Fitzgerald (1996), and Thornton Wilder (1997). Deas also illustrated the stamps of Marilyn Monroe (1995), James Dean (1996), and Humphrey Bogart (1997) in the Legends of Hollywood series.

In 1898, Benét was born in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania. Publishing poetry while still a student, he attended Yale University in New Haven, Connecticut, and the Sorbonne in Paris.

Benét used the life and death of John Brown to mimic *John Brown's Body* (1928). Born in Connecticut and raised in Ohio, Brown fought slaves over, leading a number of his agents to liberate slaves. In 1859, he led a raid on Harper's Ferry, Virginia. Many abolitionists considered Brown a martyr for their cause.

Benét won two Pulitzer Prizes, one for *John Brown's Body* and the other for *The Devil and Daniel Webster* (1911), an autobiography in verse. He wrote several poetry collections, including *Heaven and Earth* (1925) and *Ballad of the Folio Club* (1931). After his death in 1943, his epic poem *Western Star* (1943) was published.

Though he is known primarily for his poetry, Benét also wrote in other genres. He wrote his short story *The Devil and Daniel Webster* (1937) into a folk opera in 1940. He wrote novels and screen-

plays as well. This stamp was issued on July 22, 1998, in Harper's Ferry, West Virginia.



Stamp printed by Ashton-Potter (USA), Ltd.

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No. 543 in a series

July 22, 1998 / Printed in U.S.A.

The visual effect of paper currency was important to the designers then, and beauty and style are appreciated by collectors now. Obsolete Notes that use the rather few images of the Civil War are particularly linked to their time. Patriotic fervor stimulated bankers to select these images. The same impulses impelled young men to rush to join the exotically dressed Zouave units.

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