Quest for Glory

Gérard Dôle



Translated and Edited by Anita Conrade

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The Exploits of Grande Armée Veteran Captain Charles Gouget
Followed by the Adventures of His Only Son Joseph
Who Fought the Texas Revolution and the American Civil War

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Genealogical Research
Stéphane Vielle

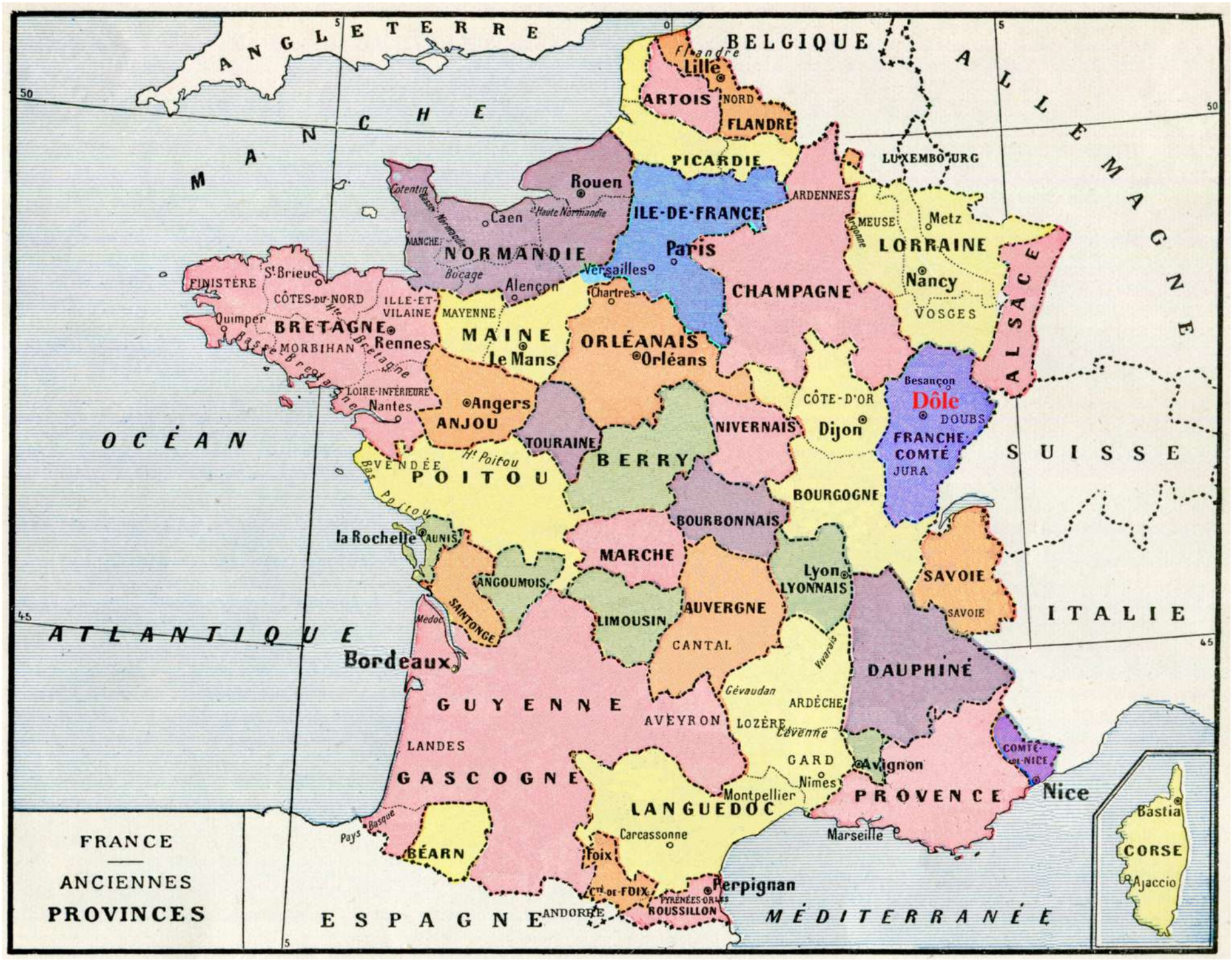
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Historical Research
Michèle Schiavi

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Layout and Art Direction
Solange Gambin

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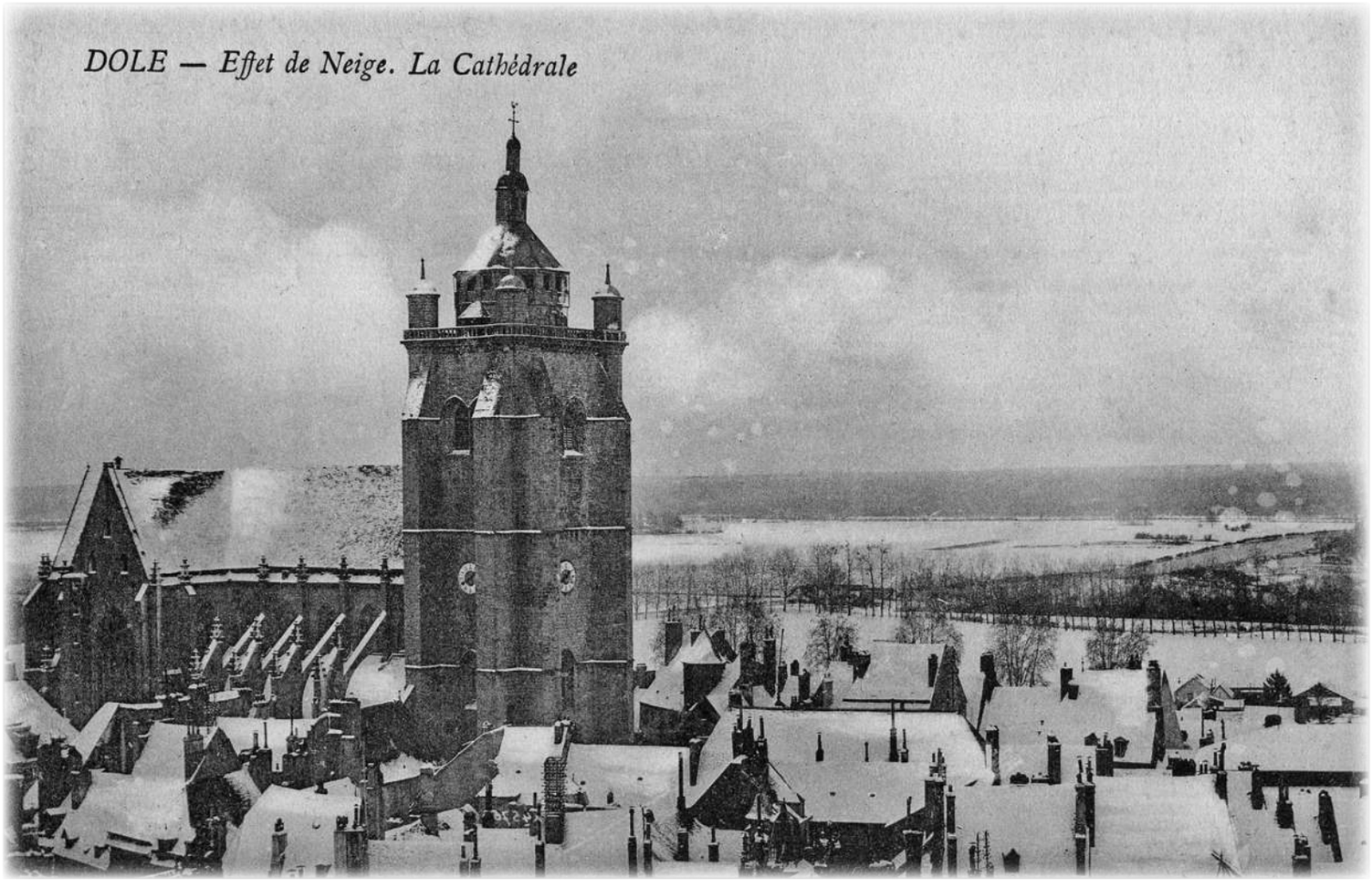
FOREWORD

I bear the name of an illustrious city, Dôle, the former capital of Franche-Comté, rising at the foot of the Jura Plateau, between the River Doubs and the Saône. All of my ancestors on my father's side of the family, which I've traced back to 1556, were born there.

My father, René Dôle, was gifted with the ability to bring our forefathers to life as dream companions. As a result, history was a thrilling, action-packed panorama for me, and my father's colorful stories stood in vivid contrast to the dingy pages of my history textbooks.

From the outset, my father imagined me as one of the stars in his heroic constellation, by choosing to name me Gérard—a Germanic compound of *ger*, or lance, and *hard*, strong—in honor of the courage of the Sequani, willing to perish to the last man, lance in hand, rather than surrender to their invaders. These indomitable Gaulish tribes controlled the huge territory now known as the French department of Jura. Showing me the mounds of stones on Mount Roland in Dôle, my father conjured up the vision of their great hilltop fortified settlement, built on the site of a camp dating back to the Stone Age. I easily imagined myself fighting alongside the fierce Sequani warriors, surrounded and vastly outnumbered by Caesar's legions, gradually yielding to their bloodthirsty attacks. My father never ruled out the possibility that one of ours had been shoulder-to-shoulder with the valiant Sequani defenders.

In my childish eyes, History would irresistibly be associated with fortresses



The city of Dôle covered with snow.

besieged by enemy throngs. Dôle was an ideal setting for such dramas. I usually imagined my forebears crouching behind tall wooden palisades, holding off the ferocious hordes of Huns. These barbarians must have been even worse than the Alamans, Vandals, Franks, and Burgundian tribes who had rampaged earlier, because my father waxed eloquent on the subject of their leader, Attila, who annihilated everything in his path, hence his title, "the wrath of God."

Standing in front of the bastion on the bridge over the Doubs, I saw the people of Dôle constructing sturdy ramparts to protect our city, which seemed to arouse the envy of all. On such occasions, my father spoke of how the stones for the parapets had been cut and joined, pointing out the crenellations protecting the walkway around the battlements. His history of warfare was mingled with instruction in fortification techniques, of which he was especially fond due to his training in construction.

I realized it had taken generations for France to form. My province, Franche-Comté, had been a "Free County" of the Kingdom of Burgundy. Then we became subjects of the Holy Roman Empire. Later, we were ruled by France and Austria. I admit that I became slightly lost in all of these details. Complicated diplomatic machinations led to the signature of a treaty or peace, and huge land holdings were transferred from one crown to another, with little concern for the people farming the soil.

Stories of the sieges my city had resisted in the Middle Ages excited me much more. When my father and I walked around the old city of Dôle, we often stopped in front of the Robin House, where he would tell me a tale I adored, embellishing it with more tragic details every time.

I had glimpsed the grim profile of Louis XI in a textbook, but my father brought the tyrant to life. And with renewed ardor, I sharpened the blades with which I would defend Dôle against his cruel soldiery. At the time, my city was a dependency of Spain, and King Louis XI of France was determined to conquer it. My father taught me that during one especially deadly battle, Louis's troops, far greater in number than the men of Dôle, shouted, "*Comtois, rends-toi!*" ["Comtois, give up!"]. Immediately, the defenders replied, "*Nenni, ma foi!*" ["Upon my faith, I will not!"].

That very evening, the men of Dôle crept into the enemy camp and fought so stubbornly that the French forces were routed. Louis XI raised a new army, 15,000 strong, violating a truce even though it had been sworn on the Bible. Its chief was Charles d'Amboise, lord of Chaumont. A dastardly lord indeed, I thought to myself, for as my father told me, d'Amboise dishonored himself by using sacrilege and perjury to trick my ancestors and force them to submit.

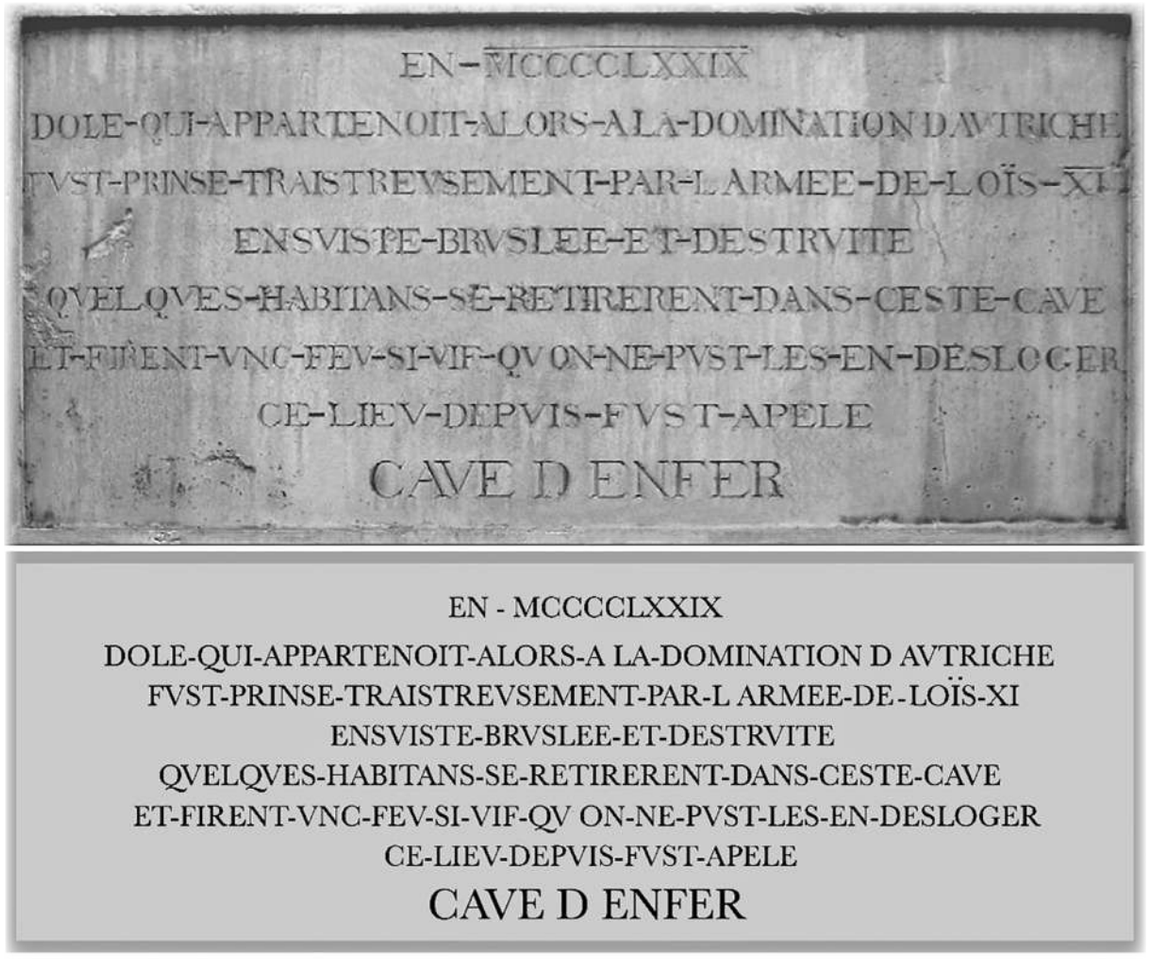
A corps of reinforcements was bound from Alsace to Dôle. D'Amboise intercepted and corrupted them, so they allowed their ranks to be infiltrated by his soldiers. When the column reached the gates of the city, the defenders were so relieved to see the faces of their allies arrive that their wariness momentarily ebbed. Nevertheless, they demanded the troops swear a solemn oath of loyalty. At the great gate, an altar was set up, and the Eucharist was presented. The clergy and magistrates clustered round. Loyal Christians all, they never suspected the depths of blasphemy to which Charles d'Amboise would stoop.

Each officer stretched out his arm, touched the Holy Host, and swore upon it to defend the city. Reassured, the guards raised their halberds so the troops could pass. And suddenly, the cries of joy were drowned out by shrieks of agony. The traitors, smelling victory, had cast off their masks. Havoc broke loose, as they ran riot, killing, looting, and raping. But immediately, from alley to alley, a desperate struggle for survival began. Submerged by enemies overrunning the city, the people of Dôle were butchered. Near the church, where the women and children had

taken refuge, the last defenders barricaded themselves in a shoemaker's cellar, firing their guns with such fury that they stood off all comers.

Charles d'Amboise had spared this handful of champions, saying "they should be kept as seed." So he wasn't quite as vile as I imagined. With the approval of my father, who was visibly pleased by the assumption, I had declared that the great-grandfather of Stéphane Dôle (1556-1653) had been among the insurgents in Hell's Cellar. The underground redoubt bore such a fantastical name that I was convinced my ancestor and I had to be a part of it.

Delighted by my enthusiasm, my father would often walk with me to the cathedral after our ritual visit to Hell's Cellar. According to him, the tragic but noble defeat was only one of a long series our city had overcome. Louis XI had ordered the torching of Dôle, and within three days, the city had been reduced to smoldering embers. But its inhabitants petitioned for



A carved stone plaque on a façade in the Rue de Besançon, a memorial to Hell's Cellar.

"In 1479, Dôle, then ruled by the Austrian Crown, fell to the treachery of the armies of Louis XI, and was burned to the ground. A few inhabitants took refuge in this cellar and kept up such a lively fire it was impossible to dislodge them. Ever since, it has been known as Hell's Cellar."

and received permission to dwell in their cellars, building temporary roofs over the holes to keep out the rain. They were forced to live like rats! A few years later, they were free of Louis's despotic rule, traded to the Holy Roman Empire. Obstinate as ever, the people of Dôle hurriedly erected Notre-Dame Cathedral on the site of a church consumed by the flames. They wanted its bell-tower, the tallest in Franche-Comté province, to symbolize the rebirth of their city from its ashes.

When the tower was completed, a trumpeter was stationed there. He sounded his gigantic horn to announce the canonical hours and to give the alert in case the town was in danger. Night and day, this lone guard kept watch from above. He even had a special apparatus to hoist food and drink to the top. Thus, he never had to descend or climb the 365 steps separating him from *terra firma*.



Notre-Dame Cathedral's trumpeter with his horn.

Learning from my father that the cathedral tower had been of key strategic value in observing the movements of Condé's troops, obeying Louis XIII, in the 17th century, I silently thanked the people of Dôle for their wisdom in providing the city with a watchman.

With determination, my people withstood the ordeals of the siege: eighty days of ruthless artillery fire, accompanied by a dreadful epidemic of plague. Amidst these perils, the people of Dôle refused to surrender. Condé, faced with such courage and stubbornness, finally made up his mind to go home.

Next, my town was surrounded by the armies of Louis XIV, on two separate occasions. Whenever he addressed this subject, if we were strolling on the Bridge Bastion, my father would suppress a mischievous grin, and tell me the story of sassy young Dominique Dôle.

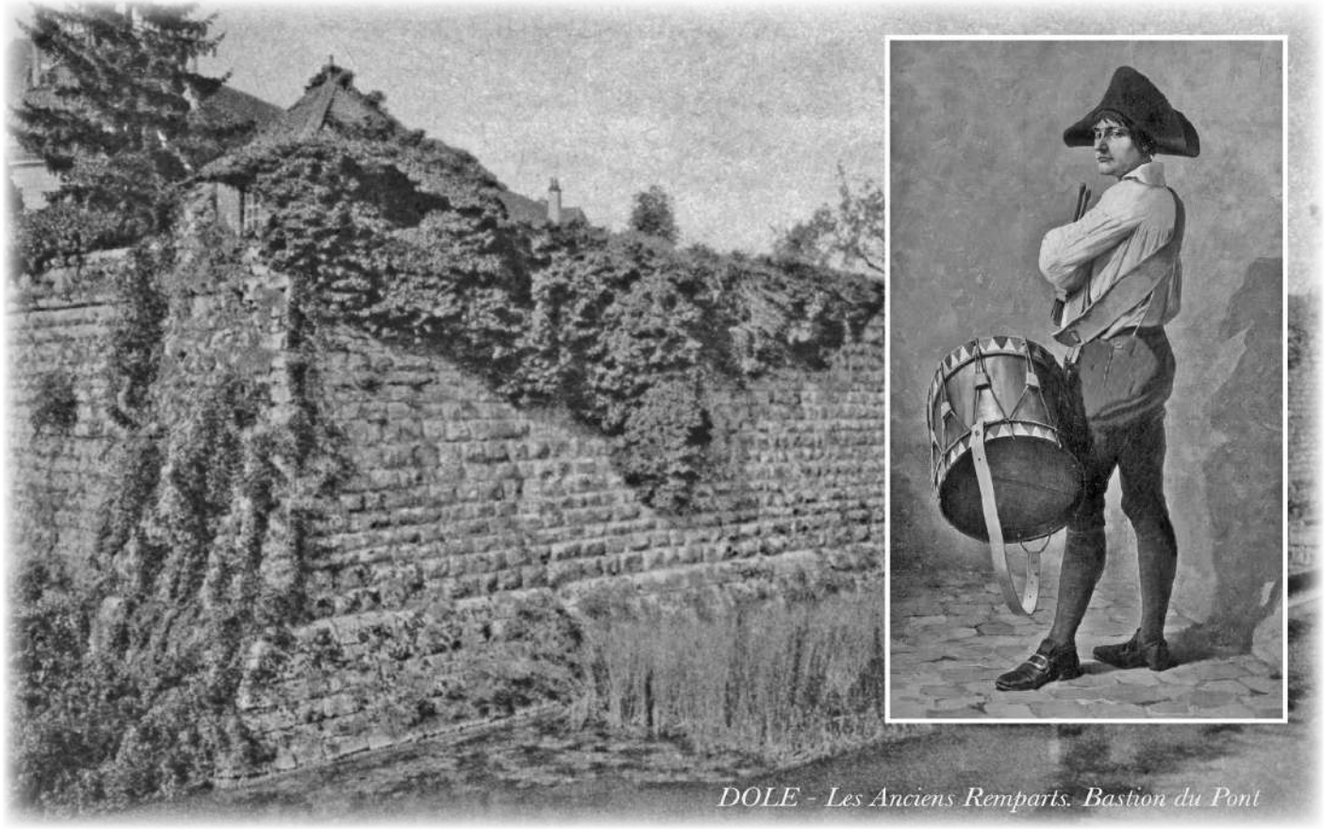


The City of Dôle in the 1600's.

Louis XIV rode up to the gates of my city in a carriage. Then he got out and galloped all around the ramparts astride a magnificent white horse. He saw a young drummer thrumming up a racket to rouse the guard. Pulling up on the reins, he asked the boy: "*Drummer, what are you beating?*" And the child retorted, "*I'm beating shit!*"

When Dôle capitulated after three days of intense combat, its garrison was decimated. Of 3,000 men, only 1,200 remained. Louis XIV granted the city honors of war, permitting the garrison to parade past his family and army with their weapons and gear. Then he seated himself upon his throne, and called up the little drummer. In a brittle tone, the king ordered the boy to repeat his ugly words aloud, so that all the courtiers could hear him. Without flinching, the child knelt on one knee and replied, "*Sire, yesterday, you were my enemy; today, you are my king.*"

No matter how many times he'd repeated this family legend, my father always relished telling me the end: King Louis XIV, surprised and flattered by the nine-year-old child's quick wit and tact, gave him permission to stand. Then he awarded him thirty gold coins, and assigned him to the office of City Drummer for the rest of his life. And that's how Dominique Dôle won the privilege of shouting the news in the streets of his beloved city until the end of his days.



The old Dôle ramparts, the Bridge Bastion, and the city drummer at the time of Louis XIV.

I can still recall feeling all aglow, as a little boy, when my father lifted me onto his shoulders so I could watch the regimental marching bands parade on the main street. Was it to seal the bond between us even tighter, when he made me that little drum, with the silver-painted cylinder, and pinned his Génie Militaire engineer corps insignia onto my helmet? Papa had even given me his bugle, marking the occasion by putting it to his lips and playing a few of the calls, brightened by grace notes and flourishes, he had learned in the army, in the Rhineland. He also wowed me with sultry saxophone waltzes.

Fortunately, he had that horn with him during his *séjour forcé* in Louisiana. He was on his way north from Buenos Aires, after having crossed the Atlantic and most of France. He'd been working



René Dôle serenading Marie Laveau's ghost somewhere in the Old St. Louis Cemetery, New Orleans, La, Oct. 1929.

at a joinery in Choisey, in the Jura forests, where they made organ chambers. His job was to accompany and assemble the shipment, and then sail back to France. On Thursday, October 24, 1929, the day of the great Wall Street crash, his Le Havre-bound ship had just put in at New Orleans. And, in reaction to the panic in New York, the local authorities immediately impounded the tramp steamer at a customs dock lower down on the Mississippi. Papa was free to venture into the French Quarter where, on certain nights, he played with *Jass* bands. "The Creole musicians were delighted to hear the latest Casino de Paris Fox-Trots. I'd learned them off records and played them by ear."

Like the picture of the city of Dole's drummer boy, that of the trumpeter in his bell tower became familiar tiles in the mosaic of my vision of history. My father recalled that one of these trumpeters, named Victor, was drunk as a lord three-fourths of the time. There were rumors that he'd deserted from the German army, and I could imagine the expression on the face of my grandfather François Dôle, a lieutenant in the firemen's brigade, when he saw Victor stagger past his barracks, still buttoned into an olive-drab uniform and wearing a spiked helmet, like the Kaiser on the old German postcard my Tante Mathilde had shown me. I also imagined the firemen joking when they bought the trumpeter a drink to thank him for keeping such good watch. They must have burned the infamous traces of his short military career.



The Dôle Fire Brigade.

François Dôle is the fireman circled in the picture.



Roman Buccinator

At the crucial moment, did Victor lift an immense bronze horn to his lips, like the Buccinator illustrating the cover of my first Latin grammar? It would have been hard for me to say. The sound of his trumpet would have been harsher than that of my grandmother's piano, and its piercing notes effective in alerting the people of Dôle.

My childhood dreams were lively with these visions of sieges, battles, and conquests, accompanied by blaring trumpets and the insistent rat-a-tat-tat of the drums. As I grew, other stories, and especially fresh heroes, permeated my mind. The city of Dôle was no longer the center of all the action.

My paternal great-great-great uncle Charles Gouget was a Captain of the Chasseurs à Cheval (the Mounted Hunters) in the Grande Armée. How excited I was to behold the saber, shako, and green wool jacket, handsomely trimmed with braid, displayed in a case at the museum at Les Invalides. I was sure my uncle had worn them. When we visited Paris, my father, a collector of antique weapons and military memorabilia, invariably figured out a new way to guide me through the museum collections. His stories always enchanted me with a magic as prodigious as Merlin's. The spell he cast put me at the Little Corporal's side in all the thrilling battles. Napoleon's shadow was all-pervasive, ubiquitous, the names of the great adventures assigned to Paris boulevards, bridges, and squares: Pyramides, Austerlitz, Arcole, Iéna, Wagram, Friedland. After the tour, to celebrate our victory, I'd clamber onto one of the bronze cannon lining the great courtyard at Les Invalides, and ride it until a guard sternly ordered me off.

Brandishing his sword, Charles Gouget had galloped into the blood-soaked mud of the principal battlefields of the Empire. Wounded twice, he had survived and gone home to Dôle. Family and friends admired him as a hero. He had been awarded the Croix d'Honneur by Napoleon himself, an honor that made my heart beat faster when my grade-school teacher bestowed

the best-student medal on me. I believed that I was perpetuating a heroic tradition. Perhaps my feat was of lesser magnitude, but basically, I was on the right path. That much was clear to me.

But mystery surrounded the fate of Charles's only son, Joseph, born in America just after his father was called back to France to serve the King. Musing upon my Aunt Mathilde's stories, I pictured Joseph growing up amid the Indians on a French settlement in rural Alabama. Undoubtedly, the boy was a daredevil, a hothead like my Uncle Joël who had hidden out in the mountains with the French Underground during the Occupation. At an age when modern French boys are sitting the first part of the baccalaureate exams, Joseph had tied his belongings up in a sack, saddled his horse, and ridden to Texas. I imagined him shading himself from the sun with a hat that looked something like the battered one worn by William S. Hart, the silent-era Hollywood cowboy star. I'd read and reread of Hart's feats in my father's old collections of *Mon Ciné* magazine, and at home, we screened 8mm movies of Hart galloping across the Western chaparral on his beautiful brown-and-white pinto Fritz. I became obsessed with the desire to own the hat, at least. My devoted grandmother was finally able to find one for me, probably the only one in town. I can still see that beautiful electric-blue cowboy hat, with its broad brim and high ten-gallon crown, delicately dented on three sides. Alas, it was only a child's costume accessory, and my head was already too big for it. All we could do was bring it back to the toy store. Believe me, I was broken-hearted.

But let us return to Joseph. Two years after the tragedy of the ill-fitting electric-blue hat, I saw the movie *Escape from Fort Bravo*. Set in a Union POW camp during the Civil War, it tells the story of a group of Confederate soldiers who are plotting to break out and run away, back to Texas. It taught me another piece of American history, about the northerners and southerners, and I became convinced that Joseph must have been a Confederate soldier like the ones in the movie. I had asked my father about it, and he had nodded. This merely added to my confusion, however: the month before, in Paris, Papa had pointed at the dromedaries at the Jardin d'Acclimatation and told me, "In Texas, when a camel tried to run away, Joseph would track him down in the desert, throw his lasso around his neck, and lead him back to the fort." My mother, who knew all about camels because she was born in Tunisia and had lived in Morocco, asserted that Arabs were the only people who knew how to tame these stubborn beasts. She explained that they prevented gun shyness by firing shots from a mukhala right next to the newborn camel's ear. Accustomed to rifle fire, the camel would remain calm at the approach of a Bedouin fantasia.

Lasso, mukhala (a beautiful example of one of these Oriental rifles hung in our living room, over the mantelpiece)… Texas, Morocco… Horse, camel… In the end, I began to wonder if there had been

many camel-wranglers in the ranks of the Confederacy. Perhaps Joseph's mother had been an Arab, not an Indian. All of these questions spun crazily in my skull.



A Fantasia.



A Riffian holding his Moukala.



Young Gérard Dôle at play with his friends in Provence.

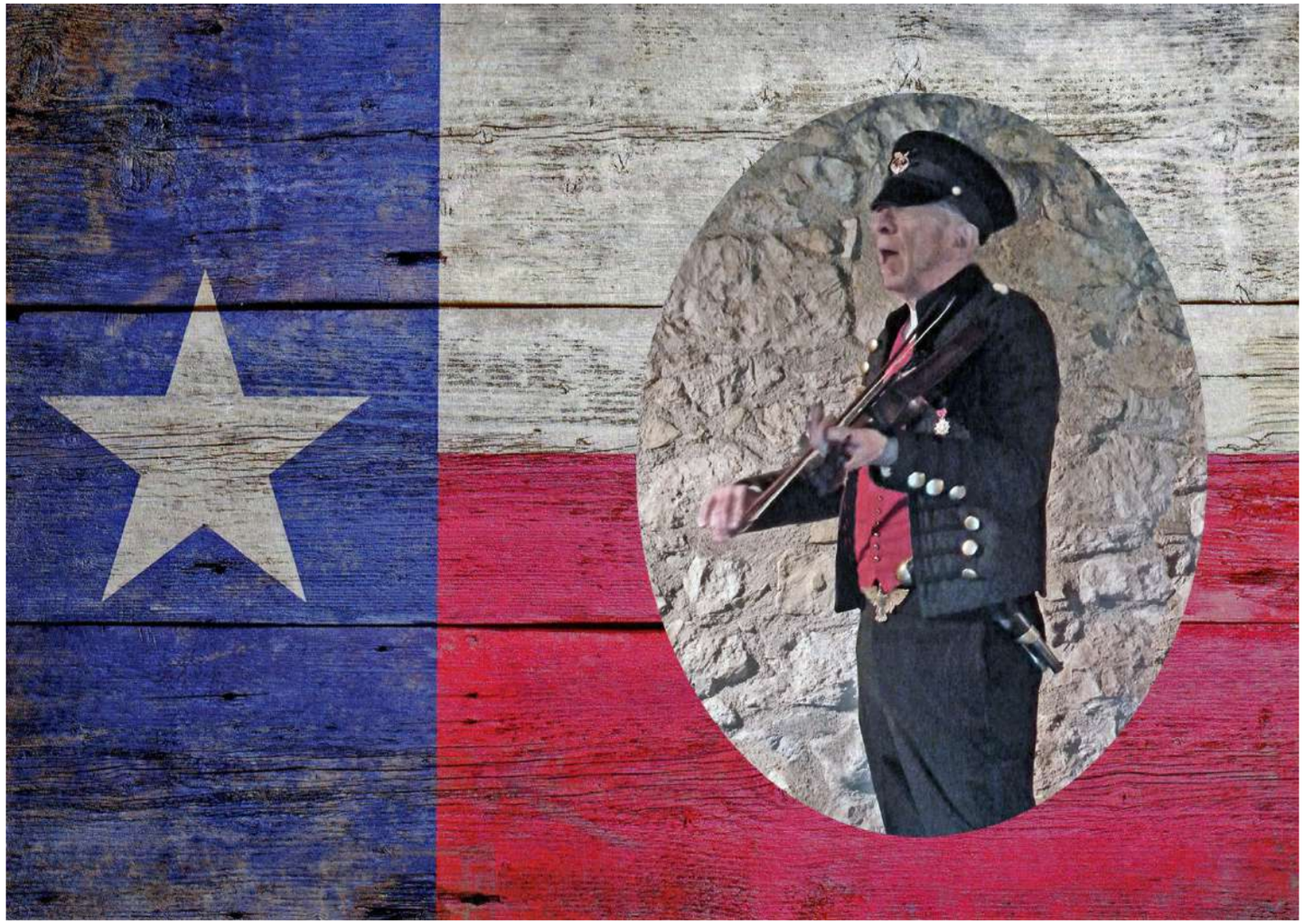
All I needed now was my own battle, so that I, too, would have a story to tell my parents. Like many boys my age, I identified with my hero Davy Crockett. At play with my friends, I defended my own Fort Alamo, located behind a rickety fence in a disused coal yard I had audaciously borrowed from the French Rail Administration.

Still happy to share in my dreams, my father offered to film us after I breathlessly outlined the plot to him: we were Texans besieged at Fort Alamo, just like the men of Dôle in Hell's Cellar, but General Santa Anna was less generous than Charles d'Amboise with the survivors. The Mexican Army would rain an uninterrupted shower of artillery fire on us, just like the cannoneers of the King of France, and the trumpeter, instead of playing for the salvation of souls, blew the forbidding notes of the lethal *Degüello*.

Much water has flowed beneath the single arch of the Roman bridge spanning the Doubs at Dôle. My father is no longer here to enchant me with his stories. And all that remains of my past as a frontiersman clad in fringed buckskin with a coonskin cap is two or three yellowed photos and a few strips of 8 mm home movie film.

Now I take part in reenactments of historical events, in France and America. Sometimes I become Charles Gouget, fighting in a series of Napoleonic battles, from the French Campaign and the farewells at Fontainebleau. At other times, I assume the identity of his son Joseph during the Texan Revolution and the Civil War. I was greatly moved by the memorial ceremonies held in San Antonio on March 6 and 8, 2014, in honor of the defenders of the Alamo. At the invitation of Ector Aguilar, Living History Coordinator, I presented myself inside the Alamo compound in a Mobile Grey uniform. At the museum doors, I played my violin and sang an old family song about the Texan Revolution.

An eternal child, I am still awed by these adventures.



Gérard Dôle fiddling and singing inside the Alamo.

In Search of Charles and Joseph

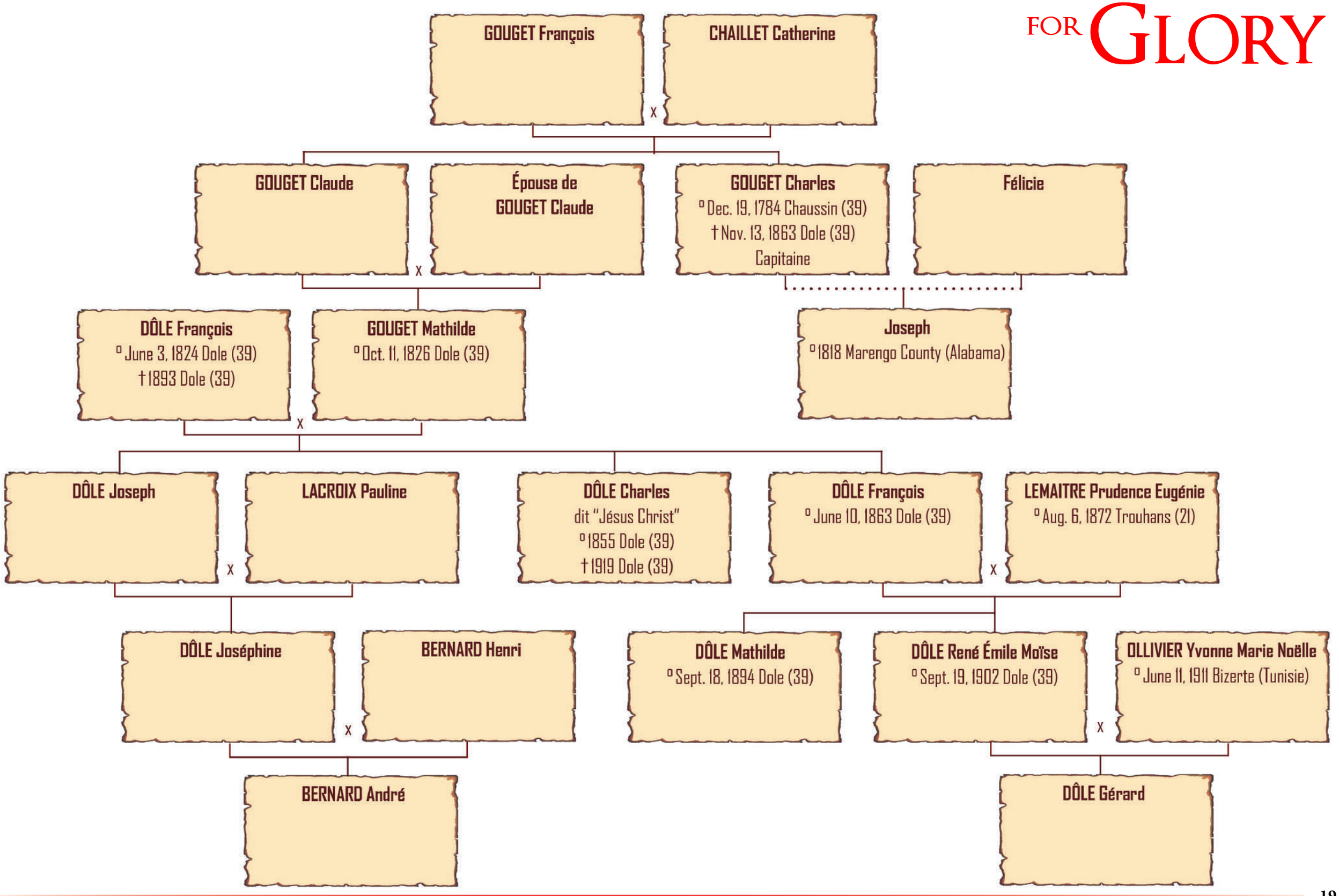
Here is a suite of epic stories—or should I say fanciful tales?—that have been transmitted orally within the framework of the Dole and Bernard families, both allied to the Gougets. When still a child, my father René Dole (born 1902) heard them distilled by his uncle and godfather Charles Dole (born 1855) a tall, red-bearded carpenter nicknamed Jesus-Christ. Charles had learned them from his own uncle and godfather, Captain Charles Gouget (1784–1863). My dad's older sister Mathilde Dole (born 1894) remembered hearing them from the aforementioned uncle Jesus-Christ, her father François Dôle (born 1863) and her grandmother Mathilde Gouget (born 1826,) the Veteran's niece, who never knitted without a cat in her lap and a brass foot heater under her slippers.

Of course, I am aware that subsequent retellings embellished the stories with new details, to replace those erased by passing time. Nevertheless, I would like to believe that basically, they remained the same.

In January 1998, after reading Mathilde Dôle's will making me her only heir, Maitre Jacques Montravers, a solicitor in the city of Dole (in the Jura) handed me a couple of big envelopes filled with family ancestry records expressly intended for me. At the same time, Mathilde's cousin André Bernard, presented me with a box full of military relics, images, letters, etc. corresponding to Captain Gouget's eventful life. Years later, Stéphane Vielle, historian and genealogist, went through dusty piles of ledgers at the Archives Nationales of Paris and the Archives Militaires of Vincennes to follow Gouget's campaigns, from the triumphant battle of Iena in 1806 to the Waterloo disaster of 1815. As one might surmise, she found nothing about Gouget's vain project to rescue Napoleon from Saint Helena, but she did begin mapping the outlines of our quest to clarify other questions. About the same time, Michael J. Young, M.D., of Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, offered to help me trace Gouget's stay in Philadelphia and his subsequent journeys to Mobile and New Orleans in 1817. Michael also scrutinized and analyzed scores of records in an effort to document the military accomplishments of Gouget's natural son Joseph during the Texas Revolution and the Civil War. Philadelphia native Anita Conrade has translated and edited the results of this research with the same professionalism that she applied to my book *Texas 1836: Musical Echoes from the Alamo*.

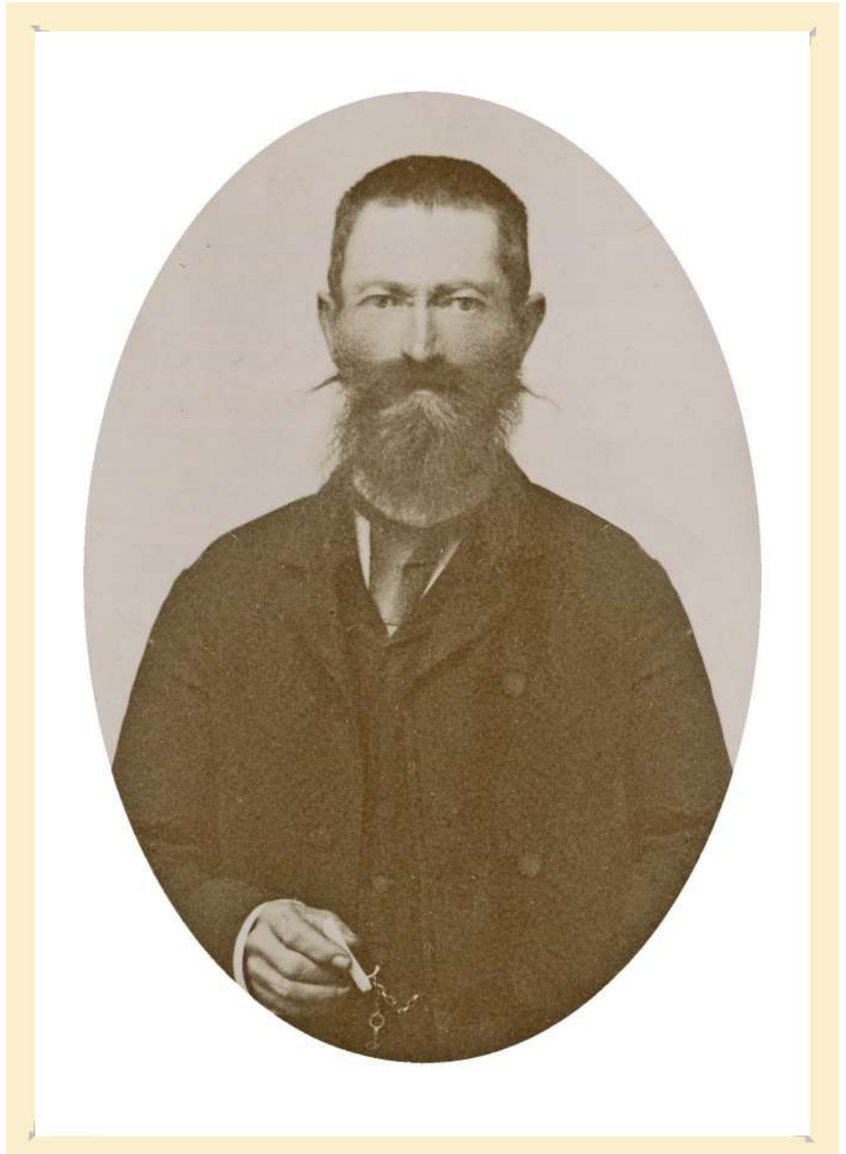
My warm thanks to you all, dear friends.

Gérard Dôle


GOUGET François
CHAILLET Catherine
x
GOUGET Claude
Épouse de GOUGET Claude
GOUGET Charles
° Dec. 19, 1784 Chaussin (39)
† Nov. 13, 1863 Dole (39)
Capitaine
Félicie
x
DÔLE François
° June 3, 1824 Dole (39)
† 1893 Dole (39)
GOUGET Mathilde
° Oct. 11, 1826 Dole (39)
Joseph
° 1818 Marengo County (Alabama)
x
DÔLE Joseph
LACROIX Pauline
DÔLE Charles
dit "Jésus Christ"
° 1855 Dole (39)
† 1919 Dole (39)
DÔLE François
° June 10, 1863 Dole (39)
LEMAITRE Prudence Eugénie
° Aug. 6, 1872 Trouhans (21)
x
DÔLE Joséphine
BERNARD Henri
DÔLE Mathilde
° Sept. 18, 1894 Dole (39)
DÔLE René Émile Moïse
° Sept. 19, 1902 Dole (39)
OLLIVIER Yvonne Marie Noëlle
° June 11, 1911 Bizerte (Tunisie)
x
BERNARD André
DÔLE Gérard



François Dôle (1824–1893) and his son Charles ("Jesus-Christ") aged 6 years.



Charles Dôle, nicknamed Jesus-Christ.



Grandma Mathilde Gouget.



François Dôle, firefighter lieutenant in full dress uniform.



François Dôle and Prudence Lemaitre, the day of their engagement.



René, François and Mathilde Dôle.



René Dôle, Sapeur Maître Ouvrier,
5e Régiment du Génie, Düren. (Westphalie.)



Mathilde Dôle.

Charles Gouget Military Campaigns In Napoleon's Grand Army

Charles Gouget was born on December 19, 1784, in Chaussin (a village in the Jura). His parents were baker François Gouget and his wife, Catherine Chaillet.



Chaussin, Jura.
Charles Gouget was born in the house with the thatched roof.

As the replacement of a conscript drafted by the lottery system, he was inducted into the 21st Regiment of Chasseurs à Cheval on Nov. 1, 1805, then assigned to the 5th Regiment on Aug. 1, 1814.

His campaigns took him to Prussia in 1806, to Poland in 1807, and to Spain from 1808 to 1813. There, he was wounded by a lance blow to his left pectoral. He also saved the life of Second Lieutenant Louis Roze. Although a seasoned soldier, he was again wounded by two sword blows during the retreat from Spain. He participated in the campaigns in France in 1814 and 1815, then served again in Spain in 1823 and 1824.

Starting as a private in 1805, Charles Gouget was promoted to brigadier on Dec. 2, 1808. He attained the rank of sergeant on Feb. 5, 1814.

Discharged in 1815, he was again called up for service on Nov. 4, 1817, and assigned to the 9th Regiment of Chasseurs à Cheval.



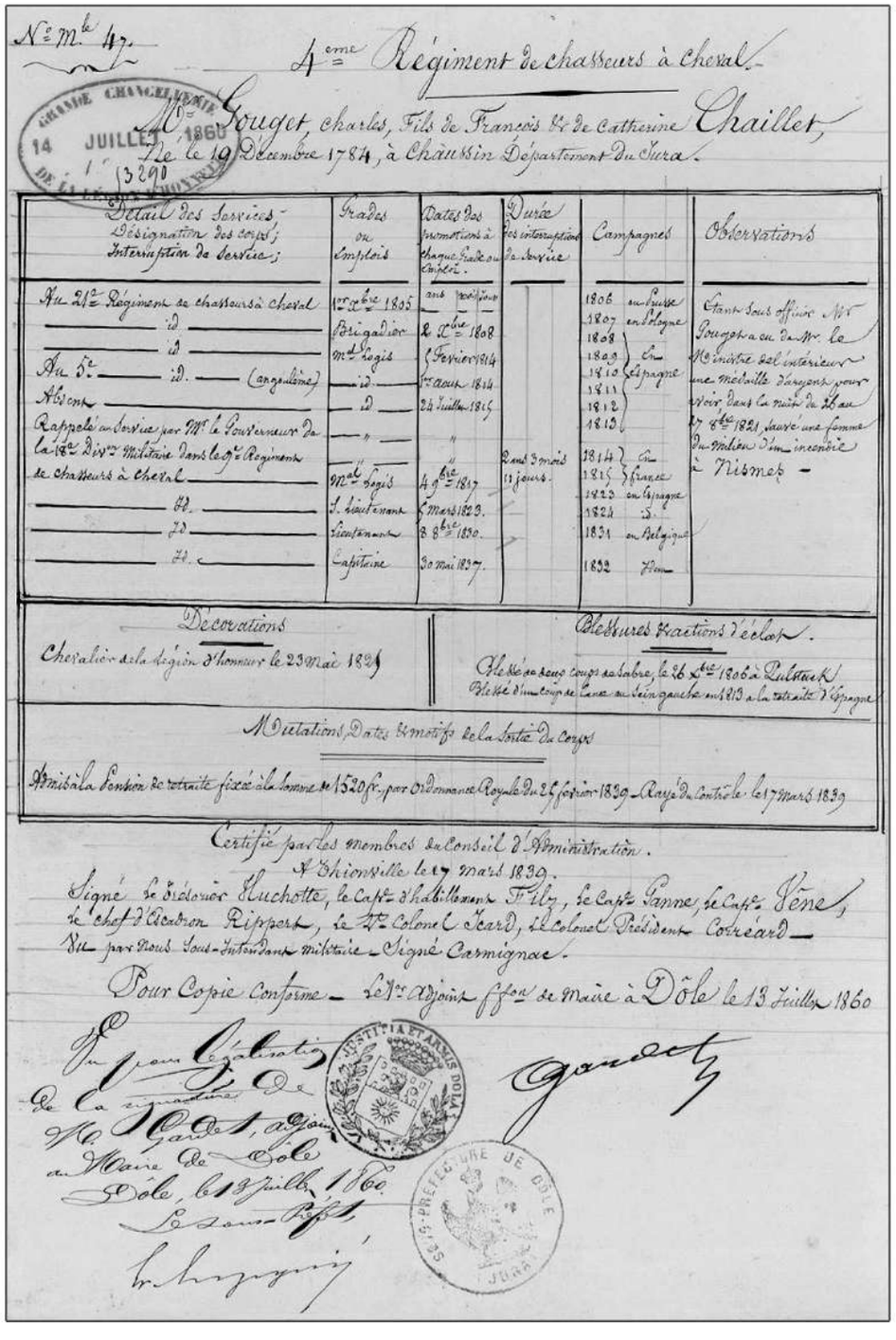
In an act of bravery, he rescued a woman from fire in Nîmes, a town in the province of Gard, on the night of Oct. 25, 1821. This deed earned him a silver medal from His Excellency the Interior Minister.





Medal of Bravery for life-saving awarded to Charles Gouget.





Charles Gouget's service records.

Gouget was promoted to second lieutenant in 1823. Evaluated as an officer with a record of "very good conduct and excellent habits," he was recommended for membership in the Légion d'Honneur as Chevalier. The request is signed by Field Marshal Inspector Goumier and Lieutenant-General d'Ordonneau, and certified by Colonel Comte D'Hautpoul in Madrid, on Aug. 22, 1824. Finally, on May 23, 1825, Charles Gouget became a Chevalier de la Légion d'Honneur.

Promoted to lieutenant in 1830, Gouget was then stationed in Belgium from Aug. 13 to Sept. 25, 1831, and from Nov. 17, 1832 to Jan. 4, 1833. He ended his career in 1838, in the 4th Regiment de Chasseurs à Cheval as a captain, a rank to which he had been promoted in 1837.

Still unmarried, Captain Gouget petitioned to retire, despite the fact that he lacked the required two years of seniority in his rank. His request for a retirement



Charles Gouget.
Old photographic reproduction of a portrait miniature.

pension was supported by Lieutenant General Lalaing d'Audenarde, Inspecteur Général de Cavalerie, who wrote that Charles Gouget "no longer has the physical strength necessary to fulfill the duties of his position suitably." Gouget's colonel added "the veteran has always served loyally, in times of both peace and war." Moreover, Field Marshal de Castelbajac notes that Charles Gouget "has only one horse, and cannot buy a second one."

In the end, on Feb. 1, 1839, Gouget was granted a pension amounting to 1,520 francs.

Like many other courageous soldiers who fought alongside Napoleon 1st from 1792 to 1815, Charles Gouget was decorated with the Croix de Sainte-Hélène, created by Napoléon III in 1857 to reward the veterans still alive at the time.

In 1859, when Charles Gouget was pensioned as a Chevalier de la Légion d'Honneur, he resided in La Bedugue, just outside Dôle, in the Jura. He remained there until his death on Nov. 13, 1863.


LÉGION-D'HONNEUR.

NUMÉRO D'ORDRE DES MATRICULES. 71326

REGISTRE : 22

FOLIO : 23

Nom Gouget,

Prénom Charles

Qualité ou grade Sous Lieutenant aux Chasseurs de la Dordogne

Date de la naissance 19 Decembre 1784

Lieu de la naisssance Chaurin (Jura)

a été nommé **Chevalier** de la Légion-d'Honneur par décret du 23 Mai 1825

PIÈCES JOINTES.

1175
1

Legion of Honor medal and certificate awarded to Charles Gouget.



MÉDAILLE DE SAINTE-HÉLÈNE

INSTITUÉE PAR S. M. NAPOLÉON III.

NAPOLÉON 1er

A ses Compagnons de gloire. Sa dernière pensée!

Sainte-Hélène, 5 Mai 1821.

Le Grand Chancelier de l'Ordre Impérial de la Légion d'Honneur, certifie que

Mr. Gouget, Charles, Capitaine au 4e de Chasseurs

ayant servi durant la période de 1792 à 1815, a reçu la Médaille de Ste. Hélène.

Donné à Paris

Inscrit à la Grande Chancellerie No. 79525.

IMP. PAUCAL

Saint Helena medal and certificate awarded to Charles Gouget.

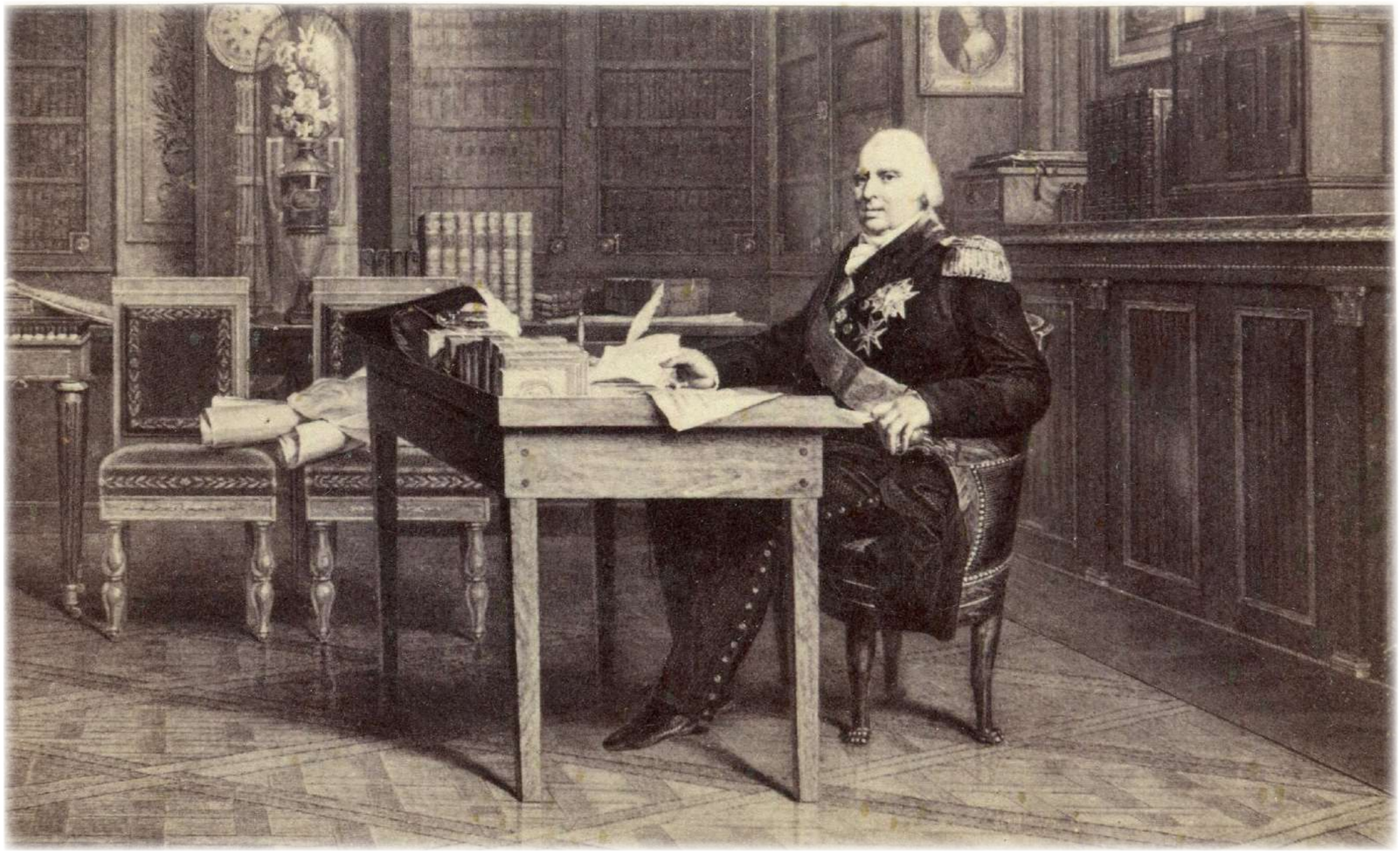


Battle of Waterloo. "The Guard dies, it does not surrender!"

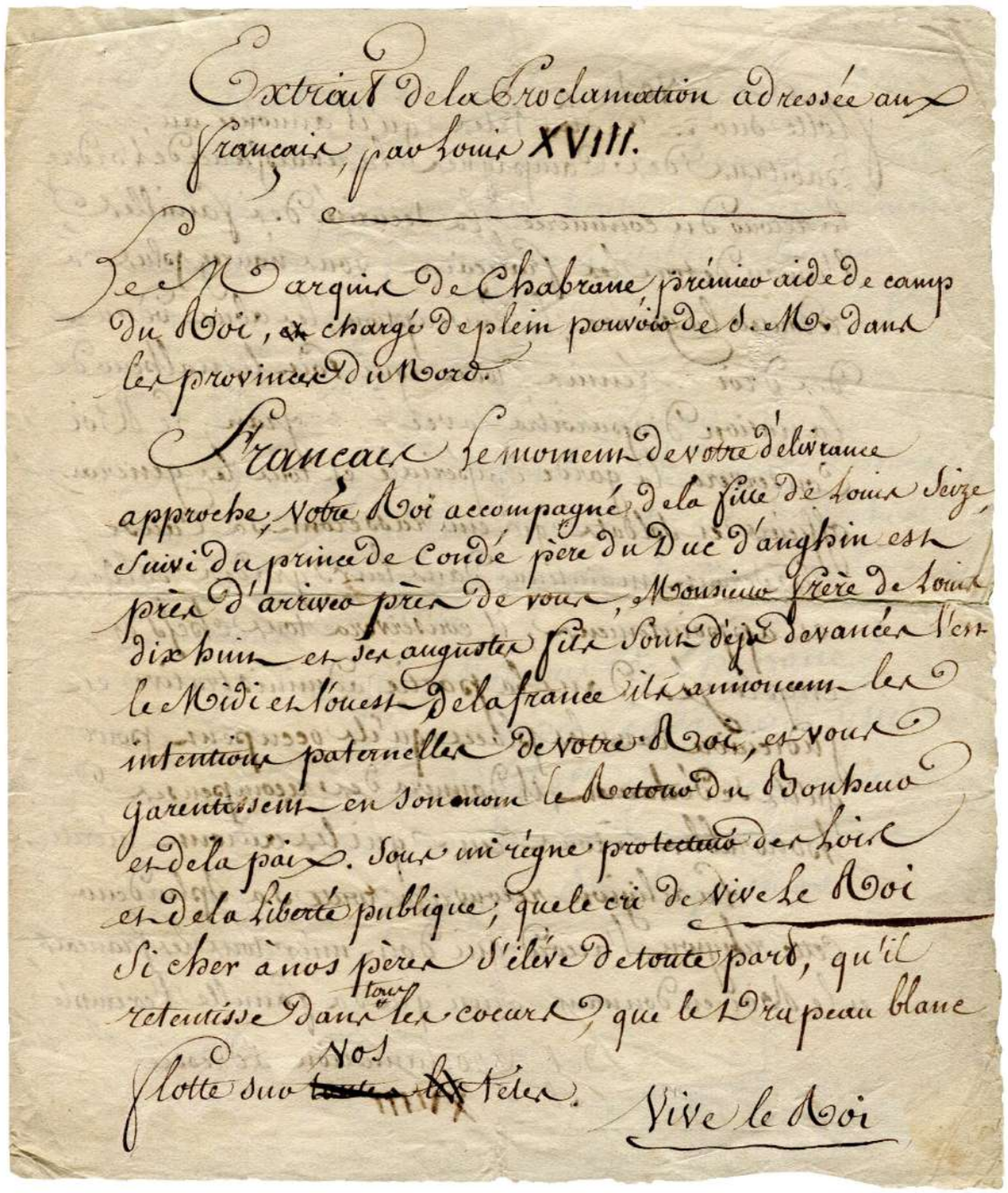
CHARLES GOUGET IN ALABAMA
THE ADVENTURE OF THE VINE AND OLIVE COLONY



Charles Gouget, then the ranking sergeant of the 5th Cavalry Regiment, left the army on July 24, 1815. The same day, Louis XVIII, who had returned to Paris after writing a letter of reassurance to the French people, promulgated a vile decree that had been drafted by Fouché, the chief of police. The document was actually a list of the men the newly restored monarchy intended to prosecute for their participation in the Hundred Days. As a result, several Grand Army officers were arrested and jailed. The Bravest of the Brave, Michel Ney: Marshal of France, Duke of Elchingen, Prince of the Moskowa, faced a firing squad.



Louis XVIII in his study at the Tuileries.



Extrait de la Proclamation adressée aux Français, par Louis XVIII.

Le Marquis de Chabrane, premier aide de camp du Roi, & chargé de plein pouvoir de S. M. dans les provinces du Nord.

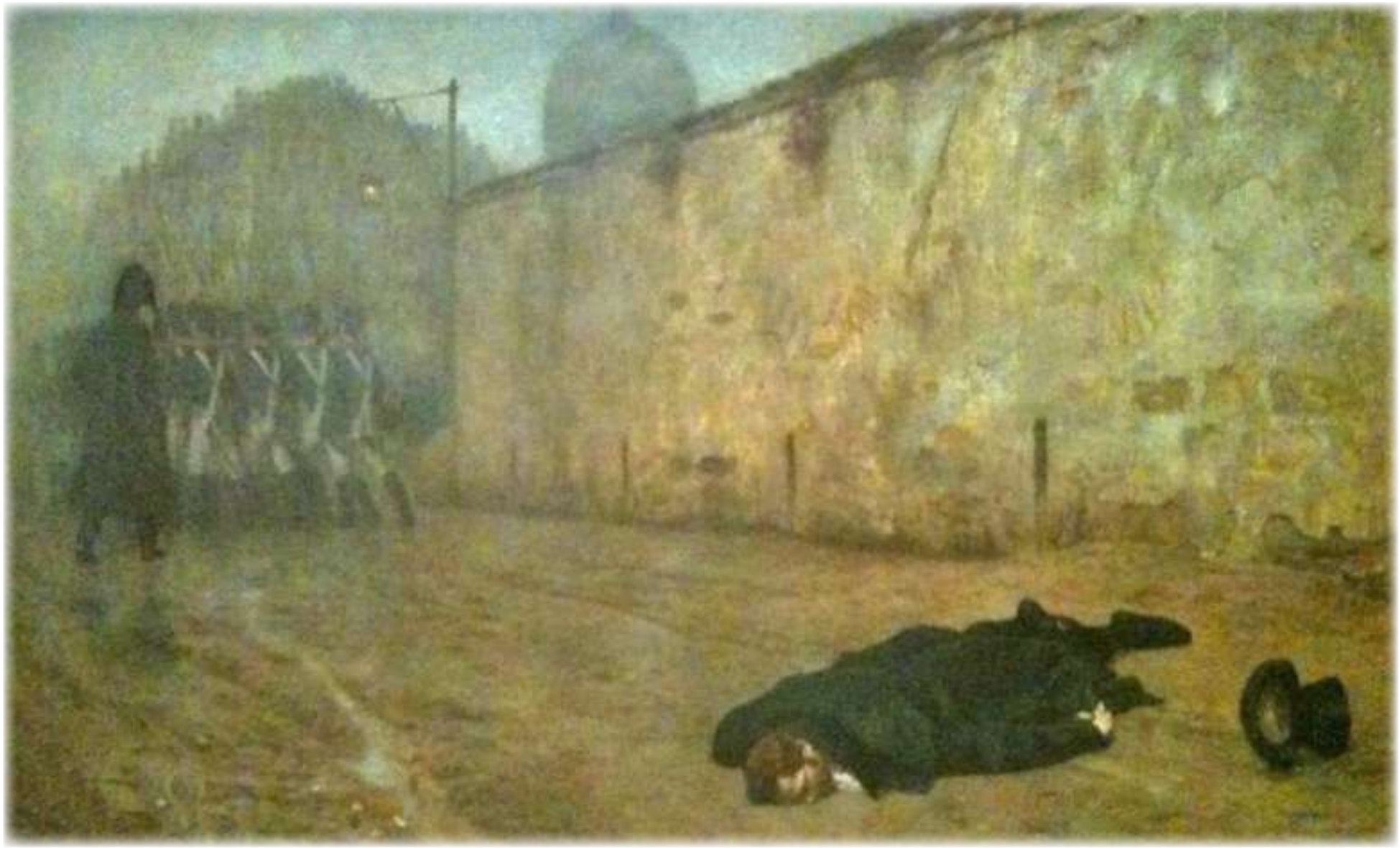
Français le moment de votre délivrance approche, Votre Roi accompagné de la fille de tous Seize, suivi du prince de Condé père du Duc d'anghin est près d'arriver près de vous, Monsieur frère de tous dix huit et ses augustes fils sont déjà devancés vers le Midi et l'ouest de la france ils annoncent les intentions paternelles de votre Roi, et vous garentissent en son nom le retour du bonheur et de la paix. Sous un règne protecteur des loix et de la liberté publique, que le cri de vive le Roi si cher à nos pères s'élève de toute part, qu'il retentisse dans tous les coeurs, que le Drapeau blanc flotte sur toutes nos Tours.

Vive le Roi



Military and civilian fashion under Louis XVIII.

Louis XVIII's letter of reassurance.



The Execution of Marshal Ney.



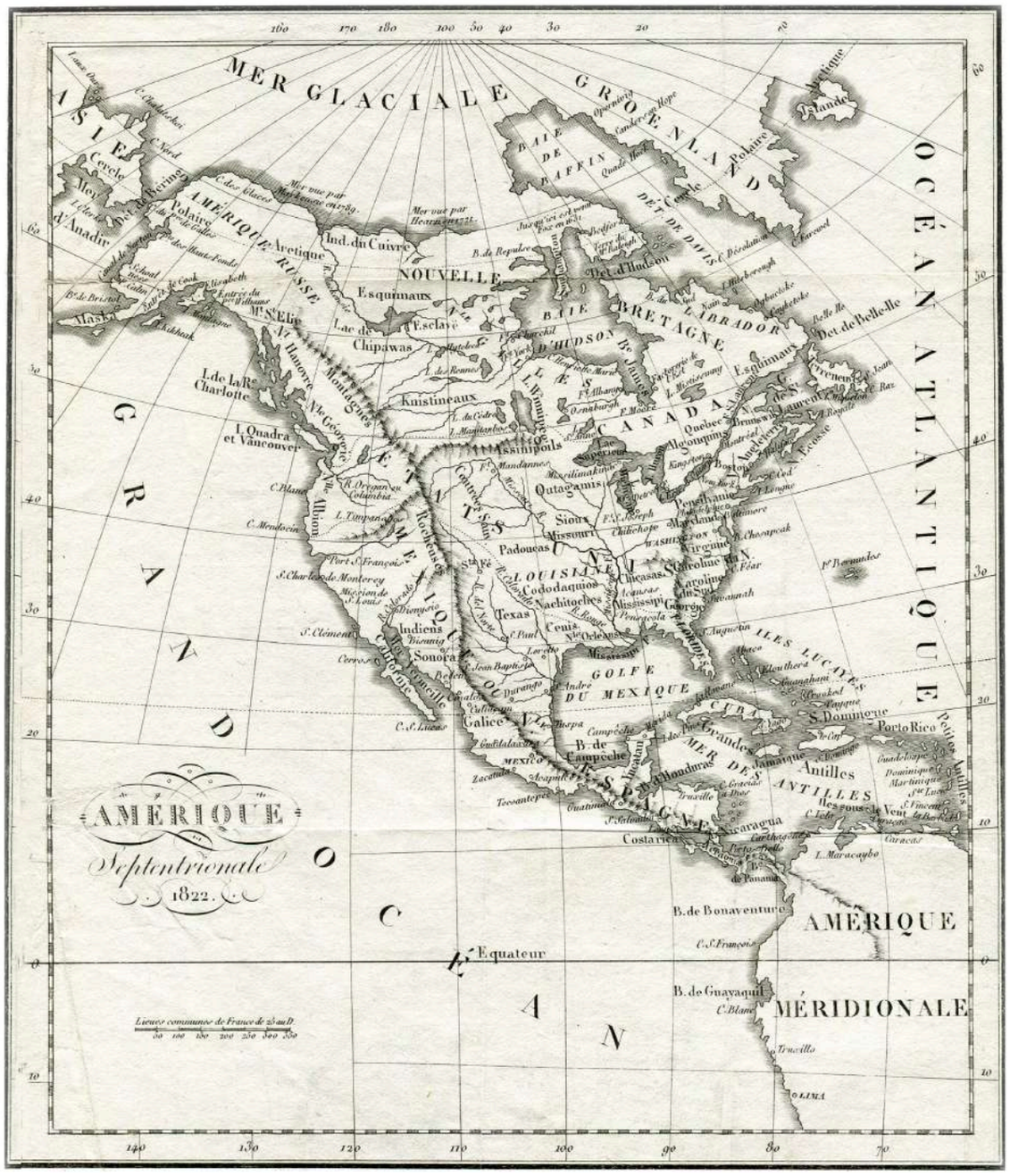
Veterans of the Grande Armée and the Guard wearing their original uniforms and insignia.

With the situation in Paris still unstable, a series of attacks called the *White Terror* was being perpetrated in the countryside, principally in the Rhône and Vendée regions. In southern France, dozens of Grand Army soldiers were murdered. In Marseille, the Mameluks, who had accompanied Napoleon in all of his campaigns, were massacred by a mob. In Avignon, a crowd of local people lynched Marshal Brune.

After weighing his options, Gouget decided to leave France and make his way to America. He had a nest egg, a sum he'd been paid in "l'an XIV" (1806) to replace a conscript by lottery.



The tragic death of Marshal Brune.



Map of North America published in 1822.

Spring of 1816 found Gouget in Philadelphia, where refugees from the Grand Army had rallied around Joseph Bonaparte, Napoleon's elder brother. They were conspiring to rescue Napoleon from the island of Saint Helena, where he was the captive of the British Crown. But the plot was soon discovered, and its participants were forced to scuttle it.

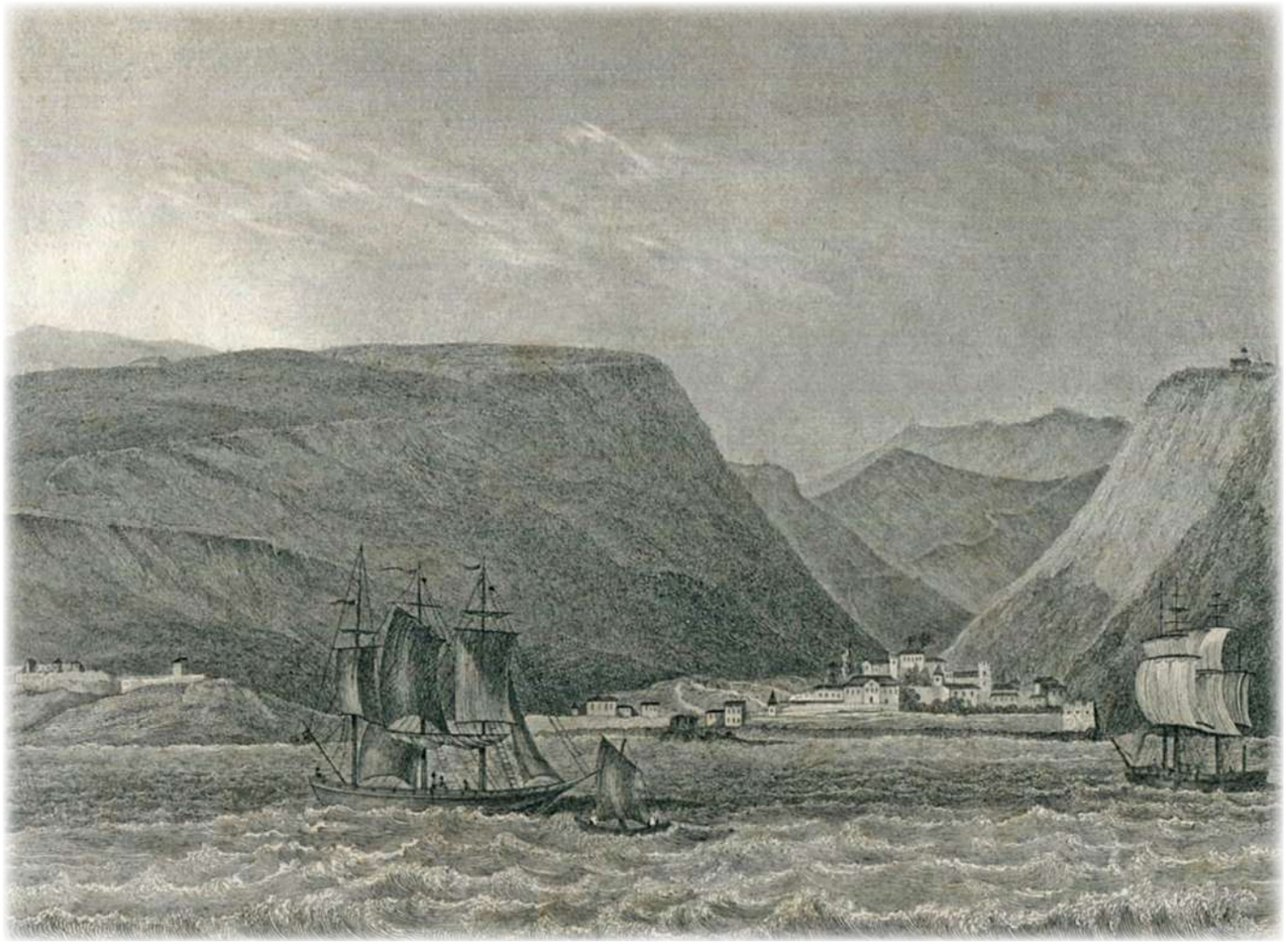


Joseph Bonaparte.



Second Street north from Market Street with Christ Church, Philadelphia.

Officially, the refugees reinvested their energies in an agricultural colony. As a consequence, during the fall of the same year, Count Charles Lefebvre-Desnouettes and other prominent officers organized the "Colonial Society of French Immigrants" and petitioned Washington for settlement farmland. After vainly scouting the western frontiers of the Southern United States, they were persuaded by a Dr. Brown of Kentucky, who had traveled extensively in France, to choose a place in Alabama near the confluence of the Black Warrior and Tombigbee rivers. There, the physician believed, the exiled Frenchmen would find the climate and soil very similar to that of their own country. They'd also meet many kindred spirits. Mobile was the home of many exiles whose hearts were filled with sympathy, admiration, and love for Napoleon. Besides, New Orleans was not far away, and could serve as a base for the furtherance of their scheme, slumbering but not abandoned, to rescue the Emperor.



The Island of Saint Helena.

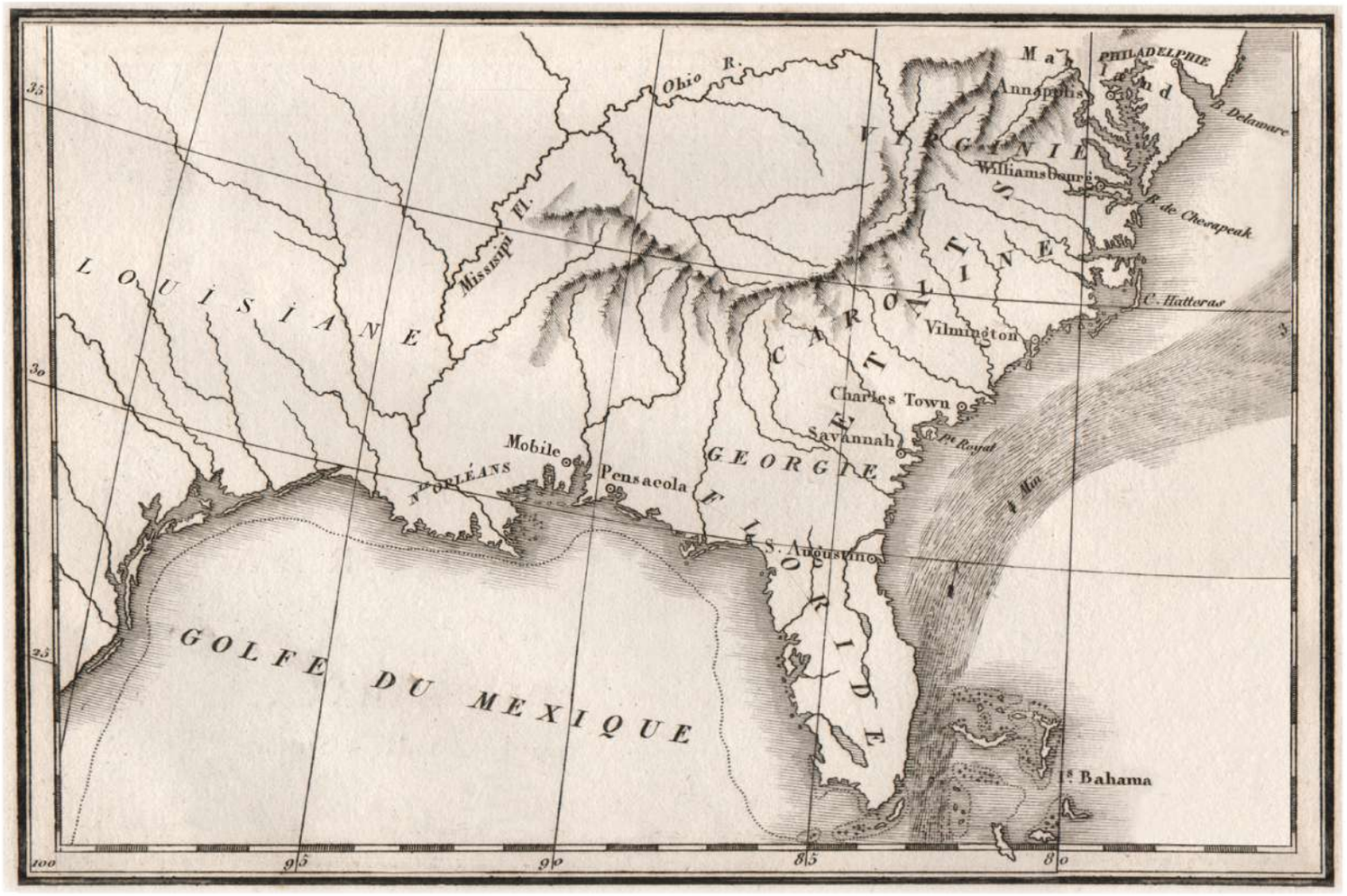


Napoleon.

By an act approved on March 3, 1817, the United States Congress granted the French community in exile about 92,000 acres of land in the Territory of Alabama with the proviso that each settler would cultivate grapes and olives.



Count Lefebvre-Desnouette,
President of The Colonial Society.



Eastern Gulf of Mexico. Early 19th Century Map.



The French Quarter, New Orleans.

Soon, aboard a schooner procured for the journey, a party of men, women, and children sailed from Philadelphia for Mobile, and then up the Tombigbee River. On July 14, 1817, with Charles Gouget aboard, the ship cast anchor at Écore Blanc, also known as White Bluff, a chalk cliff roughly one mile long. The colonists disembarked, chose lots, and began laying out a small town they named Demopolis—the city of the people.

In the course of his sojourn in Philadelphia, Gouget had struck up a romance with a young lady named Félicie. She had been the maid of Countess Marie-Louise-Stéphanie Lefebvre-Desnouettes, who had left Paris for Philadelphia to join her husband. But crossing the turbulent Channel had already exhausted the delicate French noblewoman, and she left her companion Léontine Desportes (born in Bordeaux) to make the long voyage alone



White Bluff.

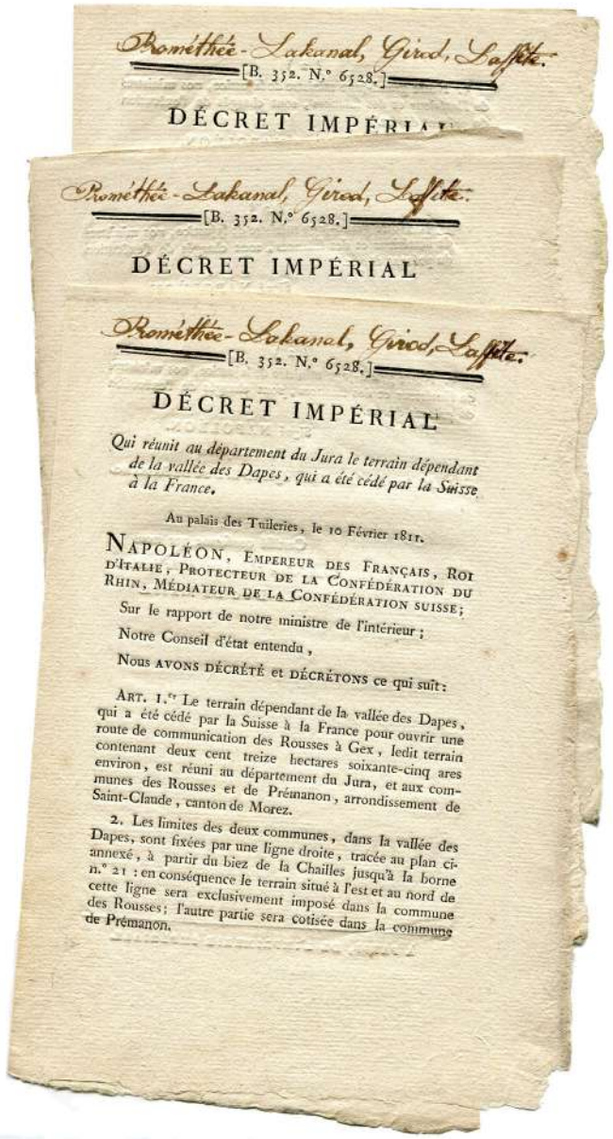
with Félicie (who was very likely from the Desportes family herself).

In Philadelphia, Léontine Desportes became a focus of interest for the French consul there, as he suspected her of abetting the plot to rescue Napoleon from Saint Helena. The consul's suspicions were not unfounded. Léontine was carrying coded Bonapartist messages—some of which still survive—to disseminate to the Alabama settlers. Charles Gouget gallantly assisted Léontine, sailing from Mobile to New Orleans to establish contact with Baron General Charles Lallemand, Jacques Lakanal, and other devotees of Napoleon. They still cherished their dream of rescuing the fallen "Prometheus," as Lord Byron called Bonaparte.

According to a popular story, Nicolas Girod, former mayor of New Orleans, had built his splendid mansion at 124 Chartres Street as a palace to accommodate Napoleon as soon as he reached America. Everything



Baron General Charles Lallemand.


Prométhée - Lakanal, Girod, Laffite.
[B. 352. N.° 6528.]
DÉCRET IMPÉRIAL
Prométhée - Lakanal, Girod, Laffite.
[B. 352. N.° 6528.]
DÉCRET IMPÉRIAL
Prométhée - Lakanal, Girod, Laffite.
[B. 352. N.° 6528.]
DÉCRET IMPÉRIAL
Qui réunit au département du Jura le terrain dépendant de la vallée des Dapes, qui a été cédé par la Suisse à la France.
Au palais des Tuileries, le 10 Février 1811.
NAPOLÉON, EMPEREUR DES FRANÇAIS, ROI D'ITALIE, PROTECTEUR DE LA CONFÉDÉRATION DU RHIN, MÉDIATEUR DE LA CONFÉDÉRATION SUISSE;
Sur le rapport de notre ministre de l'intérieur;
Notre Conseil d'état entendu,
Nous AVONS DÉCRÉTÉ et DÉCRÉTONS ce qui suit:
ART. 1.er Le terrain dépendant de la vallée des Dapes, qui a été cédé par la Suisse à la France pour ouvrir une route de communication des Rousses à Gex, ledit terrain contenant deux cent treize hectares soixante-cinq ares environ, est réuni au département du Jura, et aux communes des Rousses et de Prémanon, arrondissement de Saint-Claude, canton de Morez.
2. Les limites des deux communes, dans la vallée des Dapes, sont fixées par une ligne droite, tracée au plan ci-annexé, à partir du biez de la Chailles jusqu'à la borne n.° 21: en conséquence le terrain situé à l'est et au nord de cette ligne sera exclusivement imposé dans la commune des Rousses; l'autre partie sera cotisée dans la commune de Prémanon.

Coded Bonapartist messages written on Imperial decrees.

Charles Gouget carried them to New Orleans to get known by Joseph Lakanal, Nicolas Girod and Jean Laffite.

was ready for the illustrious guest who, unfortunately, had been detained. Next, the tale takes an outlandish twist: rumors say that Jean Laffite, the fearless French privateer of the Caribbean, crossed the Atlantic to Saint Helena and whisked the grateful ex-emperor away, leaving a double to fool the guards. Unfortunately for Laffite, "Prometheus" (the code name for the former Emperor) allegedly expired during the westward journey. As soon as he docked with his deceased cargo, Laffite buried Napoleon in Perrin Cemetery, in the swamps of southern Louisiana at the junction of Bayou des Oies and Bayou Barataria. The sacred ground itself later became the source of the most fantastic legend in the entire state: Here, it was said, the remains of Jean Laffite, John Paul Jones, and Napoleon Bonaparte rested in three adjoining tombs:

> "There are no headstones, no inscriptions. The owner of the graveyard, Madame Toinette Perrin, says simply: 'I tell you like my mamma and my gran' mère tell me. Laffite is buried dere. Other mans? Napoleon? *Mais, oui!* Zat is his name. Me, I'm old, and I don't remember like I used to, but I know dis: every year some woman comes to zat grave on All Saints' Day, and light candle and pray. She say she come from far away and he is her kin. And she give me plenty money to keep his grave nice.'" (Lyle Saxon. *Gumbo Ya-Ya: A Collection of Louisiana Folk Tales*).



Napoleon House, New Orleans, La.



An emulator of Jean Laffite.



Perrin Cemetery.

But let us tarry no longer with such fancy. In reality, upon meeting a handful of Grand Army veterans living at Hotel Tremoulet in New Orleans, Gouget was struck with surprise and resentment. The wayward troops, nostalgic for their glorious past, now spent their time enjoying the sweetness of Creole life. Admittedly, they had been betrayed by false hopes. After they had enlisted with General Charles Lallemand in Philadelphia, they were stymied, because secrecy was such they were never told the true purpose of their commander's plans.

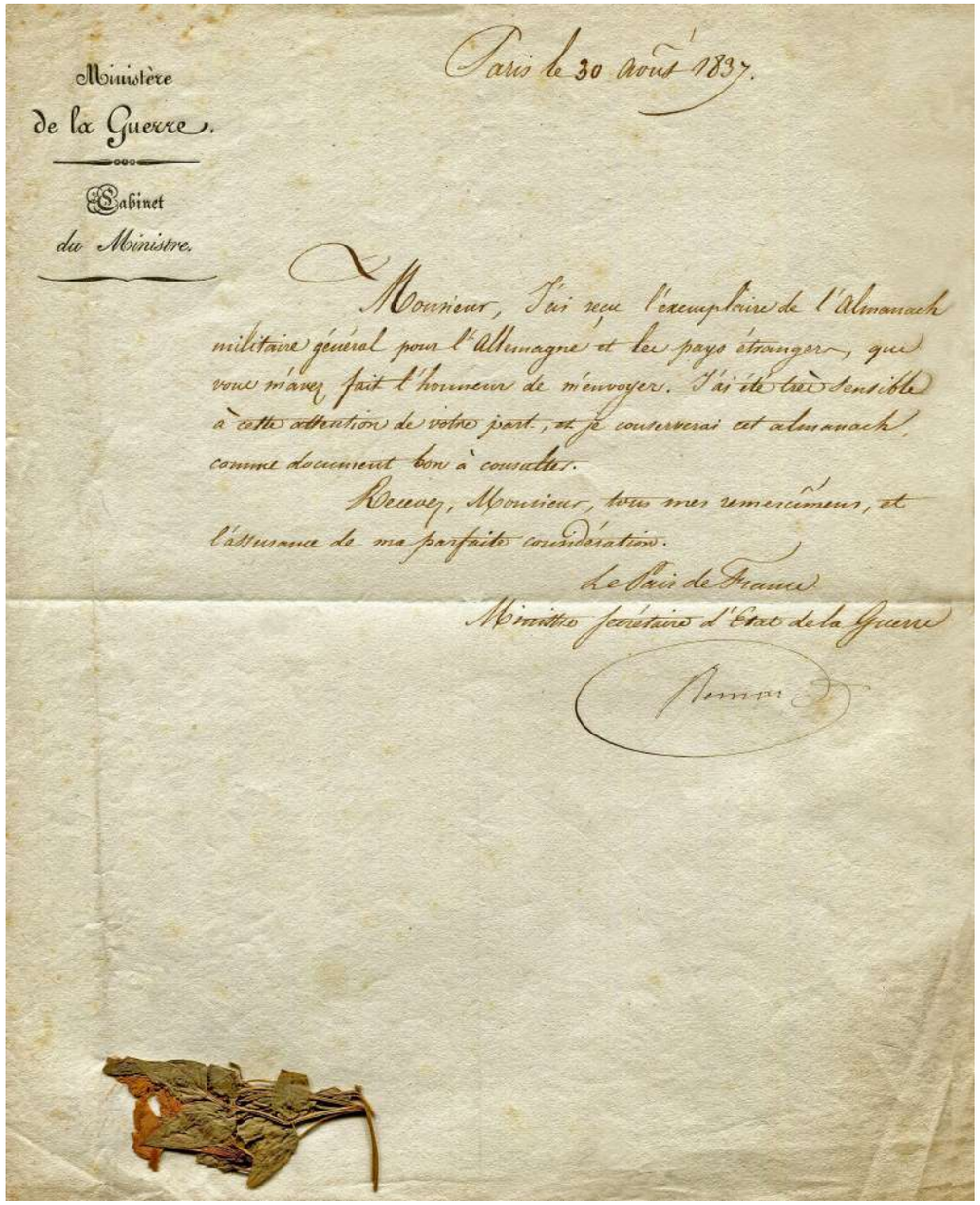
During his short stay in the Crescent City, Gouget paid his respects to General Simon Bernard, a fellow native of Dôle. A wise man, Bernard kept his distance from Lallemand's plot. To him, it was transparent enough: first, take possession of the precious mines, somewhere beyond the Rio Grande (just as Robert Cavelier de la Salle had envisaged much earlier); acquire great wealth and power; then rent Barataria filibusteers to free the captive French Emperor and put him on the throne of Mexico.



General Simon Bernard.

Gouget had actively participated from 1808 to 1813 in the disastrous campaign to defend Joseph Bonaparte's rule in Spain. All too cognizant of Spain's uncompromising attitude towards its valuable overseas possessions, he shared his countryman's doubts about the success of Lallemand's aggressive scheme on Mexican land.

Simon Bernard was also a member of the prestigious Columbian Institute for the Promotion of Arts and Sciences, alongside such prominent men of the day as former presidents Andrew Jackson and John Quincy Adams. Bernard's association with these influential leaders from the communities of medicine, the military, and government service would have been valuable to Gouget. Bernard may have helped Gouget regain his place in the French army when he sailed back to France, after an interruption of two years, three months and 11 days.



Ministère
de la Guerre.

Cabinet
du Ministre.

Paris le 30 Août 1837.

Monsieur, J'ai reçu l'exemplaire de l'Almanach militaire général pour l'Allemagne et les pays étrangers, que vous m'avez fait l'honneur de m'envoyer. J'ai été très sensible à cette attention de votre part, et je conserverai cet almanach comme document bon à consulter.

Recevez, Monsieur, tous mes remercimens, et l'assurance de ma parfaite considération.

Le Pair de France
Ministre Secrétaire d'Etat de la Guerre

Simon

Simon Bernard's letter to Charles Gouget.

General Lefebvre-Desnouettes was now leading the Vine and Olive Colony, where Léontine Desportes also owned land. She was among the founders of Demopolis, Marengo County, and her name appears on the earliest list of persons established there.

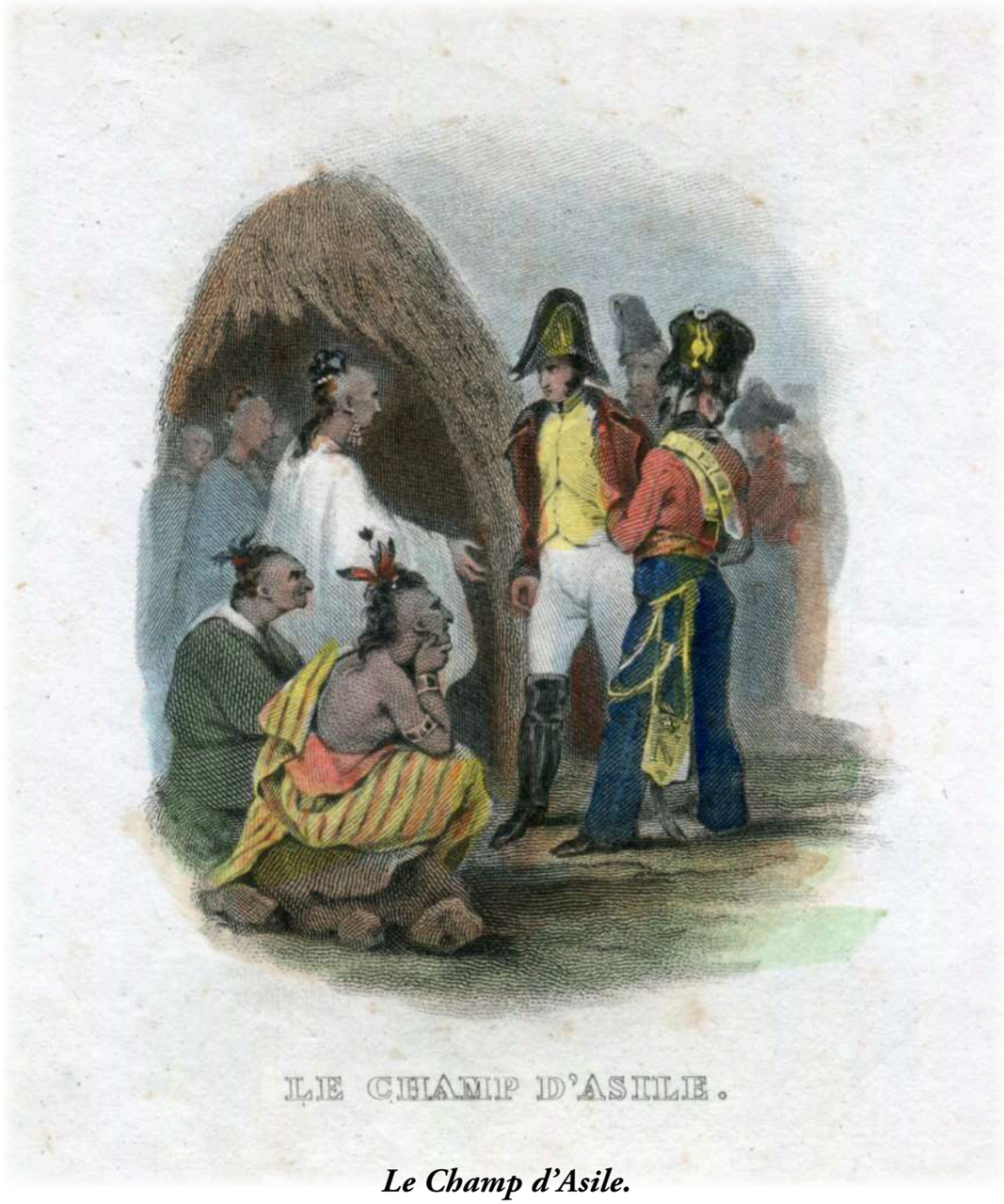
But in the following months, while a number of new immigrants had arrived, it was discovered that a mistake had been made in the land grant as recorded in Washington. The settlers were forced to move some miles up the Black Warrior River to form a new colony. They named it Aigleville, in honor of the French Imperial Eagle, the Napoleonic standard. It was there that Félicie gave birth to a boy christened Joseph, months after Charles Gouget, unaware of her pregnancy, had left North America.



Construction of Aigleville.

As for Léontine Desportes, she had become engaged to Dr. François Violle, another early Demopolis grantee. Neither of them were in the first flush of youth, but they were married in May 1818. The couple soon set out for Texas, in the wake of General Lallemand, who was attempting to establish a Napoleonic colony on the Trinity River. The site was known as the "Champ d'Asile," although his officers dedicated themselves primarily to building a fortress and manufacturing munitions. It seemed obvious that their goal was military aggression, for which their agricultural endeavor was merely a pretext. The Mexican Army soon marched against them, and Lallemand and his men were forced to retreat.

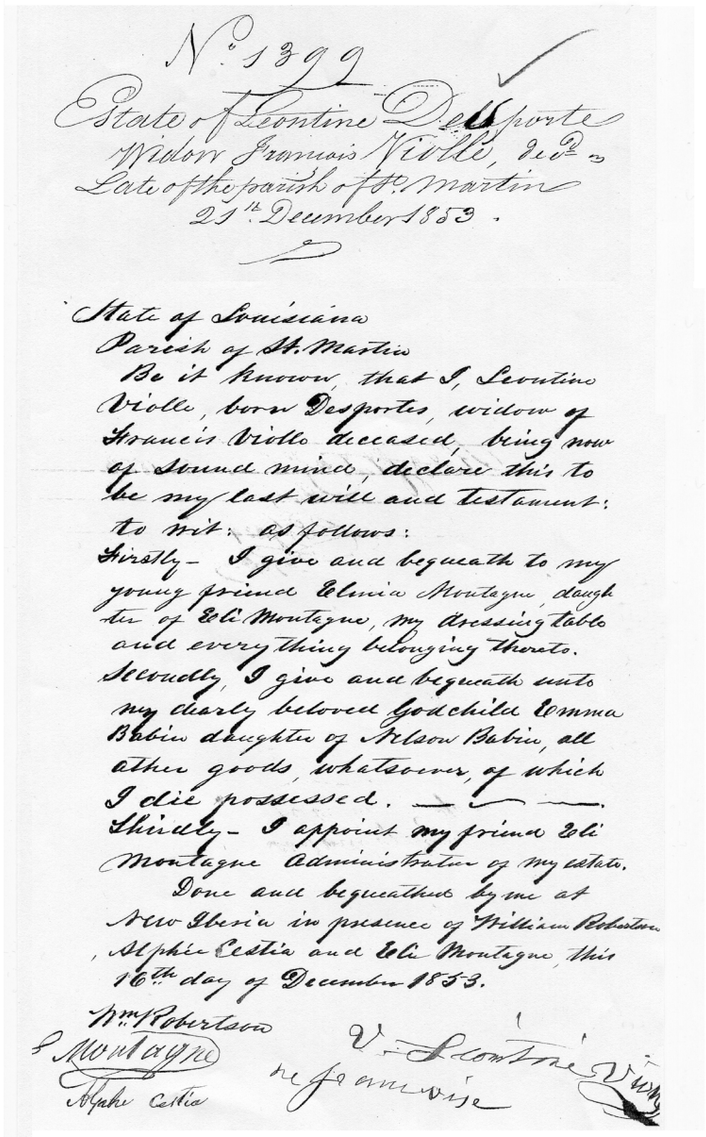
Léontine and François fled to New Orleans, and then returned to Demopolis, where they remained for about three years. They finally moved to St. Martinville, Louisiana, where they spent their declining years. The doctor practiced his profession until his death in late 1845, and his wife was buried next to him eight years later.



Le Champ d'Asile.



St Martin Catholic Presbytery, St Martinville.



N°1399

State of Leontine Desportes
Widow Francois Violle, 2nd
Late of the parish of St. Martin
21st December 1853.

State of Louisiana
Parish of St. Martin
Be it known, that I, Leontine
Violle, born Desportes, widow of
Francis Violle deceased, being now
of sound mind, declare this to
be my last will and testament:
to wit: as follows:
Firstly - I give and bequeath to my
young friend Elmire Montagne, daugh
ter of Eli Montagne, my dressing table
and everything belonging thereto.
Secondly, I give and bequeath unto
my dearly beloved Godchild Emma
Babin daughter of Nelson Babin, all
other goods, whatsoever, of which
I die possessed. — — —.
Thirdly - I appoint my friend Eli
Montagne Administrator of my estate.
Done and bequeathed by me at
New Iberia in presence of William Robertson
, Alphie Cestia and Eli Montagne, this
16th day of December 1853.
Wm Robertson
Eli Montagne
Alphie Cestia
V. Leontine Violle
her Jeanne Wise

Léontine Desportes' will, December 16, 1853.

From the beginning, the plan by which the Colonial Society of French Immigrants was to establish vineyards and olive groves in western Alabama was ill-conceived, to say the least. The grantees had set about their task enthusiastically, but with little or no agricultural skills and experience. Lacking wagons and teams, unacquainted with the long hours required of pioneers, they made but slow progress in subduing the wilds. More adept astride a warhorse than trudging behind a plow, some faltered while others fell victim to fevers and disease. In addition, they faced constant encroachment on their land by American squatters, as well as natural disasters like floods and droughts. All of these factors led to the eventual collapse of the settlement. After 1825, most of the colonists left in discouragement, for Mobile and New Orleans, or returned to France. Only a few stayed in Marengo County permanently. Félicie was one of them. She had been wise enough to decline the invitation from Léontine Desportes and Dr. Violle to go to Texas in 1818. Instead, she remained in the vicinity of Aigleville with her child, turning to good account the couple's allotments. She eventually met a stout frontiersman named Hopkins, who boasted of having fought the Creek War side by side with David Crockett in Alabama. Hopkins cherished young Joseph as if he had been his own son.

Souvenir d'Aigleville, capitale de l'Etat de Marengo
sur les bords du Tombechbé

Memory of Aigleville, capital of the state of Marengo, on the banks of the Tombechbé.

Félicie's dried flowers presented to Charles Gouget in 1863.

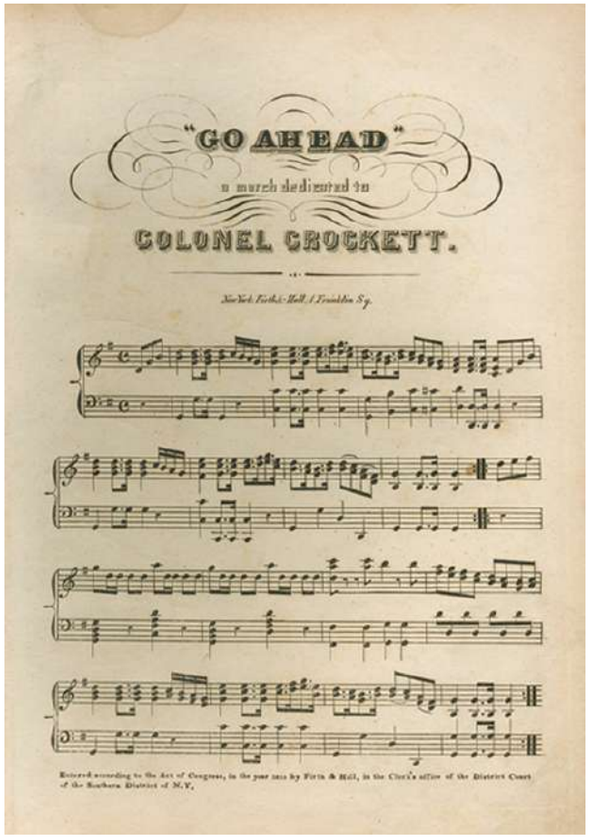


Fort Mims Massacre, August 30, 1813.

The Red Sticks, a party of Creek warriors who had been blessed to become invincible to bullets, broke into the fort and butchered everyone in it with tomahawks, knives and fire.



David Crockett.



"Go Ahead"
A March Dedicated to Colonel Crockett.

Also known as "The Crockett Victory March," it first appeared in 1835. The famous congressman was probably aware of it and may have heard it performed.

The famed hunter and former US Congressman had already become an American celebrity before his death at The Alamo. This painting, done nearly fifty years after the epic battle, shows him in typical frontier dress.

JOSEPH HOPKINS IN TEXAS, THE MOBILE GREYS AND THE WAR OF INDEPENDENCE

Joseph Hopkins, Charles Gouget's natural child, was just seventeen when he left Aigleville in 1835. He became acquainted with James Butler Bonham, a rowdy son of South Carolina then practicing law in Montgomery, Alabama. Bonham served in the Texas revolution as a trusted confidant of Sam Houston and as a courier for William Barrett Travis. In the end, he was martyred at the Alamo.

On Oct. 17, 1835, Bonham led a rally in support of the Texian cause at the Shakespeare Theater in Mobile. Three days later, the citizens of the town elected him to carry their resolutions to Houston. The famed commander-in-chief of the Nacogdoches militia had expressed his belief that war between Texas and the central Mexican government was inevitable, and had called for volunteers to begin the "work of liberty." In another two weeks, Bonham was organizing a fighting unit of about thirty Alabamians. They were called the Mobile Greys for the name of the city where they had formed and the color of their military fatigues, with which Albert C. Horton, a former member of the Alabama House of Representatives, had outfitted them at his own cost.

Enthralled by the Texian cause and the winds of adventure, Joseph chose to enlist under the name Hopkins. Such was his way of paying a vibrant tribute to the generous frontiersman who had helped Félicie raise him in Marengo County.

Commanded by Captain David Burke, the Mobile Greys set out for Texas via the Gulf. Arriving at Copano and traveling to San Felipe de Austin on Nov. 30, 1835, they were ordered to San Antonio de Bexar, a fort under the control of General Martin Perfecto de Cos, brother-in-law of Mexico's despotic president Antonio Lopez de Santa Anna.

For almost two months, Texas volunteers had been camped near the city in a virtual standoff with General Cos and his troops. The stalemate ended when Ben Milam, an indomitable original settler who had fought for Mexico against Spain, convinced three hundred brave men to follow him. Starting before daybreak on Dec. 5, 1835, they began the siege of San Antonio and daringly skirmished for the next two days. On Dec. 7, Milam was killed by a rifle shot. His death infuriated his companions, who stormed the town in a bloody house-to-house combat. By Dec. 9, the Mexicans had been forced to retreat to a nearby old Franciscan Mission known as the Alamo. Desertions and casualties were so heavy in their ranks that General Cos resolved to surrender.



Mobile Gris.
Drawing from the hand of Joseph Hopkins, Texas, 1836.

A combination of mishaps had delayed the Mobile Greys. They missed the battle, reaching Bexar on Dec. 14, two days after the Mexican soldiers had disarmed and left.

The Mobile Greys then proceeded to Goliad. Founded on the San Antonio River, the city was the site of a strong stone fortress built in the 1770s. Known as Presidio La Bahia, it was the only one of its kind on the entire Gulf Coast.



La Bahia Presidio Chapel.

At Goliad, Burke's command was enlarged by adding what remained of Captain Breece's New Orleans Greys, one of two militia companies which had previously formed in Louisiana for service in the Texas War. On Feb. 12, 1836, these volunteers, who represented a cross-section of young men unafraid to fight, became part of the Lafayette Battalion led by Col. James Walker Fannin. Since the outbreak of hostilities, this former West Point Cadet had been harping on the need for a well-drilled, professional army. Upon assuming leadership at Presidio La Baya (renamed Fort Defiance), he was dismayed to find it staffed by a collection of men he considered mere ruffians, despite his dire need for their support. The friction between the colonel and his fighters would be a point of contention throughout the Goliad campaign.

After the revolution, the few Greys who had survived were rewarded with positions of high rank in the government of the Republic of Texas. Others fought in the Mexican border wars as military and Texas Rangers. At least two former Greys served the Confederacy during the Civil War.



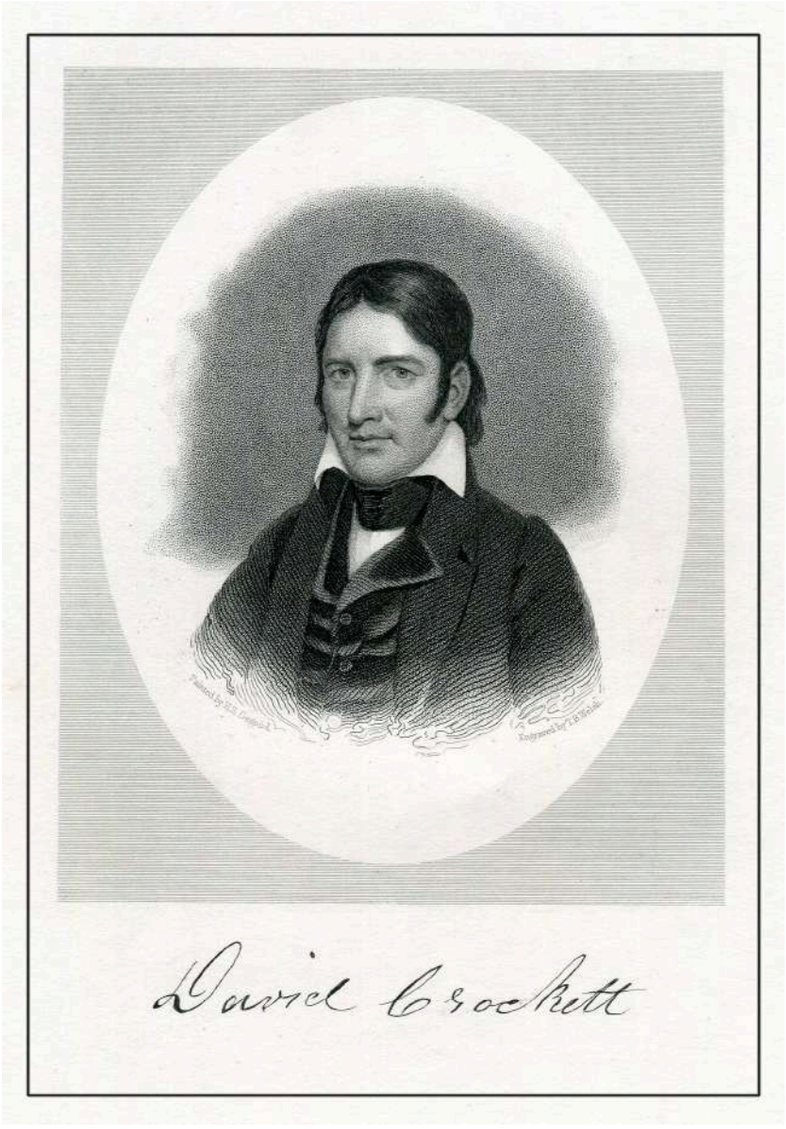
Appeals from Alamo commander William Travis prompted Colonel Fannin to launch a relief march of over three hundred men and four pieces of artillery on February, 25, 1836. But Fannin, delayed and disappointed by various accidents that occurred along the road, failed to reach the fort in time to provide full military support during the last stand.



James Walker Fannin, Jr.

A group of bold volunteers, some of whom had been in Burke's or Breece's companies, disregarded Fannin's orders and rode like the wind to strengthen the Alamo garrison. But they did not approach the fort's walls undetected. The Grey Sergeant McNelly recalled that they were "driven across the prairie by the enemy." The exact number of men who made it into the Alamo is still unknown, and time has yet to reveal the identity of many of them. Moreover, it remains to be proved that Travis sent out David Crockett in person to locate the relief group and guide them through Mexican lines.

Go ahead!



David Crockett.

It is tantalizing to imagine that Joseph Hopkins was among the Greys who entered the Alamo that morning. He may have fought side by side with David Crockett, the way his foster father claimed to have done in the Creek War. This could explain why the famed Tennessee frontiersman gave Joseph a lock of hair and an autograph, as a personal gift to his old battlefield companion, Hopkins senior. Later, the precious ringlet was sealed with wax and embellished with a few lines from a newspaper clipping. This artifact was discovered in the early 1900s by my great-uncle Charles Dole when he was going through his late godfather's possessions. It rested between two pages of Gouget's favorite book, The Saint Helena Memorial. The relic had survived a long journey through time and space. According to my aunt Mathilde, Félicie, Joseph's mother, brought it from Alabama to the French Jura when she crossed the ocean to visit the love of her youth (see "Charles and Félicie's Late Romance"). The other mementos Félicie packed in her trunk were their son's



David Crockett's lock of hair.

pencil self-portrait in "Mobile Gris" and his photographic image in Confederate uniform. By presenting these two pictures to the old veteran of the Napoleonic campaigns, she no doubt wished to show him that his son was a chip off the old block. Captain Gouget could take pride in the knowledge that Joseph had inherited the Gouget courage, if not the name. The lock of David Crockett's hair was evidence to him that Joseph had fought and survived one of the most heroic and desperate battles of the 19th century. It may be thought

indeed that the young volunteer was one of the very few unsung heroes who managed to escape Santa Anna's lancers on March 6, 1836, in the immediate Alamo aftermath. "I can assure you that there were very few who may have gone to relate the event to their companions," boasted Santa Anna in a letter to the Secretary of War José Maria Tornel. These two words, "very few," in the mouth of a self-aggrandizing general who loudly proclaimed his complete triumph and exaggerated the number of casualties, are revealing. They tend to show that there were most probably more survivors on the Texian side than the two white men generally accounted for by historians.

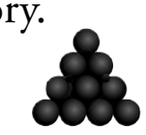


The Alamo, San Antonio, Texas, 1849.

Sam Houston, who had been appointed Major General of the Texas army in November of the previous year, arrived in Gonzales to organize his troops on March 11, 1836. That very evening, two Mexicans turned up with hair-raising details of the Alamo's fall. Houston canceled his plans for a march on San Antonio and ordered Fannin to pull back.

On March 19, after endless hesitations, Colonel Fannin led a retreat from Fort Defiance. But it was too late. They had traveled less than six miles when the Mexican cavalry appeared. After a fierce engagement known as the Battle of Coletto, the Texians surrendered and were taken back to Goliad as prisoners. On Palm Sunday, March 27, 1836, on orders from Santa Anna, they were all shot, Fannin being the last to be executed. Twenty-eight men somehow escaped the massacre and at least five of them found their way to San Jacinto where they participated in the final battle there.

By Feb. 29, 1836, Captain David Burke, the commander of the Mobile Greys, was absent from Goliad. Officially, he was on furlough, but Sam Houston reported to his Louisiana friend Col. William Christy that he had sent Burke to New Orleans and Mobile to enlist more volunteers. However, unbeknownst to Houston, Burke had never reached the other side of the Gulf. When he rode into Galveston to set sail for New Orleans, Robert Potter, the Secretary of the Texas Navy, in charge of the Port of Galveston, had commandeered him to captain the brig *Pocket.* It had to be ready to sail at a moment's notice in the event of a Mexican victory.



Like detectives trying to solve a mystery, we must now use our imaginations to reconstruct the next episode in the adventures of Joseph Hopkins in Texas, for we have very little written evidence of what transpired. First, how did the young Mobile Grey avoid being shot with the other captives at Fort Defiance, on Palm Sunday, March 27, 1836?

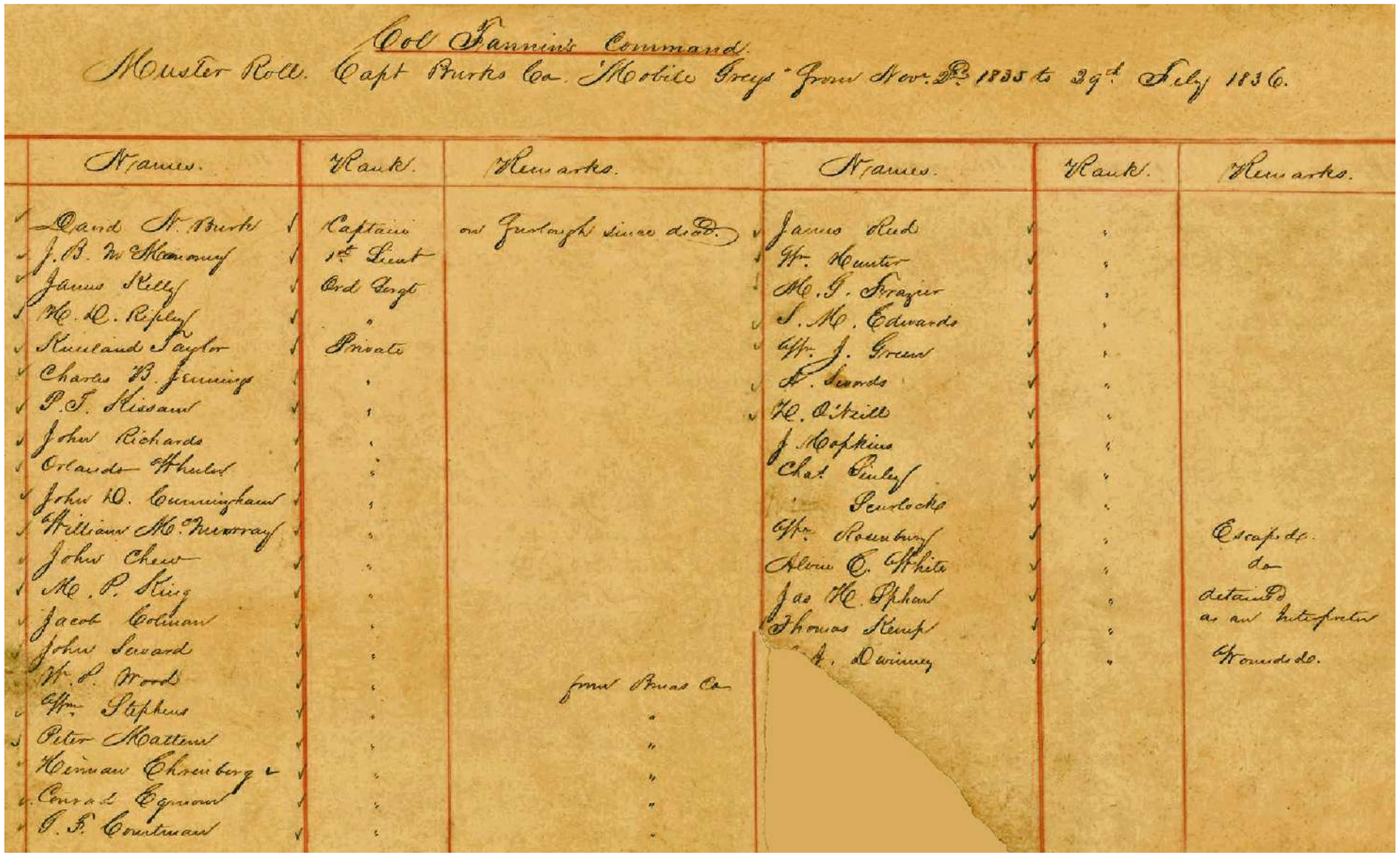
Let us suppose that Joseph had reached Gonzales just after the fall of the Alamo and made his alarming report to Sam Houston. When the major general learned that Hopkins was from southern Alabama, he realized he would be the ideal aide to David Burke. Still unaware that Burke's recruiting mission had been canceled, Houston ordered Joseph to saddle his horse and dig in his spurs, in hot pursuit of his new assignment with Burke. The young Mobile Grey obeyed, thereby escaping the Goliad massacre.

In Galveston, Joseph was so disappointed by the turn events had taken that he obtained permission to leave. To him, wearying himself as an infantryman was preferable to quietly standing guard aboard an anchored ship.



Goliad Executions.

Next, let us imagine that as Joseph was riding off to join Houston's army, he met an aged Frenchman who claimed to be a veteran of Napoleon's most glorious battles and to have been decorated with the Legion of Honor by the Emperor in person. In a flash, Joseph realized that the old soldier was not a total stranger. His mother Félicie had seen him long ago in Aigleville. Actually a lowly private in the French light cavalry named Rose, he had boldly reinvented himself as Lt. Louis Roze upon migrating to North America. Unmasked by veterans at the Vine and Olive Colony, he was severely flogged and banished from the settlement. And now, the vile impostor bluntly declared that he had sneaked out of the Alamo just prior to its fall, unwilling to die for a lost cause. Overwhelmed by hatred and disgust, Joseph hurled Rose into a cactus patch and galloped away to find the Texas forces.



Col Fannin's Command.

Muster Roll. Capt Burks Co. "Mobile Greys" from Nov. 2d 1835 to 29th Feby 1836.

Names.	Rank.	Remarks.	Names.	Rank.	Remarks.
David S. Burks	Captain	on furlough since dec.	James Reed	"	
J. B. McKamey	1st Lieut		Wm. Hunter	"	
James Kelly	Ord Sergt		M. G. Frazier	"	
M. C. Ripley	"		S. M. Edwards	"	
Rutland Taylor	Private		Wm. J. Green	"	
Charles B. Fenning	"		A. Swords	"	
P. T. Hissam	"		H. O'Neill	"	
John Richards	"		J. Hopkins	"	
Orlando Thulet	"		Chas. Pixley	"	
John D. Cunningham	"		Penlocke	"	
William McMurray	"		Wm. Rosenburg	"	Escaped &c.
John Chew	"		Alvin C. White	"	do
M. P. King	"		Jas H. Pshar	"	detained &c as an Interpreter
Jacob Coleman	"		Thomas Kemp	"	
John Seward	"		A. Devinney	"	Wounded &c.
W. P. Woods	"	from Brazos Co			
Wm. Stephens	"	"			
Peter Mattews	"	"			
Herman Ehrenberg	"	"			
Conrad Egmon	"	"			
D. F. Countman	"	"			

Muster Roll. Col Fannin's Command. Capt Burks Co. "Mobile Greys" from Nov. 2, 1835 to Feb. 29, 1836.

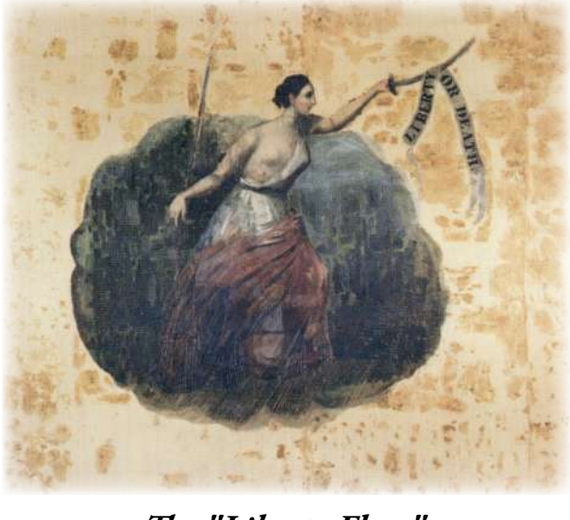
"Joseph Hopkins: Spared execution for absence or illness 14-27 March."

According to verifiable historical facts, on March 13, 1836, the Mexicans were approaching Gonzales. There was no time to lose. Having advised all Texas settler families to follow him, Sam Houston ordered an immediate retreat, and by midnight his little ragtag army was tramping off to the east.

On April 16, the cautious Major General ended what has since been known as the Runaway Scrape and turned southeast to march toward the imminent confrontation with the enemy. On April 21, he fought the Battle of San Jacinto, a bold surprise attack that was over in about eighteen minutes. Some 630 Mexican soldiers were killed and 730 captured, while only 9 Texians died. General Santa Anna, who had hidden in the woods when Houston attacked, was tracked down the following day and held as a prisoner of war. Three weeks later, he signed the peace treaty paving the way for the Republic of Texas to become an independent country.



The Battle of San Jacinto.



The "Liberty Flag" was flown by the Texian Army led by General Sam Houston at the Battle of San Jacinto.

The "Liberty Flag."

JOSEPH HOPKINS, CAMELS, AND THE CIVIL WAR

When the War Between the States broke out in April 1861, Joseph joined a Louisiana militia. On May 1, 1862, he was filled with bitterness when the Port of New Orleans, after offering almost no resistance, was captured by a Yankee fleet. Worse yet, he quickly realized that Union Major-General Benjamin Butler's proposals were tempting, but unscrupulous. Butler was merely eager to bribe a local gentleman in order to carve up the city for his own personal profit. Joseph immediately fled to Texas, where he enlisted in a ranger company assigned to Camp Verde, southwest of Austin. The whole base was simply an immense camel corral, part of an aberrant plan to substitute these Saharan beasts for the Army's mules.

The experiment with using dromedaries as pack animals had obtained a $30,000 appropriation from Congress, for the purchase of the creatures and their shipment from various Mediterranean ports. The first supply arrived safely at Indianola, Texas, on April 29, 1856, and a second one soon followed. Early in the summer of the same year, the Army loaded and drove a camel caravan to Camp Verde (consequently called Little Egypt) via Victoria and San Antonio.

The initial trial seemed promising. The desert dwellers were exceedingly strong and tough, ambling swiftly and surely across challenging terrain. Although they were hard to handle, camels appeared to be more economical than horses or mules, and also more self-sufficient. They would graze on plants the equines disdained, like Texas mountain cedar and creosote bush.

With every camel outing, a teamster rode ahead, shouting, "Get out of the way, the camels are coming!" The dromedaries frightened horses badly. One description noted that "the flat nostrils gave the beasts a disdainful look and the half-closed eyes and pouting lip lent a most bored and sleepy expression to the creatures."



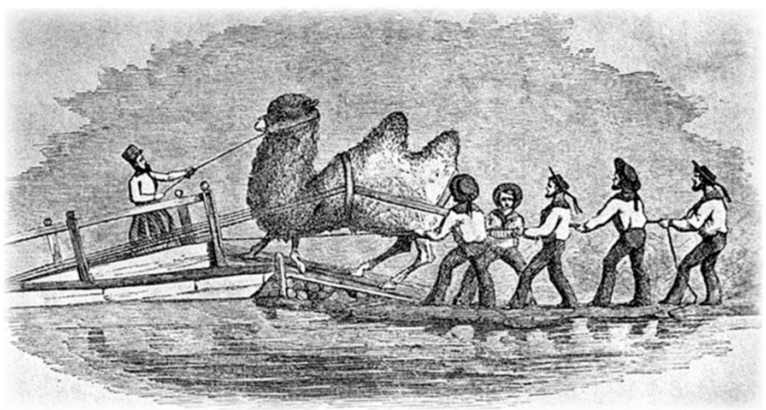
Army camel at a Government Depot.



Butler horrified the local population by posting notices that threatened to treat any woman who insulted one of his soldiers like "a woman of the town plying her avocation" (a euphemism for prostitution).



Chameliers.



Loading up a Camel in the Middle East.

Nevertheless, Secretary of War Jefferson Davis and other camel enthusiasts marvelled about the dromedaries. For instance, in 1859, Second Lieutenant Hartz, who had become something of a zealot on the subject, wrote:

> *Not only the capability, but the superiority of the camel for military purposes in the badly-watered sections of country, seems to be established. The patience, endurance, and steadiness which characterize the performance of the camels during this march is beyond praise.*

As we can see, the romance of camel-borne transportation across what was then known as the "Great American Desert" had gripped the government's imagination long before Johnny Rebs stormed Camp Verde, seizing eighty camels tended by a handful of Arabs.

The Texas Ranger company in which Joseph Hopkins served was assigned to the camp in 1862. Gouget's son immediately volunteered to give a hand to the veteran Arab camel driver Hi Jolly. Born Ali al-Hajaya ca. 1828 in Jordan, to Bedouin parents then under Ottoman rule, he served with the French Army in Algiers until 1856, when he was recruited as an expert camel-wrangler by the U.S. Army.



Camel driver.

As a child in Alabama, Joseph had heard fabulous tales about camels from a Mameluke who had served Bonaparte during his Egyptian campaign (1798–1801). Now that he could finally lay eyes on real ones, he was at once enthralled by their majesty and inspired to learn how to master them. Had he already forgotten the Napoleonic veteran's warning? Camels were prodigious spitters, they also sneezed and vomited in remarkable volume, and they tended to attack strangers with snapping teeth. Dogs barked hysterically whenever they appeared, and oxen and mules sometimes stampeded at the sight of them. Nevertheless, at Camp Verde, the most obedient specimens were used to transport salt or cotton.



François Ducel, Mameluke of the Imperial Guard.

Born in 1789 in Touches, Saône-et-Loire, Ducel was promoted to second Mameluke on March 7, 1813, service number 311. He fought in the campaigns of 1813 and 1814.



A pack train of camels in the American Southwest.

The day was near when Jefferson Davis, an early supporter of camels and later of the Confederacy, would discourage their continued use. They soon were widely scattered. Private freight companies and gold prospectors bought some, but most were simply turned out on the open range where, for decades, they occasionally shocked unsuspecting travelers.

As near as anyone can determine, camels continued to be sighted in the Southwest through the early 1900s. According to local legends, the final sad act of these encounters occurred on December 16, 1902 when 75-year-old Hadji Ali was sitting in a saloon at Quartzite, Arizona. A prospector stumbled in, telling of a huge, red camel wandering nearby. Hadji Ali rushed outside and was never seen alive again. His withered body was found weeks later in the remote desert. There he lay, with lifeless arms wrapped around the neck of the last camel in the West. Another blood-freezing tale asserted that Hadji Ali, tied in the saddle, could be seen on the spectral beast called the Red Ghost. The apparition appeared frequently during dust storms in the area. This weird story had the unfortunate Arab riding the camel forevermore.



The Red Ghost.

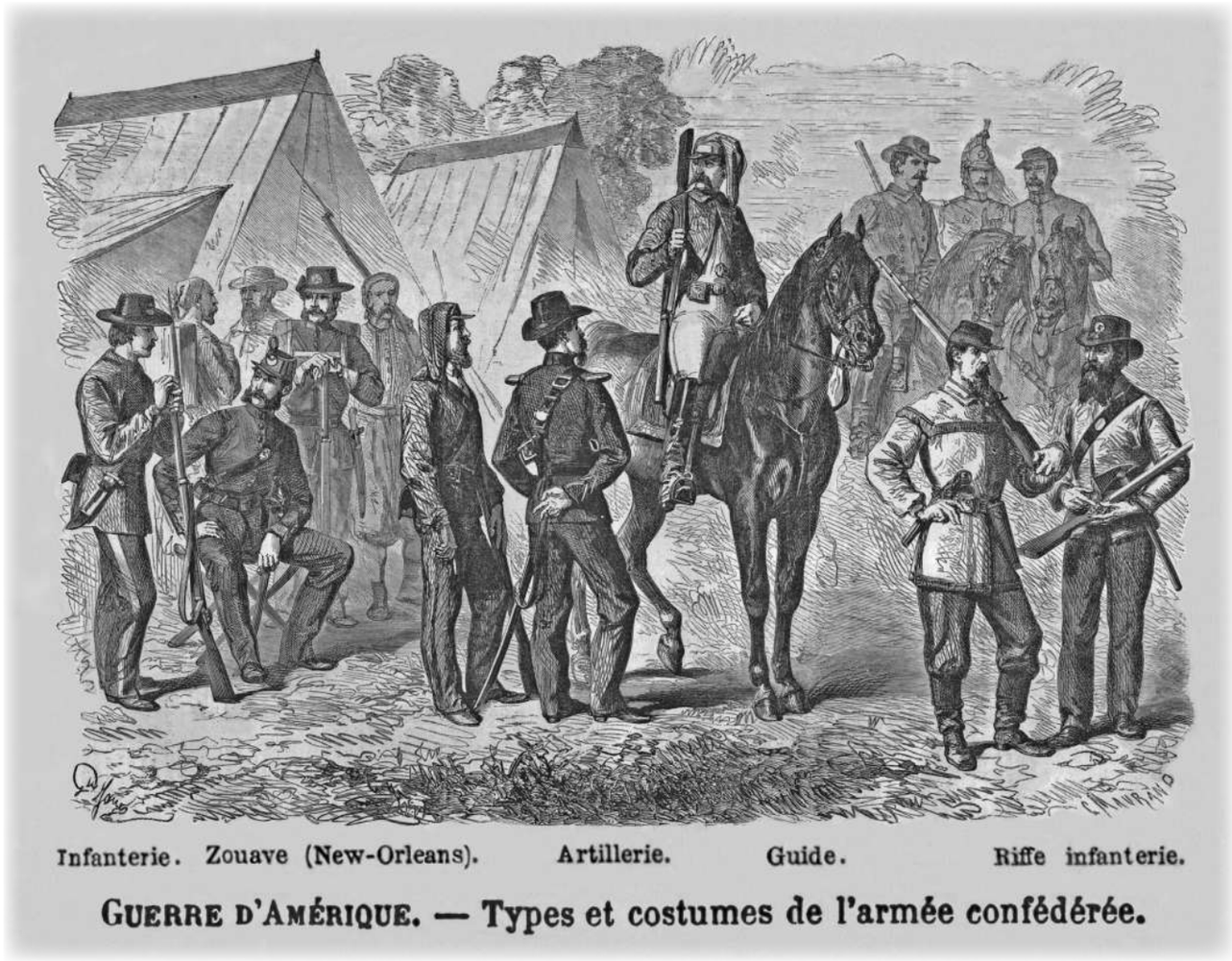


Frank Laumeister on one of his camels.

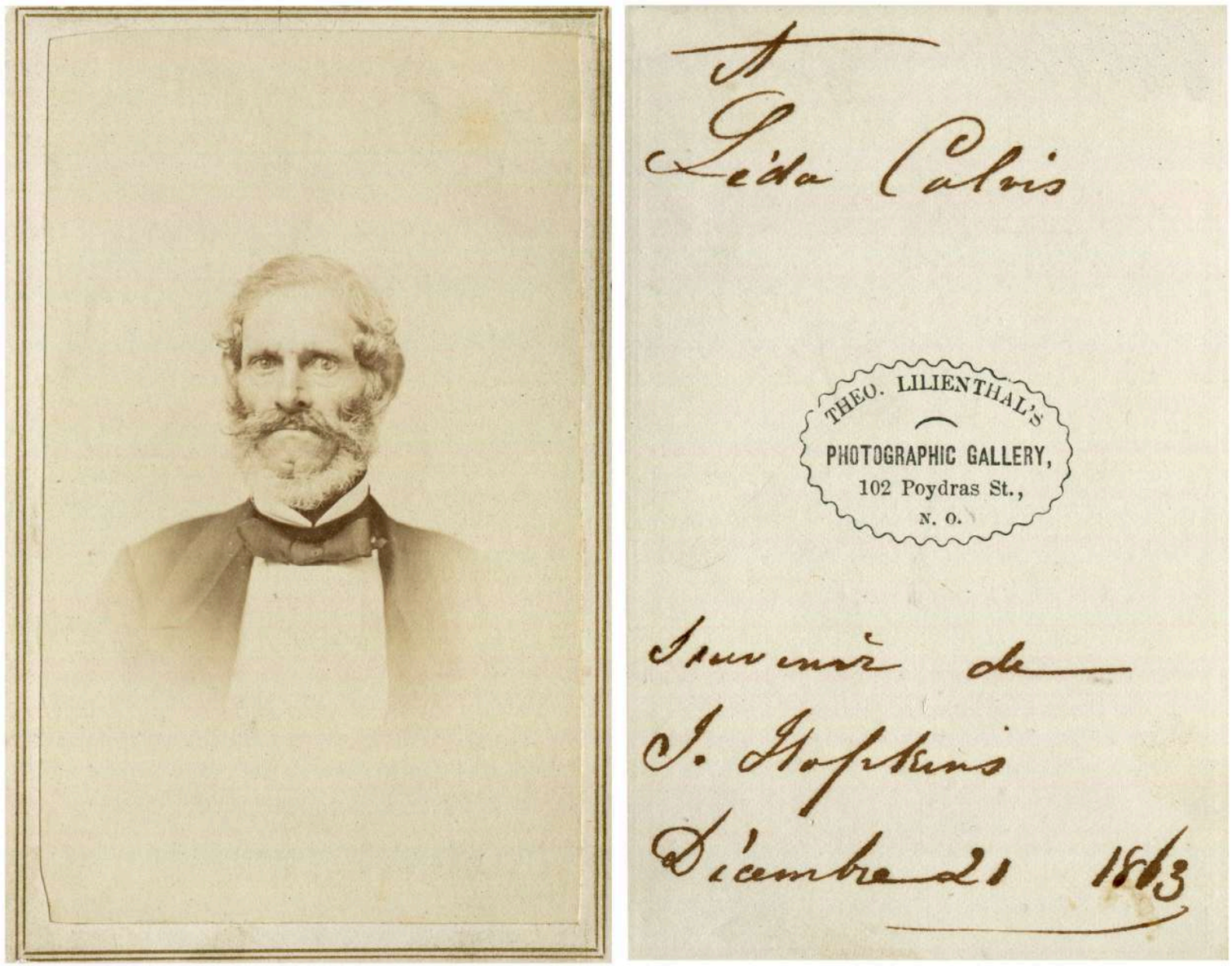
A former-solider and Canadian gold prospector, Frank Laumeister bought a herd in 1862, but soon discovered that camels weren't easy to handle. In addition, he found that they would eat anything they found: Hats, shoes, clothes that were out drying. Even soap. And so, after a few years, he gave up on the experiment, too.

Disinclined to wrangle dromedaries, Joseph joined Johnson's Mounted Volunteers, an elite cavalry unit formed in Texas during the winter of 1861-62.

A thorough disciplinarian and solid soldier, Lieutenant Colonel James Johnson whipped his men into finely-tuned fighters. In between missions he would dismount a portion of his troops and supply them with blank cartridges. Then he would charge this line with the rest of his command as it blazed away. This little exercise accustomed the horses to gunfire and taught the riders to have no fear of volleying infantry. Johnson drilled his men on horseback so often and so long that they were able to fall into combat formation without thinking.

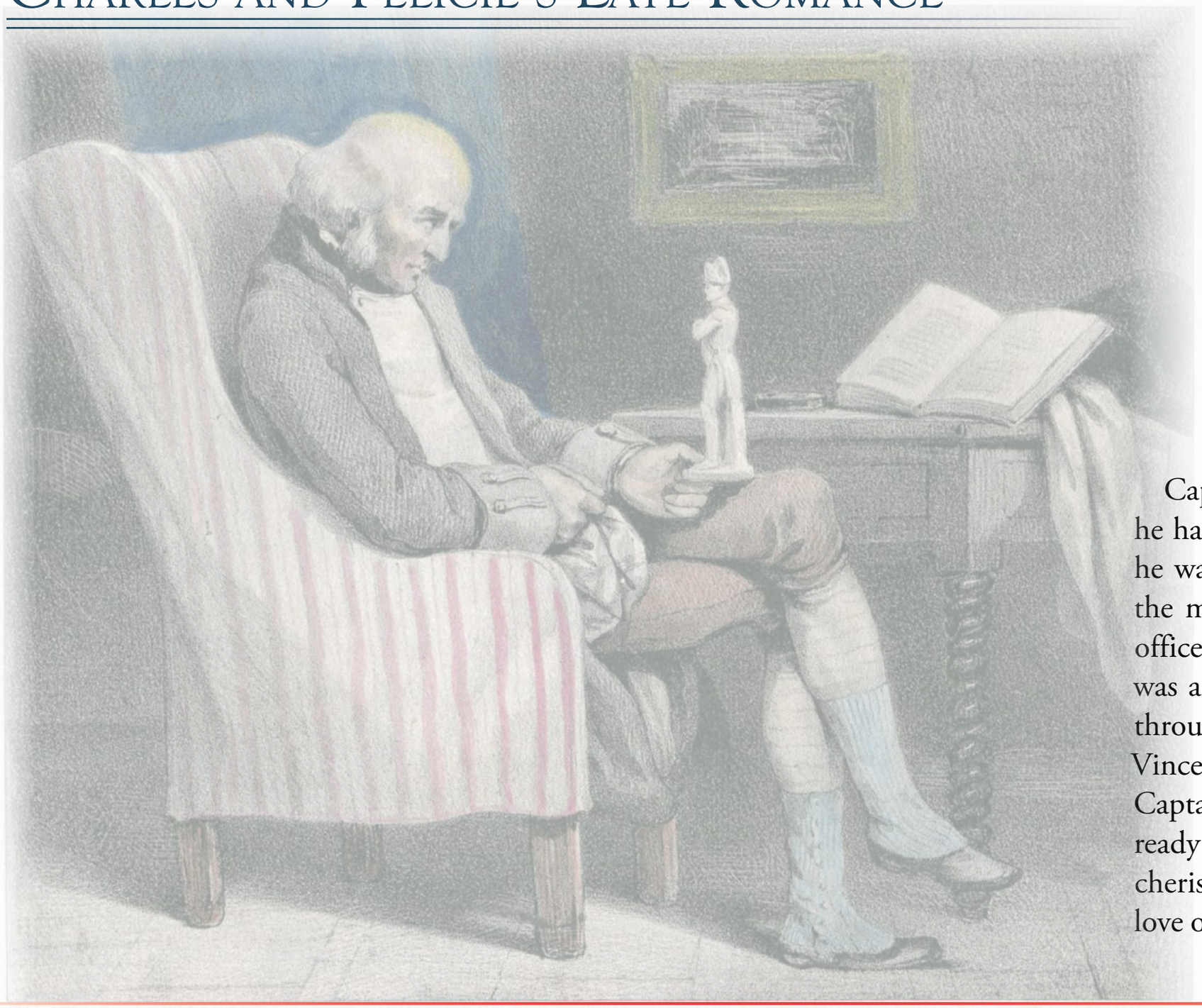


Confederate troops and their uniforms.

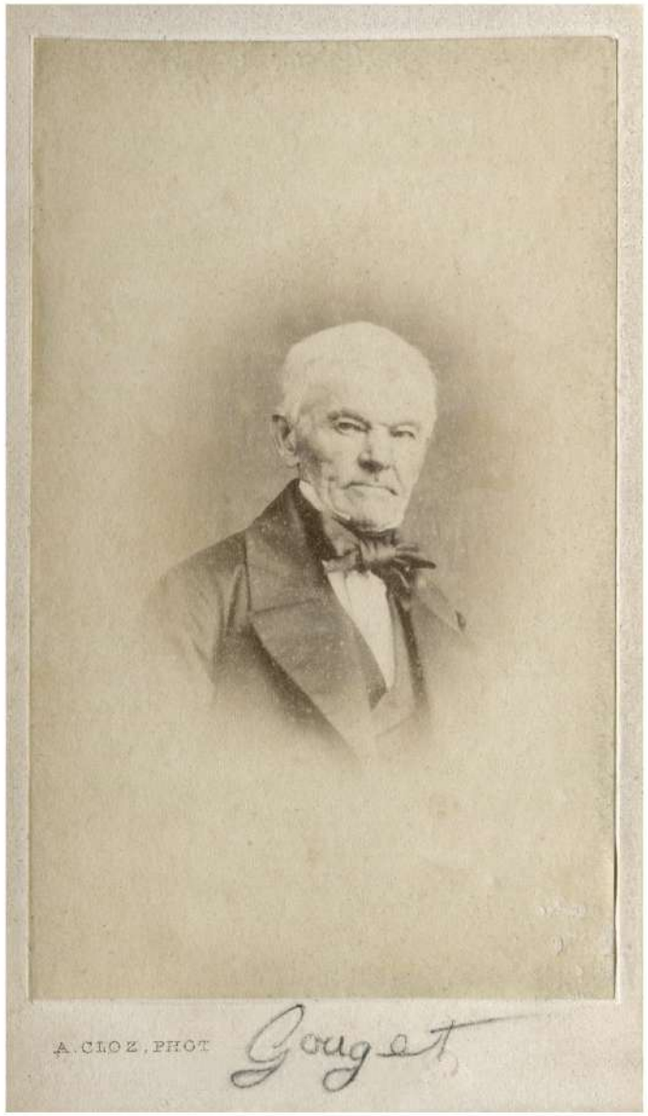


Joseph Hopkins Sr., born in Alabama in 1818. Natural son of Charles Gouget.

Charles and Félicie's Late Romance



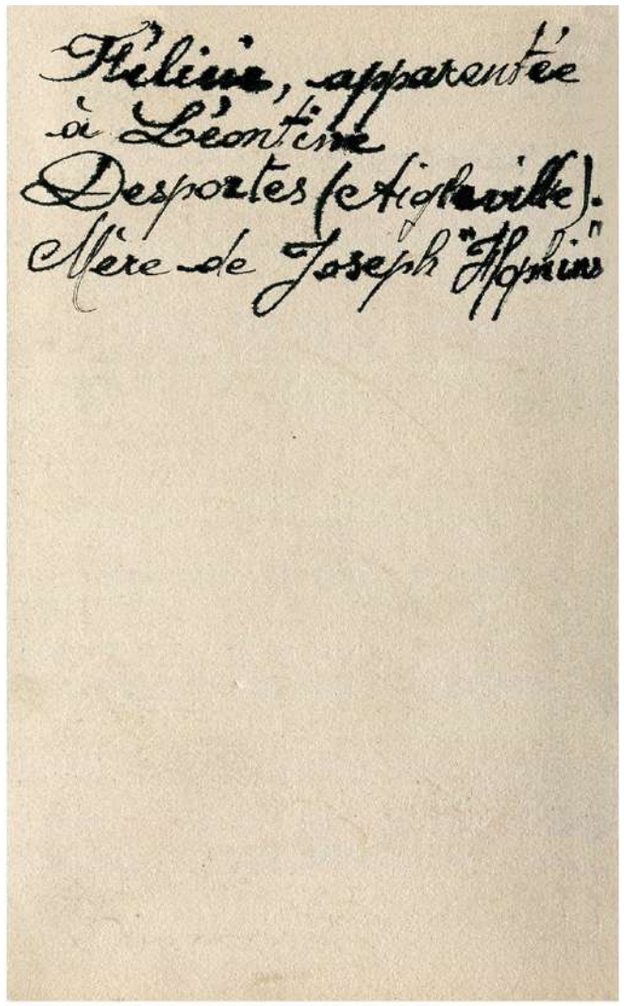
Captain Charles Gouget learned that he had had a son only in early 1863, when he was in his old age. He had settled into the modest bachelor existence of a retired officer in Dôle, in the Jura. Félicie too was an elderly lady by then. Having learnt through letters exchanged with Baron de Vincent who had been prefect of Jura, that Captain Gouget was in poor health, she was ready to move heaven and earth to share the cherished memories of her youth with the love of her life.





Charles Gouget.



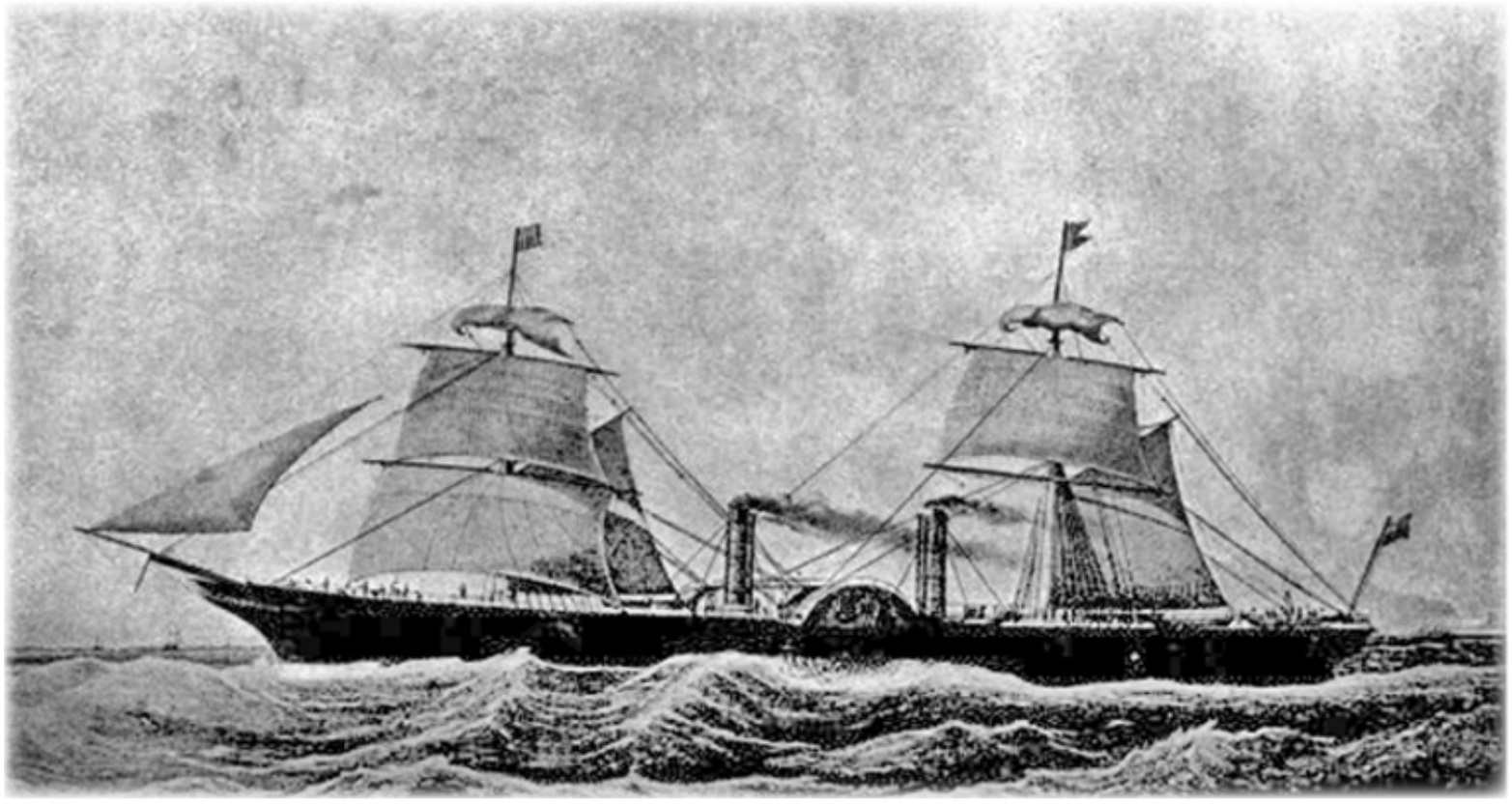


Félicie.

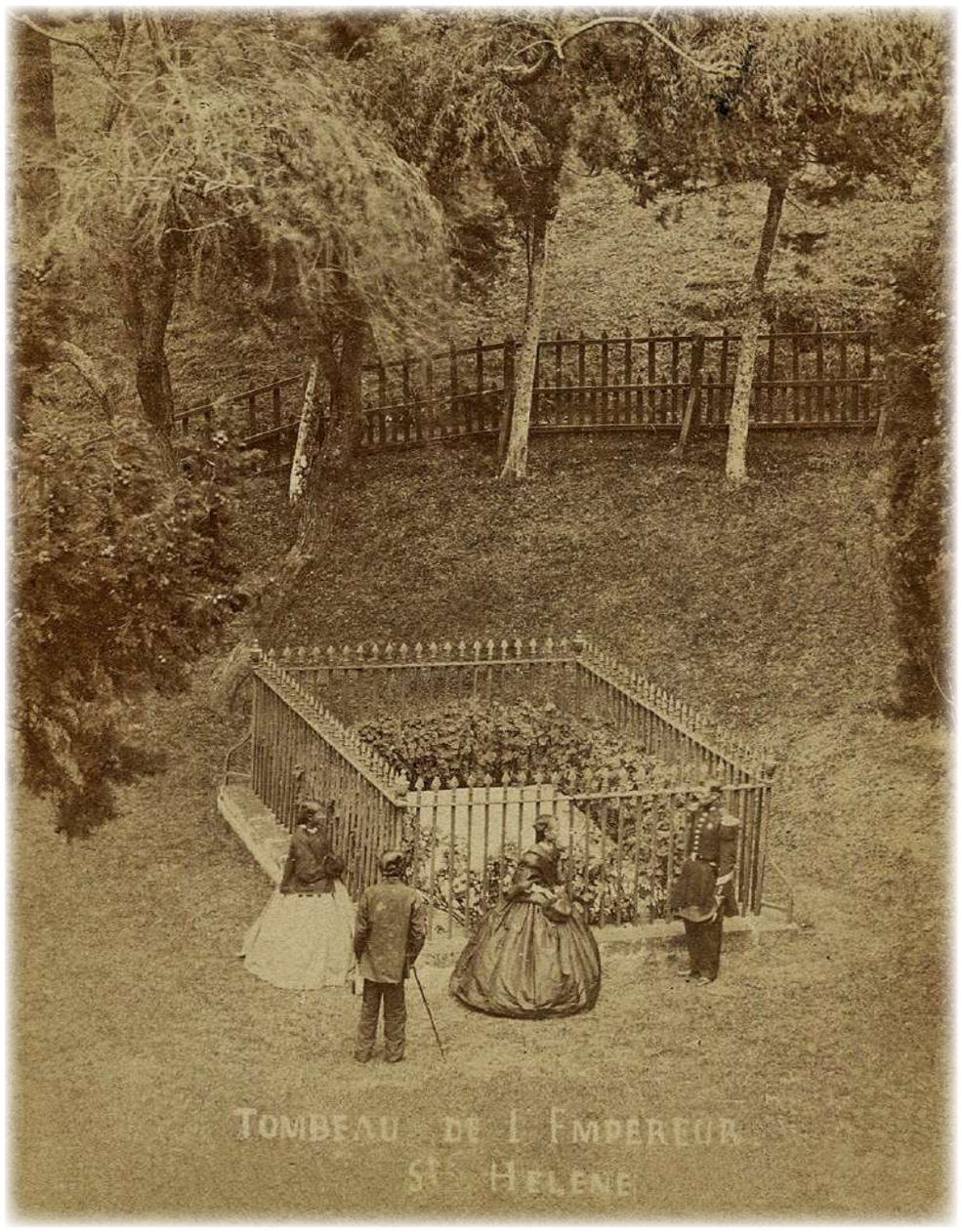
Related to Léontine Desportes (Aigleville),

Mother of Joseph Hopkins.

Decades in land speculation had made her wealthy, so gold was not a problem for her. Consequently, defying the war then raging, she managed to cross the enemy lines, reach New York and take passage on board the *Scotia*, a British liner bound for Liverpool. Reaching England in January 1863, she crossed the Channel, setting foot at last on her long-lost native soil. She then embarked on a journey via railway and carriage to eastern France, to visit Charles. Undoubtedly, the old veteran was deeply moved to see Félicie and thunderstruck to hear about their son. In addition to her own portrait, she presented him with a photographic image of Joseph. His was the sort of proud pose Captain Gouget might have held for a painter during his military life.



SS. "Scotia", 1863.



St Helena: The Emperor's Tomb.

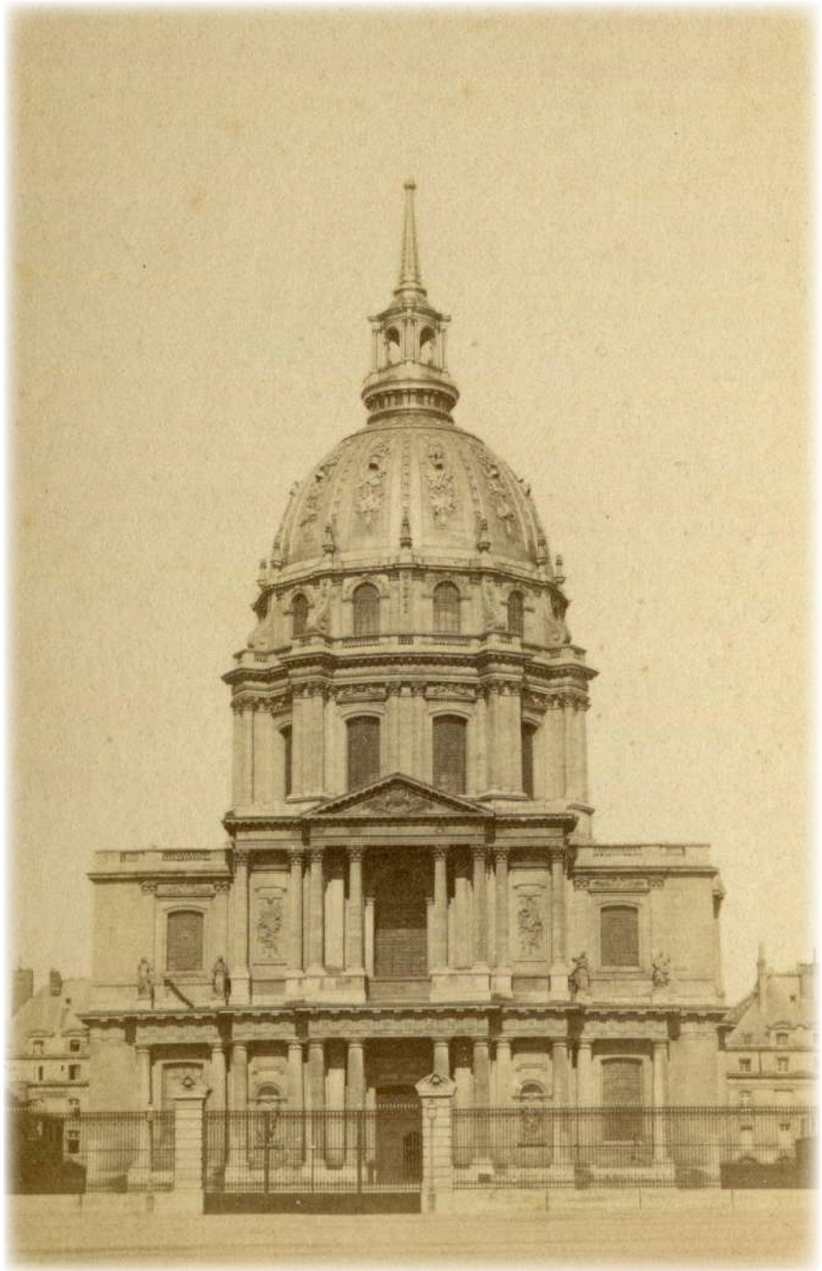
In 1840, Gouget had attended the ceremonies given for le Retour des Cendres (the return of the mortal remains of Napoleon 1st from the island of Saint Helena.)

Before the Emperor died in 1821, the British government had instructed Governor Hudson Lowe that the body was to stay on the island. A burial site was chosen about a mile from Longwood House on land owned by the merchant Richard Torbett. Initially, Torbett received £650 as an indemnity plus an annual subsidy of £50, but later, he negotiated a lump sum payment of £1200—not a bad deal as Napoleon's "ashes" were returned to France in 1840.

On December 15, 1841, a state funeral was held in Paris for the Emperor. The hearse started at the Arc de Triomphe, went down the Champs-Élysées, crossed the Place de la Concorde, drove to the Esplanade des Invalides, and stopped near the cupola in St Jérôme's Chapel.



The return of the ashes of Napoleon.



St Louis des Invalides Church.
Napoleon was entombed under its dome with great ceremony.
Photograph taken in 1863.

Charles Gouget's dream was now to go back to Paris and visit the Emperor's mausoleum, erected in 1861 at the Hotel des Invalides. He wanted to meditate in front of the glass case displaying the Emperor's bicorne. So, reunited for the last time, hand in hand, Félicie and Charles accomplished this solemn pilgrimage.



The Emperor's bicorne.



Napoleon's sarcophagus at the Invalides, Paris.

"It is my wish that my ashes may repose
on the banks of the Seine,
in the midst of the French people,
whom I have loved so well."

JOSEPH HOPKINS, CHERBOURG, BORDEAUX, AND LOUANNEC



Following a campaign in Mississippi with Johnson's Mounted Volunteers, Joseph obtained his discharge and left. On his way to Texas, he mailed a letter to his mother to inform her of his plans, enclosing a portrait of himself in uniform. He arrived in Galveston on January 2, 1863, two days after the Confederacy had taken control of the port. Then he secretly joined Captain Raphael Semmes aboard the *CSS Alabama*, hidden in a cove in the Gulf of Mexico.

Ever since Semmes's career had begun, the international press had been reporting on the real or fictitious feats or misdeeds – depending on the writer's bias – of the captain of the Confederate commerce raider. When Joseph boarded the sloop-of-war, Semmes was already a world-famous navigator.

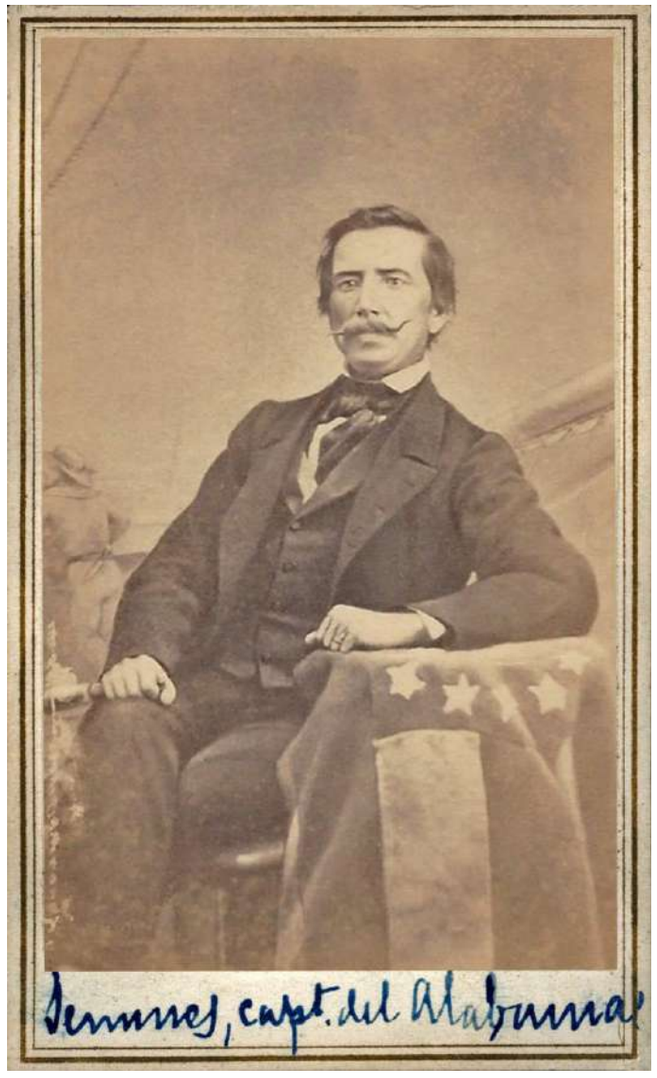
Although Joseph could not have known it, his privileged relationship with Raphael Semmes, whose wife Anna lived in Mobile and was a close friend of Joseph's mother Félicie, mirrored the trust Jean Laffite had long before placed in Joseph's father, Charles Gouget.

Like the legend of Laffite, the quicksilver Louisiana pirate, that of the commander of the *CSS Alabama* was thriving. In twenty-two months, his sloop relentlessly plied the Atlantic and Indian Oceans and the Sea of China, covering a total of 75,000 nautical miles. Semmes commandeered hundreds of merchant ships, seizing and confiscating sixty-four Yankee cargo ships, and sinking a Union warship. He always succeeded in outrunning the enemy cruisers sent to pursue him – and that was not the least of his accomplishments.

He was also generous and full of solicitude, in offering Joseph a berth aboard the Europe-bound *CSS Alabama*. Raphael Semmes was cognizant of the fact that Joseph, weary of the war raging in America, longed to be reunited with his mother. She had boldly crossed the Atlantic Ocean and was back in Bordeaux after a mysterious journey to the Jura Mountains.

Joseph's plans seemed to be off to an auspicious start, because the *CSS Alabama* would be mooring at a French port to take on coal. But the crossing was more of an ordeal than foreseen, and the ship that sailed into Cherbourg on the eleventh day of June 1864 was weary and weathered.

Raphael Semmes decided to request permission to carry out the most urgent repair work. He assigned Joseph to deliver his letter to the harbormaster. At the same time, he provided him with the means to leave the city openly, without running the risk of being arrested by the Maritime Gendarmerie. The cunning Confederate raider gave Joseph a seaman's book made out in the name of Pierre Ollivier, a Breton crew member who had deserted almost as soon as the *Alabama* had anchored. Semmes simply signed final discharge papers for Ollivier and suggested that Joseph impersonate the Breton.



Raphael Semmes.

Everything was set. Although Joseph spoke French with a thick American accent, he would somehow find a way to convince the guardsmen he was a native of Louannec, if they happened to trouble him on his way.

Evidently, when he climbed into the dory that was to row him ashore, Joseph could not foresee that the *CSS Alabama* would sink a few days later, in a duel to the death off the Cherbourg coast. Had he known, he would undoubtedly have stayed at the side of his courageous captain until the bitter end.

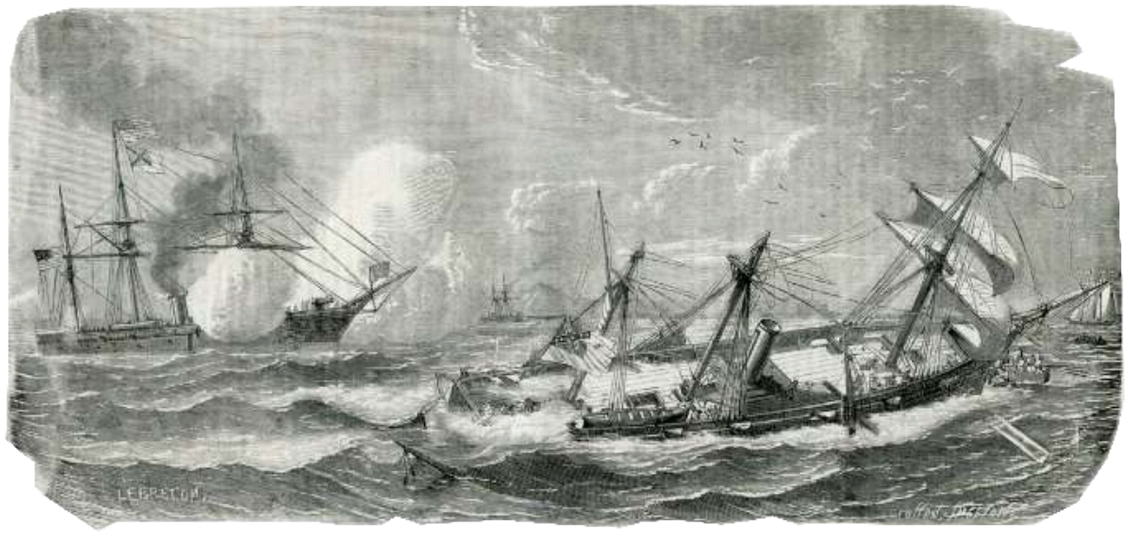
Let us see how the weekly L'*Univers illustré* reported the event immediately after it happened:

On March 28, the CSS Alabama *reached the Cape of Good Hope. When she put in at Cherbourg, her captain aimed to repair damage to the rigging and renew supplies of fuel, food, water, and wine. The vessel, commissioned two years ago by the government in Richmond, has elegant lines. She is designed for speed: she sits low in the water and her deadwork is painted black. She carries a complement of twenty-two officers and one hundred and twelve crew members, who are American, British, Danish, Breton, and even Norman.*

The Alabama*'s rival, the* USS Kearsarge, *had been moored in Brest. By the morning of June 14, she had appeared in the waters off Cherbourg pier, and sent a dinghy ashore. The masters of the two ships were friends, having served together in the past. Their former camaraderie now motivated their animosity.*

By June 15, Captain Winslow sent a challenge to his former companion-in-arms. In substance, it said: "I hope that you will not shy away from a battle. It shall no longer be said that Yankee vessels always seek out the CSS Alabama *where they are sure they will not find her."*

"I shall sail out of Cherbourg Harbor in broad daylight," Captain Semmes vowed, "and we shall see if the Kearsarge *can keep me from continuing on my course." Matching word and deed, Semmes then took every measure to be certain his ship could withstand a fight.*



***Battle between the* Alabama *and the* Kearsarge.**

On Sunday, June 19, at seven o'clock, the CSS Alabama *fired up her engines and put them in gear. Captain Semmes ordered all hands on deck to prepare for combat. All the boarding equipment was put on deck: grappling hooks, axes, sabres, daggers, and revolvers. With that accomplished, he assembled officers and crew and harangued them with a speech, to which they replied with spirited cries: "Hurrah for the South! Long live Lee! Long live Jefferson Davis! Long live France!" Thousands of onlookers had assembled to watch, atop Mount Roule and the nearby heights, from the rigging of ships in the harbor, from the terraces of the ocean spa casino, and on the piers and docks. Parisians who were touring the Normandy coast on a vacation train added to the crowd of curious spectators.*

An immense round of cheers and "huzzahs" arose from the crowd when the CSS Alabama *hoisted her Confederate colors, saluting the flag with several cannon blasts. She then proceeded out through the western passage. Just beyond the breakwater, she tacked and advanced toward her opponent, lying to the east. The night before, the crew of the* Kearsarge *had armored her hull midsections with an anchor chain, to protect her engine. The chain braced the planks crosswise, from keel to gunwale, and was covered with a teak facing.*

At ten minutes past 11 o'clock in the morning, the CSS Alabama *engaged the* Kearsarge, *about eleven miles offshore to the north-northwest. She fired her first shot from about a mile away. The Union ship retaliated with her starboard guns. A lively cannonade ensued. The two ships circled each other, starboard beam to starboard beam, moving upwind and downwind. Early in the battle, the* Kearsarge *was hit by cannonballs that damaged her armor and smokestack. One of them bounced of the sternpost and rolled to within six inches of the tiller. Another went in through one side of the pilothouse and came out the other. The captain's coat rack was sprayed with shot. But the* CSS Alabama *was faring even worse. Steel-pointed shells with fins shattered her tiller, and pierced her engine apparatus. A second mate was killed, while an officer and two seamen were wounded. Shells were buried in her decks and hull. Men fought in water up to their knees. Puffs of smoke and steam emerged from the hatches. Another strike snapped her propeller and doused her furnaces. The* CSS Alabama *headed for land, but the* Kearsarge *cut off her escape and, attacking her starboard beam again, fired its last steel-pointed shot, demolishing a twelve-foot length of the port-side rail.*

The stern of the Confederate sloop was sagging. Captain Semmes lowered his flag and sent Lieutenant Fulham to parley with the enemy from aboard a dory.

"Do you surrender?" Captain Winslow shouted to him.

"The CSS Alabama *has surrendered," Fulham replied, "but she is sinking, and I have come to ask you for aid."*

The Kearsarge *stopped, and hoisted the Union flag on the mainmast as a sign of victory. She launched her lifeboats. Captain Semmes had the wounded men put aboard the dories, along with any sailors who didn't*



***The* Alabama *sunk by the* Kearsarge.**

know how to swim. He ordered all hands able to save themselves to jump overboard, leaping last, after throwing his sword over the rail. A British yacht, the Deerhound, *rescued Captain Semmes, who was nearly exhausted, along with twelve other officers and twenty-seven seamen. They immediately headed for Southampton, haughtily ignoring Captain Winslow.*

The CSS Alabama *lost nine hands to cannon fire or drowning, one of whom was Dr. Llewellyn, swept overboard just as he finished bandaging a seaman – who survived, among the ship's twenty-one wounded in the battle.*

The Kearsarge *entered Cherbourg harbor at five o'clock in the evening without any major damage, despite being hit by twenty-five cannonballs. Only three men were injured. They were taken to the naval hospital with the Confederate wounded."*

Bound for Bordeaux, Joseph spent several days on the road. It would have aroused suspicion had he travelled by rail, for the papers Semmes had turned over to him attested to his modest rank as a seaman. So he bumped and jiggled along the rural roads in a stagecoach, chafing at every stop - God alone knows how many there were! One evening, at an inn, he learned of the tragic end of the *CSS Alabama*. His sorrow was keen, but he was relieved to know that his captain was safe and had succeeded in escaping to England.

Meanwhile, Félicie was wringing her hands with impatience. Still no sign of her son! Joseph had been delayed by his need to dodge the gendarmes. His outlandish accent made them scratch their heads in puzzlement. Also, he seemed too proud to be a common seaman. Joseph judged it wiser to continue southward on narrow country roads. He avoided wardens on foot, hid when he heard the highway guards' horses approaching, and shunned villages and larger settlements. For a soldier who had fought a guerrilla war in Texas, this was not perilous – but it was time-consuming, and his mother was awaiting him.

Soon the poor woman, in despair, became convinced that he had perished in the waters off Cherbourg, or that he was being held prisoner aboard the *Kearsarge*.



With the bitter taste of ashes in her mouth, she resolved to return to Alabama. Anna, as the wife of Raphael Semmes, would be able to give her the most reliable information.

Unfortunately, during the westward crossing, Félicie suffered a stroke. Joseph would never have a chance to know the secret of his birth.

Joseph learned of his mother's death upon his arrival in Bordeaux. Grieving, uncertain what course to take, Joseph decided to remain in France until the civil war ravaging his country ended.

He nevertheless felt he had a duty to travel to Brittany to return to its rightful owner the seaman's book that had been so useful to him. He enclosed Pierre Ollivier's discharge papers signed by Captain Semmes. The document was valuable because, although it was unlikely that anyone in Louannec was aware of the fact, Ollivier had deserted.

And this is the point where the plot takes an incredible turn. Yves and Joseph Ollivier, Pierre's sons, greeted Hopkins with open arms. Their father had recently gone to his grave, on June 17 of that very year. They plied him with questions about the end of the *CSS Alabama*. The whole family put on a feast in honor of the Confederate officer.

For Pierre Ollivier had invented a battle story that was far more glorious than the truth. In every sailors' tavern on the Normandy coast, he trumpeted that he had fought like a lion from his post on the deck of the *Alabama*, as soon as the *Kearsarge* had fired the first shot. When the ship began to sink, and the water was up to a man's waist, he'd been one of the last to abandon the vessel. He stayed with Captain Semmes, whose strength was flagging, until the officer was rescued.

Joseph kept his smiles to himself and took care not to ruin the party by puncturing his hosts' illusions. He assented: the *Alabama* might have gotten the better of the enemy, had its ammunition been of higher quality. Moreover, the Yankees had not given the rebels enough time to repair the sloop. He even recalled the cruel twist of fate that had spared the *Kearsarge*'s tiller. Had the shot exploded, the vessel, rudderless and unable to steer, would have been forced to surrender. It was Joseph's turn to be toasted as a hero.

Charmed by the craggy beauty of the Armorican coast and cosseted by the Ollivier family, Joseph considered settling in Louannec. Now he was the great soldier whose exploits people travelled from afar to hear. Our hero enjoyed a delightful interlude in Brittany, never suspecting that he would soon be hurled into another conflict.



Louannec: the village and the church.

JOSEPH HOPKINS AND THE PARIS COMMUNE OF 1871

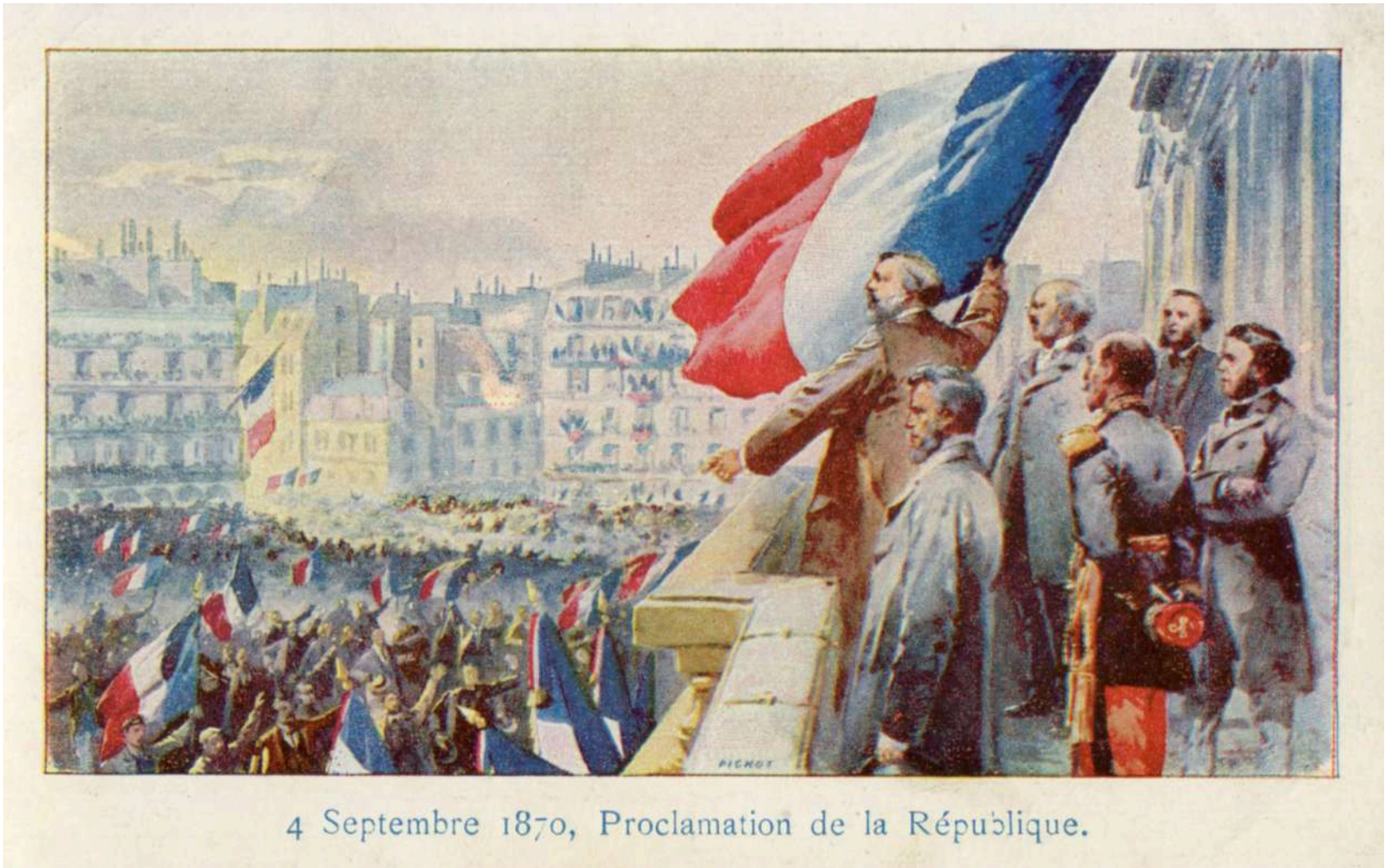


On July 19th, 1870, France declared war on Prussia. The whole country was vibrating with patriotic fervor. Joseph, who had just celebrated his fifty-third birthday, enlisted in the local chapter of the national guard.

On September 4th of the same year, the Republic was proclaimed, in the aftermath of the shameful surrender of Emperor Napoleon III. But over the following months, the new Government of National Defense failed to deal effectively with Bismarck's troops. Hostilities tore Paris asunder. On March 18th, 1871, the Communards rebelled, and took over.

The Parti de l'Ordre had fled to Versailles. There, they voted to raise battalions of volunteers in the provinces, march on Paris and suppress the uprising. Rank upon rank of rural men were recruited and given rudimentary training by officers exasperated by the disgraceful defeat of the French army.

But Adolphe Thiers, head of the provisional government, strategically delayed the final assault. He had learned the lessons of the revolutions of 1830 and 1848: it is self-defeating to wear out soldiers of the line with guerilla encounters, skirmishes, and ambushes. Thiers preferred to let the insurrection in Paris develop, the better to crush it later.



Proclamation of the French Republic, September 4th, 1870.

The country people of Louannec believed the Parisians to be dangerous anarchists, and Joseph had no other judgment to go by. So, in order to serve the cause he believed to be right, just as he had in fighting for the rebel army in America, he reported his prior military experience to a hastily organized conscription committee, and was integrated into a Free Corps.



Rookies and old-timers, defenders of the Commune.

Excerpts from Joseph's diary.

The Seven-Day Battle.

General Douay has ordered many summary executions in Paris. The soldiers are stained red with blood by all the slaughter. The city, although hushed like a cemetery, is at a peak of tension. I sense an enormous terror looming.

Corpses are heaped in the streets and gardens, and on the squares. Wells, sewers, and quarries are clogged with dead bodies.

The Tuileries Palace is burning! The wall of flames, whipped by the wind, is reflected in pools of blood. Elsewhere, factories and warehouses are aflame. I hear that the Fédérés did not set all of these fires. There are cases of arson: merchants are burning goods they are unable to sell, hoping to collect on their insurance policies.

Turncoat thugs are the most bloodthirsty killers. Until the wind changed, they hung with the Communards. Aware of their treachery, fearing it will be discovered, they display ignoble zeal. They are ready to cut the whole world's throat. Whenever a neighborhood is taken over, they try to prove their good faith by exposing the partisans of the Commune. They use our firing squads to settle personal scores.



The Seven-Day Battle.



The burning of the Tuileries Palace.

Versailles is covering Paris with an immense, blood-red shroud. The rat-a-tat-tat from machine-gun nests is constant. This is truly a massacre. Men who are merely wounded are picked off as they attempt to crawl away. It's like shooting fish in a barrel.



Boulevard Picpus, on the outskirts of town. On the night of May 25th, two elderly Poles, the last survivors of the exile of 1831, brew a pot of tea, and discuss the events. Age has eliminated them from participating as anything other than observers. They know the Versaillais have taken over the quarter, and their nephew is a lieutenant. Perhaps he'll stop by! They lay the table with three cups. While they chat peacefully, our squadron is questioning the concierge of their building.

"Any foreigners living here?" our captain asks.

"Yes, sir," the cowardly gossip replies. "Two Poles, on the sixth floor."

"Poles! They're all conspiring with the Communards. Take us to them!"

The concierge obeys. The bully knocks on the door, the uncle rushes to open it, but it's not his nephew.

"You were sending signals," the captain charges, gesturing towards the candles they lit for the party. "Why are there three cups? Where is the man you're hiding?"

The two old men try to babble an explanation, but their fate is already sealed. Our soldiers push them into the stairs, insulting them, and shoot them in front of the door on the street.

I can't bear it anymore. The disgusting murder of these two old gentlemen, unarmed and a threat to no one, has caused the scales to fall from my eyes. I now see the truth about the "Parti de l'Ordre." A moment later, a man leaps out of the shadows. He is the Poles' nephew, but he's too late to prevent their execution. Insane with rage, he draws his pistol, shoots the captain, and dashes off. I take advantage of the confusion to make my own escape.

The Versaillais have caught me, and are holding me prisoner. Fortunately, the only crime I am charged with is rescuing a poor woman from drowning. The Versaillais were sure she had been destroying property by throwing firebombs. Shouting "Sale pétroleuse !" they flung her into the Seine from the Quai de Bercy.

There are over five hundred of us prisoners. Most of the soldiers guarding us have faces of horrifyingly idiotic ferocity. Obviously, these armed cretins are thinking about how they will be shooting us, not long from now.

"Forward, march!"

There's a great deal of marching. I twisted my ankle, and now it is so swollen I can barely get my boots on. It is also terribly painful. The state of my nerves intensifies the suffering even more. Although my neighbor is nearly as weary as I am, he helps me limp along. The prisoners who fall are immediately shot in the neck. We cross Paris between two lines of gendarmes, heading for Luxembourg Gardens.



A Soldier of the Line.

People who, the week before, had shouted, "Vive la Commune!" are now yelling, "Vive Thiers!" They call us incendiaries and murderers. Nothing surprises me anymore.

The soldiers make off with whatever they can get their hands on. Anyone who has remained in the city instead of fleeing to Versailles is guilty. The test is foolproof, and everything is looted. Also, it is not a good idea to have had an enemy or competitor. The wine-merchant on the corner informs on the one down the street. There are plenty of opportunities to satisfy old personal grudges.

I was tormented by doubts. Were we really being taken to the Orangerie, or were they marching us to our doom, at the wall? If it was the firing squad, I was sure that some would be spared: we'd be subjected to a sadistic test. There's a story about General de Galliffet picking victims from a group of prisoners. Pointing to each man he chose, he would bark, "Are you a veteran?"

"Yes, sir."

"See? I know how to spot them. Step forward!"

When he had chosen ninety-three men, he ordered:

"Now, have them shot!"

And turning to the other prisoners with a sardonic grin, he said, "Ninety-three! Ninety-three, that terrible year. You shall never forget the number."

In Paris, on the morning of Sunday, May 28th, as the lugubrious "Seven-Day Battle" concludes, I am at the end of my rope. Neither dead nor alive. Soaking wet and freezing, drained and dejected, at an utter loss for strength and courage.

We reach Luxembourg Palace. As I walk past the guards at the gates, I hear:

"Look at that poor bastard. He's not long for this world."

"I see him. The crows will be eating him soon!"

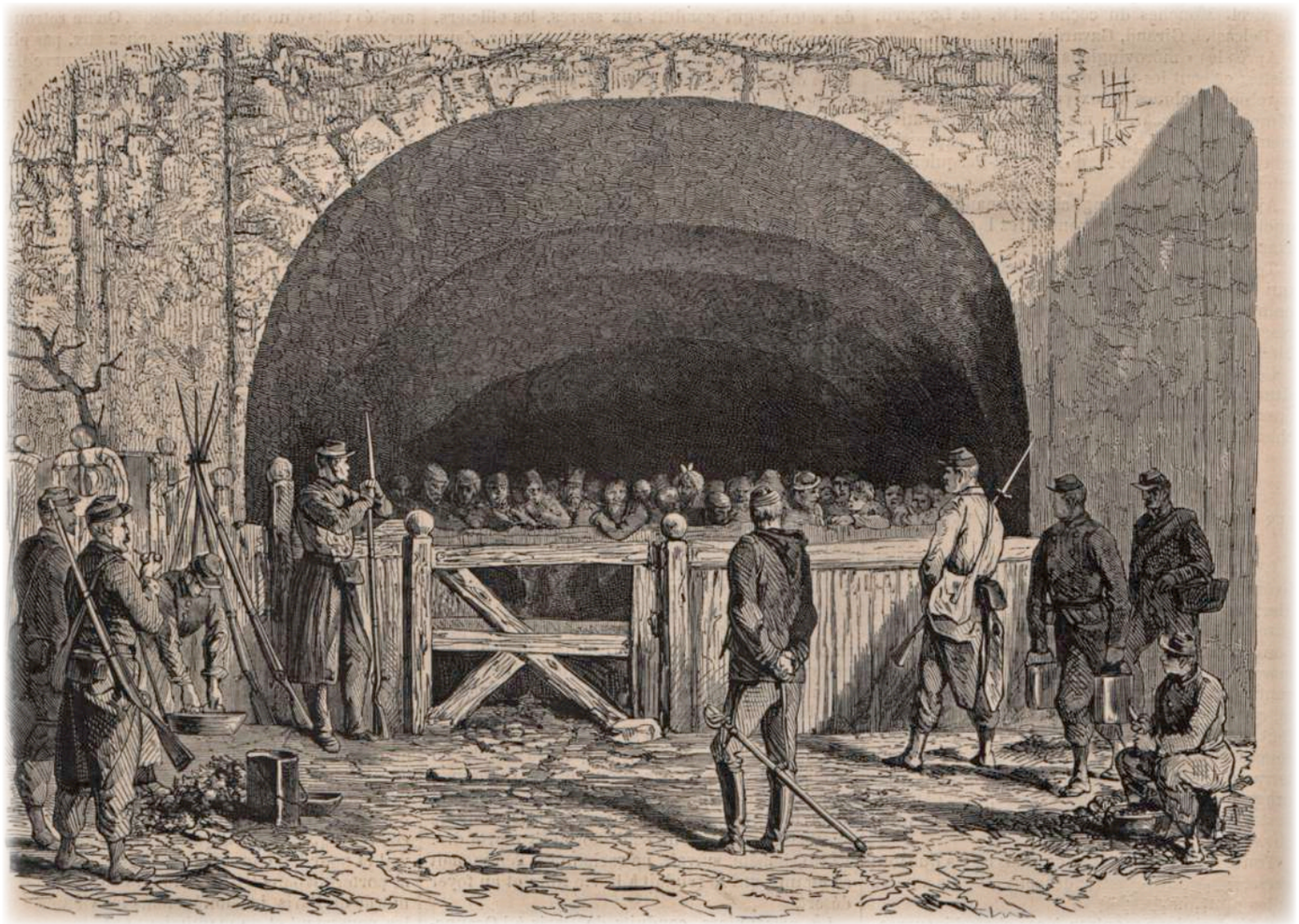
"Good. He won't even cost us a bullet."

A few steps farther along, we come face to face with a machine gun.

"See the pepper mill?" the soldiers cry. "Pretty soon, you'll get a taste!"



Pepper Mills.



Luxemburg Gardens - The Orangery.

In front of the Senate, I see a plump young officer cadet who has a friendly smile.

"What is bothering you?" he asks, in a sympathetic voice. I tell him, without complaining.

"All right, I'll send you to the ambulance."

Wonderful! The name conjures up a cloud of delights: a bed, a cup of hot chamomile tea, and maybe a little soup, too.

How bitterly I was disappointed! I was led to the Orangery. It had been divided into three parts with barriers made of orange-tree planters, with the soil removed. Soldiers stood guard in the center aisle. On either side, the prisoners were crammed in. The front door was guarded by gendarmes, and beyond them, beneath dark and dilapidated arcades, an abandoned quarry.

I joined the group on the right. Everyone had claimed a mat from the pile stored there to protect the orange trees from frost. It wasn't much of a bed, but it was still welcome. I stretched out on one of them, and grabbed another to serve as a cover. I was close to being warm.

Four of us are in the corner. Two orange-tree planters separate us from the others. The poor devils in the middle lack straw mats. More are being crowded in. The Versaillais have emptied the insane asylums and brought the inmates here. These fellows are chained to the iron posts of the structure. They are howling for all they are worth. As long as day lasts, it's bearable, but nightfall casts a terrifying shroud of darkness over our surroundings.

I shall never forget the screeches of the matron, who had helped man the cannon in the thick of the battle. She would bawl, "These bastards killed my daughter, not yet twelve years old! Murderers! Scum!"

You cannot imagine the way this clamoring churns in my empty stomach.



Clara Fournier, Female Gunner.

Communard Amazons are howling like wolves caught in a trap. Wounded men groan in pain. In the throes of death, they choke and wheeze. One of them shouts as he passes. His final, inarticulate cry summons the soldiers, who immediately come in and carry his body away.

Now I understand why they were so prompt. They strip the corpses of whatever loot they can. All the soldiers own several pairs of boots. They sell the dead man's watch, if he has one, and split the profits.

I overhear infantrymen guarding the Orangerie, and chatting:

"How many?"

"Five."

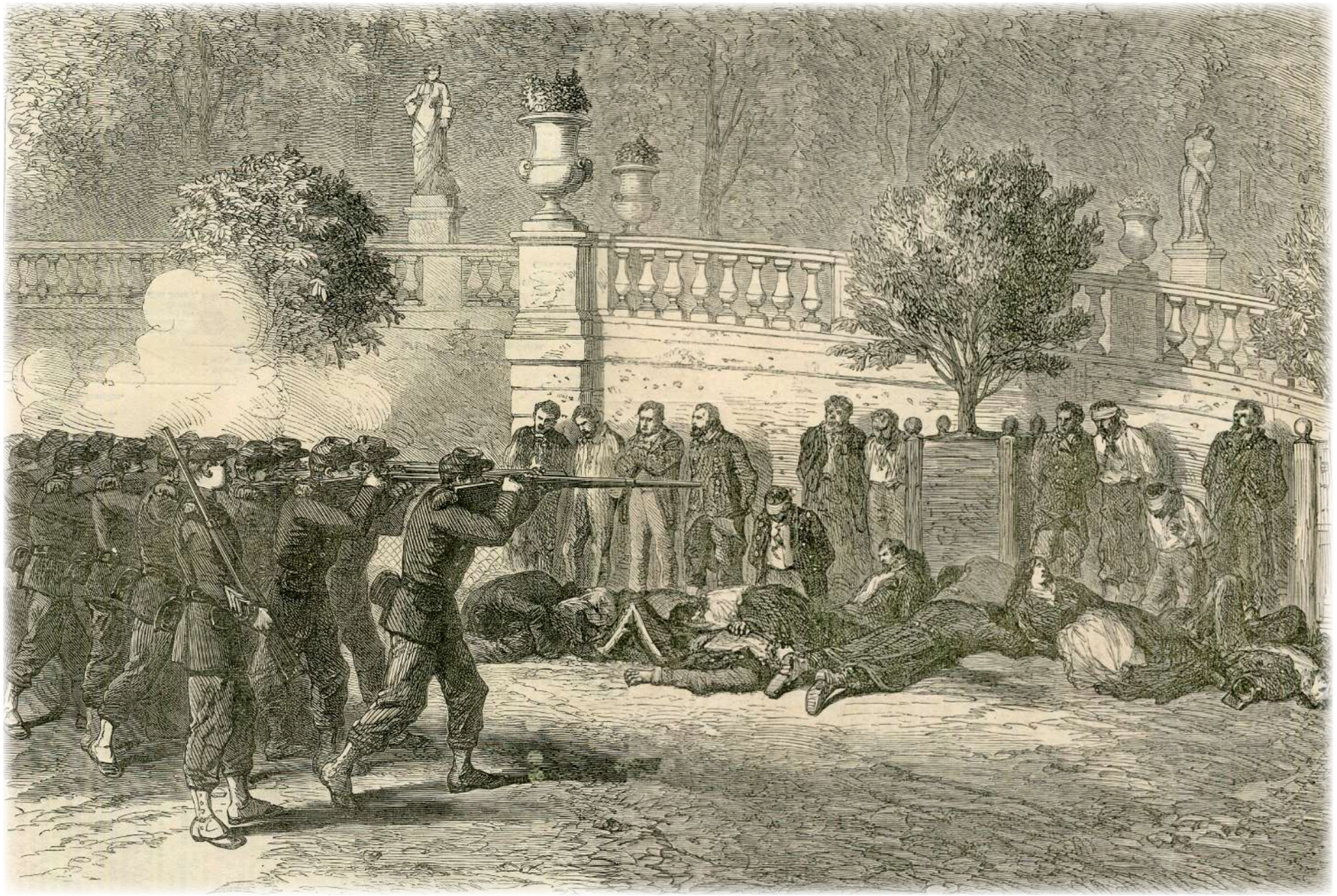
"Six, for me."

"No less than twenty, in my case. With the bayonet, every single one!"

"Do you remember when I slashed that plump redhead's belly, and the baby spilled out onto the cobblestones?"

"By God I do! And remember that snot-nosed kid trying to sneak off sidewise, creeping like a crab? I broke both of that goddamned little anarchist's legs, I did."

I also pass by the women these brutes drag into corners, using them to relieve themselves of their lust.



Shooting prisoners in Luxembourg Gardens.

Suddenly, a skinny, frantic fellow with wild eyes rushes in, followed by a lieutenant and a general. The captain belongs in an insane asylum.

He hurries up to us and barks, "What is this? I hear you're whispering. Talking is forbidden! I have ways of spying on you, you know!"

Then he turns to the gendarmes :

"If more than three of these vermin form a group, I order you to fire without warning!"

Then he turned on his heel, and left. The captain already has a brutal reputation. He is the one who orders that prisoners be bound and flogged for hours, until they expire. Even the torturers tire of beating them. Imagine the suffering of the helpless victims!

The soldiers rifle through the pockets of the corpses. Bodies are piling up. Their sergeant



Corpses of the Communards in their coffins.

orders them to choose a dozen of them - the most presentable ones, of course - and stuff them into hastily made coffins. The wooden boxes are lined up on the lawn. We can't imagine why, but then a photographer and his lackey drive up. The photographer unfolds a large tripod and sets a box on top of it. He then goes about the business of inserting and removing the glass plates, as calmly as if he were making a family portrait, fiddling with the contraption all the while. Meanwhile, the errand boy capers about, giggling idiotically: "Don't move!" "Say cheese!" He seems quite insensitive to the macabre scene.

We have been ordered to assemble at attention, for a review. An elderly officer takes me aside and asks, "Who are you? What did you do?"

"Nothing, sir."

"Really? Because I am looking for a certain man, and you match the description I was given of him."

He stares at me, but I do not say a word until he murmurs that the person in question was recommended to him by the mayor of Louannec.

That changes everything. I nod and discreetly reply that yes, I am from Louannec.

"Hurry up, then." He gives me a sack. "Hide this somewhere. When the time comes, use it, and use it well. God be with ye!"

The Orangery was abuzz with the news. The fellow with the funny accent, who had been imprisoned under a borrowed name, had escaped at sunset the day before. He'd donned a lieutenant's cap and buttoned his wasted frame into an overcoat and a pair of red trousers. When the sentries saluted him, he said "Good night, boys." For days afterwards, the whole corps of Luxembourg wardens, humiliated, stayed mad as hornets.

Clever as a Mohican, the fugitive wormed his way past all the checkpoints set up in Paris and on its outskirts. He sneaked onto a freight train, leaping from boxcar to boxcar several times.

Finally, he reached Louannec, where he fell into the arms of the Ollivier family, safe and sound. What a relief! They believed they had no hope of seeing him again.





Versailles troops patrolling railroad tracks.

The reader is entitled to wonder how this story - or legend - worked its way into a Dôle's ear, since Joseph never set foot in Franche-Comté. Inspired by the great Charles Perrault, let us answer the question with another tale:

Once upon a time... there was a pretty Neapolitan lass named Caterina d'Angelo. She was born at the foot of Vesuvius in 1884: her father was a stonemason and her mother, a seamstress. At 16, Caterina sailed for Tunis, where her elder sister Assunta was living. Assunta had married a businessman named Giuseppe Casaluce, and the two would have twelve children. Caterina d'Angelo did not know how to read or write, but she was endowed with wit and beautiful voice, and was able to play the piano. She lived with the Casaluce family in Ariana and La Goulette until she wed Hyacinthe Ollivier, chief petty officer aboard a French Navy ship. The couple had a daughter, Yvonne Marie-Noëlle, born in 1911, and a son, Joseph Léon, two years later.



Chief Petty Officer Hyacinthe Ollivier, 1916.

During World War One, Hyacinthe Ollivier piloted a destroyer in the Dardanelles, as part of the French Armée de l'Orient. Wounded, he died in 1919 at Sidi Abdallah Hospital in Tunisia. Caterina later remarried Gustave Marchand, an officer in the Foreign Legion. In 1931, when Marchand retired with the rank of lieutenant-colonel, the family moved to Saint-Raphaël, on the French Mediterranean coast.



Captain Gustave Marchand, of 2nd Foreign Regiment, riding at the head of his troops. Bizerte, Tunisia, November 11th, 1928.

It so happens, by some incredible accident, Caterina d'Angelo was my grandmother. Her first husband, Hyacinthe Ollivier, was my grandfather. Hyacinthe had grown up in Louannec, the son of Yves Marie Ollivier, a fisherman, one of the two brothers who were so kind to Joseph after the tragedy of Cherbourg in 1864. That is how the amazing story of Joseph's adventures was handed down from generation to generation, until my maternal grandmother told it to me in 1957, when I was vacationing with her at a spa in the Pyrenees. It really impressed me, because that was the year



Caterina d'Angelo.

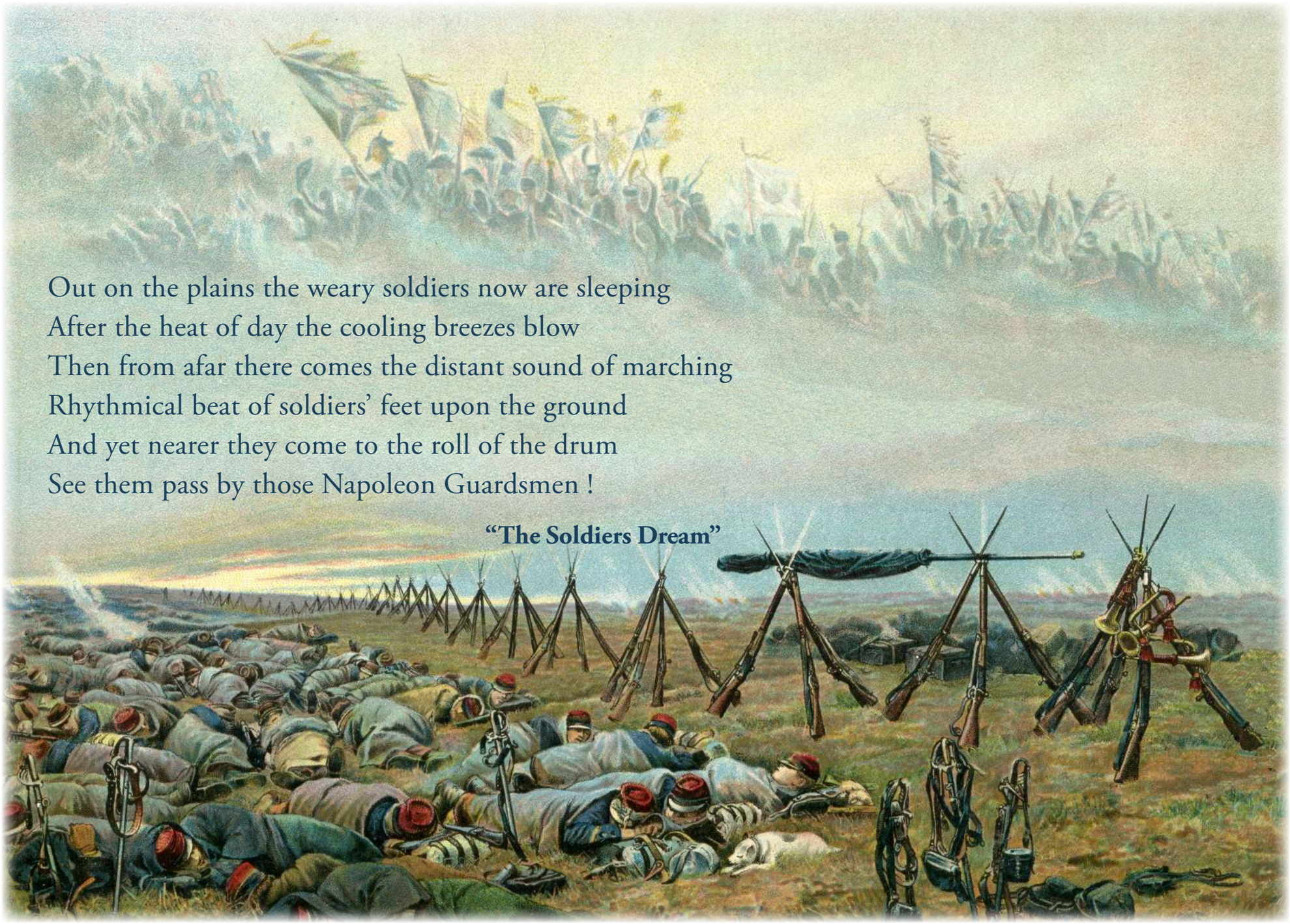


Gérard Dôle on stage at the Casino de Luchon, 1957.



Yvonne Ollivier and her black dog Wolf.

I was crazy about Davy Crockett. In fact, I even sang his theme song on stage at the Casino in Luchon, accompanied by Louis Corchia and his orchestra, to an audience of children assembled for their chocolatines and milk at snack time. The Wild West had come full circle.


Out on the plains the weary soldiers now are sleeping
After the heat of day the cooling breezes blow
Then from afar there comes the distant sound of marching
Rhythmical beat of soldiers' feet upon the ground
And yet nearer they come to the roll of the drum
See them pass by those Napoleon Guardsmen !
"The Soldiers Dream"

