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ALCIDE BOUANCHAUD

Pointe Coupee Artillery, Louisiana

By Brian Costello

One hundred miles north of New Orleans, at the juncture of the Mississippi, Atchafalaya and Red Rivers, lies the Creole Mesopotamia of Pointe Coupee Parish, Louisiana, one of the oldest settlements in the Mississippi Valley. This important agricultural region, equally rich in history, culture and traditions, has been the site of continuous habitation since 1720 and many of its present-day citizens can trace their ancestry to the earliest settlers. Famous sons and daughters of Pointe Coupee include statesman and philanthropist Julien Poydras, Governor Arnaud Beauvais, Judge Charles Parlange, Justice Olivier Provosty, General John Archer Lejeune of United States Marines fame, New Orleans Mayor deLesseps "Chep" Morrison and his first cousin Congresswoman and Ambassador Corinne "Lindy" Claiborne Boggs, novelist Ernest Gaines, General Russell Honore and, the most gallant of all, Captain Alcide Bouanchaud of the celebrated Pointe Coupee Artillery.

Joseph Alcide Bouanchaud, as the name was pronounced during his lifetime, was born on the beautiful oxbow lake of False River, once the main channel of the Mississippi, just west of the town of New Roads, on August 16, 1838. His mother, Charlotte Saizan, was descended from several of the oldest families of False River. His father, Pierre Bouanchaud, sailed from the town of St. Nazaire, near Nantes, France, and was a cotton planter, member of the Police Jury and marguillier (church warden).

Alcide Bouanchaud was the second of four children, all boys, born to the couple. Pierre Bouanchaud, Jr. was older, Jules, who died as a child, and Emile Bouanchaud were younger. The Bouanchaud boys had an older half-brother, Jean Baptiste St. Cyr, Jr., issue of their mother's previous marriage which had ended in her widowhood.

At the age of 14, Alcide Bouanchaud was placed under the tutelage of Professor Hypolite Didier, headmaster of nearby Poydras College. After two years of instruction, he enrolled in a boys' academy at Elizabethtown, Kentucky, where he remained for two years. At Elizabethtown, he formed a lasting friendship with his professor and principal, General Lafayette Hewitt, a distinguished Auditor of the State of Kentucky. Upon the completion of his studies, young Bouanchaud returned to his native parish and moved with his family to a cotton farm on the Island or opposite bank of False River from where he had been born. He was appointed a deputy in the office of Clerk of Court for Pointe Coupee in 1858. In 1860, he was united in marriage with Amelia Hebert, daughter of Forestin Hebert and Adeline Daigle, natives of Iberville Parish, who had established a sugar plantation in partnership with the St. Dizier family on the Island of False River in 1855. Mr. Hebert was a first cousin of Governor and Brigadier General Paul Octave Hebert and Brigadier General Louis Hebert. Ten months after their wedding, Alcide and Amelia became the parents of the first of their five children: a daughter named Marie Althee.

Althee's birth coincided with the election of Abraham Lincoln to the United States presidency. The Bouanchauds were "uncompromising secessionists" and, when the formation of military units immediately got underway, Pierre, Sr. and sons were among the first to enter the ranks of gray. Pierre, Sr. served in Company H of the Pointe Coupee Regiment, Louisiana State Militia. Pierre, Jr. joined Captain Henri Knaps' company of the Fausse Riviere Guards and later transferred to Captain Severin Porche's cavalry unit, which became Company K of the 2nd Louisiana Cavalry (I had three direct ancestors serve). Alcide first served as an adjutant in the Pointe Coupee Regiment of the Louisiana Militia, then he and Emile Bouanchaud and their half-brother, Jean Baptiste St. Cyr, cast their lots with the Pointe Coupee Battery, organized by a Mexican War veteran named Richard A. Stewart. Alcide, enlisting on June 20, 1861, was immediately assigned the rank of 1st Lieutenant. On November 7, the men saw their first major action, at the Battle of Belmont. Originally a single battery, the unit was armed with one 10 pound Parrott gun, two 12 pound howitzers and three 6 pound smoothbores by April 6, 1862. Two months later, on June 21 at Abbeville, Mississippi, the unit was increased to battalion strength. The original unit was designated Company A with Alcide Bouanchaud as its captain. New recruits formed Company B, under the command of Captain William Davidson. Company C, was formed from some members of Company A and new recruits under Captain Alexandre Chustz of Pointe Coupee Parish.

The surnames of the young warriors of the Pointe Coupee Artillery Battalion read like a Who's Who of antebellum Pointe Coupee, including among their number Aguillard, Barra, Barrow, Bouanchaud, Carmouche, Chustz, Decuir, Decoux, Fortlouis, Gremillion, Guerin, Jewell, Joffrion, Langlois, LeBeau, LeDoux, LeJeune, Major, Olinde, Patin, Porche, Pourciau,

Robillard, Roy, St. Cyr, Samson, Sicard and Vignes. The *Pointe Coupee Democrat* newspaper later recounted: *“This celebrated battery was composed of the elite of the parish. Our representation of young men were the first to join it and our old Creole families had one or more sons to aid in getting it up... From first to last this battery was conspicuous among the Confederate artillery, and no higher honor was asked for by a Confederate than to be recognized as a member of Bouanchaud’s Battery.”*

The artillerymen received their baptism by fire in the Battles of Island No. 10 and Fort Pillow. Part of the battalion, under Captain Bouanchaud, fought at Coffeeville on December 5, 1862. Early in 1863, Company C and a portion of Company A led by Captain Bouanchaud reported for duty at Port Hudson, Louisiana, while Company B under Captain Davidson and the other portion of Company A, under Lt. J.J. Thompson, helped defend Fort Pemberton, Mississippi. Soon, all three companies were dispatched to aid various brigades of Brigadier General William W. Loring’s division around Jackson, Mississippi. On May 16, 1863, Companies A and C, with eight guns under Captain Bouanchaud, served in the Battle of Champion’s Hill, where his effectiveness as a commander was noted for posterity by Brigadier General Winfield S. Featherston as follows: *“During this skirmish, and, in fact, the entire day, my brigade behaved well. All orders were promptly obeyed, and an eagerness to meet the enemy was manifested during the engagement by the whole command. The three pieces of artillery used by me to protect the retreat belonged to Captain Bouanchaud’s battery. They were well served; both skill and courage were shown by the officers and men attached to these guns.”*

Company B with two 3” rifles under Captain Davidson, Company C, with two 6 pounder guns and two 12 pounder howitzers under Captain Chustz, and the second section of Company A with two 3” rifles led by Lt. John Yoist, then fell back on Vicksburg and helped defend the garrison during the siege from May 18 until July 4, 1863. The first section of Company A, headed by Captain Bouanchaud, remained with Loring’s division as it served in central and eastern Mississippi. The section of Company A at Vicksburg surrendered there, as did all of Company B and all but one section of Company C. Companies B and C, therefore, ceased to exist. Some of the subsequently exchanged and paroled men of the Pointe Coupee Artillery, including John Yoist and James Alfred Morgan, were united in December 1863 with veterans of the 1st Artillery Battery Regulars to form the 6th Battery Volunteer Artillery, renamed the 6th Louisiana Field Battery in November, 1864, but which was popularly known by the nickname of Grosse Tete Flying Artillery.

Captain Bouanchaud and the first section of the Pointe Coupee Artillery Battalion Company A – which had not served at Vicksburg and was with Loring’s division – went on to participate in the Meridian Campaign in February and March of 1864. Two months later, in Georgia, they were attached to the Army of Tennessee and fought at Resaca on May 13 and at Calhoun on May 18. Refitted with 12 pound howitzers, Bouanchaud and company accompanied the Army of Tennessee throughout its movements in the Atlanta Campaign, the Battle of Allatoona and maneuvers in the state of Tennessee.

To be continued ...