

# Music and the Civil War

by Glen Johnson



**Zouaves Band, Petersburg, 1864**

**Source:** Rauscher, Frank. *Music On The March*. Philadelphia: Press of WM. F. Fell & Co. 1892

The American Civil War was a time of suffering, depression, sacrifice, and fear of life and death. It was also a time for music. Music shaped many of the battles and it affected the spirit of the troops as well as people at home. By the end of 1861, there were over 600 bands in the union army 28,000 musicians.

The 114th Pennsylvania Volunteers, a Civil War regiment known as the Zouaves d’Afrique or Zouaves, was one of the most colorful regiments in the Union Army. Charles Collis raised a company of men and outfitted them in uniforms based on the French Zouave d’Afrique, which served and in northern Algeria. The regimental band consisted of between fifteen and seventeen brass players and under the direction of Frank Rauscher.

The Zouave band’s first duty came in September 1862. They played for funerals and reviews and serenaded the troops at night. In October the regiment and band marched across Pennsylvania. They were ordered to throw out all unnecessary to make their bags lighter, but they were able to protect their instruments. Eventually they crossed the Potomac in knee-deep water and headed for an encampment in the Blue Ridge Mountains of western Virginia. The band performed stirring songs, while below they could hear heavy wagons and artillery trains rumbling and struggling to make their way over the primitive roads.

In December 1862 the band lead the regiment across a pontoon bridge as they received enemy fire. After the battle was over, a field hospital was set up in front of a large mansion and the band members assisted the doctors and nurses in carrying for the wounded and dying. In his memoir, Frank Rauscher wrote of the gruesome images from these hospitals. Two days later the band was ordered to perform at the headquarters and forced to shift its attention from mayhem to music.

The very next day Frank Rauscher and his brother Louis went out to look for things to cook for breakfast and ran into Confederate soldiers who captured them and the band. They were declared prisoners, ordered to pack up, but told to put down their instruments and to leave them behind. The band was taken to the Libby Prison where conditions were unbearable. They slept on a bare floor on top

of a morgue, where every morning they could look through the missing wood panels and see 6-10 bodies. Meals consisted of black bean soup twice a day. The third meal was a piece of meat one-inch square and bread.

In January 1863 a boat took them to the Annapolis Camp where prisoner exchanges took place. After they were released, band members were supplied with new instruments and played for soldiers to keep their spirits up. Fortunately, or unfortunately, the band returned to the 114th regiment in time to serve at the Battle of Gettysburg. Rauscher described working in the field hospital during the battle. "To and from our hospital the ambulances heaped with the wounded were running all day; some of the men were dead when delivered to the surgeon; and others were more dead than alive." On July 5, band members received orders to leave the field hospital and report back to the regiment. They resumed their place at the front of the advancing union line, but it was more like a funeral procession as they marched over dead horses and the bodies of men.

### **Questions**

1. Who were the "Zouaves d'Afrique"?
2. Why is the regiment still remembered?
3. What were the jobs of the regimental band?