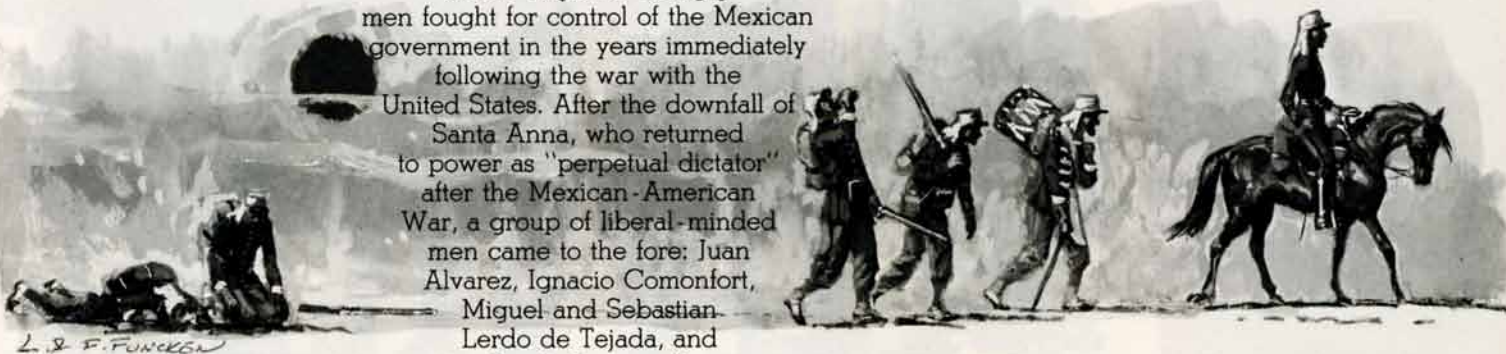


T

he Civil War that divided the American nation provided a seemingly propitious opportunity for the great European powers — France, Spain, and Great Britain — to create a new Latin empire in North America, which would serve later to check the expansive thrust of the United States.

Mexico appeared ripe for the taking, suffering through violent unrest as power-hungry men fought for control of the Mexican government in the years immediately following the war with the United States. After the downfall of Santa Anna, who returned to power as "perpetual dictator" after the Mexican-American War, a group of liberal-minded men came to the fore: Juan Alvarez, Ignacio Comonfort, Miguel and Sebastian Lerdo de Tejada, and Benito Juarez, all dedicated to reform.



L. & F. FUNCKEN

THE FORGOTTEN LEGION

Juarez drafted the liberal constitution of 1857, instituting the secularization of Church properties and attacking the privileges of the army. Conservative opposition was bitter and civil war broke out, ending with Juarez victorious in 1861. Immediately, the conservatives sought foreign intervention, negotiating with Napoleon III to found a Mexican empire.

Pushed by his Spanish wife and her friends — who had been deprived of their enormous Mexican estates by Juarez — Napoleon III agreed to a Mexican expedition which would be, in his mind, little more than a military promenade. The Republic of Mexico had known 240 "pronunciamentos" (coups de etat) during the previous thirty-five years and seemed ready to receive a European-born emperor who would, among other things, take over payment of the enormous debts owed to European countries by the impecunious government of President Juarez.

(Continued on page 30)

WRITTEN AND
ILLUSTRATED BY
LILIANE AND
FRED FUNCKEN



UNIFORMS OF THE BELGIAN LEGION

A. Grenadier. The white neckbands were worn only on special occasions. French-style gaiters were worn over white gaiters, and contemporary photographs show leggings worn under the white gaiters.

B. Voltigeur.

C. Staff musician. The bonnets de police bear the traditional Belgian tassel, used as late as 1940.

D. Voltigeur bugler. The decreasing width of the white buttonhole tapes is a detail frequently overlooked.

E. Enlisted man's hat.

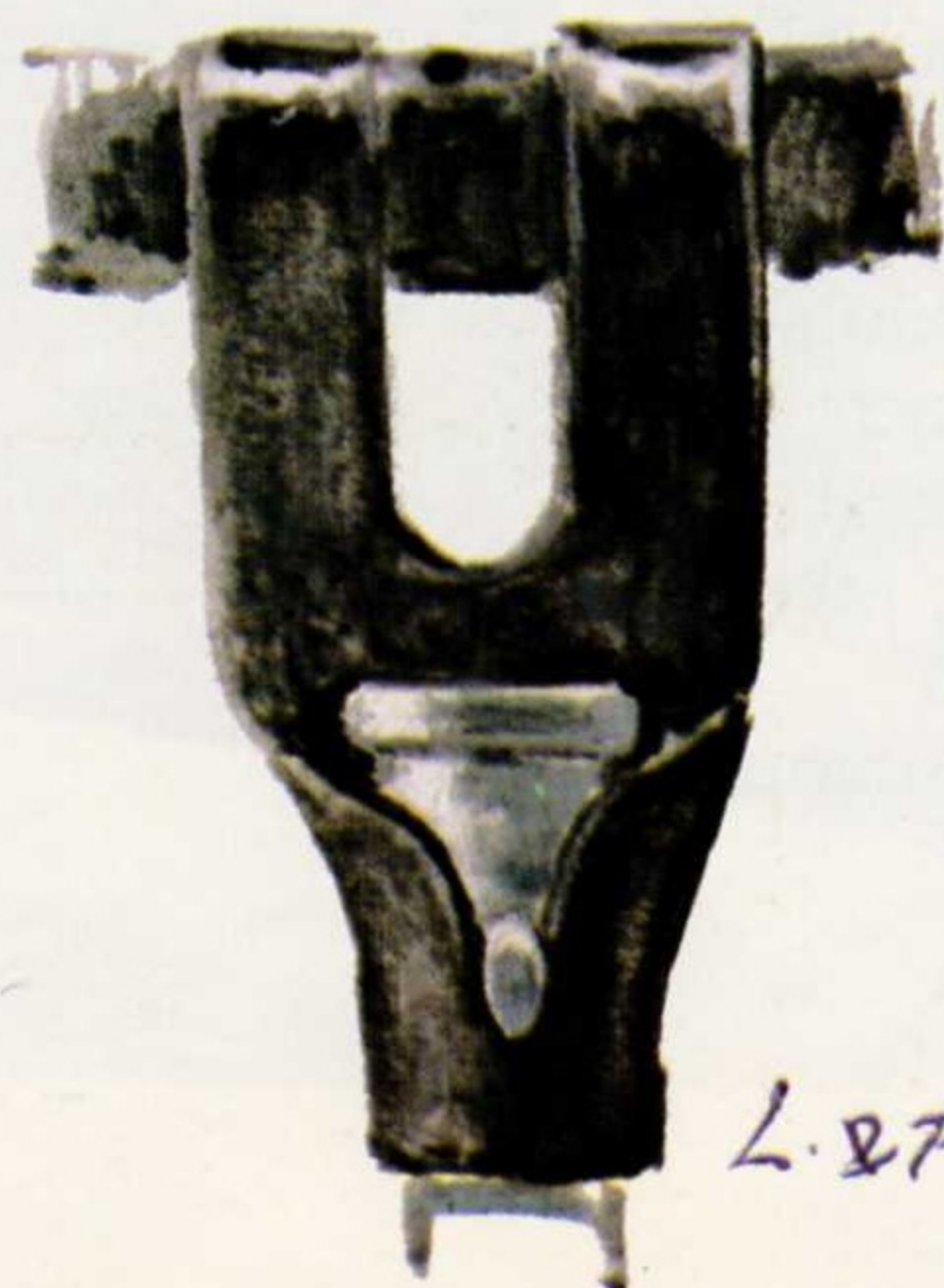
F. Buckle.

G. Wings. Red, grenadiers; white, staff; green, voltigeurs.

H. Bayonet scabbard.

I. Soldier in marching order, February 1865: turned-up overcoat and blue linen jacket, blue woolen jacket rolled in the blanket over the knapsack with the tent cloth. The hat was soon "lost" because of the height of the stacked gear.

J. NCO, undress.



L. & F. FONCKEN



**UNIFORMS
OF THE
BELGIAN
LEGION**

- K. Drummer, wearing new-model gaiters.*
- L. Voltigeur. The gray Zouave trousers were worn in the hot areas of Mexico. He carries his battalion fanion.*
- M. Grenadier with jacket under the frock coat. Some gaiters still had 24 buttons instead of the regulation 10. The trousers are plain white ones, distributed at the beginning of 1866.*
- N. Voltigeur with woolen jacket and some Mexican accoutrements he has "borrowed."*
- O. Officer in civilian jacket with Navy-style rank stripes.*
- P. Mounted company of the "Roi des Belges" battalion. An order of 1865 authorized the wearing of beards because of the lack of army barbers. The boot tops have been added to regular boots.*
- Q. Reconstruction of the French-style kepi, made of overcoat and bonnet de police cloth. The only distinctive color specified (July 1865) was red for grenadiers.*

L. & F. FOUVIER

THE FORGOTTEN LEGION

Continued from page 27

Deciding to take no part in this imperialist plan, Spain and Great Britain withdrew their support and "Napoleon le petit" — as he was cruelly nicknamed by Victor Hugo — rushed alone into the adventure. The role of Emperor of Mexico was, curiously, imparted to a Germanic prince, Archduke Maximilian of Austria . . . one of "those innumerable archdukes," as Queen Victoria once said contemptuously.

Archduke Ferdinand Maximilian, denied a part in the Austrian imperial government by his reactionary brother, Emperor Franz Joseph, was the opposite of his elder brother. Nervous and feeble, willingly affecting a tranchant attitude, Maximilian was known for backing off before those who stood up to him. Franz Joseph had authority, method and a solid ethic, whereas "Maxi" could only hope through his short reign to one day shake hands with Juarez.

Married in 1857 to Charlotte, the daughter of the first king of Belgium, Leopold I, the young archduke had been granted by his imperial brother the vice-royalty of Venetia and Lombardy, a kingdom he lost soon after the war conducted by Napoleon for the freedom of Italy and the end of Hapsburg domination in Lombardy.

The young couple were living in the castle of Miramar, near Trieste, when the offer to become Emperor of Mexico reached Maxi through the Mexican, Gutierrez Estrada, who begged "the help of the intended savior of the ruined Mexico, former most beautiful jewel of Charles V's crown."

Charlotte — or Carlotta — jumped for joy at the news; her husband, more reasonable, asked first for a plebiscite of the Mexican people. The massive vote of the notables was presented, comprising the whole number of votes; the non-voting illiterate Indians were completely unaware of the pending arrival of their new emperor. Juarez, for his part, reacted with strenuous opposition to the invaders and their Mexican sympathizers. In Europe, Franz Joseph, Queen Victoria and King Leopold were horrified by the course of events but could not get Maximilian out of the situation. As a last resort, even though he had been persuaded to accept the crown, the Queen of England offered the throne of Greece to Maxi but this was in vain. Queen Amelie, widow of King Louis-Philippe of France, said prophetically to the obstinate archduke (as he was now nicknamed), "Poor man — they will kill you!"

On 25 May 1864, the sovereigns landed at Vera Cruz, supported by the money and the army of France. The financial background of this operation was particularly malodorous; to requite his imperial benefactor, Maximilian had to assure the payment of the enormous Mexican debt, wantonly increased by France to 135 million, by Great Britain to 85 million, and by Spain to 40 million. An idealist filled with dreams of reform, Maximilian had no understanding whatsoever of the Mexican people, their country, or their struggle. Whatever sympathizers he may have had in Mexico were alienated only a year later by his decree of 1865 ordering the summary execution of all followers of Juarez. In the deserted streets of Vera

Cruz, only French hussars and Mexican lanceros were on hand to welcome the new emperor and empress. After a long cross-country trip, the young couple were received in Mexico City by the disquieting Marshal Bazaine and installed in Chapultepec Palace.

Torn apart by strife, the country was exhausted; more and more provinces flaunted open dissidence. An aggravating circumstance was the end of the American Civil War, giving freedom of movement to the American president, who immediately sent a large army to the Mexican border. The only rule throughout the country became the gun. Paris and Vienna tried to discuss matters and negotiate a settlement but were abruptly rebuffed.

Already disgusted by the unanticipated violence of the Mexican adventure and vigorously attacked by his political opponents, Napoleon had no more money to spend for his expeditionary corps, additional funds being refused by the Chambers.

Maximilian, seeing Bazaine driving Mexico to disaster, was in constant dispute with the

her room with live chickens that would be prepared for her meals so she wouldn't have to eat what she believed was the poisoned food of the Vatican cuisine.

Maximilian's empire had now shrivelled to Mexico City, Puebla and Vera Cruz as lethal waves of Juaristas swarmed down from the north. The emperor assumed personal command of what was left of his forces, the bulk of them concentrated at Queretaro. After a siege against his 7,000-man force that lasted from March to May in 1867, Maximilian was forced to capitulate. He was sentenced to death and executed by a firing squad on 19 June 1867, despite a United States request that he be granted prisoner of war status. An American woman, Princess Salm,¹ begged for mercy to Juarez but was told, "He shot my partisans at Zacoteca; if I do not kill him, I will be butchered by my own men." The execution of Mexican partisans Juarez referred to was, actually, Bazaine's responsibility.

Buried in Mexico, Maximilian's corpse was exhumed and reburied on 20 January 1867 in



Emperor Maximilian and Empress Carlotta, rulers of the short-lived Empire of Mexico.

French marshal. Martial law was declared by Bazaine on 3 October 1865, with the death penalty within twenty-four hours for any Republican or even supporter of Juarez. In despair, disturbed and troubled by the calamitous situation in the country, Maximilian asked Napoleon to remove all the foreign troops as soon as possible. This was on 19 February 1866. In April 1866 the withdrawal became official, to the relief of Bazaine and the French emperor.

During the summer of 1866, Carlotta went to Europe to plead the cause of her beloved husband before Napoleon and even the pope but she was received with coldness and often the worst coarseness, particularly in Paris. In a short time, the young woman began to show signs of mental disturbance. In Rome during September she was completely

the Capucines crypt in Vienna after long hesitation by Juarez.

Carlotta lived in one of the Belgian castles until 1927, dying at the age of ninety-six. During the long, pathetic years of her life, she again and again played the Mexican national anthem on her piano.

The Expeditionary Corps

L'Etoile belge (The Belgian Star), on 23 March 1864, was the first newspaper to mention the Belgian military corps intended to be the Guard of Empress Carlotta. Enlisted in "good and serious condition," the future volunteers would favor, by their presence, the "establishment of commercial and industrial relations in the rich country as soon as order and confidence have been proved." As usual, busi-

The same year, on 10 April, the official *Moniteur Belge* went into the matter further, giving the following details in an article headed "Memorial Diplomatique": "The organization of the foreign troops in Mexican service will form an effective of 16,000 men, composed of 8,000 French,² 6,000 Austrians and 2,000 Belgians. The corps will take the title *Legion Etrangere*, under the command of a French general responsible directly to Emperor Maximilian." The *Legion Etrangere* was to be divided into several regiments, bearing the titles *Empereur Napoleon III*, *Imperatrice Eugenie*, *Empereur Maximilian Ier* and *Imperatrice Charlotte*, this last one reserved for the Belgian regiment. Even an Ethiopian battalion was offered to Maximilian by the Viceroy of Egypt.

The Belgian Legion

On 1 August 1864, an Admission Commission was installed at Audenarde, a small Flemish city forty-three miles from Brussels, where the recruits received their first instruction with thirty-two carbines loaned by the government.

After a difficult start imposed by lack of money (relieved by a credit of 3,500,000 Belgian francs granted to Maximilian by the Rothschild bank³), recruiting began.

Opposition was strong and gave way to stormy discussions. The war minister, Chazal, was called out to duel by a determined deputy and the volunteers were compared to Swiss mercenaries. Even a firing squad was demanded by some strongly opposed to the legion's organizer, General Eugene, for a deliberate violation of the Belgian constitution. The recruits were assembled willy-nilly, coming mainly from all ranks of the army; next came the customary groups of employees and craftsmen dreaming of great adventures or exotic emotions; parochial dandies, tired of hoping to reach improbable social standing; uprooted foreigners (principally Germans) and very young men. The legion, however, never reached its estimated number.

The corps was composed of one battalion of grenadiers and one battalion of voltigeurs, to be assembled in Mexico by the progressive amalgamation of four successive detachments sent from Belgium.

The first force sailed overseas from Saint Nazaire, France, on 16 October 1864. It consisted of:

A staff corps of seven officers and subalterns and a battalion staff of seven officers and subalterns (sergeants and corporals).

1st Grenadier Company: four officers, fourteen NCOs, three drummers, three buglers, 125 grenadiers, one *femme de compagnie* (company woman).

2nd Grenadier Company: four officers, sixteen NCOs, two drummers, two buglers, 122 grenadiers, one *femme de compagnie*.

1st Voltigeur Company: four officers, sixteen NCOs, two drummers, two buglers, 122 voltigeurs, one *femme de compagnie*.

2nd Voltigeur Company: four officers, sixteen NCOs, two drummers, two buglers, 121 voltigeurs, one *femme de compagnie*.

Soon after, the second contingent was ready, despite fierce opposition. It left Audenarde on 14 November. Its strength was much weaker

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Sous l'Etendard



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THE FORGOTTEN LEGION

Continued

than the first group, having one battalion staff of eight officers and men. In addition, it included:

3rd Grenadier Company: four officers, sixteen NCOs, two drummers, two buglers, 68 grenadiers, one *femme de compagnie*.

4th Grenadier Company: four officers, fifteen NCOs, two drummers, two buglers, 67 grenadiers, one *femme de compagnie*.

3rd Voltigeur Company: three officers, sixteen NCOs, one drummer, two buglers, 61 voltigeurs, one *femme de compagnie*.

4th Voltigeur Company: three officers, fifteen NCOs, two drummers, two buglers, 69 voltigeurs, one *femme de compagnie*.

With them all were probably thirty-five musicians, not noted in the official records.

The third convoy was sent to Mexico on 16 December, consisting of the 5th and 6th Grenadier Companies, the 5th and 6th Voltigeur Companies, and a staff, totaling 362 people. The fourth and last detachment, leaving on 27 January 1865, had only 189 members.

As soon as they were assembled in Mexico City, the detachments were regrouped and renamed according to an Imperial decree. The grenadier detachment became *Bataillon de l'Imperatrice* and the voltigeurs became *Bataillon Roi des Belges*⁴. The Belgians were formed in a brigade with the Austrian corps, under the command of General Count de Thun. This,



Cantinieres of the regimental staff (left), with white braids, and of the Voltigeur battalion "Roi des Belges." The jackets had seven braids, like the officers' rather than the common ten of the men and NCOs.

though, was only on paper; the Belgians and Austrians never fought together.

In Belgium, the enlistment bounty was about 60 to 100 francs, according to rank. Once in Mexico, daily pay was:

Privates:	15 Austrian kreutzers or 37.5 centimes
Corporals:	20 Austrian kreutzers or 50 centimes
Sergeants:	25 Austrian kreutzers or 62.5 centimes
Sergeant-majors:	30 Austrian kreutzers or 75 centimes
Adjutants:	40 Austrian kreutzers or one franc

Enlistment was for six years, though some officers were discharged by the king after only two years. The gratuity at demobilization was equal to the enlistment bounty. A second enlistment brought a daily pay augmentation of 5 kreutzers or 12.5 centimes. Those men who agreed to settle in Mexico afterwards received from twelve to thirty hectares (1 hectare = 2.47 acres) of good land.

THE AUSTRIAN CORPS IN MEXICO

All units wore black neckbands as a distinctive insignia.

A. Uhlan.

B. Hussar officer.

C. Mounted artillery; foot artillerymen wore gaiters.

D. Chasseur. Knapsack is brown, with a canteen carried on the top.

E. Foot artilleryman in overcoat and fatigue hat.

All the men in the corps were bearded.

From the paintings of Willi Richter, lithographed by A. Gerash.

The Uniforms

It is said that Maximilian himself wanted to design the uniforms of his legion but the model selected was simply the French one with slight modifications.

Except for tents, campaign tools and utensils distributed by the French army, the Belgian military garb was:

A tunic of *Bleu de roi* cloth, a very deep blue

— almost black — single-breasted with ten buttons of yellowish copper, with the same number of Brandenbourgs made from braid in the distinctive color: red for grenadiers, green for voltigeurs, as were the small wings on the shoulders. White was the distinctive color for the staff, drummers, buglers, and musicians. Red, green and white distinctions were selected because they were the Mexican national colors.

A short vest of the same material, with eight small buttons of yellowish copper.

Trousers were gray-blue, fastened under the knees by leather fawn-colored garters. The outer seams were ornamented by braid of the distinctive color.

The overcoat was of the same gray-blue material, with two rows of five buttons and with a half-belt at the back.

UNIFORMS OF THE BELGIAN LEGION

A. Captain, full dress.

B. Colonel, full dress. The sleeve insignia consists of five braids. The colonel was the only officer to wear a white plume.

C. Lieutenant, campaign dress.

D. Captain in service dress, wearing an Austrian kepi. His rank, on the kepi, is indicated by horizontal stripes, in the style of the Austrian army.

E. Captain in campaign dress with French kepi. Rank on cap is indicated as in the French army.

OFFICER'S HAT



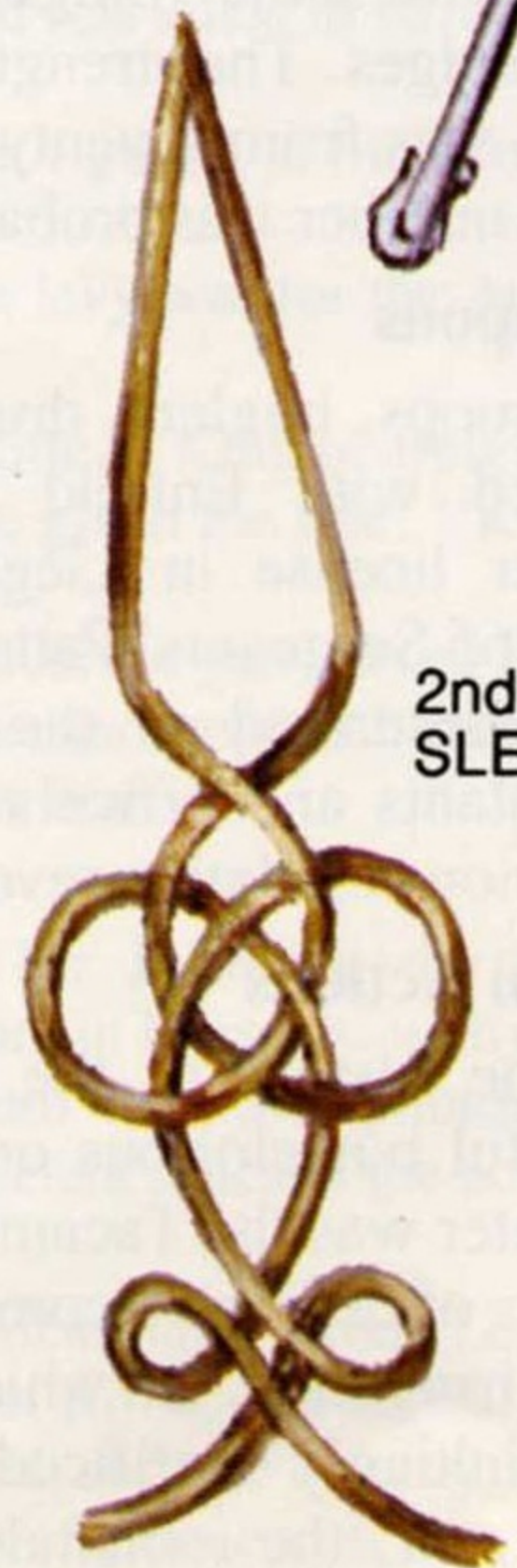
LEFT SIDE



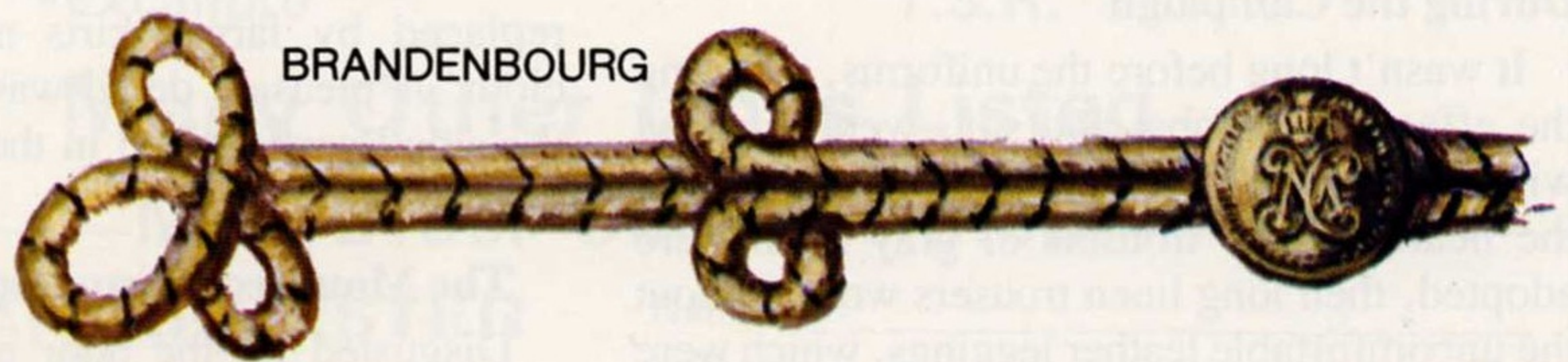
RIGHT SIDE



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2nd LIEUTENANT, SLEEVE BRAID



BRANDENBOURG

The hat was the only genuine Belgian attribute. It was of the carabinier type, a headdress of Corsican origin. Only two examples are known to exist today. It was made of rigid black felt, wrapped with a turban of dark blue uniform cloth striped with four braids of distinctive color. The pompom was red, white and green wool, with the green in the center.

The plume was made of black cock feathers for grenadiers and voltigeurs. In his famous *L'Armée Belge*, Colonel Rouen asserts that the musicians, buglers and drummers wore white feathers but we believe this to be a risky assertion.

In summer, a white cover was worn on the hat.

The *bonnet de police* was the French model with braiding of the distinctive color.

The neck cloth, or *cravate*, was of sky-blue calico; white for dress occasions.

Leggings were patterned after the French model in fawn-colored sheepskin, moulded on the calf and edged with black leather. Gaiters were of white canvas with ten small bone buttons. Shoes were the famous *godillots* worn by the French Army.

The Officers

Their uniform was made of a finer cloth than that of the troops, single-breasted and with nine gilded buttons.

The Brandenbours were made into Hungarian — or Austrian — knots in gilded braid, striped by a tiny black filament from centimetre to centimetre. Rank was indicated on the sleeves by large Austrian knots. These were silver for adjutant-majors and gold for other officers in the staff or in the battalions.

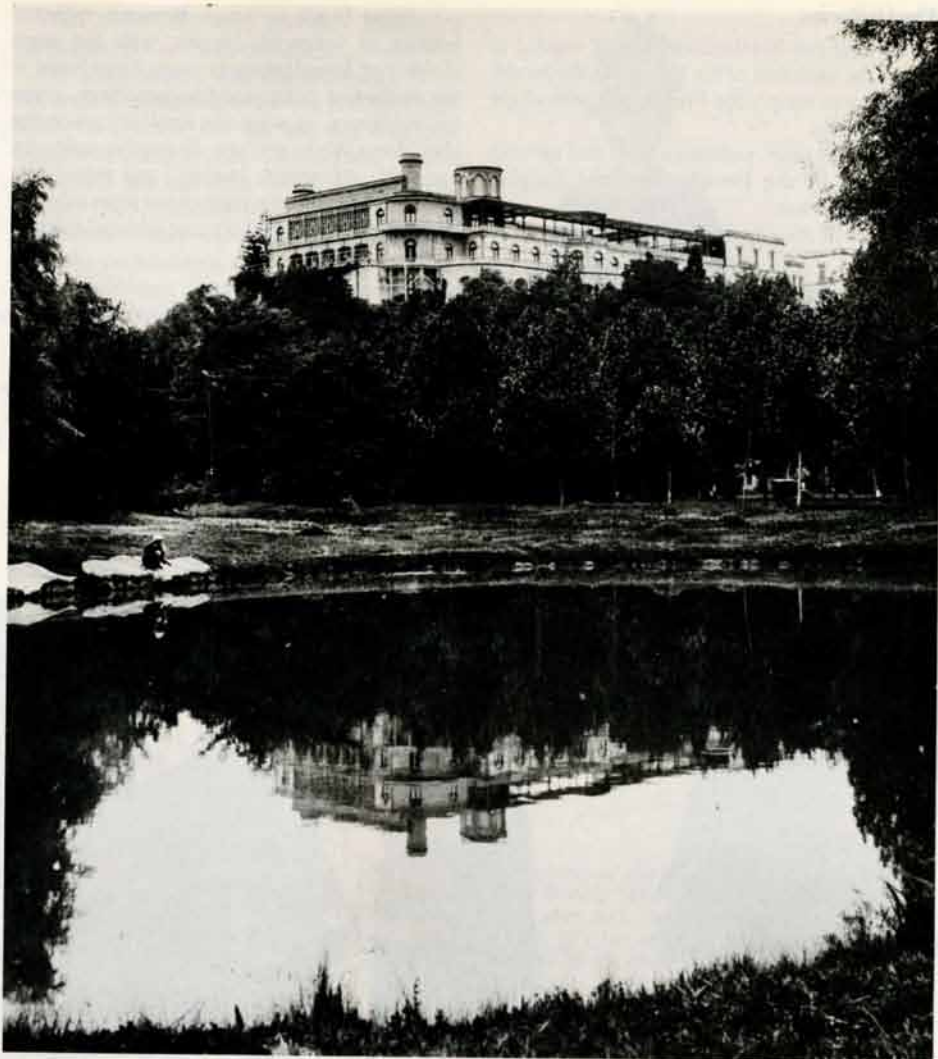
The hat was the same as for the men, though of better quality; the special braid is shown in the illustrations. The plume was of green feathers for all officers, except for the *Chef de Corps*, who wore a straight aigrette of white heron feathers fixed in a gilded tulip with a base of red, white, and green vulture feathers, the red ones at the bottom.

Mounted officers' saddle cloths were dark blue with large gold galloons. The holsters were covered by black leather edged in yellowish copper.

For *petite tenue*, all the braiding was of black silk; the buttons were black olives. Rank was as indicated on the dress uniforms, in gold or silver. An Austrian-model kepi, without indication of rank, was worn with this uniform. For field service, officers wore a tunic with black ornamentation (which was less conspicuous) and black leather leggings. The rest of their dress was as for the troops.

During the Campaign

It wasn't long before the uniforms, suffering the effects of combat and sun, were replaced with white linen coats, much more practical in the heat. Zouave trousers of gray linen were adopted, then long linen trousers worn without the uncomfortable leather leggings, which were finally replaced with gaiters of white linen. The heavy *godillots* were discarded in favor of lighter shoes; the knapsacks were replaced by lighter items of the do-it-yourself variety.



Chapultepec Castle at Mexico City, the residence of Emperor Maximilian and Carlotta.

The heavy hats also disappeared (frequently "lost") and in their place, the men adopted kepis made from the bottom of the greatcoat. The turban was made of the dark blue cloth of the rarely-used *bonnets de police*. The old white hat covers were adapted to the new headgear. In 1865, the musicians' kepis were made of the same cloth used for the trousers. The cantinieres, as well as the men, wore kepis. The typical Mexican sombrero was often used as a head covering, according to existing photographs.

Cantinieres (Femme de Compagnie)

Each company had its cantinieres. Fifteen women were in the regiment, though a report in 1866 lists only three with the grenadiers and two with the voltigeurs. There is no doubt as to the courage of these women; one of them won the Medal of Military Merit at Tacambaro.

Their uniforms were essentially the same as those of the men, though the trousers were replaced by large skirts made of gray-blue cloth. A pleasant detail was the stockings and the small cask striped in the Mexican national colors.

The Mounted Companies

Disgusted by the poor performance of the Mexican cavalry, two mounted battalions were organized, using captured horses and a wide variety of Mexican saddles.

The uniform included a Zouave sash (at least

in the voltigeur unit) with, whenever possible, French cavalry boots and trousers of white leather. The scarcity of sabres of all types led to the arming of one "peleton" of each mounted company with carbines with fixed yatagans — or bayonets — which served as lances.

The first mounted company was created on 15 April 1866, with grenadiers who knew how to ride creating the Regiment Imperatrice Charlotte. The second company was organized on 16 July with some voltigeurs of the Regiment Roi des Belges. The strength of each company, it is said, was from seventy to eighty horses but the total number was probably closer to fifty.

Weapons

Troops, buglers, drummers and NCOs were armed with Enfield carbines manufactured under license in Liege; the pattern was the M1865 Sergeants' Pattern Enfield. The bayonet was described as the English yatagan type. Adjutants and officers carried straight swords and non-regulation revolvers.

Main Actions

The history of the Belgian Legion was a painful but glorious one. Their first great encounter was the Tacambaro disaster. After five hours of defensive combat against 3,800 Mexican irregulars, in which 250 voltigeurs were unthinkingly sacrificed by the French military governor, the remainder of the Belgians were

taken prisoner after their last cartridges had been fired.

Soon after, the Belgians' revenge was taken in the battle of La Loma, where 800 Belgians took a fortified position from 3,000 Mexicans, killing 400 and capturing six guns, one flag, and many prisoners. To exculpate his defeat, the Mexican general said that the Belgians had used an unfair element: bearded soldiers!

Fighting closely with the French soldiers, the Belgians were nevertheless the victims of Bazaine's intrigues. The French marshal even tried to denationalize the Belgian regiments in order to relegate them to an indigenous regiment of Cazadores. The official order was cancelled before this came about, after verification of obvious slanders against the Belgian troops. Vexed, Bazaine sent the Belgians to the north to Monterrey, where they fought valiantly alongside the French at Charco-Redondo and Marin.

More and more sorely tried, the Belgian Legion began to slowly retreat inland with the French, from time to time giving a solid push to Juarez's troops, such as in Tula, where the Belgians organized a commando operation to release a captive garrison. The attempt ended in failure but only after heroic fighting.

Bazaine, despite his profound animosity toward the Belgians, was forced to recognize the bravery of those who had thwarted his tenebrous plans.⁵

The Belgians were later rushed to the east to help the disheartened Austrians. Surrounded by the enemy, they held their position firmly. It was there that news of Maximilian's decision to resist alone with his Mexican followers reached the Belgians on 24 December 1866.

On 20 January 1867, the remains of the Legion — 789 officers and men, emaciated and ragged and numbering half the original force — embarked at Vera Cruz for Anvers. A hundred men stayed behind, standing beside the unfortunate and fugacious Emperor Maximilian until his inexorable surrender. □

1) Princess Salm was the daughter of Colonel Le Clerc, a French officer. Her husband, Prince Frederick of Salm-Salm, fled from Germany to avoid his creditors. He served in the Union army with outstanding bravery, becoming general of the 2nd Brigade of the Cumberland 2nd Division. Deeply devoted to Maximilian, he succeeded in becoming part of the emperor's suite, becoming his aide-de-camp, counselor, and closest companion as well. He later entered the service of Germany and was killed in 1870 during the war with France.

2) French troops had been fighting in Mexico since 1861.

3) The larger part of this levy was for the Austrian corps.

4) Instead of the simple title, "King of Belgium," the Belgian sovereigns are given the title, "King of the Belgians".

5) One of the most controversial generals of French history, Bazaine's attitude and approach worsened during the Franco-Prussian War.

Sources:

We are deeply indebted to Mr. J. Lorette, the curator of the Royal Army Museum in Brussels, who cheerfully gave us full freedom to draw, photograph, measure and handle the ancient relics of the actors in a long-ago tragedy.

"L'Expedition belge au Mexique," Louis Leconte, in *Carnet de la Fourragere*, No. 6, 2nd Series, 1930. This is an exhaustive and definitive study of the organization and uniforms of these corps.

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