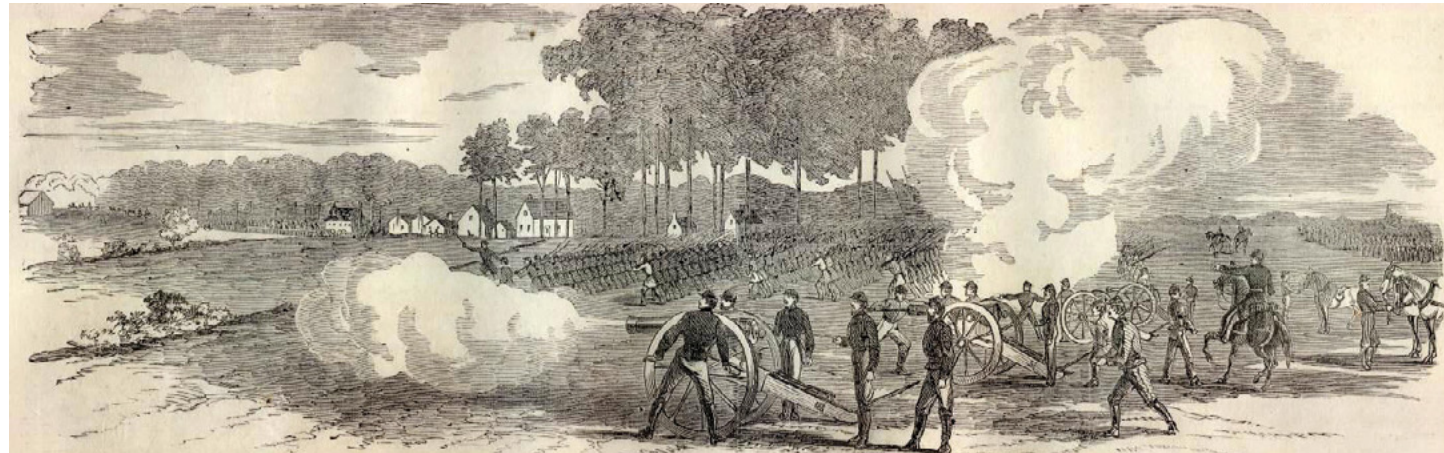


QUIET HERO: JOHN L. RAPIER



» ABOVE: Rapier was temporarily blinded by an exploding shell during the Seven Days Battles and later received a battlefield commission, becoming adjutant of his battalion. BELOW: At his death in 1905, John L. Rapier was a prominent figure in Mobile, owner of the *Mobile Register*, tireless promoter of the city and champion of the underprivileged.



Following the death of John Lawrence Rapier in Mobile, Ala., on May 7, 1905, accolades and expressions of sympathy were quick to arrive. Cardinal James Gibbons, Archbishop of Baltimore and a boyhood friend of Rapier's, sent condolences, as did U.S. Senator Stephen R. Mallory, Jr., of Florida, son of the late U.S. Senator and Confederate Secretary of the Navy, along with other elected officials and members of the media. Rapier's funeral was held at the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception, where he was remembered as a kind and generous man, a defender of the downtrodden and a champion of the city where he had long served as owner and publisher of its most notable newspaper. For all the attention rightfully lavished upon Rapier for his civic-mindedness, the man had lived quite another life before settling into the role of newspaperman and city promoter.

John L. Rapier was born in Spring Hill, Ala., on June 15, 1842, the son of Spring Hill College professor Thomas Gwynne Rapier and the former Evelina Senac, originally of Pensacola, Fla. The family moved from the Mobile area to New Orleans in 1846 when the Jesuits took control of Spring Hill College. The senior Rapier became a high school principal and later superintendent of public schools in New Orleans.

Rapier, naturally enough, was educated in the public school system and attended one year of college at New Orleans' College of the Immaculate Conception (present-day Loyola University) before taking a job as a mercantile clerk in the Crescent City. Rapier had not yet reached his 19th birthday when Louisiana seceded from the Union on Jan. 26, 1861. Ten days after hostilities began in South Carolina, Rapier enlisted as a private in the First Company of the "Chasseurs-a-Pied," also known as St. Paul's Foot Rifles, named after their commander, Henri St. Paul.

Within a few days, the soldiers traveled from New Orleans to Pensacola, where Rapier had relatives, and in September were ordered to Richmond, Va., being bivouacked near Centreville. On Oct. 1, 1861, the company was merged with Company B of the Crescent Blues, forming the 7th Louisiana



» As an 18-year-old, Rapier had enlisted as a private soldier in the Confederate Army.

Battalion, which was strengthened on Nov. 1 by the addition of Catahoula Guerillas. Initially, the men were assigned to the Washington Artillery Battalion as sharpshooters. In March 1862, the battalion moved to Yorktown, Va., when the Confederates evacuated Manassas.

Rapier fought in the Battle of Williamsburg on May 5, 1862, the first intense fighting experienced in the Peninsula Campaign, the effort led by U.S. Major General George B. McClellan to capture Richmond. During the battle, Rapier and his fellow Louisianans occupied a redoubt near Ft. Magruder and helped to repulse an advance by a division of Union soldiers led by Brigadier General Joseph Hooker. Rapier's battalion sustained only two casualties in the fierce fighting, having one man killed and another wounded. While the Confederates rallied under Major General James Longstreet, they were forced to retreat after the arrival of Union reinforcements under Brigadier General Philip Kearny.

In the pitched and bloody Battle of Seven Pines on May 31 and June 1—the largest battle in the Eastern Theater to date—the Louisianans fought valiantly, helping to stop McClellan's advance on Richmond. For his heroic efforts, Rapier was promoted to sergeant-major of the battalion.

Now as part of the newly-formed Regiment of Louisiana Zouaves and Chasseurs, Sergeant-Major Rapier fought in the Seven Days Battles, which began on June 25, 1862, with a Union attack at Oak Grove. Under the command of Confederate General Robert E. Lee, the Southerners pushed back hard over the course of a week, forcing McClellan into retreat. In one of these battles, fought at Frayser's Farm on June 30, an artillery shell exploded near Rapier's face, temporarily blinding him. Nevertheless, he went on to fight in some of the bloodiest battles of the war, including Second Manassas, Sharpsburg (which saw the most casualties for a single day in American history), and Fredericksburg, before his battalion was transferred to southeast Virginia. In January 1863, Rapier was promoted to first lieutenant and made adjutant of the battalion. Two

months later, Confederate Secretary of the Navy Stephen R. Mallory (whose Pensacola-born wife was related to Rapier) reportedly offered the young man a commission in the Confederate Marine Corps. Regardless, he remained in the Confederate Army long enough to participate in the Siege of Suffolk in April and May, before being commissioned as a second lieutenant of Marines on July 11, 1863. He reported to the Marine Camp at Drewry's Bluff on the James River the following month. Rapier remained at Drewry's Bluff until December, when he received orders to report to Confederate Navy Admiral Franklin Buchanan, commander of the Mobile Squadron.



» He later was commissioned as a second lieutenant in the Confederate States Marine Corps.

Rapier was still assigned to the Mobile Marine Barracks when, on Aug. 3, 1864, he and several other Marine officers were ordered to reinforce Ft. Gaines on Dauphin Island. During the Battle of Mobile Bay, he and several other Marine officers were captured by Union forces, and in a letter to U.S. Secretary of the Navy Gideon Welles dated Aug. 22, 1864, Rear Admiral David G. Farragut proposed that Rapier and other Marine officers be exchanged for U.S. naval officers being held prisoner by the Confederates.

Rapier was transported to New Orleans as a prisoner of war, placed first in the offices of the Picayune, then the Union Press. After three weeks imprisonment, Rapier was notified that he was one of 18 officers selected for a prisoner exchange. He and his fellow prisoners began planning an escape, but another prisoner betrayed their plan. Rapier and his comrades were said to have wanted to kill the man as a traitor, but "a staunch old Presbyterian" dissuaded them from doing so, for which Rapier later confessed his life-long gratitude. Instead, the men began working on another plot, and on Oct. 13, 1864, 13 prisoners of war made their way through a hole in the brick wall while five prisoners stayed behind, including a wounded Confederate paymaster who distracted the guard by playing his flute.

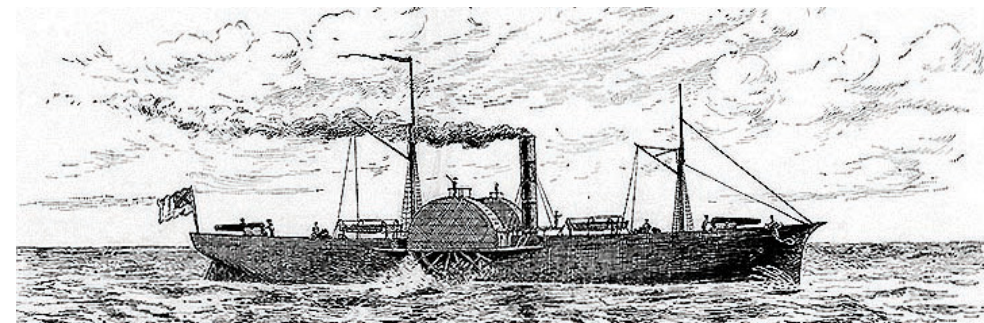
Having grown up in New Orleans, Rapier knew his way around the old city and easily eluded roving Union patrols. He looked up friends who took him and the other officers



» Rapiere and a dozen other men effected a daring escape after being held as prisoners of war in New Orleans. Rapiere utilized his knowledge of the city and friends there to avoid capture and return to Mobile.

in, hiding them in the hours immediately following their escape. The men split up, and Rapiere was smuggled out of the city in a carriage. As they rolled along the shell road, a Union picket was sighted ahead. Rapiere plunged into the bayou to escape detection, finally locating a pirogue and making his way up Lake Maurepas, and, after a week, to the town of Ponchatoula, La., some 50 miles from New Orleans. From there, Rapiere struck off on foot, returning to Mobile. He later learned that all 13 men made good their escape from New Orleans.

Arriving in his native city on Nov. 10, the footsore Rapiere encountered his first cousin, Confederate Navy Lieutenant Joseph Fry. Fry had commanded the CSS IVY early in the war, acquitting himself well in action at the Head of the Passes in the Mississippi River, as he did later as the commanding officer of the CSS MAUREPAS, in its engagement with the



» He served until the end of the war in the Confederate gunboat MORGAN, fighting in the battles of Ft. Blakely and Spanish Fort.

USS MOUND CITY. Fry later served in Bermuda and the Bahamas, working for his (and Rapiere's) uncle, Confederate Navy Paymaster Felix Senac, and acting as an agent for the Confederate Navy. Fry also had presented a plan for a semi-submersible torpedo boat to the head of the Confederate Secret Service, Commander James D. Bulloch. Although authorized, the vessel apparently never was built. Lt. Fry was now assigned to the 202-foot Confederate gunboat MORGAN, which had escaped capture during the Battle of Mobile Bay by running up the bay to the city under cover of night. Fry secured a position for Rapiere in charge of the MORGAN's two 32-pounder guns (her armament consisted of 10 guns in all). Rapiere served in the MORGAN during the battles of Ft. Blakely and Spanish Fort in early April 1865, using the big guns to bombard the Union troops at long distance. The fight was truly a lost cause at that point, and, with the surrender of Mobile, the MORGAN, NASHVILLE and BALTIC fled up the Tombigbee River on April 12 while the ironclads CSS HUNTSVILLE and TUSCALOOSA were sunk in the Spanish River to avoid capture.

On April 28, Rear Admiral Henry K. Thatcher reported that he had dispatched the gunboats USS OCTORARA, SEBAGO and WINNEBAGO up the Tombigbee to blockade the NASHVILLE and MORGAN. On May 4, Admiral Thatcher accepted an offer by Confederate Flag Officer Ebenezer Farrant to surrender "all Confederate naval forces, officers, men and public property now afloat..." Six days later, the CSS MORGAN, NASHVILLE, BALTIC and BLACK DIAMOND were turned over to Federal forces. For Second Lieutenant John L. Rapiere, Confederate States Marine Corps, the war was over.

Rapiere returned briefly to New Orleans and worked for a printing and stationery house but was lured back to Mobile by his old commanding officer, Major Henri St. Paul, who had co-founded a newspaper called the Mobile Times. In 1867, Rapiere wed St. Paul's daughter, Regina, but their happiness was short-lived as she died a few months later. The following year, the Times was consolidated with the Mobile Register, and Rapiere stayed on. He married again in 1871, this time to Regina Demouy. Together they had four sons and a daughter. In 1874, Rapiere formed a partnership

with John Forsyth, Jr., to operate the Register. Upon Forsyth's death in 1877, Rapiere became the editor and sole proprietor of the paper.

During his tenure, Rapiere hired editors who could improve the quality of the newspaper, while he became a champion of Mobile, involved in numerous civic matters, promoting the city and taking care of its underprivileged. Rapiere devised a plan to care for the city's Catholic orphans; he served as a trustee of the McGill Institute; he was deeply involved with the Catholic Church but was known to support the work of various denominations. He was socially prominent and participated in Mardi Gras as a member of the Strikers and the Order of Myths.

In December 1894, President Grover Cleveland appointed Rapiere as Postmaster of Mobile, in which position he served until the end of Cleveland's term of office in March 1897.

As were many former Confederate officers, Rapiere was given the honorary title of "Colonel," and the paper that he had shaped and turned into a pro-business advocate reported that Colonel John L. Rapiere died at 2:35 on the morning of May 7, 1905, at his home on the corner of St. Louis and Conception streets, surrounded by family and friends. By 8 a.m., fellow veterans from the Raphael Semmes Camp 11, United Confederate Veterans, had arrived to keep watch over the body as it lay on the catafalque in the west parlor of the house. While most of the city would remember him as a newspaper man and advocate of those in need, "a man of big heart," as his eulogy would describe him, his fellow comrades in arms remembered John L. Rapiere as the teenager who volunteered to march off to war, as the soldier who fought in some of this nation's bloodiest engagements, rising from private to sergeant-major to commissioned officer, as the man who led a daring escape and returned to duty, and as a naval officer who was among the very last in the country to surrender.

KEYPORT WAREHOUSING

"Moving Companies Forward"

- Over 1 Million Square Feet of Warehousing
- Foreign Trade Zone
- ½ Mile From I-10
- 20 Minutes From Port of Mobile
- Cross Docking/Trans-Loading Services
- Pick & Pack/Mailing Services
- RFID Bar Coding Capabilities
- Fleet of Trucks, Vans and Flatbeds
- Container Stuffing/Stripping
- Order Selection/Fulfillment
- Kitting/Packaging

30427 County Rd 49 North . P O Box 500 . Loxley AL 36551-0500
Tel 251.964.4607. Fax 251.964.4614 . www.keyportwarehousing.com

Serving the Gulf Coast for Over 20 Years



Dockside Services is a fully insured and bonded maritime service company doing business in the Ports of Mobile, Pascagoula, Gulfport, and Pensacola.

Our mission is to provide the most expedient and economical services while in port.

- Services include:**
- Line Handling Services
 - Crew Transportation
 - USDA Regulated Waste Disposal
 - Local Deliveries
 - Agriculture Washing
 - Ship Spares Storage & Delivery

- International Services include:**
- Customs Bonded Carrier & Warehouse
 - AirCargo International® Agent

- Logistics related services include:**
- 24-Hour, 7 Day "Hot Shot" Service
 - 5,000 square foot warehouse
 - Roll Off Rental & Debris Removal
 - Heat/Shrink Wrap
 - Rail Car Cleaning
 - Container Trucking Service

www.dockside-services.com
251.438.2362 • P.O. Box 122, Mobile, AL 36601