

The Military at Fort St. Joseph

Showing the Flag

With only a handful of soldiers for a garrison, Fort St. Joseph was hardly a military stronghold. Its military value lay in showing Native Americans that the Crown's authority extended to the farthest reaches of New France. An officer and a few soldiers could rally militiamen and Native warriors to form a powerful striking force. Fort St. Joseph anchored the southern Lake Michigan region for New France.

Troupes de la Marine

Soldiers of the Troupes de la Marine garrisoned Fort St. Joseph during the French occupation, 1691-1760. "Marines" referred to regular troops serving overseas, not marines in the modern sense of soldiers trained in amphibious landings. Marines under Ensign Augustin Legardeur de Courtemanche built Fort St. Joseph in 1691 near the already-existing Jesuit Mission. In the 1720s, eighteen men garrisoned the post of the St. Joseph River (as the fort was then known), including eight officers of the Troupes de la Marine and ten enlisted men. During a major military action, these men would lead up to 400 resident Potawatomi warriors, plus allied Indians from elsewhere.



Regional map of the Great Lakes from 1757, showing the location of Fort St. Joseph



The King's 8th Regiment were stationed at Fort St. Joseph.



Common British firearm called the "Brown Bess" (1779 model)



Typical gun flint used in flintlock

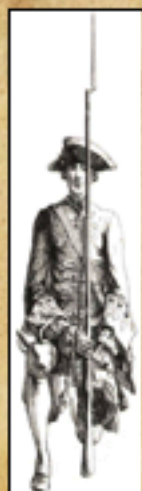
Fort St. Joseph's Military Actions

1695: Iroquois raided Fort St. Joseph. The Iroquois came close enough to poke their muskets through gaps in the palisade before Natives and Marines drove them off.

1730s: The Fox Wars. Several thousand soldiers and warriors from throughout New France assembled at Fort St. Joseph for expeditions against the Fox Indians in Wisconsin and Illinois. These brutal campaigns virtually exterminated the Fox.

1736-40: The Chickasaw Wars. Fort St. Joseph was an important staging point for campaigns against the Chickasaws in present-day Mississippi. The Chickasaw, with English encouragement, harassed French shipping on the Mississippi River in an effort to split the French colonies of Canada and Louisiana and displace the French from the region. Unlike the Fox, the Chickasaw emerged victorious and signed a peace treaty with the combined forces of Canada and Louisiana in 1740.

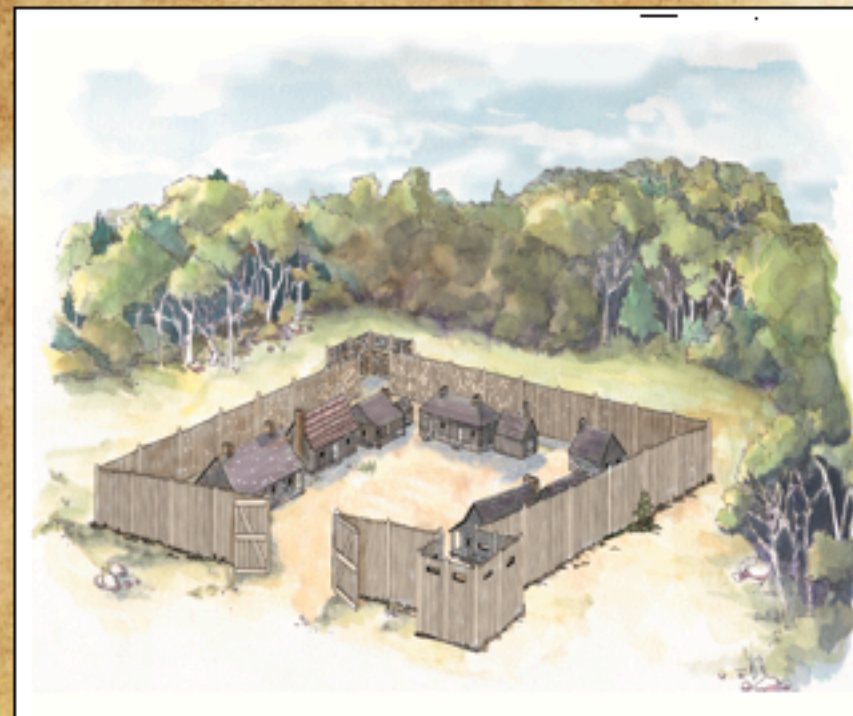
1763: Pontiac's Rebellion. England garrisoned Fort St. Joseph with a detachment of the 60th "Royal American" Regiment in 1761 after the fall of New France. A coalition of Indians rose up against the British in the forts throughout the Great Lakes and several thousand inhabitants were killed. What became known as Pontiac's Rebellion came to Fort St. Joseph on June 25, 1763, leading to the death of the entire garrison, except Ensign Francis Schlosser and three of his men who were held for a future prisoner exchange. Fort St. Joseph never again had a garrison.



French soldier at the



Typical supply bag carried by



An artist's colored rendition of what Fort St. Joseph may have looked like in the 17th and 18th centuries



Militia

Militiamen reinforced the Troupes de la Marine in wartime. In New France, as in most of the English colonies, all men ages 16 to 60 had to serve as militiamen. They supplied their own muskets, powder and shot, and trained at militia musters. The French used militias effectively during their various wars with England, culminating in the Seven Years' War (the French and Indian War). English militias, trained mostly for home defense, proved less effective, especially when employed in campaigns. Although maligned for consuming supplies and contributing little in battle, militias actually served well when employed for their intended purpose.