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6: Military Presence at Fort St. Joseph

Fort St. Joseph Archaeological Project

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Military Presence at Fort St. Joseph

From 1691 to 1698 and from 1717 to 1761, French military personnel occupied Fort St. Joseph to defend the site's strategic position on a major trade route near the portage between the St. Joseph and Kankakee rivers, while maintaining alliances with friendly Native American groups to facilitate the trade in furs.

The military presence at the fort normally consisted of a commandant and 8 to 10 enlisted men. Several French Marine uniform buttons have been uncovered during archaeological excavations as well as an entire cache of gun parts (part of a gunsmith's repair kit), some of which likely belonged to flintlocks of military issue. These items give tangible evidence of the soldiers, beyond the official documents that recorded their presence at Fort St. Joseph. British soldiers occupied the fort from 1761 until Pontiac's Rebellion in 1763 when supporters of the Ottawa leader attacked and occupied Fort St. Joseph in order to force the British from the area and encourage the return of the French. The fort was not regarrisoned by the British after this episode until a brief occupation in 1779. Material evidence of the British military consists of a ramrod



A French Marine button uncovered at Fort St. Joseph, indicating the French military presence at the fort.

guide (part of a musket used to hold a ramrod for pressing a charge down into the gun's muzzle) in the Fort St. Joseph Museum's artifact collection that is incised with a British broad arrow. This mark indicates that the artifact was once part of a musket which was property of the British crown and therefore likely issued to a British soldier stationed at the fort. As archaeological excavations continue more will be revealed about the military presence at Fort St. Joseph. Structural remains and artifacts will tell us where the soldiers lived and

carried out their daily duties, what they wore, what they ate, and what they might have done for leisure. But it is already certain that the soldiers at the post on the St. Joseph River carried out the important duty of securing the western Great Lakes region for trade which was so important in colonial North America.



Re-enactors depict the King's 8th, a British regiment stationed at Fort St. Joseph.