



Phil Porter. *The Soldiers of Fort Mackinac: An Illustrated History.* East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2018. 196 pp. \$39.95, cloth, ISBN 978-1-61186-281-2.

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The Soldiers of Fort Mackinac: An Illustrated History is the product of author Phil Porter's extensive experience working at Mackinac State Historic Parks since 1976, where he is currently director. The text is a large-format book that tells the story of Fort Mackinac's creation by the British in 1780 during the American Revolution through its decline and repurposing as the headquarters for the second national park created by the United States government in 1875, before its final closure in 1895 due to military budget concerns. Approximately 4,500 soldiers served at the fort during its life span, and they represent the core focus of the book.

Porter structures the book with an introductory essay covering the five major periods of Fort Mackinac's life span, followed by four illustrated sections containing brief biographic entries and photographs of soldiers, possessions, and buildings. The illustrated sections cover the two periods of British occupation, 1780-96 and 1812-15, as well as American life at the fort from 1796 to 1812, 1815 to 1861, and 1862 to 1895. For readers unfamiliar with Fort Mackinac's history, a brief synopsis of Porter's essay is helpful.

The British established Fort Mackinac during the American Revolution at the strategic juncture between Lake Huron and Lake Michigan for the purpose of controlling the lucrative fur trade and

continuing policies of Indian diplomacy within the region. After the Revolution, the British remained at the fort because American military strength proved inadequate to dislodge the British from western forts like Mackinac. From 1796 to 1812 the United States briefly occupied the fort in the wake of Jay's Treaty, but it fell to the British at the outset of the War of 1812 and remained in British hands until the end of the war. Fort Mackinac waned in importance as the fur trade became less competitive and the boundary of US settlement continued to creep westward throughout the early nineteenth century, which lowered the strategic importance of the fort. The US military periodically abandoned and understaffed Fort Mackinac until repurposing it as a prison for Confederate politicians captured during the Civil War. Mackinac's true renaissance came in 1875 when the federal government created the Mackinac National Park in recognition of the growing summer tourist industry, which prompted a surge of new construction and modernization within the fort. This rebirth proved short-lived when military budgeting deemed the fortress expensive and of marginal strategic value, prompting its closure in 1895.

Porter's essay is informative and reflects contemporary scholarship in his commitment to utilizing Native American tribal and community names when identifiable, and in situating Fort

Mackinac within the historical trends that shaped its life span. Of greatest interest to military historians is undoubtedly the attention Porter devotes within each section of the essay to the experiences of soldiers stationed at Fort Mackinac. Under each phase of Mackinac's life span, Porter highlights issues such as soldier pay, daily life and work, discipline, and strategic planning. Some continuities become apparent, such as the consistent depression of wages for soldiers, the changing nature of corporal punishment and military discipline, the constant need to rebuild and modernize the fort as it fell behind, and understaffing.

Illustrations form the core of Porter's book. The large format and glossy paper utilized in the physical production of *The Soldiers of Fort Mackinac* ensures that images fill half to two-thirds of each page. The quality of these images is generally consistent, though there are occasional instances where one image clearly possesses a higher pixel density than the image on the corresponding page. The images with the greatest disparity appear on pp. 38-39, though these formatting issues are infrequent enough not to detract from the overall presentation of the work. Each image or portrait typically corresponds with a biographical sketch of the soldier represented, along with quotations and facts about their most relevant experiences and connections to Fort Mackinac. While Porter provides footnotes for the introductory essay, the paragraphs tied to the images have no corresponding citation or archival reference. This will make tracking down the more interesting quotations from soldiers difficult for researchers. Even more interesting than the portraits and photographs are images portraying soldiers' lives and material culture, such as artillery officer's swords, Dr. John R. Bailey's medical kit and guidebook to the island, and Lieutenant Edward H. Plummer's elephant clock and Egyptian-themed candlesticks that he received as a wedding gift and used in his officer's residence while stationed at the fort. While space is always a premium for publishers, the inclusion of a list of soldiers known to have served at Fort Mack-

inac to offset the limited selection of soldiers included with their portraiture would enhance future editions of the book.

Readers with a connection to the region surrounding Mackinac, tourists visiting the park, or genealogists interested in their familial ties to soldiers who served at Fort Mackinac seem to be the most logical audience for *The Soldiers of Fort Mackinac*. Military historians will find the focus on Fort Mackinac's life span in the introductory essay interesting, but of limited use in a college class or their own research. Nevertheless, Porter has succeeded in producing an interesting and beautifully illustrated book on a fort that survived for over a hundred years and served a surprising variety of purposes.

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