

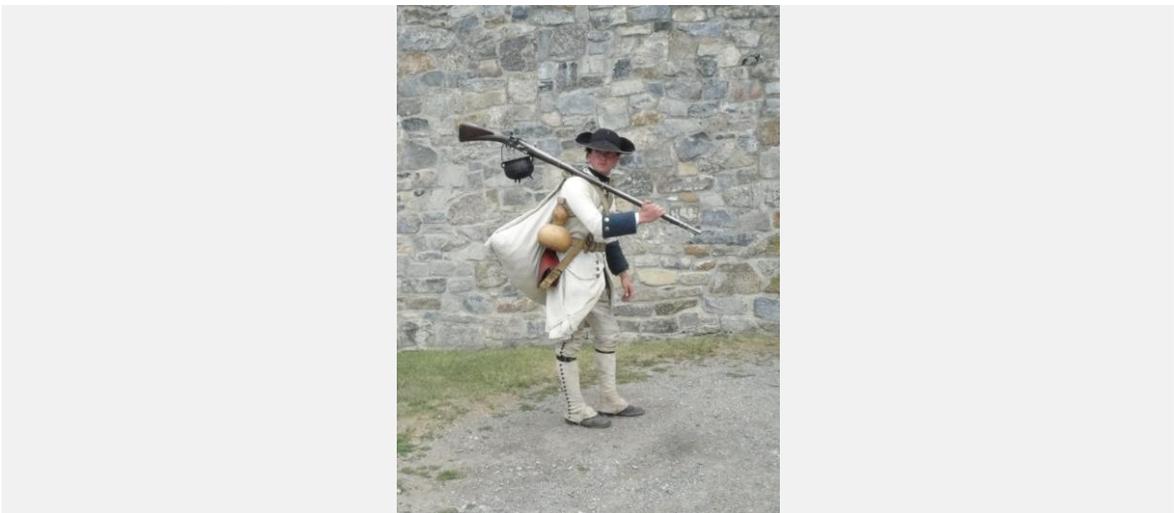
3 Steps to a Better French Army Portrayal for the French & Indian War

Posted on [December 16, 2016](#) by [admin](#)

By Senior Director of Interpretation, Stuart Lilie

In 2017, Fort Ticonderoga will be portraying the year 1757, with daily on-going programs, weapons demonstrations, and guided tours. The year will also feature epic living history events bringing to life French soldiers serving right here at Fort Carillon. Sailing across the Atlantic Ocean, these French soldiers defended Canada for nearly five years, winning Pyrrhic victories against vastly larger British and Anglo-American armies. Equally fascinating is the blend of unique military cultures embodied in the clothing, equipment, and food of the French army soldier in North America. Here are three simple details that really bring the story of French soldiers to life.

1. Havresac not Haversack



Everything a French soldier needed, extra clothing, personal items, & rations could be carried inside the gran haversac. These large bags are often shown in the period filled to the gills.

This distinction is more than just a 'k,' it's a gulf between two completely different military systems. In his 1768 book, "A System for the Compleat Interior Management and Oeconomy of a Battalion of Infantry," Captain Bennet Cuthbertson defined the British army haversack, saying, "...a Soldier cannot conveniently get through the Duties of a Campaign, without a Haversack of strong, coarse, grey linen (which is always issued as part of the Camp-equipage) to carry his bread and provisions on a March..."

In contrast, the French soldiers' *havresack* was two distinct bags. In, "*Institutions Militaire*" from 1754, the *havresacs*' dimensions and use was defined:

The Havresac of good and useful dimensions for Officers, Sergeants, and the same for soldiers, is a plain sack of linen 4 feet long, 2 feet, 6 inches wide at the corners, still giving him a hide/skin for normal usage to wrap up in for sleeping on campaign, and contains a small leather sack to carry cloths and keep out the rain. Closing the sack is a flap of the dimensions, closing with 4 buttons closing the outer part. It is 2 feet long and 1 foot wide. It would carry all that a Dragoon on foot would have independent of his personal equipment. The knapsack/haversack has a leather strap 2 feet long of Russia or buff leather, as wide as a waistbelt. The buckle is attached with another strap of Moroccan in the same width, 3 inches long sewn do the side the same distance from the opening. Above the strap, it folds over to keep out the rain, closed around the middle by a leather strap or cord. The little havresack is carried in the middle of the open space of the bag. The strap of the bag

is carried over the right shoulder, but is long enough to be carried over both shoulders, which is less work. (1)



This soldier's ration of tobacco is depicted in a small bag with two ties to close it. [Collection of the Musee de la Armee.](#)

In English parlance, the French havresac is much closer to their snapsack or knapsack of the time. The *gran* and *petit havresacs* together were to carry all a soldier's personal items. Blankets were not a standard issue item to French soldiers serving on the continent of Europe. Unique to French service, the *gran havresac* was large enough to serve as a sleeping bag. Blankets were issued as part of the colonial clothing issue to French soldiers in North America and were used in conjunction with their *gran havresacs* and bearskins in the winter. It does beg the question, how were rations carried, if they didn't have haversacks in the English sense? The answer is that rations were carried in the *gran havresac* as well, but likely in privately acquired linen bags. Some pieces of camp equipment, issued to individual British soldiers, like canteens, were issued to a *tente*, or *chambree* (or mess in English) of 8-10 French soldiers. In the case of canteens, or *bidon*, it was common for French soldiers, to procure gourd canteens for their personal use. It appears a similar practice was common for rations. The 1757 official watercolor of a soldier of the Berry regiment shows him enjoying a smoke, drawing his tobacco from a small bag with two ties closing it at the top. Tobacco, was a ration like any other in the French army. These small bags may well have been used more commonly to keep other rations like salt pork, flour, & all away from the sleeping soldier inside the *gran havresac* at night.

2. Pea Soup and more Pea Soup

French army officers had a surprising diversity of foods available. Chevalier de la Pause of the Guyenne regiment noted officers' rations as they prepared for campaign in the summer of 1755.

Given moreover to the commandant and major a barrel of pigs ears, two pots of goose thighs confit, and two barrels of wine and a parcel of groceries, thirty-two for them, and more a ham of each officer, two for the commandant, the same as the major, and in the place of the second ham each officer was given a wheel of gruyere cheese that was shared among all. Issued for stores to the major was one barrel of oil, one of vinegar, one of prunes, one of raisins and one crate of 50 pounds of soap, ten pounds of powder and eight pounds of lead.



Eating split pea soup and bread with the other members of your tent or barracks room was a daily ritual for French soldiers.

This was not the case for enlisted soldiers. In the spring of 1756, Chevalier de la Pause outlined the soldiers' rations for each soldier also per month:

60 pounds of bread

13 pounds of lard (salt-pork)
7 ½ pounds of peas

1 pot of brandy

1 pound of tobacco

These rations were either dry or salted, and so could be preserved without refrigeration. In the summer of 1755, this ration of flour often came as biscuit, a kin to ship's biscuit in British service, or hard tack a century later. At established posts like Carillon, bake ovens were built to allow proper bakers to turn rations of flour into proper fresh bread. French soldiers ate a lot of bread, but other than bread, dried peas and salted pork were the bulk of their rations. This meant two to three meals a day consisted of split pea soup. Each mess of eight to ten French soldiers had a *marmite* or iron kettle and a *gemelle* or tinned-iron mess bowl. They shared these to cook with along with a *bidon* or tinned-iron canteen for all of them, their tent, and a pot ladle. This meant that a cornerstone of daily life for a French soldier was eating together with the members of his mess, sopping up split pea soup with bread or biscuit.

3. **Hats: Collect All Three!**

If French army soldiers serving in North America lacked for anything, it wasn't hats. The full dress uniform of a French soldier included his *chapeau*, a cocked hat of black felt, bound in wide faux gold or silver lace. This lace matched the color of the metal of the buttons on the coat and sleeved vest underneath. More important soldiers, like sergeants, were distinguished by fine, not faux gold or

silver lace. While the cocked hat looks great, it really had to be preserved for full dress occasions, like mounting guard or battle itself. For messier duties, French soldiers' had a *bonnet*, which later was called a *bonnet de police*, or fatigue cap in English. Article LXVII of the 1753, "Royal Ordinance, Covering Regulations on the Service of the Infantry on Campaign," directly stated,



Blankets were issued by the colony of Canada in North America. For service in Europe these French soldiers are shown sleeping under their coats with their legs inside the gran havresac.

"When the troops are in camp, two or three men per mess, in vest and bonnet, will be conducted in good order for wood and straw, as the Officers & Sergeants command to this effect." Generally, these *bonnet* were made in the colors of their regimental coats, turned up in the color of the coat's cuff. The French naval ministry, which administered Canada, shipped brand new bonnet from France to go with new uniforms for French army soldiers arriving in 1755. These white *bonnet* were turned up at the bottom up with either blue or red wool cloth, to match the coat cuff colors of the six battalions arriving from France. The only thing better than two hats...is three. French army soldiers received an annual clothing and equipment allotment from the colony of Canada. This was similar, but not identical, to what Canadian *malice* and colonial regulars received. This clothing included another bonnet, which French officers like *Aide Major*, Chevalier de la Pause noted as a *bonnet d'laine*. This hat was the *tuque*, the red wool knit cap worn in France by sailors and worn in Canada by most men. This *bonnet* or *tuque* was often made double layered and in the Canadian winter must have been a welcomed comfort from the cold. The *tuque* was also a tangible symbol of serving in North America. These many hats represent the many roles of French soldiers in America; well-disciplined regular soldiers, skilled laborers, and fighters in the varied seasons and country of North America.

1: All measurements are in Paris feet and inches, not English measure. A Parisian inch is approximately one and one-eighth English inch.

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