

= Battle of St. Louis =

The Battle of St. Louis , Spanish San Luis , also known as the Battle of Fort San Carlos , was an unsuccessful British @-@ led attack on St. Louis (a French settlement in Spanish Louisiana , founded on the west bank of the Mississippi , after the Treaty of Paris (1763)) on May 26 , 1780 , during the Anglo @-@ Spanish War of 1779 ? 1783 . A force , composed primarily of Indians and led by a former British militia commander , attacked the settlement . The settlement 's defenders , mostly local militia , under the command of Lieutenant Governor of Spanish Louisiana Fernando de Leyba , had fortified the town , as best they could and successfully withstood the attack .

A second simultaneous attack on the nearby American outpost at Cahokia , on the opposite bank of the Mississippi and technically in British @-@ controlled territory , was also repulsed . The retreating Indians destroyed crops and took captive civilians outside the protected area . The British failure effectively ended their attempts to gain control of the Mississippi River , during the war .

= = Background = =

Following the entry of Spain into the American Revolutionary War in 1779 , British military planners in London wanted to secure the corridor of the Mississippi River against both Spanish and Patriot activity . Their plans included expeditions from West Florida to take New Orleans and other Spanish targets , and several expeditions to gain control of targets in the upper Mississippi , including the small town of St. Louis . The expedition from West Florida never got off the ground , since Bernardo de Gálvez , the Governor of Spanish Louisiana , had moved rapidly to gain control of British outposts on the lower Mississippi , and was threatening action against West Florida 's principal outposts of Mobile and Pensacola .

= = = British expedition = = =

The British expeditions from the north were organized by Patrick Sinclair , the military governor at Fort Michilimackinac in present @-@ day Michigan . Beginning in February 1780 he instructed fur traders to circulate through their territories , recruiting interested tribes for an expedition against St. Louis . The fur traders were offered the opportunity to control the fur trade in the upper parts of Spanish Louisiana as an incentive to participate .

Most of the force gathered at Prairie du Chien , where they were placed under the command of Emanuel Hesse , a former militia captain turned fur trader . The force numbered about two dozen fur traders and an estimated 750 to 1 @,@ 000 Indians when it left Prairie du Chien on May 2 . The largest contingent of the force was about 200 Sioux warriors led by Wapasha , with additional sizable companies from the Chippewa , Menominee , and Winnebago nations , and smaller numbers of warriors from other nations . The Chippewa chief Matchekewis was given overall command of the native forces . When the force reached Rock Island they were joined by about 250 men from the Sac and Fox nations . These warriors were somewhat reluctant to attack St. Louis , but Hesse gave them large gifts to secure their participation in the venture . The diversity within the expedition included some animosity among the tribes , for the Chippewa and Sioux in particular had a history of conflict with each other . However , Wapasha and Matchekewis promoted unity during the expedition .

= = = Spanish and American defenses = = =

The village of St. Louis was primarily a trading hub on the Mississippi River , but it was also the administrative capital of Upper Spanish Louisiana , and it was governed by Lieutenant Governor Fernando de Leyba , who was also a captain in the Spanish Army . Leyba was warned in late March 1780 by a fur trader that the British were planning an attack on St. Louis and the nearby American @-@ held post at Cahokia . He began developing plans for the village 's defense . He had only 29 regular army soldiers of the Fijo de Luisiana Colonial Regiment and an inexperienced militia force of

168 , most of whom were dispersed in the surrounding countryside .

Leyba developed a grand plan of defense that included the construction of four stone towers . Without funds , or the time to get them from New Orleans , Leyba asked the villagers to contribute funds and labor to the construction of these fortifications , and paid for some of the work from his private funds . By mid @-@ May a single round tower had been built that was about 30 feet (9 @. @ 1 m) in diameter and thirty to forty feet tall . The tower , dubbed Fort San Carlos , provided a commanding view of the surrounding countryside . As there did not appear to be sufficient time to build more towers , trenches were dug between the tower and the river to the north and south of the village . Five cannon were placed on top of the tower , and additional cannon were placed along the trenches .

With a force of only 197 men , 168 of which were inexperienced militia , it was highly probable that the opposing British @-@ Indian force of 1 @, @ 000 would overwhelm the Fort San Carlos . However , Leyba appealed to a 70 year old French habitant , Francois Valle , who was located 60 miles to the South of the fort at the site of the French Colonial Valles Mines . Valle sent his two sons and 151 well trained and equipped French militia men which tipped the scale in favor of the defenders . By Royal Decree on April 1 , 1782 , King Carlos III of Spain , conferred upon Francois Valle the rank of lieutenant in the regular Spanish army thus making him a Spanish don . (citation : Colonial Ste . Genevieve : An Adventure on the Mississippi Frontier written by Carl J. Ekberg , Patrice Pr ; 2 Sub Edition , March 1996) .

Valle also greatly aided in the Battle of Fort San Carlos because he gave the defenders of both forts a major tactical advantage by supplying them with genuine lead (instead of pebbles or stones) from his mines for musket balls and cannonballs . Getting hit with a pebble or stone did not compare to the damage and knockdown power of a 52 caliber rifle ball at 100 feet . [see [http : / / en.wikipedia.org / France in the American Revolutionary War](http://en.wikipedia.org/France_in_the_American_Revolutionary_War)]

As a result of his contributions , Francois Valle was called the " Defender of St. Louis " [see [http : / / vallemines.com / OfHistoricalNote / DefenderOfStLouis.aspx](http://vallemines.com/OfHistoricalNote/DefenderOfStLouis.aspx)] .

On May 15 , Leyba was visited by John Montgomery , the American commander at Cahokia , who proposed a joint Spanish @-@ American force to counter Hesse 's expedition , an idea that did not reach fruition . On May 23 , Leyba 's scouts reported that Hesse 's force was only 14 miles (23 km) away , had landed their canoes , and were coming overland .

= = Battle = =

On May 25 , Hesse sent out scouting parties to determine the situation at St. Louis . These parties were unable to get close to the village due to the presence of workers , including women and children , in the fields outside the village . The next day Hesse sent Jean @-@ Marie Ducharme and 300 Indians across the river to attack Cahokia , while the remainder headed toward St. Louis , arriving about 1 : 00 pm . A warning shot was fired from the tower when they came in view , with the Sioux and Winnebagoes leading the way , followed by the Sac and Fox , and the fur traders , including Hesse , bringing up the rear . Leyba directed the defense from the tower , and opened a withering fire from there and the trenches when the enemy force came in range . On the first volley , most of the Sac and Fox fell back , apparently unwilling to fight , leaving many of the other participants suspicious of their motives in joining the expedition and complaining of their " treachery " .

Wapasha and the Sioux persisted for several hours in attempts to draw the Spanish defenders out , going so far as brutally killing some captives they had taken in the fields . Although this angered some of the townspeople to the point where the militia requested permission to make a sortie , Leyba refused , and the attackers eventually withdrew and headed north , destroying crops , livestock , and buildings as they went .

On the other side of the river , Ducharme 's attack on Cahokia was easily repulsed . The timely arrival of George Rogers Clark to lead its defense played a role ; Clark 's reputation as a frontier fighter made the Indian force reluctant to pursue the attack .

= = Aftermath = =

The village of 700 lost between 50 and 100 killed , wounded , and captured , virtually all civilians . A year later the Spaniards from St. Louis raided Fort St. Joseph , bringing the captured British flag back to St. Louis .

Fernando de Leyba died the following month , the subject of local criticism because he never formally recognized the efforts made by the citizenry in the town 's defense . His valor earned him a promotion to lieutenant colonel from King Charles , who did not know that he had died .

= = Legacy = =

The site where Fort San Carlos stood is at the corner of Fourth and Walnut Streets in St. Louis . A local organization annually commemorates the battle by reading the names of 21 people who lost their lives in the battle . The battle is also remembered in a mural and diorama located in the Missouri State Capitol (pictured) .