BATOCHE
NATIONAL
HISTORIC
SITE

DEPARTMENT OF INDIAN AFFAIRS AND NORTHERN DEVELOPMENT

Illustrations through the courtesy of the Hudson's Bay Company (p. 1), the Public Archives of Canada, and the National Film Board (p. 18)

The historic photographs reproduced in this booklet were taken by Captain James Peters who commanded an artillery battery at the Battles of Fish Creek and Batoche. These were the first photos taken of a military campaign in Canada. Captain Peters was equipped with an early camera using bulky glass plates. The relatively long exposure time and the difficulty of taking photographs while under fire made it inevitable that the photos would be of poor quality but even with their imperfections Captain Peters' photographs provide an invaluable historic record of the campaign in the Northwest.

Batoche National Historic Site

Issued under the authority of the
HONOURABLE JEAN CHRÉTIEN, P.C., M.P.,
Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development

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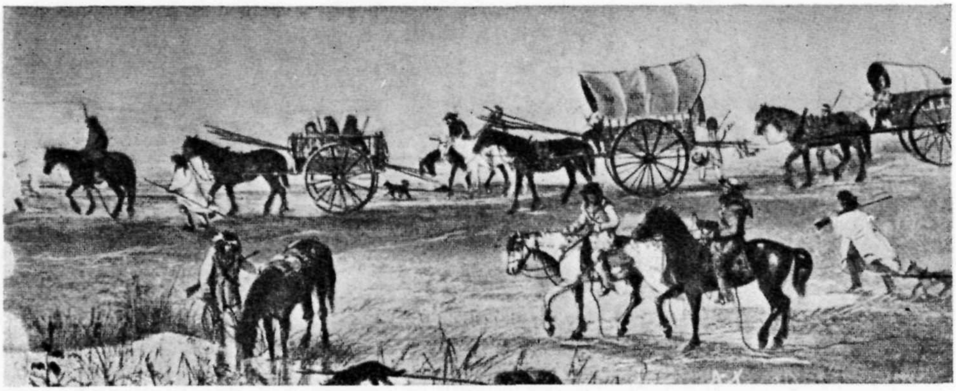
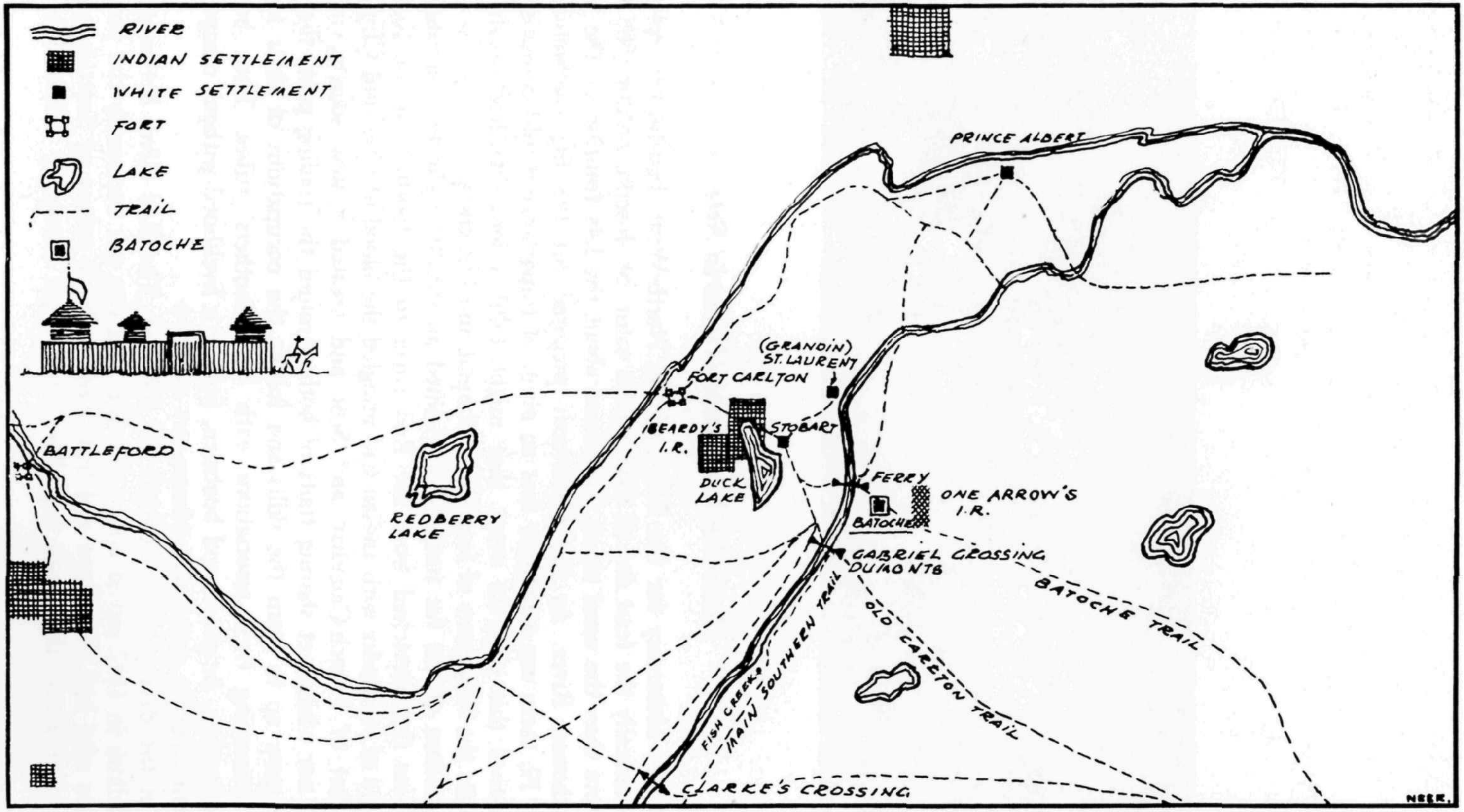


Batoche National Historic Site

It was customary for the Métis of the North-West Territory to celebrate enthusiastically the feast day of their patron saint, St. Joseph, but in 1885 there was more than the usual air of excitement about the lots fronting on the South Saskatchewan River. As the half-breeds prepared for the big celebration on March 19, there was a promise that an event of importance would coincide with the festival this year, an event that might fulfil a long-cherished dream and obliterate the long years of frustration, despair and bitterness.

Children of the fur trade, they claimed an historic right to their share of the plains that stretched from the Red River to the foothills of the Rockies. Marriage of fur trader with Indian had mingled the blood of Cree and Chippewa with that of French-Canadian and Scot and created a new society, neither Indian nor white, yet sharing traits of both. Around the trading posts the half-breeds grew up to learn the skills and follow the occupations of their fathers while preserving their associations with their mothers' tribes. They became buffalo hunters, freighters and boatmen, finding a livelihood without compromising their freedom and independence.

Yet the days of freedom were not limitless. The Red River Settlement of Earl Selkirk in 1812 served notice that the land was not necessarily the property of those who had been born and had lived on it. A colony of Scottish settlers was placed across the route that the North-West Company followed to the


RIVER
INDIAN SETTLEMENT
WHITE SETTLEMENT
FORT
LAKE
TRAIL
BATOCHE
PRINCE ALBERT
(GRANDIN)
ST. LAURENT
FORT CARLTON
BEARDY'S I.R.
STOBART
DUCK LAKE
FERRY
ONE ARROW'S I.R.
BATOCHE
GABRIEL CROSSING
DUMONTS
BATOCHE TRAIL
OLD CARLTON TRAIL
MAIN SOUTHERN TRAIL
FISH CREEK
CLARKE'S CROSSING
BATTLEFORD
REDBERRY LAKE
NEER.

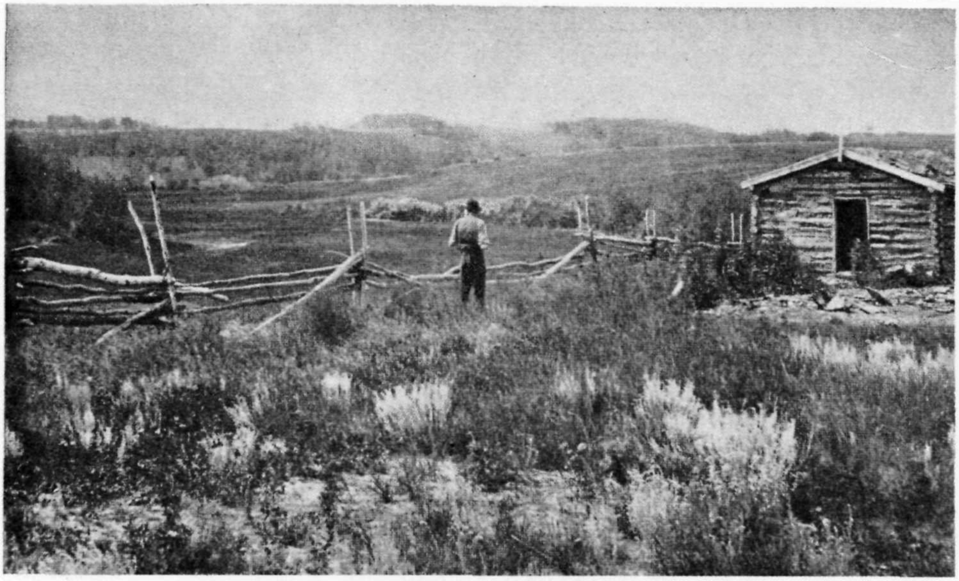
The country around Batoche as in 1885 showing main trails and settlements.

Athabasca trapping grounds. Encouraged by their friends, the Nor'westers, to believe they were a "new nation" with a land title to the West that nothing could destroy, the Métis opposed the settlement. Their resistance was futile: the settlement stayed and after 1821, when the Nor'westers who backed the half-breed agitation disappeared in the union of their company with the Hudson's Bay Company, the Métis were forced to accept the unpopular fact that they would have to share the West with not only Indians but also settlers from Scotland and eastern Canada. Yet they never renounced their claim to a share of the western lands.

The first crisis came when the Hudson's Bay Company sold the West to the Canadian Government in 1869. The half-breeds were indignant that the land transfer could be made without consulting them and feared that their language and religion would not be respected by the new land-owner. Their resentment grew when government surveyors chained across their long narrow river lots threatening their land tenure. Invariably these lots had a narrow frontage on the river thus assuring each tenant water rights as well as convenient access to the river for transportation. Being so close to their neighbors the Métis developed cohesive communities and a certain social solidarity. Surveying of the land into sections of 640 acres (the even-numbered sections which would be available free for homesteading and the odd-numbered for sale by the government) would shatter the Métis community and thrust them off their land for no policy had been provided to allow them any special consideration.

The Métis, angry at the refusal of the Canadian Government to recognize their problem, formed a provisional government headed by Louis Riel, a Métis schoolteacher fitted both by natural aptitude and by education to give his people political leadership. This action persuaded the government to take a different view of the eventual status of the North-West Territory; instead of becoming a colony of Canada the Red River settlement was to be the Province of Manitoba with all the constitutional rights of the other Canadian Provinces including the right to a responsible and locally elected government of its own. In 1870 the Province of Manitoba was created and the Canadian Government recognized the Métis land claims by setting aside 1,400,000 acres for their eventual occupation.

Social and economic circumstances, together with an apparent instability prevented the Métis from enjoying the gains they had made. Until the land could be surveyed and distributed the half-breeds would have to be satisfied with scrip, the certificates which entitled the owner to 240 acres of land. Their leader, Riel, had left, banished from Canada for five years for his part in the death of a labourer from Ontario. Without his advice the people became bewildered and impatient. Some never waited to receive their scrip and left Manitoba without it; others, not understanding the value of the land certificates, sold their scrip to glib land-sharks for about a fraction of its worth. Then, demoralized further by the influx of settlers from Ontario and the loss of livelihood when their freighting activities were taken over by railroads and steamboats, they drifted away to other parts of the Northwest.



Fish Creek as it looked in 1884.

In what is now Saskatchewan the Métis had laboriously developed for more than 15 years a counterpart of Red River on the banks of the South Saskatchewan. Again the Métis were confronted with a familiar problem: they had no legal right to the land they occupied and no hope of obtaining land concessions unless they obtained the sympathy of the Canadian Government. Petition after petition was presented to the government but in vain. It was clear to them that their political leader should be invited back to win support for the Métis claims. So in 1884 four delegates from the Métis went to St. Peter's Mission near Fort Benton, Montana, to ask Louis Riel to return. Riel, moved by the troubles of his people, accepted and returned to Batoche on July 1, 1884.

It was at Batoche that Riel now waited for the dawn of St. Joseph's Day. Throughout the winter of 1884-85 he had worked energetically to solve the problems of the Métis. His eloquence and the moderate program of reform that he advocated won him much support in Saskatchewan, for many white settlers were as dissatisfied as the Métis with the government's administration of the North-West Territory. Yet he had accomplished nothing: the government remained blandly indifferent to the troubles of the West. Perhaps a show of strength would persuade the federal government that the Métis were again united and determined to have their grievances answered.

What Riel proposed was a reception of the Métis coup d'état of 16 years ago in the Red River Settlement. On St. Joseph's Day he intended to proclaim again a provisional government and through the strength of the armed Métis and their Indian allies intimidate the Canadian Government into meeting the Métis demands. Riel's argument to the Indians was a persuasive one: he visualized a new confederacy of the half-breeds and Indians, a republic in which all those of Indian blood would share the administration of the central plains of the continent. Yet there was little support from the Indians. Embittered though they were by the white man's administration and by the hunger and the distress of their people, few of the Indian bands had declared themselves on the Métis side. Only the Crees of Chiefs Poundmaker and Big Bear and a band of Sioux seemed ready to take the warpath.

Riel played on the superstitions and credulity of the Métis and the Indians as St. Joseph's Day approached. Exploiting the knowledge of an impending solar eclipse (which was available to anyone with access to an almanac) he solemnly told his followers that God was on the side of the half-breeds and if their enterprise was to be successful his hand would blot out the sun. The impressive prophecy came true on March 16. On the same day the North-West Mounted Police at Regina received orders to march north to protect Prince Albert, then a settlement of about 1,000 population.

The only apparent opposition to the Métis plans were the Mounted Police. Spread thinly throughout the North-West they could muster only 557 all ranks to enforce law and order in a large area stretching from the western border of Manitoba to the passes and valleys of the Rockies. "D" Division, which policed the region of unrest, was particularly strained; the total strength of the detachments at Fort Carlton, Fort Pitt, Prince Albert and Frog Lake and the divisional headquarters at Battleford was 200 men. The detachments at Carlton, only 20 miles from Batoche, and Prince Albert were vulnerable to attack. Fort Carlton, a dilapidated trading post located poorly for defence, could not withstand a siege and Prince Albert, with its stores and warehouses, offered a tempting prize to an enemy in need of supplies.

The Mounted Police column left Regina for Prince Albert in the early morning of March 18. While the police pressed northward through bitter cold a rumour alerted the Métis at Batoche. A large force of police was reported coming to Batoche to arrest Riel and his supporters. To forestall the police, Riel and his men seized arms and ammunition from the two stores in Batoche. They took some prisoners, including a magistrate, two telegraph operators and an Indian agent, cut the telegraph line between Batoche and Prince Albert and commandeered the Batoche church building as a headquarters.

Then on St. Joseph's Day Riel organized the provisional government. A "Council of Twelve" was appointed as the executive council and began drafting policy. The most pressing matter to be decided by the council was military strategy. Gabriel Dumont had been named commander-in-chief and he, like most members, favoured the calling up of the Indians and immediate attacks on Fort Carlton and Prince Albert.

Dumont had all the qualities of a top flight guerilla leader. Years of buffalo hunting and occasional encounters with Indian war-parties had taught him the ways of plains warfare and developed a keen awareness of the military advantages of terrain. His complete fearlessness, his skill with arms and his good judgment marked him for command and his reputation for integrity and generosity assured him of a loyal and devoted following. While leading the Métis buffalo hunts he had enforced a strict but just discipline that the hunters respected. When the Métis sought a leader to represent them Dumont had been the popular choice but, aware of his limitations, he declined and proposed instead the nationally-known champion of Métis rights, Louis Riel. The compromises and intrigues of politics were beyond Dumont; he was a simple and direct man lacking the polish and education to enable him to deal confidently with Canada's greatest men. While Riel was the Métis intellectual dreaming of political and philosophical systems Dumont was the man of action, a good man to have beside you in a fight, a counsellor who could be relied upon for practical advice.

It would be expected that Riel and Dumont would differ on military strategy. The aggressive Dumont wanted to make immediate attacks on Fort Carlton and Prince Albert; the cautious Riel wanted to preserve the Métis' moral position by refusing to fight unless they were first attacked. But the Council of Twelve resolved to capture the fort without bloodshed. To gain this objective they offered terms of surrender to Superintendent L. F. N. Crozier, the N.W.M.P. detachment commander at Fort Carlton. Crozier, whose small command had been reinforced by about 80 volunteers from Prince Albert, rejected the offer and prepared to repel a Métis attack.

By March 24 the Mounted Police column from Regina had reached Prince Albert, by-passing Batoche. They did not arrive too soon. A band of Sioux who had taken refuge on the South Saskatchewan after the Minnesota Massacre of 1862 had begun moving northward from their reserve, (presumably for an attack on Prince Albert). The forced march of the Mounted Police, a remarkable journey of 300 miles in seven days made in severe weather, deterred the Sioux attack and saved Prince Albert from possible attack.

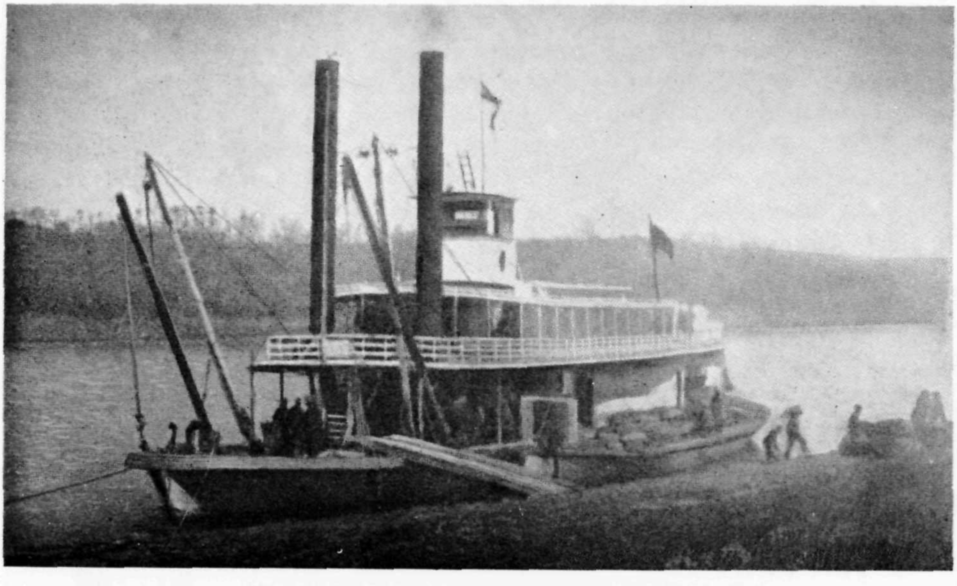
The arrival of the police column was unknown to the Métis and believing that a strong force of police was marching to Batoche to arrest their leaders, they prowled the South Saskatchewan to intercept the force. Nor did Crozier at Carlton know of its arrival. When a police patrol returned on March 26 to report that they had been stopped by a large force of half-breeds from recovering supplies hidden near an abandoned store at Duck Lake, a point on the trail between Batoche and Fort Carlton, he decided to show the Métis that they could not obstruct or intimidate the North-West Mounted Police. With about 100 volunteers and police, mounted or riding in sleighs, he took the trail to Duck Lake.

Two miles from the store Crozier and his men encountered the half-breeds, well-positioned on three sides of the trail. There was a futile attempt at parley and then someone's tense trigger finger moved. It was a brief but bloody affair. The Métis and their Indian allies poured a murderous fire on the police and the volunteers and within 40 minutes forced Crozier to make a difficult and costly withdrawal under fire. It was a crushed and beaten force that returned to Fort Carlton. Twelve men had died in the snow of Duck Lake and 11 had been wounded. The Métis loss was four dead. Both commanders were wounded; Dumont received a head wound and a bullet grazed Crozier's cheek.

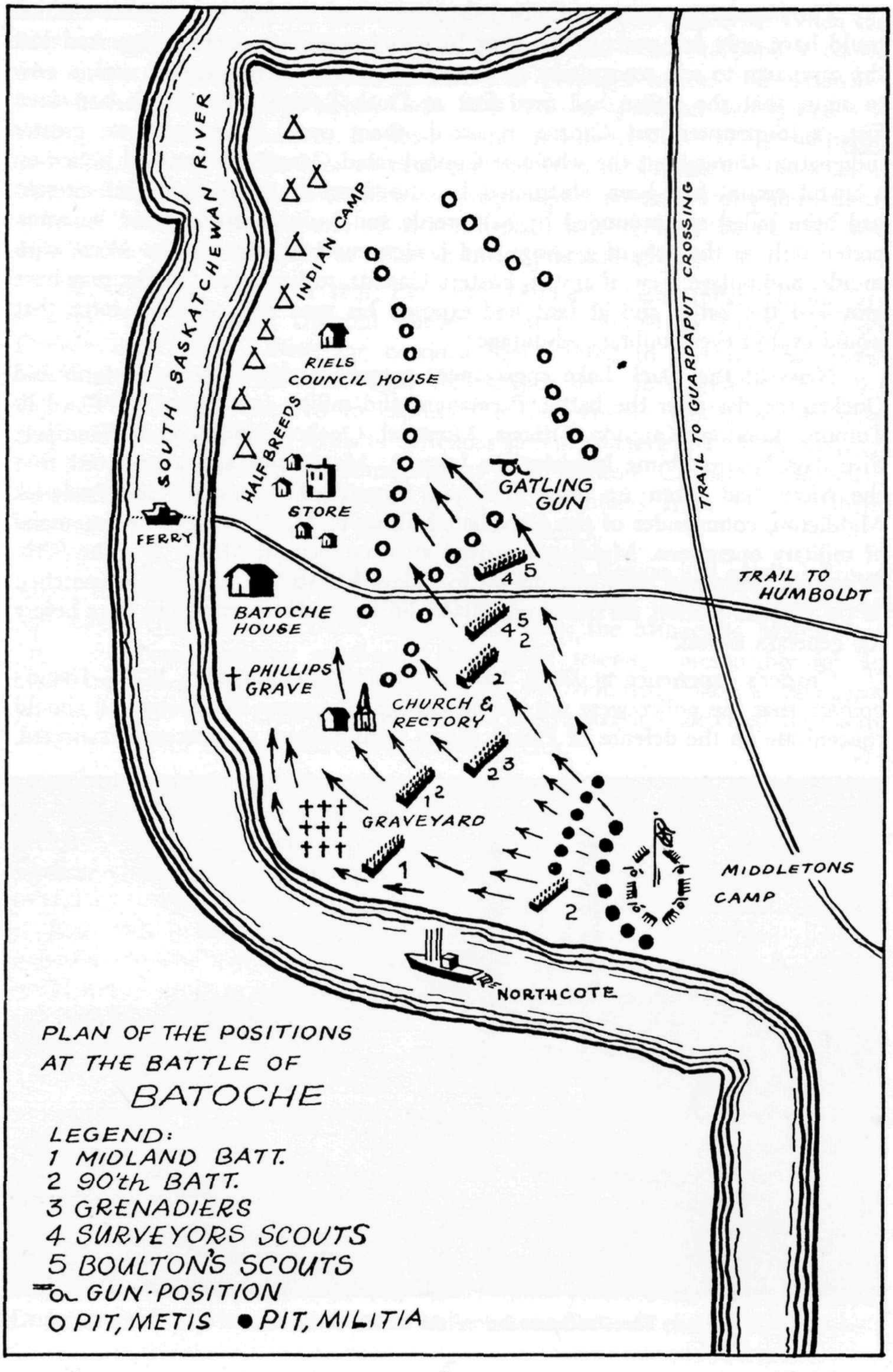
The bloody encounter at Duck Lake committed the Métis to a course which could have only one end. While they had won a military victory they had lost the campaign to win recognition of their grievances by force. It was useless now to argue that the police had fired first at Duck Lake. If the Métis had fired first, as Superintendent Crozier reported, there could have been no greater indignation throughout the whole of Confederated Canada. A band of police on a lawful errand had been obstructed by armed rebels, loyal Canadian citizens had been killed and wounded by half-breeds and Indians—these could be interpreted only as the acts of a savage and lawless mob threatening the West with murder and pillage. Few, if any, in Eastern Canada, realized that Crozier may have provoked the battle and at best had exposed his men to a superior force that would exploit every military advantage.

News of the Duck Lake engagement spread quickly through Ontario and Quebec the day after the battle. Permanent and militia units were mobilized in Toronto, London, Kingston, Ottawa, Montreal, Quebec, Halifax and Winnipeg. Five days before, Prime Minister Sir John A. Macdonald had announced that the Métis had taken up arms and had despatched Major-General Frederick Middleton, commander of the Canadian Militia, to the West to take command of military operations. Middleton arrived at Winnipeg on March 27. The 90th. Winnipeg Rifles had been in arms for four days and its left wing was despatched to Qu'Appelle Station, on the main railway line in Saskatchewan, two days before the general's arrival.

Crozier's experience at Duck Lake confirmed Commissioner A. G. Irvine's opinion that the police were not strong enough to engage the Métis and should concentrate on the defence of Prince Albert until military reinforcements arrived.



The Northcote before the Battle of Batoche.


SOUTH SASKATCHEWAN RIVER
INDIAN CAMP
HALF BREEDS
RIELS COUNCIL HOUSE
STORE
FERRY
BATOCHE HOUSE
PHILLIPS GRAVE
CHURCH & RECTORY
GRAVEYARD
GATLING GUN
TRAIL TO GUARDAPUT CROSSING
TRAIL TO HUMBOLDT
MIDDLETONS CAMP
NORTHCOTE
1
1 2
2 3
2
4 5 2
4 5
2
PLAN OF THE POSITIONS AT THE BATTLE OF
BATOCHE
LEGEND:
1 MIDLAND BATT.
2 90'th BATT.
3 GRENADIERS
4 SURVEYORS SCOUTS
5 BOULTON'S SCOUTS
GUN·POSITION
O PIT, METIS ● PIT, MILITIA

Accordingly, he ordered the evacuation of Fort Carlton. On the night of March 27-28, while agitated citizens in the cities of Eastern Canada discussed the Battle of Duck Lake, its survivors took the road to Prince Albert abandoning the fort to the flames of a mysterious fire whose origins were never officially admitted.

With the victory at Duck Lake as proof of his power, Riel turned his attention to agitation among the Indians. Riel did not hope that the Indians would provide a force for his army; he believed they could not accept the discipline and control that would be necessary if they were to be part of the Métis command. His strategy was to persuade the Indians to rise in their own way. Unorganized and uncoordinated though such risings would be, they would distract the attention of the Canadian army and disperse its striking force. With the army scattered through the North-West putting down a hundred separate Indian uprisings and trying at the same time to protect panic-stricken settlers, Riel hoped that a master-stroke like the capture of General Middleton and other senior officers would complete the demoralization of the Canadian Government and force it to settle with the Métis on their terms.

The Indian Rising broke out around the end of March. A hundred miles to the west of Batoche, the Crees and Assiniboines united and occupied the village of Battleford while 400 inhabitants and nearby settlers took shelter in the N.W.M.P. fort. On April 2 Crees, many of them from Big Bear's band, massacred nine white men at the settlement of Frog Lake. Crees besieged police in Fort Pitt, a Hudson's Bay post between Battleford and Fort Edmonton, and forced its abandonment.

The assembly of the North-West Field Force was carried out swiftly. Within a few days after the call-up most of the eastern troops were on their way.

Middleton marched on April 10 from Fort Qu'Appelle toward Batoche. Another column, which was marching from Swift Current under the command of Lieut.-Col. W. D. Otter of Toronto, was to join him at Clark's Crossing, one of the ferry points on the South Saskatchewan, and the combined force was to take Batoche and then move on to relieve Battleford. Instead of joining the attack on Batoche Otter received orders to advance directly to Battleford.

The army had 200 miles to march through country that offered numerous profitable opportunities for ambush to a skilled enemy. "Uncle Gabriel", as Dumont was called by Riel, yearned for a chance to harass the advancing army but was restrained by Riel. The presence of police and armed volunteers at Prince Albert could not be ignored. They were a constant threat to the Métis headquarters at Batoche and a worried Riel could not afford to release his rifle men for raids farther south.

Riel's caution deprived the Métis of the few military advantages they had. He placed far too great a value on Batoche, which Dumont was surrounding with an elaborate system of trenches and rifle-pits. Static defences robbed the Métis of their mobility and condemned them to fighting a conventional battle against a stronger and better armed force trained for this type of warfare. However, Batoche was the home of the Métis, the nucleus of their community, a constant physical reminder of what they were trying to hold. Riel, obsessed with his role as a prophet, regarded it as a new Jerusalem that must be held at all costs.

Dumont knew that the Métis could not hold out long at Batoche. He had good information on the size of Middleton's force. Against such a force he preferred guerilla tactics. Small, fast-moving units could have taken the initiative striking the Canadian soldiers and police only when all conditions for a successful attack were in their favour. Evidence that such tactics might have been successful was provided at Fish Creek.

On April 23 Middleton started the march from Clarke's Crossing and that evening a party of half-breeds and Indians led by Dumont set an ambush at the ravine of Fish Creek, 25 miles north.

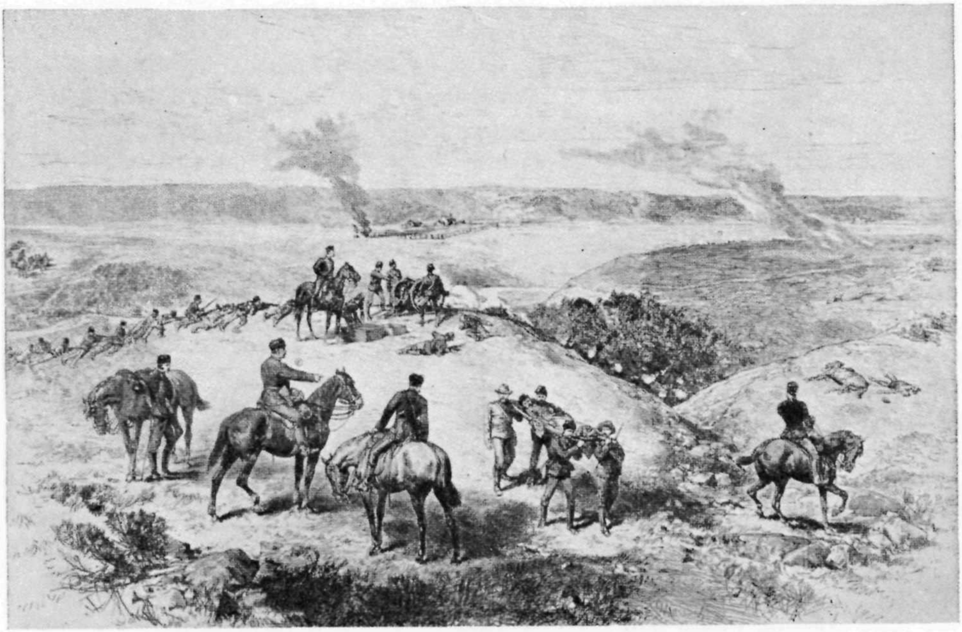
Behind bluffs and boulders or lying in rutted game-trails hidden in the brush Dumont's force of probably 160 men waited for the army on the morning of April 24.

The ambush would have been successful had not several Indians left their positions prematurely revealing themselves to Middleton's advance scouts. All hopes for a surprise now lost, the Métis set the prairie afire to confuse the advancing soldiers and began firing rapidly and accurately against the 500 soldiers who moved forward in skirmishing order. While the Métis kept their heads down, their attackers had to run over open ground to reach the front of their coulee and here many men fell, the 90th. Winnipeg Rifles suffering particularly. Except for a few Winchester repeating rifles the Métis fought with muzzle-loaders, firing either ball or shot, while the soldiers had single-shot Sniders, a weapon whose greater range would have given an advantage had the riflemen been adequately trained.

Middleton had not sufficient numerical superiority to defeat a determined well-entrenched enemy for he had split his force into two columns, one of which was marching on the left bank of the river. Communications between the two columns was extremely poor and the column on the left bank, attracted by the sound of firing on the opposite bank, crossed over only after the main fighting was over. If this column, which was almost as large as Middleton's, had not been detached, a concentrated attack on the Métis position would have been possible.

As it turned out, the rebels held off the militia until early afternoon. The soldiers suffered severely in their encounter: ten soldiers were killed and 40 or more wounded. Dumont's losses were 11 killed and 18 wounded. After Fish Creek, Middleton halted his advance to Batoche for two weeks to await the arrival of supplies and reinforcements and to arrange for the evacuation of wounded soldiers.

When Middleton resumed his advance to Batoche he had a "navy". The Hudson's Bay Company steamer, *Northcote,* arrived on May 4 after a long delay. Low water made it impossible for the steamer to make a quick passage and much of the voyage was accomplished only by the laborious use of long poles mounted



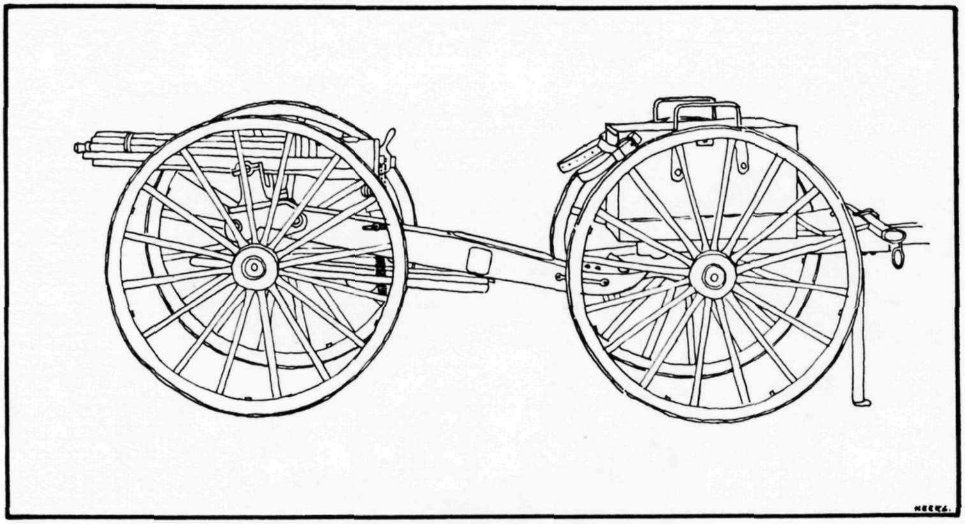
The Battle of Fish Creek from a sketch by Capt. H. De H. Haig, Assistant Quartermaster-General to General Middleton.

at the sides. In much the same way as a man using crutches the steamer raised itself upward and then forward with the support of the poles. It was a tedious trip for the militiamen of the Midland Battalion of Ontario, the medical and transport personnel, and particularly an American National Guard officer who could barely restrain his impatience to demonstrate his pet weapon in action.

Capt. A. L. Howard was a strange addition to the North-West Field Force. It was a long way from his native Connecticut to the deck of a stern-wheeler bringing supplies and reinforcements up the South Saskatchewan for a Canadian army but Howard would have travelled even further for an opportunity to show other soldiers the advantages of the Gatling machine gun. He was present not as an official U.S. Army observer but as a demonstrator for the Colt Patent Fire Arms Company at Hartford, Conn., the manufacturer of the Gatling. Colt had loaned two guns for use in the campaign; one was with Howard on the *Northcote*, the other with a Canadian field battery in Col. Otter's column.

The Gatling, patented by Richard Gatling in 1862 and adopted by the U.S. Army in 1866, was new to Canada but was in use by European armies. It achieved a very high rate of fire by a cluster of from four to ten barrels rotated by a hand crank and firing in rotation. Spewing out as much as 500 bullets a minute the Gatling was a deadly weapon against massed troops caught in the open.

When the Gatling and the Midland battalion had joined the army and the steamer had been barricaded to serve as an improvised gunboat the advance on Batoche was ready. On May 8 the steamer moved to Gabriel's Crossing,



The Gatling

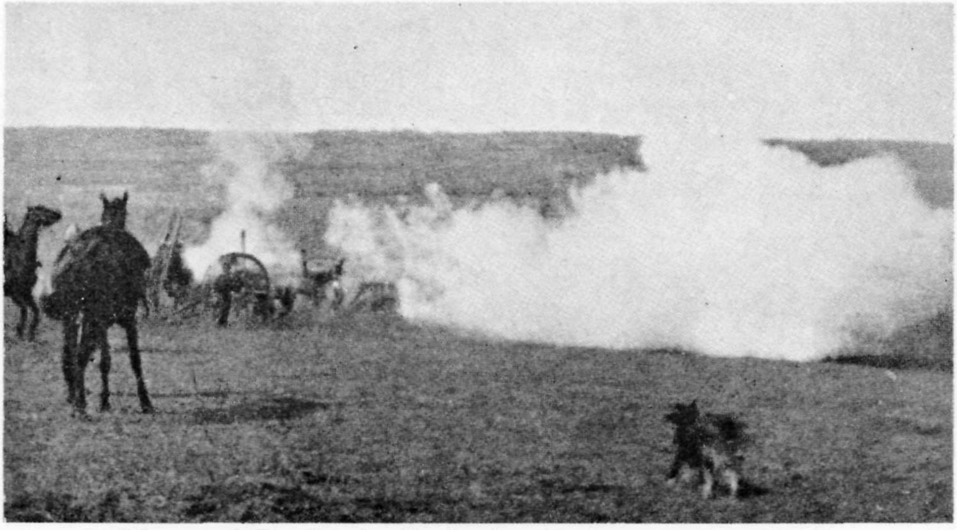
the ferry crossing which had been manned by Dumont in more peaceful times. These ferry crossings consisted of a wire cable strung tightly across the river and a scow connected to the cable by pulleys. Dumont's home was here and later that day scouts looted it, finding among the Métis leader's possessions a billiard table and a washing machine which were installed with delight on the *Northcote*.

Early the next morning the *Northcote* moved downstream to Batoche and did not get far before she came under heavy rifle fire from Métis and Indians hidden on the river banks. In the excitement, the captain lost control of the wheel and the boat drifted into a ferry cable that the insurgents had strung across the river. The cable sheared off the upper structure complete with the smoke-stacks and the whistle which had been intended for use as a signal to keep in touch with the troop movements. While the crew tried to repair the boat the snipers kept up a steady fire which discouraged concentrated work and it was the evening of May 10 before the *Northcote* again got under way. After further delay caused by grounding on a sand-bar the stern-wheeler managed to get down the river to Hudson's Bay Ferry Crossing below Batoche. There she was joined by the *Marquis*, another Hudson's Bay Company boat, and after many more embarrassing delays, the two managed to reach Batoche. However by then the fighting was all over.

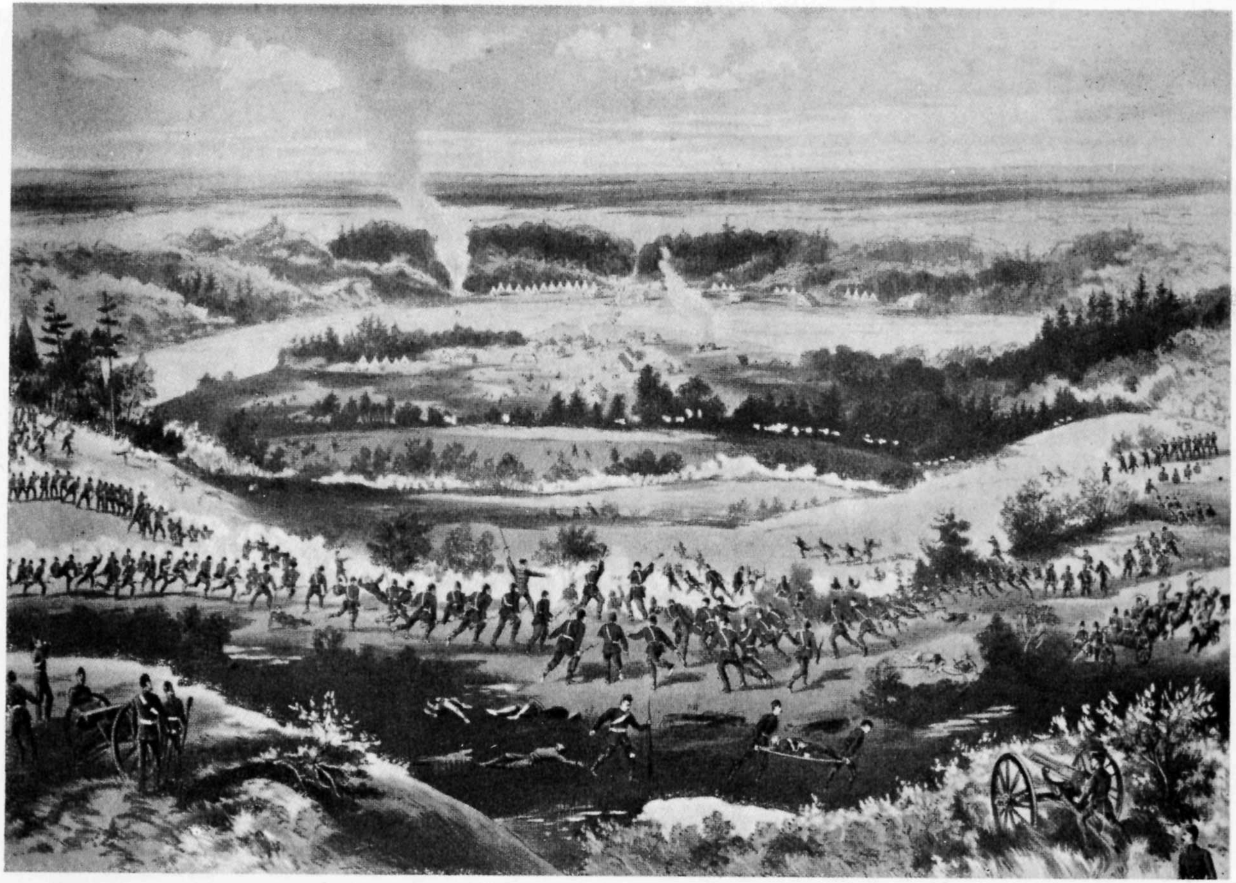
The Battle of Batoche was fought in the outskirts of the village where the Métis had built a skilful defence system of rifle-pits and trenches commanding all entry routes. Thirty or forty rows of rifle-pits were arranged in a semi-circle so that they would be able to provide mutual support. In each row there were from five to 25 well-dispersed pits. The rifle-pits had been constructed with care and imagination: they were long enough to shelter two or three men and were three to four feet deep for protection against rifle and shell-fire. Above the pit was a breastwork of earth, rocks, and logs slotted for firing and camouflaged by small branches thrust in the top. Every bit of ground had been exploited to the full in arranging the defence network. Men could move between the pits along routes that were shielded from enemy fire by high points and further concealed by thick brush. Every rise in the ground was crowned by barricades of trees and rocks. Middleton, inspecting the defences after the battle, "was astonished at the strength of the position and at the ingenuity and care displayed in the construction of the rifle-pits".

The village that the Métis defended was not prepossessing by modern standards. The settlements on the South Branch of the Saskatchewan were mainly a few rough buildings grouped around a store or one terminal of the several ferries that crossed the river. Batoche had grown up around the famed Batoche House, the abode of a prosperous trader, Xavier Letendre, known as Batoche. This fine house with its gables, its two and a half storeys and its classically columned verandah added distinction to what was otherwise an architectural desert. The rest of Batoche was some log houses and several small stores while a mile southeast were the church and the rectory, the latter serving as accommodation for the priests as well as a hospital and school.

When Middleton reached Batoche he sent scouts ahead to probe the Métis defences. Several barricaded houses on the outskirts of the village were shelled and caught on fire, one being rapidly vacated by a few Métis. With Howard and his Gatling the scouts then reached the church of St. Antoine de Padoue and the rectory. When the Gatling fired on the rectory Father Julien Moulin, the parish priest, and another priest appeared with a white handkerchief. The rectory contained five priests from various Métis missions who had been ordered by Riel



The guns shelling Batoche. Shortly after this photograph was taken the Métis attacked the position.



The capture of Batoche.

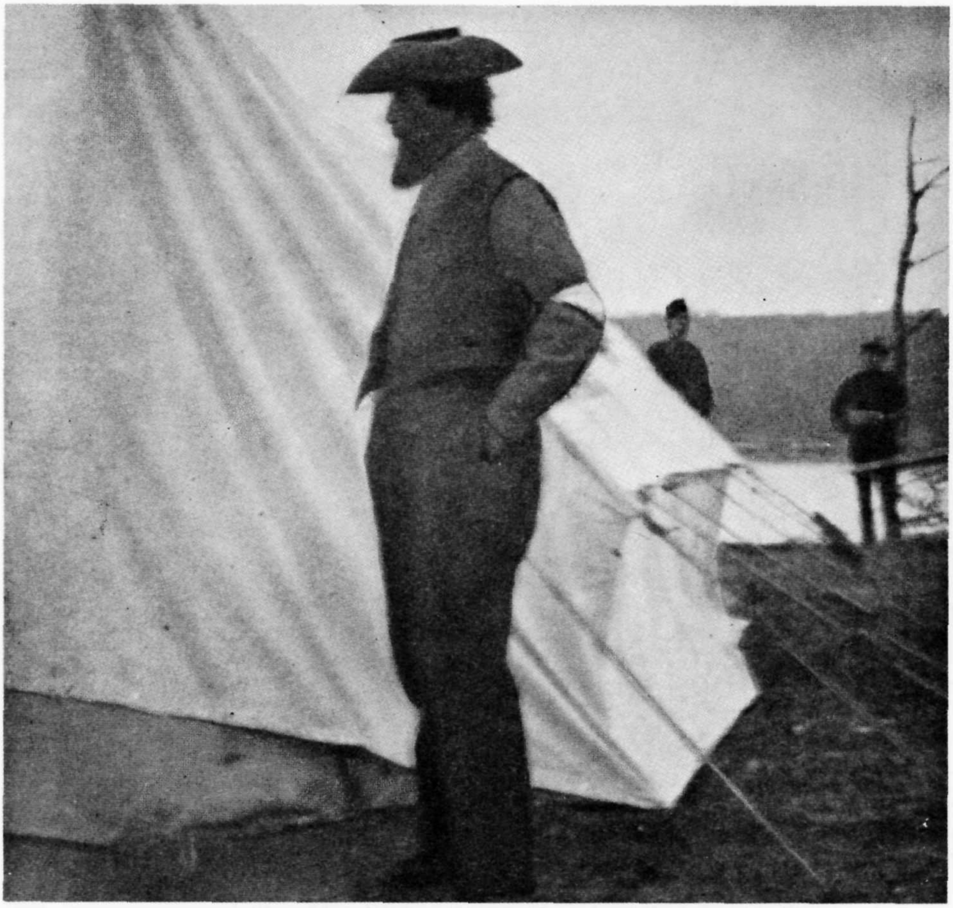
General Middleton and his officers meet the priests at the rectory.

to stay at Batoche and several nuns from the Order of the Faithful Companions of Jesus who had fled from the St. Laurent district to Batoche early in April. For these the arrival of the soldiers was a deliverance; since Riel had taken control of the religious life of Batoche they had been almost prisoners in the rectory.

Beyond the church and the rectory, the scouts were fired upon and drew back while two companies of the Royal Grenadiers advanced to engage the enemy. They too were halted by heavy fire and took cover. The artillery was ordered to change its positions and while this was being carried out a party of Métis crept close and fired a volley into the gunners, wounding several men and killing one horse. The guns were threatened but the Gatling went into action and, though its fire was high, checked the rebels from making an organized charge.

For the rest of the day the battle was a stalemate. The military could not advance and the rebels maintained a steady pressure on all sides. Middleton's line was constantly in danger of encirclement and menaced by small bands of infiltrators. One such band crawled to within 100 yards of the artillery position, suddenly rose, and fired, wounding three men, one of whom was killed shortly after by a second shot. Believing this man to be still alive, the Midland battalion led a diversionary charge which enabled a party led by Captain James Peters, the battery commander, and Dr. Alfred Codd of Winnipeg to recover the body.

Later in the afternoon the Métis fire slackened and the soldiers retired to an entrenched camp a half-mile from the battlefield. In this zareba men and horses stirred uneasily during the night behind the shelter of the wagons while their pickets exchanged shots with Métis snipers.



Louis Riel as a prisoner of the army.

The second day of the battle was equally inconclusive, both sides holding their positions and exchanging rifle fire. On Monday, the third day of the battle, Middleton went out to reconnoitre some open prairie lying to the northeast of Batoche. Dumont feared this was an attempt to out-flank his position and sent off part of his force to meet the threat. This reduced the number of men defending the rifle-pits and enabled the army to make a small gain. This small success was not exploited and the day ended again with the army sheltering in the zareba and the Métis hunched in their rifle-pits.

On the fourth day the soldiers impatiently prepared for another frustrating day. They were eager to end the battle and the campaign, to return to their homes and jobs, but their British commander preferred to postpone the decision for an all-out assault on the rebel positions. His plan for this day was to repeat his distracting reconnaissance to the northeast and draw off rebels from the positions facing his line. He instructed his infantry commander to attack the Métis rifle-pits as soon as he heard the reconnaissance force going into action with the Gatling and a field-gun. Although Middleton fired at the enemy, the sound of his guns did not carry back to his infantry and no attack was launched. An annoyed Middleton returned to camp and, after lunch, ordered the infantry to take up the positions they had established previously and advance as far as possible for "a reconnaissance in force".

Whatever the general meant, two battalion commanders interpreted this order liberally. With a loud cheer, the Midlanders moved forward on the left of the rebel line with their commander, Col. A. T. H. Williams, leading. They burst through the rebel positions rolling up the right flank of the enemy. Almost at the same time the Grenadiers attacked the centre, where the main group of rifle-pits was located, and some of the 90th. Winnipeg Rifles attacked on the right. The fierce advance overwhelmed the Métis, who, after three days of battle were reduced to charging their muzzle-loaders with nails, tacks and gravel, and they broke and fled. In less than two hours the village of Batoche was captured and the Métis insurrection ended.

The end of the Battle of Batoche marked the end of the Métis resistance. The defeated Métis hid in the woods and then gradually began surrendering to the Canadian troops. Riel surrendered to three of Middleton's scouts on May 15; on Aug. 1 he was found guilty of treason and on Nov. 16 plunged from the scaffold at the Mounted Police barracks at Regina. The wily Dumont evaded the soldiers and police who were looking for him and escaped to Montana. Some years later he became a member of the Wild West troupe of Col. W. F. "Buffalo Bill" Cody and entertained audiences throughout the world with displays of his riding skill and marksmanship. At last he returned, virtually unnoticed, to Batoche and lived there quietly until his death in 1906. He is buried in the cemetery adjacent to the Rectory.

Subjugation of the Indians of Big Bear and Poundmaker occupied the troops after the Métis defeat at Batoche but by the end of summer the volunteer soldiers of the North-West Field Force had returned to their homes. Their rewards were land grants of 329 acres or, if they preferred, a cash gratuity of $80, and special campaign medals. General Middleton was voted a reward of $20,000 by the Canadian Parliament and knighted by the Queen.

Defeat at Batoche broke the spirit of the Métis. The Northwest Rebellion was their last stand as a distinct and united people. The pride and self-confidence of the half-breed were shattered in that May of 1885. The days when the Métis could believe that no man was his superior on the plains, had gone. Like the buffalo he was superbly equipped for life on the western frontier, so much the master of the trail and the hunt that he was indispensable to the opening of the land to trade and settlement. But the frontier was closing leaving him an anachronism.

Possibly the land issue was not the real reason the Métis rebelled. When the government belatedly allowed special surveys for the river-lots and offered either land or money scrip, few Métis took advantage and less benefited. Of the 1,942 claims approved of Métis living in the North-West Territory outside Manitoba

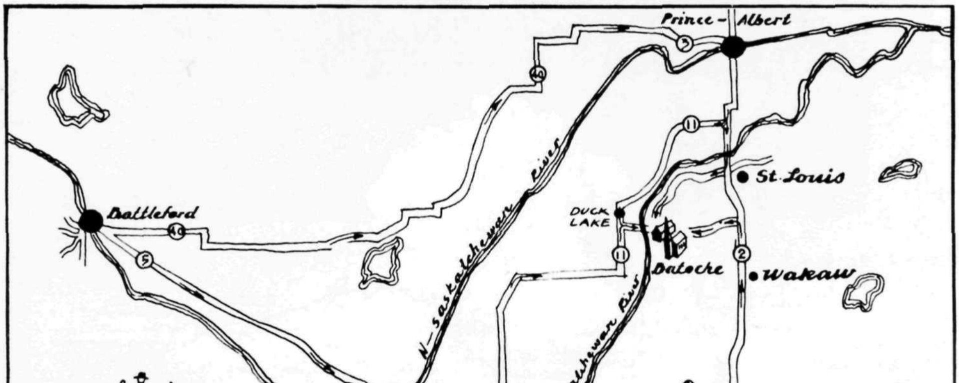
The Batoche Church and rectory today, with the graves of Métis killed in the Battle of Batoche in the foreground.

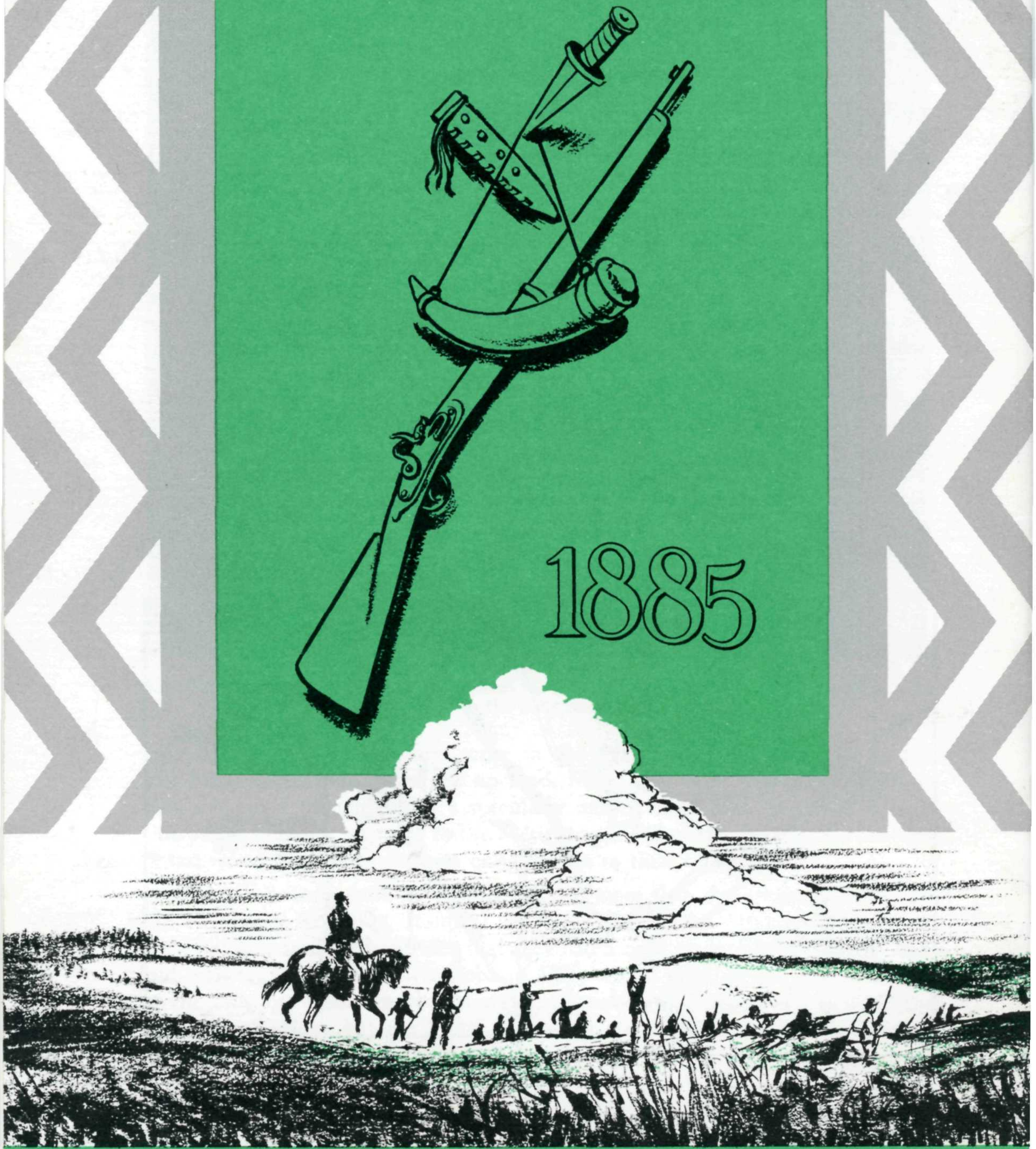
only 232 claimants chose land scrip; in the Qu'Appelle area only two of the 250 Métis entitled to scrip took up land. Many who took land scrip passed it over without a thought when a speculator offered them cash payment. A land title probably meant no more to the Métis than it did to the Indians; the concept of individual land ownership was quite foreign to their culture.

The land issue could have been nothing more than the superficial cause of the Northwest Rebellion. It might be expected that the Métis, who had first been indoctrinated with the idea that they had a right to land by white men and had won on that issue in Manitoba in 1870, would seize on the land question as the only one that the people of Canada could understand and might sympathize with. None but the Métis themselves could understand the real reason for their stand. A new society with bewildering ways of life was rolling over them and they stood on their native plains, rifles in hand, to assert their resistance to a world in which they could no longer take a prominent place. After their defeat, there was no way they could survive as a distinct and separate people, no grounds to entitle them to special consideration. Some Métis prospered in later years as farmers and small merchants and many accepted the new conditions without qualification and became assimilated in the western population. But a larger number, holding to the culture pattern of their ancestors, were unable or unwilling to adapt. Their fate—a precarious existence on sub-marginal farm lands or constant retreat before the advancing northern frontier—is the tragedy of Batoche.

Today little remains of the old settlement of Batoche, nor of the path of warfare. Dumont's skilfully placed foxholes have been largely obliterated by the plough, and with them most of Middleton's trenches. Of the latter a segment remains at the site of the zareba, and they have been preserved along with the Rectory as a National Historic Site. The parish church of St. Antoine de Padoue, built in 1884, a year after the Rectory, stands just next to it.

Life is quiet around Batoche, so quiet the small historical museum in the Rectory doesn't quite convince you that here the Métis made their last bloody fight for a place in the sun. But if you examine carefully the weathered boards outside around the upstairs window, you will find a scattered handful of penny-sized scars. Gatling or Snider? It's hard to tell now, and to the defender of Batoche that May week 1885 it really didn't matter—if they were well aimed one was as deadly as the other. Perhaps, though, these ancient bullet holes may serve more than anything else to remind the visitor that for rights they held dear, the Métis, like free men throughout history, were prepared to risk their lives.

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