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Master of Defence Studies Research Paper

“All Quiet On The (North)Western Front”

Counter-Insurgency in Canada:

An Examination of the 1885 Northwest Rebellion

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21 April 2010

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ABSTRACT

In a light of Canada's recent experiences prosecuting an extremely complex counter-insurgency campaign in Afghanistan, the Chief of Land Staff, Lieutenant-General Andrew Leslie, issued B-GL-323-004/FP-003 *Counter-Insurgency Operations* in December 2008. The intent of this manual was to capture lessons learned from this new fighting experience and adjust Canadian doctrine, outlining clearly defined principles for counter-insurgency (COIN) warfare. While irregular warfare is often unique to particular conflicts, Canadians should realize that certain dynamics of insurgencies never change, and principles of countering an insurgency don't necessarily have to be reconsidered. Canada has successfully fought past insurgencies. The unique aspect of the 1885 Riel Rebellion, in which Canadians fought against a combined Indian and Métis uprising in the Canadian Northwest, was that it was the first operational deployment of Canadian Forces under "Canadian" command and control. It is also an early example of the successful application of the above mentioned COIN principles by an operational commander.

Chapter One examines insurgencies from several theoretical perspectives, determining that they are inherently politically motivated with a certain degree of violence associated with their application. The chapter progresses with a general description of the eight principles of COIN outlined in B-GL-323-004/FP-003 *Counter-Insurgency Operations*. This sets the stage for an understanding of the complexities of the 1885 rebellion. A historical overview of the underlying causes leading up to and including the Northwest rebellion provides the reader with a greater understanding of the issues that were at the root of this particular affair. With demands for recognition of

inherent rights largely ignored by the federal government, the Métis and Indian population of the west felt threatened by the encroachment of settlers from the east and the United States. They believed that without concessions similar to those achieved during the Red River Rebellion, they would become marginalized, lose their intrinsic place in society and largely become irrelevant. Riel succeeded once in achieving recognition for Métis rights in Manitoba, and now they put their faith in him again to lead them in achieving the successful fulfillment of their present grievances. The chapter concludes with the determination that the 1885 Northwest Rebellion qualified as an insurrection in accordance with modern conceptual perspectives.

Chapter Two examines the campaign conducted by the designated commander General Sir Frederick Dobson Middleton against the insurgents. This campaign was a significant milestone in Canadian history as it was the first operational deployment of purely Canadian forces under Canadian command and control, while also being the first counter-insurgency successfully fought on Canadian soil. The chapter provides an overview of the specific campaign planning and movement of the troops in order to afford the reader a greater understanding of the challenges faced by Middleton and the Dominion forces in defeating Riel. It broadly describes the campaign from inception to conclusion, but does not delve down into tactical details. The focus of analysis is largely at the operational level. It depicts historical conditions and the interaction between the strategic level (Prime Minister Macdonald and Minister of Militia Caron) and at the operational and tactical level by Middleton. This degree of understanding of Middleton's campaign is necessary in order for the reader to appreciate fully its conduct when it is

contrasted in detail during the examination of the principles of COIN provided in the next chapter.

Chapter Three outlines aspects of the campaign that demonstrate Middleton's adherence to the eight key principles of COIN. It shows that these principles are as applicable today as they were in 1885. Upon detailed examination of each of the key principles, the chapter concludes that Middleton's historical success as a COIN commander in defeating the 1885 insurgency can be credited to his adherence to the fundamental principles of counter-insurgency as defined in B-GL-323-004/FP-003 *Counter-Insurgency Operations*.

All the young men of Canada who have a spark of manly feeling in their nature are coming forward to show that they are true Canadians and not miserable skulking cowards...we are going to the North-West in order to show the world that Canada is a power and not a stripling.¹

Dunlop: "Willy Goes to War"

INTRODUCTION

Shortly after Confederation, Canada confronted discontent and rebellion in 1870, commonly referred to as the Red River Rebellion. These events were yet a precursor of things to come. Fifteen years later, with the return of Louis Riel to Western Canada on the behest of discontented Métis, Indian and White settlers who were shunned and literally ignored by the government of the day, matters became serious. On 26 March 1885 the Métis, led by Louis Riel and his lieutenant Gabriel Dumont, engaged in an exchange of rifle fire with a combined force of 90 Prince Albert volunteers and North-West Mounted Police at Duck Lake. The police force, led by Superintendent Leif Newry Fitzroy Crozier, suffered 11 dead and 12 wounded, while the Métis force suffered only 6 dead, although Dumont was wounded. It has been suggested that the casualties on Crozier's side could have been much worse, and only the actions of Riel himself limited the bloodshed.² Nevertheless, this violence was the start of Canada's first counterinsurgency operation, officially recorded as the 1885 North-West Rebellion.

More than a century later, Canada's armed forces are again engaged in counterinsurgency (COIN) warfare in Afghanistan. Far from the Cold War era, and definitely not within the realm of peacekeeping to which our forces had become

¹ Allan C. Dunlop, "Willie Goes to War," *The Nova Scotia Historical Quarterly* V (March 1975), 4. as quoted in Jack Dunn, "The Alberta Field Force of 1885" (Calgary: Jack Dunn publisher, 1994), 3.

² The Battle of Duck Lake; available from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_Duck_Lake; internet; accessed 06 January 2010.

accustomed, this new theatre of operations has presented numerous challenges to the tactical, operational and strategic thought processes of the military's once staid methods of thinking. In 2002 the Chief of the Land Staff, Lieutenant-General Andrew Leslie, issued **B-GL-323-004/FP 003** *Counter-Insurgency Operations*. This new doctrine manual, prepared in comparison to the existing US Army manual, was intended “*to capture our lessons learned and formalize our doctrine.*”³ Leslie further states that “*Tactical level actions...should not contravene the guiding principles and philosophy described in this publication.*”⁴ This statement is profound as it exemplifies that the basic tenets of COIN operations are well grounded and learned throughout history and despite the fact that new technology, equipment and methodologies exist to counter insurgencies, the basic tenets remain as pertinent today as they have in countless battles throughout history.

The COIN campaign conducted in 1885 by Major-General Sir Frederick Dobson Middleton is a prime example of a successful counterinsurgent commander adhering to and applying the principles of COIN in defeating a determined insurgent force. Despite not having formal principles of COIN to guide his campaign, it will be argued that General Middleton's intuitive adherence to the modern principles of COIN operations outlined in B-GL-323-004/FP 003 *Counter-Insurgency Operations* was the primary reason for his ultimate success. This demonstrates that the basic principles are time tested

³ Canada. Department of National Defence. B-GL-323-004 FP-003 *Counter-Insurgency Operations*. (Ottawa: DND Canada, 2007), 2/3.

⁴ Ibid. 2/3.

throughout history, and are as enduring today as they have been throughout previously successful historical COIN campaigns.

CHAPTER ONE

Insurgency Defined

From a purely military perspective, and more specifically the Canadian Forces (CF) context, an insurgency is defined as: “A competition involving at least one non-state movement using means that include violence against an established authority to achieve political advantage.⁵ To the Americans, insurgency is “an organized movement aimed at the overthrow of a constituted government through the use of subversion and armed conflict.”⁶ Finally, O’Neill provides the following:

Insurgency may be defined as a struggle between a nonruling group and the ruling authorities in which the nonruling group consciously uses political resources and violence to destroy, reformulate, or sustain the basis of legitimacy of one or more aspects of politics.⁷

Therefore, the common element of these definitions is that some form of violence will necessarily occur, and the core principle related to insurgencies is that the underlying cause of all violence is politically motivated. However, this is not necessarily to say that all insurgencies are aimed at the complete overthrow of a government or political institution. Metz clearly outlines that an insurgency will also arise when the central

⁵ Department of National Defence, B-GL-323-004 FP-003 *Counter-Insurgency Operations*. (Ottawa: DND Canada, 2007), 1-2.

⁶ United States, Department of the Army, *Counterinsurgency*, Field Manual 3-24 (Washington, DC: Department of the Army, December 2006), 1-1.

⁷ Bard E. O’Neill, *Insurgency and Terrorism: From Revolution to Apocalypse*. (Washington, D.C.: Potomac Books, 2005.), 15.

government is not able or unwilling to address the valid socio-economic grievances of the population.⁸ The significance is that had the Macdonald government simply demonstrated an understanding of the demands put forth by Riel, it would have shown a modicum of concern for their plight, and signaled to the aggrieved that they were not being totally ignored. Instead, by failing to respond to the demands, the government alienated this segment of the population, losing legitimacy and provoking them to resort to violence in order to be heard.

Coupled with political motivations, insurgencies often rely on highly motivated individuals to take up the cause and lead the insurrection. The charismatic nature and influence of the insurgent leader over his small and dedicated core supporters, who fight on behalf of the larger overall population, cannot be understated. Martin van Creveld, in a prophetic way, captured the essence of Louis Riel's persona and motivation behind inciting insurgency:

War will not be waged by armies but by groups who we today call terrorists, guerrillas, bandits and robbers, who will undoubtedly hit on more formal titles to describe themselves. Their organizations are likely to be constructed on charismatic lines rather than institutional ones, and be motivated less by professionalism than by fanatical, ideologically-based, loyalties.⁹

Louis Riel was a skilled orator and his willingness to represent the grievances of a deprived and historically wronged society endeared him to the local population in the west. He was a man of words and action. However, to the detriment of the 1885

⁸ Stephen Metz, *Rethinking Counterinsurgency* (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute Press, June 2007), 5.

⁹ Martin van Creveld, *The Transformation of War* (New York: The Free Press, 1991), 197.

insurgency, Riel also considered himself to be a pariah, or “prophet of the new world.”¹⁰ He was elected by a society grounded in deep religious beliefs and convictions, enabling him to effectively maintain strict control over them. Those persons who dared challenge his authority were known to suffer severely violent reprisals and public rebukes. This very fact played a large role in the ultimate defeat of the insurgents, as frequently opportunities would arise wherein the insurgents could have struck directly at the vulnerability of the Dominion forces. Tenuous supply lines, coupled with increased distances between Dominion forces and their bases of supplies made for opportune targets that Riel’s chief subordinate Gabriel Dumont desired to attack. However, despite the logical and tactical acumen of these suggestions, Dumont was consistently overruled by Riel, demonstrating the complete control Riel had over his insurgent forces and the local population that he could directly influence.

In summary, insurgencies have as their root cause some form of political grievance, and frequently result in acts of violence. These acts are not necessarily meant to overthrow a government, but may have as their *raison d’être* the desire to address a perceived wrong or lack of attention from the legitimate governing body. Insurgencies rely on the charismatic leadership of key individuals who take it upon themselves to represent the cause of a neglected population, either fully supported, or in the case of Riel, a select portion of society acting on the greater behalf of a larger population, that was deprived of an inherent and, in their opinion, historical entitlement.

¹⁰ Beal, Bob and Macleod, Rod. *Prairie Fire: The 1885 North-West Rebellion*. (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Inc., 1994), 10.

An examination of the principles of modern COIN sets the stage for a comprehensible understanding of the situation facing Middleton in 1885.

Counter-Insurgency Principles¹¹

Chapter 3 of B-GL-323-004 FP – 003 Counter-Insurgency Operations (CFP 323-4) provides a modern interpretation of basic principles that endure when conducting effective COIN campaigns. These principles need to be considered as a whole, and not individually, as they are inherently linked and each is as vital to the successful outcome of a COIN campaign as the other. They are also intuitive, and are not to be subscribed to exactly as a checklist. Effective commanders will understand the differing dynamics of their particular campaign, and weigh the importance and application of each principle accordingly. Neglecting to apply any of the principles may not necessarily result in failure of the mission, but could conceivably contribute to increased frustration, prolonged operations and increased risk. Middleton possessed a remarkable insight into the application of the principles throughout his campaign, and although not perfect, demonstrated a solid understanding of the importance of each as the operational commander.

Effect Political Primacy in the Pursuit of a “Strategic Aim”

This principle holds that insurgencies, by and large, have as their underlying concern political tribulations. Louis Riel and his close cohort indeed had age-old and

¹¹ Department of National Defence. B-GL-323-004 FP-003 “*Counter-Insurgency Operations*”. (Ottawa: DND Canada, 2007), Chapter 3.

apparently legitimate grievances at the political level with the Dominion government. Although these complaints were long-standing problems that had been consistently ignored by the government since 1870, the challenge presented was the first real test to the central authority of the new Dominion. Once the insurgency was officially recognized by Macdonald, the government should have decided upon a strategy to stop, neutralize and reverse any effects of the insurgency. Besides dealing with the short term ramifications of the immediate insurgency, a government should make long term plans to address the underlying causes of the insurrection. The military's role is in fact secondary and subordinate in nature; military action provides the security framework that sets the conditions for further implementation of rectifying solutions by the government and other engaged agencies. From a political and strategic perspective, this principle was a particular weakness of the overall campaign. From a military standpoint, Middleton's concerns for potential political ramifications during the conflict and eventual outcomes of the COIN campaign proved that as an operational commander, he was significantly more attuned to the requirements of this principle in comparison to his political superiors. This aspect frequently led to planning frustrations when he was forced to speculate as to the future post-campaign reparations instead of having firm political direction.

***Promote Unity of Purpose to Coordinate the Actions of Participating Agencies –
Control and Coordination***

The conduct of a COIN campaign not only requires a military force, but a comprehensive approach involving coordination of a wide range of agencies all vying to resolve the situation. Key to the success of this principle is the implementation and adherence to a single command system. Due to the complexity of the various

organizations that will inevitably be involved, coupled with their assuredly differing methods of operating and philosophies, a clear identification of a single point of command is vital to the successful organization and direction of the efforts of these external actors. Trust is identified as a key factor in making this joint organization functional, as well as realizing that different personalities bring different challenges. The successful COIN commander must be able to leverage effectively the unique and advantageous elements of the various personalities to his advantage. Several inconsistencies in adhering to this principle, while not necessarily having a detrimental effect on the eventual outcome of the campaign, did cause administrative grief, tactical mistrust and errors that could potentially have spelled disaster for campaign. Particularly evident were the competing intrinsic motivators and interests of the military and private/public organizations involved in the campaign. From a military perspective, the campaign was to restore the legitimate order of the government; for agencies such as the Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR) and the Hudson's Bay Company (HBC), it was capitalistic survivability of business matters that was of primacy; for the politicians it was about patronage and protection of those key issues that were at the forefront of their party platforms, and necessary for their political survival. Middleton was constantly forced to accept strategic direction as an operational commander without fully understanding the rationale behind the decisions. This frequently added undue logistical complications in a relatively simple campaign plan, conducted over extended lines of communication and in unfamiliar territory.

Understand the Complex Dynamics of the Insurgency, Including the Wider Environment

By and large this principle defines a variety of inter-related dynamics within an insurgency that will likely provide difficult challenges for any commander. As stated at the outset, insurgencies are complicated ventures by nature. Middleton's initial ignorance of the situation was a weakness that he quickly recognized, and his concerted efforts to understand the causes of the insurgency and its key players commenced upon his arrival in Qu'Appelle with his first meeting with LGov Dewdney. Here he ascertained the vital areas used as supporting bases for the insurgents and determined at this point that the insurgency was relatively isolated in nature. Given the extent of the forces which were planned to arrive shortly in the west, he determined that he had sufficient manpower to quickly overawe the insurgents, and bring a rapid end to the situation. Middleton understood the influence of Riel upon his supporters, but showed a shortsighted appreciation of the sociological environment, and vastly miscalculated the willingness and tenacity of the foe that he was about to face. Because of this shortcoming, he would eventually face considerable delays while he awaited reinforcements after his first engagement at Fish Creek, and was forced to adapt tactics to counter the hit and run tactics of Riel's troops. Eventually, General Middleton proved to be obstinately masterful at understanding and dealing with these dynamics in putting down this insurrection through adaptation of small unit tactics, adopting counter-measures and effectively employing scouts to provide early warning of enemy intentions.

Exploit Intelligence and Information

Intelligence, in all its variations, whether it be knowledge of the country, its culture, religions, and/or the underlying causes of the adversary's grievances is key for a commander to understand adequately his particular situation. Operations must be driven by the intelligence gained throughout the duration of a campaign. It is natural when entering into an unfamiliar environment that information is extremely limited due to lack of contact with intelligence sources, and simply from a lack of experience in the region. As a result, the amount of intelligence and viable information obtained as a campaign progresses constantly results in subsequent operations inevitably producing more and more actionable intelligence. The commander can quickly become inundated with too much information, and needs to analyze successfully and synthesize the information into useful intelligence and initiate actions as a direct result. Sources must be obtained that are credible, reliable, and intelligence acted upon and re-analyzed after each operation, be they successful or not.

Middleton utilized intelligence garnered from a multitude of sources, some reliable, others skeptical at best, to guide him in his decision making capability. Among his key difficulties lay in the fact that he was often receiving erroneous information, or information that had been embellished by locals in order to create a condition that seemed untenable, thereby forcing Middleton to react and send valuable troops and resources to protect innocent civilians. This requirement often frustrated Middleton, forced him to amend his original campaign plan almost immediately, and caused interminable delay in the successful completion of the campaign. However, given the extremely limited technology available at the time for gathering and analyzing information and forming

reliable intelligence, coupled with the confusion surrounding a plethora of constantly changing information, Middleton demonstrated remarkable insight and judgment, and he possessed an instinctive ability to glean valid and relevant information from a multitude of sources to concentrate successfully his forces at the right place and right time to defeat the insurrection.

Separate the Insurgents from their Sources of Strength

This principle quite simply envisions the separation of insurgents from their two fundamental sources of strength: physical and moral.

Separation from the insurgent's physical strength is achieved by the COIN force establishing a firm base of operations and, once secured, rapidly expanding outward and confronting the insurgents in a method commonly referred to as "*The Ink Spot Approach.*"¹² The basic premise behind this methodology is that as the area is secured, hostile forces lose their support network and withdraw, with an ensuing state of normalcy returning to the local population, and the ability of the COIN force to therefore continue forthwith in securing the next threatened area. While there are many methods available in modern times to separate physically insurgents from their sources of strength, Middleton primarily relied on brute military force and sheer volumes of troops to overwhelm his adversary and force him to withdraw to subsequent defensive areas.

Separation from the insurgent's moral strength is generally conducted by attempting to take away the justification for the insurrection amongst the local supporting population. While CFP 323-004 offers a multitude of modern methodologies related to

¹² For an explanation of this technique, see page 3-10 of B-GL-323-004.

governance and reform of local institutions, it must be taken in context that during Middleton's campaign, Canada was still in its infancy as a country, and therefore the skills, knowledge and ability to conduct separation in this manner were extremely limited and will not be addressed. However, where Middleton was successful was in his ability to hold the higher moral ground and applying power discriminately. The former was vital to ensure that the force travelling out west and conducting military operations was seen in a favourable light, and not simply as a destructive force bent on crushing indiscriminately what were previously law-abiding citizens of the country. The latter point was demonstrated by Middleton's willingness to reduce destruction of local infrastructure, and possibly inhabitants, based on an adherence to the rules of armed conflict, and perhaps a certain degree of battlefield chivalry. Middleton was extremely proud of the fact that his forces targeted only those insurgents directly engaging them, and responded and acted accordingly to enemy forces that surrendered or approached them under a flag of truce.

Neutralize the Insurgent

Although at first glance this principle appears self-evident, it is in fact more complicated when examined more closely. It will never be possible to completely destroy an entire insurgent movement. The critical aspect that needs to be considered is to defeat the insurgent on his "home ground"; in essence, the requirement is to neutralize the effectiveness of the insurgency by attacking at what is referred to today as his centre

of gravity.¹³ Mission command, which relies heavily upon the initiative of subordinate commanders to meet various missions and objectives, enables tactical and operational opportunities to be exploited only if activities are conducted in harmony with all other agencies involved in the COIN campaign¹⁴. Commanders must ensure that proportionality in the use of force is constantly enforced; otherwise, the COIN force risks losing the faith and respect of the local inhabitants from unnecessary want and destruction of their valued property and possessions, and lending additional credibility to the insurgent cause. Middleton quickly determined that the strength of the insurgency lay in the leadership of the insurgents: Louis Riel and Gabriel Dumont. To defeat them would effectively defeat the insurgent's will to continue the struggle. Additionally, given the natural limitations of technology at the time, and the great distances between the various columns, Middleton was essentially obligated to utilize mission command as his leadership style. He was forced to trust in his subordinates' compliance with his orders and their following the proper chain of command. However, throughout the campaign, conflicting reports of actions contrary to his desires frequently tested and became one of the Middleton's bitter disappointments throughout the campaign. Both subordinate commanders frustrated Middleton at various points; however, the decision of Otter to depart Battleford in pursuit of Poundmaker is the most compelling example of the sheer

¹³ Canada. Department of National Defence. B-GJ-005-500/FP-000 *The Canadian Forces Operational Planning Process*. (Ottawa: DND Canada, 2008), Chapter 2, para 201.5

¹⁴ NATO. AJP-01(C) *Allied Joint Doctrine* (Brussels: NATO Standardization Agency, North Atlantic Treaty Organization, 2007), 5-3.

frustration Middleton experienced in attempting to communicate his intent, and seeing the opposite enacted once reports reached his headquarters location.¹⁵

Sustain Commitment to Expend Political Capital and Resources over a Long Period

Over time, insurgencies have proven to be characteristically long term affairs. Insurgents understand that they do not necessarily have to win the decisive battles, only make the COIN operation expensive and/or difficult to sustain over the long term. Insurgents frequently lose battles and tactical engagements, but keep the larger purpose of the insurgency in mind by sapping the strength of occupying forces and their conventional military tactics. The longer a COIN operation lasts, with the ensuing negative publicity possibly affecting the supporting population, the more difficult it will be for momentum and necessary public support to be maintained. Hence, time was not a luxury that Middleton could afford, nor was it ever his intention to make this affair a long and drawn out engagement. Middleton was perspicaciously aware that he needed to react quickly to quell the disturbance, and conducted his campaign in such a manner. Moreover, he was cognizant of the fact that Prime Minister Macdonald faced a barrage of inquiries and criticism for the cost of the campaign, and any prolongation would only exacerbate the situation.

Conduct Longer Term Post-Insurgency Planning

¹⁵ Needler provides a superb accounting of the frustration experienced by Middleton in dealing with his subordinates over great distances and naturally delayed by reliance on telegraph messages to convey reports both to and from subordinates. See: General Sir Fred Middleton, *Suppression of the Rebellion in the North West Territories of Canada, 1885*. Edited, with introduction by G.H. Needler. (Toronto: UP, 1948), xi.

In order to resolve successfully the insurgency, more than just the defeat of the insurgents is required. For a government to abandon a COIN campaign without implementing initiatives designed to address and placate the local population of their initial grievances lessens the chance of long-term victory and is an invitation to a repeat of the situation (witness the effects of failing to address the grievances presented in 1870 Red River Rebellion). Middleton did in fact understand this principle; however, the effect of political primacy is pertinent, and the power of the military to make firm commitments or implement decisive measures is solely related to the willingness of the government to address seriously the underlying causes of the insurgency in the first place. Middleton's concerns for post-campaign actions to be implemented, and the limited measures that the government enacted (or failed to enact) provides proof that it was Middleton, and not the government who was most acutely aware of the importance of adhering to and planning for appropriate implementation of corrective measures post-conflict.

Historical Context

What in fact led to the discontent of the Métis and Indians that could have possibly led to the 1885 uprising? While it can be said that "On a world scale of violence, Canada's North-West Rebellion of 1885 was a trifling affair."¹⁶, it was nevertheless a defining moment in Canadian history, one which had, and continues to have, implications within Canada from both a federal and provincial standpoint. The

¹⁶ Thomas Flanagan, *Riel and the Rebellion: 1885 Reconsidered*. 2nd ed. (University of Toronto Press, 2000), 3.

discontent present in the 1885 Rebellion disclosed the dangers of not adequately addressing and rectifying underlying political grievances. In a startling recurrence of events fifteen years earlier, the causes present in the first resistance in 1870, referred to as the Red River Rebellion, were again manifested in the uprising in 1885, leading to serious discontent and action finally being implemented as a final effort to attain the government's undivided attention.

The events of 1870 coincided with the decision of the Canadian government to buy Rupert's Land from the Hudson's Bay Company in 1869. At this time, the majority of the area was populated by approximately fifty percent Métis, and the remainder Anglophones. While the lengthy negotiations for transfer of authority were taking place, settlers from Eastern Canada and the United States began to move in. This settlement led to concerns from the Métis for the preservation of their inherent land rights. The Canadian government further exacerbated the situation by sending land surveyors west to plot the land according to the square township system used in Ontario, instead of the existing French Seigniorial system. The Métis became increasingly concerned when the Canadian government appointed the openly anti-French Sir William McDougall, as Lieutenant Governor of the Northwest. Under Louis Riel, the Métis refused McDougall entry into the territory, and seized control of the settlement of Fort Garry (Winnipeg), while fighting against pro-Canadian settlers. The event climaxed in 1870 when Riel declared a provisional government in order to enter directly into negotiations with the Canadian government. Perhaps his biggest mistake was the execution of Thomas Scott, an Orangeman and member of the pro-Canadian faction that was part of the original provisional government. Riel's provisional government succeeded in obtaining an

agreement with the Canadian government which formed the basis of the Manitoba Act of 1870. The Government then decided to exercise its authority over the newly formed settlement, and dispatched to the Red River vicinity a military expedition under Colonel Garnet Wolseley. Its main purpose was to restore order in the area; however, Riel learned that certain members of the varying militia elements were intending to lynch him, and therefore he fled to the United States as the expedition approached. With the loss of their key leader, the last vestiges of the resistance movement evaporated, effectively marking the end of the Red River Rebellion.¹⁷ Many disgruntled Métis moved further west out of the newly formed Manitoba to continue their livelihoods.

Even though the rebellion was suppressed, discontent amongst the Métis, Indians, and even the originally sympathetic white settlers remained outstanding. In the fifteen years since the Red River Rebellion, the arrival of settlers occupying land, the implementation of law and order in the form of the Northwest Mounted Police (NWMP), and the desire to complete a railroad across Canada in the form of the CPR, again started to have a negative impact on the lives of the Métis and Indians. They were being forced to alter their lifestyle according to the new ways of the arrivals from the East. It was believed that Indians could be “civilized”, which in essence was the term used to denote the plan to convert them from a hunting society into agrarian farmers. Ill-respected treaty obligations led to meager living conditions on Indian reserves. The Indians failed to make

¹⁷ While this is only an encapsulated and abbreviated outline of the Red River Rebellion, it shows that the underlying cause of the initial resistance was both politically motivated and aimed at undermining legitimate authority, while using violence as a method of achieving the desired effect; in essence, it qualified as an insurgency. An excellent review of the Red River Rebellion can be found at J.M. Bumsted. *The Red River Rebellion* (Winnipeg: Watson & Dwyer Publishing Ltd, 1996)

the transition from a nomadic way of life centred on the rapidly disappearing buffalo herds, and this change, coupled with rapidly developing discontent with respect to the abilities and intentions of government supervised farmer instructors, again planted the seeds of discontent. In fact, the Indians were perplexed by the terms of government treaties which, by their very nature, were contrary to their inherent way of thinking. In his book *Arduous Destiny*, Peter Waite captures this sentiment clearly when he expresses the Indian beliefs towards ownership of land: “Owning land was a concept foreign to their thinking. They used land, and it was this usufruct that they believed they had conveyed to the white man.”¹⁸ By 1879 the newly appointed Indian Commissioner of the Northwest (and eventual Lieutenant-Governor of the Territories) Edgar Dewdney, was fully aware of the crisis facing the Indians, yet did little to resolve the situation. Cooperation of the Indians was to be guaranteed by the provision of rations, to replace the loss of their ancestral dependency on the dwindling buffalo. With fiscal deficits rising, Prime Minister Macdonald (curiously enough who held the position of “Superintendent-General of Indian Affairs for 1878-1887”¹⁹ was fiscally constrained. He took appropriate, yet ill-chosen budget cutting measures and “[t]he Indian Department suffered with the rest.” These cuts, advised Dewdney, were “fundamentally wrong”.²⁰ The situation deteriorated to such an extent that in November 1883, the Assistant Indian Commissioner, after a visit to the West, reported:

¹⁸ Peter B. Waite, *Canada 1874-1896, Arduous Destiny*. (McClelland and Stewart Ltd., Toronto/Montreal, 1971),148.

¹⁹ Waite, *Canada 1874-1896, Arduous Destiny*...147.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 148.

A strong feeling is being fostered against the Govmt [*sic*] & all officials relative to the nonissuing [*sic*] of patents...the people are egged to the belief that nothing short of a rebellion is necessary in order to obtain their right...²¹

To further exacerbate an already tenuous situation, the population of Métis and Indians, along with other settlers, was not represented in the House of Commons, and therefore few Northwest grievances were able to be effectively addressed to the government as an outlet.

The significance of these warnings is that they provide evidence that the government had ample warning of the discontent brewing in the west, yet deliberately chose to ignore the warnings and focused their priorities on what to them were the greater threats and challenges to the country at the time. In hindsight it is easy to criticize the decisions of the government; however, it also demonstrates with clarity the dangers of underestimating the seriousness of a particular situation and the consequences that could occur if a government ignores a specific component of its society as a whole.

Frustrated with lack of attention paid to their numerous grievances which had frequently been sent to Ottawa without response, Louis Riel, now living in exile and teaching in the United States, made plans to return to Canada (one of the visitors to his home in the United States was to be his future military commander during the insurgency, Gabriel Dumont) to represent the Métis and Indians, in a similar manner to those from Manitoba, who had earned concessions in 1870. Riel acquiesced to their demands and moved his family to Saskatchewan in July 1884 and settled in the vicinity of Batoche. Riel officially formed his provisional government, the “*Exovedate – taken from the sheep*” with his headquarters situated at Batoche on 19 March 1885, with

²¹ *Ibid.*, 150.

Gabriel Dumont as his adjutant general. Again reiterating the demands first made during the Red River Rebellion, Riel presented a simple and not overly unreasonable (given the horrendous conditions being encountered) set of demands on behalf of the Indians and Métis to the Federal Government. Although largely related to land issues, and recognition of the inherent rights of the Métis, the message being presented to the federal government was one of open defiance of government authority and legitimacy. The secessionist overtones were clearly a challenge to the authority and governance of the nation.²²

Frustrations continued to grow, and by February 1885, after not having received any form of response from the Federal government, Riel was:

forced to think of more drastic measures, egged on by his more military-minded general, Gabriel Dumont... This meant armed blackmail. The proclamation of a provisional government, supported by the Métis and English half-breeds, and with the threat of Indian support, would bring the Dominion government to a more tractable frame of mind.²³

On 26 March, in an attempt to meet this defiance of government authority head on and once again restore a semblance of order, a small force comprised of 53 North West Mounted Police and 47 Prince Albert volunteers, under command of Superintendent Leif Crozier, departed Fort Carlton in order to “secure some provisions and arms” at a local store in Duck Lake. It was here that Crozier’s force encountered and clashed with Gabriel Dumont and the Métis. The result was Crozier’s force suffered 12 dead and 11 wounded in a span of 15 minutes. Ironically enough, at this engagement (Duck Lake), it was Louis Riel himself who put an end to the Métis firing at Crozier’s retreating forces, thus preventing what could have been an even worse massacre. This action in and of

²² Charles Pelham Mulvaney, *The History of The Northwest Rebellion of 1885*. (Toronto: A.H.Hovey & Co., 1885), 27-28.

²³ Waite, *Canada 1874-1896, Arduous Destiny...*,154.

itself demonstrates that Riel, unlike Dumont, was not completely committed to the use of violence to solve issues, and would repeat itself at various times throughout the campaign. This small engagement, coupled with an ensuing murder of nine whites and half-breeds at the hand of Cree Chief Big Bear's band at Frog Lake, and the pillaging and destruction of a Hudson's Bay trading post at Fort Pitt, would have profound effects, and the wheels of the insurrection were officially set in motion. In a matter of a few brief moments, the authority of the North West Mounted Police, and therefore the Canadian government, was undermined."²⁴ Canada thus embarked on its first valid COIN campaign.

CHAPTER TWO – THE CAMPAIGN

With the news of the Duck Lake massacre reaching the government, the realization that an insurrection was taking place, or at the very least highly likely to occur, should have prompted the government to begin making plans to quell the uprising. Milan Vego states that counterinsurgency "is understood as those military, paramilitary, political, economic, psychological and civic actions taken by a government to defeat an insurgency"²⁵ and that it "is essentially a political problem. Hence, it cannot be successfully resolved by relying solely on either nonmilitary or military means."²⁶ CFP 323-4 has further refined the nuances of these definitions: "Since an insurgency is a political problem, the military plays a largely supporting role to other agencies and

²⁴ Desmond Morton, *The Last War Drum*. (Toronto: Hakkert, 1972), 23.

²⁵ Milan Vego, "Counterinsurgency Campaign Planning" (provided as part of course reference material for Canadian Forces College activity DS-525/FUN/LD-5 Joint Command and Staff Programme 35, 2007), 5.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 5.

government departments in countering an insurgency” and that “The constant is the fact that insurgency and counter-insurgency are essentially about the battle to win and hold popular support both at home and in the theatre of operations.”²⁷

While these definitions remain valid, the insurgency of 1885 was somewhat different in that the non-military ‘agencies and government departments’ were not what one would consider at the developed stage, or in more simpler terms, as extensive and established as those encountered in more recent times. The overall context in which this insurrection took place, with respect to both military and non-military agencies, was one in which from the outset, Middleton’s military force would be forced to play a more dominant role, and be supported by those agencies such as the CPR and HBC in resolving the crisis.

The apathy of the government at this time was readily apparent. With a conviction demonstrating less than practical concern for the plight of the Métis and Indians, Prime Minister Macdonald was very open in his blatant disregard and indifference towards the predicament manifesting itself in the west. Macdonald was a veteran politician, and he was averse to letting long existing and miniscule problems such as the Métis and Indian grievances take precedence over more pressing national matters. At this same time he was faced with national issues such as a potential failure of the CPR, and therefore was extremely frustrated with what were likely perceived by him to be simple political gripes that commonly occur in the course of regular political dealings.²⁸

²⁷ Canada. Department of National Defence. B-GL-323-004 FP-003 *Counter-Insurgency Operations*. (Ottawa: DND Canada, 2007.), 1-3.

²⁸ Morton, Desmond and Roy, Reginald H. *Telegrams of the North-West Campaign 1885*. (Toronto: The Champlain Society, 1972), xiv.

Lieutenant-Governor Dewdney, who attempted to calm matters down in the west, had consistently warned Macdonald that the situation was becoming tenuous. This situation was particularly evident when Dewdney, prior to knowing of the series of disastrous events previously mentioned, sent a telegram to Macdonald stating: “In the event of mission failing, must have a large force at command who are sufficiently strong at first blow to overcome the half breed and Indian population.”²⁹ On 22 March, upon learning of the full extent of the unfolding situation, Dewdney initiated action by again contacting Macdonald: “Situation looks serious – think it imperative some able military man be on staff in the event of militia going north.”³⁰ It was at this time that Macdonald decided to dispatch Major-General Frederick Middleton, General Officer Commanding the Canadian Militia, out west to Winnipeg in order to reassert the authority of the Government and send the message to the local inhabitants, and particularly Riel, that further misbehaviour would not be tolerated. This stout 59 year old British infantry officer was a veteran of previous COIN campaigns in New Zealand and India³¹, and therefore benefitted by possessing a certain degree of understanding of how to fight a successful COIN campaign. He was a logical and wise choice to lead this particular campaign. Surprisingly, with knowledge of Middleton’s military COIN experiences, Dumont decided that guerilla-like tactics were likely to have the most significant impact on the forces being assembled and sent west. What Dumont did not count on was the alacrity and determination of the government to send a well-equipped and supplied force

²⁹ Morton, *The Last War Drum...*, 25.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 26.

³¹ Charles Pelham Mulvaney, *The History of The Northwest Rebellion of 1885*. (Toronto: A.H. Hovey & Co., 1885), 63.

to confront his troops, nor their willingness to remain until the job was finished. Riel on the other hand appeared to understand the long-term limitations that this strategy would have on his insurgent's ability to continue operations, and was evidenced in his seeming desire to again avoid violence and enter into negotiations. This was the major delineating factor between him and Dumont. Riel was a strategic thinker while Dumont, although highly effective, remained focused at the tactical level.³²

In the eastern provinces, panic amongst the local population began to set in. The newspapers reported on the engagements, and the astonishment of the locals learning that what had been rumoured for weeks as simple discontent of the Indians and Métis had in fact turned into deaths of whites and NWMP, brought about grave concern for the potential of all out Indian warfare. Unfazed, Macdonald openly demonstrated his disregard for the situation by publicly stating: "if you wait for a Half-breed or an Indian to become contented, you may wait till the millennium."³³ On 26 March, three days after Macdonald dispatched Middleton to Winnipeg, official news of the incident at Duck Lake reached Macdonald, quickly changing his opinion. In a letter to Dewdney, Macdonald expressed his fears, "This insurrection is a bad business but we must face it as best we may."³⁴ This was the first indicator that Macdonald realized the events

³² Gabriel Dumont, as translated by Michael Barnholden. *Gabriel Dumont Speaks*. (Vancouver: Talon Books, 1993), 12.

³³ Charles Pelham Mulvaney, *The History of The Northwest Rebellion of 1885*. (Toronto: A.H.Hovey & Co., 1885), 18.

³⁴ Donald Creighton, *JOHN A. MACDONALD: The Old Chieftain*. (Toronto: The MacMillan Company of Canada Limited, 1955), 418.

transpiring in the west were more than an inconvenience, and that apparently something had to be done. He now had no choice but to confront the situation head on.

However, Canada was in a sorry state militarily, and Macdonald did not have many credible assets available with which to deal with the situation. The Canadian Militia of 1885 was very much an auxiliary force, comprised of a militia headquarters in Ottawa staffed by a total of four officers: General Middleton, Commander of the Militia, his aide-de-camp, the Adjutant General, and a retired British officer who served as inspector of artillery.³⁵ The Permanent field force establishment consisted of approximately 750 men, split amongst two artillery batteries (*schools*) situated at Kingston and Quebec City. The remainder of the force consisted of reserve soldiers situated in both rural and city locations. The first unit activated in any way was a company sized element of the 90th Rifles situated in Winnipeg, and the Winnipeg Field Battery, ordered to activate by Lieutenant-Governor Dewdney on 23 March.

Strategic Orders Received

On 23 March, prior to the government receiving official news of the Duck Lake massacre, but solely reacting to the urgency of the reports sent from Lieutenant Governor Dewdney, Defence Minister Adolphe Caron met with Middleton, and offered him some of Prime Minister MacDonald's "crude ideas" on the campaign. In modern parlance, Middleton had received strategic direction: "It really amounted to advice to do everything at once – to guard the railway, watch the frontier, arrange for the mounted police to organize local forces and, above all, to isolate the insurrection."³⁶ Middleton himself

³⁵ Morton, *The Last War Drum...*, 31.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 55.

seemed startled by the call to come and see Caron, and had little idea of the actual situation developing in the Northwest: “I am inclined to think that there must be something serious or Sir John would not have consented to my being sent up.”³⁷ While enroute to Winnipeg, and in a somewhat arrogant and oblivious manner, Middleton updated Caron on an interview that he had granted to a reporter. In an attempt to underplay the seriousness of the situation developing, with perhaps the intention of calming the public perception and panic in Eastern Canada, he stated: “I told him that of course, I had always intended to visit the N. West [sic] part of my command, and that as I thought I might be of some use, I obtained your permission...and that I did not anticipate anything serious in the N.W.”³⁸ This comment/attitude again signifies the initial lack of seriousness being afforded to the grievances of the western inhabitants when even the senior military commander at the time was unaware of the disturbances taking place nor the underlying cause of the discontent that would soon lead to armed insurrection.

Middleton’s initial direction from Macdonald was “to localize the insurrection” and “neutralize the Blackfoot Confederacy in present-day Alberta.”³⁹ Shockingly, what was about to transpire was the mobilization of a young nation, and an untested conventionally trained military force dispatched against a wily and creative insurgent force utilizing tactics that had never before been encountered.⁴⁰ This fact would lead to a

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 28.

³⁸ Desmond Morton, and Reginald H. Roy, *Telegrams of the North-West Campaign 1885*. (Toronto: The Champlain Society, 1972), 12.

³⁹ Jack F. Dunn, *The Alberta Field Force of 1885*. (Calgary: Jack Dunn publisher, 1994), 7.

⁴⁰ Morton and Roy, *Telegrams of the North-West Campaign 1885...*, 268.

rude awakening and a baptism of fire that could not possibly have been imagined by the young men making their way in earnest out west.

Essentially what was now agreed upon was that Caron would take responsibility for the mobilization and call out of the troops, arrange for logistics and rail transport with the CPR, while Middleton would make best speed out west and gain a better understanding of the situation, in advance of the arrival of the main body of troops.⁴¹ After dispatching the militia, Macdonald seemingly contented himself with delegating responsibility for all decisions to his Minister of Militia Adolphe Caron, while Macdonald “took up once more the old task of maintaining Canadian confidence at home and defending Canadian prestige abroad.”⁴²

On 27 March, Middleton arrived in Winnipeg in a remarkably short period of time, ironically utilizing the US railroad network as a civilian, while his main follow-on force would travel on an epic journey utilizing the incomplete CPR line. That same night he departed for Qu’Appelle (until 1882 referred to as *Troy*), taking with him the remaining elements of the 90th Infantry Battalion. Middleton chose Qu’Appelle as his primary base location for it “was the nearest spot on the Canadian Pacific Railway line to Winnipeg...from whence there was a direct trail to Batoche, Riel’s headquarters.”⁴³ It was here that Middleton would first meet with Lieutenant-Governor Dewdney, where he

⁴¹ Donald E. Graves, *More Fighting for Canada: Five Battles, 1760-1944*. (Toronto: Robin Brass Studio Inc, 2004), 87.

⁴² Creighton, *JOHN A. MACDONALD: The Old Chieftain...*, 419.

⁴³ General Sir Fred Middleton, *Suppression of the Rebellion in the North West Territories of Canada, 1885*. Edited, with introduction by G.H. Needler. (Toronto: UP, 1948), 6.

was quickly apprised of the serious nature of the situation and advised that four key locations, all situated on the North Saskatchewan River, were to be considered chief danger points. These locations were Prince Albert, Fort Carlton, Battleford and Fort Pitt. Each of these locations had contained a detachment of NWMP. Time and again, this asset would prove both valuable and underutilized during varying aspects of the campaign. Middleton was determined to take his miniscule force northward to engage Riel with as little amount of delay as possible as he believed that any delay would only give the rebels more confidence.

In his meeting with Dewdney, Middleton also agreed with the Lieutenant Governor's belief that it was necessary "to strike out for the centre of the revolt, envelop it and deliver a knock-out blow" and that "the entire rebellion depended on Louis Riel."⁴⁴ Middleton felt that if Riel and his stronghold, reported to be in the vicinity of Batoche, were captured any further resistance among his key supporters, the Indians and Métis, would collapse, and those four key communities identified previously by Dewdney would be secured, thus ending the campaign. This is palpable evidence that Middleton was a keen practitioner of the Operational Art, and effectively had identified the enemy's operational centre of gravity.⁴⁵ Middleton possessed the ability to comprehend the deeper ramifications of the insurrection, and a higher level appreciation of the principles and methodology he would apply in attempting to defeat this particular insurgency.

⁴⁴ Morton, *The Last War Drum...*, 56.

⁴⁵ A Centre of Gravity is defined as "characteristics, capabilities or localities from which a nation, an alliance, a military force or other grouping derives its freedom of action, physical strength or will to fight." Department of National Defence, B-GJ-005-500/FP-000, 2-1.

While appointed as the commander of the campaign, Middleton was also privileged to have two key subordinate officers assisting in key offensive aspects of his campaign. Prior to departing Toronto, Middleton had warned off Lieutenant-Colonel William Otter, then commanding officer of the local infantry school, that “he and his men would be sent for if trouble occurred.”⁴⁶ On 27 March, with the news of Duck Lake reaching parliament, Middleton wired back to Ottawa saying: “Matter getting serious, better send all Regulars and good City Regiments. Experts say ought to have at least 2000.”⁴⁷ Otter and the main body were dispatched that night on an epic journey across the barren land, and via rail, to their posts in the west. In a preliminary move to envelop Riel’s forces, as well as utilize established railheads, Otter was assigned the drop off point of Swift Current as his initial staging area. From here it was envisioned that he would advance in parallel with Middleton’s forces to the east, and envelop Riel at Batoche.

In a somewhat bizarre manner, Caron took it upon himself to approve of the services of Major General Thomas Bland Strange, a retired ex-Royal Artillery officer now making a living as a rancher in the Calgary area, as Middleton’s second subordinate. In a telegram to Strange, Caron stated: “Would like to see you to the front again... Trust you as ever.”⁴⁸ Middleton knew of Strange from having previously served with him in India. During the campaign, Middleton expressed his ill-feelings regarding the appointment of Strange, when in a letter to a personal friend the Duke of Cambridge, he

⁴⁶ Morton, *The Last War Drum*...., 33.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 34.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 35.

commented: “(Strange) was a little odd, and does funny things.”⁴⁹ Regardless, Middleton accepted his appointment, and as it turns out, Strange was efficient and effective in drawing the attention of the aggrieved Indians in the western portion away from the main conflict areas to the east.

Both subordinate commanders were excellent officers; however, both would also draw the ire of Middleton for actions contrary to his wishes. These actions could have had potentially disastrous effects upon the outcome of the campaign and clearly demonstrated the difficulty Middleton experienced with command and control of his subordinates over great distances, again reaffirming the necessity to adopt the mission command philosophy whenever possible.



Figure 1: 1885 Northwest Rebellion Campaign Map⁵⁰

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 112.

⁵⁰ Northwest Rebellion Map available from <http://members.shaw.ca/bskaalid/riel/territorymap.html>. Internet; accessed 02 March 2010.

Middleton set forth in developing a straightforward campaign plan (See Figure 1). His original campaign envisioned a three-pronged envelopment of the insurgents, with Middleton commanding the easternmost column advancing north from Qu'Appelle to Clarke's Crossing and then onwards to confront Riel in the vicinity of Batoche. His middle column, commanded by Lieutenant-Colonel Otter, would depart from Swift Current, 150 miles west of Qu'Appelle, and also advance north, but occupy the west bank of the South Saskatchewan River, and assist in attacking Batoche, as Middleton had received credible information that Batoche had civilian dwellings as well as Indian camps on both sides of the river. Middleton was convinced: "By advancing along both river banks he would be able to surround Riel and his followers and bring their rebellion to a swift conclusion."⁵¹ He envisioned the possibility of a sequel operation of marching one of the columns on to Prince Albert and the other to Battleford to secure these key locations.⁵² His western-most column would be commanded by Major-General Strange, who, after gaining the obedience and support of the Indians in the vicinity of Calgary, would march his forces northwards towards Edmonton, and then turn eastward and close with Middleton's and Otter's forces in a grand envelopment of the entire campaign area with the hopes of capturing or eliminating the key Indian Chiefs Poundmaker and Big Bear. Desmond Morton points out:

In retrospect, it might be possible to assume that these movements represented the execution of a carefully conceived, highly co-ordinated plan. Nothing could be farther from the truth. No grand strategic vision illuminated General Middleton's

⁵¹ Morton, *The Last War Drum...*, 58.

⁵² For a definition of "*Sequel*", see NATO. AJP-01(C) *Allied Joint Doctrine* (Brussels: NATO Standardization Agency, North Atlantic Treaty Organization, 2007), 4-23.

mind beyond his sensible determination to deliver a single, concentrated attack on the centre of the rebellion.”⁵³

This is harsh and stinging criticism against a commander who had received vague strategic direction from the outset, but who would soon prove his proficiency in dealing with the insurgency. Each column would have engagements specific to their deployments with consequences for the entire campaign.

Middleton apparently still regarded the fighting effectiveness and threat from the insurgents in low esteem, and was blissfully confident in the abilities of his fledgling force. Shortly after departing Fort Qu’Appelle on 6 April, and justifying his reasoning for departing before additional forces were assembled, Middleton expressed his conviction to Caron that he “was not overly concerned with numbers at this time since he did not anticipate significant resistance and believed his troops would overawe the Métis and Indians, causing them to immediately disperse.”⁵⁴ This demonstrated a dangerous miscalculation on Middleton’s part as to both the temerity of the insurgents, as well as the capabilities of his own force. These factors would soon be revisited and quickly adjusted as the campaign progressed.

“All good plans never survive the start line” is a common euphemism amongst modern day military personnel denoting the fact that with even the best of intentions and planning, something inevitably occurs that will force you to deviate from the original plan. After reaching Clarke’s Crossing, Middleton finally learned of the shocking news of the Frog Lake massacre. On 11 April, after already having previously ordered part of

⁵³ Morton, *The Last War Drum...*, 95.

⁵⁴ Jim Wallace, *A Trying Time: The North-West Mounted Police In the 1885 Rebellion* (Winnipeg: Bunker to Bunker Books, 1998), 142-143.

his column, consisting of 50 members of the NWMP and under command of Superintendent Herchmer, to secure Battleford in order to placate the incessant appeals for security from this community, he was now forced to order Otter's column diverted from the main effort towards Battleford, and content himself with making preparations to attack Batoche with the remaining forces in his own column. This aspect frustrated Middleton immensely, and in a letter to Caron, he stated: "More convinced than ever that things are awfully exaggerated everywhere...If he had not been led astray as to the state of Battleford, should have had Otter's Column to co-operate and should have probably surrounded the Rebels..."⁵⁵ On 23 April, Middleton's column began to advance once more towards Batoche, with his own force divided on either side of the river.

The first test of the resilience and determination of the deployed force would occur on 25 April in the vicinity of Fish Creek. Owing to the adept employment of scout troops in advance of the column, a carefully planned and executed ambush of the Dominion troops was averted. Gabriel Dumont, who had prepositioned his force on a reverse slope position, in well prepared dug-in emplacements, successfully engaged and delayed the advance, and by the end of the engagement, quickly proved to the Dominion forces that the Métis and Indian were equally capable, if not tactically superior, to their foe. However, "(T)here was nothing in Indian or Métis tactical lore which called for prolonged or desperate engagements..."⁵⁶ A shortage of ammunition and lack of will to enter into prolonged engagements caused the insurgents to begin slipping away. Fearing that he could possibly be outflanked, Dumont himself made preparations for withdrawal

⁵⁵ Desmond Morton and Reginald H Roy. *Telegrams of the North-West Campaign 1885*. (Toronto: The Champlain Society, 1972), 194.

⁵⁶ Morton, *The Last War Drum...*, 66-67.

with his remaining force, and after setting a diversionary fire, departed the vicinity, thus ending the engagement. Middleton's force had bloodied itself, with the resulting casualties after the first engagement in the campaign being six killed and 49 wounded, of which four would eventually succumb to their injuries. These losses were extremely heavy losses, considering Dumont's force suffered only four killed and one mortally wounded. At the same time, and further to the west, Otter's column entered Battleford after an uneventful march, much to the relief of the settlers entrapped there, and the NWMP detachment. To Middleton however, this "was a confirmation... that he had been misled about the allegedly desperate plight of the surrounded settlers."⁵⁷ After this encounter, the ubiquitous Middleton was "badly shaken by his first encounter with the Métis. The self-confidence and disdain for his enemy which had so far governed his strategy had vanished."⁵⁸ The realization that his force was not impervious to the insurgent threat, coupled with his sudden comprehension of what the extent the lack of training and actual fighting inexperience meant to his force, Middleton became increasingly concerned, and more reluctant to commit these same forces to further combat. Middleton's concerns with the tactics and danger posed by the insurgents caused him to rethink his tactics. Hoping to both resupply and evacuate his wounded by river, Middleton remained in the vicinity of Fish Creek for several weeks. When it became apparent that the steamships, relied upon to resupply Middleton, were being delayed by low water levels, and simultaneously the morale of the troops was plummeting due to inactivity and lost opportunity, Middleton was forced to take action. Middleton sent a

⁵⁷ Morton, *The Last War Drum...*, 102.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 69.

reconnaissance party south to search for the presumably delayed supply ship, while continuing a reconnaissance in force towards Batoche. On 5 May, news reached Middleton that the steamer Northcote, with supplies and reinforcements, had been located. On 7 May, Middleton's force, reinvigorated and augmented with reinforcements, including the services of the venerable Gatling gun, recommenced the march towards Batoche. Middleton's long awaited encounter with Riel was only days away.

The plans for Batoche were relatively simple, only complicated by the recent addition of the fortified riverboat Northcote which would be utilized as a floating diversion, timed to arrive at Batoche simultaneously with the main force. On 9 May, in a similar fashion to the battle at Fish Creek, Middleton's force encountered a hidden enemy, firing from a reverse slope and well-prepared defensive positions. For the next four days, confusion reigned, and a series of feints and enveloping manoeuvres resulted in a constant stalemate and daily withdrawal to the safety of their Zareba.⁵⁹ Frustrated with the lack of success, and acknowledging for the first time that perhaps he did not have sufficient forces to deal with the existing threat, Middleton appealed to Caron for reinforcements: "Am in rather ticklish position...Force can succeed holding but no more—want more troops."⁶⁰ Caron, having much difficulty understanding the complexities of the battle, and in fact not having a full grasp of the situation, as one would expect from controlling a campaign via telegraph from thousands of miles away, quickly ordered the mobilization of additional forces in the east, as well as the diversion

⁵⁹ Morton, *The Last War Drum...*, 85.

⁶⁰ Morton and Roy. *Telegrams of the North-West Campaign 1885...*, lx-lxi.

of existing forces already positioned in the Northwest.⁶¹ Finally on 12 May, seemingly frustrated by the lack of success or direction, the main body of Middleton's force simply surged forward towards the Métis lines and cleared the village of Batoche by dusk. Riel, however, had not been captured despite the successful defeat of the insurgents at Batoche. For Middleton, the key objective in the battle, Louis Riel, had escaped and still remained at large.⁶² On 15 May, after receiving an offer of protection from the General, Riel surrendered to two of Middleton's scouts; the enemy's COG was defeated. Now all that remained was to round up the last vestiges of the key insurgents, which was largely to become the responsibility of the other two subordinate commanders, Otter and Strange.

After having discovered the relative calm situation in Battleford, Otter and his force became restless, and were spoiling for a fight. These soldiers had trained and deployed to prove their worth in combat; they were not content in the role of replacement forces for the NWMP in Battleford.⁶³ Interaction with the Battleford settlers, and adjusting to their first encounter with the devastated condition of Battleford, infuriated the soldiers; in turn the desire to take action mounted. What transpired next can be blamed partially on lack of clear communication and direction, confused priorities, and potentially outright disobedience. On 26 April, Otter sought the simultaneous permission of both Dewdney and Middleton to conduct a reconnaissance with the aim of determining the location of the Cree Chief Poundmaker, who was attributed with causing a majority of the uprising in the Battleford area: "I would propose taking part of my force at once to

⁶¹ Morton, *The Last War Drum...*, 87-88.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 92.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 102.

punish Poundmaker.”⁶⁴ Dewdney concurred, whereas Middleton did not. However, in the confusion that ensued between mixed messages and unclear telegram orders, Otter proceeded with his plans, and on 1 May, departed Battleford in search of Poundmaker. He did not receive Middleton’s last warning: “Fighting these men entails heavy responsibility. Six men judiciously placed would shoot down half your force. Had better for the present content yourself with holding Battleford and patrolling about the country”⁶⁵ At dawn on 2 May, Otter’s force came upon Poundmaker’s camp in the vicinity of Cut Knife Hill, and initially the surprise lay with Otter’s force. However, quick reaction from the Indian fighters allowed them to gain the advantage, once again surrounding the Dominion troops from enfilade positions within the coulees surrounding Otter’s forces occupying the high ground. By the end of the battle, Otter was forced to withdraw his force back across the creek adjacent to Cut Knife Hill. It was only through the grace of Poundmaker, who “forbade his followers to continue the battle”⁶⁶ that the withdrawing troops were not pursued and dealt a more punishing defeat. Upon hearing the news of the defeat of Otter’s force, Middleton reported to Caron: “Am sorry Otter attacked, particularly as he retired so far and so rapidly. Doubtful of effect on other Indians.”⁶⁷ Not intimidated in the least by Otter’s forces, Poundmaker began to move his people towards Batoche, presumably to link up with Riel’s force, but unaware of the defeat at the hands of Middleton earlier in the month. Poundmaker’s last act of defiance was the capture of a supply train of wagons on 14 May. This event coincided with the

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 103.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 109.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 108.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 109.

capture of Riel, and six days later, Poundmaker offered his terms of surrender in the form of a missionary, three prisoners, and the captured supply train teamsters, to Battleford.

On 25 May, Chief Poundmaker officially surrendered to Middleton.

Well over a month earlier, in the vicinity of Calgary, General Strange was excited to learn of the government's decision to counter Riel and the insurgents. Upon hearing of the mobilization of troops, and offering his services to Caron to assist in quelling the insurgency, Strange received a message from Caron: "Would like to see you to the front again... Trust to you as ever."⁶⁸ With the concurrence of Middleton, on 10 April he received his orders to "over-awe the Indians in the district"⁶⁹ and then continue to march towards Edmonton and eventually swing east and link up with the other two columns in a pincer movement.

Strange regarded this appointment as somewhat of a blessing. Having attempted to make a living as a ranch manager, his frequent encounters with 'illegal' Indian activities, and the seemingly indifference and lack of action taken by local law enforcement to stifle these actions, he believed that it was time to take positive action and matters into his own hands. Seemingly exasperated by the lack of ramifications for illegal actions of the Indians, he concluded: "'With all savages, leniency has no meaning but cowardice."⁷⁰ This attitude would set the tone for his style of leadership, and his hard-nosed reputation may have been his greatest asset in the upcoming days.

⁶⁸ Morton, *The Last War Drum...*, 35.

⁶⁹ Jack Dunn, *The Alberta Field Force of 1885*. (Calgary: Jack Dunn publisher, 1994), 7.

⁷⁰ Morton, *The Last War Drum...*, 112.

Middleton, who was not particularly fond of any professional soldiers other than British-trained, found a glorious opportunity to engage the French Canadian military contribution. In a post-conflict letter to the Prime Minister, Middleton explained his decision to deploy the French Battalions to Strange in the west: “I sent both French regiments to the front knowing you wished it...but I sent them west as I did not think it wise to bring them where so many French half-breeds were to be met about here...”⁷¹ With this action, Middleton demonstrated his political acumen coupled with a propensity to find a tactful and unique solution to a potentially tenuous political situation.

Strange, on the other hand, was ecstatic about receiving the troops. He himself could speak French and he held no disdain for any soldier offering his services to the Crown. He would soon be more engaged in organizing provisions and kitting his force than any concerns about their linguistic or cultural background.

Logistical problems aside, by 20 April Strange had assembled sufficient forces to commence his march with alacrity northward to Edmonton as per Middleton’s instructions. Strange was concerned about the ability of his force left in Calgary, under command of Lieutenant-Colonel Osborne Smith of the 91st Winnipeg Light Infantry, to control the Blackfoot Indians in the region. He left Smith orders to ensure that the Blackfoot were to be strictly confined to their reserves. Dewdney, having been notified of these instructions, saw the peril of a situation that could possibly cause discontent amongst the Blackfoot, who had sworn loyalty to the Government, and thus threaten the tenuous situation. In an apparent effort to overrule the local military commander, Dewdney stated: “If military take upon themselves management of our Indians shall

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 112.

withdraw Indian Agents and all Indian Department officials.” Caron, learning of this, instructed that Strange: “deal with the native people only through the government-appointed agents.”⁷² Middleton, annoyed with the apparent audacity of such an order, expressed his concern and initial misgivings with the appointment of Strange when he commented to the Minister, “I always thought it a dangerous experiment giving him command. He is a good fellow but he is what you call in this country a ‘crank’ and with a little religion in it which is dangerous.”⁷³ This apparent lack of trust in Strange’s ability to manage the situation in the west would be pervasive throughout the remainder of the campaign.

Despite rigorous challenges posed by the nature of the environment, and a most arduous trek of approximately 208 miles, Strange’s advance force reached Edmonton on 1 May, with Strange holding nothing but praise for the conduct, efforts and perseverance of his soldiers. By 10 May, Osborne Smith’s soldiers had reunited with Strange in Edmonton, after having been relieved in Calgary by men of the 9th Voltigeurs. On 14 May Strange departed Edmonton in an eastward direction, utilizing both river boats that he had designed and ordered built ahead of time, as well as by land. The pace was slowed by inclement weather; however, on 25 May (unbeknownst to Strange, 10 days after Riel had surrendered, and the day of Poundmaker’s surrender) his force entered the Frog Lake and Fort Pitt area, and witnessed the aftermath of the massacre first hand. On 27 May, his scouts located a large encampment of Indians camped only a few miles from Fort Pitt, on the north side of the river in a location known as Frenchman’s Butte. These Indians

⁷² *Ibid.*, 116.

⁷³ *Ibid.*

were in fact members of Big Bear's tribe who had attempted to reunite with Poundmaker, but on learning of the arrival of soldiers in Battleford, decided to remain in this area.

Strange was highly cautious in his advance. His force had slowly been depleted to around 197 men, 27 police, a few scouts and one field gun because of the fact that as he advanced, he was required to garrison various communities along the route, and maintain a guard of his rear area. A force-on-force engagement occurred with these Indians on the evening of 27 May; however, no significant results were encountered as both sides. He decided discretion was the better part of valour, and unbeknownst to either side, each withdrew. Over the next few days, Strange's force would attempt to make contact again with the retreating Indians. The scout leader, Major Sam Steele, eventually tracked the Indians down in the Loon Lake area. On 3 July, an engagement ensued, however, Steele's force lacked the provisions, manpower and overall ability to sustain a proper pursuit of the Indians, and he therefore made the decision to withdraw to Fort Pitt.⁷⁴ This engagement would mark the last battle ever fought on Canadian soil during the rebellion. Middleton, apparently not overly amused with Strange's decision to attack at Fort Pitt, expressed his displeasure once again when he reported to Caron: "It was a pity General Strange had not waited for my arrival, when a more decisive blow might have been struck."⁷⁵

When Steele returned to Fort Pitt to report to Strange, he discovered that Middleton, having accepted the surrender of Poundmaker on 25 May, had already linked

⁷⁴ Morton, *The Last War Drum...*, 126

⁷⁵ General Sir Fred Middleton. *Suppression of the Rebellion in the North West Territories of Canada, 1885*. Edited, with introduction by G.H. Needler. (Toronto: UP, 1948), 62.

up, and that Strange's independent command had officially ended. What ensued afterwards was a series of somewhat coordinated efforts to pursue and capture Big Bear.

Despite Middleton's coordination of these final efforts Big Bear was never officially captured. For the troops, they soon found that this last portion of the campaign was quickly becoming onerous, and somewhat futile. They were exhausted and the lack of significant results coincided with a subsequent lack of motivation and increased desire to see the campaign conclude.⁷⁶ On 26 June, in light of the successes to date, and after witnessing first hand the fatigue and degraded physical condition of his soldiers, Middleton informed Caron:⁷⁷

I think I may now fairly say the object of the campaign has been attained. Riel's party defeated and broken up – himself a prisoner,--all the prisoners given up or retaken, --Poundmaker his principal chief, the Battleford murderers and most of Riel's principal men... There only remains Big Bear and the Frog Lake murderers... the capture or surrender of Big Bear is only a matter of time.

Evidently Middleton was correct, because on 2 July, Big Bear and several of his followers surrendered at Fort Carleton.

In Middleton's mind, the campaign was effectively over. It was now time to commence with post-hostility planning and preparations, and to once again hand control of the campaign over to the civilian authorities. Through a series of closely coordinated efforts, the troops returned to their home stations via steamships and railroad. By the end of July, the majority of the force involved in the campaign had returned to their home stations. However, amongst those making the original journey out west, "forty men had

⁷⁶ Morton, *The Last War Drum...*, 134.

⁷⁷ Morton and Roy. *Telegrams of the North-West Campaign 1885...*, 361-362.

died in the campaign and 119 had been wounded. Many others would bear the effects of disease and infirmity, contracted during the campaign, to their graves.”⁷⁸

General Middleton, in an eloquent dispatch to the Minister in praise of the COIN campaign effort, reported:

I trust I may be allowed to think that the country has every reason to be proud of the conduct of its Volunteer Militia, in this, its first essay in arms, unassisted by regular troops, and it has equal reason to be proud of the Department which called out, equipped and transported to the scene of action, from distances varying from 300 to 3000 miles, this force, and, without failure in commissariat or transport, enabled the Officer commanding to carry out, under exceptional circumstances, a successful campaign in less than 4 months.⁷⁹

CHAPTER THREE: COUNTER-INSURGENCY PRINCIPLES EXAMINED

With a broad comprehension of Middleton’s COIN campaign presented, further examination of the various principles of COIN will demonstrate Middleton’s acumen in applying these principles in order to achieve success. While the principles outlined in CFP 323-4 are explicit, it must be understood that they are only guidelines, and must be adapted to each particular situation, and adjusted accordingly in their application as the changing situation dictates. Certain key aspects of the campaign relate to each of the principles, and the same set of circumstances may impact on more than one principle. This reveals the necessity for a commander to fully understand that each principle is inherently interrelated, a facet that Middleton was solidly adept at appreciating. A further

⁷⁸ Morton, *The Last War Drum...*, 144.

⁷⁹ Middleton. *Suppression of the Rebellion in the North West Territories of Canada, 1885. ...*, 15.

examination of the principles will detail events or situations where Middleton clearly demonstrated his application of the principle to achieve success in the campaign.

Effect Political Primacy in the Pursuit of a Strategic Aim

COIN planning is not a military affair conducted in isolation, but rather the concerted effort of many agencies, led by strong government, acting in unison, to defeat the insurgents. Milan Vego states: “Like in any war, any counterinsurgency effort must be subordinate to policy and strategy. A counterinsurgency is essentially a political problem.”⁸⁰ With the military placed in a supporting role, Middleton was extremely effective, albeit somewhat fortunate given the circumstances, in quelling the insurrection with a degree of élan and a sense of urgency. His success can largely be attributed to his audacious approach to the campaign, while limiting his actions to only the minimum force necessary to accomplish the mission, thereby ensuring his intent was to assist rather than destroy the indigenous population throughout the campaign. This goal was particularly evident during the battle for Batoche wherein he agreed to constrain his gunners from indiscriminately bombarding the entire built-up area, after Riel contacted him via courier (a released prisoner) with a request to avoid inflicting unnecessary harm upon the civilians caught in the crossfire:

He (the courier) handed me a letter which he said Riel had written and sent to me. I opened it and found it to the effect that if I massacred his women and children, he would massacre the prisoners. As I supposed he referred to our shelling the houses, I at once wrote in answer that we were most averse to injuring women and

⁸⁰ Milan Vego, “Counterinsurgency Campaign Planning” (provided as part of course reference material for Canadian Forces College activity DS-525/FUN/LD-5 Joint Command and Staff Programme 35, 2007), 5.

children, and that if he would put them all in one place or house, and let me know the exact locality no shot or shell would be fired at it.⁸¹

The operational authority Caron provided to Middleton from the onset of hostilities was the most logical choice, when one considers the difficulties that could be anticipated in controlling a force over great distances and with limited effective or reliable communications. Caron showed a willingness to delegate the majority of responsibility for the campaign to Middleton:

...forced him (Caron) to rely on Middleton for just about every aspect of the operation in the North-West, and he gave the General a tremendous amount of authority and latitude in not only conducting the campaign but also in implementing local arrangements for the support of the force.⁸²

However, Middleton's role, and the endstate of defeating Riel, was only the short term military solution. Macdonald and his government had not envisioned any enduring support or effectual changes post-insurgency from a strategic point of view. To their credit, the government took immediate and remarkable steps to react quickly and effectively once the acknowledgement of the threat occurred: "(W)ithin a week of Riel's proclamation of a provisional government there were troops at Qu'Appelle, and within two weeks, enough that General Middleton could set off northward."⁸³ Additionally, political sensibilities were already apparent and invasive in the decision-making capacity of the senior government officials. In an attempt to make this a truly national struggle

⁸¹ Middleton, *Suppression of the Rebellion in the North West Territories of Canada, 1885*. ..., 51.

⁸² Major C.A. Lamarre, *Logistics in the North-West Rebellion of 1885* (Toronto: Canadian Forces College Command and Staff Course 28 Master of Defence Sciences Research Paper, 2002), 16.

⁸³ Waite, *Canada 1874-1896, Arduous Destiny...*, 158.

against an inherent threat, Macdonald, through Caron, instructed both English and French militias to mobilize. While this may seem somewhat mundane, it was an action that was not without certain complications. Emmanuel LaChapelle, a military surgeon assigned to the 65th Carabiniers Mont Royal, wrote Caron:

you will doubtless not be unaware that several of our leading officers were close friends and college contemporaries of Louis Riel or that all our men regard the Métis as their compatriots and are not far from believing that the Métis demands have been made in our national interest and are no less just than those of our ancestors in 1837.⁸⁴

With Middleton uncertain of the willingness or fortitude of the French Canadian troops to enter into direct combat with the Métis, descendants of their own brethren, it was quickly decided that the prudent measure would be to send them to the west, under the command of Major-General Strange. Here the soldiers would be isolated from the expected main engagement with the Métis, yet be seen in the eyes of the population as actively taking part in the campaign. As previously mentioned, General Strange was elated to receive the French Canadians to bolster his forces, and in the end, the concern over the willingness of the French Canadian soldiers to perform their duties was never put to the ultimate test; however, their performance nonetheless was remarkable given the arduous conditions experienced during their portion of the campaign. Desmond Morton summarizes this issue succinctly when he states: “Whatever grumbling and reservations there might be beneath the surface, Canada met her first great crisis as a united country.”⁸⁵ This profound statement adroitly captures the tenuous situation facing the young Dominion of Canada at the onset of the insurrection.

⁸⁴ Morton, *The Last War Drum...*, 37.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 37.

It bears mentioning that at the onset of the insurrection, the Dominion of Canada was struggling with the ambitious dream of uniting the country via railroad in the form of the CPR, while at the same time attracting settlers to the new country. However, the unwillingness of the government to recognize initially the serious nature of the insurrection was attributable to wider concern: “For the sake of immigration and railway investors, the government had tried to minimize reports of troubles in the territories.”⁸⁶ The fact that the government was predominantly occupied with these issues likely influenced Middleton’s incessant apprehension with the image that his actions were portraying to the remainder of the world, and his desire to communicate his concerns to his superiors: “I am trying to do with as few troops as possible not only to save you (Caron) money but to prevent the outside world thinking too much of it and thus injure the emigration.”⁸⁷ Clearly, this commander was concerned both for the outcome of his campaign, while at the same time retaining the overall strategic picture, reinforcing the fact that political primacy was first and foremost in his planning considerations.

Middleton expressed his pride in the outcome, from tactical and strategic perspectives. He wrote Caron:

In concluding, I trust I may be allowed to think that the country has every reason to be proud of the conduct of its Volunteer Militia, in this, its first essay in arms, unassisted by regular troops, and it has every reason to be proud of the Department which called out, equipped and transported to the scone of action, from distances varying from 300 to 3000 miles, this force, and, without failure in

⁸⁶ Morton and Roy, *Telegrams of the North-West Campaign 1885...*, xxvi.

⁸⁷ Morton, *The Last War Drum...*, 71.

commissariat or transport, enabled the Officer commanding to carry out, under exceptional circumstances, a successful campaign in less than 4 months.⁸⁸

Middleton was effective in meeting the exigencies of the first COIN principle. However, he was also challenged to determine his exact endstate, as he received negligible post-insurgency instructions from the strategic level.

Promote Unity of Purpose to Coordinate the Actions of Participating Agencies

In modern COIN operations, a plethora of non-military agencies will present themselves in theatre, which forces a commander to either integrate them, or as a minimum consider their impact when conducting operational planning. Given the relative immaturity of the west with respect to other participating agencies, Middleton enjoyed a less complex environment, yet did involve three key agencies in achieving success: The CPR, the HBC, and the NWMP. The contribution and integration of the services of these three key agencies will be examined to demonstrate both Middleton's and the Government's adherence to this particular principle.

For the sake of brevity, other government departments and actors, such as the Indian Agents, missionaries and teamsters, which played a supporting, albeit important role will not be addressed under this specific principle.

Due to the great distances between militia headquarters in Ottawa and the Prairies, and complete reliance on telegraph as a means of communication, Middleton would naturally be offered the conditional support for all actions and decisions that were

⁸⁸ Canada. Department of Militia and Defence. *Report upon the Suppression of the Rebellion in the North-West Territories, and Matters in Connection Therewith, in 1885.* (Ottawa: Dept. of Militia and Defence, 1886), 15.

to be made within the theatre of operations. However, he was also constrained by Caron entering into various arrangements with the CPR and HBC that at times confused and contradicted Middleton's authority in theatre. At the outset of the insurrection, it was largely understood that the division of responsibility between Caron and Middleton was such that Caron would handle those aspects related to logistics, while Middleton would be responsible for operational command and control of the fight.⁸⁹

Strangely enough, this division of responsibility was due to compelling circumstances which led to the government decision to rely on an uncompleted railway system to deliver the bulk of its troops, when in fact Middleton and various other non-combat-related troops readily passed through the United States at varying times on their way out west.

In early 1885, Macdonald was faced with a dual set of potential disasters: he had an open revolt on the prairies, coupled with the constant threat of his long envisaged unifying national railway collapsing at the same time. He felt that if both of these problems were not dealt with expeditiously, his political leadership was definitely threatened, as well as the vision of a unified Canada. Macdonald drew the conclusion: "He could use the railway to defend the west. He could use the west to justify the railway."⁹⁰ William Cornelius Van Horne, charged with overseeing the construction of the CPR, also realized the importance of transporting the troops when he stated openly to his subordinates: "not only the credit but perhaps also the very existence of the Canadian

⁸⁹ Donald E Graves, *More Fighting for Canada: Five Battles, 1760-1944*. (Toronto: Robin Brass Studio Inc, 2004), 87.

⁹⁰ Creighton, *JOHN A. MACDONALD: The Old Chieftain...*, 417.

Pacific Railway depended upon the speed and efficiency with which it could complete this great effort in military transport.”⁹¹ Therefore, unity of purpose in this instance was questionable at best. Was the government actually interested in quelling an insurrection, or was the motivation more towards saving one’s political career and/or other capitalistic enterprise?

It is worth noting that the CPR was chosen over competing offers from the Grand Trunk Railway system in the United States. On 4 April, A.H. Taylor sent Caron a detailed telegram offering the services of the Grand Trunk system to expeditiously transport the troops west. For reasons undetermined, this kind offer was refused.⁹² In the end the bulk of Middleton’s force faced an arduous journey during the peak of winter. Desmond Morton described the railway: “Winter still held a tight grip on Northern Ontario and the railway line was incomplete. Between Dog Lake and Nipigon, four gaps (depicted in map) totaling close to a hundred miles in length, broke the line.”⁹³ Upon completion of the campaign, many soldiers commented that the most difficult part of the entire operation was the endurance of the horrible physical conditions present during the trek via the CPR.⁹⁴ Clearly, politics took precedence over sound and military considerations.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 419.

⁹² Morton and Roy, *Telegrams of the North-West Campaign 1885...*, 123.

⁹³ Morton, *The Last War Drum...*, 33.

⁹⁴ Desmond Morton provides a clear depiction of the hardship endured at: *The Last War Drum*. (Toronto: Hakkert, 1972), 41-44.

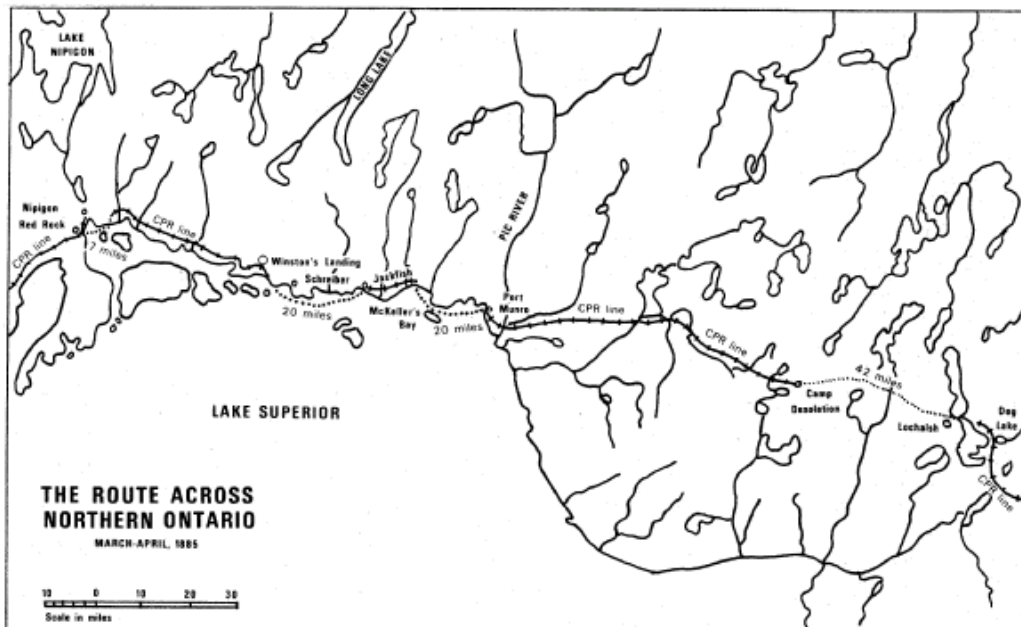


Figure 2: 1885 CPR railway depicting four major gaps.⁹⁵

With a longstanding tradition established since its existence in the west, the HBC was one of the first major enterprises affected by the uprising, as many of its trading posts were ransacked by the natives in the early stages of the insurrection. With its Canadian headquarters in Winnipeg, the chief trade commissioner Joseph Wrigley was well aware of the poor conditions and relations that existed within the native communities, and expressed “regret that sufficient enquiry had not been made into the justice of the claims of the Half-Breeds.”⁹⁶ In an even harsher tone, C.J. Brydges, HBC land commissioner, expressed his frustration to London: “the difficulty could have been warded off for some time, if there had not been so much delay and stupidity on the part of

⁹⁵ Map obtained at Major C.A Lamarre, *Logistics in the North-West Rebellion of 1885* (Toronto: Canadian Forces College Command and Staff Course 28 Master of Defence Sciences Research Paper, 2002), 26.

⁹⁶ J.E. Rea, *The Hudson’s Bay Company and the North-West Rebellion*. *The Beaver* (Summer 1982): 44.

the Government in dealing with land matters.”⁹⁷ Immediately upon learning of the Duck Lake massacre, Wrigley “was to place the resources of the Company at the disposal of the Dominion authorities...” and concluded that “Protecting the Company’s interests would therefore demand offering its officers and resources to the government’s service.”⁹⁸ Wrigley signaled his company’s intentions to cooperate fully when he stated:

The interests of the Company were clear enough to its officers. The rebellion must be suppressed with all dispatch or its fur, land and commercial business for the whole year would suffer...to throw the full organization for the Company into the lists against Riel was simply good sense. Whether it would be good business, as well, would remain to be determined.⁹⁹

Being a time of fiscal restraint, Caron was faced with finding solutions to keep war expenses to a minimum, while satisfying the profusion of patronage dealings and partisanship politics that existed. To employ the HBC as principal agent for supply and transport seemed a logical choice. However, as the campaign progressed, confusion began to appear as to who was in control of supply and transport issues. Middleton, and other subordinate commanders, faced with extended lines of communication and supply concerns, used their initiative and entered into their own agreements with local merchants. The situation eventually became mired in confusion, to the extent where at one point Middleton had even hired transport teams from the Qu’Appelle Valley Farming Company, and at the same time appointing its owner, a former militia officer Major W.R. Bell, as his Quartermaster, while appointing Captain Herbert Swinford, an HBC employee, as chief supply officer at Qu’Appelle, and S.L. Bedson as his chief transport

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 44.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 44-45.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 46.

officer. This decision created a confused chain of command, as the former two individuals looked directly to Middleton for direction, instead of Caron as had previously been arranged. Wrigley himself added to the frustration by bringing patronage issues to the forefront when he expressed concern of local merchants attempting to influence local militias to purchase supplies from them vice the HBC: “We are buying outside as cheaply as possible with payment, but find everybody anxious to make money.”¹⁰⁰ As time progressed, Caron became increasingly frustrated with Wrigley, and “became more open to persistent demands of both politics and patronage and saw increasing danger in a general dependence on one source of supply.” In an effort to alleviate the confusion, Caron communicated to Wrigley: “You are to make all arrangements until further notice...No contracts have been made by Government except with you.”¹⁰¹, while at the same time dispatching Colonel W.H. Jackson to Winnipeg to serve as his principal supply officer and negotiator between the Government and the HBC. Wrigley, with obvious inputs from Middleton, was thus afforded the opportunity to directly control logistical decisions in an informed and controlling manner. This made the decentralized system more responsive to the immediate needs of the theatre troops, simplified the administrative aspects of the campaign, while at the same time unifying the logistical system under one clear authority.

Ultimately, the entire force was adequately supplied and effectively transported via rail, land and water despite a plethora of challenges and weak overall strategic

¹⁰⁰ Morton, *The Last War Drum...*, 46.

¹⁰¹ J.E. Rea, *The Hudson's Bay Company and the North-West Rebellion*. *The Beaver* (Summer 1982): 48.

direction. Caron, in a speech to Parliament, commented: “I question whether, if it had not been for the help given to the Department by the Hudson’s Bay Company and the valuable assistance given us by Mr. Wrigley...it would not have been impossible to achieve what we have achieved.”¹⁰²

It is extremely difficult to promote unity when the motives of participating agencies vary. When an organization is motivated more from self- interest and preservation instead of patriotism, conflict is bound to occur. Middleton persevered and cooperated in controlling the various logistical assets as best he could. As the operational commander in a theatre with extended lines of communication and limited or unclear communications with his superior headquarters, he made calculated decisions which demonstrated a unique flair and ultimate concern for the well-being of his troops. In defending his actions, which many deem controversial, before a parliamentary committee after the campaign, Middleton summed up his decisions as operational commander to appoint key individuals at key locations when he stated: “I thought I was the ruling power up there,...and that I could do pretty much as I liked.”¹⁰³ Despite the lack of clear direction and understanding of the situation from the strategic level, the services rendered from the HBC were invaluable in the success of the campaign and the mitigating factor was solid coordinating efforts on behalf of Wrigley and Middleton to supply and transport the force in the most expeditious manner possible.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 57.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 57.

Less controversial was the participation of the NWMP. The force had lost credibility and prestige amongst the native population after it was forced to uphold unpopular government decisions. It also reeled from the defeat of Crozier and his men at Duck Lake: “It was natural and necessary for the sake of unity of action that the Mounted Police should be placed under the commander-in-chief along with all other forces.”¹⁰⁴ Each column contained elements of the NWMP, and their services rendered varied depending on the assessment and relationship of the various commanders. Middleton held the force in low esteem:

had two main targets for his disdain and contempt, Commissioner Irvine at Prince Albert and Inspector Morris at Battleford...Middleton referred to the Mounted Police in Prince Albert as “gophers,” comparing them to prairie rodents who run for their burrows at the first sign of danger.¹⁰⁵

This was perhaps one of Middleton’s most apparent leadership weaknesses and in contrast to the requirements to work hand-in-hand with civilian and police agencies. It was also a major factor in his recommendations for post-conflict termination that will be addressed under the eighth principle of conducting longer-term post-insurgency planning.

Despite Middleton’s concerns, both Otter and Strange were pleased with the performance of the NWMP and effectively utilized those assets assigned to them in the conduct of their campaign. In fact, Otter appointed his NWMP Superintendent William M. Herchmer as chief of staff, who, given his vast experience, took it upon himself to address Otter’s force prior to departing Swift Current and lend some advice. In perhaps

¹⁰⁴ Middleton, *Suppression of the Rebellion in the North West Territories of Canada, 1885...*, xiv.

¹⁰⁵ Jim Wallace, *A Trying Time: The North-West Mounted Police In the 1885 Rebellion*. (Winnipeg: Bunker to Bunker Books, 1998), 194.

the only instance of malcontent, this well-intended advice was taken in the wrong spirit, and demonstrated the exuberance, self-confidence and naivety of the soldiers when it was expressed by a subaltern in his diary:

We are all amazed at Colonel Herchmer's conduct tonight. He, probably with the best of intentions in the world, undertakes to read us a lecture on the proper exercise of discipline in a volunteer regiment, hinting very plainly that our men are allowed too much liberty. We do not appreciate his entirely uncalled for and, to say the least of, not over-polite criticism of his hosts. Our men are a fine willing lot of fellows, and friends that one knows intimately are not to be ordered about like a parcel of slaves.¹⁰⁶

Clearly, the members of the NWMP understood their role, and played a key part in the campaign. While not equipped for combat, they were heavily relied upon for the inherent security that they provided in their policing role. Additionally, as scouts, their local knowledge of the surrounding areas, and cultural dynamics related to the inhabitants of the west contributed greatly to the understanding of the operational environment.

Understand the Complex Dynamics of the Insurgency, Including the Wider Environment / Exploit Intelligence and Information

Middleton was admittedly ignorant to the plight of the insurgents prior to his departure for the west. Having downplayed the seriousness of the situation prior to his arrival in Troy, he demonstrated a boorish attitude to the campaign, and was confident that he could quickly bring the rebels to their knees by a simple show of force and without entering into combat. A soldier under his command reminisced about Middleton's attitude: "He expected them [the Métis] to flee at the first sight of his

¹⁰⁶ Donald E. Graves, *More Fighting for Canada: Five Battles, 1760-1944*. (Toronto: Robin Brass Studio Inc, 2004), 92.

Falstaffian figure;...”¹⁰⁷ However, upon meeting Dewdney and Herchmer in Troy, Middleton gained his first real insight into the seriousness of the situation, and quickly began to broaden his knowledge base in order to craft his campaign plan. Middleton, as well as Otter and Strange, relied heavily upon information gleaned from a variety of sources to guide them in their actions and decision making processes. One cannot prioritize who Middleton relied upon most for his intelligence collection; however, knowledge of the terrain and native habits was obtained from a diverse range of sources such as Indian agents, missionaries, NWMP officers, telegraph operators, and logically enough with human intelligence garnered from prisoners providing some of the most up to date and accurate representations of the true situation. All information was continuously collated and cross-checked for reliability by Middleton’s intelligence organization. It is interesting to note that members of the Dominion Land Surveyors, who were a part of the original surveying crews which caused the discontent of the Métis and Indians in the first place, were organized into an “Intelligence Corps”¹⁰⁸ and used to garner a greater operating picture, thereby permitting Middleton to direct various actions against the insurgents. Surprisingly enough, these 50 odd surveyors did not travel with the main body, but by rail via the USA much the same as Middleton and other auxiliary forces. They had already been to the majority of the locations that Middleton’s forces

¹⁰⁷ Beal, Bob and Macleod, Rod. *Prairie Fire: The 1885 North-West Rebellion*. (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Inc., 1994), 222.

¹⁰⁸ Rod C. Macleod, *Reminiscences of a Bungle by One of the Bunglers and Two Other Northwest Rebellion Diaries*. (The University of Alberta Press, 1983), 5-6.

would be travelling and possessed detailed knowledge of territory, plains life in general, and were used to “roughing it” as part of their everyday duties.

Not only was the use of intelligence important in preparing the campaign and guiding various actions, Middleton also demonstrated a high understanding of the impact that negative media could have towards popular support for his campaign. Middleton was supportive of the use of embedded media accompanying his force in order to dispel rumours, and to counter the propaganda being generated by Riel. It was known that Riel was generating false rumours amongst the natives with the hopes of garnering their support. One such falsehood was:

that England was engaged in a war with Russia, and could not spare a man of her army to help the Canadian Government, whose own soldiers were no use, and could not fight or move in the prairies, and that a large body of Fenians and Indians from the United States with artillery were coming to join him, etc.¹⁰⁹

These false statements did not go unnoticed, and Middleton took appropriate measures to counter their effect. Middleton welcomed and was surprisingly tolerant of war correspondents accompanying his force. He made effective use of them by ensuring depictions of the progress of the campaign and the outcome of various engagements was reported accurately and in a timely manner to the rest of Canada in order to maintain continued support for the mission and ease fears amongst the general population. Charles Boulton, a senior scout with Middleton’s force, commented on the value of the correspondents:

The press of Canada shewed [*sic*] the greatest enterprise in sending correspondents to the front, in order that the public might have the earliest and

¹⁰⁹ Middleton, *Suppression of the Rebellion in the North West Territories of Canada, 1885...*, 7.

most accurate information concerning the daily events of the campaign. They were almost entirely confined to the Canadian newspapers...Comparing the various accounts of the campaign with one another, it is however to be said that the public got a very accurate description of the important events.¹¹⁰

Middleton however continued to maintain some modicum of control over the media. While waiting for reinforcements to arrive after the Fish Creek affair, Middleton was forced to kick a reporter from the Toronto Globe and Mail out of his camp who “had the temerity to criticize the soundness of Middleton’s dispositions.”¹¹¹ Middleton understood the importance of public opinion, and to have any seed of discontent emanating from within his own forces could possibly feed the negative propaganda machine that he was fully engaged in countering, and create doubt and loss of support amongst the civilian population and his own troops.

The only weakness with the intelligence aspect of the campaign became evident during the final stages when all three columns spread out in uncharted and unfamiliar territory in search of Big Bear and his tribe. The constant changing of direction in reaction to various purported sightings had a demoralizing effect on the troops, and Middleton, seeing that the situation was quickly becoming a wild goose chase, decided to recommend termination of the campaign. Although it was an unfortunate end to an otherwise successful campaign to date, it was well tolerated by the troops and the government, as both was eager to see this campaign come to a close. It was also fortunate for Middleton in that a desperate enemy could have taken drastic measures and struck at vulnerable supply lines and stretched lines of communications in order to disrupt the

¹¹⁰ Charles Arkoll Boulton, *Reminiscences of the North-West Rebellions*. (Toronto: Grip Printing & Publishing Co. 1886), 401.

¹¹¹ Morton, *The Last War Drum...*,73.

force while reconstituting itself. Fortunately for Middleton, the desire and ability of the Indians to conduct further insurgent activities had long disappeared.

It is interesting to note that a certain dynamic presented itself amongst the Dominion soldiers fighting the insurgents. Charles Mulvaney captures the sentiments of the troops as they progressed further along the campaign trails in search of the insurgents. In a letter from one of the accompanying correspondents, a profound understanding or degree of regard and sympathy existed within the troops towards the underlying cause of the insurrection:

The feeling that the Half-breeds have been wronged, that the Government has been criminally negligent in its treatment of their claims, and that the whole trouble, grows more deeply rooted and more widely spread...bring home to every man the reality of the residents' grievances.¹¹²

While the troops did sympathize with the plight of the locals, and came to a degree of understanding for their grievances, this sympathy in no way stopped them from wanting to fight the enemy. At each engagement, the insurgents proved to be shrewd and effective in standing up for their rights and beliefs. A further sense of hatred for Riel developed among the soldiers, who blamed him for the plight, and a greater amount of respect for the insurgents who would risk their lives for this type of tyrant. This view worked in Middleton's favour as the campaign progressed, as with each engagement, his force became more motivated to see the campaign draw to a successful conclusion for the benefit of all parties involved.

¹¹² Charles Pelham Mulvaney, *The History of The Northwest Rebellion of 1885*. (Toronto: A.H. Hovey & Co., 1885), 152-153.

A final point to address is the reliance of Middleton on the telegraph system in order to communicate his intents with Ottawa, as well as his other two commanders. It is interesting to note that Riel could easily have harassed and impeded the progress of the force simply by cutting the lines in several locations, thereby blinding Middleton and his ability to command his force efficiently. However, as Middleton himself pointed out in his final recollection of the campaign: “Riel did not interfere much with the telegraph wire, contenting himself with cutting it between Batoche and Prince Albert, as he thought he might, after defeating me, require to use the wire to communicate with Ottawa and make terms with the Government!”¹¹³

Separate the Insurgents from their Physical and Moral Sources of Strength

Physical separation of the insurgents was perhaps the simplest facet of the campaign. Middleton learned from LGov Dewdney the four key insurgent areas previously mentioned, and quickly established his campaign aimed at alleviating the pressure on these communities, while attacking directly at Riel. He would gradually stage the advance, ensuring secure bases and provisions were established and protected, while winning over the hearts and minds of the locals, and assuring them that the restoration of law and order was indeed occurring and they could return to normal daily routine. In each of the columns, battles were fought, objectives consolidated, and then the next in a series of objectives was reached. This progression had the effect of constantly keeping the insurgents on the run, thereby making a cohesive stand difficult to conduct, as well as support logistically. The simple fact was that by the time the

¹¹³ Middleton, *Suppression of the Rebellion in the North West Territories of Canada, 1885...*, 21.

Dominion forces had arrived in the west, Riel had already lost a great deal of his original support for his cause once he had initiated violence as part of his campaign.

Additionally, from the outset the insurgent forces had limited sustainability and frequently were low on supplies and ammunition during key engagements. By the time the battle at Batoche occurred, the Métis and Indian forces could not effectively mount any form of coherent defence despite having prepared significant defensive positions. With a sustained push from the Dominion forces, they were routed from their positions after a four day standoff. Their retreat from Batoche signaled the beginning of the end of the insurgency.

Separation of the insurgency from a moral perspective began prior to the departure of forces out west. In a clever move by Macdonald a year prior to the Duck Lake massacre, missionaries were dispatched westward in order to appease the most warlike tribe, the Blackfoot Indians, in order to avoid an all out Indian war. With additional rations issued, and a more relaxed imposition of Indian Department regulations, Chief Crowfoot reaffirmed his loyalty to the Dominion, and this particular threat was removed. General Strange (a friend of Chief Crowfoot) also employed the missionaries to great effect during his advance, sending them forward with inherent freedom of action, to gain knowledge and warn the local tribes of the impending arrival of the force, and the necessity to cooperate. General Strange demonstrated a shrewd tactic of ensuring loyalty by not shaking hands with tribal chiefs along the route as they proclaimed their loyalty, instead indicating that he would only do so upon his return, and only if they had behaved as promised. The same tactic was generally employed on each of the other columns. Indians professing loyalty to the Dominion troops were treated to

“presents of tea, bacon, tobacco, and flour.”¹¹⁴ In essence, Indian loyalty was obtained by purchasing this favour with the promised provision of essential elements of daily living.

Morality was also critical in winning the support of the local population as the military force advanced towards each of their objectives. A force that does not regard the local inhabitants and is indiscriminate in its employment of force, and demonstrates reprehensible conduct will certainly impede any commander in meeting his objectives. Middleton had nothing but praise for the conduct of his force on all fronts, when after the campaign he stated:

During the whole of the time he has not had to assemble a court martial, and in fact there has been an absence of crime. They have had vast hardships to undergo and real difficulties to overcome, and have met them like men, with ready cheerfulness and without complaint. They, as untried volunteer soldiers, have had to move in a country where an extraordinary scare existed, and against an enemy whom it was publicly declared they would be unable to cope with, unless with a great superiority of numbers. . . . And the Major-General in taking farewell of his old comrades begs walks of life, and to sincerely thank them one and all for having, by their gallantry, good conduct, and hard work, enabled him to carry to a successful conclusion what will probably be his last campaign.¹¹⁵

The exemplary conduct of the soldiers in the force assisted in guaranteeing success for Middleton. As they moved northwards, lines of communications in all columns became increasingly stretched. The ability to protect these supply lines over vast distances was aided by the fact that local inhabitants did not feel threatened by the COIN forces, and were assuaged of many of their concerns. Instead, they chose simply to return to daily life, and were neither compelled nor persuaded to interfere with operations.

¹¹⁴ Middleton, *Suppression of the Rebellion in the North West Territories of Canada, 1885...*, 21.

¹¹⁵ Boulton, *Reminiscences of the North-West Rebellions...*, 388.

Neutralize the Insurgent

Neutralizing the insurgency was conducted predominantly by military force, and was principally attritionist in its approach. However, once Middleton had identified the insurgent centre of gravity, and directed his main focus and attention to eliminating Riel, all support quickly faded for the remainder of the insurgency.

On 23 March, while Middleton was enroute to Battleford to link up with Otter, he learned via messenger that Poundmaker wished a truce and to learn of the truth related to rumours circulating that Riel had been defeated. Middleton, spying an opportunity, replied:

I have utterly defeated the half-breeds and Indians at Batoche, and have made prisoners of Riel and most of his council. I have made no terms with them, neither will I make terms with you. I have men enough to destroy you and your people, or, at lest to drive you away to starve, and will do so unless you bring in the teams you took and yourself and councilors, with your arms, to meet me at Battleford on Monday, the 26th. I am glad to hear you have treated the prisoners well and have released them.¹¹⁶

Poundmaker indeed surrendered to Middleton at Battleford on 25 May, and because of this, Middleton and his subordinate commanders achieved another milestone in their endeavour to ultimately neutralize this insurgency. All that essentially remained of this particular insurgency were those fighters remaining loyal to Big Bear.

Sustain Commitment to Expend Political Capital and Resources over a Long Period

The willingness of the government to enter into this conflict was always coupled with the fact that cost and duration of the campaign were major factors being considered.

¹¹⁶ Middleton, *Suppression of the Rebellion in the North West Territories of Canada, 1885...*, 59-60.

Caron was under considerable financial pressures at the time, and coincidentally Middleton was aware that reducing costs of his campaign was paramount, both for the public purse, as well as for the perception that this would have on the supporting public opinion. Fortunately for the government, Middleton's insightful appreciation of the situation, and control over the unified movements of his forces, ensured that the campaign was conducted in the most expeditious manner, when considered against the multitude of factors impacting on operations. It has been said, however, that Riel and his supporters never really intended to enter into a protracted affair with the Government, fully believing that the threat to their legitimacy, in the form of the Exovedate, would ultimately lead to renewed negotiations and a settlement being reached in a similar manner to the Red River affair of 1870. They did not plan on the Dominion committing to such a comprehensive response to their threat, and were ultimately powerless to counter such a sustained effort from the onset.

For its part, the government committed over 5000 soldiers to the campaign, expending well over \$5 million overall, while being fiscally constrained as a nation.

Lamarre best summarizes the situation when he states:

It was the ability of the Canadian government to mobilize, transport and sustain a large field force from eastern Canada to the field of operations, all within a few short weeks, which secured victory.¹¹⁷

Considering the financial distress the nation was in at the time of the insurrection, this commitment clearly demonstrated to the Canadian citizens, as well as other nations

¹¹⁷ Lamarre, *Logistics in the North-West Rebellion of 1885* (Toronto: Canadian Forces College Command and Staff Course 28 Master of Defence Sciences Research Paper, 2002), 4.

keenly interested in the outcome, that the Canadian government was serious in enforcing law and order within its sovereign territory.

Conduct Longer Term Post-Insurgency Planning

A distinct weakness in the strategic level COIN campaign becomes evident when one examines the post-insurgency aspect. During the pause Middleton took after the battle of Fish Creek, he took the time to postulate about the future of the west once the campaign had concluded. In an apparent attempt to initiate post-hostility initiatives, Middleton expressed to Caron: “I would recommend your Government to think of some public works up here. I fear there will be something like a famine, and very few may be expected hardly any sowing having been done yet.”¹¹⁸ This was an early sign that Middleton was aware of the principle, yet his superiors had not considered the after-effects of the campaign. He clearly felt that it was time to present options to the government; otherwise, disorder and confusion would once again reign with the departure of the force post-hostilities.

Demonstrating his disdain for the effectiveness of the NWMP, he also communicated to Caron that the NWMP had “completely lost all prestige with whites, breeds and Indians.”¹¹⁹ Middleton envisioned a military corps comprising 1,000 troops and the four permanent force troops providing security in the region at least until winter was over. However, LGov Dewdney intervened and recommended to Caron that this recommendation be reconsidered as he felt that soldiers “are unaccustomed to Indians

¹¹⁸ Morton and Roy, *Telegrams of the North-West Campaign 1885...*, 216.

¹¹⁹ Morton, *The Last War Drum...*, 145.

and are more than likely to get us into trouble if brought in contact with them...”¹²⁰ It was generally agreed that it was far more logical to augment the existing NWMP structure than to garrison the west with soldiers. With Macdonald less than enthusiastic about finding a replacement for the NWMP, the idea of a militia-style organization to uphold the peace eventually faded into obscurity.¹²¹

During the closing stages of the combat portion of the campaign, Middleton, not having received any strategic direction for post-hostility arrangements, could only offer speculation and rudimentary advice to the Indians and Métis during the discussions with Poundmaker and his key leaders:

Tell them (to the Interpreter) that I am only a soldier and do not know the intention of the Government; but I believe that if they (the Indians) behave well and stay on the reservation they will receive food, will be taught to cultivate the ground, and will be shown how to earn a living.¹²²

Even after Riel’s capture, Middleton had to ask Caron for direction, “Riel is my prisoner. What is to be done with him? I await instructions here.”¹²³ This is a clear indicator that no forethought had been made to the eventual outcome or success of the campaign, or as a minimum, it was certainly not communicated to the one key person who ought to have known. As the campaign began to wind down, Middleton questioned Caron as to how long the force was to be maintained, as he noticed that after the capture

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 147.

¹²¹ Jim Wallace, *A Trying Time: The North-West Mounted Police In the 1885 Rebellion*. (Winnipeg: Bunker to Bunker Books, 1998), 201.

¹²² Mulvaney, *The History of The Northwest Rebellion of 1885...*, 391.

¹²³ Morton and Roy, *Telegrams of the North-West Campaign 1885...*, 288.

of Poundmaker, his troops had sensed that the objective of the campaign had been reached and were longing to go home. Caron again offered little guidance:

You must judge of length of time you consider force should be kept. Think the permanent Corps should be last to leave as they lose nothing by being at front. About force to be established, should like to get your suggestions before deciding...Let me know what number of men you consider would be required?¹²⁴

Apparently frustrated with attempting to ascertain strategic level direction over the telegraph, Middleton had the audacity to suggest to Caron that he proceed out west and meet with Middleton to determine the sequel to the campaign: "I think it would simplify matters if you could come up here soon. We could arrange matters better together, either at Regina or Winnipeg."¹²⁵

Exasperated with the campaign and the fruitless endeavours of chasing Big Bear, Middleton determined on 26 June that the object of the campaign had been achieved. With that, Middleton commenced drawdown of his force, and within a matter of weeks the entire force had returned to their home stations under the direction of Middleton.

There were certainly positive aspects that resulted from the campaign that were directly beneficial to the inhabitants of the west. The enormous military expenditure resulted in a depressed economy being stimulated as numerous teamsters were employed to support the force, with the obvious associated economic spinoffs. Eventually residents began to receive land titles after years of delay, and by 1886, federal representation was granted to all three Provisional districts. With the progress of all three military columns,

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 322.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 344.

increased communication systems were incorporated as telegraph lines were laid throughout the Prairies in support of the columns. Loyal Indians were showered with various gifts, and even offered train excursions to eastern Canada as goodwill gestures. Unfortunately for the west, the situation causing the initial grievances remained much the same, if not more difficult, especially for the Indians and the Métis who had contravened orders to remain neutral or taken up arms.¹²⁶ Despite the best efforts and suggestions by Middleton, conditions for the inhabitants continued to deteriorate, as repercussions towards the Indians were severe, with several key leaders being hanged, and both Poundmaker and Big Bear being imprisoned. The outcome for Riel is well known, as on Macdonald's instructions he was hanged on 16 November 1885. Indirectly, the execution of Riel also had unexpected, although not completely unforeseeable consequences. The rift between Protestant Ontario who supported the execution and Roman Catholic Quebec who condemned the hanging, set in motion the seeds of discontent that are still witnessed today between English and French Canadians when governing the country.

¹²⁶ Details of the aftermath and the plight of the Indians and Métis is best summarized by Jack F. Dunn, *The Alberta Field Force of 1885*. (Calgary: Jack Dunn publisher, 1994), 257-261.

CONCLUSION

“The issue of Canadian expansion had been settled, and settled for all time. The west had been won by Canadian soldiers and a Canadian Railway.”¹²⁷

Creighton: “The Old Chieftain”

The 1885 Northwest Rebellion marked Canada’s first foray into the intricacies of fighting an operational-level counterinsurgency campaign, and more importantly, one that was occurring on its own soil. It demonstrated that insurgencies are complex problems requiring comprehensive solutions. Although the military was the primary agent in resolving this particular problem, the role of the government at the strategic level, as well as key partners, is equally important in the overall solution.

Theoretical definitions of the nature and causes of insurgencies outline the complexities that are associated with this form of warfare. Insurgencies are extremely complicated affairs, with their root causes being both political grievances coupled with a violent undertone in association with their implementation. The modern principles of counterinsurgency are found in B-GL-323-004/FP-003 *Counter-Insurgency Operations*. A basic understanding of those key tenets that a commander, faced with an insurgency, should follow in order to defeat successfully an insurgency demonstrates that these principles were as relevant in 1885 as they are today. The seeds of discontent that were prevalent in western Canada, commencing with the initial dissatisfaction of the Métis and Indians during the Red River Crisis of 1870, provided a clearer understanding of the underlying causes of the insurrection in 1885. Failure to address the principles behind the underlying causes in an insurgency will ultimately lead to potential defeat or prolonged

¹²⁷ Creighton, *JOHN A. MACDONALD: The Old Chieftain...*, 425.

COIN campaigns, as the root causes of the insurgency are never satisfied and therefore likely to arise again over time.

The factors affecting both the Dominion government, but more particularly the operational Commander Major-General Frederick Dobson Middleton, had a clear impact on how this operational campaign was to be conducted. Complications affecting the strategic level direction of Prime Minister Macdonald and his Minister of Militia Adolphe Caron, such as initial apathy towards the crisis, financial constraints, political motivations, as well as patronage and capitalistic issues, each had a major impact on their ability to render firm decisions and formulate clear plans from a strategic perspective. At the operational level, General Middleton was faced with a plethora of complications ranging from the aforementioned unclear strategic direction, long lines of communication, dynamic and conflicting personalities of key leaders, and personal animosity towards key agencies under his command. Command and control of the force, along with coordination of sustaining the force between multiple layers of command, was difficult at best. However, with the implementation of a simple campaign plan, directed at the clearly identified insurgent centre of gravity, and adhered to with strict acumen, Middleton accomplished his mission in a remarkably short time, and with minimal collateral damage physically and to the reputation of Canada as a country.

At the operational level, Middleton's ability to command and control his counterinsurgent force in the successful completion of his mission can be credited largely to his adherence to those principles outlined in B-GL-323-004/FP-003 *Counter-Insurgency Operations*. Counterinsurgency is a comprehensive operation with many conflicting and complicated facets associated with its conduct; the military, while being

largely involved, is only one of a cast of supporting actors required to conclude successfully the crisis. Weakness in strategic level direction caused innumerable complications with the campaign, while motivations for supporting the campaign from the outset were questionable at best amongst several of the key players. Had it not been for the perseverance and steadfast approach of General Middleton and his key subordinates in adhering to the principles of counterinsurgency, the outcome of the campaign could have taken a decidedly worse turn for Canadian history.

As Canada continues with its modern counterinsurgency campaign, it is reassuring to note that the eight key principles of counterinsurgency provided by the Chief of Land Staff, Lieutenant-General Andrew Leslie, are well-tested, tried and true and are as enduring today on the complex modern battlefield as they were at the onset of our young and proud country as were entered into the challenges of nationhood. Canada has realized the complex nature of insurgencies and is committing itself to a whole of government approach to resolving the present situation in Afghanistan. This is proof positive that the lessons of the past have been learned, and with successful execution, will be further refined and implemented by the next generation of counterinsurgent forces if and when required. Modern proponents of counterinsurgency can reflect back on the campaign of General Middleton in his defeat of Louis Riel to garner key examples of the proper application of these principles to guide them towards success.

Chronology of Key Events ¹²⁸

- June 5th, 1884 Louis Riel agrees to accompany a half-breed delegation back to Saskatchewan
- December 16th, 1884 A petition drafted by Riel, expressing the grievances of the Indians and Métis, is forwarded to Ottawa
- March 18-19th, 1885 Riel seizes hostages at Batoche and proclaims a new Métis provisional government, with Gabriel Dumont as his adjutant general
- March 23rd, 1885 Minister of Militia and Defence, Adolphe Caron, orders Major General Middleton to Winnipeg to handle the escalating situation in the West.
- March 26th, 1885 Superintendent Crozier rides out to meet the defiance of government authority and is badly defeated in a clash at Duck Lake.
- April 1st, 1885 Nine whites and half-breeds are murdered by Crees of Big Bear's band at Frog Lake
- April 6th, 1885 Major General Middleton leaves Fort Qu'Appelle with the first available troops to march to Clarke's Crossing and Batoche

¹²⁸ Compiled from chronologies contained in Desmond Morton, *The Last War Drum*. (Toronto: Hakkert, 1972) XXI-XXII, and Major C.A Lamarre, *Logistics in the North-West Rebellion of 1885* (Toronto: Canadian Forces College Command and Staff Course 28 Master of Defence Sciences Research Paper, 2002), Annex A.

- April 11th, 1885 Lieutenant-Colonel Otter's column is diverted from main effort to relieve police and settlers reported to be entrapped at Battleford
- April 25th, 1885 Middleton's column engages Dumont at Fish Creek in the first major battle of the campaign. Otter's column enters Battleford.
- May 3rd, 1885 Otter fails and is forced to withdraw after attacking Poundmaker's camp near Cut Knife Hill.
- May 9th-12th, 1885 Middleton's column reaches Batoche and engages in a four-day battle, culminating in a successful assault on the Métis settlement.
- May 15th, 1885 Riel surrenders to Middleton
- May 25th, 1885 Poundmaker surrenders to Middleton
- May 28th, 1885 General Strange fights an inconclusive battle with Big Bear's men at Frenchman's Butte.
- June 3rd-9th, 1885 Middleton attempts to pursue Big Bear, but abandons effort near Loon Lake. Re-deployment of forces begins.
- July 2nd, 1885 Big Bear arrives at Fort Carlton to surrender
- November 16th, 1885 Louis Riel is hanged at the police barracks in Regina.

Campaign Order of Battle

Middleton's column, departing Fort Qu'Appelle on April 6th, 1885 consisted of:

| | |
|---|----------------------|
| "A" Battery, (Quebec) - | 111 (total strength) |
| 90 th Battalion (Winnipeg) - | 323 |
| Infantry School Corps (partial) - | 46 |
| Boulton's Scouts - | 80 |
| 10 th Battalion Royal Grenadiers - | 267 |
| Capt. French's Scouts - | 60 |
| Winnipeg Field Battery (partial) - | 33 |
| Dennis' Surveyors' Scouts - | 60 |
| Midland Battalion - | 108 |

Lieutenant-Colonel Otter's column, having departed Swift Current on April 13th,

consisted of:

| | |
|--|-----|
| "B" Battery, (Kingston) - | 114 |
| Queen's Own Rifles - | 275 |
| Infantry School (partial) - | 45 |
| Todd's Sharpshooters - | 51 |
| Winnipeg Field Battery (partial) - | 30 |
| 35 th Battalion (partial) - | 265 |

Major-General Strange's column, departing from Calgary, consisted of the following:

| | |
|---|-----|
| 65 th Battalion Mount Royal Rifles - | 232 |
| Winnipeg Provisional Battalion - | 307 |
| Strange's Rangers - | 50 |
| Mounted Police - | 67 |

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