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LOGISTICS IN THE NORTH-WEST REBELLION OF 1885

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Logistics in the North-West Rebellion of 1885

The year preceding the outbreak of the North-West rebellion gave Sir John A. Macdonald's government ample indication that trouble was afoot in the western reaches of Canada. The complaints in 1884 did not differ much from those which had led to the first Métis uprising some 14 years earlier. The Red River Rebellion of 1870 was a success for the Métis; it resulted in the passing of the Manitoba Act by the Canadian government which in addition to establishing Manitoba as a province, guaranteed "protection for the French language and denominational schools and, in addition to the confirmation of all existing land claims, the setting aside of 1.4 million acres of land for the Métis and their children."[1] Unfortunately, these promises, beyond establishing Manitoba as a province, were largely unfulfilled. For the Métis and white settlers, the complaints in 1884 centered on land rights issues; for the Indians, the concerns lay more at the basic issue of survival at the hands of a government unwilling to meet its obligations of sustenance after it had moved them onto reservations. Seeking leadership in this new struggle, the Métis convinced Louis Riel to return to Canada from Montana where, in near poverty, he was teaching in a missionary school. His arrival in the North-West had the immediate effect of distancing the white settlers from the nascent Métis and Indian coalition. Riel's written appeal in December 1884 to the federal government, expressing the grievances of the Métis and needs of the Indians, was ignored. Meanwhile, reports about the growing unrest sent to Ottawa by the Lieutenant-Governor of the North-West territories, by appointed Indian agents, Hudson's Bay Company

[1] Bob Beal and Rod Macleod, Prairie Fire: The 1885 NOrth-West Rebellion, (Toronto: McClelland and Steward Inc, 1994), 24.

(HBC) employees and various other minor officials living in these territories, also failed to nudge Ottawa toward addressing the situation. It was not until March 1885, after the Métis had seized hostages at Batoche and Riel proclaimed a new Métis provisional government that the federal government ordered the General Officer Commanding (GOC) the Canadian Militia, Sir Frederick Middleton, to go west to handle the escalating situation. After a bloody encounter at Duck Lake between the North-West Mounted Police under Inspector Crozier and the Métis under Gabriel Dumont, where 12 policemen were killed and 11 wounded, there would be no turning back; the rebellion would have to be put down with force. By the time Riel surrendered on 15 May, over 5,000 militiamen had been mobilized and employed in the North-West Rebellion, a campaign that would eventually be described as the first truly Canadian military expedition.

The literature on this episode of Canadian history is extensive. In addition to the official account presented to Parliament by the Minister of Militia during the fifth session of 1886, numerous first hand accounts by key players such as Major-General Middleton, the GOC, Colonel Dennison, Commanding Officer of the Governor General's Body Guard, and Major-General Strange, Commander of the Alberta Field Force, are available for study. Gabriel Dumont, Riel's Adjutant General and tactical field commander, dictated a verbal account of the conflict that accurately provides the Métis' view and impression of the events surrounding the rebellion. Numerous other accounts by more junior officers and soldiers also serve to provide a first hand look at the campaign. Naturally, historians have written extensively on this conflict, directing their efforts to the social and political causes of the conflict, the biographies of the individuals involved, and the tactics of the battles fought. What they have not done is examined the campaign from the operational function construct

of command, sense, act, shield and sustainment. Of these, sustainment, chiefly known as logistics, presented the largest challenge but also the greatest strength of the Canadian forces as they set out to put down the rebellion.

How important was logistics to the planning and conduct of the campaign in the North-West Rebellion? Simply stated, logistics was the key enabler to Canada's successful conduct of the campaign against Riel and the Métis. The battles fought at Fish Creek, Cut Knife Hill, Batoche, and Frenchman's Butte were skirmishes at best, tactically significant only to the individuals involved and in the time and space where they occurred. 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. From their advanced logistics base in Winnipeg, these forces were supplied and sustained through established procedures and also through extensive use of alternate service delivery provided by the Hudson's Bay Company, a key player throughout the conflict. Beside material needs, the troops were supported to the same extent that today's large, modern military force have come to expect in such areas as casualty evacuation, medical treatment, mortuary affairs, pay and other administrative services. The logistics challenges were great, but the success of the Canadian force in overcoming them was instrumental to the successful conduct of the campaign.

The North-West Territories as a War Theatre

Numerous factors as well as access to logistical systems influence how the fighting elements will conduct a campaign, and how they will be logistically supported. The terrain which the rebels and Canadians fought over consisted of rolling prairie with numerous

ravines and river valleys, though not always with significant streams in them. Particularly difficult for the government forces, due to their extensive use of wagons for supplies and horse drawn field artillery pieces, were the marshlands and occasional salt marshes, an unpleasant circumstance for a force relying on available potable water. As the campaign ran from March to July, the ground would have been frozen at the start but all participants would have struggled in the black, sticky prairie mud that is particular to the Canadian west as temperatures rose with the change in seasons. The mud, especially along the river banks, sometimes forced the Canadians to hitch up to 10 horses per gun carriage instead of six, rendering simple movement exhausting and time consuming. By late May, the ground would have dried out to provide easier marching and suitable ground for the freight wagons. Rapid travel by the long wagon supply columns along the lines of communication was essential for the sustainment of the government force which now numbered over 5,000 men. While travel along the prairie trails was good, other impediments obstructed rapid movement.

The water obstacles along the way consisted of sloughs, ponds, marshes and rivers. The most significant rivers, in addition to the Battle River in Alberta, which challenged General Stange's column movements north, were the South and North Saskatchewan rivers. At the time of the rebellion, these last two rivers were used as navigable waterways, though mostly in the spring when the run-off from the prairie and Rocky Mountain snowmelts provided sufficient water to float the steamers and scows used on the prairie waterways. During the rest of the year, low water levels exposed shifting sandbanks and made navigation difficult if not impossible. Crossing these rivers was not always a simple matter. Though bridges had been built over some smaller rivers, the South and North Saskatchewan had to be crossed via ferries or cable barges. In early April 1885, as the force marched toward its first

engagement at Fish Creek, the ferries and barges were still up on dry-land for the winter. Through coaxing and the possibility of profit, their owners were convinced to brave the elements and remaining ice, and set their boats in the water to move the troops across the rivers.

The weather played a significant role in the first portion of the campaign. The Canadian government troops endured the rigours of the Canadian winter as they moved westward through Ontario. Any hope for an early spring on the prairies was dashed during the first day of marching, and they continued to suffer through Manitoba and Assiniboia on their way to Qu'Appelle and their eventual encounters with the Métis. The troops had to contend with plunging temperatures, snow, freezing rain and rain, equipped only with their tunics, snow boots, gloves, hats, three blankets and a waterproof sheet. In a telegram to Caron from Qu'Appelle on 1 April 1885, Middleton reported that "everything is against us, the weather being unusual, it is now snowing hard and the roads are getting in a fearful state. Riel has chosen his time most judiciously."[2] Despite the weather, medical reports submitted by the expedition's surgeons make no mention of cold related injuries and Middleton himself commented on the good health of men and horses in these extremes of weather. Wood for fuel was unavailable on the prairies and had to be transported by wagon to the troops, mostly for cooking of rations. The soldiers displayed a toughness of body and spirit quite remarkable for a force assembled in such a hasty manner.

The lack of firewood was only part of the flora challenge to the campaign. The area of operations consisted of prairie grassland and some cropland, most of it either under snow or barely emerging by the time Batoche fell in early May. Forage for the horses and draught animals had to be carried forward in wagon trains, adding a voluminous burden to the already

[2] RG9, Militia and Defence, Series II-A-3, Volume 6, Reel T-10394. NAC.

demanding logistics of this campaign. This issue also drove the decision to employ horses from the local area for scouting troops, as they were much more able to survive on the meager forage available on the prairies in winter. It directed the use of the available steamer paddleboats on the South Saskatchewan for sustainment activities not only due to their huge tonnage capacity, but also because they did not consume the hay and oats destined for the forward troops during the process of getting it there. Finally, it dictated the length as well as locations of the overland lines of communications.

A significant system of trails used for freighting of supplies between the settlements already existed on the prairie by the time the government forces arrived to fight the Métis. In addition, trains were now part of the landscape. Though the Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR) was still under construction, the portion stretching from Winnipeg to Calgary was complete and was to be used extensively to move troops and supplies to forward locations and hence to one of the columns. Logically, the builders of the CPR chose established locations, such as HBC trading posts or small settlements, as their stops across the vast prairie. Middleton's forces ended up using many of these stops to establish the baseline of communications; trains would bring forward supplies which would then be transferred to wagons, possibly moved on the South Saskatchewan by steamer, and transferred once more to wagons for delivery forward to the manoeuvre elements, much as intermodal transportation systems are used to accomplish the same function today.

Intermodal systems, as described above, require careful coordination. To this end, the Canadian forces were able to employ and improve the already established telegraph system. Though the Métis and Indians cut some of the wires between Batoche and Prince Albert, they left most of the system untouched, which allowed the Canadians to use telegrams extensively

to coordinate the sustainment of the force. Linemen worked extensively to repair existing systems and laid hundreds of miles of wire, including kerite wire under the rivers, to keep the force in communication with Ottawa, its forward logistic base in Winnipeg and along its baseline of communication alongside the CPR lines to the south of the manoeuvering troops. The ability to communicate was critical to the logistic effort in support of the fighting elements. The area of operation did not have sufficient resources to sustain the force in food or forage. Also, all arms, ammunition and other requirements had to be ordered either from Ottawa or Winnipeg. Having established communications, the force was able to send its requirements by wire and could anticipate receiving the needed materiel within a few days. This sustainment ability would be critical to the success of Middleton's forces as they implemented his concept of operations to defeat Riel and the Métis.

Middleton's Concept of Operations

What any commander intends to accomplish, and specifically how he intends to accomplish his aim, will drive the support plan. Middleton's operational construct, though not overly imaginative, certainly presented a challenge to his logistic planners and operators due to the time and space it entailed across the breadth of the North-West Territories.

Middleton communicated his concept of operations to the Minister of Militia and Defence on 28 March 1885 from Qu'Appelle:

> (I will) move the principal column under my own command direct to Clarke's Crossing, a telegraph station and ferry on the South Saskatchewan about forty miles by trail from Batoche. A second column under Lieutenant-Colonel Otter, a capable officer belonging to the permanent Militia, who was coming up with reinforcements, to meet me there from Swift Current, A Canadian Pacific Railway station some 150 miles to the westward of Troy and a few miles from the south branch of the Saskatchewan, which I was recommended to use eventually as a line of communication, making Swift Current my main base. I was given to understand by an old scout that I might fall in with the enemy at or near Clarke's Crossing, and it seemed somewhat probable, but, if not, the two columns would then move, on each side of the river, and attack Batoche, which I understood had houses and Indian camps on both sides of the river, with a large ferry boat to connect them. After the capture, one column, if necessary, might march on to Prince Albert, the other pushing on to Battleford, whither I proposed sending at once a reinforcement of mounted police under Lieutenant-Colonel W. Herchmer, from Regina, the mounted police having been put under my command. A third column I proposed forming at Calgary, giving the command to Major-General Strange, late R.A., and commanding the Canadian Militia, who had placed his services at the disposal of the Government. This column, after over-awing the Indians in the district, would move on to Edmonton, and proceed down the North Saskatchewan to Fort Pitt, where I hoped to meet them after having disposed of Poundmaker and his band. We should then together follow up, and dispose of Big Bear, which would pretty well break the neck of the rebellion.[3]

In addition, Middleton worried about force protection from possible threats originating in the United States immediately to the south of his baseline of communication, in support of the Métis. As remote as these threats may have appeared, it nonetheless caused him to direct scouting parties away from his main effort to keep a watchful eye on the border area along the Cypress Hills of what is now south west Saskatchewan and eastern Alberta.

[3] General Sir Frederick Middleton, Suppression of the Rebellion in the North West Territories of Canada 1885 Ed. G.H. Needler, (Toronto: Toronto UP, 1948), 8.

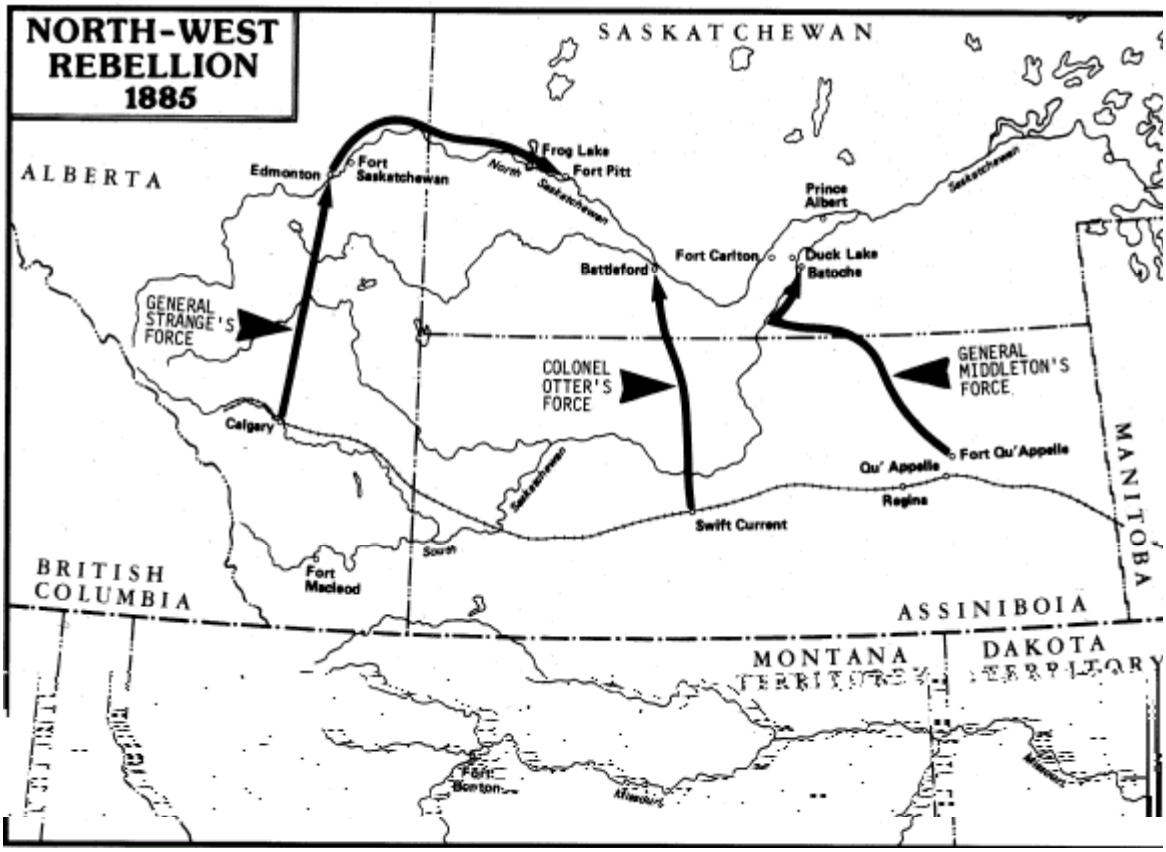

Figure 1. Area of Operations for the Suppression of the North-West Rebellion

This campaign plan could only be accomplished with a system of logistics capable of extending and maintaining itself some 1,200 kilometres east-west from Winnipeg to Calgary, and nearly 300 kilometres in a north-south direction. Middleton was aware that his lines of communications were potentially vulnerable, but based on his intelligence picture of the enemy, he determined that "the Métis would not wander far afield, but would remain in or close to Batoche."[4] As such, other than positioning follow-on cavalry and foot-borne troops at his stations along the baseline, in addition to the scouting parties closer to the American border, he left the rails and trails unprotected throughout the conflict.

[4] Middleton, 9.

Métis Tactics and Logistics Support

The Métis conducted an unremarkable campaign, typified by its lack of raiding or interference with the Canadian lines of communication. Key to winning any conflict is the ability to attack the enemy's center of gravity, a characteristic, capability or location from which enemy or friendly forces derive their freedom of action, physical strength, or will to fight.[5] The Canadian center of gravity was the ability to sustain their large, deployed force, and this represented an ideal situation for a guerilla campaign with raids against wagon trains, rail lines, supply depots or any other portion of the supply chain. Gabriel Dumont advocated these tactics but he was overruled by Riel, whose apprehension to decisive military action was likely rooted in his desire for a peaceful political settlement, much as he had achieved during the 1870 Red River Rebellion. Historians have speculated, as did the leaders of the Canadian columns no doubt, on the impact that a protracted guerilla campaign might have had on the ability of the Canadians to defeat the Métis coalition. Other historians have argued that early success by the Métis against the lines of communication and supplies intended for the Canadian columns would have tipped the balance in convincing many more Indians to join the coalition:

> If there had been two or three successful derailments of trains with troops or goods destined for Qu'Appelle, and two or three ambushes that had shown the weakness of Middleton's tactics and captured some of his weapons and supplies, it is unlikely that the restive Chief Piapot would have remained inactive, and his adherence to the cause would have brought in all the Cree not yet involved, together with the Métis of Wood Mountain and Cypress Hills and those of the Sioux in Canada who had not already joined the rebellion. In such circumstances, it is unlikely that Crowfoot would have been able to restrain his warriors, which would have meant the entry of the whole Blackfoot Confederacy as well as the remaining Assiniboine and the Métis of Edmonton, St. Albert and Lac Ste. Anne. In other words, the entire Indian and half-

[5] Canadian Forces, B-GL-300-001/FP-000 Conduct of Land Operations – Operational Level Doctrine for the Canadian Army, (Kingston: DAD, 1998), 38.

> breed population would have been in revolt (for the English half-breeds would hardly have contrived to stay aloof), and Middleton's army would have been entirely inadequate – in numbers and training alike – to contain such a movement. [6]

However, even if Dumont had enjoyed free reign in conducting a guerilla campaign against the Canadian columns and lines of communication, it is doubtful that he would have been able to conduct such operations away from Batoche for extended periods of time. While the government forces drew their strength from their system of sustainment, the Métis lacked any type of organized logistical support. When mobilizing his force at the start of the conflict, Gabriel Dumont established two scouting parties and ten fighting companies. He did not establish a headquarters to coordinate the efforts of the companies nor did he create a service support organization to administer and sustain the fighting elements. His account of the conflict indicates that he personally coordinated or arranged the logistic support to his force, but by exception and only when absolutely necessary. In the short term, it was plainly evident that he required stores and equipment to prepare for his campaign, because few of his men were ready for the coming battles. Of the roughly 350 men joining the cause, only 200 had weapons. These weapons ranged from Winchester repeating rifles to shotguns, muskets and, in the case of a few of the Indians, bow and arrows.[7] As Dumont himself recounted, "many had not much more than sticks. There was one armed with a staff, with a curved top, used to dig potatoes."[8] Early engagements revolved around efforts to seize arms and supplies. The most expedient sources to meet these requirements were the various stores and

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[6] George Woodcock, Gabriel Dumont: The Métis Chief and his Lost World (Edmonton: Hurtig Publisher, 1975), 193.

[7] Ibid, 166.

[8] Gabriel Dumont. Gabriel Dumont Speaks. Translated by Michael Barnholden (Vancouver: Talonbooks, 1993), 59.

Hudson's Bay Company (HBC) posts in the surrounding area. On 18 March 1885, Baker's general store at Batoche was raided and emptied of its contents. Mitchell's store at Stobart, near Duck Lake was pillaged shortly after the battle against Crozier and his North-West Mounted Police force on 26 March 1885. The Métis and Indians repeated this pattern at other stores and HBC posts at every opportunity, raiding or simply walking in and demanding that equipment and stores be handed over. They also foraged on the battlefield whenever the tactical situation permitted.

In his 1903 narrative of the campaign, Dumont recounts how his force was always trying to scavenge rifles, cartridges, powder and other supplies. They regularly appropriated houses, cattle, and any other commodity deemed necessary to sustain their force. The brandy in medical kits abandoned at Fish Creek by retreating government forces was drunk with requisite toasts, while the supplies themselves were returned to Batoche for use there. Nonetheless, his priority was always toward weapons and ammunition. Reflecting on the battle of Batoche, Dumont remembered:

> Each night the police returned to their camp, and often there were bullets left on the ground, usually at the foot of a tree, where they had stopped to reload. Often we found machine gun belts which held forty bullets each. These were the same caliber as many of the Métis twelve-shot hunting rifles. We also took the guns of the dead. At the end we had sixty or seventy.[9]

This lack of ammunition would dictate when contact with the Canadians had to be broken and would eventually force the Métis to adopt drastic measures to even maintain their ability to fight. At Fish Creek, each fighter was allotted a basic (and only) load of 20 rounds of ammunition, and Dumont personally fired the last seven rounds prior to setting fire to the

[9] Dumont, 70.

prairie and withdrawing from the battle.[10] At the battle of Batoche, the shortage of ammunition was even more critical, forcing the Métis to melt down the lead found in tea boxes to create their own ammunition. By then, shotgun loads were improvised of scrap metal, small rocks and any other hard material that could be fired toward the enemy.

Improvisation was also the modus operandi for sustenance. Feeding of the troops was a haphazard affair, and there is no indication that any stockpiling of food took place either in the months leading to the conflict or even while the government forces were advancing from Winnipeg toward Batoche. Often, cattle were simply slaughtered and eaten in situ whenever required. Prior to the battle at Fish Creek, for example, Dumont "had a bull killed and its meat grilled on a fire of willow boughs so that they could breakfast before battle."[11] There is no indication that any of the fighters were fed communally when not involved in one of the battles. Likely, most of them would have fended for themselves or, in the case of local fighters at Batoche, simply gone home to eat. Where fresh meat was not available or cattle had not been brought along on an excursion, the Métis resorted to seizure in a just-in-time fashion indicative of a total lack of foresight. Dumont recalled: "It was night and we needed to eat. I remembered a Sioux lodge nearby that had a lot of meat in the last few days. I went and got a leg of dried meat."[12] Given that the field commander had to resort to scavenging for food during campaign, it is not surprising that other aspects of logistic support were also unplanned and when required, not available to the Métis fighters.

A robust medical system is desirable not only to attend to casualties and return them to duty in the briefest possible delay, but also to sustain the morale of the troops who need to know that someone will look after them when injured. The Métis had no medical support,

[10] Ibid, 202
[11] Ibid, 197.
[12] Dumont, 73.

whether doctors, nurses or orderlies. Dumont himself suffered a significant wound to his scalp when grazed by a bullet at Fish Creek. This injury remained untreated, eventually suppurating and causing him a significant level of discomfort throughout the campaign. During the battle at Batoche, the Métis women assisted the wounded to the extent they could. A glimpse of this care, and the resilience of some of the combatants, is provided by Dumont his recounting of how an Indian, who suffered injuries to his thighs and a torn scrotum, sang to show he had no fear while the women attended him.[13] The surgeons with the Canadian force would, after the conflict and in the name of humanity, provide some limited medical assistance to the Métis wounded at Batoche and Fish Creek. Had they not done so, these men would likely have succumbed to their untreated wounds, victims of a non-existent logistical function.

The Métis logistical support for their organization can be summarized as non-existent in most instances and improvised when absolutely necessary. The short lines of communications (Duck Lake and Fish Creek are only 12 and 23 kilometers respectively from Batoche) allowed them to depend on a main base from which to conduct their operations. Though they did not face the logistical challenges the government troops would encounter when mobilizing and deploying to the North-West, the lack of logistics capability would nonetheless limit how and for how long they would be able to conduct operations. Significantly, Dumont failed to designate an organization with the proper command and control structure to plan and provide the required support, thus limiting the Métis' ability to fight. This lack of structure and system was in stark contrast to the rather extraordinary logistical system that the Department of Militia was able to implement, with a fair amount of ingenious improvisation, to bring the fight to the Métis at Batoche.

[13] Ibid, 121.

Organization, Command and Control of the Canadian Logistics Elements in 1885

The Department of Defence and Militia in 1885 was a small entity, lacking a formal departmental structure and support organization. The Minister, the Honourable Adolphe Caron, was a junior politician who had been given what was thought to be a safe portfolio. Canada was not at war, Britain did not seem ready to launch on an expedition where the colonial powers would be required to participate and the problems in the west were not taken with any degree of seriousness until the start of 1885. Caron had a few clerks to handle parliamentary business but not a full-fledged department. Unprepared for the problems posed by the rebellion in the North-West, he nonetheless rose to the occasion and "supervised the complicated logistics of the campaign."[14] He involved himself in all aspects of the operation, be it Middleton's campaign plan or the most minor of supply functions when he advised by telegram on 14 April 1885 that "Great coats have been sent by fast express and left on fourth".[15] The distance from Ottawa to Winnipeg and Qu'Appelle, combined with his lack of military experience, nonetheless forced him 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 to the force. Some of these arrangements would later be scrutinized and questioned by a special commission on war claims established in August 1885 and confirmed by an Order in Council passed on 15 October to look into fraud associated with the multitude of claims submitted to the government from individuals and

[14] Jack Dunn, The Alberta Field Force of 1885, (Calgary: self published, 1994), 59.

[15] Desmond Morton and Reginald H.Roy, eds., Telegrams of the North-West Campaign 1885, (Toronto: The Champlain Society, 1972), 127, 175.

companies, large and small. However, the haste with which the force was mobilized and sent to the North-West did not leave Caron many options. Planning and support had to be done by the miniscule permanent staff of the department.

Militia Headquarters in Ottawa in 1885 consisted of only four military officers: Middleton and his aide-de-camp, the Adjutant General who fulfilled the function of chief of staff, and a retired British officer who served as inspector of artillery. The Deputy Minister, Lieutenant-Colonel Chales Panet, presided over every administrative responsibility in the Department. As such, the storekeepers and paymasters answered to him.[16] Among this staff of 'storekeepers' was the Director of the Stores Branch, Lieutenant-Colonel J. MacPherson. It was his organization that coordinated, to the extent possible, the initial provisioning and contracting of supplies to equip the force as it prepared to deploy to the North-West. His Branch possessed neither the personnel nor the ability to support the operation in the field. Caron recognized that a deployed staff was needed to coordinate the administration of the force and he directed Lieutenant-Colonel William Hayes Jackson, the militia staff officer at London, to proceed directly to Winnipeg, the forward logistics base, to assume these responsibilities. His orders were to "organize a commissariat corps, create a staff and take responsibility for the supplies, transport and pay arrangements for the campaign."[17] Caron appointed other individuals as the magnitude of the administrative task unfolded. Lieutenant-Colonel E.A. Whitehead assumed the responsibilities of Chief Transport Officer to the force.[18] A Montreal businessman, Whitehead would sit on the commission on war claims and play an important role in containing the excesses and abuses by many of the

[16] Morton, Desmond, The Last War Drum, (Toronto: Hakkert, 1972), 31.
[17] Ibid, 38, 44.
[18] Ibid,74.

contractors looking to profit from the campaign.[19] While these officers arranged and coordinated support from the forward base in Winnipeg, logistic support also had to be planned and implemented for the columns established under Middleton's concept of operations.

Each of the three columns appointed their own Transportation and Quartermaster officers. The individuals selected depended on the availability of local talent and the preferences of the individual doing the selection. Some were very good. General Middleton appointed Samuel L. Bedson, warden of Stony Mountain Penitentiary in Manitoba and a former British army officer, Chief Transport Officer for his Batoche column. His coordination of the transportation overland and by inland waterways in support of the Batoche column earned him mention in the report on the campaign submitted to parliament in 1886.[20] The selection of others created controversy. Major W.R. Bell, a former Canadian militia officer was appointed, also by General Middleton, as quartermaster at Qu'Appelle, a position which entailed the hiring of wagons, teams, and forage. Questions arose during and after the campaign about the propriety of this appointment. Bell was also the manager of the Qu'Appelle Valley Farming Company, which became the single biggest contractor to the force for forage.[21] In the end, the war claim commission recommended that Bell be forced to reimburse $1809.45 pocketed when he, as quartermaster, gave contracts at inflated prices to his own company.[22] Though the selection of available individuals to fill these critical

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[19] Canadian Parliament, "Preliminary Report of the Commission on War Claims", No. 6 Sessional Papers A (1886), Appendix 4, 1.

[20] Canadian Parliament, "Report Upon the Suppression of the Rebellion in the North-West Territories, and Matters in Connection Therewith", No. 6 Sessional Papers A(1886), Appendix No.1: p.13.

[21] Morton, The Last War Drum,.52. Canadian Parliament, "Report Upon the Suppression of the Rebellion in the North-West Territories, and Matters in Connection Therewith", No. 6 Sessional Papers A(1886), Appendix No.4

[22] Canadian Parliament, "Report Upon the Suppression of the Rebellion in the North-West Territories, and Matters in Connection Therewith", No. 6 Sessional Papers A(1886), Appendix No.4, Report No. 87.

positions could, as shown, be a hit and miss affair, worse were those appointed due to political connections.

Major-General Laurie, an ex-British army officer and long time member of the militia in Nova Scotia, offered his services to the government. Because of his affiliation with the Conservative party, the Canadian government pressured the British War Office to send him to the North-West despite Middleton's reluctance to accept him. Permission was eventually granted when Laurie agreed to ignore his seniority to avoid undermining Middleton. Once deployed, he was assigned the position of Commander of the Base and Lines of Communication, operating out of Swift Current. His responsibilities there consisted largely of overseeing the use of steamers for the sustainment of the force, Swift Current being the closest point to the South Saskatchewan river along the CPR.[23] Though the appointment was Middleton's method of removing Laurie from his own camp, it typifies how a system of command and control for the logistics effort was generated from any and all available individuals.

This ad hoc staff organization's key weakness was the lack of clear definition of responsibilities and authority, which sometimes resulted in duplication of effort, temporary shortages, and frequent friction between the various characters working within it. What is remarkable, however, is the timeline imposed upon it. The battle at Duck Lake occurred on 26 March and Riel surrendered on 15 May, two days after the defeat of the Métis at Batoche. In the space of roughly seven weeks, the staff went from non-existence to coordinating the

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[23] Morton, 53-54.

sustainment of 5,456 men and 586 horses.[24] That the force they were sustaining only came into being during the same time-frame only added to the magnitude of the task.

Mobilization and Deployment to the Theatre of Operations

The mobilization efforts were little short of extraordinary. The defeat of Superintendent Crozier's force of North-West Mounted Police at Duck Lake in the early morning of 26 March was the trigger to mobilize Canada's militia units. Riel's seizure of hostages on 19 March 1885 resulted in some preliminary preparations by the 90th Rifles in Winnipeg, thus enabling the Commanding Officer, Lieutenant-Colonel Houghton, to deploy that same night from Winnipeg toward Qu'Appelle with one of his companies. General Middleton had been ordered by Sir John A. Macdonald on 23 March to travel to Winnipeg to address the growing problem being reported by the Lieutenant Governor, Edgar Dewdney. By the time he arrived on 27 March, the town of Winnipeg was on a war footing, and Middleton left that night with the remainder of the 90th Rifles. News of the defeat at Duck Lake quickly spread to Eastern Canada, as did alarming and wildly exaggerated reports about the extent of the uprising in the West. One such message, sent to Robb Watson, MP for Winnipeg, suggested that the House of Commons be advised that some 150 helpless women and children were trapped at Battleford, at the mercy of "thousands of Indians and half-breeds."[25] Such reports had the effect of speeding the mobilization, equipping, and deployment of the militia units from eastern Canada to the North-West.

[24] Canadian Parliament, "Report Upon the Suppression of the Rebellion in the North-West Territories, and Matters in Connection Therewith", No. 6 Sessional Papers A(1886), introductory description of the conflict.

[25] RG9, Series II-A-3, Volume 6, Reel T-10394, NAC

Most units that deployed already existed in the order of battle of the Canadian militia. The requirement for scouts, however, led to creation of many small units comprised of local men familiar with the terrain, the Métis and the Indians. Raising such a unit was also logistically intensive. Major Boulton, who organized and commanded Boulton's Scouts, described the challenge:

> I happened to be visiting Winnipeg at the date of General Middleton's arrival, and having served him with him (sic) on former occasions, I waited on him, and offered to raise a force of mounted men that would prove serviceable in the proposed expedition. The men, I urged, resided on their homesteads in the interior, not very far from the scene of action. He asked at what cost this could be done, and I told him at the same rate as the Mounted Police, viz., seventy-five cents per day, with clothing and equipment. I received my authority on the 31st March; and before leaving Winnipeg, I ordered from the Hudson's Bay Company my equipment of rifles, blankets, tents and saddlery. I came out by train to Moosomin, and drove north to Birtle, where I left a notice with Mr. Pentland, land agent there, asking for thirty men and horses to be ready for inspection in two days. I then drove north to Russell, and there put up a similar notice. By the 6th of April, I returned to Moosomin, with sixty men and horses, besides officers, orderlies, cooks, etc. – in all eighty-two men, including six teams for transport of provisions, equipment and forage. I had traveled in the six days two hundred and twenty miles by rail and one hundred and forty miles by road. I purchased all my horses in the district, at an average of $165.00 a piece, giving orders on the Hudson's Bay Company posts at Fort Ellice and Russell, which were duly honoured.[26]

The advantages of using local men as troops and scouts in the campaign were significant. Not only did they know the terrain involved, most of them had direct dealings with Métis and Indians. This can hardly be overlooked from the viewpoint of human intelligence for the campaign. This first-hand knowledge of the land and the Indians around them would be particularly beneficial to the Alberta field force.

General Strange would face similar challenges in Alberta. A retired British Army artillery officer, Strange had proved himself during the Indian Mutiny where he had "fought

[26] C.A. Boulton, Reminiscences of the North-West Rebellions, (Toronto: The Grip Printing and Publishing Co., 1886).202-203.

in thirteen fierce engagements. Four military dispatches cited his bravery."[27] In 1881, he had settled near Calgary and adopted the role of rancher. When news of the battle at Duck Lake became known, he immediately telegraphed the Prime Minister and offered his services. From an initial nucleus of 40 cowboys, he soon accumulated a variety of volunteers, including prominent missionaries who knew the country, spoke Cree and could travel unmolested among the neighboring tribes.[28] Sam Steele, then of the Mounted Police, would lead his policemen and others as Steele's Scouts. Strange would eventually have over 500 men under his command, including the two French speaking units involved in the campaign. His logistic challenge was even more daunting than that faced by the two other columns. At one point, he threatened to resign and disband his force should Caron not meet his needs for weapons and ammunition. The ploy worked and he was soon able to begin his mission.

Strange's column marched North to Edmonton, floated East on the North Saskatchewan all the way to Fort Pitt, skirmished with Big Bear's men at Frenchman's Butte along the way, and eventually met up with Middleton's forces. Though his logistics trail was particularly complicated, he was not the only commander to run into troubles in outfitting his fighting elements nor was he the only one to go directly to the Minister for resolution of his problems.

The militia's stores and equipment in 1885 were in pitiable shape and Caron was soon inundated with telegrams seeking authorization to either purchase equipment or to have some sent to the garrison where soldiers were reporting or being recruited. One unit in Sutton,

[27] Dunn, 36.
[28] Ibid, 62.

Ontario, reported on 6 April 1885 that fully half of its rifles were unserviceable.[29] Lieutenant-Colonel Amyott of the 9th Voltigeurs (Quebec) informed Caron that boots had been bought, more were needed and that he would endeavour to purchase medical supplies in order to be prepared to leave by train the following day, that being 2 April.[30] Caron issued orders "for the immediate transport to Winnipeg of a reserve supply of Arms, Ammunition, Accoutrements, and Camp equipment, so that any emergency might be provided for, and within a period of ten days from the time the order was issued over 1,000,000 rounds, Small Arm Ammunition, a supply of Artillery Ammunition and Projectiles, 6,000 new "Snider" Rifles, and 1,500 sets of new Accoutrements were delivered."[31] A reserve supply of boots, clothing, towels and blankets sufficient for 4,000 men was purchased and also sent to Winnipeg.[32] Finally, the units in Quebec and Ontario were equipped with camp equipment, two blankets per man, waterproof sheets, boots and fur winter caps if deemed necessary.[33] Notwithstanding the official report to parliament, many units were simply not equipped for the rigours of winter and they were saved from abject misery by the industriousness of the various women's leagues in their garrison cities that rose to the occasion by collecting underclothing, boots, mufflers and other necessary items for the comfort of the soldiers.[34] By 22 April, despite these initial provisioning difficulties, the government had managed to equip and send close to three thousand militiamen across the top of Lake Superior.[35]

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[29] RG9, Militia and Defence, Series II-A-3, Volume 6, Reel T-10394, NAC.

[30] Ibid

[31] Canadian Parliament, "Report Upon the Suppression of the Rebellion in the North-West Territories, and Matters in Connection Therewith", No. 6 Sessional Papers A(1886), Appendix No.3, 65.

[32] Ibid

[33] Ibid

[34] Morton, The Last War Drum,.34.

[35] Ibid,44.

The Deployment

The speed at which the deployment occurred is impressive even by today's standards. In 1885, the rail infrastructure in Eastern Canada was well established and used extensively for commerce and passenger service. Two companies, the Canadian Pacific Railway and the Grand Trunk, were fierce competitors. This competition fell along Conservative and Liberal Party affiliations, which eliminated any possibility for cooperation in building or even line sharing and resulted in Canada eventually ending up with two national rail links.[36] The CPR had the contract to build Sir John A. Macdonald's prized transcontinental railway, but much change had occurred in the rail industry since the company was first organized in 1881. A major transformation was taking place in the rail industry, and revenue from freight dropped some 33% from 1881 to 1886. This drop in revenue had the effect of discouraging investors from buying into new companies such as the CPR. The Canadian government had difficulties in enticing new settlers to the West and the land sale revenue that the CPR so desperately depended on to continue building the link simply did not keep up to expenses.[37] By 1885, the CPR was close to bankruptcy. Many of the country's richest Conservatives were personally committed to support the railway financially to the point that a default in loan repayment would have "reduced them to beggary."[38] The government had provided yet another loan to the company the previous year, and it is doubtful that the Prime Minister would have been able to convince even his party to support additional funding.[39] Though few would call a rebellion serendipitous, it certainly appeared that way to those building Macdonald's railway. The official history of the Canadian National Railway describes the

[36] G.R. Stevens, History of the Canadian National Railways, (New York: the Macmillan Company, 1973), 143.
[37] J. Lorne McDougall, Canadian Pacific: a Brief History, (Montréal: McGill UP, 1968), 50-53.
[38] Ibid, 60.
[39] Ibid

timing: "in the darkest hours, as by miracle, came salvation. For the second time in fifteen years, Louis Riel took the field at the head of the Métis in rebellion."[40] The CPR's Van Horne offered to transport the force West as long as it had the exclusive contract to do so. Due to the urgency of the situation, this stipulation was granted; the Prime Minister once more could pledge public money to the CPR and building of the line resumed. In later years, Van Horne was to say that, in simple gratitude, "the Company ought to erect a monument to Riel as its greatest benefactor."![41] Though Macdonald's dream and personal fortunes were saved, the soldiers bore the brunt of the decision to grant an exclusive contract to the CPR.

The Grand Trunk, through its American connections, offered a nearly perfect transportation solution to Caron. Special trains would be given right of way over their lines and those of the American Railways. The time guarantee between Chicago and Winnipeg was 38 hours while Montréal to Chicago could be accomplished in 32 hours. An agent from the American Railways Company had wired his government to ascertain if permission would be granted for the troops to pass through American territory. Assurances had been given that this permission would be authorized, but that out of courtesy to the Canadian government, the application would have to come from them.[42] The Chicago and North-Western Railway Company had made a similar offer and it too was disregarded.[43] In the end, what could have been a three-day transit in proper passenger cars turned out instead to be among one of the greatest challenges to the young, inexperienced soldiers of the Canadian force.

[40] Stevens, 143.
[41] McDougall, 61.
[42] Morton and Roy, eds, Telegrams of the North-West Campaign 1885, 123.
[43] Ibid, 98.

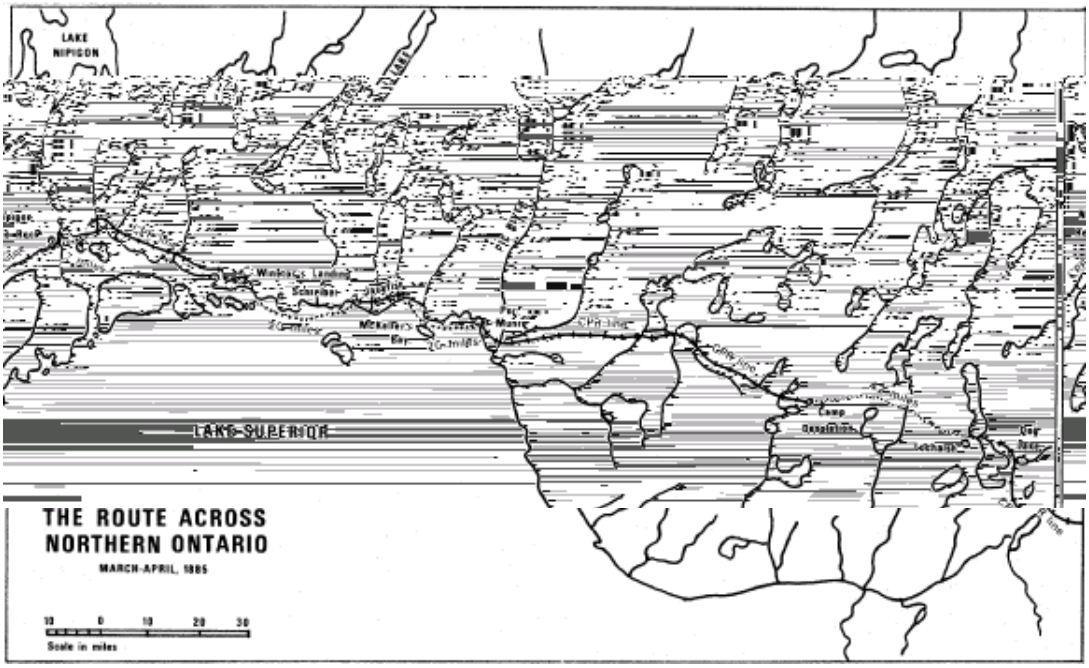

Figure 2. The CPR Along the North Shore of Lake Superior in March/April 1885

The CPR had no difficulty in getting trains to the garrison towns and cities to pick up the departing units. The problem lay along the North shore of Lake Superior where the railway line was not completed. The superintendent of the construction of the main line west from Sudbury, Henry Brathwaite Abbott, was contacted directly by Caron and given the task of making "all necessary arrangements for transport and subsistence of four hundred men to Winnipeg over line."[44] The young, untrained militiamen experienced the first test of their determination as they submitted themselves to Brathwaite's solution for the passage from Dog Lake, the last community attached to the completed eastern line, north of Lake Superior and onward to Winnipeg. Using a combination of horse drawn wagons, open rail cars on the finished segments, and long route marches over the frozen bays of the lake, the men finally arrived at Red Rock where they were once more able to board heated passenger cars. It was,

[44] Ibid, 5.

by all accounts, a very arduous week-long trek, often in extremely cold temperatures and without proper shelter. Nonetheless, three days before the battle of Fish Creek, almost 3,000 soldiers had journeyed to Winnipeg along this route and were either advancing as part of one of the columns or were preparing to join them. The last of the gaps was closed a month later and the last few units from the East avoided the hardship that their peers experienced in the rush to establish a presence in the North-West.[45] The 3,000 fighting troops available to Middleton in late April represented a *ten to one ratio* over the highest number of Métis and Indian fighters that Riel and Dumont were ever able to assemble during the conflict. The movement of troops did not go unnoticed by the white settlers, Métis, and Indians of the North-West. The settlers would have drawn comfort from the response; the Métis resolve must have suffered at the formidable display which would have served as a further deterrent to the Indians to limit their involvement in the Métis coalition. The age of rail had significantly altered the balance in favour of the government. Middleton never mentioned a show of force as one of the elements necessary for victory, concentrating instead on the defeat of the enemy on the battlefield. Nevertheless, the rapid mounting and deployment of the force demonstrated the government's resolve in defeating the rebellious elements, and limited the size of the enemy that Middleton would eventually face. Once the troops reached the theatre, their leaders faced the new challenge of sustaining them in an advance over extended lines of communication.

[45] Morton, The Last War Drum, 44.

Sustainment and Supply

Though the concept of support was never articulated, necessity gave the impetus for a number of actions to occur. The Store Branch of the Department of Militia and Defence under Lieutenant-Colonel MacPherson operated at the strategic level. As mentioned earlier, it coordinated the distribution of existing stores from armouries to the units being mounted and deployed, arranged for the manufacture of ammunition and coordinated the contracts for clothing, accoutrement, weapons, camp stores, and other supplies. It even demonstrated foresight by ordering a supply of lighter weight Grey Suits "in anticipation that a portion of the Force might remain on service in the North West during the summer season."[46] The first trainload of ammunition arrived in Winnipeg on 31 March; the 1.5 million rounds of small arms and 2,000 rounds of artillery ammunition sent west would prove more than sufficient for the entire campaign.

From Winnipeg, Lieutenant-Colonels Jackson and later Whitehead had the responsibility to plan and coordinate the logistics for the entire theatre of operations. In addition to the materiel provided by the department of stores, arrangements had to be made to sustain the force as it advanced toward the Métis. The challenge facing these two gentlemen was that the militia in 1885 did not include the organic service support elements required to sustain any size of force. In addition, the logistical challenge was made more difficult by Middleton's campaign design of three columns advancing on three separate axis. Any support would have to be improvised, and mostly contracted from available sources. The

[46] Canadian Parliament, "Report Upon the Suppression of the Rebellion in the North-West Territories, and Matters in Connection Therewith", No. 6 Sessional Papers A(1886), Appendix No.3, 66.

merchants of Winnipeg looked upon this large influx of troops as an excellent opportunity to reap windfall profit, and political loyalties soon came to bear on Caron back in Ottawa who was inundated by various party members looking for favourable treatment for their businesses. In the end, however, only one organization proved able to provide the required support, a capability acknowledged in the official report to parliament on the campaign which stated: "without the Hudson's Bay Company's massive administrative organization, the problems of transporting and supplying the Dominion troops might well have appeared insuperable."[47] In an early and massive example of alternate service delivery, the Canadian government turned to this private enterprise for a solution to its sustainment dilemma.

The Role of the Hudson's Bay Company

A Royal Charter granted by Charles II of England in 1670 established the Hudson's Bay Company. The Charter stated that the Company was to control all lands whose rivers and streams drained into Hudson Bay, effectively a deed to over 1.5 million square miles of land equivalent to 40% of modern Canada and much of Minnesota and North Dakota.[48] The industriousness with which the Company ran and controlled the fur trade in these wild territories made it a force not only in Canada but also in England where its headquarters were located. By the time of the rebellion, the Company had ceded much of this land back to Canada, a step deemed critical by Sir John A. Macdonald in establishing Canada as a nation. However, the network of trading posts throughout the North-West made it an integral part of the economic and social landscape and essential to the government for the campaign.

[47] Morton and Roy, eds., Telegrams of the North-West Campaign 1885, xi.
[48] www.hbc.com/hbc/e_hi/historic_hbc/charter.htm accessed online 4 April 02

The Deputy Adjutant-General for Military District No. 10 (Manitoba and the North-West Territories), Lieutenant-Colonel Frederick Houghton first established contact with the Hudson's Bay Company in Winnipeg, and Caron gave him instructions to have the company provide transport and subsistence to the force. A series of short and sharp telegrams from Caron to Houghton indicate that the Minister thought his man in Winnipeg should have been doing better in terms of arranging for support. Lieutenant-Colonel Jackson replaced Houghton on 2 April who was also unprepared for the magnitude of the task facing him.[49] Not only was he untrained and unprepared for the work ahead, he was also, save for a few retired militiamen, without a staff to assist him in this monumental task. Luckily, an intervention directly to Caron on 27 March by the Chief Commissioner for the Hudson's Bay Company in Canada, Donald A. Smith (Lord Strathcona), established a relationship between the minister and Joseph Wrigley.[50] As commissioner of the Hudson's Bay Company in Canada since 1884, Wrigley ended up being the de facto logistics planner, contractor and contracting agent for the force. Wrigley, by virtue of a professional lifetime dedicated to the acquisition and distribution of goods, was up to the task. While Jackson maintained his position and performed in a mostly satisfactory manner, from early April onward Caron dealt with Wrigley on an almost daily basis to direct support, authorize expenditures, request advice and to admonish him to keep expenses to a minimum. In this respect, the Hudson's Bay Company showed significant restraint in limiting what could have been a profit windfall. The Company provided all goods at wholesale price, charging only a commission on the

[49] Morton, The Last War Drum, 45.
[50] Morton and Roy, eds., Telegrams of the North-West Campaign 1885, 13.

goods and services, which averaged seven percent.[51] All this capability would be called into action as soon as the first contingents departed Winnipeg on 26 March.

At that time of year, the prairie was simply not able to sustain the horses and cattle required by the force, and forage had to be acquired and transported for each column. The numbers bear mentioning. A horse in the advance would consume 24 lbs of oats and 14 lbs of hay daily; the daily forage to support 520 horses in the advance then called for 12,500 lbs of oats and 7,500 lbs of hay, or the equivalent of 20 Red River carts, each capable of handling about 1000 lbs.[52] The Hudson's Bay Company secured sources for this forage and established sufficient contracts with teamsters and their wagons to maintain this flow of supplies throughout the campaign. In many respects, the conflict replaced and significantly expanded the season's normal commercial traffic. The expansion of the traffic included having to provide sustenance for the 5,000 soldiers of the force.

The troops soon came to realize that the campaign would not be remembered for its gastronomical delights. Though there was a definite preference for fresh meat, the cattle brought along for this purpose tended to slim down dramatically from the forced marches, needed to be cooked in an area where fuel was virtually unavailable, and had the added nuisances of requiring feed themselves.[53] Alternative options were examined and, in the case of pemmican, rejected out of hand.[54] The diet for most of the campaign consisted of canned beef and biscuits, the 19th century equivalent of today's Individual Meal Packs (IMPs) or Meals Ready to Eat (MREs). A rumour that tinned beef from Chicago had been tampered

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[51] J.A. Reay, "The Hudson's Bay Company and the North-West Rebellion", The Beaver, (Summer 1992), 55.

[52], Telegram to Bell 18 April 1885, North-West Field Force – Register of all Expenses, Wages, Rations, etc. RG9, Militia and Defence, Series II-A-3, Volume 6, Reel T-10393, NAC.

[53] Morton and Roy, eds., Telegrams of the North-West Campaign 1885, 110-111.

[54] Morton, The Last War Drum, 47.

with, possibly by Fenians, overcomplicated an already difficult contracting process and caused no end of grief to Wrigley who had to arrange for confirmation by meat inspectors in Winnipeg that the meat was suitable for human consumption. At times, Wrigley acted not only as the senior representative for the Hudson's Bay Company but also, de jure, as a key logistics staff officer for Caron himself. Wrigley did not relish this arrangement, but there was little alternative.

The biggest detractor to the provision of support by the HBC was the lack of a clear chain of command and authority. As everyone thought himself entitled to order against the Company's standing offer to outfit his unit/column/force, there soon arose a problem of duplication and excess. At one point, Lieutenant-Colonel Whitehead wired Caron to advise him that enough subsistence materiel had been purchased and sent forward to support 20,000 soldiers and that he, Caron, was surrounded by thieves. Certainly, no troops lacked for support and never was the operational commander's campaign plan in jeopardy due to a shortage of supplies. However, this concern did underline a lack of proper accounts and procedures in requisitioning, authorization and, more critically, distribution of supplies.

Lines of Communication

The lines of communication for the campaign were extensive. Upon arrived in Winnipeg, men, horses and supplies needed onward movement to join up with their designated columns. The CPR's line from Winnipeg to Calgary proved extremely beneficial in rapidly conveying supplies along the base line of communication commanded by General Laurie. Drop off points along the track were selected for each of the columns. Locations at

Swift Current, Touchwood, Humboldt, Clark's Crossing, Calgary, Regina, Qu'Appelle, McLeod, Lethbridge, and Yorktown were protected by militia units or sub-units, often the later arrivals to the West. From here, goods were cross-loaded from the trains to the carts and wagons that would take them to the columns. Other goods and supplies not arriving by train would also be gathered in these locations, forward depots really, for onward movement. Depot clerks appointed by the HBC ran these places and were responsible for receipt and onward distribution of goods. They certified waybills, authorized payment and feeding of Teamsters, and were held responsible for good order and discipline at their station. The "North-West Field Force Instructions to Depot Clerks" made it quite clear what their roles were, and stressed the importance that this portion of the supply chain to the overall success of the force. They were the ones who ensured demands from the columns were met with properly assembled convoys, containing the critical items required for the force to be sustained.

The supply convoys sent forward to replenish the columns were massive. The magnitude of the sustainment effort was vividly described in the report to parliament on the suppression of the rebellion: "on May 28 there left Calgary for Edmonton a convoy three miles long, consisting of 178 ox and Indian pony carts; 45 four and two horse teams and 80 double bull wagons, each hauled by ten huge oxen, conveying two or three hundred tons of supplies."[55] At the peak, over 1,000 teams were freighting across the prairies, built into convoys averaging between 20 to 40 miles daily. [56] For the men driving the wagons, it represented a daily hire rate of between eight to ten dollars and the only source of income

[55] Canadian Parliament, "Report Upon the Suppression of the Rebellion in the North-West Territories, and Matters in Connection Therewith", No. 6 Sessional Papers A(1886), page 2 of the summary of the campaign.

[56] Telegram Bedson to McKnight 20 April 1885, North-West Field Force – Register of all Expenses, Wages, Rations, etc. RG9, Militia and Defence, Series II-A-3, Volume 6, Reel T-10393, NAC.

during the uncertainty of the rebellion. For Middleton's force, it represented the lifeblood the general needed to chase down Riel.

As mentioned earlier, Middleton decided against sending armed escorts to accompany the convoys even though he had cavalry troops available that could have been used for this purpose. These units, including the Cavalry School Corps from Quebec and the Governor General's body Guard from Toronto, were relegated to guarding static locations along the CPR line. This decision not to escort the convoys led to a few instances where teamsters threatened to refuse going forward until given arms to defend themselves. This act of defiance by the teamsters was largely an empty threat because the convoys never stopped and only one was ever attacked, likely more out of hunger than a desire to impede Middleton's progress. Middleton's decision was based on an intelligent assessment of facts. His scouts were hardly ever challenged as they moved toward Batoche, his linemen were able to travel the prairie unmolested, tapping into and fixing the telegraph wire as required, and key staff and dispatch riders traveled to and from unit locations without encountering any challenge or threat. Even the Hudson's Bay Company's boats on the rivers, large and slow moving targets that they were, carried out their role without interference.

The replenishment of the force was not limited to overland travel. The paddle wheel steamers *Northcote, Minnow,* and *Marquis* traveled the two Saskatchewan rivers as soon as the ice condition allowed. The *Northcote* even played a minor role in the battle of Batoche, its sides having been reinforced to protect the crew from shots from the Métis fighters. As the conflict drew to a conclusion, these and other steamers were also used to evacuate, a personnel support function, wounded troops from Saskatoon to Winnipeg due to their relative comfort compared to horse or ox drawn wagons.

Personnel Support

Personnel support is a broad area of logistic support, which was well conducted throughout the campaign. All men were paid, they were promptly returned home once the rebellion was defeated, and all participants received an appropriate campaign medal. The dead were properly buried and their graves can still be found on the Saskatchewan prairie. The most complicated and critical function of personnel support in this campaign was the medical system. Its success in supporting the force is owed, in large part, to the work of the appointed surgeon-general, Dr D. Bergin, M.P. Upon being appointed, Bergin immediately set about gathering a staff and devising a plan. The medical strategy then, as it is now, was to keep soldiers healthy and in the battle order through proper sanitation in the camps, with casualties being treated as far forward as possible to return them to their units without delay. The wounded at Fish Creek, for example, were treated within a few hundred meters of the site of the engagement. Within a week of his appointment, Bergin had selected Dr. Roddick as his deputy surgeon-general and Dr. Sullivan as his purveyor. Dr. Roddick, described as a brilliant surgeon from McGill University, was given the responsibility for supervising all medical arrangements for the campaign as well as command of a field hospital. A second field hospital was established under the leadership of Dr. Henri Casgrain of Windsor.[57] The key staff of both field hospitals came from the medical faculties of McGill and the University of Toronto. Dressers and orderlies from Quebec and Ontario also volunteered for the campaign. The conflict marked the first formal employment of nursing sisters in operations, a

[57] Morton, The Last War Drum, 38-39

total of 12 deploying to Saskatoon and Moose Jaw.[58] Dr Sullivan, a Conservative Senator, had a particular challenge as the purveyor for the medical organization. Yet, by 12 April, "Roddick and his hospital had reached Winnipeg, traveling through the United States. A few days later, the unit reached the newly established base as Swift Current." [59]

Medical support throughout the campaign was exceptional. Bergin himself traveled to the North-West to witness the work of the medical organization. In a letter submitted to Caron on 21 July 1885 from Winnipeg, he detailed how the last of the Canadian soldiers wounded in battle were evacuated from Saskatoon on the Hudson's Bay Company steamers *Sir John A. Macdonald* and *Alberta* via the North Saskatchewan all the way to Winnipeg. His letter tells of the support provided by the settlers of Saskatoon, the contracts established with the Winnipeg General Hospital for the continued care of the patients once in that city, and the convenience of traveling by steamer instead of overland which would have been tremendously difficult on the wounded. It also provides and account of his trip, along with Dr. Boyd, to the communities of Fish Creek and Batoche where they provided medical and surgical aid to several wounded Métis.[60] As earlier discussed, their intervention in treating enemy casualties was humanitarian in nature, a recognition that these men were, after all, part of the emerging Canadian mosaic and, undoubtedly, their only chance at surviving their injuries.

Though recommendations were made to maintain a permanent medical organization within the Department of Militia, it was not until 1898, in time for the deployment to the

[58]G.W.L. Nicholson, Canada's Nursing Sisters, (Toronto: Hakkert, 1975), 23-25.
[59] Morton, The Last War Drum, 40.
[60] Letter from Bergin to Caron, 21 July 1885, North-West Field Force – Register of all Expenses, Wages, Rations, etc. RG9, Militia and Defence, Series II-A-3, Volume 6, Reel T-10395, NAC.

Boer War, that Canada would permanently establish such a Branch.[61] The first Commanding Officer of the Canadian unit sent to South Africa, Lord Strathcona's Horse, was none other than Sam Steele, formerly of the North-West Mounted Police and leader of Steele's Scouts in General Strange's Alberta Field Force of 1885. Clearly, some of the lessons learned during the North-West Rebellion, including the importance of a proper medical system to maintain the health of the fighting force, were not forgotten when it came time for Canadians to once more go to war.

The Rebellion, in terms of hostilities, came to an end shortly after Riel's surrender on 15 May. Though there was to be one more clash between General Strange's column and Chief Big Bear's warriors at Frenchman's Butte on 27 May, the conflict had by then petered out and Big Bear also surrendered on 2 July. After a trial, Riel was hanged in the police barracks in Regina on 16 November 1885.

Conclusion

Riel and Dumont had at most 350 Métis and Indian fighters with which to face the Canadian force of over 5,000 soldiers sent to the North-West to crush the rebellion. Four minor battles were fought, none of which can be described as having secured victory for General Middleton. The success of the force sent to the North-West lay in the ability of the government to create an ad-hoc logistical system, complete with staff in Ottawa and Winnipeg, to mobilize, deploy, sustain and maintain an overwhelmingly superior expeditionary type of force within a few short weeks after the defeat of Crozier's police force at Duck Lake. Certainly, this success could have been hampered by a more aggressive,

[61] Nicholson, 26.

guerilla type campaign on the part of the Métis, but Riel was unwilling and Dumont would not have been able to sustain this type of warfare indefinitely. More Canadian soldiers would have come and eventually overwhelmed the Métis and Indians. The speed with which over 3,000 troops were moved across the Canadian prairie prior to Riel's capitulation limited the participation of many Indian tribes and secured the funding critical to completion of John A. Macdonald's trans-continental rail link. It also demonstrated that the two sides possessed vast differences in tactics and logistical support systems. The nascent CPR was critical to the deployment and sustainment of the force. Without this conflict, however, it is doubtful that the last spike would have been driven in 1885 or any year soon thereafter. The suppression of the rebellion marked the first large scale Alternate Service Delivery initiative by a Canadian military force. Middleton's success would not have been possible without the availability of the Hudson's Bay Company's stores and distribution system, and the hard work of its able commissioner, Joseph Wrigley. Dominance of the North-West territories was complete when nearly every trading post, almost overnight, became a Canadian military installation, dispatching supply columns many miles long and, at the height of the conflict, containing nearly three times as many supply wagons and teamsters as there were Métis and Indian fighters in the entire area of operation. The logistics challenges faced by Middleton's forces were great. Time, terrain, weather, supplies, transportation, personnel support, and extended lines of communications are the challenges that any operational level commander would face today in mounting, deploying, and sustaining a force in operations. In Middleton's case, overcoming these challenges was the key to Canada's successful conduct of the campaign against Riel and the Métis.

Annex A – Sequence of Events of the North-West Rebellion of 1885

5 June 1884	Louis Riel agrees to accompany Dumont's delegation back to Saskatchewan
16 December 1884	A petition drafted by Riel, expressing the grievances of the Indians and Métis, is forwarded to Ottawa
4 February 1885	The Minister of the Interior informs the Lieutenant Governor of the North-West Territories (Dewdney) that the government will investigate half-breed claims to land grants and titles
18-19 March 1885	issa

27 May 1885	Clash between Gen Strange's column and Big Bear's men at Frenchman's Butte
2 July 1885	Big Bear surrenders
16 November 1885	Riel is hanged at the police barracks in Regina

Chronology compiled from pages XXI and XXII of Desmond Morton's The Last War Drum and the Canadian government's sessional paper 6a Report Upon the Supression of the Rebellion in the North-West Territories, and Matters in Connection Therewith, in 1885 found in Volume 5 of the Sessional Papers of the 4th session of the 5th parliament session, 1886.

Annex B – Canadian force disposition during the campaign

1.	First Column under Middleton		
	a.	A Battery, (Quebec)	111
	b.	90th Battalion (Winnipeg)	323
	c.	Infantry School Corps, (part)	46
	d.	Boulton's Scouts	80
	e.	10th Battalion Royal Grenadiers	267
	f.	Capt. French's Scouts	50
	g.	Winnipeg Field Battery, (part)	33
	h.	Dennis' Surveyor's Scouts	60
	i.	Midland Battalion	108
2.	Second Column under Otter		
	a.	B Battery, (Kingston)	114
	b.	Queen's Own	275
	c.	Infantry School (part)	45
	d.	Todd's Sharpshooters	51
	e.	Winnipeg Field Battery (part)	30
	f.	35th Battalion (part)	265
3.	Third Column under Strange		
	a.	65th Battalion	232
	b.	Winnipeg Provisional Battalion (32nd)	307
	c.	Strange's Rangers	50

d. Mounted Police 67

4. Remainder of the force was stationed as follows:

a. Clarke's Crossing

i) 7th Battalion 232

ii) Midland 168

b. Touchwood

i) 35th Battalion, 2nd Company 80

ii) Quebec Cavalry School 40

iii) Winnipeg Troop Cavalry 39

c. Humboldt

i) Governor General's Body Guards 81

d. Fort Qu'Appelle

i) 91st Battalion 396

e. Moose Jaw

i) 66th Battalion, Halifax (part) 175

f. Medicine Hat

i) 66th Battalion, Halifax (part) 175

g. Gleichen – Calgary – Fort McLeod

i) 9th (Quebec) Battalion 232

h. Old Wives' Lake

i) White's Scouts 51

i. Cypress Hills

i) Stewart's Rangers 150

Canadian government's sessional paper 6a Report Upon the Supression of the Rebellion in the North-West Territories, and Matters in Connection Therewith, in 1885 found in Volume 5 of the Sessional Papers of the 4th session of the 5th parliament session, 1886.

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