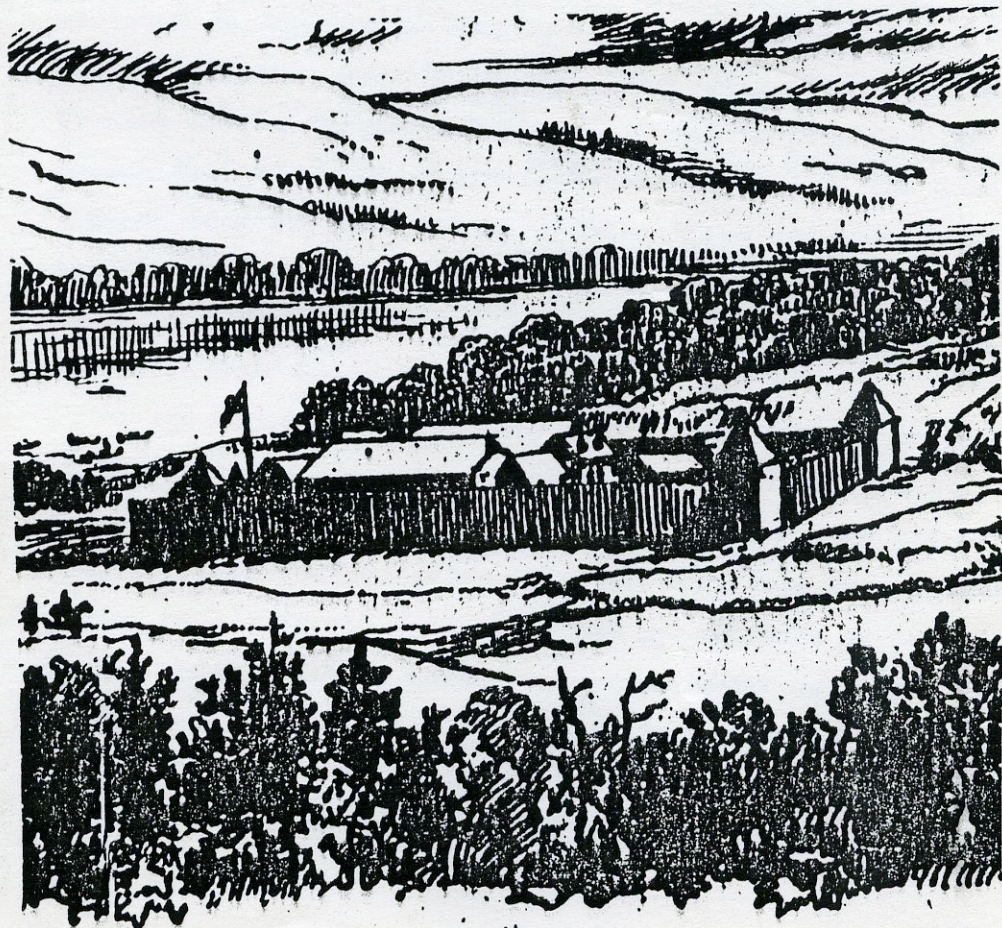


RESISTANCE OR REBELLION ?
A BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE EVENTS OF 1885



CARLETON, THE HUDSON'S BAY POST ABANDONED

TABLE OF CONTENTS

What Happened in 1885	1
A Look At Significant Events	3
What Led To The Confrontation	5
How Did The Hostilities Begin	7
What Happened At Duck Lake	9
What Happened At Fish Creek.....	11
What Happened At Batoche.....	14

WHAT HAPPENED IN 1885?

In the Spring of 1885, the Metis of several communities along the South Saskatchewan River fought a number of battles with Canadian military forces. The Metis people, who are of Indian and French-Canadian ancestry, were assisted during the battles by the Sioux Indians from Beardy's Reserve near Duck Lake. They were also supported by many of the English Halfbreeds living in neighbouring communities along the South Saskatchewan River. The Cree Indians from Big Bear's camp at Onion Lake and from Pound-maker's band at Cut Knife were on their way to help the Metis, but arrived too late and fell into the hands of the North West Mounted Police.

The first battle of 1885 took place on March 26, at Duck Lake, a small town situated on the west side of the South Saskatchewan River between Saskatoon and Prince Albert. This confrontation is often described as a skirmish rather than a battle because it was not planned or organized in the usual military manner. It came about as a result of the hostile encounter between a group of Metis and a party of Mounted Policemen stationed at Fort Carlton, not far from the Metis settlements along the South Saskatchewan River.

The second battle occurred about a month later at Fish Creek, a narrow wooded ravine southeast of Duck Lake. Here, on April 24, the Metis successfully delayed the advancement of Middleton's troops toward Batoche. This battle lasted almost a full day and ended with the withdrawal of the Canadian troops to a plateau not far from the ravine. There they remained until they received further military supplies, including the big cannon known as the "Gatling".

The final and longest battle took place at Batoche, a Metis village on the east side of the South Saskatchewan River. The battle lasted for three days and was the most serious confrontation between the two opposing parties. It ended on May 13, with the defeat of the Metis and the capture of the village of Batoche by Middleton's troops.

A LOOK AT SIGNIFICANT HISTORICAL EVENTS PRIOR TO 1885

The main event which led to the conflict between the Metis and the Ontario-based politicians was the sale of Rupertsland to the Canadian government by the Hudson's Bay Company. This area covered most of the North West. Another reason for the conflict was the influx of European and American settlers on the prairies. Before the sale the Metis had begun to recognize their role as a unique group of Canadians with goals and aspirations that differed from those of their Indian relatives. Consequently, the Metis had developed a strong sense of nationhood.

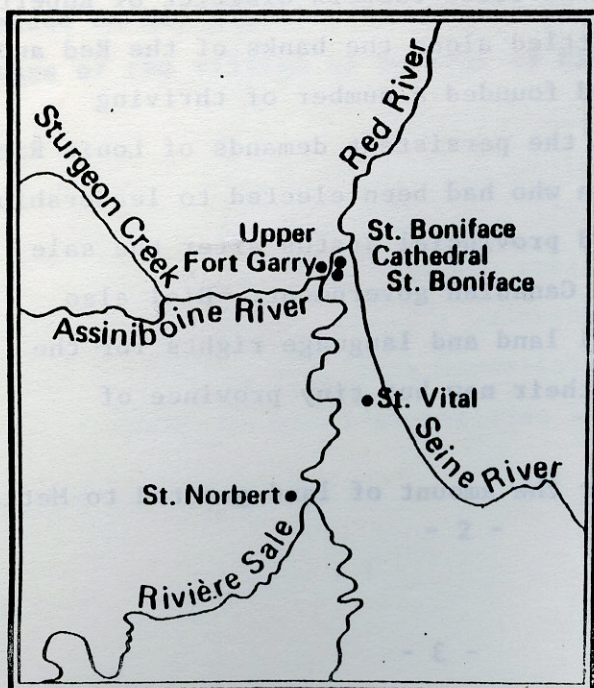
After the decline of the furtrade, many of the Metis moved to Assiniboia, the south-eastern district of Rupertsland. There, they settled along the banks of the Red and Assiniboine Rivers and founded a number of thriving communities. Through the persistent demands of Louis Riel, one of their spokesmen who had been elected to leadership, this district received provincial status after the sale of Rupertsland to the Canadian government. Riel also negotiated for special land and language rights for the Metis as citizens of their new but tiny province of Manitoba.

The dispute over the amount of land granted to Metis

families under the legislation of the new province took well over two decades to resolve. Meanwhile, the colonizing companies moving in from eastern Canada had pocketed the majority of the Metis' would-be entitlements.

As more European and American settlers moved into Manitoba and took over the land once occupied by the Metis, the latter moved on to join their friends and relatives who lived to the west, in small farming settlements along the banks of the South Saskatchewan River. There they cultivated the long narrow river lots typical of French-Canadian and Metis communities of eastern Canada and managed their affairs in an independent and co-operative manner.

The Red River settlement, 1844



WHAT LED TO CONFRONTATION BETWEEN THE METIS AND THE GOVERNMENT?

Wherever there is confrontation there are at least two different points of view, and the confrontation is either sudden and happens without warning or is the final stage in a series of longstanding grievances.

In the case of the events of 1885, the confrontation was climax of a longstanding dispute between the Metis and the Canadian government over the recognition of Metis land titles, provision for Metis schools, and maintenance of Metis religious institutions.

The Metis were asking the Canadian government for title to their land along the South Saskatchewan River because, unlike their Indian relatives, they recognized that land could be "owned" by individuals, and because they understood that without a landbase they would have little control over their destiny, including educational and religious institutions. The Metis were also pressing the government for a better deal for the Indians who, through the treaties, were scattered, landlocked and starving on isolated reserves across the prairies. (A few Indian bands who had refused to settle on the land assigned to them were under constant surveillance by the officers of the North West Mounted Police.) But, the government was either uncaring or unwilling to acknowledge the urgency of the Metis' requests.

The information that has reached the public has seldom presented the confrontation from the Native point of view. Although this information is available, the accounts from the Non-Native perspective have been given more credibility and wider circulation, than have the Native explanations. In the past, Social Studies texts have portrayed the Metis as trouble-makers and have condemned the Metis leaders, Riel and Dumont, using derogatory terms. While many writers had to admit that the Canadian government was negligent in answering the Metis' petitions, it did not stop them from presenting their viewpoint with a strong anti-Metis bias.



Louis Riel in 1873 .

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HOW DID THE HOSTILITIES BEGIN? WHO FIRED THE FIRST SHOT?

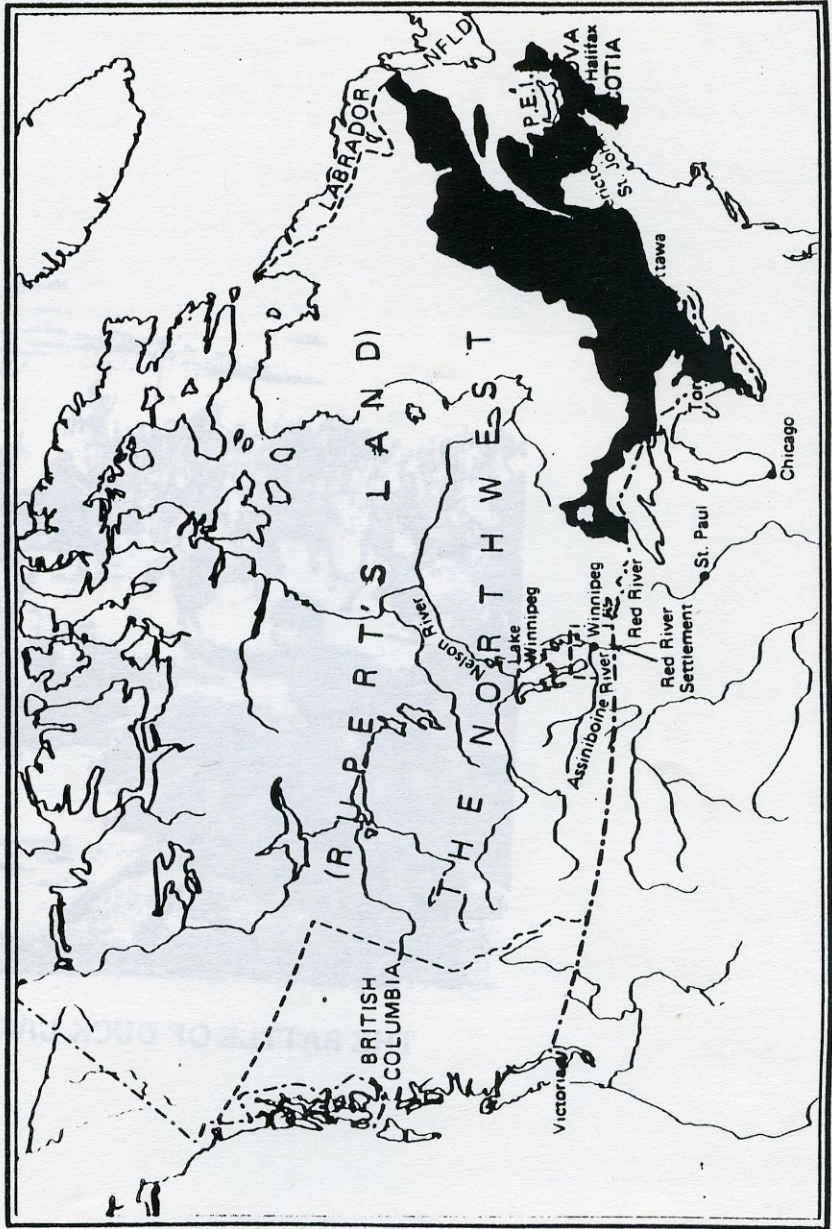
History books usually explain that the hostilities in the North West began when Louis Riel seized guns and ammunition from two stores in the Batoche area, took a group of government officials as hostages and sent out a party to cut the telephone lines linking the Metis communities with other parts of Canada. If Riel had resorted to these violent actions without provocation this explanation could be accepted as valid. However, as many people living in the Batoche area at the time knew, Riel had valid reasons for his actions. On the previous day, Riel had received a message that, in the words of a Batoche resident, "struck fear in the hearts of the Metis". The message, passed on by a Hudson's Bay official, informed a group of Metis gathered at St. Louis that five-hundred policemen camped at Troy (the former Fort Qu'Appelle) had bullets for the Metis and chains for Riel.

The foregoing remark, reportedly made by the Hudson's Bay Company factor Lawrence Clarke, who was stationed at Fort Carlton, has been mentioned by several writers. Clarke himself denied having made the remark and therefore this version of the instigation to violence is often ignored. Yet, even Stanley admits that "the other view was prevalent at the time."²

The important point to be made about this incident is the crucial difference between an unprovoked resort to hostilities and a desperate effort to gain ammunition and hostages as a way of defending families or gaining a bargaining position. This distinction has prompted people familiar with the circumstances of the events of 1885 to use the term "Resistance" instead of the term "Rebellion".

The first shot was fired at Duck Lake on March 26, 1885, but there is much controversy about who began the shooting. After the battle, N.W.M.P. Crozier explained in a letter to the prime minister that the police had been attacked by a force of half-breeds who were marauding at Duck Lake. Crozier's explanation has generally been accepted by historians. Thirty years later Joe McKay, a police interpreter, admitted that he had fired the first shot because he thought that an old, half-blind Indian by the name of Assywin was grabbing for his gun. Joe fired two shots which killed the Indian and also Isidore Dumont, Gabriel's brother.

Joe's confession made local headlines in Prince Albert, but had little effect on writers of history books and school-texts.³



Canada, 1868

from local

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THE BATTLE OF DUCK LAKE

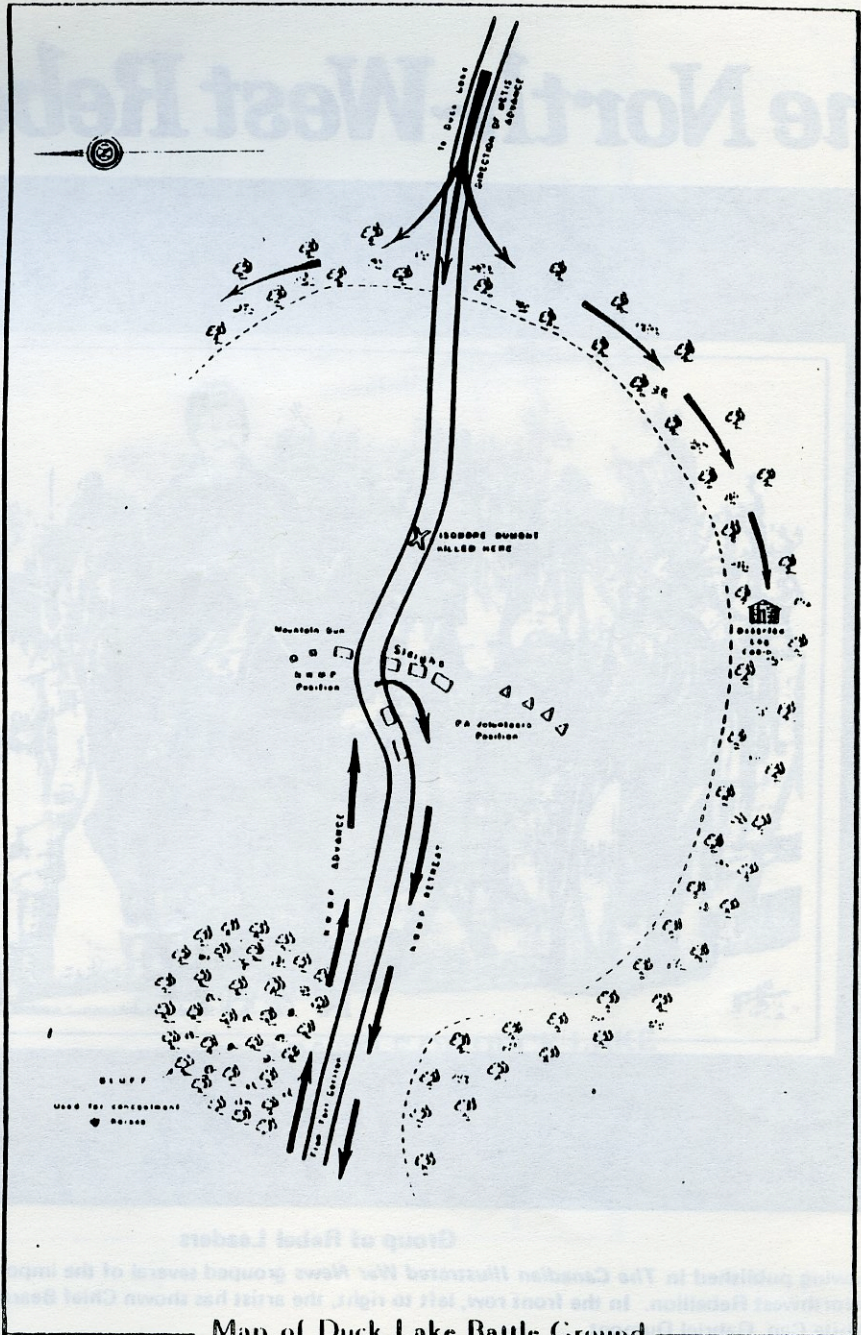
The North-West Rebellion



Group of Rebel Leaders

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This drawing published in *The Canadian Illustrated War News* grouped several of the important Métis and Indian leaders of the Northwest Rebellion. In the front row, left to right, the artist has shown Chief Beardy, Chief Big Bear, Louis Riel, Chief White Cap, Gabriel Dumont.



Map of Duck Lake Battle Ground

WHAT HAPPENED AT DUCK LAKE

The skirmish which took place at Duck Lake on the 26th of March 1885 was not planned by either Gabriel Dumont, the Metis chief organizer of defence, nor by Major Crozier who was in charge of the North West Mounted Police fort at Carlton.

Crozier had sent a party of policemen, under the command of Sgt. Stewart, to Duck Lake to purchase supplies. On their way to the village they met a number of Metis. According to reports from Gabriel Dumont and the Mounted Police, some jostling and name-calling took place until, somewhat distressed, Stewart decided to return to the fort with his men. Major Crozier was at this point persuaded "to get even with the half-breeds" and reluctantly set out to meet the Metis head-on. About seven miles from the fort and a half mile from Duck Lake, the two parties clashed in a battle that took the lives of five Metis and three Canadian policemen.

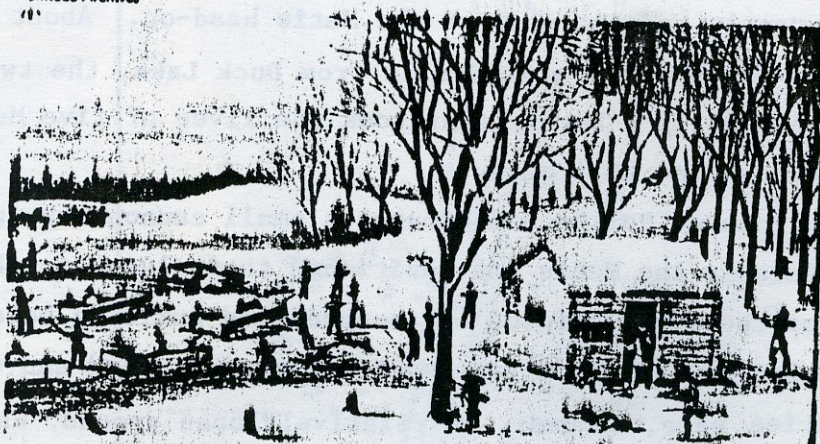
The Mounted Police had brought a small cannon that proved useless because the Metis had positioned themselves to take advantage of the cover offered by an abandoned building belonging to Chief Beardy's reserve and nearby clumps of brush and willow. The Mounties were, however, on relatively open ground. When Major Crozier realized that neither his men nor his cannon were capable

of defeating the Metis, he withdrew his force to Fort Carlton.

On his return to Carlton, Crozier wrote a report of the Duck Lake encounter which, when read by Prime Minister John A. Macdonald, was considered incomplete. Macdonald criticized Crozier for his impulsive move to meet the Metis and asked for further details of the situation.

In reply, the Major wrote to say that he was attacked by the Metis. However, Police Lieut. Col. Irvine explained to the prime minister that he believed that Crozier's better judgment was overruled by the overeagerness of the Police and the volunteers.

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71



the Battle of Duck Lake

WHAT HAPPENED AT FISH CREEK

The victory at Duck Lake elated the Metis. Meanwhile, however, John A. Macdonald continued to further his national dream which was a transcontinental railroad system. Realizing that the public was unwilling to provide him with money to finance this undertaking, it appears that he now needed a crisis in Western Canada to justify the completion of the C.P.R. Trans-Canada Line. The clash between the Metis and the Mounted Police served the purpose of arousing public support for his scheme and a large force, mobilized by the prime minister was moved to the North West within 10 days of the battle of Duck Lake via a hastily completed railway line. In so doing Macdonald saved the Canadian Pacific Company from bankruptcy.⁵

General Middleton, in charge of five thousand Canadian troops, arrived at Clarke's Crossing on the South Saskatchewan on April 17th. By April 24, the general and one half of his troops had arrived at a thickly wooded coulee about thirty miles from Batoche. This coulee, through which ran a little creek, was known as Tourond's Coulee or Fish Creek Coulee.

When the government troops approached the coulee, they were ambushed by Gabriel Dumont and his party of Metis who were well hidden along both sides of the creek. A fierce battle, which lasted almost a full day, ensued.

A late evening thunderstorm followed by rain and sleet soaked and chilled the combatants so that both sides readily withdrew from their positions. Impressed by the extraordinary stamina and courage displayed during the fighting, Gabriel rounded up his remaining force of 56 men, of which two were wounded, and returned to Batoche.

The Metis lost four men in the battle while the government troops lost ten and had forty wounded. At one point the opposing force had come so close that Dumont shot through Middleton's fur cap. Counted among the wounded soldiers was Hugh McDonald, the prime minister's son. Among the dead on the Metis side were two Sioux from Chief White Cap's band.

Gabriel Dumont reported after the battle that his soldiers had fought well, encouraging one another. When one of them became fearful, he began to sing The Song of Pierre Falcon, an old French ballad that had been popular in the Red River Metis colony of Manitoba. "The other's picked up the chorus, and all gained courage."⁶

The government correspondent travelling with Middleton's troops wrote that, at close quarters, the wounds inflicted by Metis on Middleton's soldiers were a terrible sight. Duck shot, round balls and irregularly shaped pieces of lead had been used in loading the guns. This information leads one to conclude that the Metis were not prepared to fight an all-out war with

either the Mounted Police or the government, but were organized in haste to defend themselves against an overwhelming force of trained soldiers. If they had been intent on a rebellion, they surely would have prepared an adequate supply of arms and ammunition.

The Battle of Fish Creek

Manitoba Archives



Gabriel Dumont

Gabriel Dumont became famous as a Métis guerrilla fighter.

Manitoba Archives



WHAT HAPPENED AT BATOCHÉ?

After the encounter at Fish Creek, Middleton and his army camped a few miles from the site of the battle to await additional military forces and supplies of food, medicine and ammunition. The supplies arrived at Clarke's Crossing on May 5th, by way of the steamer "Northcote". Being towed by the steamer were two barges, one carrying a Gatling gun and the other provisions and extra soldiers.

On May 9th, the Northcote was scheduled to travel on to Batoché to attack the village from the river while the Canadian army attacked on land. However, this plan did not succeed because the steamer encountered such heavy enemy fire that it sailed along with unusual speed and arrived at its destination before Middleton's soldiers. To make matters worse, the ferry cable across the Saskatchewan, which had intentionally been lowered by the Metis, ripped the top off the Northcote's smokestack and set fire to the deck of the steamer. Finally, the Northcote got stuck in a sandbar and became the target of Metis sharpshooters from the riverbanks. When the steamer managed to free itself, it moved with haste down the river and was not seen again until the battle was over.

Middleton soon realized that he had to fight the Metis unassisted, and moved his army toward the village of Batoché.

There, his soldiers encountered heavy gunfire and were unable to advance further. The General therefore decided to camp for the night on the crest of a little hill overlooking the village.

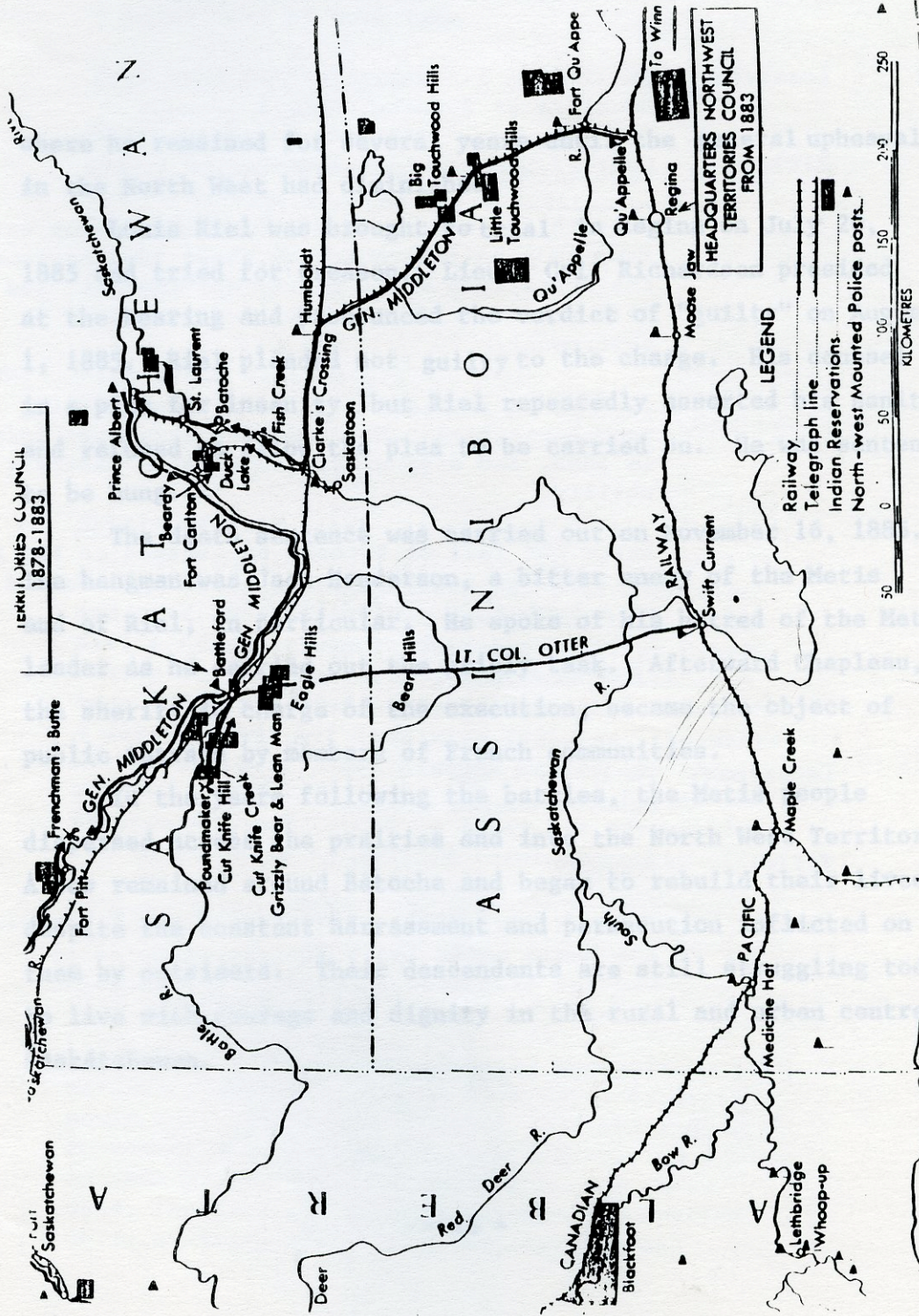
On the following day, May 10, the fighting was renewed. Middleton's men engaged in skirmishes in order to expend the Metis' limited amount of ammunition and returned to the protection of the camp at night. Neither on May 10 nor 11th did the soldiers gain access to the village. On May 12th, the last day of the battle, Riel pleaded with Middleton for the safety of the women and children. The General consented. Seeing that the Metis were running out of ammunition, he gave the order to cease firing. However, two of his officers disobeyed the order and led a bayonet charge into the now defenseless Metis rifle-pits. The General, although outraged by the disrespect for his authority, did not dare to reprimand the officers who were responsible. (The newspapers, at a later date, depicted Middleton as a coward and the officers as heroes.)

The troops charged into the village of Batoche, took over the former headquarters of the Metis position and rounded up a number of prisoners.

Two days later Riel gave himself up to three North West Mounted Police scouts. He was quietly taken to General Middleton's tent. Gabriel Dumont escaped to the United States

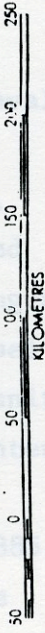
TERMINUS COUNCIL
1878-1883

HEADQUARTERS NORTHWEST
TERRITORIES COUNCIL
FROM 1883



LEGEND

- Railway
- Telegraph line
- Indian Reservations
- North-west Mounted Police posts



where he remained for several years until the general upheaval in the North West had diminished.

Louis Riel was brought to trial in Regina on July 20, 1885 and tried for treason. Lieut. Col. Richardson presided at the hearing and pronounced the verdict of "guilty" on August 1, 1885. Riel pleaded not guilty to the charge. His counsel put in a plea for insanity, but Riel repeatedly asserted his sanity and refused to allow the plea to be carried on. He was sentenced to be hung.

The death sentence was carried out on November 16, 1885. The hangman was Jack Henderson, a bitter enemy of the Metis and of Riel, in particular. He spoke of his hatred of the Metis leader as he carried out the grisly task. Afterward Chapleau, the sheriff in charge of the execution, became the object of public outrage by members of French communities.

In the years following the battles, the Metis people dispersed across the prairies and into the North West Territories. A few remained around Batoche and began to rebuild their lives despite the constant harrassment and persecution inflicted on them by outsiders. Their descendents are still struggling today to live with courage and dignity in the rural and urban centres of Saskatchewan.

HISTORICAL MARKERS AT THE BATTLE SITES

Location: SW 14-43 - 1 - W3m
Cemetery at Batoche, Church grounds

Title: Gabriel Dumont, 1838-1906

Text: Born in Assiniboia, Rupert's Land, he won early fame as a buffalo hunter. About 1868 he founded the Metis camp which became St. Laurent, and in 1873 became first president of its local government.

In 1884 he led a party to Montana to bring back Louis Riel. He commanded the Metis forces in 1885, and displayed considerable military ability.

After the fall of Batoche he escaped to the United States. He returned years later and resumed the life of a hunter.

(French & English)

Location: SW-17-43-1-W3m
Batoche Church grounds

Title: Batoche

Text: Here on May, 1885, after four days of fighting, the Metis under Louis Riel surrendered to General Middleton commanding the Canadian troops.

(French & English)

Location: 3 miles west of Duck Lake

Title: Duck Lake Battlefield

Text: Here, on March 26, 1885, occurred the first combat between the Canadian forces under Major L.N.F. Crozier and the Metis Indians under Gabriel Dumont.

(French & English)

Location: Fish Creek 24-41-2-W2m
Follow highway from Rosthern to Gabriel's Crossing. Turn left after the bridge at Gabriel's Crossing.

Title: Battle of Fish Creek

Text: On April 24, 1885 Major-General F.D. Middleton and over 500 troops were moving north to attack Riel's headquarters at Batoche. At Fish Creek ravine they encountered a concealed force of some 200 Metis, led by Gabriel Dumont. After a day of heavy but indcisive fighting, the Metis withdrew, their casualties 11 killed and 18 wounded. Middleton, who had lost 10 killed and 40 wounded, was forced to delay his advance for two weeks while he awaited reinforcements.

(French & English)

Title: Fish Creek, 1885. Middleton's Camp

Text: After the engagment with Gabriel Dumont's Metis and Indian forces at Fish Creek crossing south east of here on 24 April 1885 Major-General Frederick Middleton withdrew his troups to a camp on this site. Here the Militia buried their dead, tended their wounded, rested and drilled while awaiting the arrival of supplies and



Manitoba Archives

Under Attack!

The *Northcote* under attack by rebel forces.



Manitoba Archives

Middleton's troops making camp at Batoche

reinforcements. On 7 May, Middleton resumed his advance on the Metis headquarters at Batoche. Of the ten soldiers killed at Fish Creek some were later reburied elsewhere. The headstone was subsequently erected in memory of Gunners De-Manolly. Cook and Atmsworth.

Location: SE 33-38-3-W3m
6.7 km (4.2 mi) west of Highway 27 and
Highway 41 intersection, then 1.6 km (1 mi)
south

Title: Clark's Crossing

Text: About five miles west of here was Clark's Crossing, named for John F. Clark who came to the west as an assistant to the dominion scientific expedition of 1879.

Clark established a ferry in 1881, 600 feet south of where the Dominion Telegraph line crossed the South Saskatchewan River in 1876. This was also on the route of the first CPR survey. Ferry service was maintained irregularly until 1889 for traffic on the Battleford trail.

In 1884 a telegraph station was opened at the crossing.

During the rebellion of 1885 General Middleton split his forces advancing on Batoche into two columns at Clark's Crossing, and spent April 20th and 21st ferrying one column to the left bank. Three days later the right column was surprised by Metis forces at Fish Creek, 25 miles north of the crossing, where an indecisive battle was fought.

(English)