

1885 was a year of conflict in the North West. A conflict of cultures on the edge of the Frontier. Bloodshed on the Prairies.

It is now over 100 years since those first shots were fired at Duck Lake, but the Battle of Duck Lake was more of an accident in my mind.

The real fighting started at Tourond's Coulee! It was Tourond's Coulee to the Metis, and Fish Creek to the rest of Canada, and it produced wounds that have been a long time healing.

Tourond Coulee or Fish Creek was the southern limit of the Metis South Branch Settlement ... and when the Canadian Militia reached the banks of that meandering creek, they entered Metis homeland. It was not unlike the incident that started the Manitoba Uprising of 1869. Then it was Alexander Webb, the engineer, whose survey party entered the homeland of Andre Nault and all hell broke loose with Louis Riel in the forefront. Some historians say it is a close parallel.

In any case, it was Metis Muzzleloaders against the Soldiers' Sniders. But it was also buffalo hunting skills against the inexperienced soldier. The Metis under Gabriel Dumont were obvious battle victors.

After Fish Creek came the Battle of Cut Knife Hill, and that was a clean-cut victory for the Indians of Chief Poundmaker.

A week later, the Battle of Batoche, and every Canadian focused his attention on our West. Four days of battle before the Metis Lines were crushed and the Canadian Militia claimed victory. It was the final battle ... now there was peace.

When you look at the conflicts, I guess you could say the Metis and Indians won some battles, but lost the war ... and it is still that way today!

The wounds of a century have still not healed properly. Some call it a Century of Peace, but it is not a Century of Contentment. There are many Metis who fought for Canada in two world wars, but there are also many Metis who will not march with a Canadian soldier at Batoche on May 12, 1985. The scars show.

At his trial in 1885, Riel said a "Century is but a spoke in the wheel of eternity."

That wheel turns slowly as the politicians and Metis and Indian and Inuit leaders negotiate claims and grievances of the past centuries. You and I may not make the wheels turn much faster, but with care and understanding we can help them run smoothly. Let's try a little harder.