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# Outpost

## The Dominion of Canada's Colonial Garrison in Manitoba, 1870 to 1877

DAVID GREBSTAD

*Abstract: Military garrisons were a common requirement of empires, ancient or modern, in order to secure and maintain their imperial authority in colonies. Nineteenth century Canada was no different. When the Dominion of Canada annexed the North-Western interior of North America in 1870, it acquired a peripheral colony to be exploited by the economic, political, and cultural metropole of central Canada. Between 1870-1877, the Dominion maintained a garrison of Active Militia in what is now Winnipeg to pre-empt external aggression, bring order to the frontier, and conduct policing duties in the rough and tumble nascent Province of Manitoba.*

MILITARY GARRISONS were a common requirement of empires, ancient or modern, in order to secure and maintain their imperial authority in colonies. The British Empire was no different as throughout the modern period, but most especially in the nineteenth century, the British maintained an expansive network of garrisons to secure their colonies around the world. British colonial garrisons were deployed haphazardly throughout the latter half of the eighteenth century, and then with more determination and order as the British imperium spread after the defeat of Napoleon in 1815. By the mid-nineteenth century, however, the rising cost of these garrisons worried British political leadership, and by the 1860's there was a determined cry in the corridors of Whitehall and Westminster to reduce the expensive imperial footprint. By 1871, save for strategically vital points such as Esquimalt, Halifax and Gibraltar, the British legions were called home. Importantly, as the British imperial footprint

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receded, the imperial aspirations of the Dominion of Canada in the North-American continental interior increased.

When the Dominion of Canada annexed the North-Western interior of North America in 1870, it acquired a peripheral colony to be exploited by the economic, political, and cultural metropole of central Canada.<sup>1</sup> As its ancient and contemporary imperial *confrères* had done, Canada was required to deploy a military garrison in order to achieve key military objectives. The three military-strategic objectives of these garrisons were articulated by historian Peter Burroughs in the *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* thusly: preempting external aggression by foreign powers; bringing order to unstable or lawless frontiers, and conducting internal or policing duties.<sup>2</sup> Although the young Dominion Government had hoped the British would provide this service, the political leadership in London, who were bent on centralizing the army at home, steadfastly refused. Consequently, between 1870 and 1877 the Dominion government maintained a colonial garrison of Canadian Active Militia soldiers in the Red River Settlement.<sup>3</sup>

Lamentably, the story of the Dominion military force on service in Manitoba is practically unknown as very little historical rigour has been directed towards it.<sup>4</sup> Little is known of its constitution, its actions, what life on the frontier was like or how the force served to establish and maintain Canadian authority in the region. The aim of

<sup>1</sup> For an excellent historical summary of how the established provinces of the Dominion of Canada treated the North-West as a colony with natural-resources to exploit, see Mary Janigan, *Let the Eastern Bastards Freeze in the Dark: The West versus the Rest since Confederation*, (Toronto: Knopf, 2012).

<sup>2</sup> Peter Burroughs, "Imperial Defence and the Victorian Army," *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 15, no. 1 (July 2008), 58.

<sup>3</sup> Although known as Winnipeg today, several terms were used interchangeably to refer to the region which has since been subsumed by the City of Winnipeg. The Red River Settlement included a number of parishes along the Red and Assiniboine Rivers. Fort Garry, also known as Upper Fort Garry to differentiate it from another fort further north near Selkirk, Manitoba, was the Hudson's Bay Company post near the forks of those two rivers, and the village of Winnipeg was one of the parishes of the Red River Settlement, lying just north of Fort Garry. Contemporaries often used these terms interchangeably, particularly when the village of Winnipeg grew so exponentially after 1870, eventually geographically dominating the local area.

<sup>4</sup> There are some important exceptions. See George Francis Gillman. Stanley, *Toil & Trouble: Military Expeditions to Red River* (Toronto: Dundurn Press, 1989) and Frederic Shore's unpublished doctoral thesis for the University of Manitoba *The Canadians and the Métis: The Re-creation of Manitoba, 1858-1872*. (Ottawa: National Library of Canada, 1993.)

this article is to rectify this situation and fill a regrettable gap in the narrative of Canadian military history. It will do so by first providing a brief historical sketch of the creation, deployment and changing characteristics of the Dominion garrison in Winnipeg from 1870 to 1877. Afterwards, it will illustrate how this garrison achieved the very same strategic military objectives of British imperial garrisons during the height of the British Empire, namely as a military deterrent to external aggressors, a force to stabilize the frontier for settlement, and in the provision of law and order. Finally, it will illustrate the more nefarious aspects of the militia garrison, particularly the soldiers' racial and culturally-motivated violence against Métis inhabitants of the region. In so doing, this article should shed some light on an unfortunately neglected, yet interesting and important, chapter in Canadian military history.

### **THE RED RIVER EXPEDITION**

The story of the Canadian garrison in Manitoba cannot be considered without reference to the singular event that caused its creation, the Red River Resistance of 1869-70. The resistance is itself an historical event of great importance to Canadian history, too complex to be discussed in detail here. That notwithstanding, a brief survey of how the Resistance led to Canadian annexation is important to contextualize the deployment of the garrison to Manitoba.

The history of the North-West predates European contact by millennia, inhabited as it was by Indigenous peoples for centuries before the first European explorers and traders penetrated the heart of the continent. Europeans arrived in the region in the seventeenth century, and immediately recognized the commercial value of the region's natural resources, particularly its furs. In 1670, the Hudson's Bay Company formed in London and received a royal charter from the British government for exclusive trading authority in the Hudson's Bay watershed, a region known to Europeans as Rupert's Land. The Hudson's Bay Company was joined in the exploitation of the region's natural resources by other trading companies, such as the Montreal-based North-West Company and the XY Company, also known as the New North-West Company. The latter two companies joined forces in 1805, and eventually merged with the Hudson's Bay Company in 1821 after much acrimony and violence. After 1821, the Hudson's Bay

Company became the *de facto*, and to a degree the *de jure*, colonial authority in the North-West.

In addition to fur traders, Thomas Douglas, 5th Earl of Selkirk, also known simply as Lord Selkirk, established a colony of Scottish emigres in the Red River Valley in 1811 on land granted him by the Hudson's Bay Company, near where the city of Winnipeg is currently situated. The Red River Settlement, as it came to be known, was soon the focal point of the entire North-West in the early nineteenth century due to the presence of both the Selkirk settlement and the principal Hudson's Bay Company Trading Post at Fort Garry, both situated near the confluence of the Red and Assiniboine Rivers. Unsurprisingly, the European settlers chose a location that had been a traditional Indigenous meeting and trading location for centuries. By the late 1860s, we find that the area of the Red River Settlement was a sparsely populated yet culturally pluralistic conglomeration of Indigenous peoples, French and English Métis, descendants of Selkirk's Scottish emigres, Canadian immigrants, and Hudson's Bay Company officials and traders.

In the mid-nineteenth century the financial fortunes of the Hudson's Bay Company began to wane, and Canadian interest in acquiring the North-West for exploitation increased. Late nineteenth century explorations and surveys of the North-West revealed that "The Great Lone Land," as it was termed by British soldier and explorer William Butler, may have been in many ways devoid of activity, but it was nonetheless full of potential.<sup>5</sup> Curious about the economic and resource possibilities in the region, in the 1850s the Province of Canada<sup>6</sup> and the British Government each funded their own exploratory expeditions to determine if the North-West was suitable for settlement. The two reports produced mixed reviews. While the British survey was tepid in its assessment of the North-West's potential, the Canadian expedition concluded that the region held enough economic promise that it was indeed worthy of annexation and settlement.<sup>7</sup> It is likely for this reason that when the Fathers

<sup>5</sup> Capt. William F. Butler, *The Great Lone Land: A Narrative of Travel and Adventure in the North-West of America* (London: Sampson, Low, Marston, Low, & Searle, 1873).

<sup>6</sup> Between 1840 and 1867 the Province of Canada included what is now known as the provinces of Ontario and Quebec.

<sup>7</sup> See Henry Youle Hind, *Narrative of the Canadian Red River Exploring Expedition of 1857 and of the Assiniboine and Saskatchewan Exploring Expedition of 1858* (London: Longman, Green, Longman, and Roberts, 1860).

of Confederation met at the 1864 Quebec Conference to discuss possible Confederation, they included in their 72 *Resolutions* a clause specifically targeted at keeping the door to annexation of the North-West open.<sup>8</sup> Additionally, when Confederation was achieved three years later, section 146 of the *British North America Act* provided for the eventual admission of Rupert's Land into Confederation.<sup>9</sup>

When it became apparent that it would be in the best interest of the Honourable Company to relinquish control of Rupert's Land, and that Canada was willing to bring the lands into the Dominion, a transfer to the Crown was eventually arranged for 1 December 1869, with a transfer to the Dominion to occur sometime thereafter. Importantly, no one bothered to consult with the inhabitants who understandably took umbrage at being traded off like chattel. When the Lieutenant-Governor-designate, the Dominion Minister of Public Works and long-time annexation advocate William McDougall, arrived at the Hudson's Bay Post at Pembina near the international border south of Red River on 30 October 1869, he was met there by a representative of the Métis National Committee, an organization formed by Métis in Red River, who bade him not to enter the territory of the North-West without the committee's authorization.<sup>10</sup> This single act put a stop to the peaceful and orderly transferral of the region to the Dominion.

Fort Garry and its stores were seized; a pro-Canada counter-resistance was organized and failed, its adherents imprisoned; and eventually the Provisional Government of Assiniboia with representation from English and French Parishes was assembled with Louis Riel as its President. Thomas Scott, a bellicose Orangeman and staunch pro-Canada advocate who had come to the North West as part of the Dawson Road labour force, was executed by firing squad at Riel's order on 4 March 1870. Scott's execution became the *cassus belli* for many Anglophone Protestants in Ontario and

<sup>8</sup> Early Canadiana Online Website, "Resolution 10" *Report of Resolutions adopted at a Conference of Delegates from the Provinces of Canada, Nova Scotia, and New Brunswick, and the Colonies of Newfoundland and Prince Edward Island, held at the City of Quebec, October 10, 1864, as the Basis of a proposed confederation of those Provinces and Colonies*, [http://eco.canadiana.ca/view/oocihm.g\\_01325/1?r=0&s=1](http://eco.canadiana.ca/view/oocihm.g_01325/1?r=0&s=1), (accessed 14 November 2018).

<sup>9</sup> *British North America Act, 1867*, 30&31 Vict., c. 3 (U.K.)

<sup>10</sup> "Letter from William McDougall to The Honourable Secretary of State for the Provinces" dated 31 October 1869 in *Correspondence Relative to the Recent Disturbances in the Red River Settlement*, (London: William Clowes & Sons, 1870), 4.

amongst the militia volunteers who subsequently deployed to Red River. The resistance eventually ended when representatives of the Provisional Government provided their list of rights and demands to Dominion representatives in Ottawa, resulting in the *Manitoba Act*, which created the Province of Manitoba in May of 1870 and which was later ratified by the Provisional Government at Fort Garry.

Almost from the outset of the resistance, a military response was contemplated. Indeed, contracts for the construction of the boats necessary to convey a force through the rivers and lakes between Thunder Bay and Fort Garry and orders to improve the corduroy road leading North West of the former were issued as early as January 1870.<sup>11</sup> Although initially cool to the idea of suppressing the resistance by force, interest amongst the political leadership in Ottawa in the deployment of a military force increased exponentially once word of Scott's execution arrived in Ontario.<sup>12</sup> Only five days after Scott's execution, on 9 March 1870, the Governor General informed the Secretary of State for the Colonies, Earl Granville, that if troops were to be dispatched, they should begin movement in late April. Later, on 23 March 1870, in an early intimation of the expected role of the force in Manitoba, the Colonial Office informed the War Office that the British General Officer Commanding in British North America, Lieutenant-General James Lindsay, might be required to despatch to the Red River Territory "a detachment not exceeding 200 infantry and a small force of artillery, in company with a larger body of Canadians, *to maintain order in that settlement during the process of its annexation to Canada* [emphasis added]."<sup>13</sup> This observation, coupled with the fact that the War Office was insistent that British regular forces would be withdrawn in the fall of 1871,

<sup>11</sup> Simon Dawson, *Report of the Red River Expedition of 1870*, (Ottawa: Times Printing and Publishing Co., 1871), 6.

<sup>12</sup> "Copy of a Report of a Committee of the Honorable the Privy Council, dated 16th December, 1869," *Correspondence and Papers connected with recent occurrences in the North-West Territories*, (Ottawa: I.B. Taylor, 1870), 143.

<sup>13</sup> Early Canadiana Online Website, "Letter from the Colonial Office to the War Office dated 23 March 1870," *The War Office to Lieutenant-General the Honourable James Lindsay*, <http://eco.canadiana.ca/view/oocihm.g1209/2?r=0&s=1>, (accessed 14 November 2018).

indicates that the use of Canadian Militia as a form of colonial garrison was contemplated even before the force was assembled.<sup>14</sup>

In April, rumours about a possible expedition to the North-West were circulating amongst the ranks of the militia.<sup>15</sup> *Militia General Orders* of 12 May 1870 listed the officers who had been selected to proceed to Red River as part of the Red River Expeditionary Force. This brigade was a combined force composed of a British Regular Battalion, the 1st Battalion 60th Rifles, supported by a troop of British artillery and a small force of British engineers. The Canadian contingent consisted of two *ad-hoc* battalions of Canadian Militia volunteers from Active Militia Corps in Ontario and Quebec, styled the 1st Ontario Rifles and 2nd Quebec Rifles respectively.<sup>16</sup> These two militia battalions became the colonial proto-garrison of the post-Confederation North-West.<sup>17</sup>

A moment should be taken here to investigate the Canadian militia system from which these two battalions derived. The structure of this system was articulated in May 1868 in *An Act respecting the Militia and Defence of the Dominion of Canada* (hereafter the *Militia Act 1868*). The Canadian Militia was organized into two divisions: the Active and Reserve Militia. The former referred to volunteers who joined local militia corps and drilled regularly. In 1870, the Active Militia numbered 40,000 men. The Reserve Militia, conversely, consisted of all the men of the country not exempted from service due to age, profession or family status, who were not members of the Active Militia and did not parade or train. They simply represented the country's population liable to service in a *levée en masse* in the event of emergency, estimated in 1870 to number 675,000 men.<sup>18</sup>

The head and Commander-in-Chief of the Canadian Militia was, and remains to this day, the Governor General while the responsibility

<sup>14</sup> Early Canadiana Online Website, "Letter from the War Office to the Lieutenant General Lindsay dated 24 March 1870," *The War Office to Lieutenant-General the Honourable James Lindsay*, <http://eco.canadiana.ca/view/occihm.g1209/2?r=0&s=1>, (accessed 14 November 2018).

<sup>15</sup> "From Montreal" *The Volunteer Review*, 4, no. 15, (11 April 1870), 230.

<sup>16</sup> Canada, Department of Militia and Defence, *Militia General Orders (17) No. 1*, 12 May 1870.

<sup>17</sup> It should be noted that this was not the first military force sent to Red River to conduct colonial garrison duties. See Stanley's *Toil and Trouble* for a comprehensive history of the British garrisons that spent time in Red River.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 10-11.



to administer the militia fell to Minister of Militia and Defence.<sup>19</sup> The Adjutant-General was the senior military officer responsible to the Minister for the military administration of the Militia.<sup>20</sup> In 1874, the Dominion Government decided to create the position of General Officer Commanding, and in 1875 Briton Sir Edward Selby Smyth was named the General Officer Commanding of the Canadian Militia.<sup>21</sup> Administratively, the militia was divided into military districts. In 1870, nine military districts were in existence and each commanded by a Deputy Adjutant-General with the rank of Lieutenant-Colonel.<sup>22</sup>

Returning now to the Red River Expeditionary Force, volunteers were assembled for a term of service of one year. By mid-May the force mustered at the Crystal Palace in Toronto where they were drilled, received their uniforms and equipment, and underwent medical examinations. On 21 May the expedition's commander, British Colonel Garnet Wolseley, moved to Collingwood on Georgian Bay with a vanguard of British regulars and arranged for the force to be transported by steamship to Thunder Bay. In the weeks following the force's arrival in Thunder Bay, it built a corduroy road from Thunder Bay to Shebandowan Lake and thereafter it executed a herculean task by making its way by canoe and portage to Fort Garry via the Precambrian morass of muskeg, rock, and lakes that is northwestern Ontario. The lead elements of British regulars arrived at Fort Garry in a driving rain on the morning of 24 August 1870. Despite the overtures that the expedition was a "peacekeeping"

<sup>19</sup> Militia Act, 31 Victoria, c. 40 (Canada), s. 1&2 (1868).

<sup>20</sup> "Militia Report 1870" National Defence Directorate of History and Heritage (DHH), 2019, <http://www.cmp-cpm.forces.gc.ca/dhh-dhp/his/rep-rap/doc/mili-rep/Militia-Report-1870.pdf>, (accessed January 25).

<sup>21</sup> Stephen Harris, *Canadian Brass: The Growth of the Canadian Military Profession 1860-1919*. (Ann Arbor: University Microfilms International, 1980), 47. The position of General Officer Commanding remained in effect until 1904 when it was replaced by the new office of Chief of the General Staff.

<sup>22</sup> Militia Act (1868), s. 12. Four in Ontario, three in Quebec, and one each in New Brunswick and Nova Scotia. If large enough, districts were further sub-divided into Brigade Divisions, and they into Regimental Divisions which were in turn sub-divided into Company Divisions. The purpose of the Brigade/Regimental/Company divisions was to maintain an up to date nominal roll of the reserve militia in the district, in order to facilitate the mobilization of the population in the event of an emergency. To maintain the reserve rolls, Regimental Divisions had appointed to them one Lieutenant-Colonel and two Majors, all members of the Reserve Militia, while Company Divisions were appointed a Captain and two sub-officers of the Reserve Militia.

force, and the fact that the resistance had all but ended with the unanimous ratification of the *Manitoba Act* by the Legislative Assembly of Assiniboia three months prior, the 60th Rifles deployed in order of battle. As they advanced on the Fort, they discovered that Louis Riel and his principal lieutenants had, wisely, fled the scene. Two days later, the first elements of the Canadian militia volunteers arrived and settled down to garrison the newest provincial capital in the Dominion. By 2 September, Colonel Wolseley and the British Regulars had departed, en route to Ontario and thence home to the United Kingdom. Command of the Dominion colonial garrison in the North-West devolved to Lieutenant-Colonel Samuel Jarvis, Commanding Officer of the 1st Ontario Rifles.<sup>23</sup>

### SEVEN YEARS IN THE NORTH-WEST

The Canadian garrison in Red River spent the next seven years representing Dominion authority in the newly acquired territory. Throughout its tenure, the size and organization of the Dominion forces in Manitoba waxed and waned, influenced by local security circumstances and, as ever, federal fiscal realities. After its first year of garrison duty, the Adjutant-General in Ottawa, British Colonel Patrick Robertson-Ross, decided to reduce the size of the force in Manitoba, noting the imminent termination of the volunteers' terms of service, and stating in his annual report that "the necessity ... for maintaining, under arms, so large a force in that Province no longer exists (the peaceful solution of all difficulties there having [as expected] been happily realized)."<sup>24</sup>

Consequently, the garrison was reduced in size from 862 to 89 – four officers and eighty-five men, under the command of Major Acheson G. Irvine.<sup>25</sup> In addition to his decision to reduce the force, Colonel Robertson-Ross made a number of other recommendations to the Minister of Militia concerning the defence of Manitoba, the

<sup>23</sup> For a detailed account of the Red River Expedition see G.L. Huyshe, *The Red River Expedition*, (London: Macmillan and Co., 1871). Captain Huyshe was a staff officer to Colonel Garnet Wolseley during the expedition.

<sup>24</sup> "Militia Report, 1870" DND DHH Website, <http://www.cmp-cpm.forces.gc.ca/dhh-dhp/his/rep-rap/doc/mili-rep/Militia-Report-1870.pdf>, 31 (accessed 24 January 2019).

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 38.

most important being his suggestion that a new military district, Number 10, should be created in the Province of Manitoba. His recommendation was subsequently approved by Order-in-Council on 19 January 1871.<sup>26</sup> Despite the early approval of his recommendation, orders from Militia Headquarters to create Military District No. 10 were not published until October 1871.

The eighty-nine militiamen who remained in the garrison were volunteers from the original force who agreed to be retained for at least another six months, with the possibility of extending the terms for a further six months as determined by the Commanding Officer. Those of the original expedition desirous of discharge were offered a grant of land equal to 160 acres in Manitoba, or transportation back to the military district of their enrolment.<sup>27</sup> The discharge began in earnest in May and culminated in June 1871.<sup>28</sup>

As the ranks of the militia defenders in Fort Garry thinned, foreboding martial clouds gathered. In 1871, Ottawa received word of a possible Fenian incursion into Manitoba and preparations for the defence of the new province were undertaken. The Order-in-Council that authorized the creation of Military District No. 10 of January 1871 was finally enforced in *Militia General Orders (23)* of 16 October 1871. In the same order, Lieutenant-Colonel William Osborne Smith, Deputy Adjutant-General of Military District No. 5 (Montreal, Quebec) was designated the new Deputy Adjutant-General of Military District No. 10. Additionally, even though only four months had passed since the reduction of the force in Manitoba, *Militia General Orders (23)* called for volunteers for a second Red River Expeditionary Force to augment the eighty-nine members of the garrison in Fort Garry.<sup>29</sup> Captain Thomas Scott of Perth, Ontario was selected to command this expedition which consisted of 275 officers and men, drawn again from Ontario and Quebec Active Militia corps.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 32.

<sup>27</sup> *Manitoba News Letter*, "Discharge of Volunteers," 27 May 1871, 2.

<sup>28</sup> "Militia Report 1871," National Defence DHH, <http://www.cmp-cpm.forces.gc.ca/dhh-dhp/his/rep-rap/doc/mili-rep/Militia-Report-1871.pdf> (accessed 25 January 2019).

<sup>29</sup> "Militia General Orders (23) dated 16 October 1871" *The Canada Gazette*, 5, no. 17, (21 October 1871): 1.

<sup>30</sup> "Militia Report, 1871" DND DHH Website, <http://www.cmp-cpm.forces.gc.ca/dhh-dhp/his/rep-rap/doc/mili-rep/Militia-Report-1871.pdf>, 40 (accessed 25 January 2019).

The Fenian threat of October 1871 sputtered out quickly when a U.S. Cavalry force rounded up the invading ‘army’ after it pillaged the Hudson’s Bay Company Fort at Pembina. The Second Red River Expedition arrived on 18 November, long after the Fenian threat had ended.<sup>31</sup> Ironically, the whole of the officers of the Second Expedition, with the exception of one, were veterans of the First Expedition who had been discharged and sent home not long before.<sup>32</sup> The Second Expedition merged with the remnants of the First and formed what thereafter was referred to as the Provisional Battalion of Infantry.<sup>33</sup>

In the spring of 1872, the terms of service for the First Red River Expedition men who had stayed on in Fort Garry and those who had come out in the Second Red River Expedition were nearing an end. Whereas the year previous the Adjutant-General had been anxious to reduce the size of the garrison in Manitoba, the recent Fenian unpleasantness convinced Robertson-Ross to authorize Osborne Smith to discharge the men whose terms of service were expiring, but only insofar as he could maintain the size of the force in Manitoba through local recruitment. Osborne Smith was also informed that, should he be unable to do so, reinforcements from the eastern provinces may be required.<sup>34</sup>

There was an insufficient number of local recruits in Manitoba willing to join the ranks of the volunteers. Consequently, on 6 September 1872, the Adjutant-General once again issued orders to the military districts to recruit volunteers for service in Manitoba. Two hundred more volunteers were sought from Active Militia corps

<sup>31</sup> *Manitoba Liberal*, “Arrival of the Troops” 19 November 1871, 3; Justus Griffin, *From Toronto to Fort Garry. An account of the Second Expedition to Red River. Diary of a Private Solider*, (Hamilton: Evening Times, 1893), 53.

<sup>32</sup> “Militia Report, 1871” DND DHH Website, <http://www.cmp-cpm.forces.gc.ca/dhh-dhp/his/rep-rap/doc/mili-rep/Militia-Report-1871.pdf>, 40 (accessed 25 January 2019).

<sup>33</sup> The original name was the Provisional Battalion of Rifles, but was renamed to the Provisional Battalion of Infantry.

<sup>34</sup> Library and Archives Canada (LAC), Correspondence of the General Officer Commanding (GOC) of the Canadian Militia and his predecessor, the Adjutant General, RG 9, “Correspondence from the Adjutant General of Militia to the Deputy Adjutant General of Military District No. 10,” 10 March 1872, RG 9, Series II B1, Volume 518.

in Ontario and Quebec.<sup>35</sup> Additionally, District 7 (Quebec City) was tasked to provide one officer, one sergeant and twenty-four Gunners from B Battery School of Gunnery at the Citadel.<sup>36</sup> In the fall of 1872, this draft of men, the Third Red River Expeditionary Force, was dispatched to Fort Garry and arrived on 23 October. The Provisional Battalion of Infantry and the composite Artillery Battery became known, collectively, as the Dominion Forces on Service in Manitoba.<sup>37</sup> In a departure from previous terms of service, which were usually six months of enrolment with a liability for a further six months at the discretion of the Commanding Officer, this iteration of the terms of service were extended to one year with a liability for a further period of service not exceeding two years. The elongated terms of service are indicative of the Dominion Government's inclination to maintain a long-term garrison in Fort Garry.<sup>38</sup>

In May of 1873, mere months after the arrival of the third expedition, Militia Headquarters in Ottawa advertised for a further 156 volunteers to proceed to Manitoba. The plans for this, the Fourth Red River Expedition, coming hard on the heels of the arrival of the Third Red River Expedition was doubtless related to the fear of an Indigenous uprising that was pervasive in Manitoba in the spring of 1873, and a question to which we will return to later. Whereas previous volunteers were drawn from Ontario and Quebec Active Militia corps, this draft of replacements came from the Maritime Provinces – fifty men each from New Brunswick and Nova Scotia. Additionally, fifty-six more gunners split between B Battery and its sister organization, A Battery School of Gunnery in Kingston, Ontario, were dispatched

<sup>35</sup> LAC, Correspondence of the General Officer Commanding (GOC) of the Canadian Militia and his predecessor, the Adjutant General, RG 9, "Correspondence from Adjutant General of Militia to all Deputy Adjutant Generals" 6 September 1872, Series II B1, Volume 518. The quotas for the various districts were as follows: District 1 (London) 25; District 2 (Toronto) 35; District 3 (Kingston) 20; District 4 (Ottawa) 20; Districts 5 and 6 (Montreal and St. Jean) 66; and District 7 (Quebec City) 34.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> Public Archives Manitoba, *Journal of the Provisional Battalion of Rifles at Fort Garry, 1871* as found in James Taylor Collection, MG6, B5. The journal erroneously only refers to the 184 volunteers who were destined to join the Provisional Battalion of Rifles, and leaves out the 24 artillerymen from B Battery who formed the Dominion Artillery on Service in Manitoba.

<sup>38</sup> LAC, Correspondence of the General Officer Commanding (GOC) of the Canadian Militia and his predecessor, the Adjutant General, RG 9, "Correspondence from Adjutant General of Militia to all Deputy Adjutant Generals" 6 September 1872, Series II B1, Volume 518.

to bolster the militia fire power in Winnipeg. The Fourth Expedition arrived in July 1873.

In 1874 the Active Militia underwent a nation-wide reduction from 40,000 to 30,000 which had a significant impact on the militia in Manitoba. In the fall of 1874, Militia Headquarters ordered Lieutenant-Colonel Osborne Smith to reduce the size of the Dominion Forces in Manitoba. The Militia, having for four years provided deterrence and enforced law and order in the North-West, were replaced. The North-West Mounted Police, which had been created the year previous in 1873, assumed the preponderance of these duties.<sup>39</sup>

Osborne Smith was authorized to offer discharging soldiers a gratuity of two months' pay and a sum of money equivalent to the cost of transport to the volunteer's original Military District. This led to a doubling of the number of men seeking discharge, and Osborne Smith was compelled to prioritize them based on their length of service and conduct.<sup>40</sup> In his annual reports for the District in 1873 and 1874, Osborne Smith reported that the number of Dominion Forces under his command was reduced from 344 to 200 personnel.<sup>41</sup>

While many of the duties of the Militia may have been taken over by the Mounties, the military force did not disappear overnight. On the contrary, the size and organization of the militia in Manitoba remained consistent for the next three years, with only slight variations in the number of men enrolled until June 1876 when Militia Headquarters ordered another reduction in size of the Dominion Forces in Manitoba. Although political leaders had hoped that the Militia volunteers would settle in Manitoba and thus provide a cohort of experienced soldiers to be called upon in emergencies, less than ten percent of the men released in 1876 chose to remain in the area.<sup>42</sup> The majority took their land warrants home with them upon discharge, hoping to realize a greater profit in southern Ontario, given that

<sup>39</sup> *Manitoba Free Press*, "Military Here to Be Reduced," 4 November 1874, 1.

<sup>40</sup> "Militia Report 1874," DND DHH Website, <http://www.cmp-cpm.forces.gc.ca/dhh-dhp/his/rep-rap/doc/mili-rep/Militia-Report-1874.pdf>, 51 (accessed 25 January 2019).

<sup>41</sup> "Militia Report 1873," DND DHH Website, , <http://www.cmp-cpm.forces.gc.ca/dhh-dhp/his/rep-rap/doc/mili-rep/Militia-Report-1873.pdf>, (accessed 25 January 2019) and "Militia Report 1874" DND DHH Website, accessed 25 January 2019, <http://www.cmp-cpm.forces.gc.ca/dhh-dhp/his/rep-rap/doc/mili-rep/Militia-Report-1874.pdf>.

<sup>42</sup> *Manitoba Free Press*, "Dominion Forces in the North-West," 20 July 1876, 4.

speculators in Manitoba were offering much lower prices for the land warrants.<sup>43</sup>

The 1876 reductions were the initial death throes of the colonial garrison in Manitoba. In May of 1877 the editors of the *Manitoba Free Press* lamented that “they [are] sorry to learn there is some foundation for the rumour which prevailed yesterday that the garrison of Canadian regular militia hitherto maintained here, and which has been looked upon as one of the institutions of the place, is likely to be abolished in the course of a few weeks.”<sup>44</sup> There was surprisingly little delay between the official announcement of the disbandment of the regular garrison in May and the act itself. In August 1877, almost seven years to the day that the Canadian Militia arrived in Fort Garry, the Dominion’s colonial garrison in Manitoba was disbanded.

### THE DOMINION’S STRATEGIC TOOL IN THE NORTH-WEST

What was the impetus for the Dominion Government to keep this rather robust force on its colonial frontier? The logistical demands alone were a sufficient argument to dismiss the force at an early date. The force was isolated on the margins of colonized territory with no reliable line of communication between the political, popular, and economic power base of central Canada. As one settler put it, Fort Garry sat beyond the *Ultima Thule* of the civilized world.<sup>45</sup> What role did this colonial outpost play?

A necessary precondition to answer that question is to understand the Dominion of Canada’s strategic intent in the North-West. In very simple terms, this intent was articulated in the joint address of 17 December 1867 by the Canadian House of Commons and Senate sent to Queen Victoria. In it, the Canadian political leaders expressed their arguments for the joining of the Dominion with Rupert’s Land. The proffered list of benefits to be derived from such a transfer is lengthy, but throughout there is a common theme of pan-Imperial benefit. For example, the Canadian government suggested that annexation would “promote the prosperity of the Canadian people, and conduce to the advantage of the whole Empire ... if [Canada’s authority] were

<sup>43</sup> *Manitoba Free Press*, ‘Local and Provincial’, 4 August 1877, 4.

<sup>44</sup> *Manitoba Free Press*, “Expected Abolition of the Garrison,” 26 May 1877, 4.

<sup>45</sup> *Manitoba Free Press*, “Music Hath Charms” 19 August 1876, 5.

extended westward to the Pacific Ocean.” Additionally, they argued that the life of the British subjects living therein would be “materially enhanced by the formation therein of political institutions bearing analogy, as far as circumstances will admit, to those which exist in the several Provinces of this Dominion.”<sup>46</sup> This last observation seems a thinly veiled reference to the threat of American republicanism and the inherent benefits of British constitutional monarchy. In short, the strategic intent of the Dominion of Canada was to annex to the North-West for its exploitation, and to preserve and enhance the British Empire with a trans-continental Dominion of Canada as a constituent element thereof. With these strategic goals as a foundation, this article now turns to the question of how the Dominion Government used this military force to achieve the three military objectives of colonial garrisons articulated by Peter Burroughs: pre-empting foreign aggression, stabilizing the frontier, and providing law and order.

#### PRE-EMPTING FOREIGN AGGRESSION

A threat to the Canadian annexation of the North-West, at least as many contemporary Canadians saw it, was the ever-expanding United States, although in the end this threat was more bark than bite. American interest in annexing British North America was a constant theme from the end of the Revolutionary War.<sup>47</sup> By the mid-nineteenth century, American and British/Canadian westward expansion resulted in their interests colliding to the west of the Great Lakes.

American influence grew in the latter half of the nineteenth century as settlement of the American West increased. For example, in 1849 the territory of Minnesota was home to only 5,000 people. By

<sup>46</sup> “Joint Address to Her Majesty the Queen from the Senate and House of Commons of Canada,” *Copy and Extracts of Correspondence between the Colonial Office, the Government of the Canadian Dominion, and the Hudson’s Bay Company, relating to the Surrender of Rupert’s Land by the Hudson’s Bay Company, and for the Admission Thereof into the Dominion of Canada*, (London: HM Stationary Office, 1869), 1-2.

<sup>47</sup> Russell W. Fridley, “When Minnesota Coveted Canada” in *Minnesota History*, 41 (2), 76-79.



1860 that number had grown to 172,000.<sup>48</sup> Additionally, immigration from the western regions of the United States into the North-West increased substantially and many American settlers openly agitated for annexation by the United States.<sup>49</sup> These influential changes in both the economic and demographic make-up of the North-West and the subsequent burgeoning influence of Minnesota and the American West threatened to pull the North-West into the American Republic.

Fortunately for Canada, the Civil War distracted American interest in the North-West, if only for a few years. When the war ended, tepid American interest in annexation resumed, emanating primarily from Minnesota. One of the most outspoken post-Civil War proponents of American expansion was Minnesota Senator Alexander Ramsey. To Senator Ramsey, the Red River Settlement was a spring-board to the North-West, the resources of which he envisioned providing a massive economic boon to his state.<sup>50</sup> Senator Ramsey was not alone in his covetous thinking. While Ramsey was the dominant expansionist force in Minnesota, Charles Sumner, the chair of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, was his equal in Washington. Sumner was extremely vocal in his support of the removal of British authority from North America.<sup>51</sup> To illustrate, when the United States purchased Alaska in 1867, Sumner urged ratification of the purchase as he felt it was a crucial step to occupation of the whole of the North American continent.<sup>52</sup>

While a small group of American policy makers were supportive of annexation, the movement lacked broad political support. With the exception of peak periods of animosity, such as the War of 1812, Canada never figured prominently in the minds of the majority of American political leaders. When it did, the consensus was that time and inertia would inevitably draw Canada into the Republic.<sup>53</sup> However, if interest in American expansion into British North

<sup>48</sup> George F.G. Stanley, *The Birth of Western Canada, A History of the Riel Rebellions* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1960), 24.

<sup>49</sup> Arthur S. Morton, *A History of the Canadian West to 1870-71: Being a History of Rupert's Land (the Hudson's Bay Company's Territory) and of the North-West Territory (including the Pacific Slope)*, (London: T. Nelson & Sons, 1939), 854.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 696.

<sup>51</sup> Charles P. Stacey, *Canada and the Age of Conflict: a History of Canadian External Policies*, vol. 1, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1989), 29.

<sup>52</sup> David Orchard, *The Fight for Canada: Four Centuries of Resistance to American Expansionism* (Westmount: Robert Davies Multimedia Pub., 1999), 49.

<sup>53</sup> Stacey, *Canada and the Age of Conflict*, 29

America was lukewarm in the United States, the same could not be said of the angst amongst Canadian political leaders, whose fear of the Yankee Bogeyman was a persistent theme. Indeed, it seems there was more fear of American expansion in Canada than there was appetite for annexation in America.

That said, Canada's fears were not wholly without merit. American land purchases, annexations, and outright conquests in Texas, Mexico, and Alaska demonstrated the voracious appetite of American expansionism. Likewise, a series of Anglo-American treaties, such as the 1842 Weber-Ashburton Treaty and later the 1848 Oregon Treaty, revealed Great Britain's willingness to appease American interests by ceding future Canadian territory in order to avoid potential conflict.<sup>54</sup> Additionally, the history of American incursions into Canada officially or by non-state actors in the Revolutionary War, the War of 1812, and during the Fenian invasions all contributed to a general sense of unease amongst Canadians about American intentions in British North America.

This mindset explains why the Red River Resistance of 1869-1870 caused fits of concern amongst Canadian political leaders who worried the United States could exploit the situation to their benefit. Reports from Fort Garry that the resistance was taking a pro-American bias increased the government's appetite for dispatching an expeditionary force. Considering that Canada's military power was less than impressive, and that the United States military, although demobilized after the Civil War, was large, well-armed, and battle-hardened, British involvement was considered a necessity for any sort of legitimate dissuasive effect to be realized.<sup>55</sup> Sir John A. Macdonald stated this outright in a letter to the Governor General on 26 January 1870, writing that "it is of great importance that some of the force should be Regular Troops as it will convince the United States Government and people that Her Majesty's Government has no intention of abandoning this continent."<sup>56</sup> Thus, from a military perspective, a joint Anglo-Canadian expedition was necessary for the realization of Canadian strategic goals, not only to potentially subdue the insurgents, but also to pre-empt the danger of American

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>55</sup> Stanley, *Toil and Trouble*, 74.

<sup>56</sup> Extract from a letter of Sir John A. Macdonald, 26 January 1870, as quoted in Stanley, *The Birth of Western Canada*, 129.

interference.<sup>57</sup> Fruitless efforts from the Dominion Government to convince the British to keep a regular garrison in Fort Garry meant that the only military deterrent available was a Canadian militia force.

While the strength and quality of the garrison in Fort Garry was insufficient to defeat any concerted American invasion, it nonetheless existed as an overt symbol of Dominion authority. Moreover, the maintenance of a Dominion garrison in Fort Garry continued the British practice of deploying forces to the region to deter American expansion. In 1846, in the face of increasing American expansionism in the west, the Imperial Government in London had deployed a force of 347 soldiers of the 6th Regiment of Foot, the Royal Warwickshires, to garrison the Lower Fort, near present day Selkirk, Manitoba.<sup>58</sup> Again in 1856, in response to the arrival of US Cavalry near Pembina, the Imperial Government dispatched 120 soldiers from the Royal Canadian Rifles in St. John's to Fort Garry via Hudson's Bay. The Rifles remained until 1861.<sup>59</sup>

Official American expansionism was not the only threat causing consternation amongst the Canadian political leadership. Throughout the 1870s and 80s there remained a pervasive fear of military incursions by Fenians in both Manitoba and in Ottawa. Rumours of Fenian hordes were rife enough in January 1872 that, mere months after the initial abortive invasion of Manitoba, several letters to the editor of the *Manitoba Liberal* were penned to express concern. One writer, going by the pseudonym "Correspondent" asked "how long may we command the services of the brave Volunteers who now protect us?" "In a short time their term of service will expire," he continued, "and we will be in as piteous a condition as ever, looking to another [US Cavalry officer] Colonel Wheaton for protection – hoping and trembling."<sup>60</sup> "Correspondent" went on to suggest the appropriate size and constitution of a volunteer militia for the province, with a

<sup>57</sup> Charles P. Stacey, "The Military Aspect of Canada's Winning of the West, 1870-1885," *The Canadian Historical Review* 21, 1 (1940), 6-7.

<sup>58</sup> Frits Pannekoek *A Snug Little Flock: The Social Origins of the Riel Resistance of 1869-70*, (Winnipeg: Watson and Dwyer, 1991), 27.

<sup>59</sup> "The Royal Canadian Rifles at Fort Garry 1857-1861" in *History of the Royal Canadian Rifle Regiment*, Department of National Defence Directorate of History and Heritage Archives, 504.013 (D2), Ottawa, Ontario; George F. G. Stanley, *Toil and Trouble. Military Expeditions to Red River*, (Toronto: Dundurn Press, 1989), 19-52.

<sup>60</sup> *Manitoba Liberal*, "Correspondence" 13 January 1872, 1.

focus on a cavalry force composed of “sixty or seventy dashing young fellows” capable of rapidly deploying to meet interlopers from the south and thus “save our families from destruction by ragamuffin bands, or, what would still be more terrible, the desecrating hand of the religious fanatic.”<sup>61</sup> Like their imperial predecessors, the Canadian militia volunteers served as a physical manifestation of authority in colonial territory, even if a predominantly symbolic one, to both state and non-state external aggressors.

#### STABILIZING FRONTIERS

In 1872 Robertson-Ross undertook a tour and inspection of the North-West of the country at a time when the Dominion Government was considering the practicality of maintaining the Provisional Battalion in Fort Garry. In his report to the Minister of Militia he pointedly observed that,

No doubt whatever exists in my mind as to the propriety of [maintaining a force in Manitoba], in view of the presence of many bands of Indians, considering the primitive state of the Province, the strong political party feeling which exists, and the fact that on both sides of the International Boundary Line restless and reckless characters among both white men and Indians abound.<sup>62</sup>

Ross’ observations epitomize the security concerns amongst the local and federal political leadership and newly-settled citizenry of Manitoba from internal political strife, criminals and ne’er-do-wells traversing the plains, and the perceived threat of Indigenous bands. Security was thus a principal concern for those who were in the process of installing a colonial footprint in the North-West.

Unfortunately, the very presence of Indigenous bands caused disquiet amongst settlers and could dissuade immigrants, anathema to the strategic goals of the Dominion in the North-West. Take, for example, the concern that was raised in the winter and spring of 1873 in the western reaches of the province. Intelligence was received, and

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> Colonel Robertson-Ross, Canada, Department of Militia and Defence, *Militia Report 1872*, (Ottawa: LB Taylor, 1873), cxi.

confirmed by an emissary from the Indian Department, that a band of Sioux on the Little Missouri River led by a man named Little Knife intended to raid some part of the province in the spring. The concern was most acute in what is now western Manitoba. Archibald Macdonald, the chief trader at the Hudson's Bay Post in Fort Ellice, wrote to Donald A. Smith, Member of Parliament and Governor of the Hudson's Bay Company, in January 1873 suggesting that "it will be for the benefit of both the Company and the Government that troops be sent up here before the end of March."<sup>63</sup> Additionally, in March of 1873, the people of Palestine, now known as Gladstone, sent a petition to Lieutenant Governor Morris in which they expressed concern at the aforementioned intelligence and pleaded with Morris to furnish protection, in the form of a hundred soldiers, in order to "protect our settlement from being ravaged." The anonymous author went on to lament "I do not understand the policy of the present Dominion Government in regard to immigration, *but I do not think many immigrants will be induced to go farther west unless they can see some chance of their lives and property being protected* [emphasis added]."<sup>64</sup>

Some contemporaries suggested that the rumours of Indigenous bands being on the war path were created by the Hudson's Bay Company to prompt the Dominion Government to deploy soldiers to reassure the settlers – soldiers who would require sustenance from the only source of provisions in the region, the Hudson's Bay Company. The *Free Press*, for example, considered the threat of an Indigenous uprising overblown, even referring to the situation in print as the "Indian Humbug." The editors reported that "the alarm at Ottawa is something most remarkable. Our telegraphic dispatches indicate that the Lieut. Governor has started on his return to this country, in anticipation of Indian troubles; and, besides, that the military force in this country is to be reinforced."<sup>65</sup> (Referring to the fourth Red River Expedition that was in the process of organizing.)

While the editors at the *Free Press* may have dismissed the fears of Indigenous violence as a contrivance, their colleagues at the

<sup>63</sup> "Extract of a letter from Archibald McDonald, Esq., Chief Trader, addressed to D.A. Smith, dated 11 February 1873, from Fort Ellice" in *Annual Report on Indian Affairs for the year ending June 20 1872*, Canada Sessional Papers, Volume 5, 1st Session, 17.

<sup>64</sup> *Manitoba Free Press*, "Sioux Indians," 15 March 1873, 5.

<sup>65</sup> *Manitoba Free Press*, "The Indian Humbug" 3 May 1873, 5.

*Manitoban and North-West Herald* were more than happy to stoke the fires. Two weeks after the *Free Press* printed their column on the “Indian Humbug,” the *Herald* published an editorial that listed the size of U.S. forces garrisoning the west and asked,

who will say that this array and distribution of force is unnecessary in the presence of 60,000 Indians who are impressed with the belief that the advancing settlements of whites will disperse the herds of buffalo and antelope and appropriate their hunting grounds? With such a prospect it is folly not to expect that collisions will not occur, and without great prudence and precaution, the inevitable antagonism may lead to indescribable horrors of Indian massacre.<sup>66</sup>

The threat of Indigenous violence—real or perceived—was sufficient to justify the dispatch of fifty militiamen to Fort Ellice to reassure the local population.<sup>67</sup> On 30 April 1873, Robertson-Ross informed Donald A. Smith that he had been instructed by the government to dispatch a military force to Fort Ellice with as little delay as possible, and that he was authorized to communicate with the Company to expedite matters.<sup>68</sup> The call for volunteers for a Fourth Red River Expedition was made the very next month in May 1873, and the expedition arrived in July of that year.

Clashes with Indigenous peoples on both sides of the border exacerbated the concerns of the settlers in Manitoba. Word of the defeat of General Terry’s United States Army column during the Great Sioux War of 1876, which included the 7th Cavalry under Colonel George Custer immortalized by their defeat at Little Big Horn, reached Winnipeg at approximately the same time as news of the reduction of the Dominion Forces in Winnipeg became public knowledge.<sup>69</sup> Such an unhappy confluence of events led the editors of the *Free Press* to observe that

<sup>66</sup> *Manitoba and Northwest Herald*, “Indian Hostilities,” 17 May 1873, 2.

<sup>67</sup> *Manitoba Free Press*, “The Indian Humbug” 3 May 1873, 5.

<sup>68</sup> LAC, Correspondence of the General Officer Commanding of the Canadian Militia and His Predecessor the Adjutant General, RG 9, Correspondence from the Adjutant General of Militia to Donald A. Smith, MP, 30 April 1873, Series II B 1, Vol. 543.

<sup>69</sup> The Great Sioux War was an attempt by the US Government to pacify the Indigenous tribes of the norther mid-west, specifically the Black Hills region of modern South Dakota and Wyoming.

the disaster which has befallen Gen. Terry's expedition against the rebellious Sioux has engendered a doubt as to the possibility of the U.S. Government now accomplishing their subjugation during the present season, and caused a feeling of some anxiety to be exhibited in Canada as to the degree in which the North-West Territories may be affected by the course of future events. ... To deal with these armed savages, or to be prepared to deal with them, it is absolutely necessary that the strength of the Dominion forces in the North-West should be augmented.<sup>70</sup>

Consternations amongst the local population and settlers about Indigenous violence, largely overblown and based in racist stereotypes, nonetheless demanded the presence of a military garrison to provide security in the frontier region. The Canadian militia volunteers provided a sense of security and helped to set the conditions for European settlement in the region. As the area stabilized, at least from the perspective of the European colonizers, the security role was taken up by the North-West Mounted Police in 1873, with local Active Militia Corps being kept on hand for emergencies. Prior to the arrival of the Mounted Police, however, it was the militia garrison that ensured law and order in an unruly frontier region.

#### LAW AND ORDER

While the militia stood as a military deterrent to foreign interlopers and a reassuring agent to settlers, they were far more active as an agent in aid of the civil power. Aid to Civil Power is a specific type of mission performed by military forces in support of local authorities for the maintenance of peace, order, and good government. It is an enduring element of the Canadian national mythos that the Canadian North-West was settled in an orderly and peaceful manner, a view deliberately at odds with the more violent experience in the United States. To an extent this is true, although lamentably the credit for the orderly settlement of the Canadian North-West is too often attributed solely to the North-West Mounted Police. Notwithstanding the very important role the Mounties played in the maintenance of law and order, the role played by the Dominion Forces on Service in Manitoba in establishing a lawful, orderly, and settler-friendly

<sup>70</sup> *Winnipeg Free Press*, "Dominion Forces in the North-West," 17 July 1876, 2.

society is little known. Like other regions of Canada, the militia was an embryonic police and civil defence force in the North-West that set the conditions for British settlement and growth.

The authority for local militia forces to act in such measure was articulated in the *Militia Act 1868* thusly:

The Active Militia shall be liable to be called out with their arms and ammunition in aid of the Civil Power in case of riot or other emergency requiring such services. ... The Officers and men, when so called out, shall ... be special constables, and shall be considered to act as such so long as they remain so called out.<sup>71</sup>

Using militiamen to maintain law and order was commonplace in the latter half of the nineteenth century. Militia corps were, in many corners of the Dominion, the only public security force available to civic leadership. Military historian Desmond Morton has chronicled the use of the militia in aid to the civil power. Reflecting on the diverse number of threats to public order, Morton observed that “in the absence of effective local or provincial police forces, the militia were frequently the only available support for magistrates confronted by rioting Orangemen or defiant strikers.”<sup>72</sup> Today, the use of the Canadian military in a law enforcement role is a rarity, but it was considered a routine task for the militiamen of the nineteenth century. Throughout Canada, both pre- and post-Confederation, the military, in the form of British regulars or, later, Canadian militia, was used to assist in maintaining social order. Post-Confederation Manitoba was no exception.

The question of maintaining law and order in the region was given serious thought prior to the departure of the expedition. In a letter to the Deputy Minister of Militia dated 19 April 1870, Lieutenant-General Lindsay mentioned that fifty men from Eastern Canada were to be enrolled for a new mounted police force in Manitoba, with a goal of recruiting an additional 150 men in Manitoba once the

<sup>71</sup> An Act respecting the Militia and Defence of the Dominion of Canada. 1868, 31 Victoria, c. 40.

<sup>72</sup> Desmond Morton, “Aid to the Civil Power: The Canadian Militia in Support of Social Order, 1867-1914,” *The Canadian Historical Review* 51 4 (December 1970), 407.



transfer to Canadian authority was complete.<sup>73</sup> This police force, however, was to be completely separate from the military expedition, and under the command of a Captain Cameron, late of the Royal Artillery, who accompanied the Lieutenant Governor-designate, William McDougall, to the North-West.<sup>74</sup> The planned police force never materialized and necessitated the use of the militia to fill the void.

The use of the militia as a tool to ensure peace, order, and good government began early in the history of Manitoba. The new province was a rough country exacerbated by ubiquitous ethno-racial tensions. British Army officer Captain George L. Huyshe, who chronicled his participation in the Wolseley Expedition in his book, *The Red River Expedition*, recorded that during the short time that the British regulars were in Fort Garry, “the place seemed turned into a very Pandemonium – Indians, half-breeds, and whites, in all stages of intoxication, fighting and quarreling in the streets with drawn knives”<sup>75</sup> A productive society could not be built on so shaky a foundation.

This state of affairs is unsurprising when one considers that when the Wolseley Expedition arrived in Fort Garry, it happened upon a society in which law enforcement was almost non-existent. Indeed, Alexander Begg and Walter Nursey recount in their history *Ten Years in Winnipeg* that upon the arrival of the Wolseley Expedition, Winnipeg had only a single police officer.<sup>76</sup> Consequently, the militia became agents of social order far more than bulwarks of national defence.<sup>77</sup>

Politically-inspired violence often led to the employment of the militia in aid of the civil power. One of the first instances of the use of the Militia in such a manner came during the provincial elections of

<sup>73</sup> James Lindsay, “Letter from Lieutenant-General James Lindsay to the Deputy Minister of Militia” dated 19 April 1870, Canadiana Online, <http://online.canadiana.ca/view/occihm.g1209/2?r=0&s=1>, 12 (accessed 29 January 2019).

<sup>74</sup> James Lindsay, “Letter from Lieutenant-General the Honourable James Lindsay to His Excellency the Governor General” Canadiana Online, <http://online.canadiana.ca/view/occihm.g1209/2?r=0&s=1>, 19 (accessed 29 January 2019).

<sup>75</sup> Huyshe, *The Red River Expedition*, 222.

<sup>76</sup> Alexander Begg and Walter Nursey, *Ten years in Winnipeg. A narration of the principal events in the history of the city of Winnipeg from the year A.D. 1870 to the year A.D. 1879, inclusive*, (Winnipeg: Times Printing and Publishing House, 1879), 15.

<sup>77</sup> Morton, “Aid to the Civil Power,” 407.

19 September 1872 when a mob assembled in Winnipeg, worked into fervour by inflammatory rhetoric from the hustings. A requisition signed by three magistrates for a force of seventy-five soldiers was immediately filled by the Acting Deputy Adjutant-General Major Irvine, Osborne Smith being absent on leave in Eastern Canada. The mob grew violent and was intent on burning the Dominion Savings Bank to the ground, and while they were able to smash a few windows, the militia guard arrived in time to prevent the mob from setting the bank alight. Unfortunately, local printing shops, particularly those supportive of the Provisional Government of Louis Riel, did not fare so well and many were severely damaged, their printers smashed. As the mob became emboldened by drink, another attempt was made to assault the Dominion Savings Bank where a small guard was maintained by the militia after the initial confrontation earlier in the day. Happily, the battalion diarist recorded, in response to the advancing mob the orders “*Guard turn out and fix bayonets* proved too great a barrier [emphasis added].”<sup>78</sup> The mob retreated.

In 1873 the provincial legislature was prorogued in disarray after an attempt to incorporate the City of Winnipeg was stymied by what some considered the interference of the Hudson’s Bay Company. It was presumed amongst the aggrieved that the Company feared the impact of municipal taxes that would accompany incorporation. The ill-will was substantial enough that the Speaker of the Legislature, Dr. Bird, was “decoyed from his residence on the pretence of being called to see a patient, and when near Point Douglas he was taken forcibly from his cutter, and a pail of hot tar thrown over his face, head and shoulders.”<sup>79</sup> In response to this and in order to “frustrate the carrying into execution threats freely circulated by citizens to set fire to the buildings” the Provisional Battalion was requested to post a guard of fourteen soldiers on the Parliament Buildings, while another force of soldiers was maintained at the ready in Fort Garry, should they be required at short notice.<sup>80</sup>

Later in 1873, the militia was requested to send a detachment of soldiers to White Horse Plains, which lays thirty kilometers west of Winnipeg, where a quizzical confrontation between Mennonites,

<sup>78</sup> *Journal of the Provisional Battalion of Rifles at Fort Garry, 1871.*

<sup>79</sup> Begg and Nursey, *Ten Years in Winnipeg*, 80.

<sup>80</sup> Osborne-Smith, *Militia Report 1873*, (Ottawa: LB Taylor, 1874), 36; *Journal of the Provisional Battalion of Rifles at Fort Garry, 1871.*

teamsters, and Métis had turned violent. As the story is related in the *Free Press*, a group of Mennonites were traveling in carts across the prairie when a Métis horseman passed nearby and struck one of the horses. In retaliation, one of the teamsters driving the cart struck the Métis with his whip. Tempers flared, and the Métis returned with a pistol but was fortunately pre-empted from violence by some of his colleagues. Nonetheless, the Mennonites and their teamsters stopped in at a local hotel for respite. Shortly thereafter the same Métis gentleman arrived, and the argument began anew, after which the same teamster roughed up the Métis. This did not aid in calming the situation, and soon a large group of the Métis gentleman's colleagues arrived at the hotel, armed and in a foul mood. Tempers flared to the point that the pacifistic Mennonites holed themselves up on the second floor of the hotel, and a request was expedited to Fort Garry for assistance. A detachment of fifty soldiers was dispatched from Fort Garry, accompanied by the Judge of the Queen's Bench and the Attorney General of the Province, to arrest the Métis.<sup>81</sup> The soldiers arrested a party of five Métis and marched them back to prison while escorting the Mennonites into Winnipeg.

Protecting the local prison became a routine task for the militia on station in Winnipeg. In July of 1873, Osborne Smith furnished another force of men to retain two Americans, Messrs. Hoy and Keegan, who had been incarcerated and were awaiting trial on serious criminal charges, namely the kidnapping of a notorious character named "Gordon." There was some concern about flight of the accused, or rescue by their confederates, necessitating the militia guard.<sup>82</sup> Later, Ambrose Lepine, alleged murderer of Thomas Scott during the era of the Provisional Government of Assiniboia under Louis Riel, was also incarcerated in Fort Garry and the militia were asked to provide a force to both retain him in custody and prevent locals from taking the law into their own hands. The incident is recorded in the Battalion's *Journal* thusly: "On one or two occasions threats were made in the presence of the guard to lynch the prisoner, the mob displaying ropes, but cold steel had a wonderful effect in dispersing the crowd, as the guard merely fixed swords and remained steady."<sup>83</sup>

<sup>81</sup> *Manitoba Free Press*, 'Arrests by the Military', 5 July 1873, 5; *Journal of the Provisional Battalion of Rifles at Fort Garry, 1871*.

<sup>82</sup> Osborne-Smith, *Militia Report 1873*, (Ottawa: LB Taylor, 1874), 36.

<sup>83</sup> *Journal of the Provisional Battalion of Rifles in Fort Garry, 1871*.

While the Militia provided a formed body of troops to conduct policing duties, one must not overlook the first police force in Winnipeg was drawn exclusively from the ranks of the Militia garrison. Captain Villiers of the Quebec Rifles organized the first police force that consisted of nineteen soldiers of the Militia. Begg and Nursey recorded that “almost every day [Villiers] could be seen drilling his recruits in front of the Davis House.”<sup>84</sup> Villiers was succeeded by another volunteer from the Militia, Louis Fasse de Plainval who even went to the lengths of travelling to Montreal to interview Police Force authorities there and learn practices that might work well in Winnipeg.<sup>85</sup> Additionally, Captain Edward Armstrong, who came to Fort Garry as the Quarter Master of the 1st Ontario Rifles and later served as the Quarter Master of the Provisional Battalion, was appointed as Sherriff of the Province of Manitoba in 1872, a post he held until 1876.<sup>86</sup>

When the North-West Mounted Police was formed in 1873, unsurprisingly former Militia garrison men such as Major A.G. Irvine and Captain Herchmer were to be found in its ranks.<sup>87</sup> Moreover, Osborne Smith was named the first, albeit temporary, Commandant of the force and did much of the early planning and organization to ensure the later success of the Mounties.<sup>88</sup>

### **MEN BEHAVING BADLY**

Inasmuch as the Militia garrison provided a force for the establishment of law and order, in many ways it was also, ironically, a key source of the violence and crime that pervaded early Winnipeg. Despite what, on the surface, may have been valorous and dutiful service to

<sup>84</sup> Begg and Nursey, *Ten Years in Winnipeg*, 15; Shore, *The Canadians and the Métis*, 170.

<sup>85</sup> “Montreal,” *Volunteer Review*, 6 (47) , 9.

<sup>86</sup> *Letter from the Adjutant General of Militia to Captain Armstrong* dated 21 February 1872, LAC, RG 9, II B1, Volume 518; “Memorable Manitobans: Edward Armstrong,” Manitoba Historical Society (MHS) Website, , [http://www.mhs.mb.ca/docs/people/armstrong\\_e.shtml](http://www.mhs.mb.ca/docs/people/armstrong_e.shtml). (accessed 27 July 2017)

<sup>87</sup> “Memorable Manitobans: Louis Fasse Plainval,” MHS Website, [http://www.mhs.mb.ca/docs/people/plainval\\_ln.shtml](http://www.mhs.mb.ca/docs/people/plainval_ln.shtml) (accessed 21 January 2019); *Manitoba Free Press*, “Local and Provincial”, 5 August 1876, 2.

<sup>88</sup> Ernest Chambers, *The Royal North-West Mounted Police. A Corps History*, (Montreal: The Mortimer Press, 1896), 19, 160.

the country, in many cases the conduct of the Militia volunteers was abysmal. The force encountered the usual variations from good order and discipline that are common amongst any large military body, but unfortunately its ranks were also home to those who would employ violence and intimidation to achieve their goal of an Anglo-protestant society in the North-West at the expense of the Métis.

#### CONDUCT UNBECOMING

The general crime and misdemeanours of the militia was varied and common to military forces, particularly those deployed in remote areas with little in the way of entertainment to keep young hands and minds occupied. Life as a soldier garrisoning a town on the edge of what was considered by contemporaries to be “civilized” terrain was rote and boring. Justus Griffin, who deployed to Fort Garry with the Second Red Expedition, recalled that once he arrived in Manitoba his life became “the same dreary round of duties and few changes of scenery and few incidents to interest and occupy the mind, the arrival of mails from home being the only interesting event perhaps for weeks.”<sup>89</sup> The readily available supply of intoxicants did not help. Charges against soldiers for drunkenness increased from 56 in 1870 to 470 in 1873, absence without leave increased five-fold from 99 to 500 in the same time period, and the number of instances of involvement of Police or Civilians in occasions of military crime likewise increased from 29 to 112.<sup>90</sup>

General assault seemed also to be a favourite pass time. For example, on Christmas Eve, 1873, Mr. J.J. Johnston was driving his cutter through the city when he was stopped by two soldiers, one of whom took hold of the horse while the other made to strike Mr. Johnston, presumably to steal the sleigh. Fortunately, a witness in a local saloon came to the man’s rescue brandishing a unique type of sabre, a pool cue, and chased the volunteers off.<sup>91</sup> While Mr. Johnston escaped with his life, James A. Brown was not so lucky. In June of 1874, Gunner Michaud and Corporal Baker got into an argument after a night of alcoholic excess in the taverns of Winnipeg and Mr.

<sup>89</sup> Griffin, *From Toronto to Fort Garry*, 53, 56-60.

<sup>90</sup> Shore, *The Canadians and the Métis*, 287.

<sup>91</sup> *Manitoba Free Press*, 27 December 1873, 5.

Brown had innocently stumbled upon them during their fisticuffs and attempted to break up the fight. Michaud turned on the unfortunate Good Samaritan and horribly assaulted him with a knife, leaving him to die in the street. The post-mortem was conducted by Dr. Turvers during which the body was found to have a great number of wounds, no less than 33. These included three cuts to the throat, eight skull fractures, two knife wounds into the skull that penetrated into the brain, and at least one knife wound that penetrated deep into the right lung.<sup>92</sup> When Gunner Michaud sobered up, he confessed to the murder saying “[Je suis] coupable dans mon cœur et je mérite le mort.”<sup>93</sup> In a legacy that the Militia authorities probably did not want to leave, in August 1874 Gunner Michaud was hanged in the yard of the city court house and thus became the first person to be executed by the state in Winnipeg.<sup>94</sup>

#### THE PROCESS OF INTIMIDATION

More pernicious than these admittedly disturbing crimes was the racially-based violence designed to intimidate local Métis. Frederick Shore posits in his doctoral thesis for the University of Manitoba, *The Canadians and the Metis: The Re-Creation of Manitoba 1858-1872* that while some of the volunteers' misbehaviour was simply the result of poor discipline, much of it was calculated with unsavoury intent. From an official perspective, the Wolseley Expedition was intended to be a peacekeeping force. Contrarily, Shore concludes that amongst the militia volunteers who filled the ranks of the Ontario and Quebec Battalions – particularly although not exclusively the former – there was an unofficial mission within the Red River Expeditionary Force to employ a “Kansas-style influx of armed settlers whose purpose was to guarantee that the new Province of Manitoba assumed an Ontario image without the interference of the Métis.”<sup>95</sup> Shore refers to this as the process of intimidation.<sup>96</sup>

<sup>92</sup> *Manitoba Free Press*, “Murder!,” 20 June 1874, 5.

<sup>93</sup> *Nor'Wester*, “The Execution,” 31 August 1874, 1.

<sup>94</sup> *Manitoba Free Press*, “Michaud's Execution,” 29 August 1874, 7.

<sup>95</sup> Shore, *The Canadians and the Métis*, 217.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, 217-18.

The list of transgressions perpetrated by militia volunteers against Métis are too partisan in nature to casually dismiss as routine soldierly steam-venting. In a paper prepared for the Louis Riel Institute entitled “The Reign of Terror against the Métis of Red River,” Lawrence Barkwell, the Coordinator of Métis History and Heritage Research, articulated a profoundly upsetting list of volunteer violence that clearly illustrates a partisan bias and targeting of Métis and their sympathisers.<sup>97</sup> Moreover, Métis were not alone in suffering the intimidation of the volunteers – French Catholics were also considered legitimate targets of the soldiers who aimed to impose an Anglophone protestant cultural hegemony on the new province. The list is too extensive to share in full here, but a sampling of the events will demonstrate the extent of volunteer intimidation. Unfortunately, in many instances, whether for a lack of vigour in the investigation, or perhaps a legitimate lack of evidence, many of the alleged perpetrators were never brought to justice.

The litany of sins is long: In September of 1870, John Shultz, leader of the pro-Canada party during the Resistance, broke into the home of Thomas Spence, the editor of the *New Nation*, a newspaper created by Louis Riel after he amalgamated the *Nor’ Wester* and the *Red River Pioneer*, horsewhipped him, and then broke into his office, scattered his staff and destroyed the printing press.<sup>98</sup> In September of 1870, James Ross, who was representative of the English Métis and was also a member of the Provisional Government under Riel, had his home burnt to the ground in an act of arson. In November of 1870, a man named Landry was set upon by 12-15 soldiers, had a rope tied around his neck and was dragged for about a hundred feet before the police were brought to the scene – the soldiers claiming they wanted revenge for the death of Thomas Scott.

Louis Riel and his family were specific targets of the volunteer intimidation. In December of 1871, a group of discharged Expeditionary Force men burst into Riel’s home claiming to have a warrant for his arrest. He was not home at the time, and the brigands resorted to

<sup>97</sup> Lawrence Barkwell, “The Reign of Terror Against the Metis of Red River.” Virtual Museum of Metis History and Culture accessed 25 January 2019, <http://www.metismuseum.ca/resource.php/149078..>

<sup>98</sup> John W. Dafoe, “Early Winnipeg Newspapers: The Last 70 Years of Journalism at Fort Garry and Winnipeg” *MHS Transactions*, Series 3, 1956-57, MHS Website, accessed 12 June 2017, <http://www.mhs.mb.ca/docs/transactions/3/earlywinnipegnewspapers.shtml>.

threatening the women by holding guns to their heads and demanding to know Riel's whereabouts. One member vowed that Riel would be dead by the end of the evening. This act was disagreeable enough to motivate several citizens to write a petition to the Lieutenant-Governor asking him to take steps to ensure such atrocities did not repeat.

Perhaps most grievous was the assault and subsequent murder of Elzear Goulet, a Métis who was involved in the execution of Thomas Scott. Goulet had been one of the staunchest supporters of Riel during the resistance which consequently made him one of the most despised inhabitants of Red River amongst the virulently pro-Canada partisans. He remained in Fort Garry after the arrival of the Wolseley Expedition, while many of his colleagues fled. Joseph Alfred Mousseau remarked in an October 1870 edition of *l'Opinion Publique*, that “depuis l'arrivée des troupes, il était resté au milieu des métis français, se gardant bien de s'aventurer sur le territoire ennemi.”<sup>99</sup> In September of 1870, Goulet reportedly accepted a job as a guide for a Mr. Cunningham from Toronto. Goulet crossed from St. Boniface and was recognized by what Mousseau referred to as “un parent de l'un des prisonniers de Riel au Fort Garry.”<sup>100</sup> He was then set upon by some volunteers – originating from *la vertueuse Province sœur*, as Mousseau sarcastically referred to Ontario, and fled his assaulters by bolting for St. Boniface.<sup>101</sup> He attempted to swim the Red River to evade his pursuers, but they pelted him with rocks as he swam, one rock striking him on the head, and he eventually drowned. No punishment was ever meted out to any of those involved.<sup>102</sup> Compounding the tragedy, his daughter, Laurette was allegedly raped by members of the Red River Expeditionary Force and died of her injuries.<sup>103</sup>

## CONCLUSION

As odd as it may feel to consider Canada an imperial power that colonized the North-West in the latter half of the nineteenth century,

<sup>99</sup> Joseph-Alfred Mousseau, “Goulet” in *L'Opinion Publique*, 1 (41), 2.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, 2

<sup>102</sup> Shore, *The Canadians and the Métis*, 230-32.

<sup>103</sup> Barkwell, “the Reign of Terror...”, 11.



the parallels between the actions of the Dominion in Rupert's Land and Great Britain globally are undeniable. This is particularly true when considering the role played by the Canadian militia garrison maintained in Manitoba from 1870 to 1877, an interesting and enlightening chapter of Canadian military history that is lamentably unexplored.

Born of the Red River Expeditionary Force sent, ostensibly, as a peacekeeping force in reaction to the Red River Resistance of 1869-70, the Dominion Forces on Service in Manitoba garrisoned the newly acquired peripheral colony in order to set the conditions for the successful settlement and exploitation of the region by the central Canadian metropole. The garrison, whose numbers waxed and waned over the years in response to both real and perceived security threats, fulfilled the three critical military objectives of a colonial garrison. It provided a military deterrent, albeit predominantly symbolic in nature, to state and non-state external aggression from the American Republic to the south. It provided a military reserve for use in stabilizing the frontier for settlement when European and Canadian settlers felt trepidations, largely based on racist stereotypes, about local Indigenous bands. Finally, in the rough and tumble frontier region where no law enforcement agency existed to maintain peace, order and good government, at least until the creation of the North-West Mounted Police, the militia garrison provided aid to the civil power to ensure law and order in the region.

Despite these seemingly beneficial acts, one must not fall into the trap of blind lionization of the militia volunteers. Many came west with a racial and cultural agenda, to ensure Anglo-protestant cultural supremacy in the new colony at the expense of its inhabitants. The soldiers often resorted to off-duty violence in a process of intimidation against the Métis of the region which contributed mightily to the latter's displacement westward and the regrettable abandonment of their traditional homeland.

The story of the Canadian garrison in Manitoba is deserving of further investigation. It may lack the excitement of battle narrative, it occurred in an isolated post far from the economic and political focus of the country, and its timeline is relatively short. Nonetheless, the militia volunteers in Manitoba made a distinct impact, for good or ill, on the evolution of Canadian society and the growth of the Canadian nation.



**ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

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