



The  
**Origins**  
of the  
**Royal Canadian  
Mounted Police**



Royal Canadian Mounted Police Gendarmerie royale du Canada

Canada

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## *The Great Lone Land*

Called “The Great Lone Land” by officers who traversed it, “Rupert’s Land” by the Hudson’s Bay Company and “home” by nomadic buffalo-hunting native tribes, the Canadian North-West officially became a part of Canada on July 15, 1870. A small part of it along the banks of the Red River became the new province of Manitoba. The remainder, extending across the prairies, was designated the North-West Territories, federally administered by a lieutenant governor and council.

## *Sir John A. Macdonald and the North-West Mounted Police*

In the 1870s a new wave of traders from outposts of the American North-West crossed the border (to compete with the Hudson’s Bay Company) into the foothill country of present day Alberta, the tribal home of the Blackfoot. These tough, adventurous

men, representing many nationalities, often veterans of the Civil War, had little concern for the welfare of Canada’s aboriginal peoples. They soon established themselves in fortified posts whose colourful names reveal something of their picaresque character – Slideout, Kipp, Standoff and the most notorious of all, Whoop-up. By 1873, these “free traders”, as they were called, had captured most of the Blackfoot trade. The newcomers brought cheap whiskey from Chicago and St. Louis distilleries; it was often adulterated with various ingredients to potentiate its effect and increase profits.

Several observers reported the deteriorating conditions on the western plains to Ottawa. One of these observers, Lt. Butler, after traveling across the North-West in 1871, wrote: “The institutions of Law and Order, as understood in civilized communities, are wholly unknown.” Canada’s first Prime Minister, Sir John A. Macdonald, became directly responsible for establishing Canada’s authority in the newly acquired territories.

The violence which had accompanied American expansion onto the western plains in the previous decade was uppermost in Macdonald’s mind as he considered the problem of establishing law and order on Canada’s frontier. A series of wars with native tribes on the plains followed the rush of settlers and miners into the American West. These wars cost the United States government millions of dollars and the lives of hundreds of troops and settlers. Macdonald was aware that Canada did not have the resources to repeat the American experience. He was determined that law and order must be established in advance of settlement. Macdonald’s answer to this thorny problem was a para-military force of mounted police, trained and equipped for plains warfare, but with primarily civil responsibilities; it would be the advance guard of settlement, establishing friendly relations with the Indian tribes and maintaining peace as settlers arrived. The model for the proposed force was the Royal Irish Constabulary, which had

# the establishment of a North West Territories’.



been used as a pattern for organizing numerous police forces throughout the British Empire.

## *The Establishment of the North-West Mounted Police*

On May 23, 1873 the Dominion Parliament passed an act to provide for the establishment of a “Mounted Police Force for the North-West Territories”. The Force was recruiting men between the ages of 18 and 40, of sound constitution, able to ride, active, able-bodied and of good character. The pay was set at 75 cents per day for sub constables, \$1.00 for constables. Furthermore, the men were required to “be able to read and write either the English or French language.”

The Command was to be divided into Troops. The Commanding Officer was to be termed “Commissioner”. The term of service was set at three years. The Force was to be a para-military body. Its immediate objectives: to stop

liquor trafficking in the North-West; to gain the respect and confidence of the natives; to collect customs dues; and to perform all the duties of a police force. The North-West Mounted Police, as it was soon called, actually came into existence on August 30, 1873, when the provisions of the Act were brought into force by Order-in-Council and recruiting began.

The authorized strength of the Force was 300 men. Initially, however, only three Troops of 50 men each were formed. These Troops were quickly organized after the government received reports from Cypress Hills that white wolf hunters had massacred a band of Assiniboine. In the Autumn of 1873, they were sent west over the Dawson Route. They reached Red River in late October and proceeded to Lower Fort Garry, or the “Stone Fort”, 20 miles down river from Winnipeg.

It was soon realized that 150 men would be insufficient for the task which lay ahead. The Force’s first permanent

Commissioner, George A. French, recruited an additional three troops, totaling 150 men, from Eastern Canada during the Spring of 1874. These recruits left Toronto in June, 1874 traveling by rail through Chicago to Fargo, North Dakota. Here they disembarked and marched northward across the border, to join up with the original 3 troops at the small boundary settlement of Fort Dufferin.

## *The March West*

On July 8, 1874, the small force of North-West Mounted Police moved out of Dufferin, Manitoba, and headed west toward the junction of the Bow and Belly Rivers over 800 miles away, in what is today southern Alberta. Their objective was to locate Fort Whoop-up, notorious stronghold of the whiskey traders, and destroy the whiskey trade. For two months the cavalcade of ox carts, wagons, cattle, field pieces and agricultural equipment crawled steadily westward. At La Roche Percée, the contingent split. The greater part of “A”

# the presence of the NWMP in their scarlet tunics played an important

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Troop proceeded northwestward via Fort Ellice, to establish itself at the Hudson's Bay Company post, Fort Edmonton. The remainder of the force, ragged and weary, its horses starved and parched, toiled on in pitiable condition to the Sweet Grass Hills, near the International Boundary. There, the Commissioner and the Assistant Commissioner led a small party south to Fort Benton, Montana, to replenish exhausted stocks of food and purchase fresh horses.

On his return from Fort Benton, the Commissioner set out with two troops for Swan River, the newly appointed headquarters of the Force. Assistant Commissioner James F. Macleod, commanding "B", "C" and "F" Troops and the remainder of "A", continued westward to the foothills. Macleod, with the assistance of Métis scout Jerry Potts, located Fort Whoop-up, but the whiskey traders had fled. The column finally halted on the banks of the Old Man River, where in October 1874, they began building the first

police outpost in the far west. It was named Fort Macleod.

In the months that followed, the whiskey trade was smashed and lawlessness sharply declined. By 1875, the police had erected additional posts at Fort Saskatchewan, Fort Calgary and Fort Walsh. Law and order was firmly established on Canada's western frontier.

The NWMP's main task between 1874-85 was to establish and maintain amicable relations with the native peoples of the N.W.T. One of the Canadian Government's main concerns during this period was to avoid the American experience of frontier wars. Fortunately, the Canadian situation was different from that below the border. Miners and settlers had still not arrived in the Canadian west in sufficient numbers to challenge the warlike tribes for their hunting lands. By the time substantial settlement did get underway on the Canadian prairies, the Indians' way of life had already changed dramatically, with the rapid disappearance of the buffalo herds.

In the Spring of 1876, hostilities between the American Sioux and the United States Army made Canadian authorities anxious to peacefully acquire title to most of the territory held by the Saskatchewan First Nations and the Blackfoot Confederacy. In the same year, Treaty No. 6 was concluded between the Canadian Government and the Cree and Assiniboine. The Crees and Assiniboine surrendered their title to 120,000 square miles of central Saskatchewan and Alberta by agreeing to this treaty. The presence of the NWMP in their scarlet tunics played an important calming role in the negotiations of Treaty No. 6.

In September, 1877, at Blackfoot Crossing on the Bow River, tribes of the Blackfoot Confederacy met with the two Canadian commissioners appointed to treaty with them: the Honourable David Laird, Lieutenant Governor of the North-West Territories; and Commissioner J.F. Macleod of the North-West Mounted Police. The bond of trust which had developed between

# calming role

## in the negotiations of Treaty No. 6.”

Commissioner Macleod and the two most prominent Indian Chiefs, Crowfoot and Red Crow, was the key to the successful signing of Treaty No. 7. In accepting the “Blackfoot Treaty,” Crowfoot said: “The advice given me and my people has proven to be very good. If the police had not come to this country, where would we all be now? Bad men and whiskey were killing us so fast that very few of us would have been left today. The Mounted Police have protected us as the feathers of the bird protect it from the frosts of winter.” On September 22, amid pomp and ceremony, the Chiefs of the Blackfoot Confederacy signed Treaty No. 7, surrendering their title to what is today Southern Alberta. At last, the way was clear for plains’ settlement and the building of a transcontinental railway which Canadians hoped would bring a new and prosperous future to their young nation.

### *The American Sioux*

In 1877, thousands of American Sioux refugees arrived in Canada threatening the order which the Mounted Police had helped bring to the prairies. For years the Sioux had been fighting a losing battle to protect their traditional hunting lands from the encroachment of white civilization. In 1875, the American authorities informed the Sioux that unless they settled on the reserves allocated to them, they would be considered enemies of the United States. The Sioux refused, and in the spring of 1876 the United States Army began a campaign to force them onto the reserves. The climax of the Sioux resistance came at Little Big Horn in June, 1876, with the annihilation of five 7th United States Cavalry troops under the command of Lieutenant Colonel George A. Custer. Custer’s defeat, however, was the beginning of the end. The Sioux could not hope to defeat the large military forces now closing on them from all sides. Tired and hungry,

they gradually retreated northward to seek refuge in Canadian Territory.

The Sioux’s arrival disturbed the peaceful relations which Canada was in the process of establishing with its own tribes. The Sioux were traditional enemies of many Canadian First Nations. Their presence would strain the already dwindling buffalo herds.

The North-West Mounted Police task was a difficult one. The Sioux would have to be closely watched. There must be no revival of intertribal warfare. The Sioux must obey Canadian laws and, above all, they must not be allowed to attack the United States using Canadian territory as a base. Fort Walsh in the Cypress Hills now became the Force’s main center of operations. The post, established there in 1875, was reinforced and enclosed by a fortified stockade. In 1878 NWMP headquarters was moved from Fort Macleod to Fort Walsh, in recognition of its new importance.



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Scouts brought the first news of the Sioux migrating to Fort Walsh in November 1876. A large party of Sioux, they reported, were moving north towards the trading post at Wood Mountain. Within a few days, Supt. Walsh and a party of twelve Mounted Police were on their way east to meet with the refugees.

Arriving at Wood Mountain, Walsh found about 2000 Sioux under Black Moon, the tribe's hereditary chief, camped close to the trading post. A council was called. They informed Walsh that they were tired of being hunted; they had come to the land of the Great White Mother to find refuge. Walsh warned them firmly that they must obey Canada's law and above all, they must not raid the United States.

Early in 1877, two more Sioux groups followed Black Moon's band: the first under Chief Four Horns, and finally a large band under Sitting Bull, now recognized as the leader of the Sioux resistance.

By summer, 1878, it began to look as if the Sioux would remain in Canada for good. In spite of negotiations between the Canadian and American Governments, they still refused to return to the United States. Dwindling buffalo herds soon accomplished what diplomacy failed to do. As their traditional source of food diminished, the Sioux began to realize they must accept a sedentary way of life. There was no point in defending a land now empty of buffalo. The Canadian government continued to insist on the Sioux's refugee status, with no intention of granting them reserves north of the border. They must return south.

By 1879, Sitting Bull's influence was on the decline and small bands of Sioux began returning to the United States. The Sioux leader and a small group of intransigents still refused to trust the Americans. The Macdonald government decided to take a firmer stand. In 1880, the Mounted Police were instructed to visit the remaining Sioux camps and warn them that the govern-

ment would no longer supply them with food. They would starve unless they returned to the United States. A year later the last band, led by Sitting Bull, surrendered to the American authorities at Fort Buford, North Dakota.

### *Settlement*

In 1874 the North-West Territories' white population numbered only a few hundred, mostly traders, missionaries, Hudson's Bay personnel, plus a few settlers. There were no railways, telegraph lines, regular mail services or newspapers. The new police posts at Fort Macleod, Fort Walsh and Fort Saskatchewan now attracted settlers. By 1878, there was a substantial village of several hundred persons adjacent to Fort Walsh. Settlers congregated in and around the posts providing police with many required services and trading with the natives who camped in the area. Battleford grew rapidly after it was designated the territorial capital in 1876. In the same year the telegraph linked it to Fort Pelly and Winnipeg. In

1877, the line extended west to Edmonton which still had less than 1,000 inhabitants. In 1878, The Saskatchewan Herald, the Territories' first newspaper, began its publication.

The number of settlers did not begin to increase steadily until railway construction across the prairies during the period 1881- 1883. In 1877, the first train was unloaded at Winnipeg, but construction across the plains did not really get under way until four years later, when W.C. Van Horne became Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR) General Manager. By October, 1881, the track had arrived at Brandon. A year later it reached the new territorial capital of Regina. By August, 1883, the line was through to Calgary. In its wake, there came a steady stream of settlers. Many were construction workers. Towns soon sprang up along its route — Medicine Hat, Moose Jaw, Maple Creek, Swift Current — and older frontier posts, like Calgary, grew rapidly. In 1881, the white population was about 7,000, in addition to 5,000

Métis and 20,000 -30,000 Indians. The census of 1884 -5 showed the white population had climbed over 23,000.

The hunting grounds of the First Nations and the need to control whiskey trade had determined the early police posts' locations. Once the First Nations relocated to their reserved land, the Force was gradually deployed to police the growing settlements along the railway. In 1882, "Headquarters" was moved to a more central location beside the Wascana Creek, on the outskirts of Regina. In 1883, the government increased the NWMP's statutory strength from 300 to 500 men, in order to meet growing responsibilities. Detachments and divisions were soon established at the new urban centers and railway settlements.

### *Policing the Railway*

In 1882, the CPR reached Maple Creek. By late 1883, it had progressed to the summit of the Rockies. For the railway to be completed on schedule, it

was essential for law and order to be maintained amongst the thousands of CPR labourers. Living conditions in construction camps were rough. Gambling and drinking provided the main source of entertainment. Unfortunately, they were often the cause of violence and disorder. The Force organized a detachment, under Inspector S.B. Steele's command, to follow the construction and enforce the Act for the Preservation of Peace in the Vicinity of Public Works. This Act prohibited gambling and drinking within a 10 mile radius of the railway line.

The Force also encountered its first experience with labour unrest during this period. In 1883 the CPR reduced its engineers' and firemen's wages resulting in the first serious strike. Reinforcements were rushed to Moose Jaw and Broadview to guard railway property from unruly strikers, and provide protection for those who refused to leave their jobs. In 1885, Beaver Crossing became the site of another serious strike. Twelve hundred men





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walked off the job over a pay dispute. Inspector Steele, armed with a rifle, rose from his sick bed to confront a mob of strikers intent on preventing the arrest of a violence-inciting leader. After the Riot Act had been read, he warned the strikers force would be used, if necessary, to preserve peace and order.

### *Servants of the Public*

For many years Force members fulfilled every duty concerned with civil authority in the North-West. They maintained essential services for public order and welfare. The Force also assumed responsibility for many mail services in the early west, either acting as mail carriers between settlements or awarding contracts for this service. As late as 1883, many police barracks served as Post Offices, with members acting as Postmasters. Members were also customs collectors, Indian agents and census takers. For a while detachments compiled meteorological records. The Force's surgeons, often the only medical practitioners for miles

around, tended to the medical needs of the local populace. Criminals sentenced to jail terms often served their time in Mounted Police Guardrooms. Those sentenced to hard labour swung axes on the post wood pile. The Force escorted patients to the nearest psychiatric facility at Brandon. Aside from these federal duties, they administered the following territorial ordinances: recorded vital statistics, coralled stallions at large, and controlled the spread of contagious diseases and prairie fires. As the Federal and Territorial governments appointed officials, departments became more and more established, and the police were gradually relieved of these duties.

### *The North West Rebellion*

The railway's arrival brought more and more settlers into the country. The Métis and native peoples along the North Saskatchewan River became concerned about the loss of their land and way of life. Government surveyors were re-mapping the land and threat-

ening the Métis with eviction. The Métis hoped to obtain title to their traditional river front lots. However, when they petitioned Ottawa their grievances went unheeded by an apparently indifferent government. Consequently, they decided to take the law into their own hands. At the invitation of Métis leader Gabriel Dumont, Louis Riel returned from his self-imposed exile in Montana to take up the Métis' land fight with the federal government.

Early in 1885, a provisional Métis government was set up, headed by Riel, with Dumont Commander-in-Chief of the Métis force. Big Bear's Crees supported the Métis cause. The Blackfoot, however, remained aloof from the conspiracy. Crowfoot, their chief, believed that the cause would fail, and in any case he and his people were reluctant to side with their traditional enemies, the Cree.

On March 13, 1885, a report from Battleford stated that a rebellion was likely to break out at any moment and the Cree would join the Métis. The

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northern detachments had to be reinforced. Commissioner Irvine received orders to proceed northward from Regina with all available men. Accompanied by four officers, 86 non-commissioned officers and men, and 66 horses, he made a forced march in bitter weather. Adroitly slipping past the insurgent outposts, the column reached Prince Albert, where they learned that looting had already begun and attacks on Prince Albert and Fort Carlton were imminent. Hostilities broke out before they reached Fort Carlton. On March 26, a severe clash took place near Duck Lake between 56 Mounted Policemen, 43 Prince Albert Volunteers, and a large body of Métis and Indians. Outnumbered by more than three to one, the Police-Volunteer force managed to retreat. Twelve of the 99 man force were killed in the action.

Duck Lake was an important psychological victory for the rebels, but one skirmish does not win the war. Hundreds of militia were on their way from eastern Canada over the newly

completed railway and within a few days an army had been assembled under Major -General F.D. Middleton's command. It moved forward to crush the rebels. In the military campaign which followed, the North -West Mounted Police played an important role. On May 12, 1885, after a series of indecisive engagements, the rebels were finally defeated at Batoche.

## *Free Land*

In 1896, under the Minister of the Interior Clifford Sifton's driving leadership, the Canadian government began a vigorous campaign to attract settlers to the prairies. Pamphlets advertising the soil's quality and its suitability for agriculture, were printed and distributed throughout the U.S. and Europe. A grant of 160 acres of land was given to anyone settling on the prairies. Subsidized fares were provided on sea passages, as well as reduced rail fares on CPR colonist cars departing ports of embarkation. The great land rush gradually gained momentum as the world

emerged from a long depression, and there was a growing demand for wheat. By 1914, over a million settlers had arrived on the prairies.

To ensure the success of the program, every Canadian official, from the Minister down to the Mounted Policeman, was enlisted to advise and assist the new settlers. The police became land agents, agricultural experts, welfare officials and immigration officers. The immigrant's first contact with officialdom on stepping off the train was often the local NWMP detachment. The police would give advice on the remaining available land in the area, sometimes driving the settlers out and helping them choose their sections. The police issued seed grain, quarantined livestock, and wrote copious reports on crop and soil conditions. If a settler lost a cow, he came to the police. If his crops failed and he had insufficient means to get his family through the winter, he applied to the local detachment for welfare.

Almost a third of the settlers who arrived between 1896 and 1914 were from continental Europe Ukrainians, Germans, Finns, Swedes and Russians. Many did not speak English, and the police had to employ interpreters to explain Canadian laws and customs. The only criterion used to select immigrants was their ability and willingness to settle the land. Some of them had religious beliefs which posed special problems for the police. During 1899, several thousand Doukhobors arrived to take up homesteads. They were excellent farmers, but by 1902, a fundamentalist group among them began the first of many protest marches. More than a thousand Doukhobors started out from Yorkton in winter weather, without adequate food or clothing. Insp. J.O. Wilson commanded a group of 20 men to accompany the Doukhobors on their march and ensure their safety. In November they reached Minnedosa, Manitoba. Here, under Dominion officials' orders, and with a minimum of violence, the NWMP supervised boarding the Doukhobors onto trains for their return to Yorkton.

Assisting new settlers placed an additional burden on the Force. It also provided the Commissioner with a new argument to counter demands for a reduction in the Force's strength.

### *Klondike Gold Rush*

While the Force in Alberta and Saskatchewan was adjusting to the growing tide of settlers, a new frontier was opening up to the north along the banks of the Yukon River and its tributaries. Little was known of the Yukon prior to 1886. A sudden flurry of activity there, focused attention on the Fortymile River. A gold strike on this small Yukon tributary, just inside the Canadian border, set off a chain reaction attracting a sudden modest influx of gold seekers. Local traders, conscious of the new market, now turned their attentions to these fresh customers. The increase in population created a need for a more stable regulative authority: major commercial interests looked for some form of order; the Anglican clergy sought to protect the

Indian population from indiscriminate liquor traders; and even the miners worried about possible future disorder. The Canadian government's solution to these problems was "something for everyone". There would be no immediate show of force which would risk a violent clash with the miners and traders over government regulations, but the government wished to ensure that the region would remain Canadian.

On May 20, 1894, Commissioner L.W. Herchmer directed Inspector Charles Constantine to set out for the Yukon's headwaters. S/Sgt. Charles Brown accompanied the Inspector, who was now well versed in the several government departments he would represent. One of his primary objectives consisted in letting the people of the Yukon know that a Dominion Agent was establishing roots.

Almost two and a half months later, traveling by foot, boat, and on horseback, Constantine and Brown arrived at Fort Cudahy near the town of



Fortymile. It was August 7th, 1894 - and who could predict that gold would soon be discovered? For the moment, Constantine and Brown had few pressures with only 1,000 miners, traders and trappers in the Territory. Yukon temperatures, Constantine was told, range from  $-77^{\circ}$  F in the nine month winter to  $120^{\circ}$  F in the summer. The environment itself would provide the greatest initial challenge.

The majority of people in the Yukon were natives. The majority of the white population was almost equally divided between Americans and Canadians. A few English and other nationalities completed the population picture. Fortymile had approximately 260 miners, but the gold pickings were thin in comparison to what was to come. Constantine evaluated the 1893 gold take from the Yukon at approximately \$300,000.

The Inspector anticipated difficulty in establishing authority because the miners believed Yukon conditions justified mining claims five times the size

allowed by Canadian law. He also felt they would hold out for their rights as established by local practice. Constantine, conscious of possible trouble over mining or other regulations, recommended an allotment of 50 men including two officers, one surgeon, three sergeants and three corporals. The men should each have at least two years experience, "large and powerful build" and a reputation for sobriety. Despite his report to the Canadian government, Constantine was sent back to the Yukon with a contingent of only 19. On July 24, 1895, he arrived outside Fortymile with Inspector D'Arcy Strickland, Assistant Surgeon A.E. Wills and the remaining men. Two days later, a Canadian Order-in-Council created the separate "Yukon District" as an administrative sub-unit within the North-West Territories. Constantine and the men began constructing the first Mounted Police post in the Yukon, Fort Constantine. Fortunately, they were firmly established just in time for the spectacular Klondike Gold Rush.

In mid-August, 1896, George Washington Carmack, Skookum Jim and Tagish Charlie, with their "Bonanza" gold discovery on Rabbit Creek, charted a new course for life in the Yukon.

Rabbit Creek, renamed Bonanza Creek, was a Klondike tributary which flowed into the Yukon River 50 miles upstream and east of Fortymile. After striking coarse gold valued at 30 times the normal 10-cent-strike-per-pan, the men registered their claims with Inspector Constantine on August 21. As Constantine anticipated, news of the strike outside the Yukon provoked a frenzied stampede in search of easy gold. Over the next two years tens of thousands of gold seekers converged on the Klondike via various routes.

The nineteen officers and men of the NWMP could not handle the anticipated "rush". They had to be quickly reinforced. The Force in the Yukon swelled from 19 members in late 1896 to 285 by November, 1898. Fort Herchmer, located at Dawson, became the new

# Constantine evaluated the 1893 gold take from the Yukon at approximately

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headquarters in summer, 1897. On June 13, 1898, after the Yukon Territory was created, the now 31 detachments were reorganized into “H” and “B” Divisions. Superintendent Samuel Benfield Steele arrived at the head of the Lynn Canal, the main entrance to the gold fields, in February, 1898. Inspectors D’Arcy Strickland and Robert Belcher took charge of the detachments established at the summits of White and Chilkoot passes. Their chief official function was collecting customs duty for supplies brought into the Yukon by gold seekers.

Between 1898-1900, the Canadian government sent a 200-man force, drawn from Canada’s permanent militia, known as the Yukon Field Force, to assist the NWMP in guarding prisoners, banks and gold shipments. The North-West Mounted Police and the Union Jack became symbols of personal security and justice at the summits of the passes. Steele wrote, “The whole demeanour of the people changed the moment they crossed the summit. The

pistol was packed in the valise and not used. The desperado, if there, had changed his ways, no one feared him.” Certain crimes did increase. In the Yukon punishment was designed more to fit the “need” for supply fuel than the “deed”, and thieves frequently were sentenced to the huge Mounted Police wood pile behind Fort Herchmer.

The NWMP achieved a glowing record of assistance and protection to the tens of thousands who entered the Yukon in search of gold. The Yukon refused to surrender her riches easily and the entrepreneurs continually battled the realities of their harsh environment. Only a few found gold; injury and death rewarded many who dared venture. Not many found their Eldorado and most left the inhospitable climate as quickly as they had come.

### *North to the Arctic Shores*

Establishment of law and order, similar to settlement of the prairies, preceded the opening up of Canada’s Arctic fron-

tier. Although attention was focused upon the Force’s dramatic role in the Yukon, the Force had already begun to extend its activities into the subarctic forests of Canada’s Middle North: the Athabasca country, the Mackenzie River system and the Keewatin District west of Hudson’s Bay. By the close of the nineteenth century, traders, trappers and prospectors frequently penetrated these areas. As a result there was a growing need for more effective control to protect the native people, enforce liquor laws and administer hunting regulations.

A patrol had been made to York Factory on Hudson’s Bay as early as 1890. Another patrol three years later extended the Force’s influence into the Athabasca country. In 1897 Insp. A.M. Jarvis and two men reached Fort Resolution on Great Slave Lake and later that year permanent detachments were established at Fort Chipewyan, Athabasca Landing and Lesser Slave Lake.

# \$300,000.”



Because men were needed to police the Gold Rush, the movement to establish authority northward was slowed. It did not pick up until Yukon conditions began to stabilize. Through a detachment and patrol network, the Force gradually extended its authority throughout the forest belt to the Arctic Ocean's barren shores. The end of World War I saw the entire northern mainland effectively brought under Canadian jurisdiction.

In 1903, a dispute between Canada and the United States over the Alaskan boundary location prompted a new thrust northward. The judicial council arbitrating the case decided in favour of the American claim. Ottawa became concerned that American whalers' activities along Canada's Arctic coasts might lead to further territorial loss. As a result Supt. Constantine, Sgt. F.J. Fitzgerald and four constables were ordered to proceed to Fort McPherson, at the mouth of the Mackenzie River, to explore the need for Western Arctic posts.

Upon arrival at the settlement, Constantine obtained detachment quarters from the local mission. He then returned leaving the rest of the men to spend the winter there.

Sgt. Fitzgerald, meanwhile, continued on down the Mackenzie River. On August 7, 1903, he reached Herschel Island in the Arctic Ocean. Reports that whalers wintering on the island had been supplying Eskimos with liquor prompted the Sergeant's visit. Fitzgerald rented two sod houses from one of the whaling companies and with only four sheets of note paper settled down to spend the winter. He found little liquor but succeeded in making it clear to American whalers that henceforth, supplying booze to the natives must cease, Canadian laws must be respected and customs must be paid on all goods landed. In 1905, the Mackenzie District and Athabasca country detachments were organized as "N" Division with headquarters at Athabasca Landing.

Thousands of miles away, on the other side of the country, Supt. J.D. Moodie and a 16-man party were preparing to leave Halifax on the S.S. "Neptune" for Hudson's Bay. Moodie's task was to police the whalers using the area and establish a post from which to extend Canadian authority westward into the Keewatin District. Fullerton was chosen as the site for a new post on the west coast of Hudson's Bay facing the southern tip of Southampton Island. Its harbour was a frequent wintering spot for whaling vessels. Moodie and his party arrived at Fullerton on September 23, 1903, unloaded their supplies and hastened to erect detachment buildings before freeze-up. During the winter one of the men went insane, and in the cramped quarters his sickness was a great strain on the others' nerves.

In the summer of 1904, Moodie left three men behind and returned eastward on the "Neptune" to report his findings to Ottawa. He returned immediately with reinforcements and orders to extend his activities throughout the



## “The end of World War I

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entire Hudson's Bay region, now designated "M" Division. On September 17, 1904, his party sailed from Quebec City on the C.G.S. "Arctic" commanded by Captain J.E. Bernier. During the second winter at Fullerton, Moodie sent out several patrols including a mail run to Churchill and back, a distance of some 1,100 miles.

To extend control over the area covered by these two new divisions, the Force began operating a system of regular winter dog team patrols. On December 27, 1904, Constable H.G. Mapley, with two other constables and a guide, undertook a mail patrol from Dawson and, discovering a short route through the mountain ranges, reached Fort McPherson on February 2, 1905, covering the 475 miles in just over a month. In February, 1906, Constable L.E. Seller inspected whaling operations in Repulse Bay and Lyon's Inlet, more than 500 miles north of Fullerton.

The most spectacular patrol of this period was led by Inspector E.A.

Pelletier. This young French-Canadian officer was given the task of establishing a link between "N" and "M" Divisions through almost unknown country east of Great Slave Lake. With a corporal and two constables, Pelletier left Athabasca Landing in June, 1908. Traveling by Hudson's Bay boat, the party crossed Lake Athabasca and continued down the Slave River to Fort Smith. Here they transferred to two canoes, and with three months supply of food, began the long and difficult journey eastward.

Their route took them across Great Slave Lake, over the height of land and down the Hanbury and Thelon Rivers to Baker Lake. They traversed scores of portages and were constantly attacked by hordes of insects. Pelletier reported seeing musk ox and vast herds of migrating caribou. The first part of their journey ended at Chesterfield Inlet on August 31, 1908, when they were met by a whale boat sent from Fullerton. Later that winter, Pelletier continued southward by dog team to Churchill,

Norway House, and Gimli, completing a patrol of over 3,000 miles.

By 1919, with 25 detachments, the Force had a strength of over 70 men, policing the northern frontier. These included 14 detachments in the Yukon under "B" Division at Dawson, and 9 under "G" Division at Edmonton Athabasca, Coppermine, Fort Fitzgerald, Fort Resolution, Fort Simpson, Fort McPherson, Grouard, Peace River, and Herschel Island. "F" Division's detachments, Fullerton and Port Nelson, on the shores of Hudson's Bay, completed the Force's northern arm. It was a small band with which to police Canada's vast northern domain, but it was sufficient to ensure that Canadian laws and sovereignty were enforced. Only the most northerly Arctic islands remained to be brought under the Force's jurisdiction.

# saw the entire northern mainland effectively brought under Canadian jurisdiction.”

## *The Royal Canadian Mounted Police*

By 1914 the Mounted Police had achieved an international reputation for their role in Western Canada's orderly development. In 1897, a NWMP detachment represented Canada at Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee in London. Further contingents participated in King Edward VII and King George V's coronations in 1902 and 1911, respectively. During the South African War members of the Force had been given leave of absence to fight with the 2nd Battalion, Canadian Mounted Rifles and the Lord Strathcona's Horse. In 1904, their achievements received recognition when King Edward VII granted the Force the prefix "Royal" and it became the Royal North-West Mounted Police.

Although its deeds and its heroes were becoming a part of the legend of the West, a source of adventure and

romance for the novelist and early motion picture producers, the Mounted Police frontier role was almost at an end. The First World War and its aftermath brought new conditions and challenges that resulted in the complete reorganization of the Force and its responsibilities.

Mounted Police members were anxious to volunteer for active service when hostilities began in Europe. The government, however, refused to relieve them of their duties. It was concerned about the thousands of German settlers who had immigrated to the prairies. The Prime Minister decided the RNWMP must be retained in the West to ensure there were no attempts to sabotage the war effort. By 1917, anxiety over the German settlers had diminished, but the government had become even more concerned over reports that United States pro-German sympathizers planned to cross the border and create unrest. As a result the Force terminated its provincial policing contracts of Alberta and Saskatchewan,

and concentrated its resources on protecting the international boundary. It was not until 1918 that the threat subsided and the government allowed the Force to send two mounted cavalry squadrons overseas. The first, or "A" Squadron, served in France and Germany. The second, "B" Squadron, formed part of the Canadian Expeditionary Force in Siberia.

Conditions in post war Canada brought even greater changes. There was a sharp increase in industrial strikes and disturbances in western Canada due to unemployment and the high cost of living.

In December, 1918, to ensure that order was maintained, the government increased the Force's strength and extended its federal responsibilities throughout the four western provinces. During 1919, labour unrest continued, culminating in a general strike in the city of Winnipeg. Fearing that the country might be engulfed in a revolution similar to that which had occurred in





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Russia, the government decided there must be a single federal police force spread throughout the country to maintain law and order. In February, 1920, the Mounted Police absorbed the Dominion Police, which had carried out federal policing in eastern Canada. Headquarters was moved from Regina to Ottawa and the Force became responsible for enforcement of federal laws from the Atlantic to the Pacific. In keeping with its new role, it was renamed the Royal Canadian Mounted Police.

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