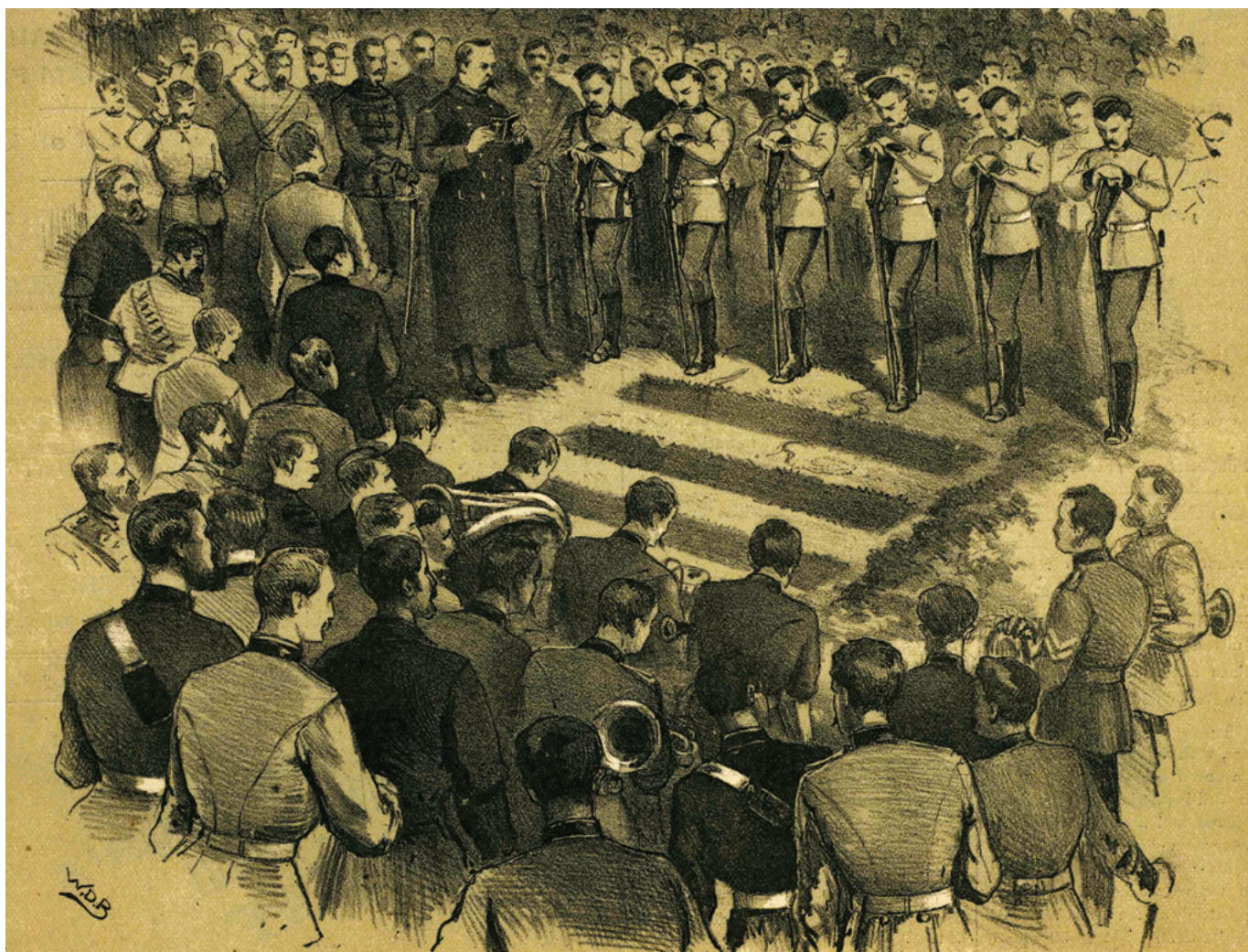


Westward Expansion, Military Operations and Indigenous Resistance 1870 and 1885



**Print, *Solemn Scene After the Battle of Fish Creek*
The Illustrated News, North-West Rebellion of 1885.**

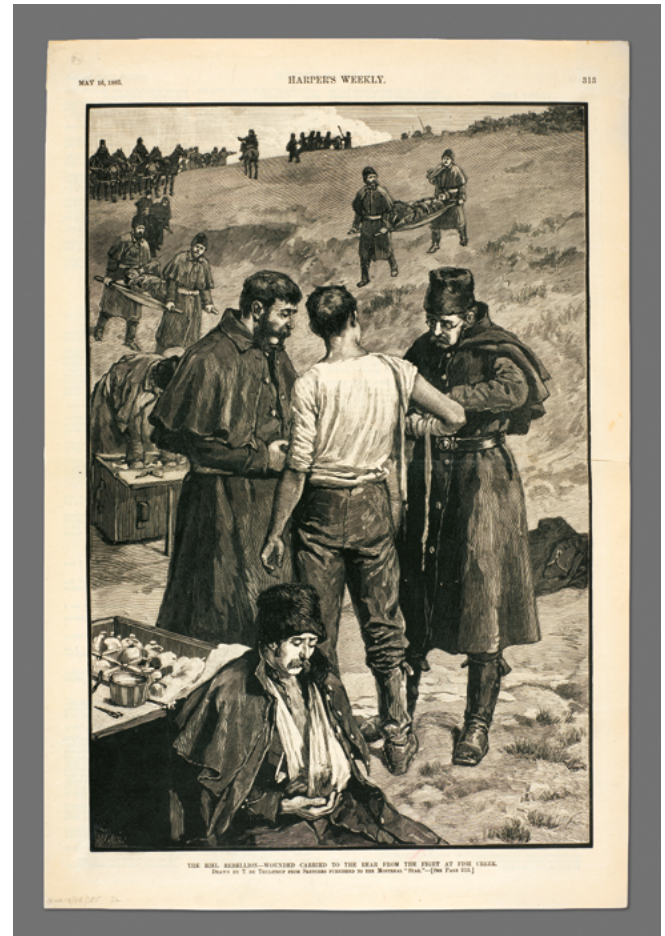
The Hartland Molson Library collection
Canadian War Museum

Westward Expansion, Military Operations and Indigenous Resistance 1870 and 1885

Resistance to Westward Expansion

Two military operations took place in Manitoba in 1870 and in the North-West Territories in 1885. Known as the Riel Rebellions or the Métis Resistance, these military operations within the new Canada were part of the early confederation project that saw westward expansion in the face of the ongoing American threat and desire to forge a new country. Indigenous Peoples resisted this foreign occupation of their traditional lands.

In 1867, the new Dominion of Canada that had been confederated from four British colonies in 1869 acquired all of Rupert's Land from the Hudson's Bay Company. This included the Red River Settlement near Winnipeg. Fearing that their interests and claims would be ignored by Canadian authorities and their land taken, Métis inhabitants prevented William McDougall – the newly appointed Lieutenant Governor – from entering the area in December 1869. It was a troublesome situation for the federal government, and a decision was made to confront the Resistance. The Métis felt that these foreign colonizers would destroy their way of life. Far from the growing Resistance, authorities in Ottawa made an appeal to London for military assistance. Initially reluctant, the British government finally agreed in spring 1870 to launch an expedition against the Métis in Red River, who were led by Louis Riel (1844-1885).



Print, *The Riel Rebellion - Wounded Carried to the Rear From the Fight at Fish Creek*

Beaverbrook Collection of War Art
Canadian War Museum
CWM 19850109-013

“Rébellion” or “Resistance”

While the terms “rebellion” and “resistance” are sometimes used as synonyms, Indigenous Studies scholars and many academics refer to the Métis and First Nations uprisings as resistances, meaning reactions against European colonization. The Museum uses “Red River Resistance” and “North-West Resistance” in its archives and artefact and library catalogues.

Because the names of the events have shifted over time, researchers should also search other terms associated with the event, such as “Red River Rebellion,” “Riel Rebellions,” “Métis Rebellion” and “North-West Campaign,” etc., online and in catalogues.

The Red River Expeditionary Force (**RREF**) was created in the spring of 1870 and consisted of British regulars and two Canadian **militia** battalions, one each from Quebec and Ontario, all under the command of Colonel Garnet Wolseley (1833–1913). In late April, the **RREF** assembled in Toronto, Ontario for training and on May 14, 1870, the first troops departed by rail for Collingwood, Ontario – the first stage of their long journey to Red River, now modern-day Winnipeg. From there, men and supplies were transported by boat, through Lake Huron and Lake Superior to Prince Arthur’s Landing. In the age before a transcontinental railway, from the shores of Lake Superior, it was an arduous, 1,100-kilometre journey on a route hacked out of the wilderness, with innumerable portages and by birch-bark canoe and wooden boat. Wolseley and the British regulars entered Fort Garry on August 24, and the first Canadians arrived three days later.

Riel fled to the United States, defusing the situation. After the exceedingly difficult voyage, Wolseley rested his men and – incredible as it seems – only a few days later, they began the return journey to central Canada. The Canadian **militia** battalions remained in Fort Garry until they departed in September, although many men took their discharge in the newly formed province of Manitoba. Additional soldiers were recruited in central Canada, and the **RREF** remained in Manitoba until 1877.

For the Métis, the grievances of 1870 continued to simmer and by 1885, Métis and some First Nations confronted the federal government and demanded action to relieve famine and destitution. Riel returned from exile in Montana to Saskatchewan to rally the disaffected in an armed resistance. Tensions reached a breaking point on March 26, when a contingent of North-West Mounted Police (**NWMP**) was routed at Duck Lake. Six days later, Cree fighters – who had rallied to Riel’s call to mobilize in military force – killed nine settlers and civilians at Frog Lake in what was labelled a “massacre” in contemporary English newspapers. A few weeks later, Cree warriors captured a small settlement at Fort Pitt.

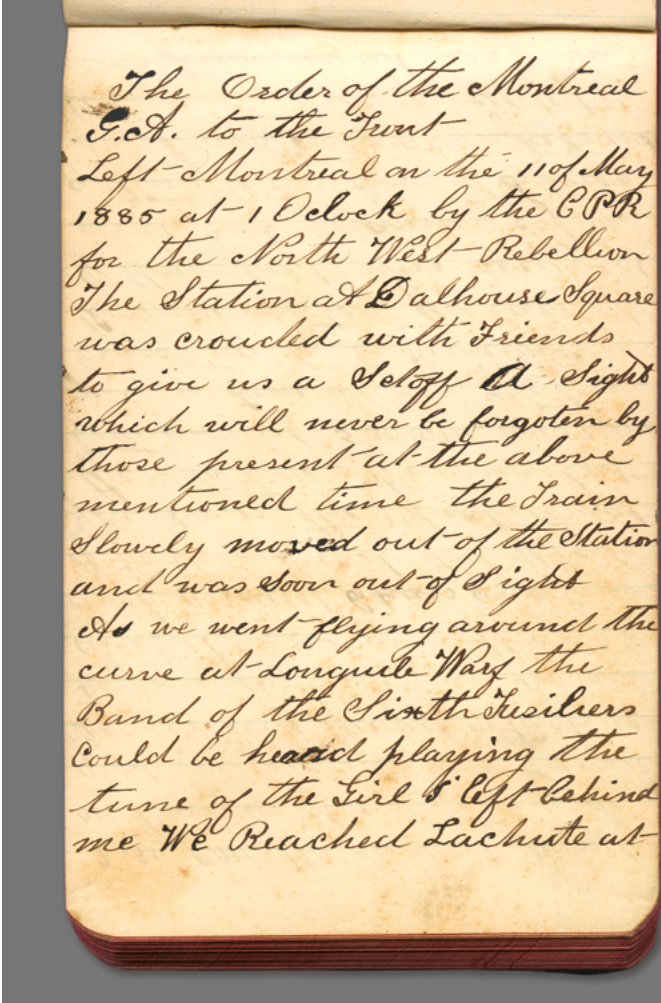
As trouble erupted again, the government in Ottawa mobilized a military force. Major General Frederick Middleton (1825-1898), General Officer Commanding the Canadian Militia, assumed command of the North-West Field Force (NWFF) in late March. By the end of April, over 3,000 **militia** members from Central and Eastern Canada had arrived in the North-West Territories. **Units** were also raised locally, including the Alberta Field Force, Steele's Scouts, the Rocky Mountain Rangers, and other smaller formations. Aside from Middleton and several aides, no British Army personnel took part in suppressing the resisting forces, although a dozen military nurses supported the **militia**. Government **units** were transported quickly from Central Canada on the recently completed Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR).

The resistance lasted only several weeks, but the fighting was often vicious and deadly. In a series of critical battles and skirmishes, Riel's force and that of separate Cree warriors held their own against superior numbers, especially at Fish Creek and Cut Knife Hill. The tide turned on May 12, when Middleton and the NWFF defeated the Métis at Batoche. Three days later, Riel surrendered. Small pockets of resistance carried on the fight, but by the end of June, hostilities had ceased in the region.



Major John Dunlop Hay

George Metcalf Archival Collection
Canadian War Museum
CWM 20230224-001



*The Order of the Montreal
G.A. to the front
Left Montreal on the 11 of May
1885 at 1 O'clock by the CPR
for the North West Rebellion
The Station at Dalhousie Square
was crowded with friends
to give us a ~~send off~~ ^{send off} sight
which will never be forgotten by
those present at the above
mentioned time the train
slowly moved out of the station
and was soon out of sight
As we went flying around the
curve at Longueuil Warf the
Band of the Sixth Fusiliers
could be heard playing the
tune of the Girl I Left Behind
me We Reached Lachine at*

Gunner Thomas Garvin left Montréal with great fanfare on the newly built CPR for the North-West Resistance.

The order of the Montreal Garrison Artillery to the front. Left Montreal on the 11 of May 1885 at 1 o'clock by the CPR for the North-West Rebellion. The station at Dalhousie Square was crowded with friends to give us a send off, a sight which will never be forgotten by those present at the above mentioned time. The train slowly moved out of the station and was soon out of sight. As we went flying around the curve at Longueuil Warf (sp.) the band of the Sixth Fusiliers could be heard playing the tune of The Girl I Left Behind.

Diary of Gunner Thomas Garvin, Montreal Garrison Artillery

George Metcalf Archival Collection
Canadian War Museum
CWM 20210509-001

Records of the Métis and the Dominion of Canada

The Red River Resistance and the North-West Resistance are one of the few instances in Canadian history where fighters from both sides were from within modern Canadian borders. Métis fighters, First Nations warriors, and Dominion of Canada soldiers were all veterans of the conflict. However, the records of service and of post-conflict veteran support were not the same for both sides. Dominion

of Canada personnel were employed in a state and military system that produced more written records (for example, as pay and pensions, land grants, medals), which were archived in government institutions for administrative purposes. Métis and First Nations participants did not serve in a system with the same practices.

Their service was generally recorded in community or private records, such as personal journals, newspapers, petitions, church records, and family histories. Sometimes their service may also be listed in state records, such as land claims or Indian Affairs records, but no comprehensive and centralized records exist as they do for Canadian-state soldiers. These records are more dispersed and often less accessible or easy to identify. As a result, this research guide has more references associated with Dominion of Canada soldiers. Relevant resources for Métis and First Nations participants will be added as we identify them.



Chief Payipwat and Plains leaders, Edgar Dewdney and the Montreal Garrison Artillery

George Metcalfe Archival Collection
Canadian War Museum
[CWM 19810060-005](#)

North-West Territories

The territorial and provincial borders in Canada shifted over time. During the Resistance, the newly formed province of Manitoba was a small square within the North-West Territories. In this research guide, we refer to the place names as they were at the time. When doing their research, researchers should remember that the North-West Territories of 1870-1885 included the modern-day boundaries of Yukon, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba and Nunavut, as well as sections of northern Ontario, Quebec and Labrador.

Canadian Military Service

On April 16, 1870, the RREF was authorized, with the British agreeing to lead the expedition and assume responsibility for providing about one-quarter of the necessary personnel, with Canada agreeing to supply the remainder.

The RREF consisted of the following British **units**: the 60th Rifles, a small detachment of the Royal Artillery, the Royal Engineers, the Army Service Corps, and the Army Medical Corps.

The Canadian contribution consisted of two battalions of approximately 370 officers and men, one each from Ontario and Quebec: the 1st Ontario Rifles and the 2nd Quebec Rifles. While many of these men may have had some military experience with the **militia**, others did not and probably volunteered for the experience. The RREF was under the command of British Army officer Colonel Garnet Wolseley.

In October 1871, a second **RREF** was recruited in Ontario and Quebec to serve as reinforcements. Upon arrival in Manitoba, the **unit** was officially designated the “Provisional Battalion of Rifles” under the command of Major Acheson G. Irvine (1837-1916). The following year, in September 1872, a third **unit** of reinforcements was recruited, including a detachment of 25 non-commissioned officers and gunners from the **A** and **B** Batteries of the Permanent Force in Kingston, Ontario and Quebec. Once the **NWMP** was organized in 1873-1874, the Provisional Battalion was reduced in size before finally disbanding in 1877.

The Red River Expedition of 1870 was the last time British regulars were deployed in Canada, but the expedition and the creation of the **RREF** had a significant impact on the new province of Manitoba, which was founded in 1870 in the aftermath of the expedition. Many of the men who joined the **RREF**, especially those from Ontario, elected to take their discharge and accept a land grant in the province.

There are no individual files for **RREF** members, although considerable personal and service information is available in a Register of Service, 1870-1877 (Library and Archives Canada [**LAC**]: **RG 9-II-B-4**, volume 16, microfilm reel T-6955, images 463 to 521). The register can be consulted online through [Canadiana Héritage](https://www.canadiana.ca/en/heritage). The Department of Militia and Defence maintained a register for every **RREF** member that included their full name, number, age, date and place of attestation, rank, **unit**, marital status, occupation, place and date of discharge, total service time, and whether they received a land grant and when.

RREF nominal rolls (a list of all members of a **unit**) and pay lists, 1870-1877, are available through **LAC** (**R180-101-0**, **RG 9-II-F-7**, volumes 1 to 4). Other related records include a list of officers recommended for service, correspondence on the organization of the **RREF**, hospital returns, guard reports, court martials, and returns of defaulters (**LAC**: **R180-69-0**, **RG 9-II-B-2**, volumes 33 to 35).

Like those who volunteered with the **RREF**, there are no service files for **NWFF** members. In 1885, government forces consisted of numerous **militia**, volunteer, and locally raised **units**. Yet, those who served in 1885 can be identified. Available **LAC** records include nominal rolls and pay lists (**R180-101-0**, **RG 9-II-F-7**, volumes 4 to 9), an index of pension claims (**R180-60-1**, **RG 9-II-A-4**, volume 17), and a small number of individual pension files for those who were wounded (**RG 24-C-1-a**, volumes 21 to 41 and **RG 38-A-2**, volume 419).



***North-West Field Force in the Enemy's Country
on the Road to Battleford***

George Metcalfe Archival Collection
Canadian War Museum
[CWM 19610047-002](https://www.warmuseum.ca/19610047-002)

For members of the NWMP who campaigned in the West, service files are available through LAC (R-196-158-9, RG 18-G, volumes 3318 to 3436). These files are on microfilm reels T-18201 to T-18242 and can be consulted online through [Canadiana Héritage](#). Officers' files, which include correspondence and service information, are located in RG 18-G, volumes 3436 to 3465 and 4835 to 4860, and files for the Prince Albert Volunteers are in RG 18-G, volumes 3573 to 3577.

In 1885, the Grip Publishing Company of Toronto published what was purported to be a complete list of those who served with the NWFF in two souvenir editions of the *Canadian Pictorial and Illustrated War News* ([No. 1, July 4](#) and [No. 2, August 1885](#)), available online through [Canadiana Héritage](#).

Métis Service

Identifying Métis and First Nations individuals who supported their cause in 1885 is more difficult. One of the best resources is Lawrence Barkwell, *Veterans and Families of the 1885 Northwest Resistance* (Saskatoon, SK: Gabriel Dumont Institute, 2011) and Blair Stonechild and Bill Waiser, *Loyal Till Death: Indians and the North-West Rebellion* (Calgary, AB: Fifth House, 1997). The Barkwell database of individuals is available online through the [Virtual Museum of Métis History and Culture](#). The National Métis Veterans' Memorial

Monument also includes the names of some Métis fighters for the 1885 Resistance. More information, including a list of names on the Monument, can be found on the [Gabriel Dumont Institute](#) website. Researchers are also encouraged to research private, corporate and state records held by organizations such as the [Virtual Museum of Métis History and Culture](#), the [Société historique de Saint-Boniface](#), [Le Musée de Saint-Boniface Museum](#), LAC's [First Nations Genealogy](#) page, and the [Hudson's Bay Company Archives](#).



Handcuffs used to restrain Louis Riel before his hanging in 1885

Canadian War Museum
[CWM 20030122-004](#)

Casualties

There is no complete list of **casualties** – killed or wounded – on either side of the conflict. In most cases, militiamen were returned to their place of residence for burial. A contemporary list of names can be found in the Department of Militia and Defence's published annual reports described below. For NWMP members who were killed, see [RCMP Graves](#). A number of monuments were built to mark the campaigns, with large ones in Winnipeg and Toronto, and with other individual monuments to **units** or killed militiamen. Two monuments were also raised to Riel in Winnipeg. To some, he was a martyred figure after his execution by the state on November 16, 1865.

Medals

For the 1870 campaign and the Fenian raids of 1866 and 1870, both British regulars and Canadian militiamen were eligible for the "Canadian General Service Medal, 1866-1870," but it was not authorized until June 1898 and was awarded on application (i.e., only those who were still living could apply). RREF members received the medal with the "Red River, 1870" bar or clasp. The medals were inscribed with the recipient's name, number, rank and **unit**. The medal registers can be consulted through LAC (R180-63-7, RG 9-II-A-5, volumes 3 to 10, microfilm reels C-1861 to C-1863). The registers have been digitized and can be searched by name on the [Military Medals, Honours and Awards, 1812-1969](#) database.

Researchers should also be familiar with two books, both of which are available at the Canadian War Museum's Military History Research Centre (MHRC): Graham H. Neale and Ross W. Irwin's *The Medal Roll of the Red River Campaign of 1870 in Canada* (Toronto, ON: The Charlton Press, 1982) and John R. Thyen's *Canada General Service Medal Roll, 1866-1870* (Winnipeg, MB: Bunker to Bunker Books, 1998).



Canadian General Service Medal, 1866-1870, with Red River 1870 bar

Note the Fenian Raid 1870 and Fenian Raid 1866 bars. It is not uncommon to see a combination of these bars from the two events on one medal.

Canadian War Museum
CWM 19720243-014

The original medal register for British Army personnel can be consulted at [Ancestry.ca](#), "UK Military Campaign Medal and Award Rolls, 1793-1949," see "Canada, 1866-1870."

The North West Canada Medal was authorized in July 1885 and awarded shortly thereafter to all those who had served with the NWFF. About 5,650 were issued to soldiers and support personnel. A Saskatchewan bar was also awarded to about 1,750 recipients.

The registers include the name of the recipient, their **unit**, marital status, address in 1886, and medal number ([LAC: R180-63-7, RG 9-II-A-5, volumes 11 to 12a, on microfilm reel C-1863](#)). Recipients are searchable through the Military Medals, Honours and Awards, 1812-1969 database mentioned above. Many examples of the medals can be found in the Canadian War Museum's database by searching "[Canadian General Service Medal, 1866-1870](#)" or "[North West Canada Medal.](#)"

Land Grants

All officers and men who served with the **RREF** in the 1870s were eligible for a grant of 160 acres of Dominion land in present-day Saskatchewan and Alberta, and possibly even Manitoba. A register of grant warrants awarded from 1872 to 1876 is available through [LAC, Red River Force, Land Grant Records \(LAC: RG 9-II-A-4, volumes 18 and 18A\)](#), while the warrants themselves are documented in more detail in the records of the Department of the Interior, Red River Rebellion, Military Land Warrants, 1870-1875 ([LAC: RG 15-D-II-9, volumes 1608 to 1628](#)). These records can be searched by name through [LAC's Collection Search](#).

Special mention should be made of Fred J. Shore (1942-2022), "The Canadians and the Métis: The re-creation of Manitoba, 1858-1872" (PhD thesis, University of Manitoba, 1991). Dr. Shore compiled two very important appendixes for his thesis, Appendix II being a list of the 1,704 men who served with the **RREF** and Appendix III being a list of the "bounty warrants" or land grants awarded to **RREF** members, including the discharge date and location. The appendixes are available online through the [Canadian Military Heritage Project](#) and [Olive Tree Genealogy](#).



North West Canada Medal with Saskatchewan bar

Canadian War Museum
[CWM 20200071-002](#)

Those who served in the 1885 Resistance were also eligible for a grant of 160 acres of Dominion land in the North-West Territories, and these grants are documented in Department of the Interior records ([LAC: RG 15-D-II-9, volumes 1629 to 1644](#)). The land grants are searchable by recipient name through [LAC's Collection Search](#).

Further Research and Reading

In addition to the sources above, see George F.G. Stanley's *Toil and Trouble: Military Expeditions to Red River* (Toronto, ON: Dundurn, 1989) and *The Birth of Western Canada: A History of the Riel Rebellions* (Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press, 1970).

An overlooked source of information for individuals who served with the NWFF or who were affected by the Resistance are the Department of Militia and Defence's annual reports:

Annual Report of the Department of Militia and Defence for the Year Ending December 31, 1885 ([Canada, Sessional Papers 1886, volume 5, no. 6](#)).

This report includes a lengthy contemporary explanation of the causes and outcome of the military expedition and the Resistance. A series of appendixes to the report includes lists of those killed and wounded at the various skirmishes and battles and lists of those treated by medical staff for wounds or disease. The *Preliminary Report of the Commission on War Claims* includes information on and names of civilians – including Métis – whose lands were affected, overrun by, or part of the catalyst for the uprising.

Annual Report of the Department of Militia and Defence for the Year Ending December 31, 1886 (Canada, Sessional Papers 1887, volume 10, no. 9). Appendixes continue the Claims Commission and include an index to claimants, a description of the claim, the amount, and supporting documentation. The same report also lists pensions awarded to the families of militiamen who were killed in action or who died of wounds or disease, as well as a separate list of pensioners with their name, rank, **unit**, pension amount, and nature of wound, injury or disease.

Two other sessional papers are also of interest, including a return of transport officers with dates of appointment and rates of pay, and a list of all officers on Major-General Middleton's staff. Canada's Sessional Papers are available through [Canadiana Héritage](#).

Researchers should be aware that regimental histories often include a section on the 1885 campaign. A good example is Ernest Chambers, a well-known and prolific writer whose publications on the military operations are particularly useful for family history. His books include *The Queen's Own Rifles of Canada* (Toronto, ON: E.L. Ruddy, 1901); *The Governor-General's Body Guard* (Toronto, ON: E.L. Ruddy, 1902); *The 90th Regiment: A Regimental History of the 90th Regiment, Winnipeg Rifles* (n.p., 1906); *Histoire du 65ème Régiment Carabiniers Mont-Royal* (Montréal, QC: La compagnie d'imprimerie Guertin, 1906); and *History of the 10th Royals and of the Royal Grenadiers* (Toronto, ON: Hunter, Rose, 1896). Chambers's books include lists of officers and men, short biographical sketches, **casualties**, and more. These books are available at the Canadian War Museum's MHRC and online through [Canadiana Héritage](#).

Biographies of those who served with No. 1 Company, Governor General's Foot Guards, known as the Ottawa Sharpshooters, can be found in John D. Reid (ed.), *The Ottawa Sharpshooters* (Ottawa, ON: British Isles Family History Society, 2005). Many of the key figures in both 1870 and 1885 are the subject of lengthy biographies in the [Dictionary of Canadian Biography](#). Any research on those who served in the 1885 campaign should include contemporary newspapers, many of which are now available online.

Canadian War Museum Resources

The Canadian War Museum's MHRC houses the Hartland Molson Library Collection and the George Metcalf Archival Collection, both of which can be searched online through the MHRC catalogues. As mentioned above, **unit** histories are excellent resources that often include honour rolls, biographies, and lists of **casualties**, usually with additional details. They can also provide important information on the battles, group culture, photographs, and individuals identified.

The Library also has information about uniforms and equipment. The Museum's archives are predominantly personal in nature and can add an intimate perspective to service. The Museum's Library also holds all the printed references noted in this research guide, where visitors can see the original reports with campaign maps from the 1870 and 1885-1886 rebellions.

Key Vocabulary

Casualty

Typically means war dead, wounded, missing or sick. Note that statistics and casualty figures can vary widely depending on the inclusion/exclusion criteria and the accuracy of record-keeping.

Unit

An encompassing term that refers to any organized group that an individual could be assigned or attached to, including numbered squadrons, training schools, or depots.

Militia

A "non-standing" military unit whose personnel are civilian soldiers and are not professional soldiers by trade. The Department of Militia and Defence was created in 1869 to be responsible for Canada's military. Many of the soldiers and the units that existed as militia units at this time became permanent force soldiers and regiments in response to events such as the North-West Resistance and the South African War.

With thanks to guest contributor Glenn Wright, former archivist at LAC.
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