

The government had made considerable cutbacks in their treaty promises to the First People. This resulted in increased distress and problems for them.

Other letters were sent to Ottawa. These were from local North-West government officials, the North West Mounted Police, missionaries, and others. These letters warned the federal government that there could be trouble if they did not respond to the complaints that had been outlined in the petition.

Prime Minister Macdonald did respond. A commission was formed to draw up a list of all the Metis who were eligible for scrip and land grants. Scrip is a certificate or coupon that was given to Metis people as compensation for land, entitling the holder to a choice between cash or land.

The Metis were disappointed at Macdonald's response to their petition, since they had expected more assistance. They asked Riel to stay in Canada to help them.

On March 19, 1885, Riel set up a provisional or temporary government, like the provisional government he had set up in Manitoba. Gabriel Dumont was appointed to be the military leader.

The Caucasian settlers along the Saskatchewan River were not interested in joining the Metis in an armed resistance against the Canadian government. They were very angry at the federal government, but they refused to follow Riel once he decided to take action in such a violent manner. Most of the First People decided not to take up arms against the federal government. Two exceptions were the bands led by Poundmaker and Big Bear.

An Armed Uprising

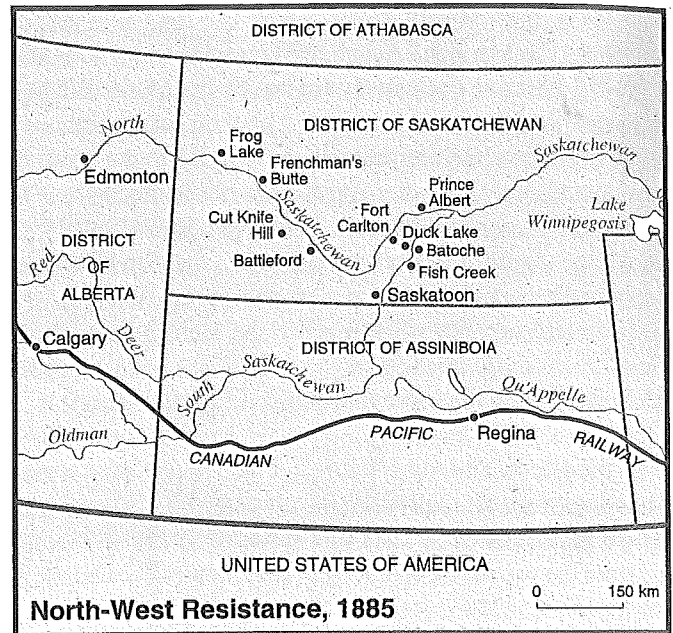


The North-West Resistance began on March 26, 1885, with a battle at the small town of Duck Lake. Gabriel Dumont and a group of Metis attacked Superintendent Crozier of the North West Mounted Police and some of his men as they were on their way to rescue arms and ammunition from a store in Duck Lake. Twelve of Crozier's men were killed and 11 wounded after a half-hour battle. Five Metis were killed. After the Battle of Duck Lake the Metis destroyed Fort Carlton. The non-Native inhabitants there had fled to Prince Albert.

Chief Poundmaker travelled at the end of March to Battleford to meet with the government agent to discuss getting more food for his people. When the townspeople heard that the First People were coming, they fled to the safety of the fort. The town was deserted when Poundmaker arrived and the government agent refused to come out of the fort to talk with him. Poundmaker's companions became frustrated and angry. They broke windows and took supplies.

The most serious incident involving the First People occurred on April 2 at Frog Lake. Chief Big Bear's men killed nine people, including the government agent, Thomas Quinn.

Prime Minister Macdonald, having heard news of armed rebellion, ordered 8000 soldiers and volunteers to travel west on the unfinished Canadian Pacific Railway. The trip took them only nine days.



*Major-General Middleton, the commander of the Canadian Militia, was in charge of battle operations. He divided his troops into three groups. He and his column set out for the Metis headquarters at Batoche. A column led by Colonel Otter set out for Battleford, where he hoped to find Poundmaker. The third column, led by Major-General Strange, set out after Big Bear and his men.

Throughout the North-West Resistance of 1885, Riel was guided by his religious convictions. Dumont wanted to use hit-and-run guerrilla tactics to defend Batoche, but Riel insisted that he had been ordered by visions from God to wait until Batoche was attacked and then defend it.

On April 24, at Fish Creek, Gabriel Dumont's men attacked Middleton's column, using the hit-and-run and then hit again tactics that Dumont found so effective. Dumont was able to slow down Middleton's progress, but he did not stop him from reaching Batoche. Middleton arrived there on May 9.

The battle at Batoche lasted for four days, from May 9 to May 12. The 300 Metis and First People had dug rifle pits from which they fired at their attackers. By the last day the defenders were out of ammunition and were firing stones and nails from their rifles. Finally Middleton's troops stormed the rifle pits and the battle was over. There were over 25 dead from both sides.

*You read on page 241 about how Prime Minister Macdonald was able to get the money he needed to finish the railway after transporting soldiers so quickly to the trouble spot.

Both Riel and Dumont managed to escape. Riel gave himself up after a few days, but Dumont fled to the United States.

Colonel Otter located Poundmaker and about 200 followers at Cut Knife Hill, near Poundmaker's reserve. Otter had hoped to make a surprise attack, but the Cree were ready for them and drove them off. Poundmaker's men had every opportunity to kill Otter's soldiers, but Poundmaker held them back and allowed the soldiers to return to Battleford. He saw no honour in killing an enemy who had already been defeated.

Poundmaker then decided to go to Batoche to help the Metis. On their way they heard the news of the Metis defeat. Realizing that there was no point in further resistance, Poundmaker surrendered to Middleton on May 26.

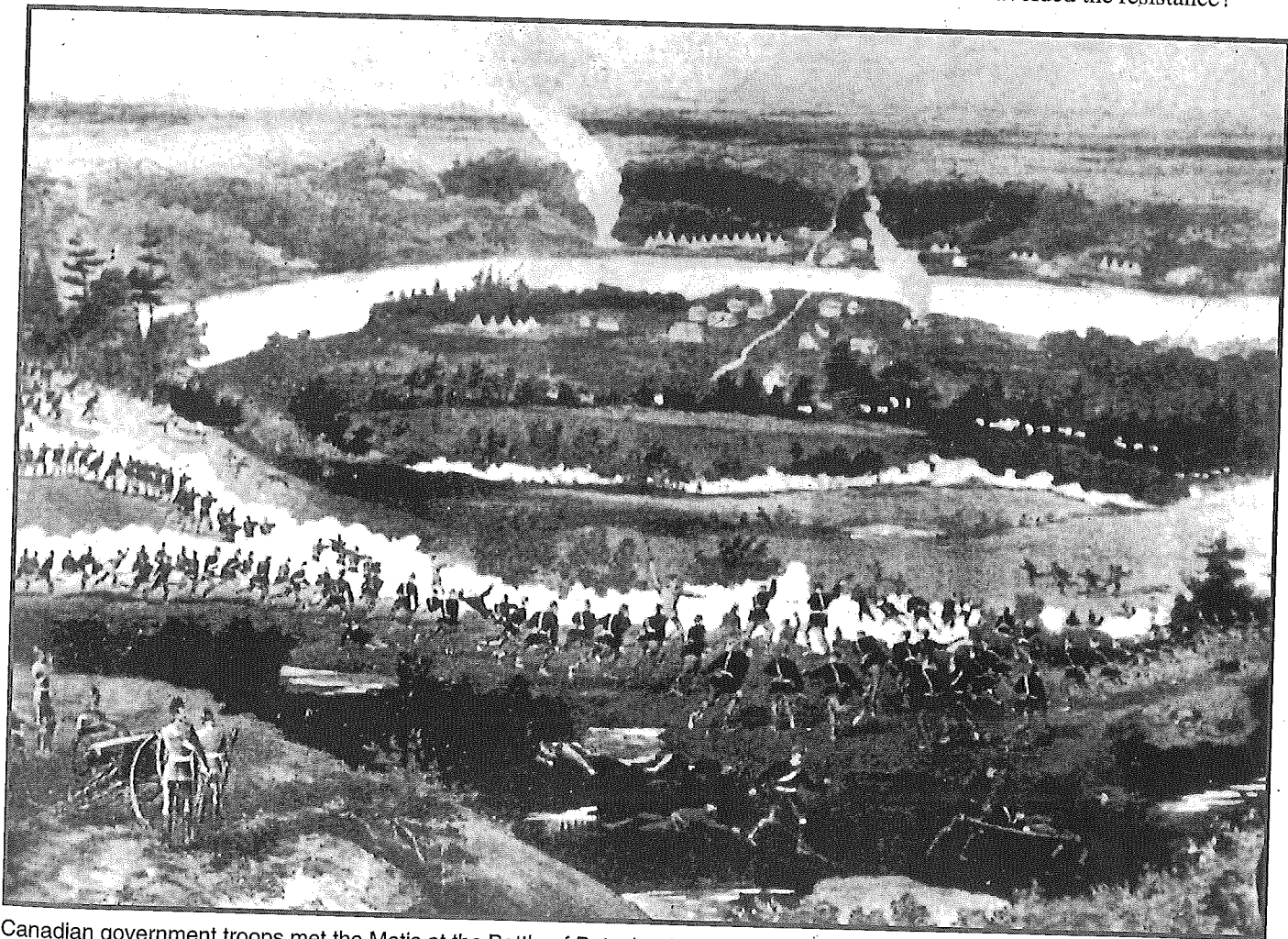
On May 28 Big Bear and his men clashed with General Strange's soldiers at Frenchman's Butte. Strange withdrew at the end of the day, planning to fight again on the next. Big

Bear and his men, being low on ammunition, took advantage of the lull in the action to escape while they could.

Both General Strange and General Middleton followed Big Bear for the next few weeks. They never did find him, but on July 2 he surrendered, accompanied only by his young son. His followers had either surrendered or simply gone elsewhere. Big Bear's surrender marked the end of the 99-day North-West Resistance.

Exploring Further

1. List the groups of people in the North-West and the concerns that each had regarding the federal government prior to the North-West Resistance.
2. Are uprisings like the North-West Resistance ever justified? Explain your answer.
3. What other methods might the Metis and the First People have used to solve their problems? How might Prime Minister Macdonald have avoided the resistance?



Canadian government troops met the Metis at the Battle of Batoche, May 9 to 12, 1885.