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- Newspaper account commemorating the fiftieth anniversary of the Riel Rebellion.

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BATTLEFORD REMEMBERS STOCKADE DAYS

On July 24th, thousands of Western pioneers gathered near the old Stockade at Battleford,

in celebration of 50 years of peace after
Riel Rebellion. The material on this page
was written by Mrs. C. Wetton, one of
the Star-Phoenix correspondents in
northwestern Saskatchewan

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ONE MEMBER LEFT OF
BATTLEFORD RIFLES

William La Tour, Now Nearly 80 years of Age, Served During
Rebellion

The only surviving member of the Battleford Rifles and the only man now resident in Battleford who fought at the Battle of the Cut Knife Hill, told his story to the Star-Phoenix. It was William La Tour, now nearly 80 years of age, who came to Battleford from Quebec in '82.

He talked freely of the unrest among the Indians for many months prior to the rebellion and told of a freak "accident" that prolonged the life of Farm Instructor Payne for at least another 18 months. An impatient Indian who sought food and tea from the farm instructor on the Stoney Reserve was ejected forcibly by Payne. Lean Man, for it was he, whipped a pistol from underneath a blanket and all but shot Payne in the back. But the hammer jammed on Mr. La Tour's thumb in the struggle that ensued. The young French Canadian was assistant farm instructor at the time.

He joined the Battleford Rifles when they were recruited on March 26, '85, and well remembers marching out of the barracks square on the afternoon of May 1 under Captain Nash. They were 50 strong and brought up the rear of the force under Colonel Otter which sought to stem the Indian tide at Cut Knife Hill.

Hemmed in, their only retreat through a horseshoe neck, Corporal La Tour says it was only Poundmaker's intervention that stopped the Indians from circling round and obliterating the force before sundown.

As it was, they were imperilled as they made their way slowly out of the gully. Battleford Light Infantrymen, whose battle honors perpetuate the stand of the Battleford Rifles in '85,

recall with pride that though this volunteer force went into battle in the rear of the column, it was a protective guard until the retreat had been accomplished. With Corporal La Tour was Corporal Charlie Daunais, now deceased, who came West with him in '82. Months after the battle two Indians said to them, "We could have killed you and Charlie at Cut Knife Hill. We saw you from where we were hiding in the willow bushes near the creek." They were a couple of Stonies from the reserve where William La Tour had served as assistant farm instructor two years before.

If an Indian never forgets an insult, it is equally true he

rarely forgets a kindness, and who can tell, perhaps some generous act of William La Tour's stayed fingers that closed around a trigger.

450 Persons Sought
Shelter in Stockade
When Battle Flared

ONLY ONE GUN, A SEVEN POUNDER, IN FORT AT BATTLEFORD: HAD TO
GET WATER FROM RIVER: SETTLEMENT LAID WASTE

What of life in the stockade at Battleford during the Riel Rebellion, where 450 people sought shelter from hordes of infuriated Indians who terrorized the district and who, before aid could be secured, plundered and laid waste this pioneer settlement? What of its perils, its hardships, its heartaches?

The answer was forthcoming from Mrs. J. H. Storer, the first newspaper woman west of Winnipeg; Mrs. Charlie Parker, "The Daughter of the Regiment;" and Mrs. G. H. Clouston, who entered the stockade as a bride.

Mrs. Clouston, daughter of William Latimer, who joined the N.W.M.P. in '75, was married on February 17, 1885, and on March 26 hastened with others to seek refuge in the stockade, obeying police instructions.

Mrs. Storer recalls the looting of the town on March 29 and a hasty exit from their home which stood on a plateau overlooking the Battle River, which they forded in the high water of the Spring freshet.

Mollie Burke, who later became Mrs. Charlie Parker, was born in the barracks. Her father, Trumpeter Paddy Burke, came west with the Wolseley expedition. He was a bugler in the barracks and a grandson of a survivor of "The Birkenhead."

All food was supplied by the Government and was rationed out. The barracks, built in the form of a T, provided separate quarters for the women and children, and in addition a number of them were housed in the superintendent's quarters. Consider their peril. There was only one gun, a seven-pounder, within the fort. It was built on a bastion in a corner, with look-outs on either side -- 50 men to a garrison, and not a chance in the world in a four-square attack. Worse still, no water was obtainable in the barracks and if access to the river had been prevented by the enemy, their doom would have been sealed.

Events from April 22-24 among the most stirring of siege.

April 22, Inspector Dickens and his men arrived by boat from Fort Pitt, with all the horrors of the Frog Lake massacre in their minds. That night Scout Frank Smart rode out from barracks on patrol, with an aftermath the following day in a funeral procession that filed slowly through the barracks

square and out into the lonely hillside where the police cemetery lay. It was when the funeral procession was returning that a scout galloped up to the orderly's office. Otter's Column was approaching. Battleford was saved by a force that journeyed 2,000 miles to its rescue.

That evening there rang out such a call from the bugler as never before resounded in these hills. Trumpeter Paddy Burke mounted the ramparts and blew for all that was in him. His call was heard four miles away, and answered by a bugler in Otter's force. That night Colonel Otter and his men encamped a distance from the town.

There is no record of it, but surely among the 35 women and children in the superintendent's quarters, some of them gazed out through the wide windows that April morning when Otter's Column, four miles long from tip to rear, swung over and down the brow of the hill that marks the western end of the Swift Current trail.

What a sight for the siege-weary watchful eyes -- dark green uniforms of the Queen's Own Rifles; red-coated sharpshooters from the Governor-General's Foot Guards; Toronto infantrymen; blue-coated artillery men from Quebec and the scarlet and gold of the Mounted Police.

Here was the deliverance for which they had prayed.

Days of anxiety, though numbered, were far from over. A week later they waved farewell to a force proceeding west to Poundmaker's Reserve, and this time they took with them some of their own kith and kin, a company of the Battleford Rifles. Trumpeter Burke, he who sounded the call that heralded Otter's approach a week before, stepped out on that morning of May 2 and on Cut Knife Hill sounded his bugle for the last time. Indian snipers picked off this gallant policeman and he died on the homeward trail.

Mrs. Parker says she recalls accompanying her mother to the emergency dressing station in Government House. In the dim lantern light they stepped over the bodies of the dead and dying till they reached the spot where the trumpeter lay. Mr. Laurie has in his possession a prized photograph of early barrack life, and among them is one of Paddy Burke, as bonny and gallant a bugler as ever sounded a call.

Poundmaker's surrender to General Middleton on May 24 was the death knell to rebel hopes. By the end of May most of the inhabitants of the stockade had left for their homes. Those whose homes had been completely destroyed by the enemy lingered on for another month.

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