DETAILED BATTLE ZONE MAP
BATOCHE. DAY 1, MAY 9, 1885.
3:00 PM

AREA WHERE ZAREBA WILL BE BUILT IN AFTERNOON

KEY
1 Sequential Military Manoeuvres
2 Metis and Indians
3 Northwest Field Force
4 Rifle Pit (Unoccupied)
5 Rifle Pit (Occupied by Metis)
6 Rifle Fire
7 Cannon (9 Pounders) / Fire
8 Gatling Gun / Fire

NOTES
A Boulton's Mounted Infantry
B 10th Grenadiers
C 90th Battalion
D Midlanders
E 'A' Battery
F Winnipeg Field Battery
G French's Scouts
H Surveyors

0 100 200 400 800 Feet
0 30 60 120 240 Metres
effect this would have on the enemy; second, he did not know how far to retire. His concern over whether the Métis would interpret the withdrawal as a retreat from weakness (to which the Métis could respond by an attack) was paramount with Middleton.

Melgund’s account of this event does not relate any of the atmosphere surrounding the order, or any of the underlying reasons for it. He simply stated:

About 3 p.m. General told me he wished me to go to Humboldt and send some telegrams for him. He also wished me for several reasons to go to Ottawa. I accordingly started, and found our camp on prairie breaking up in order to move up to General.68

By approximately 3:00 p.m. the fighting had subsided. Middleton had sent Boulton and Secretan to strike camp and move it to within a mile of Batoche (about one-quarter mile from the church). Three and one-half hours later the transport carrying the camp forward was arriving and a zareba was formed. The zareba consisted of a transport pulled into a “zareba” shape, with earth and poplar branches filling the space underneath the wagons; a small trench was also dug around the outside of the enclosure.

Zareba warfare is recommended when a long column of transport needs to be guarded and when fighting guerillas. Major Callwell also advocated the use of these tactics, especially when approaching an enemy of unknown strength. It was seen as a defensive tactic within an overall offensive campaign:

The principle [zareba warfare] is an excellent illustration of defensive tactics superimposed upon offensive strategy. The regular troops invade hostile territory, or territory in temporary occupation of the enemy, and they maintain strategically the initiatives; but when they find themselves in presence of the irregular forces prepared for battle, they form the laager or zareba as the case may be, and either await attack or else leave their impediments in it and go out to fight without encumbrances. In any case they have a secure bivouac and adequate protection during the hours of darkness.69

In fact, Callwell recommended such tactics in the terrain of South Africa and North America. The precedent for the use of such tactics originated with pioneers, who came to the frontier in wagons, and used circling formations in face of hostile natives. In regular military strategy this tactic stems from
the square. A similar tactic was actually used by the Métis against the Sioux at the battle of Grand Coteau. In North America, pioneers “when operating against Red Indians often formed laagers, or corrals as they were called.” Callwell specifically cited the use of zarebas: “During the suppression of Riel’s rebellion in 1885, laagers were generally established after each march by the government troops.” He furthermore cited Middleton’s tactics as an example of a proper use of these tactics: “in the campaign against Riel … the regular army has adopted it to varying circumstances with great success.” And as such Callwell concluded:

Some think it to be derogatory, some fear its evil moral effect upon the troops. But if kept within limits, and employed only when clear necessity arises, if not permitted to cramp their energies or to check judiciously applied offensive action on the part of the troops there is much to be said for a military system which safeguards the supplies of an army and which grants it temporary repose.

Coinciding with the withdrawal of the troops to the zareba, at approximately 6:30 p.m., was a renewed advance from the Métis. Middleton wrote: “Towards evening the troops were gradually withdrawn, some of the enemy following them up until checked by a heavy fire from the zareba.” The Gatling gun was again heavily relied upon to cover the retreat to the zareba (see map 6). From all accounts the retreat was an unpleasant one: “The rebels, well aware of our retirement, took advantage of their safe route under the brow of the cliff, and rising over the brow fired into the zareba.” Both the 90th and the 10th Grenadiers were deployed to meet the Métis’ pursuit and, as one source noted, “the wonder is that our loss was not heavy. The only reasonable explanations are poor ammunition, poor and hurried marksmanship, greater caution on the part of our forces, and a kind Providence.” One man was killed during this final skirmish of the day, however: Private Moor, 3rd Company of the Grenadiers, was shot through the head while defending the zareba.

At dusk, around 7:00 p.m., the fire lessened; “A few of them kept up a desultory long-range fire for a short time, killing two horses and wounding a man.” As the fighting waned, fires were lit and men ate supper and prepared for the night. Only the wounded were allowed to sleep in tents, the remainder made do under the open sky. The night was ominous for many, and one man recorded his feelings:

Night came at length, but tired as we were it was scarcely welcome. We were cooped up, and had the extreme satisfaction of furnishing a good mark for pot shooters. In the
corral were more than six hundred mules and horses, and eight cattle. Men were busy throwing up hasty entrenchments; teamsters, nervous and frightened, were yelling at equally nervous animals; around the hospital tents the doctors were busy dressing wounds, probing for bullets, etc. The bullets were whizzing and pinging overhead, and occasionally when one remembered that a favorite trick among the reds is to stampede the cattle and horses of the enemy. Hoofs would be apt to deal worse wounds than balls, and against afrighted animals, cooped up within a small space, we had absolutely no defense. The anticipations of a mean night were largely realized, though thus far we have escaped a stampede. Few, if any, slept five hours consecutively, and the firing kept up almost all night.78

To prevent a surrounding manoeuvre by the Métis during the night, trenches had been dug around the zareba, and the Midland Battalion and one company of the 90th took up positions on a height of land overlooking the river. This did not prevent the dropping fire which the Métis and Indians kept up throughout the night, however.

According to Elie Dumont, the Indians did much of the firing during the first evening:

Grosse gagne se sont assis. On tire des plans pour la soirée. Sauvages disaient on va les tirer ce soir dans leur camp, toute la nuit: vous autres vous travaillerez dans la journée, les métis. Métis disent oui. Au commencement de la veillée, les sauvages ont commencé à tirer, sur le camp, une 10ne de minutes entres les coups, toute la nuit jusqu’au jour.79

The resistance of the Métis and the Indians on the first day appears to have momentarily stunned Middleton. His decision to move the camp up to the front showed that he had not entirely lost confidence in the ability of his men to break through the defenses at Batoche—but in spite of this, Middleton’s actions during the next few days were cautious and deliberate. Even though his intelligence reports were showing that the Métis were fewer in number than he had estimated and that they were low on ammunition, Middleton was taciturn, unwilling to embark on a bold offensive.80 He chose this tactic even though he had lost only two men and a few wounded. In effect, he was imposing a partial siege on Batoche. His caution was shown when, according to Boulton, he ordered reinforcements to the front, although Middleton himself did not admit this in his official account published in the Sessional Papers.
By the end of the first day of fighting at Batoche, Middleton and the North West Field Force were in a defensive encampment; the men and animals huddled in the zareba spent a fretful night. While the Métis and the Indians by contrast were in an almost victorious mood: having witnessed the uniformed army in retreat, they showed an audacious confidence by keeping up a constant fire into the corral throughout the night. Fourmond recalled that the Métis were in a jubilant mood that evening. As he wrote: “On eut dit l’armée mise en fuite. Et la victoire gagnée par les métis qui alors poursuivant l’ennemi d’aussi près que pouvait le permettre le gatling gun.”

The priests who occupied the church through most of the fighting made a number of perceptive observations. The first was that the Canadians appeared to be somewhat disorganized on this first day (a weakness that Middleton himself acknowledged): “Parmi les diverses impressions de la journée, il en est une qui regarde la tenue de l’armée canadienne. Fûmes surpris de son triste accoutrement aussi bien que de son peu de discipline. Nous disions: où sont nos troupes françaises. Quel contraste! Il nous semblait voir des enfants jouant au soldat.” Fourmond also noted the shortage of ammunition among the Métis even after the first day: “on voyait Sioux, rôder sur le champ laissé par les soldats, les cartouches abandonnées ou perdues, s’approvisionnant ainsi pour le lendemain.” After a cannon ball was fired on the house holding the prisoners, it too was used for ammunition: “Le fils de Michel Trottier ramasse le boulet, va au bas de la côte porter la poudre de dedans et ramasse les balles des soldats et va les faire fondre pour faire des balles pour Métis.” One other observation made by the priests was that the Métis may have gained a false sense of security from the method of firing used by the Field Force: “Les Métis souvent induits en erreur sur les morts des soldats par la manœuvre qui fait coucher le premier rang avant le second tire.” The recognition by the Métis that they were killing fewer men than they believed could have demoralized them after the apparent victory of May 9.

The next day, May 10, was a Sunday; the North West Field Force was unable to reach the position left the day before, “as the enemy was in greater force, and now held the high ground about the cemetery and the ground in front of the church. Some of them, apparently Indians from their war cries, had taken post at the end of the point of land below the cemetery…” (see map 7).

Middleton had apparently decided to attempt to demoralize the enemy with heavy artillery fire during the day. Shortly after 5:00 a.m., he began to fire on positions which he had held the previous day: “Two guns were directed against the houses in the basin-shaped depression along the river.
DETAILED BATTLE ZONE MAP
BATOCHE. DAY 1, MAY 9, 1885.
6:00 PM

- Treed Areas
- Floodplain
- Contour Line
- Slopes
- Cemetery
- Trails
- Church and Rectory
- Ferry
- Contour Line

Sequential Military Manoeuvres
Métis and Indians
Northwest Field Force
Rifle Pit (Unoccupied)
Rifle Pit (Occupied by Métis)
Rifle Fire
Cannon (9 Pounders) / Fire
Gatling Gun / Fire

NOTES
A Boulton's Mounted Infantry
B 10th Grenadiers
C 90th Battalion
D Midlanders
E 'A' Battery
F Winnipeg Field Battery
G French's Scouts
H Surveyors

Scale:
0 100 200 400 800 Feet
0 30 60 120 240 Metres
A few rebels lay behind three log shanties just below the river bank, and the artillery soon drove them out."

On May 11, Middleton appeared more anxious for a direct engagement with the Métis and the Indians (see map 8). But he approached this strategy with caution. Most of the day was spent in reconnaissance, exploring all the possibilities available for a major attack. On this penultimate day of the Battle of Batoche, the fighting escalated, as a consequence of the reconnaissance carried out by Middleton.

It had been reported to Middleton that a space of open prairie, overlooking the village of Batoche, lay just to the north of the zareba. Boulton, whose men accompanied Middleton, described the purpose as follows:

We marched out about ten o’clock under the command of the General himself, leaving (Alone) Montizambert, Colonel Grasset, Colonel Williams, Major Jarvis, Colonel Mackeand and Colonel Van Straubenzie all discussing the position, and studying a plan of the ground which had been drawn by Captain Haig, R.E. with a view of preparing an attack."

Middleton, accompanied by the Gatling gun, proceeded north through a small swamp, under the cover of bushes lying to the north of the zareba (see map 9). They emerged on an irregularly-shaped clearing “about two miles long and 1,000 yards in the broadest part, with a sort of slight ridge running down the centre and some undulations.” As they moved northward they attracted a sporadic fire from the rifle pits which ran along this ridge. In response to the sniper fire, Middleton ordered the Gatling gun to direct two or three rounds into the rifle pits. Middleton then rode further to the north, where he pursued two men he spotted riding across the prairie on ponies and captured another, later discovered to be one of Riel’s men, who came out of the bush. According to Middleton, “We also captured some cattle and ponies which we took back to camp with us.” Boulton wrote: “Before leaving this point we burned down some log houses that might offer shelter to the enemy, in case further operations were needed here.”

Middleton had been receiving intelligence reports which indicated that the Métis were almost out of ammunition. Now that he could see the Métis thinly spread out along their line of rifle pits, he discovered what he needed to know in preparation for his final attack on Batoche: “We could see with our glasses that the enemy had a series of rifle pits all along the edge of those woods, and numbers of them were running up between the woods and disappearing into the pits. Evidently they were prepared for an attack in this direction.” It was clear that the Métis had responded to Middleton’s
manoeuvre of pulling men away from their right flank to reinforce the left where the Field Force “drew a smart fire.”

Further evidence that the Métis had followed the Gatling gun to the north awaited Middleton when he returned to camp. There he found that the infantry were able to regain the ground they had held on the first day of fighting: “A party of Midlanders, under Lieutenant-Colonel Williams’ command, finding the fire slacken from the Indians’ post below the cemetery, and led by him, gallantly rushed it, the Indians bolting leaving behind them some blankets and a dummy which they had used for drawing our fire.”

Middleton now knew that the Métis could not be certain how many men he might deploy in a manoeuvre to the north because of the cover offered by the intervening bushes. As a consequence of the advances made by the infantry, the artillery were again able to draw up in the vicinity of the graveyard to open fire on the village and on the houses on the opposite bank: “shelling the opposite bank we [observed] that the shells created great consternation among the rebels, making them scatter and get well beyond range, and silenced the long range rifles which were a constant source of annoyance.”

It was clear to Middleton that the resources of the Métis and Indians were running low and that his men were gaining confidence. The Métis hardly pursued the Field Force as it retired for the night and there was no fire into the camp that evening; a parapet had been built around the zareba that day to protect against bullets fired into the camp. Late that evening Middleton made his decision: “Our men were beginning to show more dash, and that night I came to the conclusion that it was time to make our decisive attack.”

Convinced that the Métis and the Indians would follow his manoeuvre accompanied by the Gatling gun, Middleton again reconnoitred to the open plain north of the zareba. Middleton then told Van Straubenzie to proceed to the original front, and “that as soon as he heard us well engaged he was to move off, and, having taken up yesterday’s position, push on towards the village.” This manoeuvre engineered by Middleton was commemorated in a major military study of the 19th century, which examined warfare against what were referred to as “savages” throughout the British Empire. Major Callwell cites Middleton’s feinting action as particularly successful in the situation confronting him:

General Middleton found the half-breeds holding a long line of rifle pits; this stretched across the land enclosed by a wide salient angle formed by the Saskatchewan. The Government forces encamped opposite one end of this line of defence and formed a zareba, and they remained facing
THE BATTLE OF BATOCHE 1885
DAY 2, MAY 10, 1885.

Sequential Military Maneuvers
Métis and Indians
Northwest Field Force
Rifle Pit (Unoccupied)
Rifle Pit (Occupied by Métis)
Rifle Pit (Hastily constructed by NWFF)
Rifle Fire
Cannon (9 Pounders)/Fire
Gatling Gun/Fire
Exploding Cannon Shells

NWFF:
A Boulton's Mounted Infantry
B 10th Grenadiers
C 90th Battalion
D Midlanders
E 'A' Battery
F Winnipeg Field Battery
G French's Scouts
H Surveyors

Map 7 of 10.
WAFF withdraws to Zareba in evening.
THE BATTLE OF BATOCHE 1885
DAY 4, MAY 12, 1885. 10:00 AM

- Sequential Military Maneuvers
- Métis and Indians
- Northwest Field Force
- Rifle Pit (Unoccupied)
- Rifle Pit (Occupied by Métis)
- Rifle Pit (Hastily constructed by NWFF)
- Rifle Fire
- Cannon (9 Pounders)/Fire
- Gatling Gun/Fire
- Exploding Cannon Shells

NWFF:
A Boulton's Mounted Infantry
B 10th Grenadiers
C 90th Battalion
D Midlanders
E 'A' Battery
F Winnipeg Field Battery
G French's Scouts
H Surveyors

Ashley arrives at approx. 11:00 am carrying a white flag and message from Riel to Middleton.
the enemy four days engaged in skirmishes. On the third day the mounted troops made a demonstration against the hostile centre, and it was observed that a part of Riel’s followers were withdrawn from the end of the line opposite the zareba to strengthen the threatened point. On the following day this demonstration was repeated by the mounted men with two guns, and these then returned quietly to camp. In the afternoon the whole Government force attacked the end of the rebel line in front of the zareba where it had been greatly weakened, and broke through and reached Batoche. The undulating nature of the ground patched with woods and copses enable the feint to be carried out in very effective fashion.99

The strategy was straightforward and simple, even though it failed initially. The attack from the left flank was to be led that morning by Colonel Van Straubenzie’s brigade. The men making up the party intended to participate in the feinting manoeuvre were ‘Captain Dennis’ corps, my own corps [Boulton], and Captain French’s, in all numbering about one hundred and thirty men, one gun of “A” Battery, under Captain Drury and the Gatling under Lieutenant Rivers, accompanied by Captain Howard, marched off under General Middleton…”100 The nine-pounder which accompanied Middleton’s expedition was pulled up into firing position, and the Land Surveyors, under Captain Dennis, dismounted and advanced in skirmishing order. The Gatling gun was then stationed to the north of this point, and Middleton rode out to within 400 yards of the Métis rifle pits to order the advance of the dismounted surveyors. The rest of the infantry was kept hidden behind the advancing skirmishers. According to one surveyor’s reminiscences, it appeared that the Métis were anticipating an attack from the basin where Middleton assembled his men: “The Rebels evidently expected us, for we had only advanced a few yards when they must have caught sight of one of us over the rise, and a volley was fired into our ranks, at the report of which we dropped our faces in the brush, one of us never again to rise again, for poor Kippen fell dead with a rifle bullet in his brain.”101 The nine-pounder and the Gatling also opened fire and there was a brief, but from most accounts, intense exchange. Perhaps the Métis, in fact, had expected the main attack to come from this front.

During the morning’s action, another event occurred which suggests that the Métis position was weakening. It also showed that Riel, by sending his message to this front, believed that it was where the main attack would take place. Just as the Gatling was ready to move to a position further to the
north, Middleton saw a man riding towards him with a white flag. It turned out to be a Mr. Astley, a surveyor captured by Riel just after the battle at Duck Lake. “He told me he had just come from Riel, who was apparently in a great state of agitation, and handed me a letter from him in which he said, apparently referring to our shelling the houses, that if I massacred his women and children they would massacre their prisoners.”

Middleton replied that he had no intention of deliberately injuring women and children and suggested that they be placed in a building marked by a white flag. Astley, after having explained Riel’s condition for surrender, returned with Middleton’s reply. Shortly after this, another man emerged on foot carrying a white flag. He turned out to be Thomas Jackson, later found to be sympathetic to Riel. Jackson was carrying the same note as Astley; however, he refused to go back to Riel’s camp and Middleton allowed him, for the time being, to go free.

It was now about 11:30 a.m. and Middleton was prepared to move back to camp. His deployment of troops in the morning seemed to confuse the men in the rifle pits, according to Boulton, “keeping us for a while just out of sight of the enemy, occasionally showing a mounted man or two to puzzle the rebels as to our movements, which always drew a volley from them.” Following this, the men returned to camp having lost only one man in what was to be an all-out advance against the Métis and Indians.

That morning Van Straubenzie had ordered the Midlanders and Grenadiers out in quarter column ready for an attack on the left flank. Due to a strong east wind he was however unable to hear any of the artillery or rifle fire from Middleton’s contingent. According to a number of accounts, Middleton was furious when he returned to camp at lunch to find that no attack had been made. Middleton himself wrote: “I am afraid on that occasion I lost both my temper and my head.” Later, in retrospect, Middleton seemed to believe that it was fortuitous that the charge had been aborted:

On regaining the camp I was much annoyed at finding that, owing to a misconception of my orders, the advance parties had not, as I had directed, been sent forward to hold the regained position and press forward, as I drew the enemy from their right by my feint; but now I am inclined to think it was a fortunate thing that they had not, for I believe the total silence and absence of fire from my left only strengthened the belief of the enemy that I was going to attack from the prairie ground.

The men of the Grenadiers and Midlanders were just completing their meal, which one man described as “munching the bulletproof discs of that
indescribable compound known as Government biscuit that formed our lunch... 

Middleton was sitting down to his when he gave a rather vague order to Van Straubenzie to “take them as far as he pleased.” It is believed that the order was simply intended to send the men back to the positions they held that morning although it might have been taken as a signal to advance further against the Métis positions.

Conflicting accounts over exactly what happened and who was responsible for the charge at this point are numerous (see map 10). Much of the conflict was motivated by those who sought personal glory, and also by those who either hated or admired Middleton. One observer noted:

one of the Midland men on the slope of the hill near the cemetery was hit by a volley from the west side of the river, and the ambulance men going to his relief were also fired upon. This seemed to infuriate the men, and their officers saw that there was no holding them any longer. Colonel Williams therefore decided upon charging, and with only two companies of the Midland, he led the way counting on the 90th and the Grenadiers for support.

Others also gave credit to Williams for leading the final charge, though it is not clear whether he proceeded on his own or under orders. Colonel Denison, who was not at the front but stationed at Humboldt, acknowledges Williams as the leader of the final charge. Captain Peters gives credit for the charge to Van Straubenzie, while Boulton tends to credit Middleton and Van Straubenzie with issuing the string of orders which led to the final charge. Middleton’s own description, which he wrote closest to the time of the action, indicates that the breakthrough merely happened and was not actually ordered as an advance:

After the men had had their dinners they were moved down to take up old positions and press on. Two companies of the Midland, 60 men in all, under Lt. Col. Williams, were extended on the left and moved up to the cemetery, and the Grenadiers, 200 strong, under Lt. Col. Grassett prolonged the line to the right beyond the church, the 90th being in support. The Midland and Grenadiers, led by Lt. Cols. Williams and Grassett, the whole led by Lt. Col. Straubenzie in command of the Brigade, then dashed forward with a cheer and drove the enemy out of the pits in front of the cemetery and the ravine to the right of it, thus clearing the angle at the turn of the river.
One theory suggests that because of the turn in the river it was necessary for the line of advance to be equidistant from the rifle pits all along the front and that, consequently, the extreme left had to be ordered slightly forward. When so commanded they advanced without resistance, possibly due to weakly manned or vacant rifle pits (men being now located to the north, where attack was anticipated). Gaining confidence and momentum and encountering little resistance, they broke into a run. Seeing this movement, the rest of the front, extending to the right from the river past the church, now followed suit. This advancing front, made up from left to right of the Midlanders, Grenadiers and 90th, was now joined by men ordered by Middleton to extend the line to the right. This was done by sending out the gun of “A” Battery and by “B” and “F” of the 90th; Boulton’s Mounted were then sent to lengthen the line even further. The Surveyors were ordered out to the right of Boulton’s men. The artillery were now firing both at the village and at the Métis in rifle pits across the river, whose fire was pouring down on the Midlanders closest to the river. The gun from the Winnipeg Field Battery and the Gatling were ordered to fire at the village from the right extreme on the front.

Loud cheers were heard as the men now broke towards the village. One reporter wrote:

> with a rush and a cheer they were down on the rebels with the fierceness of Bashi-Basouks, the Midland on the left, the Grenadiers in the centre, and the 90th on the right. The advance came sweeping round until a few minutes saw the line of direction at right angles to the original line of attack. The cheering was that of satisfied and contented men, and the enthusiasm was intense. Nothing could have withstood the pace, the force, and the dogged determination of the men. The cheering attracted the General, and, taking in the situation at glance, he came on with the Winnipeg artillery, Gatling and three companies of the 90th.\(^{111}\)

Just as Middleton heard cheers from the men as they broke through the first line of rifle pits, Astley, Riel’s messenger, again appeared. He carried with him a note from Riel which read, “General,—Your prompt answer to my note shows that I was right mentioning to you the cause of humanity. We will gather our families in one place and as soon as it is done we will let you know.”\(^{112}\) It was signed Louis David Riel. On the outside another missive, reflecting a more agitated state of mind, appeared. “I do not like the war, and if you do not retreat and refuse an interview, the question remains the same concerning the prisoners.”\(^{113}\) The message on the envelope, which
contained a veiled threat, was in fact a contradiction of the note inside, an indication of Riel’s instability. Middleton ignored both the note and the message:

Of course no answer was sent, and soon, with the officers well in front, a general advance of the whole line was made with rousing cheers, the place was captured, the prisoners released, and the fighting was over, except for some desultory long-range firing, which was soon put down by two or three parties sent in different directions.¹¹⁴

The final offensive did not run as smoothly as Middleton described, and a number of sources indicate that some stiff resistance was met as they moved down the slopes towards the village. One skirmisher recalled the action: “The enemy poured in a hot fire when we started, but I don’t think any of our men were hit until we got into the bush. Here many of the men were struck.”¹¹⁵ Most were hit by shots fired from the camouflaged rifle pits.

The well-constructed rifle pits discovered after the attack by the Field Force were praised by Middleton:

I was astonished at the strength of the position and at the ingenuity and care displayed in the construction of the rifle pits ... In and around the pits were found blankets, trousers, coats, shirts, boots, shoes, food, oil, Indian articles of sleep, one or two damaged shot guns and one good rifle. It was evident that a detachment of Rebels had lived in these pits, day and night, and it was easily understood, by an inspection of them, how perfectly safe the holders of these pits were from the fire of our rifles and especially from the Gatling and artillery.

These pits were also judiciously placed as regards repelling a front attack, but by attacking their right (which was their weakest point) and driving it in, we turned and took in reverse all their entrenchments, along the edge of the prairie ground, and thus caused a rout which ended in a “sauve qui peut.”¹¹⁶

The Métis, as is now well known, were short of ammunition and fighting men on this last day. Of the original 320 to 350 combatants, Lépine recalled that only 50 to 60 men were fighting during the final battle¹¹⁷: “40 environ métis, avaient des carabines, le reste avaient des fusils à canard (2 coups).”¹¹⁸ Nails were being fired by some in the rifle pits when the metal bullets manufactured from the last of the melted down cannon balls had
been exhausted. In addition to the fact that they were poorly armed and lacked ammunition, the Métis, it appears, were also misled by appearances on this last day. Vandale remembered thinking that the peace had been won when Middleton withdrew his men from their left flank in the morning. The Métis, it seems, believed that Riel’s messages had succeeded in winning a cease-fire. Vandale wrote: “Le canon arrête et Champagne se sauve et dit c’est la paix... Les Métis se lèvent, s’assient sur le bord des trous ... puis se relèvent et se retirent au camp des familles, une douzaine environ, pensant que c’était la paix.” As was evident, however, it was a terrible misunderstanding: “On était à se laver, quand Gabriel vient nous renvoyer aux trous du vieux chemin—s’y sont rendus, et grand bruit dans le camp et coups de fusil—10 minutes plus tard, bataille générale. Quand la bataille recommence, il y en avait 18 qui tenaient bon, et plusieurs se sauvaient un à un quand ils avaient une chance.” It is clear that the state of disarray the Métis found themselves in on the last day was greater than has previously been believed. Indeed, the orders under which the Métis were acting were confused and contradictory. The final attack by the Field Force was decisive, therefore, even from the perspective of the Métis:

On voit l’armée déboucher de tous côtés en ordre de bataille. Infanterie, artillerie, cavalerie, tout à la fois. Avec un ordre et détermination, une rapidité de mouvement que nous n’avions pas vue les autres jours. Du ler coup d’oeil, on comprit que l’heure decisive était venue; que c’en était fait de Batoche.

At dusk, Middleton ordered that the camp be formed into a zareba. Trenches were dug, but they were not as extensive as before. These precautions turned out to be unnecessary as no other shots were fired at Batoche. The zareba was located just to the north and east of Batoche’s house.

During the period after the fighting and throughout the following days, the men with the Field Force, and the reporters accompanying them, made a number of observations about the Métis and recorded statements made by them. While these statements were accurately recorded, whether they were factual remains questionable. One recurring observation was that the Métis and their families were forced to take up arms against their will.

Almost ten years later, when he was reflecting over the events of 1885, Middleton was generous in his praise of the fighting ability of the Métis and Indians. Of the combat on May 12, in particular, he wrote:

Needless to say, I was well satisfied with the result of the day’s fighting, which proved the correctness of my opinion
that these great hunters, like the Boers of South Africa, are only formidable when you play their games, “bush fighting,” to which they are accustomed, but they cannot stand a determined charge.\textsuperscript{123}

This seems to be an accurate assessment, but begs the question in that the Métis and Indians were prevented by their own leader from fully engaging in guerilla warfare. A bold frontal attack was possible not through anything Middleton or the Field Force did, but through Riel’s determination to decide their fate at Batoche.

For the Westerners who rose or were tempted to rise in arms, there was a subtle irony in the presence of these Eastern soldiers. Many who had come obediently and with preconceived notions of the savagery of the Wild West came to sympathize with the problems of their former foes. The problems of the administration of the Northwest was apparent to those who marched into the territory—they too suffered from privations on the frontier. Only after receiving reports from the distant Northwest did many of the officials in the East become aware of Western discontent and discover that there was substance to the complaints.

Melgund, on whose observations both Lansdowne and Derby relied, believed that there was general discontent in the Northwest among all groups as a result of inadequate administration and neglect. As he wrote after the fighting had ended:

Riel and Gabriel Dumont were not counting only on their half-breed and Redskin rifles, but on the support of white men who they had been lulled into believing would stand by them. Riel put his fighting men in his first line, but in his second we may perhaps find the disappointed white contractor, the disappointed white land shark, the disappointed white farmer.\textsuperscript{124}

The tragedy of Batoche was that those mentioned by Melgund, and especially the Métis and Indians who fought in the last battle, relied too heavily on Riel to win redress for their grievances.