

# Midland played a role in the Battle of Batoche

If you already know that 376 officers and men from Midland and area fought in the North West Rebellion of 1885, Wally Wilson would like to talk to you.

Midland resident Wilson didn't know about the Midland connection until he happened to visit Batoche National Historic Park, Saskatchewan. He hasn't been able to find any information locally since he returned home to Dominion Avenue.

According to information at the national park, the Midland Battalion was part of the North West

Field Force of 5,044 men.

The Midland Battalion was composed of volunteers from various infantry battalions all based in the Midland district of Ontario. Lieutenant Colonel Arthur Williams, a popular Member of Parliament, commanded the regiment until his death from typhoid fever, as the troops were on their way home.

Four of the 376 officers and men were wounded.

The men of the North West Field Force came primarily from southern Ontario. The North West

Territories, Manitoba, Quebec, and Nova Scotia also provided volunteers. They were Canada's militia: part-time soldiers, shopkeepers, bank clerks, and tradesmen who belonged to local regiments more in demand on social occasions than for fighting frontier campaigns. Until the rebellion of 1885, few of them had faced enemy fire.

The Midland Battalion was the largest component of the 1,383 man column of Major General Frederick Middleton, the force that engaged the rebels.

The Midland Battalion

played a key role in the decisive battle.

Between May 9 and May 12, 1885, fewer than 300 Metis and Indians led by Louis Riel and Gabriel Dumont defended the village of Batoche from a series of rifle pits which they had dug along the edge of the bush surrounding the village.

On the fourth day, Middleton and 130 men, equipped with a nine-pound gun, and a Gatling gun, reconnoitred to the north of the village's church and rectory and began to advance on the Metis rifle pits. The feint was supposed to draw the Metis out of the pits and around the church within range of the Gatling gun.

Upon hearing gunfire, another group of soldiers was to open fire and move in from another side. Strong wind kept the gunfire from the ears of the second body of soldiers. Middleton withdrew, without knowing that the feint had been a success.

"As Middleton sat down to lunch minutes later, the Midlanders, under Lieutenant Colonel Williams, broke through the weakened Metis lines near the church."

"The battle was over in minutes as the Field Force swept down the slopes to Batoche, past rifle pits where by now the Metis were firing nails and stones from their rifles," according to the account of the battle provided visitors to the historic site.

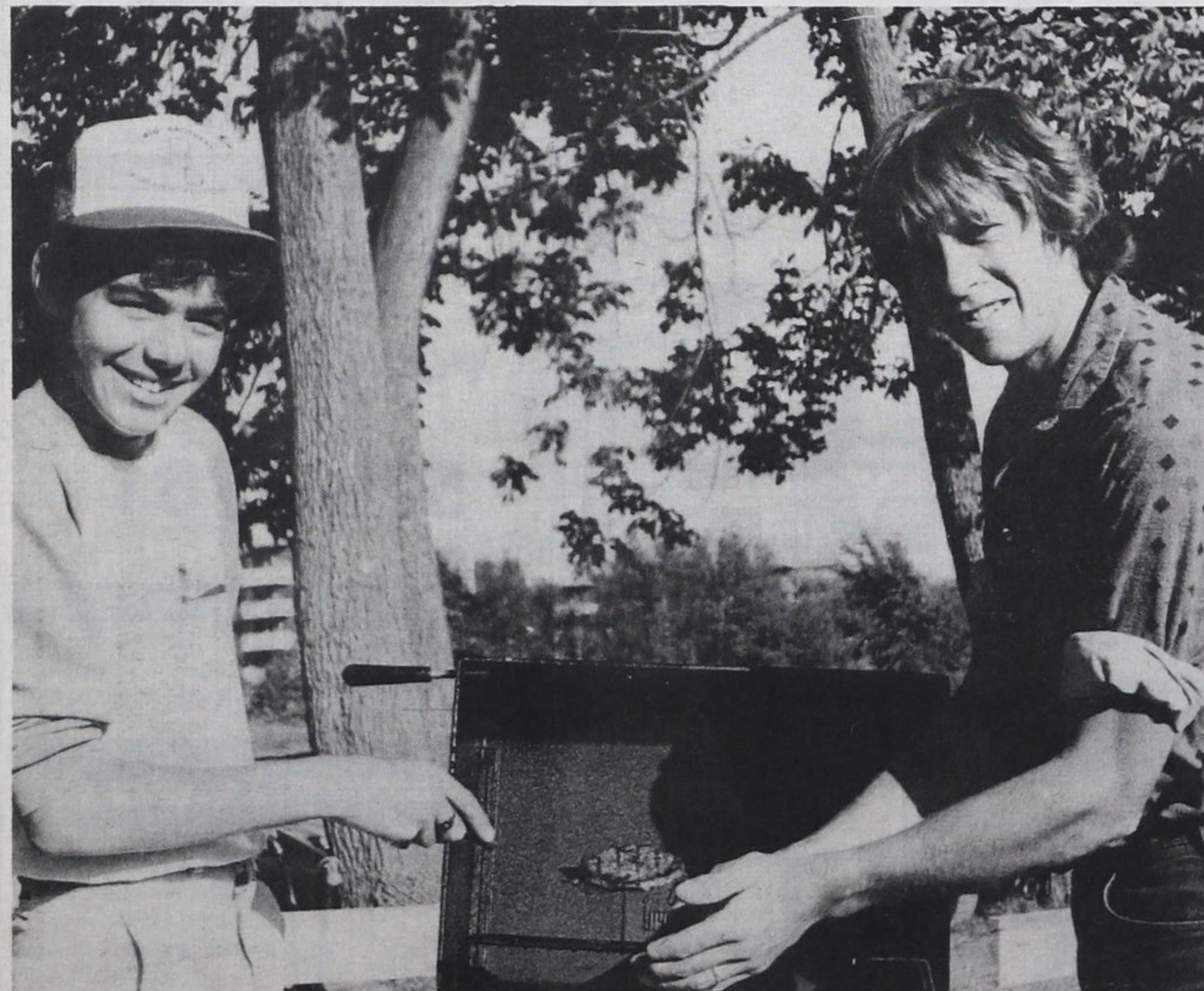
"Riel and Dumont escaped. Riel gave himself up later but Dumont fled to the United States. Those who had not dispersed were captured and held for later trial in the courts. Over 25 dead from both sides were counted when the battle ended."



**Uniform officer**

This is a replica of a uniformed officer from the Midland battalion who fought the Battle of Batoche. An estimated 376

men from Midland fought in the North West Rebellion of 1885. Photo by Jerry Swager, submitted by Wally Wilson.



**He can't wait**

Little Lake Park on Sept. 2 was the scene of a picnic by the Midland-Penitanguishene area Big Brothers Association. Chad Hamelin offers a half-cooked ham-

burger patty to John Weel, who can't seem to wait until it is cooked.

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