

Mounties

by Bob Johnstone, CBC Toronto

In 1869, Canada was just two years old, but expanding. It consisted of the provinces of Ontario, Quebec, New Brunswick and Nova Scotia. To that was about to be added all the land west of the Great Lakes, owned for a couple of centuries by the Hudson's Bay Company.

The Prime Minister, John A. Macdonald, wanted to get that land from the Hudson's Bay Company while the British Government was in a mood to let it go.

On the other hand, he didn't know just what to do with it.

A railway would have to be built to join it to Canada in the East. That would cost more than the government had.

South of the border, the American Government was spending \$20 million a year fighting Indians. Those wars had gone on for years and no end was in sight. The entire budget of the new Canadian Government was less than that, only \$19 million.

So, it was obvious that Canada couldn't afford the American way.

Macdonald had a couple of studies done by British military men who had gone west. They recommended a semi-military police force. Macdonald liked the idea of a police force, because it sounded cheaper than an army.

He had all the literature available in London about the Royal Irish Constabulary sent to him. This was a vaguely military force that was really a police force and it seemed to work all right. It had been used as the model for several police forces in India, and had worked well for the British. It consisted basically of British officers and local people serving under them.

But, that year, in 1869, the first of Louis Riel's two rebellions came to a head. The province of Manitoba was formed, and its population consisted of two squabbling elements: the Ontario settlers who were mostly Protestant and anti-French, and the French-speaking, Catholic Métis. If either of these groups provided men for a police force, the other side would make sure that force didn't work.

So Macdonald realized he would have to recruit his whole force somewhere else. He thought maybe in Eastern Canada. And there were plenty of British Army veterans available, coming out of the army after service all over the world.

If all that sounds like much talk and no action, it was. Macdonald hated to make a decision. His friends called him "Old Tomorrow" because they could never get a straight answer out of him today.