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The Year of the Mounties

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## The Royal Canadian Mounted Police

The RCMP is Canada's federal police force and it has the largest jurisdiction of any force in the world — 3,256 miles from the Atlantic to the Pacific and 2,992 from the North Pole to the United States border. It has some 10,000 men and they are enlisted, as in an Army, not hired as in a police force. It pays salaries beginning at \$5200 a year and it flies planes, pilots ships, drives snowmobiles and occasionally moves on snowshoes although it no longer has working sled dogs. It is the police force in all Provinces, except Ontario and Quebec. It handles traffic, counterfeiting, national security, drunk and disorderly cases, murder, and the delivery of emergency medicine and babies. It is 100 years old this year.

It is considered by many, with reason, the best police force in the world. A police force can too easily be thought of as an "army of occupation," despised at worst, feared at best, by the people it is designed to serve. The Mounties avoided this even at their birth when they were in truth an alien force among the Indians of the Plains.

It has been criticized as well as praised and last year its principal critic was one of its own. Jack Ramsay, a former corporal who resigned from the force in 1971 after fourteen years, wrote with candor last spring in *Macleans Magazine* about the day-to-day routine of the men in the RCMP. Later the *New York Times* reprinted a part of it. His charges were not sensational but they were serious, and they touched off exchanges in Parliament, an inquiry by the then Solicitor General Goyer and newspaper editorials across the country.

Ramsay attacked the rigidity of the RCMP's internal life and regulations — "I couldn't even stop at a liquor store on my way home. I couldn't lend money to a friend in the force without the permission of my officer commanding, couldn't talk of my work to friends outside the force."



Commissioner William Leonard Higgitt replied that "some RCMP officers are less than perfect." He insisted that morale is high and pointed out that the RCMP "has the lowest turnover rate of any law enforcement body in the world."

It is also unique in other regards. It was modeled after the Irish Constabulary and today it resembles the FBI in some respects, but it wasn't and isn't like either.

It began on May 23, 1873, six years after Canada came together in the Confederation.