

RNWMP Veteran Remembers

by Gray Campbell, Sidney, B.C.

"In the century that has made Canada a great nation, the symbol of nationhood that has endured and flourished — at home and abroad — is the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. The love and pride Canadians share about their country is there for the world to see when the Musical Ride passes in review.

What other nation has the maturity to have, as its best known emblem, its police force?"

Patrick Reid, Canadian Consul General

* * *

The road was never easy for the North-West Mounted Police since it made its Great March West into the unknown in 1874. For the next quarter of a century, the Force would build a solid foundation of service, chivalry and traditions through the Northwest Territories, the Yukon and the Arctic. On June 24, 1904, the Canada Gazette announced that His Majesty King Edward VII had been pleased to confer the title "Royal" on the North-West Mounted Police. The future held nothing but promise for those who served.

Then the unexpected happened, and the young Force fell on difficult times. The territories it had patrolled, nurtured and protected through the developing years,

became restless and stretched their muscles. On September 1, 1905, the lusty provinces of Alberta and Saskatchewan were born, and from all this emerged a new set of politicians, lawyers and agreements. As a result, the RNWMP would try to maintain a strength of at least 500 men to police the new provinces under contract with the provincial governments. Commissioner A.B. Perry was worried that the Force would wither away and die. The next blow came with the 1914-1918 war, which drained nearly 1,000 men from its ranks; to stem the tide, the Force decided to send a squadron of volunteers overseas in 1918. At about this time, Alberta and Saskatchewan formed their own provincial police, and left the RNWMP with limited duties under the federal acts.

Those difficult days were recalled in a recent visit I had with my friend, Reg. No. 8389, ex-Cst. W.N. (Bill) Holmes, now living in Duncan, British Columbia. In 1919, Holmes joined the Force at the age of 18, trained at Regina for six months, and was then posted to "M" Division, at Fort Macleod. In the first few months of 1920, there was a reorganization of federal police services and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police moved its headquarters from Regina to Ottawa, absorbing the duties of the Dominion Police: guarding government buildings, and policing of counterfeiting, smuggling and enemy plots. The Force became a nationwide federal law enforcement and security agency, but in spite of all this,