



Articles from

The Birtle Observer

April 17, 1885 to June 29, 1885

In 1885, Major Charles Boulton led a group of militia known as Boulton's Scouts to help put down the North-West Rebellion. They saw action at Fish Creek and Batoche.

Below are excerpts from articles that appeared in *The Birtle Observer* at the time.

Excerpts of letters from Hubert Wood, published in *The Birtle Observer*, April 17, 1885

Fort Qu'Appelle, April 10th

We have just stopped here for dinner and will likely push on about 25 miles before night. I suppose you have heard of my promotion and of the others. J. Johnson is captain. I have been kept on the jump all the time getting things into shape. The men of the Queen's Own and all others were very much struck with our troop and we had plenty of applications to join us. One young fellow from the Queen's Own succeeded in getting an exchange into us, but he will probably be left as he was thrown from his horse and badly hurt. We got to Beaver Creek the first day and started from there at 4:30 next morning. We all found it very cold as we had left our overcoats with the transports which stopped at Fort Ellice that night. We make quite an imposing array when we mounted. We are furnished with helmet, coats, breeches, stockings, rubbers and blankets. We are having things pretty rough, but still it is exciting and there is not time to think of hardships. Dalton is my brother Sergeant and we take turns in our duties with the Russell sergeants.

Posted in *The Birtle Observer*, May 1st, 1885

In Camp, 18 miles south of Humboldt, April 14

It is my night to have charge of the guard tent, so having to be awake all night I will employ some of the time by writing home. You have no idea how lonely I get sometimes in spite of all the excitement, I can stand the hard tack, bacon and tea, which is all we get just now from the Major down, but not to see or hear from any of you for so long gives one the blues.

Major Boulton has had several telegrams from General Middleton urging him to hurry to the front, as he has no horsemen, and we are likely to be sent in advance of the main army to do the scouting. Since starting from Qu'Appelle we have generally made about 20 or 25 miles a day. We could do more on horseback but we must keep up with our transports. On Sunday we had the hardest day's ride of any, travelling nearly 40 miles; and on Saturday we had to stop at four o'clock on account of a blinding snow storm. Dalton and I went into a half-breed's house close

by to warm ourselves and while there espied a pie in the cupboard. Twenty-five cents was soon squandered and that pie went where it would do the most good.

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Boulton's Scouts, Birtle No. 2 Troop, Captain J.A. Johnston (centre)
Glenbow Archives

Several of us have colds caused by the cold nights, but will be all right when the weather is warmer. On Sunday night we overtook the 19th Royals, of Toronto. We reached their camp about 9 o'clock, cold, tired and hungry, and having left our transports behind a long distance we had no grub or tents. However, the Toronto boys gave us some hard tack and tea, but all their tents were full so our men had to make the best of it under wagons. The Major, two captains and Cox got a tent and I was invited into the Sergeant tent. Lots of fun!

We have been travelling with the Royals since then and we make quite an imposing procession. Yesterday and this morning we had a most desolate country to pass through – the salt plains, about forty miles across, with some mud holes that seemed almost bottomless. We are in much better country here. This is a dark, rainy night and I pity the sentries, I have to take a relief out every 2 hours. Winearles is out just now and will have to be relieved in about 10 minutes. We will reach Middleton's camp tomorrow, and then I don't know what will be the next move. I will have to close now as camp is to be roused at 4 o'clock and we will march at 6. I hardly know what my address will be but I think if you sent to Boulton's Mounted Infantry, General Middleton's headquarters, via Humboldt, it will reach me.

Clark's Crossing, April 17

Reached here today at noon. All quiet so far. We overtook General Middleton yesterday. The weather has been very cold and windy and we (therefore). The General employs us as scouts. We ride two or three miles beyond and on the side of the army.

Clark's Crossing, April 19

I have been wondering what you were all doing at home for the last hour or two. How I wish I could spend my Sunday's at home. I feel rather seedy today as I was riding all day yesterday and all last night. Besides my usual duties of mounting sentries I had to take two men and ride around the camp about two miles and see that all was quiet. As it had to be done every hour of the night it kept us going. Yesterday we had our first encounter with the enemy. It was nothing very brilliant, but it may be important as it was the capture of three scouts who had evidently been watching us for some time. Any way it is a feather in our caps to have our troop be the first to do something. Lord Melgund took us out to explore the enemies position and we found these fellows hid in a ravine. Tomorrow the whole army is to move forward to where the rebels are supposed to

be posted. I wish you could take a look at us in our camp life. Everything is rough, but still there is lots of fun. We have good band music, and telegraphic communication with the rest of the world, which beats even Birtle. Divine service was held his morning, all the troops attending. The singing and music was good, but those in the rear could not hear the sermon. The weather has changed for the better today and we all hope it will continue to improve. Mr. Cole is up here. Please write often. We all look eagerly for letters from home and friends.

The Birtle Observer, May 8, 1885

“An interesting letter has been received from Wm. Morrison. A few extracts are made.”

We had a stern fight with the half breeds and although we did not rout them, we beat them so badly that not one of them has been seen since. They made a determined resistance and were intrenched in a well situated and strong position where they were concealed by timber and scrub. We did not expect that an enemy was so near when suddenly we were fired upon from a bluff. Boulton's men were, as usual, in advance of the main column which was about half a mile behind, we succeeded in holding the rebels until the 90th came up, we dismounted, let our horses go and lay down on the ground and fired at the rebels whenever they showed their heads. We killed 56 horses and captured 15 besides a quantity of supplies. Major Boulton acted with great bravery and was well to the front during the battle.

Birtle Observer June 1, 1885

“The following are extracts from a letter dated at Batoche, May 13, from Trooper Morrison of Boulton's Horse:”

We have been fighting for the last four days. We met and engaged the enemy on Saturday and fought for 12 hours straight on but did not succeed in routing them from their rifle pits. We burned several houses, held own positions, threw up earth works and slept in the trenches.

On Sunday we had it something in the style of two old maids fighting over a kitten. On Monday the Infantry peppered away at the breeds all day. Our troops were out reconnoitering and were fired upon. We returned the fire with our Winchesters and the Gatling and retired when we had seen all we wanted to. We captured a breed and returned to camp.

On Tuesday we proceeded to the same place with the Gatling and artillery. One of the Winnipeg Surveyors was killed. I cannot account for it but I seem to live a charmed life. I have had a number of very close calls but have not been struck yet. I had a bullet through my breeches but that is a trifle. We returned to camp, swallowed our dinner and were just sitting down to read the papers which had arrived on the previous evening when an order came from the General ordering out the artillery. They were out in five minutes, followed by the Gatling. Then we heard the Grenadiers cheer and we knew that they had charged the rifle pits. We were ordered to saddle and mount and be ready to move at a moment's notice. We had only a few minutes to wait when the order came and we went out “on the living tear” and overtook the skirmishers. We dismounted, took up the right flank and carried forward the charge in a crescent.

Just as we were about to enter the ranks, I noticed a man coming towards us with a white flag.

Some of the boys in the bush fired on him, so Hubert Wood, Travis and I ran forward to tell them he carried a flag of truce. He brought a message from Riel to the General. We heard what the messenger had to say and then sent him to the camp to find the General knowing he was not there. We kept up the charge and cleared everything before us. We would make a push and a yell and take a bluff or rifle pit, take a few shots while we were getting out breath and then make for the next objective point until we gained the outside house of the village. At this house there one fellow behind a woodpile who took a particular liking to Travis and me and proceeded to give us his individual attention, but we made it so hot for him that he soon made up his mind to secure more comfortable quarters. We rushed forward, took the house, searched it and went on.

We kept this up for a mile and a half until the village was taken and the prisoners released. The poor fellow had been shut up in a cellar for seven or eight weeks. They had lived on meat and water straight for two weeks. They said they had been informed that they were to be shot that night if Middleton shelled the church, but we "busted" the little game and let the boys out. One poor fellow no sooner realized that he was free than he snatched the arms of a wounded man and struck out to fight the breeds. By this time our Winchester ammunition ran out and we all three struck back to camp and got a fresh supply and joined our troop again on the right. We all got together in good shape and after we had all got a drink of water Major Boulton ordered us to charge a house a quarter of a mile away. We were pretty well choked up with dust but we tuned up and made the air ring with our yells, for yells they were in earnest. We made a wild dash and took the house. In less time than it takes to write it the house was in flames. They gave us a few shots as they retired.

After we had withdrawn some distance Travis and I went back to secure a light express waggon to be used as an ambulance. We held the shafts with one hand and our rifles with the other and started off. The breeds give us a breeze but did not hit us and we landed the express safely within our lives. We laid around until dark and then marched down to the town. The Infantry camped there for the night and we went back and slept in our trenches.

The next morning, we were sent off to Humboldt to escort an ammunition train. Our victory was a complete one. White flags are now as common as newspapers at a street corner. I was the first to break into Riel's chapel. He had it fixed up in good shape. We lost the Captain of the Russell Boys. There are three mounted corps. The General don't say much but he always takes our corps with him when he goes out and is always putting us in important places. The Surveyors who were specially fitted out as an intelligence corps felt badly cut up when the General sent us ahead to do the scouting and sent them to the rear as a guard.

A letter received by S.W. Chambers from a friend, who was a member of Winnipeg's 90th Battalion, praising Boulton's Mounted Infantry. Posted in *The Birtle Observer*, June 29, 1885.

I am glad to say that my neck is now nearly well although it has not healed as quickly as I expected it would. It is now nearly seven weeks since the 24th of April, the date of the brush at Fish Creek and on the 20th of May I was all right and felt no pain or stiffness in my neck. I was sent back on the guard that brought Riel to Regina, we were under the impression then that the prisoner would be taken to Ottawa and the prospect of that journey and the anticipation of spending a fortnight at home and about there was enough to make me forget for the time the

wound. However, we were disappointed on the score of our trip at the Government's expense and the result was a reaction. In a week's time I think I will be all O.K. again. I don't think it will be enough to entitle me to a pension and I am thankful for it.

You have heard long before this all the particulars of the Batoche fight, and have read a dozen accounts of the Fish Creek affair so I need say nothing about either of those battles, as they are by courtesy called. I have been pleased to see all along that the papers of our city did not omit to mention Boulton's Horse in the accounts given of the campaign. Since the above body first joined us, which was, I think, the day before we reached Clark's Crossing. They were far and away the best body of men with Middleton, and indeed I don't think that in all the Northwest Field Force including the "Gophers" we had such useful men. They were better men than French's scouts for the reason that they were more accustomed to prairie life, were as a rule, hardier men, and were as well mounted, and as good if not better shots. They were always in a position of danger while on the march, literally carrying their lives in their hands from minute to minute as at any moment they might be fired on from the numerous ambushes along the route, and in action at close quarters they set the rest of us an example of coolness, and, I think, effective service with their Winchesters.

Lieutenant Col. Boulton has established a reputation as a cool and wise officer. He was, I think, consulted frequently by the General and was always at the head of his men in the fight. On the last afternoon at Batoche he surpassed all his previous exploits and went down the face of the bank along with his men, pointing out to them the lurking breeds and redskins and giving the boys a chance to knock them over or put them to flight. Where all did so well is not perhaps generous to single out any particular corps but you can see that these men had to beat the enemy up and bring them to bay, and when they did it so well they ought to have all the credit, and the boys of the 90th were proud to think that our province turned out such good ones. Eastern troops could not deny that Manitoba sent good men to the front.