



Canadians at the Battle of Paardeberg, February 1900, by Arthur H. Hider.

## EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP IN COUNTER-INSURGENCY: THE NORTH-WEST MOUNTED POLICE IN SOUTH AFRICA, 1899-1902

by Kenneth Grad

*Thus it may be known that the leader of  
armies is the arbiter of the people's fate,  
the man on whom it depends whether the nation  
shall be in peace or in peril.*

– Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*<sup>1</sup>

### Introduction

The Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) Report entitled *A Time for Transformation*, published in 2003, stresses the need for the Canadian Forces (CF) to adapt to the changing nature of modern warfare. As it states:

We are moving from an age of achieving military objectives through massed, heavy, ponderous forces, to an age of applying lethal force as precisely as possible through the use of nimble, mobile, and smarter forces. At the dawn of the

information age, it is already clear that the scalpel is better than the bludgeon, quality is more important than quantity, fast is better than slow, and lethality is more important than tonnage.<sup>2</sup>

A clear trend has emerged in military literature focusing upon leadership for the 'modern' battlefield. This new battlefield is characterized by, among other things, the absence of an identifiable front, a polymorphous enemy, and the lack of a clear, decisive moment of victory. This necessitates strong leadership to maintain unit cohesion and morale under demanding circumstances. Lacking strong leadership, confidence and cohesion are easily undermined, resulting in a reduction of combat efficacy.

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There is, however, nothing novel about counter-insurgency warfare. Indeed, the strategy has been employed regularly from ancient times to the present day. Guerrilla warfare is a tactic whereby a smaller army may use its greater mobility to effectively counter a larger enemy. It is important to note that the dichotomy between *traditional* warfare and *guerrilla* warfare is not mutually exclusive. Even most 'formal' wars involve some element of irregular combat. The attributes required of the new leader articulated by the CDS are therefore quite similar to those of the traditional leader, even if guerrilla warfare "...is more commonplace than ever before."<sup>3</sup>

What follows is a case study of North-West Mounted Police (NWMP) participation in the South African War (Boer War), 1899-1902. It will posit that effective leadership was the principal cause of NWMP success on the South African stage. The primary relevance of this study is the very 'modern' nature of warfare encountered by the NWMP, despite the obvious fact that this war took place over 100 years ago. Competent leadership was an integral factor enabling the NWMP to efficaciously fulfill its assigned task of counter-insurgency. Thus, there is much to learn from this historical precedent, particularly if one takes into account Doctor Allan English's contention that "...there are potentially serious shortcomings in leadership in the CF."<sup>4</sup> The bulk of the Mounted Police contribution took place within two units, the Canadian Mounted Rifles (CMR), and Lord Strathcona's Horse (LSH). The role of the NWMP in both units was to counter the guerrilla operations used by the South Africans to frustrate the larger, slower British army throughout the early stages of the war. Both the CMR and LSH, led primarily by NWMP officers, achieved

a great amount of success and received many accolades for their efforts. The importance of the leadership that NWMP officers brought to these units cannot be understated. By exhibiting the necessary requirements of successful leadership in counter-insurgency, NWMP officers thereby ensured their units' success.

### The Role of Leadership

Capable leadership is an essential precondition for the success of any organization, and the military is no different. Confidence in leadership is necessary for the maintenance of morale and unit cohesion, which are integral contributors to combat effectiveness. Cohesion can be subdivided into horizontal and vertical components; whereas horizontal cohesion refers to the relationship between members of the unit, vertical cohesion denotes the relationship between the unit and its leader. While cohesion at both levels is important, the primary factor that distinguishes cohesive, successful units from mediocre ones is the adequacy of leadership.<sup>5</sup> Since "...in combat it is the leader more than anyone else who can spell the difference between certain death and the rush of victory," if the leader's competence is impugned, unit members will be reluctant to submit their lives to his or her authority, therefore shattering vertical cohesion.<sup>6</sup> Given that cohesion is an important contributor to morale, *lack* of vertical cohesion will undermine confidence in the unit as a whole by decreasing the likelihood of success in combat.

Maintaining high morale is especially important in counter-insurgency operations, where the confidence of a unit is extremely vulnerable. As the US Army discovered in Vietnam, the non-territorial nature of



A bivouac on Bloemfontein Common.

counter-insurgency operations can effectively deny the tangible, short-term goals that boost morale.<sup>7</sup> Small war, furthermore, is characterized by uncertainty. It is nearly impossible to predict when and where the enemy will strike. Uncertainty is always more stressful than certainty, even if the latter involves a less desirable outcome.<sup>8</sup> Under stressful conditions, morale will quickly deteriorate in the absence of adequate leadership. Indeed, "...bad leadership, especially at the officer level, appears to assure that military units will often not retain unit cohesion under relatively mild battle stress."<sup>9</sup> Strong leadership is additionally vital to a productive unit by minimizing operational stress casualties, which are especially prevalent in an environment characterized by bad leadership and lack of unit cohesion.<sup>10</sup> Psychologist Rick Campise *et al.* thus find that good leadership offers significant protection from combat stress.<sup>11</sup> In sum, the axiom that "...a unit is only as good as its leader," contains a large element of truth. In the absence of competent leadership, poor military performance is virtually guaranteed.

### An Analytical Framework

The analytical approach employed in this study borrows from the Canadian Forces Leadership Institute (CFLI) manual entitled *Leadership in the CF: Conceptual Foundations*, published in 2005. This model operates under the assumption that leaders possess two main bases from which to draw their social power: position and personal. *Position* power "...reflects the attributes of an appointment or rank within a larger social structure of authority or power," while *personal* power "...reflects the socially valued or useful qualities of the individual."<sup>12</sup> So, whereas position power is conferred by others, personal power "...is earned entirely by individual effort and adaptive learning, and therefore is highly portable."<sup>13</sup> Three separate sub-classes of power compose personal power: *expert*, *referent*, and *connection*. Expert and referent power are particularly relevant to the stressful nature of counter-insurgency combat,<sup>14</sup> the former being defined as: "The capacity to provide others with needed knowledge or advice," deriving "...from unique knowledge, skill, or experience." Referent power, meanwhile, is defined as:

...the capacity to provide another with feelings of personal acceptance, approval, efficacy, or worth. Referent power is generally based on the respect and esteem of followers for a leader. It may also derive from followers' identification with and desire to emulate a leader. Qualities that increase referent power include friendliness and likeability, concern for and loyalty to others, courage, authenticity, integrity, and other forms of selfless and benevolent behaviour.<sup>15</sup>

As we shall see, NWMP officers in South Africa possessed high amounts of expert and referent power, attributing largely to their overall success.

While officers inevitably rely on both position and personal power, this study argues that, in the military, personal power is of much greater importance to leader power than position. Put simply, soldiers will obey orders if they have confidence in and respect for their leader; they may not follow an officer merely because he or she is their superior. In fact, "self-serving and punitive leaders can generate networks of resentment that function to unite soldiers against their leaders."<sup>16</sup> Meaningless discipline destroys the trust between soldier and leader, causing a reduction in combat effectiveness.<sup>17</sup> In addition, the value of personal power increases inversely to the size of the unit involved. The more contact the unit has with its leader, the more important personal power becomes, as the officer's actions are continually on display. This gives personal power

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an exaggerated importance in small unit combat characteristic of counter-insurgency. Thus, examining the failure of the US Army in Vietnam, military historians Richard A. Gabriel and Paul L. Savage found that position power was not enough to motivate soldiers in counter-guerrilla warfare. Rather, "the military officer...must be perceived as sharing burdens of risk and death at least equal to and preferably exceeding the risks and burdens of his men."<sup>18</sup> This principle is often exhibited by the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) and typically is seen as a reason for its success.<sup>19</sup> As the former Israeli Chief of Defence elucidated the value of such leadership:

In achieving maximum efficiency and maximum results in these actions, in improving fighting methods and means, and in keeping losses to a minimum is immeasurable. I believe that the fact that our senior commanders go with their men where the danger is, is first and foremost an expression of a certain moral level and quality of humanity...Our commanders consider it a great personal responsibility to be with their men at the place where the mission is to be carried out, the place where they can have the maximum personal influence on the outcome.<sup>20</sup>

Shalit affirms this sentiment by positing that the leader-first approach is not only optimal in 'modern' warfare, but it is also the style most approved by soldiers.<sup>21</sup>

NWMP officers in the Boer War evidenced leadership methods high in personal power. Bolstered by personal power, they were able to maintain morale and unit cohesion in the forces under NWMP command, and to facilitate overall combat effectiveness.



### Enter the NWMP

The first months of the Boer War, in late 1899, presaged NWMP involvement. Successive Imperial setbacks culminated in “Black Week,” a series of devastating losses during the week of December 9-15 1899 that galvanized the British War Office.<sup>22</sup> The lesson of these defeats was clear:

The South African fighting had demonstrated the superiority of the Boer commando’s tactics, with their hit-and-run attacks, and the endurance of their veldt ponies...If the war was to be won, the Boers had to be fought by rugged outdoorsmen who could ride, shoot, and find cover in the rough country.<sup>23</sup>

British and Canadian authorities soon realized that in the North West Mounted Police, they had at their disposal a force with the skills required to combat Boer guerrilla warfare.

In 1899, the NWMP was a police force in name only. While policing may have been its ostensible purpose, in reality the NWMP was a paramilitary organization, and NWMP officers were well-versed in military

tactics. The specific nature of NWMP combat experience gave officers an invaluable source of expert power in South Africa. The NWMP was regularly involved in small-unit combat in its paramilitary duties, and thus, it had tactical experience in the counter-insurgency required during the Boer War. The “Almighty Voice Affair” was indicative of this experience. Almighty Voice, a Cree Aboriginal, murdered an NWMP sergeant in 1895 near the South Saskatchewan River. As a consequence, a small contingent of policemen was dispatched, encountering guerrilla combat with a band of One Arrow Cree in an attempt to capture Almighty Voice. After a lengthy pursuit and several unsuccessful skirmishes, during which the NWMP sustained four fatalities, by 1897 the mounted police managed

to defeat Almighty Voice and his accomplices with the aid of cannon fire.<sup>24</sup> In addition to such smaller-scale conflicts, several of the NWMP officers who deployed to South Africa were veterans of the North-West Rebellion, which provided them with further useful experience in counter-insurgency operations.

As a result of the NWMP’s particularized skill-set, the British and Canadian governments confidently drew upon the manpower and experience of the NWMP when composing the Canadian Mounted Rifles and the Lord Strathcona’s Horse. An analysis of each of these units will help discern the paramount nature of NWMP leadership during guerrilla operations conducted upon the South African veldt.



The Canadian Mounted Rifles

The Canadian government handed over responsibility for the CMR to the NWMP, which carried out all aspects of organization and recruitment of the 352-man battalion.<sup>25</sup> The most prominent NWMP contribution was in staffing the new unit. Thirteen of the CMR's 19 officers came directly from the NWMP, including all the key appointments.<sup>26</sup> The initial commander was Laurence Herchmer, at the time Commissioner of the NWMP. However, Herchmer encountered health problems early in his tour of duty, and T.D.B. Evans, a veteran of the North-West Rebellion, replaced him.<sup>27</sup> While the official reason for his displacement was illness, as Miller stresses: "Herchmer had never been a popular man... he could be a bit of a tyrant." When he recovered from his illness in May and attempted to resume control of the CMR, a group of officers petitioned the War Office that Herchmer, even if medically fit, was "...too severe and harsh to command."<sup>28</sup> Accordingly, the British sent him home on 19 May 1900. Herchmer's reliance upon position power at the expense of personal power led to his alienation from his soldiers and his subsequent dismissal. "Some felt Herchmer was so unpopular with his men that some of them might shoot him."<sup>29</sup> The heads of the CMR's two squadrons, C and D, were both NWMP superintendents – Joseph Howe and G.E. Sanders.<sup>30</sup> And several other prominent officers were current or retired members of the police force.<sup>31</sup> In sum, while not NWMP in name, the Canadian Mounted Rifles was simply an extension of the mounted police. A substantial portion of the CMR's men were either active or former members of the NWMP, including nearly all of its officers.

The CMR arrived in Cape Town as part of the Second Contingent on 26 February 1900, at a pivotal point in the war.<sup>32</sup> The unit soon had a positive impact upon events that would take place on the South African veldt. Leadership proved decisive, as NWMP officers time and again exhibited personal power to effectively lead those under their command. Efficacious leadership was evident on the three major campaigns undertaken by the CMR: on Lord Frederick Roberts' march from Bloemfontein to Pretoria, on patrol in the Transvaal after the fall of Pretoria, and during events surrounding the Battle of Lilliefontein. NWMP officers exemplified outstanding leadership ability during these campaigns in South Africa, inspiring the bravery and sacrifice of their men.

The first major campaign undertaken by the CMR was as part of the drive to Pretoria, the capital of Boer-controlled Transvaal. The Mounted Rifles, under the overall command of Edward Hutton, a British general, formed the advance guard of Roberts' main column.<sup>33</sup> General Hutton, like Herchmer, also exhibited

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General Edward Hutton.

many of the attributes unbecoming of a leader in counter-insurgency operations, and hence offers a useful counterpoint to the successful leadership of the NWMP. Specifically, his reliance on position power at the expense of personal power led to Hutton's alienation from his subordinates. CMR officers and men "...simply resented the general's peremptory, intemperate, and insensitive manner, and felt that he lacked judgment and tact."<sup>34</sup> In the event, the British War Office transferred Hutton in the fall of 1900. In the meantime, since CMR officers at lower levels of command shared their subordinates' distaste for Hutton and his coercive style of leadership, this likely left vertical cohesion at the small unit level unaffected. An example of this, which occurred on 4 May 1900, is indicative. Under the command of Captain A.C. Macdonell (later Lieutenant-General Sir Archibald Cameron "Batty Mac" Macdonell, KCB, CMG, DSO), a group of 80 men embarked on a successful pre-dawn raid into Boer territory. Despite having been in the saddle for 15 hours, they succeeded in cutting the railway and telegraph line along the Boer line of retreat, before returning to camp by the next morning.<sup>35</sup> This raid was extremely significant; the CMR had performed exactly what they had been called upon to accomplish – a swift, efficacious example of counter-insurgency operations. The raid earned a Mention in Despatches, and Macdonell's service later earned him a Distinguished Service Order (DSO).<sup>36</sup>



Archibald 'Batty Mac' Macdonnell.

When at Klipriversberg Ridge, the Boers made a stand in defence of Johannesburg, Lord Roberts again gave the Canadians a significant role. A CMR-led excursion seized and cleared some *kopjes* (rocky outcrops) in advance of the main force of the Imperial army, achieving their goal under heavy fire. Corporal R.C.H. Stevens and Private J.W. Gray, both of the NWMP, received wounds in the action.<sup>37</sup> The CMR then held the position overnight and into the next morning, while repeatedly fired upon by Boer troops fifteen hundred yards away.<sup>38</sup> Although the CMR did not participate in Pretoria's capture on 5 June 1900, the contribution of the CMR did not go unnoticed. As Miller explains: "By the time Canada's mounted units reached Pretoria they had become seasoned warriors, and contrary to their fondest expectations, too valuable to be released from service before their time had expired."<sup>39</sup>

Following Pretoria's capture, set-piece battles had effectively ended. The war was now exclusively a guerrilla conflict in which the Canadian mounted units

were involved in counter-insurgency operations. Under these conditions, mounted troops were in greater demand than ever, as Imperial tactics relied upon the use of soldiers on horseback to force Boer commandos up against blockhouses where infantry could then annihilate them. As a consequence, Roberts relied heavily upon his mounted battalions as he pursued Boer general Christiaan de Wet, and the CMR concentrated on outpost, escort, search, and reconnaissance duties. This was often dangerous and difficult work. At Nooitgedacht on 5 September, the CMR fought its way out of a desperate situation that had been the result of a surprise Boer offensive.<sup>40</sup> Lord Roberts especially commended the Mounted Rifles for their bravery, singling out Major Sanders, "...[for] his command and coolness."<sup>41</sup> Notwithstanding a shell lodged in his back, Sanders helped to extricate his men from their perilous position, and he later received a DSO for heroism.<sup>42</sup> As for T.D.B. Evans, the evidence strongly suggests that his expert power derived from experience in the North-West Rebellion served him well on campaign. Indeed, he "...was ever ready to send his scouts out by day or night to locate *laagers* [enclosed encampments], provide early warning, or to ambush unwary Boers."<sup>43</sup> In the early morning of 11 October, Evans led 200 Mounted Rifles to victory at Bankfontein, outmanoeuvring a much larger Boer force.<sup>44</sup> Continually performing beyond expectations, the CMR had solidified its reputation as an effective unit.

The CMR had a salient role in two final clashes. The first was a disastrous raid, ordered by Major-General Horace Smith Dorrien, who had replaced Hutton in command.<sup>45</sup> On 1 November, Dorrien's force moved south toward the Komati River under Major Sanders, who, despite his injuries at Nooitgedacht, had returned and was now leading the advanced guard of Mounted Rifles. When the guide took a wrong turn, the unit encountered a Boer contingent and had to carefully retreat under heavy fire. The precarious situation rapidly deteriorated, however, when a Boer sniper shot the horse out from under Corporal Joseph Schell, injuring Schell's ankle in the process. Sanders immediately came to the rescue, and a sniper's bullet struck his horse as well, throwing Sanders to the ground. Lieutenant T.W. Chalmers died in an attempt to save Major Sanders, his commanding officer, before a British counter-attack finally brought the two men to safety.<sup>46</sup> Owing to such heroism, the unit emerged from this encounter largely intact.

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The subsequent Battle of Liliefontein five days later redeemed the disastrous events of 1 November. Smith-Dorrien decided to take the initiative yet again, utilizing CMR units in a renewed offensive. As Boer forces attempted to counterattack, in a “spectacular

display of horsemanship,” 35 Mounted Rifles beat a much larger number of Boer horsemen to a strategic ridge, occupying it “...to the delight of British forces” who could then fire upon the Boers located below.<sup>47</sup> The CMR held the ridge until reinforcements arrived, at which point, it joined up with the main force, holding off the few attacking Boers that remained.<sup>48</sup> The CMR continued to prove itself effective in counter-insurgency manoeuvres.

Exemplary leadership is ubiquitous in all accounts of CMR participation in South Africa. Given their prior experience in the Canadian northwest, the competency of NWMP officers in these counter-insurgency operations strongly suggests that expert power was a strong contributing factor to successful leadership in the Boer War. Moreover, CMR officers consistently demonstrated referent power. They shared the risks of their men; the heroism displayed by Major Sanders and Captain Macdonell is emblematic of this type of leadership. T.W. Chalmers, who gave his life in an attempt to save Sanders, his commanding officer, gives a good idea of the type of referent power CMR officers held over their subordinates. Sanders’s earlier heroism on behalf of his own men at Nooitgedacht inspired Chalmers to likewise risk his own life to save his superior officer. A contrast to the personal power exhibited by officers of the NWMP emerges from the examples of Laurence Herchmer and Edward Hutton. Both attempted to utilize position power and coercion at the expense of personal power, and both alienated those under their command. NWMP officers were constantly active at the head of their troops, exhibiting astounding courage and setting a positive example for their men to emulate. The NWMP officers of the CMR thus cultivated the trust *in* and respect *for* their leaders necessary for success in combat.



Map by DZK / McGill-Queen's University Press

## Lord Strathcona's Horse

**B**orn in Scotland, Donald Smith, the future Baron Strathcona, worked his way up from being a fur trader in the Hudson's Bay Company to its Chief Executive Officer before returning to the United Kingdom as Canada's High Commissioner in 1896. His Canadian experience left him with a high opinion of the NWMP. Concerned by early British losses during the Boer War, Smith offered to fund a 500-man cavalry unit composed entirely of western Canadian horsemen.<sup>49</sup> He appointed Samuel Benfield Steele, a Superintendent in the Mounted Police, as commander of the new force.<sup>50</sup> Steele had been an officer in the NWMP since its inception, and he was a veteran of the North-West Rebellion. The NWMP had an integral role in staffing Strathcona's regiment. Ten of the 29 officers were policemen, including most of the key appointments.<sup>51</sup> A majority of the NCOs were also active or former members of the Force.<sup>52</sup> The mounted police held the essential positions of command in the regiment, a contribution that would be decisive in South Africa.

Following their arrival in South Africa on 10 April 1900, Strathcona's men swiftly earned a reputation as a fierce combat regiment, participating in two important campaigns: first, with General Redvers Buller's Natal Field Force, and second, in a guerrilla campaign against Boer General de Wet. NWMP leadership was efficacious during both endeavours.



Lord Strathcona.

### MOVEMENT OF THE STRATCONA'S HORSE

20 JUNE - 1 SEPTEMBER 1900



Map by D2K/McGill-Queen's University Press



General Buller's division utilized the Strathconas to great effect. From the moment of its arrival, the LSH was involved in "almost continuous" action with Boer rearguards.<sup>53</sup> Sergeant A.H. Richardson of the NWMP earned the Victoria Cross, the British Empire's highest award for valour, during one such encounter. Richardson exemplified bravery and sacrifice on behalf of his men necessary for setting a positive example and building trust – thereby cultivating personal power. As the *London Gazette* described his gallant action:

...on the 5<sup>th</sup> July, 1900, at Wolve Sprait, about fifteen miles north of Standerton, a party of Lord Strathcona's Corps, only thirty-eight in number, came into contact and was engaged at close quarters, with a force of eighty of the enemy. When the order to retire had been given, Sergeant Richardson rode back under a very heavy cross-fire and picked up a trooper whose horse had been shot and who was wounded in two places, and rode with him out of fire. At the time when this act of gallantry was performed

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Sergeant Richardson was within 300 yards of the enemy, and was himself riding a wounded horse.<sup>54</sup>

Richardson was the first Canadian to be awarded a VC in the Boer War, and one of only four awarded to Canadians during the conflict.<sup>55</sup> At

One Tree Hill, on 11 July, it was Steele's turn to exhibit courage – while simultaneously putting his counter-insurgency experience to good use. Steele used guerrilla tactics typified by the Boers against the South Africans themselves; ordering a small group of his men to dismount, Steele then led them undetected towards an enemy position, where his men caught the Boers off-guard, opening fire and scattering their opponents while inflicting a number of casualties in the process.<sup>56</sup> A further raid on 10 September, this time at Spitzkop, earned Steele and Belcher high praise from General Buller. In what the British General characterized as a "dashing and capable" attack, the NWMP officers led a joint charge of Strathconas across several ridges, driving the South Africans back and capturing vital supplies.<sup>57</sup>

Following the break-up of Buller's column, the Strathconas were transferred to the pursuit of Boer General de Wet in the southwestern Transvaal and the southeastern Orange Free State. De Wet remained an elusive target. He relied heavily upon guerrilla tactics, and, in so doing, increased the worth of mounted troops. Hence, after spending only one day resting in Pretoria, the LSH received orders to embark upon a new campaign, under the overall leadership of General Charles Knox.<sup>58</sup>

On the morning of 3 December 1900, the LSH participated in its first main clash, at Good Hope farm. In an "...effective, coordinated operation," Steele and his men led a multi-phased assault on the farm, in spite of stiff resistance. During the offensive, NWMP Inspector Belcher once again displayed bravery, leading a dash to occupy the farm, while Major Arthur Jarvis, also of the NWMP – and later awarded a CMG for his service – cleared and occupied the surrounding *kopjes*.<sup>59</sup> De Wet, unfortunately, got away. In the weeks that followed, Steele, often far in advance of the main column, repeatedly created opportunities to capture the Boer general:

In their hot pursuit of the Boers the Strathconas often ran far ahead of their supply wagons, having to camp without food and blankets. Steele was in the saddle from dawn to dark, showing the stamina of a man half his age.<sup>60</sup>



Arthur Herbert Lindsay Richardson, VC.



Members of Lord Strathcona's Horse.

However, Knox's hesitation consistently squandered opportunities to trap de Wet.<sup>61</sup> Steele, nonetheless, did seize a final opportunity to demonstrate the efficacy of his unit. When Knox decided to give up his quest in early January, de Wet proceeded to hound Knox's withdrawal, and "the hunter became the hunted."<sup>62</sup> Steele utilized the situation to his advantage by turning and striking the Boers; first, by luring a group of Boer horsemen into an ambush on 6 January, and then on 8 January at Vet River,

"...[he] took charge of the operation....at one point, just before crossing the bridge, Steele's support troops, under heavy pressure from the Boers' persistent rifles, dismounted to return fire. Steele, however, refused to permit the delay and ordered the supports forward. 'They dashed over the bridge, all officers retiring last to encourage their men'...The Strathcona's Horse's skilful work meant that the rearguard survived unscathed...More remarkable still, the Strathcona's Horse reported no casualties.<sup>63</sup>

The Vet River action was the last conflict in the Strathconas' tour of duty in South Africa. The officers and men of LSH had accomplished much, and had demonstrated competency in counter-insurgency combat.

During its time on the veldt, the LSH participated in two important campaigns, distinguishing itself in each. Several NWMP officers, including A.H. Richardson, Robert Belcher, Arthur Jarvis, and, of course, Sam Steele, received commendations for their efforts.<sup>64</sup> The Canadian militia promoted Steele to the rank of brevet colonel for his service with the LSH.<sup>65</sup> Steele and his subordinate officers made concrete the ideal of effective leadership in guerrilla warfare, utilizing

a high degree of personal power. As veterans of NWMP operations, many of the officers of the LSH brought useful experience with them to the veldt, which probably gave them vital expert power. Steele's actions in particular imply that he used his unique abilities as an NWMP officer to the Strathconas' advantage. On several occasions, he inflicted casualties upon the South Africans with actions resembling those of the Boers themselves, specifically, by employing small groups of men, and by using swift manoeuvres that caught the Boers off guard.

We should also attribute to the officers of LSH an incredible amount of referent power, deriving from the leader-first approach, exemplified particularly by Steele. A willingness to put their lives on the line permeated the entire officer corps of the unit. A.H. Richardson modeled this altruistic attitude, and Richardson's heroism earned him a well-deserved VC. Steele's highly active leadership style, moreover,



General Sam Steele.

has been shown to be most appropriate for building cohesion and for boosting morale in counter-insurgency operations. In guerrilla combat, "...action strengthens trust in a self-fulfilling fashion; action will maintain members' confidence that the team is able to manage uncertainty, risk, and vulnerability."<sup>66</sup> Further, Steele's tendency to push far ahead of supply lines is similar to IDF operations during the Six Day War,

"... [when], in order to maintain initiative, column commanders whether of task force or companies – indeed all officers – were always well forward in their columns, farther forward than is usually recommended in conventional military schools."<sup>67</sup>

In addition, Steele and Belcher periodically helped set an example of coolness by lighting up their pipes during battle, exerting a calming influence upon their men.<sup>68</sup> Cumulatively, then, Steele and his officers exemplified the characteristics necessary for competent leadership during counter-insurgency, accounting for much of the LSH's success.

Such success was plainly evident to the British elite. As special recognition for their efforts, Edward VII issued the South African War medals to Lord Strathcona's Horse personally, and the Canadians also met Lord and Lady Strathcona for the first time and received their gratitude.<sup>69</sup> Additionally, the Crown bestowed the prefix "Royal" upon the NWMP, specifically on account of their service with Lord Strathcona's Horse. The contribution of NWMP leadership to this unit clearly did not go unnoticed at the time, and with good reason.

## Conclusion

The nature of contemporary warfare in the Middle East, namely counter-insurgency, has given rise to a focus upon the skills necessary for fighting a 'modern' war. The importance of leadership has encouraged the Canadian Forces to pay particular attention to the leadership qualities integral to success in modern warfare; specifically, the ability "...to secure the commitment of subordinates and to influence peers, superiors, and people in general," through "...[the] qualities associated with personal power – competence, personal dedication, integrity, respect and concern for others, and similar characteristics that, over time, help to create a trust

relationship."<sup>70</sup> The recent publication by the CFLI of two leadership manuals, one regarding leadership doctrine, and one based upon conceptual foundations, certainly attests to the importance given by the CF to effective leadership. 'Modern' war, however, is synonymous with small war, at least, according to the following definition employed by the CDS: "Applying lethal force as precisely as possible through the use of nimble, mobile, and smarter forces."<sup>71</sup> The prevalence of guerrilla combat and counter-insurgency throughout the history of warfare underscores the importance of learning from past mistakes.

Competent leadership was a primary reason for the enormous success enjoyed by NWMP-led units in South Africa, namely, the Canadian Mounted Rifles and the Lord Strathcona's Horse. By utilizing personal power, NWMP officers commanded the trust and loyalty of their men. The officers of the LSH and the CMR continually displayed two important components of personal power vital to small unit combat: expert and referent power. The expert power possessed by NWMP officers in South Africa derived from their unique experience in the counter-insurgency operations typical of paramilitary duties in the Canadian Northwest. In addition, several NWMP officers in South Africa were veterans of the North-West Rebellion, a war characterized in part by guerrilla combat, which was analogous to their experience during the Boer War. NWMP competency in performing counter-insurgency operations while on the South African veldt strongly suggests that their experience from the Canadian prairies was invaluable to NWMP officers during the Boer War. Referent power, moreover, also proved decisive in maintaining the cohesion and morale necessary for effective



Canadian War Museum PA-173037

combat. Several NWMP officers received commendations for their bravery, and the courage exhibited by those in charge undoubtedly had a salutary effect upon the morale and comportment of their men.

As noted historian John Keegan writes, "...those who impose risk must be seen to share it."<sup>72</sup> By sharing in the risks of their subordinates, NWMP officers buttressed cohesion and morale among their men, which are vulnerable

**"In addition, Steele and Belcher periodically helped set an example of coolness by lighting up their pipes after battle, exerting a calming influence upon their men."**

in counter-insurgency warfare. In doing so, they ensured the effectiveness of those units under their command. The prefix 'Royal,' still in use today, serves as a reminder of the NWMP contribution to the Boer War. We should not forget the successful leadership it represents, and the lessons we can draw from this example to ensure capable leadership upon the modern battlefield.



## NOTES

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3. Kenneth Macksey (ed.), *The Penguin Encyclopedia of Weapons and Military Technology: Prehistory to the Present Day* (London: Viking Press, 2003), p. 146.
4. Allan English, "Leadership and Operational Stress in the CF," *Canadian Military Journal*, Vol. 1, No. 3 (Autumn 2000), pp. 36-37.
5. Paul Bartone and Faris Kirkland, "Optimal Leadership in Small Army Units," in *Handbook of Military Psychology*, David A. Mangelsdorff and Reuven Gal (eds.), (Chichester, NY: Wiley, 1991), p. 398.
6. Frederick J. Manning, "Morale, Cohesion and Espirit de Corps," in *Handbook of Military Psychology*, p. 464.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 461.
8. Elmar Dinter, *Hero or Coward: Pressures Facing the Soldier in Battle* (London: Cass, 1985), p. 129.
9. Richard A. Gabriel and Paul L. Savage, *Crisis in Command: Mismanagement in the Army* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1978), p. 59.
10. English, p. 36.
11. Rick L. Campise et al., "Combat Stress," in *Military Psychology: Clinical and Operational Applications* eds. Carrie Kennedy and Eric Zillmer (New York: Guilford Press, 2006), p. 228.
12. Department of National Defence, *Leadership in the CF: Conceptual Foundations*, p. 58.
13. *Ibid.*
14. Connection power "refers to the capacity to access useful information, resources, and opportunities...Personal contacts and ties with other military professionals, influential figures, or sources of valued expertise represent several forms of connection power..." While undoubtedly important, I consider expert and referent power to be particularly relevant to counter-insurgency combat in theatre, where soldiers and their superiors are in regular, direct contact with each other and often possess limited contact to other "military professions" or "influential figures." It is imperative in this situation that soldiers trust the competency and bravery of their immediate superiors who command them. See *Ibid.*, p. 59.
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21. Shalit, p. 131.
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39. *Ibid.*, p. 240.
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41. Chambers, p. 126.
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43. Reid, p. 124.
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46. Chambers, p. 126.
47. Miller, p. 270.
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