

Thomas Wellington Chalmers

Mountie, Surveyor, Soldier

Inspector Thomas Chalmers in Mounted Police mess uniform, 1883.



▼
by
Barbara Brydges

Early in the last century, feminist and author Emily Murphy was dining with Edmonton's Mayor, William A. Griesbach, when the conversation turned to his experiences in the Boer War and to the exploits of an ex-Mountie with whom he'd served. Suddenly she realized this man's memorial tablet was opposite to where she sat in All Saint's Anglican Church, and this was the man, Captain Chalmers, about whom she'd been "weaving romances" during the reading of the first and second lessons. It was hard to sustain her romantic illusions when she discovered that Chalmers bore the nickname 'Scissors' due to his long, thin

legs, and that he was a reticent person who didn't shine as 'a good fellow' during his time in the Mounted Police. However, she also learned that in South Africa he turned out to be "the most efficient officer of them all." And she leaves the reader to weave some romance of their own by her tantalizing final revelation:

And once Old Scissors had a serious love-affair – No, on second thoughts, I'll not tell.¹

Captain Chalmers' full name was Thomas Wellington Chalmers and, in addition to being an officer in the North-West Mounted Police and serving in the Boer War, he was the surveyor who laid out one of the most controversial sections of the Klondike Trail north of Edmonton.

Born in 1862 in Adolphustown, Canada West, Chalmers may have been destined for a military career from the time he was given the middle name of 'Wellington' presumably in honour of the very English hero of the Battle of Waterloo. Thomas' father 'Captain' James Chalmers, earned his living sailing on Lake Ontario. However, he also purchased land so by the time Thomas was five years old, his father had acquired 20 acres of land immediately adjacent to the small village settlement. By 1871 he had become a full-time farmer, owning 180 acres on the first concession, fronting on the Bay of Quinte.²

After completing high school, Thomas entered the Royal Military College (RMC) in Kingston in 1880 – the 99th 'gentleman cadet' to enter the institution since its formation.³ The RMC, modelled along the lines of West Point, provided education in engineering and general scientific knowledge, in addition to military tactics. So when Thomas graduated at the age of twenty-one, in June 1883, he had a 1st class certificate, as well as both

military and civil engineering credentials.⁴ He had also formed friendships within his relatively small group of classmates, perhaps most particularly with Gilbert Sanders, with whom his path was to intersect significantly in the future.

Following his military training, Thomas became a lieutenant in No 4 Battery, Montreal Garrison Artillery,⁵ but as this was a voluntary militia group, he also had to find gainful civilian employment. During his first year after graduation he did some work for the Dominion Lands Survey in the North-West Territories but a more exciting opportunity presented itself when he became a cowboy for retired Major-General Thomas Bland Strange on his 70,000 acre Military Colonization Rancho east of Calgary.⁶

In 1885 he was still on Strange's ranch when the North-West Rebellion broke out. Chalmers hastily left the ranch and headed east to join his militia unit and use his military training. Ironically, he might have seen more action by remaining with Strange, who organized forces in Alberta that engaged the Cree at Frenchman's Butte. As it was, it's doubtful that Chalmers saw any action because the Montreal Garrison Artillery didn't receive orders to proceed to the North-West until after General F.D. Middleton wired for help from Batoche on May 11. Riel had already surrendered by the time they arrived in the West on May 20. There they were faced with the tedious task of garrisoning Regina, where their leader Col. W.R. Oswald wrote that "...a number of us feel that this loafing is not what we came for. We are all ready and anxious to fight for our country..."⁷ Within a month, most of the troops were on their way back east. Chalmers was again left to seek a way to earn a living.

This time he sought a commission in the North-West Mounted Police, which already had many graduates of RMC. He had reason to be optimistic because the shock of the North-West Rebellion and pressure for settling the prairies had led to a doubling of the size of the Force from 500 to 1,000 members. This also meant an increase in the complement of officers, "selected through the usual government mixture of political patronage and geographical representation."⁸ Chalmers wrote to Sir John A. Macdonald on July 27, 1885, supported by a letter of reference from Col. Oswald who wrote that "I can recommend him as a most excellent

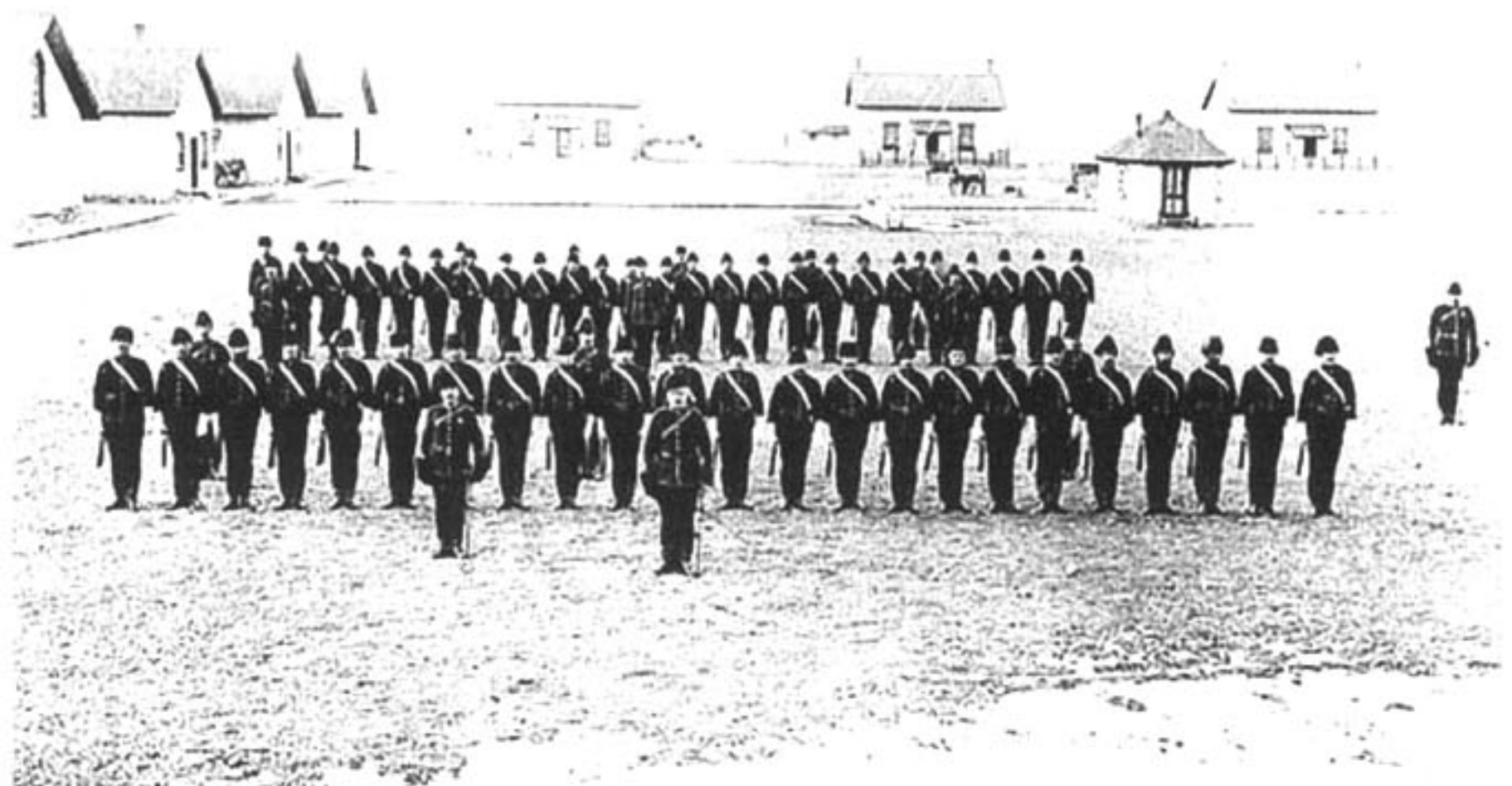
painstaking officer, well up in his work and thoroughly reliable in every respect."⁹

When he was not immediately successful, Chalmers enlisted the support of Thomas Strange. On February 12, 1886, Strange wrote "Dear Sir John" a letter recommending Chalmers who, he said, had been a very good cowboy with a good head on his shoulders, a good physique, was steady, hardworking, and gentlemanly. In conclusion, Strange warned that if a commission was not forthcoming, that Chalmers was thinking of going to the United States and "it is a pity to educate these fine young Canadians for a foreign country." Chalmers, in his own letter stressed his educational qualifications and experience.¹⁰ The application was forwarded to Sir Hector Langevin, by direction of Sir John, with a recommendation for approval to the committee of the Privy Council. The approval was duly granted and took effect April 10th, 1886.¹¹ Chalmers was given the position of Inspector left vacant after Francis Dickens, son of the famous novelist, had left the force.

Chalmers was twenty-three years old. His medical examination record for the Force lists his personal attributes: fair complexion, light hair, blue eyes, and a sanguine temperament. At a height at 5 foot 11½ inches, but only weighing 145 pounds, one can see how he earned the sobriquet 'Scissors' from the men under his command.¹²

The young man proved to be a competent but not exceptional officer. When his name does occur in the police Annual Reports, it is in regard to the relatively routine actions. For instance, during his first posting at Macleod, in October 1887, Chalmers was involved

Wellington was stationed at Fort Macleod during his term with the Mounted Police. The fort can be seen here with D and H Divisions on the parade square in 1890.



in trying to put out a grass fire sparked by a hunting party south of Pincher Creek.¹³ Early in the following year, he experienced the full throes of winter on the prairies when he was sent to arrest a Blood Indian named The Dog, who was rumoured to be in the area after having escaped from custody the previous year while being conducted to the Manitoba Penitentiary. At 2:45 a.m. on the morning of January 20, 1888, Chalmers was sent with 30 non-commissioned officers and men to re-arrest him. When they departed, the temperature was 19 degrees below zero. By the time they had completed their 19-mile trip to Standoff, about four hours later, it had fallen to 36 degrees below. Everyone suffered intensely from the cold, with four constables so severely frostbitten that they had to remain at the Standoff detachment when their comrades returned to Macleod. In the end, the expedition was all for naught as the informer had identified the wrong person.¹⁴

In July of the same year, Chalmers was dispatched to Montana, along with a constable, to recover two police horses which had strayed from Maple Creek. Once they crossed the border, the constable deserted, apparently tempted by the high wages offered by railway contractors in the United States. Alone, Chalmers had to drive the two animals for 210 miles across the Blackfoot Indian Reservation back into Canada. And report that he had lost his man.¹⁵

Aside from giving him experience as an officer, Chalmers' posting to Macleod had a personal and social side. Gilbert Sanders, his classmate from RMC, was already serving there as an NWMP Inspector, and in the early months of 1887 corresponded several times with Chalmers. When Sanders arrived back at Macleod on May 26, 1887 he wrote in his diary that he "found Tom Chalmers in barracks."¹⁶

Although the officers, unlike the enlisted men, were expected to socialize with the locals and settlers, the bare officers' quarters in Macleod, which contained only a deal table and half-a-dozen common chairs, made it difficult for officers to return the hospitality of settlers. Nevertheless, Sanders' diary portrays the officers' attempts to engage in some leisure activities suitable to their station in life. He writes of constructing a tennis court and playing tennis with Chalmers, and records Chalmers' taking two

five-day recreational trips: once fishing in Pincher Creek with fellow officers, and once camping with Percy Neale's family.¹⁷

As an officer, Chalmers was described as "a quiet and reticent man among men who were not quiet and reticent [and] made the best patrol reports ever sent in to Ottawa. Being a civil engineer, and painstaking, these accurate observations greatly delighted his officers."¹⁸

Late in 1888, Chalmers was transferred to "C" Division in Battleford where one of his duties was to participate in ceremonies at Regina, the Territorial capital. On August 29, 1889 he marched a contingent of 44 horsemen and three wagons to Saskatoon, where they met a similar-sized group from 'F' Division. The two divisions started a five-day, 165-mile march to Moose Jaw. It was a year of drought, and the journey involved two 40-mile stretches where there was no water for the horses, so they arrived very fatigued in Moose Jaw at 1 a.m. on the morning of September 9. After two days' rest, the combined force rode on to Regina where they formed into a Provisional Division under canvas. The object of the whole exercise was to form a guard of honour for Governor General Lord Stanley on his arrival in Regina on October 3. Six days later, having taken part in a review before His Excellency, they were on their way back to their respective headquarters, each division having travelled a total distance of 600 miles.¹⁹

In March 1891, Chalmers was posted to Lethbridge under the command of Supt. R. Burton Deane. A touch of his personality and professionalism was revealed in an incident there in July, when an American immigrant who was short of supplies was unduly delayed at Coutts by lack of attention from a drunken Customs' Collector. Chalmers sarcastically commented, "I do not suppose that it is necessary to detain people until the Collector of Customs at Coutts sees fit and is sober enough to attend to business."²⁰ In January 1892, Chalmers went on three months' leave to attend to private business and on April 30, 1893, he resigned from the Mounted Police.

When going into business for himself, Chalmers had no hesitation seeking assistance from his superiors in trying to set himself up as a civil engineer and surveyor in Edmonton. On March 23, shortly before he left the Force,

he wrote to NWMP Comptroller Frederick White asking his assistance in acquiring a contract for surveying work that summer and promising to resign his commission as soon as such assurance was received. White responded fairly quickly, saying that he would soon hear about a survey having been awarded him. "I am sorry you have decided to cease being a 'bobby'," he wrote, "but congratulate you for having pluck enough to strike out for yourself and take your chances of doing better."²¹

By the time Chalmers took up surveying as a full time operation, four-fifths of the land in western Canada had already been surveyed but there was much to do. Most of his work was in the area around Edmonton, often in bushy country that presented many challenges – rivers, lakes, muskegs, mosquitoes, and blackflies included. A local history of Elk Point gives him credit for establishing the outlines of townships in that area in 1893 or 1894.²²

In May 1896, Chalmers received \$500 and instructions from the Surveyor General to undertake a survey of Townships 57 and 58, Ranges 9 and 10, which was to be the future site of St. Paul de Metis.²³ The aim of the colony was to turn the Metis into self-sufficient farmers. By May 16 the surveyor had arranged for an outfit and engaged seven men, but it was snowing and the roads were impassable. He had the heavy items transported to St Paul on a raft that was heading to Battleford, but it was not until May 21 that Chalmers himself headed out, along with the carts that they would use for transportation once they reached their destination.

The actual surveying work began on May 27, when they picked up the line between townships 57 and 58 on Range 10. The next day Chalmers "ran" a mile and half of the north boundary of Township 57, Range 9. Their work continued in much the same fashion throughout the summer, hindered sometimes by heavy rains and thunderstorms, and involving moving the camp to a new location every few weeks. In late October they began to build a shanty for winter quarters and a shelter for the horses. This was none too soon, as by November 2 there was snow and sleet all day. By mid-November the snow was too deep for wheels. Chalmers procured a sleigh and two jumpers to bring in the outfit, and at Manowan Lake



left behind the tents and anything else they could do without. It was a difficult haul to Edmonton as the temperature kept dropping. When they reached Egg Lake on the third night, Chalmers put his men up at the stopping house, since they were not clad for such weather. On November 23 he reached Edmonton and paid off the party.

Thomas Chalmers, at left, is seen at Fort Macleod in 1887. At centre is his good friend Gilbert Sanders, and right is J.O. Wilson.

In 1897, newspapers across the continent were suddenly filled with stories about the discovery of gold on Bonanza Creek in the Yukon Territory. Tens of thousands of gold seekers rushed north to seek their fortunes, going via Seattle and up the coast. In the North, they were then faced with an exhausting trek either over the White Pass, or the even more-dangerous Chilkoot Pass.

Others, however, looked at their maps and discovered that Edmonton was the closest railway point to the Klondike. When the Edmonton Board of Trade began getting inquiries from potential prospectors, they envisioned Edmonton as the gateway to the Yukon gold fields, providing an all-Canadian route. Accordingly, the North-West Territories government looked into the possibility of cutting a road north from Edmonton towards the Yukon and hired Chalmers as the surveyor.²⁴ In September 1897 he left Edmonton with ten horses, two carts, and a party consisting of a NWMP corporal, a constable, and the well known guide and packer Dan Noyes. Chalmers assignment was to explore two possible routes from Fort Assiniboine to Lesser Slave Lake.

His was one of three such surveys, each sponsored by a different level of government.

After Thomas Chalmers built a trail from Fort Assiniboine through the Swan Hills to Lesser Slave Lake in 1897 it received mixed reviews. This photo shows a government treaty party on the trail in 1900. Dr. O.C. Edwards, who was with the party, said, "From what I have seen of it, I think Mr. Chalmers should spend the rest of his life repairing it."



On November 7, he returned and in separate reports to the NWMP and to the Chief Engineer of the Territories, he recommended the construction of a wagon road from Fort Assiniboine, across the Pembina and Athabasca Rivers, and then through the Swan Hills to terminate about ten miles below the narrows of Lesser Slave Lake. This was almost the exact route he'd been told to explore by the chief engineer. When he arrived at Lesser Slave Lake the Indians told him that his was the only passable route. He'd have preferred to follow the same route back and begin actual surveying for a road, but since there was no way to contact his superiors he returned by the designated alternate route, which proved to have too much muskeg.

The suitability of his recommended route seemed verified by NWMP Inspector A.E. Snyder who had travelled the opposite direction from the shores of Lesser Slave Lake to Fort Assiniboine in a course that closely paralleled his own route. In fact, Chalmers suggested that since Snyder's route had followed the trail of an experienced native hunter, this slightly variant course might be an even better choice than his group's exact path. He expressed very few reservations about the terrain, saying in fact: "I never saw a country before, the surface of which is so rugged, through which so good a road can be built at such a small expense. There will be no heavy grades, and very little soft ground to be corduroyed." He

estimated that \$12.00 a mile would cover the expenses for making a trail ten feet wide, putting in whatever corduroy was required, and bridging all creeks except the Swan and Driftpile Rivers, which would have to be forded.²⁵ He also wrote that, "on the road it is proposed to follow, there is plenty of feed and good water," a statement that proved to be devastatingly wrong.²⁶

The day after his return, Chalmers set out with two teams, a foreman, six axemen and a cook to improve the old road from Edmonton to Fort Assiniboine and establish the new one from there to Lesser Slave Lake.

In a matter of weeks, Chalmers' route through the Swan Hills became the stuff of horror stories for gold seekers heading north from Edmonton. Author Pierre Berton provides a dramatic and somewhat florid description:

Here the familiar stench of rotting horseflesh, the telltale perfume of the Klondike stampede, began to permeate the route to the Peace. Of the four thousand horses that expired or were shot on the overland routes, two thousand died of starvation in the Swan Hills. The country was devoid of feed. At some points the maddened animals gnawed the bark from the trees or staggered on, sustained only by scraps of frozen moss, until they dropped in their tracks. With the trail blocked by stranded parties, those who followed were forced to detour, hacking new trails out of the forests as they pressed on towards the Swan River. By spring, the Chalmers Trail had become a two-way route, with those in the rear crying, "Forward!" and those in front shouting "Back" as in the days of Horatius.²⁷

In fairness to Chalmers, many of these over-eager Klondikers set off before the trail was complete, with several parties leaving Edmonton soon after Chalmers' crew began work. Anxious to reach the northern rivers by spring thaw, other groups left Edmonton in the early months of 1898, when the trail was no more than half complete.²⁸ And not all travellers experienced the same problems. The 23 men and 123 horses of the Fugard party, ably assisted by experienced guides, overtook Chalmers' party shortly after crossing the Athabasca River at Fort Assiniboine and successfully arrived at Lesser Slave Lake on January 15, 1898, demonstrating that the route could be viable

if wisdom was used in travelling it.²⁹ On the other hand, the group of ten upper class Britons, usually referred to as the Helpman party, who left Fort Assiniboine in February 1898, were horrified by the cruelty the trail imposed both on their own horses and on the animals of other inexperienced travellers. Far too many injured and dying horses littered the trail, others bearing sores from pack loads left in place for weeks at a time, and starving for lack of food.³⁰ The Chalmers Trail took its toll on horses but only one human grave lies along its length, that of a five-year-old child.

Chalmers' report that this was a satisfactory route through the Swan Hills conveniently endorsed the orders he had been given and might be interpreted as a way of pleasing his sponsors and, perhaps, gaining the road building contract. At the very least, it shows great misjudgment by Chalmers about the route in relation to the number and eagerness of potential gold seekers using it. In suggesting that there was sufficient feed along this route he did not take into account the large number of horses that would be grazing on the small amount of available grass. Author James MacGregor states that a pack trail needed to drop into a meadow where horses could feed at intervals of approximately every ten miles. He noted that because such meadows were scarce in the Swan Hills, native trails did not try to go straight through them.³¹

Nor did Chalmers appear to consider that inexperienced men would be taking this trail, men who did not know how to care for their animals.

To his credit, Chalmers did issue warnings that the route would be impassable until a proper trail had been established. According to writer Joan Weir, "He stated emphatically that no travellers should attempt to cover that first distance around the Swan Hills until a proper trail had been axed through."³² So he should not be held entirely responsible for those who tried to break the trail ahead of his road builders. The route was passable, if extremely difficult, even before he'd finished his work. However, he did not finish until August 1898, at which time the gold rush was over and it was no longer needed. But one might question how good the completed trail really was. Two years later, on the Treaty 8 expedition of 1900, Dr. O.C. Edwards was scathing in his comments about the route:

"From what I have seen of it, I think Mr Chalmers should spend the rest of his life repairing it."³³

On the personal side, during this time, Chalmers reportedly became a father. On December 12, 1898, an Edmonton woman named Harriet Mary Gauvreau gave birth to a son, who was given the Christian name of Andrew and the surname of Chalmers. Chalmers paid for all the costs related to the child's birth and a subsequent operation, but the expenses were incurred in the mother's name, he "not wishing the fact of his paternity to be known." Chalmers agreed to pay an ongoing \$12 a month for the child's upkeep and to pay Gauvreau to be housekeeper for himself and his brother Walter – a position that continued until January 1, 1900. Harriet gave birth to another son, Alfred Chalmers, on August 8th, 1900, but by this time Thomas was far away in South Africa.³⁴ Was this the "romance" to which Emily Murphy had alluded?

In the autumn of 1899, war was declared between Britain and the Boers of South Africa. In response, Canada provided a thousand troops that fall, followed by a second contingent comprised of the 1st and 2nd Battalions of the Canadian Mounted Rifles. The 2nd Battalion was formed around a nucleus of current and former members of the North-West Mounted Police and included Thomas Chalmers.³⁵ On October 2, 1899 he wrote to NWMP Comptroller White even before war was declared, offering his services. He said that he could raise a troop of fifty good men to act as scouts. White replied that, while he would have nothing

The 1900 treaty party is seen here at the Athabasca River, just before embarking on their arduous trek across the Chalmers trail.





Boer prisoners on foot near Pretoria during the Boer War.

to do with selecting Canadian troops, he would report favourably about him if asked by the Militia Department. He also advised Chalmers that the most he could expect would be a Lieutenancy and "I think it would be unwise on your part to cut loose from the North-West where you have built up a business and a reputation."³⁶ Chalmers was not to be dissuaded, saying that "he would like very much to go to Africa as there would be, I think, good chances when this war is over and the winters are too long here for a surveyor ever to make much."³⁷

Before leaving Edmonton, Chalmers was feted in an evening at the Alberta Hotel. As a local newspaper wrote, "Perhaps one of the happiest dinners ever held in that happy place, the Alberta dining room, was that given in honour of Lieut. T.W. Chalmers of the Mounted Rifles and Sergt. Aston, of the Mounted Police, on Thursday night... It was in a measure an impromptu affair, gotten up at short notice, and it brought together as fine a company as ever sat at host Jackson's tables."³⁸ The dinner was attended by twenty-eight men, including the ex-Mayor of Edmonton and was co-chaired by MLA Matthew McCauley. Each man present was called upon to speak or sing, often including patriotic references to Britain and quotes from Tennyson's inspiring war poetry.

Chalmers was commissioned a lieutenant, responsible for the 2nd Troop of "D" Squadron of the 2nd Canadian Mounted Rifles. The Commanding Officer of the battalion was Commissioner Lawrence Herchmer of the NWMP, now named a lieutenant-colonel. Commanding "D"

Squadron was Chalmers' old friend, Gilbert Sanders.

In South Africa, Chalmers appears to have come into his own and proved to be a very competent officer. Perhaps, like many introverted people, it took coming into maturity and years of experience to give him the confidence to be a leader of men. Emily Murphy heard from W.A. Griesbach that 'Old Scissors' turned out to be the most efficient officer of them all, who "showed a grasp of things military and tactical that no one ever dreamed to be hidden away under his sedate exterior."³⁹

In his memoirs, Griesbach blamed Herchmer for choosing his officers mainly from the ranks of the Mounted Police and says that, by-and-large, they were both too old for the ranks they held and lacked training in anything other than police work. However, he makes three exceptions to this general observation, one for Colonel Sanders, "a very sound officer" and one for Captain Chalmers who "was always cool and collected and had the certain touch of a man who knew his job."⁴⁰ Griesbach expanded on the latter's abilities as an officer:

We had, by this time, taken the measure of all our officers in our squadron. A few were good and the rest were not. I began to witness a phenomenon which has followed me through my military career. After a fight a poor officer would ride in with a few men and a good officer would come in stronger than he went out. What had happened was simply this, that the men get away from the command of a poor officer and attach themselves to an officer whom they can trust. Captain Tommy Chalmers was such a one. I have seen him riding in after a show with practically the whole squadron behind him. Sometimes the poorer officers had ridden in first and told some tall stories about their troops being cut to pieces and so on.⁴¹

Chalmers's capabilities were recognized fairly quickly when he was promoted to the rank of captain. In June 1900, a reporter for *The Globe* described the CMR's exploits in glowing terms and made special mention of Captain Chalmers:

During the week a detachment of one hundred of our men from the four squadrons, under the command of Captain

Chalmers, together with a squadron of the Imperial Mounted Infantry, the whole under the command of Colonel Anderson, rode out over sixty miles without once off-saddling, captured twenty-four Boers, including a Commandant, some Field Cornets and other officers, and returned to camp without casualties.⁴²

The reporter also mentioned that “the marvellous way in which they have gone through the heaviest rifle and shell fire without suffering any casualties is also a subject of much comment.” Unfortunately this luck could not continue and in November, 1900, Captain Chalmers was killed in action and Major Sanders wounded.⁴³

A detailed account of the engagement was provided by Col. T.B. Evans in a letter to Lord Minto. (August 9, 1901) According to him, an advanced column of 50 men, under Sanders’ command was led astray on a foggy morning by a guide and forced to return under heavy fire. Sergeant Tyron, having given an injured man his horse, fell behind and was picked up by Sanders. Due perhaps to the double load, the saddle turned and both men fell off. Sanders received a small wound in his side and somewhat dazed, he took shelter behind a rock. When the sergeant reported to Chalmers that he couldn’t convince Sanders to come back, Chalmers went back to urge him. Instead of coming, Sanders ran to the shelter of a bigger rock. Then, Evans reported:

Chalmers, determined that Sanders would either come or be brought back, sent Private Smith to Sanders with a led horse and this man also sat mounted, under heavy fire and urged Sanders to mount and rejoin Chalmers, who had got his men under good cover, but Sanders again refused. Chalmers, greatly annoyed at Sanders’ fourth refusal, said he would stay there until they did get him and while arranging that some of the support should be brought up to make a stand, he saw young Herchmer riding over from the support. Knowing that Herchmer would, if he did not dismount, come under a very heavy fire as soon as he came up on the ridge, Chalmers, although warned not to do so by his men, ran out to warn Herchmer and was shot through the body and died in a few minutes.⁴⁴



Colonel Evans then concluded, “In Chalmers I lost my coolest, bravest and best officer who was loved, trusted and admired by all ranks.”

When General Smith-Dorien learned of the troubles of the advanced party, he got a couple of big guns to fire on the Boers who then retreated. After the firing ceased, Major Sanders, obviously recovered from his daze, ran back to the advanced guard, mounted, and returned to the main column.

When Col. Evans learned that Smith-Dorien was recommending Sanders for the Victoria Cross, he argued strenuously that the major should not get one unless Chalmers was also honoured, along with three other men involved in the episode. In the end, Sanders was granted a Distinguished Service Order but officials did not approve postmortem honours to Chalmers and the others. Smith-Dorien tried unsuccessfully to get the War Office to announce in the *Gazette* that Chalmers and [Sergeant] Builder would have probably both received the Victoria Cross had they lived, but, “The War Office will not give honours for the actual act in which a man loses his life – why they won’t do so I cannot fathom.”⁴⁵

“*Dulce et decorum est pro patria mori*,” (“It is sweet and fitting to die for one’s country”) reads Edmonton’s memorial tablet to Thomas Chalmers. Emily Murphy disagreed with these lofty sentiments: “Death for any cause is never sweet to a young man in the flood-time of life,” she wrote. “They are only the high-sounding catchwords meant to drown the gasp and strangle of a strong

These are the officers of the Canadian Mounted Rifles upon their arrival in Capetown, South Africa, during the Boer War.

man clutching at the veldt sand in his death-agony.”⁴⁶

In a strange coincidence, contemporary Canadian children’s literature owes much to those long-ago events of November 1, 1900. After Chalmers’ death in South Africa, his sister Grace came to Alberta from her home in California to settle his estate, met and married a farmer’s son from Fort Saskatchewan. Eventually she became the grandmother of Linda Smith of Grande Prairie, a librarian, who has published eight well-received children’s books including the *Tales of Three Lands* trilogy. Gilbert Sanders survived the war, became a police magistrate in Calgary, and raised a family. In unique parallel, one of his great-granddaughters, Kit Pearson, also trained as a librarian and became the author of such award winning children’s books as the *Guests of War* trilogy.

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NOTES

- 1 Emily Murphy, *Janey Canuck in the West*. London: Cassell, 1910, 288-89.
- 2 *Census of Canada, 1871*, Return of Cultivated Lands, Counties of Lennox and Addington.
- 3 Letter to author from Ross Mackenzie, Curator, Royal Military College Museum.
- 4 *Ibid.*
- 5 Thomas Wellington Chalmers officer file, RG 18, Series G, Vol. 82,0-74, National Archives of Canada (NAC), Letter from A.F. Duguid, Director of the Historical Section, Department of National Defence to Commissioner S.T. Wood, RCMP, Oct 28, 1943.
- 6 *Ibid.*, Letter from Thomas Strange to Sir John A. Macdonald, Feb 12, 1886.
- 7 W.R. Oswald to Hon. A.P. Caron, May 31, 1885, cited in Desmond Morton, *The Last War Drum: The Northwest Campaign of 1885*. Toronto: Hakkert, 1972, 136.
- 8 William Beahan and Stan Horrall, *Red Coats on the Prairies: The North-West Mounted Police 1886-1900*. Regina, SK: Friends of the Mounted Police Museum/Print West Publishing Service, 1998, 154.
- 9 Chalmers file, NAC.
- 10 *Ibid.*, Chalmers to Macdonald, Feb 20, 1886.
- 11 *Ibid.*, Unsigned memo to Hector Langevin, April 7, 1886.
- 12 *Ibid.*

- 13 *Report of the Commissioner of the North-West Mounted Police, 1887 (NWMP Annual Report)*. Ottawa: King’s Printer, 1888, 48.
- 14 *Ibid.*, 59.
- 15 *Ibid.*, 56.
- 16 Sanders family fonds, Glenbow Archives, M 1093/140, transcript of Gilbert Sanders diary, 1887.
- 17 *Ibid.*, Aug 21, Sept 27, 1887.
- 18 Murphy, 289.
- 19 NWMP Annual Report, 1889, 78.
- 20 Beahan & Horrall, 19.
- 21 Chalmers file, NAC, White to Chalmers, April 14, 1893.
- 22 Mary Bennett (ed), *Reflections: A History of Elk Point*. Elk Point and District Historical Society, 1977, 18.
- 23 T.W. Chalmers, surveyor’s diary, 1898, ACC PR 1979.0027 Vol 444, Provincial Archives of Alberta (PAA).
- 24 Lesser Slave Lake patrol file, RG 18, series A-I, volume 141, file 575-97, NAC. Herchmer to White, Sept 5, 1897 (extract)
- 25 Lesser Slave Lake patrol file, report by Chalmers to Chief Engineer, N.W. Government, Nov. 8, 1897 (copy).
- 26 Chalmers file, Glenbow, patrol report.
- 27 Pierre Berton, *Klondike*. Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1972, 221-22.
- 28 W.P Taylor, sent out by Edmonton business men to continue the road on from Peace River Crossing, left Edmonton on Feb. 25, 1898, and reached Lesser Slave Lake Post in short order, having found the Chalmers Trail cut out only as far as Deer Mountain in the Swan Hills. This was probably the beginning of March. James G. MacGregor, *Klondike Rush Through Edmonton*. Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1970, 192.
- 29 *Ibid.*, 51.
- 30 John Weir, *Back Door of the Klondike*, Erin, ON: Boston Mills Press, 1988, 73-91.
- 31 MacGregor, *The Klondike Rush*, 34.
- 32 Weir, 49.
- 33 O.C. Edwards, *On the North Trail: The Treaty 8 Diary of O.C. Edwards*. Calgary: Alberta Records Publication Board/Historical Society of Alberta, 1999, 14.
- 34 Transcript of birth of Alfred Chalmers, Department of Health Records, 89.440/04121575, PAA. Birth registration filed Nov. 20, 1917. Information about the birth of Andrew Chalmers obtained from Chalmers’ lawsuit file, 1905. GR 1969.0305/3406 (Bon 54), PAA.
- 35 Ernest John Chambers, *Royal North-West Mounted Police: A Corps History*. Montreal: Mortimer Press, 1906, 125.
- 36 Chalmers file, NAA, White to Chalmers, Oct 14, 1899.
- 37 *Ibid.*, Chalmers to White, Nov 1, 1899.
- 38 Undated clipping, probably from the Edmonton *Bulletin*, in possession of author.
- 39 Murphy, 289.
- 40 William Antrobus Griesbach, *I Remember*. Toronto, Ryerson, 229.
- 41 *Ibid.*, 266.
- 42 *The Globe*, Toronto, June 18, 1900.
- 43 *Ibid.*, November 9, 1900.
- 44 Thomas Wellington Chalmers file, Glenbow, Evans to Minto, Aug 8, 1901 (copy of the original which is in National Archives of Canada)
- 45 *Ibid.*, Smith-Dorrien, Notes in reply to Evans, undated (copy of original in National Archives of Canada).
- 46 Murphy, 289.
- 63 Murphy, 289.
- 46 Murphy, 289.

Reciprocity

Sir Frederick Borden is being sent by the dominion government to England. This is the beginning of the new era of reciprocity between the mother country and her chief colony. Canada has been importing studs from England for years, and it is gratifying to find that the government has at last decided to do a little exporting on her own account.

---- *Calgary Eye Opener*, March 23, 1907