

Sharpshooters Field Diary

Extract of the Field Diary of Captain Alfred Hamlyn Todd

transcribed by Duncan MacDougall

PREPARATION

Sunday 29 March 1885

Received from the Minister of Militia - Hon. Mr. Caron - a written order to raise a Company of "Sharp Shooters" to leave the city tomorrow by noon by CPR to proceed straight to Winnipeg to report myself to Gen Middleton. I immediately had posters struck off calling on rifle shots of the city who had and would volunteer for this service to parade tomorrow (Monday) at the Drill Hall at 9 am Also put advertisement in "Citizen" to same effect.

30 March 1885

On parade (9 am) Found some 80 volunteers. Picked out best shots. Notified men that Dept of Militia could not forward Coy till tomorrow. Spent rest of the day with Lieut Gray pushing matters in connection with necessary transport, stores, equipment. Had called men to parade at 8 pm. On parade found that some 5 old shots couldn't come owing to their employers refusing leave of absence. Took on some good drilled men in their places for service in camp. Marched to Militia stores with Company to give out kit. Got through at 12 p.m.[3] Before dismissing the men, ordered men to parade at 8.45 am next morning for kit inspection.

31 March 1885

Men all paraded at hour. After inspection by Col Ross and shortly before departure received a letter from Col White commanding 43 Bn. Rescinding a previous order - in writing- permitting Pte Osgoode (of his corps) to come with the Coy. Referred the matter to Col Ross who said it is too late to let the man go. On the way (to the station) the National Tent Co presented the Coy with a Union Jack as a colour. The station was so crowded with spectators that it was very difficult getting the men on the train.

THE JOURNEY WEST

31 March 1885

The train left about 1 p.m.. Men took their first meal at Chalk River Station about 6 pm from one About 9 o'clock Mr. Frank Gordon lumberman of Ottawa who was on the train from the start, drew me aside and said he was so pleased with the orderly conduct of the Company that he would like to give them a present to be spent on their behalf as I should see fit. He then very generously handed me fifty dollars (\$50.00)! The men were greatly delighted and gave him 3 rousing cheers.

1 April 1885

Arrived at Sudbury at 6 o'clock. Men had their breakfast. At 1.20 arrived at Biscotasing. Men had dinner (413 miles from Ottawa) from Messrs Brown and Leach. Drilled at squad drill for an hour. Then took men out [5] for rifle practise at mark on the lake. Men fired well (5 rounds each). Took dinner with Mr H. Abbott general manager. 1st hearty meal had eaten since Sunday. Mr. Duncan MacPherson (Div Engineer CPR Office 107 St James St Montreal has treated us officers Lts Gray, Todd and me handsomely, giving us use of his car, meals etc. Train to leave during the night.

2 April 1885

Left Bicotasing this morning at 6.30. Train stopped at Corkland for ½ an hour. Breakfast rations were

issued to the men. Tea biscuits and cheese. At 2 o'clock train arrived at Nemegosenda. Men had dinner. Men had some pistol practice here. Train left at 3 o'clock. [6]. Arrival at 27 siding at 6.30 pm Delayed for an hour and ½ for tea for men.

3 April 1885

Train stopped 7 am at Comnee's shanty and had breakfast. At end of track shifted men and stores to eight teams. Left at 9.15. Arrived at ½ way station (Magpie station) at 4.15 (7 hours). Took meals here and gave certificate for breakfast and dinner in one receipt as requested. Left camp at 6 pm in 9 teams arrived at end of gap about 11 pm Found 4 companies of Royal Grenadiers under command of Col Grasett and rear guard of Queen's Own. Reported myself to Col Grasett and gave him my written instructions to report to Col Otter. Said that for the present would be attached to his detachment. Issued rations to men and had camp fire made. About 1.30 men fell in on arrival of train. Train left station at 3.30. Men were put in flat cars boxed in without roof. Officers crowded in Caboose. 9 cars in all.

4 April 1885

Stopped at CPR stores at about 6 pm. Men were paraded outside and served with breakfast outside hut. One man sick with cold (Kingsley). Col Sgt. W inter's cheek frozen. After a delay of couple of hours [8] train moved on. Arrived at Port Monroe at about 4 pm. Some 150 men were quartered in a schooner. Balance of men billeted about in shanties. No room for my Coy. Tent was pitched on some square timber by the shore. Supper at about 6.30 pm Good food. Offered to furnish guard for the night to relieve the Royals who were tired out. Guard did duty well all night. Kept watch out for a whiskey seller.

Easter Sunday 5 April. 1885

Reveille at 5.30. Left Port Monroe at 8 o'clock. Glorious bright morning with some 20 teams to carry baggage, stores, rifles etc. The men marching 20 miles to CPR train (12 miles short of McKellor Bay. Arriving at 3.30 (7 ½ hours). Took train to Jack Fish Bay. Men in open flats. Arrived at 1/4 to seven. Men billeted all over.

6 April 1885

Left Jack Fish Bay in trains and drove 23 miles on Lake Superior to Winston. Here took train in open flats. About 6 o'clock train stopped at McKay's Harbour and rations were brought on the train. Arrived at end of track about ten o'clock. Began march in dark (raining) and took 6 hours to reach train at Nipegon or Red Rock. So dark and snow so soft on roads, which were full of holes, that we kept slipping and falling [9] almost every step. Several of the Royals thoroughly exhausted. All my Coy walked it through with none falling out. Arrived at our destination averaging 2 miles an hour. The worst march I ever experienced and was a severe test of the discipline of the men owing to the impossibility of the men from tripping and falling continuously. Entered cars soaking wet - clothes and boots etc. Men had to remain in this condition till arrival of their kits, rifles etc. which didn't arrive till 6.30 am.

7 April 1885

Arrived at Port Arthur about 10 am Men paraded on platform. All present and well (!) But one man Pte. J.D. Taylor Citizen reporter. Sick from the effects of remaining so long in wet clothes and having to sleep in damp blankets in baggage car. Dr. Ryerson saw him. Nothing serious. Men were immediately marched off to breakfast and quarter in different restaurants. Left at honour of men not to drink at bar - to take nothing but tea. Obeyed order. Saw Fill Colter late of Ottawa who has a private boarding house, Belmont House. Thoroughly enjoyed my breakfast. Saw old friend S.W. Ray who took Gray, Walter, Fill Colter and myself [10] to drink a couple of bottles of champagne. Gave me two bottles of champagne.

8 April 1885

Arrived at Winnipeg at 7 am Breakfasted at hotel on station. Capt Gautier ADC was most kind telephoned to Col Jackson about stores for the Coy. After breakfast marched the Coy to Hudson Bay Co stores to receive issue of boots - caps for the men. Bought pair of heavy field boots - \$16.00 and some socks. Went with Gautier to lunch at the Club with Brophy Champagne. Capt W.H. Adams in charge of Hudson Bay stores was very civil and obliging. Saw several friends that I knew. Bought 39 red toques for Coy at .60 = \$23.40. Left Winnipeg at 4 pm Before starting took photograph of the Coy for Graphic. Passed Brandon bought tea etc. on train.

9 April 1885

Arrived at Qu'Appelle at 8 am Received instructions to report to Col Otter. [11] Did so and received instructions to disembark from the car and to camp on the ground next to the detachment of Queen's Own and B Batteryof Col Otter. The Royals detrained and to Qu'Appelle Fort 20 miles. . . . station. Received a telegram from Captain White GGFG (Ottawa) that friends sent us \$50.00 as a present! Another telegram from Mr Thisle (Ottawa) sending us \$25.00 as a present. The Coy was inspected by Col Otter at 3pm accoutrements require tightening up and rifles cleaning.

10 April 1885

Qu'Appelle Camp

High winds - cold. Never spent such a sleepless cold night in my life. The cold struck right through a rubber sheet and 2 blankets. Shivered all night. Paraded at 10 am. Put men through extension for attack and skirmishing. At close of drill 2 men fell out of the ranks in dead faint - Humphries and Patterson. Men complained that rations of meat were not issued in sufficient quantity. In consequence divided duty between Staff Sgts Newby and Rogers. The latter is to procure the rations for the future. The Queen's Own left this afternoon for Swift Current. Expect to leave for same place tomorrow. Mr Henderson late Alderman of Ottawa on a farm 3 miles back (his house in Ottawa is brick house corner of Lyon and Nepean). Bought 5 pies and a lot of homemade cakes for the Coy, also a pail of milk.

11 April 1885

Slept well last night having lay under rubber sheets. Walter drilled the Coy till 12 o'clock. Have pistol practice with men after dinner. Struck tents at 2 o'clock. Embarked on train for Swift Current at 4 pm with B Battery. An American officer companied the two Gatling guns on board. They must have been borrowed from the US Government or else taken on trial from the manufacturing firm of which the officer is a member.

Sunday 12 April 1885

Swift Current

Debarked from train at 7 am and pitched tents in rear of Queen's Own and C School of Infantry at 10 am. Had Divine Service. Formed hollow square. Bugle band in centre to play hymn tunes. Pte. Attcheson of the Queen's Own conducted the service.