

Police, consisting of the Commissioner and 50 troopers, accompanied the Commandant from Swan River. Their arrival at the scene of the threatened disaffection at once made apparent the authority of the Crown. The party proceeded westward, visited Fort Saskatchewan and turned southward to Fort Macleod. Near the latter place the Commandant held council with several hundred Blackfeet under Chief Crowfoot, who expressed great satisfaction with the sudden transformation. Subsequently, the Commandant of Militia reported: "Too much value cannot be attached to the North West Mounted Police; too much attention cannot be paid to their efficiency".

The Influx of the Sioux.—In 1876 the Sioux, the most powerful tribe in all the northwestern States, appealed to the Blackfeet to cross the Border and join them in warfare against the United States cavalry regiments. There was promise of booty and a prediction that the combined forces would later turn northward to wipe out the Mounted Police and all white settlers. Though persistently repeated, the request was spurned with the rejoinder that the Blackfeet were on friendly terms with the red-coats and the "Great White Mother". The Sioux threatened to attack the Blackfeet in retaliation for their curt rejection but Crowfoot was informed that in such an event the Mounted Police would fight to protect his realm. Hearing of the dignified old warrior's loyalty, Queen Victoria forwarded her grateful thanks to him.

Soon afterwards, the most ghastly clash between white men and Indians in all the history of the West stirred the civilized and Indian worlds.

Beginning with the Minnesota Indian War in 1862, hostilities had been incessant between the Sioux and the United States Army over a wide extent of the trans-Mississippi plains. In June, 1876, this bitter warfare culminated on the Little Big Horn River, 300 miles south of the Cypress Hills. Probably the largest Indian camp ever assembled on the North American Continent resulted. It was made up of Sioux under the leadership of the already renowned medicine man and necromancer Sitting Bull and the able war chiefs Crow King, Crazy Horse and Gall. Treaties had been disregarded by a feverish white invasion from the East, especially in the Black Hills of Dakota where gold had been discovered. The Sioux, thrown on the defensive, decided upon a stand. As a result a fine military organization under the command of one of the most picturesque and courageous officers—Major-General George A. Custer of the 7th United States Cavalry—was needlessly sacrificed, being wiped out to the last man. A nation's indignation was stirred to the depths and the Sioux, now scattered to the winds, turned northward for refuge, the first band of fugitives crossing the International Boundary to pitch their lodges 100 miles southeast of Fort Walsh on Canadian soil.

A supreme test now confronted the Force. Officers and men were continually called upon, on the one hand, to pacify the Indians of Canada and prevent a junction with the newcomers; on the other, to prevent the Sioux from spreading to the Blackfeet hunting grounds, already being seriously depleted of buffalo. The climax of a difficult position came with the arrival in Canada of Sitting Bull himself and his more immediate following, resulting in a total of Indians from the United States of about 5,600 men, women and children. But again, the loyalty of Crowfoot, coupled with a tireless and tactful handling of the situation by the Force, saved the day.