

0. GORDON IS BEHEADED - Story Preface

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Rudolf Slatin, an Austrian who was governor of Darfur at the time of General Gordon's murder, was then a prisoner of the Mahdi's followers. Years after his release, Slatin wrote about Gordon's death. Slatin's book—*Fire and Sword in the Sudan. A Personal Narrative of Fighting and Serving the Dervishes. 1879-1895*—includes this image (facing page 206). The illustration, published in 1896, depicts three of the Mahdi's soldiers showing Gordon's severed head to Slatin (before they delivered it to the Mahdi himself). Online via Wikimedia Commons and the [British Library's photostream at Flickr](#).

Perhaps believing Muhammad Ahmed could be talked into giving up his struggle with colonial forces, [General Gordon](#) sent gifts to the Mahdi. He also offered to bestow the title of Sultan on the leader if he agreed to immediately stop the uprising.

Ahmed sent a swift response to Gordon's overtures. Returning all gifts, the Mahdi sent his own present to Gordon: a [jibbah](#). He demanded that Gordon, now in the Sudan, convert to Islam. The British general, a Christian, would never convert.

Although he had 7,500 well-supplied troops with him in Khartoum, Gordon realized Ahmed would follow his normal pattern: He would lay siege to Khartoum. (The [story of the Mahdi](#), portrayed by Sir Laurence Olivier, and Gordon, portrayed by Charlton Heston, is depicted in the Oscar-nominated film [Khartoum](#).)

The [siege](#) lasted ten months. Despite his best efforts to fortify the city and rally its people, Gordon [ran out](#) of time and supplies. Thirty thousand Mahdist troops surrounded Khartoum. They destroyed telegraph lines, leaving Gordon without meaningful contact with the outside world.

Despite an outcry from the British people to help their hero, [Gladstone](#) (then the prime minister) delayed his response. As months passed, Gordon spent part of his day on the roof of a Khartoum building, telescope in hand. He was searching for what [never came](#) during his lifetime: relief and supplies.

The granaries were empty and people were dying of starvation and exhaustion after more than 300 days of siege. During the morning hours of 26 January 1885, the Mahdi and his military force of 50,000 dervishes [descended on the city](#). The resulting slaughter was horrifying:

- People were butchered or enslaved
- Girls and women were sent to harems
- Gordon's head was cut off.

The victorious Mahdi was furious at the [fate of the British general](#). He wanted [Gordon](#) alive to use as a bargaining chip. Once dead, with his head paraded through the streets, Gordon would become an even greater hero now that he was ALSO a [martyr](#).

Avenging General Gordon's death was now on the agenda, although the British withdrew from Sudan on 22 March 1885.

See [Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:](#)

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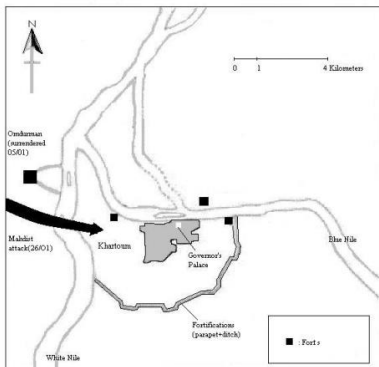
General Charles Gordon

Image online, courtesy Wikimedia Commons.

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Map Showing Siege of Khartoum

Image online, courtesy Weapons and Warfare website.

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Prime Minister Gladstone

Courtesy of United Kingdom Parliament.

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Gordon - British General

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