



0. REVENGE AND DESECRATION - Story Preface

1. TROUBLE IN SUDAN

2. THE MAHDI TAKES CHARGE

3. GORDON IS BEHEADED

4. DEATH OF THE MAHDI

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6. REVENGE AND DESECRATION

7. A COWARD'S FEATHERS

This image depicts a young Winston Churchill as he appeared in his Hussar's uniform, circa 1885.

Winston Churchill, who had sent dispatches to Lord Kitchener regarding the Mahdist positions, now found himself in the thick of the Lancer's charge. (Follow the link to the National Library of Scotland to see Churchill's originals.) Because he had a bad shoulder, Churchill decided that he would use his Mausers C96 pistol instead of a drawn sword.

At full gallop, as the bugles sounded the charge, Winston replaced his sword with his pistol. When next he looked up, he was shocked. Instead of 150 riflemen, aiming at 310 charging Lancers, there were 3,000 spear-carrying dervishes ready to annihilate the men on horseback.

In Churchill's My Early Life: A Roving Commission, the future statesman describes what he saw following the initial two-minute clash:

...a succession of grisly apparitions; horses spouting blood, struggling on three legs, men staggering on foot, men bleeding from terrible wounds, fish-hook spears stuck right through them, arms and faces cut to pieces, bowels protruding, men gasping, crying, collapsing, expiring. (Roving Commission, page 193.)

The battle for Omdurman was fierce, but Kitchener's losses were "only" 3% of his total forces. Scholars say much of the credit for saving thousands of Anglo-British soldiers goes to a hero of the Scottish highlands: General Hector Macdonald.

Kitchener, by all accounts, was not satisfied with merely destroying Omdurman on September 2, 1898. In addition to the September 4th memorial service for Gordon, he wanted to avenge the murdered general's death by different means. On his orders, the tomb of tomb of Muhammad Ahmed, the Mahdi, was destroyed, including its mosque.

In his book about Churchill, William Manchester describes the desecration of the Mahdi's remains:

...the Mahdi's tomb was desecrated, the corpse ripped from its shroud, and the head lopped off and dumped in a kerosene can to be "preserved for future disposal" - an official phrase which, the outraged Churchill wrote, could only be interpreted as meaning that it would be "passed from hand to hand till it reached Cairo," where it would be treated as "an interesting trophy." (Visions of Glory, page 281.)

Before he was talked out of it, Kitchener had reportedly planned to use the Mahdi's skull as his personal inkwell.

Lord Cromer, on hearing of Kitchener's actions, ordered the skull to be reinterred. It is said that the Mahdi's remains, absent the skull, were burned and his ashes scattered in the Nile. Other accounts hold that his remains now lie in an unmarked plot near Wadi Halfa. In 1947, the Mahdi's son had the tomb and mosque rebuilt. No foreigners are allowed inside.

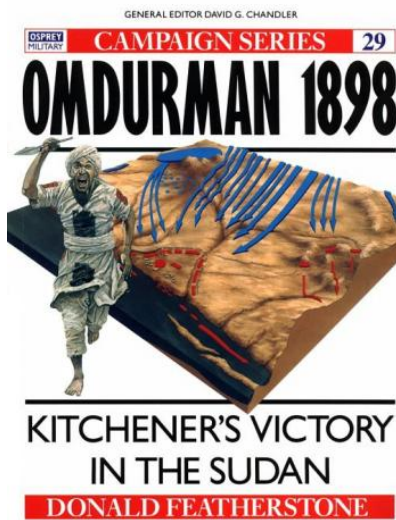
After the Mahdist defeat at Omdurman, Britain controlled Sudan. Kitchener lived to serve with great distinction in World War I, but it was not until 1956 that Sudan gained its independence.

See Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/REVENGE-AND-DESECRATION-Four-Feathers-The>

See Learning Tasks for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicActivities/REVENGE-AND-DESECRATION-Four-Feathers-The>



Spear Carrying Dervishes

Image online, courtesy [amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com) website.

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General Hector MacDonald

Courtesy of Imperial War Museum.

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Kitchener's Memorial Service for Gordon

Image online, courtesy the [diplomatist2](https://www.diplomatist2.com) blog.

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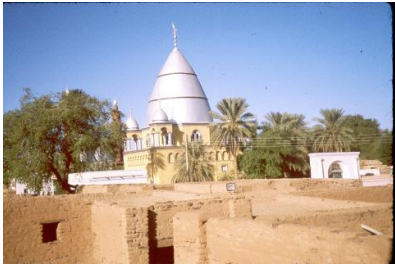
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Lord Cromer

Image online, courtesy sharobim1 blog site.

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Mahdi's Tomb

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Photo of British in Sudan

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