

# THE ONE-HUMPED CAMEL IN THE ANGLO-EGYPTIAN MILITARY CAMPAIGNS IN SUDAN, 1885-1926

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## ABSTRACT

A religiously inspired revolt by Muslims in Sudan in the early 1880s lead by the Mahdi (a self-proclaimed Islamic prophet) eventually succeeded in overcoming the country's Egyptian administrators. The British sent General Gordon to Khartoum to attempt to reverse the situation but he was besieged in his palace. Following public pressure Britain mounted an expedition to relieve Gordon. The main body was the Camel Corps – a novelty for the British military forces – comprising four Regiments. Three – Heavy, Light and Guards Camel Regiments – drew personnel from regular British Army Cavalry Regiments. The fourth – Mounted Infantry Camel Regiment – drew on British Army Infantry Regiments already in Egypt supplemented by soldiers from the UK. The Camel Corps was relatively successful as a fighting force. Camels were also used by Artillery, Engineer, Medical and Transport and Communications units. After the reconquest of Sudan in 1898 the Camel Corps was reconstituted into several Companies lead by British officers but manned by Sudanese personnel. Having participated in 16 “actions” (battles or skirmishes) between February 1884 and November 1899 the Camel Corps undertook 43 “patrols” between January 1902 and January 1930: “patrol” was a euphemism for British flag-waving or for persuading – or forcing – recalcitrant native tribes to submit to central Government. Continuing in name as the Camel Corps it became fully motorised in 1935, ending the active role of camels as a fighting force in Sudan after more than 50 years of operations. Sudan provided 18,000 camels to an expeditionary force to oust the Italian occupiers and re-instate Emperor Haile Selassie as ruler of Ethiopia. Camels were fundamental to military operations in Sudan in the period under review. Without them the campaigns and the victories achieved would have been much more difficult.

**Keywords:** Abu Klea, camel corps, mahdi, mounted infantry, transport