

## Chapter 4

### THE BATTLE OF OMDURMAN (1898)

#### Moving images of a British victory

The year 1898 was a good one for British and American imperialism. In that year the Americans toppled the Spanish from their colonies in the Caribbean and the Philippines; and then a few months later the British crushed the Mahdist regime in the Sudan. These twin examples of 'regime change' had more in common than the year in which they occurred. Both were very popular wars among the publics of their own countries, not least because they were seen as defeating corrupt and outmoded regimes which stood in the way of progress and the betterment of their populations; and also because they were very successful militarily, with both the British and American armed forces achieving rapid total-victories against their foes. For these reasons, the glorification of these conflicts in the media was 'pushing at an open door' in the sense that news editors didn't have to work too hard to show 'our side' as being both morally good and militarily unbeatable. However, actually obtaining relevant images to illustrate the events was altogether more difficult.

We will examine the Spanish-American conflict in the next chapters, but in this chapter we look at the Sudan campaign, and at how it was filmed and otherwise represented in the visual media. In the process we will meet again that pioneer of war filming, Frederic Villiers, as well as his colleague from the Greco-Turkish war, René Bull, and also a new face – the 'squire filmmaker', John Bennett-Stanford. As we shall see, these filmmakers, faced with difficult desert conditions and less than reliable film cameras, secured very little footage in the war zone, so it was down to the exhibitors to find alternatives. Indeed perhaps the greatest contribution of this war to filmmaking (as with the Spanish-American War), was in post-production: in the imaginative use by exhibitors of existing and newly-produced films, related to, but not showing, the conflict. Films of troops, flags and military celebrities dominated Britain's screens in the wake of the war, providing patriotic audiences with images to cheer.

## INTRODUCTION

### **The British versus Mahdism**

By the 1870s the British were becoming increasingly influential in Egypt and in large parts of the Sudan. The region was important strategically, not least because of the adjacent Suez Canal. But events did not go smoothly for Britain, the would-be dominant colonial power: other European powers also had designs on the region, and there were local uprisings in both territories. Egypt was becoming more closely aligned with Britain, and the country's ruler, the Khedive, became a valuable British ally in the 1890s. But in the Sudan to the south it was a different story. An Islamic regime under Muhammad Ahmad

Mahdi (1848-1885) – usually called simply ‘the Mahdi’ – came to power, and sought to expel foreigners from the region. Faced with a Mahdist uprising in 1883 the British government decided to quit the Sudan, and the following year General Charles Gordon was sent to Khartoum to supervise the evacuation. He became trapped, and in January 1885 the Mahdist forces overran his headquarters, massacring Gordon and the entire garrison. A relief expedition sent to save his mission arrived two days too late. It was a cause of both shame and indignation in Britain, but nothing could be done about it militarily – for now.

In some ways the Mahdi was a wise and far-seeing ruler, but on his death in 1885 he was succeeded by an altogether different leader, known as the Khalifa. This wilful and autocratic man was, in the words of V.G. Kiernan, ‘the architect of a crude state’, both ‘despotic and military’, and brought disaster on his country through tyrannical, ultra-Islamic rule.<sup>1</sup> A contemporary journalist, George Steevens, stated it bluntly: ‘the Sudan is the home of fanaticism’.<sup>2</sup> By the mid 1890s, claimed one admittedly partisan writer, the population of the Egyptian Sudan (‘the Mahdia’) under the Khalifa had been reduced by 75% due to war, famine and disease.<sup>3</sup>

Press stories of brutality in the Mahdist state – including the imprisonment of Europeans – helped to instil a public mood of outrage in Britain (mirroring the outrage in the American press over stories of Spanish brutality in Cuba in the mid 1890s). This provided some of the justification for the 1897-8 reconquest.<sup>4</sup> Contrary to some beliefs in our post-colonial era, colonialism/imperialism often had (and has) wider motivations than a desire to exploit natural resources, and these motivations include global interests and rivalries; as well as a general desire to topple egregiously unpleasant and backward regimes.<sup>5</sup> Probably a stronger motivation was that the British government wanted to forestall growing French and Italian colonial interests in the region, as well as desiring to avenge the humiliating defeat of Gordon, which had been a severe blow to British prestige.<sup>6</sup>

By 1896 the decision had been made to reoccupy the Sudan (coincidentally about the same date that the first film shows were taking place in London), and the efficient Horatio Kitchener, the ‘Sirdar’, was chosen to lead a joint British and Egyptian force to do the job.<sup>7</sup> This was more than anything a logistical challenge of conveying large amounts of *materiel* and thousands of soldiers up the Nile. Significantly, Winston Churchill called his book about the campaign, *The River War*, and much of the military campaign was about surmounting the problems of getting the Anglo-Egyptian force up the river to the heartland of the Mahdist state, to arrive eventually at the twin cities of Omdurman and Khartoum. The Nile is only partially navigable, and the master stroke of Kitchener’s plan was to build a railway across the desert to bypass a long stretch of un-navigable river and cataracts.<sup>8</sup>

As a result of this and other logistical feats, Kitchener commanded overwhelming firepower, and through 1897 and 1898 he won a number of victories against the Khalifa’s numerically larger forces, including the capture of Abu Hamed (August 1897) and the Battle of Atbara (April 1898). The

campaign culminated in the battle of Omdurman on 2<sup>nd</sup> September 1898. This battle is such a momentous event in the history of imperialism, weaponry and – yes, cinema too – that I will take a moment to describe the events.

### **The Battle of Omdurman**

At the end of August the Anglo-Egyptian Army had reached within striking distance of Omdurman and Khartoum, and it became clear that the showdown with the Khalifa's forces would take place here. The Sirdar's army made camp on the west bank of the Nile, near the Kerreri hills, protecting their encampment with trenches and a 'zareba' or thorn hedge. The army at this point numbered over 23,000, a third of whom were British, and two thirds were Egyptians, Sudanese and from African tribes.<sup>9</sup> There had been no difficulty in recruiting men to fight against the Khalifa, for there was considerable hostility in Egypt/Sudan to him and his policies. Indeed, in Kiernan's phrase, 'in part it was a civil war of the Sudan.'<sup>10</sup> Opposing Kitchener's multi-national soldiers at Omdurman was the Khalifa's force of between 37,000 and 53,000 fighters, sometimes called dervishes.<sup>11</sup> The Khalifa's army therefore numbered about twice the Sirdar's force, though in terms of armaments the advantage was all the other way.

The Sirdar's army had 80 artillery pieces, 44 Maxim machine guns, ten gunboats, and the soldiers were armed with rifles (many firing makeshift dum-dum bullets).<sup>12</sup> On the other hand, only some of the Khalifa's forces had rifles (the Khalifa, so sure of God-given victory, refused to issue many of the fire-pieces that he had available).<sup>13</sup> In general they were equipped much as their warrior forbears had been: merely with swords (and as a further anachronism, some even wore medieval armour). Even so, had the Khalifa employed more intelligent tactics, such as defence of walled towns, or night raids, there might have been some chance of limited success against Kitchener. Indeed the Sirdar's forces were expecting such raids all through the night of 1<sup>st</sup> September. Instead, the Khalifa, in a feat of generalship which Steevens described as 'a masterpiece of imbecility', played right into the Sirdar's hands.<sup>14</sup>

On the morning of 2<sup>nd</sup> September at dawn, British war correspondents could scarcely believe their eyes when they saw hordes of dervishes flooding across the plain toward the Sirdar's heavily-armed encampment. The British big guns opened up, killing and wounding many of the dervishes in the distance, then as the remaining warriors approached closer the Maxims did their cruel work, along with volleys of rifle fire from the Sudanese and British soldiers. In Steevens' vivid description:

'They came very fast, and they came very straight; and then presently they came no farther. With a crash the bullets leaped out of the British rifles... Shrapnel whistled and Maxims growled savagely. From all the line came perpetual fire, fire, fire, and shrieked forth in great gusts of destruction.'... 'The dervish army was killed out as hardly an army has been killed out in the history of war.'<sup>15</sup>

But Kitchener didn't have it all his own way. After this initial one-sided episode, as his forces broke out of the zarefa, other hitherto-hidden groups of dervishes attacked, hitting one of the Sudanese units under Hector McDonald, but this attack too was beaten off, with the help of fire from the British gunboats positioned in the river. The event which caused the most excitement when the public in Britain came to hear of it, was actually one of the few dubious actions on the allied side. The Sirdar gave a cavalry regiment, the 21<sup>st</sup> Lancers, the task of reconnoitring ahead before commencing a general advance on Omdurman. Somewhat rashly, their commander decided to charge through any remaining dervish stragglers. What he didn't know was that there was a significant force of dervishes lying in wait in a ditch to protect the route to the city. This force broke the charge of the 21<sup>st</sup>, and in the hand-to-hand combat which followed, the British cavalry lost large numbers of men and horses.<sup>16</sup> This was the last cavalry charge in British military history.

Overall however Omdurman was an almost total victory for the Sirdar's forces, and, as a British participant noted, 'one of the most spectacular (and perhaps "safest") battles ever fought'.<sup>17</sup> Safest for the winning side, that is, because this battle marked the most clear-cut disparity ever seen between weapons of wealthier and poorer nations: the 'firepower gap' – with technology such as the Maxim machine-gun only used by one side – meant that the dominance of the West 'now knew few limits'.<sup>18</sup> It was the battle of Omdurman which inspired Hilaire Belloc's famous rhyme on the triumph of colonialism:

'Whatever happens we have got  
The Maxim gun and they have not'

The disparity in casualties after the day of battle tells the story most graphically. While the number of dervishes killed was around 11,000 (with 16,000 wounded and 4,000 prisoners), British and allies' casualties were in the low hundreds with fewer than 50 killed (and less than 30 of these British).<sup>19</sup> It is difficult to think of another land battle with such a disparity, with the possible exception of the first Gulf War in Kuwait in 1991.

Yet in some ways the British tactics, while devastating in terms of logistics and technology, had been old fashioned (even apart from the cavalry charge). Volley firing was the norm, with the British troops standing shoulder to shoulder and firing in unison as the officer gave the order, just as their forefathers had fought at Waterloo.<sup>20</sup> In the future, few enemies would present themselves for the kill in such large and defenceless numbers as the Khalifa's unfortunate drones had done. The following year in the Boer War the British were forced by the Boer hit-and-run tactics into a very different style of warfare, in which the once formal battlefield was stretched out to become an entire country with sharpshooters hidden anywhere. This would be difficult enough for the military planners, and was equally tricky for filmmakers. Omdurman, then was a last chance for the new cinema medium to record an old-style war: but, as we shall see, the war correspondents who had the chance to film here, largely failed.

### **Journalists at the front**

Already in early 1898, scenting the coming battles, war correspondents were applying to the authorities in Cairo to accompany the Sudan expedition, and the officials were having 'no end of trouble' in selecting them.<sup>21</sup> This problem may have been mainly because, while many journalists were applying, few were being accredited because of Kitchener's well-known dislike of the war correspondent 'tribe'. Indeed at one point it was rumoured that only five or six news organisations would be allowed to have war correspondents with the battlefield force, and Kitchener tried to keep even these away from the front line, supposedly due to lack of transport.<sup>22</sup> Eventually about thirty journalists covered the Sudan campaign, though little more than half that number actually went to report on the battle of Omdurman itself.<sup>23</sup> This was a small fraction of the veritable army of correspondents who covered the Spanish-American war earlier in the year.

As well as the restriction over who could go to the front, there was also censorship of the material that the journalists created in the war zone, before it could be dispatched away by telegraph or messenger. The Sirdar was very keen on this.<sup>24</sup> The immediate task of censorship fell to Colonel Wingate. Some correspondents found this censorship irksome, though others suffered it relatively uncomplainingly. Frederic Villiers, while acknowledging that Wingate expunged a lot of material from war correspondents' despatches, found him the most 'courteous and urbane censor' he had ever met, and they even dined together at the front.<sup>25</sup> A few journalists may have managed to evade the censorship.<sup>26</sup> But censorship was not the only problem. Being a war correspondent during this (or almost any) campaign was hazardous, and two of the fraternity died and two were wounded. As Watkins wrote of this war: 'Truly he who wields the pen, like the man of the sword, has his risks to run, and needs be brave'.<sup>27</sup>

As well as being writers (i.e. print journalists), war correspondents were often artists and photographers too. Several of the correspondents took photographs during the campaign, and one of these men, Hubert Howard (representative of *The Times*) was actually taking photographs when he was killed by a shell fragment.<sup>28</sup> But it was not only journalists who were photographing in the Sudan, for many military officers had provided themselves with the new snapshot cameras which were on the market in Britain by 1898, and indeed small portable Kodak cameras 'were in evidence everywhere during the campaign'.<sup>29</sup> One officer, Gregson took over 200 photos and made up several albums of these after the war, and there were several other officer-photographers.<sup>30</sup> Wingate himself, the press censor, was one of the keenest of the lens men, and in a bizarre reversal of roles, even took snaps of war correspondents.<sup>31</sup> The photographs of the Battle of Omdurman, were, however, generally disappointing, leaving it up to painters back home to offer the drama that the correspondents had caught in words but not in their cameras. [Fig. 1 and 2]

Even more than with stills photography, it was the war correspondents who dominated efforts to cover the Sudan campaign in moving images, though with equally unsatisfactory results. There are three men with a claim to have

filmed aspects of the campaign, and notably at Omdurman: René Bull, Frederic Villiers, and John Benett-Stanford. In the following sections, I will examine their claims one by one. As with much early cinema research the truth is by no means easy to establish, as the available sources are scattered, fragmentary and often unreliable.

### **CORRESPONDENT CAMERAMEN: VILLIERS et al**

What is beyond doubt is that there was at least one film camera present during the campaign at Omdurman, and probably more. There are several *general* statements (I will cite more specific ones later) which suggest this. The editor of *The Sketch* noted in early October that:

‘I am waiting to see the battle of Omdurman presented at one of our leading halls on a cinematograph. Surely it was taken! I know of more than one adventurous person who was bent on making the attempt’.<sup>32</sup>

One or more film cameras were certainly at the Sudan campaign, noticed by some of those present. The young Winston Churchill, who was attached to the 21st Lancers (and took part in the famous charge), commented on the extraordinary amount of paraphernalia being brought to the front by war correspondents, who were arriving ‘...equipped with ice machines, typewriters, cameras, and even cinematographs’.<sup>33</sup> Another eyewitness was Lieutenant Staveley, in charge of a gunboat at Omdurman. In a letter to his mother, four days after the battle he noted that ‘...two or three of the correspondents had cinematographs with them, and one of them I am told actually set it up in the firing line and photo’d the Dervishes as they came on’.<sup>34</sup>

The latter in particular seems an extraordinary claim – that someone was actually filming as the attack took place (though we should note that the Lieutenant didn’t observe this himself, but is merely reporting what he had been told). However it does receive some substantiation in a letter from an eyewitness, albeit reported many years after the event – and this letter names the cameraman in question as René Bull.

#### **René Bull**

In a letter to a British weekly in 1935, a former soldier who had served at Omdurman, W. Coyne, recalled that:

‘On September 2, 1898, at 6 a.m., we found ourselves forming the front face of ‘the Square’ [the classic British defensive formation] five miles outside Omdurman waiting for the onslaught of 100,000 Dervishes who were advancing..., and as soon as they were in range hell was let loose, and when it was at its hottest, I saw Rene Bull, the famous *Black and White* artist, calmly turning the handle of his camera; he was not satisfied with a tripod, but had a bamboo trestle 10 ft. high and was perched on the top.’<sup>35</sup>

This is an unlikely proposition, to say the least. Such a prominent platform would be highly vulnerable to fire from the enemy (though as it happened not many dervish bullets reached Kitchener's zereba during the battle). It also seems improbable that the British commanders would have allowed such a camera platform to be constructed. But the claim should not be totally dismissed, because the British war correspondents were encamped next to the British fighting units so if Bull had been doing something of this kind, Coyne could probably have seen him.<sup>36</sup> So when I read this claim I thought it was worth investigating, and as a first step decided to try to trace Coyne. After several failures, I managed to find his details through a descendant. It turned out that his name was William Coyne (1871-1950): he had been a private in the Seaforth Highlanders throughout the 1890s, and had definitely served at Omdurman.<sup>37</sup> That part was true, then – that the witness to Bull's alleged filming was indeed in the right place at the time. But I could find no further details of Coyne's sighting of Bull, so that part of the trail ran cold.

But is there anything from Bull himself which would substantiate the claim? René Bull was indeed, as Coyne says, a war artist for the illustrated weekly journal, *Black and White*, and was present at the battle of Omdurman. He'd covered the Sudan campaign since the early part of 1898 for *Black and White* and was also at the battle of Atbara. (Just before that, he, like Frederic Villiers, covered the Greco-Turkish war). He undoubtedly took stills photographs during the Sudan campaign (despite suffering problems of intense heat blistering his photographic plates), using a top-notch camera, an 'Adams deLuxe' (the advantage of which was that it was collapsible, hence portable).<sup>38</sup> Bull certainly took stills photographs during the battle of Omdurman – he had prepared 36 plates and used them all.<sup>39</sup> A number of his Sudan war photographs were published in *Black and White* magazine and in a special publication on the Sudan campaign entitled 'War Albums'. After returning to the UK he gave several lantern lectures using slides based on his own photographs, and perhaps his drawings, of the Sudan.<sup>40</sup>

So clearly Bull was present at the battle, took stills, and (given his photographic experience) probably had the know-how to take cinema films. The only problem is that he doesn't mention this in any source that I have seen. In his article about photographing the war there is no mention of filming, and Bull tells us that he was riding round on a horse taking still photographs during the battle, so it would seem unlikely that he could also have operated a film camera on the alleged bamboo trestle.<sup>41</sup> Furthermore, I can find no mention of Bull's filming in the photographic press. An article about his stills photography of the war, published in a trade journal in 1899, mentions in passing the filming of warfare as if it is a future possibility, not a current fact.<sup>42</sup> One would think that if Bull really had filmed during the war, it would have been mentioned in this article, though one possibility is that he did film, but that his films weren't successful or were lost – such a failure would be reason enough to keep quiet about his attempt afterwards.

And one should add that an involvement with cinematography at the war would not have been out of character for René Bull, as he seems to have had a genuine interest in film. One of the first ever print cartoons about the new

cinema medium was by Bull, appearing in April 1896 in the British weekly, *Pick-Me-Up*.<sup>43</sup> And as we shall see, he may have filmed during the Boer war with a small-format film camera. Furthermore, René Bull was the brother of Lucien Bull the scientific cinema pioneer, so an interest in filming was in the family. Unfortunately, at present, we can draw no firm conclusion as to whether Bull filmed at Omdurman or not, and we are left, therefore, with this as an open question.

### **Frederic Villiers**

While Bull's status as cameraman in the Sudan is dubious, for the other two of our three putative film cameramen at the battle, the evidence is more positive and clear cut. Let us begin with Frederic Villiers. We last saw Villiers on the island of Crete during the early summer of 1897 in the aftermath of the Greco-Turkish War, where he was observed by our same witness Coyne filming the troops. From Crete, Coyne's unit, the Seaforth Highlanders, were transferred to the Nile, where they stayed from 1897 to 1898, engaged in Kitchener's campaign. Villiers also came to the Sudan to follow the campaign: one visit in 1897 and then again the following year when he joined Kitchener's march to Omdurman as correspondent for the *Globe* and the *Illustrated London News*.<sup>44</sup> He was not new to the Nile region, having been there before as a correspondent in the 1880s, during the early stages of conflict between the British and the various Egyptian/Sudanese factions opposed to a British presence. Villiers had clearly grown fond of the area, describing it as a 'happy hunting ground for the war correspondent' – a somewhat inappropriate description considering that no fewer than seven correspondents were killed during these campaigns.<sup>45</sup>

As in the Greco-Turkish War, Villiers was again experimenting with novel campaign equipment: his tent was 'a new idea for the desert, a glorified umbrella that could be put up in less than five minutes by tugging at a cord'. [Fig 3.] As in Greece he had a bicycle with him.<sup>46</sup> According to a fellow-correspondent, E. N. Bennett of the *Westminster Gazette*, this 'dull green' machine was not very well suited to desert conditions and as a result 'was usually to be found in the charge of his servant'.<sup>47</sup> René Bull was particularly snide in one of his columns, reproving an unnamed war correspondent with a bicycle – evidently meaning Villiers – and suggesting that it would be 'utterly impossible' to cycle in the desert due to the intense heat and the cloying sand. But another source stated that the bicycle performed quite well on the hard pan of the desert, as Villiers knew it would.<sup>48</sup> Bull's comment does suggest some animosity between himself and Villiers, perhaps due to rivalry when they had both reported for *Black and White* in Greece the previous year.<sup>49</sup> [Fig. 4]

Incidentally, Villiers was not the only person to bring outlandish items to this war. Another war correspondent, Frank Scudamore, had one of his transport camels devoted exclusively to carrying lager beer, with an extra camel for carrying an ice-making machine to cool the beer. Another *bon viveur*, George Steevens, brought tins of fine foods from Fortnum and Mason, including turtle soup. This surely speaks volumes about westerners' attitude to war in this era as being a kind of 'sport'.<sup>50</sup>



The main outlandish item which concerns us here is Villiers' film camera. After the Greco-Turkish war, as I recounted in the previous chapter, his films were eclipsed by the faked versions by Méliès, yet he decided to have another try at filming during the Nile campaign, as he explains in his autobiography: 'I thought that in this case I might get some of the real stuff before the fakers set to work, because it would be hard for them to vamp up the local color of the desert, dervish costumes, and so forth.'<sup>51</sup> Villiers kept the camera secret from his colleagues since, as he says, he wished to be 'first in the field'. Unfortunately, the size of the apparatus gave his secret away. According to Villiers' memoirs, when some of his fellow-correspondents learned of this device they all 'wanted to take movies as well'. Villiers continues:

'Why they imagined they could get the necessary camera and spools simply by wiring to Cairo, as one would for a packet of tea, I have no idea; but, anyway, the whole thing caused no little excitement in our mess. The two who were going to upset my little plans would occasionally look at me with a kind of pity for the "beat" they were making. Presently their box arrived, and the look of triumph quickly died out of their faces when they found that instead of a camera it contained a lantern projector and quite an amusing series of films of a racy terpsichorean nature to please an Egyptian audience.'<sup>52</sup>

However, Villiers' filming plans did not go smoothly either, and he relates his travails in one of his newspaper reports. On the day before the battle of Omdurman he was weak, suffering the after-effects of a very painful scorpion sting, and that night slept fitfully:

'Shortly before dawn I woke up, remembering that I had forgotten to fix up my cinematograph camera with films, and there might be a chance to get some action in the coming fight... [But the moon was out, and] ... Charging the camera could only be done where darkness reigned; so I aroused my servant, got the apparatus together, and took it down to the gunboat, the 'Melik', where I found darkness enough for the purpose in her stifling forehold.'<sup>53</sup>

He was there for a while ('the films for movies were difficult to fix in a hurry in those days'), and by the time the camera was loaded, dawn had broken. Suddenly the boat began to move. The captain (Major W.S. Gordon – who was a nephew of Gordon of Khartoum) had received sailing orders and it was now too late for Villiers to go ashore.<sup>54</sup> He recalled:

'This was annoying, but Gordon told me I could erect my tripod in the aft battery, which had been put out of action the previous day; and as his boat would be close in-shore I should see everything. I thought it was a good idea, for I had a level platform and a wonderful coign of vantage.'<sup>55</sup>

The boat took up its position and prepared to give supporting fire to the right flank of Kitchener's army.<sup>56</sup> Villiers hurriedly set the camera on its tripod, ready to start cranking. The scene was everything a cameraman could ask

for: 'The dervishes were now streaming toward us in great force – about ten thousand spearmen – just as I wanted them, in the face of the early sun and in the face of my camera.' But fate, alas, was against him:

'I had just commenced to grind the "coffee pot" when our fore battery opened fire. The effect on my apparatus was instantaneous and astounding. The gunboat had arrived on the Nile in sections and had evidently been fixed up for fighting in a hurry, for with the blast of her guns the deck planks opened up and snapped together, and down went my tripod. The door of the camera flew open and my films were exposed. However, I had no time to weep over spilt milk, for the fighting had commenced. I pulled out my sketchbook, and my only comfort was that from my vantage point I saw many things I should have missed ashore and that no camera of my kind could have registered.'<sup>57</sup>

He must have been consumed with disappointment, having so nearly filmed an epoch-making British victory, and then been let down by his camera, though as he says, the camera might not have registered much of the battle anyway. But this is all assuming that he was telling the truth about having a camera at Omdurman. Was he?

As with his claims of filming in Greece, the question again arises of Villiers' credibility. Indeed there is more to doubt here, for, in the Greek case there is definite evidence that his films were shown later. John Barnes finds his claim to have had a film camera at Omdurman suspicious, arguing that even if was true that the camera was put out of action at the battle itself, 'surely, had Villiers indeed possessed a cine camera in the Soudan, there would have been other occasions when it could have been used.'<sup>58</sup> One possibility is that Villiers brought the camera with him from England but it was lost en route, for he himself tells us that he travelled up to Omdurman with few supplies because he had lost, 'most of my kit in the Nile'.<sup>59</sup>

Certainly there was never mention of any films by him ever being shown, for example in the lectures he subsequently gave about the campaign. Villiers lectured on the war after he returned to London from mid November to early December 1898. Entitled 'Khartoum at last', the lecture covered the following subjects: 'The Dervish Attack, The Khalifa's Tactics, The Gallant Charge of the 21<sup>st</sup> Lancers, Macdonald's Brave Stand, The Sirdar's Entry into Omdurman, Where Gordon Fell.'<sup>60</sup> The programme states that the lecture was illustrated with lantern slides – 'limelight views' – 'from snapshots taken on the battlefield by Mr. Villiers'. (In fact some of the images were sketches rather than photographs: the Sirdar's Entry into Omdurman, for example, was his sketch.<sup>61</sup>) Villiers gave a lecture of the same title in Brighton a few days later. But at neither venue is there any reference to films being shown, only slides.<sup>62</sup>

Was Villiers' claim that his camera overturned during filming simply an excuse to explain why he returned with no films? Writing of another war of 1898, that between Spain and America, Terry Ramsaye describes old-timers 'telling tales of photographic desperation and film making amid the shock of clashing battle lines and bursting shrapnel. But all these tales end with, "And then a big shell

came along and blew up my camera and I never got back with any of the film."<sup>63</sup> But despite Ramsaye's disbelief, such accidents *did* happen: descriptions by early cameramen of such misfortunes occur too frequently to be mere excuses. Kevin Brownlow quotes several cases in *The War, the West and the Wilderness*: from Jessica Borthwick, Tracy Mathewson and Urban's *Britain Prepared* cameramen.<sup>64</sup>

I feel that Villiers too was broadly telling the truth, about attempting to film the battle. Firstly, because he was a 'man of honour' and, while exaggeration and self-glorification were in character, mendacity was not. Secondly, it is unlikely he would have lied, because he was writing about these events while other witnesses were still alive, so any untruths could have been pointed out. In addition to these general considerations, there are several specific reasons why we should believe Villiers. One part of his story is clearly true – that he was on board the 'Melik' gunboat during the battle and that he managed to do sketches – because some of these sketches subsequently appeared in the *Illustrated London News*.<sup>65</sup> They are from the point of view of a gunboat on the river, suggesting that this is indeed where he was located during the battle. [Fig. 5 and 6] What is more, substantiation for his claim that he had his camera on the gunboat comes from the fact that he mentions this in his *contemporaneous* report published in the *Globe* newspaper (quoted above), not just in his later account of the battle in his autobiography – and the two reports tally, despite being written over twenty years apart.<sup>66</sup>

Most significantly there are contemporary allusions by others to his taking a film camera to the campaign. The first mention of this appeared in a London periodical called *M.A.P* on 30<sup>th</sup> July which reported that Villiers was 'taking a cinematograph [camera] with him' to the Sudan:

'...and hopes to bring back a "living picture" of a real battle, though the apparatus may be difficult to manage when the British Army is taking a Dervish zareba by storm, or when a passing simoon [sandstorm] playfully fills the works with sand.'<sup>67</sup>

Then a paragraph in the *Photographic News* of mid August 1898 stated that Villiers '...has taken away with him a kinematographic camera to the Soudan, for the advance to Khartoum, so that it is quite possible we may before long see some of such results exhibited publicly'.<sup>68</sup>

These reports could be mistaken, or simply one journalist repeating a rumour that another has started, but I believe that the likelihood is, taking into account Villiers' own statements and these sketchy independent reports, that Villiers did indeed have a film camera at Omdurman. Why he failed to take any films before or after the gunboat accident – or at least didn't apparently show any on his return to the UK – is a question for which we simply have no answer. In any case, his unfortunate experiences with trying to film at Omdurman, and before that of being 'beaten' by fakes in the Greco-Turkish war, seem to have disillusioned Villiers about the possibilities of filming war. In a 1900 interview he concluded that: 'A cinematograph is a cumbersome thing to take about anywhere; on the field of battle it is simply ridiculous.'<sup>69</sup>

### **John Benett-Stanford**

The third and last of our cameramen at the battle of Omdurman was the only one to have any obvious success in the endeavour, yet ironically had the least familiarity with the media of the three – indeed it seems that he had had no previous experience as a war correspondent before this campaign, let alone as a film cameraman. John Montague Benett-Stanford (1870—1947) [Fig. 7] was a member of the well-established Stanford family which owned Preston Manor, near Brighton, as well as having property in Wiltshire. He was schooled at Eton, after which he enlisted in the Wiltshire Militia cavalry, then swiftly joined the prestigious First Dragoon Guards, and he saw active service abroad on several occasions.<sup>70</sup> A full-time Army career doesn't seem to have suited him, however, and from the 1890s he was a mere reserve lieutenant in the First Dragoons and in the Royal Wiltshire Yeomanry, and he spent much of his time in the leisure activities of a traditional landowner. Though he was apparently an intelligent and articulate man, he was an archetypal squire of the old school, and had deeply reactionary views on many matters, so it is perhaps somewhat surprising that he was also a pioneer of filmmaking.

Both the 'cinematographic' and journalistic sides of his career began in 1898. Benett-Stanford's reserve status meant that he was not on permanent military service, and in the summer of that year he was at something of a loose end. He fancied trying his hand as a war correspondent, and wrote to several British newspapers to find out if any of them would take him on. One replied – the *Western Morning News* – to offer him a position as their representative for the Sudan campaign, and Benett-Stanford departed from the UK on 6 August. He himself recounted his activities as a correspondent in some detail in a lecture he gave after his return to England, and as this role was related to his filmmaking, I will describe his press work first.<sup>71</sup>

Benett-Stanford had no pass from the War Office to report on the campaign, but claimed that he managed to get a telegraphed permission from Kitchener. This was unusual given the lateness of his application and the Sirdar's known hostility to correspondents, and might perhaps have been facilitated by Stanford's good military connections. His luck stayed with him for the journey too, as *en route* he happened to meet an old friend who was quite an influential officer in the Sudan campaign, and so Benett-Stanford shared this officer's privileged travel arrangements all the way to the front. He arrived there on 25 August – having taken a mere three weeks to get from Britain to the depths of the Sudan, which was quick passage indeed in that era.<sup>72</sup>

Some war correspondents at this time were noted for their arrogance and sense of self importance (Churchill was seen by some in this way), and Benett-Stanford was one of the worst offenders in these respects. The night before the battle of Omdurman he scouted towards the dervish positions – as much, it seems, to prove his courage as to gain information in his role as a journalist. The following morning as the battle began he repeated his scouting, and this proved an actual hindrance to the Sirdar's forces when he and another correspondent got in the way as one section of the British forces was about to start shooting.<sup>73</sup>

He caused a further problem for the military later on. After the first dervish attacks had been beaten off, Benett-Stanford ventured forth onto the battlefield to try to snatch some war booty for himself, a Mahdist flag, from one of the slain warriors, but as he grabbed it he had an unpleasant surprise: in his words, 'up jumped a nigger with a spear, and came for me'.<sup>74</sup> Benett-Stanford carried a powerful 4-barrelled 'Lancaster' pistol (a favourite among officers in the Sudan campaign), and shot at the man, but missed.<sup>75</sup> The dervish came at him again and eventually was shot by a soldier, Captain Nevill Maskelyne Smyth.<sup>76</sup> Smyth was wounded by the warrior with a spear in the process, and was awarded a VC for the act of saving the life of a 'camp follower', i.e. Benett-Stanford (who, incidentally, showed no gratitude for this).<sup>77</sup>

These events reveal something of the character of Benett-Stanford. Overall, one gets the impression that he was selfish, and tended to view the Sudan conflict more as a 'jolly jape' than as a deadly serious war. In the latter respect he epitomizes the almost light-hearted attitude to war and conflict in the era before the events of 1914-18 (which I mentioned in my Introduction). One can understand why some of the new breed of professional military commanders like Kitchener had so little time for war correspondents when some of them were like Stanford.

He caused a further problem for the military later on. After the first dervish attacks had been beaten off, Benett-Stanford ventured forth onto the battlefield to try to snatch some war booty for himself, a Mahdist flag, from one of the slain warriors, but as he grabbed it he had an unpleasant surprise: in his words, 'up jumped a nigger with a spear, and came for me'. Benett-Stanford was prepared to shoot, and carried a powerful 4-barrelled 'Lancaster' pistol (a favourite among officers in the Sudan campaign), but he does not seem to have been a very good shot.<sup>78</sup> A fellow correspondent put the best gloss he could on what happened next:

'Mr Bennett Stanford [sic], who was splendidly mounted, with a cocked four-barrelled Lancaster pistol aimed deliberately at the dervish, who turned towards him. Waiting till the jibbah-clad warrior was but a score of paces or so off, Mr Stanford fired, and appeared to miss ... for the dervish without halt rushed at him, whereupon he easily avoided him, riding off.'<sup>79</sup>

But another witness to the incident adds further details which make this incident less flattering to Benett-Stanford: apparently the attacker was a 'feeble...gaunt, grey-bearded dervish', and Benett-Stanford himself (described as 'a heavy man'), 'was riding a small pony of uncertain gait'. This pony had been unable to go fast enough to escape the greybeard.<sup>80</sup> Furthermore, the dervish had already been wounded when he attacked the correspondent. The episode therefore is not at all the glorious exploit that Benett-Stanford implied it to be, for he was mounted on a second-rate pony, was attacked by an old, wounded man, and then missed his shot! Eventually a soldier, Captain Nevill Maskelyne Smyth, shot the persistent dervish, himself being wounded with a

spear by the warrior in the process.<sup>81</sup> Smythe was awarded a VC for the act of saving the life of a 'camp follower', i.e. Benett-Stanford.<sup>82</sup> In his lecture about the battle Benett-Stanford remarks that he was 'astonished' that Smythe should win a medal for an action which was so straightforward as shooting one dervish. This does seem an ungrateful comment, given that Smythe had gallantly saved his life.

I have described these events at some length because I think they reveal something of the character of Benett-Stanford. Overall, one gets the impression that he was selfish, and tended to view the Sudan conflict more as a 'jolly jape' than as a deadly serious war. In the latter respect he epitomizes the almost lighthearted attitude to war and conflict in the era before the events of 1914-18 (which I mentioned in my Introduction). One can understand why some of the new breed of professional military commanders like Kitchener had so little time for war correspondents when some of them were like Stanford.

Benett-Stanford's experiences at Omdurman would scarcely be worth describing in such detail were he not, against all odds, a noteworthy pioneer of war cinematography, both here and at the Boer War the following year. Yet, as we shall see, it seems that Benett-Stanford's casual attitude to his role as newspaper correspondent at Omdurman also extended to his work in cinematography. Rachael Low wrote that he was 'the son of a wealthy family in Brighton, and took up kinematography as a hobby', and this is as good a brief description as one could ask for.<sup>83</sup>

He might have been introduced to cinematography by the film pioneer, G.A. Smith. Both men lived in or near the coastal town of Brighton (at least Benett-Stanford had one of his houses near there) and perhaps living relatively close to one another led to their meeting, and to Smith supplying Stanford with film equipment. According to a British photographic journal in September, 'G.A. Smith has fitted out one of the foremost war correspondents in the Soudan with apparatus and films for taking cinematograph pictures "at the front"'.<sup>84</sup> (The phrase 'one of the foremost' was more than excessive in relation to Stanford.) Smith's sales ledger shows that in August 1898 Benett-Stanford purchased some 14(?) rolls of negative film from him (made by the Blair company).<sup>85</sup> This must have been at the beginning of August, given Benett-Stanford's known departure date to the Sudan on the 6<sup>th</sup> of the month, and the would-be filmmaker had probably obtained his camera from Smith too. The Sudan assignment was apparently Stanford's first experience of filmmaking.

### **Benett-Stanford's Omdurman film**

We know few details of Benett-Stanford's experience with this camera at the front, because he does not mention it in his account of the campaign, the lecture he gave afterwards. He certainly made one very significant film, though the fact that he produced so little again suggests a less-than-committed attitude to his filmmaking work. All we know about this film is from a letter that he enclosed with it on his return from the Sudan, which was published in several British photographic journals from November:

'The cinematograph film which you have was taken by me on the battlefield of Omdurman the day before the battle. It is the only genuine Soudan film, as nobody else had a cinematograph camera with them. [untrue, as we have seen.] There was a rumour that the dervishes were advancing to attack us, and all the men were told to lie down and be in readiness to fall in for anything. I, therefore, fixed my camera on the Grenadier Guards (Queen's Company), and when the brigade trumpeter, whom you see in the photograph, sounded the call, I took the men standing up, fixing bayonets, and marching off. It was taken in the British zareba, at the village of Kerreri, in the same position as they fought the battle commonly called Omdurman.'<sup>86</sup>

The film was developed by G.A. Smith, Benett-Stanford apparently paying for this processing himself.<sup>87</sup> Smith's ledger shows that on 6 October 1898 an amount of £1.10s.6d. was charged to Stanford for 'Developing 4 lengths Neg'. Stanford was later charged an additional 5 shillings for 'Joining, etc, Omdurman Neg'.<sup>88</sup> The phrase '4 lengths Neg' and the charge for joining might suggest that the film was made up of more than one shot, though the final length is unknown, and no copy of the film is believed to survive. Indeed, until recently no images from it were extant. However, I have now found a series of frames from the film reproduced in *The Photographic Dealer*.<sup>89</sup> The two strips of frames show British troops in the desert advancing across picture, silhouetted against the sky. Being all that we have left of this historic film, these few images are indeed precious. [Fig. 8 and 9]

Incidentally, G.A. Smith's ledger suggests that another film relating to the Sudan was made by Stanford, entitled *The Sirdar*, because an entry in Smith's account book on 2 Jan 1899 notes, 'Develop'g short neg "Sirdar" – 3 Shillings'.<sup>90</sup> (This was almost three months after Benett-Stanford's Grenadier Guards film was developed.) John Barnes lists it as possibly filmed in December, in which case it was presumably not filmed in the Sudan. Another mystery. In any case, clearly it must have shown Kitchener, the Sirdar.

Benett-Stanford's film of the Guards at Omdurman was widely publicised in the photographic and lantern press from the second week in November, distributed by Wolff and entitled, *Alarming Queen's Company of Grenadier Guards at Omdurman*, though it later lost the 'alarming' word in the title<sup>91</sup> It was noticed in the press principally for its claim to be the only film of the campaign taken on location. One journalist wrote:

'Such a film cannot fail to be eminently popular during the present season, and one can easily imagine with what enthusiasm its exhibition would be attended in any British audience. There are many films on exhibition of military subjects, in which the scenes are evidently artificially prepared, and are wholly lacking in reality, but here we have the real article, which will be proportionally more valuable and more infused with thrilling incident.'<sup>92</sup>

The writer was both wrong and right. Wrong that the film was 'infused with thrilling incident' – after all, it just showed troops advancing through frame –

but right that it was valuable because it was ‘the real article’. In fact the *Photogram* journal suggested this film was ‘the most notable of the whole year’, predicting that it would be in huge demand.<sup>93</sup> It was distributed by the agents Philipp Wolff, and the *Optical Magic Lantern Journal* commented that, ‘Mr Wolff is to be congratulated on having the publicity of this valuable film’. Though it was genuine, that didn’t prevent various people from making false claims for the film. While Benett-Stanford makes clear in his letter, with uncharacteristic modesty, that it showed the troops on the day *before* the battle, in an interview with Smith, the film is described as a ‘real battle-picture, the only one he [Smith] believes in existence’. This article inaccurately notes that the film ‘represents a portion of the English army springing from bivouac, forming up, and running forward to join in the annihilating of the Dervishes at Omdurman’.<sup>94</sup> One wonders if showmen made similar claims – that this film was actually shot during the famous battle?

As noted above, disappointingly, Benett-Stanford doesn’t seem to have commented on his filming at Omdurman apart from in his letter enclosed with the film which I have quoted above. Though he gave a lantern lecture about his experiences at the battle in January 1899, and while the transcript of this lecture is rich with anecdote about his actions before and during the battle, he fails to mention anything at all about his filming activities.<sup>95</sup> I have also looked at reports of the Sudan campaign in the newspaper he represented, the *Western Morning News*, for the relevant period, and this too contains nothing about his use of a film camera in the Sudan.<sup>96</sup> Why would he not want to mention his film making? Some likely explanations are, firstly that he didn’t consider it an important enough part of his activities to merit a mention. Secondly – a reason suggested by David Beevors, an expert on Benett-Stanford – perhaps he feared that being seen to have anything to do with the ‘cinema’, a common fairground attraction, might seem ‘infra dig’.<sup>97</sup> And thirdly, maybe he thought that because he came back from the Sudan with so few actual films – only one or two scenes – his experience had been embarrassingly unproductive.

Yet though he may have remained uncharacteristically diffident about his achievement, Stanford’s few feet of film taken on the battlefield of Omdurman were recognized at the time as being remarkable – commentators noted as much – and in retrospect the film was truly historic, being the first film ever shot of a British war, only a day before a remarkable but one-sided victory. The film (albeit shot on the day before the battle, and not therefore in a literal sense a record of ‘war itself’) marks a significant milestone in the history of war and the media. These images offer a tantalizing glimpse of an important historical event in the changing face of colonial warfare, in which a ruthless, mechanical, ‘scientific’ war was making obsolete all and every form of traditional warfare

But this was a lone triumph, and it is clear from our examination of the work of the three potential cameramen at the campaign, Villiers, Bull and Benett-Stanford that in general the filming of the Sudan war had largely been a failure. With only a single film taken in the field ever released, this was not enough to satisfy audiences back home.



### **The cameraman in the picture**

There is one further tantalising possibility regarding the filming at Omdurman which I will mention. In the archives of the vast Hulton picture library in London there is a photograph, apparently taken in the aftermath of the Omdurman events.<sup>98</sup> Marked on the back is the caption, 'Kitchener reviewing troops in Khartoum after the victory over the Mahdi' and in German, 'review of Sudanese troops'. The photograph shows a military ceremony in the desert, with a group of apparently Sudanese soldiers standing before Egyptian and pith-helmeted British officers and more British officers are on a rostrum. The intriguing aspect from our point of view is that there seems to be a movie camera filming the event, in the lower right of the picture. Standing by the camera are one or two men, one wearing a white jacket and pith helmet and the other a soft trilby-like hat. One of them is possibly the cameraman.<sup>99</sup> The picture is so indistinct and the film camera and two men so far to the side that it is difficult to know what is pictured. [Fig. 10 and 11]

What was this event? There was a ceremony held two days after the battle, a tribute to the late General Gordon, which Bull and Villiers both attended, but this location is dissimilar to that one.<sup>100</sup> More likely, it is a rather less pleasant event which took place at about the same date, which is referred to in a War Office file as Kitchener's attempt to punish some misconduct among his Sudanese troops after the battle. The report notes that 'Seven officers, ringleaders, were marched out in front of the troops, their badges of rank were removed, they were then reduced to the ranks and drummed out of the Service...'<sup>101</sup> The photograph indeed shows approximately seven men in Sudanese uniforms (?) lined up.<sup>102</sup> One further piece of speculation: as mentioned, the photograph shows the British officers standing on a rostrum, and I wonder if this could help to explain the testimony of soldier Coyne, who thought he recalled René Bull filming the battle of Omdurman from a rostrum. Perhaps what he saw, instead and later mis-remembered, was merely a cameraman filming an event in the aftermath, of a scene including a rostrum?<sup>103</sup>

In any case, I have now found confirmation that one of the cameramen did film an event – perhaps this one – after the battle. This comes from a diary entry of one of the Grenadier Guards who was present. Sergeant Harris wrote in his diary for 7 September that his unit:

'...paraded at 6.30 and did rifle exercises etc. in front of the [Egyptian Army]. One of the reporters has them on the cinematograph. No doubt it will appear in London some of these days.'<sup>104</sup>

Was this the same event as appears in the photograph? Possibly. Harris states the time was 6.30, and the long shadows in the image certainly point to an early morning time. What's more the image certainly matches Harris' statement that both British and Egyptians/Sudanese were present. Was the cameraman René Bull? This is not possible if the event was on 7 September as Harris states, for Bull departed on 5 September (embarking on a gunboat from Omdurman with three other war correspondents, heading back towards

Cairo).<sup>105</sup> In which case the cameraman or 'reporter' that Harris mentions must have been either Villiers or Bennett-Stanford, and perhaps it is the same cameraman and event which is depicted in the Hulton photograph? Perhaps we shall never know for sure, but at least we know, thanks to Harris, that someone was filming after the battle.

## CELEBRATING VICTORY IN THE BRITISH MEDIA

News of the Omdurman victory, relayed by telegraph, broke in Britain a couple of days after the event. Over the following month the press was thick with special issues and features on the campaign, which coverage escalated further when the war correspondents returned. There were pages of news reports, images, and outright military glorification in the newspapers and illustrated press.

While historians, including film historians, have discussed the frenzied patriotic spirit which prevailed in the USA at the time of the Spanish-American war and in Britain at the time of the victories in the Boer War (the so-called 'Mafficking' crowds), it has rather been forgotten that a similar frenzy was ignited, albeit on a smaller scale, by the reconquest of the Sudan and especially the battle of Omdurman.

This patriotic fervour was not to everyone's taste in Britain. One anti-colonialist writer noted in his diary that: 'The whole country, if one may judge by the Press, has gone mad with the lust of fighting glory, and there is no moral sense left in England to which to appeal.'<sup>106</sup> The frenzy extended to the poor too: a labour paper complained that the working class were more interested in celebrating Omdurman than in supporting a coal strike then taking place in Wales.<sup>107</sup>

The celebration of the Sudan victory extended across all media. Books about the campaign were brought out within weeks, with huge print-runs. Steevens' *With Kitchener to Khartoum*, for example, was an immense success and even before the end of 1898 had been reprinted 'many times'; and Watkins' account went through at least three impressions.<sup>108</sup> There were celebratory poems and songs, many of the latter about the Charge of the 21<sup>st</sup> Lancers.<sup>109</sup> The Lancers' charge was also the chief subject of war tableaux, souvenir illustrations, chromolithographs, and posters.<sup>110</sup> Madame Tussauds had a waxwork display in praise of Kitchener's contributions to the Sudan campaign, and everywhere there were references back to General Gordon, whose death had finally been avenged by the recent victories.<sup>111</sup> Even as far afield as Germany the September victory evoked keen interest, and a panorama painting was advertised of 'the taking of Omdurman by General Kitchener'.<sup>112</sup>

The Sudan events also inspired performance media. In this era before cinema had fully taken root, the magic lantern brought the war to many screens. A photographic journal predicted that this subject was 'so much to the fore' that it would be a popular lantern lecture during the winter, and so it proved.<sup>113</sup> Some of the war correspondents including Bull and Villiers lectured on the

Sudan war with slides, and other lantern lectures were offered through organisations such as the National Sunday League.<sup>114</sup> Slide sets were released about the campaign, including one on Gordon and Khartoum by Newton and Company with 60 lantern slides, many of these based on original drawings by Caton-Woodville, Seppings Wright and others, with an accompanying lecture.

In November Pooles Myriorama advertised shows in Hove on military themes, including the blowing up of the Maine and the war in Sudan.<sup>115</sup> Lord George Sanger's circus mounted a spectacular show with a thousand men and horses to depict 'Kitchener's Glorious Victory over the Savage Forces of the Khalifa'.<sup>116</sup> At Crystal Palace Brock's firework display had 'Fire portraits of Gordon and the Sirdar... with the word "Avenged" underneath', and a newspaper noted that 'so long as the fiery picture was visible the cheers of the spectators continued'. The following year there was a complete 'pyrodrama' entitled 'The Battle of Omdurman'.<sup>117</sup>

The most passionate emotions were manifested in music halls, where the war theme was ubiquitous for some weeks. Throughout September of 1898 no variety programme was complete without a reference to the Sirdar's victory.<sup>118</sup> At the Middlesex Music Hall as late as December the songs still referred to the Sudan victory and, as one observer noted, 'what was noticeable was the intense patriotism of each Artiste'.<sup>119</sup> The music hall was a common venue for film shows in this early era before the establishment of permanent cinemas, and, as we shall see, the same frenzied reaction greeted films about the campaign as met other media representations.

## **WAR-RELATED FILMS**

With the virtual failure of the filmmakers at the Sudan war and Omdurman to film the actual events of the conflict, film exhibitors were left looking for an alternative. In these circumstances, lacking film of the actual event, and needing something to put on screen, exhibitors quickly learnt to look for existing films which showed related images, what I call 'close substitutes'. These could be films of either the same people who took part in the event, or the place where it happened, or a similar kind of event. In practice this meant screening the following kinds of films: British troops (preferably from the same units which had been at Omdurman); or their commanders; or views of the Nile region; or troops charging. Films might also be re-titled to fit into one of these categories in order to seem more appropriate. Finally, as a separate category, a few symbolic, nationalistic scenes were made, and shots of British flags flying were also to be seen.

### **Related images: charging lancers**

As news broke in the UK of the victory at Omdurman and of the actual Lancers' charge, films of British cavalry became the 'in thing'. As G.A. Smith stated: 'As soon .. as there was a demand for the Charge of the 21st Lancers at Omdurman, pictures were forthcoming which had been taken at Aldershot a year or two before'.<sup>120</sup> (Aldershot is a major garrison town in England.) By mid

September a 'Charge of Lancers' film was being advertised, and probably this same one – entitled 'Charge of the 21st Lancers', aka 'Charge of the 21st Hussars' – was available from distributors Philipp Wolff and Fuerst Brothers.<sup>121</sup> Some commentators seemed to think the latter scene might show the actual cavalry charge in the Sudan:

'Messrs Fuerst Bros inform us that they are prepared to supply kinematograph films of the recent fighting in the Soudan, and one in particular would be, we should think, extremely interesting – viz., the charge of the 21<sup>st</sup> Lancers.'<sup>122</sup>

Others who actually had seen this film were more circumspect, and didn't imply that the film showed the charge itself. The *Era* in January wrote of a film being screened at the World's Fair, Islington: 'A striking animated picture shown here is one representing the Charge of the 21<sup>st</sup> Lancers at Omdurman.'<sup>123</sup> Note the use by the *Era* writer of the word 'representing', suggesting that this was probably a parade ground view of lancers which could be said to 'represent' the actual charge. A report of another screening of this or a similar film made it clear that this was indeed merely, 'a *parade* of the now famous 21<sup>st</sup> Lancers'.<sup>124</sup> (My emphasis). Even though these lancers were filmed nowhere near the Sudan, the moving image of them on parade was 'greeted with tremendous applause', which was a common reaction to all Omdurman-related films at this time.

A later example of this 'off the shelf' type of film was Birt Acres' *Charge of the 12th Lancers* and was advertised on 19 August 1899 with the by-line: 'We have just secured the finest and most realistic military film ever taken... After seeing this film you will understand what the Dervishes had to encounter... They charge right at you'.<sup>125</sup>

### **Related images: heroic troops**

In addition to this technique of resurrecting existing films related to the subject, another strategy was emerging at this time in the presentation of war news on film. If you couldn't film the troops winning their victory, maybe you could at least film them just *before* or as soon as possible *afterwards*. The Seaforth Highlanders took part in the battle of Omdurman, and like all the Scottish regiments, with their picturesque uniforms, were perennially popular with large parts of the British public. By October 1898 several distributors offered films of the Seaforths marching through Cairo. These films were often titled either 'Leaving Cairo for the Front' or 'return[ing] to Cairo after the fall of Omdurman and Khartoum'.<sup>126</sup> Quite possibly they were all the same film, either taken before or after the battle – after all, a shot of soldiers parading in a Cairo street would look the same whenever it had been filmed. This film survives (in the NFTVA), identified as *The Seaforth Highlanders Return to Cairo after the Fall of Omdurman and Khartoum*. [Fig. 12 and 13] Alfred Bromhead, head of Gaumont UK, recalled that 'it was a fine picture photographically, and the soldiers made a capital show with their swinging kilts'.<sup>127</sup> We do not know who made this film (or films). If made *after* the battle it is just possible it was shot by Bennett-Stanford on his way home from the

front, though there is no record of G.A. Smith developing it for him, and it is more likely to have been shot by another travelling cameraman.<sup>128</sup>

A similar film which may have been made at about the same time, *MacDonald's Egyptian Brigade*, was released by Fuerst in September. It was screened at the Alhambra music hall, London, apparently under the auspices of 'Edison's Pictures'.<sup>129</sup> MacDonald himself has sometimes been described as the real hero of Omdurman, for under his quick-thinking command his brigade played a crucial role in the battle. One American photographic journal reported second-hand that the MacDonald film showed the brigade charging the Dervish hordes, which was of course not feasible.<sup>130</sup> It is likely that, rather than charging, it merely showed the brigade marching somewhere, possibly in Cairo, for the aforementioned film, *The Seaforths Leaving Cairo* was shown in the same 'Edison's Pictures' programme, which might suggest that they came from the same source. Perhaps indeed the Seaforths and MacDonald's soldiers had been filmed in Cairo on the same occasion?

One other film of this ilk is worth mentioning. From 1 October the Royal Music Hall in London was advertising among 'scenes from the Soudan', a film entitled, *The Cameron Highlanders Leaving Wady Halfa for the Front*.<sup>131</sup> Wadi Halfa is far down the Nile toward Cairo, and the Camerons had actually departed from there on the new railway en route to Omdurman many months before, and it's unlikely a cameraman had been in the region at that time. What is much more likely is that they were filmed *after* the battle, on their way back to Cairo, i.e. some time in September. The fact that the film was only advertised a month after victory at Omdurman suggests that the negative was brought back from the Sudan by the cameraman who was with the troops. Again it is possible it was shot by Benett-Stanford or indeed Villiers.

Films of troops returning to the UK from their victory in the Sudan were also very saleable at this time. The Grenadier Guards (whom Benett-Stanford had filmed the day before the battle) was a highly popular regiment in the British Army. They were some of the tallest and fittest troops, worthy warriors of the nation, and any film of them was bound to sell. They returned to the UK about a month after the battle of Omdurman, and were filmed on 6 October 1898 as they marched through London on their way to their barracks. Impressively, as many as five films of this march (or of their earlier arrival in Southampton), were released – from companies Wolff, Paul, Biograph and A.D. Thomas – attesting to its saleability as a subject.

The Biograph company was amongst those firms which filmed the Guards' London return, and made great play of the speed with which the film was screened after the event – it was showing in their regular venue, the Palace Theatre in London, within seven or eight hours of the march.<sup>132</sup> Interestingly for students of film form, the film was introduced by a lantern slide with a title on it, reading: 'See the conquering heroes come! Welcome Home!' This was years before actual inter-titles became widespread, and again demonstrates the innovative character of early war-related film exhibition, and the stimulating effect on film technique of the pressure to present conflict on screen. Descriptions of the audience reactions to this film emphasise its huge

popular appeal, and suggest that this exhibition strategy of showing a close substitute for the actual war could be very popular, for at such a time the public were keen to see their conquering troops in almost any context. One newspaper noted of the Biograph film:

‘The audience seemed to cheer with even more vigour than had been heard in the streets; and they were rewarded with a really fine spectacle of the men in their helmets marching as if on parade round York-street into Westminster-bridge-road... The orchestra played the Grenadiers through the canvas to their own familiar march, which was enthusiastically echoed throughout the theatre.’<sup>133</sup>

Another newspaper added that ‘many of the audience were so carried away that they... waved their hats and handkerchiefs, and cheered vociferously.’ Following the film, some even more evocative patriotic images were screened, harking back to former British military glories: a ‘picture’ (film or slide?) of Nelson’s flagship *Victory* was shown to the tune of ‘Rule Britannia’ as well as a film of the Union Jack fluttering, which both ‘evoked great cheering’.<sup>134</sup> Meanwhile a short distance away in the Empire Theatre, the war-related film ‘which perhaps aroused the greatest enthusiasm of the evening’, said one journalist, ‘simply showed a Union Jack floating proudly from the top of a mast. The audience cheered this frantically, showing the extraordinary loyalty and patriotism now rife in the land’.<sup>135</sup> (More of flag films later, in my section on symbolic films). There are obvious similarities here with the reception in the United States of films of flags at the time of the Spanish-American War – notably the film of *Tearing Down the Spanish Flag*. These parallels to America’s war were to continue, with other kinds of films related to the Omdurman victory.

### **Related images: celebrity commanders**

Just as Admiral Dewey was turned into a national hero in America by their war of 1898, and was filmed afterwards at his every public appearance, the same happened to the British military hero of 1898, Kitchener (who, a few weeks after the victory was elevated to Baron, ‘Kitchener of Khartoum’). The first available opportunity to film the Sirdar was at his homecoming – and films of his return to the UK were released by the same four companies which had covered the return of the Guards.

The Biograph company’s efforts gained the most attention, and cameraman Dickson was as ever more enterprising than most, in that he filmed both the Sirdar’s embarkation at Calais in France, and also the arrival of the great man at Dover a few hours later (both 27 October). There were many photographers present at the homecoming (to Kitchener’s evident annoyance), including the Biograph company’s W.K.-L. Dickson. It was probably the sight of Dickson at his camera which caused the *Daily Telegraph* reporter to fulminate: ‘A cinematograph operator had his infernal machine installed on the bridge of the steamer’.<sup>136</sup> But with notable hypocrisy the same newspaper was full of praise for the results on screen at the Palace Theatre, presented that same night, for the large format Biograph film meant that the images were extremely clear and detailed: ‘admirable full-face and side portraits of the gallant General have

been obtained. So clear and distinct are the photographs that every expression on the Sirdar's features is plainly visible.'<sup>137</sup> The audience's reaction was one of sheer adulation:

'In the first instance the Palace audience saw the conqueror of the Soudan at Calais. They saw six feet odd of hard, wiry humanity, framed in an ordinary lounging jacket suit of grey, alert and smiling. They saw him exchange a hearty shake of the hand with the steamer's skipper — and they rose to a man, aye, and to a woman, cheering loud and long. And when the cheers had died away they were succeeded by volley after volley of vociferous and unmistakably genuine British "hurrahs," which spread from floor to ceiling, from pit to gallery, from the back of the stage even into the fashionable atmosphere of the tiers of boxes. The demonstration was renewed when the second scene was presented — representing the reception of the Sirdar, hat in hand, walking down the Admiralty Pier to meet the Mayor of Dover.'<sup>138</sup>

So popular were these films of Kitchener that they were still shown at the Palace Theatre five months later.<sup>139</sup> Other film companies also covered Kitchener's return. R.W. Paul secured, 'an excellent animated photograph of the reception of the Sirdar at Guildhall', which, at 120 ft., was unusually long, attesting to its predicted appeal.<sup>140</sup> A film of the Sirdar's return was shown at the Alhambra Theatre to huge adulation, reported one newspaper, 'arousing roars of applause, while another depicting some French soldiers at drill is received with a burst of hisses!'<sup>141</sup> Hisses for the French were only to be expected, of course, for they were the traditional enemy of Britain in this era before the 'Entente cordiale', especially as their government had designs on the Sudan (which designs were thwarted at Fachoda, again by Kitchener). For these reasons there is no record of the Sirdar film being shown in France, though interestingly it was screened in Holland at this time — which is ironic, given the sheer hatred for Kitchener exhibited in that country during the Boer war, which broke out just a year later.<sup>142</sup> An earlier hero of the Sudan also received his due during this period of inflated national pride. The *Era* reported on 10 September:

'An enthusiastic scene was witnessed at the Alhambra on Tuesday night. The statue of Gordon was included in the cinematograph pictures, with the words, "At Last." The band played the national Anthem, and the large audience cheered vociferously.'

The following week more views were added, including one of Kitchener, though it was still General Gordon's image — presumably a lantern slide — which garnered the most intense enthusiasm.<sup>143</sup> Similarly, a lantern view of Gordon's statue was screened at the Palace Theatre during the Biograph programme, and was 'received with great enthusiasm'.<sup>144</sup> Gordon, though his mission in the Sudan had been a failure, and he was ignominiously killed by the mob, was by this time firmly established as a great British hero.

### Re-titled scenes

As I have explained in my second chapter, deception about a film's status can take place at the stage of exhibition as well as production. This often comes down to misleading new titles being given to existing films, and this certainly came to pass in the case of the Sudan war. Fuerst Brothers advertised several 'Soudanese pictures' at the end of September, including *Gunboats on the Nile* and *War Correspondents Arriving in Camp*.<sup>145</sup> It is not clear what/whose these films were, but it seems unlikely that they were of the actual campaign, because (as we have seen) none of the potential cameramen are known to have shot anything of this kind. My suspicion would be that the first title was filmed near Cairo (or possibly it was a shot of general shipping on the Nile), and the second could have been a Spanish-American war film bearing this title which Edison released earlier in the year. Warwick's *The Return of the War Correspondents* could be the same film.<sup>146</sup> In any case, the re-titling made these films appropriate and relevant to the Sudan war.

### Staged films

Several staged symbolic films to do with the Sudan War were screened. The 'flag films' mentioned earlier fall into this category, though it is not clear who made them or if they were specially made for this war. Other allegorical scenes came onto the market at this time, more specifically related to the Sudan War, including one entitled, *Khalifa Praying for Victory*. This scene – comparable to such films as Amet's Uncle Sam film (made during the Spanish-American War – would have been very simple to set up with a suitably dressed performer.<sup>147</sup>

Warwick offered two dramatised films relating to the war, which may be classed as 'fakes' or 're-enactments', though coming rather long after the war. *Defence of the Colours*, probably released in late 1898 or early 1899 was described as 'A thrilling Incident of the Recent War'.<sup>148</sup> Appearing later was *A reproduction of an Omdurman battle*, and this is another mystery, of unknown genre and lacking description.<sup>149</sup> A further film from the company, released at the end of 1899, was a fully dramatised subject, entitled *How Tommy Won the Victoria Cross: an Incident of the Soudan War*, presumably made to exploit the patriotic climate at the time of the Boer War through this tale of the earlier war. The plot synopsis describes a tale of British heroism and dervish perfidy:

'Two Dervishes near Omdurman ambush and wound a British soldier, who fights back and manages to wound them in return. A cavalryman finds the exhausted trio and offers them water, whereupon the Dervishes attempt to kill the two Britons. The two British soldiers however manage to kill the attackers and make their escape on horseback, as more Dervishes arrive.' 100 ft.<sup>150</sup>

Incidentally this story was not the pure xenophobia it might appear to be. The action was partially based on genuine experience of British troops in the Sudan in 1898 (and in earlier times), a number of whom reported dervishes playing dead and then attacking British soldiers as they passed, or wounded dervishes doing the same when offered water.<sup>151</sup> There are too many



independent reports of this 'shamming when dead' behaviour for it to be mere invention – but clearly it was good propaganda too.

### **Programmes of several Sudan war films**

Charles Musser in his pioneering work on the Eden Musee in New York has shown the importance of the exhibitor in the early cinema era, and his role in shaping/creating screen programmes out of individual short films (and lantern slides). Exhibitors played a similar role in Britain in the aftermath of the Sudan war. In the British case the programme was shaped as much by film companies as exhibitors, because some of the companies, in listing films in their catalogues, grouped scenes about the Sudan events together, which would make it easier for an exhibitor to choose and compile subjects about the war.

Fuerst Brothers, for example, from the end of September listed a group of 'Soudanese pictures', which included six of the films related to the war which I have previously mentioned.<sup>152</sup> The Warwick Trading Company's catalogue had a section headed 'The Soudan Campaign' with eight film titles, including some views of the Nile at Wady Halfa and other places associated with the campaign. These latter, showing the region in which the battle took place, are an example of my category of related films, in the sub category of showing 'the place where it happened'.

A. D. Thomas screened such Nile views at his shows in the Alhambra Theatre, along with other war-related reels and a view of General Gordon, which was described as 'a coloured picture', and was presumably a slide.<sup>153</sup> This mixing up of slides and film was, as we shall see, a regular strategy in the Eden Musee shows of the Spanish-American War, and was also practiced in the UK, as this and other examples prove. It seems though, that Sudan war programmes in the UK were not as long and complex as in the Eden Musee, tending to be mere sections within an individual programme, rather than a complete war show. Lists of the films/images in such programmes are rare, and the A.D. Thomas show at the Alhambra is one of only a couple of examples of listings of Sudan war films/images that I have found. The other was at a provincial theatre as late as April 1899, where three films about the war were grouped together in the programme.<sup>154</sup> The aforementioned examples of shots of troops or commanders such as Kitchener being screened might have involved several films being shown, rather than just one, although this is not clear from the descriptions of the shows.

## **CONCLUSION**

### **The film industry and Omdurman**

After two years of preparations in the Sudan, in September 1898 Kitchener managed to pull off a total victory. It was a surprise and a joy for most of the British nation, and people clamoured for news and information about the events. While the cameramen at Omdurman, faced with an insurmountable problem of trying to film a new kind of warfare with primitive cameras, largely failed to record the war, the exhibitors managed to overcome the deficiency.

Exhibitors and distributors, by adapting the cut-and-paste style of the print media, put together a number of moving images ('moving' in every sense), which served to represent and celebrate the victory. Though the efforts of the American media during the Cuban war were more extensive, with longer film programmes, the British in their way were equally creative in presenting newsworthy (and propaganda) images related to this colonial war. Films of victorious troops marching through the streets, lantern slides of Kitchener and Gordon, symbolic films of Union Jacks waving or enemies vanquished – all were used to celebrate the British victory at Omdurman. However, these were somewhat piecemeal efforts, based on cobbling together minimal numbers of films and slides. As we shall see, a year later when the Boer War commenced, the British film industry had learned much, and as a result was better prepared to film aspects of the war, and was also more successful in subsequently presenting these films to a patriotic public.

### **Scientific war and the end of visible heroism**

It had been something of a lost opportunity. The year 1898, in terms of warfare, was the dividing line between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The Boer War the following year introduced a new kind of warfare in which longer-range weaponry and defensive tactics held sway. Omdurman, while a proving ground for some new military technology (and culminating in a massacre of a primitively-armed foe), was in other respects the swansong of the traditional colonial battle. In this sense, one might say that the cinema had arrived just a few years too late, for if more experienced filmmakers had been on the scene in 1898, perhaps we might have in our film archives today a visual record of aspects of this earlier kind of British warfare, employing such – now quaint – tactics as a defensive square, volley firing, and a glorious (and ineffectual) cavalry charge.

Certainly a film of the latter, or shots of the troops who had just taken part in it, would have been a massive success at the time, for most of Kitchener's campaign had been a foretaste of the uninspiring, unheroic, 'scientific war' (as commentators were already calling it in the 1890s) of the future, in which logistics, efficient supply and impregnable defence were more important than valour.<sup>155</sup> Some aspects of the Sudan campaign exemplified a process in which many previously visible elements were being taken out of war. Bright uniforms were giving way to khaki. Guns had longer range, thereby stretching out the battlefield and reducing the intensity of hand-to-hand combat of earlier warfare. Rifle fire, with the advent of smokeless powder was becoming invisible.

In contrast, the charge of the 21<sup>st</sup> Lancers seemed truly heroic, an inspiring example of the old-fashioned glories of battle. In this respect, as Harrington has noted, there is an interesting parallel between this charge of the Lancers' and the Rough Riders storming up San Juan Hill two months earlier in Cuba. Both were heroic actions, albeit militarily insignificant, and both were exploited by the media for their inspirational content. Harrington writes:

'The Sudan campaign and the Spanish-American War were rather mundane affairs lacking the dash which the public had come to expect from war; these two charges, one on foot, the other on horses, echoed earlier military glories and were ripe for exaggerating by the journalists of 1898.'<sup>156</sup>

We shall now move on to discussing the Spanish-American War, in which the storming of San Juan featured. This war, which took place a short while before Omdurman, marks an even more important stage in the development of media and filmic representation.

### Notes:

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<sup>1</sup> V.G. Kiernan, *European Empires from Conquest to Collapse : 1815-1960* (London: Leicester University Press/Fontana Paperbacks, 1982), p.79. Kiernan adds that the Mahdist regime only ever dominated the south of the country, and as 'Mahdism contained no message of social liberation' all efforts to convert the Egyptian population to its cause failed. Warner stresses that the tyranny in the Mahdiah was due to the Khalifa, not to his predecessor, the Mahdi. See Philip Warner, *Dervish : The Rise and Fall of an African Empire* (London: Macdonald & Co., 1973), p.224. Holt on the other hand suggests the Khalifa was demonised by European writers of the time, though even he admits a marked difference between the two regimes, and a 'failing in action' during the Khalifa's rule. See P.M. Holt, *The Mahdist State in the Sudan, 1881-1898 : A Study of Its Origins, Development and Overthrow* (Nairobi ; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), p.4-5. These days many people of Sudanese origin would see the Khalifa's regime as anachronistic, to say the least. See Jamal Mahjoub, *In the Hour of the Signs* (Oxford: Heinemann, 1996). For a good account of the Sudan campaign and the media, see John O. Springhall, "'Up guards and at them!'" British imperialism and popular art, 1880-1914', in John M. Mackenzie, *Imperialism and Popular Culture* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1986), p.49-72.

<sup>2</sup> G. W. Steevens, *With Kitchener to Khartum* (Edinburgh & London: W. Blackwood & Sons, 1898), p.2.

<sup>3</sup> The claim was made by Slatin Pasha, probably in Rudolf Carl Slatin and Francis Reginald Wingate, *Fire and Sword in the Sudan : A Personal Narrative of Fighting and Serving the Dervishes, 1879-1895* (London: Edward Arnold, 1898). Quoted in Bennet Burleigh, *Sirdar and Khalifa, or, the Re-Conquest of the Soudan, 1898* (London: Chapman & Hall, 1898), p.1. Wallis and Bodge's *Handbook for Egypt and the Sudan* (c1906) states that during dervish rule, the population of the territory decreased from eight million to two. Cited in Alan Sillitoe, *Leading the Blind: A Century of Guidebook Travel, 1815-1914* (London: Papermac, 1996), p.184-5: Sillitoe adds that this is equivalent to the effect in Cambodia of Pol Pot's regime.

<sup>4</sup> Kiernan, op. cit., p.79. Interestingly, the Mahdist state included part of Darfur, recently tyrannised once again by the agents of a despotic, islamic regime. See Douglas Porch, *Wars of Empire* (London: Cassell, 2000), map on p.150.

<sup>5</sup> Moore-Morris stresses that the Mahdist period has echoes even today. Ralph Moore-Morris, (ed.) 'Sudan Centenary Special Issue', issue of *Soldiers of the Queen*, no. 94, Sep 1998.

<sup>6</sup> It is worth pointing out that, as with some other instances of imperial intervention in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, there was not necessarily any overwhelming economic benefit in winning this land. Indeed some suggested that reconquering the Sudan was 'not worth the candle'. Even the bullish imperialist Steevens stated that Egypt would be better off without its southern neighbour under its purview, for the Sudan as a whole 'was never a pecuniary advantage to Egypt'. G. W. Steevens, *Egypt in 1898* (London: W. Blackwood and Sons, 1898), p.165. In Lawrence's *The Rainbow* of 1915 two characters debate whether Britain was right to overthrow the Mahdi, one maintaining that it was none of our business, the other that intervention was all about duty to Britain. See D.H. Lawrence, *The Rainbow* (1915), Chapter 11, 'First Love'.

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<sup>7</sup> See Dupuy and Dupuy, *The Encyclopedia of Military History : From 3500 B.C. To the Present* (London: Jane's, 1986), p.847-8. The campaign got under way when, on 12 March 1896 the Sirdar received instructions from Lord Cromer authorising an expedition into Dongola province. See Winston Churchill in *The River War : The Sudan, 1898* (London: Eyre & Spottiswood, 1899-1900), Vol. 1, p.181.

<sup>8</sup> The Sudan Military Railway was, as Steevens put it, 'the deadliest weapon that Britain has ever used against Mahdism', part of what he called the 'machine-like precision' that characterised this campaign. Steevens, *With Kitchener to Khartum*, p.22. Some historians too believe that the SMR was the 'decisive weapon' in the 1897-98 campaign rather than the machine gun, which is popularly thought to be the crucial technology of this war. Moore-Morris, op. cit.; R.T. Stearn, 'Muskets and Maxim Guns: The Weapon Factor in the Scramble for Africa', *Soldiers of the Queen*, no. 105, June 2001, p.6-7. The SMR ran 270 miles across the desert, say some, though one source says 550 miles. See *Sudan Campaign, 1896-1899. By 'an Officer.'* (London: Chapman & Hall, 1899), p.166. It was laid with astonishing speed, at the rate of up to three miles a day in the summer of 1898. See O.S. Watkins, *With Kitchener's Army : Being a Chaplain's Experiences with the Nile Expedition, 1898* (London: S.W. Partridge, 1899), p.72. When completed, this railway enabled troops, guns and gunboats to be brought rapidly and in great quantities to where they were needed.

<sup>9</sup> Kitchener's force strength was roughly as follows. British: 8,200 ; Egyptian/Sudanese etc 17,600. On the balance of forces in Sudan, see Donald Featherstone, *Omdurman 1898 : Kitchener's Victory in the Sudan* (London: Osprey, 1993), p.61.

<sup>10</sup> Kiernan, op. cit., p.80.

<sup>11</sup> The number of dervish fighters at the battle has never been established with any precision and Clark has worked out what is probably the best available estimate. See Peter Clark, 'The Battle of Omdurman', *Army Quarterly and Defence Journal* 107, no. 3, 1977, p.320-334; and Peter Clark, *Three Sudanese Battles* (Khartoum: [Institute of African and Asian Studies, University of Khartoum], 1977).

<sup>12</sup> British forces filed their bullets into what were effectively dum-dums to give them more killing power (see Burleigh, *Sirdar and Khalifa*, p.106.) The Colt .45 was developed in 1911 for similar imperialist reasons – to give American soldiers a weapon with more 'stopping power' against the determined fighters of the southern Philippines.

<sup>13</sup> The word 'dervish' simply means 'poor', says Warner, p.9.

<sup>14</sup> Steevens, *With Kitchener to Khartum*, p.289. Some of Britain's opponents in the Third-World at this time were much more successful in their tactics, using sniping and hit and run raids, etc. The correspondent L. Oppenheim who was at both the Tirah campaign against the Afridis in Afghanistan and also at Omdurman notes that while the Afridis forced the British 'to play their game', the Khalifa 'came and played the Sirdar's game', though he acknowledges that most of the Sirdar's success was due to sound organisation. See *Nineteenth Century* 44, Dec 1898, p.1042 etc.

<sup>15</sup> Steevens, op. cit., p.263-4, 285.

<sup>16</sup> But see Terry Brighton, *The Last Charge : The 21st Lancers and the Battle of Omdurman, 2 September 1898* (Ramsbury: Crowood Press, 1998), which takes a more positive view of the wisdom of the charge. The film *Young Winston* (1971) wrongly implies that the charge of the 21st Lancers took place the 'following day' as a follow up operation; it was the same day.

<sup>17</sup> See John Meredith, ed. *Omdurman Diaries, 1898 : Eyewitness Accounts of the Legendary Campaign* (Barnsley; London: Leo Cooper, 1998), p.189. The British troops felt some sympathy for the dervishes. Lieut. Hamilton Hodgson noted in his diary: 'I felt sorry for these men; they were simply wiped out... nothing could live under the fire...' Hamilton Hodgson, 'The Lincolnshires at Omdurman', *Journal of the Society for Army Historical Research*, Summer 1942.

<sup>18</sup> Paul M. Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers : Economic Change and Military Conflict from 1500 to 2000* (New York: Random House, 1987), p.150.

<sup>19</sup> Some sources give British and allies' casualties at a mere 382 or 387, of which only 49 were killed (and only 30 of these British). For more on this see Kiernan, p.80; Steevens, *With Kitchener to Khartum*, p. 284, 286. Though Repington put British losses a little higher. Huyshe has Dervish dead 10,800, wounded 16,000; British and Egyptian dead and wounded 47 and 342 respectively. See Wentworth Huyshe, 'The Omdurman Victory', *Living Age* 219, no. 2831, 8 Oct 1898, p.121-3. The estimate in at least one source of 25,000 dervishes killed is exaggeration. (TLS 2 Aug 1996, p.31). Clodfelter is most useful on casualty figures (and

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several other kind of battle facts and figures). Churchill described Omdurman as 'the most signal triumph ever gained by the arms of science over barbarians'. He defended the use of the dum-dum and similar bullets in such 'savage warfare', as such opponents sometimes refused to acknowledge their injuries and they 'give no quarter'. Churchill, op. cit., vol. 2, p.164 and p.338.

<sup>20</sup> Thomas Pakenham, *The Scramble for Africa, 1876-1912* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1991), p.544. Only one British commander at the battle, Lyttleton, allowed free firing, as opposed to volley firing, but some old-fashioned commentators condemned this new military tactic as inadvisable. See *Western Morning News* 31 Aug 1898, p.8.

<sup>21</sup> Letter from Lord Cromer in R. Wingate papers, Sudan Archive, Univ. of Durham: 267/1/224 of 8 Jan and 267/1/233 of 11 Jan 1898.

<sup>22</sup> A would-be war correspondent wrote to the press censor, Wingate, to find out the situation – he had been advised of the five or six limit, and wondered if he'd be allowed, knowing Kitchener's repugnance for correspondents. (Letter from Everard Fielding, 19 July 1898. R. Wingate papers, Sudan Archive, Univ. of Durham, 266/7/26.) In early January 1898 the Sirdar issued an order that war correspondents not be allowed south of Assouan, but the *Daily Telegraph* challenged this prohibition. Burleigh, 1898, p.80. Others say it was *The Times* which made the challenge. Hugh Cecil, 'British Correspondents and the Sudan Campaign of 1896-98', in *Sudan : The Reconquest Reappraised*, edited by Edward M. Spiers (London ; Portland, Or.: Frank Cass, 1998), p.111. Some complained that this control on numbers of correspondents was the death of the liberty of the press in the field, but one army writer responded to say that war correspondents had caused problems for the army and were a drain on the forces – he noted that each war correspondent in Sudan needed two camels, a horse, and four or five servants. Threestay, 'The Sirdar and the Correspondents', *Naval and Military Magazine*, Feb 1898, p.74-6.

<sup>23</sup> Cecil, p. 102, 112. Wilkinson-Latham says that 15 war correspondents were there. See Wilkinson-Latham, *From Our Special Correspondent : Victorian War Correspondents and Their Campaigns* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1979), p.242. Harrington and Sharf list 17 war correspondents present at Omdurman, though miss out Benett-Stanford, which would make the figure 18. See P. Harrington and F.A. Sharf, *Omdurman, 1898 : The Eyewitnesses Speak : The British Conquest of the Sudan as Described by Participants in Letters, Diaries, Photos, and Drawings* (London: Greenhill Books, 1998), p.219. Churchill lists 12 correspondents at Omdurman; there had originally been 26 for the earlier campaign, of which one was killed, one died of fever and one was wounded. See Churchill, *The River War*, op. cit., vol. 2, p.3 and p.230-1.

<sup>24</sup> Churchill, *The River War*, op. cit., vol. 1, p.415: on 7 Apr, the day before the battle of Atbara, Kitchener muzzled the correspondents and allowed no telegrams to pass.

<sup>25</sup> F. Villiers, *Peaceful Personalities and Warriors Bold* (London & New York: Harper & Bros., 1907), p.193. On 16 August Wingate had dinner with Villiers. See R. Wingate's diary, Sudan Archive, Univ. of Durham, 100/1/106. In his diary Wingate lists some of the correspondents present. See 100/1/107.

<sup>26</sup> Lionel James, a *Times* reporter, claimed to have circumvented the censorship. James, *High Pressure : Being Some Record of Activities in the Service of the Times Newspaper* (London: J. Murray, 1929), p.84.

<sup>27</sup> Watkins, p.260.

<sup>28</sup> BJP 23 Sep 1898, p.612. See also Wilkinson-Latham, p.242.

<sup>29</sup> P. Harrington, 'Images and Perceptions: Visualising the Sudan Campaign', in *Sudan : The Reconquest Reappraised*, edited by Edward M. Spiers (London ; Portland, Or.: Frank Cass, 1998), p.88.

<sup>30</sup> Francis M. Gregson made albums of these for distribution to officers in the regiment he accompanied, the Grenadier Guards. (Cambridge University Library, manuscript Y3042C.) Other officers known to have been taking photographs at Omdurman are Lieut. E.D. Loch of the Grenadier Guards, Lt. Short and Ser-Major Bruce of the RAMC, Captain E.A. Stanton, and gunboat captain Lieut. Cecil Staveley. Loch's photographs survive in the National Army Museum, and the *London Gazette* 30 Sep 1898, p.6, mentions him as Lieut. Hon E.D. Loch, Grenadier Guards. Short and Bruce provided the good quality photos in Watkins' book: see Watkins, op. cit., passim. A couple of Stanton's photographs of troops just before the battle of Omdurman may be seen in the Mary Evans image library (and the Hulton) along with

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illustrations based on his sketches. Staveley photographed at Atbara and at Khartoum (Sudan Archive, Univ. of Durham, 637/2.)

<sup>31</sup> For Wingate, see his diary, 20 Aug (Sudan Archive, Univ. of Durham, 100/1/107). Wingate was depicted as he took a photograph in *Black and White* 17 Sep 1898, p.361.

<sup>32</sup> 'Small talk of the week', *The Sketch* 5 Oct 1898. p.465: in the context of a tongue-in-cheek suggestion for an exhibition about the Sudan. Cited in Harrington, 'Images and Perceptions: Visualising the Sudan Campaign', p.92.

<sup>33</sup> He is writing about January 1898 at this point, though might have added this comment based on what he saw later that year. Churchill, *The River War*, op. cit., vol.1, p.364. The cinema had evidently entered Churchill's consciousness in the Sudan, for, in describing his experience in the charge of the 21st Lancers, he uses a filmic metaphor: 'The whole scene flickered exactly like a cinematograph picture; and, besides, I remember no sound. The event seemed to pass in absolute silence.' Churchill, op. cit., vol.2, p.142. Churchill was known in later life as a fervent cinema fan, and it seems from this metaphor that films were already a preoccupation. Villiers wrote that he had always envied Churchill for taking part in the charge, and receiving 'his baptism of fire that day'.

<sup>34</sup> Letter dated 6 Sep 1898, signed 'Cecil'. This includes details of the battle four days earlier, which he had witnessed from his gunboat, including the Dervish advance: 'a most magnificent sight'. He had a 'Kodak' with him, but told his mother he had been 'very disappointed' with his Atbara photos and hoped that the ones he'd just taken of the aftermath of the battle of Omdurman, near (Gordon's) Khartoum palace 'will be a better success'. Diary and letters of Lieut. Cecil Minet Staveley, Sudan Archive, Univ. of Durham, 637/2. Thanks to Nick Hiley for suggesting I look in this source.

<sup>35</sup> W. Coyne, 'First pictures', letter to *The Radio Times* 2 August 1935, p.9 (This is the same letter which I cited in my chapter on the Greco-Turkish war. It was also printed in *The Listener*). Coyne goes on to say in the letter that after seeing Bull filming at Omdurman, 'A little later I saw Lieut. Winston Churchill charge with the 21<sup>st</sup> Lancers', which seems unlikely, as that took place in a different part of the battlefield. Ken Gordon later noted sceptically: 'The first recorded newsreel story was... of the great war artist, Rene Bull, building a rostrum of bamboo poles to film the Dervishes' charge at the battle of Omdurman. I do not know if this picture ever saw the light of the projector, but a hand cranked camera on a bamboo rostrum would be very unsteady...': Kenneth Gordon, 'Forty Years With a Newsreel Camera', *The Cine-Technician*, March-April 1951, p.44-45, etc. (Gordon states, probably misremembering, that his source was a *Daily Telegraph* report, but the Coyne letter seems more likely).

<sup>36</sup> Repington notes that in the days before the battle (and presumably on the 2<sup>nd</sup> September itself) the correspondents were placed in the middle left (as seen from the river) of the zareba encampment, near the first and second British brigades. See Repington, *Vestigia* (London: Constable and Company Ltd., 1919), p.132. The British First Brigade (commanded by Wauchope) included the Seaforths, Lincolns, Warwicks, Camerons. The Second Brigade (Lytleton in command) included the Grenadier Guards and Northumberland Fusiliers. H.S.L. Alford and W.D. Sword, *The Egyptian Soudan: Its Loss and Its Recovery* (London; New York: Macmillan, 1898), p.239.

<sup>37</sup> Letters to author from R.E. Williamson of 9, Causeway, Derby, 15 June and 1 November 1992, saying that William Coyne was his maternal grandfather, and giving me his career details.

<sup>38</sup> PN 5 Aug 1898, p.510. Bull described his still photography at the battle in René Bull, 'To Khartoum with a Kodak', *The Captain* 1, April 1899, p.66-70.

<sup>39</sup> René Bull, *Black and White War Albums ... Snapshots by René Bull* (London: Black and White, 1899): Issues 1 and 2 of the four albums are on the Sudan, devoted to Omdurman and Atbara respectively. While Bull stated that only some 16 of his photographs of the battle of Omdurman came out, his total number of photographs of the campaign was much more than this. There is some confusion on this point in Harrington, 'Images and Perceptions: Visualising the Sudan Campaign', endnote no. 22.

<sup>40</sup> Bull's known lectures are as follows: Early(?) December in Dublin and 20 December in St James' Hall, London (BJP 16 Dec 1898, p.811). 23 Jan at St. Georges' Hall, London (PD Feb 1899, p.25). Again at St James' Hall 7 Feb (BJP 31 Mar 1899, p.203). c. March in Glasgow (PD Apr 1899, p.75). See also *Photography* Jan 1899, p.57. His photographs appeared in *Black and White* throughout September and early October.

<sup>41</sup> Bull rode around with Burleigh. See Bull, 'To Khartoum with a Kodak', op. cit.

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<sup>42</sup> 'The camera in the battlefield', BJP 31 Mar 1899, p.203. This notes: '...it is not improbable that combats in the near future will be depicted with the cinematograph in conjunction with the phonograph or some similar instrument, thus enabling all the sights and sounds of war to be witnessed and heard at entertainments at home'. Incidentally, this article also points out that none of the photographs of the battle by any photographer depict actual fighting – some rather fuzzy images of dust clouds, said to be troops in action, are the closest one comes to it (such as the dusty snaps by Gregson, which I mentioned above). The only way to have obtained battle action photographs, it adds half seriously, would have been for one of the illustrated weeklies to have 'had a black snap-shotter with the Dervishes...but that was perhaps impossible'.

<sup>43</sup> *Pick-Me-Up* 25 Apr 1896. Reproduced in my book, *I Want to See This Annie Mattygraph : a Cartoon History of the Coming of the Movies* (Gemona/Bloomington: Le Giornate del Cinema Muto: Indiana University Press, 1995).

<sup>44</sup> The first of these two trips in the Sudan region was from July 1897. Villiers had probably gone there directly after the Greco-Turkish War. He gave a lecture in London in early 1898 on his recent Egypt/Sudan experiences. Frederic Villiers, 'My Recent Journey from the Nile to Suakim', *Journal of the Society of Arts* 46, no. 2359, 4 Feb 1898, p.233-40.

<sup>45</sup> Pat Hodgson, *The War Illustrators* (London: Osprey Publishing, 1977).

<sup>46</sup> On the subject of his tent, see *Villiers: His Five Decades of Adventure*, p.260.

<sup>47</sup> E.N. Bennett, *The Downfall of the Dervishes : Being a Sketch of the Final Sudan Campaign of 1898* (London: Methuen, 1898), p.118-9. A poor-quality photograph by E.D.Loch survives, of Villiers' bicycle being wheeled through the desert during the 1898 campaign. NAM 7009-11-90, 13189-13215. On the reverse is written 'How Mr. Villiers, War Correspondent, rode his Bicycle to Omdurman'. For more re Villiers' bicycle see Wilkinson-Latham, p.237.

<sup>48</sup> Bull's editor added a comment that the unnamed man was Villiers and that the cycle was not a failure, for he 'rode the machine for miles on the march'. See *Black and White* 3 Sep 1898, p.295; another comment that he cycled for miles is reported from the Central News Agency in *Western Morning News* 30 Aug 1898, p.8. According to Burleigh the bicycle performed well: see Villiers entry in Dennis Griffiths, *The Encyclopedia of the British Press : 1422-1992* (London: Macmillan, 1992). See also F.L Bullard, *Famous War Correspondents* (Boston ; London: Little, Brown & Co.; Pitman, 1914), p.188, who says that the bicycle inspired some awe: 'the natives used to think the machine was alive'. In his autobiography Villiers points out that he took the cycle to the Sudan knowing from his previous experience that on much of the desert there is a hard coating, meaning that a cycle would not sink into the sand. Villiers, an old hand in the desert and other challenging environments, was not as naive as Bull seems to have assumed. Further confirmation of this comes in the *M.A.P.* article cited below, which states that Villiers 'considers the firm, sandy surface of the desert excellent for cycling', and that he had even had the bicycle fitted with specially strong tires for the desert.

<sup>49</sup> Bull also, apparently, 'detested' Bennett Burleigh, the *Telegraph* correspondent, so much so that, in April at Atbara, he drew a sketch of the dervishes attacking, with one of the fiendish warriors made to represent Burleigh ! (See Meredith, 1898, p.85.) Bull and Burleigh did, however, ride around together during the battle of Omdurman, so perhaps the dislike had worn off by then.

<sup>50</sup> James, *High Pressure*, p. 4 and 65. On war correspondents' luxuries brought to this campaign see Wilkinson-Latham, p.225-6; Scudamore, *A Sheaf of Memories* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1925), p. 282-4, 387. This is not as frivolous as it might seem. I know from experience, filming in remoter parts of the world, that a few luxuries can make a difficult experience more tolerable, though one might take this too far, such as in Evelyn Waugh's novel, *Scoop*, where a war correspondent takes all kinds of paraphernalia with him to the front, including comfortable chairs and a bath.

<sup>51</sup> Frederic Villiers, *Villiers: His Five Decades of Adventure*, p.259.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, p.259-60. It seems improbable that one could order films and a suitable projector from Cairo at this early date. Perhaps, if this incident really occurred, these were lantern slides.

<sup>53</sup> From Villiers' report written 3 September 1898 and published in the *Globe and Traveller* on 26 September, p.4. Bennet, *op. cit.*, p.141, confirms the scorpion story: another reason to believe Villiers' account of other matters too – including his claims of attempted filming. In another *Globe* report Villiers confirms that he did have his camera ('Beyond Omdurman', *Globe and Traveller*, 4 Oct, p.4): 'I had originally come on board in the early morning with a

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camera...’ A drawing of Englishmen in a Sudan rail carriage shows a parcel marked ‘Villiers’ – possibly this was his camera? See ILN 10 Sep 1898, p.381.

<sup>54</sup> Gordon was in the Royal Engineers (*London Gazette* 30 Sep 1898). Staveley calls him ‘Bill Gordon’.

<sup>55</sup> Frederic Villiers, *Villiers: His Five Decades of Adventure*, p.264.

<sup>56</sup> The ‘Melik’ was one of three gunboats covering the right, or northern flank. See W.S. Chalmers, *The Life and Letters of David, Earl Beatty, Admiral of the Fleet...* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1951), p.36. (Beatty at this early point in his career at Omdurman commanded a Nile gunboat.)

<sup>57</sup> Frederic Villiers, *Villiers: His Five Decades of Adventure*, p.264.

<sup>58</sup> Barnes, 1898 volume, p.61.

<sup>59</sup> Prince Francis of Teck lent Villiers some supplies due to the latter’s loss. Teck, like Villiers, was on the ‘Melik’ during the battle (see Villiers, *Peaceful Personalities and Warriors Bold*, p.178-80) where he ‘worked a Maxim gun to good effect’ (see Bennett, *op. cit.*, p.247-8).

<sup>60</sup> Barnes reproduces this list of themes for the lecture presented in London in early December 1898. (See Barnes, 1898 volume, p.61.) The lecture was to be given on 7 Dec, 1898, in the St. Georges Hall, Langham Place, London. Reported in the *Daily Graphic* 7 Dec 1898, p.982c. It was also given earlier in the same venue, on 15 and 16 November, according to *The Times*: ad on 12 Nov, p.1 and ‘The Sudan campaign’, 16 Nov, p.3, which gives a little more detail.

<sup>61</sup> Villiers sketch, ‘The Sirdar’s Entry into Omdurman on the night of the battle’, had appeared in ILN 1 Oct 1898, p.480. Villiers states in the *Globe and Traveller* 26 Sep 1898, p.4 that he was on the ‘Melik’ during the army’s entry into Omdurman, so perhaps his sketch of it was based on other people’s descriptions, or on an ‘official’ entry after the main army’s entry.

<sup>62</sup> It was scheduled for 13 Dec 1898 at The Dome, Brighton, to be illustrated with slides taken from photos ‘and sketches’ by Villiers. See *Brighton Society* 29 Oct 1898, p.9 and 10 Dec 1898, p.8.

<sup>63</sup> Terry Ramsaye, *A Million and One Nights: A History of the Motion Picture* (London: Frank Cass and Co. Ltd., 1964), p.390.

<sup>64</sup> Kevin Brownlow, *The War, the West and the Wilderness* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1978), *passim*.

<sup>65</sup> See for example his sketches in ILN 24 Sep, p.448-9 of the action at 6.30 am as seen from the ‘Melik’, and ILN 1 Oct, p.481: three pictures of battlefield action all seen from the river; and in the same issue p.484 the ‘Melik’ saving the Camel Corps. There is a picture in the ILN of Major Gordon and Prince Francis of Teck on the ‘Melik’ after the battle, with former prisoners of the Khalifa (held in the Hulton). A picture in *The Graphic* 8 Oct shows Staveley Gordon. A picture of a Nile gunboat of this type is reproduced with other photos of the Omdurman campaign in Clammer, *op. cit.*, p.90-91.

<sup>66</sup> Villiers remained on the ‘Melik’ on the night after the battle too. He reported in his newspaper – an additional mention of his film camera – ‘my bed was the platform of the fore battery, and my camera my pillow’. ‘Beyond Omdurman’, *Globe and Traveller*, 4 Oct, p.4. His being on the boat perhaps accounts for Bennett’s assertion that after the battle Villiers couldn’t be found (even by his servant). Bennett, *The Downfall of the Dervishes*, p.75.

<sup>67</sup> ‘M.A.P. in society’, *M.A.P.* 30 July 1898, p.151-2. Reproduced in ‘Personal’, *The Regiment* 3 Sep 1898, p.358. Cited in Harrington, ‘Images and Perceptions: Visualising the Sudan Campaign’, p.92.

<sup>68</sup> PN 12 August 1898, p.508.

<sup>69</sup> See Raymond Blathwayt, ‘Fresh from the Front... a Talk with Mr. Frederic Villiers’, *Daily News*, 19 April 1900, p.7. Villiers was interviewed when he’d just returned from the Boer War. In the same interview he says that for war reporting, sketching is a more convincing and reliable medium than photography.

<sup>70</sup> Entry for Benett-Stanford in E.E. Dorling, *Wilts and Dorset at the Opening of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century* (London: Pike and Co., 1906), p.82. See also his obituary in the *Salisbury Journal* 21 Nov 1947, p.7 and 28 Nov, p.6; *Army List*, Oct 1899, p.1121. Much of my information on Benett-Stanford has come from David Bevors, curator of Preston Manor, near Brighton.

<sup>71</sup> Benett-Stanford delivered the lecture at the Assembly Rooms in Salisbury, Wiltshire, which was published as: John M. Benett-Stanford, ‘The Battle of Omdurman’, *The Wiltshire County Mirror and Express*, 27 Jan 1899, p.8.



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<sup>72</sup> Entry in F.R. Wingate's diary of the 1898 Sudan campaign for 25 August: 'Bennett Stanford [sic] W.M. News arrived'. Sudan Archive, Univ. of Durham, 102/1.

<sup>73</sup> The other journalist was Hubert Howard, who later that day was killed. Churchill did something similar. See Ziegler, *Omdurman* (London: Collins, 1973), p.115.

<sup>74</sup> John M. Benett-Stanford, 'The Battle of Omdurman', *The Wiltshire County Mirror and Express*, op. cit., column d.

<sup>75</sup> Many officers equipped themselves with powerful pistols specially for the Sudan campaign. Scudamore spells this weapon as 'Lankaster'. See Scudamore, 1925, op. cit., p.123. Churchill had a Mauser pistol with 10 shots. See chapters 14 and 15 of Winston S. Churchill, *My Early Life* (London: Mandarin, 1991). A fellow correspondent put the best gloss he could on this incident: 'Mr Bennett Stanford [sic], who was splendidly mounted, with a cocked four-barrelled Lancaster pistol aimed deliberately at the dervish, who turned towards him. Waiting till the jibbah-clad warrior was but a score of paces or so off, Mr Stanford fired, and appeared to miss ... for the dervish without halt rushed at him, whereupon he easily avoided him, riding off.' Burleigh himself fired at the man at that point but failed to stop him. B. Burleigh, *The Khartoum Campaign, 1898 : Or the Re-Conquest of the Soudan* (London: Chapman & Hall, 1898), p.203-5.

<sup>76</sup> Another witness to the incident adds further details which make this incident less flattering to Benett-Stanford (James, op. cit., p.74): apparently the attacker was a 'feeble...gaunt, grey-bearded dervish', and already wounded. Benett-Stanford himself (described as 'a heavy man'), 'was riding a small pony of uncertain gait'. This pony had been unable to go fast enough to escape the old warrior. James adds that two correspondents were menaced at first, but that one of them galloped away leaving Benett-Stanford. This escaping journalist may have been René Bull. A further account of this incident is to be found in *Sudan Campaign, 1896-1899*, op. cit., p.198, which tells us that the Baggara attacker in addition to being old, was already wounded. See also *Western Morning News* 24 Sep, p.8, col. 7 for another account, possibly by Benett-Stanford himself. The incident had long reverberations and was still being discussed as late as 1909. See PRO file WO 30/57, piece 10, letter 17. Interestingly in Kipling's *The Light that Failed* (1891, revised ed. 1898, chapter 2) is a similar scene in which the hero, Dick Helder, saves the life of another war correspondent by shooting an attacking Sudanese warrior. A case of life imitating art, perhaps.

<sup>77</sup> In his lecture about the battle Benett-Stanford remarks that he was 'astonished' that Smythe should win a medal for an action which was so straightforward as shooting one dervish. Smythe is named in *Brighton Society* 19 Nov 1898, p.6. A VC was given to an Intelligence officer Smyth, for saving the life of one 'camp follower'. Churchill, *The River War*, op. cit., vol. 2, p. 424 and 465.

<sup>78</sup> John M. Benett-Stanford, 'The Battle of Omdurman', *The Wiltshire County Mirror and Express*, op. cit., column d. Many officers equipped themselves with powerful pistols specially for the Sudan campaign. Scudamore spells this weapon as 'Lankaster'. See Scudamore, 1925, op. cit., p.123. Churchill had a Mauser pistol with 10 shots. See chapters 14 and 15 of Winston S. Churchill, *My Early Life* (London: Mandarin, 1991).

<sup>79</sup> B. Burleigh, *The Khartoum Campaign, 1898 : Or the Re-Conquest of the Soudan* (London: Chapman & Hall, 1898), p.203-5. Burleigh himself fired at the man at that point but failed to stop him.

<sup>80</sup> James, op. cit., p.74 notes that two correspondents were menaced at first, but that one of them galloped away leaving Benett-Stanford. This escaping journalist may have been René Bull.

<sup>81</sup> Another account of this incident is to be found in *Sudan Campaign, 1896-1899*, op. cit., p.198, which tells us that the Baggara attacker in addition to being old, was already wounded. See also *Western Morning News* 24 Sep, p.8, col. 7 for another account, possibly by Benett-Stanford himself. The incident had long reverberations and was still being discussed as late as 1909. See PRO file WO 30/57, piece 10, letter 17. Interestingly in Kipling's *The Light that Failed* (1891, revised ed. 1898, chapter 2) is a similar scene in which the hero, Dick Helder, saves the life of another war correspondent by shooting an attacking Sudanese warrior. A case of life imitating art, perhaps.

<sup>82</sup> Smythe is named in *Brighton Society* 19 Nov 1898, p.6. There is some confusion over his first names: a letter about Omdurman by Robert Smyth (commander of the 21<sup>st</sup> Lancers during the conflict) notes that early in the battle, about 7am, a war correspondent rode up near them and remained mounted, attracting the fire of Dervish riflemen. Smyth took the

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blame for this, but he privately blamed the correspondent. (Sudan Archive, Univ. of Durham, 533/6/4.) This may or may not refer to the Benett-Stanford incident. A VC was given to Intelligence officer Smyth, for saving the life of one 'camp follower'. Churchill, *The River War*, op. cit., vol. 2, p. 424 and 465.

<sup>83</sup> Low and Manvell, vol 1, p.65.

<sup>84</sup> PD Sep 1898, p.54: the journal added that there would probably be a lot of excitement in Smith's lab when any such exposed films were returned to England.

<sup>85</sup> Thanks to Tony Fletcher who, circa 1998 created a name index to G.A. Smith's ledger/account books in which there are several entries for J. Benett-Stanford, 9 Charles Street, Berkeley Square, W. – mainly for developing negatives, from Aug 1898 to Apr 1900.

<sup>86</sup> 'A New Military Cinematographic Picture', *Optical Magic Lantern Journal*, December 1898, p.174. The report begins: 'When at the offices of Mr Philipp Wolff, of 9, Southampton Street, W.C., a few days ago, Mr Hessberg, the manager, informed us that they were about to publish a remarkable cinematographic picture taken in the Sudan by a well-known war correspondent. We give, with permission, an extract from an explanatory letter written to Mr Wolff'. (Mr Hessburg took over from Wolff himself who died in May, says John Barnes). The letter is also reproduced in the following journals: AP 11 Nov 1898, p.890; 'A genuine Soudan film', *The Optician* 17 Nov 1898, p.344; *Photogram*, nd, 1898, p.393; *Photographic Siftings* Nov 1898, p.157; PD Nov 1898, p.110. The first phrase is sometimes slightly changed to 'The cinematograph film that you have'. See also Barnes, 1988 volume, p.60.

<sup>87</sup> Probably, being a man of some wealth, he had paid for his trip out to the Sudan himself as well as for the film processing. Perhaps this was one reason a newspaper like the *Western Morning News* had agreed to take on such an inexperienced man as their war correspondent – that they were essentially getting him for free.

<sup>88</sup> Barnes, 1988 volume, p.60. From Smith's ledger p.27. Also in Tony Fletcher's manuscript 'index' to Smith's ledger/account books.

<sup>89</sup> 'A film from the front', PD Nov 1898, p.110. This rare journal is not preserved for this date in any British collection, and the only known copy of this issue is held in New York Public Library. This is the only trade journal I have seen which reproduced these frames.

<sup>90</sup> From Smith's ledger, p.27.

<sup>91</sup> *The Era* 12 Nov 1898, p.30e: cited in John Barnes, 1988, op. cit.,. In December the film was being advertised in PD by Wolff as *Queen's Company of Grenadier Guards at Omdurman*. (i.e. without the word 'Alarming...')

<sup>92</sup> AP 11 Nov 1898, p.890. *The Optician*, op. cit., p.344 stated: 'The film is sure to be popular. It is the genuine article.'

<sup>93</sup> *Photogram*, 1898 [no month given], p.393; Barnes agrees with this assessment of the film's importance, calling it, 'the most celebrated of the year'. (Barnes, 1898 volume, p.60.)

<sup>94</sup> 'A Brighton Kinematograph Factory', *Brighton Herald* 14 Oct 1899, p.2d. Though this is not given as a direct quotation from Smith, the phrasing does suggest that Smith was trying to claim that the film was shot during the battle itself. The article is partly reprinted in V.W. Cook, 'The Humours of 'Living Picture' Making', *Chambers Journal*, 30 June 1900, p.488 etc. This adds the comment that: 'The original film is the property of Mr Bennet-Stanford [sic], the war correspondent, by whom it was taken', and notes that Smith himself developed the film.

<sup>95</sup> John M. Benett-Stanford, 'The Battle of Omdurman', *The Wiltshire County Mirror and Express*, op. cit.

<sup>96</sup> I searched from 18 August to 26 September. This newspaper is held in Plymouth Public Library.

<sup>97</sup> Beevors, curator of the former Benett-Stanford residence of Preson Manor, near Brighton, suggested this in a radio programme, 'When Pictures Began to Move' (BBC, nd).

<sup>98</sup> The Hulton (now owned by Getty Images) inherited several picture archives, and this photo is from the former Heinz Guttman library of Wembley. A German caption, handwritten, is partially hidden behind a later label but includes the words, 'Revue der sudanischen Truppen'. The Hulton subject reference is 'War 1882-1900/Sudanese Wars/Camp (Sud)/Khartoum'; H18300; Box 98-5/4. I should point out that there is no proof that this photograph was taken after Omdurman, apart from the caption which implies this, and it might even have been later in the Sudan's history.

<sup>99</sup> The white jacket is similar to that worn by René Bull in another photograph (reproduced in my *Sight and Sound* article on Villiers) of a group of war correspondents at Omdurman. I doubt, however, that it was Bull, as I argue below.

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<sup>100</sup> 'The camera in the battlefield', BJP 31 Mar 1899, p.203 states that Bull's photos included one of 'the memorial service at Khartoum'. We know that Villiers was present at this ceremony, because he says as much. F. Villiers, *Villiers: His Five Decades of Adventure* (New York & London: Harper & Bros., 1920), p.266 and in his *Who's Who* entry in 1899.

<sup>101</sup> PRO file W.O.30/57 document no.27. This is a fragment of the entire report. I suggest that the photograph of the ceremony (possibly) being filmed is the 'disgracing' ceremony and not the Gordon memorial ceremony for the following reason. The 4 Sep memorial ceremony to Gordon took place in front of the ruins of Gordon's palace in Khartoum just across the river from Omdurman. It was in 'the open space facing the palace', which had Egyptian and British flags flying from its roof, says Steevens. Surviving photographs of the ceremony (indeed with two flags on the roof) seem to show that this open space was amongst ruins of a building, whereas the Hulton photograph is in an outright desert setting with no buildings visible, and the flags on a podium. For photographs of the Gordon event see David Clammer, *The Victorian Army in [Old] Photographs* (Newton Abbot: David and Charles, 1975), p.92 and I.F.W. Beckett, *Victoria's Wars* (Princes Risborough: Shire, 1998), p.59. See also Pakenham, *The Scramble for Africa*, p.546. and Steevens, *With Kitchener to Khartoum*, p.312-4.

<sup>102</sup> I have not yet found an exact date for this 'disgracing' event, though it was about the same date as the Gordon memorial event. It is not mentioned by Ziegler or Burleigh in their accounts. If we could find out what date it took place, this would help determine which event is in the photograph, and if the cameraman could be René Bull, for Bull (see below) departed on 5 September.

<sup>103</sup> The War Office report noted that Kitchener had ordered 'all the troops in Omdurman' to attend the disgracing parade, so presumably Coyne must have been there.

<sup>104</sup> S. W. Harris and John Harris, 'The Nile Expedition of 1898 and Omdurman: The Diary of Sergeant S. W. Harris, Grenadier Guards', *Journal of the Society for Army Historical Research* 78, no. 313, 2000, p.24.

<sup>105</sup> This according to H.P. Creagh-Osborne's diary of the 1898 Sudan campaign, entry for 5 Sep. Sudan Archive, Univ. of Durham, 643/1. Incidentally, the diarist adds that Bull had with him at least three pictures (drawings?) for *Black and White* and several developed negatives of the battle of Omdurman. He developed more negatives while on the gunboat. See also Bull, 'To Khartoum with a Kodak'.

<sup>106</sup> Wilfred S. Blunt in *My Diaries* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1919) p.364-5. Entry for 5 or 6 September.

<sup>107</sup> John M. Mackenzie, ed., *Propaganda and Empire*: Manchester University Press, 1984), p.7.

<sup>108</sup> See Wilkinson-Latham, p.238; John M. MacKenzie, ed. *Popular Imperialism and the Military, 1850-1950* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992), p.129. Steevens' book was published very swiftly after the battle by using his own telegraphic reports: see Cecil, op. cit., p.104; Steevens, *With Kitchener to Khartoum*, Foreword to 12th edition.

<sup>109</sup> Poem: Henry Surtees, *The March to Khartoum and Fall of Omdurman* (London: Parkins and Son, 1899). Songs: Francis, Day & Hunter in 1898 published two songs about the 21<sup>st</sup> Lancers, viz: John P. Harrington, et al. *The Charge of the 21<sup>st</sup>*, and Orlando Powell et al, *What Will They Say in England? A Story of the Gallant 21st*. Also published: Léonard Gautier, *The Heroic Charge of the 21st Lancers at the Battle of Omdurman ... For the Pianoforte* (London: E. Donajowski, 1898).

<sup>110</sup> MHTR 23 June 1899, p.398: war tableaux at the Royal Aquarium; *The Cigarette* 23/1, 24 Sep 1898: free poster of the charge; A. Sutherland: Chromolithographs of the battle of Omdurman – Maggs Books catalogue, c2003, item no.330.

<sup>111</sup> Harrington, 'Images and Perceptions: Visualising the Sudan Campaign', p.94-8.

<sup>112</sup> *Der Komet* no. 703, 10 September 1898, p.24: by Otto Gocksch of Thuringia. Thanks to Deac Rossell for this information.

<sup>113</sup> PD Oct 1898, p.78, which noted that the Newton set had just been published. Odd slides about the war are still around, some, for example, turning up in the Magic Lantern Society sales and wants list no.19 for April 2000.

<sup>114</sup> Information re the National Sunday League comes from Tony Fletcher who has searched through a run of the organisation's journal.

<sup>115</sup> See *Brighton Society* 5 Nov 1898, p.8.

<sup>116</sup> A poster for this show was in Fitzsimmons book catalogue, no.29, 1993.

- <sup>117</sup> *Morning Post* 9 Sep 1898, p.3. John M. MacKenzie, ed. *Popular Imperialism and the Military, 1850-1950* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992), p.191.
- <sup>118</sup> *The Era* 10 Sep 1898, p.18; see also 17 Sep, p.10 and p.18; and 24 Sep, p.18.
- <sup>119</sup> *Pick-Me-Up* 24 Dec 1898, p.195.
- <sup>120</sup> V.W. Cook, 1900, op. cit.
- <sup>121</sup> *The Era*, 17 September 1898. Wolff: cited in Gifford, British non-fiction catalogue; his source: *The Era*, 29 Oct 1898. Fuerst: *Photography* 15 Sep 1898, p.609; PD Oct 1898, p.94; OMLJ Oct 98, p.143; PN 7 Oct 1898, p.662.
- <sup>122</sup> PN 16 Sep 1898, p.588.
- <sup>123</sup> *The Era* 21 Jan 1899: cited in Vanessa Toulmin, *Randall Williams : King of Showmen : From Ghost Show to Bioscope* (London: The Projection Box, 1998), p.39. *The Era* date is given as 29 January in Colin Harding and Simon Popple, eds., *In the Kingdom of Shadows: a Companion to Early Cinema* (London/Madison: Cygnus Arts/Fairleigh Dickinson UP, 1996), p.195.
- <sup>124</sup> *Brighton Society* 24 Sep 1898, p.13 re the Biograph at the Brighton Empire. It states in full that a 'photograph of a *parade* of the now famous 21<sup>st</sup> Lancers' was shown, but it is not clear if this 'photograph' was a still picture – a lantern slide – or an actual film; ditto the image of Nelson's flagship 'Victory' which was also shown.
- <sup>125</sup> *The Era* 19 Aug 1899, p.24. It was released by The Northern Photographic Works, Ltd. of High Barnet.
- <sup>126</sup> For example *Seaforth Highlanders Leaving Cairo for the Front* along with *Arrival of Guards in London* was advertised by Wolff in *Photographic Siftings* in Oct 1898, p.140, which suggested such films would 'score well at any entertainment'. What is possibly a frame from the Highlander film is reproduced in this same journal, December, p.344, given as a Gaumont release.
- <sup>127</sup> Alfred Claude Bromhead, 'Reminiscences of the British Film Trade', *Proceedings of the British Kinematograph Society* 21, 11 Dec 1933, p.7. He added that many copies of the film were sold to A.D. Thomas, most of which were sent to New York (though the American market would seem an unlikely place for so many prints about a British war). Thomas released two films in the UK with similar titles (*Seaforth Highlanders Marching to the Front* and *The March on Omdurman and Khartoum*). Cited in Gifford, British non-fiction catalogue: his source being an ad in *The Era* 21 Oct 1898; see also ad, MHTR 21 Oct 1898, p.271. Egerton states that the Seaforths were in Cairo from around 10 Jan to 2 March. Then they headed south for action at Atbara and Omdurman. After Omdurman they arrived back in Cairo at 6am on 17 Sep, 'ragged and dirty looking' (though their poor condition might not be apparent in a film). See G.G.A. Egerton, *With the 72nd Highlanders in the Sudan Campaign of 1898* (London: Eden Fisher & Co., 1909). Potentially more useful as a means of identification is that the Seaforths sported a white plume, called the 'duck's tuft' on their helmets. See Ziegler, op. cit., p.40.
- <sup>128</sup> Benett-Stanford could not have filmed it before the battle, as the Seaforths were already up river near Omdurman when he arrived in Egypt.
- <sup>129</sup> A report of Edison's show mentions a different title, *The 10th Sudanese leaving Cairo*, but as the 10<sup>th</sup> Sudanese or Egyptian Brigade were under MacDonald's command at Omdurman, I believe this to be the same film. *Brighton Society* 17 Dec 1898, p.20; Featherstone, op. cit., p.61.
- <sup>130</sup> *The American Amateur Photographer* Nov 1898, p.500-01 assumed it to be a Lumière film. See also *Photography* 15 Sep 1898, p.609; PD Sep 1898, p.54; OMLJ Oct 1898, p.143; PN 7 Oct 1898, p.662; the film was given catalogue no.9052 by Fuerst.
- <sup>131</sup> London Entr'acte 1 Oct 1898, p.2: also in this journal the following four weeks. Before this, in September they were advertising *Panorama of the Nile* – 'in colours'.
- <sup>132</sup> PD Oct 1898, p.78. The *Daily Telegraph* hailed this as a 'remarkable' photographic feat but the *British Journal of Photography* expressed itself impatient with such claims of the rapidity of screening events, saying that eight hours to develop, print, dry and exhibit a film is 'ample time for the work' and 'certainly cannot be termed remarkable'. BJP 14 Oct, p.659.
- <sup>133</sup> *The Daily Chronicle*, quoted in Richard Brown and Barry Anthony, *A Victorian Film Enterprise : the History of the British Mutoscope and Biograph Company, 1897-1915* (Trowbridge: Flicks Books, 1999), p.197-8. Illustrated periodicals carried many images of the Guards' return to London: see, for example, *The Graphic* 15 Oct 1898.
- <sup>134</sup> *Morning Post* 7 Oct 1898, p.5.

- <sup>135</sup> *Brighton Society* 31 Dec 1898, p.13.
- <sup>136</sup> The cameraman is unnamed, but presumably was Dickson, Paul Spehr believes. Reported in *Daily Telegraph* 28 Oct, p.7. Noted in PN 4 Nov 1898, p.717, which responded that after all cameras don't cause any harm. Also reported in *The Photographer* Dec 1898, p.182.
- <sup>137</sup> 'A photographic feat', *Daily Telegraph* 29 Oct 1898, p.5. In the Biograph photo frame collection, MoMA, #583 is a frame from *Reception of the Sirdar at Dover*. On Musser, *Motion Picture Catalogs... Microfilm Edition*, reel 2.
- <sup>138</sup> *London Morning Leader*, 28 Oct 1898 quoted in Brown/Anthony, op. cit., p.51.
- <sup>139</sup> Palace Theatre programme, 1 Apr 1899, held in British Library at 11796.d.6.
- <sup>140</sup> The Sirdar was feted at the Guildhall, London, on 4 November. Paul's film of the event was 120 feet long and cost £3. (PD Nov 1898, p.104). Part of this film, 77 ft., survives in the NFTVA as *Sirdar's Reception at Guildhall*.
- <sup>141</sup> *Brighton Society* 31 Dec 1898, p.13.
- <sup>142</sup> Kitchener's return ['terugkeer'] to England was featured at O. Carré's venue in Amsterdam, according to *Asmodée* 17 Nov 1898: ad. Information from NFM Research Dept.
- <sup>143</sup> *The Era* 10 Sep 1898, p.18; see also *The Era* 17 Sep, p.10 and p.18; and 24 Sep, p.18.
- <sup>144</sup> PD Sep 1898, p.56.
- <sup>145</sup> BJP 30 Sep 1898, p.637: each film was about 55ft long.
- <sup>146</sup> Film no.1397 in Warwick's Supplement to *Descriptive List Of New Film Subjects...* (1898), p.16.
- <sup>147</sup> Distributed by Fuerst Bros, says PD Oct 1898, p.94 and BJP 30 Sep 1898, p.637. It adds that this and the Lancers' Charge are Lumière films.
- <sup>148</sup> Supplement to *Descriptive List Of New Film Subjects...* p.50
- <sup>149</sup> *Blue book of "Warwick" and "Star" selected film subjects... 1902*, p.97-103: the film was also included in the section, 'The Bioscope in Egypt', p.103; and see p.120-21.
- <sup>150</sup> *The Era* 23 Dec 1899, p.28a, reproduced in Barnes, vol 4, p.291; WTC Catalogue, 5 Sep 1900, p.124.
- <sup>151</sup> There are several statements which report this dervish tactic. Corbett notes that as he and his men crossed the battlefield after the conflict, they were attacked by 'dead' dervishes who knifed some soldiers in the back, even as they were offering water to the wounded. A.F. Corbett, *Service through Six Reigns : 1891 to 1953* (Privately printed, 1953), p. 34 and 36. Neufeld also gives an example of this. Charles Neufeld, *A Prisoner of the Khaleefa : Twelve Years' Captivity at Omdurman* (London: G. Bell, 1899), p.288. Others confirm that dervishes played dead, then rose and attacked the Sirdar's forces as they passed. See Meredith, 1998, p.188; Roger Stearn, 'Ernest Bennett and War', *Soldiers of the Queen*, no. 105, June 2001, p.16-24; Wilkinson-Latham, p.244-5; Watkins, 1899, p.178; Repington, 1919, p.151; James, 1929, p.75. It had even happened to Villiers himself when he was reporting a battle in Egypt in 1884 – an apparently dead Arab came at him with a knife, and Villiers only escaped because a British soldier shot the Arab dead. Kipling commented on this phenomenon in his poem 'Fuzzy Wuzzy' with the line, 'he's generally shamming when he's dead'. Both cited in article on Villiers in *Ludgate Magazine* 6, April 1894, p.579 etc. One war correspondent, Ernest Bennett, alleged that allied troops, especially Soudanese, killed defenceless, wounded dervishes after the battle of Omdurman. One of the field commanders who had been there responded to say that some killing of wounded was a necessary response to the problem I've just described, as a precaution, as he put it, 'against treachery when moving amongst wounded Dervishes'. See Bennett, 'After Omdurman: Treatment of Enemy Wounded in the Soudan Campaign', *Contemporary Review* 75, Jan 1899, p.18-33; and W. Gatacre, 'After the Atbara and Omdurman', *Contemporary Review* 75, Feb 1899, p.299-304.
- <sup>152</sup> BJP 30 Sep 1898, p.637.
- <sup>153</sup> *Brighton Society* 17 Dec 1898, p.20.
- <sup>154</sup> Paul J. Marriott, *Early Oxford Picture Palaces* (Oxford: The author, 1978), p.3: ad for Albany Ward's Improved Velograph. Films to be shown included: 'Scenes from the Soudan War: Charge of the 21st Lancers; MacDonald's Brigade; Seaforth Highlanders Marching to the Front'. No date is given, but one film in the same programme is *Cup Tie Between Sheffield U. and Derby County*, played Sat, 15th April. This date was a Saturday in 1899 (and not a Saturday in 1898, 1900 and 1901). I conclude the programme was screened sometime after 15 April 1899.
- <sup>155</sup> Military theorist Jean de Bloch had predicted this triumph of the defence over attack.

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<sup>156</sup> Harrington, 'Images and Perceptions: Visualising the Sudan Campaign', p.99. Another similarity, Harrington notes, is that both wars ended with flag raisings over the towns of their defeated enemies.