

GORDON RELIEF EXPEDITION — NILE RIVER COLUMN 1884 - 1885

By the end of 1883 the Mahdi had gained control of much of the Sudan from the weak and disorganized Egyptian military. Khartoum was harassed and the Egyptian government, under British pressure, decided to abandon the rest of Sudan. In January 1884 Charles George "Chinese" Gordon, Sudan's former governor, was sent by Britain to decide on the best means of evacuation. On February 18th Gordon arrived in Khartoum as the Egyptian governor-general. The Mahdi's hold around Khartoum tightened and soon Gordon was cut off from communication with Cairo. By August British public opinion forced Prime Minister Gladstone and parliament to authorize a relief expedition commanded by General Sir Garnet Wolesley. Upon arriving in Cairo he immediately organized the relief forces. Over the next few months British military units were sent up the Nile to Korti, eventually advancing across the desert to Abu Klea (January 17th, 1885) and on to Abu Kru (January 19th) on the Nile. Time was running out, so they dashed towards Khartoum on January 24th in two steamboats. On the 28th they came within sight of Khartoum but realizing the city had fallen, the boats reversed course to the camp of the Desert Column. Indeed, Khartoum fell on January 26th and Gordon was killed. At the end of March the British began withdrawing from Korti and all were out of the Sudan by the end of July.

Mail was handled by the Egyptian civil post offices along the line of march. From Cairo to Assiut the mail was carried by railway; Assiut to Assouan by steamer; Assouan to Philae by rail; Philae to Halfa by steamer; Halfa to Sarras by rail; Sarras to Abu Fatmeh and the south by camel. Regular post offices were opened at Dongola and Korti. Local posts were organized by the military along the Line of Communications with the means of transport almost entirely by camel. The post riders were either natives or Egyptian soldiers.

Covers of interest include: • the earliest of eight known covers with the straight-line Assouan star and crescent c.d.s., • a cover from George, Duke of Cambridge and Commander-in-Chief of the British Army to the Commander of the British Army of Occupation in Cairo commenting on the Gordon situation, • an incoming cover to and an outgoing postcard from members of the Canadian Voyageurs, • one of the three known covers postmarked Tani.

LUXOR, EGYPT to IOWA, UNITED STATES

19 FE 84

Twenty paras post card written at Luxor on 19 February 1884, the day after Gordon arrived at Khartoum on his ill-fated venture. It is postmarked **ASSIOUT ARRIVEE 21 FE 84**, **ALEXANDRIE ARRIVEE 27 FE 84** and **DES MOINES, IOWA REC'D MAR 19 3 AM**.



After much general tourist banter, the message ends with: "We hear lots of talk about el Mahdi. It is believed by some if the English do not act promptly he will march into Lower Egypt however things there are very quiet & the natives do not believe in him"