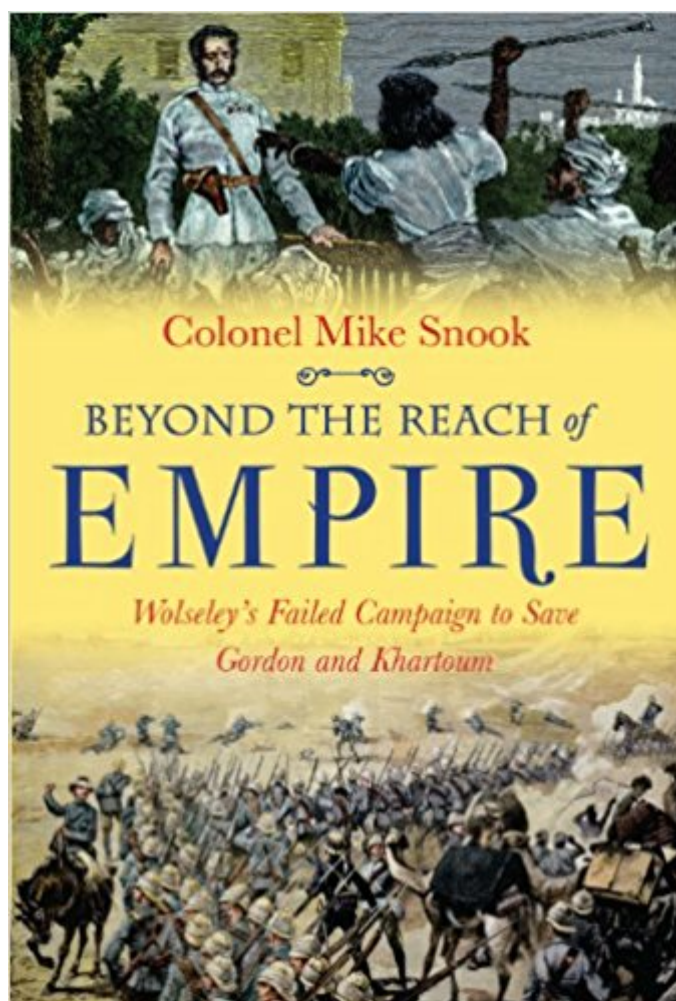


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# Beyond The Reach Of Empire: Wolseley's Failed Campaign To Save Gordon And Khartoum



## Synopsis

In the early 1880s the Mahdi unleashed a spectacularly successful jihadist uprising against Egyptian colonial rule in the Sudan. Early in 1884 Cairo bowed to British pressure to withdraw. Beyond the Reach of Empire describes how Major General Charles Gordon was dispatched to evacuate Khartoum and turn the Sudan over to self-rule. It goes on to explain how and why the mission backfired, and then homes in on Sir Garnet Wolseley's planning and execution of the long-delayed Gordon Relief Expedition which arrived, according to popular myth, only two days after the city had fallen and Gordon had been killed. Colonel Mike Snook's narrative is characterized by scrupulous attention to detail, an instinctive grasp of the period, and an intimate understanding of its setting. The author argues compellingly that the Khartoum campaign was mismanaged from the outset. The outcome is the exoneration of Colonel Sir Charles Wilson, the man cast in the role of scapegoat, and an indictment of Wolseley's generalship over the course of the last and most deeply flawed campaign of his career.

REVIEWS

Mike Snook's research and narrative mirror the scale of Victorian Britain's herculean effort to save General Gordon. Ultimately though the author's quest is crowned with success, not least because he brings to his story the understanding of a fighting soldier, cutting through the jingoism and bombast of earlier accounts, laying bare the reasons for the campaign's failure.

Mark Urban, author of *Rifles: Six Years with Wellington's Legendary Sharpshooters*

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## Customer Reviews

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Colonel Mike Snook was commissioned into the Royal Regiment of Wales and over the ensuing 30 years served all round the world in command, operations and intelligence appointments. He spent two thirds of his career overseas and saw extensive active service in four campaigns. He is a graduate of Leicester University, Sandhurst and the Army Staff College. Twice honoured for operational distinction, he was awarded the MBE in 2000. He spent four years as a British military adviser in South Africa and latterly was the head of the UN's J3 Operations staff in Khartoum. A recognised authority on the military history of the Victorian era, he is the author of *How Can Man Die Better: the Secrets of Isandlwana Revealed*, *Like Wolves on the Fold: The Defence of Rorke's Drift*, *Into the Jaws of Death: British Military Blunders 1879-1900* and *Go Strong into the Desert: The Mahdist Uprising 1881-5*.

Excellent book! Excellent research by an author who is both an active duty soldier and scholar. The author has in most cases visited the battlefields. The author has reviewed and read after action reports and first person accounts of the participants. There are many citations of books and personal journals by participants of the battles that should anyone wish to do additional reading and research they may do so. I would heartily recommend any and all the works by this author.

Enjoyed this book, I was familiar with the relief of Gordon campaign. This book sheds a new light on the pre and post campaign politics and back stabbing of the British General Staff. Great addition to my British Victorian military collection.

In the 1960s, a movie was released called "Khartoum" starring Charlton Heston and Sir Laurence Olivier. The movie was about a little known Islamist uprising in the Sudan in the early 1880s. This book tells the rest of the story surrounding that movie in a very accurate and thorough manner. This was the first modern Islamist Jihad, and many instances, as you read the book, you'll notice many similarities to today. There is a reluctant British political leader - Gladstone - who doesn't want to get involved with imperial adventures. Instead, he wants to focus on domestic issues. But, Khartoum has thousands of European and Christian citizens and if the Islamists take the city, there may be a

massacre of these innocents. Gladstone reluctantly agrees to send General Gordon to Khartoum to bring these individuals to safety. However, he is quickly surrounded by the Islamists, making it impossible for all the individuals to leave and Gordon also stays. Gladstone procrastinates but finally makes a decision to send a British relief force to Khartoum to save the individuals surrounded there. Because of his procrastination, the force arrives too late and the city falls, resulting in the death of Gordon and many of the individuals in the town. This book tells this story plus the story of the relief force and its fights at Abu Klea and Abu Kru with the Islamists. As the author, who is an ex-military man and did excellent research even visiting the sites, tells the story, you have a sense of being there, smelling the black powder as the British soldiers volley their Martini-Henrys in squares. I highly recommend this book for anyone interested in military history. It is a great read.

The world's greatest military power sends its most famous general to rescue one of the most famous heroes of the Victorian age. What could go wrong? Well, almost everything it would seem and once again, Colonel Snook does an outstanding job telling a fascinating story while explaining it all to you in clear and easily understandable prose. What makes the story so readable is just how current it all seems. The British government wanted to protect the interests of its far flung empire without expanding it even further. A charismatic Islamic figure rises on the periphery of the empire, potentially threatening its most vital asset, the Suez Canal. What to do? send its most famous hero, General Gordon to contain the situation and withdraw. Only he has his own game plan to force his government's hand. Gladstone is so angry, he delays the government's action for months. But public opinion was never going to allow him a choice. The UK chooses its most celebrated general, Lord Wolseley to command the rescue mission, but one who never really commanded a major campaign in the field. He proceeds to put together the most complicated plan possible, drawing in resources including some of Britain's most famous officers and field units that take even more precious time to gather, to take the longest route possible to reach Gordon in Khartoum. And fails miserably, to utter public dismay. The popular story is that the British rescue mission missed saving Gordon by two days. Snook makes it abundantly clear that was never true, and brings up the credible possibility that Wolseley had his own personal agenda to aggrandize himself in play. Snook does a masterful job covering the overall situation, the players, their actions and delivers a riveting depiction of the battles that ensued. One could not possibly expect more.

Another outstanding book by Mike Snook. It covers this period of disgrace in British history as clear and as factual as any book on this subject. The author has a style that makes the reader look

forward to the next page. If you are looking for the battle of Kartoum in this book you will be disappointed. But the battles described within will more than make up for that. If you are interested in this part of African history by all means pick up this book.

Very clear.

The author served as a career military officer and has written extensively and well on the Victorian army. He also visited the largely inaccessible battlefields of Sudan. It is fitting that he has written a comprehensive work reviewing the battles, personalities and problems involved in the unsuccessful attempt to rescue Gordon in Khartoum. The only serious blemish on this fine study is Col. Snook's obvious (and somewhat unreasonable) dislike for Garnet Wolseley, one of the best generals of the late nineteenth century (only Arthur MacArthur and Ranald MacKenzie are serious rivals). To be sure, Wolseley's plan was overly complex and doomed to failure, but given the short time available no plan was likely to succeed. The problem was political: sending the ungovernable Gordon to Khartoum and dithering while the situation grew ever worse. With all, this is a very important book.

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