



HISTORY OF SIGNALLING IN 100 OBJECTS THE DONGOLA CLOCK– THE NILE 1884-87



The Dongola clock is a souvenir acquired by an officer in C Troop of the Telegraph Battalion RE from the Telegraph Office in the town of Dongola, which was the capital of Northern province of Sudan in the 1880s.

C Troop played a key role in the British Nile Expedition that commenced with the Sir Garnet Wolseley landing an expeditionary force at Ismailia in Egypt, and a few days later, on the 13th September 1882, winning the battle of Tel-el-Kabir.

Sir Arthur Mackworth then commanded C Troop that accompanied this force. The victory dispatches were sent by C Troop, using telegraph addressed to the Queen and to the Prime Minister. His medals for this campaign are on display in the Royal Signals Museum and his name is engraved on the Clock's brass plate, which is one of the oldest artefacts on display in the museum.

British involvement in Egypt continued eventually with an advance into the Sudan. Here the forces under the leadership of Muhammad Ahmad, who proclaimed himself the "Mahdi", set about a divine mission to reform Islam and destroy all infidels. The Egyptian government forces were defeated by the Mahdi and by September 1883 all the country south of Khartoum was under his control.

The city of Khartoum was threatened. General Gordon had been appointed Governor General of the Sudan in 1877 and had maintained peace there until he resigned in 1880 returning to England. He was asked to go back to the Sudan to resolve the deteriorating situation. He arrived in Khartoum in February 1884. The siege of the city commenced in March 1884. Gladstone, who was then prime minister refused to send a relief force until August 1884, which was when Wolseley set out to relieve Khartoum; again C Troop was part of this force.

The story of this Nile Expedition was written in the 70,000 messages, which eventually passed over telegraph lines beside the Nile from Hamdab to Cairo.



The force arrived 3 days after Gordon had been killed. However, telegraph communications along the Nile continued. Captain Bagnold RE remained after British Forces withdrew in August 1885. He maintained the telegraph links until 1887, when the telegraph system was handed over to the Egyptian government. His main office was in Dongola in Northern Sudan, but when he left this office, he took with him the telegraph office's clock, seen here! It was used in the HQ Mess in Catterick until 1962, when it was handed over to the Royal Signals Museum. The brass plaque, added in the UK, covers all campaigns from 1870 to 1914 and is engraved with the names of all C Telegraph Troop and battalion officers for this period.