



## World History

### The Fashoda Incident

Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
Section: \_\_\_\_\_  
Score: \_\_\_\_/5

Directions: Read the following article about the Fashoda Incident in Africa in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Once finished reading answer the Questions at the end of the article.

## The Fashoda Incident

By Dr. Jim Jones

### Introduction

By 1890, Europeans had established their claims to all of Africa's coastal land except for Morocco (independent) and Liberia (independent under USA protection). Ethiopia remained independent in the East African interior, as did the two Boer Republics and a few African states in South Africa. The major European powers threatened them all as they continued to stake claims and try to divide up whatever was left of Africa. The biggest remaining prize was the Congo basin, which received special status at the Congress of Berlin as the "Congo Free State." It was administered by an international association headed by King Leopold II of Belgium, a country whose neutrality was guaranteed by the 1839 treaty that created it. The other major unclaimed region was in the Upper Nile River Valley (modern Sudan and Uganda).

Attention on those areas was focused by two rival imperial schemes. The British imagined an African empire that stretched from Capetown in the south to Cairo in the north. Even though the creation of German East Africa (modern Tanzania, Burundi & Rwanda) and the Congo Free State seemed to block the way, the idea remained a potent tool for British politicians who wanted to drum up domestic support for imperial expansion. French imperialists had their own dreams of a trans-African empire that reached from Dakar (Senegal) in the west to Djibouti (on the Red Sea) in the east. But the two dreams were incompatible, since they had to cross somewhere. Only one country could expect to get its way, so as long as both continued to seek a trans-African empire, conflict was inevitable.

### The Fashoda incident

British efforts to reach the Upper Nile Valley began with the expedition to relieve Gordon and his Egyptian garrison at Khartoum in 1885. The effort failed and the Upper Nile Valley remained in a state of rebellion for the next decade. By 1895, all that remained of Egyptian authority in the Upper Nile Valley was a British post on the Red Sea at Suakin and an Egyptian garrison in the province of Equatoria, far to the south near Kenya.

Meanwhile, the French remained angry over the British occupation of Egypt in 1882 and refusal to honor a promise to withdraw once order was restored. In February 1895 a member of the French parliament and leader of the "pro-colonial" faction urged his colleagues to approve an advance towards the Nile from its southern end unless the British withdrew. When news of the French interest reached Great Britain, a member of parliament declared a month later that the entire Nile Valley belonged to the British. By the end of the year, the race was on to see which Europeans would be first to claim the Upper Nile Valley.



The Italians got a head start from their Eritrean outpost at Massawa on the Red Sea, but their defeat by the Ethiopians at Adowa in March 1896 ended their attempt. In September 1896, King Leopold, the official leader of the Congo Free State, dispatched a huge column of 5,000 Congolese troops equipped with artillery towards the White Nile River from Stanleyville on the Upper Congo River. They took five months to reach Lake Albert on the White Nile, about five hundred miles from Fashoda, but by then, their soldiers were so angry at their pace and treatment that they mutinied on March 18, 1897. Many of the Belgian officers were killed and the rest were forced to flee.

Meanwhile, the French began to assemble their own expedition. They began by sending Captain Jean-Baptiste Marchand, a veteran of the French conquest of the Soudan, back to West Africa. He recruited a force composed mostly of loyal African troops from Senegal and boarded a ship for central Africa. On June 20, 1896, he reached Libreville in the colony of Gabon with a force that included eleven French naval officers and 150 Senegalese soldiers.

It took them nearly four months to move about 100 tons of supplies to the navigable portion of the Congo River at the Malebo Pool, and six more months to sail upstream to Bangui by steamboat. From there, they continued for another 450 miles along the Ubangi River and its tributaries, and then overland to the easternmost French post located at Ouango. From there, they dragged their equipment (including a collapsible steel steamboat with a one-ton boiler) overland to the Sué River, a tributary of the Nile. Unfortunately, by the time they reached the Sué, the dry season was underway and the river was too shallow to float their steamboat. So they made camp and remained there until the following summer when the water became deep enough to continue.

Once they got underway, it took a week to reach the *Sudd*, an enormous swamp that lay between them and the Nile. It took thirteen more days to cross the swamp, which was inhabited by lethal crocodiles, swarms of mosquitos and the Dinka people who warned them not to continue and then harassed them as they advanced. Eventually, Marchand's force reached open water on the White Nile River on June 25 at a point more than 4,000 miles and almost exactly two years from their point of departure on the West African coast. Fifteen days later, they reached Fashoda on July 10, 1898.

**Background:** Fashoda was founded by the Egyptian army in 1855 as base from which to combat the East African Arab slave trade. It was located on high ground along about a hundred miles of marshy shore line at one of the few places where a boat could unload. The surrounding area, although swampy, was densely populated by Shilluk people, and by the mid-1870s, Fashoda was a bustling market and administrative town. The first Europeans to arrive were a German named Georg Schweinfurth in 1869 and a Russian named Wilhelm Junker in 1876. Junker described it as "a considerable trading place ... the last outpost of civilization, where travelers plunging into or returning from the wilds of equatorial Africa could procure a few indispensable European wares from the local Greek traders." But by the time Marchand arrived, the fort was deserted and in ruins.

While Marchand and his soldiers were waiting for the Sué to rise, a British force led by Lord Kitchener was working its way up the Nile, ostensibly to rescue Italians cut off after the 1896 battle with Ethiopia. Kitchener's force reached Omduran, just north of Khartoum, in September 1898 and defeated a Mahdist army. When he learned of the French presence at Fashoda, he continued upstream by steamboat and arrived at Fashoda on September 19.

Even though the French were there first and had even convinced a local leader to sign a "treaty of protection," they were outgunned and too far from home to mount much resistance, while the British had a direct telegraph connection to London that kept Kitchener informed about his government's intentions. On October 24, Marchand accepted an offer from the British to sail with them back to Cairo so he could contact his government and file a report. Along the way he learned that the French government had already sent him an order to evacuate without a battle.

## The diplomatic results

The "Fashoda Incident" showed that Europeans would avoid open warfare over African territory, something that they failed to avoid a generation later when World War I broke out. In addition, Kitchener's defeat of the Mahdist forces left a power vacuum in the Upper Nile Valley which the British filled with Egyptian troops (plus British officers) by creating the fiction that Egypt was still independent and naming the region "Anglo-Egyptian Sudan."

For their part, the French were humiliated by their "defeat" at Fashoda, but that had less impact on public opinion than the loss of Alsace and Lorraine to Prussia in 1870. When it came time to form alliances, the French decided that rather than seek revenge against the British for the loss of a remote piece of territory in Africa, they could set aside their disappointment and focus on developing their rather spacious territories in West Africa. The result was the signing of a military agreement with the British (the *Entente Cordiale* in 1904, and war against Germany in 1914.

*Jones, Jim. "The Fashoda Incident." West Chester University, 2014. Web. 12 July 2014.*

### Thought Questions

#### 1. Identify the Short Term and Long Term Effects of the Fashoda Incident

|                   |                    |
|-------------------|--------------------|
| Short Term Causes | Short Term Effects |
| Long Term Causes  | Long Term Effects  |

#### 2. How does this incident reveal the nature of Jingoism and how it was driving closer to war. Cite specific examples.