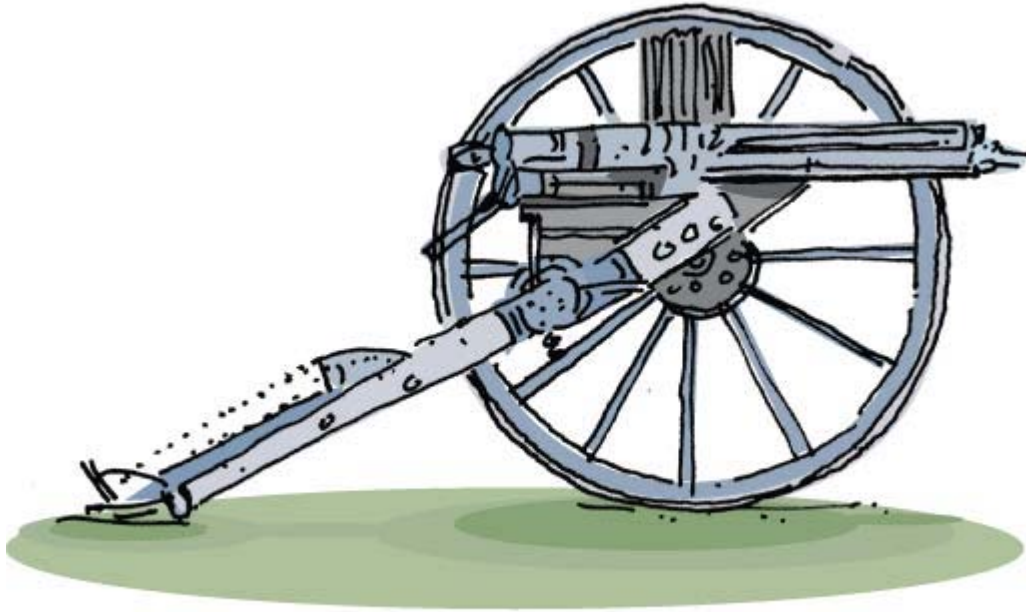


POSTSECONDARY LEVEL

LESSON PLANS TO ACCOMPANY
“Mr. Gatling’s Terrible Marvel”
by Julia Keller



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1. When was the Gatling gun invented? How many barrels did the original version have? How many bullets per minute could it shoot?

2. How did Mark Twain describe it? Did he like it?



3. In what ways could such a gun change a battle?

4. What is the author's thesis?

5. What does the author use as proof or support for her argument?



6. What would have happened at the Battle of Gettysburg if the Confederates had used Gatling guns?

7. Why does the author say that “lethal weapons complicate American’s conception of itself”? What does that mean? What is America’s idea of itself?



Essay Assignment: The Battle of Omdurman

Historical Context: The British Conquest of the Sudan

British forces invaded and occupied Egypt in 1882 to put down a nationalist revolution hostile to foreign interests and remained there to prevent any further threat to the khedive's government or the possible intervention of another European power. The consequences of this were far-reaching. A permanent British occupation of Egypt required protecting the Nile waters—without which Egypt could not survive—not from any African state, which did not possess the technical resources to interfere with it, but from rival European powers, which could.

The results of the battle were the destruction of Abd Allāh's army, the extinction of Mahdism in the Sudan, and the establishment of British dominance there.

– from the *Encyclopedia Britannica* entry

What follows is a passage from young Winston Churchill's account of the Battle of Omdurman, which took place on September 2, 1898.

THE BATTLE OF OMDURMAN

SEPTEMBER 2, 1898



The British and Egyptian forces were arranged in line, with their back to the river. The flanks were secured by the gunboats lying moored in the stream. Before them was the rolling sandy plain, looking from the slight elevation of the ridge smooth and flat as a table. To the right rose the rocky hills of the Kerreri position, near which the Egyptian cavalry were drawn up--a dark solid mass of men and horses. On the left the 21st Lancers, with a single squadron thrown out in advance, were halted watching their patrols, who climbed about Surgham Hill, stretched forward beyond it, or perched, as we did, on the ridge.

The Dervish centre had come within range. But it was not the British and Egyptian army that began the battle. **If there was one arm in which the Arabs were beyond all comparison inferior to their adversaries, it was in guns.** Yet it was with this arm that they opened their attack.

In the middle of the Dervish line now marching in frontal assault were two puffs of smoke. About fifty yards short of the thorn fence two red clouds of sand and dust sprang up, where the projectiles had struck. It looked like a challenge. It was immediately answered. Great clouds of smoke appeared all along the front of the British and Soudanese brigades.

One after another four batteries opened on the enemy at a range of about 3,000 yards. The sound of the cannonade rolled up to us on the ridge, and was re-echoed by the hills. Above the heads of the moving masses shells began to burst, dotting the air with smoke-balls and the ground with bodies. But a nearer tragedy impended. The 'White Flags' were nearly over the crest. In another minute they would become visible to the batteries. **Did they realise what would come to meet them?** They were in a dense mass, 2,800 yards from the 32nd Field Battery and the gunboats. The ranges were known. **It was a matter of machinery.** The more distant slaughter passed unnoticed, as the mind was fascinated by the approaching horror. In a few seconds swift destruction would rush on these brave men. They topped the crest and drew out into full view of the whole army. Their white banners made them conspicuous above all. As they saw the camp of their enemies, they discharged their rifles with a great roar of musketry and quickened their pace. For a moment the white flags advanced in regular order, and the whole division crossed the crest and were exposed.

Forthwith the gunboats, the 32nd British Field Battery, and other guns from the zeriba opened on them. About twenty shells struck them in the first minute. Some burst high in the air, others exactly in their faces. **Others, again, plunged into the sand and, exploding, dashed clouds of red dust, splinters, and bullets amid their ranks.** The white banners toppled over in all directions. **Yet they rose again immediately, as other men pressed forward to die for the Mahdi's sacred cause** and in the defence of the successor of the True Prophet. **It was a terrible sight, for as yet they had not hurt us at all, and it seemed an unfair advantage to strike thus cruelly when they could not reply.** Under the influence of the shells the mass of the 'White Flags' dissolved into thin lines of



spearman and skirmishers, and came on in altered formation and diminished numbers, but with unabated enthusiasm. And now, the whole attack being thoroughly exposed, it became the duty of the cavalry to clear the front as quickly as possible, and leave the further conduct of the debate to the infantry and the Maxim guns. All the patrols trotted or cantered back to their squadrons, and the regiment retired swiftly into the zeriba, while the shells from the gunboats screamed overhead and the whole length of the position began to burst into flame and smoke. Nor was it long before the tremendous banging of the artillery was swollen by the roar of musketry.

Taking advantage of the shelter of the river-bank, the cavalry dismounted; we watered our horses, waited, and wondered what was happening. And every moment the tumult grew louder and more intense, until even the flickering stutter of the Maxims could scarcely be heard above the continuous din. Eighty yards away, and perhaps twenty feet above us, the 32nd Field Battery was in action. The nimble figures of the gunners darted about as they busied themselves in their complicated process of destruction. The officers, some standing on biscuit-boxes, peered through their glasses and studied the effect. Of this I had one glimpse. **Eight hundred yards away a ragged line of men were coming on desperately, struggling forward in the face of the pitiless fire--white banners tossing and collapsing; white figures subsiding in dozens to the ground; little white puffs from their rifles, larger white puffs spreading in a row all along their front from the bursting shrapnel.**

The infantry fired steadily and stolidly, without hurry or excitement, for the enemy were far away and the officers careful. Besides, the soldiers were interested in the work and took great pains. But presently the mere physical act became tedious. **The tiny figures seen over the slide of the backsight seemed a little larger, but also fewer at each successive volley.** The rifles grew hot--so hot that they had to be changed for those of the reserve companies. The Maxim guns exhausted all the water in their jackets, and several had to be refreshed from the water-bottles of the Cameron Highlanders before they could go on with their deadly work. **The empty cartridge-cases, tinkling to the ground, formed a small but growing heap beside each man.** And all the time out on the plain on the other side bullets were shearing through flesh, smashing and splintering bone; blood spouted from terrible wounds; valiant men were struggling on through a hell of whistling metal, exploding shells, and spurting dust--suffering, despairing, dying. Such was the first phase of the battle of Omdurman.

The Khalifa's plan of attack appears to have been complex and ingenious. **It was, however, based on an extraordinary miscalculation of the power of modern weapons;** with the exception of this cardinal error, it is not necessary to criticise it. He first ordered about 15,000 men, drawn chiefly from the army of Osman Sheikh-ed-Din and placed under the command of Osman Azrak, to deliver a frontal attack. He himself waited with an equal force near Surgham Hill to watch the result. If it succeeded, he would move forward with his bodyguard, the flower of the Arab army, and complete the victory. If it failed, there was yet another chance.

While the attack was proceeding, the valiant left, consisting of the rest of the army of Osman Sheikh-ed-Din, might move unnoticed to the northern flank and curve round on to the front of the zeriba held by the Egyptian brigade. Ali-Wad-Helu was meanwhile to march to the Kerreri



Hills, and remain out of range and, if possible, out of sight among them. Should the frontal and flank attacks be unhappily repulsed, the 'enemies of God,' exulting in their easy victory over the faithful, would leave their strong place and march to the capture and sack of the city. Then, while they were yet dispersed on the plain, with no zeriba to protect them, the chosen warriors of the True Religion **would abandon all concealment, and hasten in their thousands to the utter destruction of the accursed**--the Khalifa with 15,000 falling upon them from behind Surgham; Ali-Wad-Helu and all that remained of Osman's army assailing them from Kerreri. Attacked at once from the north and south, and encompassed on every side, the infidels would abandon hope and order, and Kitchener might share the fate of Hicks and Gordon. Two circumstances, which will appear as the account proceeds, prevented the accomplishment of this plan. The second attack was not executed simultaneously by the two divisions of the Dervish army; and even had it been, **the power of the musketry would have triumphed**, and though the Expeditionary Force might have sustained heavier losses the main result could not have been affected.

The last hopes of barbarism had passed with the shades of night.

Thus ended the Battle of Omdurman---the most signal triumph ever gained by the arms of science over barbarians. Within the space of five hours the strongest and best-armed savage army yet arrayed against a modern European Power had been destroyed and dispersed, with hardly any difficulty, comparatively small risk, and insignificant loss to the victors.

Editor's Note: The Dervish Army, approximately 52,000 strong, suffered losses of 20,000 dead, 22,000 wounded, and some 5,000 taken prisoner--an unbelievable 90% casualty rate! By contrast, the Anglo-Egyptian Army, some 23,000 strong, suffered losses of 48 dead, and 382 wounded--an equally unbelievable 2% casualty rate, thus showing the superiority of modern firepower!

Your assignment

1) There is no historical record of what the Egyptians thought of the Battle of Omdurman. Please write a brief (1-page) account of the battle **from an Egyptian soldier's point of view**.

2) Was the battle just? From whose side? Was the battle justly fought? Was the force used proportional? Excessive? Appropriate? (1 page)

