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Directors of Veterinary Services in the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan:
George Richard Griffith, 1903-1906 (Principal Veterinary Officer)

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Abstract

Following the reconquest of Sudan by combined Egyptian and British forces it became necessary to provide health services for the huge numbers of transport animals required to manage the country. A veterinary service established in 1902 was staffed mainly by personnel of the British Army Veterinary Service. The second of these officers in charge (Principal Veterinary Officer) was George Richard Griffith. Born in 1857 in Hamilton in Scotland he was the son of a Sergeant Major in the Fifth Dragoon Guards. Following a childhood in his parents' home and at boarding school he graduated as a veterinary surgeon (MRCVS) and joined the Army Veterinary Department in 1880. Posted to Egypt in 1882 Griffith served in campaigns, first against the Egyptians and then the Sudanese, being involved in several military actions until 1889. Awarded several campaign medals and clasps he was seconded to the Egyptian Army in 1889. Captain Griffith continued to serve in Sudan throughout the 1890s, being present at several major engagements, culminating at the Battle of Omdurman in 1898. He was Principal Veterinary Officer of the Sudan Veterinary Service from 1903 to 1906 where his main concerns were ensuring the health of cavalry and transport animals. He retired from the army in 1908, then married at this late stage of life and died aged 63 in 1920.

Keywords

Army veterinary services; Egyptian army; Military campaigns; Livestock diseases; Transport animals

Introduction

The Sudanese, led by a charismatic religious leader claiming to be the Mahdi (the "Guided One"), rebelled against the Egyptians who were governing the country. General Gordon was sent to assist the Egyptians but became besieged in Khartoum. A British relief force fought its way up the River Nile in 1884/1885 but Gordon was killed before it arrived. Public pressure in Britain resulted in a second expedition being sent to recapture Sudan in 1898. A decisive victory by the British over the Sudanese under the Khalifa ("Successor" – the Mahdi had died shortly after the death of Gordon) at the Battle of Omdurman in September 1898 resulted in the reconquest of the country. The Anglo-Egyptian Sudan, nominally a joint administration by the two countries but essentially a British enterprise, was established as a Condominium shortly afterwards [1,2]. Continuing unrest and civil disturbance by the Sudanese necessitated a large military presence, largely Egyptian but supported by British troops and administrators. Maintaining law and order required enormous numbers of cavalry and transport animals (horses, mules, donkeys and camels) to govern and control the turbulent population. The health of these animals was a major consideration in the setting up of a fledgling veterinary service. In all, 12 people served as Principal Veterinary Officers (to 1910) or as Directors of Veterinary Services (from 1910 to 1956) in the 55-year period from the setting up of the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan in 1901 to the achievement of independence by the Republic of Sudan on 1 January 1956. During the early years the veterinarians were military officers who were seconded, usually for short periods, from the British to the Egyptian Army which in turn employed them directly or seconded them to the Sudan. George Richard Griffith was the second of the twelve expatriate personnel who served as head of the Sudan Veterinary Service, being in the post from 1903 to 1906.

Early Life

George Richard Griffiths (note the "s" in the surname) was born on 5 July 1857 in the military barracks in Hamilton, Scotland. He was the son of George Griffiths, a Sergeant Major in the Fifth Dragoon Guards, and his wife Ann (née Ness). His birth was registered in Hamilton District Registry Office on 13 July and it is noted that his father was absent [3].

At the census of 1861 he was the second child of his parents, aged 3, living in the East Cavalry Barracks in Aldershot, Hampshire, England. His father, born in Ireland, aged 39 had been promoted to Quartermaster in the Fifth Royal Irish Lancers, his mother (29) had been born in Wales, his older brother (8) had been born in Ireland and a younger sister (3 months) had been born in Aldershot [4]. The 1871 census has George Richard Griffith, a scholar aged

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13 at The Old Hall School in Watling Street Road in Wellington in the county of Shropshire in the English West Midlands [5].

George Richard Griffith entered the Royal Veterinary College in London about 1876 where he graduated Bachelor of Veterinary Medicine and became a Member of the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons (MRCVS) on 31 March 1880 [6]. Griffith was admitted as a Veterinary Surgeon on probation into the Army Veterinary Department on 26 May 1880, the appointment becoming substantive after six months on 26 November [7].

War Office, Pall Mall, 25th May, 1880.

Veterinary Department, The undermentioned Gentlemen to be Veterinary-Surgeons on probation. Dated 26th May, 1880:—

Henry Thomas William Mann.

George Richard Griffith.

War Office, Pall Mall, 11th December, 1880.

Veterinary Department, The undermentioned Veterinary-Surgeons on probation to be Veterinary-Surgeons:—

Henry Thomas William Mann. Dated 26th May, 1880.

George Richard Griffith. Dated 26th May, 1880.

On 4 April 1881 George Richard Griffith, unmarried, aged 24 and a veterinary surgeon was living in the Cavalry Barracks of the 7th Dragoon Guards in the South Camp at Aldershot in Hampshire [8].

Sudan: Military Campaigns 1882 to 1899

Griffith was posted to Egypt where he was present throughout the British campaigns there and in Sudan from 1882 to 1889. During the Egyptian Expedition of 1882 he served at the actions of El Magfar, Masameh, Kassassin on 26 August, the Battle of Tel-el-Kebir and the forced march to and capture of Cairo [9]. For service during this campaign he was awarded the Egypt Medal with Clasp and the Khedive's Star. He served in the Sudan Expedition of 1884-1885 and was awarded another Clasp to his Egypt Medal. His actions at the Battle of Gemaizah on 20 December 1888 resulted in yet another Clasp to the Egypt Medal and his being Mentioned in Despatches [9]. Up to this time Griffith had served in Egypt and Sudan with the British Army but during 1889 he was seconded for service with the Egyptian Army [10]:

War Office, Pall Mall, • 11th June, 1889

Veterinary Department, Veterinary-Surgeon George Richard Griffith has been seconded for service with the Egyptian Army. Dated 27th May, 1889.

Griffith was soon in action again at the Battle of Toski. Throughout 1889, 1890 and 1891 he continued his secondment with the Egyptian Army with which he was Principal Veterinary Surgeon based in Suakin on Sudan's Red Sea Coast. He was present at the capture of Tokar on 19 February 1891, gained a Clasp to his Khedive's star and, at least in part, for his presence there he was awarded the Turkish Order of Osmanieh 4th Class [11]:

Whitehall; August 17, 1891.

THE Queen has been pleased to give and grant unto the undermentioned Officers in Her Majesty's Army Her Royal licence and authority that they may accept and wear the Insignia of certain classes of the Orders of the Osmanieh and the Medjidieh (as signified against their respective names), which His Highness the Khedive of Egypt, authorized by His Imperial Majesty the Sultan, has been pleased to confer upon them in recognition of their services whilst actually and entirely employed beyond Her Majesty's Dominions with the Egyptian Army

Osmanieh, Fourth Class.

Veterinary-Surgeon George Richard Griffith, Veterinary Department.

In 1891 Griffith moved a little out of his military environment and was initiated as a Freemason in the United Grand Lodge of England in Lodge Number 1105 Grecia located in Cairo. The information provided in the register on page 122 states he is a Captain in the Army Veterinary Department (he had been promoted to Captain on 26 May 1890, 10 years after entering the service), male, aged 34, born about 1857, was initiated on 9 December 1891 and paid his first year's subscription of two shillings and six pence (the economic power value of that amount in 2017 is £168.30). Several other people initiated as Freemasons at or about the same time were military personnel [12].

In 1895, along with several other officers he was the subject of a cartoon (Figure 1) [13]. The identity of the artist Marcel PC is not known but at the date of the drawing in 1895 as a Veterinary Captain Griffith would have been entitled to the Egyptian rank of Bimbashi and not that of Kaimakan as noted on the sketch¹.

Griffith served in the Expedition to Dongola in 1896 as Principal Veterinary Officer and was in action at the operations of 7 June at Firkez and of 19 September at Hafir, was Mentioned in Despatches and again gained a Clasp for his Egypt Medal and two Clasps for his Khedive's Star [1]. A Despatch from Major-General Sir H.H. Kitchener, K.C.M.G., C.B., dated Dongola, 30th September, 1896 sent through the Officer Commanding in Egypt to the War Office described the Dongola campaign. Griffith, in addition to a "Special Mention" (i.e. he was Mentioned in Despatches), was twice singled out for his contributions [14]:

The transport was very capably administered by Major F. W. Kitchener, Director of Transport (West Yorkshire Regiment), and the loss in camels has been exceptionally small considering the hard work, severe heat, and difficult nature of the country through which the operations were conducted; this was largely due to the camel saddle invented by Veterinary Captain Griffith² and constructed by Captain Gordon, Royal Engineers (Figure 2) [16].

and:

The labours of the Veterinary Department were also exceptionally heavy, and were efficiently carried out under the able direction of Veterinary Captain Griffith, Principal Veterinary Surgeon.



Figure 1: "El Kaimakan G. R. Griffith" (note annotation in top left hand corner 'PVO' for Principal Veterinary Officer)

¹"Kaimakan" was a rank in the Egyptian Army equivalent to full Colonel and also carried with it the honorary title of "Bey". It was usual for officers seconded from the British to the Egyptian Army to be given ranks higher than their British substantive one.

²The camel saddle referred to was used by the Camel Corps which had been formed in four Regiments from officers and men drawn from several British cavalry and infantry Regiments: an account of the constitution and actions of the Camel Corps in this campaign is given in [15].

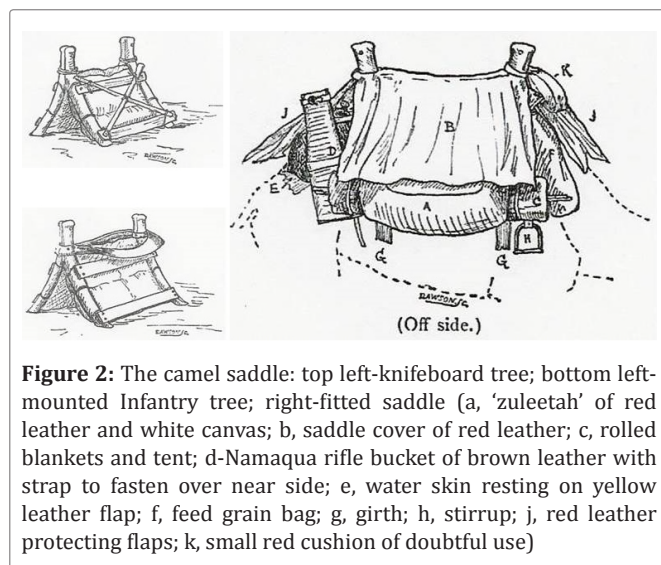


Figure 2: The camel saddle: top left-knifeboard tree; bottom left-mounted Infantry tree; right-fitted saddle (a, 'zuleetah' of red leather and white canvas; b, saddle cover of red leather; c, rolled blankets and tent; d-Namaqua rifle bucket of brown leather with strap to fasten over near side; e, water skin resting on yellow leather flap; f, feed grain bag; g, girth; h, stirrup; j, red leather protecting flaps; k, small red cushion of doubtful use)

Griffith was shortly created a Companion of the Distinguished Service Order (DSO) [17]:

War Office, November 17/1896.

THE Queen has also been graciously pleased to give orders for the following appointments to the Distinguished Service Order, and promotions in the Army, in recognition of the services of the undermentioned Officers during the recent operations in the Soudan. The promotions to bear date 18th November, 1896:

To be Companions of the Distinguished Service Order, viz.:—

Veterinary Captain George Richard Griffith, Army Veterinary Department (employed, with the Egyptian Army)³.

In addition to his "day job" as a horse and camel doctor, Griffith was also able to practice his skills as a companion animal veterinarian. A dog belonging to another officer was stung by a small black scorpion. The dog was in the "state of Horus" (foaming at the mouth, rigid body and muscles and weak heart beat). Major Griffith and others immersed her body in pails of very hot water for several hours and at sundown she was breathing comfortably and recovered soon afterwards [18].

Griffith continued his journey up the river with the Nile Expeditionary Force throughout 1897 and 1898 [1]. Following the Battle of Omdurman on 3 September 1898 he was again Mentioned in Despatches and granted the next higher rate of pay of his rank [19]. His last action against the enemy forces appears to have been the Nile Expedition of 1899.

Throughout his service in Egypt and Sudan from 1882 to 1899 Griffith moved through the ranks from Lieutenant to Captain and then to Major. In addition to the DSO gallantry award and the honorific award of the Osmanieh, he collected a plethora of campaign medals and clasps. These included the Egypt Medal 1882-1889 with clasps for Tel-el-Kebir, The Nile 1884-85, Gemaizah 1888 and Toski 1889. The Khedive's Star was always awarded together with the Egypt Medal so Griffith had this medal (which was not withdrawn until 1891) with clasps for Tel-el-Kebir, The Nile 1884-1885, Gemaizah 1888, Toski 1889 and Tokar (the last issued with an Arabic inscription only and not awarded with the Egypt Medal which had already been withdrawn). Griffith received the Queen's Sudan Medal which was authorised in March 1899 and awarded to British and Egyptian forces that took part in the Sudan campaign between June 1896 (i.e. Dongola) and September 1898 (i.e. Omdurman) although no clasps were awarded. Khedive Abbas Hilmi ordered a new medal, formally

known as the Khedive of Egypt's Medal for Campaigns in the Sudan, 1896-1908. Griffith had this medal with clasps for Sudan 1897, The Atbara, Khartoum and Sudan 1899 (Figure 3) [20]. The culmination of this period of his service was the Third Class Order of the Medjidie that was conferred upon him by His Highness the Khedive of Egypt [21]:

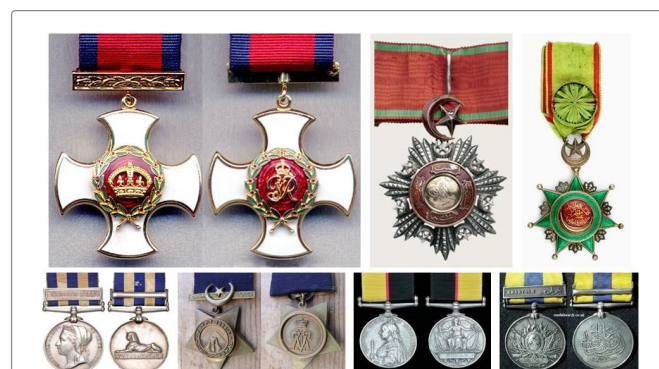


Figure 3: Examples of honours and campaign medals awarded to George Richard Griffith (Distinguished Service Order; Order of the Medjidie 2nd Class, Order of the Osmanieh 4th Class; Egypt Medal 1882-1889, Khedive's Star; Queen's Sudan Medal 1898-1899, Khedive's Sudan Medal 1898-1908)

Whitehall, May 10, 1899.

THE Queen has been pleased to give and grant unto each of the undermentioned Officers in Her Majesty's Army Her Royal licence and authority that he may accept and wear the Insignia of the Imperial Order of the Osmanieh or of the Medjidieh, as stated below, which Decorations have been conferred upon the said Officers by His Highness the Khedive of Egypt, authorized by His Imperial Majesty the Sultan of Turkey, in recognition of their services in Egypt and the Soudan during the recent Campaign :—•

The Order of (The Medjidieh of the Third Class)

Veterinary-Captain George Richard Griffith, D.S.O, Army Veterinary Department.

Sudan: Principal Veterinary Officer, 1903-1906

Unlike many other veterinary officers who had served in Sudan, Griffith did not fight in the Second Boer War of 1899-1902. He was still seconded to the Egyptian Army in 1900 and was promoted to Major on 26 May of that year. He continued with the Egyptian army throughout 1901 and 1902, latterly with the acting rank of Lieutenant Colonel [22]. On 12 December 1903 he was promoted to Lieutenant Colonel and put on half pay [23].

Griffith was appointed Principal Veterinary Officer of the Sudan Veterinary Service in 1903. He was one of only two qualified veterinarians in the Service, the other being described as a "civil veterinary surgeon" [24]. This latter was initially a Mr Hill but he fell ill and was evacuated from Sudan in March. He was not replaced until 10 September 1903 when R. Phillips Thomas was appointed on three months probation by the Sudan Government with remuneration of Egyptian Pounds 40 per month. A second civilian veterinarian, A. de R. Gordon, was appointed as Veterinary Surgeon to the Veterinary Department on 26 November 1905 and he was followed by H. R. Meade who was appointed as a Civil Veterinary Surgeon in the Veterinary Department on 1 May 1906 [25].

In his first 3-page annual report of 1903 (Appendix A) Griffith, opens by stating there had "been no serious outbreak of contagious or infectious disease in the Sudan during the last twelve months".

³The DSO was only awarded to persons who had already been Mentioned in Despatches. It was normally reserved for officers of the rank of Major and above but there are numerous exceptions to this tradition.

He then went on, however, to list the presence and locations of Foot and Mouth Disease, Cattle Plague, 'abu nini' (Contagious Caprine Pleuropneumonia) and Horse Sickness (43 out of 98 cavalry horses died in Tagalla District) [26]⁴.

The PVO and his staff continued to be primarily concerned with the large numbers of equines and camels at this period. It was realized, however, that Sudan's meat producing animals were a considerable reserve of wealth with potential to earn money from exports. In 1904 and 1905 cattle and sheep were sent by sea from Suakin to Suez but trade was frequently interrupted by rinderpest outbreaks. Quarantine posts and patrols on the border with Ethiopia were only partially effective. A few thousand cattle were inoculated each year with virulent blood and serum but in view of the huge livestock population this was of only limited value. The military vets considered their time wasted on domestic livestock in that it reduced the efforts they could exert to maintain the health of military and transport animals [27].

Griffith was succeeded as PVO by Captain Arthur Oliver late in 1906 but his service in Sudan had not gone unrecognized and on retirement he received due reward [28]:

Whitehall, November 28, 1907.

The KING has been pleased to give and grant unto Lieutenant-Colonel George Richard Griffith, D.S.O., late Army Veterinary Service, His Majesty's Royal licence and authority that he may accept and wear the Insignia of the Second Class of the Imperial Ottoman Order of the Medjidieh, conferred upon him by His Highness the Khedive of Egypt, authorized by His Imperial Majesty the Sultan of Turkey, in recognition of valuable services rendered by him as Principal Veterinary Officer, Egyptian Army

Later life, 1908-1920

Griffith left Sudan on 11 October 1907 and retired from the army on 20 November 1908 to enter the Reserve of Officers with the rank of Lieutenant Colonel [29]. He continued to appear in Army Lists as Lieutenant Colonel until at least 1918. In the meantime, however and just prior to his retirement, on 28 October 1908 it was announced in a local newspaper that Lieutenant Colonel G. R. Griffith DSO was to marry Miss A Maud Redpath and one month later on 25 November 1908 his formal engagement to the lady was posted in the newspaper [30].

Alice Maud Redpath had been born in Putney, London early in July 1868 and was baptised at St Mary's Anglican church on 27 July, the daughter of the Reverend George Drummond Redpath and his wife Alice Styles Redpath [31]. Alice Maud's mother died shortly after her birth such that at the census of 1871 she was living with her father at Hambledown in Kent where he was curate to the Parish priest. In subsequent censuses in 1881, 1891 and 1901 she was living with various maiden aunts or cousins of independent means and genteel lifestyles. On 22 April 1909 the confirmed bachelor that was Lieutenant Colonel G. R. Griffith DSO married the old maid Alice Maud Redpath at Christ Church in Eastbourne in East Sussex: he was approaching his 52nd birthday and she was 41 years of age [32,33].

Nothing is known of George Richard and Alice Maud over the next 10 years except for three mentions of Griffith in Army Lists. It has, most unusually, not been possible to find any trace of them in the British 1911 census. George Richard Griffith died aged 63 on 21 March 1920 at Ferney Close in the village of Hartley Wintney in northeast Hampshire [34]⁵. He was buried in the churchyard of St Mary in that village (Figure 4) [35]. Probate of the effects, valued at £20,886 8sh 3d, of George Richard Griffith of Ferney Close Hartney Wintney was granted at London on 31 July 1920 to Arthur Chester Hillman, Solicitor [36].



Figure 4: Headstone of grave of George Richard Griffith in St Mary's churchyard, Hartley Wintney

Mrs G. R. Griffith continued to live at Ferney Close, Hartley Wintney after her husband's death and was listed in the telephone directory as Telephone Number Harley Wintney No 8 in 1920 [37]. Alice M Griffith died towards the end of 1924 aged 56 [38]. She is not buried with her husband and his gravestone makes no reference to her (nor to his being her dearly beloved husband). As she was not the recipient of his effects on his death can it be assumed that the marriage was less than successful?

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⁴At the end of the report he is styled as "Miralai", an Egyptian rank higher than "Kaimakan" and equivalent to the British rank of Brigadier.

⁵At the British census of 1911, Ferney Close was occupied by a "Former Colonial Governor, Knight Commander of the Order of St Michael and St George". In 2017 houses in the immediate vicinity were offered for sale at prices in excess of £1,000,000.

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Appendix A

