

SAYYID MUHAMMAD 'ABDILLE HASSAN 1856-1920 (Somali: Sayid Maxamed Cabdille Xasan)

1856 Born in Kirrit, Northern Somalia.

1867 Has learned the Qur'an by heart (known as a *Hafiz*)

1874 Enrols as a fireman for merchant shipping. Travels extensively through Middle East region, including Mecca and centres of Islamic learning.

1884 Establishment of north of Somalia as a British protectorate – British Somaliland.

1894 He undertakes a second hajj pilgrimage to Mecca. Comes under the influence of radical sufi mystic Mohammed Salih.

1895 Returns to north of Somalia. Makes a name for himself as a peacemaker between local clans (*kabil*). Begins to preach against corrupting influences and foreign occupation: "Somaliland for the Somali and out with the infidels".

1899 Falsely accused by the British of stealing a rifle. Begins to organize his dervish (*darweesh*) army.

1899 – 1920 Conducts a series of military campaigns against British rule. A number of expeditions are sent to defeat him. British administration arms "friendly" clans to take the sayyid on. Instead they fall to looting, pushing the region into famine (1910-1912) leading to an estimated one third of the population dying (known as *The Time of Eating Filth* – due to people being forced to eat vermin to survive).

August 1913 Dervish forces defeat British commander Richard Corfield at the Battle of Dul Madoba. Corfield is killed. The sayyid writes his most famous poem *Koofil* – mocking Corfield and the British. Rocks the British administration, who are unable to take the sayyid on due to approaching world war.

1920 Winston Churchill is determined to finish "The Mad Mullah". Organises combined land, sea and air attack. The newly formed RAF, in their first sortie over Africa bomb the sayyid's forces, who are killed or scattered. The sayyid escapes and is chased into Ethiopian held Somali territory.

December 1920 The sayyid dies, most likely of Influenza. He is buried secretly by his followers near Imi. The whereabouts of his remains are still a mystery.

" From Mohammed Abdulla to the English people:

" I say listen to my words and mark them. First, I send you this letter. It is the first letter I write about the former and present doings. We have fought for a year. I wish to rule my own country and protect my own religion. If you wish send me a letter saying whether there is to be peace or war. You do not listen to my words. Listen now and consider. Before this I have sent letters which you have not listened to.

We have both suffered considerably in battle with one another. You have heard that the Dervishes have run away. They have not done so. I have moved my camp, but I have not run away. I have got horses, camels, and cattle. When I get news of good grazing I go to that place... I warn you of this; I wish to fight with you. I like war, but you do not...

I have no forts, no houses, no country. I have no cultivated fields, no silver or gold for you to take...If the country was cultivated or contained houses or property, it would be worth your while to fight. The country is all jungle, and that is no use to you. If you want wood and stone you can get them in plenty. There are also many ant-heaps The sun is very hot. All you can get from me is war, nothing else. I have met your men in battle and have killed them. We are greatly pleased at this.

Our men who have fallen in battle have won paradise. God fights for us. We kill, and you kill. We fight by God's order. That is the truth. We ask for God's blessing. God is with me when I write this. If you wish war I am happy; if you wish peace I am also content. But if you wish peace, go away from my country to your own. If you wish war, stay where you are." Listen to my words.

Send me a letter saying whether you want war or peace."

(Signed) " MOHAMMED BIN ABDULLA. " 1903
