

# SAMORI TURE'S RESISTANCE IN THE WESTERN SUDAN - EXTRA CONTENT

Information on the French expansion in the Sudan that we couldn't fit into Bob Giglio's article in *Wi404*.

## COLONIAL CONQUEST

The French Sudan was a colonial territory in the federation of French West Africa from 1880-1960, when it became the independent state of Mali. The colony was formally called French Sudan (or Soudan) from 1890-99, then again from 1920-58, and had a variety of different names over the course of its existence.

Originally it was formed as a set of military outposts extending the French colony in Senegal. The area offered France little economic or strategic gain, but the military effectively advocated greater conquest in the region, in part for the promotional opportunities that conquest offered the French military personnel. French empire-builders in West Africa were, from the outset, military men. At the beginning of Napoleon III's reign, the presence of France in Senegal was limited to a

trading post on the island of Goree, a narrow strip on the coast, the town of Saint-Louis, and a handful of trading posts in the interior. The economy had largely been based on the slave trade, carried out by the rulers of the small kingdoms in the interior, until France abolished slavery in its colonies in 1848.

In 1854, Napoleon III appointed General Louis Faidherbe as Governor of Senegal, to govern and expand the colony, and to give it the beginning of a modern economy. The French began a major push eastward into the savannah regions, building a series of forts along the Senegal river; they formed alliances with leaders in the interior, and sent expeditions against those who resisted French rule. A new port was built at Dakar and many developments initiated including telegraph and rail lines, schools, bridges, and systems to supply fresh water to the towns. Reaching into

the Niger valley, Senegal became the primary French base in West Africa and a model colony. Dakar became one of the most important cities of the French Empire and of Africa.

## INTO WESTERN SUDAN

French conquest of the Western Sudan began in 1879, when Captain Joseph Simon Gallieni was dispatched to establish a fort and survey the land for a railroad from Dakar to the Niger river. This was followed with the establishment of several French forts and political alliances with leaders in the region in the early 1880s. The French gradually took over more territory, moving southeast from the Tukolor Empire to link up with their Ivory Coast enclaves, often using inter-ethnic rivalries and political tension among leaders in the area to appoint leaders who supported the French.

Map of West and Equatorial Africa by Capt Marceau, c.1911, with French territory shaded, and the names most commonly used at that time. What the French termed 'Soudan' stretched north and east of Senegal, from today's Mauritania in the north, across Mali and Niger to Tchad ('Chari'). French Guinea would occupy the gap between Portuguese Guinea and British Sierra Leone; south of 'Sikasso' (today's Burkina Fasso), the Ivory Coast would lie on the coast between US-sponsored Liberia and the British Gold Coast (Ghana). North-east of the French Congo was 'Oubanchi', today's Central African Republic. (From Marceau's *Le tirailleur soudanais*, 1911; author's photo).



French civilian administrators struggled with the military leaders, and the two forces went through several leadership changes over the territory, until Colonel Louis Archinard was appointed military governor in 1892. Archinard has been presented in French histories as the conqueror and 'pacifier' of the French Sudan, having led military campaigns against Ahmadu Sekou Tall of the Tukolor Empire and Samori Ture of the Wassoulou Empire, as well as other West African leaders who resisted French colonial rule. The French conquest of the Western Sudan was remarkable, because a relatively small number of French naval troops - Infantry de Marine (Marine Infantry) - accomplished it, creating an empire larger than France.

In the 1880s the race to secure territories along the coast intensified as the French rivalry with Britain escalated in West Africa. France declared a protectorate over part of Dahomey in 1882, by agreement with the local ruler. The remaining territory was added by a military campaign in 1892-94. Similarly, one of the African kings in Guinea was persuaded to accept French protection in 1881, but neighboring chiefs took longer to appreciate the advantages on offer, and it was not until 1918 that France fully subdued the whole of what became French Guinea.

In the Ivory Coast, French traders and military expeditions pressed north in tandem during the 1880s. By 1893, France was well-enough placed to claim the area as a colony. Borders were agreed upon with other European powers in 1898, but it was not until after World War I, that the colony was fully secured from internal resistance. While these piecemeal annexations were continuing, a far greater race was taking place inland. With France already well established on the Senegal river, and Britain trading far up the Niger river from the coast, there was

intense competition as to which power would control the upper waters of the Niger, which flowed in a great curve from near the source of the Senegal. This was a race in which the French made dramatic progress.

#### **MOVING INLAND - FRENCH WEST AFRICA**

In the early 1880s, a combination of military force and local treaties brought the French sphere of influence steadily further inland until, in 1883, the town of Bamako was captured to give France a presence on the Niger. Timbuktu was reached in 1894, and by the end of the nineteenth century the southern Sahara was patrolled by a French camel corps. Mali, known at the time as French Sudan, was linked up with French Algeria to the north. From 1895-97, the area to the south of Mali, below the Niger river, became a French protectorate in successive stages. Its

southern border along the Gold Coast was settled in an agreement with Britain in 1898, and the area was subsequently known as Upper Volta. By 1895, these French colonies were grouped together as French West Africa, forming a vast but unbroken territory administered by a single governor general with his headquarters in Dakar.

To the six colonies already constituting French West Africa in the late 1890s - Senegal, French Sudan, Upper Volta, French Guinea, Ivory Coast, and Dahomey - two more were soon added, Mauritania (extending north to link with Morocco) and Niger. This was an extraordinary swathe of land, assembled in just two decades, stretching unbroken from the Mediterranean to the Bight of Benin. The Congo was later added, with the addition of French Equatorial Africa, and by 1900, France had the second-largest colonial empire in the world, behind the British.

*Left: Lieutenant, full dress, 1873-1902.*

*Right Private, Infanterie de la Marine; overseas full dress, 1890s.*

*Illustrations by Mark Stacey from MAA  
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