

paign between 1867 and 1903, and covered wars between other countries as well. Villiers, who also wrote stories for the *Graphic*, even lived long enough to portray the Great War.

In Prior's first campaign experience, he joined Maj. Gen. Sir Garnet Wolsley on his foray into Ashanti (present-day central Ghana) in West Africa, in 1873, traveling through the dense jungles with the troops to the capital, Kumasi. Besides a revolver, a double-barreled gun, and a plentiful supply of whiskey, he carried several small sketchbooks in which he scribbled the scenes unfolding before his eyes.

In his tent at night, he would work these up into larger pencil sketches with annotations to guide engravers back in London. Every week, these sketches would accompany the official dispatches down the jungle track to Cape Coast Castle, the seat of colonial government on the British Gold Coast in Ashanti, where they would travel by ship to England, then by train to London. At the *London News*, other artists would transfer them onto wood blocks that would be carved and readied for printing.

The finished pictures would appear in the large-format *Illustrated London News* every Saturday. While news of the campaign had already been telegraphed and published in daily newspapers such as the *Times*, the pictorial press became quite popular by presenting the images behind the news: the jungle, the local people, soldiers on campaign, the leading officers, and the fighting.

Prior's skill with pencil and ink was ideally suited to pictorial reportage; although he was never considered a great artist, his quickness in recording scenes won him the admiration of many, especially the officers with whom he spent most of his time. Prior always made a point of ingratiating himself to those in authority, and his cooperation with the leading military men won him special treatment: At one point in Egypt, years later, a victorious Wolsley stretched out

beside Prior on a rug in his defeated enemy's tent and helped the artist copy Wolsley's plan of the action.

Over the next decade, Prior covered wars in Spain against the Carlists, then an insurrection against the Ottomans in Herzegovina, and conflicts elsewhere in Africa. He attended the failed peace initiatives in Constantinople in 1876, and when a major clash between Turkey and Russia broke out in 1877, he was rushed to the "seat of war," narrowly escaping injury during the bombardment of Rustchuk, a Turkish stronghold in Bulgaria.

Prior would often be found near the fighting. Not merely a witness, he stormed trenches with British troops putting down an Egyptian army revolt at Tel-el-Kebir, saw a British square crumble at Tama in the Sudan, and tried mountain fighting against the Afriids in northwest India. He probably saw more combat than most British officers, given the range of military action he covered, yet his book indicates he was as interested in the lamb stew he shared with a soldier in the desert as in campaign strategy and tactics.

IN 1878, PRIOR was back in Africa, this time in the south, where extensive mineral wealth was attracting European prospectors, entrepreneurs, and adventurers. When they encroached on tribal lands, conflict followed. Local militias, backed by some imperial troops, were being called upon to defend Europeans in boundary disputes. Prior did his best to cover the fighting against the natives, while his *London News* counterpart, William Simpson, was in Afghanistan to observe the war that had broken out there.

The next year, Prior traveled to Natal, South Africa, to report on the far more organized campaign against the Zulus. Fortunately for him, he was not present in late January 1879 when a Zulu army massacred a British force at Isanhlwana and another small group of redcoats heroically defended Rorke's Drift against overwhelming numbers. He did sketch

the aftermath of those battles, and the subsequent six months of fighting. While British regulars bore the brunt of the fighting, many local militias and irregular troops participated, including numerous Dutch farmers. Though eager to fight the Zulus, the Boers were wary of the British, not only for their land avarice but also because Dutch Protestants considered the Church of England a disguised branch of the Roman Catholic Church. Tensions between these two European groups came to a head in 1881.

Prior reported on the conflict, including the repercussions of the second African disaster for Britain, this one at Majuba Hill, where Boers killed, captured, or wounded more than half of a British force of 450. Many of Prior's sketches were based on the eyewitness account of his friend and colleague, John Cameron of the *Evening Standard*.

The Boer struggle epitomized national aspirations emerging throughout the empire, especially in Egypt, where the population resented not only Ottoman rule but also the presence of the British and French, who were primarily there to safeguard the Suez Canal. Under the leadership of a former Egyptian soldier, Arabi Pasha, a revolt broke out in 1882. Now referred to by the *News* as "our man in Africa," Prior rushed north across the continent and was on board HMS *Alexandria* when British ships bombarded the city of Alexandria. After British troops landed to quell the rebellion, Prior accompanied them along the Freshwater Canal to Tel-el-Kebir, where they crushed the Egyptian army.

Next, Sudan was gripped by nationalist fervor mixed with religious fanaticism under the self-styled "second prophet" Muhammad Ahmad ibn as Sayyid Abd Allah, known as the Mahdi. The clear danger this Islamic revolt presented to neighboring Egypt greatly concerned British authorities. After Mahdists attacked two towns, the British hastily assembled an Egyptian expeditionary force under the command of Col.

Valentine Baker. Prior had befriended Baker on the ship bound for the Sudanese Red Sea port of Suakim. But Prior hurt his leg in an accident and was forced to stay on board, just off shore.

He was lying in his chair on the deck when he saw through his binoculars "mounted men galloping and others on foot running as hard as they could...at first a few, then more and more, until at last, turning to the captain of the ship who was by my side, I exclaimed with horror, 'It's all up; the column has met with a disaster. It's a bolt.'" Baker and a few officers fought their way to safety,

Prior sketched battle scenes as they unfolded (right, in Turkey, 1877). In London artists carved their interpretations onto wooden blocks for the final print (below).



