

Sensational Story of France's Greatest Colonial Fighter And the Negro King Who Sat on a Throne of Beaten Gold

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(Continued from last week.)

AS TO THE war with France in 1892, it is difficult to say just what brought it on. Some Dahomeyans say that Africa had been divided into spheres of influence by the European powers, that Dahomey had been given to France, and that France sought a pretext for conquest. Other sources say it was the desire of the French to penetrate into the interior for commerce, on the one hand, and the determination of Behanzin on the other, to keep them out.

Behanzin, Hard-Headed.

Again it may have been due to the fear and jealousy of King Toffa who had a difficult role to play between the British and the French. Perhaps, also, it may have been due to fear of the French colonies near-by at seeing Behanzin getting so powerful. Germany had been supplying him with modern rifles and five Germans held high rank in his army. Then also it may have been due to Behanzin's hard-headedness

and certainty of victory. In 1890 he had scored a victory over a French expedition and had made France pay him tribute for the use of the port of Cotenou. He was stronger now and perhaps he felt he could repeat the performance.

It perhaps may have been due to a combination of all these causes, but whatever it was, war began when Behanzin is said to have declared the treaty he had made with France null and void. This treaty, ceding Cotenou to France, had been made in 1868 by his father, Gli-Gli and ratified in 1890. France agreeing to pay 20,000 francs gold annually for the use of the port.

Behanzin, it is said, set all intervention aside. Diplomacy failed. When the French envoys arrived at his palace of Dixene with presents from M. Etienne, secretary of Colonies, it is said that Behanzin set them aside brusquely, and said scornfully, "We have cases full of that in Dahomey."

When told of the system of the French government, it is



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PRINCE CLAIMS THRONE



Prince Kojo Tovalon, claimant to the throne of Dahomey, taken in the Argonne Forest, 1915. He is a doctor and a lawyer, as well as being graduated from the University of Paris.

said that he took his pipe from his mouth and laughed loud and long, saying that he much preferred his own which was quicker and more original.

"Dahomey," he asserted, "has never ceded Cotenou to France, and if the French do not get out at once I will come and drive them out with my army."

Dodds Chosen.

War began shortly after, and in the first few engagements Behanzin was victorious. France realized that she had a difficult enemy to deal with. To march into Dahomey with its absence of roads, its thick forests, swamps, burning sun and lack of water was not easy. There was but one man capable of the task, the veteran General Dodds.

On May 5, 1892, he left Bordeaux with several companies of white marines, a company of artillery and a battalion of black sharpshooters. Stopping at Senegal, he picked up other battalions of Senegalese sharpshooters and got five hundred warriors and thousands of bearers from King Toffa.

Arriving off the Dahomey coast, he blockaded it with his warships and prevented the landing of a ship filled with arms and ammunition for Behanzin.

Behanzin Defies Dodds.

This done, he wrote a letter to Behanzin calling on him to surrender. But the latter replied defiantly:

"France wishes war! Let her know that I am stronger and more determined than my father. I have never done anything to France that she should make war on me, I have never gone to France either to take the wives or daughters of the French. If they wish to take the sea-coast I will cut down all the palm trees. I will poison them. If they have not what to eat let them go elsewhere. Every other nation, German, English, Portuguese can come into my kingdom. But the French I will drive them away. I am the friend of the whites; ready to receive them when they wish to come to see me, but prompt to make war whenever they wish."

On this, General Dodds ordered a bombardment of the Dahomeyan coast, and landing a few days later, captured and burned the town of Cotenou.

Starting into the interior, he captured the towns of Zobo and Takou. Early in the morning of September 19, a part of the Dahomeyan army hurled itself with terrific fury against the French. Opening the attack with a volley from their repeating rifles, they rushed in with their swords and knives shouting their battle cry of "Koia! Koia! Dahomey!"

Blacks and Whites Together.

But General Dodds well knew that it was the habit of the African warrior to attack early in the morning. He was

ready. The black and the white men in his force re-ceived the enemy with shot and bayonet. The Dahomeyans, beaten back, returned with incredible eagerness to the charge, but the French, bringing their artillery and machine guns into action, forced them to retreat, leaving heaps of dead.

It was evident that it was going to be a stubborn fight to get to Abomey, Behanzin's capital. A few days later, stiff fighting took place at Dogba. Here General Dodds, who always fought beside his men, had one of them killed at his side.

Dahomeyans Deadly.

So far the French had been meeting only detachments of Behanzin's army. The main portion with the king himself was at Allada. Marching thither, General Dodds lost many of his men. The Dahomeyans, from the tops of palm trees, would shoot down the French or crawl through the bushes to throw themselves courageously on the foe.

At Atchoupa, during a fierce storm, a force estimated at 7,000 warriors and 2,000 amazons hurled itself at the French. The women fought with supreme courage, letting themselves be killed rather than retreat. Clinging to the legs of the French troops they brought them to earth and poignared them.

Says an eye-witness of that fight: "The Dahomeyans showed a tenacity and bravery unheard of. But their

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