

# Revisiting The Life of Ameer Muhammad Bin Abdul Karim Al- Khattabi [رحمه الله]

***'The Lion of the Moroccan Rif, who resisted  
two colonial powers.'***

[A compilation of notes and articles on the life of  
Muhammad bin Abdul Karim Al-Khattabi by Mohammed  
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## Introduction

In the name of Allah, the Gracious, the Merciful.

All praise is due to Allah. We praise him, we seek His help, we seek His forgiveness, and we seek refuge in Allah from the evil within ourselves and our evil deeds. Whoever Allah guides, there is none to misguide him. Whoever Allah leads astray, there is none to guide him. I testify there is no God but Allah alone, without any partners, and that Muhammad, peace and blessings be upon him, is His servant and His messenger.<sup>1</sup>

History is not merely a collection of dates and events; it is a mirror reflecting the struggles, sacrifices, and resilience of nations. For Muslims, learning about figures who resisted colonial oppression is not just an academic pursuit but a moral obligation. The stories of these brave individuals are not relics of the past; they are beacons of inspiration, illuminating the path of dignity, self-respect, and unwavering faith in the face of tyranny.

The colonial era was not just an age of conquest but an era of systematic oppression, where Muslim lands were plundered, cultures erased, and faiths challenged. Yet, amid the darkness, there arose heroes—men and women who refused to bow, who fought not for personal gain but for the honour of their people and the sanctity of their religion. They stood firm, often against overwhelming odds, proving that resistance is not measured by numbers but by faith, courage, and conviction.

Among these giants stands Ameer Muhammad bin Abdul Karim Al-Khattabi, famous among the Europeans with the name Abdel-Krim Al-Khattabi, the fearless leader of the Rifian resistance against Spanish and French colonial forces in Morocco. His story is not merely that of a military strategist but of a man who embodied the essence of Islamic leadership—one who led with wisdom, justice, and an unyielding commitment to freedom. His victories were not just on the battlefield but in the hearts of his people, inspiring generations to come.

In an era where history is often rewritten to glorify the oppressors and erase the struggles of the oppressed, it becomes even more crucial to revive these narratives. To learn about Al-Khattabi and others like him is to reclaim our identity, to honour their sacrifices, and to instil in ourselves and our children the spirit of resistance against injustice—wherever and whenever it may arise.

This book is a very humble effort to narrowly highlight the great life of the legend, Muhammad bin Abdul Karim Al-Khattabi. It is not a story book or a novel, it is a compilation of two summarized articles on his life, one taken from Al-Jazeera (The Qatar based news agency)- and translated into English, and another extracted from the book, 'Miyatu Min Al-Uzama Al-Islam

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<sup>1</sup> This paragraph was taken from 'Khutbah al-Hajah: How to begin a Khutbah Sermon in Arabic and English' (abuaminaelias.com)

Ghaiyiru Majri At-Tareekh (100 Greats From The Islamic Ummah That Changed The Course of History)' by At-Turbani. I have also included two notes from my end, one penning down the 'Timeline' of events of his life, and the other mentioning the famous battles he engaged in (May Allah have mercy upon him).

This book, though concise, transcends a mere historical narrative; it serves as a poignant tribute to the brave individuals who resisted colonial oppression. Their remarkable legacy continues to resonate with us today, inspiring a renewed commitment to justice, resistance against tyranny, and unwavering faith. May their legacy ignite in us a renewed sense of duty—to uphold justice, to resist oppression, and to walk in their footsteps with unwavering faith.

Sa'id ibn Zayd reported: The Prophet ﷺ, say, **"Whoever is killed protecting his property is a martyr. Whoever is killed protecting his religion is a martyr. Whoever is killed protecting his life is a martyr. Whoever is killed protecting his family is a martyr."**<sup>2</sup>

May peace, mercy and blessings be upon Prophet Muhammad, and his household, his companions and upon all those who follow his path in guidance.

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<sup>2</sup> Sunan At-Tirmidhī 1421, Sahih (Al-Albani). Translation: abuaminaelias.com.

## **North Africa (1882–1963): A Land Under Siege, A Land of Heroes**

The period between 1882 and 1963 was one of the darkest yet most defining eras for North Africa. European colonial powers—Britain, France, Italy, and Spain—descended upon the region like vultures, seeking to dominate its lands, exploit its resources, and erase its Islamic identity. However, in the face of oppression, some of the greatest heroes of the Ummah emerged, proving that tyranny only fuels the fire of resistance.

In 1882, Britain occupied Egypt, securing the Suez Canal and imposing direct rule, while France had already begun its brutal colonization of Algeria (1830). By 1912, France tightened its grip on Tunisia and Morocco, while Italy invaded Libya in 1911, bringing death and destruction. Entire communities were uprooted, Islamic scholars were targeted, and traditional institutions were dismantled in an attempt to force European ideologies upon the people.

Yet, North Africa refused to submit. Omar Mukhtar (1858–1931) led an unyielding freedom struggle against the Italians in Libya, teaching his people that faith and resilience outweigh sheer military power. In Morocco, Ameer Muhammad bin Abdul Karim Al-Khattabi (1882–1963) humiliated Spanish and French forces in the Rif War (1921–1926), pioneering modern guerrilla warfare. Though outnumbered, his strategies influenced global resistance movements.

Meanwhile, Sheikh Abdul Hameed Ibn Badis (1889–1940) ignited an intellectual struggle in Algeria, reviving Islamic education and Arab identity in defiance of French assimilation policies. His work laid the foundation for the Algerian War of Independence (1954–1962), which finally expelled the French in 1962. Morocco and Tunisia followed, gaining independence in 1956, and Libya in 1951.

The struggle was long, the sacrifices immense—but these heroes proved that colonial chains can never shackle the spirit of a free people.



A Map of Africa in 1878 indicates far less colonial presence than the 1914 map. At the Congress of Berlin in 1884, 15 European powers divided Africa among them. By 1914, these imperial powers had fully colonized the continent, exploiting its people and resources.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> (Source: <https://www.facinghistory.org/resource-library/colonial-presence-africa>)

## Muhammad ibn Abdul-Karim Al-Khattabi<sup>4</sup>

*'The Lion of the Moroccan Rif, who resisted two colonial powers.'*

Muhammad ibn Abdul-Karim Al-Khattabi is one of the most prominent and famous Moroccan figures of the 20th century, known as the "Lion of the Rif" (pronounced - Reef) and the leader of the Rif Revolution, which took place in northern Morocco in the late 1950s against Spanish and French colonialism following World War I.

He inflicted a series of defeats on Spain, most notably the Battle of Annual, and then defeated France in a second phase. His revolution was crushed by a combined force of Spanish and French armies in 1926, forcing him to surrender, and he was subsequently exiled to the French island of Réunion for 21 years. He died in 1963 in the Egyptian capital, Cairo.

### Birth and Upbringing

Muhammad ibn Abdul-Kareem Al-Khattabi was born in a small village called Ajdir (an Amazigh word referring to a grain store in a fortress), and grew up amidst one of the five tribes of the Beni Ouriaghel mountainous tribe, located on the outskirts of the Al-Hoceima Bay and its port in northern Morocco.

Muhammad, or Mohand (the Amazigh pronunciation of Muhammad), was the eldest son of his father Abdul-Karim, and his mother Taimut, daughter of the Faqeeh (scholar of Islamic jurisprudence) Ahmad ibn Al-Qadhi, one of the tribe's scholars. He had one younger brother and four sisters. Recent studies suggest that he was born in 1882.

Amr Abu Nasr, in his book "Batal Ar-Reef (The Hero of the Rif)", quoted Al-Khattabi himself as saying that his origins date back to an Arab family from the town of Yanbu in the Hejaz. His ancestor, Zarra Al-Yanbu'i, came to the Rif in the third century of the Hijri calendar and settled with the Beni Ouriaghel tribe, which has been the family's home for over a thousand years.

The boy Muhammad grew up and was raised in the arms of a renowned family in the Rifian community, with deep roots in the tribe's spiritual and knowledgeable leadership. His father, Abdul-Karim, was a "Qadhi" (judge) and a "Faqeeh" (jurist), just like his father and grandfather.

According to historians, there was nothing distinctive about his appearance. He was short in stature, somewhat stout, with dark hair and features, piercing gaze, often silent, and possessing a calm, low voice.

He was known in the Rif as "Moulai Mohand" or "Al-Qaid Mohand", or "Ammis-n-Si-Abdul-Karim", which is an Amazigh phrase meaning "son of Abdul-Karim". Internationally, he was known as Abdul-Karim Al-Khattabi, which is

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<sup>4</sup> Arabic source: <https://www.aljazeera.net/encyclopedia/2014/11/12/%D8%B9%D8%A8%D8%AF-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%83%D8%B1%D9%8A%D9%85-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AE%D8%B7%D8%A7%D8%A8%D9%8A>

actually his father's name, and this nickname remained the one most commonly used in historical writings. He was also referred to as the "Amir" (meaning Amir of Jihad) during the Rif War, which he led against Spanish and French colonialism, and he used this title when corresponding with Europeans or addressing them.

### **Education and Training**

Coming from a small number of families who inherited Islamic knowledge from generation to generation, Muhammad Al-Khattabi received a scientific, religious and legal (Shariah) education, according to the general traditions of education that Rifian families, especially those with leadership roles among the tribes, adhered to.

After receiving the basics of knowledge at the Grand Mosque in his hometown and memorizing the Quran in the seven Qira'at, his father took charge of teaching him the principles of Tawheed, grammar, history, and Islamic law.

Learning at this primary level, in an Amazigh-speaking environment, meant mastering the Arabic language. It is said that "Mohand" was able, during this early period of his life, to memorize more than 16,000 verses of Arabic poetry.

At the same time, he learned horsemanship and marksmanship like other Rifians, and the Mauser (five-shot) rifle was one of the first pieces of equipment he carried when he reached the age of bearing arms. It accompanied him during his target practice and wherever he went.

According to what historians have documented about that era, having knowledge of reading and writing in Arabic and being familiar with the seven Quranic readings (Qira'at) constituted a knowledge base that gave the holder the title of "Talib" (student of knowledge) with an Ijazah in education. If he added to that knowledge of arithmetic, grammar, some literature, and the principles of Islamic law, he would move to the rank of "Faqih" (jurist). The young Muhammad earned this title as well.

However, Muhammad's father, Abdul-Karim, made his son Muhammad expand his educational environment beyond the traditional one. He sent him to the city of Fez (in Morocco), known for its educational institutions, when he was twenty years old to complete his seeking of knowledge. There, Muhammad Al-Khattabi attended complementary classes at the Al-Qarawiyyin University for two years (from 1902 to 1904 CE), under the guidance of prominent scholars of his time, such as Sharif Muhammad Al-Qadiri and At-Tahami Al-Kanun. He became known among his peers for his intelligence, sharp mind, and excellence in learning.

In addition to mastering Arabic and Amazigh, Al-Khattabi learned Spanish and became proficient in reading and speaking it when he moved to Melilla, the Moroccan city occupied by Spain. Rupert Furneaux, in his book "Abdel-Karim, Emir of the Rif", mentioned that the French governor of the island to



which Al-Khattabi was exiled would lend him French books and newspapers, which is how he also learned that language.

### **Professional Life**

The son of the Qadhi (judge) of the Bani Ouriaghel tribe, Muhammad Al-Khattabi took on multiple professions in Melilla, which was under Spanish control. Initially, he was nominated for the position of teacher at an elementary school called the "Escuela Indígena" (Native School), where he taught the children of Moroccan residents from 1907 to 1913.

At the same time, he was chosen to be an editor at the daily newspaper "Telegrama del Rif", when its director had the idea to attract Moroccan readers by including news on the front page written in Arabic. His director at the time, Cándido Lobera Girela, a captain of artillery and journalist, said about him: "He is a natural journalist, and in any case, he is diligent, disciplined, and honest, and these are qualities that are rarely found in his people."

Despite his turbaned head and rough Rifian djellaba (gown similar to the Arabian Thawb), his dual mastery of the Amazigh dialect and the Spanish language, as well as his status as the son of a Qadhi and a diploma holder, qualified him to occupy the position of translator at the Central Administration Office of Native Affairs in June 1910. He was promoted in 1912 to inspector (or advisor) at the office, which, according to historians, gathered information related to the situation within the tribes. In the same year, he took on teaching Amazigh to Spanish officers (including General Silvestre and the director of the Telegrama newspaper) at the Arabic Language Academy, which was established in 1906 and added Amazigh to its curriculum in 1914.

In August 1913, he was appointed as a judge at the Native Affairs Office, and by order of the Spanish High Commissioner at the time, he was promoted in 1914 to the position of First Judge.

He was relieved of all his duties when he was arrested on September 6, 1915, on the pretext of his involvement in politics, which contradicted his official position. He was said to have returned to his position after being acquitted by the military court after spending nearly 11 months in detention. He remained in his position until he returned to his tribe. During his exile on the island of Réunion, one of the French colonies in the Indian Ocean, he worked in trade. One of his companions managed a food store, which expanded to include the trade of fabrics and household goods, and later developed into gold trade and perfume export.

He later worked in agriculture, particularly in cultivating geraniums (an aromatic plant used in perfume and medicine production), sugarcane, and fruit trees, in addition to raising poultry and cultivating figs and white grapes.

Mohammed bin Abdul Karim Al-Khattabi's political upbringing was influenced by diverse cultural periods and environments, from his childhood

in Ajdir to his return to his hometown in mid-December 1918, after leaving Melilla. This period encompasses his childhood, education, youth, and work in the Spanish administration.

In the Rifian environment, the normal situation at that time was framed by three- religious, scientific, and political currents. The first current was represented by the Zaawiya (Sufi lodges) scattered throughout the various Rifian tribes, which were considered an important part of the people's lives, to which they referred for both religious and worldly matters.

The scientific current was represented by the academic influence derived from Al-Qarawiyyin University. Between these two currents, scientific institutions were established, where tribes would open their mosques to students and attract capable jurists to lead collective prayers, teach students, and prepare them to complete their studies at Al-Qarawiyyin.

He also grew up in a time when the environment of the Beni Ouriaghel tribe, the most powerful and influential, formed the axis of the Rif region during that period of history and contributed to directing its policy. This was especially true during the era of the events of the rebellion of the leader Zerhouni, nicknamed "Bu Hmara", when the tribe (of Muhammad Al-Khattabi) hastened to take up arms at the decisive moment (against Zerhouni) to confront his army in the autumn of 1908.

[Translator: Jilali Az-Zerhouni, aka "Bou Hmara," led a rebellion against Sultan Abdul Azeez in Morocco from 1902 to 1908. Initially, he gained support from various tribes, exploiting public resentment over oppressive taxes. His revolt spread across northern Morocco and initially seemed succeeding, but ultimately, Sharif Muhammad Amzian (who was an influence amongst the Rif tribes) turned against him. Bou Hmara was finally captured in 1908 and publicly executed by Sultan Abdul Hafid's forces, marking the end of his seven-year revolt, which had significant implications for Morocco's internal sovereignty and external relations.]

In addition, Qadhi Abdul-Karim involved his son in all aspects of life, and his companionship with his father allowed him to open up to political life. He learned a great deal from him about administration, politics, governance, and dealing with locals and foreigners. In his thirties, he embarked on political work and became directly involved in its realities. His father relied on him to represent him on many social and political occasions, and he accomplished many tasks, including being his father's envoy to the Moroccan Sultan Moulay Abdul-Aziz in 1908, conveying messages between them.

The environment and culture of occupied Melilla, located 70 miles from Ajdir, where he lived for nearly 12 years, provided him with a solid political education and allowed him to gain insight into Spanish politics. He said, "I have long associated with the Spanish, and I know their intentions." Historians believe that the Qadhi's son (i.e. Muhammad Al-Khattabi) did not

initially react with the necessary interest to the Spanish occupation, as he saw it as bringing good to his country, which lacked stability and civilization. However, he changed his opinion after interacting with the Spanish and becoming fully aware of their colonial intentions towards the Rif region.

The shift towards confrontation with Spanish colonial authority began in 1915, marked by his arrest on the pretext of his involvement in politics and communicating with the Germans. This marked the beginning of a new political phase in his life. After his final return from Melilla in 1919 to Ajdir, he worked with his father to lead a Rifian revolution against Spanish colonial expansion. He became a prominent figure, leveraging his intellectual and religious stature to unite the Rif tribes and assume their leadership.

Ahmed Skirej describes him in his book "Al-Dhil Al-Wareef fi Mahaarabat Ar-Rif" as "he was moulded with patience and a sound heart". Skirej mentions that one of the signs of his patience was that he turned a blind eye to someone who tried to poison him. On April 18, 1921, the first "Jabal Al-Qama" conference took place after the death of Al-Khattabi's father, allegedly due to poisoning. This conference marked the beginning of Al-Khattabi's leadership of the Rifian Revolution, with Jabal Al-Qama becoming a military and political hub that went beyond being a meeting place to become a military school and training center.

### **Life of Struggle and Resistance**

The life of struggle of Mohammed bin Abdul Karim Al-Khattabi is divided, according to historians and scholars, into three periods:

The first period began in December 1918 and ended with his surrender in May 1926. This was the period of the Rifian Revolution and the struggle for the liberation of the region. It was the third Rifian war, after the first in 1893 (the Battle of Sidi Waryash) and the second - led by Sharif Amzian (another nickname for Al-Khattabi, meaning "the young Sharif") in 1909.

Researcher in history, Mohammed Bedouaa, says that "Adhar Ouberran", a mountain peak in the Timsaman tribe in the heart of the Rif mountains, was "the first battle after the end of the era of friendship between Spain and Al-Khattabi". This battle marked the beginning of a series of consecutive victories over the course of five years in more than 200 battles, leading to the recapture of more than 186 centers from the Spanish colonial army.

The Battle of Annual (Anwaal) in the summer of 1921 was the most significant defeat suffered by the Spanish army in its colonial history. In military literature, it is referred to as "The Disaster or Tragedy" because Spain lost an estimated 15,000 soldiers and 570 prisoners, including General Silvestre, who had mockingly vowed to drink tea at Abdul-Karim's house when he marched on the Rif. Abdul-Krim, a calm and collected leader, commanded the battle using weapons and equipment captured from the Spanish army. This

battle was unique in history, as it saw prisoners taken only from the enemy side, according to historian Mohammed Arabi Al-Masaari.

Abdul-Karim, also known as the "Warrior of Ajdir (Muharib Ajdeer)," pioneered the guerrilla warfare tactic, which proved effective against a modern army. He led 4,000 traditionally armed mujahideen fighters against the Spanish army. This tactic was later adopted by Chinese leader Mao Zedong, Vietnamese leader Ho Chi Minh, and Argentine revolutionary Ernesto Che Guevara.

The man of simple law, who turned into a soldier, adopted a system of digging extensive trenches underground, even into the enemy's barracks. This tactic was later acknowledged by Ho Chi Minh as an inspiration in the Vietnamese fight against the Americans years later. Following this, he established the Confederated Republic of the Rif Tribes (Jumhuriyah Qabail Ar-Reef Al-Kunfadrallyah), or simply the Republic of the Rif (Jumhuriyah Ar-Reef), and became its president in 1923 CE. Historians emphasized that "the first and last characteristic of his movement was his liberation endeavour, starting from the region to restoring the country's independence, including Morocco's territorial unity."

He continued to resist colonization until 1924, and Spain was unable to enter the Rif until it allied itself with France, which directly entered the war under the command of Marshal Pétain. To put an end to the Rifian Revolution and its victories, the two countries used chemical weapons, just months after signing the Geneva Convention (June 17, 1925), which prohibited the use of such weapons.

During the period from May 1925 to May 1926, the military aircraft carried out 23,880 missions, including 9,880 bombing operations. The volume of shells used reached 1,434 tons and 162 kilograms of explosives, according to various media outlets that reported on the battle at the time.

After the Rifian Revolution lost all possibility of continuing the war and resistance, its leader (Ameer Muhammad Al-Khattabi) surrendered to French forces on May 26, 1926. This marked the beginning of a second phase, a 21-year exile for Abdul-Karim and his family on the island of Réunion, followed by a forced refuge in Egypt during his return to France on May 31, 1947.

Abdul-Karim resided in a small, two-story villa in Cairo for nearly 16 years, where he received Morocco's former King Mohammed V on January 13, 1960. During this final phase of his life, he returned to the forefront, aspiring to play crucial roles in liberating the greater Maghreb region. North African mujahideen from Tunisia, Algeria, and Morocco rallied around him, and he established the Liberation Committee of the Arab Maghreb (Lajnah Tahreer Al-Arab Al-Maghrib), announcing its formation on January 6, 1948.

## **Death**

Mohammed bin Abdul Karim Al-Khattabi died on February 6, 1963, from a heart attack, at the age of nearly 80, and was buried in the Martyrs' Cemetery (Maqbaratus-Shuhadah) in Abbasiya, on the outskirts of Cairo.

**End.**

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## **Territory of Spanish Morocco under control of the Rif Republic of Muhammad bin Abdul-Karim Al-Khattabi (outlined in red)<sup>5</sup>**



Established in 18<sup>th</sup> September 1921 and dissolved on 27<sup>th</sup> May 1927, after the surrender of Ameer Al-Khattabi, the Republic of The Rif<sup>6</sup> spanned approximately 36,631 square kilometres.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Source: <https://www.wikidata.org/wiki/Q37102>, [https://military-history.fandom.com/wiki/Abd\\_el-Krim](https://military-history.fandom.com/wiki/Abd_el-Krim), deviantart.com.

<sup>6</sup> Read as 'Reef'.

<sup>7</sup> For a comparison, The State of Kuwait, is 17,820 square kilometres, which is about the same size of the state of New Jersey in USA.

## **"The Legend of Islamic Morocco" (Ameer Muhammad bin Abdul Karim Al-Khattabi)**

"O Ameer... I have come to Cairo specifically to learn from you." (The Communist revolutionary Che Guevara, 1960)

"This man whose name is invoked by the people of Asia, Africa, and India, and whose name they glorify... This man who fights in the name of Islam and revives the Emirate of the Faithful and the Islamic Caliphate is the coming danger to European nations." (Sir Curti, Member of the British House of Commons, 1921)

"I entered Abdul Karim's frontline trench while Spanish and French planes were raining massive fire on the area. I found him smiling, cheerful, and undeterred, shooting at the planes with his rifle. I marvelled at this unique human phenomenon!" (American journalist Vincent Sheean, 1926)

Abdul Rahman Azzam Pasha, the first Secretary-General of the Arab League, could not believe his eyes as he read the secret telegram that arrived from a group of Arab fighters in Yemen on a day in 1947: (Urgent and Top Secret... A French ship has docked in the port of Aden today carrying an elderly man in chains. It is suspected that he is the legendary Islamic hero who disappeared twenty years ago... The ship is now enroute to France and will pass through the Egyptian port of Port Said (Port Saeed) tomorrow. Immediate action is required!) As soon as Azzam Pasha finished reading the telegram, he urgently requested an emergency meeting with King Farouk to discuss this critical message received from the Bab-el-Mandeb Strait. A swift, confidential discussion took place between Azzam Pasha and King Farouk at the latter's residence. Within moments, orders were issued to the officers...

History: From this land emerged the soldiers of the "Almoravid" (Al-Murabitoon) state to Andalusia; from here, the forces of the "Almohad" (Al-Muwahhidoon) state sailed to Europe; and from here, the Islamic Brigades of Light first marched into Europe under the leadership of Tariq ibn Ziyad. Thus, European nations resolved to end this Islamic threat. European countries convened the "Algeciras Conference" in 1906, attended by 12 European states. For the first time in history, the name "America" appeared, marking the United States' breach of the "Monroe Doctrine," which stipulated: "No American intervention in international politics." All these nations gathered to terminate this eternal Islamic nightmare. The final decision of this conference was: The partition of the Islamic Maghreb (Islamic North-West Africa)!

It is astonishing that those countries were not content with merely dividing the Islamic Kingdom of Morocco, but rather did so in a malicious manner unprecedented in human history, ensuring its permanent fragmentation. France took the southern part of the kingdom, "Mauritania," while Spain seized the adjacent northern region, "Western Sahara." France then took control of the area north of Western Sahara, "central Morocco," followed by Spain's occupation of the northern coastal region, "the Moroccan Rif." Amidst

this, Germany and Britain occupied various cities. Everyone assumed that this would eradicate the Islamic presence in Morocco forever.

However, Shaikh Abdul-Karim Al-Khattabi and his son Muhammad had a different vision. They began uniting the feuding tribes under the single banner of Islam and communicating with the Ottoman Caliph in the capital of the Caliphate. The Spanish killed Shaikh Abdul-Karim Al-Khattabi (may Allah have mercy on him and accept his martyrdom), and they imprisoned his son Shaikh Muhammad in a prison atop a mountain. In a legendary escape, Shaikh Muhammad fashioned a rope from his bed sheets to escape through the window. Unfortunately, the rope was too short, and he jumped from the great height, breaking his legs and losing consciousness from the shock. Before the prison authorities discovered his escape, they returned him to prison.

After his release from prison, Ameer Muhammad ibn Abdul-Karim Al-Khattabi assembled a 3,000-strong army from the men of the Moroccan Rif tribes, pioneering a new form of guerrilla warfare that would be adopted by rebels worldwide. He also devised a system of underground trenches extending to the enemy's barracks, which was later emulated by the Vietnamese leader Ho Chi Minh in their fight against the Americans.

As Spanish losses mounted in the Islamic Rif, King Alfonso XIII of Spain dispatched a full army from Madrid under the command of his friend General Silvestre. The two forces clashed in the legendary Battle of Anwal (of Battle of Annual), pitting a well-organized Spanish army of 60,000 soldiers with aircraft and tanks against 3,000 Muslim freedom fighters armed with basic rifles. The two enemies differed in their motivations: one fought for Allah, while the other fought for land and the Cross. Allah granted victory to the believers, and the 3,000 soldiers under the legendary leadership of Al-Khattabi triumphed over the 60,000-strong Crusader army. The Muslims killed 18,000 Spanish soldiers and captured tens of thousands, while only 600 Spanish soldiers escaped to Spain, fleeing like beaten dogs to recount the horrors they witnessed in the Moroccan Rif to their king.

Subsequently, Ameer Al-Khattabi established the "Islamic Emirate of the Rif" in northern Morocco. During his five-year rule, he taught the people the true Islamic faith, free from superstition and charlatanism. He also sent scientific missions to countries worldwide and united the feuding tribes under the banner of Islam.

As expected after every Islamic awakening, the Crusader nations reunited to counter the newly-born Islamic nation, which, had it endured, would have altered the course of history. They formed an alliance of half a million European soldiers, armed with tanks, aircraft, and warships, to battle 20,000 soldiers of Al-Khattabi. The outcome was a major surprise: the soldiers, led by Ameer Muhammad ibn Abdul-Karim Al-Khattabi, emerged victorious in every confrontation, inflicting heavy losses on the invaders.

The European armies, desperate to turn the tide, bribed some Sufi Shaikhs to fight against al-Khattabi, who had previously opposed their innovations, such as dancing, chanting, and celebrating the Prophet's birthday. These Shaikhs issued a fatwa prohibiting fighting alongside Al-Khattabi. Meanwhile, French and Spanish aircraft dropped chemical weapons and toxic gases on civilians, while the British Navy blockaded Morocco's coast.

Al-Khattabi fought against the combined forces of the Crusaders and traitors, with only 200 soldiers remaining by his side, all sworn to martyrdom. These warriors fought valiantly until the Crusaders, exhausted and defeated, sought a truce with Al-Khattabi, offering guarantees for the safety of all the Muslim soldiers and the well-being of the Moroccan people. However, true to their nature, the Crusaders reneged on their promises, kidnapping and exiling Al-Khattabi to a remote island in the Indian Ocean for 20 consecutive years.

This heroic figure, who sacrificed his youth to uphold the banner of Islam, remains unknown to many Muslim youths, who instead idolize secular and communist heroes. Interestingly, Che Guevara, the communist revolutionary, travelled to Cairo to learn from al-Khattabi, a fact that could alter the perception of Muslim youths regarding their own history.

***End of the extract from At-Turbani's book 'Miyatu Min Al-Uzama Al-Islam Ghaiyiru Majri At-Tareekh (100 Greats From The Islamic Ummah That Changed The Course of History)' by At-Turbani.***

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# **Timeline of The Life of Muhammad bin Abdul-Karim Al-Khattabi (1882/83–1963) [Rahimahullah]**

## **Early Life and Education**

- Name: Muhammad bin Abdul-Karim Al-Khattabi, famous with the Europeans as AbdulKrim Al-Khattabi.
- 1882/83: Born in the village of Ajdir, in the Rif Mountains of northern Morocco, into the Aith Yusuf tribe, part of the larger Amazigh (Berber) confederation. His father, Abdul-Karim Al-Khattabi, was a prominent Islamic judge (Qadhi) and tribal leader, respected for his religious knowledge and arbitration skills.
- Early 1890s: Begins studying the Quran, Arabic, and Islamic jurisprudence under his father. Demonstrates early intellectual curiosity and leadership qualities.
- Late 1890s–1905: Sent to Fez, Morocco's cultural and religious center, to study at the University of Al-Qarawiyyin, one of the oldest universities in the world. There, he deepens his understanding of Islamic law (Shariah), Arabic literature, and theology. Exposure to debates on modernization and resistance to European colonialism shapes his worldview.
- 1906: Moves to Melilla, a Spanish-held enclave in northern Morocco, where he works as a teacher and Qadhi (Islamic judge) for the local Muslim community. Learns Spanish fluently and observes Spanish colonial administration firsthand. Develops critical views of European imperialism.
- 1907–1910s: Continues to work in Melilla, gaining a reputation for fairness and integrity. Begins writing articles criticizing Spanish policies in Moroccan newspapers. Builds networks with Moroccan nationalists and anti-colonial activists.

## **Rise to Leadership and Early Resistance**

- 1915: Returns to Ajdir after his father's death. Inherits leadership of the Aith Yusuf tribe and begins consolidating alliances with neighboring Rifian tribes. Advocates for unity against Spanish encroachment.
- 1919: Spanish forces intensify efforts to control the Rif, exploiting tribal divisions. Al-Khattabi organizes clandestine meetings with tribal leaders, emphasizing collective resistance.
- 1920: Spanish General Manuel Fernández Silvestre launches a military campaign to subjugate the Rif, establishing forward bases at Annual and Monte Abarrán. Al-Khattabi mobilizes Rifian fighters, blending traditional guerrilla tactics with modern military strategies.

- Early 1921: Issues a call for Jihad (holy struggle) against Spanish occupation, framing the conflict as both a religious duty and a nationalist struggle.

### **The Battle of Annual and Founding of the Rif Republic**

- July 21–August 9, 1921: Battle of Annual (Desastre de Annual): Al-Khattabi's forces ambush and annihilate 14,000 Spanish troops, including General Silvestre (who reportedly dies by suicide). Spain loses control of most of the Rif, marking one of the worst colonial defeats in modern history.
- 1921–1923: Declares the Confederated Republic of the Rif Tribes (later the Rif Republic). Establishes a centralized government with:
  - A constitution blending Islamic law and secular principles.
  - Administrative divisions governed by tribal councils.
  - A modern army trained in guerrilla warfare and equipped with captured Spanish weapons.
  - Judicial reforms, including bans on tribal feuds and corruption.
  - Infrastructure projects: schools, hospitals, and roads.
- 1923: Officially proclaims the Rif Republic as an independent state, seeking international recognition (unsuccessfully). Introduces a flag, postage stamps, and a taxation system.
- 1924: Repels Spanish counteroffensives, including the Battle of Tizi Azza and Battle of Sidi Messaud, using mountain terrain to his advantage.

### **War Against France and Collapse of the Republic**

- April 1925: France, alarmed by the Rif Republic's success and its potential to inspire anti-colonial movements in French Morocco, allies with Spain. Marshal Philippe Pétain commands a joint force of 500,000 troops, supported by aircraft, tanks, and chemical weapons.
- September 1925: Battle of Uarga: French-Spanish forces use mustard gas (supplied by Germany) to bomb Rifian villages, killing civilians and destroying crops. Al-Khattabi condemns the use of chemical warfare as a "war against humanity."
- 1925–1926: Despite fierce resistance, Rifian forces are outgunned and outnumbered. Al-Khattabi's appeals for international aid (to the League of Nations, Soviet Union, and UK) go unanswered.
- May 26, 1926: Surrenders to French authorities in Targuist to prevent further civilian suffering. Over 150,000 Rifians are estimated dead by this point.

### **Exile in Réunion and Escape to Egypt**

- 1926–1947: Exiled with his family to Réunion Island, a French colony in the Indian Ocean. Lives under house arrest in the town of Saint-Denis. Limited to writing letters and teaching his children, he remains a symbol of resistance.
- 1947: After WWII, The French Government agrees to transfer him to France on condition of "good behavior." En route, the ship docks in Port Said (Saeed), Egypt, where Al-Khattabi escapes with help from the Arab League and Moroccan nationalists.
- 1947–1956: Settles in Cairo, Egypt. Becomes a leading voice in anti-colonial movements:
  - Advises Algerian FLN (National Liberation Front) leaders during the Algerian War of Independence (1954–1962).
  - Publishes articles and speeches condemning French and Spanish colonialism.
  - Refuses to return to Morocco after its independence in 1956, criticizing King Mohammed V for accepting a "neocolonial" monarchy.

### **Final Years and Death**

- 1958: Publishes his memoirs, 'My Life and the Rif War', detailing his resistance philosophy and condemning European imperialism.
- 1960s: Maintains correspondence with global revolutionaries, including Che Guevara and Ho Chi Minh, who cite his guerrilla strategies as inspiration.
- February 6, 1963: Dies of natural causes in Cairo at age 80. Buried in the Cairo Cemetery under a simple tombstone.
- Posthumous:
  - 2006: Moroccan activists petition to repatriate his remains; debates over his legacy persist.
  - 2017: Protests in the Rif region invoke his name, demanding development and recognition of Amazigh rights.

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## **Some of The Battles of Muhammad bin Abdul-Karim Al-Khattabi [Rahimahullah]**

Muhammad bin Abdul-Karim Al-Khattabi, the leader of the Rif Republic in northern Morocco, orchestrated some of the most audacious anti-colonial battles of the early 20th century. His campaigns against Spanish and French forces (1921–1926) combined guerrilla tactics, tribal unity, and strategic brilliance. Below are his key battles, their outcomes, and historical significance:

### **1. Battle of Annual (July 21–August 9, 1921)**

- Participants:
  - Rifian Forces: ~3,000–5,000 irregular fighters under Al-Khattabi.
  - Spanish Forces: ~14,000 troops led by General Manuel Fernández Silvestre.
- Casualties:
  - Spanish: ~12,000–14,000 killed, wounded, or captured (including Silvestre, who died by suicide).
  - Rifian: ~1,000 casualties.
- Significance:
  - A catastrophic defeat for Spain, marking the collapse of its colonial ambitions in the Rif.
  - Cemented Al-Khattabi's reputation as a military genius and united Rifian tribes under his leadership.
  - Enabled the establishment of the 'Rif Republic' (1923), a short-lived independent state.

### **2. Battle of Tizi Azza (June 1924)**

- Participants:
  - Rifian Forces: ~10,000 fighters.
  - Spanish Forces: ~18,000 troops under General Leopoldo Saro Marín and later General José Aizpuru.
- Casualties:
  - Spanish: ~2,500 killed; thousands more wounded.
  - Rifian: ~500 killed.
- Significance:

- Al-Khattabi repelled a major Spanish counteroffensive aimed at reclaiming lost territory.
- Demonstrated the Rifians' ability to defend mountainous terrain against conventional European armies.
- Forced Spain to seek French military collaboration, escalating the conflict into a Franco-Spanish coalition.

### **3. Battle of Uarga (September 1925)**

- Participants:
  - Rifian Forces: ~20,000 fighters.
  - Franco-Spanish Forces: ~160,000 troops (including French Marshal Philippe Pétain's army).
- Casualties:
  - Franco-Spanish: ~2,000 killed.
  - Rifian: ~10,000+ civilians and fighters killed (many due to chemical weapons).
- Significance:
  - France deployed mustard gas and aerial bombing, devastating Rifian villages and crops.
  - Marked the beginning of the Rif Republic's collapse under overwhelming technological and numerical superiority.
  - Highlighted the brutality of colonial warfare and sparked international (but largely ignored) condemnation of chemical weapons use.

### **4. Final Surrender (May 26, 1926)**

- Participants:
  - Rifian Forces: Remnants of Al-Khattabi's army and civilian population.
  - French Forces: Led by General Hubert Lyautey.
- Casualties:
  - Total Rifian deaths during the war: ~150,000 (mostly civilians from warfare, famine, and disease).
  - French/Spanish losses: ~35,000+ combined.
- Significance:

- Al-Khattabi surrendered to prevent further civilian suffering after France blockaded food supplies and intensified chemical attacks.
- Ended the Rif War, but his resistance inspired later anti-colonial movements in Africa and Asia.

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## About The Translator

Mohammed (bin) Thajammul Hussain Manna - is a student of Islamic Studies, a teacher, an author and a small-time translator. He completed his Bachelors in Aeronautical Engineering from MVJCE, Bangalore (VTU) in 2012, during and after which he started studying The Quran and Sunnah under the guidance of local scholars and students of knowledge. In 2024 he completed his Bachelors in Islamic Studies from Preston International College, Chennai (TNOU), and an Advanced Diploma In Islamic Studies from the Aspire College of Excellence, Bangalore (TNOU). (As on 2024, he is currently pursuing a Masters in Social Work from Tamil Nadu Open University, Alhamdulillah.)

Some of his other works include:

1. The Biography of The Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) From Reliable And Credibly Established Narrations (3 Volumes, 1245 pages). [This is the first Seerah of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ that uses only authentic narrations for the story line.]
2. The Authentic Biography of Bilal bin Rabah (Radi Allahu Anhu).
3. Mukhtasar Sahih Seeratun Nabi (A Summarized Authentic Seerah of The Prophet in 180 pages).
4. Famous But Unauthentic Stories From The Biography of The Prophet Muhammad (Salallahu Alaihi Wa Sallam).
5. Actions That Are Equivalent To Hajj In Rewards.
6. 'The Fitnah Of Shakeel bin Haneef' -The false claimant of being Prophet Isa and Imam Al-Mahdi.
7. Various others articles, Fatawa of Ulama and translated works here ([authenticseerah.com](http://authenticseerah.com)).

In order to avail the books please email: [getauthenticseerah@gmail.com](mailto:getauthenticseerah@gmail.com) .

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