



Author, Harry Chase, U.S. photographer, Imperial War Museums, public domain, Wikimedia

Nine-tenths of tactics are certain and taught in books; but the irrational tenth is like the kingfisher flashing across the pool, and that is the test of generals.

— T. E. Lawrence



Wadi Rum, Transjordan – Author, Tomobe03, Arabic Wikimedia

Men have looked upon the desert as barren land, the free holding of whoever chose; but in fact each hill and valley in it had a man who was its acknowledged owner and would quickly assert the right of his family or clan to it, against aggression.

— T. E. Lawrence

Yvonne

*The people of England have been led in Mesopotamia into a trap
From which it will be hard to escape with dignity and honor.*

— T. E. Lawrence

*There is a gulf, and nothing can bridge it . . . We, as a nation, want this country to be ours;
the Arabs, as a nation, want this country to be theirs.*

— David Ben-Gurion

“Céline hasn’t come back?” Giovanni said when he returned.

“What are you worried about? She knows we need some time alone.”

“We don’t know,” he said with a frown, “who is hanging out in the park.”

“Are you serious?”

“You never know,” he said pouring the coffee.

We drank our coffee in silence listening to birds flitting from tree to tree and watched translucent clouds passing over the sun, the fleeting shadows dancing on fluttering leaves.

“How does your neck feel? Did I do some good?”

“Yes,” I said, cupping my hands around my neck and slowly turning my head. “Thanks to your miraculous hands I feel more relaxed. Bending over a typewriter isn’t good for me.”

“Remember, your head weighs over ten pounds. Imagine a bowling ball on your neck weighing ten pounds while you’re leaning forward, with the center of gravity of your head off balance while your neck muscles and trapezius become tense trying to hold up ten pounds. With all of that weight cantilevered forward you develop tension in your upper trapezius and across your chest too. That’s an

enormous amount of strain. It's not surprising that people suffer a lot of pain from having their head off balance hour after hour. Would you like a repeat performance?"

"You've done so much. I couldn't ask for more. Your hands must be tired."

"You like me working on your trapezius. Lay down on the pillow," he commanded. "I'm not through with you yet."

He pushed firmly along the muscle then eased off.

"Stretch, and slow release." He pushed again, "Stretch and slow release."

"Your hands are strong."



Japanese blind massage – Adolfo Farsari, 1885, public domain, Wikimedia

"I'm ready for the next chapter. Lawrence had lost the gold. He was worn out, ready to give up on the Arab Revolt and go home to England."

"The next chapter could be called 'Winning the War and Losing the Paris Peace Conference.'"

"How did they win the war?"

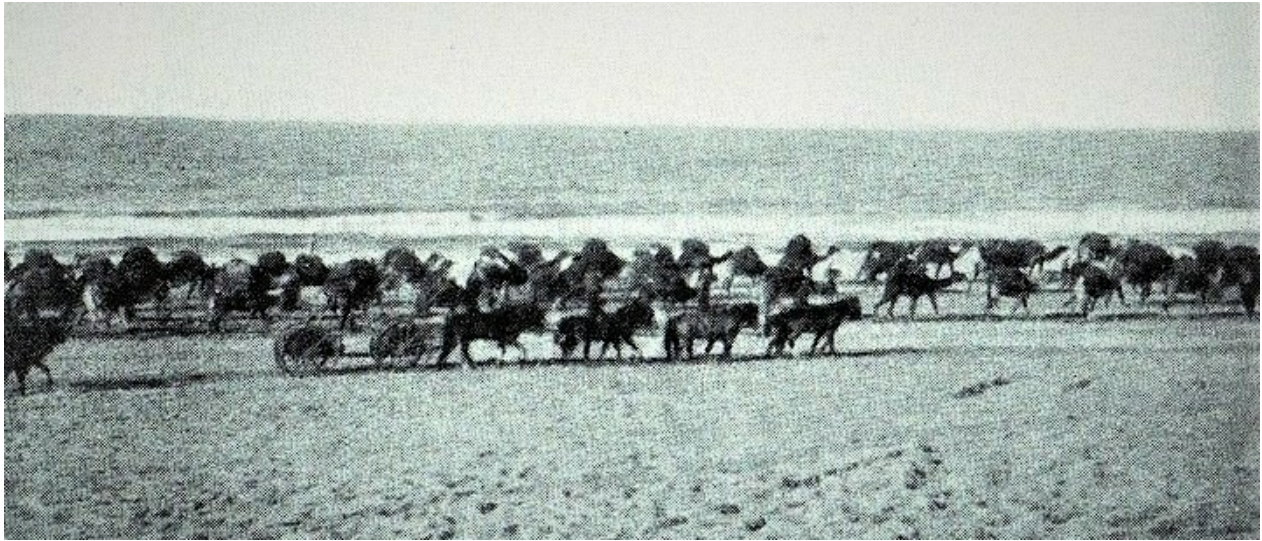
“The War Cabinet was pushing Allenby to relieve pressure on the frozen Western Front. They wanted him to take Damascus and Aleppo and force the Ottomans to sue for peace. Lawrence was the key link between the EEF and Feisal who had absolute trust in him. When Lawrence arrived with his request to be let go, Allenby wasn’t about to let a key man go. Allenby was a brilliant general. He understood that without the Arabs harassing the Turks on his eastern flank, he couldn’t take Damascus with his current amount of manpower. Despite his weariness and severe doubt, Lawrence had no choice but to go on. One day of rest and he was right back into it, telling Allenby that they’d have to take Maan and permanently sever the rail to Medina. The only way they could do that was to have hundreds of baggage camels to allow them longer range. Allenby promised the Egyptian Camel Transport Corps, 700 pack-camels which could supply several thousand Arab regulars giving them a range of action of eighty miles from their base. The worries about losing the gold were over. Allenby placed £300,000 into Lawrence’s account.”

“Good grief, in today’s money that must be 50 million pounds.”

“When you consider that Feisal had 40,000 troops on the books and had to maintain thousands of camels, it’s not that large of sum. Despite the improved finances, bad news fell again. The Germans had launched a massive offensive in Flanders and London transferred 60,000 men from Allenby’s EEF to the Western Front making it impossible for him to go on with the offensive. While the loss of troops had brought



Egyptian Camel Transport Corps loading a camel caravan at El Arish – Author, Australian Government, Australian War Memorial, public domain, Wikimedia



Egyptian Camel Transport Corps on the beach at El Arish, British Palestine campaign, 1917 – Source, Guy C. Powles, *The New Zealanders in Sinai and Palestine*, 1922, public domain, Wikimedia



Lt. Col. T. E. Lawrence, D.G. Hogarth, and Lt. Col Alan Dawnay, Cairo, 1918 – Author, Harry Chase, public domain, Wikimedia

a halt to Allenby's offensive in Palestine, Lawrence was grateful for Lieutenant-Colonel Alan Dawnay who was given to the Revolt as the liaison to the EEF. Dawnay, Lawrence said, was Allenby's greatest gift, even greater than hundreds of baggage camels. While not able to directly command since he didn't speak Arabic, Dawnay was well educated with manners that won over the Arabs. For the first time, the colonel brought organization

and discipline to the campaign, providing supply and shipping staff, ordnance and intelligence officers.

Lawrence was thrilled with Dawnay because he quickly grasped the methods of the rebellion. Dawnay was Lawrence's ideal of what a career officer could be — 'a man who 'married war and rebellion.'"

“Do you remember where it was that Lawrence ran into Lowell Thomas, the journalist who wrote the book on Lawrence?”

“It was in Jerusalem. When Lawrence was conferring with Jerusalem's Military Governor Ronald Storrs, he was introduced to Lowell Thomas. An ambitious American journalist, Thomas had the idea of making a patriotic slide presentation on the war. At the beginning of the war, the American Expeditionary Force was at their lowest number of soldiers since the Civil War. The War Department needed to motivate men to sign up. A great persuader, Thomas secured the backing of the U.S. government which hoped that his lectures would increase support in a public which at the beginning wasn't too wild about going to war. Thomas' initial idea was to do a slide show on the Western Front, but after a tour of the trenches, he realized that the frightful carnage wouldn't make an inspirational travelogue, not much glamour in it. When Thomas heard of the capture of Jerusalem, he had an epiphany. Here was something that would excite Christian America.



Lowell Thomas, 1918 – cliohistory.org/Thomas-lawrence/show, public domain, Wikimedia

“Furnished with letters of support from the U.S. Secretaries of War, Navy, and State, London gave him permission to cover the war in Palestine.”

“What was Lawrence’s reaction to Thomas’ idea?”

“Lawrence was enthusiastic about publicity for the Arab Revolt. He hoped that Thomas’ lectures would influence American support for Arab independence. When he posed for Thomas’ photographer Harry Chase, he didn’t dream that it would turn him into a legend whether he liked it or not. Returning to Cairo, Lawrence learned that he’d been promoted to Lieutenant-Colonel and awarded a DSO for the defeat of the Turks at Wadi Hesa.”

“What’s a DSO?”

“The Distinguished Service Order was founded by Queen Victoria to award officers ranked Major or higher for acts of gallantry under enemy fire. Lawrence believed the award would have made more sense if it had been given for the destruction of the Turkish boats on the Dead Sea rather than the massacre at Wadi Hesa. When he got back to Akaba, Lowell Thomas and his photographer showed up asking for more photographs. Lawrence had the photographer Harry Chase photograph the Arab leaders and after a few days went north on a scouting trip. Thomas got little information out of Lawrence who gave the credit to Emir Feisal and other Arab leaders, forcing the journalist to get his material by interviewing the officers at Akaba and in Cairo where he was given access to the Arab Bulletin and Lawrence’s reports that should have been classified. When Lawrence later discovered the exaggerated heroic portrait that Thomas had created, he said Thomas was ‘never in the Arab firing line, nor did he ever see an operation or ride with me.’”

“While waiting for Allenby’s offensive on Amman to begin, he rode north with his bodyguard and a convoy of camels loaded with food and ammunition, attacking railway stations near Amman. Unknown to Lawrence, at that moment, Allenby’s Chief of Staff had attacked Salt, ten miles from Amman. In bad weather and confusion, the Germans and Turks defeated them in a bloody battle. With 1,000 casualties, Allenby made a lightening decision to cut his losses and retreat. The EEF Desert Mounted Corps under Australian General Henry Chauvel barely escaped, retreating across the Jordan. The defeat was a low point for the British. Everything had come unraveled at once — the massive German offensive on the Western Front had driven the Allies back, making it look like Germany would win the war. The Bolsheviks had exposed the secret Sykes-Picot agreement which dictated that only the infertile lands of Arabian Peninsula would be autonomous while the most fertile land of Syria would be ruled by the Allies.



Brigadier General H. G. Chauvel at his bunker headquarters at Monash Valley, Gallipoli Campaign, 1915 – Author, Ryan, Charles Snodgrass, Australian War Memorial collections, public domain, Wikimedia



7th Mounted Yeomanry Mounted Brigade in Salonika, 1916 – Author, UK Army photographer. Imperial War Museums, public domain, Wikimedia



Ottoman Hejaz Railroad, Beersheva station, 1917 – G. G. Eric and Edith Matson Photograph Collection, Library of Congress, Wikimedia



Australian Heliograph Signal Unit, 1917 – Australian War Memorial, public domain, Wikimedia



Australians of the Imperial Camel Corps – Author, James Francis Hurley, Australian War Memorial, public domain, Wikimedia

“Confronted with the Balfour Declaration which promised the Jews a homeland in Palestine, and the knowledge that the Allies were secretly negotiating in Switzerland for an end to the war, the Arabs were enraged. Lawrence knew that there was a grave risk that the Arabs would make a deal with the Turks and abandon Britain.”

“This was the low point of the Arab Revolt,” Giovanni said.

“There was one bright spot. Lawrence found out that the Imperial Camel Corps Brigade was being reorganized as a conventional cavalry which would release thousands of camels. He instantly conjured up a plan — two thousand camels would make it possible to send fifteen hundred Arab regulars and five hundred machine gunners to Azrak, blow up the bridges in the Yarmouk Gorge that he’d failed to blow up and drive the Turks out of the key rail junction at Deraa.”

“Blowing the bridges,” Giovanni said, “would keep the Turks from bringing reinforcements up the gorge from Palestine.”

“With the Germans beating the Allies on the Western Front, Lawrence believed that an Arab attack inland to support Allenby on the littoral, would be their last chance to take Damascus. If they didn’t do it soon, all would be lost.



Camel nursing her calf – Garrondo, Wikimedia

“Despite the defeat at Salt, the reward of two thousand camels gave Lawrence new hope. ‘It was an immense gift, Lawrence said, ‘a gift of unlimited mobility. The Arabs could now take their war whenever and wherever they liked.’”

“Without the noble camel,” Giovanni said, “the Arab Revolt would’ve never been successful.”

“The camel is an exceptional creature. Domesticated over three to four thousand years ago, camels were not only a source of milk, meat and means of transport, they were ideal for Bedouin warfare because they could run distances at twenty five miles per hour with bursts of speed up to forty miles per hour. Evolution has provided them with unique abilities to survive severe desert conditions withstanding radical changes in body temperatures and water consumption that would kill other beasts. Unlike other mammals, their red blood cells



Camel calves in sternal recumbency, a position that allows cooling air to pass between their bodies and the sand – Imre Solt, Wikimedia

are oval which helps the flow of blood cells during extremes of dehydration. A large dromedary camel can drink 50 gallons of water in four or five minutes.”

“That’s hard to imagine,” Giovanni laughed. “You’d think they’d burst. I can understand how they can store water, but how do they go so long without food?”

“It’s the hump. It’s a reservoir of energy — fatty tissue which sustains them for long periods of time. Concentrating their fat in one place rather than being distributed all over their body is another factor that keeps them cool. Everything about the camel’s system is designed to conserve water. For example, when a camel exhales, water vapor is trapped in their nostrils and reabsorbed into the body. Their feces contains nearly zero water, like the Bighorn sheep which also can go many days without drinking. When a camel eats grass, the moisture in the grass is stored in their bodies. Their long legs keep their bodies away from the surface of the desert which can reach temperatures of 160 degrees. Another unique trait, is that when they lie down, the design of their legs, keeps their torso lifted away from the ground, allowing air to pass under and carry off heat.”

“It’s extraordinary,” Giovanni cried, “how evolution creates creatures so in harmony with their environment.”



Arab camel transport, 1918 – American Colony Jerusalem, public domain, Wikimedia

“The more I learn about evolution,” I said, “the more I believe that God is not a thing but the process of life. A camel’s mouth has a leathery lining which allows them to chew thorny desert plants. When great sand storms blow, their nostrils can close, their long eyelashes protecting them against the blowing sand. Their third eyelid can extricate sand wedged in their eyes and the wide structure of their feet prevents them from sinking into deep sand. For centuries, camels have been used in mobile combat, the Persians and Romans favoring them because when horses draw near they’re frightened by the camel’s scent. France created L’Armée d’Afrique camel corps to subdue the Tuaregs in the Sahara. Camels have served as cavalry in India, Pakistan, Arabia, Ethiopia, Somalia, Egypt, Sudan, Libya, Tunisia, Algeria, Niger, Mali, Mauritania, Chad and Morocco.”

“That’s a lot of countries,” Giovanni laughed. “The camels are the workers of the world. With Allenby short of troops and at a deadlock in Palestine, what was Lawrence’s plan?”

“Before he could attack Deraa, he had to wait until the camels arrived by ship.”

“I can imagine,” Giovanni said, “what the ship must have smelled like during a long journey with hundreds of camels on board.”

“The camels would need time to acclimate to grazing. In Egypt they had been fed only barley. He also had to bring up Arab regulars from the Hejaz and keep pressure on the railway, blowing up rails, bridges, wells and water towers to keep the Turks from attacking from the north. The impatient and inflexible British officer

originally in charge had trouble leading the Bedouins by giving strict commands, creating a maximum of friction. He finally suffered a break down leaving Lawrence no choice but to take command himself. The RAF was a great strength for Lawrence, their reconnaissance keeping him abreast of enemy movements. By flying from their base near Guweira, the RAF's continual bombing prevented the Turks from concentrating men and supplies, convincing Lawrence that was the future of warfare. 'A combination of armored cars and aircraft,' he said, 'could rule the desert.'

"His greatest problem were the villagers between the railway and the Dead Sea who after the defeat of the EEF at Salt were afraid to support the British because of the terrible vengeance of the Turks. After a reconnaissance in the villages of the plateau, he decided that if the villagers believed it was not merely a raid but a permanent advance of two thousand regulars, the Hauran's would declare for Feisal. For the attack on Deraa, Lawrence asked Feisal to request King Hussein to transfer to Akaba a number of Abdullah's troops in the Hejaz which would raise their strength to 10,000 men. Lawrence planned for one third of the new troops to defend around Maan, another third joining with Allenby at Jericho and the final third, a thousand strong riding on the new camels to raise the people of the Hauran and 'destroy the Turkish Palestine army between the Arab's hammer and Allenby's anvil.'"

"You mentioned," Giovanni said, "the Sykes-Picot agreement, Zionism, the Balfour Declaration. What came of Djemal Pasha's offer of independence to Arabia and his promise of self-rule for Syria if Feisal would switch sides?"

"At that moment, it was a very real possibility. When Lawrence returned to Feisal's camp after the scouting trip in the north, he made inquiries with Feisal's secretaries and learned that the emir was concealing from him negotiations with Turks. A further complexity was that Dr. Chaim Weizmann, the foremost British Zionist was making diplomatic overtures to Feisal. Weizmann's Zionist Commission had been authorized by the War Cabinet to meet Feisal at Akaba to establish good relations with the Arabs in Palestine and overcome Arab distrust of the goals of Zionism. General Clayton urged Lawrence to 'impress on Feisal the necessity of an entente with the Jews.' Lawrence had left Akaba before the telegram arrived and missed the meeting at which Weizmann posed for photos with Feisal, wearing an Arab headdress as a sign of friendship. Weizman assured Feisal that the Jews were not proposing to set up a Jewish government, but create a Jewish community under British protection which would live in political and economic harmony with the Arabs."

"Which," Giovanni said, "proved impossible."



Emir Feisal and Chaim Weizmann, 1918 – Public domain, Wikimedia

“Feisal told Weizmann that there could be circumstance in which the Arabs would allow the Jews to develop territory in Palestine, but since the Ottomans were using the Balfour Declaration to accuse the British of colonializing Palestine, he couldn’t make a public statement. Besides, it was a decision that only his father, the Sherif of Mecca could make. Later when the Jews began to flood into Palestine and buy up land, Feisal demanded that the British limit Jewish immigration. Lawrence later met Weizman at Allenby’s headquarters and concluded that the Zionist leader planned to establish a Jewish Palestine under a British façade and in fifty years create a completely Jewish Palestine. Lawrence said that for the moment, the Arabs didn’t need the help of the Jews. However, if the Syrian nationalists, Maronite Christians, and the pro-French wouldn’t accept a Hashemite as ruler, then there might be an advantage in co-operating with the Jews if it helped establish an independent Arab nation in Syria.”

“Did Lawrence convince Hussein to transfer the Arab troops from the Hejaz?”

“Sir Reginald Wingate, Feisal, and Allenby wrote to King Hussein requesting the troops and Lawrence sailed with the letters down the Red Sea to Jeddah, but Hussein refused to meet with Lawrence, claiming that he couldn’t leave Mecca during Ramadan. Since Lawrence was not allowed to enter the Holy City, Lawrence telephoned Hussein but the King pretended he couldn’t hear because of a faulty connection. Refusing to give up, Lawrence wrote a letter to Hussein explaining that the Turks had 8,000 men at Amman and Feisal didn’t have enough fighters to take on 4,000 Turkish troops at Maan. His plea fell on deaf ears. Hussein refused to release Abdullah’s troops.”

“But why,” Giovanni asked, “would Hussein refuse? The British were financing his regime.”

“Jealousy. Lawrence described it as ‘green-eyed hatred for his son.’ While Hussein was sitting in Mecca, his son was grabbing all the power and glory. Feisal’s success was eating Hussein’s soul. The other reason was that Ibn Saud’s Ikhwan warriors were threatening Hussein’s rule on the Hejaz.”

“Failing to get more fighters,” Giovanni said, “put a hole in Lawrence’s plans.”

“That’s what you do in war, make do with what you got. Colonel Dawnay came up with the idea of asking for the Imperial Camel Corps which headquarters approved. When the Camel Corps of 300 men reached Akaba under the command of Robin Buxton who also had studied history at Oxford, it was decided to disguise the coming attack on Deraa by moving to the south to overrun the Turkish garrison at Mudowwara before moving 120 miles north behind enemy lines to destroy the viaduct south of Amman. Once they arrived at their forward dump of supplies, they found it had been looted by Bedouins which forced Buxton to send back fifty men. Before they reached the viaduct, they were spotted by a German reconnaissance plane which ended any possibility of surprise. They had no choice but to return to Aba el Lissan where Lawrence heard that King Hussein had announced in the Mecca newspaper that he didn’t recognize Jaafar as Commander-in-Chief of the Arab Northern Army.”

“But why? Jaafar was commander all along.”

“Allenby had decorated Jaafar Pasha for his victories King Hussein had a fit of jealousy. Jaafar and all of his officers resigned, leaving Feisal with no commanders and essentially no army.”

“The King of Hejaz,” Giovanni said, “had become his own worst enemy. No wonder there were so many times that Lawrence wanted to walk off of an impossible job.”

“Lawrence understood why Hussein was asserting his authority over Feisal. The King wanted to spite the Syrian and Mesopotamian officers who he despised because they weren’t fighting to make him ruler of the Caliphate. They were fighting to govern themselves. The Syrian and Iraqi leaders insisted on a retraction from Hussein and Feisal sent a telegram resigning his command. Lawrence’s plan for the attack on Deraa could not go on unless Hussein relented. Instead of yielding, the King branded Feisal a traitor and ordered his youngest son Zeid to take command.”

“Jesus, what did Lawrence do?”



Emir of Mecca, Sherif Hussein ben Ali, proclaimed the Arab Revolt against the Ottoman Empire, 1916 – ArabianHeritageSource.com, Wikimedia



Ibn Saud, founder of Saudi Arabia – Public domain, Wikimedia

“Something he was good at.”

“What’s that?”

“Subterfuge. Hussein’s messages were received and decoded by British radio operators before passed on to the Arab leaders. Hussein’s final message contained a vaguely written withdrawal of his condemnation of Feisal, then rambled on to repeat his denouncement of Feisal — a total contradiction from beginning to end. Lawrence picked the message up from the radio operators and recopied it, retaining the first half, but corrupting the second half so that it was gobbley gook and took the ‘revised’ message to Feisal’s tent who was astonished because it was reasonable, quite unlike his obstinate father. Feisal read the apology (as edited by Lawrence) aloud to his staff officers then said, ‘The telegraph has saved our honor.’ The march on Deraa was on.”

“What a nightmare.”

“All wars are nightmares. I think King Hussein’s irrationality was motivated not only by insecurity and jealousy, but he was sliding into senility. The emotional inconstancy of the King of Hejaz was one of the reasons he was ultimately defeated by Ibn Saud who captured Mecca six years later, ending 700 years of Hashemite rule, uniting the Nejd with the Hejaz and founding the nation of Saudi Arabia.”

“Allenby,” I continued, “got his army back to full strength sooner than expected with Indian Army infantry and cavalry divisions transferred from the Western Front and two Indian infantry divisions from the Mesopotamian front. The German commander of the Ottoman army, Erich von Falkenhayn, had yielded territory to reduce fatalities, preserve resources and shorten his lines of communication. Blamed for the defeat at Gaza and Jerusalem and unpopular because he relied on German officers, von Falkenhayn was replaced by German General Otto Liman von Sanders who had soundly defeated the British at Gallipoli. Von Sanders was determined to stand his ground to prevent the demoralization that was encouraging the people to support the Arab Revolt.”

“What was Allenby’s plan?”

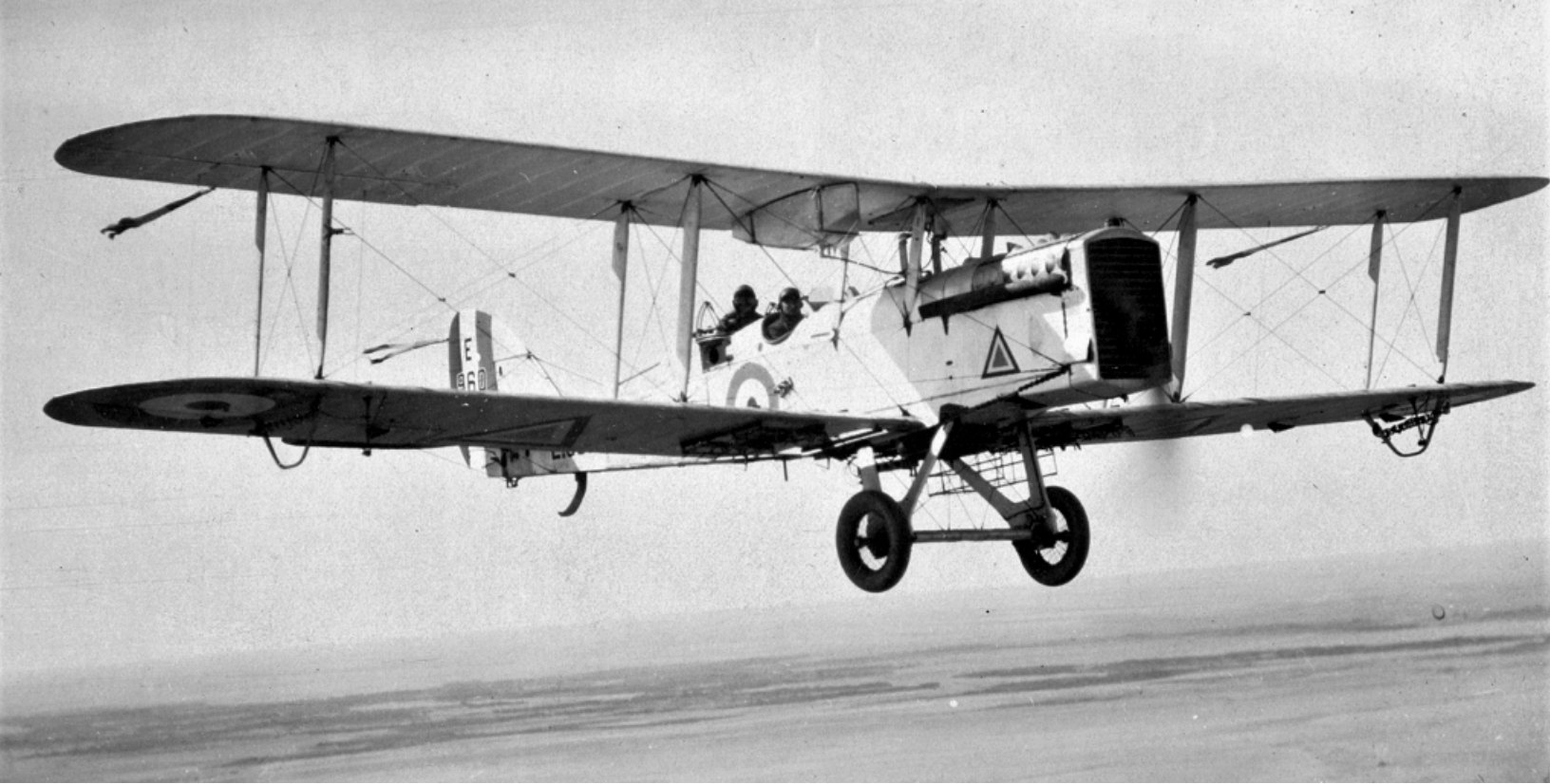
“As Lawrence tells it in *Seven Pillars*, Allenby’s attack would come at the western end of the Ottoman line where the terrain was ideal for cavalry. They would break through and strike deep in the Ottoman rear isolating the Ottoman Seventh and Eighth Armies. The Arab Northern Army would simultaneously attack the rail junction at Deraa and destroy the Turk’s lines of communication. In Allenby’s strategy during the Jerusalem campaign, he had feinted at the coast then moved to the east to strike in the interior.



General Erich von Falkenhayn – Albert Meyer, public domain, Wikimedia



Generals Otto Liman von Sanders, Hans-Joachim Buddecke, Oswald Boelcke, 1916 – German Federal Archives, Wikimedia



Royal Flying Corps Airco D.H.9A light bomber – Public domain, Wikimedia

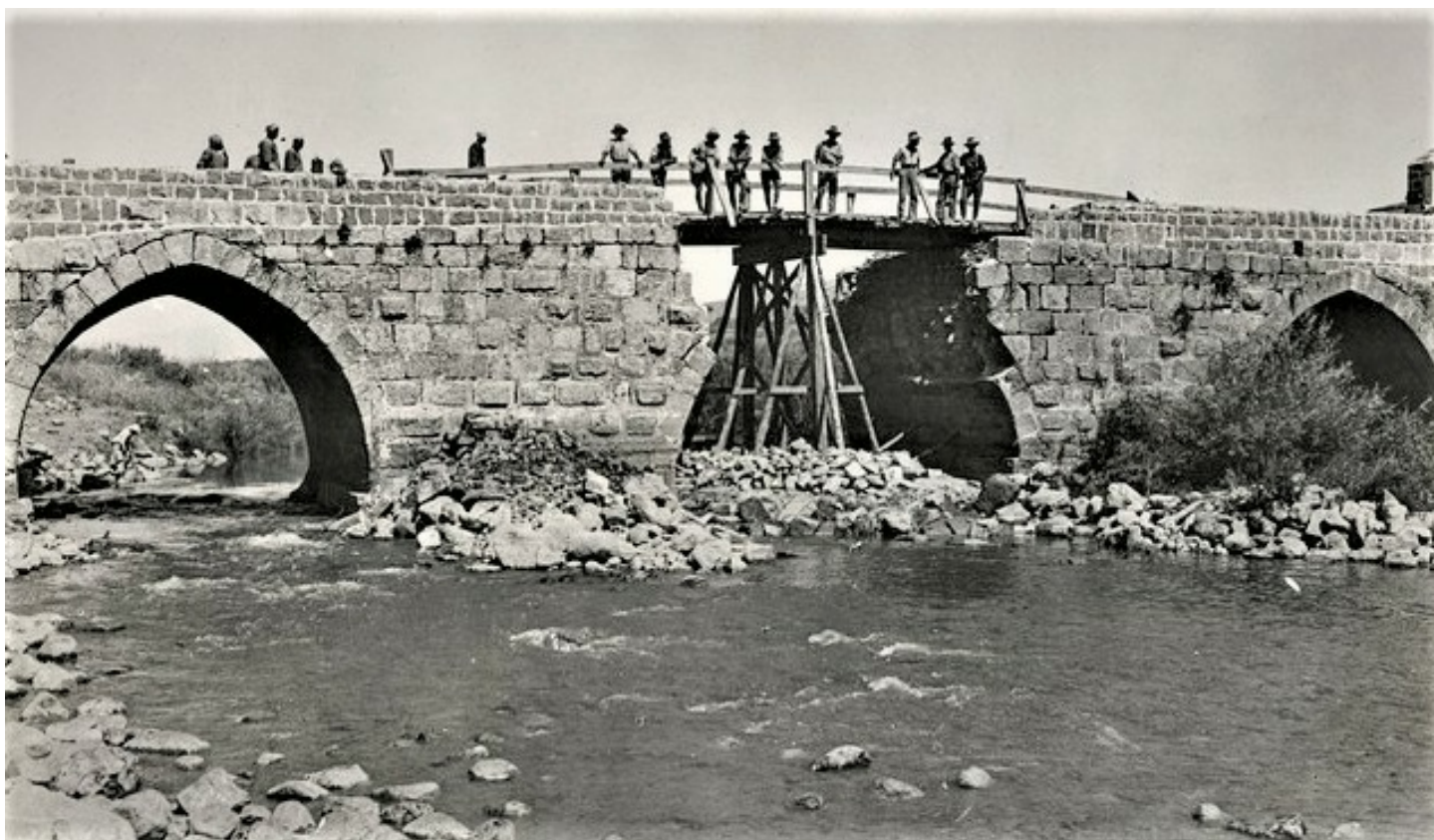
“Allenby foresaw that German General Liman von Sanders would expect him to repeat the strategy. In his attack in northern Palestine, he did the absolute reverse. He feinted inland, then quickly launched his main thrust along the coast where he had great numerical superiority over the Turks, relying on his air superiority and intelligence to distract the Turks from perceiving the gaps in his defenses. To deceive the Turks, Allenby’s forces moved quietly at night from the east to the west while during the day he faked troop movements from west to east.”

“How could he fake troop movements?”

“By an elaborate deception. Near Jericho, he set up all the unused tents in all of Egypt, creating ‘dummy camps, dummy horses, and dummy troops.’ All of the noncombatant staff marched back and forth on the dirt roads sending up clouds of dust giving the appearance of troops preparing for an assault in the east. His agents let the Turks know they were bargaining for large quantities of forage in the opposite direction than he was going. In reality his infantry and cavalry were camouflaged under the orange and olive groves of Ramlegh, ready to attack on the Plain of Sharon and the Plain of Esdraelon where many armies from ancient Egyptians to the Crusaders to Napoleon had passed on their way to Nazareth. Allenby sent two raids to strike east of the Jordan giving the appearance that he intended to attack Amman. The key factor that guaranteed the deception was the Royal Air Force keeping their latest flying machines in the air on a continual basis.



Australian Royal Infantryman and kangaroo mascot – Australian War Memorial, public domain, Wikimedia



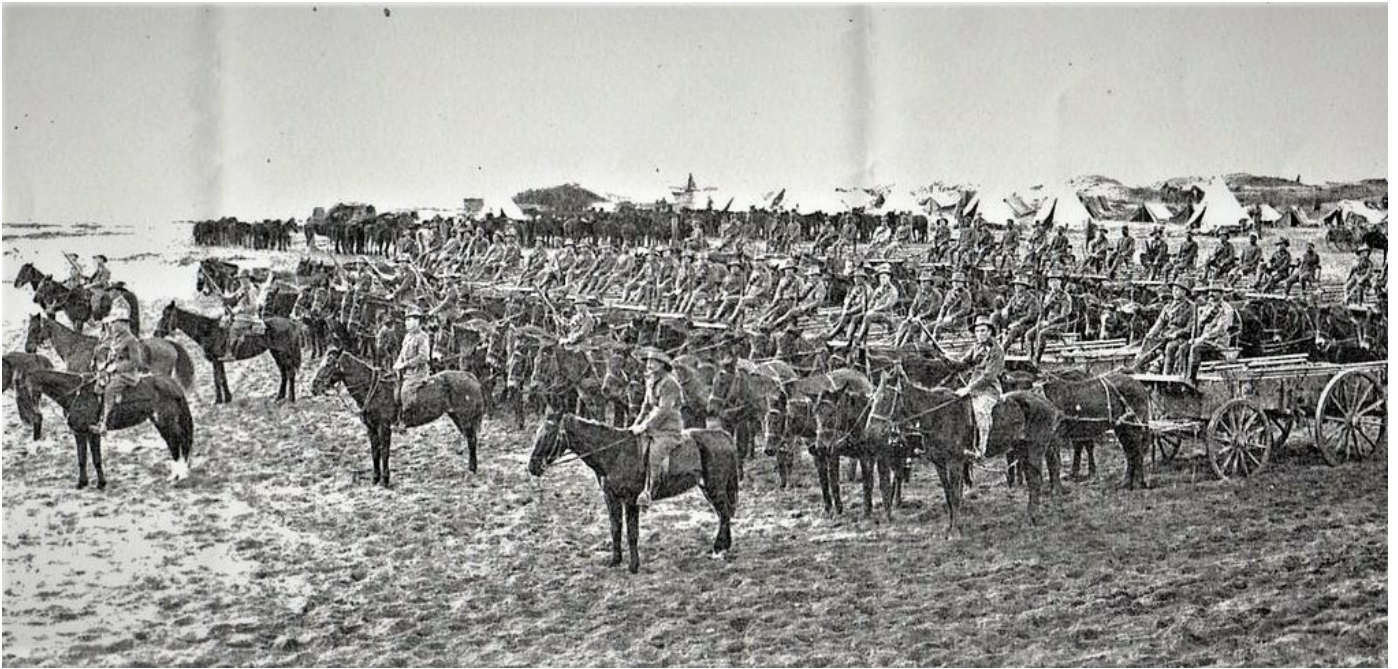
Jisr Benat Yakub, Palestine, September 1918. British and Australian Army engineers repaired the Bridge of the Daughters of Jacob over the River Jordan, destroyed by the Turks in their flight from Tiberias to Damascus – Australian War Memorial, public domain, Wikimedia



Third Battle of Gaza, General Edmund Allenby's troops march toward Palestine – Imperial War Museum, public domain, Wikimedia



British Camel Corps under General Edmund Allenby at Beersheba – U.S. Library of Congress, public domain, Wikimedia



Australian Army Service Corps, Mounted Division, 1916 – Author, Australian Army, Australian War Memorial, public domain, Wikimedia



El Arish, Sinai, Egypt – Author, American Colony, Jerusalem, public domain, Wikimedia



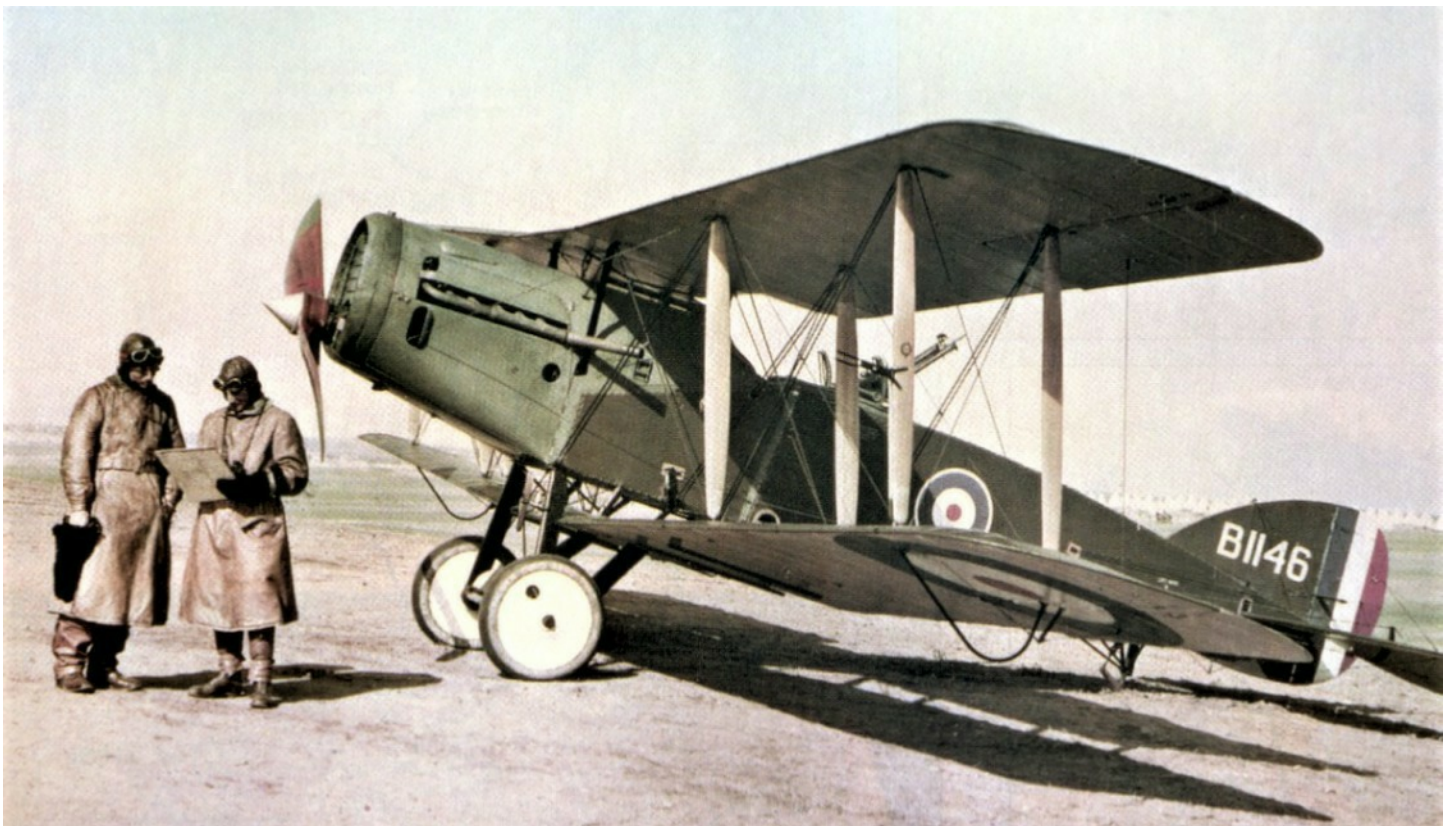
Anzac Imperial Camel Corps Brigade, Battle of Magdhaba, 1916 – Painting by Harold Septimus Power, Australian War Memorial, public domain, Wikimedia



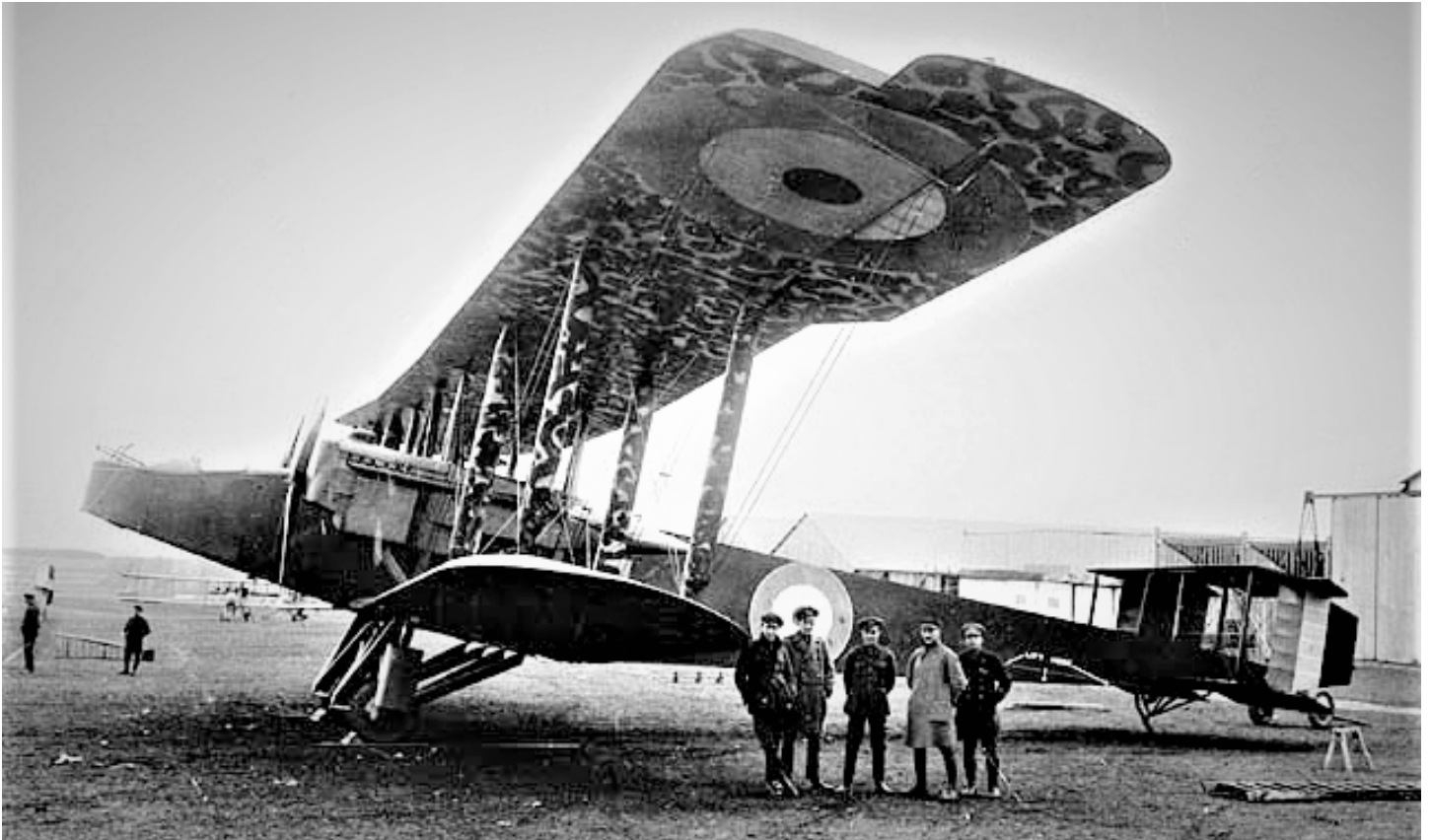
Charge of the Australian Light Horse at Beersheba, 1917 – George Lambert painting, Palestine Gallery, Australian War Memorial, photo by Bidgee, Wikimedia

“Each time an Ottoman and German reconnaissance aircraft took off, the British and Australian fighters swiftly engaged them making it impossible for the Turks to spot Allied troops concealed in the foliage of the plantations. Allenby’s cavalry and armored cars attacked behind creeping barrages of 400 artillery canon firing on the Ottoman troops on the coastal plain, catching the Ottoman forces who were outnumbered by five to one by total surprise, breaking through to encircle the Ottoman troops in the Judean Hills and cutting off their lines of retreat.

“At dawn, the Jewish Legion battalions captured the key ford across the Jordon, clearing the way for the Australian Light Horse Brigade to trap the Ottomans east of the river in a giant pincer between Allenby’s forces in the north and the Australians in the south. The Royal Air Force relentlessly bombed the Turkish Seventh Army and destroyed entire columns with waves of strafing passes repeating every few minutes, an overwhelming air campaign which routed the Turks within one hour, killing hundreds of soldiers, the fleeing survivors leaving behind six miles of wreckage, a hundred pieces of artillery, dozens of trucks and hundreds of supply wagons. As the remains of the Seventh Army were fleeing, in a smooth coordination of air to ground, an Australian Squadron flying Bristol fighters was attacking the retreating Ottoman Eighth Army and a Handley Page heavy bomber was dropping a bombs on the telephone exchange destroying Turkish communications.”



Bristol F.2B Fighter, Australian Flying Corps, Palestine, 1918 – Author, Frank Hurley, Australian War Memorial, public domain, Wikimedia



Handley-Page O-100 bomber, 1917 – Unknown author, Library and Archives Canada, public domain, Wikimedia



Battle of Megiddo, September 1918 – Author, George Westmoreland, public domain, Wikimedia. Ottoman Yildirim Army Group carts and gun carriages destroyed by EEF aircraft on the Nablus-Beisan road.



Imperial Camel Corps, Hong-Kong-Singapore Mountain Battery with field guns, 1918 – Author, James Francis Hurley, Australian War Memorial, public domain, Wikimedia



Anzac Imperial Camel Corps crossing the River Jordan to attack Amman, April 1918 – Australian War Memorial, public domain, Wikimedia



Capture of Damascus, EEF Desert Mounted Corps under Australian General Henry Chauvel riding through Damascus, 2 October 1918 – Imperial War Museums, public domain, Wikimedia

“After the Turks,” Giovanni said, “had put up such a stiff defense in Gaza, how could they suddenly collapse?”

“Allenby’s strategy made the difference. As he had done at Beersheba, Allenby caught them unawares in the Battle of Megiddo. The meticulousness of his plan and smooth coordination of his various corps was only part of the equation. After four bloody years of fighting, the Ottomans had suffered Arab troop desertions which left them understrength and demoralized. Megiddo was a storied place. Fifteen centuries before Christ, the Egyptian Pharaoh Thutmose III won a great victory at Megiddo, defeating the kingdoms of Canaan, the first battle in which history was carefully recorded. Thutmose III was the conqueror of Northern Syria down to the Fourth Cataract of the Nile in Nubia, expanding the Egyptian Empire to its greatest extent. Palestine has been fought over by scores of civilizations. Allenby’s victory became celebrated as the Battle of Megiddo and by the Turks, the Rout of Nablus.”

“Allenby’s style of warfare,” Giovanni said, “sounds like a very different style of warfare than on the Western Front.”

“Allenby’s use of concentration, surprise, and speed at Megiddo anticipated the blitzkrieg warfare of World War Two. One of the first modern commanders, Allenby integrated infantry, cavalry, artillery, air force, ships, armored cars, and guerilla fighters. The Battle of Megiddo and the Battle of the Nablus Plain had the equivalent effect on Turkish Command’s morale as Ludendorff’s Black Days had on the German Command. The Turks had no more resources to continue the war. After encountering nothing but failure on the Western Front, the War Cabinet was astounded by Allenby’s success, promoting him to field marshal and appointing him Viscount Allenby of Megiddo. Later he replaced Wingate as High Commissioner for Egypt. When Allenby conveyed his admiration for the gallantry and bravery to the men who had annihilated the Turkish armies, he said, ‘Such a complete victory has seldom been known in all the history of war.’ He had a point because Megiddo dealt a death blow to the Ottoman’s six-hundred year old reign.

“Although the story may be apocryphal, it’s been reported that while escaping north of Deraa, the commander of the Ottoman Seventh Army, Mustapha Kemal Pasha was captured and Lawrence interviewed him about the aspirations of Kemal’s Pan-Turk party. The general who’d defeated the Allies at Gallipoli, Kemal belonged to the anti-German faction of the military which wanted to eliminate the dead weight of the Arab provinces and establish a republic to cultivate the heartland of Turkestan. Kemal said that his Pan-Turk



Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, commander of Ottoman Seventh Army, Palestine, 1918, later president of the Republic of Turkey, public domain, Wikimedia

party wasn't interest in Palestine, Syria, and Mesopotamia, but rather intended to transform Turkey from a Muslim Caliphate into a modern, secular, democratic state. Feisal and Lawrence would later support Mustapha Kemal's war for Turkish independence. Without the defeat at Megiddo, it's quite possible that Mustafa Kemal, the father of modern Turkey, would never have come to power."

"While Allenby was hammering the Turks at Megiddo, what were the Arabs doing in the East?"

"Allenby's instructions to Lawrence was for Feisal's troops to raid the northern, western, and southern railways at Deraa to prevent the Turks from bringing reinforcements up from the south. They began assembling at Azrak — the tribes coming in, the Ruallas, Serahins, Druses, Howeitats, and peasants from the villages of the Hauran. Major Joyce and the British staff officers arrived with two RAF airplanes, three armored cars and tenders, Vickers and Hotchkiss guns, French Captain Pisani's crack battery of four .65 quick firing mountain guns, the Arab camel corps, an Egyptian demolition squad, and Lawrence's bodyguard making up a force of one thousand strong. They were so certain of success at Deraa that they'd made no provisions for getting back to Aba el Lissan again.



Tribes of the Hauran joining Emir Faisal's Arab Revolt, 1918 – Unknown author, Imperial War Museums, public domain, Wikimedia

“In the midst of the tumult of mobilization, Lawrence left camp to go down the valley and lie under the tamarisk trees, listening to the wind in the branches which reminded him of the wind singing through English trees. In moments of great stress, he had moments of homesickness which always passed once back in the saddle. If they defeated the Turks, he'd no longer have reason to stay in the field. He was finished, his nerves shattered. He needed a rest before he cracked.”

“That was a fantasy,” Giovanni said. “He couldn't go off on holiday. Lawrence was a critical link in the Arab Revolt, a human glue which fused Arabs and Brits together, a spirit from both races.”

“You're quite right, it was the critical moment. There was no time to rest. He'd been given the task of severing the railways into Deraa from three directions, north, west, and south, traveling through territory loaded with Turkish troops. The first bridge at Umtaiye, the sappers packed explosives into the drainage holes in such a way that after the explosion, the frame would partially remain, uselessly tottering over the ravine, requiring hours of demolition before it could be rebuilt. When he arrived at the bridge linking Palestine with Deraa, under machine gun fire, Lawrence set the explosives, packing eight hundred pounds of explosives around stone



Hejaz Railway stone viaduct near Makarim, 1908 – Unknown author, public domain

piers five feet thick and twenty-five feet tall. He was determined ‘to leave not a stone of it in place.’ He lit a six inch fuse and sprinted like hell, the mind numbing explosion searing his back, its blast heard ‘half-way to Damascus.’”

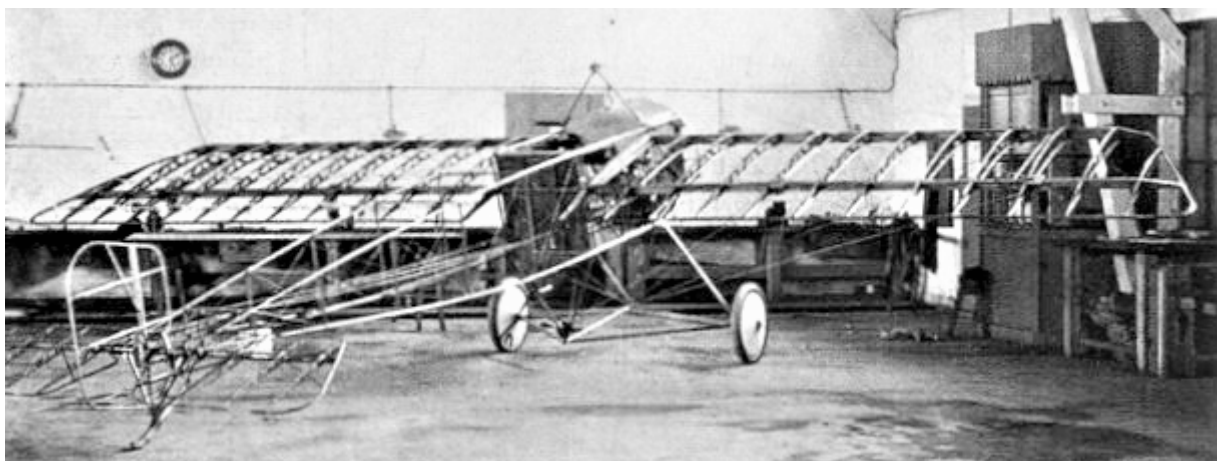
“Eight hundred pounds of explosives. What a maniac! How many bridges did Lawrence blow up?”

“Seventy nine. When the local Arabs heard the bridges being blown up, they began pouring into camp proclaiming themselves devoted servants, keeping Lawrence up all night, robbing him of another night of sleep. Just as he finally fell sleep near dawn, he was awakened by a Turkish armored train blasting away, directed by German aircraft, shelling the camp, slaughtering a number of camels. Since their original Bristol fighters had been put out of commission, they were exposed to the German planes targeting Turkish artillery strikes. Lawrence jumped into an armored car, found the Turkish aerodrome and with his machine guns, riddled the fuselage of one plane that hadn’t had time to get aloft. Back at camp, after several days of no sleep he finally collapsed, sleeping through the continuous bombing. Upon awakening, he knew that with nine Turkish flying machines based only twelve miles away, making bombing runs on their herds of camels and horses, he had to get Allenby to send air reinforcements at once. After attacking the railway at several points, he raced in an armored car to Azrak to rendezvous with a message plane from Palestine, where he was stunned to hear of Allenby’s great victory in Palestine.

“The only escape for the Turks fleeing up the pass to Syria, had been the narrow motor road cut between cliff and precipice in the gorge. For four hours, the RAF made sortie after sortie raining down tons of bombs reducing the retreating Turks to a rabble of terrified men. Lawrence took the plane to EEF headquarters in Palestine to request air support from Allenby who immediately ordered two Bristol fighters to Umtaiye with spare parts and petrol flown in by a new Handley-Page bomber, the only one in the Middle East. Allenby instructed Joyce, Dawnay, and Lawrence to smash once and for all the railway south of Deraa, close off the Yarmouk Valley where troops from the Eighth Army Corps troops were escaping, and stop Feisal from going to Damascus until Allenby gave the word. If the Arabs could cut off the Turkish retreat, Allenby could capture 15,000 Turks and 3,000 Germans and end the war. Dining with Allenby in a cool whitewashed villa surrounded by trees, Lawrence felt guilty while his comrades at Umtaiye ‘lay like lizards among the stones, eating unleavened bread waiting for the next plane to drop their bombs.’”

“It’s extraordinary,” Giovanni said, “that in the first days of aviation, that airplanes had become so essential to warfare.”

“Those early fighters were a marvel with fuselages made of wood, the bi-wings covered with cloth and stabilized by wire cable x-bracing. In the beginning, the pilots shot at each other with pistols and lobbed hand grenades which didn’t bring down many enemy planes. The major problem to solve in mounting a machine gun on the craft, was how to shoot through the arc of the spinning blades of the propellers without destroying the propeller. Roland Garros, the first person to fly across the Mediterranean Sea from Fréjus to Bizerte, Tunisia, had the Morane-Saulnier aircraft manufacturer mount steel wedges on the rear surfaces of the propeller at the radial point to deflect any bullets striking the blade, a primitive solution in which the deflected bullets created a great strain on the engine’s crankshaft.”



Airframe of the 1913 prototype Fokker M.5, the predecessor to the Fokker Eindecker – Public Domain, Wikimedia

“That would be a problem, shooting off your own propeller.”

“It was solved by Anthony Fokker, a Dutch aircraft manufacturer working for the Germans, who developed the first fighter to be equipped with a synchronization gear allowing the machine gun to fire through the arc of the propeller without damaging the whirling blades. The Fokker E.1 fighter became so effective in killing allied airmen in 1915 that it was named the ‘Fokker Scourge,’ beginning the legendary dog fight era of aces like Max Immelmann and the Red Baron, Manfred von Richthoven. Later, the British Sopwith Camel and the Bristol F.2b became a match for the Germans. Equipped with Lewis guns, the Bristol F.2b had an unique construction with the fuselage mounted between the wings, one below and one above, allowing the pilots a clearer field of view, absolutely necessary in aerial combat. When Lawrence returned, he found that continual bombing had killed a number of troops and some of Frenchman Pisani’s gunners, devastating Arab morale. But when the shiny new Bristol F.2bs and the big Handley-Page with Rolls Royce engines arrived piloted by Lawrence’s former pilot, Ross Smith, things got better fast. A German bomber was spotted coming in from Deraa and Ross took to the air and within five minutes of machine-gun combat, the Australian brought the German down in a cloud of smoke lifting the morale of the Arabs who gathered round the majestic Handley-Page, the largest plane ever built by Britain, crying, ‘At last they’ve sent the greatest airplane of all, of which the others are just foals.’



Royal Flying Corps Sopwith F.1 Camel, 1914-1916 period. – RAF photographer, public domain, Wikimedia



Handley-Page, No. 1 Squadron, Australian Flying Corps. Palestine, 1918 – Australian War Memorial, public domain, Wikimedia

“The Arab forces made sweeps around Deraa, capturing prisoners. One of the leaders, Tallal, was frantic with worry because the Turks were marching on his village Tafas. When they arrived, they found Tallal’s villagers dead, a woman folded over a low wall with a bayonet stuck between her naked legs. Out of his mind with grief, Tallal stood without moving on the ridge gazing at the retreating column of troops. Suddenly, he drew his head-cloth over his face, spurred his horse and galloped at full speed into the Turks, crying, ‘Tallal, Tallal,’ the Turks opening up with machine guns, Tallal and his horse collapsing on their lances. Lawrence was enraged by the Turkish brutality at Tafas and the death of Tallal. For the only time in the war, he gave the order to take no prisoners and the Arabs killed every Turk they could find driven by ‘flames of cruelty and revenge.’ In *Seven Pillars* he wrote, ‘In a madness born of the horror of Tafa we killed and killed.’ Seized by a frenzied butchery to quench their agony, they blew in the heads of the wounded and the animals. From a distance, they could see huge explosions painting the sky with flames, the Germans firing the ammunition dumps before abandoning the city, the earth shaking beneath their feet, artillery shells rising like rockets in elliptical arcs as each magazine exploded, the distant horizon glowing as if a great city was on fire.

“As night fell, the wind beating in great gusts, Turks were stumbling in the darkness, the Bedouins and villagers killing anything that moved, a night ‘in which mankind went crazy.’ Dormant clan jealousies sprang

up in the blood lust of killing and the leaders could barely retain control. And when the rampage stopped, the silence of death descended over the country side.

“The next morning, contemptuous of the camel like most cavalry men, General Barrow suggested that Lawrence couldn’t keep up with the forced march on Damascus. Lawrence left Deraa after the general and cut across country soon catching up with General Barrow who asked him, ‘When did you leave Deraa?’ Lawrence answered, ‘This morning.’ ‘Where will you stop tonight?’ ‘In Damascus,’ Lawrence replied and rode on having made one more enemy.”

“No wonder,” Giovanni said, ‘with his impertinence why British officers later disparaged his name.’”

“Allenby had told General Chauvel to let the Arabs go into Damascus first. He understood the significance the victory was for the Arabs. The Arab advance had made the country more open to the Allies as they advanced, allowing convoys to be sent through without escort. Four thousand Arabs entered Damascus and the city erupted with joy, enflamed with happiness like the French when de Gaulle marched into Paris. Watching the thousands of Bedouin warriors passing through the streets to the citadel, the people embraced one another, danced and sang, the dervishes howling and leaping in the street, men tossing their caps and firing volleys into the air, women tearing off their veils, the high pitched shrilling of women rising over the chanting of the men, ‘*Feisal and Nasir, Feisal and Nasir.*’ The people of Damascus honored the Arab leaders and Lawrence with flowers, splashing them with attar of rose, drunk with joy to celebrate Syrian independence after six hundred years of servitude.”

“This must have been,” Giovanni said, “a great moment for Feisal. He’d realized his dream of conquering Damascus.”

“The Sherifian flag was raised and the new Damascus government declared its allegiance to Hussein, King of all the Arabs. But Lawrence’s old enemy Abd el Kader, the Algerian fanatic, proclaimed himself as head of the government despite his past support for the Turks. Lawrence summoned him and el Kader stormed into the hall with his bodyguards with murder in his heart, ignoring that Nuri Said’s troops, the tribesmen massed in the square, and Lawrence’s guardsmen in the hall. Acting as deputy for Feisal, Lawrence proclaimed the Turkish civil government abolished and named Shukri Pasha as acting Military Governor and Nuri Said, the Commandant. Abd el Kader leaped up cursing in a blind fury, drawing his dagger and lunging at Lawrence. In an instant, the grizzled warrior Auda abu Tayi was on him and Lawrence bodyguards rushed into the hall.



Field Marshal Edmund Allenby – Unknown author, public domain, Wikimedia



Faisal I , King of Mesopotamia – Bain News Service, Library of Congress, public domian, Wikimedia

“Fearing for his life, Abd el Kader fled with his men. Lawrence thought of having the fanatic seized and shot, but held his hand for he didn’t want to set a precedent using murder as a form of politics.”

“I can imagine,” Giovanni said, “the condition of the city, with the Turks and Germans blowing everything up.”

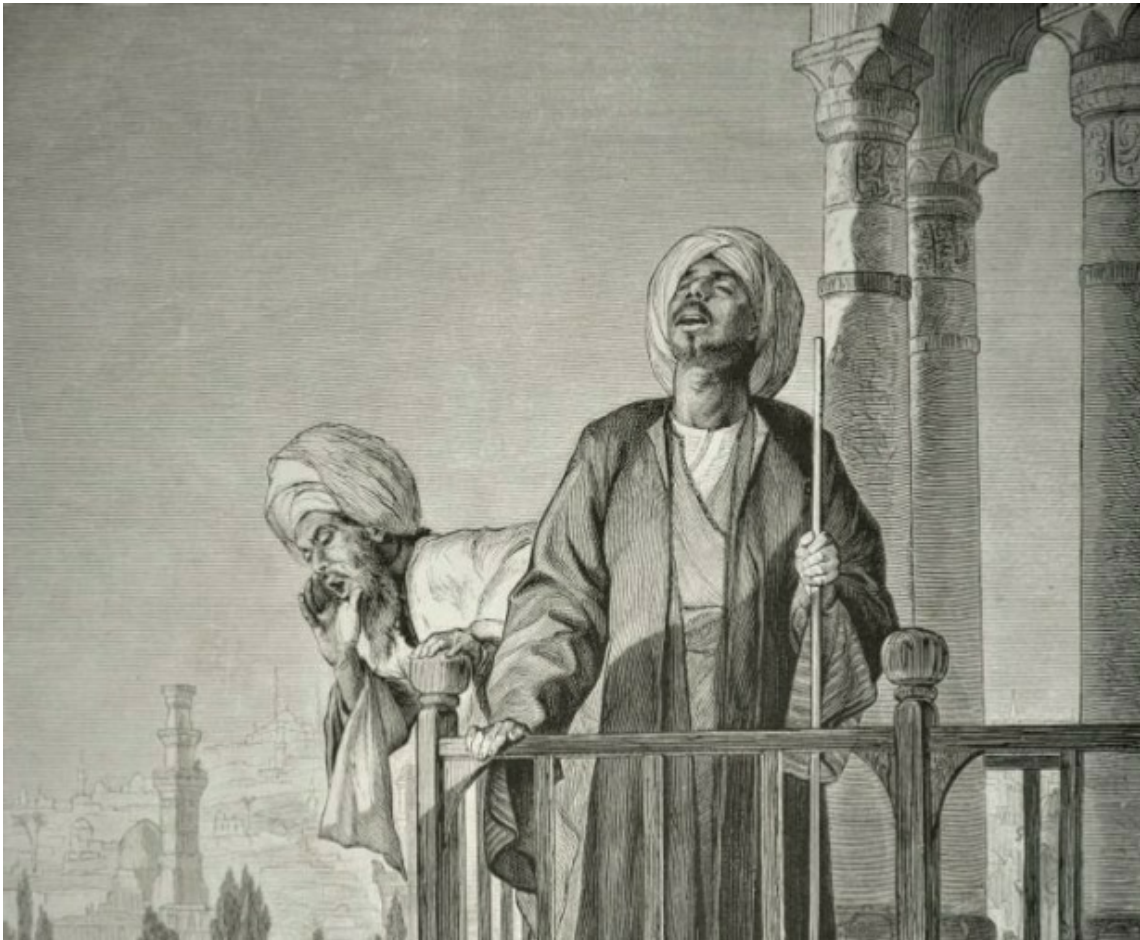
“The city was a wreck, streets full of the debris of a broken army and corpses, with typhus, dysentery, and pellagra common among the dying Turks. The electric power was cut off, fire trucks had been destroyed, the water supply polluted with the corpses of animals and men, General Chauvel had nothing to feed his 20,000 horses and the Druse peasants flooded into the city rioting and plundering. Martial law was declared, Lawrence operating on the principle that the Europeans should not take control, only offer help if the Arabs requested it. Tensions arose between Lawrence and Chauvel who was angered that a junior officer had taken control in Feisal’s name and was giving the Arabs credit for taking the city when his corps had done most of the work. Allenby arrived in his grey Rolls Royce at the Victoria Hotel, to meet Feisal for the first time in their moment of victory. With Lawrence acting as interpreter, General Allenby told Emir Feisal that France was to be the protecting power in Syria.

“In the moment of victory,” Giovanni said, “to hear that France was to be the protecting power in Syria, must have shocked Lawrence and Feisal.”

“Indeed it did. Feisal objected strongly. He was prepared to work with Britain, he said, but he had understood from the beginning that Arabs were promised the whole of Syria including Lebanon. A country without a port was no good. He wouldn’t accept a French liaison officer or recognize France’s rights in any way. Perturbed, Allenby turned to Lawrence, ‘Didn’t you tell him that the French had been given the Protectorate over Syria?’”

“No, Sir, I know nothing about it.”

“Allenby explained to Feisal that as a Lieutenant General under his command, he was bound by his orders. When the meeting was over, Lawrence told his boss that he couldn’t work with a French liaison officer either. He’d understood that the Sykes-Picot terms were no longer valid. In that moment, he made the same request to Allenby that he’d made after Zeid had misspent the gold. Victory has been achieved, he said, let me go away. He knew that this chapter in his life had ended. ‘In *Seven Pillars* he wrote, ‘the dead army of my hopes now turned to confront me. My will, the worn instrument which had frayed our path, broke



The Muezzin's call to prayer – Unknown author, source, George Ebers, *Egypt, Descriptive, Historical, and Picturesque*, 1978, public domain, Wikimedia

suddenly in my hand and fell useless.’ Allenby was dead set against his leaving, but Lawrence reminded him of his promise one year ago to let him go. In the end, Allenby sadly kept his promise.”

“With no authority over Britain’s decisions,” Giovanni said, “Lawrence knew that there was nothing more he could do in Syria. Decisions would be made in London and Paris, not in Syria.”

“By the time Lawrence left Damascus,” I said, “the Syrians had set up a running government which would endure until the heavy hand of France came down. As Lawrence sat in his room contemplating the great events of the last few days, through an open window came the Muadhhdhin’s call for the last prayer of the night — ‘God alone is great. There are no gods, but God and Mohammed his Prophet. God alone is great. There is no god but God.’ Then the Muadhhdhin spoke more gently saying, ‘And He is very good to us this day. O people of Damascus.’

And upon his words, on the first night of freedom, a great silence fell over the city. The following day, Lawrence left Damascus and never returned.”



Wadi Rum Transjordan – Bill Perry, Shutterstock

“That’s one hell of a story my darling,” Giovanni said kissing me on the cheek. “Considering what you’ve told me, it’s clear that Feisal was going to get shafted by France and England.”

“You’ve grasped the essence of Lawrence’s next campaign. Upon reaching Cairo, Lawrence filed his final military report giving the Arabs the major credit for the conquest of Damascus. Feisal offered his services to Allenby in conquering the rest of Syria and Arab forces took part in the liberation of Homs, Hama, and Aleppo. With the threat of Turkey being invaded, the Ottoman Empire capitulated and signed the Armistice of Mudros. Lawrence understood the political implication of Allenby’s assurances to Feisal that decisions on Beirut and Damascus were for the time being purely military. The final settlement would be decided by the Allies at the Versailles Peace Conference. Lawrence realized that upon taking Damascus, he and Feisal had lost control. From that moment on, his sole mission was to persuade the Allies to let the Arabs keep the freedom they’d won.”

“It makes sense that he’d want to get the hell out of there. He’d spent several years pretending to the Arabs that they could achieve full independence, while gnawing away inside of him was the belief that it was a lie. What happened to the Arab’s dream of independence at the Versailles Peace Conference?”

“Lawrence didn’t waste a minute before diving into his campaign to influence the British government on

Arab independence. On his voyage from Port Said to Taranto Italy, he met Lord Winterton, a Member of Parliament who was so impressed with Lawrence that he requested an audience for him at the Foreign Office. In a letter to Lord Robert Cecil, assistant secretary of State for foreign affairs, Winterton called Lawrence, ‘the Soul of the Hejaz.’ ‘Without him, the Arab Revolt would have never succeeded.’ In his meeting with Lord Cecil, Lawrence declared that the Arab forces could have taken Damascus solely by themselves but held off under Allenby’s orders. He stressed that letters of negotiation between Feisal and the Ottomans clearly show that the Arabs could have made a peace deal with the Ottoman Empire. Furthermore, the boundaries set by the Sykes-Picot agreement were absurd and unworkable. Next, Lawrence met with General Sir George Macdonogh at the War Office who issued a memorandum to the War Cabinet which reprised Lawrence’s ideas, setting down reasons why the Sykes-Picot agreement was obsolete due to altered circumstances over time. The British had conquered Mesopotamia and Allenby had defeated the Ottomans in Palestine and Syria with no assistance from the French and with great assistance from Feisal. President Wilson’s Fourteen Points advocated self-determination. A wave of democratic sentiment was sweeping across the world. General Macdonogh’s report suggested that Arab Syria would take in the Mediterranean coastline from Tripoli to the Gulf of Alexandretta, including the railway from Homs to Tripoli, the necessary corridor to the sea.”

“I’m surprised,” Giovanni said, “that he was able to get audiences with the top brass.”

“In that moment, Allenby was a hero in Britain. Lawrence’s reputation in conquering Akaba and Allenby’s support opened doors in London. After the meeting with General Macdonogh, Lawrence addressed the War Cabinet including the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, Lord Curzon who was the only high official in the government who predicted that British policy would lead to perpetual Arab-Jewish hostility. Lawrence told the committee that the French had made it clear to Feisal that they planned a colonial empire. On the other hand, the British declaration of 1918 had promised to Feisal, Arab sovereignty in all territory captured by Arab arms. Lawrence recommended that Abdullah be made ruler of lower Mesopotamia, Zeid ruler in upper Mesopotamia and Feisal in Syria. Tripoli, the Arabs would fight for because the Tripoli-Homs railway was necessary for access to the sea. The following day he went to Buckingham Palace for an audience with King George V.”

“Just a few months before,” Giovanni said, “he was sleeping on the ground, blowing up trains, going for days without sleep, riding thousands of miles on camels, and suddenly he was meeting with the Foreign Minister and the King.”



King George V in coronation robes, 1911 – painting by Luke Fildes, public domain, Wikimedia

“Being a military hero opens doors. People listen to what you say whether it’s nonsense or sound advice. When Lawrence showed up at the palace, he was surprised to learn the audience was for a private investiture for knighthood. Allenby had recommended him for a knighthood, despite Lawrence telling the military secretary that he wouldn’t accept any honors. Lawrence took advantage of the audience to tell the King that he’d pledged his word to Emir Feisal. If the British Government was intent on betraying the Arabs by holding to the Sykes-Picot agreement, Feisal was prepared to fight the French for Syria. Lawrence told the King that he hoped he would forgive any lack of courtesy in not accepting a knighthood.”

“Good Lord, how did the George V take that?”

“Rather well. Military heroes are forgiven many things. The King later joked about it. However, Lawrence’s noble intentions in turning down the knighthood, hurt his cause.”

“How’s that?”

“His political opponents used it against him, saying that he’d caused the King acute embarrassment. The colonialists were insulted. Only a thankless jerk would turn down a knighthood. Lawrence ignored the colonialists’ villification and went to work on a memorandum for the Foreign Office which documented the great risks the Arabs had taken in rebelling against the Ottoman Empire and their decisive role in Allenby’s victory in Palestine. He recommended that Feisal be given absolute sovereignty in his domains with the exclusive authority to choose his consultants. Feisal wouldn’t approve Jewish Independence in Palestine, but would accept limited Jewish immigration under British governance. Lawrence proposed that southern and northern Mesopotamia be divided into separate administrations since the two areas are vastly different, one with extensive irrigation and agriculture while in the Kurdish north, there are semi-nomadic tribes who treasure their independence. He called for the abandonment of the Sykes-Picot agreement and for Britain’s recognition of Arab suzerainty in the areas the Arabs had conquered by themselves.”

“Lawrence was not just a warrior, he was a diplomat too. What was Feisal’s role at the Paris Peace Conference?”

“Lawrence’s first accomplishment was in convincing members of the committee and Lord Robert Cecil to declare that Feisal’s presence was indispensable. Once he had gained their approval, he sent a message to Hussein in Mecca saying that General Allenby had recommended that the Emir telegraph Great Britain, France, Italy, and America, to inform them that Feisal is proceeding to Paris as your representative.”

“I’m sure the French would refuse to set aside the Sykes-Picot agreement.”

“That’s exactly what happened. French Foreign Minister Stephen Pichon sent a note to Britain claiming that France had a historic duty toward the people of Syria and would never relinquish any rights on Damascus, Aleppo and Mosul. Pichon demanded that the terms of the Sykes-Picot agreement be absolutely fulfilled exactly as negotiated in 1916. Ignoring the fact that Iraqi officers had played a big role during the Revolt, Sir Arthur Hirtzel of the India Office was dead set on turning Mesopotamia into a colony. Hirtzel said that we cannot allow ourselves to be used by the Arabs to secure their interest in Syria at the expense of the French.

Hirtzel strongly objected to Lawrence’s proposal to make one of the sons of Emir Hussein, King of Syria, another King of Iraq and another King of Northern Mesopotamia. ‘We are not bound by honor to defend the Arabs against the French,’ Hirtzel declared. ‘Syria is too deeply graven on the heart of France for that.’ Hirtzel insisted that if Mesopotamia is to be developed, India’s control must be absolute.”

“With France demand for control in Syria,” Giovanni said, “and the India’s demand for Mesopotamia, Lawrence was in an impossible situation.”

“Lawrence understood he was facing the greatest fight of the Arab Revolt. The Arabs had won the battle but could lose the peace. Lawrence’s only hope for Feisal to get a fair hearing at the conference depended on President Woodrow Wilson’s Fourteen Points that declared that the settlement of colonial claims must be based upon the principle that the well being of the populations must be given equal weight with the claims of colonial governments. The peace process must be completely open, Wilson insisted, ‘The day of conquest and aggrandizement is gone by; so is also the day of secret covenants created in the interest of particular governments.’”



President Woodrow Wilson, 1914 – Harris & Ewing, public domain, Wikimedia

“Wilson’s Fourteen Points,” Giovanni said with a chuckle, ‘must have really shook up the imperialists.’”

“After the carnage of the war, nations were desperate to find a solution to eternal warfare. The Fourteen Points called for an association of nations which would be responsible for guaranteeing independence and territorial integrity to both great and small states. The League’s goal was to prevent war through disarmament and collective security. Disputes between countries would be resolved by negotiation and arbitration rather than by war. The German philosopher Immanuel Kant, renowned for his theory of knowledge, wrote the essay, *Perpetual Peace: A Philosophical Sketch* in 1795 which described a peace plan to be implemented by all governments, an idea conceived a century before Woodrow Wilson’s Fourteen Points. Kant said that standing armies were to be eventually abolished. No secret treaties would be considered valid. No independent states could come under the dominion of another state and no nation can interfere by force with the government of another state. Along with Woodrow Wilson and Lord Robert Cecil, Jan Smut, an Afrikaner and one of the founders of the Union of South Africa, was one of the principal architects of the covenant of the League of Nations. Smuts proposed the Mandate system to govern the former colonies of the Central Powers.”

“But without an army,” Giovanni said, “to back up its covenant, the League of Nations was practically toothless.”

“It is also true that the Americans never ratified the League of Nations covenant. Even though Wilson won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1919 for his proposals, he couldn’t convince the U.S. Congress to join the League. Henry Cabot Lodge, the Republican Senate majority leader and chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee, objected to Article X that required signatory nations to attempt to repel any aggression. Lodge, who hated Wilson’s guts, believed that the idealism of Wilson’s Fourteen Points was unattainable and that severe economic and military penalties should be forced upon the German nation so that it could never be a threat again. Being a true believer in his vision, Wilson refused to compromise with Henry Cabot Lodge and at the end of 1919, the U.S. Senate voted to not join the League of Nations.”

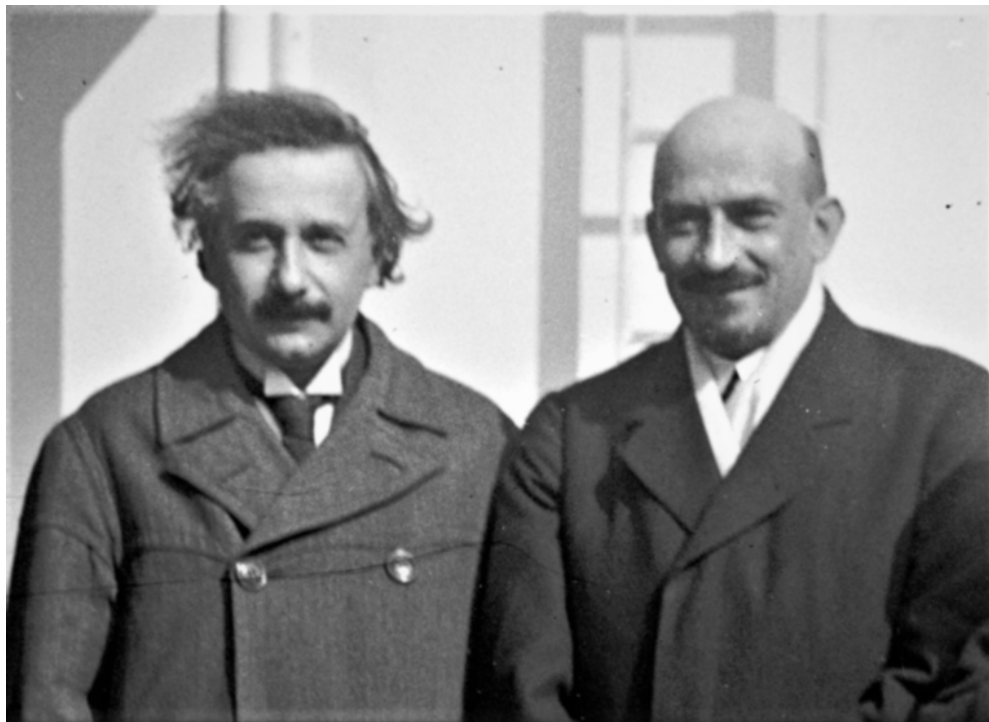
“How did it go for Feisal at the Paris Peace Conference?”

“France did everything they could to stop him from coming. When London suddenly informed France that Feisal was arriving by ship at Marseilles, the Foreign office was enraged for not being informed earlier.

Confronting a fait accompli, France insisted that Feisal couldn't be recognized as King Hussein's representative but only as a distinguished military leader. Lawrence arrived in Marseilles to receive Feisal only to find out the French wanted him to get lost. To prevent Feisal from traveling on to London to confer with the British government, the French Foreign Office delayed him by taking him on a grand tour of refineries, industrial plants, silk workshops, battlefields, and grand monuments, leaving Feisal to feel like he was a prisoner of the French, which indeed he was."

"What kind of reception did Feisal get in London?"

"Lawrence accompanied Feisal to a meeting with Foreign Office Secretary, Balfour, where Feisal said, if the French attempted to take Syria, the Arabs would immediately attack. Even though the Arabs couldn't resist such a great power, they'd rather die in the struggle than give up their freedom. With Lawrence acting as interpreter, Feisal met with Zionist leader, Chaim Weizman to establish an understanding of mutual support. Lawrence had advised Feisal that Jewish support during the Peace Conference could help gain American support for the Arab cause. Woodrow Wilson, Lawrence said, was the Arabs' last hope in the struggle with France. Weizman told Feisal that there was room in Palestine for four or five million Jews which wouldn't intrude upon the Arab peasantry, a possibility which Feisal accepted, especially if the Jews helped advance the development of Palestine.



Professor Albert Einstein and Dr. Chaim Weizmann, leaders of the World – Author, Underwood and Underwood, U.S. Library of Congress, Wikimedia



Salle de l'Horloge, Paris Peace Conference, 1919 – U.S. Signal Corps, Woodrow Wilson Library Archives, public domain, Wikimedia

“Dressed in his Bedouin clothes, Lawrence acted as interpreter while King George V awarded Feisal with the Knight Grand Cross of the Royal Victorian Order.”

“Feisal was given a glorious medal,” Giovanni said, “but no real British support in the struggle with France.”

“At least, Lawrence was authorized to accompany Feisal to the Paris Peace conference where the Allied powers was negotiating the Treaty of Paris at the Salle de l'Horloge at the French Foreign Ministry on the Quai d'Orsay. Lord Hardinge, Under-Secretary at the Foreign Office, recommended that Colonel Lawrence attend the Paris Peace Conference as special advisor to the British Delegation which upset some of the delegation who resented the fact that Lawrence was working for both the British and the Arabs.”

“Lawrence had lots of enemies.”



Leaders of the Arab Revolt at the Versailles Conference, 1919 – Unknown author, public domain, Wikimedia. Left to right, Rustum Haidar, Nuri as-Said, Prince Faisal in front, Captain Pisani, center rear, T. E. Lawrence, Captain Hassam Khadri. Faisal's slave is behind. During his advocacy for Arab self-determination, Lawrence ignored the practice of slavery among the Arabs.

“When you break the rules, you make enemies. Realizing that Syria’s chances for independence were slender, Lawrence began writing articles on Arab affairs in the press and helped Feisal prepare his submission to the Paris Conference with a focus on President Wilson’s principles of self-determination.”

“What was Feisal’s argument for independence?”

“Feisal said that the great majority of the people in Palestine are Arabs. ‘The Jews are close to the Arabs in blood. There’s no conflict of character between the two races. For six hundred years our race has resisted Turkish attempts to absorb us,’ Feisal said. Syria was advanced enough agriculturally and industrially to manage her own affairs. If independence were granted then the natural influences of race and language would unite the Arabs into one people. ‘We ask you not to force your civilization upon us, but help us embrace what serves us best. In return we can offer you little but gratitude.’”



Paris Peace Conference leaders, Marshal Ferdinand Foch and Clemenceau, France, Lloyd George, Britain, Vittorio Eanuele Orlando and Sidney Sonnino, Italy – Author, Bain News Service, U.S. Library of Congress, public domain, Wikimedia

“Only the Christian minority wanted French rule in Syria. The Muslim majority was overwhelmingly opposed to French rule. As Allenby’s chief political advisor, General Clayton said that Britain’s policies were incompatible. Zionism was unpopular in Palestine. If Britain sold Syria to the French and then tried to impose Zionism it would permanently alienate the Arabs. If Britain handed Syria to France, there would be hell to pay.”

“With France totally opposed to Feisal’s claim on Syria,” Giovanni said, “was Lawrence able to convince the Americans to help the Arabs?”

“Lawrence set up audiences for Feisal with the leading members of the American delegation. With Lawrence translating, Feisal told them that after the Arabs had taken a great risk in throwing off Turkish oppression, they were now threatened by the greed of French imperialism. Working as Feisal’s secretary and interpreter, wearing a British uniform with an Arab headdress, the Americans gave Lawrence rave reviews calling him the ‘conqueror of Damascus — the most interesting Briton alive — the most romantic character in the Peace Conference.’

“Feisal told the American delegation that the Arabs had none of the religious animosity against the Jews which prevailed in much of the world. For generations in Palestine, Arab and Jewish relations have been good. But the ‘new settlers’ are much different from the ‘old settlers.’ The new Jewish immigrants, Feisal said, almost without exception have come with an imperialistic spirit. The Jews claim that the Arabs have taken their original homeland by brute force, and we must leave. When the French saw Feisal’s influence on the American delegation, the French pressed their case for the Syrian Mandate to President Wilson.”

“What was Wilson’s verdict?”

“Wilson suggested that an Allied commission visit Syria to find out the wishes of the people. Immediately the French invented every kind of ploy to prevent a commission actually asking the Syrian people who should rule. Clémenceau said the commission shouldn’t go only to Syria, but examine British claims on Mesopotamia and Palestine as well. When the Zionists heard that Wilson believed that the Palestinian Arabs should be consulted, they strenuously opposed it. On top of the French and the Zionists, the India Office strongly opposed a commission’s visit to Mesopotamia, with Sir Arthur Hirtzel demanding that the government dump Lawrence from the conference. At this moment, Lawrence was notified that his father was seriously ill with pneumonia, but by the time he got to Oxford, his father had died two hours before. Without waiting for his father’s funeral, he rushed back Paris to represent Feisal in his meeting with Clémenceau. Feisal refused the prime minister’s offers for he understood that France was only giving lip service to independence, not true independence. Even if he agreed to France’s Mandate, the Syrian people would never agree. After giving his final word to Clémenceau, Feisal returned to Damascus on a ship, leaving Lawrence behind to begin work his book on the Arab Revolt. Realizing that he needed to review his reports in the Cairo files, he asked the British Air Delegate if he could catch a ride on a Handley-Page bomber going to Cairo, one of fifty bombers being transferred from France to Egypt.”

“That’s when he crashed in Rome,” Giovanni exclaimed.

“Lawrence had a charmed life. Not only did he survive several near suicidal episodes during the Arab Revolt — like the time he walked into the Ottoman military’s headquarters with a price on his head, he survived the crash landing at the Rome airport of a Handley-Page bomber which killed the two pilots. Within ten days, he’d recovered enough to catch the next bomber to Cairo, his arm bound in a plaster cast.”

Giovanni snapped his fingers. “The guy was indestructible.”

“Due to many imperialist enemies, his reputation wasn’t indestructible. While Lawrence was in Cairo researching the files on the Arab Revolt he wasn’t able to champion the Arab cause in Paris. The India Office unrelentingly attacked Lawrence and Arab nationalism, demanding that Lawrence never be employed in the Middle East again in any role. The propaganda of the India Office convinced many in the Foreign and War Offices that Lawrence was the one responsible for creating problems with France. Sir Arthur Hirtzel sent a private note to Foreign Minister Lord Curzon saying that Lawrence was the one behind Arab nationalist propaganda. ‘I am convinced,’ Hirtzel said, ‘there will be no peace in the Middle East until Lawrence’s malign influence is withdrawn.’ President Wilson’s opponent in the Senate, the powerful chairman of the Committee on Foreign Relations Henry Cabot Lodge declared that under no circumstances would America accept a Mandate in any of the Ottoman’s former territories and his position was supported by the Senate majority.”

“Lawrence,” Giovanni said, “couldn’t win for losing.”

“He was bitter at the lack of support for the Arab independence. The British needed Arab allies in the Middle East. In denying Syria to the Arabs, they were driving them into opposing the British. He started writing articles in the *The Times* and the *Daily Telegraph*, advocating that the original Anglo-French agreement be revised with the Arabs as equal partners in the settlement. Lawrence’s blizzard of letters supporting the Arab cause angered the Foreign office and the tide of imperialist opinion swept the Arabs away. Exactly five years after the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand in 1914, the Treaty of Versailles was signed 28 June 1919 with no provision made for Arab independence.”

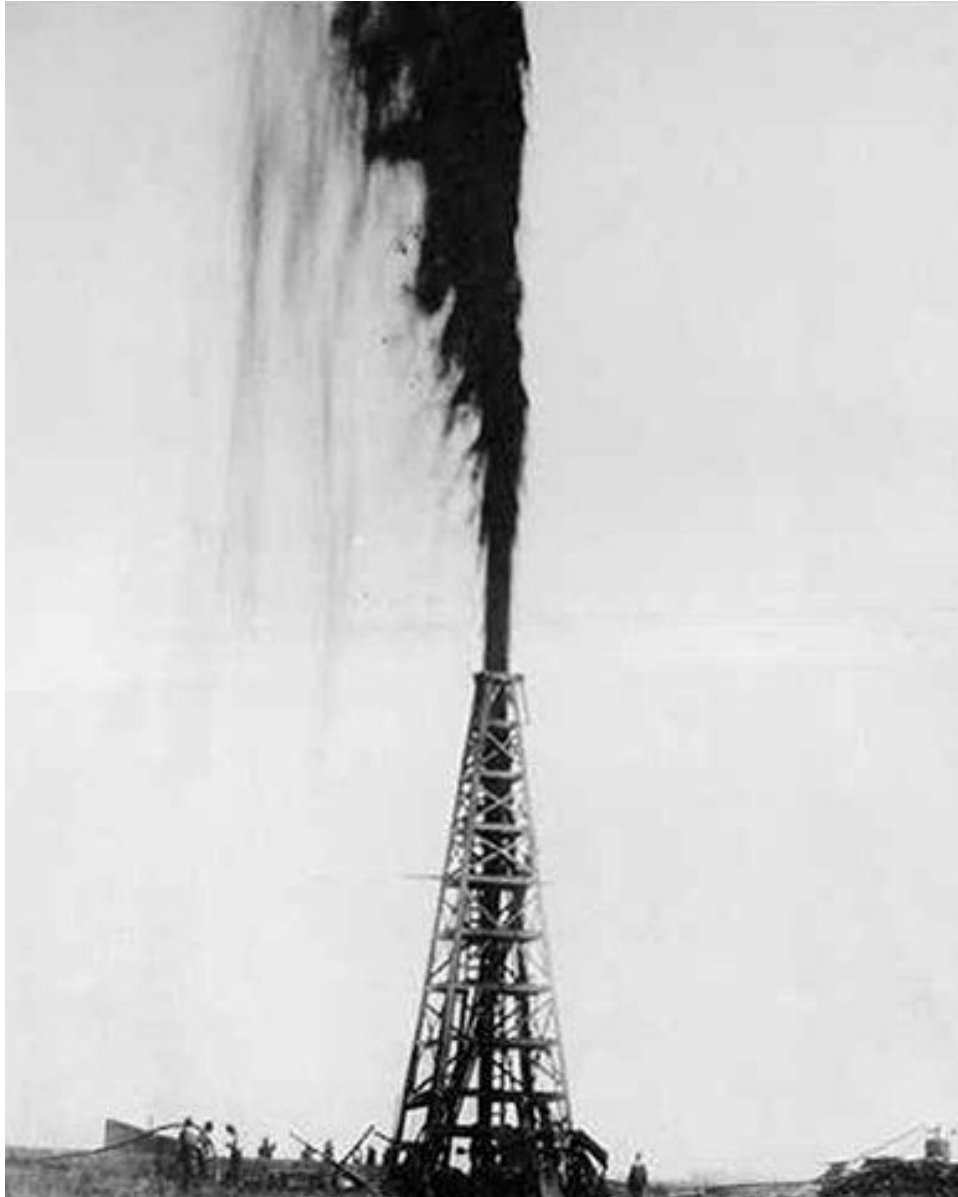
“After promising King Hussein independence for Arabs throughout the war,” Giovanni said, “and after the Arabs had done so much to defeat the Ottoman Empire, I still don’t understand why Britain couldn’t keep its promise and give independence to the Arabs. That was a disgrace.”

“It was the peak of European colonialism, the very thing that led to World War One in the first place. France, Britain and Russia had their eyes on Arab territory. Britain’s power was based on its maritime fleet. The fleet was being converted from coal to oil burning ships. An avid colonialist, Prime Minister Lloyd George seized his chance. In his negotiations with Clémenceau, he intended to obtain for Britain the exploitation of oil in the Tigris-Euphrates domains of Mosul, Bagdad and Basra.”

“Prime Minister Lloyd George was intoxicated by an empire stretching from Egypt to India establishing deferential Arab states along the Tigris and Euphrates, a Jewish settlement in Palestine and rights to Persian oil.



The signing of Peace in the Hall of Mirrors, Versailles, 28 June 1919 – Painting by William Orpen, Imperial War Museum, public domain, Wikimedia



Oil gusher, 10 January 1919 – Unknown author, public domain, Wikimedia

“In return for securing the oil reserves in Mesopotamia for Britain, the prime minister promised the French his support for its demands in Alsace and the Rhine, control of Syria and the Lebanese coast. Lloyd George ordered the withdrawal of the British Army from Syria leaving Faisal at the mercy of the French, telling the emir that his only choice was to reach a settlement with France best he could. Due to the virulent antipathy of the French for Lawrence, he wasn’t allowed to associate with Faisal during the negotiations with France.”

“How did Lawrence take Britain’s abandonment of Faisal’s claim to Syria?”

“Politically isolated, Lawrence was desolate at heart. With nothing he could do, he fell into a profound depression, sitting in his chair, his mother said, without moving for hours on end, his expression never changing.”



Lowell Thomas' *Lawrence of Arabia* and *With Allenby in Palestine*, Royal Opera House, Covent Garden, 1919 –Author, Harry Chase, public domain

“But the story didn’t end there,” Giovanni said.

“The Arab Revolt chapter of Lawrence’s life ended in defeat, but another chapter opened which would change everything.”

“I’ll bet you’re talking about Lowell Thomas’ legend of *Lawrence of Arabia*.”

“You win the bet. It was impresario Lowell Thomas. You’ll remember that Thomas had interviewed Lawrence in Jerusalem and again in Akaba. At the time Lawrence didn’t fully realize what would come of the photos of him in Arab dress. It wasn’t until after the war that Thomas got his show together opening in New York City where it wasn’t a smash success. A British promoter Percy Burton saw the financial possibilities of bringing the show to London for it had the romantic appeal of a British crusader. With Burton’s financial support, Thomas opened *Lawrence of Arabia* and *With Allenby in Palestine* in 1919 at the Royal Opera House Covent Garden with incense burning in wall sconces, Arabian exotic dancers dancing before projected photos of the Pyramids and music played by the Welsh Guards Band. It was an immediate sensation. Month after month, Thomas’ *Lawrence of Arabia* played to sold-out houses.”



T. E. Lawrence at Rabigh, north of Jeddah, 1917
– Unknown author, public domain, Wikimedia

“I’d think,” Giovanni said, “with people sick of a war, millions dying in filthy trenches, poisoned by gas, Thomas’ *Lawrence of Arabia* show sailed into London like a spring breeze.”

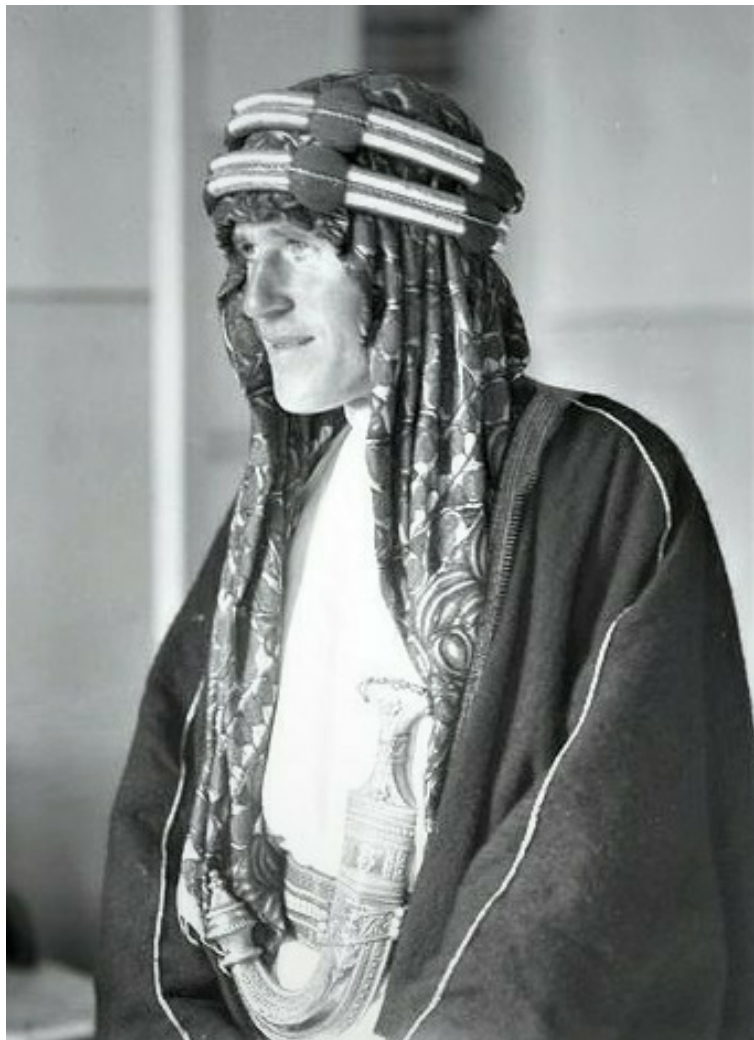
“Thomas was a wizard self-promoter. He modestly billed himself as a reporter, newscaster, war correspondent, explorer, filmmaker, author, and media entrepreneur, and eventually performed more radio broadcasts than anyone in the world. On CBS in 1939, he hosted the first television news broadcast and the following year hosted the 1940 Republican National Convention in Philadelphia. Thomas had a genius for being in the right place at the right time and had the knack of concocting a commercial angle, like talking the railroads into giving him free tickets in exchange for writing promotional articles about travel by rail. Thomas’ show made him rich. Lawrence didn’t make a penny. Five years after the show closed, Thomas wrote *With Lawrence in Arabia*.”

“The book I read as a kid.”

“Lowell made Lawrence a star. That’s what the media does — makes people a star — journalism as entertainment. Lowell was a virtuoso. Four million people came to see the show. *Lawrence of Arabia* transfixed the public and transformed him into a war hero and international celebrity. Royalty and politicians were entranced. It was such a success that it had to move four times to larger halls. Prime Minister Lloyd George who a month before would’ve preferred to have never laid eyes on Lawrence, suddenly became enlightened, ‘Everything that Mr. Lowell Thomas says about Colonel Lawrence is true,’ the prime minister said. ‘In my opinion, Colonel Lawrence is one of the most remarkable and romantic figures of modern times.’”

“How did he handle his sudden fame?”

“Not well at all. It overturned Lawrence’s life. It made himself conscious. He was angry that Thomas had been given access in Cairo to his reports to the Arab Bureau. Basically a shy man, Lawrence was inundated with letters, salesmen, celebrity chasers, crazy people, women who wanted to marry him.”



T. E. Lawrence, Military Governor’s office, Jerusalem, 28 February 1918 – Author, Harry Chase with Lowell Thomas, public domain, Wikimedia

“I can imagine him becoming a recluse.”

“He refused invitations from celebrated hostesses and declined interviews with the press. He focused on his writing, hung out with poets and writers, learning the craft. After a year of work, his draft of *The Seven Pillars of Wisdom* was close to being finished. On his way to Sandhurst to pick up notes from Colonel Alan Dawnay who was critiquing the draft, he left the manuscript in the station and it was never recovered. Not only did he lose most of his chapters, he lost the photographic negatives of Arab leaders, British officers and his war notes which were critical to completing the book.”

“My God, just at the moment he’d failed to secure Syria for Feisal, he loses a year’s work.”

“Lawrence was distraught. After suffering the results of the Paris Peace Conference, losing his manuscript was a bitter blow.”

“What did he do?”

“I remember Colette once losing the only copy of her manuscript in the metro. Lawrence did exactly what Colette did — he pulled himself together and started the story all over from the beginning, working all night twelve hours at a stretch, going without food and sleep, wearing an aviation outfit to keep warm in an unheated room with no furniture or cooking facilities, living off sandwiches from the local stands, bathing in the public baths. Lawrence said, ‘driven by hunger, cold, and sleeplessness, he achieved more than Thomas de Quincey with his opium addiction.’

“While Lawrence was obsessed with writing *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, the San Remo Agreement influenced by the 1st Viscount Herbert Samuel, included conditions of the Balfour Declaration which permitted the free flow of Jewish immigration and capital into Palestine to establish a national homeland for the Jews. Prime Minister Lloyd George asked Samuel a dedicated Zionist, to become the First High Commissioner of Palestine.

“By appointing a Zionist governor of Palestine, wouldn’t that inflame the Arabs?”

“Evidently Lloyd George didn’t consider that. Many in the House of Lords and House of Commons considered Samuel’s appointment a mistake. To appoint a Jew as governor of Palestine would only incite racial tensions. When he arrived in the summer of 1920 in Palestine, Sir Herbert said, ‘I am the first Jewish leader of Palestine since the last Maccabee leader in 40 BC.’ It had been 2,000 years since a Jew had ruled in Palestine.



1st Viscount Herbert Samuel, High Commissioner of Palestine – Walter Stoneman for James Russell & Sons, public domain, Wikimedia

“Born into an orthodox family though not observant, Samuel was the first Jew to serve as a cabinet minister and to lead a major British political party, that is, if you discount Prime Minister, Benjamin Disraeli who converted to Christianity. As early as 1915, Samuel had sponsored the establishment of a British Protectorate over Palestine and along with Chaim Weizman, President of the Zionist Organization, had a major influence on the Balfour Declaration.”

“What was the Arab reaction,” Giovanni asked, “to a Jew being made High Commissioner of Palestine?”

“Jews were ten percent of the population and the Arabs, eighty percent. You can imagine the rage. The Arabs believed Samuel represented a Zionist rather than a British Government and would hand the country over to a permanent Zionist administration. The Arabs were aware that Samuel had previously advocated the eventual annexation of Palestine into the British Empire. For that reason General Allenby opposed Samuel’s appointment. Allenby warned London that Samuel’s appointment would lead to perpetual violence and his warning was confirmed by the Muslim-Christian Society which refused to recognize Samuel as governor. They informed Cairo that they wouldn’t be responsible for riots caused by his appointment.”



Sir Herbert Samuel, High Commissioner of Jerusalem with church leaders of Jerusalem, 1922 – Unknown author, Memoirs by Viscount Samuel, public domain, Wikimedia. Brigadier General Gilbert Clayton, head of The Arab Bureau, chief of intelligence and mentor to T. E. Lawrence, standing, 4th from left – Ronald Storrs, Governor of Jerusalem, standing 4th from right, Sir Herbert Samuel, High Commissioner of Palestine, sitting 3rd from right. The Church leaders representing the Anglican, Coptic, Orthodox, Abyssinian, and Armenian churches of Jerusalem – *Memoirs by Viscount Samuel*, public domain, Wikimedia

“Allenby was trying to tell London,” Giovanni said, “Palestine was a time bomb about to go off.”

“It didn’t take long for it to go off. Around Passover, 1920, shortly after the announcement of the Mandates at the San Remo Conference, riots erupted in Palestine leading to the looting and murdering of Jews. Vladimir Jabotinsky, one of the founders of the Jewish Legion which served under Allenby in the conquest of Palestine, had formed the Jewish self-defense militia, the Haganah that repelled the attacks, but not before a number of Jews had been slain. In the following year, Palestine erupted again in Jaffa on May Day with mobs killing 35 Jews on the first day before spreading all over Palestine. Samuel declared a state of emergency, imposed press censorship, and called for military support from Egypt and General Allenby responded by sending destroyers to Jaffa and Haifa. Samuel met with the Arab leaders who demanded a suspension of Jewish immigration. Fearing continuing violence, Samuel temporarily suspended Jewish immigration. Influenced by the Arabists on his staff and to soothe the anger of the Palestinians, Samuel appointed, Hajj Amin al-Husseini, an Arab nationalist who’d been one of the leaders of the riots, as Mufti of Jerusalem.”

“A Zionist would appoint an Arab extremist?”



Arab protest meeting, Rawdat el Maaref hall – U.S. Library of Congress, public domain, Wikimedia. Hajj Amin al-Husseini, second from left.

“It was Samuel’s attempt to preserve peace among Jews and Palestinians. The appointment of al-Husseini was influenced by an anti-Zionist member of the High Commissioner’s secretariat who was the liaison with the Arab community. Instead of alleviating the tensions, the appointment of al-Husseini drove a stake into the heart of any possible kind of amity between Palestinian and Jew.



Hajj Amin Al-Husseini, at center, in a visit to [Saudi Arabia](#), early 1930s. To al-Husseini’s left is [Hashim al-Atassi](#), later the president of [Syria](#). To his right is [Shakib Arslan](#), an [Arab nationalist](#) philosopher – Unknown author, [Online Museum of Syrian History](#), public domain, Wikimedia



General Henri Gouraud inspecting French troops in the Lebanon Mountains prior to the Battle of Maysalun, 23 July 1920 – Unknown author, public domain, Wikimedia

“Al-Husseini’s all or nothing approach drove the Palestinians into a wall, his virulent anti-Semitism leading al-Husseini eventually into supporting Adolf Hitler.”

“Everything was going against Feisal’s dream for Arab independence. What was happening in Syria?”

“Before the San Remo Conference adjourned, the Pan-Syrian Congress declared the independent Arab Kingdom of Greater Syria, including Lebanon, Palestine, and part of northern Mesopotamia with Feisal as head of state and his brother Zeid, regent of Mesopotamia.”

“Zeid, the one who foolishly spent all of the gold that Lawrence brought up the mountain.”

“The very one. It was quite a brief independence. French General Henri Gouraud delivered an ultimatum to King Feisal. If he didn’t disband the Arab Army, he would invade Damascus. Confronted by a force of more than 10,000 troops from the colonies of Senegal, Algeria, and Morocco and supported by artillery, tanks, and aircraft, Feisal would have been destroyed in a brief moment.



Syrian Minister of War Yusuf al-'Azma under King Feisal, 1919, slain by the French army under French General Goybet at the Battle of Maysalun – Unknown author, public domain, Wikimedia

“Feisal’s cabinet rejected Gouraud’s demand and vainly appealed to the international powers to halt the French invasion. The Syrian Minister of War, the handsome Yusuf al-‘Azma, passionately opposed a surrender and set off on the ancient route between Beirut and Damascus with 2,000 men on a suicide mission to fight the powerful French force under General Goybet at Maysalun. The Arabs were quickly overrun and the valiant Yusuf al-‘Azma was killed by machine gun fire.

“Feisal retreated to the Hauran region where he was supported by the local tribal leaders, but the French delivered an ultimatum that if they didn’t expel Feisal, their villages and encampments would be bombed. Feisal had no option but to go into exile in Palestine.”

“The Battle of Maysalun,” Giovanni said, “was the bitter end for Lawrence and Feisal’s dream of Arab independence in Syria.”

“It was the bitter end. The League of Nations authorized a French Mandate to administer Syria until it could ‘stand on its own.’ Under that authorization, the French occupation of Syria endured twenty-six years. Today, Maysalun is engraved in Syria’s national memory as the betrayal of Britain’s promises to the Arabs and the failure of Woodrow Wilson’s illusions of self-determination. It was a triumph of colonialism over the aspirations of millions of Arabs.”

“How did Britain’s Mandate turn out in Mesopotamia?”

“Even more violently than in Syria. Soon after the San Remo Conference, the 1920 Iraqi Revolution erupted with mass demonstrations against the British occupation quickly becoming an armed insurrection with tribes seizing control of areas around Baghdad. Lawrence wrote articles in *The Times* and the *Observer*, criticizing the British administration of Mesopotamia that was doing nothing to encourage Arab sympathy. He pointed out that eighty thousand British troops were an occupation force holding down the people. The government is staffed entirely by British officers and no Arabs. Even under the Ottoman Empire, a majority of the officials were Arabs. ‘How long,’ Lawrence declared, ‘will we permit millions of pounds, thousands of imperial troops and tens of thousands of Arabs to be sacrificed for a colonial administration which doesn’t benefit the Arabs?’ England has been ‘led in Mesopotamia into a trap from which it will be hard to escape with dignity and honor.’ There must be a change in policy, Lawrence said. Make Arabic the official language, reduce the British staff and hire Mesopotamians, remove every British and Indian soldier and govern Mesopotamia as loosely as Britain holds South Africa or Canada.”

“Britain,” Giovanni mused, “was an imperial power. It had great success with colonialism. Habits, especially when they make you rich are hard to change.”

“Lawrence was howling in the wilderness. The colonialist weren’t listening. Although Shia Muslims in the mid and lower Euphrates were the leaders, the revolt was essentially tribal in origin rather than religious with Sunnis joining the revolt. Soon the Kurds of northern Mesopotamia revolted to demand independence. The British War Secretary, Winston Churchill brought in troops from Iran and two squadrons of the Royal Air Force which bombed the villages. Gertrude Bell, Percy Cox’s oriental secretary whose responsibility was the reconciliation of Arab-British relations, described a RAF bombing demonstration, the dropping of ‘fire bombs which even in sunlight erupted into even brighter flames, burning through metal and water won’t extinguish them.’”



British aircraft sprays Iraqi villages with napalm and poison gas – Royal Air Corps, public domain, Wikimedia

“That sounds like napalm,” Giovanni said. “A horrid invention. It should be banned by the Geneva Convention. After winning the war with the Turks, the British were immediately at war with their former allies, the Arabs.”

“Britain hadn’t fully considered,” I said, “the fierce desire of the Arabs for true independence, rather than a pretend independence. After the deployment of 100,000 British and Indian troops and thousands of casualties, the Sunni and Shia rebels without aircraft to withstand the RAF bombing, surrendered to Britain at Najaf and Karbala. However, it wasn’t a big victory for Britain. The suppression of the Iraq Revolt cost Britain £50 million, three times as much as the entire Arab Revolt against the Ottomans. Four hundred British soldiers and ten thousand Iraqis lost their lives. Churchill realized that something had to change. At one point he even considered abandoning Palestine and Mesopotamia to the United States. With an eye on the bottom line, Churchill decided that the Mesopotamian Mandate was too expensive to maintain, especially when Britain was struggling to rebuild after the war and called for a conference in Cairo of all of the primary officials in the Middle East to determine the future of the British Mandates.

“Upon meeting Lawrence at the Paris Peace Conference, Churchill hadn’t been terribly impressed, but after seeing Lowell Thomas’ show *Lawrence of Arabia* several times, he had a sudden change of mind and invited Lawrence for a private conversation.

“A month later, the Colonial Secretary, Lord Milner retired and Winston Churchill accepted the office of Colonial Secretary. Realizing that he knew little about the Arab world and would need advisors with knowledge of the Middle East, Churchill invited Lawrence to become an adviser on Arab Affairs, not only because of his knowledge of the Arabs but due to his close friendship with Feisal.”

“As much as Lawrence hated,” Giovanni said, “the sensationalism of Thomas’ *Lawrence of Arabia*, if hadn’t been for the multimedia show, Churchill might never have called on Lawrence to advise him on the Middle East.”

“It’s called luck. Sometimes it lifts us up, and sometimes it brings us down. Lawrence had lots of luck both up and down. One aspect of luck is that it’s not equally applied.”

“After all of his diplomatic failures in Paris and London,” Giovanni said, “Lawrence’s had a chance to strike a blow for the Arabs.”

“Actually, Lawrence didn’t accept Churchill’s offer right at first. He said he’d accept only if Britain’s wartime promises to the Arabs would be honored, a pre-condition which Churchill was unable to accept, but promised Lawrence direct access to him on every point. With so much weighing on the conference, Lawrence accepted the post to the Colonial Office as an adviser on Arabian affairs. Many in the Foreign Office were dead set against the appointment. The ones who called him the ‘Wild Ass of the Desert,’ declared Lawrence was not the kind of man to fit into any diplomatic venture. They were sure Lawrence had big ideas which would lead to grief. Finally accepting Churchill’s offer, Lawrence set to work at once drafting an agenda for the conference.”

“How did the Palestinians react to the Cairo Conference?”

“Not very well. Before the conference, Churchill met in London with a Palestinian delegation led by Musa Kazim who had once been the governor of Jaffa and mayor of Jerusalem until Governor Ronald Storrs dismissed Kazim after the riot at the Jaffa Gate where Arabs chanted ‘Feisal is our King,’ and the rioting led to several deaths. The Palestinian delegation had traveled to London to ask Britain to rescind the Balfour Declaration, to revoke the creation of a Jewish National Home, end Jewish immigration and unite Palestine with its Arab neighbors. The delegation protested that European Jews were buying up Arab land, paying a Jewish immigrant twice as much for the same work as a Palestinian. Musa Kazim questioned the legality of the Balfour Declaration. To give Palestine to the Jews was as crazy as giving Spain to the Muslims for the



Musa Kasim al-Husayni, mayor of Jerusalem deposed by the British, leader of the Palestine Arab Congress, 1922 – 1934 – Source, Mahmoud Abu Rumieleh, Wikimedia

reason that the Moors had conquered Spain centuries before and built a vibrant civilization before the Catholics drove them out of Spain.”

“By that time the Balfour Declaration was etched in stone,” Giovanni said. The major powers at the San Remo Conference had made the Balfour Declaration part of the agreement. Churchill couldn’t change it. It was irreversible.”

“That’s what Churchill told the Palestinians. He told Kazim that a National Home for the Jews would be good for the Jews, good for the British Empire and good for the Arabs in Palestine. Churchill promised the Palestinians that a Jewish Government would not be set up to dominate the Arab people.”

“What more could Kazim do?”

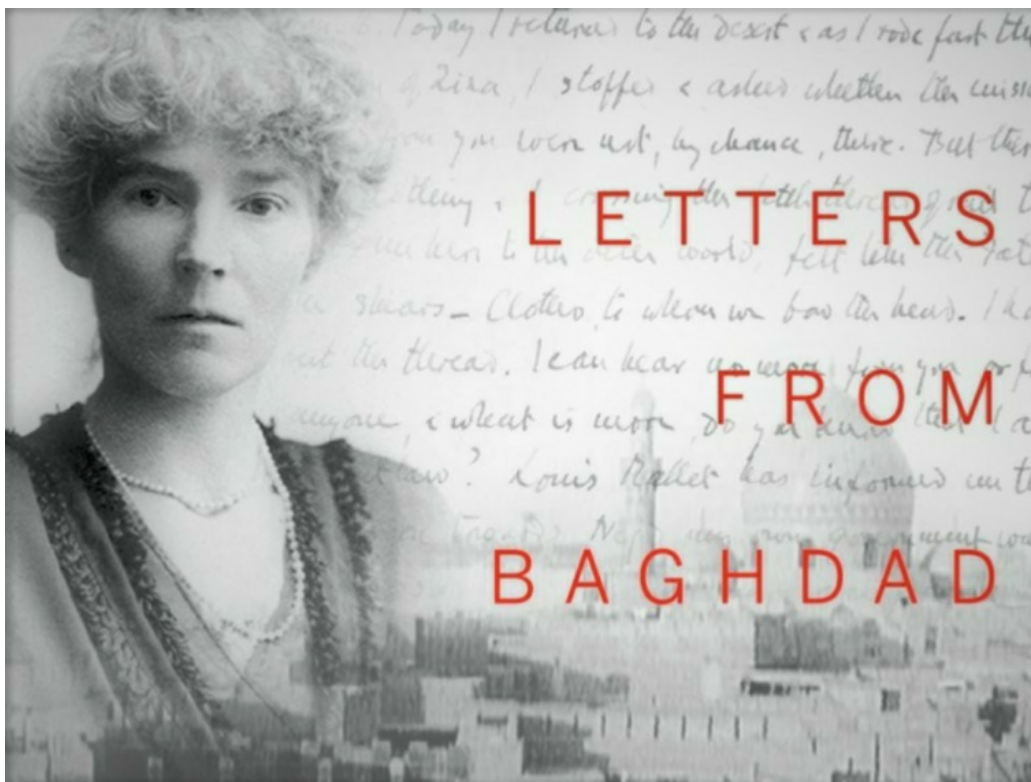
“Continue to resist. The Palestine Arab Congress in Haifa elected Kazim president to be the leader of the opposition against British Policy and he continued to guide Palestinian policy for the next ten years. Kazim met the High Commissioner in Palestine to press for Palestinian independence, but Sir Herbert Samuel refused the Palestinian Congress any recognition unless they accepted British policy for a Jewish National Home.

“As soon as the British Colonial Secretary, Winston Churchill and the High Commissioner in Palestine Herbert Samuel, arrived by train in Gaza, they were greeted by the mayor with the demands of the Muslim-Christian Association and a crowd chanting anti-Jewish slogans. Whatever the British government decided in the Cairo Conference, the colonialization of Palestine by the Jews was not going to be accepted by the Arab community.”

“Upon Lawrence’s arrival in Cairo, the city where he’d first begun his long march, he was reunited with an old ally, an archeologist he’d met in the ruins of Carchemish when he was a beginning archeologist.”

“I can guess,” Giovanni said with a grin, “the first woman to graduate from Oxford in history who’d called him ‘an interesting boy’ when she met him in Carchemish.”

“You guessed correctly.” I laughed, “The archeologist, David Hogarth of the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford gave Gertrude Bell credit for much of the success of the Arab Revolt. Even before she was made the first woman officer in the history of British military intelligence with the rank of major, she had made seven expeditions across the Arabian deserts studying the Ottoman Empire and Arab culture, sharing coffee and information with a sheikh in every encampment, including walking into camps where Germans were training Turkish soldiers and reporting to the British Foreign Office on German activities in the Empire.”



Letters from Baghdad, 2016 documentary film about the life of Gertrude Bell, 2016 – Author, Vitagraph Films, fair use. Directed by Sabine Krayenbuhl and Zeva Oelbaum

“Her knowledge was indispensable to Lawrence. After the conquest of Baghdad, Bell was appointed Oriental Secretary and became a force in Mesopotamia second only to the High Commissioner Percy Cox. She spent the next ten months writing an official report, *Self Determination in Mesopotamia*. In the spring of 1921, the Cairo Conference opened at the Semiramis Hotel attended by all British officials in the Middle East who Churchill called the ‘Forty Thieves. Among the military officers and administrators, there was only one woman, Gertrude Bell. Although there were dozens of meetings, many of the decisions had been resolved beforehand by Churchill and Lawrence, Cox and Bell.”

“If you were an Arab” Giovanni laughed, “Forty Thieves would be a good description of the British. What did they decide about Feisal’s claim to the throne?”



T. E. Lawrence and the future King of Transjordan Abdullah I bin Al-Hussein at the 1921 Cairo Conference – U.S. Library of Congress, public domain, Wikipedia



Winston Churchill, Gertrude Bell, and T. E. Lawrence on a visit to the Pyramids, Cairo Conference, 1921 – Public Domain, The Gertrude Bell Archive, Newcastle University



Gertrude Bell, T. E. Lawrence, Field Marshal Edmund Allenby, and Winston Churchill at the 1921 Cairo Conference that established the boundaries of the new Arab states after the fall of the Ottoman Empire – Unknown author, source, *The letters of Gertrude Bell in two volumes*, Ernest Benn, 1927, Gertrude Bell Archive, Newcastle University, public domain, Wikimedia

“Feisal was to be offered the throne of Mesopotamia. Since Feisal was a direct descendant of the Prophet, which is an important requirement of the Shias, the British hoped he’d be accepted by both Sunni and Shia. To establish legitimacy to Feisal’s rule, they planned to make the offer appear to come from the Arabs themselves rather than from Britain. Feisal was to go to Mecca and send letters to the leaders of Iraq saying that Arabs had been urging him to be the King of Iraq. After consultation with his father and brothers, Feisal would announce that he’d wished to offer his services to the people of Iraq.”

“Who determined the borders of the new nation of Mesopotamia?”

“Mesopotamia was comprised of three Vilayets of the Ottoman Empire, Basra, Baghdad, and Mosul. Bell was tasked with drawing up the borders. She had to decide whether to include the territory of the Kurds.”

“Who are the Kurds?”

“The Kurds are a tribal people living in the plateaus and mountains on the borders of Turkey, Armenia, Iran, and Iraq. The Kurds who are Sunni Muslims, have no regard for the Shias of Baghdad and Basra, nor the Shias for them. Other minorities were overlooked, the Armenians and the Assyrian Christian refugees who were driven out of Turkey by the Young Turks.

“Why wouldn’t the British allow the Kurds self-rule?”



Kurdish-Inhabited Area – Author, U. S. Central Intelligence Agency, Perry-Castañeda Library Map Collection, University of Texas at Austin, public domain, Wikimedia

“The government feared that if they gave independence to the Kurdish area, it would encourage the Arabs of Baghdad and Basra to also declare independence and threaten British control over Mesopotamia. Lawrence believed that it was a mistake to include the Kurds in Mesopotamia. The Kurds deserved their own state. Since the Turks had territorial claims over Mosul and Kirkuk, I suspect that Churchill wanted Iraqi Kurdistan included in the Mesopotamian Mandate as a protective buffer against Turkey. The other error made in drawing the borders of Mesopotamia was that Gertrude Bell and most of the British didn’t fully grasp the animosity between Sunnis and Shias who’d split during 7th century schism over how to choose the successor to the Prophet Muhammad. The Cairo Conference raised the intensity of the conflict by choosing a Sunni to rule over Shias who were in the vast majority. Just as the conference was meeting, a further complication occurred when Abdullah threatened to raise an army in Amman to drive the French out of Syria and restore Feisal to the throne.”

“Which was,” Giovanni said, “far beyond Abdullah’s abilities.”

“I doubt if going to war was the emir’s true intent, but was rather a bargaining ploy by Abdullah. As Lawrence had remarked long before, Abdullah was not much of a warrior, but he was a clever politician. Lawrence suggested to Churchill that he meet with Abdullah in Jerusalem to work out a role for the emir. Churchill’s solution was for Britain to establish a Jewish National Home in Palestine *west* of the Jordan and a separate Arab territory in Palestine *east* of the Jordan.”

“What did Churchill decide about Abdullah?”



Emir Abdullah of Transjordan and T. E. Lawrence conferring in Jerusalem during the British Mandate in Israel – National Photo Collection of Israel, public domain, Wikimedia



Emir Abdullah arrives in Amman, Transjordan, 1920 – Unknown author, Jewish National Fund archive, public domain, Wikimedia

“Strongly influenced by Lawrence, Churchill decided to make Abdullah ruler of Transjordan if he agreed to suppress the anti-French activities of his subjects. In exchange, on a six month trial basis, Abdullah would receive British financial and military aid. However, by separating Transjordan from the Palestinian territory west of the Jordan, it was a departure from the Balfour Declaration. Making Abdullah the Hashemite ruler of eastern Palestine enflamed the war between the House of Saud and the House of the Hashemites and created the borders that exist today between the two Arabian royal houses, the Kingdom of Saud’s Arabia and the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan. A year after Abdullah took over the administration of Transjordan, Ibn Saud’s Wahhabi Ikhwan warriors crossed the frontier to attack Abdullah before being suppressed by British planes and armored cars.”



King Faisal I of Mesopotamia and King Abdulaziz of Saudi Arabia, 1931 – Unknown author, Online Museum of Syrian History, public domain, Wikimedia

“How did the Zionists,” Giovanni asked, “react to Churchill’s solution for Palestine?”

“Sir Herbert Samuel, High Commissioner for Palestine, said that the League of Nations had included Transjordan in the territory of Palestine, therefore Britain couldn’t unilaterally separate Transjordan from Palestine. Samuel feared that an Arab Transjordan would threaten Zionist Palestine. However, I think that Arab opposition would’ve been equally as intense if Transjordan had been included in Palestine. King Hussein’s Wahhabi rival, Ibn Saud, bitterly opposed Churchill’s decision to elevate the Hashemites to the rule of Transjordan and Mesopotamia.”

“How did Churchill handle that?”

“He bought Ibn Saud off by raising his subsidy to £100,000 a year and Sir Percy Cox imposed on Saud, the borders of the Saudi kingdom with Kuwait and Iraq. Ibn Saud was a dangerous man. Lawrence underestimated the power of Saud, but Gertrude Bell did not. A few years later, Saud’s power became apparent when he drove King Hussein out of Mecca. Prime Minister Lloyd George was determined to maintain control of Iraq because he believed that large reserves of oil might be discovered in the Tigris-Euphrates plain. ‘If we leave, the Prime Minister said, ‘we’ll later find that we handed to the French and Americans some of the richest oilfields in the world.’

“At that early date,” Giovanni said, “oil was that much in demand?”

“Overnight, the automobile was becoming the primary means of transportation. Ships were converting from coal to oil. The aviation industry was dependent upon oil. There was a radical energy revolution. As early as 1871, geologists had determined that great fields of oil lie in the Tigris and Euphrates basin. At the turn of the century, German geologists reported that a lake of oil was beneath the desert. European oil companies discovered huge oil and gas deposits around Baku on the Caspian Sea and in the Persian Gulf in 1908. Under British control, oil fields began pumping at the head of the Persian Gulf. Socony, Standard Oil of New York, had obtained rights to drill on Ottoman concessions owned by Jerusalem-based business men. Before the war, as Oklahoma and Texas oilmen were preparing to drill, a road was being constructing in southern Palestine, a strategic road upon which Lawrence had once grilled the Oklahoma representative of Socony about whether the Hebron-Beersheba route could be used by Turkish military trucks in the advance on the Suez Canal.”

“How was the administration of Samuel going in Palestine?”

“Samuel had an impossible task with continual riots against what they saw as a pro-Zionist program of the British. The odd thing was that the government’s pro-Zionist philosophy was not in line with the soldiers and officials who had lived with the Arabs. They were not predisposed to execute Churchill’s policy. They understood the Arab had lived there for centuries and didn’t want their lives disrupted. The militant Zionist Vladimir Jabotinsky noted that the administration in Palestine was staffed with professional Arabists. Attracted to the Arab world, they had gone to school at Oxford and Cambridge, learned the Arab language, studied Arab culture and left Britain to spend all of their professional lives in the Middle East. Naturally, they didn’t want to see the Arab nature of Palestine changed. The British civil servants were there to run the country smoothly, to keep the people happy and peaceful. Because the vast majority were Arabs, the Balfour



Ze'ev Jabotinsky served in the 20th Battalion, London Regiment, 1916-1917 – Author, תיתלשממה תונותיעה תכשל, National Photo Collection of Israel, public domain, Wikimedia

Declaration caused nothing but trouble. Churchill estimated that 90 percent of the British army in Palestine was opposed to the Balfour Declaration policy. To the British cop in the street, London's policy made his life miserable. General Congreve, the commander of the army in Egypt said, our sympathies are with the Arabs who have been the victims of an unjust policy forced upon them by the British Government. In opposition to the British military, Jabotinsky declared that the Jews were going to have to protect themselves because the police and army weren't going to do it. It was the beginning of smuggling in weapons to arm the secret defense force, the Haganah."

"I can see," Giovanni said, "it was an insurmountable problem. I remember you telling me about al-Qassam's armed resistance, Haganah commandos, and Lehi assassination squads."

"Gertrude Bell," I said, "was a prime example of what Jabotinsky was talking about. She opposed Zionism, saying "The French in Syria and Zionism in Palestine form a stupendous barrier to honest dealing with the Arabs.

The staunch Zionist Aaron Aaronsohn drew up borders for Palestine extending nearly to Damascus. The differences between the Zionists and Arabs, along with British blithering and blundering guaranteed that only years of tragedy would follow.”

“At least, “Giovanni said, “Feisal was made ruler of Mesopotamia. It’s strange how Churchill was able to work with Lawrence — a dedicated colonialist and a fervent anti-colonialist.”

“They had a warm relationship,” I said, “the colonialist and the anti-colonialist. There are times when personal rapport triumphs over ideology. Along with the influence of Gertrude Bell, Churchill’s and Lawrence’s friendship is how Feisal became king. The two men had something that the other desired. After the revolt in Mesopotamia had cost the British dearly, Churchill’s desire to free Britain from a costly administration in Mesopotamia made him eager to work with Lawrence, and Lowell Thomas’ sensational show *With Lawrence in Arabia* didn’t hurt. The political warrior had a great admiration for the consummate desert warrior. After his bitter failure at the Versailles Treaty Conference, Lawrence was deeply thankful that Churchill established Feisal and Abdullah as heads of state in Mesopotamia and Trans-Jordan. He felt in some measure his conflicted role in the Arab Revolt had been fulfilled.

“However, Feisal was a ruler who wasn’t fully accepted by the Shias and the nationalists. Feisal’s administration was dominated by many civil servants controlled by Britain. A Baghdad newspaper said that London had promised an Arab government with British advisers, but had imposed a British government with Arab advisers.”

“It appears,” Giovanni said, “for the purposes of oil exploration, by making Feisal King of Mesopotamia, Britain had maintained colonial control under another disguise.”

“France and Britain had the same intent — the continuation of colonial rule. Just after Feisal was unanimously declared King by the Council of Ministers, Gertrude Bell arrived at Falluja where thousands of Bedouin tribesman mounted on horses and camels welcomed their new king, galloping around him with wild cries, hurling a Bedouin salute, waving their guns above their heads, galloping in clouds of dust alongside Feisal’s car as they rode with him into Fallujah, an Euphrates town since Babylonian times and center for Jewish scholars for a thousand years. In the streets and on the rooftops of Fallujah, the townspeople cheered, while thousands of Arabs escorted Feisal’s cavalcade on to Ramadi where thousands more awaited him before a one hundred meter square tent set up on the banks of the Euphrates. Splendidly attired in white robes, black



National Museum Iraq. Gertrude Lowthian Bell, archaeologist, author, intelligence agent, and diplomat began collecting artifacts for a future museum in Baghdad. In 1926, the Iraqi government moved Gertrude Bell's collection to the Baghdad Antiquities Museum with Bell as director— Author, zzztriple2000, public domain, English Wikipedia.

tunic and white headdress bound with a silver rope band, Feisal addressed them, saying ‘From this hour any tribesman who lifts his hand against a tribesman is responsible to me. I have my rights over you as your Lord. And you have your rights which it is my duty to defend.’ One by one the desert sheiks came up to lay their hands in Feisal’s and swear allegiance to their king. For Gertrude Bell, it was a thrilling moment, all that she’d dreamed of since coming to Mesopotamia. Bell became a confidante of King Feisal. Lawrence never returned to Arabia.”

“In a sense,” Giovanni said, “Bell became an emotional replacement for Lawrence.”

“In his first year as king, Bell developed a deep friendship with Feisal and during her years there, she became beloved by the people of Baghdad. Feisal helped Bell create the Iraqi Archaeological Museum, its first exhibit made up from her own collection. After Bell died in Baghdad, she bequeathed funds to endow the British School of Archaeology to undertake excavation projects in Iraq. Unto this day, Bell’s name is fondly remembered in Iraq while Lawrence has been forgotten.”



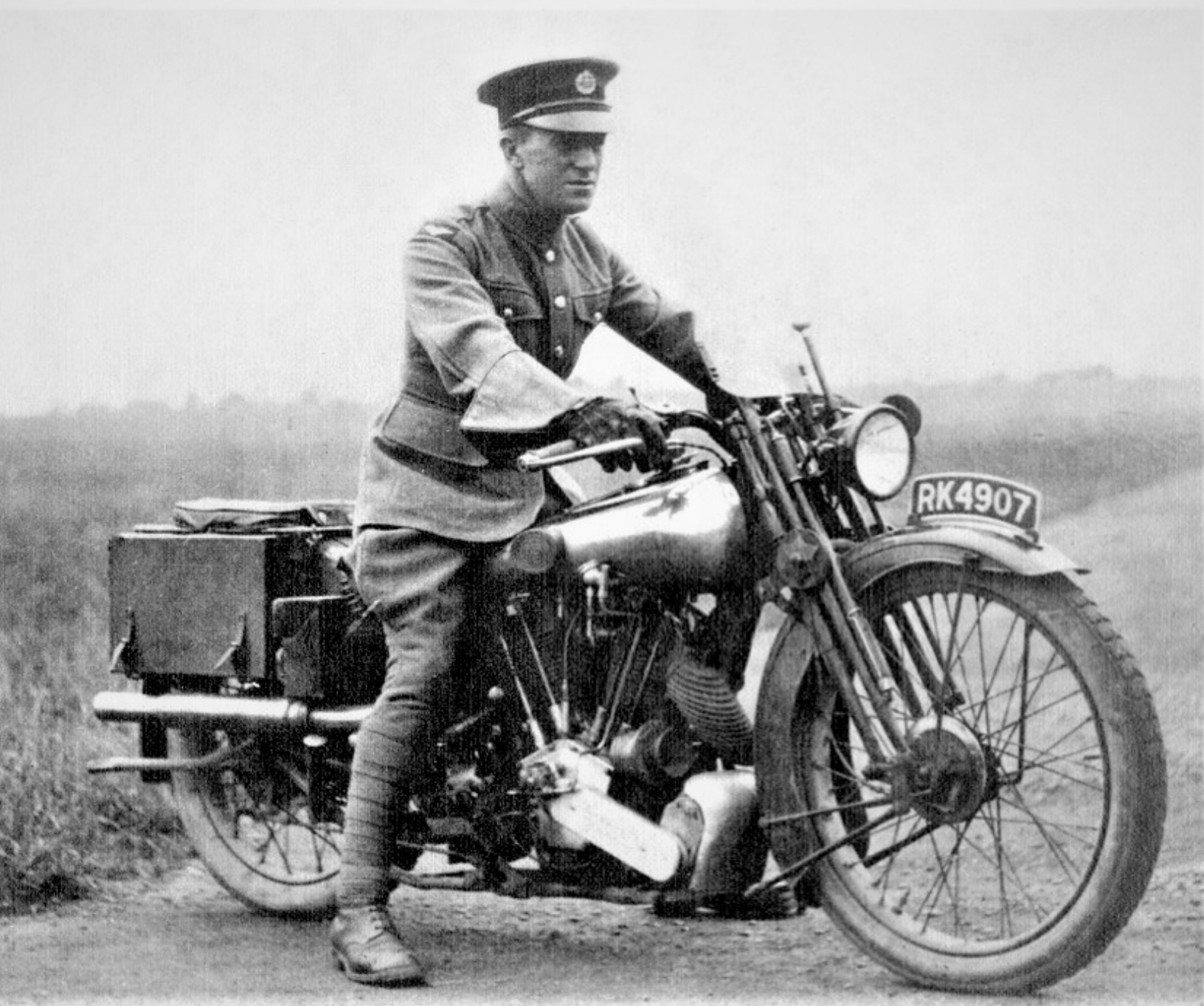
Assyrian sculpture, Nimrud, Winged genie, 870 BC. The Neo-Assyrian Empire, 911 to 612 BC, through conquest, became the most powerful state in the world, dominating the Near East, Eastern Mediterranean, Asia Minor, Caucasus, and part of the Arabian Peninsula and North Africa – Author, Rufus46, Aegyptisches Museum, Munich, Wikimedia.



Assyrian bas-relief depicting Ashurbanipal, the last great Assyrian king from the North Palace of Ninevah, Irak, c 645-635 BC – Author, Carole Raddato, source, British Museum, Wikimedia. Originating in the Fertile Crescent of Mesopotamia, now modern Iraq, the Neo-Assyrian Empire conquered Egypt, Babylonia, Phrygia, and Persia. The Iraq Museum in Baghdad, originally founded in Baghdad in 1922 by Gertrude Lowthian Bell, contains examples of Assyrian sculpture, along with art of Mesopotamian, Babylonian, and Persian civilizations. During the 2003 U.S. Invasion of Iraq, the museum unprotected by the U.S. military, was looted by thieves who carried away the most precious relics of the Assyrian, Babylonian, Sumerian, and Persian civilizations, including ancient Islamic texts, leaving the museum a wreck and the country’s heritage violated. The Iraq Museum director Dr. Youkhanna went to the U.S. Marine headquarters in Baghdad’s Palestine Hotel to plead for troops to protect the museum, but no troops arrived for three days. French President Jacques Chirac declared the looting “a crime against humanity,” and the director of the British Museum said that the looting was “entirely predictable and could easily have been stopped.” U.S. State Department cultural advisers resigned in protest at the failure of the U.S. military to protect the historic museum. Later, the FBI, UNESCO, and the U.S. supported Baghdad Museum Project worked to recover the stolen treasures by tracking the global antiquities market and offering rewards for recovery of the treasures, efforts that were only partially successful. Closed for many years during the restoration, the museum was finally opened in 2015, twelve years after the Iraq Invasion by Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi.

“It is fascinating,” Giovanni said. “With Lawrence feeling so passionate about freedom for the Arabs, risking his life many times and yet, he never returned to Arabia.”

“After finishing his diplomatic work for Churchill, Lawrence was determined to escape the public celebrity that Lowell Thomas’s show had created by assuming a pseudonym and enlisting anonymously in the Royal Air Force. During the Revolt, he had no fear of making unilateral decisions or speaking forthrightly to



T. E. Lawrence on the Brough Superior SS100 that he called "George V" – Unknown author, 1925, public domain, Wikimedia

General Allenby, to the War Cabinet, or the King. But once he'd believed he'd done all he could for the Arabs, he dreamed of living a private life with peace and quiet to write *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* and finish his translation from the Greek of Homer's *Odyssey*. But the public and the press wouldn't leave him alone. Fascinated with speed since his days of hurtling across the desert in Rolls-Royce armored cars, he spent hours riding his Brough Superior motorcycles, which were state of the art motorcycles of that day. One morning returning from the post office coming over a dip at moderate speed on his Brough Superior SS100, two boys on bicycles suddenly appeared in his path. Swerving to miss them, he was hurtled from his machine and suffered severe brain damage and died after a coma of six days.

“If he’d survived, he would’ve been paralyzed remembering nothing of his past. The neurosurgeon, Hugh Cairns who attended him, distressed by so many motorcycle deaths, began his research which led to the use of crash helmets which have saved the lives of so many motorcyclists.

“At his funeral, his friends from combat days, Ronald Storrs, Stewart Newcombe, Alan Dawnay, Lord Winterton, and Winston Churchill came to St Nicholas’ Church to pay their respects. In *The Times*, George V published a message to Lawrence’s surviving brother, ‘Your brother’s name will live in history, and the King gratefully recognizes his distinguished services to his country and feels that it is tragic that the end should have come in this manner to a life still so full of promise.’ A friend said, ‘If genius be in Emerson’s phrase, ‘a stellar and undiminishable something’, whose origin is a mystery and whose essence cannot be defined, then he was the only man of genius I have ever known.’”

“It’s astonishing,” Giovanni said, “how a scholarly archeologist could achieve what Lawrence did. There is no precedence for it — how he was able to grasp principles of warfare and understand Arab sensibilities that officers trained at the The Royal Military Academy failed to understand.”

“He was a deep thinker. That makes a difference — to think outside the common knowledge that is drilled into us at school. Lawrence understood the aspirations and dreams of the Arab people while the British officer who believed himself superior to the Arab was blocked by the chauvinism of colonialism.



T. E. Lawrence and British Museum archeologist C. Leonard Woolley and field team at the archaeological excavations at Carceish, Syria, circa 1912-1914. Lawrence’s friend Dahoum is at far right – Public domain, Wikimedia



Early Hittite bas-relief discovered by archeologists C. Leonard Wooley and T. E. Lawrence in Carchemish, Syria, 1913 – Unknown author, public domain, Wikimedia

“Lawrence was a complicated and tormented personality. His biographers have thought that his depressions later in life were triggered by unwanted memories triggered by the trauma during the war, the death of his two brothers on the Western Front, the lies he had to tell the Arabs to keep their allegiance, the failure to win for the Arabs full independence, the pitiful massacres at Tafas, Tafileh, and Deraa, the death of his friend at Carchemish, Dahoum who died from typhus, his mercy-shooting of his wounded young servant Farraj to keep him from falling into the hands of the Turks, and his execution of Hamid in Wadi Kitan to preserve peace between the tribes. Above all, he was tormented by the memories of torture and rape suffered in Deraa which left him with feelings of uncleanness, confusion, and guilt.”

“Lawrence,” Giovanni said, “had reason for nightmares. Rape is a terrible thing.”

“Rape is a violation of the soul. It destroys your integrity, robs you of your intimacy and your sense of worth. I suspect that’s why Lawrence never went back to the scene of the traumas and chose to bury himself in an ordinary soldier’s routine.



T. E. Lawrence in British Army captain's uniform – Marist Special Collections, public domain, Wikimedia

“In his later letters, he talks about his depression. The closest he came to talking about his rape were in his letters to Charlotte, the wife of Lawrence’s writing mentor playwright G. B. Shaw, when he alludes to the destruction of his core by the events at Deraa. Lawrence once said, ‘Probably it had been the breaking of the spirit, by that frenzied nerve shattering pain which had degraded me to beast level when it made me grovel to it, and which had journeyed with me since, a fascination and terror and morbid desire, lascivious and vicious, perhaps, but like the striving of a moth towards its flame.’

“There’s another, aspect,” I added, “that could account for his depressions and desire to disappear from the public’s gaze.”



T. E. Lawrence, British Army file photo – Unknown author, public domain, Wikimedia

“What’s that?”

“The number of explosions he endured at close quarters. He blew up over 80 bridges and countless railroad tracks, sometimes not having a long enough igniting cord. He was close to a number of blasts that ripped through his body in waves, surging through different densities of bone, flesh and air pockets creating a shuddering effect, shaking the brain which has the consistency of thick jelly, smacking back and forth against the skull, the cumulative effects of concussion after concussion causing permanent damage to the brain. Tens of thousands of young men suffered mental damage from the effects of constant artillery bombardment on the Western Front. Deep trauma in World War One was called ‘shell shock’ leaving soldiers under continuous bombardment shuddering and gibbering, some not even able to speak at all. During the war, Frederick Mott, a neuropathologist and psychiatrist, began studying the brain of these damaged soldiers suspecting that what was

called shell shock and later, combat fatigue, was actually a severe scarring of the brain, the result of the compression wave, the concussion and toxic gases of exploding TNT. Lawrence's physical damage and brutal rape, left him paying a terrible price for his passion for Arab independence."

"Many idols of the past are soon forgotten," Giovanni said, "but the legend of Lawrence lives today."

"During the Second World War," I said, "Lawrence's reputation shone brightly again and *Seven Pillars* was issued to British fighting men. And yet there are many who've sullied his reputation."

"How could anyone do that?"

"When Churchill adopted Lawrence's recommendations for Mesopotamia, it alienated the imperialists and the nationalists. In Britain, military rank was a sign of social status. When Colonel Lawrence signed up as an enlisted man, they thought he had disrespected the officer class."

"Lawrence was unconventional," Giovanni said. "It's difficult for people to understand eccentrics and Lawrence was the ultimate contrarian. That's why I have the deepest respect for him."

"George Bernard Shaw who had a great love for Lawrence, said, 'The reasonable man adapts himself to the world: the unreasonable one persists in trying to adapt the world to himself. Therefore all progress depends on the unreasonable man.' In his eulogy, Winston Churchill said, 'The world looks with awe upon a man who appears indifferent to home, money, comfort, power, and fame. I deem him one of the greatest beings alive in our time. I do not see his like elsewhere. I fear whatever our need we shall never see his like again.'"

For a long time, I remained silent, my hand in Giovanni's warm hand, clouds in a darkening sky reflecting my somber mood.

After a time, Giovanni asked, "How do you feel?"

"I haven't felt this rested in months, my darling. You've been so good to take my body on such a journey."

He rolled up a towel in a tight roll and had me lie down centering it beneath my vertebrae.

"Lay your arms to either side," he commanded, "with your arms and hands pointed above you. Now, keeping your chin down, roll your head slowly from side to side, about 45 degrees from side to side. You're going too fast . . . go slower. That's better. This will stretch the muscles across your chest and help you relax the upper trapezius that you've pulled out of shape by bending over a typewriter."



Parc de Sceaux by Eugène Atget – Public Domain

“I feeling like going for a run,” Giovanni said, standing up and stretching his calves. “Sceaux is a perfect place to run a few kilometers. When I get back I want to hear more about what happened in Palestine.”

“Come back soon, my love.”