

T. E. Lawrence biography

'Lawrence of Arabia' – taken from www.bbc.com

Thomas Edward Lawrence was born on 16 August 1888 in north Wales. His father, Thomas Chapman, had left his wife to live with Lawrence's mother, a governess. Lawrence studied at Oxford University and in 1909 visited Syria and Palestine. A year later he joined an archaeological dig in Syria, where he stayed from 1911 to 1914, learning Arabic. He developed a deep sympathy for the Arabs who had lived under Turkish rule for centuries. In 1914, Lawrence was part of an expedition exploring northern Sinai, carrying out reconnaissance under cover of a scientific expedition.



When war broke out, Lawrence became an intelligence officer in Cairo. In June 1916, the Arab Revolt began against Turkey, an ally of Germany, a revolt the British had worked hard to encourage. Lawrence became liaison officer and adviser to Feisal (also Faisal), son of the revolt's leader Sherif Hussein of Mecca. Lawrence was a superb tactician and a highly influential theoretician of guerrilla warfare. His small but effective irregular forces attacked Turkish communications and supply routes, tying down thousands of Turkish troops and preventing them from fighting against regular allied forces under the command of General Edward Allenby. Lawrence's overriding aim was to help the Arabs achieve military success that would lead to post-war self-government.

In June 1917, the Arab forces won their first major victory, seizing Aqaba, a strategically important Red Sea port. Success continued as they gradually made their way north. After the fall of Damascus in October 1918, Lawrence left for London and then the Paris Peace Conferences to lobby for Arab independence. Before the conference had even begun, the British and French had agreed on the future of Turkey's Arab territories. Lawrence was disillusioned by his failure to bring the Arabs self-rule, but was by now a celebrity, helped by the publicity efforts of American journalist Lowell Thomas.

In 1921, Colonial Secretary Winston Churchill appointed Lawrence as an adviser, but in 1922 he resigned and joined the Royal Air Force in an attempt to find anonymity. During the 1920s and early 1930s, he served both in the RAF and the Tank Corps under assumed names, but press intrusion continued to dog him. A private edition of his book 'The Seven Pillars of Wisdom' was printed in 1926. A full public edition was not released until after his death.

Lawrence left the RAF in February 1935 and died on 19 May following a motorcycle accident.