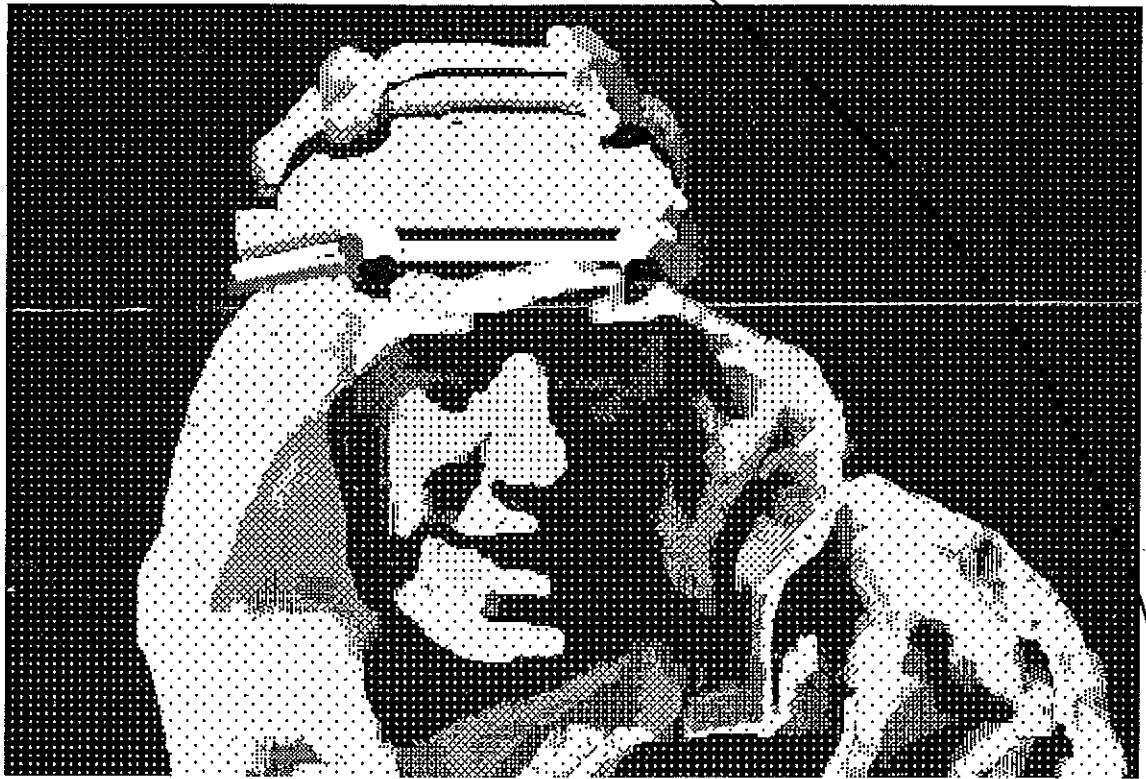


Lawrence of Arabia



The young boy lay on his back looking at the clouds overhead. One looked like a giant white castle with dragons and towers all around. He dreamed of knights in shining armor and great battles. He thought, "What an exciting time that must have been. If I lived during the Middle Ages I would go on a Crusade or I would lead an army and fight to bring glory and honor to the land of the Middle East." Little did the young boy realize that when he grew up, he would be doing just that—leading a fight to bring freedom to the Arabs of the Middle East. He would become the famous Lawrence of Arabia.

T. E. Lawrence was born in Wales in 1888. His family moved often, but finally settled in Oxford, England. There, Ned, as he was called, went to school and to the university. As a boy he loved to read about the Crusades. He spent time traveling by bicycle through England to examine castles and he made brass rubbings of artifacts. He even became an expert in military strategy and shooting.

Lawrence attended Oxford University and specialized in oriental languages. To earn a degree about the military architecture of castles, he went to the Middle East to research castles. As he traveled alone and on foot, he was welcomed in many villages as a curiosity. Many Arabs had never seen an Englishman. After completing his research, he published his thesis under the title, *Crusader Castles*.

After graduating, Lawrence returned to the Middle East to work on archaeological digs along the Euphrates River. He grew fond of the Arab people and resented the domination of the Arabs by the Turks. In 1914 when World War I broke out, Lawrence joined the British army as a lieutenant in the Department of Intelligence. Due to his knowledge of the Middle East, he was sent to Egypt to draw maps. The British were fighting Germany and the Turks were on Germany's side. Lawrence was asked to talk to Arab leaders about staging a revolt against the Turks. Lawrence spoke Arabic and had adopted the dress and habits of the Arabs; therefore, he was accepted by them. He was successful in persuading the Arabs to revolt.

Lawrence discovered one man capable of uniting the many quarrelsome Arab tribes, Emir Feisal, a respected Arab and an able leader.

With Emir Feisal, Lawrence led a core group of about 600 Arabs on many raids. The group increased and decreased at different times, as different tribes joined for different battles. He was given gold by the British to distribute to the Arabs for their work, and he also permitted them to keep the loot from raids on the Turks. The Arabs fought by making sudden raids and then disappearing into the desert. Lawrence found this type of attack very effective in destroying railroad bridges and lines that were needed by the Turks. He himself was reported to have personally been responsible for destroying seventy-nine railroad bridges. Very few Arabs were killed in these surprise attacks, but many Turks met their deaths.

With brave leaders and faithful Arab tribesmen, Lawrence crisscrossed the deserts, raiding railway lines and villages. The Arabs sometimes went without sleep for several days, eating only a simple bread made from flour and water, and dates. They slept curled in the sand and often went for months before they could change their clothes. For some, the fight for independence was made easier by the payment of gold. But for Lawrence, the biggest motive was in taking important cities before the British arrived, for he had been promised that whatever land the Arabs took control of, the Arabs could have when World War I ended. As a result, Lawrence and Feisal led the Arabs in capturing Akaba and Damascus, as well as lesser cities, and organizing the government of the cities before the British arrived.

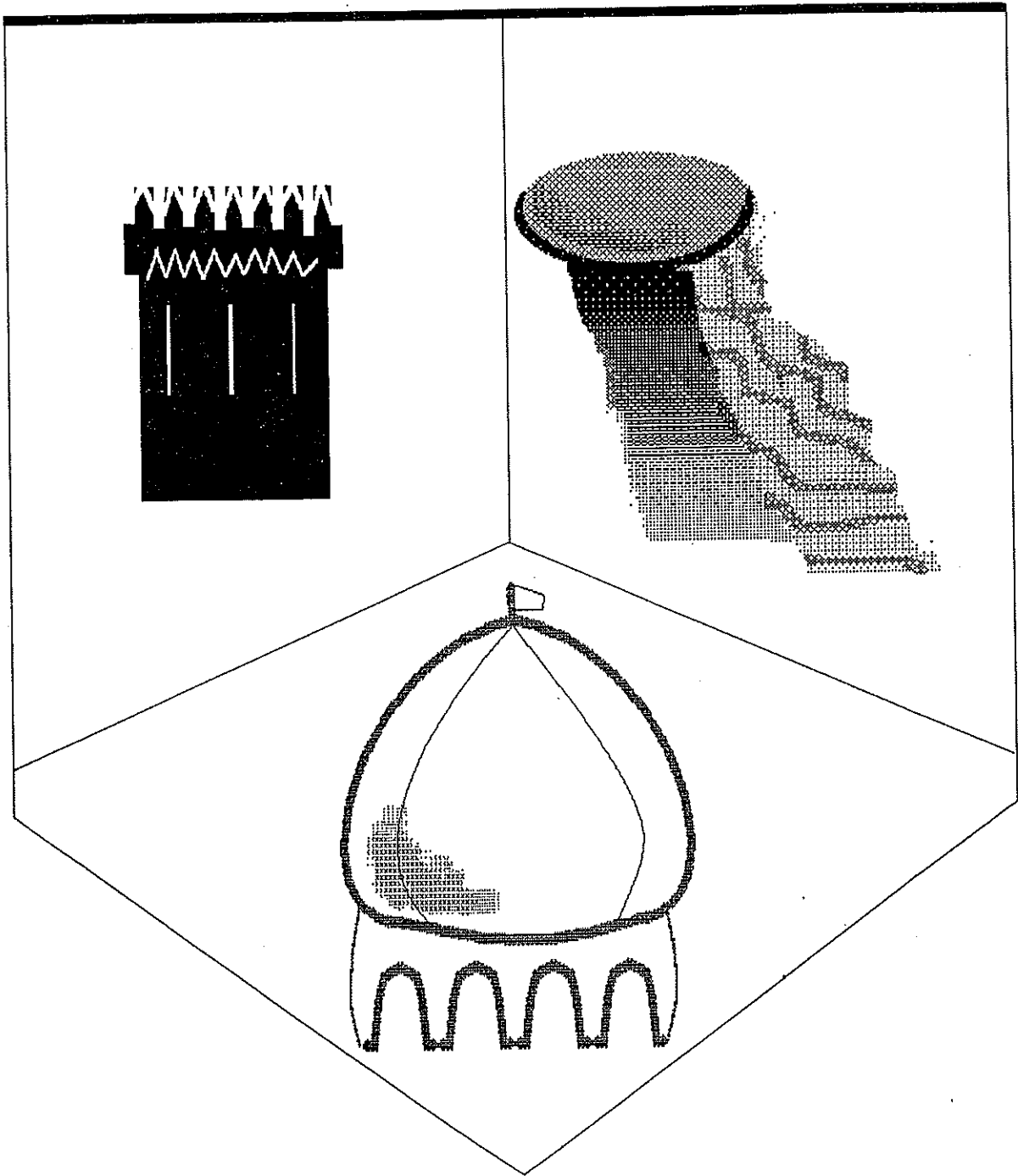
After Damascus was taken, Lawrence asked to return to England as his work was completed. After two years of strenuous desert warfare, the Arabs had regained control from the Turks. Lawrence did attend the 1919 Peace Conference in Paris as Feisal's adviser and interpreter. He was exceedingly disappointed that, despite Britain's promise, the Arabs were not given independence and Feisal was given only a part of Syria to rule, and that remained under French control. Even worse, in 1920 the French drove Feisal off the throne; but, in 1921, Winston Churchill, British statesman, asked Lawrence to go to Cairo with him to rectify the situation. Lawrence and Churchill arranged for the Arabs to be given Iraq, which is about twice the size of Syria. Feisal was elected king of Iraq, and his brother Abdullah became the ruler of Jordan. Lawrence's dream of an independent Arab nation was at last fulfilled.

Lawrence returned to England and began work on a book about the Arab revolt entitled *The Seven Pillars of Wisdom*. He was unhappy with his fame as Lawrence of Arabia and changed his name to John Ross and joined the Royal Air Force (RAF). When his identity was discovered, he joined the Tank Corps of the army as T.E. Shaw, but disliked it, and asked to be reassigned to the RAF. He eventually was accepted by the RAF, spent some time in India, and returned to England.

In 1935 after being discharged by the RAF, he was killed in a motorcycle accident. Travelling at a high rate of speed, he swerved and crashed to avoid two boys playing on a country road.

Although Lawrence never actually rode a white horse and wore armor in battle, he achieved his dream of being a crusader for freedom, and his courage and respect for the Arab people is well remembered.

Lawrence of Arabia Crest



My Family Crest

