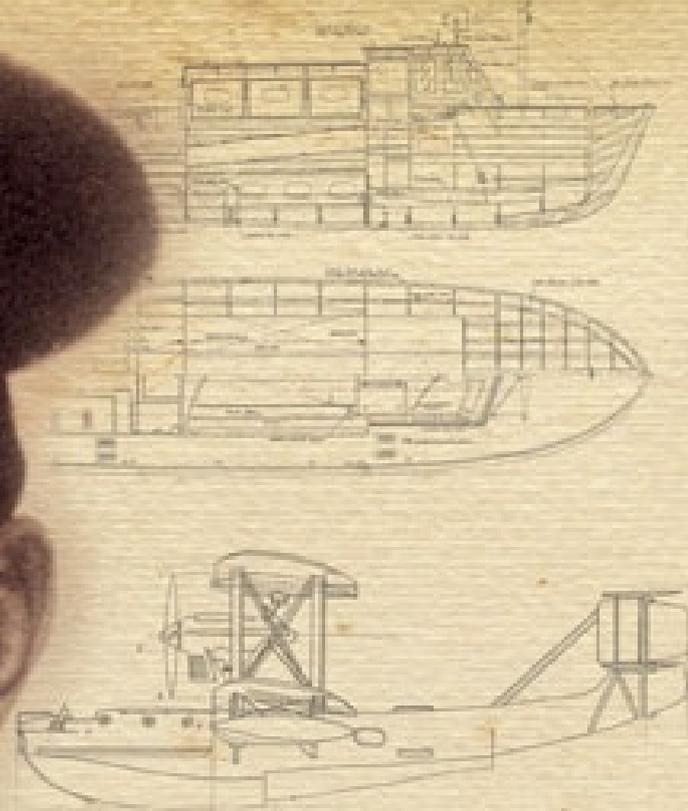


'A very good book about a very remarkable man.'

Britain at War



Another Life

LAWRENCE AFTER ARABIA

ANDREW R. B. SIMPSON

ANOTHER LIFE: LAWRENCE AFTER ARABIA

ANDREW R. B. SIMPSON

SPELLMOUNT

Dedication

In memory of my father

Wing Commander L.J. Simpson, R.A.A.F., R.Aux. A.F., D.F.C. (1918-2007)

Loved and remembered by many

Epigraph

One day I said to Lawrence:

‘... The greatest employments are open to you if you are to pursue your new career in the Colonial Service.’

He smiled his bland, beaming, cryptic smile and said: ‘In a very few months my work here will be finished. The job is done, and it will last.’

‘But what about you?’

‘All you will see of me is a small cloud of dust on the horizon.’

Winston Churchill to T.E. Lawrence on leaving the Colonial Office, January 1922.
(From *Great Contemporaries*, W.S. Churchill, Thornton Butterworth, 1938)

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By the same author

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Abbreviations used in the Text

AEC	Associated Engineering Company
AID	Air Inspection Department
Air Min	Air Ministry
ATB	Armoured Target Boat
AV-M	Air Vice-Marshal
AW or AWL	Arnold Walther Lawrence
B-G	W.E.G. Beauforte-Greenwood
BPBCo	British Power Boat Company
CAS	Chief of the Air Staff
CB	Confined to Barracks or ‘ Jankers’
CO	Commanding Officer
CSM	Company Sergeant Major
DH	de Havilland Aircraft Company
DOSD	Directorate of Service Duties
DPP	Director of Public prosecutions
E.6	Air Ministry’s Marine Craft Service or Boat Section
Flg Off	Flying Officer
Flt Lt	Flight Lieutenant
GBS	George Bernard Shaw
GW2275	Lawrence’s Brough Superior ‘George VII’
HSF	RAF’s Schneider Trophy High Speed Flight
JIC	Joint Intelligence Committee
MAEE	Marine Aircraft Experimental Establishment (Originally the Marine and Armaments Experimental Establishment)
MBC	Motor Boat Crew
MCS	Marine Craft Service
MCU	Marine Craft Unit
MI5	Military Intelligence Department 5 (Internal)
MIS	Military Intelligence Department 6 (Foreign/External)
MTB	Motor Torpedo Boat
QMSI	Quarter Master Sergeant Instructor
RAC	Royal Aeronautical Club, also Royal Automobile Club
RAF	Royal Air Force
RAMC	Royal Army Medical Corps

RAOC	Royal Army Ordnance Corps
RASC	Royal Army Service Corps
RFC	Royal Flying Corps
RSM	Regimental Sergeant Major
RTC	Royal Tank Corps
SBAC	Society of British Aircraft Constructors
S-P	Hubert Scott-Paine
TE	T.E. Lawrence
TEL	T.E. Lawrence
TES	T.E. Shaw
Tes	Sydney Smiths' nickname for Lawrence
US	Unserviceable
W	H.B. Walters, who vetted Lawrence's translation of the <i>Odyssey</i>
WIG	Wing in Ground Effect
Wing	Wing Commander
Cdr	
W/T	Wireless Telegraphy

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Saga magazine.

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Although a number of members of the T.E. Lawrence Society kindly assisted in the research for this book the Society does not officially support it. I would particularly like to thank Society Committee member Pieter Shipster, Gerald Wasley, and Jeremy Whitehorn, whose large collection of books was a great help.

Photographs

The Archive Library, R.A.C. Museum, Bovington for the photograph of E.S. 'Posh' Palmer and other general photographs of Bovington Camp.

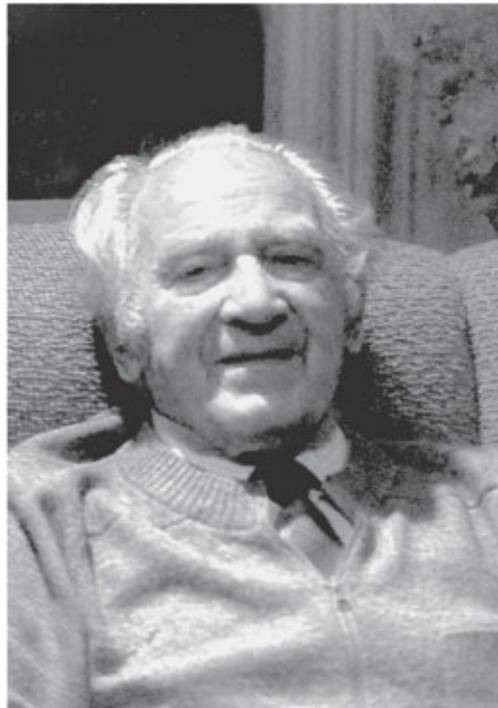
The National Archives Photographic Department for the photographs of RAF 200 on trial at Mount Batten.

The Special Collections Department, Southampton Maritime Museum for a selection of photographs from the Scott-Paine Archive.

As far as possible T.E. Lawrence has been referred to by only two names throughout: 'Lawrence' and the more informal 'T.E.', although Lawrence changed his name by deed poll to Thomas Edward Shaw in the 1920s.

Preface: The Patroclus of the Piece

This book originated with an interview I conducted with Arthur Russell at his home in Coventry in 1985. Russell had served as a private in the Tank Corps with Lawrence from 1923 to 1924 and had been, in his own words, his 'constant companion'. One day, when they were in the cottage at Clouds Hill, the poet Siegfried Sassoon came to visit. In the course of the conversation, as they were sitting in the music room, Sassoon suddenly exclaimed 'Little Russell, the Patroclus of the Piece.' (Patroclus was of course the constant companion of Achilles.) 'So that's how he dubbed me,' said Russell, 'as his constant companion.' One would have thought that spending time with someone who had known T.E. that well would have brought one closer to the man, but I did not feel that. After an hour or so of conversation, in which Mr Russell kindly answered many of my questions, T.E. Lawrence remained an enigma.



Arthur Russell at his home in Coventry, December 1985. Brought up in the city Russell ended up in the same barrack block as Lawrence in March 1923 and became his constant companion during his initial period at Bovington. Mr Russell died in 1991 aged 87. (Author)

Russell had married in 1939, settled in Coventry and had a daughter and two grandsons. In April 1995 he was confined to the Aavon Grange Old People's Home. Although many people went to see him subsequently, gradually, as the years passed, the intensity of his recollections faded. He had taken the well known photograph of Lawrence reading *The Times* outside the Quartermaster's Stores at Bovington in 1923,

and also donated a bench, carved with his name, to the cemetery at Moreton. Lawrence had changed his life and been an inspiration, as he had for many people. Transferred to Warwick Hospital, Arthur Russell died there on 7 November 1997, a very charming old man, who outlived the friend he was devoted to by 62 years.

I had been given Russell's details by Ingrid Keith. Ingrid was a teacher in Wareham at the time and all her life she had a fascination for Lawrence, such that in 1985 she decided to form her own T.E. Lawrence Society. It had humble beginnings, starting off with a small meeting in Wareham Museum where the founder members included Ronald Knight, Roland Hammersley and John Weekly. This tiny seed grew to proportions that many would have never believed possible. There are now thousands of members worldwide, with splinter groups in the US and even one in Japan. This book, therefore, was born out of the enthusiasm of others and the frustration of an inconclusive interview. I hope the reader senses the former and not the latter within these pages.

Andrew R.B. Simpson

Introduction

Thomas Edward Lawrence was born in 1888 at Tremadoc, North Wales, the second son of an Irish landowner who fled Ireland after a bigamous relationship with his housekeeper, who bore him five sons. From Wales they travelled to Scotland, France, Guernsey, the New Forest, eventually settling in Oxford. All five boys were educated at Oxford High School, eventually matriculating to the university. Although not the oldest, T.E. was the natural leader of the group, being a stronger character than the others. T.E.'s elder brother submitted to the dominant character of his mother Sarah Junner, whose, according to some judges, hypocritical religious beliefs filtered into his character. He became bound to her and served as her companion and fellow missionary for the rest of his life. The other Lawrences were strong enough to assert themselves against Sarah, and to escape on different paths.

Educated at Jesus College, Oxford, Lawrence made a walking survey of all the important Crusader castles in Syria for his degree thesis, which was awarded a First. In 1910 he was invited by D.G. Hogarth of the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, to assist at a Hittite excavation at Carchemish in Syria and gradually his knowledge of the Arab peoples began to accumulate and was applied when he went to work for British Intelligence in Cairo in 1914. The tribes in Arabia were preparing a revolt and needed a charismatic leader and Lawrence was sent to find one, in the hope it would revitalize the Allies' failing fortunes in that theatre. Not only did he do this but, by a series of brilliant moves, long distant rides, tactical attacks and strategic campaigns, manage to harass the Turks from Medina to Damascus, delaying them from transferring their troops northward and preparing the ground for the final Allied offensive in 1918.

Lawrence's leadership ability, charisma, and genius for guerrilla warfare meant that by 1918 he was leading a united Arab irregular force. The responsibility and the stresses he experienced deeply affected him so that the end of the campaign he was physically and emotionally exhausted. Those experiences would never leave him. He was not yet thirty.

After the War he was employed as an adviser to the Arab forces at the Paris Peace Conference. He failed to get the concessions he had promised to his Arab friends. This was partially, but only temporarily, righted by Churchill's mandates defined at the Cairo Conference in 1921, held to settle the Middle East question. The rivalries amongst Britain, the Arabs, and France, particularly over the question of Syria and Trans-Jordan, had to be settled. But Lawrence felt betrayed, he had failed his Arab followers. By this time he had become a celebrated international figure, owing to the films made of him in Arabia by the American Lowell Thomas, which were shown in cinemas worldwide. These made him one of the most glamorous figures of the First World War, in a war with little glamour. Lawrence had craved celebrity all his life but when he got it, he despised it.

In Arabia he had realised air warfare would be the overriding factor in any future conflict and, in 1922 joined the RAF under a pseudonym, deciding, much to the consternation of his sophisticated friends, to disappear into the obscurity of the ranks.

This book is about Lawrence's life after Arabia, his service in the RAF and the Tank Corps and details, hopefully as no other book before has done, how he became an expert in the technology of the new RAF. It examines the work he did for the 1929 Schneider Trophy Race, the development of the new RAF 200 seaplane tender, and the development of its armour-plated offspring, the Armoured Target Boat. During this period he was involved in a number of literary projects. As well as *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* he created an important study of the early days of the RAF, *The Mint*. This was ground breaking in its realism, so much so that its 'home truths' were hidden from public view until 1950. His other important literary work, a prose translation of Homer's *Odyssey*, took four years to finish and proved almost as arduous a task as *Seven Pillars*.

What is remarkable about these projects is that, for most of the time they were being written, he was working as an ordinary serviceman where, particularly at Bovington, he lived amongst company that was anything but intellectual. He spent his days doing hard physical work that might have left him little energy for more cerebral pursuits; the fact that he was able to produce such remarkable work in such circumstances, and, in his latter period in the Air Force was able to undertake other important and useful practical work is a testimony to his character. Although the likes of Robert Graves commented on his working man's accent, gold teeth, roughness of hands and fading literary output, Lawrence took great pride in the fact that he could strip an engine down and rebuild it to running condition. This seemed to be a part of his struggle to escape the 'Lawrence of Arabia' image. Where other men from such a position would have risen effortlessly in the diplomatic world, he chose to redirect his abilities to smaller, more mundane matters that, in the long term, were of almost equal importance. It was this progression 'from ink to oil' that was the key to Lawrence's life in the 1920s and '30s. It was not something forced upon him, but work that came about through a series of tragic circumstances, creating a product that gave him great joy.

T.E. Lawrence was one of the most mystifying and charismatic figures of the twentieth century. The dashing desert warrior clad in flowing Arab clothes and headdress bears little resemblance to the truth. This was partly set right in 1962 – though there was still plenty of dash – in David Lean's film, *Lawrence of Arabia*, which gave a more accurate insight into his psychological conflicts as they were understood at the time; but this still was not the Lawrence known by those close to him. His achievements in World War One were remarkable, and understood by fellow officers who encountered him, and it was this that gave birth to the legend, more so than the books that were written about him, for a legend cannot persist for 70 years without some truth behind it.

Ever since Thomas's biography appeared in 1925 there has been a regular series of biographies that vary from the excellent, such as J.M. Wilson's, to those that are so full of exaggerations and downright lies that it is difficult to believe they were published at all. But what they all illustrate is that there has been an increasing fascination with him, or with the myth that he left behind, ever since his death, the circumstances of

which only served to reinforce that myth; some say, because that is the way his admirers want it to be. He is especially attractive to a particular type of person. They tend to be loners or in some way social misfits. A.W. Lawrence, his brother, concluded it was a form of religion to them, such that, after T.E.'s death, many tried to make him a St. Paul. However, A.W. declined to lead the new sect.

Liddell Hart, when writing his biography in the 1930s intended to create a record of the Arab Revolt. However, as he researched the subject more deeply he realised that the contribution Lawrence made was much greater and had more effect than he had originally thought. Eventually he concluded that because Lawrence played such an important part, it was incumbent upon him to write a biography of the man himself and not of the movement. A series of personal interviews with him in the late 1920s and '30s led him to conclude that, despite his quiet subtlety, Lawrence was a man with a greater force of personality than any he had ever known.

PART ONE

A Voyage all out of Reckoning

CHAPTER ONE

Motivation: Colonial Office to AC2

Why did Lawrence return to the ranks? In Chapter 1 of Lawrence's *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, his account of the part he played in the Arab Revolt of 1917, is a famous passage that begins 'All men dream: but not equally. Those who dream by night in the dusty recesses of their mind wake in the day to find that it was vanity.' What follows is an explanation of the dream he had to create a new nation and restore a 'lost influence, to give twenty millions of Semites' the foundation of their national 'dream palace'. With typical self-deprecation Lawrence minimized his contribution to the aim, declaring that his was only a 'mock primacy'. He realised from early on that the British Cabinet had engineered a conspiracy, conspiring to persuade the Arabs to fight on 'definite promises of self-government'. Only Lawrence's word would assure them of the truth of this, as they had no use for written promises. This deception continued for two years, during which Lawrence was always aware of the dishonesty of his task: 'Instead of being proud of what we did together', he later wrote 'I was continually and bitterly ashamed'. His planned solution was to make the Arabs politically strong enough to convince the Allies to grant their wishes at the Peace Conference.

Lawrence explains that there were two deceptions he perpetrated in the war. Firstly 'a pugnacious wish to win the war' controlled him, but this was impossible without Arab help, so it was better for them to win on a dishonest premise than to lose. Secondly, since he was fighting under a false flag, a deception even his immediate superior was unaware of, he refused to accept any conventional rewards or recognition for his success: to prevent any 'unpleasantness arising' he began to falsify his reports, 'to conceal the true stories of things',¹ the second deception.

In Arabia Lawrence of course encountered a completely different concept of life with entirely different values to those with which he had been brought up. He explained much of his thoughts on Semitic beliefs in the introduction he wrote to C.M. Doughty's *Travels in Arabia Deserta* in 1921:

The desert is a place of passing sensation, of cash-payment of opinion. Men do not hold their minds in suspense for days, to arrive at a just and balanced average of thought. They say good at once when it is good, and bad at once when it is bad.

The different perspective led Lawrence to re-evaluate his own values. After the War he abandoned the concept of the progress of mankind. His belief in God, certainly the Christian God, disappeared in Arabia and he gave up the idea of a conventional career. He tried in his life for an absolute value, a standard, but, in his own eyes, fell far short of it: Basil Liddell Hart concluded 'His peak was so high that few other men could even see it through the mist of life.'² Churchill once said that Lawrence moved at a different speed and on a different level to the ordinary man. During the war other men began to move at his pace, but after it was over, he was left alone on his own plane once more.

In 1919 the Peace Conference in Paris ended in political decisions that gave the Arabs almost nothing, causing T.E. extreme depression and bitterness. All the promises he had made to his friends had not been met. He had entered the conference with a cry for Arab unity fresh on his lips but soon found that he was surrounded by parties with no interest in the Arab Question. The Conference, he found to his disgust, was more concerned with the settlement of the European War than with petty squabbles in Arabia.

Still, he had other dreams, an important one being the conquest of the air. He also had to write the story of the Arab Revolt, a task for which only he was qualified. He signed a contract with the new publisher Jonathan Cape, one condition of which was the writing of a second book of his choice.

Although profoundly changed by the War, that Lawrence's psychological problems afterwards were caused by his experiences in the War itself is a misconception. He was actually fairly well balanced at the Armistice. The economist J.M. Keynes, who met him in Paris, found a natural aloofness in him, but reckoned him a fit man and later concluded 'It was the subsequent events that twisted him.'³ Professor John Mack, a biographer of Lawrence, commented that he had turned inward, his mother describing how in the winter of 1919–1920 'He would sit for hours in a state of marked despondency without moving or changing his facial expression.'⁴ John Buchan met him at this time and observed that he was in a trough of depression caused by 'the failure of his work for the Arabs, which involved for him a breach of honour.'⁵ It was during this period that he at last learned the truth of his deceased father's adulterous background, his own illegitimacy (which he had suspected as a youth), and the fact that an inheritance of large estates in Ireland, which otherwise would have been his, had been forfeited. Simultaneously, Lowell Thomas was eulogizing him before thousands, and in a few years his picture shows would be seen by millions worldwide. The high profile was initially encouraged by T.E. in the hope that it would help the Arab cause; but after the Conference it was clear that it would have no effect. So against his will, he became transformed into a national hero, a society demagogue, and a matinee idol.

His psychological problems actually began to beset him whilst writing his account of the Revolt in an attic room of a terraced house at 14 Barton Street,⁶ London, in the winter of 1921–22. Here he worked day and night on the book, going without food and sleep for long periods in order to focus. His changing mental state is reflected in his letters. In December 1917 his correspondence is, if anything, jaunty, but in those written later in the 1920s there is a pronounced tone of self deprecation, a kind of masochistic desire for punishment. The consequence of his sense of failure with the Arabian affair was a desire not to have any form of responsibility over men or to make any decisions of consequence again. A step towards this, he felt, was to accept the lowest status possible, which in the ranks of the RAF was Aircraftman 2nd Class. Arthur Russell explained:

Because he'd been let down with the Arabs: he had to go down and promise them things. He knew most of it would never come off but he had to carry on and pretend, but he thought most of them wouldn't. It was due to the French government and the Indian government. And he told me then that – I don't know why the Indian government got involved – they didn't want the Indian government to have these concessions. He told me his life was forfeit if he went back to England.⁷