



Bone china portrait bust of Lawrence created by Michael Suttly.



Somerset figures re-create Lawrence of Arabia's attack on Aqaba.

Lawrence of Arabia

James H. Hillestad profiles the legendary soldier and looks at some of the military miniatures he has inspired

TEXT: JAMES H. HILLESTAD **PHOTOS:** JAMES H. HILLESTAD AND TS&MF ARCHIVES

T.E. Lawrence was one of the most heroic figures of the 20th century. He has been the subject of three movies, more than 40 books and innumerable articles.

EARLY DAYS

Thomas Edward Lawrence was born in North Wales in 1888. Known to his family as Ned, he studied history at Jesus College, Oxford, where archaeology and medieval buildings were his main focuses. This had the advantage of allowing him to put to use his growing skills as a photographer and cartographer.

Lawrence also developed a passion for military matters by serving in the Oxford University Officers' Training Corps. His interest in military history, tactics and strategy increased over time.

Castles had fascinated Lawrence since childhood. As a boy he had visited, sketched and measured the remains of most of the great castles

in Britain and France, traveling phenomenal distances by bicycle.

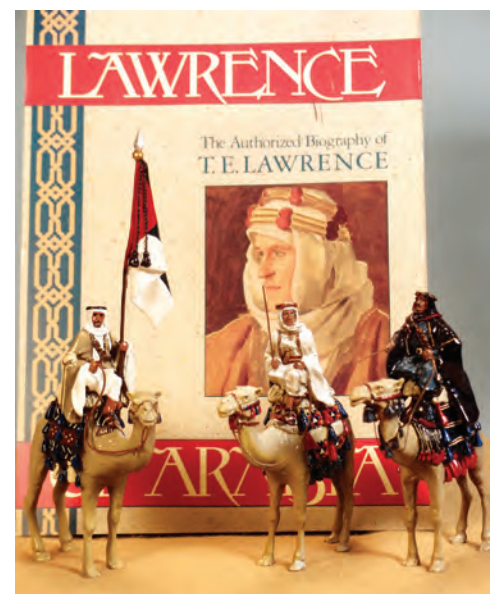
In addition, Lawrence acquired Arabic language skills while studying, touring and working as an archaeologist in the Middle East prior to World War I.

Years of these studies gave Lawrence an instinctive feel for topography. It was therefore no accident that he had entered the British Army through the back door as a map-maker.

Lawrence's reputation was built on his WWI years in the Arabian Desert during one of history's most iconic guerrilla campaigns. His forces blew up trains, took the sea fortress of Aqaba from the improbable landward side and tied down Ottoman troops, thus aiding the military campaign conducted by British Gen. Sir Edmund Allenby.

ARAB REVOLT

In the southern provinces of the



Somerset figures of an Arab standard-bearer, Lawrence and Sharif Ali (from left).

Ottoman Empire, the Arab Revolt had been launched in June 1916. Its leader was Grand Sharif Hussein Ibn Ali al-Hashimi, a descendant of the Muslim Prophet Muhammad.

The Hashemite Arab leader was the Sharif and Emir of Mecca when he proclaimed the Arab Revolt against Turkish rule from Constantinople. Hussein was also the King of Hejaz along the coast of Western Saudi Arabia.

After the Arab Revolt erupted, Lawrence served as a British liaison officer during the ensuing 2-year guerrilla campaign. British and Arab



Humorous tribute by Mad magazine in 1964 casting its fictitious mascot Alfred E. Neuman as Lawrence of Arabia. Actor Peter O'Toole's portrayal of the title character in the 1962 movie "Lawrence of Arabia" had captivated the public's attention at the time.

forces attacked the Ottoman Empire, an ally of Imperial Germany.

Launched from Mecca by Hussein and led by his four sons — Faisal, Abdullah, Ali and Zeid — the uprising was aimed at winning independence for the Arabs after four centuries of Turkish rule.

Against long odds, the Arab Revolt succeeded under the leadership of Faisal and Lawrence. They person-



King & Country figure of British Lt. T.E. Lawrence embarking on his fateful journey into the desert to meet with Faisal during WWI.

ally led raids against Turkish troops along the Hejaz Railway on the road to triumph in Damascus, Syria.

Lawrence himself blew up 70 bridges along the Hejaz Railway. He became so adept that he perfected a technique of leaving a bridge "scientifically shattered" — ruined — but still standing. Turkish crews then faced the time-consuming task of having to dismantle wreckage before repairs could begin.



Lawrence of Arabia mounted on a camel from a limited edition set issued by W. Britain. (Photo by Dennis Diamond)

CAUSE WAS LOST

Eventually, the Allies prevailed over the Central Powers (Germany, Austria-Hungary, the Ottoman Empire and Bulgaria), ending WWI in 1918.

At the Paris Peace Conference of 1919, with Lawrence at his side, Faisal argued for Arab independence. It was in vain.

Hussein refused to sign the Treaty of Versailles in protest of the Balfour Declaration and the establishment of a French mandate in Syria and British control of both Palestine and the newly created nation of Iraq. Thus began a period of conflict that continues to this day in the Middle East.

Lawrence felt betrayed by his own government and, more importantly, ashamed for having misled his friend Faisal and his many thousands of followers.

Disheartened, then Col. Lawrence returned to England. During a ceremony at Buckingham Palace in London, he went so far as to decline the military decorations about to be pinned on his chest by King George V. His reason: Britain's shabby treatment of its Arab friends.

In 1921, Hussein's sons Faisal and Abdullah were made rulers of Iraq and Transjordan, respectively. After the Ottoman Caliphate was abolished in March 1924, Hussein proclaimed himself Caliph of all Muslims. Facing



Lawrence and Arabs launch a desert raid in a vignette featuring figures from Somerset.



Bodyguards flank Somerset portrayals of Allenby, Faisal and Lawrence conferring (from left).



Lawrence in a Rolls-Royce armored car by Thomas Gunn Miniatures.

defeat at the hands of Ibn Saud, Hussein abdicated and was succeeded by his oldest son Ali in October 1924.

Ibn Saud completed his conquest of Hejaz in 1925. He consolidated his dominions into the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, which was founded in 1932 with him as its first monarch.

BUT THE LEGEND GREW

Tales of Lawrence of Arabia's exploits received widespread circulation, thanks largely to the American news correspondent Lowell Thomas. He prepared an illustrated lecture series and wrote several breathless accounts for magazines. Thomas proclaimed Lawrence "the uncrowned King of Arabia."

At this moment in history, it was said that Lawrence could have run for public office and would have won in a landslide. Winston Churchill urged him to pursue a diplomatic career.

Instead, Lawrence chose to vanish. He enlisted in the British military as a humble private, under a false name.

On May 13, 1935, Lawrence was seriously injured in a motorcycle accident close to his Clouds Hill cottage near Wareham, Dorset. Six days later he died at age 46.

"I deem him one of the greatest beings alive in our time," Churchill said. "I fear whatever our need, we shall never see his like again."

King George V wrote, "His name will live in history."

LAWRENCE FIGURES

It is not surprising that a number of toy soldier and model figure makers have chosen to portray Lawrence of Arabia. Among them are King & Country Ltd., W. Britain, Thomas Gunn Miniatures, Andrea Miniatures, and the prolific Ron Leh of Somerset Ltd. ■



Model figure kit portrayal of Lawrence by Andrea Miniatures.

ABOUT THE WRITER



James H. Hillestad is the proprietor of The Toy Soldier Museum in Cresco, Pa., USA.

LAWRENCE PUTS STAMP ON ARAB REVOLT

After Grand Sharif Hussein Ibn Ali al-Hashimi's declaration of Arab independence in June 1916, Ottoman postage stamps could no longer be used in the Hejaz. T.E. Lawrence suggested that the issue of a new, distinctive series of stamps would be one way of publicizing the emergence of the new nation.

To achieve these aims, designs never before adopted for stamps were drawn from beautiful existing specimens of Arabesque ornamentation.



Hejaz postage stamps from the time of the Arab Revolt.

Lawrence wanted each value to be backed with a gum of a different taste to help distinguish them in the dark and to popularize use of the postal service. This was found, however, to be impracticable.

Writing in his memoirs, Cairo-based British Oriental Secretary Sir Ronald Storrs noted, "Shortly after the Arab Revolution, we found that its success was being denied, and we decided that the best proof that it had taken place would be an issue of Hejaz postage stamps in Arabic."

Storrs continued, "It was quickly apparent that Lawrence already possessed a complete working technique of philatelic and three-color reproduction, so that he was able to supervise the issue from start to finish."

--James H. Hillestad