

The Telegraph

INSIDE THE

Sunday, February 2, 2014

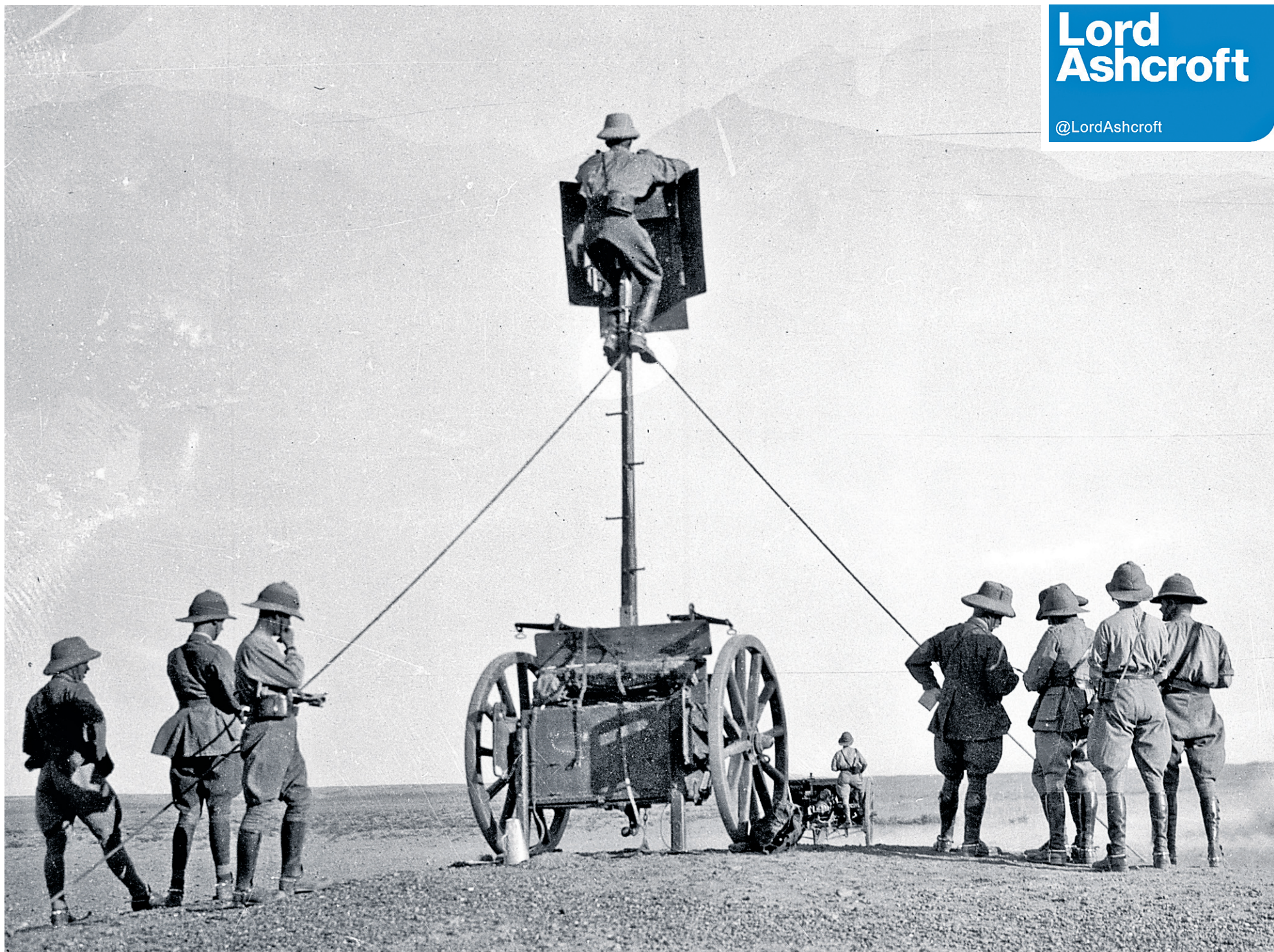
FIRST WORLD WAR

PART SIX: REDRAWING THE MIDDLE EAST

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THE WAR'S CENTENARY

➤➤ **PATRICK
BISHOP**
The curtain falls on
the Ottoman Empire

➤➤ **NEIL
FAULKNER**
Lawrence of Arabia
– guerrilla genius

➤➤ **NIGEL STEEL**
The victories and
setbacks on the
road to Damascus

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IWM PODCAST

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CORBIS

WELCOME

While war was still raging in the rain and mud of the Western Front, many of Britain's troops were wreaking havoc in the Middle East. But what were they fighting for?

There were strategic concerns such as oil and the Suez Canal. But at the root of it all was old-fashioned British imperialism and French self-interest driving the division of the Middle Eastern spoils of Turkey's Ottoman Empire.

Their arbitrary lines in the sand have resulted in instability and conflict in the region ever since. In this issue, Patrick Bishop looks at how the First World War redrew the map of the Middle East – and why 1917, the year of the Balfour Declaration, remains imprinted in Arab minds as the date that marks the blueprint for injustice.

The Arabian Desert also gave rise to a remarkable figure in guerrilla warfare, TE Lawrence. Neil Faulkner looks at how an Oxford archaeologist became Lawrence of Arabia.

Plus, we bring you our regular features on battlefield art, poetry and letters from IWM's collections, while Lord Ashcroft recounts the story of the "Six Before Breakfast" VCs.



Zoe Dare Hall

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to remember those who gave their lives in the conflict. Lord Ashcroft has established himself as a champion of bravery, building up the world's largest collection of Victoria Crosses (VCs), Britain and the Commonwealth's most prestigious award for courage in the face of the enemy. He has also written four books on bravery: *Victoria Cross Heroes*, *Special Forces*

Heroes, *George Cross Heroes* and *Heroes of the Skies*. In each of the 12 new supplements, Lord Ashcroft tells the incredible stories behind First World War VCs from his collection. Lord Ashcroft purchased his first VC in 1986 and currently owns more than 180 of the decorations. Three years ago, he began collecting George Crosses (GCs), Britain and the Commonwealth's most

prestigious award for courage not in the face of the enemy. He currently owns 14 GCs. Lord Ashcroft's VC and GC collections are on display in a gallery that bears his name at IWM London, along with VCs and GCs in the care of the museum. The gallery, built with a £5 million donation from Lord Ashcroft, was opened by HRH The Princess Royal in 2010. Lord Ashcroft has been a successful entrepreneur

for the past four decades, launching, buying, building and selling companies – both private and public – in Britain and overseas. He is a former Treasurer and Deputy Chairman of the Conservative Party. In September 2012, he was appointed a member of the Privy Council and was made the Government's Special Representative for Veterans' Transition. He is Treasurer of the International Democratic

Union (IDU) and one of Britain's leading experts on polling. Lord Ashcroft has donated several millions of pounds to charities and good causes. He founded Crimestoppers (then the Community Action Trust) in 1988. He is the founder of the Ashcroft Technology Academy and Chancellor of Anglia Ruskin University. His numerous other charity roles

include being Vice Patron of the Intelligence Corps Museum, a Trustee of Imperial War Museum, an Ambassador for SkillForce and a Trustee of the Cleveland Clinic in the US.

• For information about the Lord Ashcroft Gallery, visit www.iwm.org.uk/heroes. For information on Lord Ashcroft, visit www.lordashcroft.com. Follow him on Twitter: @LordAshcroft



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MIDDLE EAST

Our bloody legacy to a tortured region



ANGLO-FRENCH INTRIGUE AND IMPERIAL AMBITION FOSTERED THE PROBLEMS WE SEE TODAY, SAYS **PATRICK BISHOP**

The First World War was the most modern of conflicts. Yet the thinking of the men who directed it was often shaped by old-fashioned notions. Looming large among them was the idea that the victor should go the spoils and that whoever came out on top might help themselves to what they fancied of the losing parties' wealth, industrial resources and territories.

Ottoman Turkey was "the sick man of Europe" and in what appeared to be terminal decline when it chose to side with Germany in 1914. It was not long before Britain and France began eyeing up Ottoman domains and, in 1916, they struck a secret agreement about who would have what when Turkey was defeated.

It was, wrote historian James Barr, "a shamelessly self-interested pact, reached well after the point when a growing number of people had started to blame empire-building for the present war". Britain would come to regret the land-grab bitterly, for it set off a conflict that, like an active volcano, would erupt intermittently down the succeeding years and even today shows no signs of cooling.

The Allies created a terrible mess in the Middle East. As well as the Israel-Palestine struggle, they bear a measure of responsibility for the inherent instability of the states that emerged from the post-war settlements. Decisions that produced the disorder were often taken hastily, heedless of long-term considerations. It soon became clear that there would be plenty of time to regret at leisure.

The deal from which much of the mischief sprang was known as the Sykes-Picot agreement. It was worked out by Sir Mark Sykes – a land-owning Yorkshire baronet and MP with a taste for the Orient – and a truculent and Anglophobe French diplomat, François Georges-Picot. Between them they split the Ottomans' Middle Eastern empire, drawing a diagonal line in the sand that ran from the Mediterranean coast to the mountains of the Persian frontier. Territory north of this arbitrary boundary would go to France and most south of it would go to Britain.

It meant that once the Ottoman armies had been dealt with, Britain stood to take possession of Palestine. This brought several strategic advantages. Despite the agreement and the fact that they were dying alongside each other in the trenches, France and Britain maintained a fierce rivalry in the region. By securing the southern slice of the Ottoman cake, Britain would create a buffer to the east of the Suez canal, the vital economic and military short-cut to the eastern Empire, and protect it from French designs. It would also build a land bridge from the eastern Mediterranean to the petroleum fields of Iraq, a potentially bottomless source of energy for the oil-fired ships of the Royal Navy.

Possession of Palestine would put Britain in a position to grant an enormous favour to the Zionists, who were seeking to gain the backing of a great power for their dream of ending the Jews' 2,000-year exile from Israel.

British politicians had for some time been sympathetic to Zionist aspirations. Their motivations were a mix of altruism and calculation. Men like former prime minister and now foreign secretary Arthur Balfour, who had been brought up on the Bible, believed the Jews had a right to return to the Promised Land. They also harboured the conviction that Jews exercised enormous hidden influence in the world and particularly in America and Russia. By making a promise that would gladden Zionist hearts, they might win their co-operation in achieving British war aims. After the conflict was over, it could be useful to have a Jewish entity in the region that felt it owed a debt of gratitude to the empire.

In November 1917, a document was issued in Balfour's name that laid the foundations for modern Israel. It stated that the government "view with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people and will use their best endeavours to facilitate the achievement of this object". The Balfour Declaration, as it became known, made no mention of the Arabs who, at the time, made up about 90 per cent of Palestine's population. It did, however, utter the pious proviso that "nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities".

The contradictions were obvious from the outset. In fewer than 90 words, Britain had conjured up a formula guaranteed to generate endless trouble. But 1917 was a

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IN FEWER THAN 90 WORDS, BRITAIN CONJURED UP A FORMULA GUARANTEED TO GENERATE ENDLESS TROUBLE



THE JEWISH NATIONAL MOVEMENT

DECLARATION BY THE BRITISH GOVERNMENT

The Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs has transmitted to Lord Rothschild the following letter:—

FOREIGN OFFICE,
November 2nd, 1917

DEAR LORD ROTHSCHILD,

I have much pleasure in conveying to you, on behalf of His Majesty's Government, the following declaration of sympathy with Jewish Zionist aspirations which has been submitted to, and approved by, the Cabinet:—

"His Majesty's Government view with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people, and will use their best endeavours to facilitate the achievement of this object, it being clearly understood that nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine, or the rights and political status enjoyed by Jews in any other country."

I should be grateful if you would bring this declaration to the knowledge of the Zionist Federation.

Yours sincerely,

ARTHUR JAMES BALFOUR.

BAD TIMES AHEAD

Sir Edmund Allenby enters Jerusalem's Old City, above; a copy of the Balfour Declaration, left; Sir Mark Sykes, below, and François Georges-Picot, bottom; TE Lawrence (third from right), with Emir Feisal and the Arab Commission to the Peace Conference in Versailles, right



bad year, with stalemate on the Western Front, impending Russian collapse on the Eastern Front and British sea trade ravaged by the depredations of German U-boats. The Government, it seemed, was prepared to offer any undertaking that might improve the situation and the consequences could be dealt with later.

A few weeks after the declaration was published, Britain's tenure of the Holy Land became a fact. Forces under Sir Edmund Allenby surged into southern Palestine from Egypt in the autumn of 1917. On December 11, with studied humility, he entered the castellated walls of Jerusalem's Old City via the Jaffa Gate on foot to take the surrender. It was to be the high point in a dismal story. In subsequent years, British administrators, soldiers and policemen struggled with the impossible task of trying to reconcile Zionist aspirations to statehood with Arab resistance to what they saw as the hijacking of their homeland.

As well as offering promises to the Jews, Britain had for some time been making overtures to Arabs of the region who, for 400 years, had lived under Ottoman rule. The Turkish Sultan was the custodian of Islam's holiest sites at Mecca, Medina and Jerusalem and, as Caliph, exercised at least a nominal authority over the world's Muslims. On entering the war, he had called for a jihad against the British – a source of concern given there were 100 million Muslims in the British empire.

After the Gallipoli debacle of 1915 failed to knock the Turks out of the war, the danger became more acute. A Turkish counter-attack might threaten British-controlled Egypt and menace the Suez Canal. Britain now moved to encourage the Arabs to rise up against their overlords, dangling before them the prospect of freedom and self-determination in the aftermath of victory.

Their blandishments were directed at a man who regarded the Sultan as an upstart. Sharif Hussein bin Ali, 64, was the ruler of Mecca, the spiritual centre of the Muslim world and a descendant of the Prophet Mohammed. A late convert to Arab nationalism, he presented himself as the representative of the peoples of the region and embodiment of their hopes for independence.

In October 1915, Britain's man in Egypt, Sir Henry McMahon, sent an ambiguous message to Hussein encouraging him to believe that if he joined the fight against the Turks, London would back his ambitions to create an independent Arab entity that would include the Arabian peninsula and Iraq, Syria and Palestine. Seven months later, the secret Sykes-Picot agreement granted theoretical control of much of the northern part of this area to the French.

Hussein's revolt duly broke out in Mecca in June 1916, but swiftly fizzled out. It was then that a short, intense, fair-haired adventurer wrote himself into the lore of the region. In Jeddah in October 1916, TE Lawrence donned Arab robes and set off into the Hijaz mountains to learn what was going on. What he saw persuaded him – and subsequently his chiefs – that the Arabs were a genuinely important potential military asset against the Turks.

After bypassing Hussein in favour of his more malleable son Faisal, Lawrence then directed a classic guerrilla campaign against conventional Ottoman forces, blowing up their lifeline, the Hijaz railway, and capturing the strategically valuable port of Aqaba by a surprise attack from the rear. Late in 1918, Faisal's army entered Damascus, a victory that local nationalists hoped would mark the start of a new era of freedom from foreign rule.

The illusion was short lived. The Sykes-Picot agreement had stated that France and Great Britain were prepared to recognise and protect an independent Arab state, or states, in their areas. But the growing assertiveness of the nationalists and the installation of Faisal as monarch in March 1920 antagonised the French.

Less than six months later, French forces crushed the independence movement and deposed Faisal. Over the next 26 years, France fought to maintain its position in the area, promoting minorities to counter the Sunni majority, in a divide-and-rule strategy. In 1926, it created a separate entity of Lebanon, splitting Syria's historic boundaries. These divisions distorted the future development of the country and their effects are tragically apparent today.

British rule in Palestine, formalised with the grant of a League of Nations mandate in 1922, was no happier. Britain never devised a policy capable of reconciling the clashing interests of Jewish immigrants and indigenous Arabs. There were anti-Jewish riots in 1920, 1921 and 1929 that revealed the weakness of the security forces. London sent several commissions to wrestle with the conundrum it had created but no solution emerged. Instead, the administration reacted to events by appeasing one side then the other and satisfying neither.

In 1936, the Arabs rose up against British rule, an insurgency that was crushed only after three years of ruthless repression. Even before the end of the Second World War, Jewish underground groups had begun operations against their purported protectors that burgeoned into a full-scale revolt. In 1947, an exhausted Britain admitted defeat and announced it was renouncing its mandate. In May of the following year, the last Union flag was hauled down and the Arabs and Jews were left to slug it out.

Thus ended one of the empire's greatest humiliations, "a hell-disaster" in Churchill's despairing words. The British departed with few regrets but burning with bitterness and a feeling that history would treat them unfairly when judgment was passed on their tenure. After all, had they not done more than any other nation to realise the Jewish dream of a return to the Promised Land? It was true that Britain had started the process by which Israel was restored. But its motives were mixed and underpinned by old-fashioned imperialist thinking that had no place in the assertive new world that emerged from the 1914-1918 war.

● Patrick Bishop's The Reckoning: Death and Intrigue in the Promised Land – A True Detective Story will be published by HarperCollins on March 17

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ARABS AND BALFOUR

Any visitor to Israel or Palestine who talks to local Arabs can be sure of two things: conversation will turn to politics and it will not be long before the Balfour Declaration is mentioned.

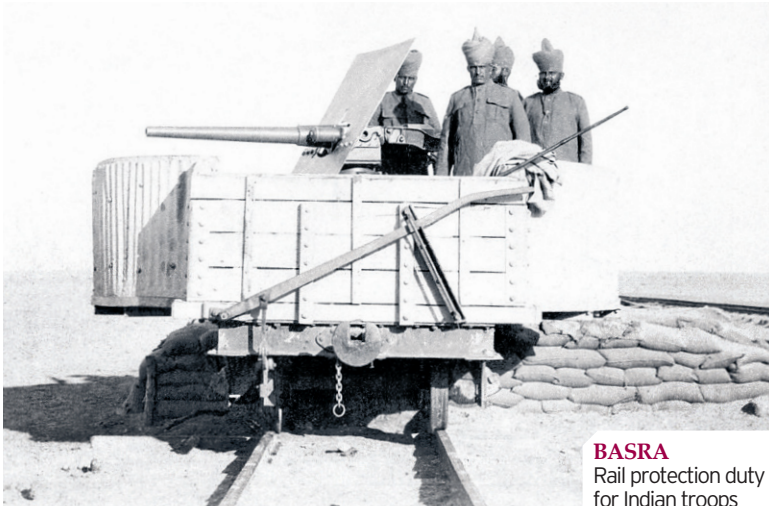
For Arabs, the declaration made conflict inevitable and set in train a calamity of biblical proportions. It culminated in Al-Nakba – the "catastrophe" of 1948 when 750,000 people were displaced from their homes.

Osama bin Laden appeared to use the declaration as a justification for the attacks on September 11, 2001, when he said America was "tasting the humiliation and contempt" that Islam had suffered "for more than 80 years".

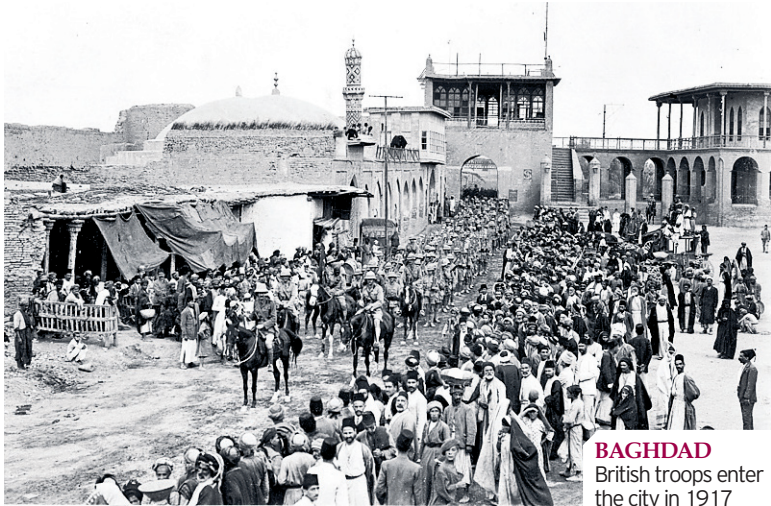
Patrick Bishop



KUT Turkish troops on rafts on the River Tigris



BASRA Rail protection duty for Indian troops



BAGHDAD British troops enter the city in 1917



PALESTINE An attack on part of the Hijaz railway



DAMASCUS German prisoners at Megiddo

The battles that shaped today’s Middle East



THE REGION’S INSTABILITY HAS ITS ROOTS IN THE DEFEAT OF THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE 100 YEARS AGO, SAYS **NIGEL STEEL**

The dismemberment of Turkey’s Ottoman Empire after the First World War still reverberates today. There is daily news of anguish and violence that can be traced back to the battles fought across the Middle East between 1914 and 1918. A century on, the instability of these former Turkish territories remains one of the clearest legacies of the First World War. In Egypt, Israel, Palestine, Syria and Iraq, fighting continues. Only Jordan remains intact from the original post-war settlement. Understanding the roots of these countries is vital to any comprehension of the modern world.

THE CAPTURE OF BASRA

In 1914, the Royal Navy’s new Super-Dreadnought battleship HMS Queen Elizabeth was powered by oil-fired turbines. Oil now had a strategic significance for the British Empire. But, unlike coal, Britain had no oil reserves of its own. Instead it had acquired a controlling interest in the Anglo-Persian Oil Company in Persia (now Iran). The end of the company’s pipeline in the Persian Gulf was overlooked by Turkish Mesopotamia. In the event of war against Turkey, Britain’s oil supply was vulnerable. To protect it, an Indian Army Expeditionary Force was moved to the Gulf to ward off any Turkish threat. Within hours of war being declared against the Turks on November 5, Indian troops landed near Fao and began to move the 60 miles towards Basra, covering the same ground captured by British forces in the 2003 Iraq War. The Turkish defence of Basra in 1914 was half-hearted and the city was secured in two weeks. By

December 9, the Indians had taken Qurna, where the Tigris and the Euphrates divide. The force’s mission had been fulfilled. But the Indian troops continued to advance along the course of the rivers. Under Maj Gen Sir Charles Townshend, the 6th Indian Division moved up the Tigris. Seemingly brushing aside Turkish resistance, over the next year they set their sights on a new, more ambitious goal: Baghdad. The Viceroy in India shared his generals’ confidence and the cabinet in London did little to interfere. In contrast to Gallipoli, where both the April and August landings had failed and trench warfare was rampant, the war in Mesopotamia seemed to be going well.

THE SIEGE OF KUT

By late November 1915, Townshend’s men were almost 25 miles from Baghdad. But at the ancient city of Ctesiphon they met their first major reverse. Tired and poorly supplied, they were stopped by unexpectedly determined Turkish resistance. Townshend fell back on Kut-al-Amara, which he had captured on September 28. The Turks pursued him and on December 3 besieged his force at Kut. Although Townshend had become famous in 1895 as the hero of the Siege of Chitral on India’s North-West Frontier, this time luck failed him. His estimates of how long he could hold out were inaccurate and his sick troops were soon living on starvation rations. On April 29, 1916, he and 13,000 men surrendered. On top of the recent humiliation of Gallipoli’s evacuation, the debacle at Kut tarnished Britain’s reputation as an imperial power throughout the Islamic world.

THE CAPTURE OF BAGHDAD

Throughout the siege, repeated attempts had been made to relieve Kut by a second British force working up the Tigris. Frustrated by its inability to manoeuvre between the river and the marshes inland, each assault had been beaten off by the Turks at an overall cost of 23,000 casualties. In August 1916, the War Office in London took command in Mesopotamia. Under Lt Gen Sir Stanley Maude, using troops released from Gallipoli, a new British push on Baghdad began in the cooler weather at the end of the year. Kut was recaptured on February 24, 1917, and Maude entered Baghdad on March 11. It was a remarkable turnaround in British fortunes that continued for the remainder of the war. Troops were pushed as far north as Mosul and threatened the eastern flank of the Turks in Syria.

ADVANCE INTO PALESTINE

While these events were under way, a British and imperial force also moved steadily out of Egypt into Palestine to threaten Syria from the south. Initially this had been undertaken to eliminate Britain’s other key strategic concern in the Middle East: the security of the Suez Canal. But once in Palestine, new goals were also set there and, despite setbacks at Gaza in March and April, 1917, under the renewed command of Lt Gen Sir Edmund Allenby, Jerusalem was taken at the end of the year. But other moves were also in play. In 1916, British officials in Egypt had encouraged Sherif Hussein of Mecca to declare an Arab revolt against Turkish rule

in the Hijaz. The Arabs, particularly those led by Hussein’s son Faisal and his close adviser TE Lawrence, moved out of Arabia to launch guerrilla attacks along the Hijaz railway into Palestine itself.

To DAMASCUS

In the opening months of 1918, Allenby’s operations north of Jerusalem had to be suspended. Many of his troops were rushed to France to help counter the German spring offensives. In the summer heat, attacks were impossible. But Allenby continued planning and rebuilding his strength. By mid-September all was ready for what he hoped would be a decisive breakthrough. On September 19, covered by an intensive bombardment, British infantry assaulted and broke into the Turkish positions. In one of the few instances of the decisive exploitation by cavalry in the whole of the war, Allenby released his mounted troops. British, Australian, New Zealand and Indian horsemen charged towards Megiddo, famous as the biblical Armageddon. Swinging round in a giant left hook on to the heights of southern Syria, the allied troops smashed open the Turkish positions. By the end of the month, Allenby’s horsemen were approaching Damascus. On October 1, the most important city in Syria, which was a symbol both of ancient civilisation and modern political opportunism, was taken. Its capture in effect brought to an end Turkish rule and opened a new chapter in the history of the Middle East.

●Nigel Steel is principal historian for IWM’s First World War Centenary Programme

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FROM IWM’S ARCHIVE – LETTERS HOME

‘Like the troubled night of a fevered sleeper’: besieged in Kut

Captain Ian Martin served as a doctor with the Indian Medical Service and in late 1915 was based in the town of Kut-al-Amara, 100 miles south of Baghdad. Early military successes in Mesopotamia had fostered a belief that Baghdad could be captured with relative ease, but Major General Charles Townshend’s 6th (Poona) Division of the Indian Army failed to seize the city from the Ottoman forces and retreated to Kut. The Turks besieged the town on December 7, 1915, and the blockade remained in place when Captain Martin began his letter dated April 1, 1916.

“It is an occupation rather suited for All Fool’s Day to sit down to write letters when it is by no means certain that the said epistles will ever leave Kut... I have put off writing so long that I have reached the stage of being thoroughly bored with the siege and all that pertains to it. The four months of our investment are in retrospect like the troubled night of a fevered sleeper.

“The beginning of the siege with its incessant rabble of musketry and crash of shells came as a douche of cold reality on our peaceful hospital. For at first we who had remained at Kut throughout the advance on Baghdad, the fight at Ctesiphon and the sullen retreat to the shelter of the river loop, had found it almost impossible to get hold of what really was happening. The arriving army, on the contrary, jaded and spiritless though it appeared to be, was yet more than awake to the true state of things. So Townshend and his men settled down in a methodical fashion to dig themselves in.

“Two days after the last of the army had struggled in the first of the enemy shells began to arrive. Since then scarcely a day – I can recall none – has passed without several of these messengers of fear and hate. Every day the investing line crept closer; every day the bombardment of the town became heavier. Every night at dusk and each morning at dawn the crackle of musketry grew into a roar – continuous but varying curiously in intensity – it comes to the ear in regularly recurring waves of sound rather like the whirling of a gigantic policeman’s rattle, punctuated freely by the muffled boom of our field guns firing star shells.”

Finishing with an abrupt postscript scrawled in a shaky hand and dated July 15, 1916, Captain Martin was now a prisoner of the Turks.

“The forebodings in the opening page of this letter have proved too horribly true. Here I am after much journeying and many tribulations sitting in my blanket shelter at (a camp whose name I forget) about 3 days march from Ras-al-Ain which is the southern terminus of the still incomplete Baghdad-Aleppo railway. At my feet runs a little muddy stream almost dry – around and upon my feet are myriad of insects – mostly biting flies, but including some thousands of ants, great and small – houseflies, big horseflies and several unknown and noxious small species. Overhead the Eastern Sun, smiting me through my thin blankets – which are disposed upon sticks about six inches above my head. I eat weird oriental food cooked in a fashion by my Indian orderly. But you must excuse me, for a gust has blown my shelter down! I shall resume another day...”

The siege had ended on April 29 with the surrender of the now starving British and Indian troops, after 147 days. Approximately 13,000 soldiers were captured and were to endure terrible conditions of deprivation as prisoners of war.

●Commentary by Anthony Richards, IWM head of sound and documents



SYDNEY CARLINE: ‘DESTRUCTION OF AN AUSTRIAN MACHINE IN THE GORGE OF THE BRENTA VALLEY, ITALY’ (1918)

The emergence of aerial warfare was a key aspect of the First World War. Fraught with danger, it quickly acquired a romantic aura, conjuring notions of knightly single combat above the trenches. This coupled with the new aesthetic possibilities of aerial viewpoints made it a subject appealing to artists. Both CRW Nevinson and John Lavery produced images of air flight, but perhaps the most vivid depictions of the new phenomenon were made by two artist brothers, Richard and Sydney Carline.

Both served with the Royal Flying Corps, and the younger, 21-year-old Richard, impressed Sir Martin Conway, director of the Imperial War Museum, with aerial sketches of the Western Front. As a result, he was afforded the opportunity to create an artistic record of Britain’s air campaigns.

Richard immediately sought the assistance of his elder brother. Seven years senior, Sydney was an established artist and by 1918 an experienced fighter pilot. He had survived being shot down in France and, when appointed by Richard, was piloting a Sopwith Camel over the Italian front. He remained in Italy, but from August 1918 served exclusively as an official artist.

Sydney undertook preparatory work for his paintings in

flight. This proved difficult in an open cockpit, because of the extreme cold and the buffeting air currents. It is, therefore, perhaps unsurprising that Sydney’s painting, *The Destruction of an Austrian Machine*, was derived from an earlier unofficial sketch made of an action in which he took part.

He wrote of the incident, capturing the grim truth of air warfare: “On patrol with two others we saw a Hun two-seater taking photos 5,000 feet below us (we at 10,000) and on our side of the Line, we dived on him. He put up no show, the pilot was shot, and the observer leaning over tried to dive for home but he was shot and the machine crashed into the river.”

Clearly, though, Sydney’s main interest here lay with the imposing Alpine range, which almost subsumes the dogfight.

His tendency to focus on aerial vistas rather than the aircraft was a frustration to the Imperial War Museum. However, in January 1919, the museum instructed both brothers to record British air operations in Palestine and Mesopotamia. Ironically, this merely provided further opportunity for artistic experimentation over the Middle East’s spectacular scenery.

● Richard Slocombe is senior art curator, IWM

● The Destruction of an Austrian Machine will feature in IWM’s Truth and Memory: British Art of the First World War exhibition, opening in summer 2014, along with new First World War galleries. www.iwm.org.uk

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WAR POEM

‘The Dead Turk’, Geoffrey Dearmer (1916): Echoes of Calvary in Gallipoli

Approaching his 100th birthday on March 21, 1993, Geoffrey Dearmer was hailed as the last surviving poet of the First World War. To mark his centenary, a celebratory collection of his poetry was launched at the Imperial War Museum by publishers John Murray. They had also published his last volume, *The Day’s Delight*, in 1923.

His first collection, *Poems*, was put out by Heinemann in 1918, with a fly leaf advertising recent volumes by Robert Graves, Siegfried Sassoon and John Masefield.

Dearmer was born into a highly literate and artistic family. His parents, the Reverend Percy and Mabel Dearmer, were active both in the church and the arts. In 1914, Dearmer became an officer in the 2/2nd Battalion, London Regiment (Royal Fusiliers).

After serving in Malta and Egypt he arrived at Gallipoli on October 13, 1915, where he remained in the Helles trenches until

the evacuation in January 1916. Later he went to the Somme where he became a transport officer in the Army Service Corps. He left the army in 1920.

As a poet, novelist and playwright, Dearmer was instrumental in persuading the Incorporated Stage Society to put on the first production of RC Sherriff’s *Journey’s End* in 1928. Between 1936 and 1950, he worked in the Lord Chamberlain’s office vetting new plays. But he was also employed at the BBC and from 1939 for 20 years he was literary editor of *Children’s Hour*, signing off programmes as Uncle Geoffrey.

Geoffrey Dearmer died in August 1996. He remained disarmingly modest about his achievements. Of the volume published three years earlier, he had said: “I don’t know if I like any of the poems in it very much. Some are rather worse than others. Remember, all the great poets died.”

Geoffrey Dearmer arrived at Gallipoli in the campaign’s closing stages. He missed both the worst of the fighting and the trying conditions of the summer. In an interview with the IWM in 1993, he claimed that he saw only two Turks while he was there, one of whom was dead. This man “was a marvellous specimen of man’s humanity, a lovely person”, and it was the sight of his body, he explained, that inspired the poem.

For Dearmer, the vision of the dead Turkish soldier seems to have been a moment of epiphany. This man was not the enemy but a fellow human being who had suffered and died just like all those around him. His own mother had died only weeks earlier while working in Serbia as a nursing orderly and his brother had been killed at Gallipoli just days before he himself landed on the peninsula. This beautiful, wasted body could have been either of them.

THE DEAD TURK

DEAD, DEAD, AND DUMBLY CHILL, HE SEEMED TO LIE
CARVED FROM THE EARTH, IN BEAUTY WITHOUT STAIN.
AND SUDDENLY

DAY TURNED TO NIGHT, AND I BEHELD AGAIN
A STILL CENTURION WITH EYES ABLAZE:

AND CALVARY RE-ECHOED WITH HIS CRY –
HIS CRY OF STARK AMAZE.

Unlike many soldiers, Geoffrey Dearmer retained the deep Christian faith in which he had been brought up. This consolation allowed him to emerge from the war mentally unscathed. He was not traumatised by it. Instead, his poems continually noted the resilience of life and the rebirth of nature beyond the desolation of war. As here in Christ’s crucifixion, hope could live after death.

To the IWM in 1993 Dearmer explained the depth of this line: “My poem *The Dead Turk* includes a reference to the Centurion at the Crucifixion who said: ‘Truly this man was the son of God.’ It is clear, I would say, that this is what the cry was. But you have to know all about that. Like so many brief poems of that sort they require an elementary knowledge in the reader.”

VC BRAVERY

The ‘Six Before Breakfast’



SIX MEN WON VCs IN A SINGLE ACTION AT THE GALLIPOLI LANDINGS, AS **MICHAEL ASHCROFT** EXPLAINS

On the morning of April 25, 1915, one of the most courageous actions ever performed by the British armed forces took place at a beach close to Cape Helles on the Gallipoli Peninsula in Turkey. The gallantry displayed that day led to the famous “Six Before Breakfast” awards in which half a dozen Victoria Crosses (VCs) were eventually handed out in recognition of the bravery shown by the 1st Battalion, the Lancashire Fusiliers. The successful capture of “W Beach”, however, came at a terrible price, with up to 700 members of the regiment being killed or wounded.

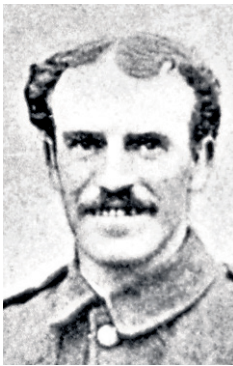
By early 1915, the war on the Western Front was not going well for the Allies: the fighting had bogged down, casualties were high and all the signs were that it would not be the short conflict that many had predicted. The Russians, too, were struggling against the Turks in the Caucasus. To help their ally and to try to knock the Turks out of the war, Britain’s First Lord of the Admiralty, Winston Churchill, and Secretary of State for War, Lord Kitchener, began a campaign to force the Royal Navy through the Dardanelles. But this faltered and it was decided to land troops at Gallipoli to clear the way forward.

Unlike the Australians who landed at dawn beyond Gaba Tepe on the beach soon to be known as Anzac Cove, the British in the south were to land in full daylight on five beaches around Cape Helles. To make up for this loss of surprise, a heavy naval bombardment was to cover the British landing. This meant the Turks had a good idea of what was coming as the biggest amphibious landing of the war began. As part of the wider British attack, the Lancashire Fusiliers were chosen to land on and take control of a small, sandy cove – code-named “W Beach” – just 350 yards long and between 15 and 40 yards wide between Cape Helles and Tekke Burnu. It was so well defended that the Turks may have regarded it as impregnable to an attack from open boats. Nevertheless, the attack began at 6am on April 25.

Captain Richard Willis, who led C Company during the attack, was one of several survivors to record the events of the day: “Not a sign of life was to be seen on the peninsula in front of us. It might have been a deserted land we were nearing in our little boats. Then crack!... The signal for the massacre had been given; rapid fire, machine-guns and deadly accurate sniping opened from the cliffs above, and soon the casualties included the rest of the crew and many men.

“The timing of the ambush was perfect; we were completely exposed and helpless in our slow-moving boats, just target practice for the concealed Turks, and within a few minutes only half of the 30 men in my boat were left alive. We were now 100 yards from the shore, and I gave the order ‘overboard’. We scrambled out into some four feet of water and some of the boats with their cargo of dead and wounded floated away on the currents still under fire from the snipers. With this unpromising start the advance began. Many were hit in the sea, and no response was possible, for the enemy was in trenches well above our heads.

“We toiled through the water towards the sandy beach, but here another trap was awaiting us, for the Turks had cunningly concealed a trip wire just below



the surface of the water and on the beach itself were a number of land mines, and a deep belt of rusty wire extended across the landing place. Machine-guns, hidden in caves at the end of the amphitheatre of cliffs, enfiladed this.

“Our wretched men were ordered to wait behind this wire for the wire-cutters to cut a pathway through. They were shot in helpless batches while they waited, and could not even use their rifles in retaliation since the sand and the sea had clogged their action. One Turkish sniper in particular took a heavy toll at very close range until I forced open the bolt of a rifle with the heel of my boot and closed his career with the first shot, but the heap of empty cartridges round him testified to the damage he had

done. Safety lay in movement, and isolated parties scrambled through the wire to cover. Among them was Sergeant Richards with a leg horribly twisted, but he managed somehow to get through.”

Captain Harold Clayton, who was killed in action six weeks later, also described desperate scenes: “There was tremendously strong barbed wire where my boat was landed. Men were being hit in the boats as they splashed ashore. I got up to my waist in water, tripped over a rock and went under, got up and made for the shore and lay down by the barbed wire. There was a man there before me shouting for wire-cutters. I got mine out, but could not make the slightest impression. The front of the wire was by now a thick mass of men, the majority of whom

never moved again. The noise was ghastly and the sights horrible.”

In describing what happened at “W Beach”, *The London Gazette*, the official government paper of record, explained that the Fusiliers “were met by a very deadly fire from hidden machine-guns which caused a great number of casualties. The survivors, however, rushed up to and cut the wire entanglements, notwithstanding the terrific fire from the enemy, and after overcoming supreme difficulties, the cliffs were gained and the position maintained.”

The Lancashire Fusiliers had started the day with 27 officers and 1,002 other men. Twenty-four hours later, a head count revealed just 16 officers and 304 men. Initially, in May 1915, six men from the

regiment, who had been nominated by their peers, were proposed for the VC, Britain and the Commonwealth’s most prestigious award for gallantry in the face of the enemy. But this number was turned down and only three Fusiliers were gazetted for the VC in August 1915. However, after much lobbying, nearly two years later, in March 1917, the remaining three who had originally been selected were also finally awarded the VC for their bravery at “W Beach”. Together they became known as the “Six Before Breakfast” VCs.

Over the past 15 years, I have obtained half of these “Six Before Breakfast” awards and I have researched the backgrounds of all three men.

John Grimshaw was born in Abram, Lancashire,

THREE OF THE SIX

From above left, John Grimshaw, Richard Willis and Alfred Richards and their medals; main picture, a British troop encampment on ‘W Beach’, June 1915

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on January 20, 1893. He was 19 when he joined the Lancashire Fusiliers, two years before the outbreak of the First World War. When war was declared, Grimshaw was in India with the rest of the 1st Battalion, but shortly thereafter he returned with them to Britain before going on to Gallipoli.

Alfred Richards was born in Plymouth on June 21, 1879. He gave his trade as “musician” when, aged 14, he enlisted in the Lancashire Fusiliers (his father’s old regiment) as a bandboy. He was appointed a full drummer when serving in Ireland near the end of the century and was promoted to lance corporal in Crete in 1899. Over the next seven years, he served in Malta, Gibraltar and Egypt before returning to England. After just two months as a civilian, he re-enlisted, rejoining his old battalion in India, where they stayed before beginning their journey to the Dardanelles.

Richard Willis (the captain quoted earlier) was born in Woking, Surrey, on October 13, 1876. He was educated at Totnes Grammar School in south Devon, Harrow and the Royal Military College, Sandhurst. He was commissioned in 1897, joined the 2nd Battalion, the Lancashire Fusiliers in India, and was posted with them to the Sudan for the Mahdist War. A talented linguist and a wonderful sportsman, he was 38 years old when he landed at “W Beach”.

All three men survived the war. As already stated, Willis and Richards were both decorated in the first set of awards, but Grimshaw’s VC, along with two others, was not gazetted until almost two years after the landing. He received his VC only because of renewed pressure on the War Office by those who felt he and the others had been hard done by.

Initially, Grimshaw had been awarded the Distinguished Conduct Medal (DCM) and he was more than content with that, unaware that his fellow Fusiliers were campaigning for the decoration to be

“OUR WRETCHED MEN, WAITING BEHIND THE WIRE, WERE SHOT IN HELPLESS BATCHES

“upgraded”. Indeed, when a journalist from the *Daily Dispatch* told him of his VC, he replied: “Whose leg are you pulling?” He needed a great deal of convincing that it was true.

The people of Abram, Lancashire, were so proud of his achievement that they presented him with a gold watch and chain to go along with the medal. By that time, he was living and working in Hull as a musketry instructor, having been invalided out of the Fusiliers with severe frostbite. He died in Isleworth, London, on July 20, 1980, aged 87.

Richards, who had been shot during the beach landings, was evacuated to Egypt, where surgeons amputated his right leg just above the knee. He then returned to England and was discharged on July 31, 1915. His discharge papers read: “no longer fit for war service (but fit for civil employment)”.

When he was given his decoration, he was known as the “Lonely VC” because he had no family and was living alone at the Princess Christian Soldiers’ and Sailors’ Home in Woking. However, in September 1916 he married Dora Coombes, who had nursed him during the previous year. His disability did not prevent him joining the Home Guard during the Second World War, when he served as a provost sergeant in London. He died in Southfields, London, on May 21, 1953, aged 69.

Willis had survived the landing at “W Beach” unscathed but was later wounded in action. He was evacuated to Egypt and, eventually, back to the UK, where he earned a reputation as a silent and serious man. After recovering from his injuries, he was promoted to major and served on the Western Front at the Somme, Messines and Passchendaele. He retired from the Army, as a lieutenant colonel, in 1920, aged 44, and joined the RAF as an education officer in Palestine. He became a teacher but fell on hard times. Willis died in Cheltenham, Gloucestershire, on February 9, 1966, aged 89.

“W Beach” was renamed “Lancashire Landing” in honour of the Lancashire Fusiliers. The gallantry medals of Grimshaw, Richards and Willis are among a collection of more than 180 VCs I have amassed. They are on display, along with VCs and George Crosses (GCs), in the care of Imperial War Museums, at the Extraordinary Heroes exhibition.

DESERT CAMPAIGN

Lawrence of Arabia: guerrilla genius

NEIL FAULKNER ON THE BRITON WHO ADAPTED ARAB WARFARE TO TOPPLE AN EMPIRE AND CHANGE HISTORY

It was all over in 10 minutes. The train had slowed at an awkward dog-leg just north of Hallat Ammar station in Saudi Arabia. The two engines at the front had reached a viaduct. There was a terrific roar, a spouting column of black smoke, and both engines along with the front carriage plunged into the wadi. An iron wheel flew through the air and landed in the sand.

The silence was momentarily broken by the hissing and creaking of smashed machinery. Then, from a series of low, flat-topped ridges immediately south of the railway, two Lewis light machine-guns opened up, sweeping the Turks from the carriage roofs “like bales of cotton”. The occupants emerged from the wreck in a mad scramble, improvising a firing line behind the railway embankment but pinned down by 80 Arab riflemen on a terrace 150 yards away.

The attackers also had a Stokes mortar. The first shot was over, but the second landed in the middle of the Turks and tore 20 to pieces. The rest bolted across the open desert, and the Lewis gunners

A MODERN HERO
TE Lawrence in full Arab dress including ceremonial knife, below; an Arab patrol, right; the Hejaz railway, far right top; TE Lawrence gives a lesson in the use of a Stokes trench mortar, far right bottom



scythed down another 30. The Arabs were upon the train in a moment, ripping open the carriages, looting everything they could find, heaping the spoils on to camels and shooing them away into the desert.

It was September 19, 1917, and the Battle of Passchendaele was raging in the mud and rain of Flanders. The Hallat Ammar ambush could hardly have been more different. Here was a new kind of war: one without front, flank or rear; one that flowed across the vast open spaces of the desert, taking the form not of great set-piece collisions but of hundreds of tiny fire-fights dispersed across time and space.

The Arabian Desert had been set alight by modern guerrilla warfare. And in the midst of the frenzied mob of looters was its mastermind, a 29-year-old Oxford archaeologist and maverick wartime officer called Thomas Edward Lawrence.

He was not yet “Lawrence of Arabia”, not yet reconfigured into hero, legend and celebrity. This process of invention and re-invention – still

continuing – would not begin in earnest until 1919. Yet already he was special. Attached to the staff of Prince Faisal, one of the leaders of the Arab Revolt which had broken out in Mecca in June 1916, Lawrence had evolved into a cross between liaison officer, military adviser and field commander. More than this, brooding, highly educated, intellectually brilliant, he had grasped the inner logic of traditional Arab warfare and turned it into an instrument with which to bring down an empire.

Encounters between East and West are often awkward. British officers favoured discipline, order and routine; they thought of war in terms of big armies, concentrated firepower, pitched battles against the enemy’s main forces to crush his powers of resistance at a stroke. But this was not the eastern way, where war was often tentative, a game of hit and run, the intention being to grind the enemy down in a war of incremental attrition. “Our enemies have the watches,” the Afghans used to say, “but we have the time.” So did the Bedouin. Leadership is not a matter

of imposing a preconceived model on an unyielding reality – of trying, in this case, to turn desert tribesmen into regular soldiers. It is a matter of constructing a model that corresponds with the reality given – one that can unleash its latent potential. This Lawrence did.

“Suppose we were (as we might be),” he later wrote in *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, “an influence, an idea, a thing intangible, without front or back, drifting about like a gas? Armies were like plants, immobile, firm-rooted, nourished through long stems to the head. We might be a vapour, blowing where we listed ... Ours should be a war of detachment. We were to contain the enemy by the silent threat of a vast unknown desert.”

The idea was not new. Guerrilla warfare is as old as war itself. It is the strategy and tactics of the weak taking on the strong. It was the method of the Jews fighting the Romans in the 1st century AD, the Spanish fighting the French in the Napoleonic Wars and the Irish fighting the British throughout history.

It pits those with modest firepower against those with much, where everything depends on the invisibility of the guerrilla – an invisibility made possible by his “embeddedness” in the landscape and its lifeways. The guerrilla survives to fight again because he merges with the background – except during those rare moments when, at a time and place of his own choosing, he engages his enemy.

But for men armed with sling or musket, those rare moments of combat tend to be lingering moments of danger. The guerrilla needs to strike suddenly and

“
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quickly against a small detachment – and then to withdraw before reinforcements can arrive. To win a war, he must do this again and again. His problem before the modern age was that his weapons were too clumsy; it required time and close proximity to kill with slingshot or musket ball.

Guerrillas armed with accurate, long-range, fast-action weapons were an altogether different matter. The Boers, skilled marksmen equipped with hi-tech German Mauser magazine-rifles, had proved this on the South African veldt in the Boer War (1899-1902). The essence of the Arab Revolt was the use of British gold and guns to turn the medieval tradition of desert raiding into a modern insurgency.

The genius of Lawrence was to perceive the potential and turn it into reality. Among his key principles of modern guerrilla warfare were to strive above all to win hearts and minds, to establish an unassailable base and remain strategically dispersed. The key was to operate in small, local groups, in depth rather than in lines and strike only when the enemy could be taken by surprise, never engaging in sustained combat. His strategy also relied on remaining largely detached from the enemy – and having perfect intelligence about them.

Lawrence was not the first practitioner of guerrilla warfare, nor even of guerrilla warfare with modern weapons – he was preceded by Boer leaders Louis Botha, Koos de la Rey and Christiaan de Wet. But he was the first to transform the experience into a military theory. Take any of the guerrilla victories of the 20th century, including Ireland (1921), China

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(1949), Cuba (1959) and Rhodesia (1979). Or take today’s guerrilla wars including the Taliban in Afghanistan, who drove out the Russians in 1989 and are now on the verge of driving out the Americans, or the wave of jihadist insurgency ranging from the Western Sahara to the Himalayas, signalling the defeat of the so-called “war on terror”. Read the great guerrilla commanders of the last century – Mao, Giap, Che. All reiterate principles first set down by Lawrence immediately after the First World War.

Much the same is true of special forces: the Commandos, Chindits, Long Range Desert Group, Special Operations Executive, SAS, SBS. These innovative British military units of the Second World War were also offspring of the Arab Revolt, their principal sponsors, Churchill and Wavell, intimates and admirers of Lawrence in the post-war years.

Both commander and intellectual, but also much maligned and sometimes denounced as liar, charlatan and attention-seeker, TE Lawrence can be regarded as the seminal theorist of modern guerrilla war – a form of warfare that has transformed world history in the century since the First World War.

●Neil Faulkner is a research fellow at Bristol University and co-director of the Great Arab Revolt Project



A quiet reminder of the spilt blood that is Gaza’s heritage

Gaza might today be associated with the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, but inside the war-ravaged Mediterranean port city lies a patch of livid greensward dating from when the town was a key battlefield in the First World War.

The British War Cemetery, meticulously maintained by local Palestinians, is the resting place for 3,686 Allied soldiers mostly from Britain, Australia and New Zealand. They lie alongside unknown thousands of their enemy buried in mass graves: troops loyal to the Ottoman Empire, Germany’s ally.

Christian, Jewish and Muslim war dead from the fighting receive the same respect in this graveyard: the head caretaker’s loyal service was recognised when he was honoured with an MBE.

But the calm presented by the well-irrigated lawns shaded by jacaranda trees gives no hint of the



fierce fighting that took place here in three bloody battles in 1917.

Gallipoli, the attempt in 1915 by the Allies to take the Dardanelles from the Ottomans, is perhaps the best known of the Near East campaigns from the Great War. Its failure initially led to the development of guerrilla warfare across the region as the British high command could not spare enough troops from the Western Front for full corps-level operations.

This changed early in 1917 when a British force based in Egypt, supported by Australian and New Zealand cavalry – many were the remnants of the Gallipoli debacle – sought to break north from the Sinai. The ancient city of Gaza, where the Bible records Samson as bringing down the temple to kill himself and his Philistine tormentors, stood in their way with a large Ottoman garrison.

Just as Israeli soldiers found as recently as 2009 when they failed to deal a fatal blow to Hamas fighters in Gaza, the British troops were able to encircle the city but not to neutralise all defences.

What became known as the First Battle of Gaza in March 1917 is regarded as a defeat for the Allies. It was followed by the similarly unsuccessful Second Battle of Gaza a month later.

After a hot summer, in which the opposing forces were spread out along a trench-line that ran from Gaza’s beaches into the Negev desert, a breakthrough came. A cavalry charge by the Australian Light Horse, one of the last horse-mounted attacks in military history, turned the Ottoman defences in the desert town of Beersheba. Gaza fell on November 1.

Ottoman forces were fatally weakened and, one after

the other, towns to the north fell to the advancing Allies. On December 11, the British commander, Gen Sir Edmund Allenby, famously dismounted his horse to enter on foot the Old City of Jerusalem through the Jaffa Gate.

The fighting in Gaza had claimed thousands of lives but sadly the diplomatic agreements to carve up the region after the war sowed the seeds for continuing conflict. Several times in the past few years Israeli forces have fired shells and rockets that have damaged headstones in the graveyards. The British have formally complained, but Gaza remains, as in 1914-18, a heavily fought-over strategic target.

●Tim Butcher is the author of *The Trigger, the story of the assassin who sparked the First World War, to be published in May by Chatto & Windus*

YOUR LETTERS

POST BOX

We have received a magnificent postbag and inbox of letters, documents and stories in response to our request for readers' First World War memories. Here are just a few of the many we would like to share with you. Please keep them coming.

Write to: First World War, Telegraph Media Group, 111 Buckingham Palace Road, London SW1W 0DT, or email firstworldwar@telegraph.co.uk

ROBBING TRAINS WITH LAWRENCE OF ARABIA

Joyce Smith from Nottingham writes about her father, James Arthur Denman, who joined a TA regiment, the Nottinghamshire Sherwood Rangers Yeomanry, in 1913 and was mobilised the following year.

In April 1915, they were sent to Cairo, where James was made sergeant, "then the whole brigade was ordered to hand in their horses and proceed to Gallipoli as infantry... and three days later were involved in an assault on Scimitar Hill. It was a barren and inhospitable country, they were never out of enemy range and sickness took an appalling toll," says Joyce.

James's brigade moved to Salonika in February 1916 and, in August, fought against the Bulgars in Struma Valley. On a ship bound for Egypt, all their equipment was lost when the vessel was torpedoed, but they survived and marched across the Sinai desert to Palestine.

"They covered 70 miles on the approach march and were in the forefront of the final charge on Beersheba. After resting and retraining in the Gaza area, they moved to the Jordan Valley, where they took a leading part with the Australian Mounted Division in the big raid on Es Salt. James was awarded the Distinguished Conduct Medal, 'for bravery and devotion to duty at Es Salt in Palestine, where he did valiant work in collecting stretcher-bearers and seeing the wounded away under heavy fire.'"

Joyce adds: "What is not widely known is that there were large train robberies, under the guidance of Lawrence of Arabia, to get money for his Arabs. My father took part in a raid and I have a Turkish sovereign that he brought back and gave to my mother."

MEMOIRS OF A PACIFIST

Donald McNair, born in 1883, had a conscientious objection to military

service, but was conscripted into the British Army and made to serve in the infantry overseas. "He never once compromised his convictions or belied his principles," says his son, Philip McNair, who has written *A Pacifist at War: Military Memoirs of a Conscientious Objector in Palestine 1917-1918*.

On October 31, 1917, at the time of the final attack on Gaza, Donald wrote: "I feel rather like a prisoner on his last night before execution, as just now it is difficult to say if tonight may not be my last night on Earth." The following day, he adds: "This fairly



exceeds the limit! The shelling... is simply frightful – we have just finished tea and they suddenly opened fire on us with tremendous fury. We are all cowering in our dug-out with the whole air and earth shaking and rocking as shell after shell is dropping all round us... At the moment of writing, to emerge out of this dug-out a couple of feet would mean almost certain death."

In May 1918 in the Hills of Judea – "Fancy Isaiah or Elijah walking over places like this!" – he endures yet more shelling. "They are putting over whackers right on us and any one might (here comes another) smash everything to pieces in a moment and the war would be over for me. However, I dare say they will stop presently, and I hope they will as I want to go to the canteen soon."

FIGHTING ON THE GRIM

Alan F Poulton, from Enfield, north London, wonders how his father ended up fighting the Pathans on the North West Frontier in India – a region many British officers called "the Grim". Like so many, says Alan, his father didn't



ON THE MOVE

British troops in Iraq, above, where many, including Alan F Poulton's father, were captured by the Turks; the pacifist Donald McNair, above left; Gilbert George Halling who was just 17 when he was recruited into the Army, below right

like to talk about his experiences, but Alan did find out a few things. "My father was serving as a gunner in the Royal Artillery during his campaign and fought all the way until the withdrawal before Baghdad and endured the siege of Kut-al-Amara until the surrender. He said he witnessed General Townshend hand his sword to the Turkish general who then handed it back to him as a sign of a gallant stand.

"He was taken into captivity and said that 'Johnny Turk' was always a clean fighter, but the prisoners were handed over to Arab mercenaries who committed many atrocities. He contracted malaria and was 'left to die'. But somehow he ended up fighting the Pathans on the North West Frontier until demobilised in 1919.

"I know from recent research that an American charity paid the Turkish government to have some prisoners released providing they did not fight against Turkey again. I think this may have been how he got to the North West Frontier, but this is only guesswork on my part."

A TEENAGE VICTIM OF WAR

Lt Col (rtd) Susan Payne, from Eckington, Worcestershire, writes



about her aunt's brother, Gilbert George Halling, who was recruited into the Dorset Regiment and died in Palestine in 1918, aged just 17. "He was

brought up in the small village where I now live. Many of the young soldiers were recruited from small communities like this and many villages had big losses of these young men," says Susan.

"He sailed for Egypt on October 20, 1917 – a journey that must have been very uncomfortable and frightening. Even during my time in the Army, travel on the ships to Germany was not very pleasant and we were used to ferry travel, not like these young men from villages who may never have left their homes before.

"While in the Royal Army Nursing Corps I also experienced basic tents and equipment in field hospitals in Denmark and Germany in the Seventies and Eighties that was not very different from equipment used in the Second World War. But it was not as basic as it would have been in Palestine. The weather conditions must have been a shock for these young men and medical conditions such as malaria would have added to their difficulties."

Susan believes Bert was killed in the Battle of Gaza.

"Fifty soldiers were killed in the attack against the Turks at Three Bushes Hill near Deir Ballut. He is buried in Ramleh cemetery, between Tel Aviv and Jerusalem. I have the medals and a framed document from the King. Bert's name on the village war memorial is read out at our remembrance service each year."

FAMILY HISTORY OF HARDSHIP

Susan Loftus from Bolton tells the moving story of her grandfather Joseph's family. "At the outbreak of the First World War, my great-grandparents were living in a two-up, two-down with their five children (Thomas and Annie, their younger sons Joseph, Edwin and Albert) and son-in-law Alfred.

"Alfred was the first to join up and was soon in the thick of fighting on the Western Front. He was posted missing, believed killed after the battle of Arras. Thomas was believed to have got himself a 'cushy number' in the Catering Corps in Mesopotamia, from whence came a series of

photos of him and assorted mates larking around with brooms and silly hats.

"Joseph joined up in 1915, rather earlier than was necessary, in order to join a locally raised battalion of the Royal North Lincs with his friends. He was shocked by the brutality of basic training and could not wait to leave the training camp. This happened early in 1916 when the battalion was posted to the Somme. Edwin joined the Medical Corps as a stretcher bearer.

"Joseph's battalion was to have been in the third wave on July 1, 1916, and they never made it out of the support trenches. There had been three days of continuous shelling and the rats in the trenches were going mad with it. After the disaster of the first day, they went into action at Guillemont and Trônes Wood. At the end of the year, they were redeployed to the Ypres salient, already horrific with flooding and sucking mud.

"1917 was a grim year for the family, though it started well enough with the news that Alfred was alive. He had been gassed, then taken prisoner and incarcerated in Quedlinburg camp...

"In May, a telegram from the War Office announced Tom was sinking fast in Mesopotamia and was soon followed by news of his death from dysentery. He was the apple of his mother's eye and, as she thought him relatively safe, it was an appalling shock. My great-grandmother took to wearing black and never again wore any other colour.

"After the war, she wrote to the War Office requesting a photo of the grave (just outside Basra) but the request was turned down as it was impossible for a photographer to get there. My mother made a similar request in 2000, but in the wake of the Gulf War, the reply was distressingly similar."

Susan tells how her grandfather Joseph was wounded in Passchendaele, where the back of his skull was blasted off by shrapnel. "He lay out in a shellhole for three days and nights before it was possible for medical aid to reach him... He survived by virtue of [a] surgeon's pioneering techniques.

"I knew little of my family's wartime history until I decided to visit the Western Front cemeteries in 1999. My mother pulled out a small suitcase full of photographs and letters and, suddenly, all the relatives I had known in childhood as old people were presented to me as young, vital men and women. I am so proud of them. They faced hardship and experiences none of us would ever wish to share and made the best they could of life."

WHAT DID YOU DO IN THE WAR?

Clement Attlee: veteran of Gallipoli who went on to become prime minister

It was while working with slum children in London's East End that newly qualified lawyer Clement Attlee, resplendently dressed in top hat and tails, converted from conservative to socialist, believing such poverty could be eradicated only through the redistribution of wealth. But unlike many fellow socialists who were pacifists – including his elder brother, Tom, who as a conscientious objector spent most of the war in prison – Attlee was quick to sign up to fight at the start of the First World War.

He served with the South Lancashire Regiment in the Gallipoli campaign in Turkey, where he fell ill with dysentery and recovered in hospital in Malta. It was a fortunate escape for him as when he was in hospital many of his comrades were killed in the Battle of Sari Bair, the British Army's final attempt to seize control of Gallipoli from the Ottoman Empire in August 1915.

Attlee returned to his regiment in time for the evacuation of Suvla, which was considered the best-executed segment of the Gallipoli campaign, with its clever ruses such as self-firing rifles to disguise the Allied departure. Attlee was the penultimate man to be evacuated in December 1915, the last being Gen Sir Frederick Stanley Maude, who conquered Baghdad in 1917.

Despite the botched implementation of much of this

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A QUIET MAN The modest Attlee just before the Second World War. He served in Gallipoli and on the Western Front in the First World War

NEXT ISSUE

● The cultural front. In music and art, literature and poetry, the First World War changed the artistic landscape. We look at how Siegfried Sassoon inspired a generation of poets, the shifting styles of artists and the combatant composer Ralph Vaughan Williams.

● Please write with your First World War photos and memories to: First World War, Telegraph Media Group, 111 Buckingham Palace Road, London SW1W 0DT or email firstworldwar@telegraph.co.uk.

BACK ISSUES

● Inside the First World War is a compelling 12-part series of supplements which will run monthly up to the centenary of the war's outbreak later this year.

To catch up with any of the five parts published so far, visit telegraph.co.uk/insidethewar



Ashcroft Technology Academy



Ashcroft Academy: Educating sixth formers for the future

As you walk through the reception area in Ashcroft Technology Academy you would be forgiven if you thought you were entering the doors of a top flight commercial enterprise. Guests are greeted by a spacious and welcoming reception gallery adorned with stunning art work that would be at home in any public exhibition. The plasma screens gaze down at you outlining achievements of another outstanding year at the Academy. Being a student at the school is a privilege; being a student in the sixth form provides a springboard to lifelong opportunities.

Sixth Form students are housed in purpose built accommodation comprising seminar rooms, common room and a study area with 50 computer work stations. Being a member of Ashcroft sixth form provides students with the very best opportunities that an outstanding school provides along with the independence afforded by a university style setting. Ashcroft Sixth Form has grown from strength to strength now attracting students from other schools and colleges as well as being the sixth form of choice for students who have attended Ashcroft in Year 11.

The sixth form at Ashcroft provides a framework for success and equips students with qualifications and skills needed in an increasingly technological society. Students leave the sixth form articulate, confident, accomplished young adults who are not afraid of rigour and high standards.

Why students choose Ashcroft sixth form? A levels, IB and BTBC are delivered in a challenging and stimulating learning environment creating a compelling point of differentiation for students in the local area and results continue to be significantly above local and national averages with 65% of A level grades at A*-B and 100% Distinction*/Distinction success rate in BTBC. Now the IB is playing an important contributory role, attracting high quality ambitious students whose results reflect their high aspirations. The

sixth form is results driven; it has to be in an increasingly competitive educational climate. In sixth form briefings, raising standards and celebrating achievement are regular themes. Students work hard to get their results and are rewarded for their efforts throughout the year with "student of the week" awards and prizes for those appearing in the study area league tables.

What seems quite remarkable is the high proportion of students securing places at top universities. But when you dig deep this is not surprising given that the sixth form has a dedicated management team with responsibility to support students in their learning and a fundamental belief in the abilities and potential of its students. Students also attend higher education and guidance sessions with a senior tutor covering a range of topics relating to making important decisions such as where and what to study at university. The sixth form also has dedicated UCAS days and takes all lower sixth students annually on a university open day. In addition the sixth form dedicates 2 weeks in the lower sixth to work experience, closely linked to university choices.

Staff are dedicated, highly qualified, motivated and skilled and know their students well. A passion for learning pervades all aspects of sixth form life and there is a noticeable unreserved belief in the potential of young people.

The range of enrichment opportunities available to students is impressive. As well as taking part in visits both home and overseas, it would not be uncommon to see over 60 sixth formers helping others in the lower school with their reading or leading school assemblies. In addition students can apply for scholarships to enhance their learning and the student support at Academy open evenings is overwhelming. Students can apply for positions of responsibility such as House Captain in a truly thriving house system or for the most senior position of Head Student and run a prefect system to support the overall leadership and management of the Academy.

There is so much to say about the Sixth Form at Ashcroft but the last words will be those of Ashcroft's students:



"Ashcroft sixth form treats everyone as an individual and strengthens their potential on a daily basis. The school has been an inspiration of putting me on the right path to become a journalist". Iona Aspin (student from a neighbouring school)

"Choosing the IB has given a totally different dimension to my life". Bianca Costa Sales (overseas student from Brazil).

"I have supported all school open evenings and am now a student ambassador. Ashcroft has given me so many opportunities". Fidda Chesser (student from a neighbouring school)

"As a Music student I have so many opportunities to develop my talent. Performances has boosted my self confidence. I can record my original songs in our new studio". Esther Okonko (former student)

"The wide variety of resources available have enabled me to add for more depth and breadth to my studies". Ewan Lewis (former student)

"The Ashcroft Sixth Form Scholarship has really enriched my life. I took a course in British Sign Language which will help me in my ambition to work in the education sector". Savannah Morrison (former student)

"I moved to Ashcroft because of its fantastic reputation and its facilities which I know would aid me in achieving my goals and aspirations". Husein Ahmed (student from a neighbouring school)

"Having been at Ashcroft for almost 5 years, I chose to stay on at the sixth form because of the excellent teaching and superb study facilities. This combination will help me achieve the necessary grades for the next stage in my life". Adam Norman (former student)

"The EPQ has given me the opportunity to explore an area of the law. I am researching the factors affecting the reliability of child witnesses and plan to study law at university". Samir Choudhry (student from a neighbouring school).

"Once I walked through the doors I knew Ashcroft was right for me". Nadine Mahmud (student from a neighbouring school)

"I plan to read history at university. I have received so much help and support from the school in writing my personal statement. Thanks have a genuine interest in my future". Rebecca Davies (student from a neighbouring school)

"Philanthropy in Kenya was certainly a heart rendering and very rewarding experience". Ahmed Hamir (former student)