

THE WIDER WAR

Germany came late to the 19th century race for colonies, but she had won herself some territories in Africa, the Far East and the Pacific. However, when the war in Europe started, most of these colonies were quickly mopped up by the Allies. New Zealand forces occupied the German colonies in **Samoa** and **Papua**. The German naval base at **Tsingtao** in China was seized by the Japanese who entered the war on the Allied side. Admiral von Spee's Pacific fleet, which had been stationed there, fled across the Pacific but was destroyed by a British fleet at the **Falkland Islands**. In Africa the German colonies of **Togo** and the **Cameroons** were captured by British and French colonial troops and forces from South Africa took over **German South-West Africa**. Only in German East Africa [**Tanganyika**] did the Germans hold on. Here the local commander **Colonel von Lettow-Vorbeck** carried on a skilful guerilla war with his Askaris – native troops – keeping Allied forces tied down until the end of the war. He did not surrender until after the Armistice was signed.

In the Middle East the British were anxious to control the oilfields of the Persian Gulf. In January 1915, an Anglo-Indian force led by **General Townshend** occupied Basra. They then pushed up through Iraq, capturing **Kut al Amara**. At first Turkish resistance was weak, but in November as they approached Bagdad the Anglo Indian army met serious opposition. They were pushed back to Kut, where they were besieged for 5 months and starved into surrender. The War Office sent out fresh British forces which did capture **Bagdad** by the end of 1916, and by November 1918 they had reached **Mosul**.

In February 1915, the Turks attacked the **Suez Canal**, threatening British control of Egypt and the vital shipping route to India. Because of this the British kept some 500,000 troops in Egypt, among them the reorganised 4th K.O.S.B. In 1917 they advanced into Turkish Palestine under a new vigorous commander **General Allenby**. By October they had captured **Gaza** and on 9th December the British troops marched into **Jerusalem** – the first Christian army to do so since the 12th century Crusades. Meanwhile, the Turkish army in the Arabian Peninsula had been kept busy by the Arab Revolt led by **Faisal**, son of the Sharif of Mecca, aided and abetted by the British. **Major T. E. Lawrence** was sent to liaise with the Arabs. He spoke Arabic, dressed like an Arab and quickly became the leader of their attacks on the Turks. He ran a successful guerilla campaign blowing up railways and ambushing isolated



General Allenby

Turkish garrisons. In a war with few obvious heroes, Lawrence became a popular figure in the British press. As Allenby's army advanced into Palestine the Arab guerilla force operated on his right wing.

After the capture of Jerusalem, there was a race to see whether the British or the Arabs would be first into Damascus. Lawrence and the Arabs knew of the **Sykes-Picot agreement**, by which the Turkish empire was to be carved up between the British and French; and they were further alarmed by the **Balfour Declaration** [November 1917] when the British government talked of setting up a Jewish homeland in Palestine. They hoped that control of Damascus would help to secure the rights of the Arabs in the region. Their army did arrive first in Damascus, but the British refused to recognise their claims and their hopes were dashed by the peace settlement drawn up at the end of the war.



Lawrence of Arabia



Native troops under British officers in Africa