

Man With an Obsession

By CLIFTON DANIEL

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The Arab Legion—"Not the largest, but the best army in the Arab world," 15,000 strong and largely mechanized.

Man With an Obsession

Abdullah of Trans-Jordan has dreamed for thirty years about a greater domain, and Palestine is his first target.

By CLIFTON DANIEL

LONDON (By Wireless).

KING ABDULLAH IBN EL HUSSEIN of Trans-Jordan is a man with an obsession. For an Arab he is also a man of remarkable decisiveness and tenacity.

In his own mind he has never relinquished his title to Palestine and the surrounding lands. His determination to possess them has not wavered for thirty years. Now all these years of dreaming and scheming have at last come to action.

Long before other Arab rulers had resolved to fight and long before Britain's intention to evacuate Palestine was declared, King Abdullah announced that the Bedouin warriors of his Arab Legion would occupy any portions of Palestine vacated by British forces. So far as I know I was one of the first two newspaper men to hear that decision. It may be that we two were the first men to hear it, for Abdullah is an impulsive man and may have extemporized his decision on the spot in answer to our questions.

That was a year ago last March and it was already broiling hot, down below sea level, when we crossed the Jordan and turned off the main road into the flat and barren plain at Shouneh. There in a sun trap formed by the plain and the sur-

rounding naked hills, Abdullah has his winter palace.

Entering the plain one sees a collection of houses laid out somewhat like a ranch in the American West. Roads amble off in this direction and that—one toward the simple two-story residence that houses the King's family, another toward the stone and plaster cottage where the King's aides live, and another, wider avenue toward the cream brick wall enclosing the King's palace. Near by there are usually tents of nomad sheep and goat herders.

We were not expected. Somebody had forgotten to confirm our appointment.

The King as usual had been up since dawn, when he had made his morning obeisances toward Mecca. He had had a busy day and he was ready for his afternoon rest. We could come back. There was a chance that the King, who is always willing to receive the humblest visitors, would find time for us. He did.

A CHAMBERLAIN took us across the flag-stoned courtyard and terrace and into a reception room that might have been the sitting room of any modern American suburban house. The chairs, upholstered in red or blue, were solid equivalents of Grand Rapids furniture. The curtains were bright chintz. The only appurtenances of royalty were the King's souvenirs—a marine painting from George V, the sailor

King of England, and the sword of King Abdullah's father, King Hussein.

Unattended, the King came in, walking with measured stride. Although he was short and plump, he carried himself with bodily dignity. His soft brown Arab eyes searched the faces of his visitors. His round beige face, tufted with a precise gray-speckled beard, was a grave mask. Silently, he took his seat, motioned us to ours and inclined his head to receive our questions.

AS Abdullah began to talk that day in March, 1947, his personality began to penetrate his words. His cool courtesy gave way to wit and joviality. Behind his blandness one could detect a keen shrewdness. He showed himself a master of that elaborate and ceremonious double talk with which Arabs evade embarrassing direct questions. When he thought a question was designed to trap him, he said so bluntly. Still he said more than almost any Arab politician ever does.

The conversation had been going along only a short while when I realized that I was being left out. My companion, who was a young Arab, was engaged in an animated private conversation with the King. They were smiling and bowing and making the kind of polite protestations that could only mean that they were exchanging compliments—one a man of 66, the other forty years younger.

I turned to the chamberlain. He told me that the im- (Continued on Page 61)



King Abdullah, head of a nation of 400,000 and a potent voice in all Arab League affairs.



Glubb Pasha, the British officer who took over the Arab Legion in 1939 and modernized it.

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pulsive King, who had met my friend less than thirty minutes before, was offering the young man a job as Minister to the United States—if he would become a Trans-Jordan citizen and when the United States recognized Trans-Jordan's independence.

The King and he had known only two Arabs, both of them much older men, who spoke English as perfectly as my friend. He liked the young man; he offered him one of the highest jobs in his Government. That was apparently recommendation enough. And the King wasn't joking.

A FEW weeks before I had been several times in the presence of King Ibn Saud, who evicted Abdullah's family from Mecca and the Hejaz in 1924-25.

It was instructive to compare the rivals, victor and vanquished. Abdul Aziz Ibn Saud is massive, rough-hewn and hearty; Abdullah is small and neat. Ibn Saud was the desert chieftain who united Arabia with his own sword and made himself King; Abdullah was born to power and became more proficient at diplomacy and intrigue than at fighting. Ibn Saud is the leader of the Wahabi sect, one of the most puritanical in Islam; Abdullah tasted the pleasures of the Turkish court at an early age but remained a strict Moslem, eschewing alcohol and tobacco and the company of immodest women. Ibn Saud has had numberless wives, concubines and progeny; Abdullah has had three wives and a relatively small family.

ABDULLAH was born the second son of Sherif Hussein of Mecca. He was educated in Constantinople while for fifteen years his father was kept there by the Turks as half-hostage, half-guest. At 19 he entered the Turkish Parliament as Deputy for Mecca and took his political schooling in Ottoman intrigue.

While serving in Parliament he belonged at the same time to a party of young Arab revolutionaries who hoped to liberate the Arabs from Turkish rule. It was Abdullah who secretly opened the negotiations with British headquarters in Cairo that eventually led to the Arab revolt raised by his father on the side of the Allies in the first World War.

However, T. E. Lawrence, casting about among the Arabs for a leader who could fan the revolt into a holy crusade, rejected Abdullah in favor of his younger brother Feisal.

Lawrence later wrote in "The Seven Pillars of Wisdom": "I became sure that Abdullah was too balanced, too cool, too humorous to be a

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prophet; his value would come in peace after success."

In those days Abdullah didn't show himself to be a great warrior, and now he is old. In the drawing room at Shouneh there is an idealized portrait of him on horseback at the head of a troop of his desert raiders. In actuality he seems to have displayed more ferocity than effectiveness, which is typical of the romantic and excitable but irresolute Arabs.

AFTER the first World War was finished, the Turks had been defeated and all the Arab lands liberated, Sherif Hussein became King of the Hejaz, the western province of Arabia on the Red Sea, and in

PEAKE PASHA

"Father" of the Arab Legion and its first leader was Frederick Gerard Peake, British officer of the Egyptian Army who fought beside Lawrence of Arabia. In 1921 Peake was appointed Inspector-General of Trans-Jordan's Gendarmerie, shortly after the nation was created by the League of Nations and mandated to Britain. He immediately found himself in the thick of tribal raids and warfare. On the theory of "thief catch thief," he enrolled the best of the tribesmen in an Arab Legion in 1922, turning one section of 200 men into a flying desert patrol on racing camels. Of Peake Pasha the Arabs said he "spoke the single tongue of truth and had the courage of a lion." He turned over command of the Legion to Glubb Pasha shortly before World War II. Now 62, Peake is living in retirement in Scotland.

1920 Feisal was installed as King of Syria in Damascus by his British sponsors.

Feisal soon fell into dispute with the French, who had acquired the mandate over Syria and Lebanon by agreement with the British. The Syrians revolted and the French Army expelled Feisal.

EMIR ABDULLAH was enraged and he rallied the Bedouin tribes in Arabia to go to his brother's rescue. His troops went north on the Hejaz railway and lacking fuel they whacked down telegraph poles along the way to stoke the boilers.

Abdullah arrived at Maan in what is now Trans-Jordan to discover that the Great Powers were holding a conference in Cairo to settle the dispute over Syria. Abdullah went to Jerusalem and met Winston Churchill, who persuaded him to desist and remain in Trans-Jordan, which was then not even a name on a map. Abdullah became Emir of Trans-Jordan, which was detached from Palestine, and Feisal was seated on another throne in Baghdad, where his young

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Abdullah, as chief of all Arab armies, instructs Palestinian Arabs.

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grandson, Feisal II, resigns today as King of Iraq, and Abdullah's nephew, Abdul Illah, is Regent.

What did Abdullah get out of his deal with the persuasive Churchill besides a title? He got a principality—now the Hashemite kingdom of Trans-Jordan—that is almost as large as Mr. Churchill's England and Scotland.

But except for a greer strip thirty miles wide in the west, it is all sand and unyielding rock, a southern extension of the Syrian Desert. It has a population no larger than that of a London borough—400,000 unruly marauding tribesmen and wandering shepherds.

FOR his capital, Abdullah received the straggling hill town of Amman, which had been the ancient city of Rabbath Amman and later bore the Greek name of Philadelphia. In the squirming, rutted streets of Amman there are few reminders of the city's past glories. One of them is a Roman amphitheatre in front of the Hotel Philadelphia, surely the most imposing rock garden in any front yard in the world.

In reality it wasn't much of a country that Abdullah got. It didn't even come with a clear title, because the Zionists complained that Trans-Jordan was actually part of the territory of Palestine in which the League of Nations had proposed that the Jewish national home should be established.

But there were compensations. Emir Abdullah, as he was called until he was proclaimed King two years ago when Britain granted independence to Trans-Jordan, obtained British protection while he proceeded to redeem his family's fortunes. What was more important, he received a British subsidy and the help of the British Army in forming the best although not the

largest army in the Arab world.

That army, the picturesque Arab Legion and one of the most photogenic fighting forces in the world, is Abdullah's principal asset at any council table. He knows that and he also knows who pays for it. This accounts for his amenability to British strategic designs in the Middle East, an agreeableness not shared by some of his nationalistically hot-headed neighbors. The Arab Legion is the big stick that the little King carries behind his back.

The Legion in its modern mechanized manifestation is primarily the creation of John Bagot Glubb, on whom has been conferred the Arab military rank of Amin Lewa, which entitles him to be called Glubb Pasha, or, as the English would say, "Lord Glubb."

Glubb wears his title modestly, for he is a shy, quiet, rumpled fellow who dislikes being called by such names as "the modern Lawrence." A naturally unhandsome man whose plainness has been accentuated by a chin wound in the first World War, Glubb Pasha is not of the Beau Geste type. His hair is gray and he wears an untutored mustache. In London he wears the Arab Legion forage cap; with the Bedouin troops he affects a red and white headcloth bound by a black rope, and with peasant units the spiked helmet of Saladin's day.

NOW 54 years old, John Glubb grew up in a military family, entered the British Army, served in France and, looking for post-war trouble, asked for an assignment in Iraq, where there was a revolt. He remained in Baghdad in the Iraq Government service and then went to Trans-Jordan in 1930. Nine years later he succeeded F. G. Peake Pasha as

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commander of the Arab Legion.

Although he adapted himself to traditional Arab ceremoniousness, Glubb Pasha worked a revolution in Arab fighting methods. He and his officers took herdsmen who had never traveled on anything faster than a donkey and made armored-car drivers of them in six months. They took illiterate nomads and taught them to read army orders and, in time, to work the logarithms that every gunner must know. Particularly they made it a distinction to belong to the Arab Legion and thereby helped to put an end to the undisciplined tribal raiding in Trans-Jordan.

WHEN the Legion was first formed, the troops wore their traditional robes and carried a variety of spectacular but outmoded weapons. Their hair grew long and the British called them "Glubb's girls."

"It is a terrifying spectacle when one of these beautiful tresses gets tangled up in the feeder of an anti-aircraft gun," said Glubb, as recently quoted by Lieut. Col. Richard Palmer of the Arab Legion. So hair-cuts were ordered and the troops now in Palestine wear British battle dress and helmets.

It remains to be seen whether uniforms, the three R's and a plentiful supply of vehicles can defeat the Jews. Glubb Pasha's own estimate of the Arab soldiers is that even the best equipped of them are more suited to raiding than to pitched battles.

Whatever their worth, Abdullah's Legionnaires are the best of the Arab lot. They have given their king his hour of triumph over his rivals if not over the new state of Israel.

For years he had been snubbed and derided by his neighbors. Other Arab statesmen and rulers distrusted his ambition and feared his fighting strength. They scored him as a puppet of Britain and denounced him as pro-Zionist. More than once Abdullah's disruptive maneuvers were discussed in private sessions of the Arab League Council in Cairo. He always proved intractable and unpredictable.

ONLY Abdullah seemed to remember year in and year out that Syria, Trans-Jordan and Palestine, which had all been part of the Turkish province of Syria, should have been one state. He never ceased to remind the others, thereby alarming the Syrians, who had established a republic; the Lebanese Christians, who feared engulfment in a Moslem sea; Ibn Saud, who had too recently acquired his kingdom to feel secure in it, and King Farouk of Egypt, who might lose his primacy among the Arab kings if Abdullah should succeed in creating a Greater Syria.

But Abdullah's time for achieving his ambitions is short. He will be 67 this year.