Prospects on the Western Front take a turn for the better, with 8 August the ‘Black Day of the German Army’. Allenby plans a September offensive while Lawrence struggles between two masters, admitting in Seven Pillars to playing a devious game. King Hussein sparks an unnecessary row with Feisal’s Arab officers.

T. E. Lawrence in August 1918

General Allenby spent the hot summer preparing his push towards Damascus. Lawrence was to move with the Arab forces northwards through Amman and Deraa to support his right flank. On 28 July, Lawrence had returned to Aqaba after several weeks with the senior British officers in Cairo and at G.H.Q. in Ramleh. Colonel Buxton reached Aqaba on 30 July with a 300-strong Imperial Camel Corps (ICC) to augment the Arabs.

In Lawrence’s planning, the ICC ‘must strike Mudowwara with absolute surprise. I would guide them myself to Rumm … Accordingly I went down to Akaba.’

1 August – Akaba [Aqaba]; 2 August – Wadi Itm [Yutm]; 3 August – Wadi Nejd [Negd]; 4 August – Rum [Rum]

After staying in Rum for a day, Lawrence returned to Aqaba. ‘A home-sickness came over me, stressing vividly my outcast life among these Arabs … I was dead-tired of my life, longing as seldom before for the moody skies of England.’

5 August – Akaba

‘In Akaba … for the last time we mustered on the windy beach by the sea’s edge … we rode into the brown hills for Guweira [Al Quwayrah / El Quwera].’

6 August – Aba el Heiran [Aba ah-Hayran]

‘At Guweira, Siddons had an aeroplane waiting. … Feisal wanted me at once in Jefer.’ Lawrence joined in a council of tribal leaders, and his neighbour ‘whispered me the name of each chief. They did not ask who I was, for my clothes and appearance were peculiar in the desert. It was notoriety to be the only clean shaven one, and I doubled it by wearing always the suspect pure silk, of the whitest (at least outside), with a gold and crimson Meccan head-rope, and gold dagger.’ After the council, Siddons flew Lawrence back and he was in Aqaba by nightfall.

7 August – Akaba

‘Next morning we heard by aeroplane how Buxton’s force had fared at Mudowwara. They decided to assault it before dawn … in three parties, one to enter the station, the other two for the main redoubts. … At [7 am] the last of the enemy surrendered quietly.’ Buxton then set off for Jefer.

Meanwhile, Lawrence and Colonel Dawnay ‘went up very brightly to Aba el Lissan, to greet Feisal’ with a warning from Allenby ‘to do nothing rash, as the British
push was a chance, and if it failed the Arabs would be on the wrong side of Jordan to be given help. Particularly, Allenby begged Feisal not to rush upon Damascus, but to hold his hand till events were surely favourable.’

‘Feisal smiled wisely,’ replying ‘that he would try this autumn for Damascus though the heavens fell, and, if the British were not able to carry their share of the attack, he would save his own people by making separate peace with Turkey.’ In fact Feisal had long been corresponding with the Turks despite orders to desist from Mecca and Cairo. Never one to do as he was told, Lawrence persuaded Feisal to carry on ‘teasing’ the Turks, but in secret; a fine line from treason!

8 August – Aba el Lissan [Abu al-Lissan]
Joyce and myself decided upon another of our joint car excursions, this time to Azrak ... Therefore we ran out to Jefer to meet the victorious Camel Corps.’

‘On the morrow, early, Joyce and I got into our tender, with the resourceful Rolls to drive us, and ran easily into Wadi Bair. ... We followed Um Kharug’s east bank, finding the way firm, but slow.’

‘In the morning ... we cranked up the cars and purred over the meeting of Um Kharug and Dhirwa ... by Ammari, which I meant to visit; for if evil came to us at Azrak, our next refuge should be Ammari, if accessible to cars.’

11 August – Jefer; 12 August – [Wadi] Um Kharug [Khrug]; 13 August – Amri, etc. [Ammari]
At the ancient fort of Azrak, ‘We stopped only a moment. Joyce and I climbed the western tower, and agreed upon the manifold advantages of Azrak as a working base ...’ Then we crossed to the northern lobe of the mud-flat, ‘a fit landing-ground for the aeroplanes which Siddons was adding.’ They drove back, seeking a shorter route, via Ammari, then along the ridge to Ba’ir.

15 August – Bair [Ba’ir]
16 August was Lawrence’s thirtieth birthday, and he devotes Chapter 103 of Seven Pillars to ‘myself’. ‘It came to me queerly how, four years ago, I had meant to be a general and knighted, when thirty. Such temporal dignities ... were now in my grasp — only that my sense of falsity to the Arab position had cured me of crude ambition: while it left me craving for good repute among men.’ He ends the chapter: ‘Indeed, the truth was I did not like the ‘myself’ I could see and hear.’

Next day ‘Buxton and his men started out in mid-afternoon. We judged that Buxton would sleep just short of the Hadi, so we rode thither.’