How Important were Personality, Ego and Personal Relationships to British Air-Land Integration in the Western Desert and Normandy?

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Abstract: Air-Land Integration (ALI) in the Second World War was forged in the Western Desert by the Army and RAF where it was instrumental to victory there and success in Normandy. The three men that made it work, Tedder, Coningham and Montgomery, did so through their initially close personal relationships. However, these personal relationships started to fall apart soon after success at El-Alamein and were calamitous by D-Day. This paper examines how important ego, personality and personal relationships were in making ALI so successful. It concludes that while key for the successful introduction of ALI in the Western Desert, they were less important in Normandy. This was because the three men had been promoted to such high rank that their dislike for each other would have far wider impact than on just ALI.

'We've been taken for suckers by Montgomery!'[1] Air Chief Marshal Tedder, July 1944.

'It's always "Montgomery's Army", "Montgomery's Victory", "Montgomery strikes again". You never say "Coningham's air force"'.[2] Air Marshal Coningham to journalists, 1944.

'I readily admit that the decision to become the focus of their attention was personally enjoyable to me.'[3] General Montgomery, 1942.

Introduction

Arguably, the ability of the British to effectively integrate their Army and Air Force to make them mutually supporting was the turning point in the war for them. The co-ordination of the two Services was borne out of bitter experience in the Western Desert and dependent on the personal relationships of the Army and Air Force commanders. It was three men, Air Chief Marshal Tedder; Field Marshal Montgomery and Air Marshal Coningham, their egos, personalities and personal relationships that really ensured that ALI became the highly effective weapon it did but also ensured that it never achieved its full potential. This close co-ordination brought Britain its first significant land victory of the war at El-Alamein, but by the time of the capture of Caen this relationship soured to outright hostility.

The first part of this paper will outline the British ALI model developed in the Western Desert. It will then look at the importance of personal relationships, personality and ego in forging ALI in the Western Desert. It will examine the role that external factors, such as professionalism, experience, the media, honours and awards as well as political manipulation played in shaping these relationships. Part one will conclude that ego, personality and the personal relationships between the three men were crucial to the success of ALI in the Western Desert. The second part will look at the personal relationships between the three commanders in Normandy. It will build upon part one's findings to demonstrate that whilst relationships between the three commanders were poor and steadily deteriorating, this did not affect the practical delivery of ALI in Normandy.

ALI in the Western Desert

The British Western Desert model of ALI was borne from much bitter experience and prone to the influence of personalities. Whilst the Army and RAF were sufficiently co-ordinated for success against the Italians, the arrival of Rommel in 1941 brought a different experience. This period was marred by bitter recriminations between the Army and RAF commanders over the use of air power. A vocal cadre in the Army wanted an Army Air Force at the call of the Divisional or Corps commander, as had been employed against them in the Battle of France. The RAF thought that impractical due to the numbers of aircraft required and was doctrinally opposed to using air power as flying artillery, focussing on interdicting the logistics chain rather than destroying tanks. This helps explain why the British arrived at their system of close air support.[4]

The victories and defeats of 1941 revealed an RAF unprepared for mobile operations[5] and an Army incapable of providing the RAF with up-to-date locations, hampering assistance by the inability to distinguish friend from foe on the ground. Some of these issues were rectified by equipment, others would take time and experience. In response to Army criticisms, Tedder insisted that all planning for air operations for Operation Battleaxe should be done in complete agreement with the Army's wishes. Even then, defeat still brought accusations from the Army of failure by the RAF despite little evidence of them calling on RAF support.[6] Tedder's view was that 'all three Services should make their big efforts in concert and not separately' and that 'there was no real co-operation between the Services and still less any concept of combined operations and yet the entire campaign "calls for staffs manned by officers with real knowledge and mutual understanding of the powers and limitations of the three Services".'[7] Tedder's solution was to re-organise the RAF into the Desert Air Force (DAF)[8] under the command of Coningham who had arrived that July at Tedder's request. One of Tedder's first directions to Coningham was for him to get together with his Army counterpart and create a joint HQ.

Tedder also proposed a review of air support by an inter-Service committee. The committee's findings and Coningham's trials resulted in the policy of Direct Air Support. The Army still wanted point protection against German dive-bombers and the situation reached an impasse. Churchill resolved the issue by directing in September 1941 that 'ground forces must not expect 'as a matter of course' to be protected against aerial attack. Whenever a battle was in progress, the Army Commander must inform the Air Commander what he wants to happen and it was the responsibility of the Air Commander to decide how best to achieve this.'[9] The RAF in the Middle East was now organised to support the Army and Navy whilst also completing its own missions. The process for requesting and allocating aircraft was streamlined and virtually established with the arrival of the UK-trained No 2 Army Air Support Control unit, reducing the time from request to arrival of air support to approximately 30 minutes.[10]

Operation Crusader, in November 1941 to relieve Tobruk, was the first test of the new system; it was also the first time that the Army and Air HQs were co-located. Whilst initially successful, Rommel's dynamic counter-attack was only checked by British armour supported by air power. Auchinleck wrote after the battle that a 'marked feature of operations to date has been our complete air supremacy and excellent co-operation between ground and air.'[11]

Rommel's next offensive on 26 May so comprehensively shattered the Eighth Army that the air support organisation ceased to function and the DAF was forced to act on its own initiative to prevent defeat.[12] Following this near disaster, Churchill and Brooke visited the Middle East to see for themselves what was wrong. Churchill sought Tedder's views, who was clear, 'I told him frankly what my views were….. the last failure in particular had shaken the faith of the troops in their leadership.' Tedder told Field Marshal Smuts a few

days later that, 'Selection, promotion and removal of staffs and commanders must be based entirely on results, not on seniority, personal friendships, old school ties etc. Failures must be analysed and exposed, not, as invariably in the past, buried under many coats of whitewash.'[13] Alexander replaced Auchinleck, whilst General Brookes' favourite, Montgomery – a man, with a genius for self-promotion,[14] took command of the Eighth Army.

Montgomery brought with him an immediate and infectious attitude towards winning the war, instilling a sense of purpose and direction in the Army,[15] impressing Tedder and Coningham. Montgomery endorsed the airmen's theory of close land and air co-operation at all stages of the planning and execution of a campaign, successfully putting it into practice at the battle of Alam Halfa in September 1942. At the third battle of El-Alamein, army-air co-operation 'greatly exceeded that of all previous air-land operations.'[16]

The Importance of Personal Relationships

How much of the British success in the Western Desert was due to the personal relationships between the senior commanders? Up to 1942 Tedder and Coningham had cordial relationships with the various Army commanders and solid progress was being made on ALI. Despite this, Army officers still wanted their own air force, did not like having their assumed leading role in the battle challenged and resented having to share operational authority with an airman.[17] Bucking this attitude was Montgomery who was quick to embrace the concepts espoused by Tedder and Coningham, particularly the co-location of Army and RAF HQs, something Tedder had told Coningham to do almost a year earlier.

Montgomery had abundant energy, self-assurance, skill and a reputation as a fine trainer of troops. Coningham's first impressions seemed promising, 'we now have a man, a great soldier if I am any judge, and we will go all the way with him.'[18] Montgomery appeared to meet Tedder's requirements for the next Army Commander as being 'alive and young, someone with fire.'[19] In September 1942, Tedder wrote to Smuts saying that Montgomery 'has brought the whole Eighth Army to life again. The effect has been electric, far more rapid than I had thought possible.'[20]

Montgomery endorsed the role of air power in the land battle, telling his subordinates that before a commander goes into the 'real battle he must "blitz" the enemy in the air and have his own air so far forward that good support and good cover will be given to the land operations. A vital essence is suitable airfields for the RAF….'[21] After Alam Halfa, Montgomery wrote to Coningham; 'It is clear to me that such magnificent co-operation can produce only one result – a victorious end to the campaign in Africa. Let our motto be: United we stand, divided we fall, and let nothing divide us.' Coningham congratulated him on winning the battle 'in such a flawless manner'.[22] But, by the time the Allies reached Tunis in 1943, relations between Montgomery and the airmen had soured perceptibly.

Arguably, the root causes lay in the personalities of the three men and the influence of external factors.

Personalities

Montgomery was a determined and aggressive individual. Described as having few real friends in the Army he became even more of a loner following his wife's early death. Basil Liddell-Hart in late 1941 wrote in his notes on Army Command appointments that Montgomery 'is certainly one of our most vigorous and "toughest" generals, if he has some of the defects of his qualities.'[23]

He was widely regarded as 'vain, egocentric, self-righteous and boastful'[24] and viewed as naturally arrogant. War Office officials described him as having a very shallow mind, using simple repetition to get his message across.[25] In August 1942, Tedder received a letter from Air Marshal Freeman, warning him not to trust Montgomery, saying he was 'a good tactical schoolmaster' but 'small-minded – and nearly had a mutiny in his regiment when he commanded it. He might do well, for he has energy – but he talks balls – is conceited, a hard worker and a cad.'[26]

Montgomery regarded himself as a military genius but he had more resources than any previous commander and never acted quickly. His desire to be seen as the perfect commander meant that he was unable to admit mistakes and fame made this worse. Hastings acknowledges that Montgomery had a certain 'lack of concern for the truth in his make-up' and D'Este agrees that 'the past existed only to serve the convenience of the present.'[27] Montgomery was relentlessly self-aggrandising and obnoxiously insistent on his own infallibility.[28] Montgomery's battle at El-Alamein did not go according to plan, but by insisting that it did he gained a reputation for infallibility, whilst his peers did not give him credit for his skill in reshaping his forces to meet the changes. Liddell-Hart observed that Montgomery had a tendency to rubbish all those who went before him in order to highlight the great changes that he made.[29] He did this with Auchinleck and Dorman-Smith, re-writing the state of the 8th Army when he took over to make his achievements look better.[30] In his diary he wrote about Army-RAF co-operation,

> I gather that there had been very close touch in the past. But the arrival of Auchinleck and Dorman-Smith at Army HQ seems to have altered that; the RAF had no use for either of these two, and Army HQ and Air HQ and the two staffs seem gradually to have drifted apart. I decided to remedy this at once and moved Army HQ back to Air HQ and brought the AOC and his senior staff officers into my Mess. This was a good move, and from then on we never looked back.

Montgomery sacked those original Eighth Army officers that had not been part of the 2nd Corps team in France to make space for his men, causing great resentment, with General Lumsden, former Commanding Officer of X Corps, telling people back at the Cavalry Club

what a shit Montgomery was.[31] Montgomery publically dismissed the efforts of the old Auchinleck team claiming that their plan would not have worked when this was clearly not the case. 'I changed the plan completely and Rommel was seen off. I did not know him; he must have been a fine fighting General.'[32] Liddell-Hart, writing to the journalist and author RW Thompson on 20 Jan 1965, agreed that Montgomery was 'not a great General' and failed to make the most of the remarkable opportunities that came his way.[33]

It also seems that he was unable to take advice. In a letter to Brigadier FEW Simpson dated 19 November 1942 he states that he has been given much advice from 'lunatics who sit in war rooms completely out of touch with realities, and who try and plan what I ought to do. A good many of these are of the RAF.'[34] Montgomery 'was intolerant of opinion which opposed his own.'[35] Brooke was forced to give his protégé advice to ensure that he did not say or do things that would upset others, describing him as 'a difficult mixture to handle, brilliant commander in action and trainer of men, but liable to commit untold errors, due to lack of tact, lack of appreciation of other people's outlooks.'[36] Montgomery thought he was a plain speaking man, to everyone else he was arrogant, but often there was more than a grain a truth to what he said.

Tedder's tutor at Cambridge described him as 'a thoroughly nice fellow in all ways: modest, pleasant, sensible. He seems to me to be much more thoughtful than many men of his age, anxious to form a real opinion of his own and to do it by carefully weighing the pros and cons.'[37] Churchill's doctor, Sir Charles Wilson, thought Tedder was quite unlike any other officer he had met, with 'a quick mind and a sharp tongue.'[38]

Churchill came to admire Tedder's qualities, even if he never liked him. Tedder's standing amongst his peers was immense. Following several defeats in the desert, Churchill found Tedder's calm practical signals deflating and in October 1941 decided to sack him. Portal, Freeman, Auchinleck and even Archibald Sinclair, Secretary of State for Air, said they would resign if this happened; with Auchinleck saying 'for the good of the Army' he hoped that Churchill would not insist.[39] Harold Macmillan who was a political advisor in Eisenhower's HQ in January 1943 wrote that Tedder was,

> a most interesting man. He has the rare qualities of greatness (which you can't define but can sense). It consists partly of humour, immense common sense, and a power to concentrate on one or two simple points. But there is something more than any separate quality – you just feel it about some people the moment they come into a room. And Tedder is one of those people about whom you felt it.[40]

Sir Robert Bruce-Lockhart, Director-General of the Political Warfare Executive thought Tedder was 'the most naturally and mentally best equipped commander I have ever met.'[41] General Omar Bradley described Tedder as 'one of the United Kingdom's most outstanding men'. Tedder was an anomaly among RAF senior leaders in that he was

'consistently willing to take a joint Service perspective rather than follow the narrow prejudices of his own Service.'[42]

Not everyone viewed Tedder this way. Brigadier Richardson, Montgomery's LO to Air HQ described Tedder as a brittle intellectual, and found him 'misguided, academic, vain and conceited – therefore, he was upset by Montgomery's personality'.[43] Whilst Hastings asserts that Tedder's arrogant self-assurance was matched only by Montgomery's.[44]

Tedder could be ruthlessly professional when required, as his advice to Churchill in June 1942 about Auchinleck shows. Equally, on 12 February 1942, following a series of newspaper articles by retired Generals blaming the Army's failures on the RAF and advocating an Army Air Force, he wrote to Sinclair saying, 'You should know that the RAF in the Desert realise that they have saved the Army, both in the recent advance and the withdrawal, and naturally resent any suggestion that the Army should control them.' The spirit of the RAF personnel was 'give us some tanks and we will stop this retreating if the Army does not wish to fight.'[45] Tedder was particularly harsh with Coningham following an outburst that appeared to criticise, in public, the performance of American troops in Tunisia. He was slow to forgive Coningham for this, which could have had serious repercussions for the Anglo-American war effort in Europe.

Coningham was described by Liddell-Hart as the real hero of the Desert War; he was everything that Tedder wasn't: decorated, stylish, had presence and wide experience.[46] He possessed 'immense energy and rare powers of leadership,' was one of the chief architects of army-air cooperation, and one of the outstanding air commanders of the war.[47] He had a talent for organisation, turning Tedder's ideas into practical reality as in the Western Desert. Eisenhower regarded him as 'impulsive, quick, earnest and sincere. He knows his job and under the British system of cooperation, performs it well.'[48]

Behind Coningham's soft-spoken and intensely charming manner, he was ambitious and ruthless, rarely bothering to conceal his contempt for other commanders. He enjoyed fame and attention as well as the finer aspects of life. Coningham's behaviour was often boorish, expecting his ideas to influence the actions of others. Coningham's ego and forceful and impatient nature could get the better of him and lead him to rash decisions and words. General Sir Charles Richardson, a staff officer in Montgomery's HQ described Coningham as having to be 'handled with kid gloves' and that he was 'very bloody minded under the old (Auchinleck) regime but was encouraged to play. But we all knew – I knew because I was in the middle of this - we had to be frightfully careful not to have one of these outbursts of frightful Prima-Donna-ish behaviour.'[49] Even Tedder commented that Coningham was 'at times rather a Prima Donna.'[50] Coningham felt that Montgomery had stolen laurels away from himself and his air force after El-Alamein. When Montgomery became a household name, things went wrong, as the ambitious Coningham felt slighted. From that point relations deteriorated to such an extent that Montgomery would try and by-pass Coningham causing further frustration and leading to an even greater decline in their relationship.[51]

Breakdown in Relationships

The cause of the breakdown in the relationship between the airmen and Montgomery appears to be rooted in Montgomery's boastfulness after El-Alamein. Montgomery's inability to exploit his success on the battlefield appears to have been the source of Tedder's loss of faith whilst Coningham's, sharing Tedder's views, appeared more to do with being denied the recognition that he felt he and his air force deserved. Equally, there is the view expressed by Major General Dorman-Smith that the breakdown was inevitable due to Service differences. In a letter to Corelli Barnett he stated that the Army was not trained to think, it was a fault of the peacetime system and that 'anyone who bothered about "Generalship" (as I did for a hobby rather than for use) was wasting his time in a vacuum.' He goes on to claim that the Army was more interested in social status and connections, the commanders were 'all gallant men, but terribly stupid and slow to react intelligently,' finishing with, 'it might be said of the British Army that it fears nothing except its brains.' In his opinion, RAF officers were more intellectually prepared for the war.[52]

Montgomery's ego was certainly starting to grow due to his success, but also due to the disproportionate praise heaped upon him. In his diary, he claimed that 'Alexander took no part whatever in the planning and conduct of operations…' further stating 'and especially did I learn how to combine the power of the Army on the ground with the power of the RAF in the sky, and to so knit the two together as to constitute one fighting machine…'[53] Even Admiral Cunningham, CinC Mediterranean Fleet commented to Admiral Ramsay 'I am afraid that Montgomery is a bit of a nuisance; he seems to think that all he has to do is say what is to be done and everyone will dance to the tune of his piping.'[54]

The decline in relationships seems to stem from the frustration that Tedder and Coningham felt when Montgomery did not follow up the Alam Haifa victory quickly, thereby missing an opportunity to defeat the Axis.[55] The airmen knew that the Germans only needed to get one or two re-supply convoys through the British Mediterranean blockade to give Rommel the fuel that he desperately needed for a counter-attack. On 4 November 1942, Tedder visited Montgomery, emphasising the need for haste as the RAF or Navy might not sink every Axis supply ship. Montgomery insisted that there was no chance of any movement for at least 10 days. Half an hour later he came back and stated that he had new information about the enemy's dispositions that would allow him to resume the advance immediately. Tedder wrote:

> Advice he will not take, even that from Coningham, who knows the desert better than any of them, but fortunately he will quite often use that advice. That the great ideas should come from the great man himself matters little, provided they are acted on.[56]

Montgomery's view was: 'On arrival in Egypt I had been told that Tedder was always trying to tell the Army how it should fight its battles, but I personally found no sign until we captured

the Marturba airfields for the DAF. It was certainly a curious message to send a land army that had just won the greatest victory a British Army had yet won in the war!'[57] Liddell-Hart made the point about Montgomery that 'until Alamein he was quite capable of accepting ideas from outside, and quite frequently acknowledged the source.'[58]

Tedder's frustrations and proposed operational moves were echoed by Rommel:

> The British Commander risked nothing in any way doubtful, and bold solutions were completely foreign to him….I was quite satisfied that Montgomery would never take the risk of following up boldly and over-running us as he could have done without any danger to himself. Indeed, such a course would have cost him far fewer losses in the long run…[59]

This failure to pursue Rommel vigorously after Alamein meant that Rommel was able to reconstitute his army, as the brains and nervous system were left intact, leading to a lengthening of the entire campaign.[60]

Montgomery's timidity in pursuing Rommel is understandable. He had never commanded in the desert before or any force of that size, but he did understand that Churchill and the British public needed victory after so many defeats. Nigel Hamilton, Montgomery's official biographer, argues that the RAF was afraid of the Luftwaffe and its refusal to bomb further west than El-Alamein prevented any follow up on the retreating Axis forces, hiding, instead, behind requests from the Army for fighter cover.[61] This is rebutted by Coningham's actions on 13 November 1942 when he sent his squadrons to advanced landing strips some miles behind the retreating enemy, in order to attack them more effectively. Liddell-Hart observed that 'Montgomery was receiving a lot of criticism at home from his fellow officers for unconformity as to how an officer should behave. Therefore, he is being over cautious for if he makes a bad slip they will drop him like the proverbial "ton of bricks". Whereas, if he merely misses opportunities, by conforming to the tactical system they uphold, they will have no such excuse.'[62] Dorman-Smith wrote to Barnett stating, 'He (Montgomery) ran true to form from my staff college days, a sledgehammer to crack a nut was his forte. Also, rightly too, he had one eye cocked on Churchill. He had bamboozled him in August (more booze than bam perhaps) and it was necessary for him to succeed spectacularly at Alamein.'[63] The real reason why there was no pursuit was because the Army's armoured formations were unable to match their German foes.[64] Montgomery did not have confidence in his Army's ability to engage Rommel's in open country, 'the standard of training for Eighth Army formations was such that I was not prepared to lose them headlong into the enemy;… .'[65] He did not know the capabilities of his commanders and how his supply system would work.[66]

The Making of a National Hero

After Operation Crusader, the media goaded the Army for its poor performance in the war writing that the Army High Command was staffed by 'blimps and boneheads, barren of

strategical conceptions, thinking in terms of the last war, devoid of powers of leadership and incidentally of guts.'[67] Whilst unjust, the Army had spent the last three and a half years blaming everyone else for its failures. The Evening Standard's military correspondent, Frank Owen, claimed that the British Army did not know how to fight and win modern battles stating that success in battle depended on inter-Service co-operation, not with them acting as ancillaries to one another, a conclusion that he had reached after reading a captured German tactics manual,[68] a point Tedder had made a year earlier.

Opinions undoubtedly shaped egos and influenced personal relationships. Prior to Montgomery's arrival, there had been many articles about RAF successes in the Desert, and about Tedder's and Coningham's leadership. The RAF had done a great deal to raise the morale of the average soldier and this was well known.[69] Montgomery was very astute at courting the press and seems to have been quite happy to have walked away with all the glory. Shortly after his arrival in North Africa, previously excluded journalists were actively encouraged. The army public relations staff excelled themselves arranging the first of three years of 'random' encounters. All this would have been profoundly distasteful, even if it had been necessary, to any man not abnormally vain. As he said himself, "I readily admit that the decision to become the focus of their attention was personally enjoyable to me."[70] Montgomery, like Coningham, craved publicity and recognition and deliberately developed a distinctive image.[71] When the British entered Tripoli on 23 January, Admiral Power noted in his diary, 'BBC shouted all day about Montgomery and Tripoli, but of course the RAF did it all.' The German commander, Kesselring, thought that the British should have been there a month earlier given their numerical superiority in men and equipment. Montgomery made sure that Coningham was nowhere to be seen when he accepted the formal surrender of Tripoli and conducted a victory tour in front of the press.[72] This angered Coningham whose enjoyment of such occasions was apparent when Alexander invited him to accompany him in his white Rolls Royce for the victory tour of Tunis.[73]

The Montgomery brand was carefully cultivated. On a trip to England, ostensibly for rest, he took his personal photographer and press agent, briefed the Canadians on Operation Husky, took tea at Buckingham Palace and was mobbed when he went to the theatre.[74] Montgomery employed a personal press agent, Captain Keating, whose job was to control the media and was the brains behind the hugely popular propaganda film 'Desert Victory'. Eisenhower's diary keeper, Commander Butcher, claimed Keating had said to him 'England had no hero so he set out to make one and Montgomery was now "it"'.[75] Victory at El-Alamein had saved two reputations, the British Army's and Churchill's and made two, the Eighth Army's and Montgomery's.[76] As Montgomery's Chief of Staff, Freddie De Guingand commented:

> It was extremely interesting to meet my chief again after his visit to London. I noticed a subtle change. He had left for Egypt as a General comparatively unknown to the British public, and had found on return to Britain that he had virtually overnight become a national hero. He received a tremendous ovation wherever he went; in the theatre,

> stepping in or out of the War Office crowds would shout "Good old Montgomery!" "God bless you, Montgomery!" Walking across the Horseguards parade to his Club he would be followed by hundreds of his fellow countrymen, all pressing forward to shake his hand or at least get a glimpse of him. What all this must have meant to a somewhat lonely man is easy to understand. Not to have enjoyed it would not have been human. He did, and sometimes asked for more. It was a good thing for the Army, which had sunk so low in the public's esteem. It needed this favourable reaction – and it needed a successful General. The main changes which I noticed were: firstly, Montgomery had, perhaps lost a little of his simplicity, and, secondly, he now realised that he was a real power in the land and that there were few who would not heed his advice. In fact, he realised that in most cases he could afford to be really tough to get his own way![77]

Montgomery understood the importance of publicity to communicate to his troops and raise their morale. After El-Alamein he told his Army that, 'this achievement is probably without parallel in history.'[78] At home it was treated as the greatest victory since Waterloo allowing Britain to retain self-respect in the eyes of the US.[79] The Eighth Army began to view itself as an elite force. At the Tunis victory parade, Churchill told the Eighth Army that they were now world famous and that their victories 'would gleam and glow and will be a source of song and story long after we who are gathered here have passed away.'[80] Montgomery was 'a gifted commander who understood the limitations of his troops and generally refused to take risks that would expose their weaknesses.'[81] He ensured that the Eighth Army never lost a battle, maintaining their morale as well as his reputation.[82] The Eighth Army believed in itself again, which was exactly what was required.[83]

Even on the medals there was elitism. Those who had served in the Eighth Army after 23 October 1942, when Montgomery assumed command, received a bar to their Africa Star. This caused much bitterness and resentment that rumbled on well into the 1960s. Montgomery was regarded by most of the old desert hands as an intolerable little man.[84] There was concern at the Allies' Algiers Headquarters that Montgomery was hogging the media limelight to the irritation of others. Eisenhower's press aide, described Montgomery as a 'glory grabbing General' who was '… riding a wave of popular acclaim and seems to think he can't do wrong.' This perception of Montgomery meant that any obstinacy on his part, based on sound military grounds, appeared as vanity rather than logic or experience.

Whilst Montgomery was being actively courted by the Prime Minister, the British Media and others, Tedder appeared on the front cover of the US Time magazine in November 1942. Under the heading 'Tedder of North Africa,' he quickly became one of the few British officers known by face and name to the American public. The article was full of praise and made Montgomery appear a supporting act to the airman.[85] Tedder also appeared in Life magazine before Montgomery did, a photo of his head and shoulders taking up the entire front cover, inside was a fulsome article with five photographs.[86]

Churchill's careful manipulation of the victory at El-Alamein also needs to be seen in context. He desperately needed success to keep him in office but also to demonstrate to the USA and the Empire that the British Army was not beaten.[87] Even complimenting Rommel as a formidable opponent was designed to draw some of the sting from the recent defeats experienced by the British Army at his hands, as Egypt was considered second only to the UK in terms of defence; 'lose Egypt and we lose the war.'[88] The RAF and Royal Navy had all had spectacular successes, only the Army was a failure, which helps to understand why Churchill singled out Alexander and Montgomery.

Even his famous quote about the battle actually starts "It might almost be said: Before Alamein we never had a victory, after Alamein we never had a defeat.' These opening words were generally omitted and Churchill had an interest in continuing this mis-quote as he had gone to Egypt and sorted out the command problems.[89] There are alternative views on why Churchill was keen to promote Montgomery's success. In a letter to Liddell-Hart dated 17 May 1965, Thompson enclosed an extract of a letter from Sir Desmond Morton, Churchill's personal assistant, to Thompson dated 15 May 1965. In it Moreton states,

> 'Montgomery got the Overlord job for several reasons. Largely because he had worked up the press over his 21st Army Group job.' The Americans madly wanted Alexander in the job as the African supremo, who had devised the tactics, 'for which Montgomery took, and the press gave him, the credit.' 'Then again (hush hush) Winston recognised early in Montgomery a man who could be made to think like he did, and yet who was biddable enough to do what Winston wanted. Winston saw sufficient of himself in Montgomery, but a lesser man. If I say that Winston was terrified of Alex, it is but a word of slight exaggeration…..Montgomery could be handled.'[90]

Following victory at El-Alamein, significant honours were awarded to Montgomery and Alexander, but initially nothing for Tedder or Coningham. Sinclair eventually wrung out of Churchill a GCB for Tedder not for El-Alamein but for his service in North Africa. Tedder had already done rather well from his time in North Africa, being promoted as well as receiving other honours. For him, real recognition was to come from other quarters such as Lord Trenchard who told Tedder, 'You were the power behind the whole operation.'[91] On hearing about the proposal to post Tedder back to the UK, Churchill said, 'It seems quite impossible to move Tedder from the Middle East until the great operations in Tunisia and Tripolitania are completed. No-one has his knowledge, connections or influence.'[92] Many newspapers printed articles on the importance of air power at the battle of El-Alamein. In Coningham's camp, the atmosphere was bitter. Air Commodore Tommy Elmhurst, Coningham's Chief of Staff wrote in his diary on 12 November, 'Montgomery got his "K" (Knighthood) yesterday and a step up in rank. We in the Air Force are depressed that Mary did not get something for the 16 months he has fought here so brilliantly.'[93] On 23 November, Coningham was informed that he had got his knighthood. Exactly what Coningham thought about the issue of Honours and Awards post Alamein is not clear. What is known is that he was very clear in his direction to

his subordinates about ensuring that honours were used to recognise the efforts of others. Thus it is not unreasonable to make the assumption that he held such awards in high esteem and that he craved them.

The Impact on ALI in the Western Desert

The decline in relations between the Airmen and Montgomery seems to have had little real impact on the delivery of ALI. Montgomery was not at his worst by this stage of the war and there were no other major battles in the pursuit to Tunis. The Airmen seem to have felt that whilst annoying, he was bearable and neither was so unprofessional to allow Montgomery's ego and personality to interfere with the prosecution of the war. Once Tunis had fallen, the DAF combined with the Allied Air Forces used in Operation TORCH to form the North African Tactical Air Force (NATAF) and here the importance of personality, ego and personal relationships really showed. During this final phase of the war in North Africa, Montgomery was served by Broadhurst who was very similar to Coningham in style, 'bold, original, creative and totally unawed by Service orthodoxy.'[94] His application of air power, at a crucial time when Montgomery's attack on the Mareth Line in Tunisia had faltered, allowed Montgomery to adjust his attack and retain his unbeaten record, from then on Broadhurst was Montgomery's favourite airman.[95]

Tedder's and Coningham's action in gripping the Allies' Air Forces in North Africa is a good example of the importance of personal relationships affecting operational outcomes. Soon after taking command of all the Air Forces in the Mediterranean, Tedder discovered that the situation between the Allies in North Africa was similar to the British in the Western Desert in 1941. Unlike his British Army counterparts, Tedder had excellent working relationships with the Americans, both Army and Air Force, quickly grasping the fact that Britain was a vital, but junior, partner of a coalition in which he was a key commander.[96] From his first encounter with them he stressed that if he was to command them then they would be one team - us. Coningham was promoted to Air Marshal and given command of the new British/American tactical Air Forces, immediately establishing a joint headquarters with Alexander who was now General Eisenhower's deputy. This change in command style, relationships and force of personality revolutionised air support to the Allies bringing it up to the standard of the DAF. Arguably, the greatest testament to the importance of personal relationships in delivering ALI came from Montgomery, who wrote to Brooke on 28 February, inviting him to send senior officers out to North Africa for instruction on how to co-ordinate the actions of an Army and an Air Force to 'see teamwork at a HQ' as 'they will never learn these things in England; they would like to, but they cannot as it is all theory; here it is all practical.'[97]

Normandy

Upon returning from the Mediterranean to conduct the planning for the invasion of Europe, Montgomery foresaw friction between the RAF and Army, realising that there was a clear division between the Army and Air Force officers who would plan and lead the invasion. He stressed the importance of acting as one entity as the only way to ensure success.[98] Integral to success was air support. The system in Normandy was ostensibly the same as

that used in North Africa and had proven sufficiently adaptable to different circumstances. The weak link was the overly complex air chain of command the Allies created that only increased the frictions between Montgomery and the Airmen. The bad feeling that had developed in the Western Desert would come to a head in Normandy where relationships between the commanders would be critical to overall success.

Sinclair and Portal championed ACM Sir Trafford Leigh-Mallory as the commander of the Allied Expeditionary Air Forces (AEAF) for the invasion. Coningham, as Commander of the British Tactical Air Force and along with his American counterpart, General Brereton, would be placed under the command of Leigh-Mallory. Heavy bombers would be required to support the invasion but both the head of RAF Bomber Command, ACM Sir Arthur Harris, and his USAAF counterpart, General Carl Spaatz, refused to work, even temporarily, under Leigh-Mallory for the invasion, but both agreed to work under Tedder, who was now Eisenhower's deputy. Churchill's opinion was that all invasion-related air power should be placed under the command of Tedder, describing him as the 'aviation lobe' of Eisenhower's brain, who 'must be allowed to use all Air Forces permanently or temporarily assigned to Overlord' as he thinks best.[99] Portal accepted this proposal, leaving Leigh-Mallory as the emasculated head of the AEAF and Coningham as commander of the Tactical Air Force. It was agreed that Coningham was the man with whom Montgomery should plan air matters. Montgomery would exploit the confused air command chain to his advantage over the coming months by dealing with Leigh-Mallory for bomber support and Coningham's subordinate, Broadhurst, for tactical air matters, thus avoiding having to deal with Coningham.

Personal Relationships

The confused Allied air command and control arrangement would heighten tensions amongst the senior British Commanders. Leigh-Mallory was an awkward character whose aloofness and distance from others was often mistaken for arrogance or, in the case of the OVERLORD team, ineffectiveness. He had 'no sand in his boots'[100], he was not part of the old North Africa team. Tedder had a low opinion of Leigh-Mallory, 'I told Leigh-Mallory that he was in danger of leading the Army up the garden path with his sweeping assurances of help…I felt that the limitations of air support on the battlefield were not sufficiently understood; neither was the full scope of the role of air outside the battle area sufficiently appreciated by the Army, or by Leigh-Mallory.'[101] Coningham's seems to have been formed possibly as a result of Leigh-Mallory's scheming against Air Marshal Sir Keith Park, a fellow New Zealander, during the Battle of Britain. Montgomery initially viewed him as a 'gutless bugger' but this changed after Leigh-Mallory attempted to secure the bomber support that Montgomery wanted to break the deadlock around Caen: 'When planning in England, we did not think very highly of Leigh-Mallory, but we all agree now that he is the only 'Air-Lord' who will do anything to help the army win the war; and he is completely genuine and sincere.'[102]

Whilst conventional thinking is that Montgomery was at fault in the dissention with the Airmen, D'Este asserts that nothing could be further from the truth. Whilst there was clear

animosity between all three, Montgomery realised fully the vital requirement for maximum co-operation between air and ground forces. He wrote to his three Army commanders before the invasion stressing to them the importance of co-ordinating their activity with their Air Forces. Indeed, Montgomery's direction to General Sir Miles Dempsey in 1944 was that the 'Army HQ must never plan a move of HQ without first consulting Air HQ. The deciding factor in the location of the Main Army will be whether it will suit Air HQ,'[103] but Montgomery was hardly ever at Main, preferring instead the solitude of his Tactical HQ. Wing Commander Scarman (later Lord Scarman), Tedder's senior staff officer, wrote on 22 June 1944 'the principal which worked in the Mediterranean – of the Army and Air commanders living together had been allowed to lapse.'[104] This was due partly to poor communications at Montgomery's HQ but also because there were few Allied airfields in Normandy at this stage. Despite his protestations to the contrary, Montgomery seems to have done little on a personal level to remedy these poor personal relationships.

Tedder and Montgomery worked together on the planning for D-Day in the spirit of co-operation and relative harmony, but after the invasion, relations fell apart again and Tedder became Montgomery's most vocal critic at SHAEF.[105] Remarks about Montgomery revealed the bad feeling in the British command network. Tedder said to one US General 'It is bad form for officers to criticise each other, so I shall!' He added, 'He is a little fellow of average ability who has had such a build-up that he thinks of himself as Napoleon. He is not.'[106] Tedder may not have liked Montgomery, but he was too wise and good to deliberately misrepresent him and in so doing endanger the lives of thousands of men and 'put in jeopardy the whole war'[107] – he was far above such personal vanity.[108]

Tedder brought Coningham into the Normandy team partly due to his experience but also because he knew how to ensure that Montgomery made best use of the Air Forces.[109] Coningham knew how to influence Montgomery and get him to change his mind, having viewed first hand his reluctance to take advice from others; it needed to be his idea. This rapidly became increasingly difficult, as relations between the two men deteriorated. Forrest C Pogue, the American historian, interviewed Coningham after the war and found him the 'bitterest critic of Montgomery I have heard speak.'[110] Hastings argues that Coningham's refusal to work with Montgomery and the Army was astonishing and it is remarkable that he was not sacked.[111] Coningham's reputation with Montgomery's staff was equally not good. Officers at Montgomery's Tactical Headquarters such as Major Johnny Henderson regarded Coningham as a 'snake in the grass and plays dirty games behind the Army's back. He will not co-operate. This is not helped by the fact that Coningham and Leigh-Mallory do not get on'.[112] Brigadier Charles Richardson, Montgomery's Liaison Officer at Stanmore, thought Coningham 'was a bad man, a Prima Donna….frightfully affected, hot on choosing his next Chateau! We distrusted him completely and I was with him with the Air Barons at Stanmore, I recognised him as a bastard…'[113]. Montgomery described Coningham as 'a very jealous person and I am beginning to feel he is anti-Army….not a loyal member of the team… untrustworthy, no-one likes him. I thought Tedder was alright, but from what the CIGS said

I have now certain doubts.'[114] Montgomery's supporters warned him about the Airmen but also stoked the situation; James Grigg, Secretary of State for War, was one of them, he wrote, 'those bastard Yanks are beginning to crab Montgomery. It is an absolute outrage because I know for a fact that the plan is working out as he designed it from the beginning. But our own journalists fell into the (SHAEF) trap and I am afraid that some of our own jealous airmen help too.' A few days later he wrote to Montgomery 'I am convinced that Coningham is continuing to bad name you and the Army and that what he says in this kind is easily circulated at SHAEF via Tedder….' 'You will have no comfort until you have demanded and obtained the removal of Coningham from any connection with OVERLORD whatever. He is a bad and treacherous man and will never be other than a plague to you.'[115]

Amongst this acrimonious backdrop, the key appointment of Commanding Officer 83 Expeditionary Air Group, that provided 21st Army Group with tactical air support, was Broadhurst. Unwanted by Coningham, who was powerless to prevent his appointment,[116] Broadhurst had established an unusually happy rapport with Montgomery in the Desert. In contrast to Coningham, Broadhurst set up his Headquarters in Normandy soon after the invasion being an almost daily and popular visitor to Tactical Headquarters. Yet, even to him 'Montgomery became more and more isolated.'[117] Broadhurst considered the poor relationship between Coningham and Montgomery as counterproductive and tried to lessen the impact wherever possible. Whilst his good relationship with Montgomery was hugely beneficial to the campaign, it did bring him into conflict with his own Service,[118] being greeted on one occasion by Tedder with the comment, 'How's your bloody Army friend today?' His reply was, 'Well, what do you expect him to be, my enemy? It's difficult enough when he's supposed to be friendly.'[119]

In Normandy, Coningham never grasped that he was no longer Montgomery's equal as had been the case in the desert; therefore, it is hardly surprising that Montgomery turned to Broadhurst whom he could control. Interestingly, in the post-Normandy honours list there was not a single RAF one star from AEAF, whilst there were many Army officers. This caused considerable resentment. Montgomery pushed for a knighthood for Broadhurst, but Tedder and the Air Ministry resisted this preferring instead to keep the nomination for a later award.[120]

Deepening Cracks

Within the first few weeks after the invasion new cracks in relations had appeared. The ability to capture or construct airfields in Normandy had been a deciding factor in selecting it as the invasion point. These airfields were considered vital as the relatively short range of the RAF's fighter-bombers meant that best use was not being made of them whilst they operated from England.[121] Tedder wanted the aircraft operating from Normandy as soon as possible and to get Coningham in there to control them for obvious reasons. But, according to Lieutenant-Colonel Christopher Dawney, Montgomery's Military Assistant, Montgomery deliberately gave the RAF 'a totally false impression….as to when he was going to get those airfields, south of Caen'. Once in Normandy, Montgomery 'didn't give a damn about those

airfields.'[122] Lamb asserts that there was even the use of a second 'unrealistic' phase map to assuage the concerns of the RAF. When the campaign faltered around Caen, Montgomery's critics used his promise of airfields and the map as ammunition to go after him.[123] After the war, Tedder confirmed to Liddell-Hart that the understanding at SHAEF was for Montgomery to push right through which, '…would at long last have begun to give us the airfield country south of Caen, which had been one of the original objectives.'[124]

Tedder, Coningham and Leigh-Mallory were increasingly frustrated and apprehensive with Montgomery's slow progress around Caen, but so too was Eisenhower and the press. Coningham's hostility was becoming an obsession and was increasingly unhelpful at this crucial time.[125] Leigh-Mallory had turned down Montgomery's plan to use the British 1st Airborne Division to break the deadlock around Caen and there was strong criticism from Coningham who 'asked for a greater sense of urgency from the Army and a frank admission that their operations were not running according to plan.'[126] Tedder has been accused of a vendetta against Montgomery following his failure to capture airfields. Whilst this is doubtful, it is certainly true that he felt that Montgomery was not aggressive enough and should either change his tactics or be replaced by someone more determined. When Operation Goodwood failed to break the deadlock around Caen, even after the use of heavy bombers in support of the Army, Tedder felt he finally had what he needed to get Montgomery sacked and he urged Eisenhower to replace him.[127] Tedder clearly overstepped the mark when he told Eisenhower that the British Chiefs of Staff would not object to Montgomery's removal. Butcher, Eisenhower's diary keeper, thought that the British media had made 'Big Chief Wind' fireproof, even in the face of a disaster.[128] Towards the end of June 1944, Montgomery was up to his old trick of blaming others for his failures. He sent CIGS a telegram outlining his concerns with the Air Barons 'jealousies' and that due to them, he might not get full value from the air power available to him. 'Mary Coningham spends all his time trying to get Leigh-Mallory to trip up and putting spokes in his wheels; he would prefer to do this rather than winning the war quickly; he does know his stuff, but he is a most dangerous chap.'[129]

Once again external factors played their role in widening the rift at the top. The British press understandably continued to play up Montgomery's role in Normandy, as the country had its pride at stake. What seems to have annoyed Tedder most was that the need for a hero was getting in the way of the truth and more importantly winning the war as quickly as possible. When Bradley finally broke out of Normandy, Montgomery took more than his fair share of the glory and was encouraged to do so by Brooke, the BBC and the British press. This boasting was 'laying the seeds of a grave split between us and the Americans,' wrote Tedder to Trenchard on 5 September 1944. 'At the moment they are being extraordinarily reticent and generous (due in no small measure to Eisenhower's very fine attitude over the whole business) but sooner or later they will come into the open and if the British public believe all that they are being told now, they will not like being told a very different story by the Americans. It is a dangerous situation and may become a tragic one.'[130] Fervent reporting in the British media had led to a wide-held belief that Eisenhower was the political head of a Montgomery-led

invasion. Eisenhower had long tired of this, having written in his diary on 7 February 1944 that 'the bold British Commanders of the Mediterranean were Sir Andrew Cunningham and Tedder.'[131] Once again, Montgomery was unable to admit that events since D-Day had not gone according to plan as Brigadier Ford, Chief J2 at SHAEF noted in a conversation with Chester Willmott.[132] With the criticism in the press mounting against Montgomery and for the sake of Allied unity, Eisenhower inadvertently assisted with the Montgomery legend by holding a press conference in London to take the pressure off Montgomery. With Tedder next to him, he described Montgomery as 'one of the great soldiers of the war.' Churchill subsequently declared, 'Nothing could have been more straightforward, courteous and fair to us.' The next day, the press had their news story, Churchill had made Montgomery a Field Marshal[133] in a rather forlorn attempt to retain control of all the invasion Land forces, something that would not happen and ultimately became a dent to British prestige.

So What for ALI?

Throughout the remainder of the campaign the increasingly cool personal relationships between Montgomery and the Airmen had a strong impact on its overall conduct.[134] Despite this, relations at the operational level between the two Services were good and worked well to the extent that the soldier on the ground did not notice anything was wrong. An Army report in late 1944 stated: 'the difficulties are usually greatest at the higher levels and decrease at the lower end of the scale. At the first point where practical executive action has to be taken, the difficulties begin to disappear, and from there downwards, in nine cases out of ten, there is no problem.'[135] The Army still had several grievances about the RAF's commitment to and involvement in air support. The main one was that the aircraft that had been developed for use in 1943 – 45 were fighter-bombers, not dedicated ground attack, which meant that they lacked the necessary range. This could have been resolved if the Army had captured the airfield country in Normandy, something that the RAF was only too aware of and angry that the Army had failed to do. Equally, the RAF felt that the Army still wanted the air force to do its job for it. This frustration came to the fore during the rapid breakout and advance from Normandy. Tedder told Eisenhower that the air force would do all it could to support the Army, but he insisted that 'Air could not, and must not, be turned on thus glibly and vaguely in support of the Army, which would never move unless prepared to fight its way with its own weapons.'[136]

It soon became apparent that without the air force, Montgomery's armies would not break out of Normandy.[137] The key to making air power work in support of the Army was Broadhurst. Broadhurst felt that Coningham's anti-Montgomery vehemence adversely affected air operations and that too much emphasis was placed on the capture of ground for airfields, regarding it as nice to have, but that 'I never felt myself short of any airplanes; we could call on enormous reinforcements if we wanted them.'[138] In Normandy, co-ordination between Broadhurst and Dempsey was extremely effective and remained that way for the rest of the campaign.[139] The Germans viewed Allied tactical air power as particularly effective, instilling terror in them. Despite this, Brigadier Richardson, noted that the lack of Mediterranean

experienced staff officers along with the 'unhelpful influence' of Coningham meant that Tactical Air Support 'co-operation was ineffective.'[140]

Conclusion

There is no question that there was indeed a breakdown in relations between Montgomery on one side and Tedder and Coningham on the other. Montgomery seems to have had poor relations with every other senior Allied Commander in the war, but it was his split with the Airmen that was arguably the most infamous. This split was undoubtedly shaped and influenced by their personalities and egos. Montgomery and Coningham had similar egos but different personalities; both craved fame, public recognition and adoration and when denied this sulked. Coningham's flamboyant personality and Montgomery's puritanical nature meant that no matter how much recognition they received, it was highly likely that a split was always going to happen. The split between Tedder and Montgomery is more surprising and less to do with ego and personality and more with professional ability. Tedder did not think that Montgomery was up to the job of being an aggressive attacking commander who could beat the Germans. He was bored with the Army moaning about air support, when they were clearly incapable of performing their own role. However, Tedder could be accused of losing sight of the national perspective and failed to see the consequences of sacking Montgomery in Normandy. The context of the time is also important to understanding the deteriorating personal relationships. The British Army had a terrible war until victory at El-Alamein, whilst the other two Services had all had great successes; therefore, the opportunity to celebrate the Army's success was never going to be missed by Churchill or the British press. This was necessary for several reasons, the British had to demonstrate that the Army could beat the Germans; Churchill wanted to remain in power and the Army needed to have its morale raised, something that Tedder had identified in July 1942. The uncontrolled nature of this recognition had ramifications for the rest of the war and beyond. The Establishment was at fault for singling Montgomery out for gratuitous attention, and failing to control the monster they had created.

So, what impact did ego, poor relationships and personality actually have on the delivery of ALI in the Western Desert and Normandy? In the Western Desert it is obvious that personal relationships were vital for the effective delivery of ALI. This is because of the level that the three men were at and the autonomy they had to prosecute the war in the Western Desert in the way they thought best. These personal relationships were heavily influenced by each individual's ego and personality. Fortunately, after El-Alamein there was never another major battle where just these three came together to plan and execute it, so the full impact of their deteriorating personal relationships on the delivery of ALI was never exposed. The scale of subsequent operations helped to cushion the impact of the poor personal relationships between the three men.

Once in Europe, the impact of the egos, personalities and poor personal relationships between the three men on ALI was lessened. Whilst their personal relationships grew steadily worse,

there were sufficient men below them who were the practical applicators of ALI who had good personal relationships to make it work, although their roles were made more difficult by the animosity between their superiors. The scale of the invasion, the levels of command that the three men were now working at, combined with the fact that there were Commanders above them meant that the impact of their poor personal relationships would be felt at the Strategic level with the potential to have more far reaching consequences than just on ALI. Montgomery's ability to annoy the Americans certainly acted against the image of the British Army post Second World War.[141]

Notes

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