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**Me, myself and I: How important were personality, ego and personal relationships to  
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## **Abstract**

Air Land Integration (ALI) in World War II was forged in the Western Desert by the British Army and Royal Air Force. It was instrumental to British victory in the Western Desert and Allied 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 the time of the Normandy invasion. This paper examines how important ego, personality and personal relationships were in making ALI so successful. It concludes that while they were key for the successful introduction of ALI in the Western Desert, they were less so 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 and that other men had taken over the day-to-day responsibility for the effective delivery of ALI and they had good personal relationships.

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## HOW IMPORTANT WERE PERSONALITY, EGO AND PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS TO BRITISH AIR LAND INTEGRATION IN THE WESTERN DESERT AND NORMANDY?

*'We've been taken for suckers by Montgomery!'*<sup>1</sup> 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".'*<sup>2</sup> Air Marshal Coningham to journalists, 1944.

*'I readily admit that the decision to become the focus of their attention was personally enjoyable to me.'*<sup>3</sup> 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 Second World War for Britain. It gave them an advantage over the Germans who had markedly better land and air equipment. The importance of an experienced well-functioning team is as important as good equipment, if not more so, as the record book for 24<sup>th</sup> Armoured Brigade noted in 1943, it was 'a sad waste the circumstances compel breaking up the trained team. It is more vital to success than the equipment – and not so easily produced.'<sup>4</sup> The co-ordination of the two Services was borne out of much bitter experience in the Western Desert and was very dependent on the personal relationships of the Army and Air Force commanders of the time. 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 that it did and also ensured that it never achieved its full potential. It brought Britain its first significant land victory of the war at El-Alamein. It was all the more remarkable then that these three went from having very good relations to open hostility by the time Caen was captured in 1944. The three quotes above, one from each of the principal characters in this paper, highlight some of the tensions that helped define their personal relationships with each other and influenced the rest of the war for the Allies. These three commanders were central to the success from North Africa to Normandy and the common factor linking them was the importance that they placed on ALI, a battle winning capability.

Whilst the personalities and egos of Tedder, Coningham and Montgomery were influential to their personal relationships with each other and with other Senior Allied Commanders, the impact on ALI was important at a certain level and then minimal beyond that, instead having a more strategic

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<sup>1</sup> W. Breuer, *Feuding Allies: The Private Wars of the High Command* (New York: J Wiley & Sons, 1995), 199.

<sup>2</sup> A. Stewart, *Six of Montgomery's Men* (Barnsley: Pen & Sword, 2011), 170.

<sup>3</sup> C. Barnett, *The Desert Generals* (London: Kimber, 1960), 251

<sup>4</sup> N. Barr, *Pendulum of War: The Three Battles of El Alamein* (London: Johnathan Cape, 2004), 412.

impact as these commanders moved up the rank structure away from the ALI coalface. In the Western Desert it was important, as they were the key individuals with autonomy to make decisions. For the invasion of Normandy it was less so, as they had all been promoted, things were on a much bigger scale and they were no longer the people at the top; there were others senior in rank to them sufficiently close to directly influence events. Equally, the scale of operations in Normandy meant that the impact of these poor personal relationships was cushioned by others below them who had good relationships, so that the man on the ground still got what he wanted.

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 in forging ALI in the Western Desert before moving on to highlight key aspects of each man's personality which will help understand why they reacted to circumstances and interacted with each other in the way that they did. It will argue that multiple external factors, such as professionalism, experience, the media, honours and awards as well as political manipulation helped shaped egos and influenced personal relationships and partly explains the subsequent breakdown in 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 due to the level of command they were at. The second part will look at the impact of ego and personality on the personal relationships between the three commanders in Normandy, now at different levels in the rank structure. It will build upon part one's findings to demonstrate that whilst relationships between the three commanders were poor and steadily deteriorating, they did not affect the practical delivery of ALI in Normandy. The paper will show that once again many external factors, intrinsically the same as in the Western Desert just on a bigger scale, played a key role in influencing the egos, personalities and personal relationships of the three men and that it was their seniority that meant their impact on ALI was greatly reduced.

The legend of Montgomery is huge and he arouses great passion. There have been many books written on him, many of which contain biases as many of the authors were present during the events that their books cover. Importantly, both Montgomery and Churchill were keen to present the truth in their own image, as Tedder states, 'I am afraid that throughout my experience during the last war one could see the evidence being very carefully and most astutely adjusted to conform with the "Gospel"'. It was quite early in the desert campaign that I first observed this process in operation, and I early came to the conclusion that it was highly improbable that the truth would ever emerge.<sup>5</sup> As such, it has been necessary to ensure that any biases identified are suitably accounted for in any analysis. There is a wealth of information on Montgomery, which in itself tells a tale, whilst there is considerably less on either Tedder or Coningham and this has proved a limitation in any analysis.

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<sup>5</sup> LHA, LH1/679 Liddell Hart to Tedder 2 January 1963.

For the purposes of this paper, ALI is defined as air activity in support of the British Army. The Western Desert is bounded as the period from the assumption of Tedder as Commander in Chief RAF Middle East Command in June 1941 through to the expulsion of the Axis from North Africa. Operation Husky, the invasion of Sicily has not been included as there is not the word count to conduct the depth of analysis required. Likewise, the analysis of the Normandy campaign is limited from early 1944 to the capture of Caen. The individuals that will be examined in detail will be limited to Tedder, Coningham and Montgomery, but the influence of others on the egos, personalities and personal relationships of the three will be explored as necessary. This paper does not examine the relationships between American and British Commanders, nor does it look at the effectiveness of ALI or the British Army in Normandy as there is insufficient word-count to provide the depth of analysis.

### **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. The British Army under General Wavell and then General Auchinleck worked with the RAF to ensure that their actions on the battlefield were co-ordinated sufficiently for success against the Italians, despite both Services operating out of separate headquarters. Official reports after the conclusion of Operation Compass highlighted the way that airmen and soldiers worked together “in close co-operation with arms of the Service other than their own.”<sup>6</sup> Wavell highlighted the “magnificent support given by the Royal Air Force”, stressing how well the Services had worked together to achieve success.<sup>7</sup> The arrival of Rommel in North Africa in 1941 led to a series of British defeats, forcing them to retreat from their earlier gains. This retreat was marred by bitter recriminations and in-fighting between the army and air force commanders over the use of air power. The root of this animosity lay with vocal cadre in the Army that believed that it needed a dedicated Army Air Force at the beck and call of the Divisional or Corps commander that could only be used by them, as the Germans had employed against the British in the Battle of France. This stance by the Army hardened the RAF’s position which was that this solution was impractical, due to the numbers of aircraft involved, but also reflected the RAF’s pre-war attitude that air support was not a proper use of air power. There is also the suggestion that there was concern about the RAF’s independent status, and the fact that senior airmen felt that the RAF was increasingly being asked to do what they felt was the army’s job; close air support was regarded as a misuse of air power. The RAF was more focussed on interdicting the logistics chain rather than

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<sup>6</sup> D. Hall, *Strategy for Victory: The Development of British Tactical Air Power, 1919-1943* (Westport, CT: Praeger Security International, 2008), 78.

<sup>7</sup> *ibid.*, 77.

destroying tanks, which helps to explain why the British arrived at the system of close air support that they did.<sup>8</sup>

The victories and defeats of 1941 revealed many issues to resolve. The RAF was woefully unprepared for mobile operations and unskilled at constructing temporary airfields away from their permanent ones in Egypt.<sup>9</sup> The Army failed to notify the RAF of their up-to-date locations, thus calls for assistance were hampered by an inability to distinguish friend from foe on the ground. Some of these lessons were easily rectified by providing equipment, others would take time and experience. In response to this criticism by the army, Tedder insisted that all planning for air operations for Operation Battleaxe be done in complete agreement with the army's wishes, even if the end results were questionable. Even then, defeat still brought accusations from the army of failure by the RAF despite little evidence of them calling on RAF support.<sup>10</sup> Tedder's view of the situation 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".' He finished by saying that the 'truth is beginning to penetrate, but it is tragic that it has been necessary for the Hun to drive it home.'<sup>11</sup> The solution to the ALI problem was solved largely by Tedder who re-organised the RAF's aircraft in the Western Desert into the Desert Air Force (DAF).<sup>12</sup> During July - September 1941 a great deal of ALI experimentation took place under the direction of Coningham who had arrived in July at Tedder's request. One of Tedder's first directions to Coningham was for him to get together with his Army counterpart and establish a joint HQ, which he did, establishing a fundamental aspect of the fighting ability of the two Services for the rest of the war.

Additionally, Tedder proposed to Auchinleck that an inter-Service committee be formed to review the delivery of air support in the Western Desert. The result of this committee's work and Coningham's trials was the policy of Direct Air Support. The Army still wanted protection against German dive-bombers and the situation reached an impasse, which was only resolved when Churchill issued direction in September 1941 that 'ground forces must not expect 'as a matter of course' to be protected against aerial attack' (Chief of the Air Staff, Marshal of the Royal Air Force Sir Charles Portal had convinced him by relaying Tedder's arguments). '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.'<sup>13</sup> Key to the provision of Direct Air Support was the implementation of a joint command structure called Air

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<sup>8</sup> I. Gooderson, *Air Power at the Battlefield: Allied Close Air Support 1943-45* (London: Frank Cass, 1998), 35.

<sup>9</sup> Hall, *Strategy for Victory*, 79.

<sup>10</sup> Royal Air Force, *AP3235 Air Support*, (London: Air Ministry, 1955), 52.

<sup>11</sup> V. Orange, *Tedder: Quietly in Command*, (London: Frank Cass, 2004), 133.

<sup>12</sup> Gooderson, *Air Power*, 25.

<sup>13</sup> V. Orange, *Churchill and His Airmen* (London: Grub Street, 2013), 176.

Support Cells. These cells consisted of Army and RAF personnel whose role was to ensure that direct air support was provided when and where requested. The RAF in the Middle East was now organised to support the Army and Navy in the way that they wanted whilst also completing its own missions. By early 1942 a totally new concept called tactical air power had been forged. The process for requesting and allocating aircraft was streamlined and, once the UK-trained No 2 Army Air Support Control arrived, the process for the rest of the war was virtually established. This new system proved very effective and reduced the time from request to arrival of air support to approximately 30 minutes.<sup>14</sup>

Operation Crusader, launched in November 1941 to raise the siege of Tobruk, was the first test of the new system; it was also the first time that the Army and Air Headquarters were co-located. Whilst initially successful, Rommel counter-attacked but was checked by a force of British armour supported by the RAF. 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.'<sup>15</sup> The new system required some adjustments after its first test in battle. Whilst many issues could be dealt with by training, the problem of combat identification meant that the RAF was not called to support the Army in destroying a large part of Rommel's armoured forces near Gazala. Until the Army resolved the issue of combat identification, RAF operations in their near vicinity would be severely curtailed.<sup>16</sup>

Rommel launched his next offensive on 26 May which 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 a defeat.<sup>17</sup> Following the near disaster at El Alamein, Churchill and Brooke visited the Middle East to see for themselves what was wrong. Tedder was, by now, in Churchill's good books and the Prime Minister sought his views on what the problem was. They had an hour alone together and Tedder's opinion 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.' Field Marshal Jan Smuts arrived a few days later and Tedder told him, knowing full well that this would be relayed to Churchill, 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.'<sup>18</sup> Auchinleck was replaced with Alexander whilst Montgomery was appointed as commander of the Eighth Army.

Montgomery brought with him an immediate and infectious attitude towards winning the war and instilled a sense of purpose and direction in the Army.<sup>19</sup> Tedder and Coningham were impressed with him, sharing many views on joint command but also on the importance of air power in the land

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<sup>14</sup> Gooderson, *Air Power*, 26.

<sup>15</sup> Hall, *Strategy for Victory*, 112.

<sup>16</sup> *ibid.*, 113.

<sup>17</sup> *ibid.*, 136.

<sup>18</sup> Orange, *Churchill and His Airmen*, 183.

<sup>19</sup> Hall, *Strategy for Victory*, 137.

battle. In the run up to the second battle of El Alamein the land and air commanders worked hand-in-glove on the plan. Montgomery's main contribution to the system of air support was his endorsement of the need for close co-operation with the DAF at all stages of planning and execution of a campaign. This was followed in early 1943 with his pamphlet entitled "Air Power in the Land Battle", although this had been effectively published in September 1941 when Coningham issued the first Army-RAF directive on Direct Air Support.<sup>20</sup> With this endorsement, the final piece of the airmen's theory on how air could best integrate with land to achieve success on the battlefield was put in place at the battle of Alam Halfa in September 1942. This battle was the culmination of over a year's experimentation and refinement, but the close working relationship between the two commanders and their Staff was crucial. Immediately after this success, Montgomery and Coningham set about planning the battle of El Alamein. Here, the principles of air involvement in the land battle were put into practice and 'its level of performance greatly exceeded that of all previous air-land operations.'<sup>21</sup> Such was the success of the DAF model for air support that in 1942 Churchill concluded that once the Allies had a foothold in Europe, 'the system and employment of the Royal Air Force should conform to that which proved so successful in the Western Desert'.<sup>22</sup>

### **The Importance of Personal Relationships**

Whilst the British in the Western Desert had arrived at a successful model for ALI how much of this 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 progress was being made on ALI. Despite this progress 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.<sup>23</sup> Bucking this attitude was Montgomery. Upon arrival in the Desert, Montgomery was quick to embrace the concepts espoused by Tedder and Coningham and in particular ensured the co-location of Army and RAF Headquarters, which was an encouraging start, but Tedder had told Coningham almost a year earlier to get together with his Army counterpart and establish a joint headquarters, which had happened with vary degrees of success depending on the Army Commander at the time.

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.'<sup>24</sup> Indeed, Montgomery appeared to meet Tedder's

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<sup>20</sup> V. Orange, *Coningham*, (London: Methuen, 1990), 80.

<sup>21</sup> Hall, *Strategy for Victory*, 140.

<sup>22</sup> Orange, *Churchill and His Airmen*, 176.

<sup>23</sup> Hall, *Strategy for Victory*, 132.

<sup>24</sup> Orange, *Churchill and His Airmen*, 186.

requirements for the next Army Commander as being 'alive and young, someone with fire.'<sup>25</sup> 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.'<sup>26</sup>

Montgomery endorsed the role that air power had to play 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, and in an advance the location of airfields will influence the scope and stage-management of the operations; forward airfields have to be fought for, and repaired, so that the leading troops can be given adequate air support' and that 'on certain occasions you cannot expect 100% clear-sky; you then disperse and adjust dispositions accordingly. But when you fight you must concentrate and then you want good air cover.'<sup>27</sup> The close co-operation between Montgomery and Coningham was as important to victory at Alam Halfa as the system that had been devised.<sup>28</sup> On 3 September, Montgomery wrote to Coningham praising the RAF's role in the victory. '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 replied congratulating him on winning the battle 'in such a flawless manner'.<sup>29</sup> Both Tedder and Montgomery were also close during the battles up to second El Alamein. By the time that the Allies reached Tunis in 1943, relations between Montgomery and the airmen had soured perceptibly. Arguably, the root causes for this lie in the personality types of the three men and the way their personalities were influenced by external factors.

## Personalities

Montgomery was a determined and aggressive individual whose personality was the result of an emotionally deprived childhood.<sup>30</sup> He was described as having few real friends in the Army and became even more of a loner following the early death of his wife. Basil Liddell-Hart in October 1941 in a conversation with General Sir Frederick Pike described Montgomery as one of the UK's 'toughest fighting commanders', following his move to command 12 Corps in Kent<sup>31</sup> a key point for any invasion. Later that year, Liddell-Hart wrote in his notes on Army Command appointments that

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<sup>25</sup> Orange, *Tedder*, 181.

<sup>26</sup> *ibid.*, 185.

<sup>27</sup> S. Brooks, *Montgomery and the Eighth Army* (London: The Bodley Head, 1991), 144.

<sup>28</sup> Hall, *Strategy for Victory*, 139.

<sup>29</sup> Orange, *Coningham*, 108.

<sup>30</sup> H. Cummins, *Mao, Hsiao, Churchill and Montgomery: Personal Values and Decision Making* (Sage Publications: Beverly Hills, CA, 1973), 57.

<sup>31</sup> LHA, LHII/1941 L-H talk with TP (General Sir Frederick Pike) October 5 1941.

Montgomery 'is certainly one of our most vigorous and "toughest" generals, if he has some of the defects of his qualities.'<sup>32</sup>

He was widely regarded as 'vain, egocentric, self-righteous and boastful'<sup>33</sup> and was viewed as naturally arrogant with War Office officials describing him as having a very shallow mind and using simple repetition to get his message across.<sup>34</sup> In August 1942, Tedder received a letter from Air Marshal Freeman, then very much in 'the know' of personalities. Freeman warned Tedder not to trust Montgomery, as 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.'<sup>35</sup>

Montgomery regarded himself as a military genius, but, he had more help and resources than any previous commander and never acted quickly. His desire to be seen as the perfect commander meant that he could not admit that he made mistakes and this was made worse by fame. 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.'<sup>36</sup> 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. In his diary, Montgomery gives the impression that it was all his idea to combine the RAF and Army command teams, saying, 'the Army was fighting its battle and the RAF was fighting its battle.' 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.<sup>37</sup> He did this with Auchinleck and Dorman-Smith, writing in his diary about Army-RAF co-operation before his arrival,

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 2<sup>nd</sup> Corps team in France to make space for his men. This caused great resentment amongst those sacked with General Lumsden, former Commanding Officer of X Corps, telling people back at the Cavalry Club in London what a shit Montgomery was.<sup>38</sup> Montgomery publically dismissed the efforts of the

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<sup>32</sup> *ibid.*, 20 November 1941 – notes on Command appointments.

<sup>33</sup> S. Bungay, *Alamein* (London: Aurum Press, 2002), 218-9.

<sup>34</sup> D. Irving, *War Amongst The Generals*. (London: Allen Lane, 1981), 42

<sup>35</sup> Orange, *Tedder*, 184.

<sup>36</sup> Orange, *Churchill and His Airmen*, 244.

<sup>37</sup> LHA, LH 687, comments on RW Thompson's manuscript for his book *A study of Field-Marshal The Viscount Montgomery of El Alamein*, 73.

<sup>38</sup> Bungay, *Alamein*, 219.

old Auchinleck team claiming that he totally changed their plans for fighting Rommel at El Alamein which would not have worked and just in time too, 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.'<sup>39</sup> 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. Good in defence, he was unable to emerge from this mind-set, Montgomery could not grasp Liddell-Hart's theory of 'expanding torrent'.<sup>40</sup>

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.'<sup>41</sup> Montgomery 'was intolerant of opinion which opposed his own.'<sup>42</sup> 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.'<sup>43</sup> Montgomery thought he was a plain man speaking the truth, to everyone else he was just arrogant, but often there was more than a grain a truth to what he said.

Despite this Montgomery was a person who saw the world in black and white. He was a very good leader who re-established the Eighth Army's belief in itself. He had an ability to simplify things until he arrived at one solution: the right one. He was very good at getting his message across to others in a simple and easy to understand manner.

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.'<sup>44</sup> Churchill's doctor, Sir Charles Wilson, said, (in the mistaken belief that Tedder's father was a Spiv), 'in the son the facets have been polished, but the hard stone is left.' Tedder was quite unlike any other officer he had met, with 'a quick mind and a sharp tongue. He admires Smuts, thinks he is a greater man than the Prime Minister and says so.'<sup>45</sup>

Tedder seems to have been widely regarded as one of the great unsung leaders of the war and appears to have been quite content with things that way. Churchill never felt at ease with Tedder<sup>46</sup> principally due to Tedder's calm personality. Over time he came to admire Tedder's qualities, even if he never liked him. Tedder's standing amongst his peers was immense. Following several

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<sup>39</sup> Brooks, *Montgomery and the Eighth Army*, 23-4.

<sup>40</sup> LHA, LH 687, BLH writing to RW Thompson on 20 Jan 1965 in response to Thompson's letter of 18 Jan 1965.

<sup>41</sup> Brooks, *Montgomery and the Eighth Army*, 88.

<sup>42</sup> Zuckerman, *Warlords to Apes 1904-46* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1978), 285.

<sup>43</sup> Hamilton, *Monty: 1942-44*, (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1983), 278.

<sup>44</sup> Orange, *Tedder*, 9.

<sup>45</sup> Orange, *Churchill and His Airmen*, 176.

<sup>46</sup> *ibid.*, 287.

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, all said they would resign if this happened; with Auchinleck saying 'for the good of the Army' he hoped that Churchill would not insist.<sup>47</sup> Harold Macmillan who joined Eisenhower's HQ in January 1943 as a political advisor wrote in February 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.<sup>48</sup>

Lord Zuckerman, the Zoologist, observed that Tedder had the blessed gift at meetings of not speaking unless he had something to say<sup>49</sup> and that he (as Deputy Commander for Normandy) would need all his qualities of 'patience, tact, cunning and political sense', together with Eisenhower's backing.<sup>50</sup> Hanson Baldwin, an American journalist, described Tedder in June 1943 as having 'a sharp and sometimes cutting humour, but he's a quiet man – one likely to go unnoticed. But not by history.'<sup>51</sup> Whilst 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.'<sup>52</sup> General Omar Bradley described Tedder as 'one of the United Kingdom's most outstanding men' and General Lauris Norstad (future head of USAFE) described him as having 'a very strong position with Americans, both in and out of the military establishment and he has, of course, the esteem and affection of his wartime associates. The remarkable thing is that he is not considered a foreigner when in this country. We regard him as one of the family.'<sup>53</sup> 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.'<sup>54</sup>

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'.<sup>55</sup> Whilst Hastings asserts that Tedder's arrogant self-assurance was matched only by Montgomery's.<sup>56</sup>

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

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<sup>47</sup> *ibid.*, 180.

<sup>48</sup> Orange, *Tedder*, 205.

<sup>49</sup> *ibid.*, 212.

<sup>50</sup> Orange, *Churchill and His Airmen*, 228.

<sup>51</sup> Orange, *Tedder*, 223.

<sup>52</sup> Orange, *Churchill and His Airmen*, 238.

<sup>53</sup> *ibid.*, 280.

<sup>54</sup> Murray, W. & A. Millett *A War to be Won: Fighting the Second World War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), 326.

<sup>55</sup> A. Horne, *The Lonely Leader: Monty 1944-1945*. London: Pan, 1995, 191.

<sup>56</sup> M. Hastings, *Overlord: D-Day and the Battle for Normandy 1944* (London: Pam Books, 1999), 268.

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.'<sup>57</sup> Tedder was particularly harsh with Coningham when the latter made the error of appearing to criticise, in public, the performance of American troops fighting the Germans in Tunisia. Tedder was also slow to forgive Coningham for the outburst, which could have had serious repercussions for the Anglo-American war effort in Europe, and wrote to Portal questioning Coningham's judgement.

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.<sup>58</sup> He possessed 'immense energy and rare powers of leadership,' was one of the chief architects of army-air cooperation, and was one of the outstanding air commanders of the war.<sup>59</sup> He had a talent for organisation, turning Tedder's ideas into practical reality as his success in the Western Desert and beyond showed. Eisenhower regarded him as 'impulsive, quick, earnest and sincere. He knows his job and under the British system of cooperation, performs it well.'<sup>60</sup>

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. He bullied Air Vice Marshal Broadhurst because he adapted some of Coningham's techniques and tried to discredit him whenever possible.<sup>61</sup> Coningham's ego and forceful and impatient nature could get the better of him and lead him to rash decisions as demonstrated by his robust, public spat with General Patton in 1943 in North Africa. 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.'<sup>62</sup> Even Tedder commented that Coningham was 'at times rather a Prima Donna.'<sup>63</sup> Coningham felt that Montgomery had stolen laurels away from himself and his air force after El Alamein. When Montgomery became a household name after El Alamein, things went wrong, as the ambitious Coningham felt slighted. From that point relations deteriorated to such an extent that Montgomery

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<sup>57</sup> A. Tedder, *With Prejudice: The War Memoirs of Marshal of The Royal Air Force Lord Tedder, GCB* (London: Cassell, 1966), 243.

<sup>58</sup> Orange, *Churchill and His Airmen*, 175.

<sup>59</sup> J. Terraine, *The Right of the Line: The Role of the RAF in World War Two* (Barnsley: Pen & Sword, 2010), 356.

<sup>60</sup> Orange, *Coningham*, 161.

<sup>61</sup> J. Haywood, "Air Marshal Sir Arthur Coningham: Desert Air Commander," in *Born to Lead: Portraits of New Zealand Commanders* eds. G. Harper and J. Haywood (Exsile: Auckland, 2003), 173-4.

<sup>62</sup> Hamilton, *Monty: 1942-44*, 200.

<sup>63</sup> Tedder, *With Prejudice*, 417.

would try and by-pass Coningham. This frustrated and aggrieved him even more leading to an even greater decline in their relationship.<sup>64</sup>

## Breakdown in Relationships

That there was a breakdown in relations between Montgomery on one side and Tedder and Coningham on the other is not disputed. The cause appears to be rooted in Montgomery's boastfulness that victory at El Alamein was all his, which Tedder and Coningham resented. 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, although sharing Tedder's views, appear 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 much more intellectually prepared for the war.<sup>65</sup>

Montgomery's ego was certainly starting to grow due to his success, but also due to the disproportionate praise heaped upon him; this was to have severe consequences for his personal relationships with Tedder and Coningham. In his diary, he claimed that from arrival in Africa he was given freedom of command, '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...'<sup>66</sup> On 27 March, after the battle of Mareth, Montgomery signalled Alexander and said '...action of my air in support of land battle has been quite magnificent throughout...'<sup>67</sup> 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.'<sup>68</sup> Montgomery appeared unaware of his poor relations with Tedder, but not with Coningham, describing Tedder as 'a brilliant airman on the big strategic side' and was also a 'delightful person' and Coningham as

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<sup>64</sup> C. D'Este, *Decision in Normandy* (New York: Konecky & Konecky, 1994), 218.

<sup>65</sup> CCA, BRNT 3/184 dated 12 March 1952.

<sup>66</sup> Brooks, *Montgomery and the Eighth Army*, 265.

<sup>67</sup> Hamilton, *Monty: 1942-44*, 200.

<sup>68</sup> *ibid.*, 252.

'...a dangerous man, being of a highly jealous nature and not to be trusted to "pull" in the team; he is out for himself.'<sup>69</sup>

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. The airmen were concerned 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 to launch a counter-attack. Both of them had seen Rommel quickly reverse Allied victories before when this had happened; yet, their advice was ignored. On 4 November Tedder went to see the situation for himself. He emphasised to Montgomery 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 to Tedder and Coningham stating 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. Where we should be if it had not been for Coningham's continual, tactful but persistent, advice to the soldiers I do not know, but I suspect that a 'slogging match' in the neighbourhood of Dhaba might still be going on.<sup>70</sup>

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!'<sup>71</sup> 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.'<sup>72</sup>

Rommel's retreat through Tunisia after El Alamein is described by some as a German Dunkirk. 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...<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Orange, *Coningham*, 170.

<sup>70</sup> *ibid.*, 119.

<sup>71</sup> CCA, GLWY 1/6, Montgomery's review of 'With Prejudice' Sunday Times 9 October 66.

<sup>72</sup> LHA, LH 687 comments to RW Thompson in the manuscript for his book *Churchill's Generals*, 80.

<sup>73</sup> A. Graeme-Evans, "Field Marshall Bernard Montgomery: A Critical Assessment," *The Australian Defence Force Journal*, May-June 1978, 53-54.

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.<sup>74</sup>

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 to believe, after so many defeats, that a smashing victory had been achieved. Liddell-Hart noted on 26-27 September that Lord Beaverbrook, a close confidant of Churchill's, was very critical of Montgomery's failure to capitalise on the opportunity for a crushing counterstroke,<sup>75</sup> which may have been indicative of the feeling at the higher level of Government. 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. It was Coningham who did not relentlessly pursue the retreating Germans, whilst at the same time asking for the Army to go forward and seize German airfields to stop the Luftwaffe from interfering with the RAF's operations.<sup>76</sup> 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.'<sup>77</sup> 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.'<sup>78</sup> The real reason why there was no pursuit was because the Army's armoured formations were unable to match their German foes.<sup>79</sup> Montgomery did not have confidence in his Army 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;...'<sup>80</sup> He did not know the capabilities of his commanders and how his supply system would work.<sup>81</sup> Liddell-Hart describes Alexander and Montgomery as our two best generals but neither an expert in mechanised warfare, 'nor very original in mind.'<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> C. McFetridge, "In Pursuit: Montgomery After Alamein," *The Australian Defence Force Journal*, March-April 1993, 29.

<sup>75</sup> LHA; LH II/1942/Pt 2 82 – dated 26 -27 September 1942.

<sup>76</sup> Hamilton, *Monty: 1942-44*, 24-5.

<sup>77</sup> LHA; LHII/1943 - 59 dated 29/9/43

<sup>78</sup> CCA. BRNT 3/184 dated 13 Jan 1959.

<sup>79</sup> Hamilton, *Monty: 1942-44*, 27.

<sup>80</sup> Bungay. *Alamein*. 144.

<sup>81</sup> M. Howard, "The Battle of El-Alamein," in *Al-Alamein Revisited: The Battle of Al-Alamein and its Historical Implications*, ed. J. Edwards (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 2000), 10.

<sup>82</sup> LHA; L-H II/1942/Part 2 78 Notes on Talk with Beaverbrook 23 September 1942.

## The Making of a National Hero

After Operation Crusader, the media had 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.'<sup>83</sup> 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, not entirely without justification, that the British Army did not know how to fight and win modern battles. He wrote 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<sup>84</sup> and, interestingly, a point that Tedder had made a year earlier.

Press reporting 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. Montgomery was very astute at courting the press and seems to have been quite happy to have walked away with all the glory, never giving credit where it was due, even in his memoirs. Journalists that had been excluded beforehand were actively encouraged soon after his arrival. 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."<sup>85</sup> Montgomery, like Coningham, craved publicity and recognition and deliberately developed a distinctive image.<sup>86</sup> 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.' Whilst 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.<sup>87</sup> This angered Coningham. His enjoyment of such occasions was apparent when Alexander invited Coningham to accompany him in his white Rolls Royce for the victory tour of Tunis.<sup>88</sup>

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.<sup>89</sup> Montgomery employed a personal press agent, Captain Keating, whose job was to control the photographers who took

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<sup>83</sup> Hall, *Strategy for Victory*, 120.

<sup>84</sup> *ibid.*, 120.

<sup>85</sup> Barnett, *Desert Generals*, 251.

<sup>86</sup> N. Barr, "High Command in the Desert," in *El Alamein and the Struggle for North Africa: International Perspectives from the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, ed. J. Edwards (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 2012), 211.

<sup>87</sup> Orange, *Coningham*, 125.

<sup>88</sup> *ibid.*, 154.

<sup>89</sup> Hamilton, *Monty: 1942-44*, 274.

pictures of Montgomery and was the brains behind the film 'Desert Victory', the hugely successful propaganda film centred around Montgomery. 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"'.<sup>90</sup> 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.<sup>91</sup> 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!<sup>92</sup>

Montgomery understood the importance of publicity to communicate to his troops and raise their morale. Following El Alamein, he issued a personal message to his troops ending, 'this achievement is probably without parallel in history.'<sup>93</sup> At home it was treated as the greatest victory since Waterloo allowing Britain to retain self-respect in the eyes of the US.<sup>94</sup> Montgomery became Britain's lucky mascot, many homes had a map of Egypt and on it was marked Montgomery's victorious advance from El Alamein; he symbolized the turning tide.<sup>95</sup> The Eighth Army began to view itself as an elite force. One man reported going up to a Sergeant from the Eighth Army and saying 'Hello, pleased to meet you. I am from the First Army,' the Sergeant replied, 'Well, you can go home now. The Eighth Army's arrived now.' 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.'<sup>96</sup> Montgomery was 'a gifted commander who understood the limitations of his troops and generally

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<sup>90</sup> *ibid*, 333-4.

<sup>91</sup> Bungay, *Alamein*, 214.

<sup>92</sup> F. De Guingand, *Generals at War* (Hodder and Stoughton, 1964), 96-97.

<sup>93</sup> Barnett, *Desert Generals*, 282.

<sup>94</sup> Howard, *El-Alamein*, 8-11.

<sup>95</sup> Graeme-Evans. *Field Marshal*, 50.

<sup>96</sup> Bungay, *Alamein*, 217.

refused to take risks that would expose their weaknesses.<sup>97</sup> He ensured that the Eighth Army never lost a battle, maintaining their morale as well as his reputation.<sup>98</sup> The Eighth Army believed in itself again, which was exactly what was required.<sup>99</sup>

Even on the medals there was elitism. Those who had served in the Eighth Army after 23 October 1942 received a bar to their Africa Star. This date was after Montgomery had assumed command and over a year after the establishment of the Army. This caused much bitterness and resentment that rumbled on well into the 1960s, with even Auchinleck requesting a reversal of the decision. When this was refused, Auchinleck replied with the criticism that there was 'a distinct feeling' that the events of the desert war before Montgomery's breakthrough had been 'deliberately ignored and depreciated, mainly for political reasons connected chiefly to the Prime Minister's prestige and the need to display him as the architect of victory.'<sup>100</sup>

Quite understandably, Montgomery was regarded by most of the old hands in the desert as an intolerable little man.<sup>101</sup> There was concern at the Allies' Algiers Headquarters that Montgomery was hogging the media limelight to the irritation of others who had also done the great things. Butcher, 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. This observation should be seen in the context of Montgomery telling others that Eisenhower's staff had never seen the battlefield, even during WWI they had been in Headquarters miles behind the front line.<sup>102</sup>

Whilst Montgomery was being actively courted by the Prime Minister, the British Media and others, Tedder appeared on the front cover of Time magazine in November 1942 under the heading 'Tedder of North Africa,' making him one of the few British officers known by face and name to the American public, Montgomery did not appear until 1943. The article was full of praise for Tedder and made Montgomery appear a supporting act to the airman.<sup>103</sup> 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 and reproductions of nine of Tedder's wartime sketches.<sup>104</sup> Whilst Montgomery's reaction to this is not known, it would appear doubtful that he would have taken it well.

Churchill's careful manipulation of the victory at El Alamein also needs to be seen in context. Churchill desperately needed success to keep him in office but also to demonstrate to the USA and

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<sup>97</sup> Murray, *A War to be Won*, 417.

<sup>98</sup> Bungay, *Alamein*, 218.

<sup>99</sup> Barr, *Pendulum of War*, 252.

<sup>100</sup> Bungay, *Alamein*, 217-8.

<sup>101</sup> Howard, *El-Alamein*, 8.

<sup>102</sup> Hamilton, *Monty: 1942-44*, 273.

<sup>103</sup> Orange, *Tedder*, 192.

<sup>104</sup> *ibid.*, 253.

the Empire that the British Army was not beaten.<sup>105</sup> 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 importance when it came to British war planning; 'lose Egypt and we lose the war.'<sup>106</sup> The RAF and Royal Navy had all had spectacular successes, including in North Africa, only the Army was a failure. As such, Churchill made a point of singling out Alexander and Montgomery for their role in beating the Germans.

'General Alexander, with his brilliant comrade and lieutenant, General Montgomery, has gained a glorious and decisive victory in what I think should be called the battle of Egypt. General Alexander and General Montgomery fought it with one single idea. They meant to destroy the armed force of the enemy and to destroy it at the place where the disaster would be most far-reaching and irrecoverable....'<sup>107</sup>

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.<sup>108</sup> There are alternative views on why Churchill was keen to promote Montgomery's success. In a letter from Thompson 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 Morton states,

'Montgomery got the Overlord job for several reasons. Largely because he had worked up the press over his 21<sup>st</sup> 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.'<sup>109</sup>

This view is reinforced in a letter dated 12 March 1959, from Dorman-Smith to Barnett stating that Churchill committed himself not only to Montgomery 'but to the whole Dunkirk 2<sup>nd</sup> Corps circus of Alan Brooke, Alexander, Montgomery, McCreery, the lot. I doubt if the old man realised to what he had sold himself, from then onwards each would cover up the others mistakes.'<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> D. Craig, "Bernard Law Montgomery: A Question of Competence." *Armor*, May-June (1992), 28.

<sup>106</sup> Barr, *Pendulum of War*, 197 - 199.

<sup>107</sup> W. Churchill, *Speech to Parliament 10 November 1942*,

<http://www.churchill-society-london.org.uk/EndoBegn.html> (accessed March 25, 2104).

<sup>108</sup> Barr, *High Command*, 216.

<sup>109</sup> LHA, LH687, Letter Thompson to L-H dated 17 May 1965.

<sup>110</sup> CCA. BRNT 3/184 dated 12 March 1952.

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 on the understanding that it should not be linked to El Alamein but for his years of 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 Tedder, real recognition was to come from other quarters such as Marshal of the Royal Air Force Lord Trenchard who wrote to Tedder saying, 'You were the power behind the whole operation.'<sup>111</sup> 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.'<sup>112</sup> 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 1942, '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.'<sup>113</sup> On 23 November 1942, Coningham was informed that he had got his knighthood. Trenchard wrote to Portal offering his congratulations on the honours 'at last' for the RAF in the Middle East. 'I am delighted that you have managed to get them through. I know how you must have felt at their omission when Alexander and Montgomery got their honours.'<sup>114</sup> 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 his ego and personality 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 he was annoying, he was bearable. Additionally, neither of them was so unprofessional as to allow something like Montgomery's ego and personality to interfere with the prosecution of the war. Once Tunis had fallen, the WDAF 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 again. 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,

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<sup>111</sup> Orange, *Tedder*, 192.

<sup>112</sup> *ibid*, 194.

<sup>113</sup> Orange, *Coningham*, 119.

<sup>114</sup> *ibid*, 124.

creative and totally unawed by Service orthodoxy.<sup>115</sup> 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 became Montgomery's favourite airman.<sup>116</sup>

It is the actions of Tedder and Coningham in gripping the Allies' air forces in North Africa that 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. There was little co-operation and co-ordination, none of the lessons that had been learnt in the Western Desert had been translated into training or doctrine in the UK or the USA. 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.<sup>117</sup> 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 the provision of air support to the Allies in this part of North Africa 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 the 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.'<sup>118</sup>

## 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.<sup>119</sup> Integral to this planning was the importance of air support. The system that was used in Normandy was ostensibly the same as that which the Allies had used in North Africa and had proven sufficiently adaptable as the situation required it. 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

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<sup>115</sup> Terraine, *Right of the Line*, 398.

<sup>116</sup> Orange, *Coningham*, 144.

<sup>117</sup> Orange, *Churchill and His Airmen*, 239.

<sup>118</sup> Orange, *Coningham*, 140.

<sup>119</sup> Gooderson, *Air Power*, 35-6.

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 Air Chief Marshal 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, Air Chief Marshal 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 on 29 February 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.<sup>120</sup> On 2 March, Portal accepted this proposal, leaving Leigh-Mallory as the emasculated head of the AEAF and Coningham as commander of the Tactical Air Force. Despite Montgomery and Leigh-Mallory being commanders of invasion land and air forces, it was agreed that Coningham was the man with whom Montgomery should plan air matters. Despite this, 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'<sup>121</sup> as the team that had assembled to plan the invasion viewed him, he was not part of the old North Africa team. Leigh-Mallory was not viewed very favourably by Tedder or Coningham. Tedder's view stems from his low opinion of Leigh-Mallory's professional knowledge, '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.'<sup>122</sup> 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

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<sup>120</sup> Orange, 234.

<sup>121</sup> Orange, *Churchill and His Airmen*, 232-3.

<sup>122</sup> Hastings, *Overlord*, 268.

support that Montgomery felt necessary to break his deadlock around Caen: 'it is very important that Leigh-Mallory should remain as the Air C-in-C. 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.'<sup>123</sup> Zuckerman's impartial view of the situation was:

Poor Leigh-Mallory, he could not have derived much pleasure or satisfaction from being Commander-in-Chief of the AEF. He did not stand a chance in the jungle, where commanders brought in from the Mediterranean knew all the call-signs, nor in the higher, more rarefied atmosphere where the Commanders of the heavy bombers mused about the destruction of Germany. His job seemed to me lonely and friendless.....I always felt that L-M bore himself with dignity in the adverse currents of the impossible situation to which he had been appointed. It simply was not his world.<sup>124</sup>

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.

I feel very strongly on the whole matter, and I know that we can achieve no real success unless each Army and its accompanying Air Force can weld itself into one entity...The two HQs have got to get themselves down side-by-side, and work together as one team; that is the only way. I wish the Army Commanders to give this matter their personal attention. There is much to be done and not too much time in which to do it. We must not merely pay lip service to a principle; we must put into practice the actual methods that will achieve success.<sup>125</sup>

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,'<sup>126</sup> but Montgomery was hardly ever at Main, preferring instead the solitude of his Tactical Headquarters. 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.'<sup>127</sup> 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. It

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<sup>123</sup> Horne, *Lonely Leader*, 235.

<sup>124</sup> Zuckerman, *Apes to Warlords*, 348-9.

<sup>125</sup> D'Este, *Decision in Normandy*, 221.

<sup>126</sup> Horne, *Lonely Leader*, 188.

<sup>127</sup> Orange, *Churchill and His Airmen*, 245.

seems highly likely that Montgomery now viewed himself as above such liaison and that he had army commanders to do this, he had assumed the status of a demi-god. Prior to D-Day, the major headquarters were all spread over the UK and Montgomery often went on fundraising tours around the UK rather than liaising with his peers, prompting one British General at Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force (SHAEF) to claim 'Montgomery does a lot of the personal publicity stuff, I don't believe he's a general at all, just a film star.'<sup>128</sup> His absence meant that the airmen had to deal with his Chief of Staff, De Guingand. This perceived slight created bad will towards the army in general and Montgomery in particular, hardly a promising start to a major campaign.<sup>129</sup> This was exacerbated on 4 June when Montgomery wanted to launch the invasion, bad weather or not. Air superiority was regarded as essential and the invasion was postponed for 48 hours. Montgomery's preparedness to attack without overwhelming air superiority not only went against one of his maxims, but also increased Tedder's frustration with him, his abilities and judgement.

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.<sup>130</sup> 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 used remarks used by Alexander to describe another General 'as a soldier, he is a good plain military cook.' He added, 'this remark applies absolutely - to Montgomery. 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.'<sup>131</sup> 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'<sup>132</sup> – he was far above such personal vanity.<sup>133</sup>

Tedder brought Coningham back from the Mediterranean as not only was he an experienced air commander but also because he knew Montgomery and could ensure that he made best use of the air forces.<sup>134</sup> 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.'<sup>135</sup> Hastings argues that Coningham's refusal to work with Montgomery and the army was astonishing and it is remarkable that he was not sacked.<sup>136</sup> 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

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<sup>128</sup> Breuer, *Feuding Allies*, 199.

<sup>129</sup> Gooderson, *Air Power*, 36.

<sup>130</sup> D'Este, *Decision in Normandy*, 79.

<sup>131</sup> Irving, *War Amongst The Generals*, 42.

<sup>132</sup> Zuckerman, *From Apes to Warlords*, 284.

<sup>133</sup> D'Este, *Decision in Normandy*, 396.

<sup>134</sup> *ibid*, 218.

<sup>135</sup> Horne, *Lonely Leader*, 190.

<sup>136</sup> Hastings, *Overlord*, 267.

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'.<sup>137</sup> 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...'<sup>138</sup>. 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.'<sup>139</sup> Montgomery had his supporters who 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.'<sup>140</sup>

Amongst this acrimonious backdrop, the key appointment of Commanding Officer 83 Expeditionary Air Group, that would provide 21<sup>st</sup> Army Group with tactical air support, was Broadhurst. Unwanted by Coningham, who was powerless to prevent his appointment,<sup>141</sup> 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.'<sup>142</sup> 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,<sup>143</sup> 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.' Despite Broadhurst's tone, Tedder was too great a leader to be affected by his outburst.<sup>144</sup> Whilst Coningham was a fine airman, in Normandy he 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,

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<sup>137</sup> Horne, *Lonely Leader*, 190-1.

<sup>138</sup> *ibid.*, 190.

<sup>139</sup> *ibid.*, 193.

<sup>140</sup> Breuer, *Feuding Allies*, 202.

<sup>141</sup> D'Este, *Decision in Normandy*, 219.

<sup>142</sup> Horne, *Lonely Leader*, 193.

<sup>143</sup> P. Grey, "Caen – The Martyred City," in *The Normandy Campaign 1944: Sixty Years On*, ed J. Buckley, (London: Routledge, 2006), 162.

<sup>144</sup> D'Este, *Decision in Normandy*, 220.

in the post-Normandy honours list there was not a single RAF one star from AEF, 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.<sup>145</sup>

## Deepening Cracks

Within the first few weeks after the invasion new cracks in relations had appeared. As such, and almost inevitably, the most virulent critics of Montgomery were in the RAF.<sup>146</sup> The ability to capture or construct airfields in Normandy was a deciding factor over the Pas de Calais as a choice for invasion point and was a key issue in understanding why relationships between Montgomery and the Airmen deteriorated. The RAF's fighter-bombers needed landing grounds as their relatively short range meant that best use was not being made of them whilst they had to operate from England.<sup>147</sup> Tedder was keen to move aircraft from England to Normandy and get Coningham in there to control them for obvious reasons. He was also concerned that delay in doing so might allow the enemy to overcome the good work of the Transportation Plan<sup>148</sup> that had destroyed so much of the transportation infrastructure in this part of France. 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.'<sup>149</sup> This totally contradicts Montgomery's views in the Western Desert about the importance of airfields. 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.<sup>150</sup> 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.'<sup>151</sup> This failure to capture the airfields threw a spotlight on to the ever-deteriorating relations between Montgomery and the airmen, as Tedder states:

As the days slipped by I could not help being worried about Montgomery's methods of conducting the battle. The principle which we had proved after painful experience in the Mediterranean – that the Army and Air Commanders should live side by side, and decide their policies together - had been allowed to lapse. The reason in this case was the lack of suitable communications in Normandy which would permit Coningham to control the air

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<sup>145</sup> *ibid.*, 221.

<sup>146</sup> Horne, *Lonely leader*, 188.

<sup>147</sup> Grey, *Caen*, 163.

<sup>148</sup> D'Este, *Decision in Normandy*, 223.

<sup>149</sup> Orange, *Churchill and His Airmen*, 244.

<sup>150</sup> Lamb, *Montgomery in Europe 1943-1945: Success or Failure?* (London: Buchan and Enright, 1983), 84.

<sup>151</sup> LHA, LH 1/679, letter from Tedder 28 April 1952.

forces from Montgomery's Headquarters. Because we had not secured the airfields to the south of Caen, the majority of the RAF was still based in England.<sup>152</sup>

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 growing into an obsession and was increasingly unhelpful at this crucial time.<sup>153</sup> Leigh-Mallory had turned down Montgomery's plan to use the British 1<sup>st</sup> 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.'<sup>154</sup> Tedder has been accused of a vendetta against Montgomery due to 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.<sup>155</sup> Here, 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 and a former civilian newspaperman thought that the BBC and British press had made 'Big Chief Wind' fireproof, even in the face of a disaster.<sup>156</sup> 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 amongst other things, 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.'<sup>157</sup>

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. 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 placing great strain on the Alliance<sup>158</sup> and 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

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<sup>152</sup> Tedder, *With Prejudice*: 553.

<sup>153</sup> D'Este, *Decision in Normandy*, 220.

<sup>154</sup> *ibid.*, 212.

<sup>155</sup> Breuer, *Fighting Allies*, 199.

<sup>156</sup> Orange, *Churchill and His Airmen*, 247.

<sup>157</sup> Hamilton, *Montgomery: 1942-44*, 678.

<sup>158</sup> Orange, *Churchill and His Airmen* 248.

story by the Americans. It is a dangerous situation and may become a tragic one.<sup>159</sup> 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.'<sup>160</sup> 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.<sup>161</sup> 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<sup>162</sup> in a rather forlorn attempt to retain control of all the invasion Land forces, something that would not happen and became a dent to British prestige.

### **So What for ALI?**

Due to poor relations between Montgomery and the airmen and in order to get support from them for Operation Goodwood and others, Montgomery often felt the need to overstate the aims of the operations.<sup>163</sup> Throughout the remainder of the campaign the increasingly cool personal relationships between Montgomery and the airmen would have a strong impact on its overall conduct.<sup>164</sup> 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 would not have noticed 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.'<sup>165</sup> 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 was angry that the Army had failed to provide. 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

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<sup>159</sup> Orange, *Tedder*, 273.

<sup>160</sup> Orange, *Churchill and His Airmen*, 231.

<sup>161</sup> LHA, LHII/1944. LH 15/15/127 – 22

<sup>162</sup> Irving, *War Amongst The Generals*, 256.

<sup>163</sup> Hamilton, *Monty: 1942-44*, 719.

<sup>164</sup> D'Este, *Decision in Normandy*, 212.

<sup>165</sup> Gooderson, *Air Power*, 36-7.

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.'<sup>166</sup>

It soon became apparent that without the air force, Montgomery's armies would not break out of Normandy<sup>167</sup> and 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.'<sup>168</sup> When Broadhurst had been supporting Dempsey's army in Italy, Dempsey's staff had made several errors in co-ordinating with the air force, for which Montgomery gave him a 'severe rocket' when he found out. In Normandy, co-ordination between Broadhurst and Dempsey was extremely effective and remained that way for the rest of the campaign.<sup>169</sup> The German view was that Allied tactical air power was particularly effective but whilst it may not have destroyed many vehicles, it created terror causing the Germans to abandon them, thereby achieving the effect. Despite this, Brigadier Richardson, who had been despatched to Dempsey's HQ, 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'<sup>170</sup> ALI had developed a sluggishness that that was due to the attitudes of the airmen.<sup>171</sup>

## 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 in their personal relationships was undoubtedly shaped and influenced by the personalities and egos of the parties involved. There was always going to be a split in their personal relationships due to Montgomery's and Coningham's similarities and differences. 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, the differences were so great that a split was always going to happen. The split between Tedder and Montgomery is more surprising and less to do with ego 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 at their own game and he was fed

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<sup>166</sup> Hastings, *Overlord*, 268.

<sup>167</sup> D'Este, *Decision in Normandy*, 212.

<sup>168</sup> *ibid.*, 223.

<sup>169</sup> *ibid.*, 220.

<sup>170</sup> S. Hart. *Colossal Cracks: The 21<sup>st</sup> Army Group in Northwest Europe, 1944-45*. (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2000), 148.

<sup>171</sup> Hastings, *Overlord*, 270.

up with the Army's 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 at that point in the war. The importance of the context of the time is crucial to understanding how the personal relationships of the three men deteriorated. The British Army had had a terrible war up to Montgomery's 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, if the Germans were going to be beaten, something that Tedder had identified in July 1942. This raising of morale was important and necessary for the future conduct of the war from a British perspective, but the uncontrolled nature of this recognition had ramifications for the rest of the war and beyond, arguably setting the tone for the Army's view of itself and its view of the RAF. 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 next major engagement for them all was in Tunisia and by this time it involved forces on a much greater scale than before as now the Americans were fully in the war. This scale of operations helped to cushion the impact of the poor personal relationships between the three men on ALI; however, ego, personality and personal relationships were key in building the fundamental Allied relationship essential for winning the war and forging a new British and American air force in the image of the DAF.

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. For example, Tedder's calls for Montgomery to be sacked would have been a major blow for the British national psyche and inter-Service relationships, Montgomery was now simply too big to fail. Ego,

personality and personal relationships were fundamental to establishing ALI and ensuring it endured and, as time progressed and people were promoted, these factors took on a new importance at a higher level with the potential to have more far reaching consequences than just on ALI.

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