

LEADERSHIP IN A DESERT WAR: BERNARD MONTGOMERY AS AN UNUSUAL LEADER

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Abstract

Bernard Montgomery was the most successful British general of the twentieth century and one of the most important participants of World War 2. He commanded British and Commonwealth troops in one of the decisive battles of the war at El Alamein in Libya and afterwards wrote several incisive and clear books about military leadership. However, his fame has dimmed in the intervening years and even in military circles he is not as well remembered or cited as would be expected. Partly this may be because, like others (such as Warren E. Buffett) whose achievements break the mould of theory, his very success is something of an embarrassment to scholars and others because he does not fit the conventional theoretical patterns, but he deserves to be remembered as an important writer on leadership as well as a great leader in his own right. A study of Montgomery's method may have much to offer contemporary debates. The aim of this paper is to put Montgomery back where he belongs as a significant contributor to theory, method and, above all, of our understanding of military leadership on the field of battle.

Quotes from Montgomery's writings

- "Leadership is the capacity and will to rally men and women to a common purpose and the character which inspires confidence.
- Decisions! ..., a commander in chief who has not got the quality of decision, then he is no good.
- Discipline strengthens the mind so that it becomes impervious to the corroding influence of fear.
- Every soldier must know, before he goes into battle, how the little battle he is to fight fits into the larger picture, and how the success of his fighting will influence the battle as a whole.

The Second World War was a bloody affair and for the first third of it, over two years, impartial observers tended to see the inevitable outcome as victory for the Axis Powers against the lone defender at that time of what turned out to be the winning Allied cause, Great Britain. France was defeated and occupied, Europe was under the heel of the triumphant German armies and Russia was invaded to the gates of Moscow. The USA did not enter the war until Britain was nearly defeated and then only once its fleet had been violently attacked at Pearl Harbor on the morning of December 7, 1941, a day described by American President Franklin Roosevelt as "a day that will live in infamy". Still the USA did not declare war

immediately on all the Axis powers and may indeed not have seen the need to enter the European war against Germany until Hitler saved them the bother of decision by declaring war on America. The official State Department position at that time was probably that it was more advantageous for the USA to engage with Japan in the Pacific without entering the European arena.

Winston Churchill defined the turning point of the whole war as El Alamein, a battle in North Africa commenced on October 13, 1942, in which a much defeated British army, led by an inexperienced commander, the unusual and heretical Bernard Montgomery, turned the tables on the Afrika Korps, the German Army which had hitherto swept all before it. The Afrika Korps was led by the general acknowledged as the finest soldier, tactician and leader of the war, General Erwin Rommel. This was the first time Rommel had been beaten on the field of battle. After the engagement, Churchill wrote "Before Alamein, we had no victories. After Alamein, we had no defeats" and he subsequently described the North Africa campaign in his memoirs as "the hinge of fate" (Churchill, 1951).

Who was this leader? And how did he do it? And what lessons of leadership can we learn from his career and writings?

Montgomery was not a prepossessing physical figure, somewhat under average height, with a rather squeaky voice and a non-aristocratic background, a younger son of the Bishop of Tasmania and by no means an academic star. It is reported that after a bizarre exploit of a would-be humorous nature at Sandhurst (involving setting fire to the shirt of a fellow officer, leading to third degree burns) he would have been sent down, were it not for the intervention of his mother who reportedly wrote to the Sandhurst CO asking that his military career be spared because "Bernard is not fit to be anything more than a soldier". This scarcely glowing reference apparently saved the day and young Montgomery duly graduated from Sandhurst in 1908 and was promptly commissioned into the infantry in the Royal Warwickshire Regiment. He served in India and was promoted lieutenant there.

His early life had been unusual. His family was Irish but landless and for much of his early life his father was often absent attending to his duties in Tasmania for months on end and his mother (from whom he became quite estranged in later life) ruled by administering regular beatings. Montgomery wrote in his memoirs that "her method of dealing with the problem was to impose rigid discipline on the family . . . there were definite rules for us children; these had to be obeyed; disobedience brought swift punishment" and he reflected later that "a less rigid discipline and more affectionate understanding might have wrought better, certainly different, results in me. . . . I was the bad boy of the family, the rebellious one and as a result I had to learn to stand or fall on my own" (Montgomery, 1951, p. 18).

His school career was at St Paul's School where he was academically regarded as "weak" though he achieved a reputation for being a fierce and often unfair scrapper at football. His school nickname was "monkey" and the school magazine described his animal nature thus: "It is vicious, of unflagging energy, and much feared by the neighbouring animals owing to its unfortunate tendency to pull out the top hair of the head. This is called 'tackling' . . . to hunt this animal is a dangerous undertaking. It runs strongly and hard, straight at you and never falters" (quoted in Montgomery, 1958, p. 21).

He reflected that "By the time I left school a very important principle had just begun to penetrate my brain. That was that life is a stern struggle, and a boy has to be able to stand up to the buffeting and set-backs. There are many attributes which he must acquire if he is to succeed; two are vital, hard work and absolute integrity" (Montgomery, 1958, p. 22).

He saw action in the First World War and one event nearly killed him. He was seriously wounded when he was shot in the chest in October 1914: “My life was saved that day by a soldier of my platoon. I had fallen in the open and lay still hoping to avoid further attention from the Germans. But a soldier ran to me and began to put a field dressing on my wound; he was shot through the head by a sniper and collapsed on top of me. The sniper continued to fire at us and I got a second wound in the knee; the soldier received many bullets intended for me. No further attempt was made by my platoon to rescue us; indeed, it was presumed we were both dead. When it was dark the stretcher-bearers came to carry us in; the soldier was dead and I was in a bad way” (Montgomery, 1958, p. 34).

He was awarded the Distinguished Service Order for gallant leadership. The citation for this award in December 1914, reads: “Conspicuous gallant leading on 13th October, when he turned the enemy out of their trenches with the bayonet. He was severely wounded.”

After a long spell in a military hospital, Montgomery returned to the Western Front in 1916 and by 1918 was chief of staff of the 47th London Division. In early 1915, after recovering from his wounds, Montgomery was appointed brigade major, taking charge of training in Kitchener’s New Army; in early 1916 he returned to the Western Front as an operations staff officer during the battles of the Somme, Arras and Passchendaele. During this time he came under IX Corps, part of General Sir Herbert Plumer’s Second Army. Through his training, rehearsal and integration of the infantry with artillery and engineers, the troops of Plumer’s Second Army were able to achieve their objectives efficiently and without unnecessary casualties.

Montgomery served at the battles of The Lys and Chemin des Dames before finishing the war as General Staff Officer and effectively chief of staff of the 2nd London Division with the temporary rank of lieutenant-colonel. In his autobiography Montgomery argued that “the higher staffs were out of touch with the regimental officers and with the troops. The former lived in comfort, which became greater as the distance of their headquarters behind the lines increased. There was no harm in this provided there was touch and sympathy between the staff and the troops. This was often lacking. The frightful casualties appalled me” (Montgomery, 1958, p. 35).

This kind of observation of course in later writings became a fairly standard critique of the British Army in 1914–1918 but it is interesting because Monty clearly intends to put distance between the interests of the operational leaders at regimental level and those of the higher staff. It became a feature of his leadership style that he quite explicitly sought to see things through the eyes of the front-line leaders who would have to implement the grand strategies of the generals. Reminiscences of those who served and fought under him indicate that this was sensed and appreciated by lower ranks.

Between the two wars, Montgomery served as a professional soldier in Ireland, Palestine and India. He had to be promoted but the promotion that came was not on the conventional *cursus honorum* for he was asked to take charge of infantry staff training at Sandhurst. There he revolutionized infantry training methods through creating a definitive training manual and insisting on using live ammunition in training exercises. He also promulgated sensible views on the sexual health of soldiers that were consequently regarded as wild, seditious and eccentric by the army establishment. Despite being regarded by contemporaries as a confirmed bachelor, he fell in love, married, had a son, David, and suffered the tragedy of having his adored wife die of septicaemia from an insect bite.

Britain declared war on Germany on 3 September 1939. The 3rd Division was deployed to Belgium as part of the British Expeditionary Force (BEF). Montgomery predicted a disaster similar to that in 1914, and so spent the so-called Phoney War training his troops for tactical retreat rather than offensive operations.

During this time, Montgomery faced serious trouble from his superiors for his attitude regarding the sexual health of his soldiers. However, he was defended from dismissal by his superior, Alan Brooke. Montgomery's training paid off when the Germans began their invasion of the Low Countries on 10 May 1940 and the 3rd Division withdrew to Dunkirk with great professionalism, returning to Britain intact with minimal casualties. He had anticipated the probable necessity of retreat and had trained and prepared his men for this contingency.

In the period after Dunkirk Montgomery antagonized the War Office with trenchant criticisms of the command of the BEF and was briefly relegated to divisional command. In July 1940, he was appointed acting lieutenant-general placed in command of V Corps, and started a long-running feud with the new commander-in-chief of Southern Command, Auchinleck. In April 1941, Montgomery became responsible for the defence of Kent.

During this period he instituted a regime of continuous training and insisted on high levels of physical fitness for both officers and other ranks. He was ruthless in sacking officers he considered would be unfit for command in action. In December 1941 Montgomery was given command of overseeing the defence of Kent, Sussex and Surrey. He renamed his command the South-Eastern Army to promote offensive spirit. During this time he further developed and rehearsed his ideas and trained his soldiers, culminating in Exercise Tiger in May 1942, a combined forces exercise involving 100,000 troops. He re-emphasized the necessity of using live ammunition in field training and when reprimanded by the War Office for this, retorted "if my soldiers cannot dodge bullets in training, they will assuredly not be able to do so in combat!"

Montgomery was by now firmly convinced of the value of his own methods:

A sense of urgency had to be instilled into officers and men and that precluded second-raters in command at any level. The unfit and incompetent had to be eliminated. . . . On the staff it was essential to ensure a standard of absolute service and technical efficiency. In fact, throughout the whole Army there was the definite necessity for physical and mental fitness, and for technical efficiency in the business of the conduct of battle. . . . The first prerequisite at all levels were commanders who knew their stuff and who were determined in spite of all the difficulties to get their own way in the conditions which obtained in those very difficult days. (Montgomery, 1958, p. 73).

By 1942 the war in North Africa was not going well and Rommel was carrying all before him. North Africa was the key to the oil riches of the Middle East which if controlled by the Axis would provide the resources to determine the war. As Commander of the North African armies, Churchill visited the scene, a tremendous risk to take, exposing himself to great danger, and having seen what was happening on the ground, replaced in turn Wavell and Auchinleck.

But Montgomery was not next in line for field command and General Gott was appointed to take charge of the Eighth Army but was killed before he could take up his post. Brooke persuaded Churchill that Montgomery could be given this chance. But the odds against British survival were very long as Rommel's Afrika Corps was within a few days of the Suez

Canal. Had the Germans achieved access to the oil resources of the Arab Middle East, the game would have been up and the war over. It is impossible to escape the inference that in being offered the command of the much-defeated Eighth Army, Monty was being in effect, offered a “hospital pass” and certainly the prevailing view was that it could only be a matter of time before Rommel broke through the demoralized remnants of British resistance.

But Montgomery did not lack confidence in his own abilities. A story, probably apocryphal but popular at the time and repeated by Montgomery in his memoirs, is that the appointment caused Montgomery to remark that “After having an easy war, things have now got much more difficult”. A colleague is supposed to have told him to cheer up – at which point Montgomery is supposed to have said “I’m not talking about me, I’m talking about Rommel!”

On taking command of the Eighth Army in the Western Desert on 13 August, 1942, Montgomery, who was not even a full general, only an acting lieutenant general, summoned his staff to an impromptu meeting at which he addressed them from the text of a speech that he had written out in the plane. It is one of the great speeches of history.

This is what he said:

- I want first of all to introduce myself to you. You do not know me. I do not know you. But we have got to work together. Therefore we must understand each other and we must have confidence in each other. I have only been here a few hours. But from what I have seen and heard since I arrived I am prepared to say, here and now, that I have confidence in you. We will then work together as a team. And together we will gain the confidence of this great Army and go forward to final victory in Africa.
- I believe that one of the first duties of a commander is to create what I call “atmosphere”, and in that atmosphere his staff, subordinate commanders, and troops will live and work and fight.
- I do not like the general atmosphere I find here. It is an atmosphere of doubt, of looking back to select the next place to withdraw, of loss of confidence in our ability to defeat Rommel, of desperate defence measures by reserves in preparing positions in Cairo and the Delta.
- All that must cease. Let us have a new atmosphere.
- . . . Here we will stand and fight; there will be no further withdrawal. I have ordered that all plans and instructions dealing with further withdrawal are to be burned, and at once. We will stand and fight here. If we can’t stay here alive, then let us stay here dead.
- Our mandate from the Prime Minister is to destroy the Axis forces in North Africa. I have seen it, written on half a sheet of note paper. And it will be done. If anyone here thinks it can’t be done, let him go at once. I don’t want any doubters in this party. It can be done, and it will be done, beyond any possibility of doubt.
- Now I understand that Rommel is expected to attack at any moment. Excellent. Let him attack.

- I would sooner it didn't come for a week, just to give me time to sort things out. If we have two weeks to prepare we will be sitting pretty. Rommel can attack as soon as he likes after that and I hope he does.
- Meanwhile, we ourselves will start to plan a great offensive. It will be the beginning of a campaign which will hit Rommel and his Army right out of Africa.
- . . . I have no intention of launching our great attack until we are completely ready. There will be pressure from many quarters to attack soon.
- I will not attack until we are ready and you can rest assured on that point.
- . . . I understand there has been a great deal of "belly-aching" out here. By "belly-aching" I mean inventing poor reasons for not doing what one has been told to do. All this will stop at once.
- If anyone objects to doing what he is told then he can get out and at once. I want that made very clear right down through the Eighth Army.
- What I have done is to get over to you the atmosphere in which we will now work and fight. You must see that that atmosphere permeates right down through the Eighth Army to the most junior private soldier. All the soldiers must know what is wanted. When they see it coming to pass there will be a surge of confidence throughout the Army. I ask you to give me your confidence and to have faith that what I have said will come to pass.
- . . . The Chief-of-Staff will be issuing orders on many points very shortly and I am always available to be consulted by the senior officers of the staff. The great point to remember is that we are going to finish with this chap Rommel once and for all. It will be quite easy. There is no doubt about it.

A rerecorded version given later but using the same text can be found at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n8TIQVHRhyA>

I believe that all aspirant leaders should know this speech by heart as this is one of the great speeches in military history and deserves to be remembered. Montgomery understood that a "culture change" must start with clarity and proceed to ownership and that these restructurings of the belief patterns and public discourse of the officers must be the basis of agreed collective action.

Montgomery's speech is short but direct, simple but highly implicative. He was asking his men to stand and fight and possibly die. He spoke as a professional to fellow professionals. He showed that he had a clear plan and that he understood the detail; of the analysis on which the plan was based.

His implementation was rapid and thorough. He set up the Chief of Staff system, trusting General Francis (Freddie) de Guingand as his alter ego. He had worked with de Guingand before and the two men had trust in each other. His method was to work with his staff all morning, and visit his troops in the afternoon. All the time he was mastering the detail of a great defensive battle as precursor to a concerted advance, by which time his materiel would be stronger than that of the opposition. He trusted his senior officers and if any betrayed that trust they were replaced immediately.

He had analysed the battle and its conditions coherently and thoroughly but his actions were at every stage conservative and oriented to minimizing the risk to his troops in the field, who were irreplaceable. He initiated a systematic and consistent build-up of materiel and reinforcements, trained for the tasks they would encounter. He knew that overwhelming power and rapid reinforcement coupled with predictable supply are what wins land battles involving infantry. He had never wanted to be anything but a soldier and he thought as a soldier, not as a leader who had to do a bit of soldiering.

In his afternoons he toured the Eighth Army positions spending on average 10 minutes in each, at which he gave essentially the same speech, and identifying his field and staff commanders by name. He asked for questions from his soldiers and noted that they invariably covered three themes, the food, the state of the latrines, and letters to and from home. He knew as a field commander of infantrymen that these were the things that bothered them.

His choice of headgear illustrates the extent to which he had thought out the power of visual symbolization. He wanted to be distinctive, although he was small of stature and physically unprepossessing. His first choice of hat was thus an Australian bush hat, of the type sometimes adorned with corks to keep off the flies. There were many Australians and New Zealanders in the Eighth Army and he realized that this hat would not be distinctive enough. So he swapped it for a French onion seller's beret, confident that this would distinguish him from all other generals. This worked but it would not have stopped bullets and he personally visited exposed front-line positions.

Though he did not minimize the risks, he identified himself as personally courageous by wearing a beret that became his icon. He had chosen the beret over an Australian bush hat because he wanted his soldiers to be able to see his face and look into his eyes. But he had deliberately decided not to wear the standard general's cap with its gold braid. "I started in the Alam Halfa battle by wearing an Australian hat . . . later I took a black beret . . . I soon learned that the arrival of the double-badged beret on the battlefield was a help – they knew that I was about, that I was taking an intense and personal interest in their doings, and that I was not just sitting about somewhere safe in the rear issuing orders" (Montgomery, 1958, p. 111).

He recognized that an important aspect of his army was that it consisted in the main of men who had been civilians in their former life. His uncle and his god-father and his wife's uncle were among the numbers of the Eighth Army and he later commented that "The Eighth Army consisted in the main of civilians in uniform, not of professional soldiers . . . it seemed to me that to command such men demanded not only a guiding mind but also a point of focus; . . . not only a master but a mascot. It helped . . . for them to recognize me as a person – as an individual – the man who was putting them into battle. To obey an impersonal figure was not enough. They must know who I was" (Montgomery, 1958 p. 111).

Montgomery's first act was both symbolic and dramatic. Auchinleck, the previous commander of the Eighth Army, had authorized plans for defensive positions on the Suez Canal and in front of Alexandria. But Monty ordered these plans to be destroyed and publicly announced this decision.

There were in fact two decisive battles in the desert. In the first, that of Alam Halfa, the relentless advance of the Afrika Korps had to be checked. Montgomery had the benefit of knowing that such a battle was imminent, by intelligence from the Ultra project at Bletchley Park. But the battle was inevitable and Montgomery had to be ready. It is usually little

consolation to a football team going in five nil down at half time to know with certainty that the opposition will be at their throats again in fifteen minutes.

The battle of Alam Halfa commenced on 30 August. Montgomery had taken command on 13 August and had thus been in charge for less than three weeks. Rommel intended to encircle the Eighth Army by attacking from the South. Montgomery's first attacks succeeded, albeit more slowly than he had hoped, and he was able to regroup and deploy back-up tanks and infantry to cover the flank. The RAF, operating from air bases in the Delta, kept at Rommel's army, in particular at his supply lines, and slowed their advance; bombing killed several senior German officers. By the morning of 2 September 2, Rommel realized that the breakthrough had not succeeded and decided to withdraw.

Rommel had blinked first and the defensive battle of Alam Halfa showed that the new model Eighth Army could stop the Afrika Corps. Montgomery commented "all in all the battle had achieved what I wanted. Besides the recovery on morale, the Eighth Army had been given a trial run under its new commander" (Montgomery, 1958, p. 112).

He wrote to a friend in England "my first encounter with Rommel was of great interest. Luckily I had time to tidy up the mess and to get my plans laid, so there was no difficulty in seeing him off. I feel that I have won my first game, when it was his service. Next time it will be my service, the score being one-love" (Montgomery, 1958, p. 112).

In due course, on 23 October, he launched the offensive battle of El Alamein. His handwritten notes reveal that he knew it would be a long drawn out affair and he updated his estimate of the time needed to secure a breach in the German lines from "about 10 days" to "12 days". He was right. The battle went according to plan.

Montgomery's handwritten orders printed in his memoirs repay careful study as they illuminate the meticulous, even simple-minded thinking of the man. For example his orders included:

8 Methodical progress. Destroy enemy part by part, slowly and surely.

Shoot tanks and shoot Germans.

He cannot last a long battle: we can.

We must therefore keep at it hard; no unit commander must relax the pressure: organise ahead for a "dog-fight" of a week.

Whole affair about 10 days (12)

Don't expect spectacular results too soon.

9 Operate from firm bases

Quick re-organisation on objectives.

Keep balanced.

Maintain offensive eagerness.

Keep up pressure.

If we do all this, victory is certain.

10 Morale – Measures to get it. Addresses.

Every soldier in the Army a fighting soldier.

Non non-fighting men. All trained to kill Germans.

My message to the troops.

(Montgomery, 1958, p. 127)

After enduring days of what he called “hard pounding” he ordered a steady, measured advance. The Afrika Korps retreated and Hitler recalled Rommel to Germany. The Eighth Army advanced to complete triumph in North Africa.

The Hinge of Fate had been turned.

Analysis

Unlike many of his predecessors, whether in North Africa or elsewhere, General Bernard Montgomery brought to the army a regime of professional training and planning. The British Army was generally inflexible in its approach: battles were planned to detail and then executed, without much initiative on the battlefield. This is why the better trained Axis forces, despite lower numbers and lower armaments, had been able to defeat the Allies.

Montgomery’s career shows the enormous importance of *mediocrity* as a basis for effective leadership (exemplified also by the career of Prime Minister Clement Attlee, and President Franklin Delano Roosevelt). Bernard Montgomery was a limited person who knew the strength of his limitations. He was a professional and he had trained and worked hard to master the fundamentals of his job. He knew that others could do the same. Field command had taught him that soldiers do not want to die and understand that the enemy is similarly motivated so preparation, training and fitness are central to success.

Montgomery realized that when he took it over the 8th Army was not in shape for a battle, and he had to get the staff officers to understand the vital importance of what he called “atmosphere” and which later came to be known as “morale”. He concluded that a leader must “know his soldiers and be recognized by them” (Montgomery, 1961, p. 51). Without this collective mental preparation, any premature action would result in further losses and lowering and quite possibly a disastrous crisis of morale.

His leadership style was impressive: he used powerful language and imagery, and cultivated symbolism and the media to lift morale and engage the hearts and minds of all soldiers. It worked at El Alamein in the decisive final battle, and beyond: the 8th Army having low casualty rates and maintaining a certain loyalty between its members that has long outlasted the war. Eighth Army survivors – the “Desert Rats” – are clannish and fiercely loyal to each other and to their General.

Montgomery used a version of what Peters later called “MBWA, Management by walking about”. His average length of stop in a particular field position was around ten minutes. But his men saw him and recognized him and he saw them. He listened to their concerns and enacted simple solutions, empowering the field commanders, who soon learned that they could not waffle their way out of difficulty.

From his days as a lieutenant in command of field units in India he recognized the essential simplicity of warfare and of common human nature. For instance he knew that soldiers would need sex and even in war and definitely in training would work out ways to get sex. This was a fact of military life that Alexander the Great also understood and arranged conjugal visits and home leave. But it was important that they should be safe in their sexual encounters so condoms were a military necessity and adequate prophylactics and medical treatment for sexually-transmitted disease were important. So Monty authorized the issue of condoms.

Food and hygiene were vital. Napoleon had said “an army marches on its stomach” and referred more to diarrhoea than to haute cuisine, so Montgomery, having soldiered in India and Palestine, understood that both rations and latrines had to be efficiently organized and delivered.

Montgomery was never known for his tact and even in his own time was criticized for lack of what we now know as “political correctness”. He did not care and he remains a controversial figure for his judgmental comments and lack of diplomatic tact. One General asked Monty why he was being transferred back to the UK. “Simple,” said Monty. “You’re no good!”

Above all, Montgomery was consistent in following through the implications of his analysis and in developing an appropriate plan for the circumstances. His mastery of detail was good and his trust in a coherent analysis was absolute.

Montgomery knew that he ought not as a military commander to show signs of weakness in public, but he undoubtedly felt emotion and had briefly known deep personal physical love for his beloved wife Betty who died young and he had very warm feelings for his father whom he admired. He was not a cold man. He was a normal weak human person who had at least some understanding of his own weakness. Any who doubt this should read the very moving Epilogue to his best-selling *The Path to Leadership* (1961).

Conclusion

1 There are some implications of more general application to contemporary debates on leadership. The first is that by no standard of comparison could it be argued that Montgomery possessed abilities or competences (whether mental or physical) above the normal. Indeed on many ways he was regarded by his contemporaries and superiors, and even by his close family members, as mediocre at best. But mediocrity can win important battles.

2 Montgomery’s approach was rooted however in field experience, obtained over a long period and in varying conditions. He was a professional soldier, a “pro”, and such people are respected by other pros. In teaching soldiers it is well to have held field command, in leading a university to be at least a competent academic. In training soccer players being able to pass, head and trap the ball command attention.

3 Arguably it could be maintained that Montgomery’s career indicates the limited value of some of the distinctions we rely on in our teaching of leadership. Montgomery was in conventional leadership theory discourse, a transactional leader who learned how to become transformational by a process of planning and deliberation. He was a self-made man who never worshipped his creator completely, but retained an instinctive reverence for things he did not understand.

4 As an analyst and theorist of leadership especially in military life Montgomery was thorough, careful and judicious. His insights are very compelling. He concluded that there were three types of leader:

Those who have faith and inspiration but lack the infinite capacity for taking pains and preparing for foreseeable contingencies – which is the foundation for success in war. These fail.

Those who possess the last-named to a degree amounting to genius. Wellington is the perfect example of this type.

Those who, possessing this quality, are inspired by a faith and conviction which enables them, when they have done everything possible in the way of preparation and when the situation favours boldness, to throw their bonnet over the moon. There are moments in war when, to win all, one has to act thus. . . .

One can sum it all up in this way. To exercise high command in war successfully a C in C has to have an infinite capacity for taking pains and careful preparation; he must also have an inner conviction, which, at times, will transcend reason. Having fought, possibly over a prolonged period, for the advantage and gained it, then there comes the moment for boldness. (Montgomery, 1961, pp. 51–52)

5 When the opportunity arose Montgomery could be bold, but he used requisite boldness; on the one occasion later in the War when he went outside this paradigm, at the Battle of Arnhem, he failed through being too bold and omitting some stages of preparation.

Some years ago I used a case based on Montgomery's leadership style and theories in a senior executive class. After the class, one of the participants, a senior HR manager, came up and said, "I served with Monty in the Western Desert. I was on his staff as a junior officer". I asked him if I had got the facts of the case right or had I missed important issues?

He responded that I had missed only one thing of significance. Naturally I enquired what this was.

"Simple," said the HR manager. "Monty was a shit. He was a complete shit. . . . But he was a very fair shit. And he was the complete professional. If you were right he would give you credit. But you had to be right. He knew his stuff. He was a *shit*. He was great to work for."

Being a shit is an important attribute in obtaining the respect of men over whom you have life or death responsibility. Being a *fair* shit is high praise.

Interestingly it is often from the ranks of military historians and latter-day military theorists that criticism of Montgomery is raised. Some of these say things like "He was lucky . . . he was the right man at the right time. He got his intelligence through Ultra." But one does not hear much criticism from the survivors of the Eighth Army in the Western Desert.

We could use worse guides to leadership than Bernard Montgomery.

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