

# Granatstein on Montgomery

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Stephen Brooks, ed. *Montgomery and the Eighth Army: A Selection from the Diaries, Correspondence and Other Papers of Field Marshal the Viscount Montgomery of Alamein, August 1942 to December 1943*. (London: The Army Records Society, 1991., 417 pp. £20.)

No one could disagree that Bernard Montgomery easily remains the most controversial Allied general of the Second World War. He was adored by the British public as the man who gave it some victories; he was loved by his Eighth Army; and he was despised by many Americans, some Canadians and the British officers he shelved. The ultimate comment on Monty is found in Charles Stacey's memoirs, *A Date With History*, where the good Colonel quotes a British general as telling Harry Crerar in 1941 that Montgomery "is an efficient little shit." - Exactly: efficient yes, but a shit too.

Those characteristics are evident in this volume, the seventh produced by the Bodley Head for The Army Records Society. It presents a sampling of Montgomery's correspondence, addresses and writing during the period he led the Eighth Army in North Africa, Sicily and Italy. The editor, Stephen Brooks, has written a good introduction on Montgomery in this 16 month stretch and he has searched diligently through records in the British archives, especially the Imperial War Museum. Like so many British historians of the war, however, he has not thought to look at Canadian collections. As most of Monty's correspondence was written by his hand, this omits the material in the Crerar papers, for example. Some of the correspondence with Trumbull Warren, Monty's

Canadian ADC who became very close to the old man, however, is included because Warren gave it to the Imperial War Museum; regrettably, none of his most critical comments on Canadian generals ("I hope to be sending [the prewar militiaman and Montreal dairy operator Major-General Basil] Price back to you [in Canada]; he will be of great value in Canada where his knowledge of the milk industry will help on the national war effort.") made it into print.

There is no question that the Montgomery who emerges here is a jumped-up little man, rude, opinionated and often disloyal to his superiors; but there is also no question that he was all too often right in his judgements of people and events. He had a clear sense of what was needed to beat the Germans, something that some of his British and American superiors really did not have. He understood what was involved in planning. And if he was not always correct in his assessments of commanders, his eye certainly was pretty good. Unfortunately, Monty was convinced that only he knew how to fight a battle, that only generals trained by him were any good and that virtually every general in Britain was a fool, the sole exception to that generalization being the Chief of the Imperial General Staff, Sir Alan Brooke, who was Monty's patron.

There is relatively little Canadian content here beyond a few mentions of Crerar, Simonds, Graham and McNaughton. Poor Andy McNaughton was stopped by Monty from visiting the First Division in Sicily and Alexander, Monty's nominal superior,



Montgomery with Crerar (NAC PA 145764)

defended that decision. But we learn in Brooks' book that Lord Louis Mountbatten received different treatment: "It was only when I saw Andy McNaughton & the Canadian C.G.S. [Ken Stuart] kicking their heels here waiting for your permission to go to Sicily that I fully appreciated the great honour you had done me in letting me . . . come over."

The best snippets of Canadian interest in *Montgomery and the Eighth Army* are found in a Monty letter to Brooke in September 1943 written after Montgomery finally allowed McNaughton to visit his troops: "I told him that commanding an army was a whole-time job, and I did not see how he could command the Canadian Army and also do all the policy stuff with Canada, political stuff, and so on. He agreed." There was the nub of McNaughton's problem as GOC-in-C First Canadian Army, the reason that a few months later he was given the push. Brooke knew this too, and his reply

- "Andy McNaughton may have agreed with your views on the surface, but certainly not at heart!" - was dead on. Brooke added that "He is a source of serious anxiety to me, but I think I have now got his case settled." The full story of this episode, the British and Canadian

military and political manoeuvrings, has yet to be told.

This book will not end debate and discussion about Montgomery as a commander and a personality, of course. What it does is to put some useful documentary evidence, skilfully annotated and introduced, into the hands of military historians. The book is also a good teaching tool.

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