

The clash of personalities and war, just as in the song in "Our Town," go together like "love and marriage," and as Dad was told by mother, "you don't get one without the other." Too bad, for sometimes the vicious infighting between Allied commanders was such as to put the purpose of the conflict in doubt. An American writer living in Britain with several books on the Second World War to his credit, Norman Gelb might seem the ideal writer to try to explore the relationship between Montgomery and Eisenhower, and in some ways he is.

Of his evenhandedness there can be little doubt as he assigns blame and praise with practised ease, sparing neither of his two subjects. Montgomery treated his son appallingly, shuffling him off to acquaintances during the war, while Eisenhower cheated on his wife, the boring, absent Mamie. Ike lost control of strategic operations in North Africa and Sicily, but Montgomery was so obsessed with the driving need to be right and to persuade everyone that he was so that he managed to persuade himself he held no responsibility whatsoever for the Dieppe debacle. Gelb makes the case that Eisenhower had no real sense of strategy, not least for his plans to invade France in 1942 that he prepared for George C. Marshall, and no real grasp of political reality as he demonstrated with his botching of the affaire *Giraud* and his inability to see the importance of Berlin. Was Montgomery any better than his rival? Not really, Gelb argues. As a tactician, he excelled in the set-piece battle, but his broader battlefield conceptions often neglected the reality that he had allies with politico-military aspirations of their own, and he had the political sense of a newt. "In defeat, unbeatable," wags said of the Field Marshal; "in victory unbearable."

Inevitably the two fought and argued. Montgomery could not bear that the militarily untried Eisenhower was his superior, and Ike, his affability masking a tension that all but ate him up, could never quite figure out how to make the little Anglo-Irishman work in harness. "Monty is a good man to serve under," Eisenhower said once, "a difficult man to serve with; and an impossible man to serve over." Even that misspoke matters. Monty was impossible to serve under unless one was an acolyte, a disciple willing to sup at the great man's table and adopt his pearls of wisdom as gospel truth. You were either for Montgomery or a bitter enemy, in other words. Guy Simonds was quick to get on side; Harry Crerar tried, but his responsibilities as a national commander got in the way, and he could never quite master the art of sucking up to the impossible little man.

Still, Montgomery was the best British trainer of the war and the first British commander to win a major battle in a war that had been marked only by a string of disasters. El Alamein was a relatively small scale battle but a critical one; North Africa was ponderously handled; Sicily was a cause of friction with the Americans; and Italy was again plodding in the extreme. Nonetheless, his handling of the Normandy battle, or so Gelb argues, was the most important Allied victory of the war. Monty foolishly spoiled his triumph by claiming that everything-yes, everything-from the beaches to Falaise had proceeded precisely according to plan when manifestly it had not, but that grotesque flaw in a rigid, frigid personality does not really take away from his accomplishment in the field.

Gelb's book is based on a mass of secondary material and a surprisingly light skim over the British and American primary

Ike and Monty

Norman Gelb. *Ike and Monty: Generals at War*, New York: William Morrow & Co., 1994, 480 pp. \$25 US.

sources. His prose is workmanlike, though the super-simplistic way he tells his story will be jarring to all but the completely uninitiated. Nor is he expert on British, Canadian and Newfoundland realities, putting the Argentia meeting of August 1941 in Canada and calling brigadiers "generals."

Still, this is a good, fair treatment of a pair of controversial military personalities that fifty years later has had more partisans than analysts. In this account, if Ike comes out just a bit ahead, he probably deserves to do so. Eisenhower was no great strategist, but he built an Anglo-American team (why were there no Canadians on it?) and made it function. Montgomery, grudgingly part of that team, a tiresome, tireless goad of his designated master, nonetheless had to obey orders or in the final analysis face dismissal. He chose to go along to get ahead, and he ended the war a field marshal and the Empire's hero. He was a "nasty little shit" to many of those who had to serve under him, while no one would ever speak in such harsh, almost dismissive terms of Eisenhower, a man who won and held the personal affection and admiration of almost all who worked for him. It was difficult to be anti-American under Ike, but all too easy to curse the bloody Brits around Monty. That Gelb makes this clear is his accomplishment.

J.L. Granatstein
York University