

MEDITERRANEAN & NORTH AFRICA: WHAT KIND OF MAN WAS MONTY?

Montgomery enjoys a cup of tea with a tank crew November 1942

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What is this source?

This is an official photograph showing Lieutenant General Bernard Montgomery in 1942 taking tea in the desert during the North African campaign where he was commander in the Eighth Army.

Immensely liked by his troops, Montgomery was less popular in Whitehall and with other commanders. "You may be great to serve under," General Eisenhower's Chief of Staff, Walter Bedell Smith told him, "but you sure are hell to serve over."

What's the background to this source?

In 1942 Montgomery took charge of the British 8th Army in North Africa. After intensive preparations he defeated the Germans and Italians at El Alamein in October 1942. This proved to be a turning point and by May 1943 the Germans and Italians had been driven out of North Africa. The next Allied campaign was the invasion of Sicily and then Italy. Montgomery played a key role in this campaign as well. He was extremely popular with the troops and the public. This was partly because he was successful. It was also because he valued the lives of his troops very highly. Although some other Allied commanders thought Montgomery was too cautious, he would always try to assemble enough of the right weapons and equipment before going into battle, as well as making sure his troops were properly trained.

Montgomery proved to be a big draw for audiences of troops and for audiences back in Britain as well. This was very unusual for a commander of the time. His huge public profile meant that in 1944 when he was announced as Commander of British forces for the D-Day landings, an actor was used to impersonate him in Gibraltar to make the Germans believe no invasion was imminent.

It's worth knowing that...

Montgomery suffered only one serious defeat during the whole of the war.

Operation Market Garden was launched in September 1944, part of the Allied advance through Holland into Germany. But British forces, after early success, failed to secure the bridge over the Rhine at Arnhem and were forced to withdraw back over the river. Montgomery called the operation "90% successful" but casualties were high and a significant breakthrough was not made.

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Does this source help us decide if Montgomery is the right man to command the land forces in France?

1. What do the photographs suggest about the relationship between Montgomery and his troops?
2. Is it possible to rely on these photographs to show an understanding of this relationship?
3. Compare these photographs to other sources in the box to learn about this relationship.
4. What does the fact that Monty had a double tell us about him?
5. Does this source help you to answer any of the questions you have to tackle in your report?