

Jolly Good Chaps, Those Yanks



On Sunday Field Marshal Sir Bernard L. Montgomery held his first press conference since assuming command of all Allied forces north of the German salient in Belgium. He gave correspondents a dose of the best straight Montgomery. It was strong and it was opinionated. But it was one of the finest morale boosters heard on the western front for months. The following textual excerpts give the full flavor of Monty's opinions.

• The battle has been most interesting—I think possibly one of the most interesting and tricky battles I have ever handled, with great issues at stake.

• But when all is said and done, I shall always feel that Rundstedt was really beaten by the good fighting qualities of the American soldier and by the teamwork of the Allies . . .

And I have seen a very great deal of him [the American soldier] in this campaign. I want to take this opportunity to pay a public tribute to him. He is a brave fighting man, steady under fire, and with the tenacity in battle that stamps the first-class soldier. All these qualities have been shown in a marked degree during the present battle.

The American soldiers of the United States Seventh Armored Division and the 106th Infantry Division stuck it out and put up a very fine performance. By jove, they stuck it out, those chaps.

• Let me tell you that the captain of our team is General Eisenhower. I am absolutely devoted to Ike. We are the greatest of friends. It grieves me when I see uncomplimentary articles about him in the British press. He bears a great burden; he needs our fullest support; he has a right to expect it; and it is up to all of us to see that he gets it . . .

My own airplane was damaged the other day. I cried to Ike: "Can you lend me another plane?"

He sent me his own at once—wonderful. There is no doubt about it, he is a great chap; I am very distressed when I see anything uncomplimentary about Ike.

• It looked to me as if Rundstedt was trying to do a big left hook to the River Meuse. There was not much there—there was damn little there—so I collected here and there, pulled in divisions and formed an army corps under that very fine American, General [J. Lawton] Collins.

It was that corps, which I had formed for offensive action, that eventually took the full blow of Rundstedt's left hook.

It took a knock. I said: "Dear me, this can't go on. It's being swallowed up in the battle."

I set to work and managed to form the corps again.

Once more pressure was such that it began to disappear in a defensive battle.

I said: "Come, come," and formed it again, and it was put in offensively by General [Courtney H.] Hodges after we had consulted together and that is his present job.

• In the use of airborne troops, what really matters is how they fight on the ground. The Germans use their paratroop divisions, too. The airborne men are jolly good chaps, all picked.

• I used to think that Rommel was good, but my opinion is that Rundstedt would have hit him for six. Rundstedt is the best German general I have come up against in this war. He is very good. He knows his stuff . . .

I would very much like to get myself into Rundstedt's brain for a couple of minutes. I have a picture of him in my room. I wanted a picture of Rundstedt very badly. The other day I was given one by Arthur Christiansen of The Daily Express. I am jolly glad to have it. It is extremely good.