

INTRODUCTION

Born in 1883, Alan Francis Brooke served in the British Army between 1902 and 1946. He fought on the Western Front for most of the First World War and by November 1918 had been promoted to lieutenant colonel, awarded the Distinguished Service Order twice and mentioned in despatches six times. In 1927, Brooke gave serious consideration to leaving the army and emigrating to New Zealand; in the event, he did neither. The 1930s saw him appointed to a wide variety of senior commands which led to further promotion. He was a lieutenant general when the Second World War started in 1939; by 1945, he was a field marshal. After the War, he was elevated to the peerage, taking the title of 1st Viscount Alanbrooke of Brookeborough. Brooke died in 1963.

On Thursday, 28 September 1939, twenty-five days after Britain declared war on Germany, Brooke bid farewell to his wife, Benita, and their two young children, Kathleen aged eight and Victor aged six; he was then fifty-six years old and Benita, his second wife, was nine years his junior. The reason for the farewell was that he had been designated to command II Corps which was part of the British Expeditionary Force [BEF] being sent to France. During his journey to Southampton docks, Brooke stopped in Salisbury and bought some small pocketbooks. Later that day, he started what was, in effect, a diary although he clearly did not view it as such. He began with a dedication,

Dedicated to Benita Blanche Brooke

Begun 28 September 1939

This book is not intended to be a diary of events, although it may contain references to my daily life. It is intended to be a record of my thoughts and impressions such as I would have discussed them with you had we been together.

After living the last ten years with you and never being parted for more than a few weeks at a time, I should feel quite lost without an occasional opportunity of a talk with you although such a talk must necessarily be confined to writing: I therefore procured this book in Salisbury on purpose for such conversations with you. It was originally part of Smith's stock of books on the Queen Mary but having failed to sell was reduced from 60/- to 15/-!

The thoughts I express may contradict themselves as I wish to give full scope to free expression and do not care if I am forced to change my mind by events.

ON NO ACCOUNT MUST THE CONTENTS OF THIS BOOK BE PUBLISHED.

Brooke continued to hold his written 'talks' with Benita on a daily basis until 1946, usually writing them late at night. As a result, he created a contemporaneous record of the entire Second World War, as witnessed by him. The significance of his record lies in the fact that Brooke held very senior commands during the War. Initially a corps commander in the BEF in France in 1939-40, he commanded the second BEF in France in June 1940. One month later, he was appointed Commander-in-Chief, Home Forces. This was followed by his appointment as Chief of the Imperial General Staff [CIGS] in December 1941, by virtue of which he became the professional head of the British Army and a member of the Chiefs of Staff Committee; in March 1942, he was appointed chairman of this committee. As CIGS and committee chairman, Brooke became the principal military adviser to the British prime minister and the cabinet.

Brooke's plea to Benita that his 'talks' must not be published may well be explained by wartime regulations which prohibited him from keeping a diary. It may equally be explained by the fact he was a private man

who shunned publicity. When, in 1951, the Royal Regiment of Artillery commissioned the historian, Arthur Bryant, to write his biography, Brooke agreed on condition that it was only written and published after his death.

Brooke was, however, to change his mind regarding publication of his 'talks'. In 1954, he agreed to Bryant's suggestion that they be used as the foundation for a book which told the story of the War between Dunkirk and El Alamein and that, once written, this book should be published immediately. In the event, Bryant used the 'talks' to write the story of the entire War, which was published in two volumes, *The Turn of the Tide* [1957] and *Triumph in the West* [1959]: as an aside, he never did write the commissioned biography of Brooke. Bryant's titles generated considerable controversy for two reasons. First, they sought to highlight the significant role played by Brooke and the British chiefs of staff in the War and, second, they questioned Churchill's management of the British war effort and his approach to strategy. The nature of this controversy was accurately captured by Lord Moran, Churchill's personal doctor, in his memoirs; he titled his chapter dealing with the controversy, "Defacing the Legend"¹ – the legend being, of course, Churchill.

Following Brooke's death, his papers were deposited with the Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives at King's College London in 1971. Many years later, Alex Danchev and Daniel Todman unearthed his 'talks' and published them in their full, unedited form in 2001. Their publication, *War Diaries 1939–1945, Field Marshal Lord Alanbrooke*, attracted this review, "The unexpurgated Alanbrooke diaries have been trailed as the last unfinished business of the Second World War. They are said to be indiscreet, malicious and true, debunking Churchill, Eisenhower, Mountbatten, Marshall and De Gaulle. They are and they do."² This was a fair and accurate review, save in one respect. Brooke was not motivated by malice when writing his 'talks': as he stated in his opening dedication to Benita, they were merely "intended to be a record of my thoughts and impressions such as I would have discussed them with you had we been together" and there is no evidence which suggests this motive ever changed. Admittedly, it is possible that Brooke's collaboration with Bryant

in the publication of *The Turn of the Tide* and *Triumph in the West* was motivated by an element of malice. This issue is addressed in Part Three.

Taken at face value, Alan Francis Brooke cuts a daunting and formidable figure. Three descriptions provide a flavour of the man, the first of which appeared in an article in *The Economist* magazine in 1957, “In his demanding and abrupt efficiency, he knew when to scold, when to encourage, when to protect. Men admired, feared and liked him: in that order, perhaps.”³ The second, provided by his chauffeur, was in similar vein although it did provide an additional insight into Brooke, “I’ve never known a greater gentleman... it was obvious the great majority of people were frightened of him.” The third, offered by a senior officer in the British Army, revealed how Brooke was viewed by his military colleagues, “We regarded him as a highly efficient military machine.”⁴ Alan Francis Brooke would appear to be one of those figures who commanded admiration and respect, rather than warmth and affection.

Historians have largely been positive in their treatment of Brooke. Indeed, one eminent military historian, writing in the 1990s, expressed the opinion that he was not only “one of the architects of Allied victory” but also “one of the outstanding soldiers of this century.”⁵ Yet, many of them appear half-hearted, almost grudging, in their acknowledgement of the role which he played in the War: one is left with the impression that they do so through gritted teeth. There are, I suspect, two reasons for this. First, they disapprove of Brooke’s collaboration with Bryant in the publication of *The Turn of the Tide* and *Triumph in the West*, viewing it as an exercise in self-aggrandisement on his part. Second, they do not like Brooke. The barrage of negative adjectives that has rained down on him over the decades tends to support this conclusion – stern, forbidding, aloof, impatient, opinionated, self-assured, blunt, forthright, sharp-tongued, brusque, abrupt, rude, short-tempered, flinty, restless, highly strung, intense, intolerant, pig-headed, stubborn and obstinate. It is, by any standards, an impressive list! In fairness, this sentiment is understandable. Brooke was forthright and abrupt in speech and manner and he could occasionally be abrasive: after the War, he recalled a conversation which he had with his opposite number in the United States

INTRODUCTION

Army, General George Marshall, in May 1943, “As I was walking with Marshall and Dill to one of our meetings, Marshall said to me, ‘I find it very hard even now not to look on your North African strategy with a jaundiced eye!’ I replied, ‘What strategy would you have preferred?’ To which he answered, ‘Cross channel operations for the liberation of France and advance on Germany, we should finish the war quicker.’ I remember replying, ‘Yes, probably, but not the way we hope to finish it!’”

I have written this book for two reasons. First, historians have focused on Brooke the soldier and strategist and chosen – perhaps deliberately and perhaps wisely – not to examine the man behind the soldier. Bryant’s titles offered a narrative history of the War as seen through Brooke’s eyes but offered little by way of detailed insight into his character. Likewise, the 2001 publication of Brooke’s diary offered little editorial comment on the character of the diary’s author. There are just two other titles in which he features prominently. The only biography of Brooke that has been published was written by the late General Sir David Fraser who was a professional soldier and military historian. Not unreasonably, Fraser dwelt more on the military aspects of Brooke’s life and career rather than his character and whilst it is illuminating in several respects, it left me only slightly the wiser in understanding the man behind the soldier. Andrew Roberts’ *Masters and Commanders* was constructed around Roosevelt, Churchill, Marshall and Brooke but since the focus of this title was on the formulation of Anglo-American strategy, he was not studied in any depth. To this day, Brooke the man remains largely unexplored territory.

My interest in Brooke was sparked after I read the 2001 publication of his diary. He appeared – at least to me – to be a complex and rather contradictory character and the more I researched him, the more intrigued I became. Here was a man who had spent his entire adult life in military service, yet he held a deep-rooted and intense dislike of war. Here was a man who devoted all his energies to winning the War, yet he clearly believed that war was utterly futile. Here was an “alert, seemingly iron, man without a nerve in his body”⁶, yet he “broke down and wept”⁷ in the Dunkirk sand hills. Here was a man who freely admitted he would have

sprayed poison gas on German troops landing on British beaches, yet he could be entranced by watching “young water hens being instructed by their mother as to how a bath should be taken. She gave a demonstration first and then those tiny mites followed suit and copied her, a wonderful sight.” Here was a man who made scathing judgments of his colleagues – one was “a repulsive creature” – yet he could write to Benita in these terms,

Such a treat this evening receiving your parcel and in it the frame with my beloved Pooks and Ti [the nicknames of their two children]! I just loved getting it, though it gave me a most desperate longing to have them here just for one large hug. I have installed them on the small table beside my bed alongside of your photograph. But just at the present moment we are having a little family gathering as I have put both your photograph and that of the Pooks and Ti on the table I am writing at, so that we are all together while I have a talk with you.⁸

Here was a man who projected “demanding and abrupt efficiency”⁹ to the outside world, yet he privately admitted in a letter written to Benita in 1942,

As usual, my darling, you are being my mainstay and anchor in life. Without you I should be able to do nothing. Your example and life is the most wonderful inspiration to me and my whole life just hinges around you.¹⁰

There were also inconsistencies in his diary. Some entries were at odds with others. Some entries appeared completely out of character for this daunting and formidable figure. Furthermore, there were entries in which he expressed regret or appeared to apologise for what he had said or done. Perhaps it was a mistake to take Alan Francis Brooke at face value? Perhaps there was a depth and complexity to his character hitherto unfathomed? One contemporary’s description of him as “a most impenetrable man” suggested there may be. The prospect of exploring the uncharted waters of Alan Francis Brooke’s character was appealing.

INTRODUCTION

The second reason is that Brooke is a very good example of the ‘unsung hero’. He played a pivotal role in the War yet, with the exception of historians and aficionados of the War, few people have heard of him: the name Montgomery draws recognition but the name Brooke or Alanbrooke tends to draw a blank, even though he was Montgomery’s immediate superior throughout the War. One explanation is that in wartime the limelight tends to fall on generals who command in the field, especially the successful ones. Another is the common perception that it was Churchill who won the War. Yet another is that whilst Brooke appears in a great many titles written about the War, references to him tend to be brief and sporadic. As a result, there is a lack of public awareness of the part he played in the Allied victory.

This book is not a biography. Its principal purpose is to offer a detailed character portrait of Brooke which presents him in a markedly different, and more sympathetic, light to the way he has been portrayed to date. He was, according to a contemporary, “a consummate actor”¹¹; the aim of this book is to unmask him.

I have constructed the book around his diary for three reasons. First, the character portrait that is offered is largely based on my detailed analysis of his entries; in common with most diaries, they reveal a great deal about their author. Second, in edited form, it not only narrates a fascinating and highly readable story but also contains his shrewd judgments of figures such as Churchill, Stalin, Eisenhower, de Gaulle, Smuts, Eden, Marshall, Mountbatten, Montgomery, Alexander and, to a lesser extent, Attlee, MacArthur and Patton. Third, the value of his diary as an historical record has not, in my view, been fully appreciated. It does far more than raise doubts over Churchill’s management of the British war effort and his approach to strategy since it opens a window on issues such as the strained relationship that exists between military and political leaders, the weaknesses of politicians, the interplay between prime minister and cabinet and how military leaders should handle their political masters. His diary also has an educational value because there were a great many lessons to be learnt from Brooke’s experiences in the War and the failure to learn, or apply, those lessons led to some of the mistakes being made

in the recent wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. All these issues are examined in Chapter 21.

Part One covers the period from 1883 up to the outbreak of the War in September 1939 and comprises a fast gallop through Brooke's childhood, his experiences in the First World War and his rise through the army in the interwar years. It highlights some of Brooke's more obvious character traits such as his high level of energy and drive – he “thought fast, talked fast and moved fast.”¹²

Part Two, which forms the backbone of the book, covers the six years of the War and ends with Brooke's retirement in 1946. It comprises edited extracts from his diary and his autobiographical Notes: these Notes elaborated on his diary entries and were written by Brooke in the 1950s to help Bryant write the commissioned biography after his death. I should emphasise that Part Two is an account of Brooke's personal experiences between 1939 and 1946 rather than a narrative history of the War.

Part Three comprises four chapters. The first contains the detailed character portrait of Brooke. The second opens with an analysis of Brooke's first year as CIGS and then examines five aspects of Anglo-American strategy. The third covers Brooke's post-War life, his collaboration with Bryant in the publication of *The Turn of the Tide* and *Triumph in the West* and concludes by listing his achievements in the War: this chapter includes an assessment of Churchill and also identifies the lessons to be learnt from Brooke's experiences in the War. The final chapter explains why I came to sympathise with Brooke and why he was a reluctant warrior.

Five points deserve mention. First, the authenticity of Brooke's diary as an historical document is well-nigh unimpeachable since they were truly contemporaneous notes written daily by a man who was, according to two of his close colleagues, “straight, absolutely honest”¹³ and “bone honest”. Moreover, their authenticity has never been questioned. On the contrary, they have been, and continue to be, freely quoted in books and television programmes without qualification as to their provenance.

Distinction needs to be drawn between the authenticity of his diary and the opinions Brooke expressed in his entries. It has been argued that since his diary was written late at night when Brooke was exhausted

INTRODUCTION

and frustrated, he was just letting off steam and, consequently, little importance should be attached to his criticisms: General Ismay was a notable proponent of this claim, as will shortly become apparent. Whilst plausible, this was almost certainly a disingenuous attempt to belittle Brooke's criticisms and sweep them under the carpet. Far more convincing is the argument that whilst his diary was undoubtedly written when he was exhausted and frustrated, that was exactly what made his opinions so compelling and revealing – Brooke wrote when his guard was down.

Second, Brooke was a conventionally minded man, yet he elected to breach wartime regulations and, moreover, create a very real security risk by maintaining his diary throughout the War: he acknowledged this risk in his 30 July 1942 entry, on the eve of his flight to Cairo, "Shall start new book tomorrow as I dare not risk being caught with this should we be caught or crash." The reason why he did so lies in his opening dedication to Benita, "I should feel quite lost without an occasional opportunity of a talk with you", and also in a letter he wrote to Benita in early 1940,

Our evening talks as you say take a long time to travel across from one chair to another, but for all that they are something quite sacred to me, the one moment when we seem to draw very close together, when I can make you say things to me and almost imagine you then saying them, and then answer back on paper.¹⁴

His 'talks' with Benita were clearly of huge importance to Brooke and the fact they were "quite sacred" to him suggests he viewed them as his lifeline to Benita.

Third, I offer the reader one notable health warning. Since Brooke was one of the principal architects of Anglo-American strategy in the War, it is well-nigh impossible to write a book about him without addressing the subject of military strategy. Unfortunately, my knowledge of this subject is, at best, limited. Consequently, on matters of strategy, the reader is in the hands of a rank amateur.

Fourth, there is an archive interview of Brooke at <http://www.bbc.co.uk/archive/the-alanbrooke-diaries/zf2f2sg> which is well worth

watching. In the opening shot of Brooke, he appears uncomfortable which is probably explained by his dislike of publicity. His demeanour is notable, in particular his eyes; he seems to glare rather than gaze at people and he conveys an air of impatience, almost irritation. When Brooke was a young man, one of his contemporaries referred to his “restless energy”. This was still apparent decades later in this interview.

Fifth, Brooke acquired three nicknames during his life. The first was the ‘Barrage King’ in the First World War. The second, and the one most frequently used, was ‘Brookie’. The third, and by far the most entertaining since it captured his forthright, abrupt manner, was ‘Colonel Shrapnel’. I did wonder if he was ‘Brookie’ to those who admired and liked him and ‘Colonel Shrapnel’ to those who feared him. In Parts One and Two, I refer to him as Brookie and in Part Three as Alanbrooke.

Brooke’s contemporaries have provided interesting – in some cases revealing – insights into his character. The following individuals are British unless stated otherwise and many of their quotes reappear in Part Three.

Field Marshal Harold Alexander.

“I served under him as a commander in the field most of the war and I could not have had a wiser, firmer or more understanding military chief to guide and look after our interests. Brookie, as we always call him, was the outstanding and obvious man for the job; a fine soldier in every sense and trusted and admired by the whole Army.”¹⁵

Major General R H Allen.

“Though I know that on occasion he can get a bit cross as I have heard a classic case when at a conference at the War Office he told a prominent Treasury official that he was a ‘cheeseparing little pipsqueak’... He was always phenomenally quick and endowed with a great sense of humour which made his repartees devastating but never ill natured... one of the most lovable men I have ever met... I rank Brookie with Archie Wavell as those for whom I have the greatest admiration.”

INTRODUCTION

Joan Bright Astley, War Office.

“I experienced the wrath of two members of the Chiefs of Staff Committee when we detrained that morning. First, a furious Sir Alan Brooke who told me with sharp clarity never again to allocate him a sleeping compartment right above the grinding train wheels... Minutes later, the Chief of the Air Staff was saying something angrily to me... the effects of this attack did not last so long as those produced by General Sir Alan Brooke.”¹⁶

“Sir Alan Brooke was enjoying himself... The day started when we all sat together in the breakfast-room. As he ate toast with caviar and drank Russian tea laced with vodka, he teased and talked and laughed. After a morning or two of silent surprise we realised that, instead of a formidable and distant figure, we had with us a delightful, amusing and easy companion who treated us with equal and courteous attention, from the brigadiers down to me and the other girls. He was a handsome man, strongly built, with broad slightly bowed shoulders, black eyes and hair, not very tall. He thought and spoke with lightning speed, reaching conclusions which darted into words and caught the listener unprepared. The mental agility revealed his French upbringing and education, and the rapid speech his perfect command of the French language. An abrupt manner and ready impatience misled people who did not know him well; if they had, they would have appreciated that both characteristics belonged to a quick and concentrated thinker; if they had, they would have known that he was kindly to subordinates. Most contradictory of all to these characteristics was his love of bird-watching and fishing – two recreations demanding the greatest patience.”¹⁷

General Sir Cecil Blacker.

“He was one of those whose brief presence was sufficient to make one perfectly sure that all would come right in the end.”¹⁸

Lieutenant General Sir Frederick Browning.

“I’ve [just] had the biggest dressing down of my life – but my God he’s a great man.”¹⁹

Richard Casey, Australian statesman.

*“Alan Brooke is a man of unusual quality and intensity. I know of no Service Leader who contributed more to the winning of the Second World War than he did, by his military capacity, by his judgement and by his complete honesty of thought and expression.”*²⁰

Admiral Andrew Cunningham, First Sea Lord and member of the Chiefs of Staff Committee.

*“Straight, absolutely honest and outspoken, he was outstandingly able in his difficult and most responsible position. Though impulsive at times, he always spoke out fearlessly and fluently against what he knew to be wrong. Generous almost to a fault, Alan Brooke was always actuated by the highest motives, and was a very charming companion. Jealousy in any shape or form did not enter into his composition. I am no judge of his capability as a fighting soldier; but feel that had it come his way in the later stages of the war he would have been one of our most brilliant commanders in the field. His long services to the country during war as Chief of the Imperial General Staff and on the Chiefs of Staff Committee were immeasurable.”*²¹

Anthony Eden, Foreign Secretary.

“Brookie was the greatest of the Allied military leaders... never [left] the Prime Minister and President in any doubt as to what militarily he and the Chiefs of Staff considered right... and would never be bullied into compromise.”

General Dwight Eisenhower (American).

“Impulsive by nature, as became his Irish ancestry, [Brooke] was highly intelligent and earnestly devoted to the single purpose of winning the War. When I first met him in November 1941, he seemed to me adroit rather than deep, and shrewd rather than wise. But gradually I came to realize that his mannerisms, which seemed strange to me, were merely accidental, that he was sincere and, though he lacked that ability so characteristic of General Marshall to weigh calmly the conflicting factors



INTRODUCTION

in a problem and so reach a rock-like decision, I soon found it easy to work with him. He did not hesitate to differ sharply and vehemently, but he did so forthrightly and honestly, and heated official discussion never affected the friendliness of his personal contacts or the unqualified character of his support. He must be classed as a brilliant soldier.”²²

General Sir Harold Franklyn, commander 5th Division, part of the BEF in France in 1940.

“When Brooke visited me at 10am that morning [27 May 1940], he studied the situation in silence – it was very bad – and then all he said was ‘What are you going to do about it?’ I replied, ‘I’m not worried about my left, but I am uneasy about the 143rd Brigade on my right – they have given and are being pushed back.’ Without a word, Brooke left. He apparently went straight to HQ 1st Division... ordered Alexander to send three battalions at once to support 5th Division and sent them to support 143rd Brigade at Comines... Brooke’s action in ordering up these reinforcements from I Corps on his own responsibility saved the situation.”²³

“He gave his orders clearly and decisively and one was left in no doubt as to his intentions... Brooke showed his great tactical ability under the most difficult circumstances and later proved himself to be the best strategist among the allies. He would have made a great Commander-in-Chief in the field.”²⁴

General Sir George Giffard.

“At the end of the war in Europe, the Commanders of the Allied Forces are being properly and warmly congratulated upon their splendid successes, but I have not seen anywhere an adequate tribute to you whom I regard as the architect and builder of our victory over Germany.”

Sir James Grigg, Secretary of State for War.

“By almost universal testimony it was due largely to his skill and resolution that not only his own Corps but the whole... BEF escaped



destruction in the retreat to Dunkirk."²⁵

*"It is no small thing, and it is certainly unusual, that the professional head of the Army should be a man who is admitted, nay proclaimed, by every other soldier of magnitude, to be beyond doubt the most accomplished soldier in the Army."*²⁶

General Sir Leslie Hollis, Senior Military Assistant Secretary to the War Cabinet.

*"Resolute, volatile, vibrant, versatile and sharp-tempered... but he was still a very good war-time CIGS. He was an equally good General in the field."*²⁷

Lieutenant General Sir Brian Horrocks.

*"The more I have studied [the 1940 campaign in France which ended in the evacuation from Dunkirk], the clearer it becomes that the man who really saved the BEF was our own corps commander, Lieutenant-General A F Brooke. I felt vaguely at the time that this alert, seemingly iron, man without a nerve in his body... who gave out his orders in short, clipped sentences, was a great soldier, but it is only now that I realise fully just how great he was. We regarded him as a highly efficient military machine. It is only since I have read his diaries that I appreciate what a consummate actor he must have been. Behind the confident mask was the sensitive nature of a man who hated war, the family man-cum-birdwatcher in fact."*²⁸

General Hastings 'Pug' Ismay, Military Secretary to the War Cabinet and Churchill's chief staff officer.

"Brooke was by general consent the best all-rounder in his Service [Army]. He had been an unqualified success in all the Staff appointments which he had held in peace and war and had made a great reputation as a fighting commander in the retreat to Dunkirk. In council he was so quick in the uptake that he was sometimes impatient with those who were slower witted; and his habit of expressing his opinions in

INTRODUCTION

positive terms led those who did not know him well to regard him as unnecessarily abrupt... It is a thousand pities that copious extracts from his private diaries have been published verbatim. They were intended for the eyes of his wife alone; many of the entries were made when he was exhausted, irritated or despondent... In these circumstances, the dogmatic, sometimes wounding, and often unjustifiable comments which he makes from time to time on his war comrades, cannot be regarded as considered judgments. There is, however, a danger that posterity, not knowing the circumstances, will take the assertions and criticisms in the diaries at face value, and will get the idea that Brooke was self-satisfied, self pitying, ungenerous and disloyal. He was none of these things. On the contrary, his selflessness, integrity and mastery of his profession earned him the complete confidence, not only of his political chiefs and his colleagues in Whitehall, but also of all our commanders in the field. On that count alone, he was worth his weight in gold. In the course of my eighteen years' service in Whitehall, I saw the work of eight different Chiefs of the Imperial General Staff at close quarters, and I would unhesitatingly say that Brooke was the best of them all."²⁹

Major General Sir John Kennedy, Director of Military Operations, War Office.

"Brooke arrived [as Chief of the Imperial General Staff] on 1st December 1941. It was a delight to work with him. He was quick and decided; his freshness made a new impact; he infected the War Office and the Chiefs of Staff with his own vitality; the change of tempo was immediate and immense."³⁰

Marian Long, Arthur Bryant's researcher.

"Brookie' is not an easy personality to capture and put on paper. There are so many different facets to him, and sometimes when interviewing people, I wonder if they are talking of the same man."

General Sir Charles Loyd.

"Few people will ever realize what you have achieved in this war and how much [your peerage] is deserved."

Field Marshal Bernard Montgomery.

“He arrived at my headquarters [near Dunkirk] to say goodbye and I saw at once that he was struggling to hold himself in check... then he broke down and wept – not because of the situation of the BEF, which indeed was enough to make anybody burst into tears, but because he had to leave us all to a fate which looked pretty bad. He, a soldier, had been ordered to abandon his men at a critical moment – that is what disturbed him... That scene in the sand-dunes on the Belgian coast is one which will remain with me all my life. I was allowed to see the real Brookie.”³¹

“One of Alanbrooke’s great qualities is sympathy... Another outstanding quality in his make-up is sincerity and loyalty; he is selfless, utterly sincere and entirely loyal... We in the Army knew that we could trust him absolutely.”³²

Letter from Montgomery to Brooke, February 1946.

“My dear Brookie,

Now that it has been announced that I am to succeed you, I must write and tell you how I feel about things.

During the late war you have given me many tasks to carry out; each one has been more difficult than the last, and each one has somehow been brought to a successful conclusion. But there have been moments when I have gone ‘off the rails’: due to impetuosity, irritation, or some such reason. You always pulled me back on to the rails, and I started off down the course again. I know very well that when I used to go ‘off the rails’, it increased your own work and anxieties 100 per cent. But you never complained. In the goodness of your heart you lent me a helping hand and asked nothing in return: not that I could have done anything for you. I want to say two things:

First – I am terribly grateful for all you have done for me.

Second – I could never have achieved anything if you had not been there to help me; it has been your wise guidance, and your firm handling of a very difficult subordinate, that really did the business. I could have done nothing alone.

INTRODUCTION

Thank you so very much, Brookie. You have been a true friend at all times.

*Your very devoted admirer,
Monty”*

Lord Moran, Churchill’s personal doctor.

“[Churchill] had said with a sly smile that if the Chiefs of Staff had not agreed with him he might have had to get rid of them. At once I taxed him with a direct question: ‘Did you ever think of getting rid of Alanbrooke?’ He became serious. ‘Never.’ There was a long pause. ‘Never,’ he repeated with complete conviction.”³³

“If Winston did not like a man he would certainly not admire him. I asked him once: ‘Don’t you think that Brooke is pretty good at his job?’ There was rather a long pause. ‘He has a flair for the business,’ he grunted. That was all he would concede. Soldiers in this country, at any rate, will feel that this is an understatement of the fact. They would readily agree that Brooke was not a Marlborough or even a Wellington; the only claim they make for him is that in the Army he is recognized as the best soldier we could produce in two wars.”³⁴

“Alanbrooke told me that before he took up soldiering he wanted to be a surgeon. A craftsman by instinct, he knew exactly what could be done with the resources at his command and he had the craftsman’s respect for method.”³⁵

“He recoiled from the idea of gaining ascendancy over men to get his own way. The truth was that the competitive instinct had been left out of his make-up. The brutality of war horrified him, and apart from a natural yearning to practise his profession in the exacting conditions of command in the field, he was without ambition.”³⁶

“A simple, gentle, selfless soul – a warning to us all not to give up hope about mankind.”³⁷

Lieutenant General Sir Archibald Nye, Vice Chief of the Imperial General Staff.

“Only a handful of people begin to realize all you did... you are more responsible for the winning of the war on the Allied side than any other individual with the sole exception of Winston himself.”

“I was in a better position than anyone else to know all you had to cope with; and could therefore know better than others not only your great gifts but your singleness of purpose, your incorruptibility and your absolute integrity – and a combination of these qualities has made you a gigantic figure which no one could fail to admire.”

General Sir Bernard Paget.

“He would have won the war in Europe a year earlier. He would have been decisive and have closely directed the campaign.”

Sir Charles Portal, Chief of the Air Staff and member of the Chiefs of Staff Committee.

“I can honestly say that I have an unbounded admiration for the way you handled our [chiefs of staff] affairs and for the forcefulness and complete sincerity and the clear-sightedness and soundness with which you always dealt with Ministers on our behalf – no one could ever hold a candle to your record in that respect and it was about the biggest factor in getting results.”

Admiral Sir Bertram Ramsay.

“No one will ever know what the country owes to Brooke. His worth is quite uncalculable.”

Field Marshal Jan Smuts, South African prime minister, as reported by Sir John Kennedy.

“I have the greatest respect for him. I believe him to be a really great man.”³⁸



INTRODUCTION

Marshal Joseph Stalin (Russian).

*“A very clever military leader.”*³⁹

Colonel Rony Stanyforth, Brooke’s military assistant in May 1940.

“AB is a most impenetrable man and rarely, if ever, shows what he is feeling.”