

The Prime Minister's Military Nursemaid

AL NEWMAN

THE TURN OF THE TIDE, 1939-1943 (A History of the War Years Based on the Diaries of Field-Marshal Lord Alanbrooke), by Sir Arthur Bryant. Doubleday. \$6.95.

The wartime Chief of Britain's Imperial General Staff from mid-November, 1941, onward was a man of mystery. Often enough in the London newspapers of 1943 and 1944 one saw features about his fellow Chiefs, Air Marshal Sir Charles Portal, Admiral Sir Dudley Pound (and later Admiral Sir Andrew Cunningham), and Admiral Lord Louis Mountbatten of Combined Operations. But rarely was there even a reference to Field-Marshal Sir Alan Brooke, their chairman.

Brooke was busy. Since Prime Minister Churchill was his own Minister of Defence, the C.I.G.S.—in addition to meeting daily with the other service chiefs and overseeing the global operations of the British Army—was available day and night to the prime minister. With Churchill, of course, it was mostly night and into the morning's small hours.

From his diaries and Sir Arthur Bryant's commentary, Brooke emerges as a sort of military nursemaid. The child he was given to tend was brilliant but wayward. It was fascinated with the highest cliffs, and Brooke's duty was to ignore the child's screaming protests and, like a faithful sheep dog, nudge the brat gently away from peril. Churchill had the most brilliant ideas of the war, and also the worst; in fact at one time or another he seems to have hit on nearly every idea there was to be had. "He has an unfortunate trick of picking up some isolated operation, and, without ever really having it looked into, setting his heart on it . . .," wrote Brooke. "Perhaps the most remarkable failing of his is that he can never see a whole strategical problem at once. His gaze always settles on some definite part of the canvas and the rest

of the picture is lost. . . ." Parts of the canvas that Churchill had his eye on time and again were Trondheim in Norway ("Where do you go from there?" asked Brooke) and, later, the northern tip of Sumatra (" . . . I could not get any definite reply from him as to what he hoped to accomplish. . . ").

The Soft Underbelly

The naysayers of this world—particularly the military naysayers—are invaluable but highly unpopular. Brooke was a master of this art. "Those damned planners of yours," said Churchill, "plan nothing but difficulties."

This trait also led Brooke into prolonged arguments with U.S. Secretary of War Henry L. Stimson and General George C. Marshall, his American opposite number. Both Americans were hell-bent on a cross-Channel invasion, either on a limited basis in 1942 to establish a beachhead on the Cherbourg Peninsula or a full-scale operation in 1943. Considering the strength of the Luftwaffe and the Wehrmacht in France at the time against the limited range of the R.A.F. home-based fighters and the relatively few U.S. divisions that could be assembled in the European theater even by early 1944, either attack would almost certainly have been disastrous.

The first few half-trained, half-equipped American divisions landed in North Africa were a force that might be likened to a promising young Golden Gloves boxer. Bring him along slowly and he may one day become a heavyweight champion. Give him fights of increasing difficulty, but never overmatch him. The defeat of Kasserine Pass early in 1943 was almost an overmatch, but the young fighter managed to get off the canvas and survive a very bad round. What would have happened to him in a tougher match was amply demonstrated by the fate

of the Canadians' reconnaissance in force at Dieppe in August, 1943.

Probably Brooke was not thinking in these terms. The long campaign in the Western Desert was something that more or less just grew. First the Italians moved toward Egypt and the British sent them reeling back inside Libya with a bloody nose. Then the Germans reinforced their allies with Rommel and the Afrika Korps and they gave the British a bloody nose, and then . . .

But as early as December, 1941, Brooke had fixed on a Mediterranean-first strategy. His diary at the time said: ". . . I am positive that our policy for the conduct of the war should be to direct both military and political efforts towards the early conquest of North Africa. From there we shall be able to reopen the Mediterranean and to stage offensive operations against Italy." Why? For the simplest reason imaginable: "It was plain to me that . . . until we had done so we should never have enough shipping to stage major operations."

Thus the U.S. Chiefs were talked into TORCH, the North African landings of November, 1942. On the successful completion of that campaign at Bizerte and Tunis the following May, where was there to go but Sicily? And with that island cleared by late August and Italy trying almost vainly to surrender, what was there to do but invade the peninsula in September? On the whole, it worked out pretty well.

THE MAJOR defect of this 624-page book is Sir Arthur Bryant's adulatory approach. Brooke is so consistently right that one begins to suspect considerable care on the part of the author in selecting excerpts from his diary. A second volume now in preparation, *The Triumph of the West*, which will deal with 1944 and 1945, should prove an acid test. What was Brooke's attitude toward the Anzio landings? Was he behind the British opposition to the ANVIL invasion of southern France, an operation that not only paid off handsomely but gave us the vital port of Marseilles? And what did he think of the Arnhem gamble?

At least once during this period Brooke was wrong by his own admission. He opposed Eisenhower's

opening offensive gambit of 1945: destruction of the German armies west of the Rhine on a broad front rather than a single concentrated thrust in the British-Canadian northern sector. According to *Crusade in Europe*, Brooke once said to Eisenhower: "Thank God, Ike, you stuck by your plan. You were completely right and I am sorry if my fear of dispersed effort added to your burdens. The German is now licked. It is merely a question of when he chooses to quit. Thank God you stuck by your guns."

One wonders how Sir Arthur will handle *that*.

IN ANY case, velvet-pawed though the author-editor may have been in selecting excerpts that would establish his hero's prescience, he spared few feelings in his choice of personal characterizations. Here is Marshall: "... a big man and a very great gentleman who inspired trust but did not impress me by the ability of his brain." And Eisenhower: "He learnt a lot during the war, but tactics, strategy and command were never his strong points." MacArthur: "I have often wondered since the war how different matters might have been if I had had MacArthur instead of Marshall to deal with. From everything I saw of him I put him down as the greatest general of the last war." Matters would have been different indeed. If the dogmatic Brooke had had to negotiate with MacArthur, there probably would have been a fist fight.

One senses that Brooke, knowing Churchill best, put him on paper best. In the dark days at the end of 1941 he wrote: "God knows where we should be without him, but God knows where we shall go with him!" After the Quebec Conference of 1943, with things going better but Churchill still being difficult: "It is a wonderful character, the most marvellous qualities and superhuman genius mixed with an astonishing lack of vision at times, and an impetuosity which, if not guided, must inevitably bring him into trouble again and again. . . .

"He is quite the most difficult man to work with that I have ever struck, but I would not have missed the chance of working with him for anything on earth."

Second Looks At the Suez Adventure

SANDER VANOCUR

THE SUEZ WAR, by Paul Johnson. With an introduction by Aneurin Bevan. Greenberg. \$2.50.

GUILTY MEN 1957: SUEZ & CYPRUS, by Michael Foot and Mervyn Jones. Rinehart. \$1.95.

The Anglo-French intervention in Suez last fall deserves to have a classic history written about it. Here instead are two political pamphlets, first published in Great Britain. Their tone would seem to indicate that political pamphleteering is still a lively art there, perhaps more so than in this country.

For a political pamphlet to be effective, it should be inspired by an issue people feel strongly about, preferably one with strong moral overtones. It should make no concessions to historical objectivity. A political pamphlet does not seek to clarify but aims to persuade.

The Anglo-French intervention in Suez was a perfect issue for pamphleteering. Though the action was generally accepted in France, the reverse was true in Britain. It split the political parties there, and to a lesser extent the population, like no event since Munich. It especially revealed the always latent tendencies of the British left wing toward political masochism and its almost total renunciation of the concept of force as a factor in international disputes.

Johnson in his work and Foot and Jones in theirs have presented this left-wing view. Johnson is an assistant editor of the weekly *New Statesman and Nation*. Jones is on the staff of the weekly *Tribune*, of which Foot is a director and managing editor; Foot is also a columnist for the Labour Party newspaper, the *Daily Herald*.

Mr. Foot and the Cloven Hoof

Of the pamphlets, the one by Foot and Jones is clearly the more important. Of the authors, Foot's influence is the most pronounced. He is easily the most persuasive political

pamphleteer in Britain, a claim he staked out for himself in 1940 with the publication of an earlier *Guilty Men*, an indictment of Britain's leaders for the events leading up to the Second World War.

Lord Attlee is supposed to have remarked on one occasion that Foot's Puritan forebears made him see the world as a place abounding with devils. It is a convenient theory. It allows us to overlook the tragic complexities of life and make folly and stupidity synonyms for sin and guilt.

Thus we have Johnson, who shows Foot's influence, writing in one of his more flowery passages: "A deadly blow has been struck at the very foundations of our society. Our modern democratic system, envied and emulated all over the world, is an effective system of government . . . because there is public confidence in the men who run it. At the heart of our political consciousness is the notion that a British minister of the Crown is an honourable man. If this is destroyed, the system is fatally injured; its lifeblood — public confidence — drains away. In the last few weeks, we have had the spectacle of British ministers lying to the House of Commons, to their own party and to the public. They have lied to the United Nations and to their own allies. When exposed, they have compounded these falsehoods by more lies. . . . Our leaders are guilty men. So long as they go unpunished, all of us are accessories after the fact."

SURELY this is too melodramatic. No government in history has ever told its own people or another government the complete truth. If governments ever told the truth, most of them would be thrown out of office.

What Johnson really wants is more information about the events leading up to the Suez intervention;