

GENERAL MONTGOMERY'S FIRST ADDRESS TO HIS SENIOR OFFICERS AT EL ALAMEIN, 1942.

“I want first of all to introduce myself to you. You do not know me. I do not know you. But we have to work together; therefore we must understand each other and must have confidence in each other. I have been here only a few hours. But from what I've seen and heard since I arrived I am prepared to say, here and now, that I have confidence in you. We will then work together as a team; and together we will gain the confidence of this great Army and go forward to final victory in Africa.

I believe that one of the first duties of a commander is to create what I call “atmosphere” and in that atmosphere his staff, subordinate commanders and troops will live and work and fight. I do not like the general atmosphere that I find here. It is an atmosphere of doubt; of looking back to select the next place to which to withdraw; of loss of confidence in our ability to defeat Rommel; of desperate defense measures by reserves in preparing positions in Cairo and the Delta.

All that must cease. Let us have a new atmosphere.

The defense of Egypt lies here at Alamein and on the Ruweisat Ridge. What is the use in digging trenches in the Delta? It's quite useless; if we lose this position then we lose Egypt. All the fighting troops now in the Delta must come here at once. Here we will stand and fight. There will be no further withdrawal. I have ordered that all plans and instructions dealing with further withdrawal are to be burnt, and at once. We will stand and fight here. If we can't stay here alive, then let us stay here dead.

I want to impress upon everyone that the bad times are over. Fresh divisions from the UK are now arriving here in Egypt, together with ample reinforcements for our present divisions. We have 300 to 400 new Sherman tanks coming and these are actually being unloaded at Suez now. Our mandate from the Prime Minister is to destroy the Axis forces in North Africa. I have seen it, written on half a sheet of notepaper. And it will be done. I don't want any doubters in this party. It can be done and it will be done, beyond any possibility of a doubt.

Now I understand that Rommel is expected to attack at any moment. Excellent. Let him attack. I would sooner it didn't come for a week, just to give me time to sort things out. If we can have two weeks to prepare then we will be sitting pretty. Rommel can attack as soon as he likes after that and I hope he does.

Meanwhile, we ourselves will start to plan a great offensive. It will be the beginning of a campaign which will hit Rommel and his Army for six, right out of Africa. But first we must create a reserve force, mobile and strong in armour, which we will train out of the line. Rommel has always had such a force in his Afrika Corps, which is never used to hold the line but is always in reserve, available for striking blows. Therein has been his

great strength. We will create such a Corps ourselves, a British Panzer Corps. It will consist of two armoured divisions and one motorized division. I gave orders yesterday for it to begin to form, back in the Delta.

I have no intention of launching our great attack until we are completely ready. There will be great pressure from many quarters to attack soon. I will not attack until we are ready and you can rest assured on that point. Meanwhile, if Rommel attacks while we are preparing, let him do so with pleasure. We will merely continue with our own preparations and we will attack when we are ready and not before.

I want to tell you that I always work on the Chief-of-Staff system. I have nominated Brigadier de Guingand as Chief-of-Staff, 8th Army. I will issue orders through him. Whatever he says will be taken as coming from me and will be acted on at once.

I understand that there has been a great deal of 'belly-aching' out here. I mean inventing poor reasons for not doing what one has been told to do. All this will stop at once. I will tolerate no belly-aching. If anyone objects to doing what he is told, then he can get out of it, and at once. I want that made very clear right down through the 8th Army.

I have little more to say just at present. And some of you may think it is quite enough and wonder if I am mad. I assure you that I am quite sane. I understand there are people who often think I am slightly mad; so often that I now regard it as rather a compliment. All I have to say to that is that if I am slightly mad, then there are a large number of people that I could name that are raving lunatics!

What I have done is get over to you the 'atmosphere' in which we will now work and fight. You must see that atmosphere permeates right down through the 8th Army to the most junior private soldier. All the soldiers must know what is wanted. When they see it coming to pass, there will be a surge of confidence throughout the Army.

I ask you to give me your confidence and to have faith that what I have said will come to pass. There is much work to be done. The orders that I have given about no further withdrawal will mean a complete change in the layout of our dispositions; also that we must prepare for our own great offensive. The first thing to do is to move our HQ to a decent place where we can live in reasonable comfort and where the Army staff can all be together and side by side with the HQ of the Desert Air Force. This is a frightful place here. Depressing, unhealthy and a rendezvous for every fly in Africa. We shall do no good work here. Let us get over there by the sea where it is fresh and healthy. If officers are to do good work they must have decent messes, and be comfortable. So off we go on the new line.

The Chief-of-Staff will be issuing orders on many points very shortly and I am always available to be consulted by the senior officers of the staff. The great point to remember is that we are going to finish with the chap Rommel once and for all. It will be quite easy. There is no doubt about that. He is definitely a nuisance. Therefore we will hit him a crack and finish him off."