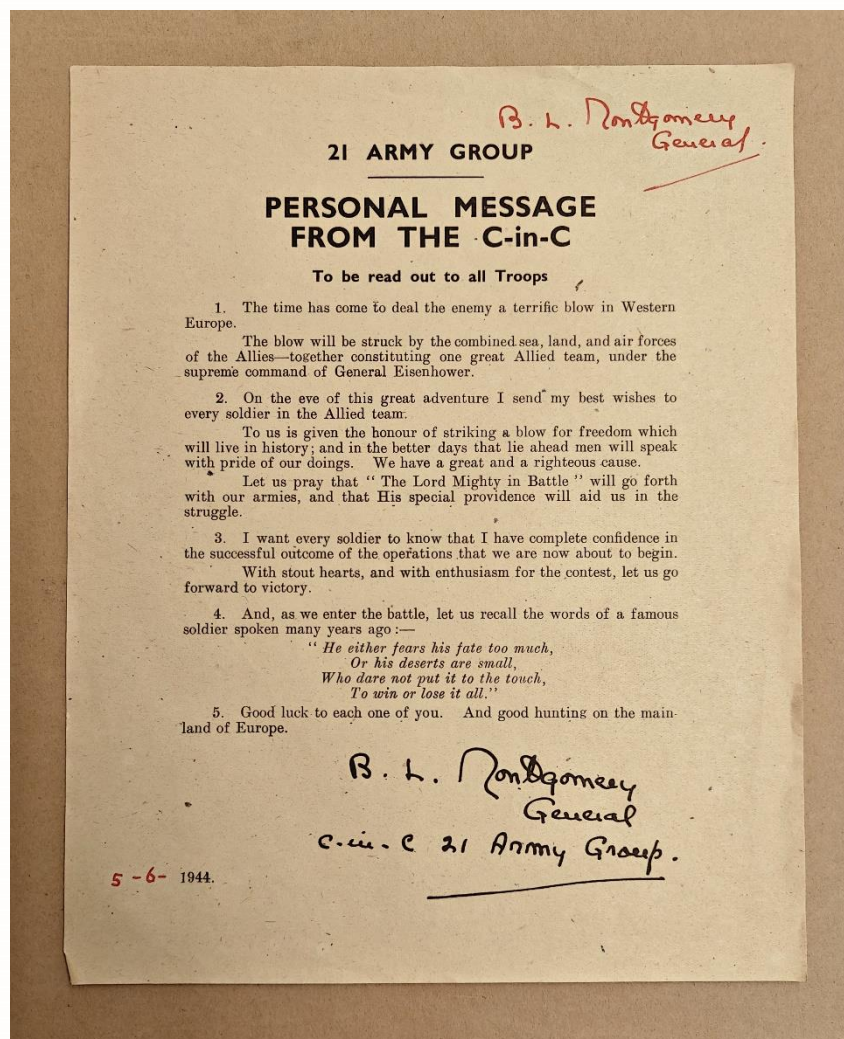


Personal message from the Commander in Chief on the eve of D-Day

CR5186/Box 23/50

November's Document of the Month has been chosen to mark this month's Remembrance Day and the 100-year anniversary commemorations of D-Day which occurred earlier this year. The document featured is a printed message from the Commander in Chief of the 21st Army Group, Bernard Montgomery, to prepare troops for the offensive. The 21st Army Group was assigned to Operation Overlord, such that Montgomery was responsible for all the ground troops at the start of the Allied invasion of Normandy.¹



The Royal Regiment of Fusiliers Museum (Royal Warwickshire Regiment) collection held at Warwickshire County Record Office, CR5186/Box 23/50.

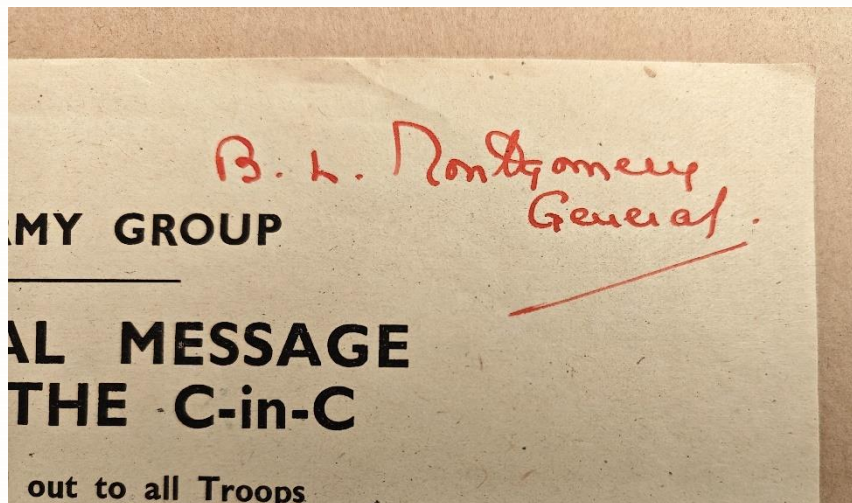
The message is commanding in tone, speaking of ‘the honour of striking a blow for freedom which will live in our history’.ⁱⁱ This emotive language likely sought to rally troops ahead of the upcoming ‘Operation Overlord’ beginning on 6th June 1944.

D-Day invasion

As indicated in Montgomery’s message, the invasion of Northern Europe was planned as an attack on all fronts, using ‘the combined sea, land, and air forces of the Allies’.ⁱⁱⁱ Now known as D-Day, 6th June 1944 marked the beginning of drive to liberate German-occupied Europe under the supreme command of General Dwight D. Eisenhower. The pressure caused the German army to retreat from France and it was never able to regain its foothold, despite later attempts at a counterattack.^{iv}

‘Monty’ and the Royal Warwickshire Regiment

Bernard Montgomery is one of the most famous figures in British military history, who in fact began his army career with a commission into the Royal Warwickshire Regiment in 1908. Montgomery saw action in the First World War, initially as a member of the Regiment’s 1st Battalion, but he was severely wounded during the first battle of Ypres. Having received the Distinguished Service Order for his conduct in battle, Montgomery had been promoted to acting Lieutenant Colonel by the end of the war.^v



The Royal Regiment of Fusiliers Museum (Royal Warwickshire Regiment) collection held at Warwickshire County Record Office, CR5186/Box 23/50.

However, it was during the Second World War that Montgomery gained his reputation as a skilful military leader. He was appointed a commander by Prime Minister Winston Churchill in the North African campaign, before leading the defence

of El Alamein to achieve victory over the German forces in October 1942. This crucial success was recognised after the war, when Montgomery was given the title Viscount Montgomery of Alamein.^{vi}

However, Montgomery was also a somewhat contentious figure. The affectionate nickname 'Monty' reflects the respect he inspired in soldiers, yet he has been described as undiplomatic and even arrogant in his attitude, characteristics which made his relationship with senior officers and superiors difficult. Though Montgomery began the invasion of Northern Europe as the commander of all land troops, he was forced to cede his position at the head of the 21st Army Group to General Eisenhower in September 1944, a change which he resented.^{vii} These frustrations were reignited by Montgomery in his memoir in 1958, in which he criticised colleagues from the war, including Eisenhower.^{viii}

Besides the famous 'Monty', the Royal Regiment of Fusiliers Museum (Royal Warwickshire Regiment) collection tells many stories from the regiment's history. Having arrived at the Record Office in 2020, this collection is currently still being catalogued, but you can contact us at recordoffice@warwickshire.gov.uk for more information.

ⁱ *National Army Museum*, 'Bernard Law Montgomery: Unbeatable and unbearable'. Available at: <https://www.nam.ac.uk/explore/bernard-montgomery> (accessed 07/08/2024).

ⁱⁱ The Royal Regiment of Fusiliers Museum (Royal Warwickshire Regiment) collection held at Warwickshire County Record Office, CR5186/Box 23/50.

ⁱⁱⁱ The Royal Regiment of Fusiliers Museum (Royal Warwickshire Regiment) collection held at Warwickshire County Record Office, CR5186/Box 23/50.

^{iv} <https://www.iwm.org.uk/history/the-10-things-you-need-to-know-about-d-day>

^v Heathcote, T. A. (2012), *The British Field Marshals, 1736-1997: A Biographical Dictionary*. United Kingdom: Pen & Sword Books. Available at: https://www.google.co.uk/books/edition/The_British_Field_Marshals_1736_1997/KAkKUN7s4TIC?hl=en&gbpv=1&printsec=frontcover (accessed 07/08/2024).

^{vi} *National Army Museum*, 'Bernard Law Montgomery: Unbeatable and unbearable'. Available at: <https://www.nam.ac.uk/explore/bernard-montgomery> (accessed 07/08/2024).

^{vii} *BBC History*, 'Field Marshal Bernard Montgomery (1887-1976)'. Available at: https://www.bbc.co.uk/history/historic_figures/montgomery_bernard.shtml (accessed 07/08/2024).

^{viii} *National Army Museum*, 'Bernard Law Montgomery: Unbeatable and unbearable'. Available at: <https://www.nam.ac.uk/explore/bernard-montgomery> (accessed 07/08/2024).