MONTY: HIS PART IN MY VICTORY

Half the time the men in command would tune in specifically to find nits to pick, which they would write down and bollock the largely blameless correspondents about later. Ironically, the reporters' embedded circumstances made them hyper-aware of potential mistakes, as they were living and working around the very people who were both the subject and primary audience of their work. Despite this, the Generals usually managed to find some tiny material inaccuracy to yell at the correspondent over.

That was when they weren't committing such inaccuracies themselves. Frank Gillard almost had his war reporting career brought to an abrupt halt several months before the same happened to the war itself. The last roll of the dice for the German army came at the Battle of the Bulge over Christmas 1944. Allied Generals, left the densely forested Ardennes sparsely defended, assuming they would be too difficult a terrain for the Axis armies to use as a route back into Belgium and France. They were therefore taken completely by surprise when the Germans did exactly that (with the bonus of having made the same mistake twice in the same war).

Though the Allies ultimately emerged victorious, it was only after a titanic five-week struggle that cost just shy of a hundred thousand men - more than the Germans lost, in fact - almost all of whom were American. So there was an understandable controversy when General Montgomery - a man known even then for possessing the tact and diplomacy of a seagull with a stubbed toe - gave a press conference (without mentioning it to the BBC beforehand), shortly after the battle was won, in which he took most of the credit for the victory on behalf of the British armed forces. For the record, the British lost fourteen hundred and eight men compared to eighteen and a half thousand US casualties. Montgomery's speech inevitably went down like a knee in a sandwich with the Americans, to the point where General Eisenhower contacted Churchill and said, as paraphrased by Frank Gillard:

"*Look, I've got three million American men under command in Europe. The only radio they can hear which they understand is the BBC's. They can't hear their home radio. If they hear the BBC reporting, even if it's doing so in all innocence, that British forces won a battle when they know bloody well the Americans won the battle, this is not good for morale."***

Gillard was embedded with Montgomery's forces at the time, and was just as annoyed with his press conference stunt as Eisenhower was. The solution was for Gillard to leave the British detachment and re-embed with the Americans, to provide clearer and more accurate reporting on (and for) the American contingent. This worked out quite well for the BBC in general, because it

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meant that Gillard was present for the fall of Cologne, for the one successful part of Operation Market Garden, and for the seminal and highly symbolic moment where the American and Soviet forces invading Germany finally met in the middle at the Elbe river. Finally, when Berlin fell in May of 1945, Gillard was astonished when Montgomery personally contacted him to invite him over to report on the signing of the Berlin Declaration - even though he was then stationed hundreds of miles away and had to scramble like a madman to make it there in time, which he did with minutes to spare. Gillard recognised the symbolism of Montgomery requesting his specific services, not only for himself but for the BBC and broadcasting in general:

"*This was Monty, really, publicly showing a favour to me...well, not just to me, oh dear, I'm being terribly arrogant, to the BBC. He wanted to show...he had recognised the value of the broadcasting services during the war period."***

The Declaration - essentially the four main generals carefully making a few things officials, like the fact that they won, that Germany was theirs now, that the entire war was all their fault and that they sucked - was signed on the 5th of June, 1945, one day short of a year after D-Day. The final episode of War Report had already gone out a month earlier, with the unconditional surrender at Lüneberg Heath providing the series finale. There was no longer any War to Report on. But the conflict had left the BBC with a vast, hyper-modern newsgathering and broadcasting infrastructure that was the envy of the English-speaking world and made stars of Gillard, Dimbleby and others. The Corporation's coverage of the last year of the War remains a landmark in the history of news and of broadcasting in general, and William Haley was justly proud of the achievement. And then he dismantled the entire thing.

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