DID FIELD MARSHAL BERNARD MONTGOMERY (MONTGOMERY OF ALAMEIN) HAVE ASPERGER'S SYNDROME?

MICHAEL FITZGERALD

ABSTRACT

In the present paper the evidence for Field Marshal Montgomery having Asperger's syndrome is examined. Biographies of Montgomery were examined to search for evidence that he met criteria for Asperger's syndrome - Gillberg (1991) and Asperger's disorder (APA,1994) and Anankastic personality disorder (WHO,1992). He demonstrates a qualitative impairment in social interaction and restricted repetitive and stereotyped patterns of behaviour, interests and activities. It can be concluded that he met criteria for Asperger's disorder DSM-IV (APA,1994).

Key words : Montgomery, asperger's disorder

Field Marshal Bernard Montgomery was born on the 17th of November, 1887. He was the fourth child and third son in the family. One of his ancestors Samuel Montgomery (known as "Uncle Montgomery") was obsessed with religion. He frittered away the family legacy. He was eccentric and lived alone with his two unmarried sisters. He was "absolutely ignorant of the ways of the world" (Hamilton, 1981). He had a small diminutive carriage built so that he would not have to give a lift to local poor. He suffered from depression. It is interesting that Samuel Montgomery was acutely aware of "a missing, inaccessible world that made him shy and often torn between humility and bigotry and was disposed more towards the male sex rather than the female" (Hamilton, 1981).

Montgomery's maternal grandfather Frederick Farrar was "a rather reserved man; a shy man" (Hamilton, 1981). He had a most "forceful personality, with total faith in his own judgement, and a remarkable ability to simplify" (Hamilton, 1981). He was ill at ease in company and could not make small talk and appeared to be rather unapproachable (Hamilton, 1981). He tended to write for most of the day and also to spend a considerable proportion of the night writing or correcting proofs (Hamilton, 1981).

Bernard Montgomery was described as a "wayward, emotionally and intellectually immature fourth child" (Hamilton, 1981). It is interesting that one of his mother's favourite phrases was "go out and find out what Bernard (Montgomery) is doing and tell him stop it" (Hamilton, 1981). He was regarded as "the 'black sheep' of the family, the trouble maker and sometimes renegade" (Hamilton, 1981). He was also described as having "no charm at all" and being "the bad boy of the family, mischievous by nature, and individualist by character" (Moorehead,1946). The rigidity of his personality was shown when he decided to join the army and had a tremendous argument with his mother and less so with his father to achieve his aim which he did.

School progress : In school he was described as "self sufficient, intolerant of authority" (Hamilton,1981). He was noted to be industrious in things that interested him. Control was extraordinarily important to him and on the playing fields in school he could plan "his own battles" (Hamilton,1981).

In personality he was described as being extremely egocentric and being "overlaid by
MICHAEL FITZGERALD

eccentricity" (Montgomery, 1987). He had an "awkward, cussed, and single minded character" (Hamilton, 1981). He was a "picky character" (Horne, 1994) and was also described as "tragedy of personality and failed communications" (Taylor, 1965). Moorehead described him as being like "an intensely compacted hank of steel wire" (Moorehead, 1946). He was regarded as being the most successful British officer in the army during the 2nd world war. Nevertheless he also played a significant role during the 1st world war. He was regarded as being one of the worst Chiefs of the Imperial General's staff being neither willing or able to co-operate with his fellow Chiefs of staff (Hamilton, 1981). Did he have Asperger's syndrome? (Wing, 1981).

Diagnostic Criteria for Asperger's Syndrome (Gillberg, 1991)

Severe impairment in reciprocal social interaction: As Horne (1994) points out he always had problems in peer relations and that he "neglected relations with his peer". It wasn't actually that he neglected them but he had an inability to deal with them. Horne goes on to say that he was unable to get on with or communicate with those nearer his own status. He had a "life long inability to open up to contemporaries". He isolated himself "from other senior officers and from people his own age" (Horne, 1994). He was "the self-contained solitary, awkward and unclubbable with his contemporaries as well as being as intractable colleague, who was susceptible to abrasive arrogance and intolerance" (Horne, 1994). It was clear that he was so isolated in his headquarters and did not read papers sent to him that he could not understand the criticism and jealousy which his behaviour was causing among the British and American Army Chiefs (Horne, 1994).

Throughout his life he showed a gross lack of a capacity to empathise or to understand what other people might be feeling emotionally. On one occasion he set fire to another cadet in Military College and he was reduced in military rank because of it. He could not see how this might be taken by the Military authorities (Hamilton, 1981). He had "no political sense" which is another way of saying that he had a lack of empathy and could not see the implications of what he was doing and how other's might view it (Horne, 1994). He was capable of "breathtakingly mean behaviour" for example when he transferred his chief of staff de Guingand from a job that he was doing well, an act that was described as "monstrously ignoble" (Hamilton, 1981). Horne (1994) described one of the most insensitive things he ever said when he was giving a speech after dinner at a function. There was a blind journalist in the room and someone at the end of the table stated that they could not hear him speaking at which Montgomery snapped back "I can see one of you is blind but are the rest of you deaf too?" He would ruthlessly sack senior officers whom he deemed to be "useless, quite useless" (Horne, 1994). Winston Churchill said about him that he made it a rule not to "accept hospitality from any of his subordinate commanders. Napoleon would at least have had roast chicken on his travelling forgone, Churchill commented, and was lead to compare Montgomery's eccentricities with those of Napoleon, Marlborough and Cromwell" (Hamilton, 1981). His essential lack of sensitivity was felt not only by men but also by women and he was described as a misogynist. He would say "you cannot marry and be an efficient officer" (Montgomery, 1987), and Kay Sommerby Eisenhower's driver described Montgomery as a "supercilious woman - hating little martinet" (Horne, 1994).

Imposition of routines and interest (Gillberg, 1991) : i) On self in aspects of life and ii) on others.

What people noticed about him was his "self-will" and his zest for "servitude militaries" (Hamilton, 1981). It was "his iron determination that would single him out from a thousand more talented, more educated and more seemingly appropriate leaders of his age" (Hamilton, 1981). He went to bed rigidly at 9.30 p.m. every night and was extremely routine to Brett James (1984). His inflexible personality meant that he was not good at seizing opportunities (Horne, 1994). He had "an iron will and determination, his complete
DID FIELD MARSHAL BERNARD MONTGOMERY HAVE ASPERGER’S SYNDROME?

self confidence of the rightness of his cause and his own ability to attain it. He has been likened in character to Cromwell" (Hamilton, 1981). While he engaged in “ceaseless work” for the rest of his life after school he could nevertheless be “obstinate to the point of bigotry” (Montgomery, 1987). He inflicted “tyrannical discipline upon others” in later life. It is clear that he totally controlled the younger officers and “they did not really argue with him, and they were totally obedient, like all his staff; you only had to make one mistake and you were out”.

All absorbing narrow interests (Gillberg, 1991): He had only one interest soldiering (Horne, 1994). In comparison to another senior officer in the British Army Alan Brooke he was “less practical, much narrower in his skills and interests, a man with almost no relaxations” (Brett James, 1984).

He succeeded at war because of his “cold-blooded determination to succeed and achieving laid-down objectives” and these objectives lead to success in the “cold deadly business of tactical warfare” (Hamilton, 1981). Militarily he was very interested in “narrow fronts” because this allowed him to exercise “concentration/control/simplicity” (Horne, 1994).

Non-verbal communication (Gillberg, 1991): He adopted the most unorthodox “head gear for a serving General of the British Army”. His brother Brian Montgomery (1987) stated that a girl who was dancing with him found him “stiff, unamusing and more interested in shooting than in such a young girl”. It was noted that the atmosphere around him “had the extraordinary quietness and calm, as if nothing in the world could disturb his peace of mind ... and as one talked to him, one was aware all the time of the stillness and quietness that rained all around him ... as if even the birds were under a spell of silence; it was a kind of stillness one might associate more easily with a priest than a General” (Horne, 1994). He was “moulded into an awkward shape” (Hamilton, 1981).

Speech and language problems (Gillberg, 1991): We have no information on speech and language problems.

Motor clumsiness (Gillberg, 1991): He meets the criteria for Asperger’s syndrome (Gillberg, 1991) with the exception of motor clumsiness and speech and language problems. Neither of these two items are necessary for a diagnosis of “Asperger’s disorder in DSM-IV (APA, 1994) and therefore he meets the criteria for Asperger’s disorder (DSM-IV).”

Anankastic personality disorder (WHO, 1992): i) The most common criticism of him was that he showed excessive caution in initiating a battle; ii) he was preoccupied with schedules; iii) He showed undue preoccupation with productivity to the exclusion of pleasure and interpersonal relationships; iv) he showed extraordinary levels of rigidity and stubbornness and v) He showed unreasonable insistence that others submit exactly to his ways of doing things.

He therefore meets the criteria for anankastic personality disorder.

DISCUSSION

The issue of high functioning autism (Autistic Disorder DSM-IV) has also to be considered. He meets the criteria for qualitative impairment in social interaction as already described. The second criteria of qualitative impairments in communication is more difficult to make a final conclusion on. One can say that there is no evidence of a capacity for symbolic play in childhood and indeed he was very poor at writing essays in school. He certainly had impairment in the ability to sustain communication and indeed as Horne (1994) points out he was a lonely man and a “tragedy of personality and failed communications”. He did meet the third criteria of restricted, repetitive and stereotyped patterns of behaviour, interests and activities as already described in detail. Nevertheless Asperger’s disorder (DSM-IV) is the preferable diagnosis. While he certainly had serious impairment in the capacity for empathy it is also possible that he had problems with central coherence (Frith, 1989). He was always good at taking into account his immediate battle field both in the 1st and 2nd world war but was very poor at understanding the bigger picture. He made serious mistakes because of this which
MICHAEL FITZGERALD

prolonged the 2nd world war e.g. not capturing the Port of Antwerp and not pursuing Rommel after the battle of Alamein. This prolongation of the war also prolonged the Holocaust. His inability to communicate with his superiors and with Eisenhower in particular also made him extremely unpopular in America and almost lead to him being sacked from his job.

It is difficult to know if there was family history of Asperger's disorder but there was evidence of traits in both maternal and paternal side. Samuel Montgomery was eccentric, lived alone and was ignorant of the ways of the world. Frederick Farrar was shy, reserved, and could not make small talk. He spent most of the night writing and correcting proofs as already described.

He also met criteria for anankastic personality disorder.

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MICHAEL FITZGERALD Henry Marsh Professor of Child Psychiatry, Trinity College Dublin, Child & Family Centre, Ballyfermot Road, Ballyfermot, Dublin 10, Ireland