

Jack Lopresti MP on the military genius who opposed Nazi and Soviet tyranny

Patton was one of the most famous and celebrated generals of WWII, who made an awesome contribution to allied victories in North Africa and the European theatre of operations. He led the Operation Torch landings in French Morocco and captured - along with Monty's Eighth Army - the island of Sicily in thirty days. Patton's Third Army led the breakout from Normandy and were the heroes who liberated Bastogne during the Battle of the Bulge, his finest hour.

When most people think of General Patton, the image that usually comes to mind is of George C. Scott standing in front of a huge American flag, with a chest full of medals wearing ivory handled revolvers, often mistakenly referred to as pearl handled! Patton himself took great offence at any reference to his pistols being pearl handled, "Ivory-God-F---ing-Damn-Handled!" The film was excellent and won eight Oscars, including best picture and best actor for Scott. Patton's family had fought the making of the film for practically twenty years, but, when they relented, were pleased with it. But it only covers Patton's WWII campaigns and, I think, struggles to portray the complexity of the man and the many facets to his personality. Patton was not only a great general; he was also a military historian, poet, Olympic athlete, prophet and a mystic who believed in reincarnation.

General George Patton Jnr. was born on the 11th November, (which, poignantly, became Veterans' Day in the USA) 1885 in San

Gabriel, California, into a family with a very proud tradition of military service. Patton's grandfather, (the first George Patton) had risen to be a colonel in the Confederate Army and died against Union troops in 1864. Fifteen other members of the Patton family fought for the Confederacy. Patton had a very happy childhood. Being brought up on his family's ranch, he became a skilled horseman, learnt to sail, to hunt and to fish. He didn't begin his formal education until he was eleven - partly due to the fact that he suffered from dyslexia and his parents wanted to spare him from the scorn of his classmates, and also because they wanted him tutored at home with a classical education. At the age of seven, he could recite whole passages from Homer's heroic Greek epic The Iliad as well as the Bible. He studied military history with a great passion; especially about the great captains, whose success he felt, from his boyhood, he was destined to emulate on the battlefield. By the time Patton approached manhood, he was an expert on the great soldiers of history: Ceasar, Scipio, Hannibal, Joan of Arc, Napoleon and Marshall Murat.

He began to see himself as someone who had lived before and had fought in some of the great battles of history. A note made in one of the margins of Patton's history books says "Man's a damn liar. I know because I was there." He spent a year at Virginia Military Institute and then, overcoming his dyslexia, secured a place at West Point Military Academy. He then joined the cavalry.

While at his first posting, Fort Sheridan, he became the Army's "First Master of the Sword" and redesigned the Army's sabre, earning his first nickname, "Sabre George". In 1912 he was placed fifth in the Military Olympics in Stockholm. By 1916 he was serving as Aide de Camp to

General Pershing. Patton initiated motorised warfare by leading the world's first motorised military action in his pursuit of a Mexican revolutionary, Julio Cardenas. He returned after the action, with a dead bandit strapped to the front of his Dodge touring car.

In 1936, when he was stationed in Hawaii, after observing the Japanese in the Pacific he wrote a paper which proved to be highly prophetic. The conclusion was that, in the near future, the Japanese would seek to attack Pearl Harbour by air. He laid out how he thought the attack would happen, which was almost exactly the same as the actual attack on December 7th 1941. He was ignored.

At the end of the war, Patton, despite his fantastic achievements, was an unhappy and frustrated man. He thought it was a huge mistake to have allowed the Russians to take Prague and Berlin and a betrayal to have half of Europe under their yoke; to have fought a war to defeat one tyranny, but to leave half the peoples of Europe under another one. Patton was one of the first people to

see that the Russians were intent on world domination and knew that Germany needed to be built up and stabilised as a bulwark against communism, which he felt could easily spread throughout the whole of Europe and, eventually, the USA. He also disagreed vehemently with the way the victors were treating defeated Germany. He was made military governor of Bavaria, but disagreed with the non-fraternisation policy and the lengths to which the de-Nazification policy went. He saw it as victor's justice and thought we shouldn't mistreat people, as he saw it, that we would need so badly.

He thought it was more important to get the country on its feet, with enough wood for the local population to heat at least one room in the very cold winter - to get the water running and food to feed the people - than to start a witch hunt for people who as he put it, had paid lip service to the Nazi party for their own survival. He also knew, historically, what happened after major conflicts - the army was run down and demobilised. He said "We will now get weaker every day while the Bolsheviks will get stronger". He wanted the western Allies and what remained of the German army to get together and, in his own words, "kick the Russians back to Moscow where they belong". Eisenhower removed him from the command of his beloved Third Army and put him in charge of the non-existent Fifteenth Army, a paper army.

The day before he was due to go back to the States and resign from the army, so he could be free to speak his mind, he was involved in a road accident which broke his neck. He died in his sleep 11 days later on the 21st December. He was buried with his men, in the military cemetery at Hamm in Luxembourg on Christmas Eve 1945.

Had he lived, he would have seen non-fraternisation abolished, the Marshall Plan implemented and the establishment of NATO and the Rhine Army. In September 1945, with his new aide Major Van S. Merle-Smith, General Patton attended a huge military review in Berlin hosted by Marshal Zhukov. As the huge tanks passed by, Zhukov said, "My dear General Patton, you see that tank, it carries a cannon which can throw a shell seven miles". Patton replied, "Indeed, well my dear Marshal Zhukov, let me tell you, if any of my gunners started firing at your people before they had closed to less than seven hundred yards, I'd have them court-martialled for cowardice". Major Merle-Smith observed, "it was the first time I saw a Russian commander

stunned to silence."