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USAFA Harmon Memorial Lecture #14
"The Many Faces of George S. Patton, Jr."
Martin Blumenson, 1971

Gen. and Mrs. Clark, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen: I am doubly privileged this evening. It is a great privilege for me to be asked to give this 14th Annual Harmon Lecture, which honors the memory of a distinguished Air Force officer. It is a great privilege also to talk with you about Gen. George S. Patton, Jr., a distinguished Army officer. I hope that my association with the Naval War College will draw the Navy and the Marine Corps into our session here and make it a complete family affair.

I regard it as a distinct honor to have been asked to work in the Patton papers.¹ I discovered there the development of a highly skilled professional and the growth of a very warm and engaging person. Quite apart from the professional concerns that George Patton documented, he left a record of a thoroughly likeable human being, a man of great charm. In addition to the pages of memoranda, speeches, instructions that he left, he wrote literally thousands of letters to his wife. They were always about himself- he was thoroughly self-centered- and they provide a marvelous account of his activities and thoughts. When he and his wife were separated, he wrote her almost every day, sometimes twice a day. The image of the man that emerges from these papers is quite different from the public image he projected. He was a devoted husband who in private was quiet and considerate and witty- yes, even funny. For example, he closed one letter to his wife with these words: "I cannot send you any kisses this evening because we had onions for dinner."

A military genius, a legend, an American folk hero, George S. Patton, Jr., captured the imagination of the world. Even now, twenty-six years after his death, he can be pictured clearly as the Army general who epitomized the fighting soldier in World War II.

He had many faces, many contrasting qualities. A noted horseman, a well-known swordsman, a competent sailor and navigator, an airplane pilot, a dedicated athlete and sportsman, he was also an amateur poet, and sixteen of his articles were published in magazines. Rough and tough, he was also thoughtful and sentimental. Unpredictable, he was at the same time dependable. He was outgoing, yet anguished. A complex and paradoxical figure, he was a man of many faces.

He is remembered best for the unique leadership he exercised. He had the ability to obtain the utmost from American troops, and some would say that he obtained more than the maximum response. Through his charisma, exemplified by a flamboyant and well-publicized image, he stimulated American troops to an aggressive desire to close with and destroy the enemy. He personified the offensive spirit, the ruthless drive, the will for victory in battle.

Gen. Dwight D. Eisenhower characterized Patton's Third Army as "a fighting force that is not excelled . . . by any other of equal size in the world." As the outstanding exponent of combat effectiveness, particularly with respect to the employment of armored forces, that is, the combined use of tanks, motorized infantry, and self-propelled artillery, closely supported by tactical aircraft, Patton brought the blitzkrieg concept to perfection.

He is recalled mainly for his victories in World War II. He is honored for symbolizing the strength and will required to vanquish the evil of Hitler's Nazi Germany. If he was sometimes brutal in his methods, the brutality was accepted and condoned because it was that kind of war, a total war of annihilation. There was a remarkable cohesion during that war on the part of the American people, who were united to a degree rarely achieved in a nation. Emotionally involved in the struggle to eliminate totalitarianism and tyranny, Americans understood clearly the issues at stake and engaged, as

Eisenhower so aptly put it, in a crusade for victory. The soldier who best represented the warlike virtues and the will to win was George Patton.

He was first and foremost a man of enormous ambition. He believed that he was fated or destined for greatness, and he worked hard to make that fate or destiny come true. As a matter of fact, he drove himself to make good, to be somebody important, to gain fame, to attain achievement, to merit recognition, to receive applause.

The initial entry he wrote in his notebook when he was a cadet at West Point read: "Do your damdest always." From time to time he added other admonitions to himself. Like this: "Always work like hell at all things and all times." In a moment of doubt he wrote: "No sacrifice is too great if by it you can attain an end. Let people talk and be damed. You do what leads to your ambition and when you get the power remember those who laughed."

How he longed for fame! "If you die not a soldier"-he meant warrior-"and having had a chance to be one I pray God to dam you George Patton. Never Never Never stop being ambitious. You have but one life. Live it to the full of glory and be willing to pay." At a time of particular anguish, he wrote: "George Patton . . . As God lives you must of your self merit and obtain such applause by your own efforts and remember that though at times of quiet this may not seem worth much, yet at the last it is the only thing and to obtain it life and happiness are small sacrifices you must do your damdest and win. Remember that is what you live for. Oh you must! You have got to do some thing! Never stop until you have gained the top or a grave."

These are terribly revealing statements. Yet he made no secret of his desire. He wrote to his father: "I know that my ambition is selfish and cold yet it is not a selfish selfishness for instead of sparing me, it makes me exert myself to the utter most to attain an end which will do neither me nor any one else any good . . . I will do my best to attain what I consider- wrongly perhaps- my destiny."

To his fiancée, he confided: "How can a man fail if he places every thing subordinate to success? . . . I have got . . . to be great [and] it is in war alone that I am fitted to do any thing of importance."

To his parents shortly before his graduation from the Military Academy, he wrote: "I have got to, do you understand, got to be great. It is no foolish child dream. It is me as I ever will be . . . I would be willing to live in torture, die tomorrow if for one day I could be really great . . . I wake up at night in a cold sweat imagining that I have lived and done nothing. Perhaps I am crazy."

To his fiancée in the same tenor: "I may loose ambition and become a clerk and sit by a fire and be what the world calls happy but God forbid. I may be crazy but if with sanity comes contentment with the middle of life, may I never be sane."

With these sentiments tormenting and driving him, he exerted all his energy in the pursuit of excellence. He fought the temptation to relax, to be lazy. He was, as a matter of fact, extremely hard on himself.

The first Patton to arrive in the United States came from Scotland- although there is some mystery about him- and settled in Fredericksburg, Virginia, about the time of the American War for Independence. He married a daughter of Dr. Hugh Mercer, a friend of George Washington, and one of their sons became governor of Virginia. One of the governor's sons, George Smith Patton, the first to bear his name, was General Patton's grandfather. He graduated from the Virginia Military Institute, practiced law, fought in the Civil War as a colonel in command of a Confederate regiment, and died of battle wounds in 1864.

His widow went to California with her four children, and the oldest, also named George Smith Patton, the second to have this name, was the general's father. He too graduated from VMI, practiced law in California, and was a Democratic politician who ran unsuccessfully for the U.S. Senate in 1916. A businessman, he was moderately wealthy when his son George was born, considerably so twenty-five years later. The source of his wealth was land that his wife had inherited.

Mrs. Patton, the general's mother, was a Wilson. Her father was Benjamin Davis Wilson, a remarkable man. Although General Patton believed that he resembled his Patton progenitors, he was

much more like his maternal grandfather, a pioneer, trapper and Indian trader, adventurer and Indian fighter, and finally a respectable man of means. He was born in Tennessee and worked his way across the continent to southern California, where he married the daughter of a wealthy Mexican and through her gained vast landholdings. This Mrs. Wilson died, and Mr. Wilson remarried, this time an American, and she was General Patton's grandmother. One of her daughters married the second George S. Patton, and this union produced the future general.

The Patton side of the family looked upon themselves as aristocratic Virginians, and they liked to trace their heritage to George Washington. Patton always referred to him as Cousin George- and beyond that to a king of England and a king of France, even to sixteen barons who signed the Magna Charta. The Wilsons were far less romantic, far less pretentious. Practical people, they drew their eminence from B. D. Wilson's early arrival in Southern California. Wilson founded the orange industry, planted the first great vineyards, gave his name to Mt. Wilson where the observatory now stands, was elected twice to the state legislature, and was highly and widely respected.

George Patton's early years were spent in southern California, a sparsely settled region of ranches. His first love was horses, and it endured throughout his life. Many years later when Patton reminisced about his childhood, he wrote: "I remember very vividly playing at the mouth of Mission Cannon [canyon] and seeing Papa come up on a Chestnut mare . . . As he rode up on the Cannon . . . our nurse said, 'You ought to be proud to be the son of such a handsome western millionaire.' When I asked her what a millionaire was, she said- a farmer."

At the age of eleven, Patton entered a private school in nearby Pasadena. When he was 18, he went to the Virginia Military Institute, like his father and grandfather. He spent a year there and compiled a splendid record. He received no demerits.

He accepted an appointment to the Military Academy because graduation automatically gave him a Regular commission. He spent five years at West Point because he had to repeat his first year. The reason was peculiar. Officially, he was found, as they say, in mathematics. But it was his deficiency in French that generated his academic failure. It was his deficiency in French that required him to take an examination not only in French but also in math. What the connection was, I hardly understand. But apparently, if a student's work in class was acceptable, he was excused from final examinations. Although Patton's class work in mathematics gave him passing grades, his class work in French put him on the borderline. He passed the exam in French, but he failed the test in math. And so he was turned back.

He graduated in 1909, and in his class of 103 men, he stood number 46, about in the middle. He had been cadet corporal, sergeant major, and adjutant. He had won his letter in athletics by breaking a school record in the hurdles. He was on the football squad for four years, but he played so recklessly during practice scrimmages that he broke bones and twisted ankles, elbows, and shoulders. According to the yearbook, "Two broken arms bear witness to his zeal, as well as his misfortune on the football field." The only game he ever got into was against Franklin and Marshall. He was sent in as a substitute at the end of the contest, and the final whistle sounded before the teams could get off a single play.

Upon graduation, he became a Cavalry officer and soon afterward married a charming young lady from Massachusetts whose family was immensely wealthy.

In 1911, Patton was transferred from Fort Sheridan, near Chicago, to Fort Myer, Virginia, close to Washington, D.C. The benefits were enormous to an ambitious young man, and he came to know important and influential people in the Army and in politics. As he said, Washington was "nearer God than else where and the place where all people with aspirations should attempt to dwell."

He certainly had his aspirations. He studied and worked hard at his profession, and he also cultivated the right people in the nation's capital, people who could help him advance. His assignment to Fort Myer was the real beginning of his rise to fame.

While at Fort Myer, he started to participate strenuously- and he did everything exuberantly and enthusiastically- in horse shows, in horse racing, and in polo games. He explained this activity to his father-in-law as follows: "What I am doing looks like play to you but in my business it is the best sort of advertising."

The advertising paid off. He came to know Gen. Leonard Wood, the Army Chief of Staff, Henry L. Stimson, the Secretary of War, and he managed to have himself selected to take part in the 1912 Olympics at Stockholm, the games that Jim Thorpe, the great Indian athlete, dominated. Patton competed in the modern pentathlon, five grueling competitions- pistol shooting, a 300-meter swim, fencing, a steeplechase, and a cross-country foot race. He finished in fifth place.

After the games, Patton traveled to Saumur, the famous French Cavalry school, and took lessons from the fencing instructor. When Patton returned to Fort Myer, he cultivated his own reputation as a swordsman, and he designed a saber that the Cavalry adopted. For a young second lieutenant, this was prominence indeed.

In the following year, Patton again traveled to Saumur and studied with the French champion, not only to improve his own fencing but also to learn how to become an instructor. Sent to the Cavalry School at Fort Riley, Kansas, he took the Cavalry course and he gave instruction in the saber. His title was impressive, and he was the first in the U.S. Army to hold it: Master of the Sword. He was still only a second lieutenant.

His next assignment was Fort Bliss, Texas, and the post commander, it so happened, was Brig. Gen. John J. Pershing. Mexico was then in turmoil as the consequence of revolution, and Army troops were guarding the border to prevent depredations against American life and property.

In March 1916, when Pancho Villa and several hundred men raided Columbus, New Mexico, and killed seventeen Americans, Pershing was ordered to organize the Punitive Expedition and pursue Villa. Pershing took Patton along as an unofficial aide. Patton performed a variety of duties. He was in charge of the headquarters orderlies, he looked after the messengers, he censored newspaper correspondents' dispatches and soldiers' mail, he acted as liaison officer. But he was happy. He was where the action was.

Patton turned his service in Mexico to great advantage. In May 1916 he was one of fifteen men, and in command, traveling in three automobiles to buy corn from Mexican farmers. On a hunch, Patton led a raid on a ranch believed to belong to one of Pancho Villa's lieutenants. Three enemy soldiers were there, and when they tried to escape, Patton and his men engaged them in a lively skirmish and killed them. Patton's men strapped the bodies to the hoods of their cars, took them to headquarters for identification, and created a sensation. Villa had disappeared, there was little news about the Punitive Expedition for the folks back home, and Patton's feat made him a national hero for about a week. Perhaps more important, his action was probably the first time the U.S. Army engaged in motorized warfare. Patton and his men had leaped directly from their machines into battle.

Although service in Mexico was monotonous, Patton observed Pershing closely and studied him assiduously. Learning how Pershing operated, how Pershing gave orders, trained his men, judged his subordinates, maintained troop morale, and carried out his command duties, Patton modeled himself on Pershing. Shortly before the Expedition returned to Texas, Patton wrote his wife as follows: "This is the last letter I shall write you from Mexico. I have learned a lot about my profession and a lot how much I love you. The first was necessary, the second was not."

When Pershing assumed command of the American Expeditionary Force and went to France, he took Patton again. Once again Patton had no well-defined job. He was in charge of the automobiles and drivers at the headquarters, he did all sorts of odd and incidental work, like having American flags painted on the staff cars, and so on.

But he was obviously a combat soldier, and Pershing offered him command of an infantry battalion. Before orders could be cut, Patton became interested in tanks. They were then unwieldy, unreliable, and unproved instruments of warfare, and there was much doubt whether they had any

function and value at all on the battlefield. Against the advice of most of his friends, and after much inner anguish and debate, Patton chose to go into the newly formed U.S. Tank Corps. He was the first officer so assigned. As Patton undertook his task, he explained to his wife: "The job I have tentatively possessed myself of is huge for everything must be created and there is nothing to start with, nothing but me that is. Sometimes I wonder if I can do all there is to do but I suppose I can. I always have so far."

Mastering quickly the techniques of how to run and maintain tanks and how to use them in battle, he became the AEF's tank expert. He formed a tank school, taught and trained his tankers, and led them in combat. In the battle of St. Mihiel and in the Meuse-Argonne offensive, where he was wounded, he proved his high competence for command. He demonstrated the same qualities that would distinguish his performance in World War II. His troops were eager to move against the enemy, and they fought like veterans.

How he was wounded is an odd story. It occurred on the first day of the Meuse-Argonne offensive. He was a colonel in command of the 1st Tank Brigade- two battalions of American tanks and an attached French groupement- about 250 tanks in all. The barrage opened at 2:50 AM and at 5:30, three hours later, the assault wave moved forward into a heavy fog that hung over the battlefield. As long as the ground was obscured, the tanks advanced with little difficulty. But around 10 o'clock, the mist lifted, the German fire became intense and accurate. Some American infantrymen became confused, panicky, and disorganized.

Patton had said he would stay in his command post at least an hour after the attack started. But he was impatient. He could hear the tanks, the artillery, the machine guns, and he could see little. So he started walking forward with a small party of two officers and twelve messengers carrying phones, wire, and pigeons in baskets. After walking a mile or two, the group stopped and took a break. But after several minutes, a few shells fell in and some machine gun bullets came close. Patton moved his group to the protection of a railroad cut. Some infantrymen came through, and they said they had lost their units and commanders in the fog. Patton ordered them to join him. He soon had about 100 men, and the railroad cut became crowded. So he led them back to the reverse slope of a small hill and instructed everyone to spread out and lie down. Machine gun fire then swept the crest of the hill.

Down at the base of the slope, Patton noticed several tanks. They were held up by two enormous trenches formerly held by the Germans. Some tankers had started to dig away the banks, but when the German fire came in, the tankers stopped digging and took shelter in the trenches. Patton sent several of his men down to get the tankers across the trenches and up the hill and at the Germans. But the incoming fires were too intense. He finally went down the hill himself. He immediately got the men out of the trenches and organized a coordinated effort to get the tanks across. He walked to the tanks, which were being splattered by machine gun fire, removed the shovels and picks strapped to the sides, handed men the tools, and got them working to tear down the sides of the trenches.

Meanwhile, bullets and shells continued to fall in. Some men were hit. Patton stood on the parapet in an exposed position directing the work. When he was asked to take cover, he shouted, "To hell with them-they can't hit me." He got the tanks across and sent them on their way.

Collecting his hundred men, he led them up the slope. He waved his large walking stick over his head and yelled, "Let's get them, who's with me?" Most of the men enthusiastically followed Patton. They were no more than 75 yards over the hill when a terrific and sustained burst of machine gun fire washed across the slope. Everyone flung himself to the ground.

It was probably at this moment that Patton had his vision. Nine years later he wrote, "I felt a great desire to run. I was trembling with fear when suddenly I thought of my progenitors and seemed to see them in a cloud over the German lines looking at me. I became calm at once and saying aloud, 'It is time for another Patton to die' called for volunteers and went forward to what I honestly believed to be certain death."

When the firing abated, Patton picked himself up. Waving his stick and shouting, "Let's go," he marched forward. This time only six men accompanied him. One was his orderly, Joe Angelo, from Camden, New Jersey, a skinny kid who weighed 105 pounds. As this miniature charge of the light brigade walked toward the enemy machine gun nests, Angelo noticed that the men were dropping one by one as they were hit. Finally just he and Patton were left.

"We are alone," Angelo said.

"Come on anyway," Patton said.

Why? He was armed with his walking stick and a pistol in his holster. Angelo carried a rifle. In that hail of bullets, they resembled Don Quixote and his faithful servant Sancho Panza.

Did Patton think that he and Angelo led charmed lives? They had come through at the trenches where the tanks were dug out. Was Patton unwilling to admit defeat, lose face with the men who were crawling back across the top of the hill? Was he trying to inspire them?

Was he seeking to be hit? Was he inviting the glory of death or injury on the field of battle? Was he fulfilling his destiny?

Or was it battlefield madness, that taut anger, that barely controlled rage, that overwhelming hatred that makes a man tremble with the desire to hurt those who are trying to kill him?

"Come on anyway," he said.

No more than a few seconds passed when a bullet struck and passed through his upper leg. He took a few steps, struggled to keep his balance, kept going on nerve, then fell.

Angelo helped him into a shellhole where they remained until the fires subsided. Then Patton was carried out and evacuated to a hospital.

Perhaps what he wrote to his father a month later explained why he had continued toward the German machine guns. 'An officer is paid to attack, not to direct, after the battle starts. You know I have always feared I was a coward at heart but I am beginning to doubt it. Our education is at fault in picturing death as such a terrible thing. It is nothing and very easy to get. That does not mean that I hunt for it but the fear of it does not- at least has not deterred me from doing what appeared [to be] my duty.'

Patton returned to the United States with the tanks, but not long afterwards went back to the Cavalry. The reasons are interesting. The National Defense Act of 1920 placed the Tank Corps under the Infantry. Patton had argued for an independent Tank Corps. But if, in the interest of economy, the tanks had to go under one of the traditional arms, he preferred the Cavalry. For Patton intuitively understood that tanks operating with Cavalry would stress mobility, while tanks tied to the Infantry would emphasize firepower. Tanks in peacetime, he feared, as he said, "would be very much like coast artillery with a lot of machinery which never works."

Furthermore, he believed that funds made available by the Congress to the Army during years of peace would be insufficient to develop tanks and tank doctrine.

Beyond that were personal reasons. Loss of independent tank status negated Patton's standing as one of the few high-ranking and experienced officers in the corps and his hope for early promotion into general officer rank. He knew relatively few infantrymen who could help him advance in his career, whereas he was at home in the Cavalry. Furthermore, Pershing was soon to be Army Chief of Staff; not only was Pershing a friend of Patton, he was also a cavalryman and interested in seeing that Cavalry officers got ahead. In addition, since Cavalry officers were expected to be prominent horsemen, Patton would have lots of opportunity to play polo, hunt, and participate in horse shows. He and Mrs. Patton liked Washington, D.C., and Fort Myer was a Cavalry post.

Perhaps above all, the tanks were unreliable machines that required roads and gasoline and oil, tanks demanded careful planning for operational employment and logistical support. They were used in mass, as in France. Horses, on the other hand, were mobile, could go anywhere, were dependable and could live off the country. Patton expected the next war to take place in a primitive area of the world, a place without road nets and railines, like Mexico, where a man on horseback was an individual,

relatively free, able to charge the foe recklessly while waving his saber. Perhaps ultimately it was this romantic view of warfare that impelled him to return to the horses.

As it turned out, the tanks were absorbed into the Infantry and came to be regarded as accompanying guns. They lost the mobility that Patton had given them in France, and the development of armored doctrine stagnated in the United States until soldiers everywhere were astonished and shocked in 1939 by the German blitzkrieg. By then, Patton was identified with the horse cavalry. Although he retained his interest in tanks and followed tank developments closely during the interwar years, he became associated with the conservative cavalymen who advocated continued reliance on the horse and who fought mechanization and motorization. As a consequence, Patton almost missed the opportunity to participate meaningfully in World War II.

In the 1920s and 1930s, Patton served in a variety of places and completed his military education. Although his academic record at West Point was unimpressive, he was an honor graduate of the Command and General Staff College at Fort Leavenworth and a distinguished graduate of the Army War College. One could say that intellectually or academically he matured rather late.

His apparently aimless assignments during the interwar years came to an end in 1940, when he was suddenly transferred to the tanks. How this came about is interesting and revealing. He was tied to the horse cavalry, but the Chief of Cavalry, for whom he worked during four years, rated him as a versatile soldier. Patton's boss wrote of him: "While he is an outstanding horseman he is also outstanding as an authority in mechanization due to his . . . experience in France with the Tank Corps and to his continued interest in the study of the subject." So he was qualified for horses and tanks both.

In 1939, Patton was a colonel and in command of Fort Myer. The functions of the post were mainly ceremonial. Every spring there was a series of drill exhibitions featuring precision horsemanship by the troops, and these attracted congressmen and other notables in the capital and thus made friends and influenced important people in favor of the Army. Fort Myer furnished escorts for funerals and occasions of state. And of course Patton, who insisted on perfection in dress and behavior, was well suited to run this kind of show. But the U.S. Army, after years of stagnation, the result of shortages of funds, was beginning to stir and to expand in size as the clouds of World War II gathered, and Patton looked longingly toward new combat units being formed and trained. No one seemed to notice him. The 1st Cavalry Division and the 7th Mechanized Brigade were both experimental combat units, commanded by old friends of his, Kenyon Joyce and Adna Chaffee, and Patton would have loved to go to either. I think it would have made little difference to him whether he went to the horses or to the machines. But he remained at Fort Myer.

In the spring of 1939, the Acting Chief of Staff of the Army, Gen. George C. Marshall, was about to move into Quarters 1 at Fort Myer. Work needed to be done on the house, and Patton invited Marshall to stay with him for a few days. The other members of the Patton family were away, and Patton wrote Marshall: "I can give you a room and bath and meals, and . . . I shall not treat you as a guest and shall not cramp your style in any way." Marshall accepted. Patton was excited. He wrote to his wife: "I have just consummated a pretty snappy move. General George C. Marshall is going to live at our house!!! . . . I think that once I can get my natural charm working [on him] I won't need any letters from John J. P. [Pershing] or anyone else. . . . You had better send me a check for 5,000 dollars." A day or so later he wrote to his wife that General Marshall was "just like an old shoe." Patton entertained him, flattered him, took him sailing, and Marshall paid no attention. They became good friends, but Marshall remained calm, cool, and distant.

On September first, the day World War II opened in Europe, Marshall became Chief of Staff and a four star general. Patton presented him with a set of sterling silver stars. Still nothing happened to Patton even though other officers were being moved into combat training jobs and promoted. Marshall ignored Patton even as he searched for young and vigorous officers to fill vacancies in the expanding Army. Was Patton too old at 54? Was he too wedded to the horse cavalry? Was Marshall testing Patton's patience? Did the White House and Democratic President Franklin D. Roosevelt think

that Patton's political connections through his wife with Republicans from Massachusetts were too close? Was Patton too flamboyant, too outspoken? Whatever the reason, Patton stayed at Fort Myer.

Finally, in the spring of 1940, several things happened. Maneuvers in Georgia and Louisiana, where Patton was an umpire, showed how far Chaffee had brought the development of American armored doctrine. With the lessons of the 1939 blitzkrieg in Poland at hand, together with the lessons of the maneuvers, Patton began to look definitely toward the ranks.

Late in June when Patton learned that his friend Chaffee was about to become chief of a newly formed Armored Force, he wrote him a letter. This letter has been lost, but Patton probably congratulated Chaffee, may have mentioned an observation from the maneuvers, and certainly invited Chaffee to stay with the Pattons whenever he was in Washington. He may have made a joking remark that he wished he were helping Chaffee, but he would not have asked directly for anything. What Patton was doing in his letter was reminding Chaffee of Patton's interest in tanks and his interest in a new and exciting challenge.

Chaffee's reply was more than Patton could have expected. Chaffee put Patton's name on the list of colonels Chaffee thought were suitable for promotion to brigadier general and for command of an armored brigade. A few days later President Roosevelt appointed Henry L. Stimson Secretary of War. Stimson was an old friend of Patton's, and Patton sent him an immediate letter of congratulations. Stimson probably wondered why a proved fire-eater like George Patton was being kept at Fort Myer and he may have mentioned this to General Marshall. The Army, now expanding rapidly after the fall of France, needed officers like Patton.

Patton was on leave in Massachusetts in July, when he read in the morning newspaper that he had been assigned to Fort Benning and the 2d Armored Division. The division commander, Charles Scott, was an old friend. Chaffee had placed Patton on the preferred list, but Scott had the vacancy and had asked for Patton. Patton's immediate reaction to the news was to write several letters of thanks. To Scott he promised he would do his "utmost to give satisfaction." To Chaffee he promised to do his "damndest to justify your expectations." To Marshall, who had obviously approved the assignment, he sent his gratitude. Soon after arriving at Benning, Patton also wrote to Pershing. "I am quite sure that you had a lot to do with my getting this wonderful detail. Truly I appreciate it a lot and will try to be worthy of having served under you." He was on his way to fame.

He took command of an armored brigade and soon regained his position as the U.S. Army's leading tanker. He moved up to command the 2d Armored Division, then the I Armored Corps, and went into combat at the head of the Western Task Force, which sailed from the Norfolk area and landed in November 1942 on the shores of French Morocco, one of three simultaneous landings in North Africa known as Operation TORCH.

In the spring of 1943, after the disastrous American defeat at Kasserine Pass in Tunisia, Eisenhower dispatched Patton to the battlefield to take command of the II Corps. He straightened out the disorganized American units, led them to victory at El Guettar, then turned over the corps to his deputy, Omar N. Bradley. While the Tunisian campaign was in its final stages, Patton planned the invasion of Sicily. He led the Seventh Army in that invasion, and although he was supposed to have only a secondary role in the subsequent campaigning, he reached Messina ahead of Gen. Bernard L. Montgomery and thereby stole the glory.

But Sicily almost brought his career to a close, for impulsively, on two separate occasions, he slapped American soldiers in hospitals. They were in the dazed condition that was known in World War I as shell shock, in World War II as combat exhaustion. What Patton tried to do was sparked by his enormous compassion for his combat troops. He suffered deeply their wounds and injuries, he anguished over their deaths. And here were men who were letting down their magnificent buddies who were giving their utmost for their country. What Patton tried to do by the slapping and the cursing was to shake them into normality, to scare away their fright and nervousness, to get them back to their jobs. His action backfired. The incidents came to Eisenhower's attention, and he ordered Patton to apologize,

not only to the soldiers he had slapped and those who had witnessed the scenes, but also to all the American troops in Sicily. Patton did so at great personal torment.

A letter he wrote in 1910, to his then future wife, curiously foreshadowed the slapping incidents. Patton was a young officer, a year out of West Point, stationed at Fort Sheridan, and he was supervising activities in the post stable. He wrote:

This afternoon I found a horse not tied and after looking up the man at the other end of the stable I cussed him and then told him to run down and tie the horse and then run back. This makes the other men laugh at him and so is an excellent punishment. The man did not understand me or thought he would dead beat so he started to walk fast. I got mad and yelled "Run dam you Run." He did but then I got to thinking that it was an insult I had put on him so I called him up before the men who had heard me swear and begged his pardon. It sounds easy to write about but was one of the hardest things I ever did.

It was no less difficult to apologize in Sicily thirty-three years later.

In the spring of 1944, Patton went to England and took command of the Third Army, scheduled to be follow-up after the D-Day invasion. The army became operational almost two months after the Normandy landings. It immediately broke into the open, swept through Brittany, drove Eastward across France, and destroyed the German defenses. Shortages of supply brought the breakout and pursuit to a halt, and a period of difficult fighting took place during the autumn. In December, when the Germans launched their Ardennes counteroffensive, Patton made a spectacular march to relieve the paratroopers holding at Bastogne. In the spring, Patton's army drove into Germany, across the Rhine, and into Austria. At the end of the war, his forces were in Czechoslovakia. Throughout, Patton had given a magnificent performance.

Old Blood and Guts he was called, but with affection. In the thousands, Americans still say with considerable pride, "I rolled with Patton." He had an impact on his time and place that few men have exerted. He has been compared with Stonewall Jackson and with Prince Murat who commanded Napoleon's cavalry. But he was unique.

Patton died in a freak automobile accident in December 1945, at the age of 60. He was probably ready to go. He had achieved his fate, his destiny. He was famous, a hero. He had earned the recognition and applause he had sought.

During his lifetime Patton displayed many appearances, many faces, and it is sometimes difficult to know who the real person was. The best-known image is, of course, his war mask. His toughness, his profanity, his bluster and braggadocio were appurtenances he assumed in order to inspire his soldiers and, incidentally, himself. He cultivated the ferocious face because he believed that only he-men, as he often said, stimulated men to fight. Like Indian war paint, the hideous masks of primitive people, the rebel yell, the shout of paratroopers leaping from their planes, the fierce countenance helped men in battle disguise and overcome their fear of death.

Social psychologists call these reinforcing factors. They are sounds, sights, and other stimuli that start the adrenaline flowing, that spur men to action, that make them act against one of their deepest intuitive drives, the urge for self-preservation. The battlefield is an eerie place, and the emotion most prevalent is fear, the fear of disfigurement, disability, and death. One of the ways to make men act despite their fear is to cultivate the reinforcing factors that will lead them to disregard their fears.

This is what Patton did so well, and this is what the ivory-handled pistols, the oversized stars of rank, the tough, blunt, profane talk, the scowling face, the vulgar posturing were supposed to produce. They gave his men the warrior psychology, the will to meet the enemy, the confident feeling they could defeat their opponents.

Patton dressed and looked the part. A showman and an actor, he insisted that his troops do the same. "A coward dressed as a brave man," he once wrote, "will change from cowardice" and take on

the courageous qualities of the hero. He believed that the appearance would prompt the reality. And so he sought to project the appearance of the warrior in himself and to stimulate the same in his men, which, he was sure, would create the kind of behavior necessary on the battlefield. It was this aspect of his personality that the recent movie on Patton presented so well, his warrior personality, an exaggeration and a caricature of the real man.

The war trappings, the highly visible qualities that Patton put on to inspire his men in combat, covered a thoroughly professional soldier. This was another facet of his personality, another mask. Beneath the beautifully turned out figure, impeccably dressed and bemedaled- the troops in North Africa called him Gorgeous Georgie- beneath the glitter was a cold and calculating commander who had the necessary knowledge, the professional know-how to be successful at his craft.

Apart from the psychology involved in leading men, the military profession requires an immense technical competence, a knowledge of weapons and equipment, of tactics and operations, of maneuver and logistics. Hardly appreciated is the amount of time and energy that George Patton expended throughout his career to learn the intricacies of his profession. He read enormously, voraciously, in the literature of warfare and history. Not only was he conversant with the field and technical manuals of his times; he was also familiar with the pages of history.

He studied the past to discover the great historical continuities. If history is a record of events, each unique and each understandable in terms of its context, that is, its time, place, conditions, and circumstances, history is also a record of continuities, great movements that can be identified as trends, patterns, clusters, forces, and the like. It is the recognition of these long-range continuities based on habit, tradition, custom, and the nature of man that provides a glimmer of understanding the past. What fascinated Patton in his search for the common elements of man's behavior in history were the meaning and importance of generalship, the factors that produced victory or defeat in battle, the relationships of tactics and supply, maneuver and shock, weapons and will power.

He discoursed easily on such matters as scale, chain, and plate armor, German mercenaries in the Italian wars, Polish and Turkish horsemen, Arabian and Oriental military techniques, the Peninsular War, and Marshal Saxe. He was familiar with the phalanx of Greece, the legions of Rome, the columns of Napoleon, and the mass armies of World War I. He could compare the heavy cavalry of Belisarius with the modern tank, and he discovered insights into the operations of Belisarius during the sixth century that he applied to the developing doctrine of how to use tanks.

Patton was hardly an intellectual, and he would not have wished to be so regarded. He was thoughtful and contemplative, but, unlike most intellectuals, he believed that the ultimate virtue in warfare was action. Yet he often lectured his officers on the benefits of reading history. And according to his medical records, he reported on sick call more than once for treatment of conjunctivitis, an infection and inflammation of the eyes, because he had read many nights until one o'clock in the morning.

This was not casual reading, but intense study. He made copious notes, and in one instance, during the 1930s, when he read a book by Gen. J. F. C. Fuller, the acknowledged father of tank doctrine, Patton's written reactions covered seven pages of single-spaced typescript.

Patton's knowledge of and interest in history, and particularly military history, was another of his many faces, the virtue of a man of reflection who translated his knowledge into action.

Reading was hardly the only way in which Patton gained his military expertise. Training was extremely important to him. Training made men accustomed to obeying orders automatically. Training enabled the offensive team to get the jump on the adversaries. Training taught men to perform their tasks automatically. Only when soldiers were so proficient in their duties could they function under battlefield conditions.

Just as important, training by means of unit maneuvers and exercises was a method to test and experiment with doctrine. While training exercises could demonstrate and prove the soundness of doctrine, they could also be used as an opportunity to improve doctrine or methodology. When Patton

commanded the tank training center in France and was preparing his troops for combat, he held a multitude of exercises and sham battles designed to test the then still rudimentary tank tactics; he also experimented with new techniques. For example, should infantry precede or follow tanks in the attack and at what distance? In Hawaii, where Patton served as a staff officer, he devised exercises to determine how troops on the march could best combat low-flying planes in the attack.

Throughout his adult life, during his thirty-five years of active duty, Patton's efficiency reports noted with remarkable consistency his enthusiastic study of and devotion to his profession. In the 1920s and 1930s, when military budgets were low and military forces small, many regular officers became discouraged. Some left, others turned to drink or gambling, many simply went through the motions of training their men. In contrast, Patton was taking his soldiering seriously. In addition to his reading and his polo playing, he invented a machine gun sled to give riflemen in the assault more direct fire support. He devised a new saddle pack to increase the range and striking power of Cavalry. He worked closely with J. Walter Christie to improve the silhouette, suspension, power, and weapons of tanks. He designed a second and better saber for the Cavalry. He drew a plan to restructure the infantry division into triangular form in order to get more maneuver and firepower out of fewer men, and he thereby anticipated the World War II type formed by Gen. Lesley McNair. Patton continually sought ways to further mobility in operations. He became an expert in amphibious landings. So that he could better understand the developing maturity of air power, he earned his pilot's license. He worked on the idea of employing the light plane for communication and liaison. All this he did before Pearl Harbor.

This dedicated attention to his profession paid off in World War II. For example, little remembered is the fact that Patton was the leading American amphibious expert in the European theater. His landings in Morocco were executed by an all-American force, the two other simultaneous invasions being conducted by Anglo-American forces. The rudimentary amphibious techniques of Operation TORCH, the first large-scale Anglo-American landings in the European theater, were immeasurably improved by the time of the next, the invasion of Sicily. This was probably the most important amphibious venture in the European arena, for it employed new communications and command methods to tie together the Army, Navy, and Air Force components, it made use of new equipment-landing craft, landing ships, the amphibious truck called the DUKW- it featured new methods of beach organization and supply, new ways of spotting targets for naval gunfire and close air support.

The invasion of Sicily was, in fact, the prototype of the subsequent invasions of southern Italy, Anzio, Normandy, and southern France. These operations made it possible to project Allied power across the water in order to bring ground and air strength directly against the enemy. Although Patton played no part in the invasions after Sicily, he set the pattern and he was consulted on all of them, officially and unofficially. Gen. John P. Lucas, the commander at Anzio, a close friend since their service with Pershing in Mexico, sought Patton out before the landings and asked his advice. Patton counseled driving inland as soon as Lucas got ashore. Lucas was unable to follow this guidance and dug in to protect his beachhead instead of driving for the Alban Hills, and his decision to do so was no small factor in his relief a month later.

Although the amphibious aspect of Patton's career, this face of his, has generally been overlooked, there is no question of his proficiency as a planner and leader of amphibious assaults. As a matter of fact, it was his willingness, his insistence, to conduct amphibious end runs in Sicily that enabled him to beat General Montgomery into Messina.

Still another example of his professional expertise was Patton's use of close support aircraft. The XIX Tactical Air Command supported Patton's Third Army throughout the European campaign, and Patton fostered the closest cooperation between both organizations. He made sure that his ground headquarters and the air headquarters were physically located close to each other. He encouraged the two staffs to work together, to eat together. He constantly applauded the efforts of the airmen and continually directed the attention of the newspaper correspondents to the importance of the air support.

He fostered a close-knit feeling of mutual admiration and cooperation that was beneficial to both organizations.

During the spectacular dash of his Third Army eastward across France in August 1944, the Loire River marked the Army's right flank. Patton's ground forces were striking toward the Paris-Orleans gap, for Patton was convinced that a speedy advance would prevent the disintegrating German forces from reorganizing their defenses in France. He therefore had no desire to divert major units to protect his flank. Yet protecting the flank was essential because about 100,000 German troops were moving out of southwest France. This rather sizable group of men was trying to escape to Germany before being blocked by the projected meeting of the OVERLORD forces advancing eastward from Normandy and of the ANVIL-DRAGOON forces marching north up the Rhone valley from southern France. As the German group marched generally to the northeast, they threatened Patton's flank and supply lines.

In order to keep his Army driving, Patton turned to Gen. O. P. Weyland, who commanded the XIX TAC. He asked Weyland to patrol his right flank along the Loire River valley. Weyland obliged. He gave 24-hour coverage, using a squadron of night fighters to augment the daylight operations of his fighter-bombers. It is true that the pilots of the small artillery observation planes of a single division also flew reconnaissance, that small roving ground patrols kept the region under surveillance, and that the French Forces of the Interior added to the security. But the high-powered aircraft comprised the major instrument of flank protection.

Patton was confident that his unorthodox solution would work. The corps commander directly concerned with the Loire River boundary and the threat to the flank was less certain. When he asked Patton how much he should worry, Patton replied that it depended on how naturally nervous he was. The point is that Patton gambled and won. But only a technically proficient expert would have had the nerve and the daring to execute the concept. As for the 100,000 German troops, Patton had cut their escape route, and they marched to the Loire River and surrendered en masse.

Patton liked to give the impression that he was impulsive and offhand in his decisions. He liked to pretend that he acted instinctively. It is true that he had a sixth sense about where the enemy was and what he was up to, and his marvelous perception enabled him to deploy his forces with confident audacity. Yet underneath the sharp and boldly announced course of action was an appreciation of the solid staff work that underlay the execution and left little to chance, staff work by men he had handpicked.

His enormous technical capacity to handle large forces rested on staff work. Probably the best example of his sure hold on planning occurred in December 1944, when the German Ardennes counteroffensive drove a bulge into the First Army line. In 48 hours, Patton turned his Third Army 90 degrees to the left and started a drive that linked up with the embattled defenders of Bastogne and threatened the flank of the German bulge. The German attack was as good as contained.

According to Charles B. McDonald, distinguished Army historian, Patton's "spectacular moves in this case . . . would make Stonewall Jackson's maneuvers in the Valley campaign in Virginia, or Galhena's shift of troops in taxicabs to save Paris from the Kaiser, pale by comparison. 2

It is a well deserved tribute, but it is hardly surprising about a man who had consistently driven himself to conquer the most arduous and care-laden intricacies of maneuver.

All his campaigns indicated how professional he was. For several weeks in August 1944, he had one corps, about 60,000 men, going westward into Brittany, while three corps were moving in the opposite direction, with the heads of his columns getting farther and farther apart until almost 400 miles separated them. It took a genius to control these stampeding horses. It took a genius to suggest switching the axis of one of his corps, as he did, to start the Allied encirclement that resulted in forming the Argentan-Falaise pocket, where two German field armies were trapped. It was his solid professional skills and experience that made it possible for him to achieve the sensational success that was his.

He had no illusions about warfare. "Ever since man banded together with the laudable intention of killing his fellows," he wrote with grim humor, "war has been a dirty business." Contrary to popular belief, I suspect that Patton abhorred the chaos and disorder and destruction on the battlefield. His nature was fundamentally- and paradoxically- contemplative. He loved the individual pursuits- fishing, swimming, riding, boating, reading- and he had to push himself, to put on his war mask in order to participate in team sports- football and polo- as in war. What motivated him to the military life was the opportunity for glory, for greatness, for achievement, for fame, for applause. He believed himself unfit for any other profession.

The following statement is starkly revealing. "Unfortunately," he wrote, "war means fighting and fighting means killing." Since he was widely and well read in history, he had no hope that man would ever build a world of permanent and perpetual peace. Man's history was a record of conflict and strife, and Patton believed that the struggle and war would continue.

Extremely pragmatic, he viewed man himself, his virtue and courage, as the ultimate weapon in war. "New weapons are useful," he once wrote, "in that they add to the repertoire of killing, but, be they tank or tomahawk, weapons are only weapons after all. Wars are fought with weapons, but they are won by men."

In a lecture to his officers in 1919, he said: "We, as officers . . . are not only members of the oldest of honorable professions"- he was making a distinction- "but are also the modern representatives of the demi-gods and heroes of antiquity.

"Back of us stretches a line of men whose acts of valor, of self-sacrifice and of service have been the theme of song and story since long before recorded history began. . .

"In the days of chivalry- the golden age of our profession- knights- officers were noted as well for courtesy and gentleness of behavior, as for death-defying courage. . . . From their acts of courtesy and benevolence was derived the word, now pronounced as one, Gentle Man. . . . Let us be gentle. That is, courteous and considerate of the rights of others. Let us be men. That is, fearless and untiring in doing our duty as we see it.

"... our calling is most ancient and like all other old things it has amassed through the ages certain customs and traditions which decorate and ennoble it, which render beautiful the otherwise prosaic occupation of being professional men-at-arms: Killers."

Ten years earlier, in 1909, Patton had written into his cadet notebook:

"Do not regard what you do as only a preparation for doing the same thing more fully or better at some later time. Nothing is ever done twice. . . There is no next time. This is of special application to war. There is but one time to win a battle or a campaign. It must be won the first time. .

"I believe that in order for a man to become a great soldier . . . it is necessary for him to be so thoroughly conversant with all sorts of military possibilities that when ever an occasion arises he has at hand with out effort on his part a parallel.

"To attain this end I think that it is necessary for a man to begin to read military history in its earliest and hence crudest form and to follow it down in natural sequence permitting his mind to grow with his subject until he can grasp with out effort the most abstruse question of the science of war because he is already permeated with all its elements."

In his own life, he sought perfection whatever the task. He was never satisfied with his performance. He was always apprehensive that he would be found wanting, not quite up to the standards he demanded of himself. He always feared that he lacked the qualities to reach the goal he dreamed of gaining.

A few days after his death, the Right Reverend W. Bertrand Stevens conducted a memorial service in the Church of Our Saviour at San Gabriel, California, Patton's birthplace. He summed up the general in these words: "General Patton's life had a fullness and richness that is denied to most of us. It was not merely the variety of things he did in his lifetime (which stagger the imagination) but in the fact that he seemed to have fulfilled his destiny."

His destiny to him was always clear, and he worked hard for what he wanted. He applied his talents and aptitudes to the job to the best of his ability, even better if that is possible. He served loyally and without complaint. He was exceptionally honest and clearheaded. He tried to be fair to all. He loved beauty in all its manifestations.

In the end, what made it possible for George S. Patton, Jr., to achieve what he wished so ardently was not only his driving will power; it was also his great good fortune that his lifetime required the kind of military leadership he embodied. In this he was lucky too. Yet it was not entirely a matter of luck. When opportunity knocked, he was ready to open the door.

A man of many faces, many aspects, many qualities, George Patton was essentially a warrior. A man of action, he was also a man of culture, knowledge, and wit. A man of erudition, he found his highest calling in execution. A throwback to the Teutonic knight, the Saracen, the Crusader, he was one of America's greatest soldiers, one of the world's great captains. We were lucky to have him on our side.

1. Unless otherwise noted the quotations in this paper are from Martin Blumenson, *The Patton Papers*, Vol. I (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1972). The best single source for the campaigns in Europe during World War II is Charles B. MacDonald's *The Mighty Endeavor* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1969). Valuable additional sources are: George S. Patton, Jr., *War as I Knew It* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1947); Ladislav Farago, *Patton: Ordeal and Triumph* (New York: Oblensky, 1963); and Charles Codman, *Drive* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1950).

2. *The Mighty Endeavor* (New York, 1969), p. 382.

Presently Ernest J. King Professor of Maritime History at the Naval War College, Professor Martin Blumenson has taught at the U.S. Merchant Marine Academy, Hofstra College, and Acadia University. From 1957 to 1967, he was Senior Historian in the Office of the Chief of Military History, Department of the Army. He is the author of eight books, of which the best known are: *Breakout and Pursuit* (1963), *Anzio-The Gamble that Failed* (1963), *Kasserine Pass* (1967), *Salerno to Cassio* (1969), and *The Patton Papers, 1885-1940, Vol. I.* (1972).

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