

The Anguished Man in "Old Blood and Guts"

BY LOUIS MORTON

THE PATTON PAPERS, 1885-1940

by Martin Blumenson

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To an aging generation of World War II veterans, General George S. Patton, Jr., was the very model of a fighting armor general. Fastidiously uniformed, bedecked with medals and ivory-handled pistols, he epitomized ruthless drive on the battlefield and success against the enemy. His military brilliance and personal flamboyance, heightened by a deliberate public profanity and vulgar sentimentality, combined to make him extremely good newspaper copy. Invariably he was pictured in the thick of combat, racing at the head of his armored columns toward some distant objective. Photographs of Patton and pungent statements by him appeared with regularity in the press, making him one of the best-known generals of the time.

A younger generation discovered Patton in the fearsome personality George Scott created in the filmed version of the General, based on Ladislav Farago's *Ordeal and Triumph*. As depicted by Farago and played by Scott, Patton was tough but lovable, hard but sentimental, intemperate, violent, irascible, a charismatic figure and a superb showman. The portrait was almost a caricature of Patton, every quality exaggerated. Patton was more than "Old Blood and Guts"—the general who strutted and swaggered his way through the carnage of the Second World War, glorying in battle. He was also a military genius whose tactical

handling of armor was superb and whose exceptional leadership contributed substantially to the Allied victory in Europe and undoubtedly shortened the war.

What sort of a man was this complex and contradictory general who could slap an enlisted man in a hospital and then redeem himself by leading the Third Army in a dash across France? Where did he come from? Did he really believe he was the reincarnation of the great generals of the past? What forces shaped his youth and career? From whom did he learn the art of war?

Since his death in a jeep accident in December 1945, nine biographers have tried to explain the phenomenon that was General Patton, yet only now, with the publication of *The Patton Papers*, can we begin to answer some of these questions. Quoting extensively from the General's papers, letters, memoranda and diaries, Martin Blumenson has skillfully sketched in the real man behind the ferocious mask.

There have long been rumors of the richness of General Patton's papers, but none of the previous biographers had access to them. At one time the Patton family sought to enjoin publication of Farago's book because of alleged unauthorized use of the General's wartime diary. Blumenson, however, has been given full access to the papers, comprising fifty metal filing cases holding 122 containers of diaries, journals, correspondence, military studies, articles, scrapbooks, and other material. Originally stored in the basement of the family home in Massachusetts, this fund of information, on Blumenson's recommendation, was given to the Library of Congress to be opened to the public in 1975, by which time the second and final volume of *The Patton Papers*, covering the war years, will have been published.

The Patton that emerges from these pages is quite unlike the swashbuck-



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Louis Morton, Daniel Webster Professor of History and Provost of Dartmouth College, is the author of *Full of the Philippines*, *The Pacific War: Strategy and Command*, and other works on World War II.

ling, hard-bitten, and hard-driving general we remember. This was the martial image he forged to impress his troops, the world—and perhaps even himself—for, like all soldiers, Patton feared death and disfigurement in battle. In his early years he was an anguished man, tortured by inner doubts and feelings of inadequacy and inferiority. Although later he was driven by visions of greatness, Patton was courteous and urbane in his dealings with others. Those who worked closely with him or served under his command found him fair and just and were intensely loyal to him. Extremely well-read, Patton could recite long passages from the classics. He also wrote poetry, most of it bad. A typical example, entitled "Fear," read:

I am that dreadful, blighting thing
Like rat-holes to the flood
Like rust that gnaws the faultless blade
Like microbes to the blood.

Perhaps the most revealing aspect of Patton's character, so much at odds with his public image, was his love for solitary pursuits—reading, hiking, hunting, swimming, sailing, riding, and fishing. But he also trained himself in competitive sports and was an avid polo player, one of the best in the Army. He believed he was destined for fame, and no man ever worked harder to achieve his destiny. "... I would like to find one thing," Patton wrote, "if it were only peeling potatoes, that I could do better than anyone else in the world. It is awful to see other people do not only some things but all things better than you do. ... There is always someone who is better in at least one thing. ..."

It is in large part this dual aspect of Patton's character, along with the opportunity to trace the slow development of a genuine military hero, that makes this first volume of *The Patton Papers* so compelling.

Patton commands the book as he commanded his military units. His prose flows through its pages, infusing them with humor, warmth, and spontaneity. When they are not on professional matters, his letters and reports center largely on his own activities, with the result that Patton's ambitions, opinions, and emotions are almost excessively detailed. Not all of the material cited in the *Papers* is of equal interest: some of it deals with trivial matters, some is repetitive; and the record of the early years, before World War I, could have been profitably shortened. But Blumenson himself never gets in the way of the narrative. Skillfully moving the story forward, supplying links between the diary entries, letters, and journals, he lets Patton parade his hopes, disappointments,

and despairs in his own manner and in his own words.

Patton grew up in Southern California, where he was born in November 1885. His paternal grandfather was a Virginia gentleman, a lawyer who died in battle at the head of his Confederate brigade in the Civil War. His maternal grandfather—a trapper, adventurer and Indian fighter—had migrated from Kentucky to California and married the daughter of a wealthy landholder who owned thousands of acres in the rich valley around Pasadena. These two strains, one derived from a cultured and established family tradition destroyed in the war of secession, the other from a self-made man of action, struggled for mastery in the youngster.

Like his father and grandfather, young Patton attended the Virginia Military Institute, but after spending one year there he entered West Point. Graduation from the Military Academy automatically led to a Regular Army commission, and he had always wanted to be a soldier—indeed, he thought himself unfit for any other profession. Patton's letters to his father and to his fiancée, Beatrice Ayer, during his school years reveal his personal growth and also tell much about life at West Point during these years. To Miss Ayer he wrote after the dismissal of eight cadets for hazing: "Those cadets who got it were in general no worse than any others but were unfortunate in being found out. The hazing they were doing and that was being done was not of a bad sort and hurt nobody not even the Plebes. In fact lots of them require just such treatment to make them wake up and find themselves. ..." Years later, after he had been in action, Patton wrote: "What West Point makes is a soul. We the graduates are efficient because we can't help it. We don't run away because we are a lot more afraid of our own conscience than we are of the enemy."

Assigned to the Cavalry after graduating in 1909, Patton learned his trade at Fort Sheridan, Illinois. The following year he and Miss Ayer, the daughter of an immensely affluent New England industrialist, were married. When maneuvers or other military duties took him away from her—which was often—he wrote to her almost daily. In 1911 he was assigned to Fort Myer, across the Potomac from Washington, D.C. Independently wealthy, with excellent connections and a talented and charming wife, Patton moved in the best social circles, kept his own horses, and soon came to know the great and near-great politicians and important military officers of the time, such as Henry L. Stimson, Secretary of War, and General Leonard Wood, Army Chief of Staff. He participated in the Olympic Games in 1912 at



Stockholm (placing fifth in the Modern Pentathlon), studied fencing in France during a vacation on the Continent with his wife, and became the Army's first Master of the Sword while still a second lieutenant.

After two years at the Cavalry School in Fort Riley, Patton was sent to the Mexican border, where he met General John J. Pershing. When the Punitive Expedition was formed to pursue Pancho Villa into Mexico, Patton went along as Pershing's unofficial aide. For one brief moment he tasted the glory of fame. In command of a party of fifteen men traveling in three automobiles to buy corn from Mexican farmers, Patton came upon a ranch believed to belong to one of Villa's lieutenants. He and his men surprised the enemy soldiers, and there followed a brisk skirmish in which three of the Mexicans were killed. "As you have probably seen by the papers," he wrote Beatrice, "I have at last succeeded in getting into a fight. ... I have always expected to be scared but was not, nor was I excited. I was afraid they would get away. I never heard a bullet but some say that you do not at such close range."

Deliberately the young man modeled himself upon Pershing, a trim paragon of soldierly virtue with his physical hardness, ruthless training methods, and loyalty demands. Patton learned



George S. Patton, Jr., in 1909 (left) and 1918 (above)—“a Patton who not only blusters but ponders, who not only poses for his public but is privately shy.”

much, observing at close range how Pershing operated, how he gave orders, rated his subordinates, maintained troop morale, carried out inspections, and performed the rest of his military duties. Shortly before the expedition returned to Texas, Patton wrote to his wife: “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 went to France in May 1917 to take command of the American Expeditionary Force, he took Patton with him, again as an unofficial aide. When Patton asked for assignment to a combat unit, Pershing offered him service with the newly formed U.S. Tank Corps. It was only after prolonged and difficult inner debate—and against the advice of most of his friends—that Patton finally accepted the assignment, which made him the first Tank officer in the United States Army. “I did not do this in a hurry,” he wrote Beatrice. “I thought about it for over a month and the night I decided I did not sleep at all. . . .” To his father he wrote that “with my usual luck I have again fallen on my feet. . . . There will be a hundred Majors of infantry but only one of Light T. The T are only used in attacks so all the rest of the time you are comfortable. . . . Also the T will be a great drawing card in the papers and illustrated maga-

zines. . . . Also, in the tanks you are not apt to be wounded. You either get blown to bits by a direct hit or you are not touched.”

No one in the AEF then knew anything about these unwieldy, unreliable vehicles, and Patton soon became the foremost American tank expert. His was a heavy responsibility: he had to create a new unit built around a weapon that the American Army had never previously used. The section of *The Patton Papers* devoted to this period in his life, which is among the most interesting, delineates Patton's growth as a commander, and at the same time traces the development of tank doctrine and warfare. Here Blumenson is at his best, presenting for the layman in clear, nontechnical language an account of how tanks were used in combat during World War I and how they are employed in general.

Patton's training program came to fruition in combat: his tankers performed extremely well under fire in the St. Mihiel attack and the Meuse-Argonne offensive. Already in that war, men trained by Patton exhibited the qualities that would make him famous in World War II—excellent training, high *esprit*, and an eagerness to close with and destroy the enemy.

For Patton, as for most of the serious-minded Regular officers, the years between the two world wars were full of frustration. Budgets were low, opportunities scarce, and a sense of lassitude pervaded the Army. Despite this discouraging atmosphere, Patton completed his military education by grad-

uating from the Command and General Staff College and from the Army War College. He continued to read and to study military history assiduously. He worked hard, played hard, and prepared himself as best he could for the “next war.”

Yet when that war did begin, in 1939, Patton nearly lost out. At fifty-four he was almost too old for a wartime field command. Brash and outspoken, he had made enemies. He had the wrong political connections. Most important, he had become identified with the horse cavalry, the old-timers, the conservatives who hated the automobile, the truck, and the tank. The conflict between Patton's interest in tanks and his love of horses emerges as a poignant instance of divided loyalties. The fact is, as Blumenson demonstrates, that Patton's loyalty to his Cavalry bosses came close to disqualifying him for high command in the war.

This first volume of *The Patton Papers* ends in the summer of 1940, when Patton was again, as in World War I, a colonel—and, as before, assigned to tanks. Our last view of Patton is of him departing for the 2nd Armored Division at Fort Benning, where his task, once again, was to bring tankers to high proficiency and fighting edge, to impart to young soldiers who had few weapons and little experience the belief that they were equal and superior to the German armor, the best in Europe.

While the book's focus throughout is, of course, on George S. Patton, Jr., as he was before he became a general, *The Patton Papers* provide fascinating vignettes of people and places—Paris during the First World War; George C. Marshall, who seemed to have no friends and was as comfortable as an old shoe; life on the Mexican border with cowboys and desperadoes; the Mormons in Mexico; Fox Conner, the Army's gray eminence between the wars; Douglas MacArthur, under fire at St. Mihiel and on the streets of Washington during the Bonus March. There are sharp comments on Woodrow Wilson (“He has not the soul of a louse nor the mind of a worm. Or the backbone of a jellyfish.”), on Secretary of War Newton Baker (“a little rat but very smart”), and on others.

A military historian who has written a great deal on World War II, Mr. Blumenson has clearly delineated those events that shaped the personal and professional development of one of the great generals of that war. And he has given us a Patton who not only blusters but ponders, who not only poses for his public but is privately shy—a thoroughly delightful character who reveals himself in these *Papers* as never before.

THE DOUBLE-CROSS SYSTEM IN THE WAR OF 1939 TO 1945

by J. C. Masterman

Yale, 203 pp., \$6.95

Reviewed by Lyman B. Kirkpatrick, Jr.

■ After more than a quarter of a century the British Government has permitted the publication of a report prepared by Sir John Masterman in 1945 describing the most important intelligence operation in World War II. What has been suspected and hinted at for some time is now documented: from 1939 to 1945 London exercised complete control over all German espionage operations conducted within the British Isles (excluding Ireland, of course). Further, in what must be the most skillful use of double agents in the history of spying, the British not only succeeded in preventing the Germans from suspecting that their spies were under control, but used the system to feed false information to Hitler and the Nazi military leadership as to the time and place of the massive Allied landing in Europe.

During the course of the Second World War there were, to be sure, many great espionage coups: the United States broke Japanese codes; Russian agents in 1941 warned Moscow of the impending German attack; Allen Dulles had an agent placed near the top of the Nazi hierarchy, from whom he obtained thousands of top-secret documents. But the fact that the British were able to discover, apprehend, and then direct every German agent in Great Britain outranks these successes to stand in a class by itself.

Sir John Masterson is eminently qualified to tell this story. As a member of Military Intelligence 5, or the Se-

curity Service, he spent four years working to frustrate the efforts of the German intelligence service. Happily, Masterman was permitted to write his report on the double-cross directly following the conclusion of hostilities, when he left the Service on terminal leave. As he points out in his preface, that was the ideal time to write this account because he was uninhibited by official restrictions and still intimately aware of the details and difficulties of the operation.

It is necessary to glance back to the years preceding the outbreak of war in Europe in 1939 to pick up the first traces of the double-cross system. The most effective intelligence networks are those that are dug in well before their wartime services are required, and M.I. 5 had long been on the alert for German attempts to place spies in Great Britain. "Snow" (Sir John prudently uses pseudonyms when referring to agents) became the base of the system in 1936. A British-born Canadian who had returned to England, where he worked as an electrical engineer for a firm that had a number of Admiralty contracts, Snow frequently traveled to Germany on business. He advised British Intelligence, or M.I. 6, of his contacts in Germany but, when a letter he mailed to a post-office box in Hamburg that was known to the British as a German "cover address" was intercepted, it became clear that Snow was acting as a double agent. In January 1939 the Germans provided Snow, whose activities were being discreetly checked up on by the British, with a wireless transmitter. By then he had convinced his bosses in Hamburg that he had ten or fifteen agents working for him. "It is probable, though not certain," writes Masterson, "that all these persons existed only in Snow's imagination." In September 1939, when

Snow returned from a visit to Rotterdam, he was arrested. The war had begun and he had been in contact with the enemy. The first message he sent off to Germany was from Wandsworth Prison, where his transmitter had been set up for him by M.I. 6 so that he could re-establish contact.

By the start of the war the Germans had developed sufficient confidence in Snow to provide him considerable material of value to the British Security Service. He was put in touch with other German agents in England and given a code—later used by the British to break other German intelligence messages—and he was asked to recruit additional agents, a task that Security promptly took over for him. Released from Wandsworth after a brief stay, Snow—together with a Welsh national whom the Germans thought reliable (he was actually a retired Welsh police inspector provided by Security)—was allowed to return to Rotterdam to meet his German contact. Thus Snow's work went on, and his network continued to expand.

In 1940 the Germans intensified their efforts to get agents into the British Isles. Six of them tried to enter England through Ireland. From September to November some twenty-five others were either air-dropped or attempted to land by boat. Tate, for example, parachuted in in September 1940 and was in radio contact with Germany (under British supervision) from October of that year until May 1945. Other agents arrived in the guise of neutral businessmen or refugees.

One factor which expedited the roundup of parachuted German agents was that their identity documents had been constructed on information supplied by the Snow organization. German spies arriving in England by different means usually contacted other spies who were already being controlled by the British and thus gave themselves away. Once caught, and confronted with the alternative of dying for Nazi Germany or working for the British, the overwhelming majority of these men chose to live and work (and to earn at least a percentage of the wages paid them by their German employers) under the tutelage of a "case officer." However, Masterson writes, "some had to perish, both to satisfy the public that the security of the country was being maintained and also to convince the Germans that the others were working properly and were not under control. It would have taxed even German credulity if *all* their agents had apparently overcome the hazards of their landing."

The Germans apparently had little knowledge of the problems of clandestine infiltration of agents. Those parachuted into Scotland usually were



"Remember all those things we thought, thank God, we wouldn't live to see? We're going to live to see them."