

BIOGRAPHY OF GENERAL GEORGE S. PATTON, JR.

One of the most complicated military men of all time, General George Smith Patton, Jr. was born November 11, 1885 in San Gabriel, California. He was known for carrying pistols with ivory handles and his intemperate manner, and is regarded as one of the most successful United States field commanders of any war. He continually strove to train his troops to the highest standard of excellence.

Patton decided during childhood that his goal in life was to become a hero. His ancestors had fought in the Revolutionary War, the Mexican War and the Civil War, and he grew up listening to stories of their brave and successful endeavors. He attended the Virginia Military Institute for one year and went on to graduate from the United States Military Academy at West Point on June 11, 1909. He was then commissioned a Second Lieutenant in the 15th cavalry Regiment.

Patton married Beatrice Ayer, whom he dated while at West Point, on May 26, 1910. In 1912 he represented the United States at the Stockholm Olympics in the first Modern Pentathlon. Originally open only to military officers, it was considered a rigorous test of the skills a soldier should possess. Twenty-six year old Patton did remarkably well in the multi-event sport, consisting of pistol shooting from 25 meters, sword fencing, a 300 meter free style swim, 800 meters horse back riding and a 4-kilometer cross country run. He placed fifth overall, despite a disappointing development in the shooting portion. While most chose .22 revolvers, Patton felt the event's military roots garnered a more appropriate weapon, the .38. During the competition Patton was docked for missing the target, though he contended the lost bullet had simply passed through a large opening created by previous rounds from the .38, which left considerably larger holes.

After the Olympics, Patton kept busy taking lessons at the French cavalry School and studying French sword drills. In the summer of 1913, Patton received orders to report to the commandant of the Mounted Service School in Fort Riley, Kansas, where he became the school's first Master of the Sword. He designed and taught a course in swordsmanship while he was a student at the school.

Patton's first real exposure to battle occurred when he served as a member of legendary General John J. Pershing's staff during the expedition to Mexico. In 1915, Patton was sent to Fort Bliss along the Mexican border where he led routine cavalry patrols. A year later, he accompanied Pershing as an aide on his expedition against Francisco "Pancho" Villa into Mexico. Patton gained recognition from the press for his attacks on several of Villa's men.

43 Impressed by Patton's determination, Pershing promoted him to Captain and
44 asked him to command his Headquarters Troop upon their return from Mexico.
45 With the onset of World War I in 1914, tanks were not being widely used. In
46 1917, however, Patton became the first member of the newly established United
47 States Tank Corps, where he served until the Corps were abolished in 1920. He
48 took full command of the Corps, directing ideas, procedures and even the design
49 of their uniforms. Along with the British tankers, he and his men achieved victory
50 at Cambrai, France, during the world's first major tank battle in 1917.

51
52 Using his first-hand knowledge of tanks, Patton organized the American tank
53 school in Bourg, France and trained the first 500 American tankers. He had 345
54 tanks by the time he took the brigade into the Meuse-Argonne Operation in
55 September 1918. When they entered into battle, Patton had worked out a plan
56 where he could be in the front lines maintaining communications with his rear
57 command post by means of pigeons and a group of runners. Patton continually
58 exposed himself to gunfire and was shot once in the leg while he was directing
59 the tanks. His actions during that battle earned him the Distinguished Service
60 Cross for Heroism, one of the many medals he would collect during his lifetime.

61
62 An outspoken advocate for tanks, Patton saw them as the future of modern
63 combat. Congress, however, was not willing to appropriate funds to build a large
64 armored force. Even so, Patton studied, wrote extensively and carried out
65 experiments to improve radio communications between tanks. He also helped
66 invent the co-axial tank mount for cannons and machine guns.

67
68 After WWI, Patton held a variety of staff jobs in Hawaii and Washington, D.C. He
69 graduated from the Command and General Staff School in 1924, and completed
70 his military schooling as a distinguished graduate of the Army War College in
71 1932.

72
73 When the German Blitzkrieg began on Europe, Patton finally convinced
74 Congress that the United States needed a more powerful armored striking force.
75 With the formation of the Armored Force in 1940, he was transferred to the
76 Second Armored Division at Fort Benning, Georgia and named Commanding
77 General on April 11, 1941. Two months later, Patton appeared on the cover of
78 Life magazine. Also during this time, Patton began giving his famous "Blood and
79 Guts" speeches in an amphitheater he had built to accommodate the entire
80 division.

81
82 The United States officially entered World War II in December 1941, after the
83 attack on Pearl Harbor. By November 8, 1942, Patton was commanding the
84 Western Task Force, the only all-American force landing for Operation Torch, the
85 Allied invasion of North Africa. After succeeding there, Patton commanded the
86 Seventh Army during the invasion of Sicily in July 1943, and in conjunction with
87 the British Eighth Army restored Sicily to its citizens.

88

88 Patton commanded the Seventh Army until 1944, when he was given command
89 of the Third Army in France. Patton and his troops dashed across Europe after
90 the battle of Normandy and exploited German weaknesses with great success,
91 covering the 600 miles across France, Belgium, Luxembourg, Germany, Austria
92 and Czechoslovakia. When the Third Army liberated the Buchenwald
93 concentration camp, Patton slowed his pace. He instituted a policy, later adopted
94 by other commanders, of making local German civilians tour the camps. By the
95 time WWII was over, the Third Army had liberated or conquered 81,522 square
96 miles of territory.

97
98 In October 1945, Patton assumed command of the Fifteenth Army in American-
99 occupied Germany. On December 9, he suffered injuries as the result of an
100 automobile accident. He died 12 days later, on December 21, 1945 and is buried
101 among the soldiers who died in the Battle of the Bulge in Hamm, Luxembourg.

102
103 Remembered for his fierce determination and ability to lead soldiers, Patton is
104 now considered one of the greatest military figures in history. The 1970 film,
105 "Patton," starring George C. Scott in the title role, provoked renewed interest in
106 Patton. The movie won seven Academy Awards, including Best Actor and Best
107 Picture, and immortalized General George Smith Patton, Jr. as one of the world's
108 most intriguing military men.

109

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