

1972

The Patton Papers

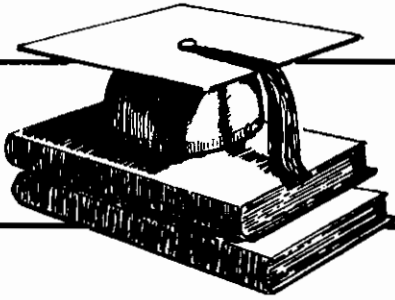
Lawrence W. Jackley

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review>

Recommended Citation

Jackley, Lawrence W. (1972) "The Patton Papers," *Naval War College Review*: Vol. 25 : No. 5 , Article 10.
Available at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review/vol25/iss5/10>

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at U.S. Naval War College Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Naval War College Review by an authorized editor of U.S. Naval War College Digital Commons. For more information, please contact repository.inquiries@usnwc.edu.



PROFESSIONAL READING

Blumenson, Martin. *The Patton Papers*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1972. 996p.

A great deal has been written about George Smith Patton, Jr., both during and after World War II. His eccentric and flamboyant behavior has been discussed, analyzed, and placed into behavioral matrices according to the psychological bents of the respective authors. Now, with the release of the complete collection of Patton's letters, diaries, and assorted memoranda by his surviving family to the eminent military historian Martin Blumenson, new insights into how Patton saw himself and his soldier's life have been opened to the scrutiny of military buff and amateur psychiatrist alike.

It must be noted, first, that Patton wrote his papers in "real time"—that is to say his memoranda are not after-the-fact memoirs shaded by second thoughts. Blumenson has allowed Patton's words of the moment, illiterate spelling and all, to reflect the man—his drives, attitudes, ambitions, and self-contradictions. Most of this anthology is contained in Patton's letters to his wife, and one cannot help but note that he seems to have spent an inordinate amount of unaccompanied time during his assignments in the United States. This was apparently due to his wife's financial status which permitted her to escape the unpleasant Midwest summers at desultory Army posts. Blumenson has selected from more than 50 filing cabinets of material the memorabilia which most vividly depict the multi-

faceted character of Patton from his cadet days at VMI and West Point through his middle career in 1940. The smooth, narrative transitions lead the reader easily through the years and set up the stage lights at each stop along the route to a passionately desired but self-doubted military fame. Patton lays bare his emotions, fears, and rationale in unparalleled candor. He shows himself to be a deeply read military student; however, the documentation here does not suggest his belief in his reincarnation from earlier military heroes as repeatedly intimated by Ladislas Farago in his *Patton: Ordeal and Triumph*, and by George Scott.

Patton reveals himself to have been an ambitious, fawning sycophant. What other Army captain or major between the World Wars would routinely invite the Secretary of State and the Vice President to social functions and expect them to accept? Who else would write the Army Chief of Staff to offer his gratuitous recommendations on the selection of the Chief of Cavalry? Patton obviously considered his wealth and social position to be natural entrées into the seats of influence. He ingratiated himself with Pershing early in the game; and in fact, became his "fair-haired boy" during the Punitive Expedition into Mexico and also later in France. Part of this favor stemmed from the close relationship between the Patton family and Pershing, who was nearly engaged to Patton's sister over a period of several years. George C. Marshall, on becoming the Chief of Staff in 1939,

however, was immune to Patton's apple polishing and ignored him with a dignified *hauteur*.

Patton's overwhelming desire for recognition and its appurtenances leads the reader to conclude that he never outgrew his adolescent perception of military heroism. Nowhere is his infatuation for decorations and medals more strongly borne out than in his successful efforts to win a Distinguished Service Cross in France in 1918. Commanding the 304th Tank Brigade, Patton personally led the attack in the Meuse-Argonne, despite an earlier rebuke for such bravado. He seemingly invited death (but was only wounded) in a setpiece of heroic role playing. Following the initial disapproval of the recommendation for his DSC, Patton personally rewrote the letter for his commanding general to sign. He finally received his sought-after medal while convalescing from his sought-after wound.

Patton was never content to be a spectator at any competitive activity in which he could possibly engage. He participated in the 1912 Olympics; organized saber instruction at the cavalry school (after a leave of absence to tutor in France at his own expense); sailed his yacht to Hawaii and back in lieu of government transportation for his tour of duty at Schofield Barracks; and constantly rode in horse shows, races, and polo games. He viewed polo as preparation for combat leadership and wrote: "... no man can stay cool in battle unless he is habituated to the exhilarating [sic] sense of physical peril ... War also demands quick decisions while engaged in rapid movement under the disconcerting influence of profuse perspiration resulting from vigorous exercise. ..." Patton also played the Washington social circuit as only an officer who was independently wealthy could. He was selected for ceremonial duty at Fort Meyer, Va., because he was one of the few who could stand the

expense involved.

Blumenson portrays Patton as an ultra-efficient and extremely competent professional officer who lived, breathed, studied, and loved the military arts. These conclusions are supported by memoranda, by excerpts from efficiency reports written on Patton, and, in some instances, by generalizations from evidence not available to the reader. The acceptability of these conclusions, however, is warranted by both agreement with other writings and by Blumenson's credentials as a historian.

This book is not for the dilettante. Although Blumenson states in his preface that he has sorted out the trivia and the irrelevant, the remaining 964 pages indeed comprise everything that anyone ever wanted to know about Patton, and then some. The casual reader will find that he is sipping champagne from a firehose—the vintage is excellent, but he will run the continual risk of being drowned. The committed academician, history/Patton buff, and student of psychiatry will find the going great.

From the historical viewpoint, it is difficult to fault *The Patton Papers*. The book is essentially an examination of one person's character development based on self-description. Patton's World War II flamboyance, his eccentric leadership techniques, and difficulties with both his seniors and contemporaries all have their genesis in *The Patton Papers*. The famous slapping incidents in Sicily, for example, can be traced to Patton's absolute intolerance, throughout his career, of seemingly cowardly performance in battle. In France, after the Meuse-Argonne he wrote his wife: "... some of my reserve tanks were stuck by some trenches. So I went back and made some Americans hiding in the trenches dig a passage. I think I killed one man here. He would not work so I hit him over the head with a shovel. ..."

Patton wrote little about his friends or his environment—his favorite subjects

were himself and his visualization of leadership in future battle. Neither does Blumenson attempt to describe the world in which Patton lived. The reader is presumed to be familiar with that world; and as a consequence, only those who either remember or have studied the early decades of our century well enough to place *The Patton Papers* in context with the times will find the effort truly meaningful. It would have been helpful if Blumenson had sketched a broader framework for each of the chapters and thus enhanced their relevance for the average military reader.

The collection of Patton's memorabilia has been placed in the Library of Congress and will be available to the public in 1975. Other military scholars may then select new sets of material from the filing cabinets and perceive a somewhat different Patton. Until then, however, *The Patton Papers* will stand as a unique, thoroughly enjoyable, and first-rate character study about one of the most controversial figures in American military history. Martin Blumenson has whetted the appetite in anticipation of the forthcoming volume covering World War II and the opportunity to compare the "Old Blood and Guts" of the news headlines with the introspective Patton as seen by himself.

LAWRENCE W. JACKLEY
Colonel, U.S. Army

Masterman, John C., *The Double-Cross System in the War of 1939 to 1945*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1972. 203p.

In perhaps the ablest treatise of its kind known to this reviewer, Christopher Felix's *A Short Course in the Secret War* (1963), deception is described as "one of secret operations' most vital and complex activities. . . ." The little volume here under appraisal may well become a standard assessment of such activity. The work of the English mystery novelist and former

vice provost of Oxford University, Sir John Cecil Masterman was composed in mid-1945, shortly after the cessation of hostilities, as a manual for future use by M.I. 5, the British internal security organization (comparable with our FBI) to which Masterman had been assigned. It has recently been published with official sanction, however, to offset some of the damaging publicity British Intelligence has been enduring in recent years from the revelations emerging at Communist spy trials.

In the intelligence field, one of the best channels for the practice of deception is by the proper manipulation of the "double agent," i.e., a spy working for two hostile nations concurrently but, in fact, owing allegiance to one only. The Double-Cross System, which got under way in the early summer of 1942 and functioned uninterrupted until May 1945, had as its goal the identification, apprehension, and then "turning" of all Axis operatives at large in the United Kingdom. Despite inevitable occasional setbacks—usually the result of that traditional nemesis, lack of coordination (see pages 82, 103-104)—the game went so well that Masterman can make the flat claim that "by means of the double agent system we actively ran and controlled the German espionage system in this country" (page 3).

After a succinct statement of the goals set for Double-Cross (pages 8-9, 58), the author devotes the bulk of his book to what might be termed the care and feeding of a very *rara avis*. Cautioning that "a double agent is a tricky customer, and needs the most careful supervision, not only on the material but on the psychological side" (pages 51-52), Sir John then elaborates upon the 12 principles of D/A management which, under the exigencies of war, gradually shaped themselves into such (pages 17-33). He takes passing note of the rarity of a spy "who could plausibly meet persons in any social stratum"