

Review on the movie patton history essay



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The curtain pulls to the side leaving an intimidating man standing in his full Army uniform. The man standing at the center of the stage behind a massive American flag is none other than George S. Patton (actually it's George C. Scott playing him). The movie Patton, which opened

February 5, 1970, is more of a pop culture look at the General. We perceive him as a loud mouth, harsh, overbearing, General who pushed his troops to the brink of insanity. In reality General Patton did train his troops to the highest standards but only for the desire to be the best and win the war. Our modern view of General Patton, when compared to the traditional view, becomes developed by how movies portray Patton. We will look at the "traditional" Patton as well as the "modern" Patton and develop a relationship between the two.

Patton's "Brain"

They say behind every man is a great woman. Well, behind every great military figure is a great group of intelligence officers. Michael E. Bigelow discusses the various means of intelligence behind General Patton (Bigelow1). Patton trained his men to be the best and only the best. After the grueling training Patton also trusted his men and often relied on their gatherings for crucial information. In today's society we often use computers as our means for gathering information. In Patton's era men used Morse code to send and receive messages, sent letters, and broke radio code in secretive language. One man could not do this on his own therefore Patton relied heavily on his intelligence unit for crucial information about the enemy.

At the Battle of the Bulge, at Bastogne, Patton realizes the counterattack and orders his troops to help counter-attack. Without the help of his intelligence, though the rigorous training, he knew the attack was coming and planned accordingly. The intelligence documents show the slow withdrawal of the tanks (Bigelow2). It notes of the Germans pulling back, only a short distance, so they may regroup and plan another attack. On December 19 Patton wrote in his journal, " We'll be in position to meet whatever happens" (Zabecki34). Only a handful of Generals would have had the guts to stay put for the attack and trust the intelligence unit enough to believe the information is reliable, especially when a large amount of troops lives are at stake. Patton put all of his trust into his G2, Colonel Oscar Koch. Koch and Patton had the type of relationship where they each identified the needs of one another, often producing documents prior to being asked (Bigelow2). Through the various methods of intelligence Koch and Patton were able to plan ahead, most notably when other intelligence units assumed the end of the war was just around the corner.

Throughout the movie, Patton seldom talks to his subordinates. The intelligence unit has very little part and it shows. How could one person know all of the information? How could he figure out where the Germans were headed or how many of them were " out there"? Many people may view Patton as being arrogant. He may have been cocky and arrogant but he did so because his intelligence unit provided crucial information that allowed him to make assumptions. The scene that plays the part the most is when Patton and General Bradley are in a meeting talking about the war. Patton comments and says he can have his entire division, roughly 100, 000 men,

and ready to move out in three days. Bradley notes how impossible this would be but he also didn't know how Patton's men worked, just like their leader, quick, fast, and with purpose.

Patton's fellow officers may have called him arrogant and cocky but Patton truly respected the German army. Patton and Koch both believed in the enemies "capabilities, not intentions" (Bigelow4). The Germans had all intentions of winning the war, yet they did not have the capabilities. The Germans wanted to counterattack, and tried to, but Patton's army quickly showed the Germans they were not capable of it. The Germans had the perfect plan for Bastogne. Bastogne was already under siege and the Army was quickly fading. Patton's army got into position and was able to rescue the army, thanks to his intelligence unit. The unit showed Patton the information, which Bigelow notes did not win the battle for Patton but it allowed him to anticipate the enemy and sparked his thinking (Bigelow34). When the thinking was sparked, Patton could now completely develop ideas to see the battle in high definition.

Slap!

One of the most controversial topics about Patton does not cover his battle plans. It's more personal. Not only did the event happen but Patton never denied it nor does his apology to the troops show remorse. On December 6, 1943 Time Magazine published an article titled "Patton and Truth" (Time). Throughout this article it debates whether or not General Patton was punished for his misconduct. The general consensus among military figures is that Patton was never reprimanded. General Eisenhower respected Patton

and knew how he dealt with soldiers. With a simple talking General Patton was sent on his way.

The incident occurred when a soldier, who was under severe stress and fatigue from battle, said he was sick. When Patton walked in and heard about it, he removed his gloves and proceeded to slap the soldier in the face. The soldier was actually suffering from fatigue and chronic diarrhea (PattonHq). A week after the incident the soldier was released and sent back on active duty. Many soldiers would have quit after the fatigue but not Patton's. Deep down Patton must have known that the severe punishment may demoralize the soldiers but it also made them stronger in the end.

The same incident occurs in Patton. Patton does slap a soldier who viewers can vividly see is fatigued. Patton tells him to get up and to stop faking it. He then proceeds to remove his glove, cock his arm backward, and slap the soldier in the face with his leather gloves. Afterward there is a brief discussion with an actor playing Eisenhower but again, no obvious reprimands for the General. The movie review notes this by stating " As when, In Sicily, he began slapping shell-shocked soldiers for their cowardice" (Canby1).

A Man of Many Views

Patton often did not care how others view him. He spoke about what he wanted, when he wanted, and how he wanted, and did not care who overheard him. In one of his famous speeches Patton says " The bilious bastards, who wrote that stuff about individuality for the Saturday Evening Post, don't know anything more about real battle than they do about

fornicating.” (Tuley). The Saturday Evening Post was read by many Americans throughout the United States during the war. It provided a bimonthly collection of various subjects and often included current events (Saturday Evening Post). Patton didn't care about anyone, he may have “loved” his troops, tanks, and pearly twin colt 45's hanging from his belt, but Patton's only goal was to get the job done, no matter what it took.

In the movie, Patton is played just as Patton acted, rough and tough. He dresses immaculately, talks like a sailor, and doesn't care what anyone else thinks of him. In the opening monologue, a compilation of his various speeches, Patton addresses the division though an overdramatic, glorified speech. Throughout this speech the viewer does not see the crowd making it feel as if Patton is addressing the viewer. In the movie, Patton does not seem to care about how others view him, often distant from the battle scenes making it feel as if he has little impact over the war. In fact Patton had a huge contribution to the European theatre of the war, saving the 101st at the battle of the bulge, taking Africa by storm, and using German tactics against the Germans.

Patton at the Movies

Many movies about famous figures, especially military personnel and events, put a spin on the personalities, events, for a more dramatic event. The New York Times wrote a review about “ Patton: Salute to Rebel” the day after it premiered, February 5, 1970. In the review, written by Vincent Canby, notes that “ Patton, the movie keeps telling us, is ‘ a magnificent anachronism’,” a 16th century man lost in the 20th century.” This is the perfect description of

General Patton. If he had lived in the 16th century we may not have heard about him. Everyone was tough, enjoyed philosophy, and was thought to be a good person.

The movie depicts him just as the review says, “ a man who loved war, was surprised and taken aback when men near to him were killed, who wrote poetry, quoted the Bible,...and was basically decent”(Canby1). The battles scenes throughout the movie are often distant, showing General Patton, with massive binoculars, looking over the battlefield. Patton did see the frontlines, but very seldom in the movie. The opening of the movie also shows Patton at his best. Standing in his uniform and recites his speech saying that “ American’s love war, that’s why we never lost one.” The Patton type of comment portrays the true Patton, a man who loved the 16th century, stuck in a modern man’s body.

General Patton spoke like he acted. He uses profane languages, racial slurs, and has one volume, loud. The army became engrained in him, a destiny when his father became a soldier, passing it through the generations; his son also became a General. The quote in the movie that defines Patton’s tactics is “ Now there’s another thing I want you to remember. I don’t want to get any messages saying that “ we are holding our position.” We’re not holding anything. Let the Hun do that. We are advancing constantly and we’re not interested in holding onto anything except the enemy. We’re going to hold onto him by the nose and we’re going to kick him in the ass. We’re going to kick the hell out of him all the time and we’re going to go through him like crap through a goose” (IMDB). This type of tactics, one of always move, helped Patton win the war.

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Patton modernized tank warfare. He used the tactic of never staying put or “holding a position.” always wanting to advance and stay on the move (IMDB). In my opinion, if he stayed put (especially in tanks) he was going to sacrifice troop’s lives. People thought tank warfare was crazy. Why would you want to have a large number of tanks instead of dividing them up into smaller amounts? For Patton this was an easy answer, force in numbers. He knew that with a large tank brigade he could “ blitzkrieg” through the war and his tactics of being on the move worked flawlessly. The enemy couldn’t position around him and wasn’t able to know where he was headed, when he was headed, or why he wanted to go wherever he did.

In the movie, the same tactics apply. He constantly is on the move but he does set up base camps. He also uses existing buildings to set up, which of course are probably more elegant than in real life due to the cinema feature. At one point of the movie, a scene in which I couldn’t decide why it was used in the movie, Patton is at a parade, in Northern Africa, getting an award for his successes. To say a stereotype is involved would be an understatement. People are dressed up in traditional Arab garments, ones in which show very little historical relevance for the time period. The scene could have been cut out, but in “ Patton fashion” it’s in because the director wanted it in, and didn’t care what others thought.

Patton at the Battle of the Bulge

The Battle of the Bulge was the turning point of the European Theatre. The allies had been no supplies going in and out of the town of Bastogne. The 101st became surrounded by the Germans with nowhere to go. Some of the worst conditions appeared here during the battle. Soldiers did not have

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proper clothing, many still in summer issue shirts, when in fact it was December. Just when everyone thought the 101st were going to die, Patton comes to the rescue.

Why would Patton have known about this? According to David T. Zabecki, Patton had information about a "large group of Nazi tanks that were in the area" (Zabecki2). He also kept plans, noted in his journal, that he had contingency plans that started to turn his division to the east, straight towards Bastogne (Zabecki2). Patton left a meeting with Eisenhower and drove straight to a camp set outside of Bastogne so he could plan his attack. Patton and his intelligence unit planned until the early morning hours and eventually slept in his jeep.

Patton eventually saves the day, the 101st still denies the fact that they needed help, and eventually the war ended for Patton. The movie ends with the slapping of the soldier and Patton eventually staying in Germany to see it being rebuilt. Unfortunately Patton actually dies in 1945 from a car accident. He is given a soldier's burial where he rests today, in Luxemburg. What better place for a General to rest than with his troops.

In conclusion, Patton was an outspoken General who used tactics that were revolutionary for the time period. He believed in his men and rigorously trained them to be the best. The movie may be a close depiction of him but it does not show the real Patton. He saves the 101st, trusted Koch's intelligence more than anyone else, and lived his entire life in the military. Movies depict events through the eyes of the director, but Patton shows us how things were, according to General Patton.