



## General Patton - freedom fighter

### Councillor Jack Lopresti on the military genius who opposed Nazi and Soviet tyranny

2005 SAW THE commemoration of the sixtieth anniversary of both VE and VJ days, which were widely celebrated, but the year also marked the sixtieth anniversary of the death of one of the most famous and celebrated generals of WWII, who made an awesome contribution to allied victories in North Africa and the European theatre of operations.

He led the Operation Torch landings in French Morocco and captured - along with Monty's Eighth Army - the island of Sicily in thirty days. Patton's Third Army led the breakout from Normandy and were the heroes who liberated Bastogne during the Battle of the Bulge, his finest hour.

When most people think of General Patton, the image that usually comes to mind is of George C. Scott standing in front of a huge American flag, with a chest full of medals wearing ivory handled revolvers, often mistakenly referred to as pearl handled! Patton himself took great offence at any reference to his pistols being pearl handled, "Ivory-God-F---ing-Damn-Handled!"

The film was excellent and won eight Oscars, including best picture and best actor for Scott. Patton's family had fought the making of the film for practically twenty years, but, when they relented, were pleased with it. But it only covers Patton's WWII campaigns and, I think, struggles to portray the complexity of the man and the many facets to his personality. Patton was not only a great general; he was also a military historian, poet, Olympic athlete, prophet and a mystic who believed in reincarnation.

General George Patton Jnr. was born on the 11th November, (which, poignantly, became Veterans' Day) 1885 in San Gabriel, California, into a family with a very proud tradition of military service. Patton's grandfather, (the first George Patton) had risen to be a colonel in the Confederate Army and died against Union troops in 1864. Fifteen other members of the Patton family fought for the Confederacy.

Patton had a very happy childhood. Being bought up on his family's ranch, he became a skilled horseman, learnt to sail, to hunt and to fish. He didn't begin his formal education until he was eleven -

partly due to the fact that he suffered from dyslexia and his parents wanted to spare him from the scorn of his classmates, and also because they wanted him tutored at home with a classical education.

At the age of seven, he could recite whole passages from Homer's heroic Greek epic *The Iliad* as well as the Bible.

He studied military history with a great passion; especially about the great captains, whose success he felt, from his boyhood, he was destined to emulate on the battlefield. By the time Patton approached manhood, he was an expert on the great soldiers of history: Caesar, Scipio, Hannibal, Joan of Arc, Napoleon and Marshall Murat.

He began to see himself as someone who had lived before and had fought in some of the great battles of history. A note made in one of the margins of Patton's history books says "Man's a damn liar. I know because I was there."

He spent a year at Virginia Military Institute and then, overcoming his dyslexia, secured a place at West Point Military Academy. He then joined the cavalry. While at his first posting, Fort Sheridan, he became the Army's "First Master of the Sword" and redesigned the Army's sabre, earning his first nickname, "Sabre George". In 1912 he was placed fifth in the Military Olympics in Stockholm.

By 1916 he was serving as *Aide de Camp* to General Pershing. Patton initiated motorised warfare by leading the world's first motorised military action in his pursuit of a Mexican revolutionary, Julio Cardenas. He returned after the action, with a dead bandit strapped to the front of his Dodge touring car.

In 1936, when he was stationed in Hawaii, after observing the Japanese in the Pacific he wrote a paper which proved to be highly prophetic. The conclusion was that, in the near future, the Japanese would seek to attack Pearl Harbour by air. He laid out how he thought the attack would happen, which was almost exactly the same as the actual attack on December 7th 1941. He was ignored.

At the end of the war, Patton, despite his fantastic achievements, was an unhappy and frustrated man. He thought it was a huge mistake to have allowed the Russians to take Prague and Berlin and a

betrayal to have half of Europe under their yoke; to have fought a war to defeat one tyranny, but to leave half the peoples of Europe under another one.

Patton was one of the first people to see that the Russians were intent on world domination and knew that Germany needed to be built up and stabilised as a bulwark against communism, which he felt could easily spread throughout the whole of Europe and, eventually, the USA.

He also disagreed vehemently with the way the victors were treating defeated Germany. He was made military governor of Bavaria, but disagreed with the non-fraternisation policy and the lengths to which the de-Nazification policy went. He saw it as victor's justice and thought we shouldn't mistreat people, as he saw it, that we would need so badly.

He thought it was more important to get the country on its feet, with enough wood for the local population to heat at least one room in the very cold winter - to get the water running and food to feed the people - than to start a witch hunt for people who as he put it, had paid lip service to the Nazi party for their own survival.

He also knew, historically, what happened after major conflicts - the army was run down and demobilised. He said "We will now get weaker every day while the Bolsheviks will get stronger". He wanted the western Allies and what remained of the German army to get together and, in his own words, "kick the Russians back to Moscow where they belong".

Eisenhower removed him from the command of his beloved Third Army and put him in charge of the non-existent Fifteenth Army, a paper army.

The day before he was due to go back to the States and resign from the army, so he could be free to speak his mind, he was involved in a road accident which broke his neck. He died in his sleep 11 days later on the 21st December. He was buried with his men, in the military cemetery at Hamm in Luxembourg on Christmas Eve 1945.

Had he lived, he would have seen non-fraternisation abolished, the Marshall Plan implemented and the establishment of NATO and the Rhine Army.

In September 1945, with his new aide Major Van S. Merle-Smith, General

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Patton attended a huge military review in Berlin hosted by Marshal Zhukov. As the huge tanks passed by, Zhukov said, "My dear General Patton, you see that tank, it carries a cannon which can throw a shell seven miles". Patton replied, "Indeed, well my dear Marshal Zhukov, let me tell you, if any of my gunners started firing at your people before they had closed to less than seven hundred yards, I'd have them court-martialled for cowardice". Major Merle-Smith observed, "it was the first time I saw a Russian commander stunned to silence."



Photograph: Councillor Jack Lopresti

**Councillor Jack Lopresti visiting General Patton's grave, on the sixtieth anniversary of the Battle of the Bulge. A TFA Member, Jack sits as a Conservative on Bristol City Council. He is a mortgage broker and a member of the General George Patton Jnr. Historical Society.**

### A SOLDIER'S BURIAL

by George S. Patton

Not midst the chanting of the Requiem Hymn,  
Nor with the solemn ritual of prayer,  
Neath misty shadows from the oriel glass,  
And dreamy perfume of the incensed air  
Was he interred;  
But in the subtle stillness after fight,  
And the half light between the night and the day,  
We dragged his body all besmeared with mud,  
And dropped it, clod-like, back into the clay.

Yet who shall say that he was not content,  
Or missed the prayers, or drone of chanting choir,  
He who had heard all day the Battle Hymn  
Sung on all sides by a thousand throats of fire.

What painted glass can lovelier shadows cast  
Than those the evening skies shall ever shed,  
While, mingled with their light, Red Battle's Sun  
Completes in magic colours o'er our dead  
The flag for which they died.

## PELAGIUS

Brian Monteith, in the last issue of *Freedom Today*, referred to Baroness Thatcher as a "Tory Trotskyist". I believe that it was the late lamented Bernard Levin who once suggested, after the end of her time in office, that had she been a Marxist, the BBC and other similar institutions would have been far more admiring in respect of her achievement in becoming the first female Prime Minister.

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Bryan Smalley, also in the November/December issue of *Freedom Today*, suggested that Britain needs a new Lord Nelson to defend British independence. I am writing this with a copy of "The Eyes of the Fleet - Frigate Warfare from 1793 to 1815", by Anthony Price, in my sight.

In the book, Mr. Price (perhaps better known for his spy novels) describes how, following Nelson's final victory at Trafalgar, ships-of-the-line were much less involved in combat, there being fewer major enemy formations for them to be pitted against, instead carrying out blockade duties, convoy escorts and the like.

For the rest of the war, much of the burden of naval operations fell on the frigates; smaller, lighter vessels, which could operate in coastal waters, often out of touch with higher authority, the captains having to rely on their own wits and ingenuity, in an age without mass communications.

Many of those commanders were former members of Nelson's "Band of Brothers", others younger men coming up after Trafalgar; perhaps few, if any, with the capability to replace Nelson, but many of them with the ability to make the very most of their own resources and talents, carrying on in the same spirit. If there hadn't been such men prepared and able to follow in Nelson's footsteps, making use of the opportunities provided by his victory, even without the same genius as Nelson, then much of the effect of that victory would have been lost. I trust that the moral is clear; many "smaller" people can replace one "great" one, if they work hard enough at it.

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William John Hagan's article on the monarchy, in the last issue of *Freedom Today*, raised some interesting points. I would argue that it was Charles I who was a greater danger to the monarchy than Oliver Cromwell. Charles demonstrated a disregard for constitutional practice, a failure to govern effectively and a belief that the people of this country had no right to a say in their own government. It is generally believed that Cromwell would have been happy to come to some sort of settlement with Charles, reducing his powers, but allowing him to continue on the throne, had Charles not attempted to renew the war by bringing in outside forces.

If Charles had somehow won, we might have seen the situation in this country becoming increasingly desperate, until it finally burst out in something like the French Revolution.