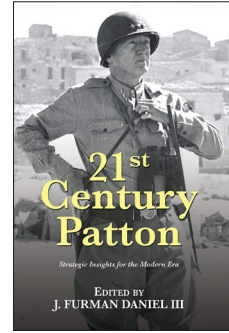


Book Reviews

21st Century Patton: Strategic Insights for the Modern Era



By J. Furman Daniel III

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Reviewed by Brigadier Andrew Roe

Biography: Brigadier Andrew Roe is the Director of the Higher Command and Staff Course and Assistant Commandant (Land) at the Joint Services Command and Staff College, Shrivenham. He is a graduate of the United States Army Command and General Staff College, the School of Advanced Military Studies and the Higher Command and Staff College. He holds a doctorate from King's College London and is the author of two books and numerous articles.

Introduction

Few World War II generals invoke more controversy than the unorthodox, seemingly old-fashioned and swashbuckling American General George Smith Patton Jr. Patton, known to his men as 'Old Blood and Guts', was a man of notable military achievements (North Africa, Sicily and on the Western Front) and a master of unprintable expressiveness. He was imbued with a ruthless drive and offensive spirit; no-one wanted to cross him and he had a larger-than-life character, masterfully portrayed by George C Scott in the 1970 eponymously titled film, *Patton*. His unique brand of brash, creative and energetic leadership drew both praise and criticism, exposing, on occasion, a deeply flawed personality. He was indisputably a challenging, unpredictable and confident general, prone to political gaffes, like the Knutsford Incident (where he failed (intentionally) to mention the Russians). Tact and diplomacy were not his strengths. Additionally, he was inclined to serious errors of judgement and impulsive acts. It is impossible to overlook the 'slapping' of two battle-fatigued Seventh Army soldiers during the Sicily Campaign in 1943. But, he was also one of the most successful generals of the twentieth century – and this reality cannot be ignored.

Therefore, separating the myth from the man is challenging. What J. Furman Daniel III, an assistant professor at the College of Security and Intelligence at Embry-Riddle University, seeks to prove in *21st Century Patton* is that Patton was a true military genius and one of the finest leaders the United States has ever produced. Looking beyond the stereotypical and carefully crafted images of the officer who ruffled feathers by pushing too hard, he exposes a man of intense thought and wisdom, who appears, at first glance, to have a mystical ability to unpick and grasp complex military problems. What the author uncovers in his study is not a romantic warrior trapped in the past; instead, he reveals a considerate, nuanced officer committed to continuous self-improvement and professional betterment. The underlying thesis of Daniel's scholarship is that Patton was primarily a product of his own efforts, who worked industriously to hone himself into a deep and original thinker. In so doing, it allowed him to transition seamlessly and with great agility between tactical action and strategic thought – mastering operational art. This, the author suggests, is a hidden but essential element of Patton's palpable military success.

Throughout this short study, Daniel introduces a side of Patton's character that is little known and competently exposes his contributions to the enduring debates on military affairs and strategy. Patton used formal written submissions to help clarify and elucidate his thinking, exposing his logic and rationale to a broader audience. More widely, he was a dedicated reader and possessed an extensive military library – including an early English translation of Carl von Clausewitz's *On War*. He made wide-ranging notes in the margins of these books or on reference cards and would often read and re-read important sections to help internalise their meaning. His musings on the Gallipoli campaign alone amounted to an entire notebook. He also sought to gain a wider cultural understanding from his studies. For example, prior to Operation Torch (the British-U.S. invasion of French North Africa) he read the Koran in detail, hoping to gain a broader theological insight into the peoples and cultures he would encounter and improve his ability to create a viable 'peace'. He similarly read widely on the history of the region, immersing himself in the realities and traditions of times past. Searching for insights, he was equally a hands-on and proactive learner. As his wife recalled: 'First he studied the battles; then, when possible, played them out on the ground in a way no-one who ever participated in the game can forget' (p.153). Furthermore, he was thoroughly modern in approach, understanding the importance of new technologies and had a lifelong love of speed and innovation. It perhaps comes as no surprise that he earned a pilot's licence during the interwar period; Patton was convinced that aircraft would provide a more accurate and timely overview of the battlefield.

Over seven chapters (based on 'The Form and Use of the Saber', 1913; 'Why Men Fight', 1927; 'The Effect of Weapons on War', 1930; 'Success in War', 1931; 'The Probable Characteristics of the Next War and the Organisation, Tactics, and Equipment Necessary to Meet Them', 1932; 'Mechanised Forces: A Lecture', 1933; and 'Desert Training Corps', 1942) and a conclusion, centred on 'A Soldier's Reading', written in 1952 by Patton's wife, Beatrice, Daniel exposes the intellectual side of Patton's character. He also exposes a rich body of work that lays bare

his vision of warfare – providing some of his best writings on the military and strategic art. What quickly becomes clear is that Patton had a rare ability to identify key strategic trends and then engage the subject with critical analysis. Although much of his writings are focused on solving the tactical and strategic problems of the first half of the twentieth century, he covers such relevant topics as: the qualities of leadership; the importance of history, culture, politics and technical knowledge; the need for continuous education and self-betterment; and the importance of critical thought and challenge when dealing with complex challenges. Daniel provides a brief outline to each chapter, seeking to set the scene by placing the following in the proper context. The remainder of the chapter comprises the unedited words of Patton.

21st Century Patton, a volume in the Naval Institute series 21st Century Foundations, skilfully uncovers Patton's intellect, philosophy and lifelong dedication to mastering the military profession. It reveals how he researched, organised and prepared his thoughts. And this informs the reader about how the lessons of history, through careful analysis and reflection, can shine a supportive light on future conflict. It also helps explain why Patton appeared to be able to anticipate the enemy's next move, arguably one of his greatest trademarks. The reality was that Patton used historical investigation and detailed analysis to allow him to think multiple steps ahead of his adversary rather than just simply responding to an unanticipated tactical move; it had nothing to do with his beliefs in mysticism or reincarnation. All told, *21st Century Patton* is a rich, compelling and enjoyable read. It is genuinely worthy of a place in anyone's professional military library and sheds light on one of the most rumbustious – and perhaps misunderstood – U.S. military commanders.

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