

BOOKS

The Fighting Pattons by Brian M. Sobel, Praeger Publishers, Westport, Conn., 1997. 248 pages, \$49.95.

While this book is about the Patton family, going back to an ancestor just before the Revolutionary War, the bulk of it is devoted to George S. Patton Jr. (III) of World War II fame, and to his son George S. Patton Jr. (IV). There are no fewer than five George Smith Pattons in the narrative, and the author is highly successful in keeping them clearly identified.

The portions devoted to GSP III are interesting, but I found essentially no new ground being broken here. I did wonder if Hammelburg would come up, and it did, but only briefly (for more detail, see *ARMOR* September-October 1996). Also, nothing particularly new was discussed regarding the motor vehicle accident that ultimately leads to Gen. Patton's death (see also *ARMOR* November-December 1995).

Most of the book is about GSP IV, and to his building an Army career independent of his father's reputation. Given the comparisons inevitably made, this is not an easy task. Great wars make great generals, and his father had WWII.

Yet GSP IV had no great war. He had terrible wars, the Korean War and Vietnam, but none that captured the imagination and support of the American people.

While he seems resistant to talking about his personal life, GSP IV does seem open about his military life, and is not reticent in discussing his lack of aptitude for his early schooling, describing himself as a "lousy student." He repeated his first year at West Point, as his father did. He graduates with the class of 1946.

After being in Germany, and Korea, he requests assignment to Vietnam and serves two tours there. He makes some penetrating observations about relations with the press and the public perception of the war in Vietnam.

He says a turning point was at Ap Bac in January 1963, where reporters had free run to see for themselves what was happening, only later to receive a briefing in which they were told things they knew were not accurate. He says we lost them at this point.

During an exchange with a captured North Vietnamese captain, Patton asks, in French, who is winning the war, and the captain replies, "you are," but then states that his side will win because the U.S. will tire of the war first. This is a good example of how well the enemy had gauged us, and equally how little we knew about the enemy.

Patton distills his experience into advice, and here underscores the importance of knowing the customs and background of the country where you are, and of your adversaries, and rightfully suggests that our deficiency in this regard hurt our effort in Vietnam.

He additionally stresses the importance of language training. His knowledge of French

served him well in Vietnam, and he suggests that those now in school should consider learning Arabic.

During his second tour, Patton is commander of the 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment (Blackhorse). He says he was broken-hearted when our troops left Vietnam, and it was a low point for the Army.

GSP IV refers to Creighton Abrams as his mentor, and serves with him often. During Patton's first tour in Germany, when he failed to move his tanks off the road fast enough, Abrams punches him in the face and knocks him to the ground. Later, Abrams gives Patton the opportunity to press charges, but Patton quickly refuses. They are portrayed as life-long friends, and when Abrams is Chief of Staff of the Army and dies in office, Patton serves as a pallbearer at his funeral.

One of the great accomplishments of Patton and other professional soldiers in the 1970s is that they held things together during a time of great turmoil. For example, upon a return tour to Germany as assistant division commander of the 4th Armored Division, Patton has to deal with drug and alcohol abuse among troops, racial unrest, run-down facilities, and low morale among short-timers who had just come from Vietnam. There are bomb threats to the division, and Patton personally receives multiple death threats.

Though wounded in Vietnam, and then suffering a broken hip in Germany which almost results in early retirement, Patton serves five more years, which includes being assistant commandant of the Armor School and CG of the 2nd Armored Division, the first time a father and son commanded the same division. Following this, when Patton is given a posting he objects to, his career does suffer, and he describes being eased out of the Army. His departure from service is a painful sequence. Rather than select a retirement ceremony with the 2nd Armored Division, he chooses instead to retire at the monthly ceremony at Fort Knox. It is a quiet way to end a 34-year career, and he leaves as a Major General in 1980.

In reading the book, I frequently wondered what Patton's rank was when he went to new assignments. The information was eventually forthcoming, but I wanted to know it right away. It is also not clear whether Patton IV starts out as an Armor officer or Infantry officer. After West Point, he attends the basic officers course at Fort Benning, so Infantry is the assumption.

Some of the references to mystical experience and reincarnation were a bit disconcerting, but GSP IV states that for a long time he thought everyone believed in reincarnation just as his family did. One sequence I did find particularly moving was his father's prediction of his own impending death, and his farewell to his family. There are eleven photos, including two of GSP IV with his father and two with Abrams. There is also a useful index. An efficiency report and other personal appraisals of Patton are referenced in great detail, which

makes a reader wonder, why not just a sentence? Perhaps Patton wanted to get these ratings on the record.

This is not a broad view of the man – there are no quotes from detractors, no countering opinions, which on the surface seems strange, since the book is not written by Patton but by someone else. However, this lack of bad news does not make the book any less valuable, or less believable for that matter; it is simply Patton's story told mainly through author Sobel. While a bit pricey, military readers will find this book a good read that can be finished in three or four nights. Even if you do not have a strong interest in the Patton family, the portions of the book on Vietnam alone and Patton's observations on the war make it worthwhile. Patton IV leads a full and remarkable life, and this review has only scratched the surface. General Patton now operates the family's Green Meadows Farm in Massachusetts.

Is this book successful in developing an image of GSP IV that keeps him separate from his father's accomplishments? I remember GSP IV from the mid-1960s, when he was an LTC and I was a lieutenant, and we both lived in the Newgarden BOQ at Fort Knox. To me at that time, he was the son of Gen. George S. Patton Jr. of World War II fame.

Now I view him in a different way, as MG Patton who served our country in hard places during difficult times, and whose father also happens to be a famous WW II general.

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NOTE: If not available at a bookstore, the publishers note that credit card orders may be placed by calling 1-800-225-5800.

The Storm Of Steel - From the Diary of a German Storm Troop Officer on the Western Front by Ernst Junger, New York, NY: Howard Fertig, Inc., 1996. (Reprint of London: Chatto and Windus, Inc., 1929) ISBN 0-86527-423-1. 319 pages, \$13.95 (paperback).

Once a generation, a battle-hardened soldier tells a tale so encompassing and descriptive that it chills the reader to the bone even decades after the smoke has cleared. In *The Storm of Steel*, Ernst Junger captivates the reader as he vividly and thoroughly recounts all the horrors and frightening realities of trench warfare on the Western Front, 1914-1918. From the stench of rotting corpses to the incessant drumming of artillery fire, from the blur of the night flares to the foul grit of lice and trench foot, Junger brings the reader along through a four-year odyssey as a platoon leader and company commander in the unbelievable savagery. This is a gripping, hor-

rific, and fantastic story of leadership and selfless service.

Not unlike Guy Sajer in *The Forgotten Soldier*, Junger struggles to understand why fate has brought him to such a grim existence. He relates how: "I learned from this four years' schooling in force... that life has no depth of meaning except when it is pledged for an ideal, and that there are ideals in comparison with which the life of an individual and even of a people have no weight." (316) He writes of how he seemingly traded his youth for the higher ideals of Germany and how war is largely an inner, existential experience.

Against this powerful theme, Junger relates many amusing anecdotes of a soldier in a foreign land. He describes his relationship with a young French girl; remembers the late night card games in the trenches; and even describes how he and several of his cronies happened across some red wine, got drunk, and almost walked into a British dugout by accident. Throughout the book, Junger expresses his admiration for the British Tommy, whom he regards as a most formidable foe. He continually praises the bravery and skills of his enlisted soldiers and holds them in close affection. During the Battle of Cambrai, he comes across his younger brother, Fritz, who was wounded; here he takes excerpts from both of their diaries to illustrate the fury of battle.

He continually expresses his anger toward the generals for the stupidity and bloodshed of trench warfare: "I cherished the firm suspicion that this operation had been ordered from the rear and by map, for it could not have occurred to anyone who had seen the lie of the land to give such orders as these" (292); then he becomes an ardent supporter of the new infiltration (von Hutier) tactics. He asserts the need for constant rehearsals, retraining, and reconnaissance before any mission. Junger also places leadership from the front as a tenet of success. Junger was wounded 14 times and received every medal for valor that his country gave, to include the *Pour le merite* after the Battle of Amiens.

Despite the historical significance and firsthand account of the Great War, I believe this work has relevance today for two reasons. First, like Junger, we are faced with changes due to improved technology. Yet it is still the *soldiers* at the small unit level that must apply the new technology in order to succeed. There is no substitute for experience, rehearsals, and leadership from the front. Junger addresses this as he retrains and drills his soldiers on the new system of infiltration tactics. Second, in light of the new technologies, many of the lessons Junger discusses are timeless. Basic troop leading procedures and care for the soldier have not changed very much since Junger's time and his thoughts on them have much relevance today. These are universally treasured lessons that all soldiers should ponder and exercise.

Also worthy of mention, as this book went to paperback print in October 1996, Ernst Junger was still alive in Germany at 101 years old.

After a brief stint in the Freikorps, he left the German Army in 1923 to become a writer. *The Storm of Steel* was originally published in English in 1929 in London, with Junger doing his own translation.

This is truly a superb work, and every professional soldier will find value in it.

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Patton's Tank Drive, D-Day to Victory
by Michael Green. Motorbooks International, Osceola, Wis., 1995, 160 pages, \$19.95 (paperback).

Patton's Tank Drive starts with a brief overview of Patton's early military career. The development of armored vehicles within the U.S. Army following World War I is covered with some mention of Patton's role in training tank units. The book then leaps forward to Patton's involvement in North Africa during World War II. The book continues, covering Patton's role through Sicily, France, the Battle of the Bulge, and his march across Germany. It concludes with Patton's "Postwar Thoughts" and finally, his death.

The most striking feature about *Patton's Tank Drive* is that it is primarily a picture book. Much to the author's credit, he cautions readers at the beginning that it consists mostly of photographs for entertainment. Overall, there is very little text, but the photographs are outstanding. Those familiar with the Patton Museum in Fort Knox will recognize many of the photographs. Some of Patton's letters and his better known speeches to the troops are included as well. There is an ample amount of information relating to the development of the armored fighting force, although much of it does not necessarily involve Patton.

One small annoyance is the captions seldom match the photographs they accompany, and even rarer do they correspond with the subject of the author's text. Typically, the captions cover a story or individual soldier's experience completely unrelated to the photograph. However, the information in the captions is interesting even if incongruent with the text or photograph. I did find the wartime reports and the after action reviews particularly interesting.

For those interested in a photographic history of Patton and the tank, it is an enjoyable book. If you want a good picture book on tanks, or a memorable souvenir of the Patton Museum, then I highly recommend *Patton's Tank Drive*. However, those seeking something more in-depth involving Patton or his World War II campaigns may be surprised or disappointed.

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