

## General S Patton Biography

General George Smith Patton, Jr. (1885-1945) was born November 11, 1885 in San Gabriel, California. He became one of the United States most successful generals, despite being a complex character who was known for his quirky attitudes and behaviour. He played a leading role in the Allied operations in North Africa, Sicily and the liberation of Germany.

### Short Bio General S Patton

From an early age, Patton wished to pursue a military career. His ancestors had fought in the Mexican war and he wished to carve out a career as a military hero.



He enrolled in the military academy at Virginia, before graduating from West Point in 1909. After graduation, he was given a commission in the 15th Cavalry Regiment. A year later he also married Beatrice Ayer. In 1912, he competed in the Paris Olympics in the modern pentathlon. At the time, the event was only open to military officers and included a range of disciplines considered necessary for officers. The young Patton distinguished himself in the different disciplines and would probably have finished higher than 5th, if it had not been for an unfortunate incident in the pistol shooting competition. Patton claimed he had a bullseye shot not recorded because it passed through a hole made by his .38 revolver. Nevertheless, his response to this disappointment was indicative of the spirit of the Olympics at the time.

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“The high spirit of sportsmanship and generosity manifested throughout speaks volumes for the character of the officers of the present day. There was not a single incident of a protest or any unsportsmanlike quibbling or fighting for points which I regret to say marred some of the other civilian competitions at the Olympic Games. Each man did his best and took what fortune sent them like a true soldier, and at the end we all felt more like good friends and comrades than rivals in a severe competition, yet this spirit of friendship in no manner detracted from the zeal with which all strove for success.”

In 1915, he witnessed his first action, leading patrols on the Mexican border against the leader of the Mexicans Francisco “Pancho” Villa. With the entry of the US into the First World War in 1917, Patton was sent to France where he became a leading exponent of the use of tanks in battle. The tank was a new invention and the first uses were of limited value as the tanks tended to break down in the muddy fields of Flanders. Nevertheless, at the Battle of Cambrai, tanks proved their usefulness and Patton became one of the leading experts on the use of tanks in war.

By September 1918, he had nearly 350 tanks at his disposal and Patton helped to direct their movement from the front lines. For his bravery in the face of the enemy he was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross for heroism (he was shot in the leg whilst directing tanks)

After the end of the First World War, Patton worked in various army staff jobs. He helped to innovate aspects of tank warfare, though the American military didn’t have many funds to invest in this aspect of war.

However, with the shock of Blitzkrieg adopted by Germans in the late 1930s, Patton encouraged Congress to place greater emphasis on tank warfare.

After the entry of America into the Second World War, in December 1941, Patton was assigned to North Africa where he took part in America’s first involvement in this operation of the war. He was by now a Commanding General and appeared on the cover of Time Magazine. His stock further rose through his passionate speeches to his men where he encouraged them to show no mercy to the enemy.

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“When we land against the enemy, don’t forget to hit him and hit him hard. When we meet the enemy we will kill him. We will show him no mercy. He has killed thousands of your comrades and he must die. If your company officers in leading your men against the enemy find him shooting at you and when you get within two hundred yards of him he wishes to surrender—oh no! That bastard will die! You will kill him. Stick him between the third and fourth ribs.”

– General Patton 1943, before invasion of Sicily

He was a very strict disciplinarian and imposed fines on soldiers who showed up unshaven. But, despite his strictness and bluntness, he was generally admired by his men. He appeared somewhat of an outsider with his somewhat unorthodox dress.

In 1943, he was part of the successful Allied invasion of Sicily. However, his success was overshadowed by a ‘slapping incident’ which nearly got Patton the sack. Patton slapped a soldier recovering from battle wounds branding him a coward. This led to negative press and a scolding from Eisenhower, however, his stock was such that he was allowed to stay on and take a role in the invasion of mainland Europe.

He was made commander of the US Third Army. Perhaps his greatest hour came during the Battle of the Bulge. A small section of the US army came under siege in the Belgian town of Bastogne. Patton disengaged from his offensive campaign and turned his third army north to relieve the beleaguered units under heavy German attack. It was largely praised as a magnificent redeployment of troops within 24 hours. During the Battle of the Bulge crisis, Patton made it known he was praying for an improvement in the weather. He said:

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“There are three ways that men get what they want: by planning, by working, and by praying. Any great military operation takes careful planning or thinking. Then you must have well trained troops to carry it out: that’s working. But between the plan and the operation there is always an unknown. That unknown spells defeat or victory; success or failure. It is the reaction of the actors to the ordeal when it actually comes. Some people call that getting the breaks. I call it God. God has His part or margin in everything. That’s where prayer comes in.”

Patton was successful in mobilising the logistic superiority of the US army in making a rapid advance over France and later Germany. Whilst entering Germany he came across concentration camps such as Buchenwald and personally made German civilians and German troops tour the camps.

After the end of the war, he returned to America to a hero’s welcome. Tragically, he died in a motor accident in December 1945; returning to Germany he suffered a fatal crash and died in a hospital in Heidelberg.

Patton was a great military leader, he also lacked the diplomatic niceties of Eisenhower. He often made disparaging comments about his British Allies (once saying the Third army could drive the British back to the sea for another Dunkirk) He was also an outspoken critic of his Soviet allies. Openly saying he would like to fight the Communists. His lack of political sense made him a liability and perhaps explains why he never in gaining overall command.

He was admired for his compassionate treatment of the defeated Germans. But, he also veered too much the other way saying that he compared the Nazis to losers in American political elections and that being a Nazi in Germany was, “like being a Democrat in the States.” After that statement, he was relieved of his command.

But, whatever his weaknesses, he was a great military leader known for his fierce determination and skill in leading his men.