

Capital Reading

It's Hard to Decide Whether Patton Was Drunk From War

Reviewed by Forrest C. Pogue

Mr. Pogue is author of "The Supreme Command" and "George Marshall: The Education of a General."

PATTON: ORDEAL AND TRIUMPH. By Ladislav Farago. Ivan Obolensky. 885 pp. \$9.95.

DURING THE FIGHTING IN NORMANDY in World War II, Gen. George S. Patton gazed enraptured over a desolate landscape littered with rubbish and dead cows and shouted (according to the author): "Compared to war, all other forms of human endeavor shrink to insignificance. God, how I love it!" Biographer Farago omits few such extravagant statements attributed to Gen. Patton, suggesting that he was a war-intoxicated man intent on slashing away on his front heedless of over-all plans or the needs and wishes of other commanders.

Yet, he also presents the Third Army commander as a calm planner of campaigns who perhaps would have been better than Gens. Eisenhower or Bradley for their war-time posts.

This ambivalence prevails throughout the book. The author is determined to show his fairness by piling up evidence that his subject was at times almost unbalanced and then seems shocked when Eisenhower and Bradley failed to take some of Patton's plans seriously. He seems both repelled and strangely fascinated by some facets of Patton's personality.

Farago depicts Patton's faults as a proconsul in Morocco where the General retained pro-Nazi French officers in power after the fighting was over. He suggests that the General was the wrong man to hold the post of Military Governor of Bavaria in 1945. Then, when it seems that he has established the basis for explaining why Eisenhower removed Patton from the

post, he declares: "Eisenhower, who had a streak of resentment in his make-up, plus a light touch of vindictiveness, repaid, in his own subtler ways, Patton's animosity towards him."

Most of the books written about Patton have been strongly partisan. Their stock villains have been Field Marshal Montgomery and Gen. Eisenhower. Farago goes them one better by adding Gen. Bradley to the list of those alleged to have prevented the Third Army commander from winning a quick victory in the summer of 1944 and possibly ending the war before the end of the year.

Although conceding that after September, Bradley stanchly backed Patton, the author is critical of the 12th Army Group commander's earlier decisions. Where the fighting went well in Normandy and Brittany, he suggests that Bradley had merely adopted Patton's plans. After carefully reminding the reader that members of



Ladislav Farago

the Third Army staff, and not he, have accused Bradley of swiping Patton's ideas, he leaves the reader with the impression that he accepts the truth of the charges. These views are not borne out in the Department of Army's official account (Martin Blumenson's "Breakout and Pursuit"), frequently cited by the author, nor in the writings of Hugh M. Cole, Army historian with the Third Army through most of the war.

Despite its bulk and time spent at it, the biography does not live up to the dust jacket's claims that it is "definitive" and that it supplies the missing link in the history of World War II. For a definitive volume, it has strange omissions. There is no indication that any use has been made of the Patton correspondence with Pershing in the Library of Congress (perhaps it was closed to him); there is no mention of Patton's

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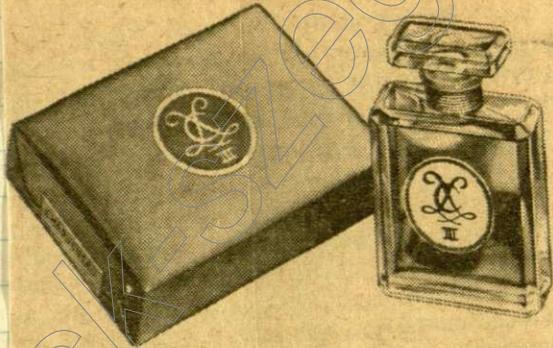
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Patton

participation in the action dealing with the Bonus March; and only oblique references to the costly raid on Hammelburg which Patton called his only error of the war.

Farago's accounts of Patton's battles are spirited and he gives proper credit to this master of the slashing attack and the exploiter of enemy weaknesses. He interprets the swagger, the pistol toting, the swearing, the ranting, the outbursts of obscenity not as the marks of a tough he-man, certain of his personal courage, but as the actions of one who constantly sought to reassure himself.

Unfortunately, Farago has accepted his hero's extremely subjective analyses of the battles in which he engaged and his unfair judgments of his contemporaries, written in the heat and frustration of battle, as if they were calm and reasoned facts.



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