A FATEFUL RELATIONSHIP

THIS IS A LONG ARTICLE

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RANKED BY THE NAZIS AS THE BEST ALLIED TACTICAL FIELD COMMANDER OF WW2, GEN GEORGE PATTON NEVER REALLY SAW EYE TO EYE WITH HIS COMMANDER, GEN DWIGHT EISENHOWER, BUT GEN EISENHOWER SAVED HIS BUTT MORE THAN ONCE DURING WW2

General George S. Patton

General Dwight D. Eisenhower

EISENHOWER DREAMED OF SERVING UNDER PATTON, BUT HISTORY REVERSED THEIR ROLES. THEIR STORMY ASSOCIATION DRAMATICALLY SHAPED THE ALLIED ASSAULT ON THE THIRD REICH.

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They never had much in common. *George Patton was a conceited, spoiled child from an* extremely *wealthy, snobbish family*. He dressed as he pleased, said what he liked, and did as he wished, he cursed like a trooper and told off his inferiors—and sometimes his superiors—with profane eloquence. Although he moved easily in America's highest society, many people, soldiers included, thought Patton vulgar. *Dwight Eisenhower came from the wrong side of the tracks in a tiny midwestern town*. He had to support himself while in high school by working nights in a creamery: he wanted to be well-liked, and he obeyed his superiors. The only thing he did to attract attention was to do his duty quietly and efficiently.

Patton was an erratic genius, given to great outbursts of energy and flashes of brilliant insight. He was capable of sustained action, but not of systematic thought. A superstitious man, he was much taken by his déjà vu — *his sense of having been somewhere before;* he devoutly believed that he had fought with Alexander the Great and with Napoleon, among others. Eisenhower had a steady, orderly mind. When he looked at a problem he would take everything into account, weigh possible alternatives, anil deliberately decide on a course of action. Patton seldom solved an intellectual process; rather, he felt that this or that was what he should do, and he did it.

Patton strutted while Eisenhower walked. Both were trim, athletic, outdoor types; but Eisenhower was usually grinning, Patton frowning. Patton indulged his moods, while Eisenhower kept a grip on his temper.

Despite the differences, the two soldiers shared a friendship that survived two decades and (according to Eisenhower) "heated, sometimes almost screaming arguments…." Their common West Point training—Patton graduated in 1909, Eisenhower in 1915—helped hold them together; other factors were, however, more important. Both had a deep interest in tanks and armored warfare. *Patton, five years Eisenhower's senior*, had led tanks in battle during World War I; Eisenhower had trained tank crews in Pennsylvania. After 1918, when the War Department almost ignored the new weapon, Patton and Eisenhower, like those junior officers in England, France, and Germany who believed that the tank would dominate the battlefield in the next war, naturally drew together.

But beyond this mutual interest, *they respected each other.* Patton's dash, courage, and recklessness complemented Eisenhower's stubborn, straightforward caution. Each admired the other and benefited from the relationship.

***The two young majors met in 1919, and almost immediately they began an argument that would last until Patton's death*. Patton thought that the chief ingredient in the modern war was inspired leadership on the battlefield. Eisenhower felt that leadership was just one factor. He believed that Patton was inclined to indulge his romantic nature, neglecting such matters as logistics, a proper worldwide strategy, and having a good relationship with allies.**

A letter Patton wrote to Eisenhower in July 1926, illustrated the difference between the two men. "Ike" had just spent a year at the Command and General Staff School at Fort Leavenworth. He had applied himself with almost monastic diligence to his studies*, and had graduated first in his class*. Patton, fearful that his friend had concentrated too hard on such subjects as transportation, staff functions, and how to draft a memo, decided to set him straight. After congratulating Eisenhower on his achievement, Patton declared, "We talk a hell of a lot about tactics and stuff and we never get to brass tacks. Namely, what is it that makes the Poor S.O.B. who constitutes the casualty list fight." Leadership was Patton's answer. Officers had to get out and inspire the men, and keep them moving. One or two superheroes would not do; Patton thought any such notion was "bull." Finally, he concisely summed up the difference between his and Eisenhower's approach to battle. "Victory in the next war will depend on EXECUTION NOT PLANS ." By execution, Patton said, he meant keeping the infantry advancing under fire.

Eisenhower disagreed. Plans, he said, meant that food and ammunition and gasoline would continue to reach the men on the front lines, that pressure would be applied where it hurt the enemy the most, and that supreme effort would not be wasted. The most difficult tasks in the next war, Eisenhower believed, would be raising, training, arming, and transporting the men; getting them ashore in the right places; maintaining good liaison with allied forces. Execution would matter, of course, but it was only one part of the total picture.

During the thirties, their Army assignments kept the two men apart, but they stayed in touch. It was a bad time for armor advocates: the army had practically no tanks. *Patton, disgusted, joined the calvary, where he could at least play polo, while Eisenhower worked patiently through a series of staff jobs*. Patton lived expensively—entertaining, racing around in sports cars, keeping his string of polo ponies, and traveling by private yacht and private plane. This was in an army that was, for most practical purposes, poverty-stricken. During the Depression, Congress cut officers' salaries and introduced annoying economic measures on army posts. Most career men tightened their belts, entertained frugally, and associated only with their fellows. Patton's ostentatious display of his wealth was offensive to most of his colleagues, especially his superiors; they could not begin to compete with him.

***Eisenhower, meanwhile, kept begging for assignments with the troops,* but his superiors, most notably General Douglas MacArthur, liked to have the hardworking, efficient major around. He lived according to the accepted pattern *and was one of the best-liked officers in the Army*. While Patton disported himself outside the system, Eisenhower worked from within. In 1940, for example, Patton—who had finally become a colonel in 1938—took command of a tank brigade of the 2nd Armored Division. He found that most of his tanks were not working because of the absence of spare parts. *When a mechanic pointed out that many usable parts were available from Sears Roebuck, Patton ordered them and paid out of his pocket*. He kept the bill a secret, but it probably ran into many thousands of dollars. As chief of staff of a division, Eisenhower often faced similar problems. His solution was to write to a friend in the War Department and, with this extra prodding, get the material he needed through the proper channels.**

When World War II began in Europe, Patton quickly forgot about polo and his active social life. Eisenhower was certain that Patton would go straight to the top when America got into the war, and in September 1940, he wrote his friend: "*I suppose it's too much to hope that I could have a regiment in your division* because I'm still almost three years away from my colonelcy." Still, he thought he could do the job.

Patton may have had his doubts, and in any case, he had a better idea about what Eisenhower could do for him. Apply for armor, Patton advised, and join up with me as my chief of staff. "He needs a brake to slow him down," General George C. Marshall once said of Patton, "because he is apt to coast at breakneck speed, propelled by his enthusiasm and exuberance." Patton himself understood this, and he thought Eisenhower would be the perfect brake.

They did not get together, however, until two years later. Eisenhower, by 1941, had become a temporary colonel and was chief of staff for the Third Army. His son, John, was considering whether to go to West Point or to study law, and he asked his father's advice. Eisenhower said that the Army had been good to him, *although he expected to retire as a colonel and admitted that his hopes had once been higher*. Still, he had to be realistic; he warned John that he would never get rich or famous in the Army. He could get instead the satisfaction of knowing he had contributed to his country. John took West Point.

Patton, meanwhile, continued to move ahead in armor. He did so because of his abilities, of course, but more to the point because *the Army Chief of Staff, General Marshall, was a remarkable man, able to overlook idiosyncrasy and to judge by performance.* A rigid soldier and old-fashioned gentleman himself, Marshall had seen the impetuous Patton in action at Saint Mihiel in World War I. He had marked him favorably in his famous little black book, a book he used ruthlessly after he became Chief of Staff to weed out the unfit and to jump men like Patton over their superiors*. Marshall moved Patton up to temporary brigadier general in 1940 and, in April 1941, to major general.*

When America entered the war in December 1941, Marshall called Eisenhower to Washington; he did not know Eisenhower, but he had read his efficiency reports and observed his brilliant staff work in maneuvers in Louisiana in 1941. *Within three months Eisenhower was head of the Operations Division of the War Department*. Marshall was so favorably impressed that three months later he sent *Major General Eisenhower* to London to *take command of the European Theatre of Operations*. In July 1942, Great Britain and America decided that their first joint offensive of the war would be an invasion of French North Africa. *Eisenhower had pleased the British as much as he had Marshall, and they agreed that he was the ideal Supreme Commander for* the invasion. He could choose his assault commanders; *the first man he picked was Patton*. It was an ironic reversal of what Eisenhower had hoped for two years earlier.

Eisenhower gave his old acquaintance the potentially toughest assignment, that of hitting the beach at Casablanca. Shortly after Patton arrived, however, the French quit fighting, as a result of Eisenhower's deal with Admiral Jean Louis Darlan, Vichy's chief of state in French Africa. This brought the North African French into the Allied camp, and Patton lost his chance for glory. He compensated by competing with the local sultans in lavish living during three months as head of United States occupation forces in Morocco, and by hobnobbing with upper-echelon Vichy Frenchmen so convivially that it struck some Americans as aid and comfort to the enemy.
In March 1943, following the Battle of Kasserine Pass, Eisenhower brought Patton to Tunisia to take command of the II Corps, which had been badly battered. He told Patton to restore morale, raise the image of American troops in British eyes by winning a victory or two, and take care of himself. Patton, Eisenhower said, did not have to prove to him that he was courageous.

Patton had always been a martinet when it came to morale. He indulged in gaudy uniforms, but he insisted that his enlisted men dress meticulously according to regulations, even on the front lines. He worked them hard, subjecting them to twice as many drills and training exercises as most generals. His insistence on spit and polish was so great that he once tried to get Bill Mauldin's famous "Stars and Stripes" cartoons banned from his area because Mauldin's G.I.'s always looked like the sloppiest soldiers in the world. (Eisenhower, incidentally, overruled Patton on the issue, after Patton had called Sergeant Mauldin into his headquarters and raked him over.) *It is doubtful that Patton's men ever loved him*—that notion was mainly journalists' copy—but they did respect him, and they respected themselves as a result. He used his techniques with the II Corps, and they worked.

He made the men shave regularly and stand straight and then scored a tactical victory over the great German tank commander, Erwin Rommel. *A grateful Eisenhower gave Patton the most coveted combat position in the Army—command of the invasion of Sicily.*

Patton did well. His Seventh Army sent the German and Italian opposition reeling across Sicily past Palermo. It was a campaign that left the British, especially General Bernard Montgomery, awe-struck. Patton had proved himself to be a master of pursuit, a general who could keep the troops going under all conditions. He was not so good at a set-piece battle. When he turned his army east for the drive to Messina, across from the Italian toe, the Germans were waiting. Progress was exasperatingly slow. The narrow roads, winding through the mountains, gave the Germans every advantage. Patton was beside himself.

On August 3, while he was in this mood, he tried to make himself feel better in a way that had often worked well before: visiting an evacuation hospital near the front and talking to brave soldiers who had recently been wounded in action. This time it backfired. The General had gone around the tent and chatted with several bandaged men, asking them how they got hit, where they were from, and so on, when he came to Private C. H. Kuchl, a young infantryman from Mishawaka, Indiana. Kuchl was sitting on a box and had no visible sign of wounds. To Patton's query, *the soldier said simply, "I guess I can't take it."* As Patton admitted later, he "flew off the handle." In his opinion, most cases of "shell shock" or "battle fatigue" were just plain cowardice, and he proceeded to say so to Kuchl in a high, excited voice and with an appropriate selection from his rich lexicon of profanity. *Then he slapped Kuchl across the face with his gloves and turned to the medical officer in charge, shouting: "Don't admit this son of a bitch.* I don't want yellow-bellied bastards like him hiding their lousy cowardice around here, stinking up this place of honor!" Patton then stalked out. *Kuchl, who had indeed been admitted to the hospital on a diagnosis of psychoneurotic anxiety, was found upon examination to have chronic diarrhea, malaria, and a temperature of 102.2°F.*

This slapping incident, although it shocked those who witnessed it, was not widely reported. Patton felt that he had done the right thing; he dictated a brief account of the episode for inclusion in his diary, and added in his hand: "One sometimes slaps a baby to bring it to." He then issued a memorandum to the officers of his command directing that any soldiers pretending to be "nervously incapable of combat" should not be sent to hospitals but, if they refused to fight, should be *"tried by court-martial for cowardice in the face of the enemy."*

Having rehearsed his hospital scene with Private Kuchl, *Patton repeated it a week later with added flourishes*. Early on the hot Monday afternoon of August 10, while on his way to a military conference with General Omar Bradley (*who was then Patton's subordinate*), his command car passed a sign pointing the way to the 93rd Evacuation Hospital. Patton told his driver to turn in. A few minutes later he was going from litter to litter, talking to the battle casualties and commending them for doing a good job against the Germans. Then he came to a man who, like Private Kuchl, was fully dressed, unbandaged, and apparently in good health. "What's the matter with you?" the General asked.

When the soldier said the trouble was "my nerves" and began to sob, Patton exploded. "Your nerves hell, you are just a goddamn coward, you yellow son of a bitch," he screamed. *He then struck the soldier twice, knocking his helmet liner off so hard that it rolled into the next tent; Patton even pulled out one of his famous pearl-handled revolvers and waved it in the man's face.* "You ought to be lined up against a wall and shot," one witness reported the General as shouting. "In fact, I ought to shoot you myself right now, goddamn you!"

The commanding officer of the hospital was incensed. Private Paul Bennett, the victim of Patton's outburst, was a regular-army soldier with a good fighting record; he had begun to show signs of unusual nervous tension only after receiving from his young wife a picture of their newborn baby. Moreover, he had gone to the hospital reluctantly, insisting that he did not want to leave his unit. Within a week a detailed report of the incident *had worked its way from the hospital through channels to Eisenhower's headquarters in Algiers.*

It was 10:30 A.M., August 17, and Patton's men had just triumphantly entered Messina. Eisenhower was feeling friendly toward Patton, and after reading the report he said mildly, "I guess I'll have to give General Patton a jacking up." He then praised Patton for the "swell job" he had done in Sicily. *Eisenhower did order Brigadier General Frederick Blessé, his surgeon general, to go to Sicily and conduct a full investigation, but he warned him to keep it quiet.* "If this thing ever gets out," Eisenhower told Blessé, "they'll be howling for Patton's scalp, and that *will be the end of Georgie's service in this war. I simply cannot let that happen. Patton is indispensable to the war effort."*

Eisenhower then sat down and wrote a personal letter to Patton. By now he was beginning to feel the seriousness of Patton's offense and to realize that more than a "jacking up" was required. "I clearly understand that firm and drastic measures are at times necessary to secure desired objectives," Eisenhower wrote, "but this does not excuse brutality, abuse of the sick, nor exhibition of uncontrollable temper in front of subordinates." Eisenhower said he did not intend to institute any formal investigation or put anything in Patton's official file; but he did warn that if the reports proved true, he would have to "seriously question your good judgment and your self-discipline." This would "raise serious doubts … as to your future usefulness."

In conclusion, Eisenhower declared, "No letter that I have been called upon to write in my military career has caused me the mental anguish of this one, not only because of my long and deep personal friendship with you but because of my admiration for your military qualities." But, Eisenhower warned, *"I assure you that conduct such as described in the accompanying report will not be tolerated in this theater no matter who the offender may be."*

But by this time the press corps in Sicily had gotten hold of the story. The reporters had conducted their investigation and were prepared to make it public. "If I am correctly informed," one reporter noted, "*General Patton has subjected himself to general court-martial by striking an enlisted man under his command."* They wanted to know, a committee of correspondents told Eisenhower's chief of staff what Eisenhower was going to do to punish Patton.

All of Eisenhower's famous abilities as a mediator were needed now. He called the reporters into his office and frankly confessed that he was doing all he could to hold on to Patton. He asked them to keep the story quiet so that Patton could be "saved for the great battles facing us in Europe." The effort worked. *The correspondents entered into a gentleman's agreement to sit on the story*.

Patton, meanwhile, tried to make amends. He apologized, although somewhat curtly, to Private Bennett and the nurses and doctors of the 93rd Evacuation Hospital. He wrote Eisenhower, "I am at a loss to find words with which to express my chagrin and grief at having given you, a man to whom I owe everything and for whom I would gladly lay down my life, cause for displeasure with me." *The incident was closed, or so Eisenhower hoped*.

Three months later Drew Pearson learned of the Patton slapping incident and *gave it full treatment in a radio broadcast*. Eisenhower's chief of staff made matters worse when, in a press conference, he admitted that Eisenhower *had not officially reprimanded Patton*. Since there was a shortage of battlefront news at the time, the story received front-page treatment everywhere. Eisenhower, the War Department, and the White House each received hundreds of letters, most of them demanding that any general who would strike a private in a hospital be summarily dismissed from the service. *The letter writers were especially upset because Eisenhower had done nothing to censure Patton.*

Eisenhower made no public defense of his actions. Nor was he willing to throw Patton to the wolves. He did answer a few of the incoming letters of criticism, carefully pointing out that Patton was too important to lose. In each case, he asked that the letter be regarded as strictly personal. He advised Patton to keep quiet, since "it is my judgment that this storm will blow over." *In the end, it did*.

In the late fall of 1943 Eisenhower received his appointment as *Supreme Commander for OVERLORD, the invasion of France.*

One major factor in his selection was his ability to get British and American officers to work together, something that would be even more important in OVERLORD than it had been in the Mediterranean. *For this reason, he was tempted to leave Patton behind*.

"Géorgie" was something of an Anglophobe and loved to tweak sensitive English noses, especially Montgomery's; and Montgomery would be one of the chief commanders in OVERLORD. But despite this, and the slapping incident, Eisenhower decided to bring Patton along. He told Marshall, who had doubts, that he thought Patton was cured of his temper tantrums, partly because of his "personal loyalty to you and me," but mainly because "he is so avid for recognition as a great military commander that he will ruthlessly suppress any habit of his own that will tend to jeopardize it." *Marshall, remembering his own earlier admiration for Patton, and bending to Eisenhower's insistence, agreed.*

Eisenhower's most important responsibility as Supreme Commander was the defeat of the German armies. He felt that whatever trouble Patton caused him in other ways, he would make a tremendous combat contribution to victory. Without accepting Patton's contention that execution was more important than planning, Eisenhower recognized that "the first thing that usually slows up operations is an element of caution, fatigue or doubt on the part of a higher commander." Patton was never affected by these.

So Patton, who had been in the doghouse without a real command since Sicily, went to England to prepare for the great invasion. On April 25, 1944, he went to the opening of a Welcome Club that the people of Knutsford had organized for the growing number of American troops in the town. About sixty people were there, sitting on hard-backed chairs in a cold, damp, depressing room, listening to insipid speeches on Allied unity. Patton was thoroughly bored. When asked to speak, he ad-libbed: he thought Anglo-American unity important "since it is the evident destiny of the British and Americans to rule the world, [and] the better we know each other the better job we will do."

***Patton thought the meeting was private, but a reporter was present*. The statement went out over the British wire services, and the next morning the British press indignantly featured it. Some editorial writers were angry because Patton had omitted Russia from the list of ruling powers; others cited the implicit insult to the smaller nations. The next day Patton's remarks were widely circulated in the United States, where he was denounced by both liberal and conservative congressmen. All agreed that generals ought to stay out of politics.**

Patton, in short, had put his foot in his mouth. *Eisenhower was disgusted.* In his small office at SHAEF headquarters in Bushey Park, on the Thames River near London, he dictated a letter to Patton. "I have warned you time and again against your impulsiveness in action and speech and have flatly instructed you to say nothing that could be misinterpreted." Eisenhower said he was forced to "doubt your all-round judgment, so essential in a high military position." Then he sent General Marshall a cable expressing his disgust over the incident. He added, "I have grown so weary of the trouble he constantly causes you and the War Department to say nothing of myself, that I am seriously contemplating the most drastic action"…*namely, sending Patton home*.

Marshall told Eisenhower to do what he thought best, and on April 30 Eisenhower replied: "I will relieve him unless some new and unforeseen information should be developed in the case." Eisenhower felt Lieutenant General Courtney H. Hodges would be satisfactory as Patton's replacement—and Hodges had no record of getting his superiors in trouble. *Eisenhower admitted that he had about given up on Patton*: "After a year and a half of working with him it appears hopeless to expect that he will ever completely overcome his lifelong habit of posing and of self-dramatization which causes him to break out in these extraordinary ways."

At 11 A.M. on May 1, Eisenhower met with Patton at Bushey Park. An old hand at getting out of a fix, Patton let out all the stops. He told Eisenhower that he felt miserable, but that he would fight for his country if "they" would let him. Alternatively, he dramatically offered to resign his commission to save his old friend from embarrassment. He seemed on the verge of tears.

The outpouring of emotion made Eisenhower slightly uncomfortable; he did not want Patton on his knees begging.

He ended the interview by dismissing Patton without having made a decision.

For the next two days, Eisenhower mulled it over. He finally decided that Patton was too valuable to lose, and sent a wire informing him that he would stay on. Patton celebrated with a drink, then sent a sentimental letter to Eisenhower expressing eternal loyalty and gratitude. In his diary, however, he confessed that his retention "is not the result of an accident" but rather "the work of God."

Eisenhower's aide, Harry Butcher, noted that Patton "is a master of flattery and succeeds in turning any difference of views with Ike into a deferential acquiescence to the views of the Supreme Commander." But if Butcher saw something that Eisenhower missed, there was a reverse side to the coin. *Patton bragged that he was tolerated as an erratic genius because he was considered indispensable, and he was right.* The very qualities that made him a great actor also made him a great commander, and Eisenhower knew it. "You owe us some victories," Eisenhower told Patton when the incident was closed. "Pay off and the world will deem me a wise man."

Patton paid off. On July 30, 1944, eight weeks after the invasion of Normandy, his Third Army began to tear across France in a blitzkrieg in reverse. Eisenhower used Patton's talents with the skill of a concertmaster, giving him leeway, holding him back when necessary, keeping him away from Montgomery's throat (and vice versa), and making sure that Bradley kept a close watch on his movements. It must be added that Patton showed a small appreciation of Eisenhower's peculiar responsibilities. To hold the alliance together, Eisenhower had to humor Montgomery on several occasions. When he learned that Eisenhower had given more supplies to Montgomery than to the Third Army, Patton is said to have mumbled, *"Ike's the best damn general the British have got."*

Patton had something of the boy in him. He liked to believe that he was putting something over on his superiors, that he was getting away with mischief. On several occasions, Patton thought that he was fooling both Bradley and Eisenhower. When he received orders to carry out a reconnaissance in force at the German border, for example, he turned it into a full offensive. He thought neither Bradley nor Eisenhower realized what he was up to, but of course, they did and had counted on it.

Aside from his drive through France, Patton's two great moments came during the Battle of the Bulge and when he crossed the Rhine River. On December 19, three days after Hitler's last offensive began, Eisenhower and his chief subordinates at SHAEF met at Verdun with Bradley, Patton, and other field commanders. The Germans had caught the Allies by surprise and were making significant gains. Sitting around a potbellied stove in a damp, chilly squad room of an old French barracks, Eisenhower opened the meeting by announcing that he wanted to see only cheerful faces at the table. "The present situation is to be regarded as one of opportunity for us and not of disaster," he said. Patton grinned and declared, "Hell, let's have the guts to let the — — — go all the way to Paris. Then we'll cut 'em off and chew 'em up." Eisenhower grinned back but said that the Germans would never get across the Meuse River.

When the Germans struck, Patton had been preparing an offensive of his own, headed east. Eisenhower ordered him to switch directions, attack north and hit the Germans in the Bulge on their left flank. In three days Patton got all his divisions turned and were on the road. By December 26 he had battered his way through to Bastogne and, along with Montgomery's forces on the German right flank, had stopped the German thrust.

In March 1945, Patton's Third Army reached the Rhine. A few American troops had already made a surprise crossing at Remagen, where they had found a bridge intact, but the main crossings were yet to come. A big effort was to be made in the north, near the Ruhr industrial concentration, by Montgomery's British and Canadian troops. Ever since Sicily, Patton had been in keen competition with Montgomery, and he was determined to get his men across the historic river first. The British general's preparations were detailed and meticulous. On March 24, after a massive artillery barrage, Montgomery started to cross. To his astonishment, he learned that Patton and his men were already over.

Patton had been carrying bridging equipment and a Navy detachment with landing craft close behind his infantry ever since the liberation of Paris, for just this moment. With less than half Montgomery's strength, he beat the British to the east bank.
While he was going over one of the Third Army's pontoon bridges, Patton paused and deliberately undid his fly. "I have been looking forward to this for a long time," he said.

***Six weeks later the war was over*. Peace highlighted the contrasting personalities of Eisenhower and Patton. Eisenhower moved smoothly into his new job as head of the occupation.**
He faithfully and without question carried out his superiors' orders. Patton chafed. He talked about driving the Russians back to the Volga River. *He got chummy with German generals.* As military governor in Bavaria, he kept former Nazis and even some SS officials in the local administration because, he argued, no one else was available. There were others available, men, of Konrad Adenauer's stamp; but it was easier for Patton to work with the old hands. In any case, Patton's policy ran exactly counter to the national policy, and Eisenhower ordered him to get rid of the Nazis. But except for a few prominent officials, Patton did nothing. He was sure that, before long, German and American generals would be fighting side by side against the Russians.

His area soon gained a dubious reputation, and the press waited for a chance to bait Patton into damning the de-Nazification policy. It came on September 22, when he called a press conference and asserted that the military government "would get better results if it employed more former members of the Nazi party in administrative jobs." A reporter, trying to appear casual, asked, "After all, General, didn't most ordinary Nazis join their party in about the same way that Americans become Republicans or Democrats?"

"Yes," Patton agreed. "That's about it."

The headlines the next day screamed that Patton had said the Nazis were just like Republicans and Democrats back home.

Eisenhower phoned Patton and told him to get over to his headquarters in Frankfurt right away. Patton arrived wearing a simple jacket and plain trousers rather than his fancy riding breeches, and he left behind the pearl-handled pistols he usually wore. The generals were together for two hours. *When Patton walked out he was pale: Ike had taken the Third Army away from him*

Eisenhower gave Patton a meaningless paper army to command. He stayed in Germany, spending most of his time hunting. In December, on a hunting expedition, his neck was broken in an automobile accident. Eisenhower, who had returned to Washington to become Chief of Staff, wrote to him on December 10. "You can imagine what a shock it was to me to hear of your serious accident," the letter began. "At first I heard it based on rumor and simply did not believe it, thinking it only a story … I immediately wired Frankfurt and learned to my great distress that it was true."

Eisenhower told Patton he had notified Mrs. Patton and had given orders that everything possible should be arranged, including the fastest transportation available to fly Mrs. Patton to his bedside. "By coincidence, only the day before yesterday," Eisenhower continued, "I had directed that you be contacted to determine whether you wanted a particular job that appeared to be opening up here in the States. The real purpose of this note is simply to assure you that you will always have a job and not to worry about this accident closing out any of them for your selection."

Eisenhower confessed that "it is always difficult for me to express my true sentiments when I am deeply moved," but he wanted Patton to know "that you are never out of my thoughts and that my hopes and prayers are tied up in your speedy recovery. If anything at all occurs to you where I might be of some real help, don't hesitate a second to let an aide forward the message to me." Mrs. Patton arrived at her husband's bedside the next day, and she read Eisenhower's letter to him. When she reached the end, he asked her to read the part about the job again.

Nine days later, George Patton died.