

## APPENDIX I

**George S. Patton Was My Leader, When We Were Young**

**Program for the Fort Clark Springs Historical Society, because General Patton served at  
Fort Clark as a horse cavalry colonel between the World Wars.**

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### George S. Patton Was My Leader, When We Were Young

One Sunday last Spring, when I was doing my monthly afternoon assignment at the museum, Sybil MacLeish and I were talking about the Fort and George Patton and the many other notables who served here in the active history of this place. I mentioned that I had served under General Patton in the winter and spring of 1945. As I put it then, I worked for the General. I am reasonably certain that he was not aware of me, but I surely knew who he was and what he was all about and that, in great measure, my future depended on the wisdom with which he performed his duties and I carried out mine.

I'd like to begin with a comment about those times. Tom Brokaw recently wrote a couple of books about America during those years, and he used the term "The Greatest Generation" to describe us, including many of you who are here today. Well, I don't like to argue with Tom, especially when he says such nice things about us, but I don't quite agree. I don't really think we were all that great. We did some great things. We weathered the Depression, and the Dust Bowl, and poverty, and much else, and then we joined with the valiant British and the Aussies and Canadians, and many others and put an end to Hitler and to Mussolini and their puppets and to Hirohito's crowd who were in the process of devouring all of Asia. But in doing all these things we were merely playing the lousy hand we were dealt, and I firmly believe that any American generation, facing similar circumstances, would have done what we did. I believe that the term "Greatest" belongs, not to just our period but to this great nation in all its splendid glory.

Okay. I've wanted to say that for a long time.

I enlisted in the army in November, 1942, at Sioux City, Iowa. I was 21 years old, and worked as a substitute mail carrier at the Sheldon, Iowa post office, to which I returned in December, 1945 after three years of great adventure. Many years later, at a reunion of the 94th Division veterans, my married 25 year old daughter commented, after looking at wartime snapshots belonging to one of my military buddies, "But Dad. You were just boys!" Yes, Carol, we were just boys, but we were a wonderful bunch of boys who did brave and unselfish deeds before we really knew how terribly important they were or how we were changing the world. I did basic training at Camp Claiborne, Louisiana, in the newly formed 103rd Infantry Division. Then I was assigned to the Army Student Training Program at Ole Miss, and spent nine months there studying harder than ever before or since. We carried 32 classroom hours per week of Basic Engineering, and in that nine months completed two years of university study. The program was discontinued in late 1943, and I was reassigned as an Infantry Rifleman to the second platoon, Company I, 3rd Battalion, 301st Infantry Regiment, 94th Infantry Division, at Camp McCain, Mississippi.

I will now digress to point out the far-reaching effects of random events in a huge endeavor such as World War II. American losses in the Italian campaign in August 1943 resulted in depletion of infantry replacement reserves in that sector. To provide a supply of trained troops, the 94th Division was cannibalized, first providing 1500 riflemen and soon after another 900. This left the 94th, which had been fully trained, with only two-thirds of the riflemen needed. We ASTP students filled in the Division shortage, and by spring of 1944 the division was once again fully trained and ready to be sent into combat. All of the above events had a result with significance we recognized only much later. Two cycles of training for the infantry also entailed two cycles for our division artillery units, which had not lost any trained personnel and which as a result were probably the best trained and most practiced artillery units in any American infantry division. Their superb skills later proved to be a lifesaving asset for the infantry units when in close and deadly combat with the Germans enemy.

In July we were loaded onto the Queen Elizabeth and after 4 days plus were landed at Greenoch, Scotland and then conveyed by train to the English countryside. D-Day, of course, was by now history and the fighting had moved from Normandy and Brittany to the liberation of most of France and to the areas of Belgium, Luxembourg, and the Saar region of Germany, and Alsace-Lorraine in northern France.

On September 4, the 94th was landed at Utah Beach, and assigned to a watchdog campaign at Lorient-St. Nazaire in Brittany. This was a strange sort of war. Large numbers of German forces were in those two port cities, and now effectively isolated by the movement of the front away from their positions. Our mission was to see that they stayed where they were, and did not try to break out to attack allied forces from the rear. During the next nearly 4 months we carried out extensive patrol operations, and engaged the enemy in minor battles. We were able to refine our skills, and I earned my first stripe and was now a Pfc. squad first scout, and spent many hours exploring the no-man's land of about 5 miles depth between our lines and those of the German enemy. I, of course, as a scout was always at least 50 yards out in front of the squad as we patrolled down sunken lanes and through fields surrounded by hedgerows. It was a lonely job, but I consoled myself with the thought that any enemy we encountered would probably let me go on by and wait for the main group to come within range.

My last patrol in Brittany was Christmas Eve 1944. We were to leave our lines at midnight, and proceed toward the German lines a specified distance and time, and then return. Lt. Dixon of the first platoon, was in charge, and we assembled, all twelve of us, in a chateau near our starting point. It was a moonlit night, and cold. The windows of the salon in which we met were all blown out, and the room was empty except for a grand piano and bench. In the moonlit night as we waited for H-hour, the

lieutenant sat at the piano and softly played Christmas music with respectable skill. Our patrol was uneventful, and the next day we began preparations to move to the front far to the north, where a little affair, later called the Battle of the Bulge, was taking place. Incidentally, Lt. Dixon survived the war against all odds, because he was a fearless and personally reckless warrior. He was wounded in February, and we never saw him again. I last heard of him in the sixties, that he was a kind of over-age drifter back in his home area in the Pacific Northwest. When I knew him, however, he was a knight, not in shining armor but in its modern day equivalent OD clothing and combat boots.

The 94th Division was now in the Third Army, commanded by General George S. Patton. We were on the right flank of the army, in a region called the Saar-Moselle Triangle, heavily fortified by the Germans when constructing the Siegfried Line. We faced concrete dragons teeth, and antitank ditches, and pillboxes and buried command posts, and a good number of German heavy tanks. The terrain was hilly, with scattered woods, and extensive farm fields. Villages were scattered about, and each was a fortified position. We faced the 11th Panzer Division, and a number of infantry units.

We spent January carrying out small unit attacks, because the emphasis at that time was to regain the former allied positions in Belgium and Luxembourg, which the enemy had taken during the initial stages of the Battle of the Bulge. During January and February we lived in the never-ending snow and cold, in foxholes in the woods, suffering many casualties from frozen feet or trenchfoot. As an example, I was in one hole for a week and in that time two other men left that position with trenchfoot. We had no rubber footwear, and no way to get warm, and the weather took a heavy toll. Meanwhile we were engaged in attacks on enemy positions which sometimes resulted in unforeseen consequences. On one occasion, Company C in the first battalion made an attack on the village of Orscholz, which was heavily defended by skilled enemy troops. Company C was destroyed that day, losing about 130 men killed and wounded, including all commissioned officers. Our I Company executive officer, Lt. Cancilla, was reassigned the next day to be C Company commander and to create a new unit. Within a few weeks that company was back in operation and performing well.

The heavy losses from natural causes were a real concern to General Patton. You probably know that his nickname was "Old Blood and Guts"- our blood and his guts. However, that was not a result of any lack of respect for his skill, or his leadership. As I remember, we knew he had a very tough job and would succeed at any cost, but we also knew that he didn't waste manpower in unwise actions, and that he really cared about every grunt in every hole in the snow and mud and cold. Because he did care, and was concerned, he solved the problem of trenchfoot casualties with an army-wide order. Every man in

the Third Army would be furnished a hot meal every day, and before eating would be required to put on a clean, dry pair of heavy socks. Failure by any mess or supply personnel to comply would result in that individual's immediate re-assignment to a rifle squad. It worked. Within days weather casualties were nearly ended, and we fought much more effectively.

To get to the point in our rear where the cooks brought the hot food, for one week I walked down a trail through the woods past a huge German Tiger tank which had been knocked out by our troops. It was very cold, and always below freezing. The turret of the tank was open, and a German soldier was folded over its edge, with his legs inside and his upper torso hanging down on the outside. he had bled profusely before he died, and there was a frozen brown puddle below him as he hung there. The first time I passed, I noticed a heavy gold ring on his right index finger, with ruby eyes set in a black skull. I would have liked to get that ring, but the finger was so badly swollen I knew it would never slip off. The next day, the ring was still there. On the third day, the finger had been cut off and the ring was gone. Two months later, I again saw that ring, or one exactly like it, on the dead hand of a man from the first platoon, who was killed on the day I earned the Bronze Star medal for heroism. As the French would say, "C'est la guerre!"

Well, we cleared the Saar-Moselle Triangle, and made an assault crossing of the Saar river in flood, and I went from PFC to Buck Sergeant Assistant Squad Leader to Staff Sergeant Squad Leader in one week, when Sergeant Pappy Blaylock was killed by shrapnel through his heart during a shelling by enemy 88's, and Sergeant Dunstan was killed by a jittery American riflemen from the neighboring 26th Division as we were assuming their position at night, so they could move further to their right and re-join their battalion. Dunstan was a nice guy in every respect. His family were wealthy and prominent in Upper Darby, Pennsylvania. They were friends with the family of Under-Secretary of War Patterson, and when that dignitary visited the 94th at Camp McCain, Pvt. Dunstan was always picked up by General Maloney's car, to go to Division Headquarters and to visit and dine with the General and Secretary Patterson. In contrast to much of the current situation in our nation, this wealthy kid with family connections served with bravery as an Infantry soldier, and died in combat, even though it was an American bullet that took his life. Several months later, when we were in Czechoslovakia after the war ended, Captain Donovan, our company commander, gave me a letter to answer. It was from Dunstan's parents, asking about the manner of his death. Without giving the painful details, I was able to let them know that he had died bravely, in an action against the enemy, and that he had served his country and his comrades with efficiency and valor. I never heard from them again.

After crossing the Saar, we fought some tough battles, until

finally the enemy collapsed and we raced to the Rhine, arriving at Ludwigshaven. During the collapse, American units advanced along any convenient paths into enemy territory and in the process became mixed up, with the result that a sorting process was necessary to re-order the Army. The 94th was assigned out of the Third Army, and sent through Belgium and Holland to engage in the final conquest of the Ruhr region, where we were located when the war ended.

As I look back at the time in the Third Army, under the command of George Patton, I think with gratitude that he cared about us, and did all he could to preserve us, and respected us, and didn't lie to us, and inspired us to victory. I last saw him in Czechoslovakia, when he paid the 94th a "thank you" visit at the city of Horazdovich. We conducted a full division formal parade, with the band and all our banners and streamers and flags, and the General landed behind our formation in one of those small artillery spotter planes, and rode in a jeep to the grandstand to review us as we marched past, and village girls presented him with native gifts of clothing and silver. It was a glorious day, and I can say that all of us in the 94th were glad that day that we knew him. Not long after, he was killed, and he lies buried in the American Military Cemetery at Hamm, Luxembourg, at the head of a vast army of the dead among whom are many with whom I served in their last days.

And that's what it was like to work for George S. Patton. It was terribly cold, and the snow was deep, and friends died or were wounded, and we were young and far from home, but those were our glory days and the memories linger though we disappear, one by one, into eternity.

There is much more to relate, but time does not allow. Thank you for listening.