



General Patton: A Soldier's Life

By Stanley Hirshson

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"War is my work and I know I sound sometimes as though I liked it; perhaps I do -- how can I tell? -- but this war hurts everybody."

-- Patton to Henry J. Taylor, 1945

General George S. Patton, Jr., an inspirational leader and outstanding tactician, has intrigued and confounded his biographers. Now, utilizing untapped archival materials in both the United States and England, government documents, family papers, and oral histories, Stanley P. Hirshson creates the most balanced portrait of Patton ever written. It reveals Patton as a complex soldier capable of brilliant military maneuvers but also of inspiring his troops with fiery speeches that resulted in horrendous acts, such as the massacres of Italian civilians. It explains Patton's belief in a soldier's Valhalla, connects the family's wealth to one of America's bitterest labor strikes, and disputes the usual interpretation of Patton's relief from command of the Third Army.

In investigating this complex man, Hirshson has uncovered surprising material about a series of civilian massacres in Sicily, about the two slapping incidents, about attempts to exploit Patton's diary after his death, and about Patton's relations with top Allied generals. Patton emerges as a soldier of great imagination and courage, and his military campaigns make for edge-of-the-seat reading. All the drama of Patton's life comes alive in this meticulously documented volume.

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General Patton: A Soldier's Life By Stanley Hirshson Bibliography

- Sales Rank: #1184225 in Books
- Published on: 2002-08-06
- Released on: 2002-08-06
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 9.25" h x 1.79" w x 6.13" l,
- Binding: Hardcover
- 848 pages

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

CUNY history professor Hirshson's exhaustively researched and well-written biography presents a balanced view of Patton's life from every angle, from his performance in the 1912 Olympics to his belief in reincarnation. Of course, most of the book chronicles his career in WWII, and the material is excellent. Besides a first-rate account of Patton's notorious slapping incidents, Hirshson (*The White Tecumseh*) also reveals American atrocities in Sicily fomented by Patton's oratory to his troops. He examines the strategies and tactics of the American war in Europe, and includes fascinating analyses of the often problematic relationships between Patton and Allied generals. Tracing Patton's advocacy of tank warfare throughout his career, Hirshson offers the surprising revelation that the general voiced doubts about it shortly before the battle for France in 1944. Extensive use of quotations from letters, memoirs, etc., enhance his clear, stimulating prose, and important insights on Patton from his extended family add to Hirshson's complete portrait. Offering an essentially sympathetic view of the general, the book still describes all of Patton's faults though carefully. His extramarital affairs (and those of other generals), for instance, are dealt with tastefully. The best biography of Patton to date, this will most likely become the definitive work on his life. Not only should it appeal to a wide audience, it should also serve to correct certain popular misconceptions that the film Patton encouraged. 16 pages of b&w photos; 8 maps. (Aug.)

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From Library Journal

Many readers will find their impression of Gen. George S. Patton Jr. influenced by George C. Scott's Oscar-winning portrayal of the mercurial and flamboyant World War II soldier in the 1970 film Patton. The movie was in turn influenced by Ladislav Farago's 1964 Patton: Ordeal and Triumph. Since that time, two other major biographical works have appeared: Martin Blumenson's Patton: The Man Behind the Legend, 1885-1945 and Carlo D'Este's massive Patton: A Genius for War. Now Hirshson (history, Queens Coll.), author of the 1997 *The White Tecumseh: A Biography of General William T. Sherman*, has produced another 800-page doorstopper about the illustrious and cantankerous general. After hundreds of pages of biographical musings, what more could possibly be said? Hirshson argues that his contribution helps to round out the unknown familial aspects of Patton's life and provides an essential context for understanding the enigmatic commander. To his credit, Hirshson has done impressive spadework in previously neglected sources, especially those relating to Patton's family background. Moreover, the book's section on the controversy over Patton's diary and unpublished memoirs also yields some new insights for scholars. Those interested in Patton will find Hirshson's book valuable reading, although for most readers the earlier books will probably suffice. Recommended for larger collections. Ed Goedeken, Iowa State Univ. Lib., Ames

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From [Booklist](#)

Hirshson, who is at least the fourth biographer of George Patton, claims to have discovered material missed by previous authors (most recently, Carlo d'Este in *Patton: A Genius for War*, 1995). Yet in his preface, Hirshson acknowledges that writing about a figure as famous as Patton entails reinterpreting well-tilled ground. Nevertheless, his portrait of the soldier who is part icon and part caricature of martial virtues provides newcomers to Patton's controversial career with a fact-jammed narrative. During the course of Patton's life, from birth into a wealthy L.A. family to death in a road accident, Hirshson aptly pauses with insights into Patton's quasimystical personality and his profane penchant for deliberately shocking his listeners. The latter trait lies behind Hirshson's effort to implicate Patton in atrocities in Sicily in 1943; how convincingly Hirshson links Patton's blood-curdling speeches to the shooting of prisoners and civilians is

something readers must judge for themselves. This assiduously researched work, which ably handles both the prosaic and heroic aspects of Patton's life, is a must purchase for active World War II collections. *Gilbert Taylor*

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Users Review

From reader reviews:

James Bardsley:

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