



J. Furman Daniel III, ed. *21st Century Patton: Strategic Insights for the Modern Era*. Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2016.

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George S. Patton is one of the most iconic, complex, and at times controversial figures in American military history. Patton was a veteran of multiple military campaigns, including the punitive Pancho Villa Expedition to Mexico in 1916, the First World War, and Second World War. A 1970 Hollywood biographical film helped to popularize his larger-than-life persona within American society. He is one of the most

prominent figures associated with the American military's warrior ethos, which emphasizes the human element in war as defined by courage, morale and discipline.¹

J. Furman Daniel III's edited volume *21st Century Patton: Strategic Insights for the Modern Era* attempts to shed new light on Patton's contributions to strategic thought, which is a lesser known aspect of his life. This book contains a variety of Patton's writings selected to demonstrate the gradual evolution of his military mind, and because of their relevance to contemporary strategic issues. The editor's excellent work helps to highlight themes such as the superiority of the human element in war, including the importance of leadership. Daniel openly admits the book does not attempt to portray a more nuanced Patton; rather the thesis guiding the volume is that Patton's intellectual side, particularly his critical approach to strategic affairs, is worthy of study.

The volume is part of the *21st Century Foundation* series, which seeks to remind modern readers of the importance of historical military theorists and philosophers by grouping selections of their writings to help shed new light on contemporary security issues. Daniel, an assistant professor at Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University, confesses in the introduction that he developed a childhood fascination with Patton, and this becomes clear throughout the book. Daniel is perhaps too uncritical of Patton's arguments, particularly his rather dated views on social class. Nevertheless, Daniel's enthusiasm and passion for his subject of study strengthens more than hinders the book.

Daniel begins the volume by providing the context for Patton's intellectual development. Patton, despite not being a particularly strong student as a child, formed a deep appreciation for understanding military thought in adulthood. He was first introduced to Clausewitz during his 1910 European honeymoon when he bought a rare English translation of *On War*. Patton as an officer became known for his boldness, which often led him to make brash public statements. However, Daniel argues that Patton actually maintained excellent professional relationships with many senior officers of his time, including Dwight D. Eisenhower and Omar Bradley. Patton's

¹ For more on Patton and the American way of war, see Brian McAllister Linn, *The Echo of Battle: The Army's Way of War* (Boston, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007).

military education was considerable: he studied at West Point, *Ecole de Cavalerie*, US Army Command and General Staff College, and the US Army War College. He frequently wrote and lectured on issues pertaining to military history and the contemporary strategic environment of his day. The majority of Patton's writings in this volume were originally published in the *Cavalry Journal*, but other pieces include published lectures and his War College thesis.

Patton frequently supported his arguments using evidence from military history. For example, Patton argued that cavalrymen needed to carry a straight blade rather than a curved one because throughout history, a straight sword was more effective at killing enemy soldiers. Patton often looked at tensions between the introduction of new military technology and longstanding trends in military history. He was very interested in the interrelationship of technological change and new and innovative ways of warfighting. When writing on the mechanization of the US Army, Patton sought to use his knowledge of military history paired with newfound technical understanding of new war machines to develop novel and effective doctrine for mechanization's integration into the battlefield. Daniel wisely links these writings to the contemporary debates on the Revolution in Military Affairs, and the introduction of new technologies such as Precision Guided Munitions on the battlefield.²

Patton felt that intellectual debates were integral to developing a deeper understanding of strategy and war. In particular, Patton was often drawn to the importance of leadership, observing that often it is overlooked in terms of strategic importance because it can be difficult to isolate compared to other variables. Patton felt that strong leadership could not be replicated; rather it was the product of a human element of warfare. His view of leadership was very similar to Clausewitz's perspective on the role of military genius. Daniel interestingly notes that, "for Patton, war is about killing people and breaking things. Wars are won by people, not machines" (52).

Overall, Patton's view of war clashed with those who argued that mass of arms was integral for victory, and he pointed out that America would be best served with a

² For more on the Revolution in Military Affairs, see Keith L. Shimko, *The Iraq Wars and America's Military Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

smaller group of professional soldiers than a mass conscript force. Patton's preference for professionalism was well ahead of its time, as it was a trend that would become especially relevant during the US military's transformation in the wake of the Vietnam War, more than 40 years after the publication of Patton's writings.³

Patton attempted to answer one of the most difficult challenges of any strategic thinker, the question of how to predict the character of future war. Patton's writings were far more widely read than many assume, for example his War College thesis was distributed within the War Department and he gained a reputation as a military thinker among his peers. His thesis largely predicted the emergence of the modern conceptualization of combined arms and helped to develop ways of managing a military's limited resources for maximum effectiveness in order to prepare for potential future contingencies. His strategic foresight was truly remarkable – he also predicted that the Treaty of Versailles would fail to contain Germany's military ambitions. Patton noted the successful military innovations being undertaken by General Hans von Seeckt during the 1920s in Germany, as well.

Daniel makes a strong case that perhaps Patton should be mentioned alongside other mechanization theorists like Liddell Hart, J.F.C. Fuller, and Mikhail Tukhachevsky. Patton was a strong enthusiast for the mechanization of warfare, predicting that armor would help armies overcome entrenched defensive positions. Patton viewed tanks as the best way for armies to return to maneuver and decisive battle in the wake of the First World War. Patton wrote how tank technology needed to continuously modernize to keep pace with wider changes in technology and military tactics, and that America should not allow the quality of its tanks to fall behind those of other nations. Patton successfully identified the major role that radios would come to play in tank warfare. He also correctly predicted that the increasingly technological sophistication of war would cement the domination of the professional soldier. Patton's vision of mechanization and war would come mostly true during the Second World War.⁴ Interestingly, Patton's writings were at times susceptible to service parochialism, as some of his mechanization articles still sought to carve out a role for the horse (Patton

³ For more on the military's post Vietnam transformation, see Frederick W. Kagan, *Finding the Target: The Transformation of American Security Policy* (New York, NY: Encounter Books, 2006).

⁴ See Robert Citino, *Blitzkrieg to Desert Storm: The Evolution of Operational Warfare* (Lawrence, KS: University of Kansas Press, 2004).

joined the Army as a Cavalry officer), and so even his military genius could not escape organizational constraints.

While the book remains very convincing in introducing new perspectives on Patton's writings, it is not without faults. At a brief 154 pages, the book certainly leaves the reader wondering if more could have been included. Further, while one of the main themes of the book is to link Patton's writings to contemporary issues, a glaring omission is that insurgency is all but ignored save for a very brief mention.

Nevertheless, Daniel does well to continuously link Patton's writing to contemporary relevancy, particularly in how the US military continues to integrated increased technological sophistication into its force structures, and the modern struggle of ensuring that officers maintain a theoretical and critical understanding of strategic affairs. This was Patton's strength, his ability to identify key strategic trends and then engage the subject with critical analysis. Patton's writings demonstrate the importance of military history, technological knowledge, and leadership during war and peace. This volume and the writings of George S. Patton are worthy of study by anyone interested in strategic studies and the US military.