



Morningstar, James Kelly. Patton's Way: A Radical Theory of War. Annapolis, MD: US Naval Institute Press, 2017.

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The legacy of George S. Patton, Jr. remains controversial to this day among military historians. Patton commanded the Third United States Army during the Second World War and achieved numerous battlefield successes, yet these were at times overshadowed by his brash personal style, such as his clashes with superior officers and public outbursts when he slapped soldiers under his command. There is thus a lack of scholarly consensus on how to understand and appreciate Patton's

operational military experience at war and, further, his contribution to strategic thought and defense policy within the United States.

James Kelly Morningstar's new book, *Patton's Way: A Radical Theory of War*, attempts to make the case that Patton was a radical military thinker for his time, and has a strategic relevancy that has been largely overlooked by many other historians. Morningstar utilizes a variety of archival primary sources, including Patton's personal papers, speeches, war correspondence, and public writings to help craft his analysis. The author is a West Point graduate, and a twenty-one year Army veteran who served in the Gulf War. He retired as a Lt. Colonel and is a PhD candidate in Military History at the University of Maryland. Morningstar's analysis of Patton is part of a collection of scholarship in recent years that has been re-examining and discovering Patton's contribution to strategic thought.¹

Morningstar asserts that Patton had a unique approach to operations which was centred on four core principles: the emphasis on shock to destroy an enemy's morale; the need to utilize combined arms and, in particular, mechanized forces; an emphasis on operational initiative and flexible command and control; and the use of intelligence systems to help identify enemy capabilities and weaknesses which could be then targeted for exploitation. Morningstar makes the compelling case that Patton's approach to military operations clashed directly with existing US Army doctrine and orthodoxy, and this lack of conformity has helped to distort his legacy and caused great misunderstandings between him and his fellow senior Army officers during the Second World War. Further, these four core principles would eventually come to have a later influence on the US Army.

Morningstar does very well in describing Patton as a radical thinker who challenged the orthodoxy of US Army doctrine and the conservative nature of his fellow officers. Patton rejected any strategy that would emphasis attrition, and instead favored a unique vision of war that was centered on shock. Patton's operational concept would favor the combination of speed paired with a focus on the exploitation of enemy

¹ See also, J. Furman Daniel III, ed. *21st Century Patton: Strategic Insights for the Modern Era* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2016).

weakness in order to create breakouts from their defenses. Morningstar points out that unfortunately Patton frequently clashed with his superiors, such as Omar Bradley and Dwight D. Eisenhower, who viewed war through the prism of existing army doctrine, which at the time emphasized highly centralized command and control and firepower rather than Patton's preference for speed and initiative. This clash of opinions would constrain Patton's operations during the war as he would often be given lesser assignments or face constraints placed on his supply line by central command.

A myth that Morningstar successfully deconstructs is that Patton was first and foremost only concerned with the use of armor. Instead, the book illustrates how Patton held a deep appreciation for the utilization of the broad range of combined arms. Patton was highly studious in strategic affairs; he studied carefully the German interwar era military transformation under Hans von Seeckt; he corresponded with British armored warfare theorist JFC Fuller; and, further, he paid very close attention to how the German Wehrmacht was able to capture France so swiftly in 1940. From all of this, Patton was able to understand that orthodox US Army doctrine, which emphasized infantry as the main element of combined arms, needed to be rejected for an approach which favored a more balanced usage of the various combat arms. In particular, Patton wanted a greater emphasis placed on mechanization and close air support. Morningstar wisely, though only briefly, observes that Patton's way of war compares favorably to the development of German Army doctrine in the interwar period. German doctrine favoured combined arms, speed and battlefield initiative of lower level officers, all things which Patton was in favor of utilizing.²

Morningstar outlines how Patton developed his own intelligence system in order to better exploit enemy weaknesses. Patton was highly adaptive in his approach to intelligence gathering and analysis. For example, when Patton was sent to Sicily he altered his forces' reconnaissance methods to become more effective on local terrain.

² For more on the German way of war in the interwar period see Robert Citino, [Blitzkrieg to Desert Storm: The Evolution of Operational Warfare](#) (Lawrence, KS: University of Kansas Press, 2004) and Robert Citino, [Quest for Decisive Victory: From Stalemate to Blitzkrieg in Europe, 1899-1940](#) (Lawrence, KS: University of Kansas Press, 2002).

Fascinatingly, the author links Patton's perspectives on intelligence to Boyd's OODA Loop (Observe, Orient, Decide and Act), in the sense that Patton felt that reconnaissance and intelligence was important in order to disrupt and exploit the enemy via well placed shocks. Here, the author does well to deconstruct the myth of Patton having a superhuman ability to predict enemy behavior as well as the myth that he was simply lucky, when in reality Patton had an advanced understanding of the importance of gathering, analyzing and then disseminating intelligence for strategic effect.

Much of the book explores Patton and the Third Army's combat experience during Operation Overlord and the invasion of France. Patton was rather critical of Overlord, feeling that it did not have enough unique strategy and that it relied too much on attrition. Morningstar seems to blame the early struggles of the campaign on the conservatism of Patton's superior at the time, Omar Bradley, and his ill-suited strategy for a breakthrough against the Germans. One of the weaknesses of Morningstar's book is that at times he criticizes in great detail men like Bradley, Eisenhower or Bernard Montgomery for getting in Patton's way, which can distract the reader from his wider conceptual points on forging a new understanding of Patton's radicalism in his approach to war. Nevertheless, Morningstar does well in highlighting the fact that, despite numerous constraints such as dealing with access to limited supplies, Patton was able to be the one to drive the main breakout from Normandy against the Germans using his operational method.

The last portion of the book is dedicated to understanding Patton's legacy in the post-War era. Patton's operational concept led to highly successful battlefield results; unfortunately, a series of factors would constrain his influence on the Army in this period. Firstly, the emergence of nuclear weapons captivated most of the Army's attention as it decided how to respond to their introduction. The result is that the Army returned to its more orthodox doctrine of emphasizing an infantry centred force structure and utilizing attrition at the core of its operational concept rather than initiative and maneuver. Further, Morningstar chides the rise of the "political generals" as men who were more focused on being bureaucrats than warfighters. It was not until the post-Vietnam era in the 1970s, during the development of the Airland Battle (ALB) doctrine, that Patton's way of war began to resurface within the military. Interestingly, Morningstar touches on the various influences of Patton on the development of ALB

and its successor doctrines, such as the importance of close air support as a key part of combined arms and that speed was also integral to securing victory. However, one should be wary of giving Patton too much credit for the development of ALB as there were a wide variety of drivers and shapers which impacted its creation.³

Morningstar concludes with a fair and balanced understanding of the limits of Patton's legacy. Patton's understanding of war is well suited for high intensity conventional combat, but lacks considerable relevancy during the counter-insurgency operations of the Global War on Terror. The author misses an opportunity to compare Patton's adaptive system of rapid intelligence gathering and analysis to the intelligence system adaptations that General Stanley McChrystal oversaw during his time with US Special Operations Forces in Iraq.⁴

This book ultimately succeeds as a comprehensive and convincing original take on interpreting Patton's role in American strategic history. Patton's approach to operations was indeed radical for its time, as it clearly led to decisive battlefield success in the face of Army orthodoxy and its legacy remains with us to this day. Patton clearly had an adaptive mind which carefully understood the changes unfolding before him in military affairs, which led him to conceptualize a new way of approaching warfighting to best exploit those changes. This work is worthy of study by anyone interested in strategic theory, leadership in war, the US military and the operational level of warfare.

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³ For more on the development of ALB see: Robert R. Tomes, US Defense Strategy from Vietnam to Operation Iraqi Freedom: Military innovation and the new American way of war, 1973-2003 (London: Routledge, 2007).

⁴ For more on intelligence adaptations during Iraq see: Sean Naylor, Relentless Strike: The Secret History of Joint Special Operations Command (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2015).

