A comprehensive biography of General George Patton draws on hitherto unavailable letters, diaries, and memoirs, uncovering many new facts to create an insightful and definitive portrait of an American military hero.

Carlo DEste, a military historian and a retired U.S. Army lieutenant colonel, has written an amazing study of an important American war hero. The reader will not only learn about military developments that led to allied victory, but they will also get a real feel for the amazing personality that was George S. Patton, Jr. Only a few biographies leave you with the feeling that you have personally met the subject. This book is one of them. Anyone considering taking on the work of becoming a biographer should read this book and use it as a model.

When most people think of Patton, they think of the 1970 film starring George C. Scott. DEste knows this and begins his study with a chapter setting up this movie as a straw man. The film was extremely powerful, but it was ultimately a work of fiction and Omar Bradley, a general who despised Patton, played a large role in its production. DEste also asks the simple but difficult questions of: who was the Patton, and why does he deserve another biography. The answer to these questions takes up 977 pages. We learn that the harsh, profane image he presented to his troops and the public was just that, an image. He was deeply religious, and was willing to take risks that only a man with the sincere believe that providence favored him would chance. He was extremely sensitive, loved poetry, understood what it took to send men into combat and was deeply troubled that soldiers under his command would die because of orders he gave. He was one of the best generals the allied coalition had and it was no accident. He had ability and worked hard at doing an extremely difficult job: killing.

The most significant factor in shaping Pattons life was his dyslexia. Not only is dyslexia a learning disorder, it also entails a whole host of emotional and psychological consequences, including: feelings of inferiority, sharp mood swings, and a tendency to boast. Patton had all
these traits and more. Given this disability, he had a difficult time as a cadet at West Point. He did well enough, though, to enter the cavalry. His natural talents as an army officer quickly became clear, but he also knew how to play the bureaucratic game. General John Pershing became a mentor of his and he excelled during the First World War, rising to the temporary rank of colonel. He was personally responsible for establishing the organizational table and most of the doctrine of the new tank corps. During these days of experimentation with armor, he made an important friendship with Dwight D. Eisenhower. Both, however, understood enough about service politics to return to their original branches. The interwar period was time of extreme frustration. It was only as the threat of war loomed that his career began to move forward.

DEste covers familiar ground during the war years: the campaign in North Africa, Sicily, Italy, the slapping of two enlisted men, the Knutsford incident, exile, and his drive across France, the Battle of the Bulge, and his removal from command. The author shoots down a number of myths. Patton and British Field Marshal Bernard Montgomery had profound respect for one another and the rivalry that developed between them came late in the war. Bradley never respected the ability of either Patton or his staff. Bradley also had a long feud with Montgomery and was the individual most responsible for advancing the other blood, his guts view of Patton. The media helped, though. Patton had horrible relations with the reporters, which contributed to the amount of attention focused on the slapping and Knutsford incidents. His friendship with Eisenhower saved him after he assaulted two soldiers. Patton thought his friend had no backbone and was would sell him out. After Pattons ill considered remarks about the Russians in Knutsford, Ike was ready to send him back to the U.S. It was only the intervention of the General George C. Marshall, the chief of staff of the U.S. Army, that saved him. He did order a chaplain to write a prayer for good weather and later decorated the man with a Bronze Star, but not during the Battle of the Bulge as the film Patton suggests. DEste, however, notes that during this battle Patton was at his best, calling it his finest hour. DEste has a novelists touch for details. The circumstance of Pattons death and the services honoring him are moving. Discussions of Pattons cowardly bull terrier, Willie, along with the relationship he had with the officers and enlisted men on his staff enable DEste to give a full picture. DEstes own military experiences inform this study. He pays attention to details that might have escaped an author with less expertise: Pattons use of maps, his organizational ability, and how he effectively employed assets such as intelligence. The research is impressive and it will be a long time before this book is ever surpassed.

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