

# AN ANALYSIS OF DISCOURSE USED BY GENERAL PATTON TO MOTIVATE THE SOLDIERS OF THE THIRD ARMY TO FIGHT FOR AMERICA IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR.

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## ABSTRACT

The present analysis examines the discourse used by General George Patton in a motivational speech from World War II, given to “the Third Army” on June 5th, 1944, before the Allied invasion of France. The investigation explores the techniques used by the General to motivate his troops to fight for their country. The main themes identified were issues of home or America, masculinity, pride, teamwork, the future, advancement and superiority over the enemy. The techniques used by Patton echo those found in consequent psychological research on motivational methods used in the army. These include the discussion of congregationalism by Wainhouse (1956), Griffith and Perry’s (1993) findings on sense of duty and obligation to the Army, and the importance of troop affiliation (Rogers, 2007). Limitations are identified within the current research, recognising the need to further investigate the characteristics of Patton.

## INTRODUCTION

*General Patton (1885-1945)*

*“Live for something rather than die for nothing.”*

This analysis examines one of the most famous speeches given during World War II; the speech given by General George Patton to “the Third Army” on June 5th, 1944, before the Allied invasion of France, an operation named "Overlord".

Patton was born in California in 1885 to a family steeped in military history. He developed an interest in warfare from an early age, in particular, an interest in the U.S. Civil War. Patton was educated at West Point Military Academy and following his graduation he was involved in WW1. Following the 1941 attack on Pearl Harbour, Patton commanded the Western Task Force. As leader of the U.S. Seventh Army, he played a key role in the U.S. invasions of North Africa and Sicily in 1942.

Patton was by all accounts a controversial character. His colourful personality earned him the nickname ‘Old Blood and Guts’ and he was renowned for his quick-temper. He was a stubborn, out-spoken disciplinarian, but earned respect from his troops as a result of his willingness to get involved and his capacity for self-sacrifice (Montefiore, 2006).

The speech to be analysed in this article was of tremendous importance and its sole purpose was to motivate the troops who had just arrived from America. Many of those present had never experienced real combat before and were about to be thrown into the thick of battle. The troops were about to embark on 281 days of combat in France, which eventually led them to Germany and to the end of the war (Montefiore, 2006). Patton, a respected general, had to remind them why they were there, who they were fighting for and to instill the courage needed for the challenges that lay ahead.

Patton was renowned for improvising when speaking to the troops. He rarely, if ever, rehearsed or prepared his speeches, preferring instead to speak from the heart. He combined anecdotes with his beliefs and morals, avoiding the empty, generalised rhetoric of many other generals. He told them of the lessons he had learned during his career that would help them survive in battle. Patton spoke to his soldiers using a down-to-earth linguistic style that they would understand, never displaying a sense of superiority. To Patton, they were all part of the war together and for this, he earned the respect of those around him. (Province, 1982)

The discourse to be examined in this report relates primarily to the question “How does a General motivate his troops to fight for their country?” The methods used by General Patton in his famous speech will be assessed. For Patton, and the other leaders, it was of paramount importance that the soldiers realised that they were fighting for something greater than themselves and that others relied on them. Other speeches

from the era, including Eisenhower's rallying calls to the troops (see Appendix 4\*), emphasise the duty of the soldiers to protect the free people of the world. However, those on the ground would have known that such rhetoric would have been of little use in motivating the troops. Generals such as Patton would have realised the importance of emphasising home, America, loved ones, and so on. Talk of the importance of American values and ideologies would have inspired the soldiers far more readily than appealing to universal principals. Any motivational speech would have had to engage in that sort of discourse in order to get the soldiers to respond as required.

The rest of this paper will analyse the language used in this particular speech, with special reference to the motivational techniques used by the general. In motivating the troops to fight for their country, one would expect that Patton would mention and make reference to America. He should use a style of discourse emphasising duty, honour, superiority and bravery. These ideas of freedom and honour have been central to American values since the time of the War of Independence. He would be expected to make it clear that the troops are not fighting for an individual purpose, but for something that extends beyond them. Patton's language should highlight the rewards or consequences that may occur in victory or defeat, in order to motivate the soldiers to persist in times of uncertainty.

A speech like this is tremendously important as it may have been the difference between life or death for many of the troops. A selfish, negative point of view could have been detrimental to the soldiers themselves and to those around them. Patton's speech had to inspire, motivate and command respect from the troops.

The goal of discourse analysis is to approach a topic and engage in a process of selection, focusing, simplifying and abstracting the raw data. In a data set such as the one presented, categories of themes are extracted in order to develop a model and to establish the function in the discourse.

In the realm of Social Psychology, an analysis of discourse relates to the function of the words used rather than the type or form of the words. Edwards and Potter (1992) highlight that the study of language should relate to naturally occurring speech. Therefore, emphasis will be placed on

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\* See [www.tcd.ie/psychology/spj](http://www.tcd.ie/psychology/spj) for appendices

the context and social action of constructing and communicating an idea via language. Most importantly however, it is always necessary to uncover the motives, intentions and goals of the speaker (Abrams & Hogg, 1990).

## ANALYSIS

Throughout the speech (Appendix 1) General Patton emphasises certain themes (Appendices 2 and 3). These include America, masculinity, pride, teamwork, the future, advancement and superiority over the enemy. Each of these themes relate to the General's attempts to motivate an army to fight for America. Patton wants to inspire these men to be true American heroes, like those of the past:

“the champion marble player, the fastest runner, the toughest boxer, the big league ball players, and the All-American football players...”

The speech is delivered from the point of view of an American General who is on the ground with his men. His language (use of profanities and personal pronouns such as “we” and “you”) indicates closeness with his troops. Were he speaking from an office or simply giving orders from afar, these aspects would not be present. As an American, his main focus is on his country. Other speeches from the era (for example, those given by Eisenhower- see Appendix 4) refer to a global motive for America's involvement in the war. Patton does not appear to care for any other nations at this moment and time; the focus is entirely on America. It is America's obligation to clean up the “mess” and it is the duty of “real American men” to fight for their country.

Everything he says relates back to fighting for home and for country. They need to work as a team and be proud so that they can overcome the enemy and move forward into the future. The excerpts that follow highlight these themes. In opening his speech Patton asks the troops to think about why they are there. In the first paragraph alone, Patton mentions America 10 times. He also refers to “home” and “country.” It is clear that he wants them to realise that they are not there for themselves, but are part of a greater scheme of things. All of America is relying on them and as true Americans, they should serve their country. He also uses words such as “true” and “real” to emphasise this. It is not

enough to be an American citizen or to have been born in America, a “true” American will fight for their country:

“Americans love to fight, traditionally. All real Americans love the sting and clash of battle... Americans love a winner. Americans will not tolerate a loser. Americans despise cowards. Americans play to win all of the time. I wouldn't give a hoot in hell for a man who lost and laughed.”

“That's why Americans have never lost nor will ever lose a war; for the very idea of losing is hateful to an American.”

Patton also wants the troops to realise that they are relying on each other. If one man were to stop fighting, those around would suffer. This again relates to the idea of the ‘true American’ discussed earlier. Patton wants to motivate the soldiers to be selfless and determined in battle. He repeats the words “every” and “all” throughout the speech indicating that each individual is important. He uses a metaphor of a great chain, each link is important and if they are not connected, the chain will fall apart.

“Every single man in this Army plays a vital role. Don't ever let up. Don't ever think that your job is unimportant. Every man has a job to do and he must do it. Every man is a vital link in the great chain. The cowardly bastard could say, "Hell, they won't miss me, just one man in thousands". But, what if every man thought that way? Where in the hell would we be now? What would our country, our loved ones, our homes, even the world, be like? No, Goddamnit, Americans don't think like that. Every man does his job. Every man serves the whole. Every department, every unit, is important in the vast scheme of this war.”

“An Army is a team. It lives, sleeps, eats, and fights as a team. This individual heroic stuff is pure horse shit!”

“They were part of a team. Without team effort, without them, the fight would have been lost. All of the links in the chain pulled together and the chain became unbreakable.”

Patton also emphasises masculinity. To him, a man is fearless, determined and will never quit. Again, he repeats words such as “true” and “real” to emphasise that masculinity is more than gender, it is how one acts on a battlefield. Patton refers to masculinity approximately 85 times in total throughout his speech, through the use and repetition of words such as ‘man’, ‘he’, ‘manhood’ and so on. Not only is masculinity seen as something important in battle, but he also describes it as a key trait of a ‘real’ American man. This serves to motivate the men to be true to their country and to those around them because anyone who fails to live up to this ideal is an outsider, a coward and a disgrace to their battalion and country.

“Americans pride themselves on being He Men and they ARE He Men.”

“The real hero is the man who fights even though he is scared...But a real man will never let his fear of death overpower his honor, his sense of duty to his country, and his innate manhood.”

Another motivational technique evident in the discourse used by Patton relates to pride. He tries to convince the soldiers that Americans are the best and that they will win the war. He uses words such as “best” and “finest.” Although he never dismisses the strength of the opponents, Patton’s positivity would have been inspiring to the troops. Believing they were among the best would motivate them to work harder and to help each other.

“We have the finest food, the finest equipment, the best spirit, and the best men in the world.”

The sense of superiority he instills would also foster a belief that they could, and would defeat the enemy.

“We'll win this war, but we'll win it only by fighting and by showing the Germans that we've got more guts than they have; or ever will have...”

“Why, by God, I actually pity those poor sons-of-bitches we're going up against. By God, I do.”

His language often becomes racist when talking about the enemy. This would motivate the men to see the enemy as inhuman, lesser, unequal beings rather than as soldiers like themselves. Patton describes the war as a ‘mess’ that requires cleaning up. He insults the Japanese, Hitler and the German army in order to motivate the troops. He also uses vulgar language and violent images to inspire his soldiers against the enemy.

“The quicker we clean up this Goddamned mess, the quicker we can take a little jaunt against the purple pissing Japs and clean out their nest.”

“And when we get to Berlin, I am personally going to shoot that paper hanging son-of-a-bitch Hitler. Just like I'd shoot a snake!”

“We're not going to just shoot the sons-of-bitches, we're going to rip out their living Goddamned guts and use them to grease the treads of our tanks. We're going to murder those lousy Hun cocksuckers by the bushel-fucking-basket. War is a bloody, killing business. You've got to spill their blood, or they will spill yours. Rip them up the belly. Shoot them in the guts.”

He sees the violence of war as necessary. If the soldiers do not do their job and be violent against the enemy, those they care about will suffer. He plays on the emotions the soldiers are feeling before going into battle. Not only are they fighting for their loved ones at home, they are fighting for the men and women they have become friends with throughout their training. As an experienced General, Patton realises that there is a bond within a battalion and uses this knowledge to encourage the troops.

“When shells are hitting all around you and you wipe the dirt off your face and realize that instead of dirt it's the blood and guts of what once was your best friend beside you, you'll know what to do!”

He uses words relating to moving forwards. It is only through battle that they can reach the higher plain of peace and glory. By repeating such ideas, Patton motivates the troops to persist and to continue moving forward.

“We are advancing constantly... Our basic plan of operation is to advance and to keep on advancing regardless of whether we have to go over, under, or through the enemy.”

“I believe in the old and sound rule that an ounce of sweat will save a gallon of blood. The harder WE push, the more Germans we will kill. The more Germans we kill, the fewer of our men will be killed. Pushing means fewer casualties.”

Just as he began the speech with reference to America, Patton cleverly ends on a similar note. Instead of going back to the old ideals of America, however (as he did at the start), Patton looks to the future. He tells of how the soldiers will be respected when the battle is fought and won. He tries to make them believe that they will see home again and will live long into old age. His positive view of the outcomes allows the soldiers to look forward to going home to a country free from war. Instead of being disgraced for being cowards, these soldiers will be proud to say they fought in the war.

“There is one great thing that you men will all be able to say after this war is over and you are home once again. You may be thankful that twenty years from now when you are sitting by the fireplace with your grandson on your knee and he asks you what you did in the great World War II, you WONT have to cough, shift him to the other knee and say, "Well, your Granddaddy shoveled shit in Louisiana." No, Sir, you can look



him straight in the eye and say, "Son, your Granddaddy rode with the Great Third Army and a Son-of-a-Goddamned-Bitch named Georgie Patton"

## **DISCUSSION**

Patton was a colourful character and this is reflected throughout his speech. Shortly before this speech was given, Patton had been reprimanded following what became known as 'the slapping incident.' Patton had slapped a soldier in a hospital - for being what he termed a 'coward.' It later emerged that the soldier had malaria and Patton apologised. However, Patton was then relegated to serving as little more than a decoy in the War, until he was given command of the Third Army in 1944. Calling the soldier a coward demonstrates Patton's belief in bravery and this is echoed in the speech. He did not believe that one should ever give in, and he tried to motivate the soldiers by repeating these ideals when speaking.

Another aspect of Patton's character was his tendency to use profane language. While many found it offensive, Patton reportedly once said that such colourful language was necessary when he needed his men to remember something "to really make it stick, I give it to them double dirty... it helps my soldiers to remember. You can't run an army without profanity" (Patton, 1944 [2008]).

This tactic is used throughout the speech and not only would it have helped to convey the message, but also Patton's use of such language would have helped the soldiers to relate to him. If he had used a cold, formal linguistic style, the soldiers may not have listened. Patton was a commander that believed in getting involved and fighting with his troops. This helped him earn the respect of his soldiers.

One of the core elements identified in Patton's speech relate to the motivational techniques employed to get the troops to fight for their country. Wainhouse (1956) examined an army's use of congregationalism to prioritise the group over the individual (Patton also emphasises this in order to motivate his troops). Griffith and Perry (1993) found that new enlistees intend to fulfill their obligations to the Army. Although this study took place long after Patton's speech, attempts to invoke the importance of duty and of finishing the task are evident throughout the speech. Britt et al. (2004) found that the leader can play an important role

in reducing stress among soldiers. They emphasised factors such as role-clarity and self-efficacy. As a leader, Patton's speech clearly defines the role each soldier must play in the Army and promotes a sense of positive self-worth and ability.

Affiliation was found by Rogers (2007) to be an important factor of leadership. Patton identifies with the troops and uses terms such as "we" and "us" to demonstrate this. He also tells them of the role he will play in this fight. Although Patton may not have even realised that the message he gave was full of motivational techniques, he knew that he had to inspire his troops.

On December 9, 1945, in Germany, Patton was in a road accident and later died as a result of his injuries (Potter, 2010). In keeping with his wishes and his oath of loyalty to his men, Patton is buried among his troops of the Third Army in Luxembourg (American Battle Monuments Commission, 2010). Although he died soon after the war ended, Patton's words continue to leave a mark on the historical landscape. The speech captures both a moment and the emotions of an era, along with sentiments and aspirations of the troops.

## **CONCLUSION**

Due to limitations in the scope of current research, this article serves merely as a starting point for the investigation into the discourse used by General Patton to motivate the soldiers. A more nuanced analysis should focus on Patton's upbringing, religious beliefs, previous roles, family status and so on, in order to gain a more complete insight into how and why he came to give this speech in the manner which he did.

As with all accounts of history, it must be noted that the story is all too often marred with the apparent benefits of hindsight. Were it not for the Allied victory- if indeed, there is a such thing as 'victory' in war- Patton's words could have been labelled the empty bravado of a fallen leader, attempting to inspire blind-faith and hope in his troops. The world had changed after the war and the America the troops returned to could never have been the same old America that the General referred to.

However, Patton's speech is more than hollow rhetoric. It is a product of his beliefs and the time in which he lived. Furthermore, it is essential to note that 'truth' is merely a result of who controls the discourse (Selden, 1985)

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