

from
**INSTRUCTIONS TO THE THIRD
UNITED STATES ARMY
1944**

----- *General George S. Patton, Jr.* -----

General George S. Patton, Jr., (1885–1945) was commanding the U.S. Third Army fighting in Europe in April 1944 when he sent this letter of instruction to its officers. He was considered a brilliant tactical commander, and his troops were instrumental in key defeats of the German army in France and Germany during 1944 and 1945. Patton was relieved of his command of the Third Army in October, 1945, and died two months later of injuries sustained during a car accident.

THINK THROUGH HISTORY: Drawing Conclusions

How would you summarize Patton's expectations for soldiers and officers of the United States Army? Use specific examples in your analysis.

CONFIDENTIAL

HEADQUARTERS
THIRD UNITED STATES ARMY
APO 403 U.S. ARMY

3 April, 1944

SUBJECT: Letter of Instruction Number 2.

TO: Corps, Division, and Separate Unit Commanders.

GENERAL

1. This letter stresses those tactical and administrative usages which combat experience has taught myself and the officers who have served under me to consider vital.

2. You will not simply mimeograph this and call it a day. You are responsible that these usages become habitual in your command.

DISCIPLINE

1. There is only one sort of discipline—PERFECT DISCIPLINE. Men cannot have good battle discipline and poor administrative discipline.

2. Discipline is based on pride in the profession of arms, on meticulous attention to details, and on mutual respect and confidence. Discipline must be a habit so engrained that it is stronger than the excitement of battle or the fear of death.

3. The history of our invariably victorious armies demonstrates that we are the best soldiers in the world. This should make your men proud. This should make

you proud. This should imbue your units with unconquerable self-confidence and pride in demonstrated ability.

4. Discipline can only be obtained when all officers are so imbued with the sense of their awful obligation to their men and to their country that they cannot tolerate negligence. Officers who fail to correct errors or to praise excellence are valueless in peace and dangerous misfits in war.

5. Officers must assert themselves by example and by voice. They must be pre-eminent in courage, deportment, and dress.

6. One of the primary purposes of discipline is to produce alertness. A man who is so lethargic that he fails to salute will fall an easy victim to the enemy.

7. Combat experience has proven that ceremonies, such as formal guard mounts, formal retreat formations, and regular and supervised reveille formations, are a great help, and, in some cases, essential, to prepare men and officers for battle, to give them that perfect discipline, that smartness of appearance, that alertness without which battles cannot be won....

TACTICAL USAGES

1. *General*

a. Combat Principles

- (1) There is no approved solution to any tactical situation.
- (2) There is only one tactical principle which is not subject to change. It is: "To so use the means at hand to inflict the maximum amount of wounds, death, and destruction on the enemy in the minimum time."
- (3) In battle, casualties vary directly with the time you are exposed to effective fire. Your own fire reduces the effectiveness and volume of the enemy's fire, while rapidity of attack shortens the time of exposure. A pint of sweat will save a gallon of blood!
- (4) Battles are won by frightening the enemy. Fear is induced by inflicting death and wounds on him. Death and wounds are produced by fire. Fire from the rear is more deadly and three times more effective than fire from the front, but to get fire behind the enemy, you must hold him by frontal fire and move rapidly around his flank. Frontal attacks against prepared positions should be avoided if possible.
- (5) "Catch the enemy by the nose with fire and kick him in the pants with fire emplaced through movement."
- (6) Hit hard soon; that is, with two battalions up in a regiment, or two divisions up in a corps, or two corps up in an army—the idea being to develop your maximum force at once before the enemy can develop his.
- (7) You can never be too strong. Get every man and gun you can secure, provided it does not unduly delay your attack. The German is the champion digger.
- (8) The larger the force and the more violence you use in the attack, whether it be men, tanks, or ammunition, the smaller will be your proportional losses.
- (9) Never yield ground. It is cheaper to hold what you have than to retake

what you have lost. Never move troops to the rear for a rest or to reform at night, and in the daytime only where absolutely necessary. Such moves may produce a panic.

- (10) Our mortars and artillery are superb weapons when they are firing. When silent, they are junk—see that they keep firing!

b. Tactical Rules in Particular Subjects

- (1) Use roads to march on; fields to fight on. In France we will find roads mined or demolished in many places, certainly when we approach the enemy. When that happens, get off the roads and keep moving. But when the roads are available for use, you save time and effort by staying on them until shot off.
- (2) Troops should not deploy into line until forced to do so by enemy fire.
- (3) When you are advancing in broken country against possible tank attacks and using the leapfrog method described in my Sicilian notes, be sure to keep the anti-tank guns well up.
- (4) In mountain country secure the heights. This is best done by daylight reconnaissance followed by night attack of a platoon reinforced at dawn twilight.
- (5) In forcing a pass secure the heights first. There are always trails leading to the rear of hills. Remember that inviting avenues of approach are invariably defended, and an advance by such lanes, without securing the heights covering them, is suicidal.
- (6) The effect of mines is largely mental. Not over 10 per cent of our casualties come from them. When they are encountered, they must be passed through or around. There are not enough mines in the world to cover the whole country. It is cheaper to make a detour than to search; however, the Engineers should start clearing the straight road while the advance elements continue via the detour. See that all types of troops have mine detectors and know how to use them. You *must*—repeat—*must* get through!
- (7) Never permit a unit to dig in until the final objective is reached; then dig, wire, and mine.
- (8) Slit trenches in artillery will be placed within ten yards of the guns. They will not be placed under trees, as those induce air bursts. Camouflage nets must be rigged so that when they catch fire they can be immediately pulled off.
- (9) Take plenty of time to set up an attack. It takes at least two hours to prepare an infantry battalion to execute a properly co-ordinated attack. Shoving them in too soon produces useless losses.
- (10) In battle, small forces—platoons, companies, and even battalions—can do one of three things, go forward, halt, or run. If they halt or run, they will be an even easier target. Therefore, they must go forward. When caught under fire, particularly of artillery, advance out of it; never retreat from it. Artillery very seldom shortens its range.

- (11) Security detachments must get out farther, and must stay out at night. One radio car, well off the road, or where it can see the road, or where a member of the crew can observe the road from close quarters, can send information which will be vital.
- (12) We are too slow in putting out minefields and in wiring positions for all-around defense. More training time should be devoted to mine-laying and mine-removal....

CARE OF MEN

1. Officers are responsible, not only for the conduct of their men in battle, but also for their health and contentment when not fighting. An officer must be the last man to take shelter from fire, and the first to move forward. Similarly, he must be the last man to look after his own comfort at the close of a march. He must see that his men are cared for. He should know his men so well that any sign of sickness or nervous strain will be apparent to him, and he can take such action as may be necessary.

2. He must look after his men's feet, see that they have properly fitting shoes in good condition. That their socks fit—loose or tight socks make sore feet. He must anticipate change of weather and see that proper clothing and footgear is asked for and obtained.

3. Field and evacuation hospitals must be kept as close to the front as enemy fire permits. The shorter a haul of a wounded man to the hospital, the better his chances of recovery.

4. Hospitals should be placed in the open and clearly marked. Do not permit liaison planes or groups of vehicles to park near them. Such action gives the enemy an excuse for attacking.

5. The successful soldier wins his battles cheaply so far as his own casualties are concerned, but he must remember that violent attacks, although costly at the time, save lives in the end. He must remember that replacements need special attention and see that they get acclimatized to their new units as quickly and harmoniously as possible.

G.S. PATTON, JR.
Lt. General U.S. Army, Commanding

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THINK THROUGH HISTORY : ANSWER

Students may answer that Patton expected U.S. Army soldiers and officers to be disciplined and prepared at all times. Students may answer that Patton expects officers to put the needs of their men first, instill strict discipline in them, and lead by their own example. Patton also expects officers to have thorough tactical knowledge and to engage in movements and battles with preparation and decisiveness. Students may also answer that Patton expects soldiers to fight their hardest at all times, firing on the enemy constantly and uncompromisingly when engaged in battle. Patton's strategy focuses on **violent, well-coordinated attacks**.