

The Death of General George S. Patton

By Peter J. K. Hendriks

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On September 29, 1945, General Eisenhower took away the army that General Patton lead so successfully from Normandy to Czechoslovakia. Eisenhower could no longer keep Patton in his position as military governor of Bavaria, not only because Patton didn't believe in and didn't carry out the orders of denazification, but he also openly said so in the press. Eisenhower was aware that he was just as much at fault, knowing Patton's strengths and weaknesses as he did.

General Truscott took over Third Army on October 7, 1945, and Patton was, as he called it, "kicked upstairs" to command the Fifteenth Army with its HQ in Bad Nauheim. The Fifteenth Army had no troops, but was a paper army (AKA the Theater General Board), researching the past campaigns for historical and analytical reasons to improve military tactics and operations. This Theater General Board was chaired by the commanding general of the Fifteenth Army. To his wife, Beatrice, Patton wrote he "liked it better than being a sort of executioner to the best race in Europe." In an interview, he said the most essential piece of equipment he needs are eye drops and that his new assignment "is right down my alley, because I have been a student of war since I was about seven years old." Since most of his "sources" for this research were back in America, he hoped to finish this short tour of duty by January 1, 1946. In the meantime, Patton traveled to France, Brussels and Stockholm to receive honorary citizenships and decorations. During Eisenhower's absence, Patton was Acting Commander of United States Forces European Theater (USFET) for little over two weeks.

With his job at Fifteenth Army almost over, he planned to leave on December 12, 1945, to go back to America. Gotten over his initial rage to resign from the army and "tell the truth," he would wait and see what job he would get in the post-war regular army. He hoped for commandant of the Army War College; otherwise, he would retire. "I hate to think of leaving the army, but what is there?" he wrote in his last letter to his wife.

When General Patton took over Fifteenth Army from General Gerow, he also inherited Gerow's driver, PFC Horace Lynn Woodring. "Woody," as he was known by all, was born September 30, 1926, as the youngest of four boys on a farm in Kentucky. His lifetime passion for the road and cars caused him to leave home at the age of 15. He became 18 overnight by adding a few years to his age so he could obtain a driver's license. He held several jobs in the defense industry and as a truck driver, when he decided in early August 1944 to follow his brother's footsteps into the army. Woody received his basic training in Fort McClellan, Alabama, and attended the Army Chauffeurs Training School there. Soon after basic training he was shipped overseas to become a replacement on the frontline. However, after a few weeks he ended up on the hospital with frozen feet. From there he was shipped to a motor pool.

It was said that being a general's driver was the best job in the army, so everyone at the motor pool wanted the job. "Who is the lowest ranking SOB in this outfit? I want to see him!" Woody heard the recruiting officer scream. The captain said Woodring was, and he was brought to his office. The officer looked Woody over and asked him if that was the best uniform he had. "No sir, I have another one just like it." Next Woody was inspected by the aide de camp and General Gerow, and became his chauffeur. Woody remembers Gerow fondly. But even though he landed in what his peers thought to be the best job

in the army, his ambition was to become General Patton's driver. During the past year, Patton had become Woody's idol. He had seen him numerous times at Eisenhower's headquarters. When Gerow went home for a new assignment, Woody stayed to become Patton's chauffeur. Patton and Woodring took an instant liking of one another. Neither man was impressed by authority. They loved to joke and seemed to speak on equal terms. For different reasons, they both did not believe in non-fraternization with German women. Every time Woody was caught with a German girl, which was often, they didn't bother to court-marshal him anymore; they just took his stripes away. Patton enjoyed it all, and joked he should have been promoted instead. Like Patton, Woody loved to drive fast. Once they even bounced over some railway tracks to skirt a roadblock. They had a ball watching the faces of the surprised military police (M.P.), watching the general's sedan bumping and bouncing on the tracks. General Patton's fondness of Woodring might be explained by the happy-go-lucky lifestyle of the brash youngster. With his Third Army taken away from him, his fighting friends reassigned mostly in the U.S., and the political situation in Germany, Patton could use all the laughs he could get. Patton asked him to be his civilian chauffeur when he retired in a year and Woodring accepted. Four days before the accident, Woody re-enlisted for one year to continue his service to Patton.

The ride Woodring remembers best was the one on December 9, 1945, "the saddest day of my life." Major General Hobart R. Gay, Patton's loyal chief of staff, and Colonel Paul D. Harkins persuaded Patton early that morning to go hunting after Patton's visitor, his best friend General Keyes, was unexpectedly called to his headquarters and had to leave. Woodring was called out of bed by Patton's orderly and was told to prepare the general's limousine, a 1938 Cadillac, Model 75. Patton and Gay, both avid hunters, were to go hunting near Mannheim. Sergeant Joseph Scruce, a jack-of-all-trades when it comes to hunting and cooking, started off in a jeep with the guns and the hunting dog. Patton, Gay and Woodring were to meet him later at a checkpoint, since Patton first wanted to visit Roman ruins on the way.

The first stop of Patton's last ride, however, was after only about five miles when he saw General Keyes's car, who left earlier for his headquarters, stalled on the side of the road with mechanical trouble. Keyes had already thumbed a ride back to Patton's headquarters, but Patton didn't continue his ride until he was certain Keyes was okay.

The next stop was at the Roman ruins near Saalburg, on top of a hill that was covered under a thin layer of snow. After walking around and discussing Roman tactics with Gay, while Woodring stayed in the car, Patton took the front seat next to Woodring, to dry his cold feet in the car's heater. They continued their drive on the autobahn, taking the exit at Viernheim. Here, their third stop, was the location of a military police checkpoint where they were to meet Sergeant Scruce again. A young M.P., unimpressed by the four stars on the front bumper of the car, wanted to see their identification. Patton, always appreciative of punctuality, complimented the unshaken M.P. Since the hunting dog was freezing in Scruce's jeep, Patton let it in his car, and took his own seat again at the right back seat of the car. According to military protocol, junior in rank by two stars, General Gay sat on the left side, behind Woodring. With Scruce leading, they followed him on the N38 into the northern outskirts of Mannheim. When they came to a

railroad crossing, Scruce's jeep got through, but Patton's car had to wait for a passing train. It was very cold that Sunday morning, and there was no other traffic around. In fact, nobody was around, and the only building nearby was a quartermaster depot on the other side of the tracks. After the train passed, Woodring noticed two army trucks about half a mile ahead, pulled off the shoulder of the road. One of these started moving in the opposite direction towards them.

In the meantime, Patton was his carefree self as always. When traveling in a car, Patton always thought of how he would position troops or attack various positions that presented themselves in the ever-changing landscape. Now he was commenting on the litter that war had left behind, piled up on both sides of the road near the quartermaster depot. Woodring slowly gained speed again and after about a quarter of a mile, the 2.5-ton 6x6 GMC truck, which was driving in the opposite direction, all of a sudden made a left turn towards the quartermaster depot. The driver, 20-year-old T/5 Robert L. Thompson from Camden, New Jersey, made no hand signal and Woodring had no chance to avoid a collision. Woodring crashed into the truck, crushing the right front fender. Patton was thrown forward and most likely hit his head on the railing above the rear of the driver's seat. This took the skin of Patton's forehead. General Gay and Woodring were only shaken up. When Woodring turned to Patton, he saw the general's scalp bleeding profusely. He fell on Gay's lap, who asked Woodring to help him out from under Patton, since Patton couldn't move. Photographs of Woodring taken not much later show Patton's bloodstains on his jacket. About this time, the first vehicle appeared which happened to be an army ambulance. Woodring stopped it and asked the sergeant, Leroy Ogden, if he was a medic. "Yes I am," he answered. "The general is hurt badly. Can you help him?" Woodring asked. "I will certainly try." He proceeded to stop the bleeding while Patton was still lying in the Cadillac. In the meantime, others arrived and Patton was finally put in the ambulance and driven to the 130th Station Hospital of the Seventh Army in Heidelberg, where he was admitted at 12:45, about one hour after the accident. It was the last time Woodring saw Patton. The Military Police had also arrived and started their investigation. While Woodring deeply regretted what happened, the truck driver, Robert Thompson, at the time didn't seem to realize the gravity of his careless driving. As Woodring said, "he thought it a big joke" and "didn't seem to care at all." He was under the influence and "goofy" and repeated with a stupid grin to the assembled spectators that he had hit Patton's car. Woodring was so mad at Thompson for this behavior, he "wanted to shoot him." A photograph of Thompson at the accident site shows him smiling. There were two additional men with Thompson inside the truck.

Lieutenants Vanlandingham and Smith of the 818th Military Police Company investigated the accident, but conducted few interviews. It was obvious to them that it was an accident. Woodring's and General Gay's statements were identical, and although both drivers were accused of "carelessness," no charges were placed against them. In Woodring's case even this charge proved baseless. Woodring claims he never took his eyes off the road when Patton pointed to the litter of war. "With two generals in the car, I never relaxed for an instant. Never." Patton made remarks absolving the drivers of any blame, and, according to Woodring, ordered the investigation to stop.

In the hospital, Patton was diagnosed with a severe dislocation of the vertebra and a bad scalp wound. He

was paralyzed from the neck down. Immediately, the best army doctors flew in from Frankfurt, and took the pressure off the dislocation of the vertebra with Crutchfield tongs. The doctors recognized the seriousness of Patton's wounds, and a search went out for a Dr. Spurling in the U.S., the best neurosurgeon of the day. In the meantime Dr. Cairns, a professor of neurosurgery at Oxford University in Great Britain, was flown to Heidelberg, where he arrived on December 10, 1945. On his suggestion, the Crutchfield tongs were replaced by zygomatic hooks, but there wasn't much he could do either. Dr. Spurling, in the meantime, was found and on his way to Germany. Mrs. Patton flew with him and together they arrived in the afternoon of December 12, 1945. General Patton had Woodring pick up Mrs. Patton at the airstrip in Mannheim to show he did not blame Woodring for what had happened. Spurling found that the total medical staff of fourteen physicians did a good job, but that Patton was in bad shape. The next day it might have shown on Spurling's face that Patton's situation was hopeless, since Patton asked him to tell the truth. "What chance have I to ride horse again?" Patton asked. "None," Spurling answered directly.

On December 17, 1945, the painful zygomatic hooks were replaced by a plaster collar because of the nearly perfect alignment of the fracture-dislocation. Like Patton's prayer for fair weather one year earlier during the battle of the Bulge, another such Patton miracle seemed to happen. Progress was so good that on December 19, 1945, it was decided to fly Patton to the U.S. However, just as suddenly as his condition improved, it deteriorated. Patton was dysphonic and had an acute attack of cyanosis, a lack of oxygen in his blood, usually present in terminal cases. There were also indications of a pulmonary embolism, a loose blood clot from a vein that travels to the lungs. It can cut off vital blood flow, with a 30% chance of death. On December 20, 1945, X-rays showed the vital embolus on the upper part of his right lung. This was a battle Patton could not win. He slept on and off on his last two days, while his wife was reading to him. He died in his sleep at 5:55 p.m. on December 21, 1945. The official cause of death was pulmonary edema and congestive heart failure. In his letters to his wife, Patton made it known he preferred to be buried among his soldiers in Europe. Beatrice selected the U.S. Military Cemetery at Hamm, Luxembourg. He was buried on December 24, 1945.

From the day Patton died in 1945 until thirty years later, nobody seriously discussed that a conspiracy lay behind his death. This idea sounded intriguing to Frederick Nolan, a British author who had signed a contract to write eight full length thrillers in a year. In 1974, within six weeks, Nolan finished his first fiction, titled "The Oshawa Project," published a year later in the U.S. under the title of "The Algonquin Project." It was a quick job, very "seventies," along the storyline of Frederick Forsyth's "Day of the Jackal." He did no research whatsoever, let alone interview Patton's passengers General Gay and Woodring. According to his website, "what you write doesn't matter, only how good it is." And even though the book was obviously a fiction about a murder plot of a fictional general, the illustration on the cover of Patton and the many similarities in the text with Patton must have planted the seed about the possibility of a plot. And its commercial potential. With the success of the Hollywood movie "Patton" in the back of their minds, MGM bought the rights to turn Nolan's thriller into a movie. To Nolan's chagrin, the MGM scriptwriter took the Nazi gold story from Nolan's other fiction, "The Mittenwald Syndicate," and mixed it with the murder plot story. Released in December 1978 under the title "Brass Target," the

movie was poor at best. Nolan himself speculates that was the reason why none of the stars joined the promotion tour. At the last minute he and Woodring were asked to do the nationwide promotion instead. Woodring went along to tell the truth about Patton's death: it was an accident pure and simple, said Woodring; "My purpose was to set the record straight. The movie certainly didn't." But Nolan's stance changed from a fictional story into "maybe it was, maybe it wasn't." It was a cynical exploitation to sell the movie to the audience at the expense of historical accuracy. Here, by mixing the storylines of two fictional thrillers into a movie, is the birth of a conspiracy theory that lasts until today. Since then, many others have jumped on the conspiracy bandwagon.

The first one to do so was Douglas Bazata, a former OSS Jedburgh who was bitter and in need of money. In 1979, 35 years after the war, he started to write his diaries about his service in the OSS. In October 1979, ten months after the release of the movie "Brass Target," he went public in an obscure, right-wing weekly "The Spotlight," headlined "I Was Paid to Kill Patton." His story was incredible with many factual errors and lacking any proof of his outrageous claims.

Less than two years later in 1981, Ladislav Farago wrote "The Last Days of Patton." Farago wrote the highly acclaimed 1964 biography "Patton: Ordeal and Triumph" on which the 1970 Hollywood movie starring George C. Scott as General Patton was based. For reasons best known to him alone, Farago instead choose to exploit the conspiracy theory as well. Not by presenting new facts and proof of a conspiracy, but by raising many questions about various possible plots, Patton's enemies, and the accident without answering them. It's possible his espionage background made him more susceptible to conspiracy theories. But the reader is kept in the dark, and only in a footnote in one of the last pages of the book does the author's son state clearly his belief there was no foul play in Patton's death and that it was just an unfortunate accident. As far as the accuracy of the events of December 9, 1945, are concerned, Farago obviously choose the wrong source. Instead of going by Woodring's story, whom he also interviewed, much about the accident is quoted from Lieutenant Peter K. Babalas, a military police officer who claimed to be the first one on the scene and to have lead the investigation. Farago writes that Babalas wrote to the Department of the Army in 1971 for a copy of the official report he had submitted. Since the report wasn't found, Farago leaves the reader under the impression somebody had something to hide. Of course, no such report was found simply because Babalas himself never made the investigation, nor was he the first to arrive on the scene. Why Farago choose to accept Senator Babalas's story rather than Woodring's, whom he had also interviewed, and Gay's, is not clear. (In 1987, Virginia State Senator Babalas would become the first member of the Virginia Senate censured by his colleagues.) Had Farago been less sensational and more in-depth in his investigation of the actual accident, rumors about a conspiracy would have ceased in 1981. Instead of disproving the conspiracy theory, Farago choose to go along with it, and it has been smoldering ever since.

In 1993 Stephen Skubik, a former CIC agent, wrote a self-published book with the provocative title: "Death. The Murder of General Patton." These lingering rumors of a plot to kill Patton lead Robert K. Wilcox to write "Target Patton: The Plot to Assassinate General George S. Patton," which was published by Regnery Publishing in 2014. While Nolan took six weeks to write his book and Farago claimed it took

him five years, Wilcox beat everyone with a ten years of research. And it shows. Wilcox followed each and every rumor, insinuation and, mostly unsubstantiated, firsthand accounts. He turned every stone and followed every side-path, to the very end. Wilcox, it must be said, did a tremendous amount of research and amassed a wealth of new information. Does it present the slightest evidence that his death was a conspiracy?

Douglas Bazata is the main pillar of Wilcox's conspiracy theory. It is also the weakest. Wilcox's theory is based on a 1999 interview with Bazata that corroborates Bazata's story based on his dairies that he wrote 35 years after the end of the war, right after MGM started the conspiracy theory to promote their movie "Brass Target." In the late 1970s, at the end of his career with the Agency, Bazata, writes Wilcox, was "bitter and in need of money" as he had been denied the rewards, jobs, disability benefits and retirement that were promised to him, most notably by OSS founder Donovan himself. This is why he went public with outrageous claim in 1979 that he was paid to kill Patton. Bazata, who called his brethren in the OSS/CIA "weaklings, liars, sneaks, cowards, thieves and especially betrayers" is hardly the man with whose unsubstantiated, uncontrollable, bitter and revengeful accounts one wants to make a case supporting a conspiracy.

Bazata presumed that Donovan must have gotten the order from President Roosevelt to stop Patton's advance through France. This he did "with a certain trick and it worked" just north of Besancon and southwest of Belfort in France. Besancon and Belfort were in General Patch's Seventh Army sector, far south of General Patton's Third Army.

Donovan, by wish of the "High Command and Higher," asked Bazata in a circumstantial way to kill Patton. Patton was considered "sick" and he and his reputation must be protected "from himself." The way Bazata describes this meeting with Donovan reads like a B-movie script, but Wilcox writes that statements like these "certainly adds credibility" to Bazata's account. He says he was paid \$10,000 to get the job done, yet Bazata isn't sure if he actually killed Patton or not. In his diary, he wrote he did and did not kill Patton. Even Wilcox admits "he was conflicting on that point." That is an understatement for such an all-important claim. But in the way Bazata describes how he tried to kill Patton, he fails to convince decisively. On the day of the accident, Bazata claims, without elaborating, that he had "people" in Patton's HQ. We must surmise that Bazata knew of Patton's plans that day. That was impossible, as both General Gay and Woodring stated the plan to go hunting was a last minute decision made that very morning, because Patton's visitor General Keyes was unexpectedly called to his headquarters. It was also impossible for Bazata to know which route Patton would take, and at what time he would arrive at a certain point to shoot him, certainly considering the three stops Patton made. It is impossible to have planned the truck to cause the accident as an excuse to shoot Patton in such a short time. It is not even logical to kill someone in such an uncertain and circumstantial way. But there are more details that are obviously false. Bazata indicated he left early that Sunday morning, from wherever he spend the night before, to go to Patton's HQ in Bad Nauheim, from where he had secretly followed the Cadillac. When Patton stopped to tour the Roman ruins near Saalburg, Bazata claims he crept up to the Cadillac and jammed the window on Patton's side so it wouldn't close. This created an opening of about four inches

through which he could shoot Patton. This is not true because it was cold and Woodring waited in the car while Patton and Gay walked around the snow-covered ruins. After they returned, Patton sat in the front compartment to dry his cold feet. This could have ruined Bazata's supposed plan, as the window in front was closed. Yet Patton took his back seat again, after his feet were warm and letting the hunting dog in, to sit next to an open window in the cold? That's implausible. Bazata next implies that he stopped following Patton's car after jamming the window, and drove ahead to the ambush area, implying he knew where they were going. This is impossible. Also, Bazata doesn't recall where and how he obtained the special rifle he used. It came either from Switzerland, Czechoslovakia or a "little country" he could not remember and had to be fired from a maximum distance of ten yards. He and his accomplice, who is only remembered as "The Pole," had a civilian truck positioned on a carefully chosen location near the entrance of the depot, less than ten yards from where they expected Patton's car to collide. Then Wilcox writes; "As to the actual accident, he did not give me a dramatic account. He just indicated everything went as planned, except they did not kill Patton." Again, Bazata has nothing to substantiate this account. He doesn't elaborate about the very moment he should be very clear about. He deliberately turns his account into a cliffhanger that raises more questions than it should have answered. No names, no specifics; he doesn't even know where he obtained his gun, or who his accomplice "The Pole" was. Did he or his back up "The Pole" shoot Patton? Bazata doesn't know. It is all extremely implausible, even if there was a shred of evidence. And with this account being factually wrong on many key issues, his follow up account about how Patton was eventually killed in the hospital doesn't dignify a serious review. Wilcox's conspiracy theory based on Bazata's story doesn't stick. There is overwhelming evidence that the accident happened as described right after the accident by General Gay and Woodring, while there is no evidence whatsoever that it happened as Bazata described 35 years later.

And if one murder plot by Patton's American superiors weren't enough, a second murder plot by the Soviets was planned, according to another agent, CIC investigator Stephen J. Skubik. Skubik wrote about it in his 1993 privately published book "Death. The Murder of General Patton," and Wilcox eagerly accepts it to substantiate his conspiracy theory. Skubik doesn't tell how, where or when, yet Wilcox elaborates on why. Wilcox writes the Russians wanted to kill Patton because he was too outspoken against them. Like many others, Patton was very critical of communism and time has proven him right. Yet he posed no threat to the Russians whatsoever. First, Patton's opinions were his own, and not official U.S. policy. Second, the majority of the Americans didn't support Patton's ideas. Third, because of his age and approaching retirement, his views and his outspokenness, Patton's influence in the post-war world was waning quickly. Fourth, as Fifteenth Army Commander, Patton was commanding a handful of clerks and researchers. He had no fighting units at his disposal. And even if he did, it is unthinkable he could start a war on his own against the Russians.

Skubik writes he was told in May 1945 of a murder plot by the NKVD, the forerunner of the KGB, by an Ukrainian nationalist leader Bandera. He claims to have brought it to the attention of Donovan, who dismissed it. If one tip weren't enough, two weeks later Skubik was told the same by Professor Smal-Stocki, a Ukrainian scholar, diplomat and nationalist. (Apparently, the Russian secret service was not very secret.) And then Skubik was told for the third time Patton was targeted by the Russians, this time

by Ukrainian General Shandruk. If nationalistic Ukrainians wanted to set up the United States against the Soviets, this was one way to do it. Maybe Skubik thought so as well at the time, since he took no more action. Writes Wilcox: "What Skubik had been doing in regard to the warnings about Patton is unclear. He does not address it per se in his book..." And: "He may have has more information than he discloses. His book sometimes gives that impression. It is not well organized, often omitting connections and explanations..." Just like Bazata's story, Skubik's story is unsubstantiated and he is very scanty with the details that could make his story credible. It doesn't pass the test to seriously consider a conspiracy.

This brings us to the next pillar in Wilcox's theory. He writes there are about five missing reports about the accident. A closer examination of the few snippets of information available, upon which Wilcox concludes there were about five reports, reveals that not every supposedly missing document is a report. It is my belief, based on my interview with Woodring and his subsequent statements throughout the years that one official investigation was made by Lieutenants Vanlandingham and Smith of the 818th MP Company. Woodring consistently denied for many years that Babalas made the investigation, although it is possible that Babalas was one of the many spectators at the scene of the accident after Patton was taken to the hospital. I presume that Babalas, as the superior officer, signed the investigation by Vanlandingham and Smith and making this the one and only official report. However, Patton himself ordered this investigation to stop and generously absolved both drivers. One account says that the military police files were destroyed. This is in character with Patton, because he didn't want to blame the two young drivers for the accident. It may explain why the Vanlandingham and Smith investigation is nowhere to be found.

Wilcox concludes that the Vanlandingham and Smith investigation and the document that Babalas signed are two different investigations. I believe it is one and the same investigation as explained above. Wilcox's third missing document is a probe by Patton's good friend, General Keyes. This probe, for which both drivers were interviewed, was an informal and personal - probably emotional - mission by Patton's best friend. Did he even put it in writing? We don't know. Since it had no official status, it is no wonder it was never filed and thus never surfaced.

The fourth missing document is the investigation by the Provost Marshall, who, writes Wilcox, is unidentified. Wilcox concludes there must be an investigation, as he discovered a letter, dated December 18, 1945, in which Seventh Army chief of staff General Willems mentions the investigation. Apparently, Wilcox is unaware of the organization of the army, as the Military Police and the Provost Marshall are one and the same organization. A letter addressed to an unidentified Provost Marshall conducting the investigation, must have been addressed to the M.P.'s of the 818th M.P. Company. Willems is referring to the same investigation by Vanlandingham and Smith, and not a different investigation as Wilcox concludes.

General Willems, in this December 18, 1945, letter, included a statement by the truck driver T/5 Robert Thompson. This statement, document number five, is also missing. That is no surprise either, as it was

filed with the other documents in the Vanlandingham and Smith investigation that were subsequently destroyed on Patton's wish.

The sixth missing document according to Wilcox is a December 9, 1945, message from General Handy on behalf of General Eisenhower, who was in Washington by then, to the European HQ in Frankfurt, asking to be informed of news about General Patton. Three days later on December 12, 1945, it was discovered that this message was never transmitted to Frankfurt. Wilcox calls this message, requesting information, a missing report or investigation. It is what it is; just a message that wasn't sent.

Wilcox's claim that up to six documents were destroyed or missing is entirely false. Only one investigation was conducted by Vanlandingham and Smith with no other conclusion that it was just an unfortunate accident. Patton, being one of the few witnesses to his own fatal accident, concluded no further action was necessary, generously absolved both drivers, and ordered to stop this investigation probably before it was completely finished and its documents destroyed. Any conclusion that there is a cover up based on this one missing document is false.

Another argument supporting Wilcox's conspiracy theory is that Patton's 1938 Cadillac Model 75 in the Patton Museum in Fort Knox, KY, is not the actual car in which he had his accident. "That's a cover up!" Wilcox exclaims. It is unclear what Wilcox expects to find in the original car after sixty-five years to prove his case. In the days after the accident there were no clues that warranted a closer examination of the car. And even if there were, 1945 investigation technology was not up to the level of today. It is suggestive to expect that sixty-five years after the accident the original car, if it were available, could prove there was a murder plot.

However, it is a known fact that the damage of Patton's Cadillac was repaired, using parts from other Cadillacs. The most visible is that the front has changed from a Model 1938 into a Model 1939. That the vehicle identification number is no longer visible doesn't merit the conclusion, as Wilcox does, there is a conspiracy. We don't know the history of his car before it was discovered in occupied France by the American army in 1944. Maybe the VIN was scratched off Patton's car. We don't even know the VIN of Patton's car, or the unique features that can identify it after all these years. The documentation by the Patton Museum that it is Patton's car is stronger than Wilcox's claim it isn't.

Wilcox believes two other claims to support his conspiracy theory: No autopsy was conducted and Patton was the only fatal victim in the two-vehicle accident. An autopsy is done if the cause of death is suspect. The cause of Patton's death was never suspect until 1978 when MGM started to raise questions to promote their movie, nor afterwards. And the fact that Patton was the only victim doesn't merit the conclusion that he was murdered. It happens all the time that by the grace of God, one passenger survives without a scratch while another is severely injured or dies.

In the end Wilcox, although trying very hard to maintain there is a conspiracy, admits to the following: "But the evidence so far unearthed suggests that it could be true. There is fact in the scenario. It could have happened. Something is not right about what we, so far, know happened to Patton - as well as what

we don't know. His accident and death needs further investigation." Like a true conspiracy theorist, he wants it to go on and on and on. He is relentless in his persistence of a conspiracy, questioning everything from the official side ("they"), while he doesn't answer any direct questions from skeptics about the claims he makes. He doesn't employ, or understand, Occam's razor, as the allegedly small inconsistencies in the official account which he rejects are dwarfed by the enormous gaping holes in logic, likelihood and evidence in his theory. Wilcox uses redundant explanations where straightforward ones will do. And it is unlikely he'll ever admit to it.

Between the lines, the message is not to trust the Roosevelt administration. The similarity of opinion about today's government is striking but not surprising, considering the agenda of the conservative publisher, Regnery Publishing, which published Wilcox's book. The result is a continuing controversy where opinions go as far as to present Patton as a murder victim of a naïve, leftist and untrustworthy government. Patton's memory deserves to be spared this kind of undignified fabrication.

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