

ARMY MOTORS

EXCLUSIVE

Honoring General Patton on the 64th anniversary of his death US Army Hospital, Heidelberg, Germany

By Denny Hair, #9986 and Carlos Manning, #10401, Hockley, Texas

Rarely is there a chance to visit the hospital and the very room where General Patton died. MVPA members Denny Hair and Carlos Manning were privileged to do just that on December 21 and 22, 2009.

Denny who, has won international recognition for his portrayal General Patton at historical events, documentaries, PBS specials, and historical lectures, was asked to be the keynote speaker in the very hospital where Patton died. He received a phone call requesting his involvement, and at the invitation of the D.O.D., Department of the Army, flew to Heidelberg, Germany to participate in the ceremony where he gave a presentation 'as Patton' of his life and battle campaigns.

The United States Army Hospital at Heidelberg has been in continuous use since World War II and is a secured facility for activity military service personal and other authorized persons. For this reason there has been almost no photographs taken of the hospital or General Patton's hospital room. Though no security clearance or other restrictions are required to make photographs the hospital is on a restricted site so there are no images available simply because no one has taken any...until now. Permission was granted to make these rare photos and Denny has given *Army Motors* permission to print them.



A LITTLE HISTORY – ACCIDENT AND DEATH

On December 9, 1945, Patton was severely injured in a car accident. He and his chief of staff, General Hobart R. Gay were on a day trip to hunt pheasants. General Patton was leaving the next day to fly home on vacation and was considering either resigning or retiring from the army. Their 1938 Cadillac was driven by Private First Class Horace Woodring (1926–2003), with Patton sitting in the back seat on the right side, and General Gay on his left, as per custom. At 1145 h near Neckarstadt (Mannheim-Käfertal), a 2-1/2 ton GMC truck driven by Technical Sergeant Robert L. Thompson made a left turn in front of the Cadillac, which was traveling at a low speed, when it hit the front of the truck.

The accident seemed to be of a minor nature as Patton's vehicle was only damaged in the front, though not drivable, and the 2-1/2 ton truck showed almost no damage. No one in the truck was hurt, and neither Gay nor Woodring were injured. However, General Patton was leaning back with trouble breathing. Thrown forward almost five feet in the spacious rear seat area, his head struck a metal partition between the front and back seats, incurring a cervical spinal cord severance injury. Patton was conscious and aware of his circumstances; considering the situation and not having much time, he asked that no one be charged in the accident.

Paralyzed from the neck down, he was rushed to the 130th US Army Station Hospital twenty-five miles away at 1245 h. Hospital Commander, Col. Lawrence C. Ball and Chief Surgeon Lt. Col. Paul S. Hill examined Patton. He had a barely readable pulse of 45-bpm and an obtainable blood pressure of 86/60. Col. Spurling, one of the US Army's top neurosurgeons was summoned from the United States and flown to Heidelberg. Accompanying him was Patton's wife, Beatrice. After her arrival, she read

to her 'Georgie' every day and watched as he slowly began to slip away. On the morning of the 21st, General Patton was cheerful but his vital signs showed continued pulmonary distress. Beatrice spent most of the afternoon reading to him. About 1715 h, he fell asleep. Beatrice then left for supper with Dr. Spurling and Dr. Hill. At 1800 h, Dr. Duanne summoned them back to the hospital. By the time they arrived, Patton had fought his final battle. The official cause of death was 'pulmonary edema and congestive heart failure'. The final entry in his log read, "1755 hours expired."

While they awaited a mortician to attend to the body, General Patton's remains were removed to the

basement, just below his hospital room. Sgt Meeks, Patton's friend and orderly, was summoned to bring Patton's personal four-star flag. He arrived and tearfully handed it to Dr. Hill who in turn gently placed it over the general's body. It was ironic, and would have been totally to Patton's liking that after death he lay on a table in what had had once been a German cavalry horse stall before WWII. The hospital was originally a German cavalry school and later transformed into a military hospital. At some point after his death, it was remodeled and made into hospital offices. General Patton's casket was later taken to Villa Reiner, high on a



mountain over looking the Neckar River and the charming city of Heidelberg. His funeral service was held at Christ Church (Christuskirche) in Heidelberg-Südstadt on December 23, 1945. The 63rd and 90th Psalms, two of Patton's favorite passages, were read at the service.

Beatrice Patton decided that her husband should be laid to rest in the cemetery at Hamm, Luxembourg, alongside the men who fought and died in his great Third Army. This would have been in accordance to General Patton's wishes as well.

HEIDELBERG, GERMANY DECEMBER 2009

UNITED STATES ARMY MEDICAL HOSPITAL

Elements of active duty personnel assigned to the hospital, honored guests and invited civilians were brought together just outside the room where Patton died. A solemn and respectful wreath laying ceremony honoring his passing was conducted with full military honors due such an occasion. Until now, there are no known photographs of the inside of his hospital room, currently being used as radiological room and examination facility.

After the ceremony, the visitors and army personnel went to the hospital cafeteria for lunch. Then followed the 'Patton Presentation' performed by Denny Hair (as Patton), and Carlos Manning (Chief of Staff) of *Patton Third Army Living Historians*. Hair treated the honored guests, dignitaries, commanding officers and visiting historians from the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg, to a historical presentation as he covered the life and death of General Patton's military service.



A rare exterior photograph of the hospital where Patton's room was located. Situated in a secured area of the base, permission must be obtained to visit the base before the facility can even be viewed, as it is not visible from the road.



A very rare photograph inside Patton's hospital room as it exists today.



The hallway beneath the hospital was once used to lead horses to and from their stalls. Keeping them below the main barracks would shelter them from the cold of winter and heat of the summer.



The ceiling of the room located beneath the hospital still has the familiar curved roof common to horse stalls of the period.



A permanent memorial displayed in front of Patton's hospital room.



Solemn wreath laying ceremony in front of Patton's hospital room marking the 64th anniversary of his death.



Grand Duchy of Luxembourg Historical Society with General Patton (Denny Hair). The society deeply respected the presentation and invited him for a return performance.



Carlos Manning was so busy making photographs that he does not appear in any of the shots. The successes of the article's images are due to him.

REFERENCES

- http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:General_Pattons_grave.jpg
- http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hobart_R._Gay
- <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mannheim>
- http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cadillac_Series_75
- <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Heidelberg>

Photographs by Denny Hair and Carlos Manning.
All photographs of the Heidelberg hospital facilities were made with the permission of the US Army.

The performance unfolded as if Patton was personally telling of his life from birth in 1885 until the car accident. Then, out of character, Denny Hair explained the general's hospital stay and his passing on December 21 concluding with his burial in Hamm, Luxembourg on December 24, 1945. The presentation was well received as evidenced by a standing ovation led by the commanding officer of the hospital.

Later that evening the delegation of active duty personnel, civilians, Denny Hair and Carlos Manning, traveled to Mannheim where a wreath was placed at the accident site. Invitations were received for a return visit at a later date to include a planned trip to Luxembourg.

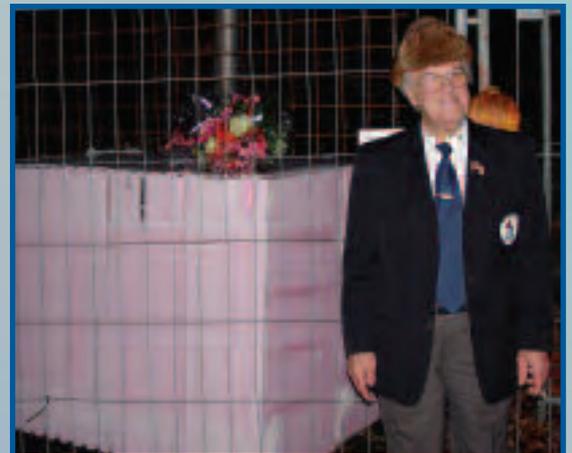
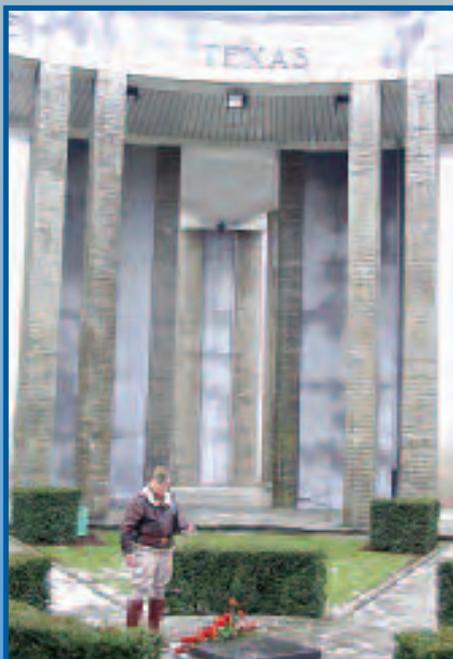
After the ceremonies, we re-traced the route that General Patton had traveled the year before his death.

We also went to Bastogne, Belgium to visit the museum, town square and memorial to the Battle of the Bulge where Denny honored the fallen of that battle. The museum at Bastogne allowed Denny to pose as General Patton inside the exhibition area. The final destination was a side trip to visit the memorial and honor the American soldiers murdered by the SS at Malmedy.

Denny Hair, part of the *Patton's Third Army Living Historians*, was recently featured in *Army Motors* #127 regarding a recreation of General Patton's shop van headquarters. Denny's organization is also the traveling spokespersons for the *Museum and the American GI* located in College Station, Texas. Their web sites are: www.pattonthirdarmy.com and www.magicstx.org

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The restored Cadillac limousine that General Patton was riding in at the time of the accident. It is now in the Patton Museum at Ft. Knox, Kentucky.



Memorial at Bastogne. Denny Hair, as General Patton, visits the hallowed site where wreaths are laid in memory of those who served and gave their lives to protect Bastogne.

A member of Grand Duchy of Luxembourg Historical Society. A memorial wreath was placed at the accident site in Mannheim, Germany. The site is difficult to find due to construction over the last 64 years.

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