



*Jules Hudson*

# COUNTRY ESCAPE

One of the phrases that's proved most incisive to Jules over the years comes from his time in the army and was spoken by one of history's most audacious military leaders

**O**ver the years I've amassed many phrases that help make sense of life's day-to-day challenges. But, without a doubt, the best were harvested during my brief sojourn in the army a quarter of a century ago. As you might imagine, not all are suitable for publication, but, having been honed in countless campaigns across many generations by those who've dealt with the most demanding of situations, they've proven invaluable guides.

So let me share what to me has long been the most incisive. It concerns teamwork and leadership, and was crafted by a man who was as controversial as he was brilliant, American general, George S. Patton.

During the Second World War, Patton emerged as the most able and gifted of Allied commanders. Affectionately nicknamed 'Old Blood and Guts', he was loved and feared in equal measure by those under his command. His no-nonsense approach to warfare was underpinned by a ceaseless sense of urgency and tireless ambition to beat the enemy. Like many of his contemporaries on both sides of the conflict, Patton had forged his battle-craft as a young officer on the Western Front of the First World War. Planning and preparation to mitigate loss of life and ensure success were common themes among those who'd fought in the trenches, and who then later assumed great rank.

Patton's contribution, during the Second World War, to the eventual defeat of the German and Italian forces in North Africa, and his relentless prosecution of the conquest of Sicily, helped establish a formidable reputation that was tested to its limits in the campaign for North-West Europe after D-Day. Patton's Third Army led the breakout from Normandy and harried the Germans in an unprecedented armoured dash right across France to the borders of Germany itself. Famously attired in crisp uniforms complete with his own pearl-handled revolvers on each hip, the plain speaking Patton inspired a legendary sense of can-do, and an assured self-belief that anything and everything was possible regardless of the odds.

But it was during the Battle of the Bulge in December 1944 that his real power to command came to the fore. As the Allied armies settled down to weather a

brutal winter in the forests straddling the German Border with France and Belgium, the enemy launched perhaps the most audacious counter attack in history. On 16th December, without warning, hundreds of German tanks and armoured vehicles – along with at least 200,000 men from hitherto hidden units – surged across the front lines. Bursting through the once silent forests of the Ardennes, enemy tanks smashed through the trees, and troops swarmed across a frozen landscape sending unprepared and undermanned American divisions reeling in chaotic retreat with the loss of thousands of men.

The Battle of the Bulge was the most serious threat to the Allied advance yet seen. With overwhelming firepower, the German Panzers tried to drive a wedge between the Allied armies, leaving the British 21st Army Group to the North, and the Americans, broadly speaking, to the south. The 'bulge' the battle created pushed the Allied line westward to the point of collapse.

Meanwhile it was Patton, whose Third Army was several days march away, who paved the way for the Allied counterattack. Within hours of the German advance, he planned to move the bulk of his Third Army northward to punch into the Bulge and take the fight to the Germans. In so doing he gained valuable time in getting his troops on the move across frozen roads and into action, a decision that would prove decisive in the final outcome of the battle as it staggered on into January 1945 with the eventual collapse of the German armies in the west.

Patton's untimely and incongruous death following a car accident at the end of 1945, and his reputation for determined action has long made him something of an enigma. But what of that phrase that's long inspired me? Perhaps not surprisingly it's simple, memorable and typical of the man who coined it: 'Lead, follow, or get out of the way'.

What would you do? 

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