Welcome to the February session of the Dr. Harold C. Deutsch World War II History Round Table. Tonight’s speaker is Jonathan Jordan, author of Brothers, Rivals, Victors: Eisenhower, Patton, Bradley and the Partnership that Drove the Conquest in Europe, who will discuss these three generals. Several veterans will describe encounters with the three generals.

There is a deeper question to be considered in tonight’s presentation: to what extent does the man make history, and to what extent does history make the man? Radical historians look to the common men, Marxist historians to forces (the “revolution”), and Whig historians to the big men and big institutions. Most of us, trying to get a handle on the past, figure that even in a global war, single individuals making sometimes small choices, can have great impact (e.g., Claus von Stauffenberg at Wolfsschanze, or Eisenhower deciding to go ahead with the landings in France despite the weather forecasts).

Dwight Eisenhower, George S. Patton, and Omar N. Bradley all appear to be cut from the same cloth. Each attended the US Military Academy at West Point. Patton graduated in the class of 1909. Eisenhower and Bradley graduated with the class of 1915, which became known as “the class the stars fell on,” where 59 out of 164 graduates (36%) attained general rank. All three were in service during America’s involvement in the Great War, although Patton was the only one who saw combat in Europe. While Patton returned from the Great War with medals, “Ike” Eisenhower spent the war training men in Pennsylvania, and Bradley criss-crossed the country training men and subduing unruly strikers and labor agitators in Butte, Montana.

Soldiers all, the three men had very different origins and upbringings. George Smith Patton grew up the only son of a wealthy patrician family from California. Despite difficulty learning to read, he devoured books, but repeated his plebe year at West Point after failing mathematics! (He graduated 46th in a class of 103.) His was the world of country clubs, polo grounds, and yachts. A man of great culture and learning, he could spew obscenities like the “bluest” of sailor or army grunt, even in the presence of world dignitaries. Patton served as Pershing’s aide-de-camp in Mexico, and commanded troop C, 13th Cavalry.

Dwight David (“Ike”) Eisenhower came from a middle class Kansas family with six brothers. After high school, he worked two years in a creamery before entering West Point, where he accumulated a less that perfect disciplinary record and excelled in English, and graduated in the upper third of his class. “Ike” could swear in the best traditions of an Army drill sergeant but also learned the art of compromise and how to get along well with others; coming from a large family offered some lessons of note. Eisenhower served in the 19th Infantry in Texas but not in Mexico.

Omar Bradley was the poorest of the three, the son of a poor country school teacher in Moberly, Missouri. After high school, he too worked, and supplemented the family’s food by hunting—he was a crack shot. Winning the competitive nomination from his congressional district, he attended West Point, where the discipline and honor code shaped his life. He finished 44 out of a class of 164. Joining the 14th Infantry, he served in northern Mexico, seeing no action, but learning much about logistics and movement.

For each man, the end of the Great War was a career cross-roads, and each saw the army as a life-long vocation. Patton and Eisenhower became friends when they were stationed together at Camp Meade, Pennsylvania. There, they would develop ideas about the use of the tanks and their usefulness beyond infantry support, and each published an article in Infantry Journal on the subject, much to the ire of their superiors. Also at this time, Eisenhower and Patton discussed the how wars are won. For Patton it was all about leadership, but Eisenhower believed in not overlooking the more mundane aspects of warfare, like logistics or alliances. Armies had to be supplied, fed, and organized in order to be effective. Bradley took a different path, becoming a teacher of mathematics at West Point for several tours during the inter-war years.

During the late 1920’s and 1930’s each of these future generals moved to various army assignments, and to the Command and General Staff College at Fort Leavenworth. Bradley and Patton served together in Hawaii, and Patton and Eisenhower were in Washington, D.C. at the same time. What binds the men as “brothers” though is that they are seen as...
Marshall’s men and owe their future careers to him. When George C. Marshall because the Army Chief of Staff (on 1 September 1939), he began with some house cleaning. He created a “plucking committee” of retired Generals who recommend the retirement of older generals, allowing Marshall to promote men he felt that had been overlooked. Bradley, Eisenhower, and Patton were three of these men.

All three men came together as architects of Allied victory in Europe, beginning in North Africa, through the Sicily and then across France into Germany. Eisenhower would lead the way as Supreme Allied Commander and his ability to compromise aided him when dealing with the British, although this was seen as a weakness by Patton and Bradley. Eisenhower’s attentiveness to the British was greeted by condensation from many British senior officers, which was one the biggest headaches Patton and Bradley had to face.

While the question of to what extent the times – history – made these men, and to what extent they made history can be argued indefinitely; the fact remains that these brothers-in-arms were indispensable to an allied victory.

Further Readings:

Announcements:
Civil War Symposium Apr. 5, 2014 – Historic Ft. Snelling Visitors Center - info@tccwrt.com - 612-823-4009
Twin Cities Civil War Round Table - Feb. 18, 2014 – Lincoln – War Diplomacy - www.tccwrt.com - info@tccwrt.com
St Croix Valley Civil War Round Table - Feb. 24, 2014 – Grant Before Vicksburg - 715-386-1268 – rossandhaines@comcast.net
Rochester WWII History Round Table –507-280-9970; www.ww2roundtable-rochester.org

Honor Flight - Jerry Kyser - crazyjerry45@hotmail - 651-338-2717
CAF - Commemorative Air Force - www.cafmn.org 651-455-6942
Minnesota Air Guard Museum - www.mngangmuseum.org 612-713-2523
Friends of Ft. Snelling, www.fortsnelling.org
Fagen Fighters WWII Museum, Granite Falls, MN, 320-564-6644,

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13 Mar. Operation COBRA and Falaise
27 Mar. World War II in China
10 Apr. Rabaul and the SW Pacific
8 May Landing on Omaha Beach
10-27 May Tour of Normandy

If you are a veteran, or know a veteran, of one of these campaigns – contact Don Patton at cell 612-867-5144 or coldpatton@yahoo.com

Eisenhower, Patton, Bradley, and Hodges, 28 March 1945, in Germany.

Crossing of the Rhine, Operations 22-28 March 1945
West Point Atlas, map 79, http://www.westpoint.edu/history/SitePages/WWII%20European%20Theater.aspx

See our programs on YouTube at http://youtube.com/ww2hrt