

Robert Porter Patterson

Soldier

Judge

Statesman

Citizen

Robert Porter Patterson

“Bob Patterson is not a New York City man,” Supreme Court Justice Felix Frankfurter wrote to President Franklin D. Roosevelt in 1940. “He is as different from downtown New York as though he came from Iowa.” While remaining loyal to his small-town upbringing, Robert Porter Patterson distinguished himself in every phase of his life as a man prepared to answer the call of public duty wherever it led him—from the battlefields of the Argonne Forest to the bench of the United States Court of Appeals, and from the inner circle of the President’s Cabinet to the largest municipal bar association in the nation.

Patterson was born the son of a local lawyer in Glens Falls, New York, in 1891. Patterson made his mark at Union College as an authority on everything from politics to baseball, and at Harvard Law School as an extraordinary legal thinker, President of the Law Review, and Marshall of his class. Despite his academic success and two later offers of the position of Dean of Harvard Law School, Patterson chose not to pursue a life in academia, claiming he did not have the “genuine scholarship” essential to the job. Instead, Patterson entered private practice in New York City at the princely starting wage of \$85 a month.

In 1916, the young lawyer had barely begun his legal career when his regiment of the New York National Guard was called to the Mexican border to join the battle against Villa’s revolutionaries. It was there that Patterson first learned to appreciate the value of “the ordinary private who marches all day with a pack on his back.” When war with imperial Germany threatened a year later, Patterson eagerly enlisted. While serving on several European fronts, Patterson encountered “the greatest adventure of my life.” He was decorated for his bravery after his first full night of serious combat, during which he showed complete disregard for his personal safety in order to lead his troops to shelter from enemy artillery. After repeatedly distinguishing himself under heavy fire, in a poison gas attack, and in narrowly evading capture by the Germans, Patterson returned to civilian life with a demonstrated capacity for leadership and an appreciation for the common soldier that would inspire his later accomplishments.

Back in private practice, Patterson began establishing himself as one of the most respected attorneys in Manhattan. His success reached the attention of President Herbert

Hoover, who appointed Patterson to the United States District Court in 1930. Patterson's courtroom soon became a popular scene for members of the New York bar and the interested public, as the Judge tackled some of the most difficult issues of the Depression with prudence, expedition, and an air of dignity. His performance moved one observer to write that Patterson "used neither [his] official position nor the robe to impress people with [his] importance." Judge Patterson continued his judicial service when he was elevated to the Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit in 1939. In his years on the bench, he set a remarkable record for affirmances by higher courts.

When Hitler's army began its attack on western Europe in the spring of 1940, Judge Patterson acted on his concerns for his country's security by asking to be recommissioned in the infantry. At age 49, Patterson began training for his return to active duty. This second stage of his military career (as well as his evening KP duty) was cut short soon after by the news that President Franklin D. Roosevelt had appointed him Assistant Secretary of War (the number two position in the War Department, renamed Under Secretary a few months later) under Henry L. Stimson. Although he lacked experience in matters of procurement and industry, Patterson soon became a leading spokesman for the military and was responsible for mobilization of military supplies on a scale unprecedented in the history of the United States, if not the world. Patterson demonstrated a deep concern for the welfare of men in service. He worked to improve the situation of the average soldier, battle civilian complacency, and—most of all—achieve victory.

When the Allies finally defeated Germany and Japan in 1945, President Harry S Truman offered Patterson a choice: a seat on the United States Supreme Court or a continuation of his civil-military service as Secretary of War. After replying that he would serve wherever he could be most useful, Patterson was appointed to succeed Secretary Stimson. As Secretary of War, Patterson continued his efforts to perpetuate military training and unite the armed forces, a goal that was finally achieved in 1947. In appreciation, President Truman offered Patterson the chance to become the first Secretary of Defense, which he declined; Patterson stated that he considered his job finished and could better serve in peacetime as a private citizen. "Never," Truman said to him in response, "have I accepted a resignation from the Government Service with more poignant regret."

Patterson returned to legal practice in New York, joining together with Chauncey Belknap and Vanderbilt Webb, with whom he had served on the Harvard Law Review,

at the firm then renamed Patterson, Belknap and Webb. Patterson re-established his leadership in the City Bar and was elected its President, while also involving himself in countless civic activities. His untimely death in 1952, the result of an airplane crash in Elizabeth, New Jersey, prompted scores of tributes for, in President Truman's words, this "great American and a great public servant."

Early years

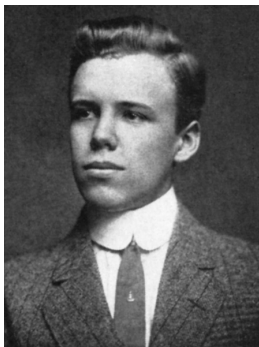
The father of Robert P. Patterson was Charles R. Patterson, a Glens Falls lawyer who was twice elected district attorney at Warren County. In the *Morning Star* we found this observation on February 14, 1891: “Warren County has a brand new district attorney, weighing ten pounds. It arrived at the house of Counselor Patterson on Thursday.”

Thus was the advent of Robert P. Patterson heralded to his fellow citizens of Glens Falls.



Patterson as choir boy in the Episcopal Church of the Holy Innocents, Glens Falls, New York, ca. 1900.

Yearbook portrait of Patterson as a junior at Union College, Class of 1912.



In his senior year [at Union College], he served as class vice president, member of the debating team and manager of the basketball team. It is noteworthy that the future Secretary of War took that team to West Point in January of 1912 where Union defeated Army, 22-18.

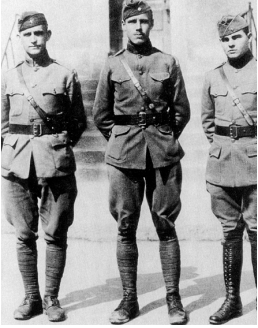
—John Austin

The professor leaned heavily on the relatively small group of students to whom he came to learn he could look for a peculiarly intelligent answer or an illuminating perception for discussion. The result of this process is that after a few months, in each class, a certain small number of students became marked men, because they are the ones who make the most significant contributions to the discussion. I well remember that at an early stage in our Law School career, Bob Patterson was one of those men, and that is how he first came to my attention.

Like everyone else in the class, I soon began to recognize his capacity to go right to the heart of a problem, to express himself clearly and simply, and to do so in an unobtrusive, helpful way, as quite outstanding . . . It was perfectly plain that he was not in the least of the exhibitionist type. . . . Nothing could be further from Bob Patterson’s approach at that time or at any time throughout his life, than exhibitionism of any kind. He was as devoid of that quality throughout his life as any human being I’ve ever encountered.

If you were puzzling over a problem, between classes, standing on the steps of the Law School Building or something, you might easily see a little knot around Bob Patterson

Soldier



*Major Patterson of the 306th
Infantry Regiment, 77th
Division, France 1919
(center).*

He [Bob Patterson] learned the hard way that wars are won by killing the enemy: “Want to know the biggest day of my life? It was on Aug. 14, 1918, near the Vesle River in France. I went out on a patrol with two corporals. Suddenly we came upon a nest of Germans in a shell crater, killed two, and I got caught there for the rest of the day. Withdrawing toward our own lines, the German fire got so heavy, I suddenly decided to crumple up and play dead—that turned out to be the longest, hottest, and the most exciting day of my life.

“For hours, I had to lie on my stomach in no-man’s land, surrounded by bodies, flat on my stomach, in full view of two German machine-gun nests, twenty feet from the nearest German rifleman. As the sun beat down on me I could feel the canteen full of water resting on my hip—but I didn’t dare move a finger to reach for a drink. Once, five men came wriggling out in my direction, but I wouldn’t lift my head to see whether they were friend or enemy . . . later, I found out they were five of my buddies who’d heard I had been hit and had come prowling out as far as they could to look for me. Guess I played the role of a corpse pretty well, because I was still alive by nightfall, unwounded, and able to make a run for safety.”

—Tex McCrary and Jinx Falkenburg

Reconnaissance men had reported Captain Patterson trapped just about 200 yards away from us. Well, five of us volunteered and out we went on our bellies, quietly, fingering our grenades. Then we came upon the captain and he waved us away after whispering he was okay. Then the Germans opened fire. We tossed our hand grenades with lucky aim and wiped out a nest of seven of them. Then all of us returned safely.

First off, let me say that he [Patterson] was one of the most modest and bravest of men I have ever met. Why, when the going was rough there on the Vale front near Bozoches [in France] I saw him many times carry the packs of two weary soldiers, in addition to his own. And sometimes he carried their rifles, too.

—Peter Finucane

As company Commander he won the respect and devotion of the men he led in battle. He never forgot them and they never forgot him. He shared their opinion that F Company was by all odds the best outfit in the whole United States Army. He never forgot the hardships and sacrifices of those in combat, particularly the infantry, because he always remained a doughboy at heart.

—*Edward S. Greenbaum*

He certainly won the extraordinary devotion of the men in his unit, in his company, and this was returned by him. None of those men, most of whom came from New York City, could ever say too much for Captain Patterson. He was always at their disposal to do anything in the world for them. Years later, when he was practicing law here, if any one of them came in to see him, he would drop anything to talk with them and help them with their problems. It didn't make a difference how trivial or modest it might be, this was more important than anything else he could possibly be doing.

—*Chauncey Belknap*

The New York Times, March 10, 1952

Patterson's Will Remembers Five Who Rescued Him in 1918 Battle

Patterson's Will Remembers Five Who Rescued Him in 1918 Battle

Five men, who, at the peril of their lives, rescued Robert P. Patterson from an enemy trap in the Argonne in World War I, were remembered in the will of the late Secretary of War.

For thirty-four years Mr. Patterson maintained a staunch friendship for the five soldiers and a reading of his will disclosed that \$200 each had been left to Patrick J. Carroll, New York; Peter Finucane, the Bronx; Richard Foy, New Jersey; John Duffy, Brooklyn; and Samuel Silverstein, Camp Gordon, Ga.

Mr. Patterson, a mass sergeant who won the Distinguished Service Cross for volunteering in a trench company in 1918, was one of the most modest and bravest of men I have ever met," he said. "Why, when the going was rough there on the Argonne, told yesterday of reconnaissance men had reported the front near Bopches (in

The loyalty Patterson felt to the men he served with is evidenced by his final bequests.

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Citation accompanying Patterson's Distinguished Service Cross:

Captain Patterson, accompanied by two noncommissioned officers, made a daring daylight reconnaissance into the enemy lines. He surprised an enemy outpost of superior numbers and personally destroyed the outpost. Later he again had an encounter with another outpost, during which several of the enemy were killed or wounded and one member of his patrol wounded. The enemy advanced their outposts, and Captain Patterson covered the retreat of his patrol during which he dropped into a depression and feigned being killed in order to escape capture. Here he lay until he was able to escape to his lines under cover of darkness.

Citation accompanying Patterson's Silver Star:

Captain Robert P. Patterson, 306th Infantry—throughout the offensive through the Argonne Forests since September 26, 1918, this officer led his men with marked efficiency, coolness and courage, and utter disregard to personal danger, under an intense concentration of artillery and machine gun fire. Undoubtedly the courage and coolness displayed by this officer led to successful attack made by his company.

Judge

His opinions were clear, penetrating, short, crisp, thorough, unostentatious, and unobtrusive, without a trace of vanity or of any desire to shine. They never avoided the troublesome issues, or left any doubt as to what he decided; they were supported by adequate authority, but never encumbered by too much or by needless side excursions. Moreover, they disclosed his underlying attitude to his duties, his understanding of the position of a judge, as interpreter.

—Learned Hand

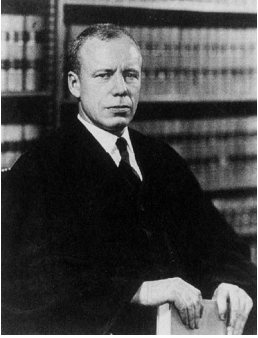
On the bench, Patterson was a judge in the old British tradition, acting as third man in the trial, searching relentlessly for such facts as counsel failed to disclose either through inadvertence or by design. In law school he was regarded as a conservative, on the bench he was called a liberal. In passing upon New Deal legislation as it emanated both from Congress and the semijudicial Government agencies, Patterson gave full credit to the letter and intent of the law. The courts, he always held, should hold their legislative function to a minimum, never seeking to rewrite the statutes according to their own passing notions.

—Forrest Davis

The cases which came before him during the 1930s involved him in the issues of the day: Prohibition, the Depression, the New Deal, and even the threatening international situation. At the time of his appointment, Patterson had the support of leading anti-prohibitionists who had previously denounced the court's harsh decisions regarding application of the Volstead Act. But the new justice had greater regard for law than antipathy toward Prohibition. When the owner of a speakeasy sought from him an injunction to prevent federal agents from ripping out his fixtures, Patterson refused to grant it, thus upholding earlier interpretations. His conception that Congress had the right to pass even laws of which he did not approve, and that the court was obliged to enforce such laws unless specific Constitutional violations could be shown, also led him to uphold the New Deal legislation which came before him for adjudication. His remarkable record of non-reversals by higher courts was, in fact, marred only by a case in which he refused to

declare invalid the processing tax provided for by the Agricultural Adjustment Act of 1933. In 1935, the Supreme Court in *Butler v. United States* invalidated the entire AAA because of this tax.

If he was reluctant to declare American laws unconstitutional, he showed no similar reluctance with respect to foreign laws and administrative decisions. In 1933 and 1935, Nazi Germany enacted legislation which provided that German firms in default to foreign creditors could purge themselves of their debt by payments to the German government which would, in turn, issue promissory notes. In a suit involving the American holders of some \$887,000,000 worth of German bonds, Patterson ruled the German law inapplicable on the grounds that the debt agreements were subject solely to American law. In 1951 he was to use substantially similar arguments on behalf of bond and shareholders, in pleading before the U.S. High Commissioner for Germany against the decision to break up the coal and steel cartels.



Judge Patterson of the United States Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit, 1939.

Issues of lesser moment also received Patterson's attention while he was on the bench. He became deeply involved in the receivership of New York's Interborough Rapid Transit Company, ultimately voiding the 999-year lease the company held on the city's elevated lines, and he was thus instrumental in bringing sunlight back to Sixth Avenue. A decision rendered in the *Harriet Hubbard Ayer Case* in 1932 brought his picture to the otherwise non-judicial pages of the *American Perfumer*.

—Manfred Jonas and Louis Morton

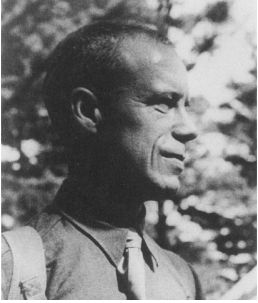
As a judge, Bob was businesslike, direct, quick to apprehend a point, courteous to counsel, an attentive listener when listening was indicated, but willing to cut off idle talk when it was unnecessarily delaying the already protracted proceedings.

—Chauncey Belknap

Simplicity and directness and force were the traits of his mind. The affection of his colleagues on the bench equaled their respect for him as a judge. He became one of the eminent judges of the land with every right to look forward to an eventual seat on the Supreme Bench.

—Felix Frankfurter

Statesman



“Buck Private” Patterson taking a refresher citizens’ military training course at Plattsburg in 1940, just before his appointment as Assistant Secretary of War under Henry L. Stimson.

Patterson brought a sense of a hurrying fate to Washington in August of 1940. The summons from President Roosevelt and Secretary Stimson had reached him at Plattsburg, where he was undergoing a refresher course which was to qualify him to lead combat troops once more. At the moment he was on K.P., dumping garbage cans into a camp truck. The call was no surprise to him. Before going to camp he had been approached on the telephone by a friend of Stimson’s.

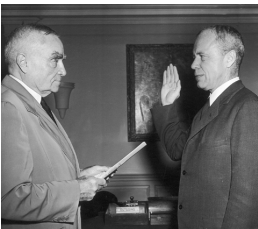
His response was characteristic. He asked no time to think it over, saying instantly, “they could get a better Assistant Secretary of War [the post of under secretary was not created until December 1940], but if they want me, I’ll accept.”

—Forrest Davis

“A lot of people have written the story about my being on K.P. when I got the wire from Washington—the way the story got told, I was peeling potatoes when the news came. Actually, I was almost enjoying myself. You see, I had a very bad cold at the time, and that was perfect for my assignment—emptying the garbage cans. Even when I lifted the covers off, I couldn’t smell a thing!”

We wondered if buck private Patterson dropped everything the minute the wire came, and hopped the noon train to Washington. “I did not. My sergeant wouldn’t think of letting me go until I’d finished out the day—which included finishing emptying the garbage!”

—Tex McCrary and Jinx Falkenburg



Patterson being sworn in as Secretary of War by Judge Learned Hand.

Twice I had to swear him in as a public official, once when he became a circuit judge, next when he became Secretary of War. Each time I feared that I might not get through without some unseasonable show of emotion. As I looked into the steady blue eyes and at the small lithe frame, as I saw the uplifted hand and called to mind with what dedication he was accepting the post, there came over me with more force than I was afraid I should manage to conceal, what was the measure of the man, and how he stood out among those whom I had known.

—Learned Hand

He plunged right into work. When he wanted to see a subordinate he would walk to his office, through the hall, often with an armful of papers. He would stand in the cafeteria line carrying his tray, waiting his turn. When it was realized that this energetic character was the new Assistant Secretary, there were mixed reactions evidenced by raised eyebrows from some of the brass and friendly smiles from many others. But he was entirely unaware of the surprise and bewilderment, disapproval and pleasure that he caused. He just went ahead and did his job.

He was completely indifferent to the privileges that went with his high office. He was annoyed at its trappings, and ignored the ruffles and flourishes. He was equally unimpressed by the rank or position of others—either in or out of the army. He treated all alike, paying at least as much attention to three stripes on the sleeve as to three stars on the shoulders.

—*Edward S. Greenbaum*

I came to know him as a man of brilliant mind combined with great moral power, singleness of purpose, and physical and nervous strength which made him able to bear an enormously heavy burden of work. During the three and one-half years from March, 1942, to September of 1945, I never saw him really relax except during a week which he spent on his farm at Garrison under orders from Secretary Stimson not to leave it. He drove himself hard and expected those whom he trusted with responsibilities to do the same. As a result, he got more out of his staff than we knew that we could do, although at times all of us had to drop out for occasional recuperation.

Judge Patterson seemed to me to be a man of the utmost rectitude with an almost unique sense of duty and obligation. If I were obliged to use a single adjective to describe him, I think that I would say that he is the noblest man that I have ever known.

—*William Marbury*

This Republican who rose to high places in successive Democratic administrations was invariably careless of the political consequences of doing what he thought was right. In these days when timidity is common and the miasma of corruption has spread so far, we can less than ever spare a man like this.

—*Ralph Hayes*



*Under Secretary of War
Patterson on a shooting range
at Fort Jackson, South
Carolina in 1941.*

To study [the problem of military morale] and to recommend a means of solving it, the Secretaries of War and Navy had decided to appoint a four-man committee [including] . . . myself. . . . Having explained all this in the space of two or three minutes, Bob Patterson looked at me and snapped out three syllables, “Will you serve?” I replied, “Yes, sir” – and that was the end of the interview. . . . The first thought that struck me when I heard the shocking news of Bob’s death was that he had once looked at me and asked me, “Will you serve?” He had made me feel that I was being called to the highest duty that an American can perform, even though it was a negligible item in the massive war effort. He could convey this sense better than anyone I ever knew. For in Bob Patterson was the concept of service in this purest and noblest form. . . . He was a man of intense dedication, which he could communicate to all, generals or privates or Presidents; by his own caliber and integrity he gave us a new and higher concept of the duties and responsibilities as well as the privileges and advantages of citizenship.

–Robert E. Sherwood

No two men in recent history [Patterson and his assistant Howard Petersen] have worked more faithfully and fearlessly in the fight to wipe out the color line. . . . Mr. Patterson with his judicial mind and freedom from the slightest semblance of race prejudice was not only willing but eager to discuss and do whatever he could to end Jim-Crowism as rapidly as possible. . . . He fought a good fight, and such progress as has been made towards the integration of Negroes in the Army as American citizens instead of as members of a minority race is in large measure due to his ability and courage.

–Walter F. White, NAACP

When Robert P. Patterson was Secretary of War, I learned of an incident which had occurred when he was Under Secretary. It concerned his refusal to take action, which he must have yearned for, due to his high concept of duty. . . .

In the summer of 1943, the Army Air Forces were planning a raid on the vital Ploesti oil fields in Rumania. This was no ordinary operation. A 2,100-mile round trip was necessary to attack the oil fields. One-third of the distance was over enemy-occupied territory and two-thirds over water.

So in Africa, a task force of heavy bombers—Liberators and Flying Fortresses—were being especially equipped to bomb a more remote target than ever before. [There] was to be low-level bombing; [and] planes must be sacrificed. And no plane suffering more than minor damage could hope to make the long trek home.

The bombardier on one of the Liberators scheduled for this mission was Lt. Robert P. Patterson Jr. His father knew it.

In Washington, the newspapers reported the success of the raid, the great damage done to oil fields and refineries, and they also reported the grim news that 67 out of our 178 planes failed to come home.

In his official position the Under Secretary could have obtained a report as to whether his son's plane survived. But he knew that the parents of the others had no such privilege. Because he would not use for personal purposes the powers of his high office, even to ask whether his son was alive, the Under Secretary refused to authorize any inquiry to answer the one question which to a father meant more than any other information in the world.

One of his officers disobeyed orders, made the inquiry, and reported that Bob Jr. was safe. His chief, beaming all over, replied, "You ought not to have done it."

—Tracy S. Voorhees

We must never forget the small and perilous beginnings of the creation of this final power. Our inadequacy, when the Second World War began, was fully as astonishing as our abundance at its close. The public may be tempted to forget those anxious moments, but those of us who had the responsibility for getting defense production started in 1940 can never forget them. Hitler's belief that he could conquer the world looks fantastic now: the facts supported it in those days.

Another great war might not find nations strong enough, without immediate direct aid from us, to resist the aggressor, even if they were inclined to do so. Nor will the oceans, which have so long protected us from the danger of immediate attack guarantee us immunity in the future. When hostilities begin, we must expect to feel their full weight almost at once. We shall not have time to yawn, stretch ourselves, and arise sleepily

from the bed of our illusions. Unless we are armed and equipped, or well on the way to being so, our efforts will be too late . . .

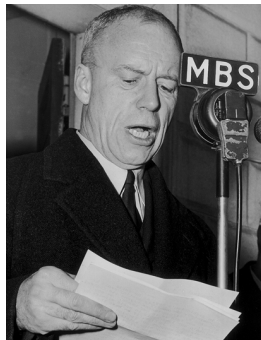
We must never forget that, if we have another war, it will be nearly won, or nearly lost, on the industrial front before a shot is fired. That front deserves, and must have, in the years of preparation as well as in the months of conflict, the greatest efforts and the ablest minds that the nation can command. If we fail there, we fail everywhere, in combat, and in all those pursuits of peace which depend upon the successful maintenance of our national security.

We often forget that, as soon as we had developed our potential strength, the last war was a one-sided contest. A well-armed pigmy may defeat an unarmed giant if the latter is taken by surprise. But, if the pigmy's first assault fails, his chances are gone. As soon as the giant summons up the power that is potentially his, the outcome can no longer be in doubt. One only need look at the relative war production figures of the Axis and the Allied nations to see how one-sided the contest was after American war production got really under way. By the end of the war the United States was producing, not merely as much as all our enemies combined, but almost as much as all our enemies and all our allies together. Once we had reached full speed, no other nation belonged in the same league with us as a military-industrial power.

—*Robert P. Patterson*

Patterson was awarded the Distinguished Service Medal by President Truman on September 18, 1945. This citation accompanied the award:

The Honorable Robert P. Patterson has served as Under Secretary of War since December 23, 1940. The entire immediate responsibility for the greatest procurement program ever undertaken by any nation rested upon him. He supervised the manufacturing programs which provided all equipment and weapons for the Army. He gave to the United States Army and its Allies better and more plentiful supplies than those in the hands of our enemies and by his efforts contributed mightily to bringing the war to a quick and successful conclusion and to saving countless American lives. Mr. Patterson's department executed contracts amounting to over one hundred billion dollars and supervised the disbursement of enormous sums. Owing largely to his dominating



Secretary of War Patterson delivering a speech on February 12, 1947 at an American Legion program held at Mount Vernon.

integrity there has hardly been even a suggestion of malfeasance among the multitudinous transactions during all these years. Vested with heaviest responsibility, war work progressed in extraordinary measure and with extreme clarity under the vigor of his initiative. His tremendous capacity for accomplishment and close cleavage to the direct line of his mission were material factors in the mobilization of matériel and industrial organizations essential to wartime needs. His contribution to victory cannot be over-estimated.

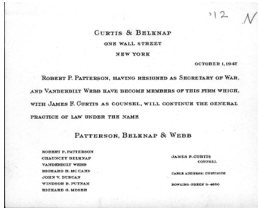


Acknowledging a job well done, President Truman and General Dwight D. Eisenhower present Patterson with a silver tray engraved with the names of high-ranking army officials.



President Truman meets with his cabinet. On the President's right is Secretary of State George C. Marshall, followed by Patterson.

Citizen



Believing that his job at the War Department had been completed, Patterson tendered his resignation in 1947, so that he could return to the practice of law.

He came down here one day and we talked about what the decision was. I said to him, “Well, this can all be sewed up with the greatest of ease, you know that. This is the simplest and most natural thing for you to do, to go back with your oldest friends. You know what you’re getting into here, and if you want to do it here, we have space available and you can start right in on Monday.” Quite characteristically, [Patterson] said, “Well, I think that’s a good idea. I think that’s what I will decide to do, and that’s the way we’ll settle it, and I’ll come in on Monday.” So that is the way it was settled. It’s an interesting story because that’s all there was to the negotiations.

—Chauncey Belknap

His self-confident grasp of the fundamentals of the law, his strong-willed, but fair, devotion to the causes he believed just, and the simple and sometimes homely eloquence of his powerful advocacy gave him a deserved reputation as a leader of the Bar.

—Whitney North Seymour

No private citizen in the land devoted more of his time and energy, more of his profound wisdom and capacity for calm judgement, to a wider variety of selfless causes. He was always on call, ready to step on an airplane wherever he might be and fly to Washington to give his incomparable counsel to harassed public servants in the Pentagon Building, the State Department or the White House itself. He was until recently President of the Bar Association of the City of New York. He was President of Freedom House. He was extremely active in the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, the National Foundation for Infantile Paralysis, the Franklin D. Roosevelt Foundation, the Atlantic Union Committee, the Civil Rights Committee, the Four Freedoms Foundation, and many, many others. Those associated with him in some of these activities (no one save him could have been associated in all of them) had reason for confidence that he would be present at every meeting, when humanly possible, that his contributions to discussion would invariably be invaluable, that he would not hesitate to accept responsibility even when working at a killing pace.

—Robert E. Sherwood



Patterson and his wife, Margaret, surrounded by their daughters, (clockwise) Aileen, Susan, and Virginia, seated on his lap. Patterson holds a photograph of his son Robert, an Army Air Force captain.

To the very end, he fought and fought hard for those things in which he believed. At our January meeting—just a week before he was killed—he stood in this room fighting unsuccessfully for what to him was an important issue, the rights of the unpopular. He felt that because these rights were being jeopardized [in the McCarthy hearings], we should resist the public clamor that sought to make a television spectacle of legislative hearings. I believe that most of us now feel that he was right and we regret that our Association did not take the leadership which he urged and which has since been taken by other Bar Associations.

—Edward S. Greenbaum

It was almost impossible to get him to take a vacation. You practically had to pick out the place where he'd go, buy the tickets, and push him onto the train or plane—pretty literally . . . He wasn't interested in taking a vacation. He was doing something here that interested him more than any vacation, and when he got off on a vacation, he might read from Civil War military history or something of that kind, but I think he got rather bored in a relatively short vacation, and he'd want to come back to work.

One of the most unusual and absolutely outstanding characteristics of Bob Patterson was that he was completely indifferent to most material advantage. I have never seen anybody so genuinely indifferent to money. . . had very few things that he particularly wanted, aside from the farm, which money could buy.

I really think he practiced law more for the satisfaction, the deep-seated satisfaction that he had in securing what he felt was justice for the cause to which he had devoted himself, and satisfaction in the craftsmanship, which he knew very well stood quite high, that he contributed.

—Chauncey Belknap

The Pattersons leave Washington with a send-off from Kenneth Royall and Bernard Baruch.



Final Tributes

The New York Times, Jan. 23, 1952

PLANE FALLS IN ELIZABETH, 31 DIE, 8 OF THEM IN 3 HOMES SET ON FIRE; EX-SECRETARY PATTERSON A VICTIM

ELIZABETH, N.J., Jan. 22—Former Secretary of War Robert P. Patterson and at least thirty other persons died at 3:45 p.m. today when an American Airlines Convair crashed at South and Williamson Streets in the South Elizabeth residential district. The accident occurred in thick fog and rain.

PATTERSON, BOOKED ON TRAINS, DECIDED AT LAST MINUTE TO FLY

Robert P. Patterson apparently changed his mind at the last minute in Buffalo yesterday and took the plane that crashed, resulting in his death, instead of returning to New York by train as he had originally contemplated.

He arrived in Buffalo yesterday morning to appear before Federal Judge John Knight in the case of the Schine Chain Theatres, Inc. His law firm, Patterson, Belknap & Webb, is associated with the Buffalo firm of Raichle, Tucker & Moore in arranging for the sale of theatres by the chain as the result of an anti-trust action.

He was a Republican and I a Democrat, but we met on the common ground of love of country and our personal relationship was such as to give me strength and warmth for the rest of my days. My personal loss is tremendous. Our country has lost a man who understood with all his mind and heart the true meaning of our form of government and our way of life and who was willing to fight for them with all the great gifts God gave him. . . . He was an American in the very best sense of the word.

—*Robert E. Sherwood*

As a private on the Rio Grande or as a kitchen policeman at Plattsburg, as a director of the mightiest military force that had ever been assembled or as an architect of the unification of the nation's armed services, Robert Patterson's effort and dedication were focused on his duty and his country.

—Ralph Hayes

I know of no man who gave more to the winning of World War II.

—Majority Leader Ernest W. McFarland

He was the perfect citizen, honest, courageous, self-sacrificing, and utterly sincere.

—General George C. Marshall

I don't think I ever met a man for whom I had higher admiration than for Bob Patterson.

—Harry S Truman

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Here was a man of superlatively high standards, complete integrity and boundless enthusiasm for whatever task he took in hand. No one whose privilege it was to know him is likely ever to forget the candor of his speech, the courage of his faith, the warm and glowing brightness of his friendship. He was a man who never dodged a responsibility, never refused to take on a hard job if it needed to be done. What he preached, he practiced. What he believed, he believed with heart and soul. He fought hard for every cause in which he enlisted, and the causes for which he fought were good and right.

Acknowledgments

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The Patterson Family, including The Honorable Robert P. Patterson, Jr., Mrs. Aileen Seldes, Ms. Susan Patterson, and Mrs. Virginia Montgomery for the loan of family photographs, newspaper clippings, memorial booklets, silver tray, army jacket, judicial robe, officer's map kit, portrait, and framed "Tributes to Robert P. Patterson"

Ms. Elizabeth Allen, Special Collections, Schaeffer Library, Union College, Schenectady, New York for photographs, newspaper clippings, 1912 issue of *The Garnet*, "Union Worthies," magazines, and pamphlets

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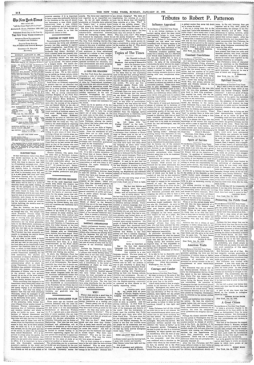
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*Fold-out facsimile of
New York Times Tributes,
January 27, 1952 at right ►*