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Shell man's motivation memo is straight from the Patton script

By Ed Crooks

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"Talent borrows, genius steals", the saying goes, but the leaked motivational e-mail sent to staff at the Sakhalin 2 gas and oil project is a salutary warning of the perils of appropriation.

Trying to stir up his managers and engineers, some of whom he suspected of "running the risk of becoming a team that doesn't want to fight and lacks confidence in its own ability", David Greer, deputy chief executive of Royal Dutch Shell's Sakhalin Energy Investment Company, borrowed heavily from the words of General George Patton.

In particular, he drew on the speech to the US 3rd Army, dramatised in a bowdlerised form in the film *Patton: Lust for Glory*, that was given by the general on the morning of the day before D-Day, June 5 1944.

General Patton delivered his words without notes on an English hillside to men about to risk their lives in the liberation of Europe.

Mr Greer used them in an e-mail about hitting targets for building a pipeline, albeit in the challenging conditions of Sakhalin Island off the eastern coast of Russia.

Mr Greer's declaration that "I despise cowards and play to win all of the time" is almost straight from the Patton script.

Several sentences are loosely adapted, with the word "Americans" replaced by the words "professionals" or "engineers".

A reference to the "champion marble player" that may have resonated with the childhood memories of young men in the 1940s is perhaps less likely to have struck a chord with adults in the 21st century.

Mr Greer, a longstanding Shell engineer, did at least avoid some of the most bloodthirsty passages from the general's speech.

"We're not going to just shoot the sons-of-bitches, we're going to rip out their living Goddamned guts and use them to grease the treads of our tanks," General Patton is reported to have said.

"When shells are hitting all around you and you wipe the dirt off your face and realise that instead of dirt it's the blood and guts of what once was your best friend beside you, you'll know what to do!"

That, like his warning "We don't want yellow cowards in this Army. They should be killed off like rats" might have been seen as taking the tough talk a little too far.

And General Patton's assurance to his troops that "You are not all going to die . . . Only two percent of you right here today would die in a major battle" might not have sounded comforting to the Sakhalin engineers.

Another of Mr Greer's most ringing phrases, "Lead me, follow me or get out of my way" is also from General Patton, who was himself adapting a 1776 quotation from Tom Paine, the radical.

The general, like other great leaders, has spawned a small industry of books such as *Patton on Leadership: Strategic Lessons for Corporate Warfare* and *Patton's One-Minute Messages: Tactical Leadership Skills of Business Managers*, claiming to let corporate executives in on his secrets.

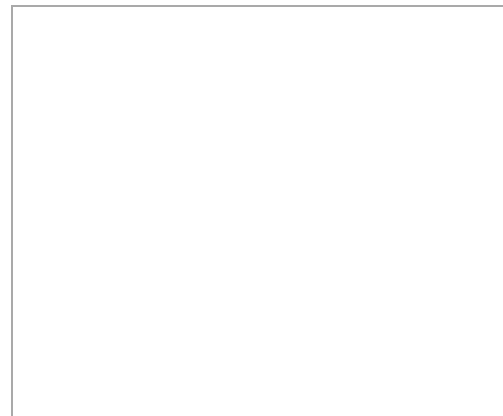
The publishers of *Patton on Leadership* suggest that "General Patton's leadership in battle is turned into the ultimate manual for victory".

Mr Greer's experience suggests that the parallels should perhaps not be drawn too literally.

However, Mr Greer's management style also has its supporters.

In a discussion about his memo on the FT's website, Mary Ann B wrote: "So he drew inspiration from Patton. Regardless, I find it inspirational.

"I, having worked for the company, can attest to how much of a good leader he is. One of those larger-than-life characters.



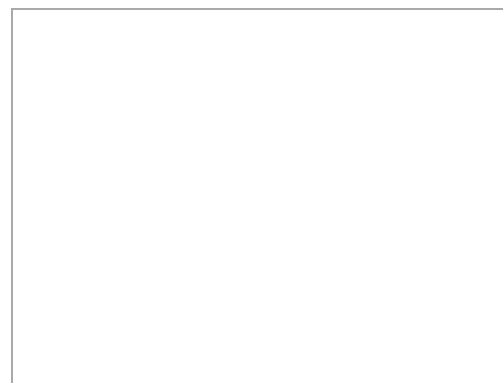
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"Boundless energy, charismatic, with a firm hand, brutally frank, highly committed and puts the people's welfare first."

A contributor signing himself Brian was also supportive, writing: "A pretty good memo, with a lot of heart in it."

"It seems a little too easy for those with cosy lives to poke fun at someone who leads a team in hard circumstances. Go take a look, via the web, at what they're building in Sakhalin."

However, another contributor, calling himself A Scotsman, was more cynical.

"Having been in the oil/gas industry for over 30 years, I can tell you this nonsense has been creeping in since the early 80s when oil companies started sending managers off on MBA and leadership type courses."

"Sad to say, that the quality of managers in the industry is now at an all-time low and it will get considerably worse as the few good guys remaining retire."

The irony of General Patton's career was that he did not get to lead the D-Day landings, having lost the confidence of Dwight Eisenhower, the supreme allied commander.

General Omar Bradley commanded the US army landing on the beaches of Normandy, and General Patton only followed him into France two months later.

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