

THE STORY OF GEN DWIGHT EISENHOWER

OVERRATED OR THE ONLY MAN FOR THE JOB IN WW2 ?????

THE GENERAL WHO BECAME PRESIDENT



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PART A

THE STORY OF GENERAL EISENHOWER - GENERAL INFORMATION ABOUT HIS MILITARY CAREER



This article is actually in three different sections. Rather than dividing this information into 4 separate shorter articles I have combined it into one rather long article. The three articles cover a lot of information about General Eisenhower while serving in the US Army. It does not cover any material after his release from the Army. As you will see, he was liked by some and disliked by some also. He was somewhat controversial in the eyes of some Allied Officers. Some of these articles may overlap and reference some of the same basic information. There are three parts. They are as follows:

- A. The Story of General Eisenhower (General Information about his Military Career)
- B. "I Don't Like Ike" (A guest writer for the War History Online) explains why.
- C. "I Still Like Ike" (A guest writer for the War History Online) explains why.

Speaking of Eisenhower, Field Marshal Lord Montgomery once said "Nice chap, no general." General George Patton once lamented that it was too bad that Eisenhower had no personal knowledge of war. General Omar Bradley would write that Eisenhower "had little grasp of sound battlefield tactics."

That might seem like some pretty harsh criticism considering the West tends to look back on Eisenhower as the man who led the Allies to victory in Europe. His iconic status was further cemented in history when he became president of the United States in 1952.

However, the historical facts would prove that Eisenhower was but a Lt. Col. at the start of 1941 and an officer who had never personally seen combat. Yet, that wouldn't stop him from getting the keys to one of the largest military forces the world has ever known.

HIS MEDIOCRE RISE TO POWER IN THE BEGINNING

Dwight D Eisenhower entered the halls of West Point in 1911 with a greater chance of becoming a football star than the Supreme Allied Commander in Europe. However, a football injury to his knee would not only end his football career but almost his military career as well. After graduating from West Point in 1915, his knee injury almost caused him to miss out on his commission as an officer in the Army.

Were it not for the intervention of West Point's chief medical officer, the world may never have heard of Dwight Eisenhower, to begin with.

He was given his commission and assigned to the 19th Infantry at Fort Sam Houston in Texas. After the United States joined World War I, Eisenhower was promoted to Captain and given orders to Camp Colt, Pennsylvania, where he would help train the newly formed Tank Corps.



West Point Graduation Picture -1915

While Eisenhower, like most young officers of his day, longed for deployment to war he would be denied. Eisenhower and his unit were given orders for a November 18 deployment to France, but the unfortunate timing of the November 11 armistice ensured Eisenhower would miss out on the entire war.

While Eisenhower would not have the opportunity to distinguish himself in combat, he was making quite a name for himself as a trainer, organizational expert, and strategic thinker. During the years in between the wars, Eisenhower would bounce through several commands and seemed well on his way to a fairly unremarkable military career.

He would, however, have the opportunity to serve closely with several high-ranking generals such as Gen. Douglas MacArthur as they prized his efficient administrative ability. As 1941 rolled around, Eisenhower was still a Lt. Colonel, but the tides were about to change as mediocrity would give way to an unprecedented rise through the ranks.

A LEADER OF GENERALS

Eisenhower would first get a chance to truly distinguish himself during the late 1941 Louisiana Maneuvers which were a series of training exercises designed to evaluate the United States military's readiness for war. At this point, a full bird Colonel, Eisenhower served as Chief of Staff of the Blue Army, and by the time the maneuvers had wrapped up Dwight D Eisenhower would finally be able to call himself General.

As a Brigadier General at the start of World War II, few still could've predicted that this man would surpass in rank the various Generals already ahead of him given his lack of combat experience.



Major General (2 star) Eisenhower in 1942

But what Eisenhower lacked in combat, he made up for with political intuition and the remarkable ability to work with the complex personalities that made up the military leadership of the Allies. Perhaps it was his time serving directly under the notoriously difficult MacArthur, but Eisenhower did not seem to be phased by the vast array of Generals who could only be described as the World War II equivalent of a diva.

In addition, the war would require a certain amount of diplomacy with heads of state. At one point, Eisenhower was so trusted that he was allowed to communicate with Joseph Stalin himself. In addition, the war would require a certain amount of diplomacy with heads of state. At one point, Eisenhower was so trusted that he was allowed to communicate with Joseph Stalin himself.

After briefly serving under Chief of Staff George C Marshall, these interpersonal abilities were recognized, and that along with his known organizational and administrative skills would propel him into power. The rest is history that we all know too well. He would become the commanding general of the European theater of operations in 1942, and before the war was over, he would be the Supreme Allied Commander of it all.

Being the person holding the keys to this mighty military machine at the moment of its victory was a good spot to be in.



Bradley, Eisenhower and Patton in Bastogne, Belgium, 1945.

MARCHING ON INTO HISTORY

After the war, Eisenhower was far and above widely viewed as a national hero. And while the allied generals who served with Eisenhower respected his abilities as a politician and administrator, they still wouldn't pull their punches when it came to evaluating his military capacity. Field Marshal Lord Alanbrooke would record in his journals as of late 1942 that as a military General, Eisenhower was "hopeless. He submerges himself in politics and neglects his military duties, partly... because he knows little if anything about military matters."

American Admiral John Hall who helped land the 1st Division on Omaha Beach would write that Eisenhower "was one of the most overrated men in military history."

While history rightly looks kindly upon the effort and leadership abilities of Gen. Eisenhower, it can't ignore the fact that his contemporaries of his day thought very little of his ability to command in the field. Perhaps one might make the case that these men known to be military divas of a sort were just having a tough time swallowing the pill that the man who just a few years prior was a Lt. Col. with no combat experience was now their boss.

Then again, history could also make the case that only a man such as Eisenhower could've led these various personalities to victory in the greatest war the world has ever seen. But Eisenhower appeared to live just fine with the criticism as Supreme Allied Commander and President of the United States is not too bad of a resume to go on one's gravestone.

The rest is up to lovers of history to decide for themselves.



Winston Churchill and General Dwight D Eisenhower, 1944

MILITARY OFFICES OCCUPIED

Commanding General of US Army Europe	1942-1945
Military Governor of the US Occupation Zone of Germany	1945
Chief of Staff of the US Army	1945-1948
Supreme Allied Commander Europe (NATO)	1949-1952

NOTES:

Promoted to lieutenant colonel in 1936, Eisenhower began to clash with MacArthur on military and philosophical topics. Opening a rift that would last the remainder of their lives.

Eisenhower's effective date as commander of US Forces, European Theater of Operations was June 25, 1942. Less than a year earlier, he had been an obscure lieutenant colonel. At dinner on the evening of his appointment, Eisenhower told Mamie that he would be returning to London and that this time it would probably be for the duration of the war. She asked, "What post are you going to have?" He grinned and responded, "I'm going to command the whole shebang."

The cadets of the United States Military Academy, West Point, are intimately twined with the country's history. The graduating class of 1915, the class the stars fell on, was particularly noteworthy. Of the 164 graduates that year, 59 (36%) attained the rank of general, the most of any class in History. Although Dwight Eisenhower and Omar Bradley, both five-star generals, are the most recognizable, other class members contributed significantly to the Allied victory in World War I, and World War II and played key roles either in the post-war U.S. military establishment or in business and industry after World War II, especially in the Korean War and the formation of NATO.

For more than half a century, these men exerted tremendous influence on the shaping of modern America, which remains substantial to this day. Individually, the stories of these military and political leaders are noteworthy. Collectively, they are astonishing. West Point, 1915 explores the achievements of this remarkable group.

PART B

REASSESSING GENERAL DWIGHT EISENHOWER'S MILITARY CAREER

WAS "IKE" AS GOOD AS WE HAVE BEEN LEAD TO BELIEVE?

WHAT DO HIS CRITICS SAY AND WHY?



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General Dwight David Eisenhower is best remembered as the military leader who led Allied forces in Europe to victory in World War II. According to Pulitzer-Prize-winning historian T. Harry Williams, the popular view of General Eisenhower's military career was as, "the friendly, folksy, easy-going soldier who reflects the ideals of a democratic and industrial civilization and who cooperates easily with his civilian superiors."

His successful 1952 and 1956 presidential campaigns - run with the amiable moniker of "I like Ike" - gave him a populist, grandfatherly political image.

The New York Times obituary for Eisenhower asserts:

[He] was not a dashing battlefield general nor a masterly military tactician, [but] as President he governed effectively through the sheer force of his popularity among average Americans of both major parties

It is hard to find critical assessments of Eisenhower as a military leader or as a politician. Praises such as “confident,” “brilliant,” and “a hero of our time, the real thing, the soldier of democracy” quickly appear when researching his name on the Internet. Eisenhower biographer Stephen Ambrose, who penned no fewer than five books about his subject, concedes that Eisenhower, “proved to be outstanding at public relations” and that, “Eisenhower manipulated the press for his purposes ... he was more aware of the importance of the press, and better at using it than any other public figure of his day.”

That skill is still evident online.

There is a seepage of revisionist views of Eisenhower’s public persona however, some of which can even be ferreted out of the many favorable biographies, but they only bubble up here and there for the methodical armchair historian. These alternative opinions of Eisenhower reveal the lesser-known facts about how much of his military success was due to political machinations.

After graduating from West Point (61 out of 164 in his class), Eisenhower’s good fortune began early in his military training when he attended the Army’s Command and General Staff School in 1925. Military historian Robert Bateman maintains that Eisenhower, “had a minor advantage over his peers: he had [George S.] Patton’s complete notebook ... Now that alone is not enough to prove anything,” Bateman observes, but “conceivably Eisenhower, a man whose grades placed him only among the top third of his class at West Point, could have developed a sudden academic flair ... still, somehow the plodding student of 1915 became the number one graduate in the same rote-memorization program he found so stultifying” at West Point.

It took 20 years for Eisenhower to rise from the rank of First Lieutenant to Lieutenant Colonel and he spent 16 years in miscellaneous administrative duties that included recruitment, staff work, and as a football coach.

In 1935, Eisenhower was assigned to the Philippines where he served as a military adviser to the Manila government and as chief military aide to General Douglas MacArthur. It was from here that his meteoric rise to power took off. Journalist Marquis Childs notes that Eisenhower “became a friend of President Manuel Quezon and during his frequent weekends on the presidential yacht, his skill at bridge and poker stood him in great stead.”

Upon leaving Manila, President Quezon awarded Eisenhower the Distinguished Service Cross of the Philippines. Eisenhower’s charm and his keen eye for social opportunities served him well. “He developed a political awareness and a thorough understanding of what it took to survive in the higher reaches of the military and political jungle of the 1930s,” according to Carlo D’Este. Marquis Childs, the author of Eisenhower: Captive Hero, writes that Eisenhower was seemingly, “shot out of a cannon from complete obscurity to a position at the very top, where he spoke as an equal with kings and prime ministers and presidents.

In politics, as President Franklin Roosevelt often said, there are no accidents. Eisenhower’s relationship with General MacArthur was a pivotal point in his astonishing rise to power. However, Eisenhower’s insolence for MacArthur is recorded in his 1954 diary: “I just can’t understand how such a damn fool could have gotten to be a general.”

In December of 1939, Eisenhower left the Philippines as a Lieutenant Colonel.

This is a good place to step back and review a timeline for his military career:

In late 1940, Eisenhower was appointed Chief of Staff of the Third Military Division; four months later he was promoted to Colonel and made Chief of Staff of the Ninth Army Corps.

In June of 1941, he was appointed to Chief of Staff of the U.S. Third Army and by September he was a Brigadier General.

On February 16, 1942, he was made Assistant Chief of Staff of the War Plans Division. In June of that year, Eisenhower was given command of the European Theater of Operations. By then he was dining with Winston Churchill twice a week.

In July 1942, he was awarded three stars of a Lieutenant General, and in February of 1943 - three years from the time he was a Colonel - Eisenhower became a full General.



Franklin D. Roosevelt, General Eisenhower, and General Patton in Castelvetro.

Ten months later, although he had never commanded troops on a battlefield or experienced warfare firsthand, he was appointed Supreme Allied Commander in the European Theater of Operations.

It was in late 1941 that Eisenhower was brought to the attention and direction of General George Marshall (one observation of their relationship reads, “General Dwight Eisenhower was the closest any soldier ever came to being George Marshall’s protégé.”)

Eisenhower’s association with Marshall opened many doors including one to the White House. Just after the attack on Pearl Harbor, Eisenhower accompanied Marshall who had been summoned to Washington to meet with President Roosevelt and British Prime Minister Winston Churchill. Author D’Este again emphasizes that “with Eisenhower, it was all about relationships and none was more important than his association with Winston Churchill

MARSHALL PROMOTED EISENHOWER AHEAD OF 366 SENIOR OFFICERS and sent him to London. Although he had barely heard of Eisenhower six months earlier, and Eisenhower had never served in battle, Marshall gave Prime Minister Churchill the files of three officers, including Eisenhower’s, to consider for heading up American military operations in Europe. According to Marquis Childs, “Churchill is reported to have felt that Eisenhower would be more cooperative and even more susceptible to Churchill’s powers of persuasion than the other two generals.”

Writer Tom Carson observes that “The myth that Eisenhower was plucked from obscurity by Chief of Staff George C. Marshall for high command after Pearl Harbor is only true insofar as he was unknown to the public.” Carson asserts that Eisenhower had been:

A cagy Army careerist ever since West Point, cultivating higher-ups in a position to finagle plum assignments for him and making himself indispensable to both John J. Pershing (his World War I predecessor) and Douglas MacArthur (his World War II Pacific doppelgänger). No wonder George S. Patton’s nickname for him was ‘Divine Destiny.

Upon his arrival in England, Eisenhower was charged with communicating war news to an anxious America. He had an intuitive sense of his public relations responsibilities, then and in his future political endeavors. Eisenhower recruited media and publicity impresario Harry Butcher, head of the CBS operations in Washington, DC, to be a member of his inner circle. Butcher later recounted, “When we talk of public relations, I have a feeling that I will gain a reputation as an expert in this field. I’ll be getting the credit for Eisenhower’s good sense, for he is the keenest in dealing with the press I’ve ever seen, and I have met a lot of them.

Another member of General Eisenhower’s inner circle was Kay Summersby, who was an ambulance driver for the British Mechanized Transit Corps until she was assigned as Eisenhower’s driver when he arrived in London. She quickly became his secretary, serving until November 1945. In her book, *Past Forgetting My Love Affair with Dwight D. Eisenhower*, she wrote of Eisenhower’s political savvy during the war. [\(See more on this story in Article # 255\)](#)



Winston Churchill and General Dwight D. Eisenhower, 1944.

Churchill's fondness for the American commander was best revealed at the dinner parties. Although Eisenhower normally was the lowest-ranking general present and despite the rigid protocol that rules Government and military circles in England, the P.M. invariably placed Gen. Eisenhower in the highest chair of honor, to his immediate right.



General Dwight D. Eisenhower addressed American paratroopers before D-Day.

There are varying assessments of General Eisenhower's command of Allied forces during the war - most are highly favorable. Many historians credit him with keeping the diverse Allied leadership united despite a wide range of egos and professional competence. For this writer, an assessment of Eisenhower's combat tactics is best left to expert military strategists. However, consideration should be given to those historians and military leaders who have reservations about General Eisenhower's role as Supreme Allied Commander.

In their book *Masters at the Art of Command*, Martin Blumenson and James L. Stokesbury write, **"A surprising number of professional soldiers and military historians give General Dwight D. Eisenhower failing grades as a commander in World War II."**



Eisenhower in a jeep in Normandy orchard, 1944.

A frustrated British Field Marshall Lord Alanbrooke, Chairman of the British Chiefs of Staff Committees, once fumed that, *"Eisenhower, though supposed to be running the land battle, is on the golf links at Rheims - entirely detached and taking practically no part in the running of the war."* Alanbrooke asserted that Eisenhower was:

At a loss as to what to do, and allowed himself to be absorbed in the political situation at the expense of the tactical. I had little confidence in his ability to handle the military situation.

British Field Marshall Bernard Montgomery, Commanding General of the Allied Ground Forces in Normandy, complained that Eisenhower, *"had not the experience, the knowledge, the organization, or the time ... he was out of his depth and in trying to do this he neglected his real job on the highest level."*

Montgomery and Alanbrooke were not alone:

General of the Army Omar Bradley believed Eisenhower, *"had little grasp of sound battlefield tactics"*.

Admiral John Hall, the commander of Amphibious Force 'O', which landed the 1st Division at Omaha Beach, wrote that Eisenhower, *"was one of the most overrated men in military history"*.

"It appears to me that Eisenhower is acting a part," General George S. Patton opined, *"He is nothing but a Popinjay - a stuffed doll."*



People gathered along Washington Street to welcome General Dwight D. Eisenhower.

After the Normandy invasion, when it came to adopting a "broad front" strategy to bleed the Germans dry or seizing on the British plan of focusing on a direct path to Berlin, *Montgomery said that Eisenhower played the politician when it came to decisive military action: "He had no plan of his own ... Eisenhower held conferences to collect ideas; I held conferences to issue orders."*

Eisenhower often mixed political angles into his military strategies. As biographer Jean Edward Smith notes: *"Without seeking the approval of the Combined Chiefs of Staff, the British war cabinet, or Washington, he had installed a new government in France ... he outmaneuvered FDR and the State Department so skillfully that he left no fingerprints ... Ike moved by subtlety and indirection. His amiable personality and avuncular enthusiasm concealed a calculating political instinct that had been honed to perfection"*.

John Stuart Mill once wrote, *"Popular opinions are often true, but seldom or never the whole truth."* A life-size General Dwight Eisenhower scaled down from icon to a man of distinction - *albeit one possessed by a relentless ambition for rank, fame, and power - is necessary since real people make history.*

PART C

WHY I STILL LIKE IKE

THE RAPID RISE OF GENERAL EISENHOWER

War History Online recently published "I Don't Like Ike" by guest blogger Peter B. Gemma. Here, Ray Panko of the University of Hawaii responds.

In general, nothing is surprising about a long period of no advancement followed by rapid promotions. Armies grow massively in war, then shrink to a ghost of their former size. During interwar periods, advancement is glacial. As wars approach, massive growth brings rapid growth in rank. When the United States went to War in 1917, its total Army force was a mere 133,000 men. By 1918, the Army had grown to four million, and the Army had trained 200,000 new officers to lead the troops.

Then, peace came again, and with it, rank stagnation. In the 1920s and much of the 1930s, the Army's size again hovered around 135,000. When the war started in Europe, the U.S. Army still only had 190,000. During this long period of stasis, it took about 13 years to be promoted from first lieutenant to captain. Even people like Jimmy Doolittle, who had set many flight records, won major air races, and earned a doctorate from MIT, went into the Reserves because of poor advancement prospects. Ben Kelsey, who was in charge of developing new USAAC aircraft (including the P-38), was a lieutenant. That Eisenhower advanced slowly in rank needs no further explanation.

As the United States Army began its rebuilding program for World War II, it held a series of larger and more complex field exercises. This allowed it to train its sergeants and lieutenants. However, General Marshall was personally focused on a different need—the need to select his top officers [Perry]. Some of the existing officers were good, others not. Beyond examining existing generals, Marshall was assessing lieutenant colonels and colonels to find the men with the potential for high rank. He used the field exercises to identify candidates for rapid advancement. Marshall had a black book for taking notes. He showed it to a reporter who asked if it existed.

In September 1941, just three months before Pearl Harbor, the two largest maneuvers took place in Louisiana and Part of Texas [Perry]. The vast "battlefield" covered 34,000 square miles, and the two Armies that faced off had 350,000 troops and 50,000 vehicles. The exercise pitted General Benjamin Lear's Second Army (Red) against Lt. Gen. Walter Krueger's Third Army (Blue). Lear's Red Army would attack Krueger's Blues to capture and occupy Louisiana. Lear had Col. George S. Patton lead the initial combined arms attack. The Reds crossed the Red River on September 15, led by Patton's tanks.

Krueger had surrounded himself with brainy but obscure assistants [Perry]. His chief of staff was Lt. Col. Dwight David Eisenhower. Marshall was not too sure about Eisenhower, but Krueger assured him that Ike was a "brilliant planner and tough soldier." Eisenhower created an innovative plan to flank Patton. Krueger implemented the plan, stopping Patton. The umpires declared victory for the Blues.

Eisenhower demonstrated innovativeness in many ways during the Louisiana Maneuvers. He realized that ground lines of sight were not enough for rapidly moving troops. He brought a Piper Cub to the exercises to show how eyes in the sky could change how troops maneuvered. Although he was a licensed pilot with 600 hours of experience, he played passenger in a Piper J-3 Cub (although he often took the controls). To teach his staff how valuable the high view was, he had his assistants take to the air as well.

Eisenhower was now in Marshall's little black book. Three months later, just days after Pearl Harbor, new Brigadier General Eisenhower was called to Washington. In a few months, he was in London, planning the invasion of North Africa. Two years later, he was the supreme allied commander in Europe.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION CONCERNING THE 5-STAR RANKS

Note that the Army rank of 5 Star General is only specifically handed out during wartime during the most extreme of circumstances as it was to the men listed below during both World War 2 and the Korean War (their awarding date (Date Of Rank) follows their name).

As such, you'd be hard-pressed to find a living, breathing 5-star general serving in today's military (the last Five-Star rank was held by General Omar Bradley until he died in 1981). Take note of the chart below which shows only 1 day difference in the Date of Rank (DOR) of the first 7 Five Star Officers of WW2 eliminating any doubt as to who was the Senior Officer.

Eisenhower was one of the 9 5 Star US Generals/Admirals produced in The United States Military Forces. The 5 Star ranks were created on December 14, 1944, and 7 of the 9 Generals to attain that position were promoted in December of 1944.

The 9 are listed below with their DOR (date of rank). **This indicates that General Eisenhower was the 6th ranking 5 Star General in WW2.**



<u>NAME</u>	<u>POSITION</u>	<u>DATE OF RANK</u>	<u>PLACE OF BURIAL</u>
Admiral William D. Leahy	Fleet Admiral	Dec 15, 1944	Arlington National Cemetery
General George Marshall	General of the Army	Dec 16, 1944	Arlington National Cemetery
Admiral Ernest J. King	Fleet Admiral	Dec 17, 1944	US Naval Academy, Annapolis, MD
General Douglas MacArthur	General of the Army	Dec 18, 1944	Norfolk, Virginia
Admiral Chester Nimitz	Fleet Admiral	Dec 19, 1944	Golden Gate, California
General Dwight D. Eisenhower	General of the Army	Dec 20, 1944	Abilene, Kansas
General Henry (Hap) Arnold	General of the Army & AF	Dec 21, 1944	Arlington National Cemetery
Admiral William F. Halsey	Fleet Admiral	Dec 11, 1945	Arlington National Cemetery
General Omar Bradley	General of the Army	Sep 20, 1950	Arlington National Cemetery

The United States Air Force did not become a service of its own until 1947. General Hap Arnold assumed command of the AF and was its only 5 Star General.

NOTE:

George Washington holds the highest rank in U.S. military history, "General of the Armies of the United States," (note the plural use of "armies") which was awarded posthumously. General John "Black Jack" Pershing was awarded the title "General of the Armies of the United States," but wore only four stars. By an act of Congress (Joint Resolution of Congress, [Public Law 94-479](#)) in 1976, George Washington, was said to **"have precedence over all other grades of the Army, past and present."**



PLEASE UNDERSTAND THAT EVEN THOUGH THIS INFORMATION HAS BEEN TAKEN
FROM WEBSITES & OTHER SOURCES THAT APPEAR TO BE AUTHENTIC, I CAN NOT ENSURE THAT ALL THE
DATA IN THIS ARTICLE IS ACCURATE AND CORRECT.