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Book Review by Douglas Porch of:
Eisenhower: A Soldier's Life written by
Carlo D'Este

Porch, Douglas



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411 Dyer Road / 1 University Circle
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group of one of the battalions of the 315th Regiment, 79th Division. The most interesting part of the book describes in detail their activities, most of which were carried out by small teams of two or three men. Their duties required them to be out in front of the battalion, sometimes in jeeps, sometimes on foot. They sought out the enemy, led patrols of riflemen (he calls them linesmen), and occasionally served as artillery spotters. They kept in touch with battalion headquarters by radio. This was an extremely dangerous military occupation, and casualties were high.

The 79th Division was part of the First Army. Campbell's material on the Normandy breakthrough and the dash to the German border relies heavily on the divisional history, with instances of his personal experiences along the way.

In September 1944, he was wounded in the leg. His account of his hospitalization and treatment is a good example of the excellent medical care given its wounded by the U.S. Army. After a period of recuperation in England, he returned to his unit in February 1945, just in time for the final push into Germany. He notes the surliness of the German civilians, who were beaten but unbowed.

After the war he had a variety of occupation duties in Germany and Czechoslovakia, processing prisoners and DPs (displaced persons) and once as an MP directing traffic at a crowded junction. Throughout his service overseas, Campbell showed interest in the people and countries that he encountered. He did not drink, gamble, or consort with loose women.

The story of his long and complicated trip home shows the difficulty and complexity of moving such vast masses of troops through a devastated countryside to ports and shipping. The U.S. Army was truly a remarkable organization in its ability to train, transport, supply, and care for troops in foreign lands. Those who criticize the long tail and small bite of the army ground forces should keep that in mind.

This interesting and well-illustrated memoir strengthens the case of those who argue that the U.S. Army in World War II, despite its many deficiencies, performed well, in large part because of citizen soldiers like Roger Campbell.

Earl A. Reitan

Normal, Illinois

Eisenhower: A Soldier's Life. By Carlo D'Este. New York: Henry Holt, 2002. ISBN 0-8050-5686-6. Maps. Photographs. Notes. Sources and select bibliography. Index. Pp. 848. \$35.00.

At first glance, Dwight D. Eisenhower would appear to fall into the category of men who have greatness thrust upon them. Born on the wrong side of the tracks in small town America, denied the chance of combat in 1918, propelled into a marriage that became distant, at times strained, Eisenhower endured the decelerated promotion of the interwar army. On the out-

break of World War II, he shot up the promotion ladder, largely because he seemed to be in the right place at the right time. His friend Mark Wayne Clark was instrumental in organizing his repatriation from Manila in 1939 and placing him on General Leslie McNair's promotion list to general in 1941. Colonel Eisenhower's easy manner and frank assessments of U.S. weakness made him a particular favorite with reporters covering the 1941 maneuvers. As a result, Eisenhower, together with Mark Clark and George Patton, soon became a household name in America. His fortuitous assignment to head the Observer Group in London made him the man on the spot to lead Torch, the invasion of North Africa, in November 1942.

Even "Ike's" most devoted admirers never ranked him among World War II's great generals. Indeed, he made enough mistakes, especially in the Mediterranean in 1942–43, to have been sacked several times over. The British liked rather than respected him, while many on his own side, including George Patton, accused him of being insufficiently attentive to U.S. interests in the wartime alliance. Eisenhower shared in full measure the strategic shortsightedness of Chief of Staff George Marshall's desire to rush Sledgehammer, the invasion of northwest Europe, even though Marshall was convinced that it would fail.

But as Carlo D'Este's biography makes clear, Eisenhower did not simply stumble fortuitously into supreme command. On the contrary, the ambitious, intelligent, and politically savvy Eisenhower spent a lifetime cultivating important personalities. His rise to prominence was facilitated by his technique of finding "the strongest and ablest man. I forget my own ideas and do anything in my power to promote what *he* says is right." The "strongest and ablest man" in the interwar army was Douglas MacArthur, who Eisenhower served for most of the decade of the 1930s, both in Washington and the Philippines. In MacArthur's service, Eisenhower honed "his ability to find common ground between competing priorities and people," his greatest asset, in D'Este's estimation. This trait, combined with a robust "old boy" network anchored on West Point and Leavenworth, a practically "religious" dedication to the success of the Anglo-American alliance, Churchill's support for Eisenhower as the "constitutional monarch" of the Western Alliance, and the fact that Marshall regarded him as a placeholder until the Chief of Staff could take over command of Sledgehammer, kept Eisenhower in place despite his obvious shortcomings.

D'Este is not blind to Eisenhower's human frailties—a remarkably insecure man, he craved recognition, especially from his old boss MacArthur, who instead was quick to include Eisenhower and Marshall among the "faceless bureaucrats" responsible for the loss of the Philippines. Eisenhower was extraordinarily thin-skinned when it came to criticism, frequently lashed subordinates with his volatile temper, and held non-Americans in barely veiled contempt. Unlike Patton, however, the diplomatic Eisenhower had the good sense to express his negative opinions in private. D'Este nevertheless rejects the accusation that Eisenhower had an affair with Kay Somersby, if for no other reason than that the Allied Commander's Versailles-like exist-

tence left him no private moments to think through strategic problems, much less carry on an illicit assignation with his driver. Nevertheless, he concedes that Somersby offered Eisenhower much-needed emotional support, and that her presence at Ike's side on unit tours and in high-level meetings invited gossip that caused his wife Mamie much distress.

D'Este dismisses criticism of Eisenhower's deal with Vichy French Admiral Jean Darlan in November 1942 as "contrived hypocrisy," even though it suggests that Eisenhower lacked the political instincts for high command, at least at this stage of the war. Eisenhower also nurtured an intense, and according to D'Este irrational, dislike of Jacob Devers, although the Sixth Army Group commander counted among his better subordinates. At the same time, Eisenhower salvaged the career of his friend Mark Clark, to whom he owed a great debt, despite a poor showing at Salerno and Monte Cassino. D'Este argues that it was Eisenhower's indifference to logistics, rather than his failure to set strategic priorities, that compromised Allied ability rapidly to capitalize on the German collapse in Normandy after August 1944. Montgomery criticized Eisenhower's excitability, and his tendency to micromanage operations from afar by telegrams, lightning visits to the front, and conferences. The December 1944 surprise sprung on the U.S. Army in the Ardennes was the final straw for Ike's numerous British critics, who had already declared Eisenhower's "broad front" strategy in the autumn/winter of 1944–45 wasteful and unimaginative.

While *Eisenhower: A Soldier's Life* covers ground familiar to many readers, this biography showcases the strengths that one has come to expect from Carlo D'Este—meticulous research, an intimate knowledge of the interwar U.S. Army which he lauds for its tolerance of eccentric and headstrong personalities, and a detailed command of Allied operations in World War II. Not surprisingly, Patton's biographer continues to see the Third Army commander as one of the U.S. Army's great fighters and Eisenhower's willingness to go out on a limb to protect his old friend from the consequences of his serial indiscretions as one of Ike's greatest contributions to Allied victory in World War II.

Douglas Porch

Naval Postgraduate School
Monterey, California

General Patton: A Soldier's Life. By Stanley P. Hirshon. New York: Harper Collins, 2002. ISBN 0-06-00982-9. Maps. Photographs. Notes. Bibliography. Index. Pp. xxii, 826. \$34.95.

Rewriting a legend is a difficult venture for any biographer, and Professor Stanley Hirshon offers an antiheroic view of a military icon in *General Patton: A Soldier's Life*. His view of the man is dark: His Patton is an anti-semitic, an inciter of war crimes, and an obsequious careerist who spared no effort in advancing himself. He scoffs at Patton's military study, and quotes

Dwight David Eisenhower (14 October 1890 – 28 March 1969), also widely known by his nickname "Ike", was an American soldier and politician. He served as Supreme Commander of the Allied forces in Europe during World War II, and was later elected the 34th President of the United States of America. We were depending on considerable assistance from the insurrectionists in France. Throughout France the Free French had been of inestimable value in the campaign. Without their great assistance the "Eisenhower: A Soldier's Life" is a great biography of the first 52 years of Ike's life followed by a compelling analysis of the European theatre during World War II. It is unfortunate D'Este was unable to pursue Eisenhower through his presidency; as a result, this book proves no more or less than an invaluable study of Eisenhower's early years and an informative review of his military career. Overall rating: 4 stars ...more. flag 3 likes · Like · see review. View 1 comment. Mar 30, 2018 David Shaffer rated it it was amazing. Carlo D'Este is a wonderful World War II Biographer and this bo...