



2013-103

Jean Edward Smith, *Eisenhower in War and Peace*. New York: Random House, 2012. Pp. xx, 950. ISBN 978-1-4000-6693-3.

Review by Grant W. Jones, Ashford University (capitalist1776@yahoo.com).

Distinguished biographer<sup>1</sup> Jean Edward Smith (Marshall Univ. and prof. em. Univ. of Toronto) begins his latest work with the assertion that “Dwight Eisenhower remains an enigma” (xi). There is much truth in this. Smith describes a man of principle who was also a political pragmatist, a man of remarkable self-control who yet struggled (and often failed) to keep his temper in check. He argues for an Eisenhower who devoted decades to the study of the military art, yet whose “understanding of the battlefield was abstract and academic” (394).

Smith concentrates on his subject’s professional career as soldier and politician, Supreme Allied Commander in Europe and president of the United States. He also treats in detail the man’s personal life, including his relationships with the three most important women in his life: his mother Ida; wife Mamie; and “confidant” Kay Summersby.

In reminiscing about his father, John S.D. Eisenhower observed that “[there] were really two Ikes,”<sup>2</sup> sharply distinguishing between the two halves of his career. When “General Ike” returned from Europe in November 1945, he transformed into the political Ike. Smith clarifies Eisenhower’s achievements by dispelling two common misapprehensions. Despite much scholarship on this, many nonspecialists still view Eisenhower as both a “do-nothing” president and an unknown quantity in the Army prior to Pearl Harbor.

In the last decade or so, historians have cleared the cobwebs from Eisenhower’s early career, showing that he was in fact well known and respected in the old, prewar Army. US Army Chief-of-Staff Gen. George C. Marshall summoned him from Fort Sam Houston to Washington a week after the attack on Pearl Harbor. Ike was on the short list for high command because he could bring

a unique set of skills to War Plans. In addition to his recent experience in the Philippines, he had served directly with the Army’s senior leadership for the past twenty years. For six years he had worked with Fox Conner and George Moseley, the intellectual kingpins of the interwar Army. He was with Pershing for two years, and had served with MacArthur for seven. Most recently he had worked for two of the most gifted troop commanders on active duty, Kenyon Joyce and Walter Krueger. He understood the nuance of command at the highest level, as well as the reality of translating orders into action in the field. Above all, he had learned to look at problems from the standpoint of high command. (177-78)

Many years later, after he had left the presidency, Ike specifically recalled his debt to Conner: “I served as his brigadier exec for three years in Panama and never enjoyed any other three year period as much” (65). Conner spent much time mentoring Eisenhower on military history and science. Mamie, however, found it difficult to live under the primitive conditions in Panama and returned home to Colorado for the birth of their son John, well aware that for Ike “Nothing came before his duty. I was forced to match his spirit of personal sacrifice as best I could” (68). The daughter of a successful businessman, Mamie became accustomed to the hardships of an Army wife and was dedicated to her husband’s career. At many duty stations, they presided together over “Club Eisenhower,” opening their home to Ike’s colleagues. Oddly, Smith omits a telling episode in the Eisenhowers’ early days of marriage. When he was ordered to detached duty, Ike informed Mamie that he would be gone for a few weeks. When she protested, he responded, “There’s one

1. Winner of the 2008 Francis Parkman Prize for *FDR* (NY: Random House, 2007).

2. *General Ike: A Personal Reminiscence* (NY: Free Press, 2003) xii.

thing you must understand. My country comes first and always will. You come second.”<sup>3</sup> These early, trying times they endured together cemented a marriage and lifelong partnership.

In the 1920s, Eisenhower attended the Command and General Staff School (CGSS) at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, and the US Army War College in Carlisle, Pennsylvania. Smith devotes just a couple pages to this phase of his career. He does not mention that in 1930 Ike attended the US Army’s Industrial College in Washington to study wartime mobilization. Near the end of his life, Eisenhower stated that his time at the CGSS was “a watershed in my life.”<sup>4</sup> Indeed, attending and doing well at these military schools is still a milestone in any officer’s career.

Despite Eisenhower’s prewar successes, he was a better politician than military strategist:

Ike’s political dexterity stood in marked contrast to his grasp of military strategy. On strategic issues he remained a prisoner of the doughboy dogma of John J. Pershing and George Marshall that all-out-attack-all-along-the-line was the way to win wars. That was the lesson the Americans (but not British, French, or Germans) took from World War I. It was propagated at Leavenworth and the War College, and Ike was a disciple, as were most American officers. George Patton and Douglas MacArthur were the exceptions .... The very qualities that made Eisenhower successful as supreme commander militated against his success on the battlefield. As a military statesman, Ike’s ability on team play, his willingness to compromise, and his ability to reconcile diverse interests were unique assets. But as a battlefield commander, where decisiveness is essential, Eisenhower’s preference for consensus became a liability. (394)

Smith believes Eisenhower’s Broad Front strategy, in particular, was a shortcoming in his military leadership and that he should instead have supported British Gen. Bernard Montgomery’s proposal in summer 1944 to advance on a narrow front. After the breakout from the Normandy beachhead, the Allied armies rapidly drove toward the German border and Eisenhower’s forces quickly outran their supply lines. His strategy was to move his armies abreast toward the Rhine River, in the conviction that clearing German forces west of the river and rectifying Allied supply problems were necessary before operations east of the Rhine could commence. Montgomery argued that, with the German Army on the run, his northernmost army group should get supply priority, particularly for fuel. He thought a single dagger thrust into the German heartland would end the war. Smith provides an extended argument in favor of Montgomery’s views.<sup>5</sup>

The author also treats at some length Ike’s professional and personal relationship with Kay Summersby, a member of the British Motor Transport Corps assigned to be his driver and assistant in England. Their close rapport was a matter of much gossip. Smith judges that “there is no question they were in love” (315). As in many areas of Ike’s life, his true feelings for Summersby may never be known, but it is unlikely that he ever entertained the idea of leaving his wife for her. He wrote Mamie affectionate letters throughout the war. In November 1945, Ike wrote Summersby a rather cold and formal “Dear Jane” letter, effectively ending the relationship. Smith quips, “FDR would have been incapable of writing such a missive, and George Patton would have said a warmer good-bye to his horse” (443). Wartime romances of officers with other women were hardly uncommon. But after the guns fell silent, the men returned home to their wives and careers.

Smith dedicates some 250 pages to the Eisenhower presidency. He takes a more thematic approach here, in contrast to his chronological handling of Ike’s military career. He highlights Eisenhower’s deep involvement in domestic, military, and foreign policy. This was no caretaker president who allowed subordinates to make policy. While Eisenhower has been criticized for moving too slowly on civil rights, Smith praises his efforts to facilitate desegregation (710–13). His deployment of troops to enforce integration of Little Rock’s Central High while avoiding any escalation of violence is one example of moderate and wise

---

3. Geoffrey Parret, *Eisenhower* (NY: Random House, 1999) 65.

4. Dwight D. Eisenhower, *At Ease: Stories I Tell to Friends* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1967) 200. Recent work credits the Leavenworth schools with developing the officers who led the Army to victory in the Second World War: see Peter J. Schifferle, *America’s School for War: Fort Leavenworth, Officer Education, and Victory in World War II* (Lawrence: U Pr of Kansas, 2010), reviewed at *MiWSR* 2012-006.

5. On the “Broad Front” versus “Narrow Thrust” controversy, see G.E. Patrick Moore, *Eisenhower versus Montgomery: The Continuing Debate* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1996).

policy: “Eisenhower took the most divisive issue to confront American society since the Civil War and moved it toward a solution with as little rancor as possible” (729). Smith portrays Ike as firmly in control of his administration and determined to steer between the political extremes of both parties.

When Joseph Stalin died early in his first term as president, Eisenhower took the opportunity to seize the initiative in foreign policy. In his remarkable address, “The Chance for Peace” (16 April 1953), he asserted that Soviet aggression had caused the Cold War and that the free world would counter that aggression with force if necessary, as in Korea. But, he also offered an olive branch: if the new Soviet leaders were to cease their subversion of free governments in Asia and Europe, the United States would welcome arms reduction negotiations that would benefit both sides. In a humane reflection that showed him to be the son of a devoutly religious mother, Ike observed that “Every gun that is made, every warship launched, every rocket fired signifies, in the final sense, a theft from those who hunger and are not feed” (575). Far from a naïve statesman, he realized such appeals would fall on deaf ears in the Kremlin and was likely speaking for domestic consumption in any case. However, both his parents were deeply religious, and, as Ike put it, for himself and his siblings, “Mother was by far the greatest personal influence on our lives” (12). While in the military, Eisenhower did not belong to any church, but as president he “appreciated religion’s political resonance” (11) and joined the Presbyterian Church. Further explication of the balance between Eisenhower’s religious beliefs and his hard-nosed political pragmatism would shed welcome light on the origins of his ideals and policies.

This appealing and useful biography does suffer from a certain imbalance in coverage. Missing altogether is the execution of Pvt. Eddie Slovik for desertion as well as the Battle of the Huertgen Forest, two of the most controversial events of Eisenhower’s time as Supreme Allied Commander. Smith sketches Ike’s early life before entering West Point in only a single chapter, but spends two on the 1952 presidential campaign. At certain points, the author’s political bias intrudes, as in his characterization of “the calcified wing of the Republican party, which continued to live in the shadow of Calvin Coolidge and to see Communists under every bedstead” (581).<sup>6</sup> But these are relatively minor flaws in an otherwise excellent book that will please and inform a wide audience.

---

6. For valuable recent work on the development of the “right” during the 1940s and 1950s, which debunks many stereotypes, see Kimberly Phillips-Fein, *Invisible Hands: The Businessmen’s Crusade against the New Deal* (NY: Norton, 2009), and Jennifer Burns, *God-dess of the Market: Ayn Rand and the American Right* (NY: Oxford U Pr, 2009).