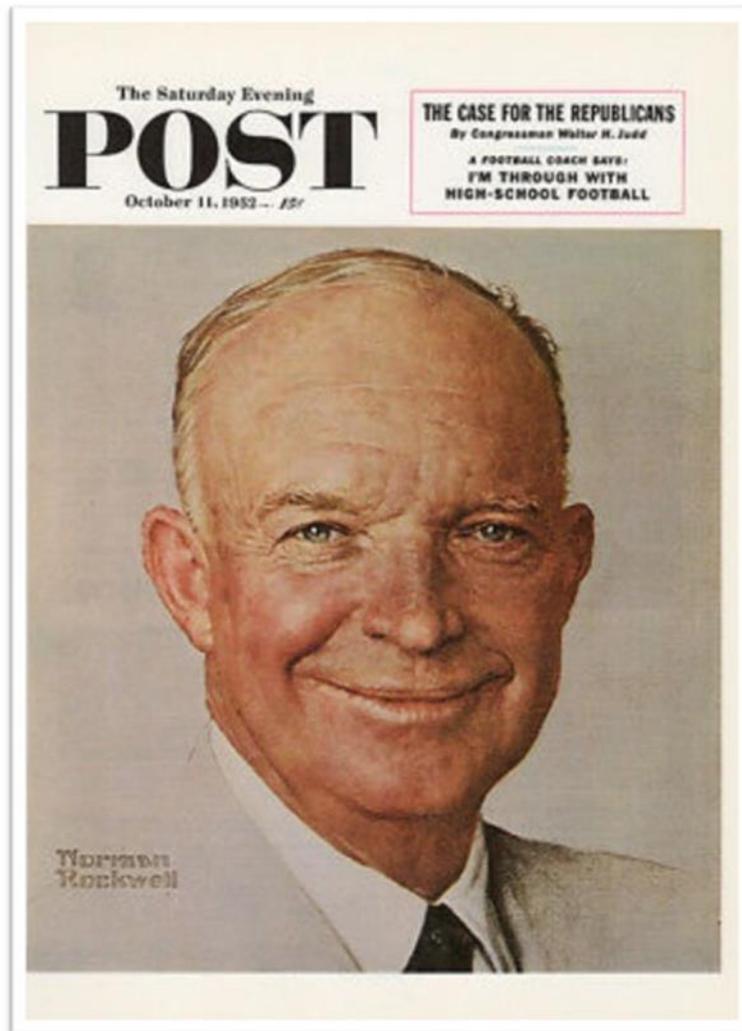


FEATURE

Remembering President Eisenhower



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By Doug Glant

Dwight David Eisenhower died fifty years ago today, 28 March 1969.

Norman Rockwell's wonderful portrait of Eisenhower appeared on the cover of *The Saturday Evening Post* just one month before the wildly and deservedly popular ["I Like Ike"] Eisenhower defeated Adlai Stevenson II by an electoral margin of 442-89 on 4 November 1952

(four days before my tenth birthday) to become our 34th president.

I joyfully watched the election returns on our 12" black & white Packard Bell television with my dad and my great-uncle Lou Wagner (a decorated WWI veteran). Ike is easily the favorite

president of my seventy-six years (Truman and Reagan are runners-up).

Historian Paul Johnson wrote that Eisenhower “was the most successful president of the 20th century, leading his nation for eight years of peace and prosperity.” I absolutely concur. Ike presided over an America (20 January 1953 until 20 January 1961) that I have missed ever since; it was “very heaven” to be young in Ike’s America.

I will write about three Dwight Eisenhowers: Ike the Warrior, Ike the President, and Ike the Man.

The Warrior

Seventy-five years ago, in the early Spring of 1944, Eisenhower, in his role as Supreme Commander, Allied Expeditionary Forces, was in London designing Op. Overlord, the invasion of Nazi-occupied France, which would occur on 6 June 1944.

It all seems so easy and obvious now, and, in truth, by mid-1944 (a year after the Red Army had broken the German advance on the Eastern Front at Stalingrad, after the attainment of U.S. air and naval dominance in the Pacific, and after the Allied success at Normandy), it was clear that the Axis powers could not win.

But it was far from certain that they couldn’t inflict enough misery and death to survive with a negotiated peace, both Hitler and Hirohito living on to do more evil (yes, Hirohito did survive, President Harry Truman wisely deciding to spare the Emperor’s life, but only with Hirohito and Japan under the surprisingly sensitive and sensible, though firm control and direction of General Douglas MacArthur).

Again, hindsight is easy, and very few know how close Eisenhower came to give up his command that long ago March of 1944. The demands of fighting a war against a brutal foe, as well as satisfying the monster-egos of men such as FDR, George Marshall, Winston Churchill, Joseph Stalin, British Generals Brooke and Montgomery, and Charles de Gaulle.

Here is what Eisenhower wrote in his diary on 22 March:

“During the two months since I arrived in this theater, our problems have been divided into two general categories, the first of which applies to the responsibilities of the combined chiefs of staff, and the second to the responsibilities devolving on this headquarters. In the second category are all such problems as the determination of proper methods of attack, including the use of special weapons, and various expedients for developing satisfactory port facilities. Training, organization, assignment of personnel, and insuring adequacy of supply have all engaged the attention of this and lower staffs.

In general, satisfactory progress has been made in all problems of this type [italics mine]. The matters that have really caused us trouble are those in which only the combined chiefs of staff can make final decisions.

The principal ones are the resources to be allocated to Overlord. Another is the organization and command of the air forces, and a third is the arrangements for dealing with political matters, more especially as far as France is concerned.

Quite troubling are the messages coming back and forth from Washington, a sudden argument over the use of the word “command.” This whole matter I had considered settled a week ago, after many weeks of argument.

This did not seem important at the time the drafts were first drawn up, but as long as the question was raised I have recommended to General Marshall that a word be adopted that leaves no doubt in anybody’s mind of my authority and responsibility for controlling air operations of all three of these forces during the critical period of Overlord.

If a satisfactory answer is not forthcoming, I am going to take drastic action and inform the combined chiefs of staff that unless the matter is settled at once I will request relief from this command [italics mine]. (P.S. At a chief-of-staff meeting this a.m. Wednesday, March 22, I was told the word “direction” was acceptable to both sides of the house. Amen!).”

No wonder Ike drank 15 cups of coffee and chain-smoked four packs of unfiltered cigarettes a day during the war.

On 5 June Eisenhower wrote a message to be delivered should the Normandy invasion fail:

“Our landings in the Cherbourg-Havre area have failed to gain a satisfactory foothold and I have withdrawn the troops. My decision to attack at this time and place was based upon the best information available. The troops, the air, and the navy did all that bravery and devotion to duty could do. If any blame or fault attaches to the attempt, it is mine alone.”

The note was tucked into Ike’s wallet and only survived because one of Ike’s aides asked for it when Ike was about to throw it away a few weeks after D-Day.

In the event, at a cost of 2,500 casualties, mainly at Omaha Beach, Eisenhower’s men had gained a striking victory. More than 23,000 airborne troops had dropped into Normandy the night of 5-6 June, and 57,500 Americans and 75,215 British and Canadian troops had come ashore during the day. More than 156,000 Allied soldiers had breached Hitler’s much-vaunted Atlantic Wall.



At the Dwight D. Eisenhower Memorial, I wish to see a simple, life-sized bronze replica of the justly famous 5 June 1944 photo of Ike with men of the 101st Airborne Division (“Screaming Eagles”) paratroopers.

It was the largest seaborne invasion in history. The message Ike read to announce Overlord’s success gave all the credit to his staff, to battle commanders and troops, none to himself.

And here is what that great man announced on V-E Day, the day of victory in Europe, the defeat of Nazi Germany and the culmination of a vast enterprise of hard work, heroism, and unspeakable tragedy:

“The mission of this Allied force was fulfilled at 0241, local time, 7 May 1945.” He later said, *“We had no local victory celebrations of any kind, then or later.”*

It’s the least we should do to preserve Dwight David Eisenhower’s wonderful memory.

The President

Dwight Eisenhower had waged war as his stern father would have waged it, with a cold and unrelenting ferocity. He would govern America as his gentle and humble mother would have, shrewdly, but with patience and remarkable good will.

Though the people revered him, Ike was always underestimated and underrated by the intelligentsia, and, sadly, still is, at least on the Left.

His organizational genius and steady leadership defined the decade of the 1950s. He had many challenges during his eight years as president, perhaps most daunting, setting the terms of the Cold War (“a deterrent of massive nuclear retaliatory power”).

Here is just a partial list of other matters Ike dealt with so adroitly: ending the Korean War, dealing with school desegregation, Senator Joseph McCarthy, getting Congress to approve using U.S. forces to defend Taiwan against Mao’s China if

necessary, building the interstate highway system, creating Atoms for Peace, untangling the mess that the British, French, and Israelis created when they seized the Suez Canal in 1956 (though some of us think that empowering Egyptian strongman Gamal Abdul Nasser was a worse option), Sputnik, Fidel Castro, battling through two heart attacks, the shooting down by the Soviets of U-2 pilot Francis Gary Powers, and appointing five men to the Supreme Court, including Chief Justice Earl Warren.

Years later, looking back, Ike said that his biggest mistake was “putting that dumb son of a bitch Earl Warren on the Court.” In dealing with all of this, even with his significant health problems, Eisenhower was not at all passive nor merely responsive and certainly not the simpleton that so many in the press and on the Left took him to be but was hands-on, engaged, and strategically minded during those critical Cold War years.

He left office in January 1961 much beloved and with great dignity. Even the Left applauded his apt warning about **the dangers of the “military-industrial complex.”**

In retirement he lived a quiet life with Mamie, his wife of 52 years, until his death at age 78 on 28 March 1969.

The Man

I held enormous regard for Dwight Eisenhower when he was alive; it has continued to grow every year since his death. Here are the views of four men, all of them Democrats, concerning Ike.

Fred Greenstein began a biography of Eisenhower fully expecting to expose a mediocrity but ended with great respect for Ike, so he titled his book, *The Hidden-Hand Presidency*.

The elegant and highly-esteemed Alistair Cooke (longtime host of “Omnibus” and “Masterpiece Theatre”) spoke of Ike’s “reassuring candor and decency.”

I befriended Ike’s authorized biographer, Stephen Ambrose, after Steve appeared on my 1990s radio talk show several times; the first was in the booth with me to promote his great 1996 Lewis and Clark book, *Undaunted Courage*. He told me he was stunned, as an FDR/Truman Democrat, to be chosen as Eisenhower’s official biographer, but Ike said he didn’t care about Steve’s politics, having much admired Ambrose’s early biographies of Civil War generals Upton and Halleck.

Like Fred Greenstein, Steve grew to have great respect for Dwight Eisenhower, as a man, as a general, and as a president. He also developed an enduring personal fondness for Ike which happened with almost anyone who ever met him.

Also, from none other than Adlai Stevenson III, the son of the man whom Ike twice defeated for president.

In 1998, in Ketchum, Idaho, an old high school pal, retired Air Force captain Kip Ingham invited me to dinner with his wife and their friends Angela Hemingway (Jack’s widow) and Adlai III. After dinner and a fair amount of excellent red wine, Adlai told us how wonderfully Eisenhower had treated the Stevenson family after the 1952 and 1956 elections, including rolling out the red carpet for young Adlai at U.S. embassies when Adlai toured South America in the 1950s. Remarkably, he finished by saying that all these years later, especially given the complexities of the Cold War, he was sure that Ike, not his father, had been “the right president for those times.”

Finally, perhaps the finest tribute of all, from Ronald Reagan, a man who was still an FDR Democrat when Eisenhower was elected president. U.S. presidents are given their choice of pictures to be hung in the White House. One of the first things the newly installed President Reagan did was to replace a portrait of Woodrow Wilson in the Cabinet Room with the one I proudly present below. It was my first visit to the White House (February 1981).



Books

There are many fine books about Eisenhower; here are a few of them: Stephen Ambrose's authorized biographies; Ike's own *Crusade in Europe*; *Eisenhower* by Louis Galambos; *The Hidden-Hand Presidency* by Fred Greenstein; *The Age of Eisenhower* by William Hitchcock.

Editor's Note:

Doug Glant was born in Seattle in 1942 and graduated from Lakeside School before attending Stanford University. In 1974, he became President CEO of his family's scrap metal business Pacific Iron & Metal. He has been active in the Anti-Defamation League, the American Jewish Committee, and Young Presidents Organization, as well as writing and teaching about U.S. popular culture.