



Eisenhower in War and Peace

By Jean Edward Smith

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NAMED ONE OF THE BEST BOOKS OF THE YEAR BY
The Christian Science Monitor • *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*

“Magisterial.”—*The New York Times*

In this extraordinary volume, Jean Edward Smith presents a portrait of Dwight D. Eisenhower that is as full, rich, and revealing as anything ever written about America’s thirty-fourth president. Here is Eisenhower the young dreamer, charting a course from Abilene, Kansas, to West Point and beyond. Drawing on a wealth of untapped primary sources, Smith provides new insight into Ike’s maddening apprenticeship under Douglas MacArthur. Then the whole panorama of World War II unfolds, with Eisenhower’s superlative generalship forging the Allied path to victory. Smith also gives us an intriguing examination of Ike’s finances, details his wartime affair with Kay Summersby, and reveals the inside story of the 1952 Republican convention that catapulted him to the White House.

Smith’s chronicle of Eisenhower’s presidential years is as compelling as it is comprehensive. Derided by his detractors as a somnambulant caretaker, Eisenhower emerges in Smith’s perceptive retelling as both a canny politician and a skillful, decisive leader. He managed not only to keep the peace, but also to enhance America’s prestige in the Middle East and throughout the world.

Unmatched in insight, *Eisenhower in War and Peace* at last gives us an Eisenhower for *our* time—and for the ages.

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“[A] fine new biography . . . [Eisenhower’s] White House years need a more thorough exploration than many previous biographers have given them. Smith, whose long, distinguished career includes superb one-volume biographies of Grant and Franklin Roosevelt, provides just that.”—*The Washington Post*

“Highly readable . . . [Smith] shows us that [Eisenhower’s] ascent to the highest

levels of the military establishment had much more to do with his easy mastery of politics than with any great strategic or tactical achievements.”—*The Wall Street Journal*

“Always engrossing . . . Smith portrays a genuinely admirable Eisenhower: smart, congenial, unpretentious, and no ideologue. Despite competing biographies from Ambrose, Perret, and D’Este, this is the best.”—*Publishers Weekly* (starred review)

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“Dwight Eisenhower, who was more cunning than he allowed his adversaries to know, understood the advantage of being underestimated. Jean Edward Smith demonstrates precisely how successful this stratagem was. Smith, America’s greatest living biographer, shows why, now more than ever, Americans should like Ike.”—George F. Will

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About the Author

Jean Edward Smith is the author of the highly acclaimed *FDR*, winner of the 2008 Francis Parkman Prize; *Grant*, a 2002 Pulitzer Prize finalist; *John Marshall: Definer of a Nation*; and *Lucius D. Clay: An American Life*. A member of the faculty at the University of Toronto for thirty-five years, and at Marshall University for twelve, he is currently a senior scholar in the history department at Columbia.

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ONE

Just Folks

I'm just folks. I come from the people,

the ordinary people.

-dwight d. eisenhower

dwight d. eisenhower was born in Denison, Texas, on October 14, 1890.¹ He was the third of seven sons born to David and Ida Eisenhower, and the only one born in Texas. The Eisenhowers lived in Denison from October 1888 to March 1892, and it was the economic low point of their married life. David worked for ten dollars a week as an engine wiper for the Missouri, Kansas, and Texas (Katy) Railroad, and the family lived in a soot-encrusted shanty near the tracks.

David's bout with poverty was self-inflicted. His Eisenhower ancestors had been prosperous farmers, first in the Odenwald region of Germany, south of Frankfurt, then in Pennsylvania, then Kansas. The first Eisenhower to arrive in America was Hans Nicholas, who landed in Philadelphia in 1741, part of the wave of Protestant emigration from Europe to the Quaker colony of Pennsylvania. The family flourished amid the fertile soil of the Susquehanna Valley. Originally Lutheran, they married into the River Brethren, a doctrinaire offshoot of the Mennonites, embraced the faith, and quickly emerged as leaders of the flock.¹ Jacob, David's father (and Ike's grandfather), became the preacher and a patriarch of the sect, attracting large audiences to his sermons, which he delivered in German-

the plattdeutsch vernacular that was still spoken in most households.

In 1878, the River Brethren sold their holdings along the Susquehanna and moved to Kansas, lured by the promise of cheap land, deep soil, and the opportunity to plant their community in the virgin countryside. They took the train from Harrisburg, filling fifteen freight cars with their farm equipment and belongings, including a dozen heavy-duty eight-horse wagons new to the prairie. They also brought a half-million dollars in cash (roughly \$9 million in current dollars), the product of a thrifty lifestyle and successful land sales in a rising eastern market.² That combination of thrift and capital, of diligence and experience, plus a generous helping of communal support, ensured success where others failed. As an early Kansas history put it, the River Brethren were "one of the most complete and perfectly organized [colonies] that ever entered a new country."³

The colony settled in Dickinson County along the fertile banks of Smoky Hill River, smack in the middle of Kansas and twenty miles west of the geographic center of the United States, an area that would become one of the most productive agricultural regions in the world.⁴ Jacob purchased a quarter section (160 acres) of prime farmland and erected a large house that also served as a Sunday meeting place for the brethren. He built a huge barn reminiscent of the Dutch barns in Pennsylvania, added to his dairy herd, and constructed a wooden windmill.

The River Brethren thrived in their new setting. Jacob acquired more land, helped found a successful local creamery, and established a bank in the nearby village of Hope. When his children married, he provided each with a quarter section of tillable land as a homestead and two thousand dollars in cash, more than enough to get started if they wished to follow in his footsteps.

David Eisenhower was fifteen when his parents moved to Kansas. Unlike his siblings he had no interest in farming and secured his father's permission to study engineering and mechanics at Lane College, a fledgling educational institution founded by the United Brethren in Christ in nearby Lecompton. With a faculty of ten part-time instructors and two hundred students, the school had a modest curriculum emphasizing religious studies and vocational training with a smattering of the liberal arts. David enrolled in September 1883, at the age of twenty, and the following year met a captivating young woman from Virginia, Ida Stover, who had entered Lane to study music.

Ida's background was similar to David's. Her ancestors had emigrated from Swabia (near Stuttgart) a decade before the Eisenhowers, settled initially in Pennsylvania, then in the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia. Among the first Germans to reach the Shenandoah, they prospered tilling the soil and soon accumulated substantial land holdings. Ida was born at Mount Sidney in 1862, one of eleven children, and was baptized in the Lutheran faith. Her parents died when she was young, and she was raised by her maternal grandparents. Blessed with boundless confidence, she left home to attend high school in Staunton, and then taught for two years in a one-room schoolhouse near Mount Sidney. When she turned twenty-one, Ida came into an inheritance of a thousand dollars left by her father. Several of her brothers had already moved to Kansas, and

she used part of the money to join them. In June 1883, she settled in Lecompton with her brother William, a successful local minister. That autumn she entered Lane.⁵

Ida and David made an attractive couple, but in many ways they could not have been more different. She was optimistic, perky, and, in the words of one biographer, "as bright as the Kansas sunshine."⁶ He was solemn, introverted, and stubborn-as humorless and self-absorbed as Ida was vivacious and outgoing. They were married on September 23, 1885, David's twenty-second birthday, and Ida spent the last of her inheritance, some \$600 (roughly \$10,000 today), on a new ebony piano built by Hallett and Cumston in Boston, a possession she treasured for the rest of her life.

Neither David nor Ida completed their studies at Lane. With his father's support, David opened a general store in Hope, using the proceeds from his wedding present as capital.⁷ The village of Hope, located twenty-eight miles southeast of Abilene, was the commercial center for the River Brethren. The main line of the Topeka, Salina, and Western Railroad had just reached the settlement, and the opportunity for growth appeared assured. Because David had no business experience, he formed a partnership with Milton Good, a young man roughly the same age who was a clothing salesman in Abilene and who was familiar with the retail trade. There were two apartments above the store. David and Ida lived in one, and the Goods in the other.

According to Eisenhower legend, Milton Good was a scoundrel who absconded with the firm's cash, leaving David helpless to pay the store's bills. The business failed, and David was forced to travel to Denison to find work. That is the account David and Ida told, and which the Eisenhower sons dutifully passed on.⁸

That is not what happened. Milton Good did not abscond with the money, and the store did not fail. It had been a rocky partnership from the beginning-the partners were temperamentally mismatched, and David was far from easy to work with. After eighteen months they dissolved the partnership and David bought out Good. He borrowed \$3,500 from his father, pledged the store's inventory as collateral, and used the money to purchase Good's share of the business. Three days later Jacob Eisenhower canceled the mortgage, in effect converting the loan into a gift.⁹

Milton Good's place in the store was taken by David's younger brother, Abraham Lincoln Eisenhower, and the firm was rechristened Eisenhower Brothers. Abraham was a River Brethren preacher and practicing veterinarian, and was as genial as David was somber. With Abraham's spark the business continued, although David grew increasingly dissatisfied. He lost interest in the store and walked away from it in October 1888. The business was renamed A. L. Eisenhower & Company, and David drifted off to Denison, leaving Ida, who was six months pregnant, and their two-year-old son, Arthur, in Abraham's care.¹⁰

David's decision to quit the store and abandon his pregnant wife is incomprehensible. He had no job lined up or profession on which to fall back, and he disdained the farm life at which the Eisenhowers excelled. In fact, the decision is so inexplicable that David could never own up to it, and neither parent ever revealed the truth to their children. Out of pity for David, those who knew the truth-the Eisenhower family and others-also kept the secret to themselves, complicit, as it were, in a myth that had no substance. As a result, Ike and his brothers died believing the family's straitened circumstances were due to Milton Good's treachery rather than their father's instability.¹¹

Ida remained in Hope with Abraham until her second son-

christened Edgar, for Edgar Allan Poe-was born, and in April 1889 moved the family to join David in Denison. Eighteen months later Dwight was born. By this time, the family had hit rock bottom. David was

twenty-seven, Ida a year older. Of his own volition, David had squandered a substantial inheritance. The Eisenhowers lived in what was little more than a shack beside the tracks. Aside from Ida's piano (which had been left in Hope), they had no assets other than their clothes and a few household possessions, and absolutely no prospect of doing better.

The family came to the rescue. In 1891, after the death of his wife, Jacob Eisenhower visited his eldest son in Denison and was visibly shaken by the poverty in which he and Ida were living.¹² The Belle Springs Creamery, which Jacob had helped found, and which had become one of the largest and most successful enterprises in Dickinson County, had recently built a new plant in Abilene.¹³ Chris Musser, David's brother-in-law (he had married David's sister Amanda), was the manager of the plant, and Jacob prevailed upon him to find a position for David. Musser offered him a job as a refrigeration mechanic at "less than \$50 a month."¹⁴ That is essentially what David was earning in Denison, but the job was a considerable step up from scrubbing the grime from Katy locomotives, and he would be back in the bosom of the family. At Ida's urging, he accepted immediately. In March 1892, after three and a half years of self-imposed exile, David and Ida returned to Abilene. His total assets, which he carried in his pocket, amounted to \$24.¹⁵

David and Ida rented a small frame house a few blocks from the creamery. It had no plumbing or electricity, and sat tight by the neighbors with no yard or garden. The Eisenhowers remained there for seven years while three more sons were born: Roy in 1892; Paul in 1894 (he died in infancy); and Earl in 1898. Five boys in a cramped house made life nearly impossible. Again the family came to the rescue. In 1898, David's brother Abraham sold his veterinary practice (he had sold the store several years earlier) and moved west as a religious missionary. Abraham owned a large two-story frame house set on a three-acre lot, complete with a barn and fruit orchard. He agreed to sell the property to David for a thousand dollars. Jacob advanced the money, and the title was put in Ida's name—evidently a precaution against a recurrence of David's wanderlust.¹⁵ That is the house in which the Eisenhower boys grew to maturity, and which is now the focal point of the Eisenhower Presidential Library and Museum in Abilene.

The Abilene of 1898 was not the Abilene of Wild Bill Hickok and the Chisholm Trail.² The famous cow town of the 1860s and '70s had faded into a sleepy Kansas backwater. The streets were still unpaved, the sidewalks still made of wooden planks, and the scent of the horse apples still lay over the main street. But the saloons and dance halls were gone. Abilene had but one policeman, who patrolled not for local crime, of which there was none, but for transient hustlers and others of ill repute. Churches, hymn singing, and picnics by the riverbank provided the town's excitement. Abilene had become a citadel of Protestant fundamentalism, the Kansas cradle of Prohibition. It was one of many buckles on the Bible Belt: a wholesome town of 3,500 where respectable citizens did not profane the Sabbath with baseball or football. The politics were populist, but the lifestyle was as staid and proper as on Boston's Beacon Hill. It was the American heartland.

Eisenhower was eight when the family moved to their new home. "I have found out later we were very poor," he recalled, "but we didn't know it at the time."¹⁶ David worked twelve hours a day, six days a week at the creamery, but his meager salary scarcely covered basic necessities. Ida ran the household, assigned chores to the children, and managed what became a three-acre garden plot. There were two cows to provide milk, a flock of chickens for eggs, ducks, pigs, and a horse to plow the garden and pull the family wagon. Except for flour, sugar, salt, and kerosene for their lamps, the Eisenhowers were largely self-sufficient. The boys wore hand-me-downs, performed odd jobs around town for spending money, and grew to manhood unencumbered by the complexities of urban life.

Religion loomed large in the Eisenhower household. The day began with David reading scripture to the family, there were prayers before each meal, and after supper the family gathered again to pass the Bible

from hand to hand as each boy read a passage out loud. "This was a good way to get us to read the Bible," said Ike's younger brother Milton (who was born in 1899). "I am not sure it was a good way to help us understand it."¹⁷

None of the Eisenhower brothers shared their parents' religious ardor. By the time Ike left for West Point he had read the Bible through twice. He was familiar with it and often quoted passages from memory, but he rarely took it literally. His vocabulary was punctuated with profanity that would make a mule skinner blush, and throughout his military service he never joined a church or attended Sunday service.¹⁸ As president he allowed himself to be convinced that the United States was a Christian country, joined Mamie in the Presbyterian faith, and urged that the words "under God" be inserted in the pledge of allegiance.¹⁹ Like FDR, a nominal Episcopalian, Eisenhower appreciated religion's political resonance.

For their part, David and Ida left the River Brethren and began the search for religious certainty in more personal terms. David found it in the Great Pyramid of Giza, which he reproduced in a six-by-ten-foot scale drawing and which he believed corroborated the prophecies in the Bible. Ida turned to a more austere and primitive sect known as Bible Students, which in 1931 adopted the name "Jehovah's Witnesses."²⁰ Ike's brother Edgar remembers meetings in their house. "Everyone made his own interpretation of the Scripture lessons. Mother played the piano, and they sang hymns before and after each meeting. It was a real old time prayer meeting. They talked to God, read Scriptures, and everyone got a chance to state his relationship with Him."²¹ David attended Bible Students meetings with Ida for a number of years and then dropped out, retreating into personal mysticism.

After his misadventure in Denison, David was chastened and bitter. He became ever more sullen and introspective—something of a stranger to his children, with a quick and fearful temper. David never played with his sons, never took them hunting or fishing, did not swim with them, showed no interest in who their friends were, and rarely inquired about their activities. "He was an inflexible man with a stern code," said Edgar.

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