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Eisenhower: The White House Years

by Jim Newton

Reviewed by Major Josiah Grover, Instructor of Military History, United States Military Academy

In 2009, the Eisenhower Presidential Library revealed the prolific historian and Eisenhower biographer Stephen Ambrose fabricated interviews he claimed to have had with the former president. Ambrose's biography of Dwight D. Eisenhower had long been regarded as the definitive biography because of the author's unique access to the 34th president. The discovery of Ambrose's deception has made his biography suspect for both scholars and leaders seeking to understand Ike, while opening the door for new and more genuine appraisals of the former president. Jim Newton offers one such appraisal with a new biography of Ike in *Eisenhower: The White House Years*. The author of the previous work, *Justice for All*, a historical account of Chief Justice Earl Warren, is the latest Eisenhower biographer seeking to rehabilitate the image of a supposed caretaker president. Contrary to contemporary critics like Marquis Childs, who portrayed Eisenhower as "indecisive and lazy, stodgy and limited . . . a weak president," Newton argues Ike was "certain, resolute, and, though respectful of his advisers, commandingly their boss." In offering the thesis that President Eisenhower was an active leader in his administration, Newton builds upon the work of diplomatic historians and political scientists, notably Fred Greenstein, and does so in a very sympathetic fashion. As the title suggests, however, the author delivers not so much a biography of President Eisenhower but a biography of his presidency.

The story begins with Ike's childhood and passes rapidly through adolescence, tracing his path to the United States Military Academy, where Ike was both average and memorable. "An assignment in Texas followed graduation, where he met Mamie Doud. They married, welcomed and then lost a son, and decamped for Panama, where Eisenhower served under the tutelage of mentor General Fox Connor. That apprenticeship on the perimeter of the American empire kept Ike out of troop command in World War I. In the interwar period he served a second apprenticeship under the gimlet eye of General Douglas MacArthur. Service with MacArthur in Washington and later in the Philippines made Eisenhower wary of theatrics. When war broke out in 1941, General George Marshall selected the young general to head the War Plans Division on the Army Staff and then, ultimately, to lead Allied forces to victory in Europe.

The author covers all of this background rather quickly, driving the narrative toward Eisenhower's presidential years, which comprise 85 percent of the biography. The theme throughout is Ike's search for a "middle way," an attempt to steer policy between perceived extremist positions on the political right and left. Seeing as *The Middle Way* is the title of Eisenhower's presidential papers, it is an easy assertion to accept, though there are holes in every story.

Newton gives cautious credit to Ike for his civil rights record, asserting that by supporting Attorney General Herbert Brownell, the president was practicing a calibrated strategy for easing racial tensions in the fullness of time. A more critical biographer might interpret Ike's record on civil rights as an abdication of presidential responsibility to enforce the law.

Other domestic topics include Eisenhower's appointments to the Supreme Court, the administration's assertion of executive privilege, and the president's refusal to confront Senator Joe McCarthy during the height of the Red Scare, where Newton asserts "nothing was inevitable, even Ike's break with McCarthy." Eisenhower did confront accusations of socialism by his own party for supporting the highway bill and the construction of the St. Lawrence Seaway, underscoring the fears of communism that were rampant in the 1950s. The internal politics of the administration are addressed in detail, including the close partnership between the president and John Foster Dulles, as well as the more complicated relationship Ike forged with his young vice-president, Richard Nixon.

The administration's foreign policy receives more in-depth treatment, from the development of a national security strategy centered on massive retaliation in the Solarium exercise to the conduct of covert operations against Iran and Guatemala. Irritated by French military misdirection during World War II, Ike rebuffed French pleas for assistance in Indochina in 1954, refusing to use American combat power to underwrite a "frantic desire of the French to remain a world power." Eisenhower employed strong-arm diplomacy against allies France, Britain, and Israel during the 1956 Suez crisis and a more conciliatory diplomacy with hostile China over the straits of Taiwan. The most important diplomatic relationship was between Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev and Eisenhower, a relationship that may have eased Cold War tensions had it not fallen apart in the wake of the 1960 U2 incident. Interestingly, an administration that sought to influence global affairs, led by a famous general, deployed American troops only once on a peace-keeping mission in Lebanon. The litany of international affairs drawing American attention over the course of the Eisenhower presidency supports Newton's argument for a reimagining of the 1950s as a deceptively eventful decade, kept under control by a president who actively worked to keep the nation on an even keel.

According to the author, President Eisenhower found an effective middle way and won the United States the peace it enjoyed over the course of his presidency. He made progress on advancing civil rights, supported his able subordinates, contained the growth of the American defense establishment, and did it all with little loss of life. *Eisenhower: The White House Years* is well written and researched, with sufficient endnotes and a full bibliography. Jim Newton draws from a wide variety of sources, including the Eisenhower Library and interviews with Ike's son, John Eisenhower. Newton also makes use of newly discovered documents to explore the drafting and evolution of the president's famous farewell speech. The biography is sympathetic to Eisenhower throughout—where others have criticized Ike's record on civil rights, Newton offers

cautious credit; where others have been critical of Ike's generalship, Newton is complimentary; where others have indicted Eisenhower's relationship with wartime driver Kay Summersby, Newton is inclined to forgive. Despite these partialities to his subject, the book is well worth reading. It is suitable for scholars and senior members of the defense establishment. As a single volume treatment of the Eisenhower presidency, it is invaluable, especially for understanding the context of decisions made in both foreign relations and domestic policy.



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The Age of Airpower

by Martin Van Creveld

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Ever since the Wright brothers demonstrated the possibility of flight in a heavier-than-air aircraft, airpower has become a standard feature of military operations, especially those conducted by the United States. Any number of air forces have been the subject of numerous works, especially those of Germany in World War II and its American and British opponents. Noted military historian, critic, and professional controversialist Martin van Creveld has now tackled the subject in a broad way with his latest work, *The Age of Airpower*.

Van Creveld takes the long view in a largely chronological fashion, beginning with the first employment of aircraft in a military manner, starting with the Italians in the Italo-Turkish War of 1912. The first major test of the potential of airpower was a World War I (WWI) challenge that the air forces of all the major combatants passed. Once it became clear airpower was here to stay, the major military powers turned to the question of how to incorporate air forces into their existing military. In many cases, incorporation meant the creation of an independent air service, closely linked to the emerging theories regarding the criticality of command of the air proposed by such thinkers as Giulio Douhet.

To his credit, Van Creveld does not limit his discussion to regular air forces. He includes extensive narration and commentary on the development and expansion of naval-air and its most common expression, the aircraft carrier. Here the author concentrates the majority of his attention on the two preeminent powers in this arena—Japan and the United States.

Van Creveld provides a fairly conventional discussion of the conduct of World War II and the air warfare, including naval operations. He fails, however, to note one of the great ironies of airpower theory and practice. The original airpower theorists proposed the use of aircraft and strategic bombing to avoid a repeat of the costly attritional warfare that was a hallmark of WWI. In actual practice, though, air warfare became the ultimate example of attrition warfare. Germany and Japan both lost control of the air because the Allies were able