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Martin Blumenson

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Eisenhower Then and Now: Fireside Reflections

MARTIN BLUMENSON

Dwight D. Eisenhower emerged resplendent from World War II. Handsome, engaging, charismatic, the soldier who had gained victory in Europe, he was America's most widely accepted hero of the conflict. Seven years later, his election to the presidency confirmed his status. Today, almost half a century after the struggle, how does his military reputation fare? Is he still regarded as a great war leader? Does he project a proper model for commanders in the 1990s?

In the minds of the general public, that convulsive conflict has all but receded from memory. Except for infrequent commemorations recalled by newspapers on anniversary dates, the great crusade has faded. Names and visages of proud achievers, mighty and brilliant men, once spoken of everywhere and recognized instantly, have slipped into virtual obscurity. Jacob Devers, Courtney Hodges, and William Simpson are examples of outstanding commanders whose exploits thrilled the nation but who are now rarely mentioned and hardly known.

Given this context, Eisenhower is an exception. He is still clear and shining. Yet, what remains in focus is his personality rather than his feats or his methods. The participants who survived the war, the diminishing number of veterans, still think of their chiefs, usually with respect. Their recollections are, for the most part, suffused with sentiment. Their attitude rests on a blurred contentment with their own service. To them, whether they were in Europe or elsewhere, Eisenhower will always be the personification of victory.

It is only the serious students of warfare, the military historians, who speak of the champions of yesteryear in an analytical, less nostalgic vein. They continue to scrutinize the record and to discuss in detail the actions of the key general officers. In the private conversations and published work of such historians, the reputations of many popular heroes have undergone

revision and suffered decline. In the historians' eyes, although Eisenhower's stature appears to have remained very much in place, the mere passage of time has raised questions about his performance. Some flaws have appeared.

Much the same has happened with other distinguished soldiers. Douglas MacArthur, Eisenhower's boss for many years, brings mixed emotions. Despite his brilliance in World War II, he tarnished his image later in Korea. Even in World War II itself, his skewed and regrettable public relations policy hid from outside view the splendid abilities and achievements of his principal subordinate commanders, Robert Eichelberger and Walter Krueger, who deserved better. Alas, it may be too late now to resurrect them completely. Americans admired Joseph Stilwell, a consummate professional and likable eccentric. They sympathized with Stilwell because he operated, they understood, in circumstances offering little chance of success. He too is sliding out of public ken.

Omar Bradley, Eisenhower's West Point classmate, was more than well-thought of, for he was solid rather than flashy, competent and modest rather than brilliant and self-seeking. He became Eisenhower's right-hand man, his principal operational assistant in Europe, the commander on whom Eisenhower most relied. Memoirs published after the war reveal him to have been a little dull, not terribly imaginative. Safe and cautious, he played by the book instead of aiming for the original and daring. Somehow, the visage he assumed, that of a country fellow, rings altogether too true at this late date, and it is hardly the right stuff for today.

Eisenhower owed a great deal to Mark Clark, who was two years behind him at West Point. They met up again, at Fort Lewis, Washington, in the fall of 1938, when Eisenhower, then a lieutenant colonel and an aide to MacArthur in the Philippines, was returning to Manila after a lengthy leave in the States. Passing through Lewis to visit an old friend, he ran into Clark, then a major, who was the 3d Division G-3. Impressed with the training exercises at Fort Lewis, Eisenhower began to correspond with Clark, in the meanwhile seeking relief from his assignment with MacArthur. Succeeding eventually, he was assigned to Fort Lewis, where he arrived on New Year's

Educated at Bucknell and Harvard Universities, Martin Blumenson served in Europe during World War II and in Korea during the Korean War and is a retired Lieutenant Colonel, USAR. He has held the King Chair at the Naval War College, the Johnson Chair at the Army War College, and the Mark Clark Chair at The Citadel. He was Visiting Professor of Military and Strategic Studies at Acadia University, Visiting Professor at Bucknell University, Professor at the National War College, and Professorial Lecturer in International Affairs at George Washington University. Professor Blumenson is the author of 15 books, including the two volumes of *The Patton Papers*; *Patton: The Man Behind the Legend*; and *Mark Clark*. He recently completed a book on the battle of Normandy.

Day 1940. Clark, he discovered, had arranged for him to have a choice space on post, command of an infantry battalion in the 3d Division.

Late in 1941, when Clark was in Washington, D.C., and working closely with Lesley J. McNair, the chief trainer of combat forces, Clark was asked to recommend ten candidates for selection to head the Operations Division, a small planning headquarters used by the Army Chief of Staff as a command post in the War Department. Clark, who had gone directly from lieutenant colonel to brigadier general, skipping the rank of colonel, wrote a single name on a piece of paper, that of Colonel Eisenhower, and under it nine sets of ditto marks. Eisenhower received the position.

Both men were closely associated during the invasion of North Africa in 1942, when Ike was Supreme Allied Commander and Clark his deputy. A year later, when Clark took his Fifth Army into the mainland of Italy, he became identified with the distinctly subsidiary Italian campaign and drifted apart from Eisenhower. Smart and hard-working, an excellent organizer and driver, Clark is remembered now mainly for his involvement in the many controversial issues in that theater.

The reputation of George S. Patton, Jr., has risen steadily since the war. The best American battlefield general of the conflict, he is tied to cavalry, tanks, and armored forces, and is chiefly characterized by audacity, will-power, unceasing pressure against the enemy, and blazing success. He and Eisenhower were very good friends. They met at Fort Meade, Maryland, in 1919. Patton had brought home from France the tank brigade he had activated, trained, and led in battle at St. Mihiel and at the Meuse-Argonne. Eisenhower had moved to Meade the tankers he had been training at Camp Colt near Gettysburg, Pennsylvania. They talked a great deal about combat—how to motivate men in battle, how to improve unit efficiency, and the like—and found their interests and outlooks to be similar. Patton attended the two-year course at Leavenworth and finished as a distinguished graduate in the upper 25 percent of his class. When he learned of Eisenhower's selection to be a student there, he sent Eisenhower his Leavenworth notes. Eisenhower graduated number one. Patton's notes, Patton was certain, were responsible for Eisenhower's impressive class standing.

Late in 1940, when Patton was again with tanks, he wrote Eisenhower and urged him to transfer to Patton's armored division. He concluded his letter with the prophetically sanguinary words: "Hoping we are together in a long and BLOODY war." Eisenhower tried to comply, but was turned down. In 1942, when he was in Washington and head of the Operations Division, he wrote to Patton and expressed his desire to get out from behind his desk and be shipped to an active combat front. "By that time," Eisenhower said, "you'll be the Black Jack [Pershing] of the damn war." Patton replied, "There is nothing I would like more than to be the Black Jack of this war, with

**Eisenhower confers with
Lieutenant General Mark
Clark in Italy, 1943.**



you as assistant Black Jack—or even the other way around.” The prescience of the latter observation is remarkable, for the reversed relationship is, of course, exactly what developed. Eisenhower, who had graduated from West Point in 1915, became the boss, with Patton, a 1909 graduate, the subordinate.

They were together throughout the war, during the landings in North Africa, the fighting in Tunisia immediately after the American disaster at Kasserine Pass, the operations in Sicily, and the campaigns of northwest Europe from the Normandy breakout to the Allied victory. Everywhere, Patton was responsible for Eisenhower’s most striking battlefield triumphs. Eisenhower recognized Patton as the single indispensable American officer at the front and admitted his reliance on Patton for battle success. He kept Patton instead of firing him on two critical occasions, once in 1943 after Patton slapped two soldiers in hospitals in Sicily, the other in 1944 when Patton made some innocuous but impolitic off-the-cuff remarks to a ladies’ group in Knutsford, England, that ballooned into a major public relations flap. Yet he treated Patton in a strange way, alternately hot and cold, ostensibly to keep

the mercurial Patton guessing, on his toes, in a perpetual doghouse, and unsure of his place in Eisenhower's affection and judgment. Eisenhower's attitude suggests the presence of some jealousy or envy of Patton's combat skill.

Patton suffered keenly Eisenhower's failure to congratulate him after particularly worthy feats. He resented Eisenhower's cavalier disregard of his advice at crucial junctures in preparing operations. Although Patton maintained his subservience in public and flattered Eisenhower outrageously, his anguish showed in his letters to his wife and in his private journal. He called Eisenhower "Divine Destiny," not only because of Eisenhower's initials but also because Eisenhower, in a position of virtual omnipotence, could use or dispense with Patton as he wished. That Eisenhower kept Patton on a short and tight leash troubled Patton. Eventually, the friendship on Patton's side dissolved.

With the exception of MacArthur, all of these officers—Eisenhower, Stilwell, Bradley, Clark, and Patton—were Marshall men. George C. Marshall, the US Army Chief of Staff, having noticed them and been impressed, deemed them professionally and personally competent and eligible for high command. He nurtured them, advanced them, and channeled their activities to gain the maximum benefit to the Army and nation.

Marshall himself was the most important American soldier in World War II, the "architect of victory," as Forrest Pogue has called him. Yet he never attracted the widespread popularity that others attained. He prompted awe rather than affection. Perhaps Marshall's aloofness was to blame; his austere personality contrasts with Eisenhower's infectious grin. Perhaps Marshall's status as a staff officer rather than commander like the others denied him the opportunity to get close to the American people. Marshall's enormous contribution resembled that of Peyton March, the Army Chief of Staff during World War I. Like March, the man behind the scenes, Marshall gave way in the public mind while Pershing and Eisenhower, the commanders, carved indelible niches in the collective American imagination.

For most of his career, except for commanding tanks in training near Gettysburg in 1918 and an infantry battalion in 1940, Eisenhower was a staff officer. Not until the spring of 1942, when he became commanding general of the European Theater of Operations, US Army, with headquarters in London, did Eisenhower take charge of a sizable command. He assumed an operational command that autumn when he was appointed Supreme Allied Commander for the Anglo-American invasion of North Africa. He received the position because the landings on the coast of French Northwest Africa had to appear to be entirely American in leadership and composition. The French harbored deep anti-British sentiments and were certain to oppose British troops coming ashore. But it was hoped that the traditional Franco-American friendship would prompt the French forces to welcome Americans. Eisenhower's inexperience in command and in

combat appalled many British officials. Yet they accepted him because the enterprise needed to look conspicuously American and because, the British figured, the greater the American stake in Europe, the farther would recede the possibility of an American departure in strength to the Pacific. Therefore, Eisenhower headed the venture, and American units carried out most of the initial assaults.

The system of Anglo-American command was largely the work of Marshall, who argued for unity of authority and responsibility placed in the hands of a single Allied theater commander, whether British or American, directing the forces of both nations in an area defined geographically. The concept was distinctly American, and it clashed with the British idea of command in committee, a shared responsibility. Three months after the North African invasion, the British succeeded in inserting their method, not to displace the American idea but rather to work together with it. Thus, in February 1943, Eisenhower, the Supreme Allied Commander, accepted Sir Harold Alexander as commander of the Allied ground forces, Sir Arthur Tedder as head of the Allied air units, and Sir John Cunningham as director of the Allied naval contingents. Eisenhower had as his principal subordinate commanders three British officers who outranked him and who had considerably more combat experience. As Sir Alan Brooke, Chief of the Imperial General Staff, Marshall's counterpart, claimed in his diary, the British had pushed Eisenhower "up into the stratosphere and rarified atmosphere" of command. Eisenhower was to deal with political matters, with fiscal concerns, with logistical problems, and was to leave the prosecution of the war, the management of the battlefield, to the British who had substantially more experience and, at least in their eyes, much more competence.

In North Africa during the last month of 1942 and during the early months of 1943, Eisenhower's position was shaky. When he signed the Darlan Deal with a member of the odious Vichy government to facilitate Allied military operations in Tunisia, the arrangement outraged American and British public opinion and provoked intense criticism. His campaign after the landings to capture Bizerte and Tunis before Axis forces arrived in strength was poorly coordinated and broke down. The inter-Allied command structure on the battlefield in Tunisia was chaotic. Eisenhower, absorbed in political and logistical problems far from the front, was unable to institute order and coherence. The humiliating American defeat at Kasserine Pass was the final blow suggesting Eisenhower's lack of fitness to lead the Allied effort.

Alexander, reporting on what he saw of the American performance, said, "They simply do not know their jobs as soldiers." They are "soft, green, and quite untrained." More to the point, "There is no policy and no plan . . . no firm direction or centralized control from above," meaning from Eisenhower. The Americans, he concluded, were "quite useless."

To Sir Bernard Montgomery, the Eighth Army commander, it seemed that the theater was ill-managed because an amateur was at the top and because the Americans had what he called too few first-class chaps. After Eisenhower visited Montgomery's headquarters, Montgomery reported on his impressions. Eisenhower, he wrote, is "a very nice chap" who "knows nothing whatever about how to make war or to fight battles . . . he should be kept away from all that business if we want to win this war."

After Kasserine Pass, when Alexander was planning what became the final stage of the Tunisian campaign, he gave the American troops a small and subsidiary mission suitable for second-rate troops. Eisenhower took no notice of the humiliation. Patton, seconded by Bradley, vigorously protested the slight to Eisenhower, who finally urged Alexander to give the Americans a larger role. As a result, American troops captured Bizerte while British and French forces entered Tunis. The Tunisian triumph, the expulsion of Axis forces from North Africa, and the capture of a quarter of a million prisoners of war restored confidence in Eisenhower.

Immediately thereafter, however, the planning for Sicily was to be strange and dreamlike. Eisenhower stood aloof from the process. No one else had the authority to coordinate the Allied land, sea, and air forces. Each service had its own point of view, methods, and desires. As the service representatives tried to mesh their activities into a synchronized effort, their attempts to plan for the invasion and the subsequent campaign were argumentative and often bitter, in the end failing. Alexander, who directed the ground forces, turned out to lack the personal strength of will to knock heads together and to get an acceptable plan on paper. In this vacuum created by Eisenhower's inability or unwillingness to lead and by Alexander's failure to resolve the issues, Montgomery took charge. He bulldozed his way through and over navy and air force objections and finally pulled a plan together. The problem with his plan for Sicily was the absence of a scheme on how to develop the campaign after the landings.

Once the Allies were ashore in Sicily, Eisenhower continued to stay removed from the battlefield problems requiring resolution. In large part, the army commanders, Patton and Montgomery, decided how to develop the action, and Alexander consented to the arrangements they had already worked out. The Sicilian campaign went quite well for the Allies except for the final disappointing action. The Axis forces departed Sicily through Messina and crossed the narrow strait to the Italian mainland, with the Allies unable to stop or to hamper them. More than 100,000 troops got out. The Allied naval and air forces were helpless to block or to impede the movement. Their inability to do so lies in the main with Eisenhower, who refrained from exercising his power of command.

Much the same thing happened during the last four months of 1943, when Allied forces invaded the Italian mainland. Although Alexander's

coordination of the British Eighth and American Fifth Armies during and immediately after the Messina strait crossings and the Salerno landings was barely adequate, Eisenhower preferred not to intercede. He made his views, his personal force, felt hardly at all. Yet his public relations image remained excellent.

On the other hand, what Eisenhower did as probably no other could have accomplished was to build an Allied organization in his theater and make it mesh superbly. Keeping himself free from bias, he consciously and conspicuously tried to be statesmanlike, to be an Allied rather than simply an American leader. He was unlike MacArthur, who, in the Pacific with Australian, British, and Dutch allies and later in Korea at the head of the United Nations forces, operated out of a normal US Army type of headquarters. In contrast, Eisenhower invented and created a new inter-Allied instrument, with British and Americans sharing approximately equal representation and power.

Eisenhower was determined to go the last mile to achieve Allied harmony. He was loyal to his subordinates to a fault, especially those who were British. Many Americans believed that Eisenhower held his countrymen to a higher standard of behavior than he did their British counterparts, and they resented his allegedly pro-British bias. Yet, in the final analysis, Eisenhower's greatest achievement was to make sustained coalition warfare work as no one has before or since.

By way of contrast, in the early days of the Korean War, Syngman Rhee, President of the Republic of Korea, placed his military forces under the command of Douglas MacArthur. MacArthur delegated command of the Korean ground troops to the US ground commander in Korea, Walton Walker. In Vietnam, a formal arrangement of similar nature was lacking, and the major national forces committed there were hardly bound together under a single command. Very recently, there was a flurry of excitement and controversy over the extent to which Norman Schwarzkopf could function as a commander in the Persian Gulf. What were his prerogatives? How much authority did he have in directing the multinational commitment? Was his command strictly American? Or did the strength of American arms in the area give him the right to a larger control? Though the final verdict must await the release of classified after-action reports, we are entitled to reach the provisional judgment now that both the combined and joint command arrangements worked exceedingly well. Success on the battlefield speaks for itself.

In December 1943, President Franklin D. Roosevelt appointed Eisenhower to be the Supreme Allied Commander for Operation Overlord, the cross-Channel invasion. There had to be an American commander in chief because the United States eventually was to put 60 divisions into the continent while the British and Canadians, together, would have no more than 20. Brooke and

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other British officers still scorned Eisenhower as little more than a good mixer and a champion of Allied unity. To them he was hardly a real commander as they understood the term. They were indifferent to or unaware of Eisenhower's extraordinary growth in self-assurance since 1942, and they downgraded Eisenhower's unequaled ability to make the Anglo-American coalition work despite ever-present frictions. Upon learning of Eisenhower's appointment, King George VI reflected British opinion accurately with this patronizing observation: "How nice to have Eisenhower in nominal command with Monty at his side"—and Montgomery presumably exercising real command.

Eisenhower hoped to have as his Overlord ground commander Alexander, who had served under him in Tunisia, Sicily, and southern Italy. But the British chose Montgomery to head the British ground forces in the invasion. Although Eisenhower knew that Montgomery would be a difficult and abrasive subordinate, Eisenhower accepted him with good grace because of sensitivity to the alliance.

Montgomery's appointment did not make him the Allied ground forces commander automatically. Eisenhower asked him to act temporarily in that role, that is, during the initial stage of the invasion for an unspecified length of time. He made the request in Algiers on 27 December 1943, when Montgomery, who had just learned of his appointment to Overlord, came to visit Eisenhower. By inviting Montgomery to be the ground commander, Eisenhower closed the circle of his principal subordinate commanders, for he would have Tedder as his Deputy Supreme Allied Commander, Sir Bertram Ramsay as the Overlord sea forces commander, and Sir Trafford Leigh-Mallory in charge of the Allied air forces in support of the invasion. It was as though Eisenhower had become enamored of the committee-type command, wished to enhance further the British contribution to Overlord, and sought to continue the sort of relationship he had previously enjoyed with Alexander.

As the year 1943 drew to its close, Eisenhower was to go to Washington for a few weeks of conferences and rest while Montgomery was to go to London at once and start preparing the British forces for the cross-Channel invasion. When Eisenhower asked Montgomery to be the Allied ground commander, he also asked Montgomery to be his personal representative in London during his two or three weeks of absence. Montgomery understood Eisenhower's invitation to mean the following, as he wrote to Brooke:

Montgomery was to be Eisenhower's "head soldier and to take complete charge of the land battle."

The Overlord plan was a basic outline conceived in accordance with the resources allocated by the Combined Chiefs of Staff. In addition to projecting airborne and special operations, the plan called for a three-division amphibious assault on three beaches fronting the bay of the Seine in Normandy and centered roughly on Caen. The chief planner, Sir Frederick Morgan, recommended a heavier initial landing requiring more sea transport. He also recommended an extended front to include part of the Cherbourg peninsula to facilitate capture of the port. Despite Morgan's recommendations to the contrary, the Combined Chiefs of Staff approved the outline plan.

Eisenhower read the plan for the first time in October 1943, immediately questioning the lack of strength in the initial assault. There was, he said, "not enough wallop." Montgomery first read the Overlord plan on his way to London at the end of December, when he stopped in Marrakech, Morocco, where Prime Minister Winston Churchill was recuperating from pneumonia. During their consultations, Churchill asked Montgomery to look over Churchill's copy of the paper. Montgomery thought the plan to be impracticable. He too believed the initial assault was not strong enough. Like Montgomery, Eisenhower stopped to see Churchill on his way to Washington. Montgomery was there, and the two commanders spoke briefly on the Overlord plan. They found their thinking very much the same.

By the time Eisenhower arrived in London in mid-January 1944, Montgomery had changed the Overlord plan to such an extent that it was widely called "the Montgomery plan." There was hardly any need for Eisenhower's formal review. Yet Eisenhower called a meeting of the principal Overlord parties to bring everyone up to date and to identify issues still needing resolution. When Eisenhower's driver Kay Summersby drove Eisenhower to the meeting and pulled up to the parking spaces numbered and assigned according to rank, she was furious to find the Number One spot occupied by Montgomery's Rolls Royce limousine. Eisenhower grinned and said it didn't matter, forget it. But after he went inside, Summersby straightened out the misunderstanding with Montgomery's chauffeur. Eisenhower was Number One. And so he remained even though he kept his distance from battlefield developments.

The Normandy landings produced two immediate positive results. The Allies came ashore successfully. And after three weeks of operations, they captured the great port of Cherbourg. Yet they were unable to expand the beachhead as rapidly as they wished and had hoped. Their foothold on 1 July was one-fifth the size projected by the planners. In addition, shipping schedules across the Channel—for men, equipment, and supplies—had slipped badly. To gain more room on the continent, the Allies revised their shipping schedules and brought to Normandy more combat troops at the expense of

logistical and administrative units. This helped but little. The Allied beachhead remained small during most of July, while the German defenses remained strong. Montgomery was in charge of the land battle, and although Eisenhower was in ultimate charge of the campaign he did little to improve the slow tempo of operations.

Restless and impatient by temperament, Eisenhower was anxious to maintain momentum in Normandy and to show gains to his bosses, the Combined Chiefs of Staff and the political leaders. Yet he refrained from trying to influence events directly. He visited Normandy frequently in June and July 1944, but took no active role in the affairs of the battlefield. He had temporarily turned over the direction of the ground effort to Montgomery. Having delegated that responsibility, Eisenhower scrupulously refrained from meddling.

Meanwhile, his SHAEF headquarters was being ferried from England to Normandy in July, but it moved slowly, for the additional combat troops being brought to the continent displaced Eisenhower's staff complement. Eisenhower felt keenly his lack of the machinery, above all his signals section, to enable him to learn in detail what was occurring. Without an information system of his own, he felt constrained from taking a direct part in the events. In addition, Eisenhower lacked a strong desire to exert such control. He preferred to exercise a loose general supervision. He chose to be aloof from the everyday concerns of his subordinates. He wished to be above it all. Particularly where battle was concerned, he had no hard and fast rules. What he did was to visit his subordinates, listen to them, encourage them, and never interfere.

Eisenhower never had what the combat leaders call an intuitive feel for battle. However, he accurately assessed and frequently reported the battlefield situation in his correspondence, particularly in his letters to Marshall. When he mentioned operational opportunities open to the Allies, as he often did, he refused to indicate how he thought the Allies should exploit the advantages. Two examples: On 31 July, after Bradley's Cobra operation had pierced the German defensive line and the rapidly advancing American troops had captured the key town of Avranches and were threatening to turn a local breakthrough into a theater-wide breakout, Eisenhower wrote to Montgomery to spur him on. He also wanted to bolster Montgomery's ego by placing Cobra, an American operation, within the larger Allied effort directed by Monty. Eisenhower told him: "From all reports, your plan continues to develop beautifully. I learn that you have a column in Avranches. This is great news and Bradley must quickly make our position there impregnable. Bradley has plenty of infantry units to rush into forward areas to consolidate all gains and permit armor to continue thrusting." Beyond that he had no specific suggestion, no concrete instruction on where the armor ought to go.

A second example came two days later, on 2 August. Again writing Montgomery, Ike said, "If my latest reports are correct, the enemy resistance

seems to have disintegrated very materially in the Avranches region. Our armored and mobile columns will want to operate boldly." Again, no precise indication of direction. The messages are vintage Eisenhower. He encouraged his subordinates. He infused energy and pushed audacity. He refrained from suggesting where columns ought to go, what they ought to do, and what purpose they ought to fulfill.

The fast-moving situation developing out of Cobra during the early days of August 1944 prompted the Germans to lose control of the events in Normandy. In the same way, the Allied commanders were unable to keep up and cope with the speed of the breakout. The exploitation and pursuit growing out of Cobra developed quite differently from prior expectations. In the situation that actually arose, the commanders on both sides had to improvise. The Allied commanders allowed the momentum of events to draw too many forces into Brittany, which quickly became a backwater of the war and which used up forces needed in Normandy. They were unable to concentrate the available forces in Normandy to knock the Germans out of the war.

The operations they set in motion to trap all the German forces in Normandy failed to accomplish the ends desired. The Allies tried to encircle the Germans at Argentan and Falaise, then again at the Seine River. But they did so in what seems in retrospect to be a half-hearted or, worse, a completely mistaken or botched way. They assumed they had surrounded the Germans, and let this assumption dictate their actions. They believed all the bridges across the Seine River were destroyed and that accordingly the Germans would be unable to get away. Instead, the Germans got 240,000 men—almost a quarter of a million—across the Seine in about ten days. These troops should have been destroyed before they could cross the river.

The point is that Eisenhower watched the operations go out of kilter and did nothing to correct what was happening. Bradley was too cautious and lost his nerve twice when he stopped Patton from executing what Bradley and Montgomery had ordered. Montgomery was always a little behind the actuality, never quite catching up with what was taking place. And Eisenhower abstained from exercising his personal will and mandated authority. He might have set right an enterprise that was going in too many directions at once. But Eisenhower elected to keep his distance. That was his manner.

Eisenhower's greatness came from his understanding of the nature of coalition war in Europe. He knew that the effort had to be Allied, and that the British and Americans as Allies had to be equal in importance. He made it possible, despite the enormous friction simmering under the surface of the alliance, for the British and Americans to work well together. He felt it wise in the instance to exercise a loose general control over his subordinates. He was extremely loath to replace Montgomery as Allied ground forces

commander. He wished to let the temporary arrangements remain in effect for the duration of the northwest Europe campaign. But the stagnation of operations in June and July of 1944 compelled Eisenhower, against his deepest wishes, to assume a position and a role for which he had little desire. His greatest fault was being a hands-off commander. Much against his will, he became the Allied ground forces commander on 1 September 1944, in addition to continuing as the Supreme Allied Commander.

David Eisenhower, Ike's grandson, has called Eisenhower's decisions in northwest Europe political in the main rather than military, and the evidence tends to bear this out. General Eisenhower gave Montgomery permission to launch Operation Market Garden in September in part to achieve an equality of contribution between the British and Americans. Market Garden was conceived to restore British place and prominence in the campaign in consideration of the enormous American liberation of territory immediately after Cobra.

Eisenhower also insisted on the broad-front strategy to make sure that the British and Americans would win the war together. Victory was to be gained not by Montgomery, Bradley, or Patton alone, but by the efforts of both Allies operating together. Furthermore, Eisenhower withheld permission from Jacob Devers' 6th Army Group to cross the Rhine River when US and French forces could easily have done so. Eisenhower's motive was simple. He feared he might exclude the British from the ultimate triumph.

In short, Eisenhower was a great coalition commander who operated, figuratively, with one foot in the political sphere, the other in the military. He did so with the utmost subtlety and skill. If he chose to keep his distance from the battlefield, it was perhaps because he was somewhat uncomfortable there. Whether Eisenhower's *modus operandi* conforms with current ideas of what a commander should be like in the 1990s depends most probably on the extent to which the political leaders decide to exercise their power. President George Bush, mindful of the problems created for military commanders in Vietnam by Lyndon Johnson's smothering personal involvement, gave Norman Schwarzkopf a long leash in Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm. This military commander's skill in managing the delicate political aspects of coalition warfare while displaying just the right degree of oversight of his component commanders may well be the model for the future.

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

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