

1890



1990

Watershed at Leavenworth

DWIGHT D.
EISENHOWER
and the Command and
General Staff School

by
Major Mark C. Bender



Commemorating the Eisenhower Centennial

FOREWORD

In 1926, Dwight D. Eisenhower was first in his class and an honor graduate of the U.S. Army Command and General Staff School at Fort Leavenworth. Eisenhower's year at the school was a formative period in his career and prepared him for many of his demanding future assignments. In his study of Eisenhower, Major Mark C. Bender eloquently testifies to Ike's drive, individualism, and sense of purpose as they relate to his assignment at the school.

This Combat Studies Institute Special Study provides the most complete account of Eisenhower's year at Leavenworth. Major Bender reveals why Eisenhower came to Leavenworth, what he accomplished in and out of the classroom, and how the Leavenworth experience influenced his subsequent military achievements. The publication of this study commemorates Eisenhower's birth centennial and illuminates the significant connection between Eisenhower and Fort Leavenworth.



March 1990

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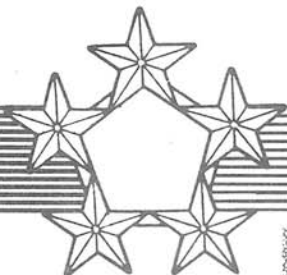


CSI Special Studies cover a variety of military history topics. The views expressed herein are those of the author and not necessarily those of the Army or the Department of Defense.

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I.

PERSPECTIVES ON EISENHOWER'S YEAR IN LEAVENWORTH

In May 1926, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, entered its 100th year of existence. One month later, on 18 June 1926, Dwight David Eisenhower would graduate from Fort Leavenworth's Command and General Staff School en route to military and political responsibilities that would shape the world. "Ike," as he was known throughout his life, would lead the Allied forces in the conquest of Germany, serve as Army chief of staff, and serve two terms as president of the United States. Leavenworth would have its share of distinguished graduates, but Eisenhower's accomplishments and contributions are unparalleled.

The year Eisenhower spent at Leavenworth was significant for what he learned at the school and the effects the experience had on him. Despite references to Eisenhower's attendance at the Command and General Staff School in virtually every biographical treatment of his life, analyses of his Leavenworth experience have been incomplete. Many accounts on the subject contain factual errors and contradictory interpretations. Eisenhower's experience at the school deserves further scrutiny.

Eisenhower's year at Leavenworth can best be understood in the context of several themes that characterized his life. One theme was his inspired competitiveness and consistent concern with how well he was succeeding. Ike was a competitor and despite his likability and basic humility was committed to doing his best—especially when he sensed his best was required. To gloss over the obvious in this case is to miss something of the essence of the man. Eisenhower felt himself inspired and was devoted to duty. Ike did not drift into supreme command or the presidency of the United States, and he did not graduate first in his class at Leavenworth without demonstrating considerable drive. His sense of purpose and dedication are exhibited in many small things, masked, perhaps, by his essentially modest personality and affability. His complex character prompts such questions as: What sort of effort did Ike put forth at Leavenworth? How did he study? And, more important for some, "Did Ike play golf at Leavenworth?"

Eisenhower's individualism—another theme—also attracts attention. His "war with the War Department" is legendary. Ike was not a joiner; he spurned the study groups of Leavenworth. In a system that demands conformity, Ike was a rebel of sorts.

His disciplinary infractions at West Point would take mature form in his questioning of established doctrine and the War Department's assignment logic later in his career.

Also characterizing Ike was his uncanny ability to recognize talent in other people and harness it to enrich his own efforts. His ability to cultivate friends in high places would help him persevere in his dilemmas with the War Department. Indeed, his entrance into the Command and General Staff School would come only through the efforts of Fox Conner, his friend and mentor. Ike made the right friends—some at Leavenworth—and impressed senior Army leaders, who later would place him in key positions of responsibility.

Eisenhower was also a pragmatist who learned how to get things done, including how to take tests. His willingness to study hard was surpassed only by his ability to study intelligently and to draw on all resources available to him. What better way could Ike have traversed the Command and General Staff School than with the aid of Patton's notes? Eisenhower had his own study methods, and if he preferred the untraditional approach to problem solving and if his superiors frequently cited him for a lack of speed in his approach, he felt, so what? Ike gained more by the circuitous route. Ike knew his own thought processes, and by a series of mental testings—not the least of which was his success at Leavenworth—convinced himself that his mental techniques were unique and invaluable.

Many of these themes of Eisenhower's life are evident from his memoirs, especially his book, *At Ease, Stories I Tell to Friends*. Written some forty years after his tour at Leavenworth, the stories are sometimes self-serving and undoubtedly tinted by Eisenhower's interests as well as the passage of time. Yet the work has a certain credibility and expresses the tone of a man truly at ease with himself and his place in history. *At Ease* shows the events of Eisenhower's life as he seems to view them himself. Often revealing, the work has become a point of departure for every Eisenhower biographer since its writing. *At Ease* gives us the events of Ike's life and their interpretation. It also reveals Eisenhower's flaws and imperfections, his penchant for card playing, his guilt and frustrations, as well as the biographical corrections he feels compelled to make. But while the memoirs are certainly a departure point, they are not the full story. Army efficiency reports, interview files, and personal correspondence—much of which is on file at The Dwight D. Eisenhower Library in Abilene, Kansas—form a primary and indispensable source of information.

The Command and General Staff School at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, must also be understood to gain a relevant perspective on Eisenhower's experience there. From this school, in one of its forms or another, graduated such notables as George Marshall, Omar Bradley, George S. Patton, Jr., Matthew B. Ridgway, Mark Clark, and Maxwell Taylor—men trained to understand the common language of war and men who would assume the key military leadership positions of their time. How did the Command and General Staff School evolve, and what was its curriculum during the 1925—26 school year? Coming as one of the final years of the "competitive period" of the school, just how much rivalry prevailed in the 1925—26 class? Students were reported to have died during previous school courses—some by suicide—and nervous breakdowns were a hazard of the experience. What skills and doctrine were taught at the school during the critical interwar period? Did the school adequately prepare its officers for the challenges to come?

This study will examine Eisenhower's year at Leavenworth against the backdrop of the Command and General Staff School as it had evolved to the 1925—26 school year. It will also consider Eisenhower's year at Leavenworth in relation to his development prior to attending the school and the effect the school experience had on his future. Ultimately, this study will attempt to discern the reasons why Ike would describe his year at Leavenworth as "a watershed in my life."¹

II.

THE ROAD TO LEAVENWORTH

At the age of eight, Eisenhower overheard his mother reveal her age as thirty-six. Intrigued by the number, he calculated the year in which he would attain that age. Ike described the result as disheartening: "Nineteen-twenty-six was ridiculously far off, a whole lifetime in the future."¹ Eisenhower was to spend the first half of 1926 at Fort Leavenworth attending the Command and General Staff School.

It is curious that Eisenhower, some sixty years later, would remember his musings as an eight year old. Remarkable, too, that in those same recollections of his childhood, he would recall "the only peak of my personal horizon [at that early age] would have been something like entering the halls of higher learning (the eighth grade)."²

There were several important family and community influences on the young Eisenhower that led him beyond his town's typical eighth-grade education to West Point and then to Leavenworth. The themes that characterized the remainder of Ike's life developed in this early period, themes that played a part in the Leavenworth "watershed." The pre-Leavenworth experiences took place during three periods: Ike's formative years in Abilene, the West Point years, and the active-duty Army years.

The Formative Years

Dwight David Eisenhower was born in Denison, Texas, in 1890, the third of seven sons born to David and Ida Eisenhower. When Dwight was about two years old, the family moved to Abilene, Kansas, where his father worked at the local creamery. Among the poorer families in town, the Eisenhowers were members of a Christian church that opposed war and violence of any kind.

In his memoirs, Ike describes his parents' relationship as a "genuine partnership," where "Father was the breadwinner, Supreme Court, and Lord High Executioner."³ Eisenhower credits his mother as having the greater personal influence on the Eisenhower boys. She was the family manager and tutor, who was able to invest the required time in the boys' development. Ike's father worked long hours, six days a week, in order to support the family. If Ike's father was quick to judge, he describes his mother as a "Psychologist," dealing effectively with

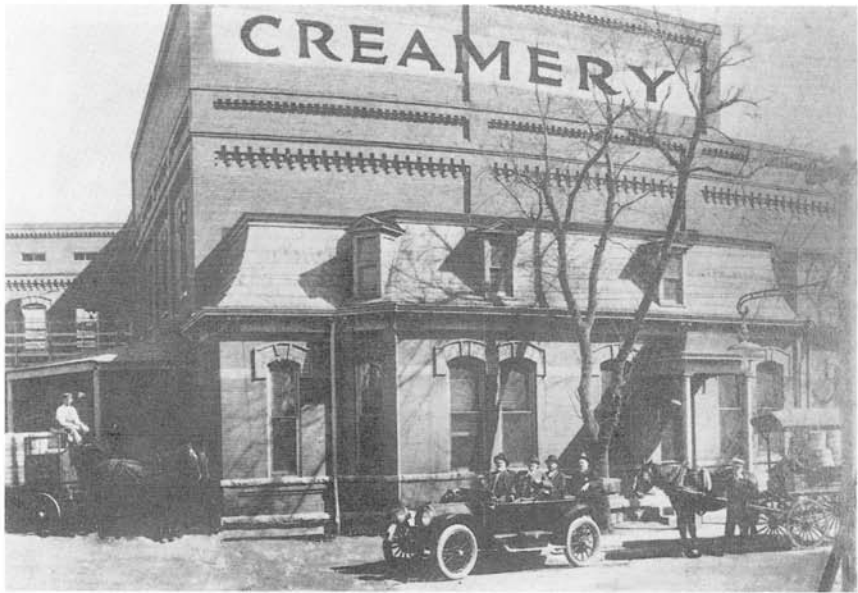
each son's "unique personality" and "adapting her methods to each."⁴



Courtesy of Dwight D. Eisenhower Library

The first-known photo of Dwight Eisenhower, age three, 1893. Left to right are Arthur (holding Roy), Edgar, and Dwight.

Eisenhower portrays his early reading interests as fixed on ancient history to the neglect of other subjects. "The battles of Marathon, Zama, Salamis, and Cannae became as familiar to me as the games (and battles) I enjoyed with my brothers and friends. . . ."⁵ Acknowledging Hannibal as his childhood "favorite," Eisenhower explains: ". . . Hannibal always seemed to be

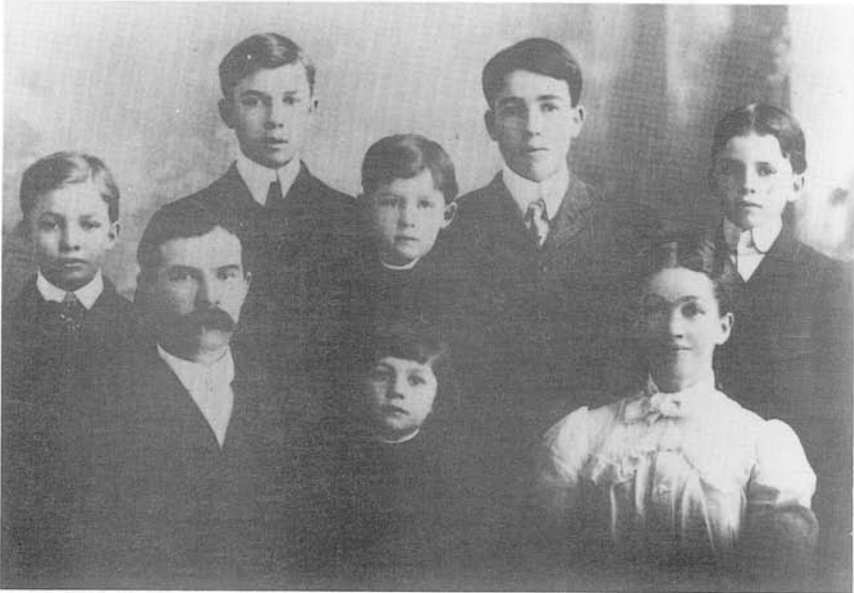


Courtesy of Dwight D. Eisenhower Library

The Belle Springs Creamery, where Dwight, his father David, and his brother Edgar worked

an underdog, neglected by his government, and fighting during most of his active years in the territory of his deadly and powerful enemy.”⁶ Eisenhower also idealized George Washington and his accomplishments at Princeton, Trenton, and Valley Forge, citing his “stamina and patience in adversity” and “his indomitable courage, daring, and capacity for self-sacrifice.”⁷ “Of course,” Eisenhower wrote concerning his youth, “I could read also about scholars and philosophers, but they seldom loomed so large in my mind as warriors and monarchs.”⁸ Perhaps it was his family’s religious distaste for war that made the subject so enticing to the young Eisenhower. His recollections of the Spanish-American War, which he gained from his uncle’s descriptions to him at the age of seven, remained clear in his mind throughout his life. He took seriously the town rumors about the possibility of Spaniards bombarding American cities by air, once mistaking a large box kite for the mysterious crafts.⁹

Family learning was an important part of the Eisenhower regimen, and the family invested considerable effort in luring Ike toward the more traditional subjects of arithmetic, spelling, and geography. Occasionally, Ike’s parents secured his historical classics so the books would not provide too great a temptation. Reading of the Bible was a shared honor in the family, and reading errors were not tolerated.¹⁰



Courtesy of Dwight D. Eisenhower Library

The Eisenhower family in 1902. Back row—Dwight, Edgar, Earl, Arthur, and Roy; front row—David, Milton, and Ida

Quarters were close at the Eisenhower house—818 square feet for 8 occupants (one of the Eisenhower sons had died during infancy). Ike shared a bedroom with two brothers and slept in the same bed with his brother Roy. Ike apparently envied his eldest brother Arthur, whose six and one-half foot by six and one-half foot private room he regarded as “splendid isolation.”¹¹

Eisenhower recalls Abilene, Kansas, as “peaceful, pastoral, and . . . happy,”—a far cry from its earlier reputation as “the toughest, meanest, most murderous town in the territory.”¹² After the Civil War, Texas cattlemen drove their cattle into the town because it afforded the nearest railhead.

With the cattlemen had come expansion, saloons, and a reputation for wildness. As the railroads extended west, the town mellowed, taking on an almost serene quality during Ike’s boyhood. Social distinctions within the town appeared to Ike to be few; “work” was the common denominator, and folks were expected to do just that.¹³

While Kansans of the period were largely literate, school was intended to introduce students to civic responsibility and prepare them for the job opportunities of the period. Of the town’s 200 children who joined Ike at grade school in 1897, only 67 entered



Courtesy of Dwight D. Eisenhower Library

Abilene, Kansas, during a pioneer parade, ca. 1920s

Abilene High School in 1905, of which only 31 graduated.¹⁴ The ability to write, spell, and work hard were the standards that Abilene demanded of its youth; graduation from high school was an accomplishment, indeed.

Ike maintained an indifferent attitude toward schoolwork throughout his attendance in the Abilene school system. He liked spelling as a child, because spelling bees aroused his “competitive instincts,”¹⁵ and he was fascinated with synonyms and how a letter could change the meanings of a word. He tolerated arithmetic “because of the finality with which an answer was right or wrong.”¹⁶ Ike describes his penmanship as poor, and matters of his deportment were frequently reported to the school superintendent while he was at Lincoln Grammar School.¹⁷

When Ike was nine or ten, an incident occurred that deeply affected him. He apparently allowed his three-year-old brother Earl to get possession of a knife with which the youngster blinded himself in one eye. Ike recalls, “. . . if I [had] been more alert the accident would not have happened. My feeling of regret is heightened by a sense of guilt. . . .”¹⁸

In 1905, Eisenhower attended newly completed Abilene High School—a building that attracted a more professional teaching staff and stimulated a new-found community pride in education. Despising algebra, Ike found himself entranced with plane geometry, which he saw as an “intellectual adventure.”¹⁹ Perhaps



Courtesy of Dwight D. Eisenhower Library

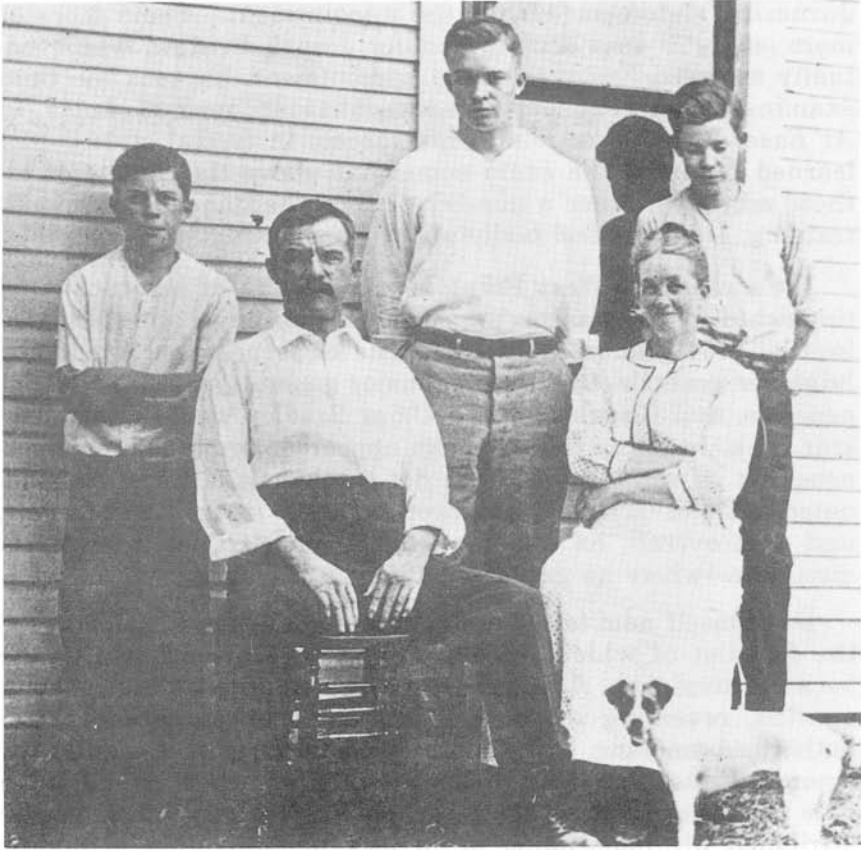
Dwight Eisenhower's fifth-grade class at Lincoln School, ca. 1900. Dwight is second from left, first row.

as a result of his apparent aptitude, he became the subject of a learning experiment. Guaranteed an A-plus grade, Ike's teacher asked him to dispense with the textbook and work out the problems on his own. This proved a successful experience for Ike, as he learned to reason out solutions to problems, a method he preferred to the rigors of study and memorization. Ike learned poker outside the walls of Abilene High, mastering the probabilities so thoroughly that (as he put it) until "I was thirty-nine or forty . . . I was never able to play the game carelessly or wide open."²⁰

Ike disdained high school social clubs, describing himself as unacceptable because of his awkwardness and "probably . . . more than happy that I was never invited to membership."²¹ Nonetheless, he was an active leader in the school athletic association and a much-lauded participant in a Shakespearian play his senior year—both experiences from which he gained social and communicative skills. Always there were summer and after-school jobs and money saved with the hope of attending college.²²

West Point

The notion of an "Admiral Eisenhower" has a distinctly odd ring, yet it was for Annapolis that the young Eisenhower was preparing after high school. It was only after he discovered that



Courtesy of Dwight D. Eisenhower Library

Milton, David, Dwight, Ida, and Earl Eisenhower (and Dwight's dog, Flip) outside the family home in Abilene, Kansas, 1910

his two years of preparation had rendered him "too old" for admission that West Point became an option. Ike had put himself through a preparatory regimen for the Navy that remarkably resembled the one he would use for Leavenworth. He and a friend had requested and received tests from the Naval Academy and studied them assiduously in preparation for the naval examination. Fortunately for Ike, the Navy tests were similar to those he used for the later West Point entrance exam. Ike's former high school teachers also assisted by tutoring him in selected subjects. He was determined to make a good showing in all subjects.²³

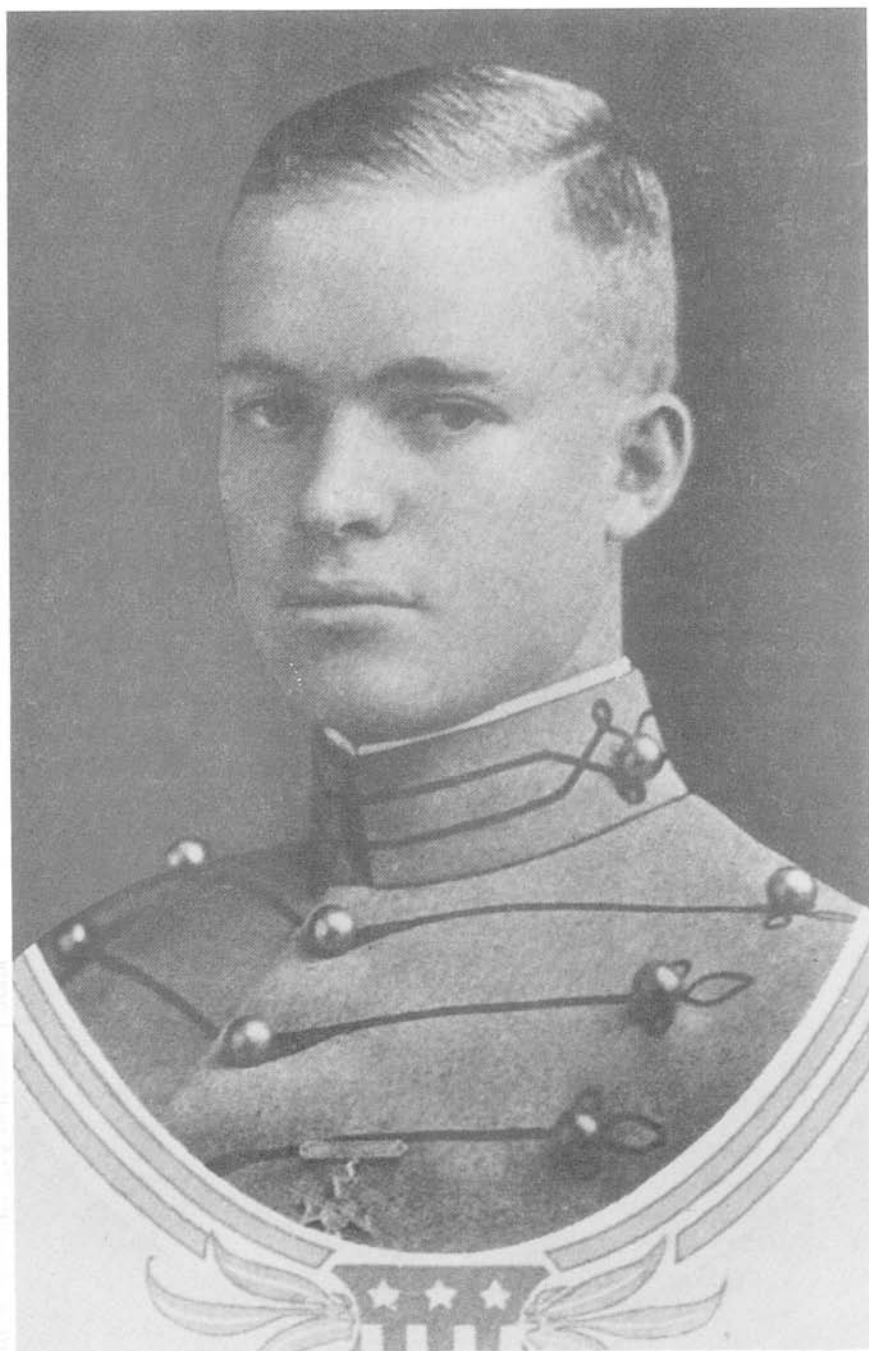
The application process was also a learning experience for Eisenhower in the interaction of politics, power, and reputation. Ike was pleased to rely on his own and his father's reputation for honesty and frugality in Abilene and had little difficulty

garnering endorsements for the appointment. "Some score or more letters"²⁴ were sent to Senator Joseph Bristow, who eventually awarded Eisenhower the appointment. Ike took the final examination at Jefferson Barracks, Missouri, near St. Louis. In *At Ease*, Eisenhower relates his success in typical style: "... I learned I passed the exam somewhat above the middle of all those admitted. Since a number of those had undergone special training, I did not feel badly about my showing."²⁵

Ike's class at West Point would be one of the most distinguished in the academy's history. Of the 265 who matriculated in 1911, 164 graduated in 1915. The class produced twenty-six brigadier generals, twenty-three major generals, seven lieutenant generals, and Eisenhower and Omar Bradley would attain five-star rank. In many cases, cadets appeared earmarked for greatness; not so with Ike—at least not so obviously. While he graduated 28th in practical engineering, 29th in drill regulations, and 61st overall, he was far from a model cadet in terms of discipline—where he graduated 125th in the class.²⁶

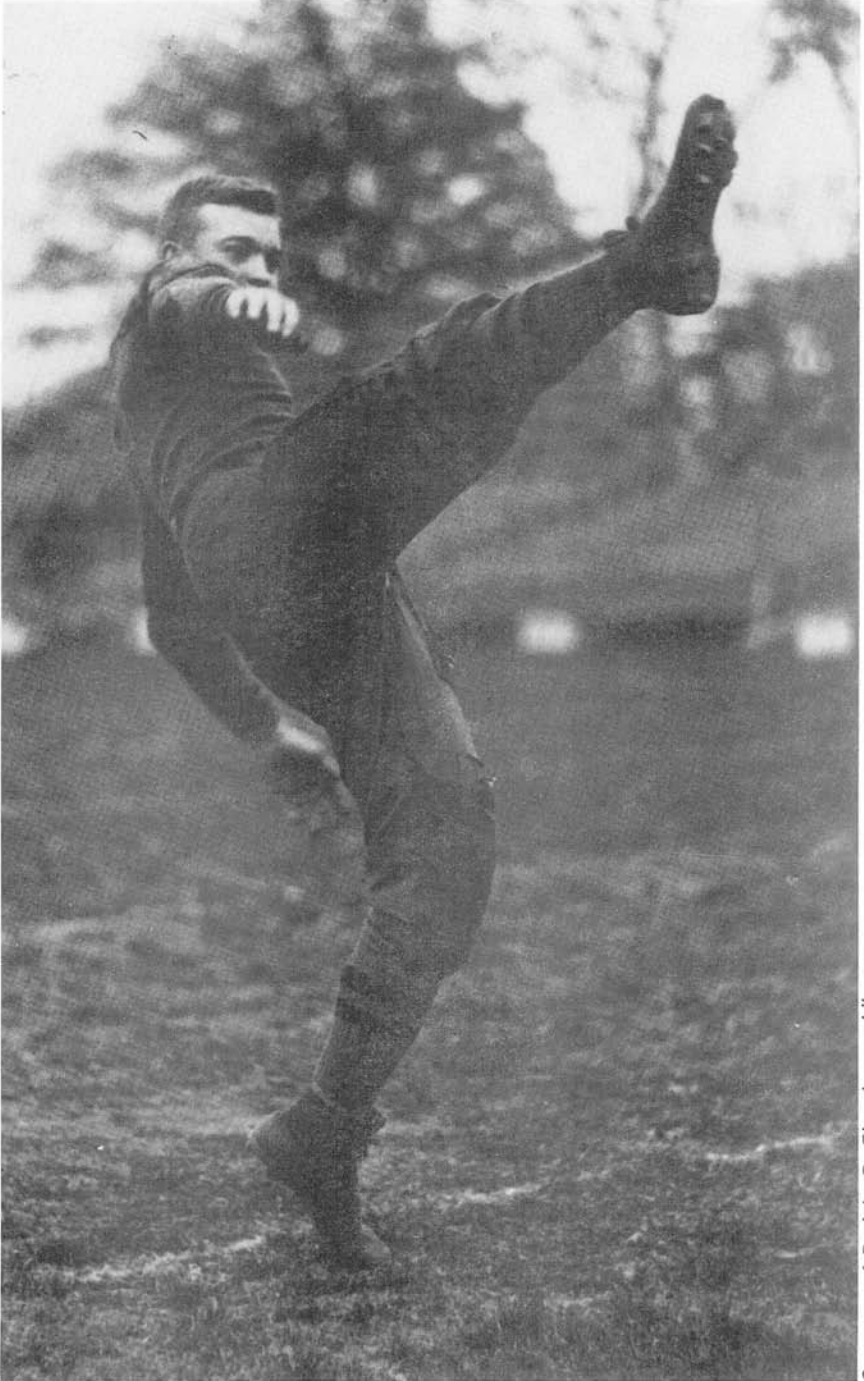
Ike himself admits to "a staggering catalogue of demerits,"²⁷ the full list of which was brought to his attention after he became president. *At Ease* lists the demerits of his last six months, revealing a smorgasbord of absences, lateness, unauthorized smoking, and failure to complete work assignments, among others. But none of his offenses breached West Point's code of honor, which would have been serious indeed. Eisenhower attributed his indiscipline to "a lack of motivation in almost everything other than athletics"²⁸—a situation that worsened when a serious knee injury knocked him off the football team. Ike simply did not think of himself as "a scholar whose position would depend on the knowledge he had acquired in school or as a military figure whose professional career might be seriously affected by his academic or disciplinary records."²⁹ Moreover, Ike "looked with distaste on classmates... haunted by fear of demerits and low grades."³⁰

Still, Eisenhower's West Point experience was a valuable one, a great source of inspiration to him throughout his life. He said of taking the oath: "From here on it would be the nation I would be serving, not myself. Suddenly the flag itself meant something...."³¹ Many of Ike's colleagues at the time viewed his most important accomplishments as occurring outside the classroom—particularly on the football field, where he was an exceptionally hard worker. Underclassman Mark Clark said of these years: "He had to excel. He always had to excel."³²



Courtesy of Dwight D. Eisenhower Library

A portrait of Eisenhower taken for the *Howitzer* following his graduation from West Point



COLLECTED BY DWIGHT D. EISENHOWER LIBRARY

Courtesy of Dwight D. Eisenhower Library

A young Eisenhower at football practice at West Point, 1912

In his mathematics studies, cadet Eisenhower's *modus operandi* was borrowed from his plane geometry class back at Abilene High, where reasoning was emphasized. He was only a half-listener in integral calculus, relying on his mastery of probability to help him figure the odds of being called on in class at any given moment. Figuring incorrectly one day, he was called on to solve an extremely difficult problem for which he had not prepared. After fumbling initially, he was able to apply his own logical processes to arrive at the correct solution. This infuriated his instructor, who accused him of knowing the answer beforehand and faking the procedures to arrive at it. Fortunately for Eisenhower, an associate professor of mathematics happened to be monitoring the episode and was impressed with Ike's methodology, calling it "easier than we've been using . . ." and fit to be "incorporated in our procedures from now on."³³ Ike's final report card termed his performance "very good," adding: ". . . should be assigned to an organization under a strict Commanding Officer."³⁴

The Early Army Years

The ten years of Army duty leading to Eisenhower's attendance at the Command and General Staff School are tremendously important to our understanding of his school experience. Many of his life's themes were developed during this period—including his personal dedication to excellence and his realization of the importance of other people to his life. Eisenhower met many of the people who would play key roles in his life during these early Army years, and he quickly mastered the skills that would allow him to profit from these associations. These years would also be frustrating for Ike. Stereotyped as a football coach, his conflicts with the War Department grew strident, and he would not reach the battlefields of World War I. Still, the period was a rewarding one marked by a series of assignments and opportunities that Eisenhower skillfully combined into a powerful learning experience.

Eisenhower departed West Point convinced that his request for duty in the Philippines would be approved—somehow believing himself to be the only applicant for positions there. Because fewer and less expensive uniforms were required for this duty in the Pacific, Ike expected to reap a small windfall from the standard uniform allowance. When the assignment failed to materialize, Ike, who had squandered his windfall over the summer of 1915, was forced to purchase a full set of uniforms for continental duty. This he accomplished by traveling from his home in Abilene to the town of Leavenworth—the location

of the nearest military tailor. It is not known whether Eisenhower visited Fort Leavenworth on that occasion, but we do know that the uniforms were bought on credit—an inauspicious beginning to his active-duty Army career.³⁵

Eisenhower may well have wondered about the utility of his required uniforms, for his first active-duty assignment was at Fort Sam Houston, Texas, near San Antonio. Fort Sam Houston was a showcase Army post in 1915 concerned with providing a deterrent to Mexican border raids. Days were spent drilling and training enlisted men who had little equipment.³⁶ Ike's reputation as a football player brought him to the attention of Major General Frederick Funston, who coerced him into coaching a local academy football team—which Ike accomplished with great success and attendant publicity. Funston would later return the favor by bending policy to allow Ike the necessary leave to marry Miss Mamie Genera Doud of Denver, Colorado. Ike and Mamie had met on post while the Doud family was spending its winter months in nearby San Antonio.³⁷

Marriage to Mamie had an immediate effect on Ike, who determined to tidy up his "carefree, debt-ridden" life.³⁸ At the request of Mamie's parents, he decided not to change branches to the Aviation Section, about which he had become enamored. The responsibilities of marriage and the career choice it necessitated were profound experiences for Eisenhower, who seemed deeply affected by the experience: ". . . it had brought me face to face with myself and caused me to make a decision that I have never recanted or regretted. The decision was to perform every duty given me in the Army to the best of my ability and to do the best I could to make a creditable record, no matter what the nature of the duty."³⁹

Ike's duties were varied during his Fort Sam Houston assignment—a period in which the Army was mobilizing for the Punitive Expedition against Mexican revolutionaries. Serving as an instructor inspector for the federalized 7th Illinois National Guard Regiment, Ike effectively took over the running of the regiment, which drilled in the hot summer months and held field exercises, combat firing, and maneuvers.⁴⁰ Ike enjoyed his new responsibility and authority and was drawn also to further study and readings in his profession. An efficiency report of the period notes his "energy, zeal," and the fact that he "availed himself of opportunities for improvement."⁴¹

Fort Sam Houston provided Eisenhower a dynamic introduction to Army life and the opportunity to meet a number of bright, ambitious, and engaging young officers. Assigned there



Courtesy of Dwight D. Eisenhower Library

Ike and Mamie's wedding portrait, Denver, Colorado, 1916

was Robert L. Eichelberger, West Point class of 1909, who commanded the Eighth Army in the Luzon and southern Philippines campaigns of World War II. The alphabetic proximity of Eichelberger's last name to Eisenhower's made him Ike's desk mate at the Leavenworth course. Ike also met his life-long friend Leonard T. "Gee" Gerow at Sam Houston. Gerow later commanded V Corps at Omaha Beach during the Normandy invasion. Gerow and Eisenhower became dedicated study mates at the Command and General Staff School.⁴²

Following his assignment at Fort Sam Houston, Eisenhower saw continued duty with troops at Fort Oglethorpe, Georgia, where he conducted tough training as part of a second series of officer training camps designed to weed out weak officer-cadets preparing for the rigors of World War I. In September 1917, Ike applied for duty with a machine-gun battalion earmarked for overseas combat. He was instead provided three months of temporary duty at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas.⁴³ Upon arrival at Fort Leavenworth in December, the post commandant immediately reprimanded him on behalf of the adjutant general of the Army. The War Department did not approve of young officers applying for special duty—even if it was hazardous duty. The message was clear: obey orders and let the War Department determine priorities. The episode exacerbated Eisenhower's already untrusting attitude toward the War Department. In addition, he had recently received a bill for missing supplies for which he did not feel responsible. Eisenhower later summarized his thoughts in *At Ease*: "If this was my first encounter with bureaucratic blundering, it was far from the last before World War I was over . . . I felt that in a nebulous region called the War Department, I had been found wanting."⁴⁴

While Ike's view of the War Department "continued to be beyond easy conversion to parlor language,"⁴⁵ he applied himself with vigor to his new duties. As assistant instructor for Company Q, he helped train provisional lieutenants—again in preparation for World War I duties. Author F. Scott Fitzgerald was a member of Eisenhower's platoon.⁴⁶ Busily engaged in the writing of his first novel, *This Side of Paradise*, during a mandatory military study period, Fitzgerald was told to redirect his efforts.⁴⁷ Leavenworth lore would have it that Ike himself issued the reprimand, but while it is probable that he did, we cannot be sure.

Ike was also put in charge of the regiment's physical training program—a challenging task during the Leavenworth winter of 1917–18. Bayonet drills, calisthenics, and exercises were the order of the day. Eisenhower described conditions as "frequently

unpleasant, and at times bitter, my duties were one way of keeping warm."⁴⁸

In early March 1918, the War Department assigned Eisenhower to Camp Meade, Maryland, where he was under the mistaken assumption that he was preparing for overseas duty with the 301st Tank Battalion (Heavy). Deeply involved in organizing the new unit, Ike was extremely disappointed when his instructional and organizational abilities made him invaluable to the continental mobilization effort. After coordinating final embarkation of the 301st, he followed War Department orders and reported to Camp Colt at Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, in April.

The Camp Colt assignment initially depressed Eisenhower, and as the camp grew to over 10,000 men, he found himself more and more tightly bound to its mobilization and training mission. Promoted to the rank of temporary lieutenant colonel, he was given command of the camp. Though humiliated by his inability to gain a combat command in the war effort, Camp Colt provided him a more valuable training ground. Combat command for Ike in Europe would have been at company or battalion level—a useful, though narrow, view of warfare. Camp Colt, on the other hand, required broad understanding and skills. Building the camp and training program from the ground up, Eisenhower experienced firsthand the logistical and leadership demands of an Army in microcosm. Furthermore, he learned how to apply preventive medicine and proper hygiene to combat disease. A congressional inquiry, with accompanying political measures, tested his resolve. Shortages in supplies and equipment



Courtesy of Dwight D. Eisenhower Library

Eisenhower as an instructor in the Tank Corps, Camp Meade, Maryland, 1919

required his utmost innovation and skill. Various postwar reductions taught him invaluable lessons concerning the motivation of soldiers and techniques successful in maintaining morale. He also learned to identify competent subordinates and strategically place them to accomplish his mission. Ike always begrudged the War Department his chance at combat command in World War I, but few combat theater positions would have offered Ike better preparation for the challenges to come than the one at Camp Colt. Of his stateside experience during this period, Eisenhower would later say: “. . . I had been singularly fortunate in the scope of my first three and a half years of duty. How to take a cross-section of Americans and convert them into first-rate fighting troops and officers had been learned by experience, not by textbook. . . . My education had not been neglected.”⁴⁹

While Ike was at Camp Colt preparing tank crews for overseas duty, George S. Patton, Jr., was intimately involved in their tactical use in France, where he earned the Distinguished Service Cross for heroism and courage. The two men met during assignment to Camp Meade, Maryland, in the fall of 1919. Patton was the commanding officer, 304th Tank Brigade; Eisenhower was second in command, 305th Tank Brigade. Although different in many ways, both men shared a passion for tank warfare. They were together at Meade for a year and spent much time together.⁵⁰

Patton was preparing for attendance at the Command and General Staff School, and he invited Ike to participate. Patton had received tactical problems from the school that the two analyzed, compared with the solutions of the school faculty, and then reanalyzed, factoring in their own field-tested tank tactics. Ike found the problems relatively easy, particularly since he was allowed to solve them in a stress-free environment.⁵¹ He and Patton tested their tank theories extensively, confirming speed, reliability, firepower, mass, and surprise as essential ingredients in successful tank warfare. They believed that by using terrain properly, tanks could break into enemy defenses, create confusion, and exploit the advantage by envelopment. Both published articles on their findings. Ike's November 1920 article in *Infantry Journal*, though professional and seemingly noncontroversial, resulted in a summons from the chief of Infantry, who informed Ike that his ideas were wrong and that henceforth he would keep them to himself or face a court-martial.⁵²

Eisenhower's ideas received a more enthusiastic reception from Brigadier General Fox Conner, to whom Ike was introduced at

a Sunday dinner in the home of the Pattons. Conner had served in France with General Pershing as the assistant chief of staff for operations of the American Expeditionary Force. Months later he would ask Ike to join his command in Panama.⁵³

But Camp Meade held additional trials for the Eisenhower family. Some days before Christmas 1920, their three-year-old son "Icky" was stricken with scarlet fever. He died a short time later. Eisenhower's most eloquent and touching prose in *At Ease*



Courtesy of Dwight D. Eisenhower Library

Mamie, David Dwight ("Icky"), and Dwight Eisenhower, ca. 1919

is dedicated to his and Mamie's loss. The boy apparently contracted the disease from a housekeeper the Eisenhowers had hired. In addition to his grief, Ike had to wrestle with a sense of guilt—much as he had over the loss of his brother's eye.⁵⁴

Some six months later, another crisis occurred. Eisenhower was charged with “offenses of the gravest character for which he might not only be dismissed from the service but imprisoned.”⁵⁵ Ike had claimed the sum of \$250.67 for the support of his son during a period of several months when the child had been living with an aunt in Iowa. Since Mamie and he lived in quarters on Camp Meade, he had no claim to the money. To his credit, Ike had raised the issue himself when he learned that another officer on post had been prosecuted for a similar offense. This did not mollify the acting inspector general of the Army, Brigadier General Eli Helmick, and the matter was vigorously pursued over an ensuing six-month period.⁵⁶

Interestingly, it was General Pershing's rise to chief of staff of the Army that turned the tide in the matter. Fox Conner immediately sent a memo to his old boss vouching for Eisenhower's efficiency and requesting his assignment to Conner's command in Panama. A previous request had been flatly denied by the War Department because charges were pending. This time, however, Army politics had changed. While Helmick had been friends with the previous chief of staff, Peyton March, it would perhaps not be wise to pursue an officer so well connected with the new leadership. Helmick executed an about-face, and orders were issued reassigning Eisenhower to Panama by January 1922.⁵⁷

Eisenhower makes no mention of the incident in *At Ease*, saying of his reassignment: “the red-tape was torn to pieces.” No doubt he learned a valuable lesson in bureaucratic politics from this episode, as well as the value of having a friend in high places. Ultimately, the incident had little effect on his career. His efficiency ratings in “tact” and “judgment” slipped a bit from previous ratings—relatively minor nicks considering Ike had faced a career-ending charge.⁵⁸

The Panama assignment began a fresh chapter in the life of Dwight Eisenhower. Assigned as Conner's executive officer at Camp Gaillard, Ike's experience and loyalty made him the ideal right-hand man. The mission of Conner's command was to reorganize and modernize the defense of the Canal Zone. Conner was relentless in this pursuit, and Eisenhower was often the enforcer of his policies. Conner required Eisenhower to submit a daily five-paragraph field order, an exacting task that involved

analysis of mission, training, and logistics.⁵⁹ Because Conner believed that the harshness of the Treaty of Versailles and the U.S. failure to join the League of Nations would lead to a major conflict, he urged Ike to be ready for it.⁶⁰

General Conner was a prewar graduate of the staff college at Leavenworth, and he encouraged Ike to prepare for his own attendance. Gradually, Conner shaped Ike's assignment into an intellectual proving ground for the future. This began with the rekindling of Ike's boyhood love of military history—a love forsaken as a result of the tedious memorization requirements at West Point. The Conner library became an inspiring place for Ike. He read *The Long Roll* by Mary Johnston, *The Exploits of Brigadier Gerard* in the Napoleonic Wars, and *The Crisis* by Winston Churchill.⁶¹

Conner questioned his pupil about the books he read, the decisions of commanders in the past, the alternatives available to them, and the conditions of each situation. Ike claims to have read Clausewitz' *On War* three times during the assignment. Conner also encouraged him to read the works of Jomini and Mahan.⁶² Ike became fascinated with the histories of the American Revolution and Civil War, his screened porch becoming a war room with a drawing board and pinned-up maps used in studying the campaigns of past wars.

Discussions with General Conner were often conducted during mounted reconnaissance, as the two men "were constantly laying out routes and charting them on maps for the rapid deployment of troops and their supply trains. . . ."⁶³ Conner is described as "something of a philosopher," who "quoted Shakespeare at length" and was a virtual "storehouse of axiomatic advice."⁶⁴ To hold up his end of the conversation, Ike was drawn to the works of Plato, Tacitus, and Nietzsche, sure that "sooner or later the General would be asking me about them."⁶⁵ Ike would describe his tutelage as "a sort of graduate school in military affairs and the humanities, leavened by the comments and discourses of a man who was experienced in his knowledge of men and their conduct."⁶⁶

Conner rated his executive officer as "superior" in most categories, consistently slighting only Eisenhower's "physical activity"—a category that included "agility" and the "ability to work rapidly." The lower rating was probably due more to Ike's old football knee injury than a mental deficiency on his part. One of Conner's superiors, who admitted to knowing Eisenhower only "slightly," questioned the rating: "I have faith in the judgment,

spirit of fairness and impartiality of the reporting officer, yet I believe the rating given is too high." Later superiors began to echo General Conner's assessment, which found the young major "exceptionally well fitted for general staff training." Always Conner closed with the remark—"he should be sent to the course at the Army Service Schools."⁶⁷

III.

WHAT KIND OF SCHOOL?

The American Civil War and the German wars of unification had demonstrated the changing nature of warfare. Wars were becoming more technological and complex and required highly educated officers to conduct them. Out of the general despondency of the post-Civil War period, the need for additional officer education became apparent to U.S. military leaders. With Indian pacification largely accomplished, the U.S. military was struggling to refocus on what its principal mission should be. This malaise, together with the serious leadership shortcomings experienced during the war, did not go unnoticed by U.S. Army leaders, who saw education as a means of rekindling professionalism.¹ As a result, on 7 May 1881—the 54th anniversary of the founding of Fort Leavenworth, Kansas—Commanding General of the U.S. Army William T. Sherman ordered the establishment of the School of Application for Infantry and Cavalry. Sherman established the new school in Leavenworth in recognition that the military was a profession with its roots in a unique body of knowledge and that officers needed to master that knowledge to be considered professionals.

General Sherman's concept of military education guided the School of Application for Infantry and Cavalry through its infant years. Sherman felt that officers, especially those being groomed for increasing responsibility, would benefit from the broadest possible educational experience. While he would have preferred that the school concentrate entirely on military subjects, the wide disparity of educational backgrounds of officers required remedial courses to make up for deficiencies. Many officers of the period required the basics of math, geography, and American history, as well as military theory and its practical application. The early years of the School of Application for Infantry and Cavalry afforded its students preparation for the duties they would perform at company level in an Army making a transition from the Civil War and Indian War periods to a peacetime Army with its attendant administrative requirements.²

During the 1890s, the school evolved from its early focus on daily recitations and "emphasis on drill, ceremonies, and garrison duties."³ Key players in this transition were Arthur L. Wagner and Eben Swift, both of whom were instrumental in the development of pre-World War I Leavenworth doctrine, tactics, and



General William T. Sherman, who ordered the establishment of the School of Application for Infantry and Cavalry, a precursor of the U.S. Army Command and General Staff School

course curriculum. Wagner, who served as a course instructor and assistant commandant and influenced the school until 1903, "wanted to immerse officers in the details of a variety of tactical situations, where they could draw their own conclusions regarding a proper course to be pursued."⁴ Eben Swift, whose direct association with the school extended until 1912, introduced the applicatory method to the curriculum by standardizing tactical analysis through the use of the five-paragraph field order—an order format that survives to this day. The process, similar to

that required of Eisenhower by Fox Conner during his Panama assignment, demanded that a student study a map, conduct an estimate of a situation, and make a tactical decision prior to writing a five-paragraph field order. The efforts of Wagner and Swift were critical in the maturation of a school that began with an essentially garrison mentality but developed into a doctrine- and skill-producing institution with far-reaching effects on officer development and professionalism.⁵

In 1904, the War Department reorganized the school as part of Secretary of War Elihu Root's proposals for a system of post-graduate military education. In theory, only the best graduates at one level of Army schools would progress to the succeeding level. Thus, Leavenworth developed into two schools, with only



Eben Swift, an early organizer of Leavenworth doctrine, tactics, and course development (as a captain)

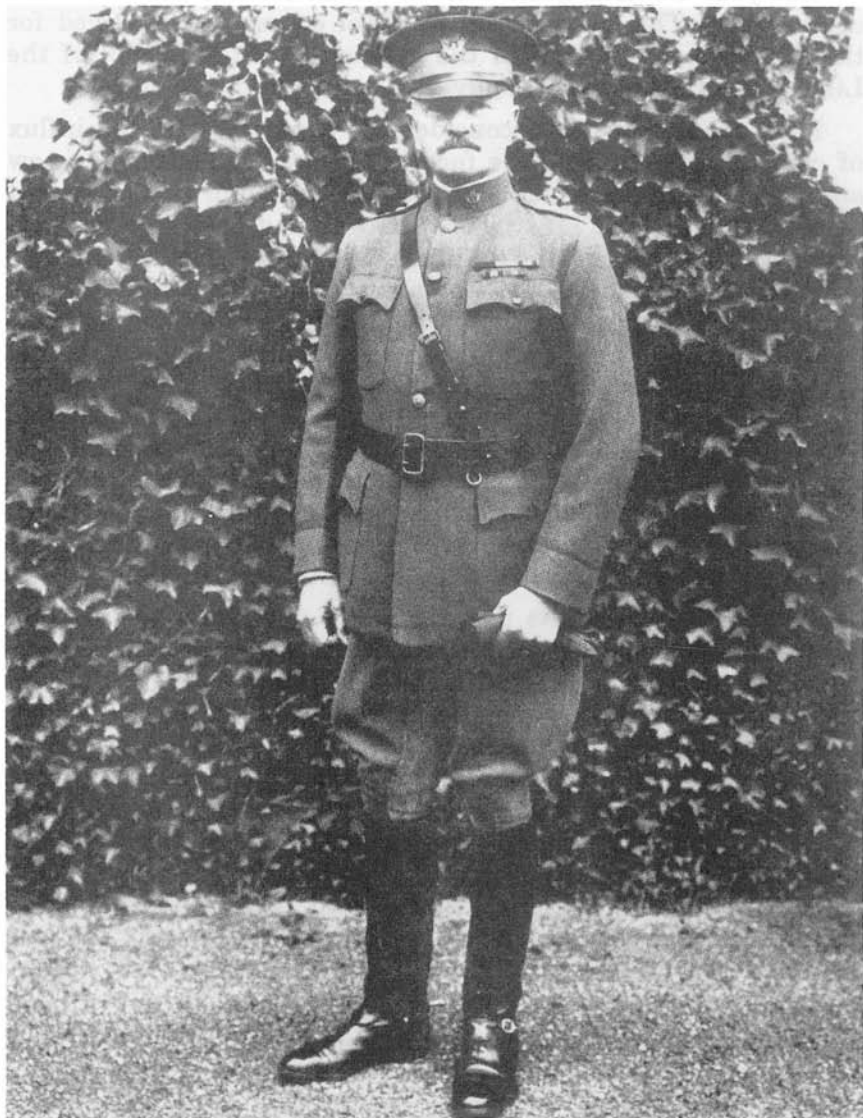
the top half of the first year School of the Line graduates to attend the second year Staff College. Students at the School of the Line studied engineering, law, military hygiene, and foreign languages, with emphasis on command and staff duties in units up to division and with tactics as the central theme. The Staff College emphasized the functioning of large-unit general staffs, corps-level operations, and logistics. Naturally, competition became quite keen for admission to the second year course. In the decade prior to World War I, Leavenworth stressed consistency in military operations, downplaying the role of "genius." Uniformity of application and mutual understanding of tactical situations was of paramount importance at the school. A common language was developed among school graduates based on shared experiences and a similar approach to problem solving. As "Leavenworth men," graduates came to exude pride in their development and understanding and found increasing respect throughout the Army.⁶

Leavenworth graduates were in great demand in World War I. Many of the officers in General John J. Pershing's American Expeditionary Force (AEF) required special expertise in the planning, logistics, and deployment of large units. Hence, Leavenworth graduates were uniquely suited for the numerous command and general staff positions available. In a 1924 address at the Army War College, General Pershing attested to the contribution of school graduates: "During the World War, the graduates of Leavenworth and the War College held the most responsible positions in our armies . . . had it not been for the able and loyal assistance of the officers trained at these schools, the tremendous problems of combat, supply, and transportation could not have been solved."⁷

Offensive combat conducted by the Americans in the summer and fall of 1918 was remarkably like that studied at Leavenworth before the war, AEF doctrine conforming in many respects to the tactical teaching of the school. Pershing spurned British and French doctrine, insisting on uniquely American efforts. But the small number of school graduates and the demand for large numbers of trained staff and combat officers compelled Pershing to set up a three-month officer course in France patterned after the curriculum and doctrine at Leavenworth. Throughout the conflict, Leavenworth men had the advantage of associations made at the school, the common language developed there, and the confidence of having worked out difficult battle problems using the applicatory method. Evidence compiled at Pershing's direction after the war strongly suggested that Leavenworth

graduates had a distinct advantage over nongraduates in performing their wartime functions.⁸

Suspended in May 1916 “by exigency of service,”⁹ the Leavenworth schools reopened for the 1919 school year. After the war, authorities at Leavenworth stated that the War Department’s closing of the school during national emergencies was “believed to be wrong” and noted that it seemed “improper to close it at



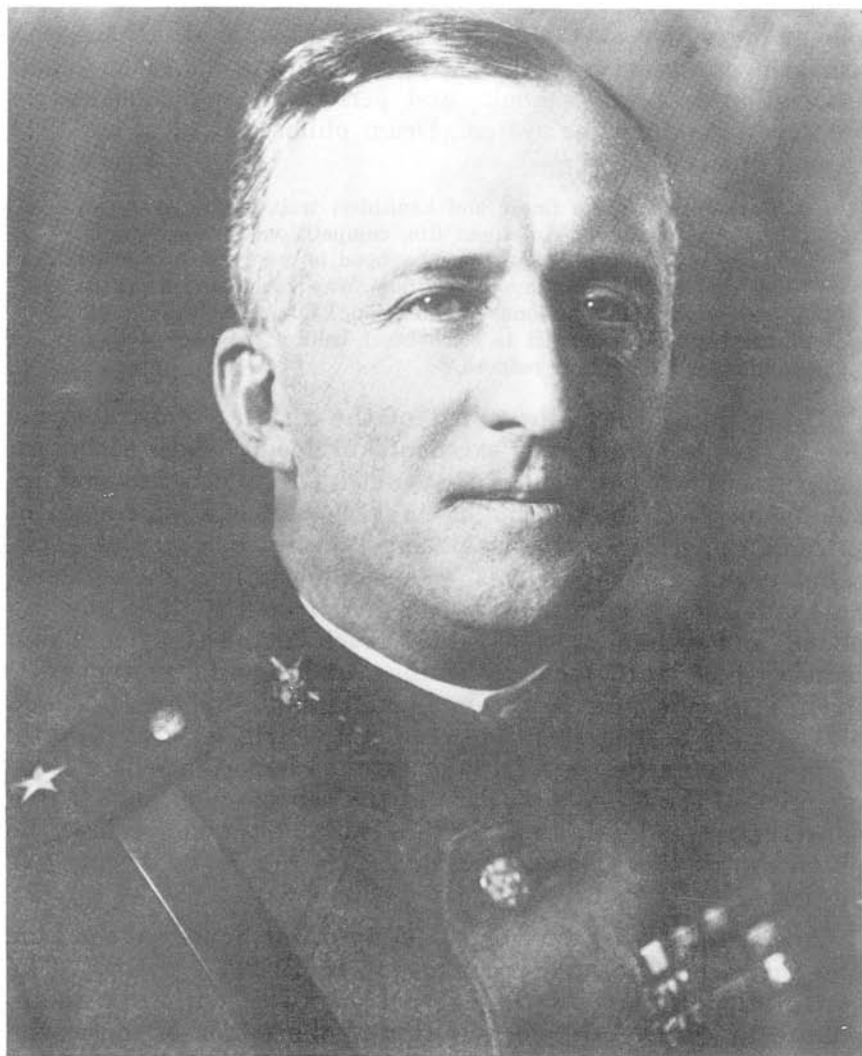
General John J. Pershing, commander in chief of the AEF, 1918, and an early promoter of Leavenworth graduates

just the time when it could perform the greatest service.”¹⁰ In addition, reopening the school for the 1919—20 school year required a tremendous effort to reestablish the curriculum and, in most cases, to rewrite textbooks based on the enlightening experience of World War I. On reopening, Leavenworth reverted to its prewar organization of the one year School of the Line, which emphasized military operations up to division level, and the second year General Staff School, which focused on corps and army levels. The General Staff School course was reserved for the top 40 to 60 percent of the graduates of the School of the Line or for those having equivalent military experience.

Both schools acquired considerable expertise with the influx of combat veterans into the faculty and student body. The new staff and faculty believed that the doctrine and tactics taught at the School of the Line before the war had been in large part confirmed. As their goal, they now sought to establish a uniquely American doctrine and to get away from the use of foreign manuals and pamphlets. They recognized that while much had been learned during the European war, many of the details and events of the war were unique and not likely to be repeated. Classifications such as “open,” “position,” “stabilized,” and “trench” could be used to describe different combat situations but were not to be viewed as special classes of warfare. Leavenworth was to inculcate offensive spirit by the study of open warfare offensive situations, taking into account war experiences with new weapons and their employment methods.¹¹

During the immediate postwar period from 1919 to 1923, the schools capitalized on lessons learned from the wartime experience. By 1922, the publication of American texts on the war had been completed, as had a complete revision of the War Department’s *Field Service Regulations*. The Leavenworth curriculum concentrated on military organization; the tactics and techniques of the various services—both separately and in combination; plans and orders; decision making; and logistics. Instructors continued to use the applicatory method, by which students learned principles in the classroom and then applied them to tactical decision making during map exercises, maneuvers, war games, and staff rides.¹²

Throughout this period, school administrators noted the students’ general irritation with the marking system and the competitiveness that it fostered. Competition for admission to the General Staff School was keen; in the 1922 graduating class, 197 officers attended the School of the Line, but only 75 continued for a second year at the General Staff School. Indeed,



Brigadier General Hugh A. Drum, assistant commandant of the school at Leavenworth, September 1920—July 1921

eleven members of the School of the Line did not graduate because of academic failure. Noting that “the question of the marking system of these schools has been carefully studied by successive commandants for the last twenty years,”¹³ Assistant Commandant Hugh A. Drum saw the main question as how to announce the marks to students: “The announcement of the exact percentages after each problem . . . seemed to disturb the student officers and cause so keen a personal competition as to be undesirable.”¹⁴ Drum supported the competitive system and

viewed opposition as the product of the "failures of officers who fear competition with brother officers."¹⁵ Citing his seven years' association with the schools, and perhaps facing considerable pressure to change the system, Drum philosophized in his 1922 annual report:

Competition is the finest and healthiest trait in the American race. In all walks of American life, competition, in one form or another, is a daily incident. From boyhood to manhood Americans foster and practice healthy competition. Why should the Army be an exception to this national characteristic? Competition is the life of these schools. Once it is removed, I believe the present high standard will be greatly reduced.¹⁶

Drum noted that "the spirit of the officers under instruction . . . has been uniformly excellent," although "under such keen competition, it is but natural that individual officers are at times disappointed."¹⁷ Drum thought "healthy, outdoor experience of extreme importance" in dissipating "the intense mental application required at the schools."¹⁸ According to him, the eighteen-hole golf course, polo field, twelve tennis courts, three bowling alleys, and swimming pool added much to the enjoyment and recreation of staff, faculty, families, and especially students.¹⁹ Drum's successor as assistant commandant, Robert H. Allen, also attested to the value of recreational activity at Leavenworth: "The golf course, especially, is of extreme importance as a large majority of the officers on duty at the schools play golf. It is a conservative estimate to state that without the golf course the efficiency of these schools would be decreased by twenty-five percent."²⁰

Allen also praised the consolidation of the School of the Line and the General Staff School (begun in 1923) by noting: "The consolidation into one class will do away with the disappointment which heretofore existed in the minds of those who had not made the General Staff Class."²¹ The purpose of the consolidation was to accommodate a large group of over a thousand officers who had entered service during World War I and who had no schooling in general staff or higher command duties. In order to consolidate the two courses into a single course (now renamed the Command and General Staff School), some of the instruction in the separate arms was transferred to the various branch schools. Subjects pertaining to army and theater levels of operations were transferred to the Army War College.

Considerable debate within the Army on the structure of the officer education system accompanied the transition. General of the Armies John J. Pershing suspected that too much money

was being spent shuttling officers to and from the schools, too much of an officer's time was spent in the schools at the expense of field experience, and that there was duplication of effort within the system. Pershing convened a board of officers to study the problem. The result was a series of battles over doctrine and territorial prerogatives that was played out against a background of greatly reduced funding from which to support any decisions made. Pershing himself made the final decision concerning Leavenworth. The school at Leavenworth was reduced to a one year course, with the School of the Line and the General Staff School combined to form the Command and General Staff School. The effect of the decision was to limit the breadth of what could realistically be accomplished at both Leavenworth and the War College. Whereas the War College had earlier focused on the larger issues of national defense, the reduction of the Leavenworth course to a single year compelled the War College to concentrate instead on the strictly military aspects of army and theater operations.²² Directly affected by the transition was Major Dwight Eisenhower, who attended the 1926 class at Leavenworth and the 1928 class at the War College.

The mission of the new Command and General Staff School was to provide instruction on (1) the combined use of all arms in the division and in the army corps; (2) the proper functions of commanders of divisions and of army corps; and (3) the proper functions of general staff officers of divisions and of army corps.²³

Although officers in the first one-year class at the Command and General Staff School (1923) were not as well prepared for the course as school authorities desired, officials expected future classes to improve as potential students prepared themselves by using Correspondence Course D, available through the school.²⁴ Within a year of the change to the one-year course, the commandant could declare it "eminently practical . . . free from extraneous matter and so-called padding."²⁵

Despite the generally positive response to the one-year concept, the Army and Leavenworth leadership considered it a temporary measure, a three- or four-year effort to increase the number of officers with Leavenworth experience. Some observers continued to believe the one-year curriculum sacrificed quality for quantity since instructors presented less in-depth analysis, and students were forced to digest material at a hurried pace. In 1928, the school returned to the two-year course, reducing the size of classes in the process. Brigadier General Edward L. King, the

commandant, would later pronounce the two-year curriculum successful, as it provided students more time to "assimilate the instruction and practical exercises."²⁶

The seven classes graduating from the one-year course at Leavenworth from 1923 to 1929 experienced a stable curriculum and doctrine. To avoid trench warfare, school doctrine directed strong and aggressive offensive action to envelop or penetrate enemy defensive positions. Follow-on pursuit required units to push both friendly and enemy troops to the limit to deny the enemy time to reorganize. Mobility and finesse were keys to the offense, rather than concentrated brute force, which required a greater investment of men and materiel. Surprise was also advantageous, because the attacker was able to choose the time and place of attack. While a commander in the defense could choose ground and buy time, doctrine considered the defense as a temporary expedient until the offense could be resumed. Furthermore, extended periods of defense forfeited freedom of maneuver and had a negative impact on troop morale.²⁷

Leavenworth instruction involving the use of tanks and air power was not immune from the military-political wranglings of the day. Air power doctrine at the school emphasized air support of tactical ground forces and reflected the ground-versus-air controversies and resolutions of the period. Coordinated air and ground operations, such as those being developed in Germany, were not a part of the Leavenworth curriculum. Tanks were viewed as infantry weapons for overcoming defensive obstacles to infantry advances, but they were seen as too vulnerable to artillery to operate independently of infantry. While some freethinkers encouraged innovations in the use of tanks, the proponents of existing dogma threatened disciplinary actions against those who pressed on concerning controversial tank issues.²⁸

In July 1925, as the 1925—26 class began its course, a new commandant also came to the Command and General Staff School—Brigadier General Edward L. King. A pre-World War I graduate of the School of the Line and Staff College, King was sensitive to student morale and more willing than his predecessors to change established procedures. He had a somewhat different view of competition at the school and seemed to adopt a students' eye view of proceedings. King ended the A, B, C grading system and had instructors mark students' products "S" for satisfactory or "U" for unsatisfactory, with appropriate comments provided to rectify important errors. The faculty continued to maintain percentage grades in order to calculate class stand-

ings, but authorities would reveal neither the percentages nor the standings to students until the end of the year. This was the system in place for 1925—26, but King ended both class standings and the “honor” and “distinguished” classifications for the 1927—28 class.²⁹

King saw the mission of the school as teaching first and testing afterward. He had the class divided into committees of about twenty students, and each committee had two instructors “to assist in every way possible the members of the committee to which assigned.”³⁰ The instructors would “consult with and counsel student[s],” clear up academic matters, and bring about “a closer relationship between the faculty and student body.”³¹

The bulk of the 1925—26 curriculum consisted of three main subjects: tactics and technique; tactical principles; and command, staff, and logistics. Other subjects taught included history, training, leadership, military organization, combat order, field engineering, military intelligence, strategy, and legal principles.

The major subjects emphasized the tactics and techniques of the various branches, including their individual capabilities and their potency when incorporated with other branches. The command, staff, and logistics subject area required officers to compare administrative and field orders, to develop the details for moving a division by truck and rail, and to determine the logistics of supply during attack, pursuit, and defense. Perhaps the most important course, Tactical Principles and Decisions, took up the full spectrum of tactical considerations and principles and was reinforced by the students’ application in staff rides, map maneuvers, and problem solving.³²

Another course, Methods of Training, required students to prepare map and terrain problems, map maneuvers, and field problems as if they were using them as means of instruction. The Military History course emphasized the campaigns of World War I and touched briefly on historical methodology. Leadership, taught mostly by lectures, included sections on psychology, troop-leading procedures, and leadership in a historical context.³³

Attendance at the 1925—26 Command and General Staff School was voluntary, with the policies for attendance established by the War Department, which calculated allotments for each branch. Combat branches received 232 allotments, noncombat branches 18 allotments. Candidates would be field grade officers, although exceptional captains who expected to be promoted to major by September 1928 could be considered. Half the class would be officers thirty-eight years of age or under; officers

forty-seven or older had to have special qualifications. Candidates were to have an efficiency rating of at least "average" and were to be

... familiar with the organization of the division and included units, should have a knowledge of the methods of solving tactical problems and of the form and expression of field orders, and should have a grasp of the tactics and technique of the separate arms as will properly enable them, after a brief review of the reinforced brigade, to pass to the solution of problems involving a division.³⁴

The War Department and the applicants' branch offices determined who would enter each Leavenworth class. Because those eligible for the class of 1925—26 fell within that enlarged group of officers commissioned during World War I, it was a highly competitive year in which to seek entrance. Branch managers would be selective in who they sent; those not selected would have to wait their turn. This set the stage for a confrontation between a bureaucratic, authoritarian War Department, on the one hand, and an obscure but determined major on the other.

IV.

THE YEAR AT LEAVENWORTH

In a letter to the adjutant general dated 3 August 1924, Dwight D. Eisenhower made his formal request to attend the Command and General Staff School for the school year 1925—26. With his tour of foreign service in Panama expiring in January 1925, Eisenhower submitted his application explaining that “if the request is approved it may affect the orders to be published for my next assignment to duty.”¹ The letter closes with the admission: “I am a graduate of no service school except the Infantry Tank School.”² Fox Conner endorsed the application, noting that Eisenhower was “especially fitted to profit by the course,” had “marked qualities for General Staff training,” and despite his lack of service school training “. . . [had] kept pace with the Benning course, by special study and contact with recent Benning graduates.”³

The letter, with endorsement, was received in the Adjutant General’s Office on 28 August and was promptly forwarded to the Office of the Chief of Infantry for comment. A handwritten response addressed to the adjutant general and initialed “For the Chief of Infantry” stated: “The name of Capt. D. D. Eisenhower has been placed on the tentative list of those officers who will be considered to attend the 1925—26 course at the C&G.S.S. Capt. Eisenhower will be eligible for the detail as he is about to be promoted to the grade of Major at the present time.”⁴

The chief of Infantry returned the request to the Adjutant General’s Office on 29 August. The action officer, Major Whipple, referred the paperwork to a Mr. Becker on 30 August with the handwritten directive: “usual action.” What resulted was a 3 September endorsement through the Panama Canal Department addressed to Eisenhower. The approval statement lifted the first sentence from the chief of Infantry’s draft almost verbatim, stating that Eisenhower’s name “has been placed on the tentative list of those officers who will be considered for detail to the Command and General Staff School, 1925—26 course.”⁵ The endorsement consisted of just the one sentence. Although Captain Eisenhower’s permanent promotion status was an important consideration in his qualification for the school, comments in that regard to the requesting officer would not have been appropriate.



Courtesy of Dwight D. Eisenhower Library

General Fox Conner, Ike's mentor (Panama Canal Zone)

One can only marvel at the dispatch with which the entire application process took place. The Adjutant General's Office received the request on 28 August, staffed it, and prepared a response by 3 September. The speed with which it was processed, coupled with the essentially noncommittal nature of the response, suggests that it was a routine action. Major Whipple's "usual action" comment supports this interpretation. While considered technically qualified for attendance at the school, Eisenhower was still far from attaining his objective—perhaps even farther away as a result of his application.

In the fall of 1924, three months ahead of schedule, the War Department moved Eisenhower back to Fort Meade, Maryland, to coach football. Ike describes the reasons for the move as "a cosmic top-secret to me. Then or now, one guess would be as

good as another.”⁶ The reasons are perhaps not so difficult to discern. Ike had in fact coached three years of football during his previous Fort Meade assignment and with considerable success. The War Department wanted to build a first-rate Army team at Fort Meade, and Ike was their man. His Command and General Staff School application may well have reminded the War Department they had a “football coach” scheduled to return from overseas—the perfect match.

The season did not go well for Ike, and it must have been difficult for him to return to the post where his son had died three years earlier. Told that he would be reassigned to Fort Benning, Georgia, at the end of the season, Ike traveled to Washington to inquire of the chief of Infantry whether the orders could be changed so that he could attend Leavenworth. “I should have known better,” Eisenhower later wrote, “he refused even to listen to my arguments.”⁷ But by this time, General Conner was serving in Washington as deputy chief of staff to General John L. Hines—in the same State-War-Navy Building as the chief of Infantry.⁸ Ike probably visited his old mentor after the chief of Infantry’s rebuff, for several days after his return to Meade, he received a telegram that read: “NO MATTER WHAT ORDERS YOU RECEIVE FROM THE WAR DEPARTMENT, MAKE NO PROTEST ACCEPT WITHOUT QUESTION SIGNED CONNER.”⁹

Shortly thereafter, Ike received orders detailing him to recruiting duty at Fort Logan, Colorado. In Ike’s words: “To be assigned to the recruiting service, in those days . . . was felt to be a rebuke a little less devastating than a reprimand.”¹⁰ But Ike had been pulled from the fire by Conner once before, and he had confidence the general was again working his magic. A letter from Conner explained everything. Because the chief of Infantry had jurisdiction over Fort Benning, he would always have to approve the request of any officer at that post (Ike included) to attend Leavenworth. But Conner had arranged for Ike’s temporary transfer from the Infantry to the Adjutant General’s Office, which had charge of recruiting officers and had two billets for the 1925–26 class at Leavenworth. Conner arranged for Eisenhower to receive one of the billets. Upon receiving orders to the school with an August 1925 reporting date, Ike declared: “I was ready to fly—and needed no airplane!”¹¹

Reflecting on the process by which he circumvented the chief of Infantry and gained entrance to the Command and General Staff School, Eisenhower’s own words are instructive:

To the cynic, all this may seem proof of "It's not *what* you know, it's *who* you know." . . . Certainly, had I been denied the good fortune of knowing Fox Conner, the course of my career might have been radically different. Because I *did* know him, I did go to Leavenworth. And I must confess that the school there, a watershed in my life, might not have been half so professionally profitable to me had I gone three years later on the schedule the Chief of Infantry thought suitable.¹²

Concerned that young readers might misunderstand his message, Ike continues in *At Ease*:

Always try to associate yourself closely with and learn as much as you can from those who know more than you, who do better than you, who see more clearly than you. Don't be afraid to reach upward. Apart from the rewards of friendship, the association might pay off at some unforeseen time—that is only an accidental by-product. The important thing is that the learning will make you a better person.¹³

As the euphoria of gaining entrance faded, Ike began to have misgivings about his qualifications for the school. Unlike most of his future classmates, he had not attended a service school and consequently felt himself "being sent to college without a secondary school education."¹⁴ An aide in the Office of the Chief of Infantry suggested Leavenworth attendance without a service school education could render him useless as an infantry officer and predicted: "You will probably fail."¹⁵ Ike, having reservations and doubts on the matter, wrote to General Conner for advice on how to prepare for the course. The response was reassuring:

You may not know it, but because of your three years' work in Panama, you are far better trained and ready for Leavenworth than anybody I know.

You will recall that during your entire service with me I required that you write a field order for the operation of the post every day for the years you were there. You became so well acquainted with the technics and routine of preparing plans and orders for operations that included their logistics, that they will be second nature to you. You will feel no sense of inferiority . . .¹⁶

If Eisenhower was reassured, he was not overconfident, and his preparation took on the same earnestness as his studies for the West Point entrance examinations some fifteen years earlier. Throughout the winter and spring, he worked the school's correspondence problems, probably Correspondence Course D, which was designed for that purpose. The course presented problems to students for independent solution and included approved solutions in separate envelopes. Ike did not consider

the work a chore and spent considerable time on his studies. Of his correspondence effort, he remembered: "I loved to do that kind of work . . . practical problems have always been my equivalent of crossword puzzles."¹⁷

In August 1925, Ike took the additional precaution of having his appendix removed at Fitzsimmons Army Hospital. While doctors attributed his internal disorder to the ravages of adjusting from the dissipating Panamanian climate, Ike thought it best to err on the side of safety and lower the risk of illness during the year-long grind of the Leavenworth course.¹⁸ The trip from Fort Logan, Colorado, to Fort Leavenworth was not a long one, but the Eisenhowers encountered considerable heat in that part of the country in the summer of 1925. In a sense, the journey was another rite of passage for the Eisenhower family, which now included three-year-old son John. Mamie's parents, the Douds, were Denver residents, and it was undoubtedly with mixed emotions that the trip back to Eisenhower country was undertaken. It is not known whether the Eisenhowers stopped in Abilene, some 150 miles west of Fort Leavenworth, but it is difficult to imagine the Eisenhowers not visiting there as it was along the route.

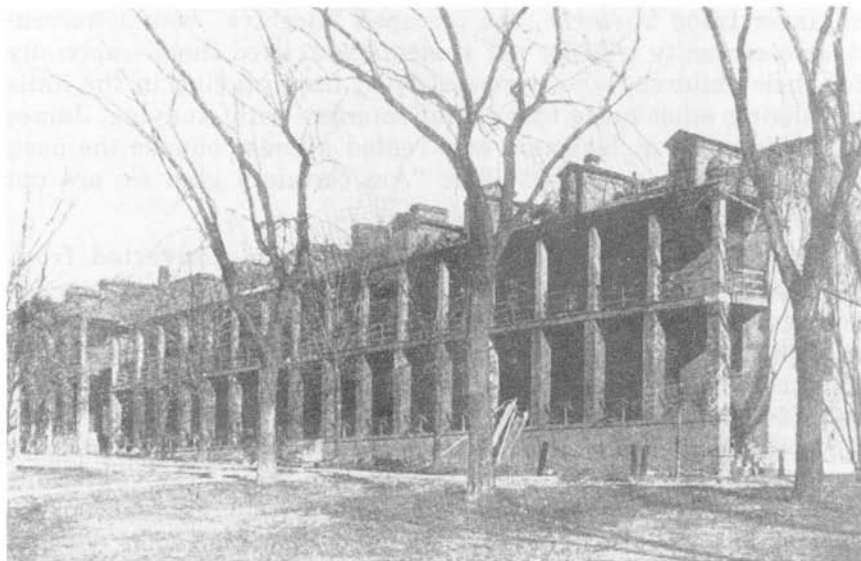
Upon reporting at Fort Leavenworth, a piece of good luck met Ike and Mamie. Rather than being quartered in the "Beehive," with nearly 100 other student families, they were given quarters across the street in Otis Hall. Converted from engineer troop barracks, the cramped "Beehive" was a tremendous community trial for the students who lived there—especially for their children, who were restricted from playing in the halls or making other noise that might interfere with studying. James L. Collins, Sr., a classmate who rented a house outside the post, wrote his wife in August 1925: "Am certainly glad we are not in the bee hive. . . ."¹⁹

Otis Hall, on the other hand, had been converted from twenty-four bachelor apartments in 1921 to eight apartments for married couples in 1925.²⁰ In 1922, the post added electric ranges to the kitchens and central heating to replace separate furnaces.²¹ The Eisenhowers were assigned apartment 2C, a second-floor apartment that included a third-floor dormer. The dormer became Ike's model command post, "off limits to all post and family personnel." His childhood desire for "splendid isolation" effectively achieved, the dormer gradually took on the look of his screened porch in Panama. He had soon covered the walls with maps, installed a large work table, and stacked the bookshelves with class reference materials.²²



Courtesy of Maj. Mark C. Bender

The Eisenhower's living quarters at Otis Hall, Fort Leavenworth



Courtesy of Maj. Mark C. Bender

Fort Leavenworth's "Beehive," the quarters for nearly 100 student families during 1926

In the words of another student, "the usual joys of getting settled were intensified by the sweltering weather during the first part of September."²³ That the "post administration" had systematized the procedure for processing and moving onto the post was one of the saving graces of the experience.²⁴ Perhaps exacerbated by the September heat, the class considered the opening exercises a test of endurance. Yet here began the class' love affair with the new school commandant, Brigadier General Edward L. King, or "Big Hearted Eddie," as he was affectionately known.²⁵

On 11 September, King presented a lecture to the class on the subject of command in which he skillfully articulated how the inherent power and authority of command must be tailored by the unique abilities and personality of the individual commander. In terms that must have been especially heartening to Major Eisenhower, King took many of his command analogies from the football field. King described the commander as the "one who gives the signal" and likened staff members to members of the team. The team would push the "play" to the limit "until the ball is down." Individual members of the staff were also like players, as they were "presumed to be competent else [they] would not be on the team." Just as players must keep the "field captain" informed as to "whether his opponent is hard to handle," so "staff officers should keep their chief constantly informed as to the possibilities." And finally, "A football team composed of individuals of medium ability, indoctrinated in teamwork and led by a real leader, will beat a team of hastily assembled stars, all wanting to carry the ball individually and in eleven different directions."²⁶

The Class of 1926 (classes are known by their date of graduation) began with 248 students; 245 would graduate. Of the three students who did not, one transferred, one resigned, and one was relieved for illness.²⁷ It was a "young" class, perhaps younger than any before it, with the average age of students "well under forty."²⁸

Welcomes and advice from the school director and various instructors characterized the opening days of the course. Instructors assured the students that there were no "trick" problems and warned them not to play hunches, to blindly follow the solutions or methods of previous problems, or to attempt to straddle the fence in presenting solutions. Students were told to "tackle" problems with an open mind and were encouraged to put themselves into the equation as though the situation actually existed.²⁹

But soon, the students faced the hard daily schedule that had come to symbolize the Leavenworth course. During the first month, to give students a feel for the "applicatory system," the staff did not grade the solutions to problems. (These early problems reinforced important military principles.) As part of the daily routine, mornings were divided into three periods of one hour each, beginning at 8:30 A.M. and continuing until noon, with breaks scheduled after each hour. During these lecture or conference periods, instructors randomly called on students for comments but again did not grade these "recitations." Afternoons began at 1:00 P.M. and normally consisted of map problems and practical exercises, where students prepared an estimate of a situation for their instructors' criticism. Despite numerous free-afternoon periods, students had extensive readings to prepare for future classes, which required afternoon and evening study time.³⁰

Tactical rides provided a welcome change for some, though Ike would recall that "many hated this with a passion."³¹ This was certainly not the case for Ike, because General Conner had thoroughly rehearsed him in the process. During the rides, the entire class rode horseback to an unknown destination for reconnaissance. Maps provided by the instructors showed principal terrain features, but the students conducted detailed analyses of the ground by observation. Students received a statement of the tactical situation and several requirements that involved drafting orders for troop movements and the like—to be turned in by a designated hour. Students received their first graded problems in October, but the weight of the problems again reflected a gradual introduction to the course. The first 8 problems counted 5 units each out of the 1,000 units in the total course. Five of the eight problems were terrain exercises conducted on the tactical rides. These rides ended in October and would not resume until spring. During the winter, map problems were solved indoors, usually on the Gettysburg and Leavenworth three-inch maps.³² The Gettysburg map provided Ike a rare advantage: he knew the terrain from his Camp Colt days and could orient himself quickly from his first-hand knowledge of the area.

Though he had no way of knowing it at the time, Ike's performance relative to his peers was lowest in that first graded month of October. Although ranking 14th in a class of nearly 250 students was exemplary, he finished in the top 10 every month thereafter.³³ His increasing success was due in large part to his selection of a good study system, which students chose

in October. There were three general study systems in use at the school during that time: the single, committee, and partner methods. Committees usually consisted of four to eight members, who split up work and shared each other's views. Although one committee invited Ike to join, he declined, not wanting "to get involved with too much conversation, argument, and discussion."³⁴ Perhaps reminiscent of his early eschewal of Abilene's social clubs, Ike was not interested in a group approach to tasks. At least this time, he was apparently asked to join a group—a point he would find significant enough to mention in *At Ease* some forty years later.

While solitary study offered the greatest independence, Ike also saw its drawbacks—loss of perspective and the possibility of going stale. In the partner system, he saw many advantages and few disadvantages. Partners could serve as a check on each other and help remove much of the monotony of study. Moreover, while plotting tactical situations on a map, one partner could read instructions, while the other marked the map. Although the partner system had no direct effect on problems solved by students in class, Ike could see in teamwork a legitimate method of saving "precious hours" and assimilating the principles of a subject.³⁵

Although he considered several of his friends for partners, Ike ultimately teamed up with Leonard T. Gerow, a close friend from his Fort Sam Houston days. Gerow, a graduate of the Virginia Military Institute, was about the same age as Ike and shared his distrust of committees and his desire to excel in the course. He had also graduated first in his class at Fort Benning's Infantry School. Because Gerow lived across the street in the "Beehive," Ike's "model command post" in the dormer of Otis Hall was the ideal meeting place, and it became the site of their most intense efforts. "We learned far more in quiet concentration than in the lecture room," Ike would later say of their joint efforts.³⁶

Ike clearly favored a measured and reasonable approach to the course and discounted theories that ascribed mysterious qualities to it. He shared his views of the school in an article designed for prospective students that he entitled "The Leavenworth Course," published in the June 1927 issue of *Infantry Journal*.³⁷ In the article, Ike notes that "some officers keep a rather complete system of notes covering points considered important, others keep none at all."³⁸ Ike had unusual assistance in this regard. Exactly where on the note-taking continuum



General Gerow, Ike's study mate at Leavenworth before the war

George S. Patton, Jr., stood is not known, but Ike had a copy of Patton's notes throughout the course. Despite the basic similarity of Patton's 1924 course and Ike's in 1926, the use of materials from prior years was not prohibited. In fact, a classmate of Ike's publicly advised in the *Cavalry Journal*: "Among the most helpful aids to study are the old problems used in former years. . . ." ³⁹ Apparently, Ike thought the notes of his old friend from Fort Meade helpful, or so Patton intimated shortly after Ike's graduation: "You are very kind to think my

notes helped you . . . I feel sure that you would have done as well without them.”⁴⁰ Exactly how helpful the notes were will probably never be known. Patton was considered a hard worker in the 1924 class and was an honor graduate. Other than the rather oblique reference to notes in his *Infantry Journal* article, Ike makes no reference to their use.⁴¹ Patton’s generous tone is discounted by his biographer, Martin Blumenson, who notes: “Eisenhower graduated first in his class and Patton was sure that his papers were responsible.”⁴²

As the course moved indoors for the winter months, the problems given to students, though less frequent, were of greater complexity and carried increased weight for class standings. The subjects of the problems became increasingly more complex, requiring students to review the principles and techniques presented in earlier classes. During map maneuvers, where the tactical and logistical deployment of units were simulated by moving bits of cardboard around on maps, instructors required students to assume the roles of the various staff officers. Usually, school solutions “carried conviction” and seemed “surprisingly simple and obvious once [they were] given”; at other times, solutions were highly debatable and hinged on a complete understanding and interpretation of the given circumstances.⁴³

System and method were key to the Eisenhower approach to solving the written problems, an approach he shared with future students in his *Infantry Journal* article. Success in the problem solving hinged on a comprehensive estimate of the situation, or as Ike would write: “. . . a problem cannot be correctly solved unless the situation as issued is thoroughly understood.” This he termed the “common sense solution of problems,” citing “prosaic common sense” as of more value than the spark of genius. Most errors, he felt, came as a result of the basic failure of students to methodically stake out the problems. Visualization was also important. Ike tried to regard troop movements as real actions carried out under the actual circumstances described by the problem, always asking the question, “Does it carry out my mission?”⁴⁴

This visualization process of working oneself thoroughly into a problem had some interesting side effects, as described by William H. Gill, a 1925 graduate and instructor for the 1926 class:

Well, you worked yourself so thoroughly into the problem to consider every angle that would influence General A in his decision,

that the first thing you knew, you assumed the time of the problem being your time as you sat there. . . . I did this one time and I got so absorbed in the problem . . . that I thought to myself—well what the devil am I doing here at 4:00 in the morning. Well I just lost sight of the fact that that was a fictitious problem . . . [and the real] time . . . was about four or five in the afternoon.⁴⁵

The pressure students felt concerning graded problems was considerable—even if largely self-imposed. Many still viewed performance at Leavenworth as a stepping-stone to continued career success. General Omar N. Bradley, a 1929 graduate, later wrote: “. . . the assumption had taken root that a high grade at the Command and General Staff School would almost insure promotion to colonel or general, for too long the competition had been literally killing.”⁴⁶ Bradley, Eisenhower, and much of the secondary literature on the school cite nervous breakdowns and suicides among students throughout this period. Although little hard evidence exists to support these accounts, they do reflect the pressures perceived by the students. While Ike noted that “students became tense under the competition,” no one in his class committed suicide. But Eisenhower added, “we must have been a very difficult group because one of the instructors did.”⁴⁷ The 1926 annual report reports that Major Phillip H. Bagby, a school instructor, died on 16 March 1926.⁴⁸ Reasons for the death of students and instructors are not provided in the annual reports. The reports of nervous breakdowns and suicides may well have risen since the class of 1925, when the



Courtesy of Dwight D. Eisenhower Library

American generals who fought in Europe. Front row (left to right)—Simpson, Patton, Spaatz, Eisenhower, Bradley, Hodges, Gerow; back row (left to right)—Stearley, Vandenberg, Smith, Weiland, Nugent

annual report records the “relief” of four Regular Army officers due to illness and the death of a student whose name is not listed.⁴⁹

Whatever the pressures at work within the class of 1926, they had to have been considerably lessened with the arrival of Commandant Edward L. King. King downplayed the role of competition in the school and made “every effort to increase the morale factor, particularly with reference to the student body.”⁵⁰ He viewed the selection of the top graduate as well as the division of the class into “honor” graduates, “distinguished” graduates, and “graduates” as an administrative bother. The 1926 yearbook, which the class dedicated to King, describes him as “fun loving,” solving the “problems of manhood with . . . simplicity and carefree abandon . . .,” and retaining “optimism . . . from his boyhood days.”⁵¹ If previous classes took themselves too seriously, the influence of General King was the perfect antidote. The attitude adjustment engineered by General King may well have been a conscious effort on his part to reverse the overseriousness of previous years.

The class of 1926 seems to have emerged from the year with its sense of humor intact. Hardly a serious note can be found in the class yearbook, *The Horseshoe*, whose object was “merriment and laughter” and whose writers had “already had all the troubles due us and our friends for a lifetime.”⁵² Robert Eichelberger, Ike’s desk mate, said of his experience: “I had at no time any feeling of depression because of my work at that school,”⁵³ and midway through the course, another student observed that “our morale as a class is still excellent.”⁵⁴

Ike also enjoyed his experience at Fort Leavenworth, recalling: “Leavenworth is in every way a reasonable and normal place.”⁵⁵ Students had weekends free and were encouraged to use them for recreational pursuits. The Officers Club or Golf Clubhouse frequently held formal dances on Friday and Saturday nights, and the Dramatic Club gave monthly performances. Accounts of the school during the 1920s also allude to frequent trips by officers to Kansas City, where students carried complimentary guest cards to the Kansas City Athletic Club.⁵⁶

General King cites the fort’s “splendid facilities . . . for exercise and entertainment” and notes that “these facilities have been used to the maximum.”⁵⁷ Among these facilities was the newly laid out golf course to which Major Eisenhower found his way: “It was in the spring of 1926 that I first picked up a golf stick, but if my progress in academics had been no greater

[than that] in golf I would never have gotten through the course.”⁵⁸ Golf became a lifelong hobby for Ike and a source of needed relaxation for him. “You can’t have a low score card if you worry about something else,” Mamie later said of his pastime, “That’s why golf is good for Ike. He can really get his mind off his problems for a few hours a week.”⁵⁹

Ike was perhaps fortunate that Mamie indulged his occasional sojourns on the golf course, because some students’ wives pushed their husbands to do well. Low pay and slow promotions combined with the prevailing air of significance applied to success at the school undoubtedly created additional pressures for some officer-husbands. Wives developed their own social cliques, usually centered on their living area, and tended to establish their own versions of success. “Miss Em, like most wives, was pushing hard for my success,” Robert Eichelberger recalled. “It was rather ludicrous to realize that she was falling for the immodest statements of some of the officers who were quartered in the same building with us.”⁶⁰

As the course progressed, Ike found it “easy to identify those people who were studying too long . . . coming to the daytime sessions . . . without fresh minds and an optimistic outlook.”⁶¹ In his *Infantry Journal* article, he would refer to Leavenworth as “not a place, but a state of mind.”⁶² As in any school, these states of mind undoubtedly varied among students. While the importance of the grading system had been deliberately minimized to relieve tension, students could still become distracted by speculation. Since students received an “S” for any satisfactory grade covering the spectrum from 75–100 percent, speculation on the actual percentage achieved or the relative class standing of the student was, according to Ike, “always interesting, but not too much time should be spent on it.”⁶³

How hard did Ike *really* work at Leavenworth? Ike denigrated his efforts. Most biographers, on the other hand, disregard Ike’s comments and focus on the obvious efforts required of a student to graduate number one in his class. Proponents of this view tend to exaggerate the number of students in the class, most frequently increasing the class size from the actual 245 to 275. It is difficult to discern where the 275 figure originated, although a special class of 32 reservists and National Guardsmen also graduated in 1926. Someone perhaps added students for good measure, either miscounting the names in records or simply rounding the number to 275. More important, a serious discrepancy exists between what Ike says of his approach to the course and the efforts biographers attribute to him. Merle Miller, per-

haps the most thorough researcher of Eisenhower during this period, surmises: "The advice he [Eisenhower] gave . . . is excellent advice indeed, but, as is so often the case with advice givers, he didn't follow it."⁶⁴

Ike emphasized in the *Infantry Journal* article that students should maintain a positive attitude and avoid worry. Because throughout the course students did not know their class standing, they would ultimately do best by not worrying about it and by keeping "interested in the work."⁶⁵ With respect to his own study habits, Ike reported: "I established a routine that limited my night study to two hours and a half; from seven to nine-thirty. Mamie was charged with the duty of seeing that I got to bed by that time. This went on five nights a week."⁶⁶ Mamie Eisenhower recounted a somewhat different view to her biographer, recalling her husband "up at one or two in the morning . . . still fighting his theoretical battles, while mounds of cigarette stubs littered every ash tray."⁶⁷ As final exams approached, "his absorption in his studies became demoniacal," and Mamie had to "force her husband to take ten minutes to eat."⁶⁸

Although at their extremes, the two pictures appear contradictory, they are not irreconcilable. Certainly Ike had long slighted his efforts at West Point, and in *At Ease*, he again clearly shows his tendency to look down on classmates overly concerned about grades. This propensity seems to carry over to his view of Leavenworth and to his advice on how others should approach the course. The big change in Ike from West Point to Leavenworth, however, is how he viewed academic accomplishment and its benefits. At West Point, he had difficulty visualizing himself as "a military figure whose professional career might be seriously affected by his academic or disciplinary record."⁶⁹ By the time he attended Leavenworth, he had a much clearer vision of himself, a more developed thirst for learning, and an understanding of the impact doing well at the school could have on his career.

In evaluating the disparity between accounts regarding Ike's effort at Leavenworth, a case can be made that each of the two basic accounts are valid but have not been correctly reconciled to one another. To make the two views compatible, one must first accept Ike's basic desire to excel in the course. There is ample evidence to support this conclusion: his extensive preparation, his basic competitiveness and concern for "doing well," his recognition of the importance of the course, and, indeed, his ultimate number-one standing. Once we accept his

essential ambition in the course, the question of how hard he studied becomes rather—"how smart did he study?" The answer, undoubtedly, is *very* smart.

If Ike chooses to emphasize pacing, rest, and positiveness in his account of his efforts, he is probably correct in doing so. Certainly there was little payoff in the course for rote memorization and academic drudgery. Leavenworth emphasized problem solving—a skill at which Ike excelled in every period of his life. Ultimately, rest, pacing, and grace under pressure were key ingredients in his success. Mamie's recollections probably hearken to the final months of the course when, despite official silence on the matter, Ike may well have known a great deal about his relative class standing. He certainly picked up the pace those last three months: he was fourth in the class in March, third in April, and third again in May—clearly his most successful period in the course.⁷⁰

Ike developed close relationships with several of his instructors during the course and likely received some inkling of his relative class standing from them. Of these relationships, Ike would write:

During recesses between conferences you have splendid opportunities for dropping into the office of any instructor you'd like to see. The little talks you will have with these officers . . . will prove invaluable to you. Instructors are anxious to help, and you can ask specific questions or just sit around and listen to the general conversation. The insight into the school, and the understanding of the whole course you will pick up in this manner is remarkable.⁷¹

Competition for the number-one position in the class of 1926 was extremely keen, a situation that the faculty followed closely. William H. Gill, an instructor that year, revealed the faculty's behind-the-scenes interest in the class of 1926:

We made a pool after we began to realize that two men were more or less fighting . . . for first place. . . . One day, one would be ahead, and the next test they had, the other one would be ahead. So it seesawed back and forth all through the year. But the people like myself had nothing to gain by it except maybe betting. . . . But one of them was Gerow . . . who was a bright young fellow. The other one was named Eisenhower. . . . We bet a dollar and we would win maybe a pot of 10 or 15. . . . In June, when the thing was over, it turned out that Ike was the final head man and Gerow was number two.⁷²

Although Gill repeats the frequently made error that Gerow was the number-two graduate (he was actually eleventh),⁷³ his revelation of the behind-the-scenes jockeying is enlightening.

Apparently, student standings were well known to faculty throughout the year and a subject of considerable interest. If, as Ike advised future students to do, he spent time with instructors—"listening to the general conversation" and gaining "insight into the school"⁷⁴—then it is not difficult to imagine that he picked up intimations that he was doing well in the course.

One of Mamie's biographers states that in May, "Ike was no use to anybody," that as final examinations approached, he became absorbed in his studies. During examination time, Mamie was "amazed that Ike was suddenly calm," but he explained that he had "done all he could and there was no use worrying."⁷⁵ The account is a simple one, but in it can be seen the evidence of sharply increased effort at the end of the course, coupled with Ike's special ability to produce the calm he extolled in his *Infantry Journal* article.

The Faculty Board met at 9:00 A.M. on 16 June 1926. Chaired by Brigadier General King, the committee included the assistant commandant, school director, Correspondence School director, and the school secretary. Their function was to confirm the statistical analyses of students provided to them, approve the graduation of students, and make specific recommendations on students' capabilities for higher training in command and staff duties, general staff corps duty, and future attendance at the Army War College. Dwight Eisenhower's class standing is recorded as number "1," and he is classified "HG" or honor graduate, a distinction extended down to the twenty-fifth graduate—the top 10 percent of the class. Having achieved 930.79 units out of the 1,000 possible, his percentage is recorded as 93.08—slightly ahead of Major Charles M. Busbee, who finished second with 92.85. Major Gerow was eleventh with a 91.37 percentage. The board recommended both Ike and "Gee" for the full spectrum of higher-level command and staff duties and additional advanced schooling. The board adjourned at 3:00 P.M.; all 245 students who completed the course would graduate.⁷⁶

Mamie remembered the neighborhood hubbub created by the 16 June announcement of Ike's class standing as anything but calm. Their quarters became a parade of "hand-shaking, back-slapping, and well wishing" conducted by "front door, back door, and telephone." It made for a "long day and longer night" through which Mamie recalled being "hoarse with laughter and excitement."⁷⁷

Separate telegrams arrived from the Douds. Mamie's father, on business in Boone, Iowa, sent the words: "Congratulations I

felt that you would do it and am pleased.”⁷⁸ From Denver, Mrs. Doud wired: “Oh Boy what a thrill Hurrah I am broadcasting the news we are all fine love and kisses.”⁷⁹ Mamie had undoubtedly called one or the other with the news, and the enthusiasm of their responses indicates their awareness of the significance of the accomplishment. Mr. Doud’s brief words suggest an awareness that a specific goal had been achieved.

The celebration continued the following evening in Kansas City. Ike and “Gee” Gerow arranged a party at the Muehlbach Hotel, reportedly with a \$150 loan from Ike’s brother, Arthur, who was then vice president of the Commerce Trust Company in Kansas City.⁸⁰ Arthur’s connections also made possible the provision of gin and whiskey—no small feat during the prohibition era. The party lasted until daybreak, most accounts of which feature a great deal of singing, with Ike in the lead.⁸¹

Ike’s Command and General Staff School efficiency report, endorsed by Brigadier General King, describes him as “alert, forceful, resourceful, dependable and courteous.” He was “superior” in attention to duty, initiative, intelligence, energy and resolution, judgment and common sense, and leadership. He was judged “above average” in physical endurance, military bearing and neatness, and tact. He fell to “average” in only his old nemesis—physical activity, which included “agility” and the “ability to work rapidly.” The narrative denotes him an “Honor graduate—especially qualified for all staff positions at division and corps.”⁸²



Dwight Eisenhower (at arrow), shown in a blowup of a small portion of the 1925—26 class photo. Eichelberger is to Ike’s right.

Ike's performance was noted by General King, who personally asked Ike if he had any objection to being placed "on the list of instructors for the next year at Leavenworth."⁸³ Ironically, in his 1925—26 annual report, King included two comments that, had they been applied to Major Eisenhower, would have precluded him from attending the school: "Officers recently recovering from an appendicitis or similar operation should not be sent to this school . . . officers coming here should be graduates of the special service schools . . ." King also questioned the labor required in determining honor and distinguished graduates, stating: "I do not know that it is of any particular value to anybody in the service in later years to be rated as Honor and Distinguished."⁸⁴

King's words to the graduates at commencement exercises were somewhat more uplifting. In a ceremony interrupted by a heavy downpour, King stated: "At the completion of your schooling here, the foundation has been laid, and the framework of your future life erected."⁸⁵ Describing the post as a "desolate place on Saturday morning," the *Leavenworth Times* noted "cars loaded to the guards with luggage . . . speeding along the fort road and heading for the open highway."⁸⁶ Speaking of the members of the class of 1926, King said: "It is for him [the student] to decide whether he shall be a leader or follower, whether he shall use his knowledge, or whether he shall be content to let it lie dormant."⁸⁷ For at least one Leavenworth graduate, on the road to a family reunion in Abilene, the answer was no longer in doubt.

V.

WHAT KIND OF WATERSHED?

After the Leavenworth graduation, the Eisenhowers journeyed home to Abilene for a family reunion that has become almost legendary among Ike's biographers. It may have been the only time in their adult lives the six Eisenhower brothers gathered at the Second Street house. The reunion was an act of mutual congratulation—and with good reason; the brothers were rising above their humble beginnings and achieving remarkable success. Arthur was a successful banker, Earl an engineer, Milton an assistant secretary of agriculture, Edgar a lawyer, and Roy a pharmacist. The brothers played golf at a local country club and swaggered, arm in arm, down the streets of Abilene, as if in celebration of their success.¹ Throughout the reunion, there was competition, with Ike bent on wrestling his older brother Edgar, who had held the upper hand as a child. Edgar successfully avoided the challenge, but their father, David, now 63, accepted it. The men's father achieved quite a moral victory, for it was only after considerable struggle that Ike was able to wrestle him to the ground. The family, in a photograph taken at the reunion, appears serious. Only Ike, dressed in his Army uniform, is smiling.

Ike apparently wrote to his comrade from Fort Meade days, George S. Patton, Jr., with news of his Leavenworth class standing. Patton responded early in July stating that the news "delighted me more than I can say. . . . It shows that Leavenworth is a good school if a HE man can come out number one in his class. . . . If a man thinks war long enough it is bound to effect him in a good way."² Patton attempted to put the Leavenworth experience in perspective: "I am convinced that as good as Leavenworth is it is still only a means not an end and thus we must keep on. I have worked all the problems of the two years since I graduated and shall continue to do so. However I don't try for approved solutions any more but rather to do what I will do in war."³

This exchange of letters between the two men began a correspondence that would continue until Patton's death. Ike deferred to Patton in most matters, asked for a regiment in Patton's 2d Armored Brigade in September 1940,⁴ and assumed in April 1942 that Patton would be "the 'Black Jack' of the damn war."⁵ Patton responded that ". . . being selfish there is nothing I would like more than to be the 'Black Jack' of this



Courtesy of Dwight D. Eisenhower Library

A family portrait of the Eisenhower family on the porch of the family home, Abilene, Kansas, 1926. Left to right are Roy, Arthur, Earl, Edgar, David, Dwight, Milton, and Ida.

war with you the assistant 'B.J.' or even the other way around."⁶ In May 1942, with Ike serving as chief of the Operations Division of the War Department's general staff under Marshall and with Patton bucking for a combat command, Patton wrote: "Sometimes I think your life and mine are under the protection of some supreme being or fate, because, after many years of parallel thought, we find ourselves in the positions we now occupy."⁷

Ike's meteoric rise had included key positions under John Pershing, Douglas MacArthur, and George Marshall. In a sense, he owed these connections to Patton, who had introduced him to Fox Conner. It was Conner who made possible the Pershing and Marshall connections and the entry to Leavenworth. Conner would again rescue Ike, whose graduation from Leavenworth had placed him in the clutches of the War Department. His class standing availed little in the War Department, which made assignments well before the class standings were determined. The War Department had assigned Ike to Fort Benning, Georgia, as the executive officer of an infantry regiment and coach of the Fort Benning football team. When the season ended, Conner,

still serving as deputy chief of staff of the Army, arranged for Ike to come to Washington and write a guidebook to World War I battlefields on which Americans had fought.⁸ It was to be written under the direction of General Pershing, then serving as chairman of the American Battle Monuments Commission. Eisenhower established a close rapport with Pershing, but Ike's work was interrupted by his selection to attend the Army War College in August 1927.

While Ike devotes five pages of *At Ease* to his Leavenworth experience, the War College garners only a brief comment: "To graduate from the War College had long been the ambition of almost every officer and I was anxious to take the assignment."⁹ The War College was a relaxed assignment, seen by some as a reward for a successful career and by others as a stepping-stone to the general officer ranks. Nevertheless, the War College built on Ike's Command and General Staff School experience as it dealt with the large problems of war: "supply, movement of large



General George S. Patton, Jr., Ike's early colleague and friend

bodies of troops, relations with allies, grand strategy”—knowledge Ike would need in his World War II role as supreme commander.¹⁰

The War College commandant, Major General William D. Connor, who some writers have confused with Major General Fox Conner, took a personal interest in Ike, his ideas, and career.¹¹ Connor played a major role in reorganizing the War College curriculum, although much of the restructuring took place after Ike's attendance. Connor insisted that students “know the facts” and then conduct in-depth analysis in arriving at courses of action. This approach was philosophically akin to Ike's championing of the estimate of the situation. While Connor recognized the intangibles of war, he required students to determine “how many men and weapons were required to defend a sector of specific size and configuration and how many days and hours were needed to concentrate, move, and deploy corps and divisions.”¹² Connor had War College students participate in the writing of four staff studies pertaining to war preparations, complete two historical analyses of past campaigns, and contribute to the drafting of a hypothetical war plan. Students participated in three month-long war games, a command post exercise, and a strategic reconnaissance. They heard lectures on a variety of subjects, from within and outside the Army, and prepared individual staff memorandums proposing an action to better the Army.¹³ Ike wrote on “An Enlisted Reserve for the Regular Army,” which drew high praise from General Connor. Seventeen pages long, the paper argued against the isolationist mentality of the time and for developing a rapidly expandable expeditionary force that would ultimately save resources and lives.¹⁴

Although as Army chief of staff Ike faulted the Army War College for its shortcomings in providing a doctrine for Allied combined operations, he would find the War College experience helpful in approaching tactical and strategic challenges. He wrote to William Connor in March 1943:

There is no doubt about the extent of influence that you are still exerting on operations in this war. Oddly enough, when the decision was made last November 11th to start rushing toward Tunisia in an effort to grab off the last foot that we could in the direction of Tunis before the German could get in, I actually related to some members of my Staff your particular solution to a very “defensive-looking” problem we once had in the War College. When we were still wondering whether the French would fight us or help us, there were many people who counselled me to be more cautious, to develop my bases, perfect my build-up and bring in steadily the troops that

we would need to wage a rather ritualistic campaign in that direction. Had we done this, we would probably now be fighting a rather heavy battle somewhere in the vicinity of Constantine.

When that argument was going on, I recalled the particular War College problem that made such an impression on me. We had been working on a problem of resisting invasion in Connecticut, and all the statistical technicians had worked out in detail the most advanced line that they could defend consistent with getting the logistics properly arranged and the necessary forces on the field. Your criticism of the problem was that it obviously called for an instant and continuous attack. I remember you said—"Attack with whatever you've got at any point where you can get it up, and attack and keep on attacking until this invader realizes that he has got to stop and re-organize, and thus give to us a chance to deliver a finishing blow."¹⁵

In his ever-increasing positions of responsibility during World War II, Ike had his Leavenworth and War College experiences as a theoretical foundation from which to analyze the harsh problems of total war. He undoubtedly felt as well that his actions would one day be judged in these sterile school environments, that the actions he took in the fog of battle would one day be dissected by future students—aided by hindsight. The schools gave Ike a frame of reference and a means of measuring the conduct of the war. In December 1942, he told a colleague: "I think the best way to describe our operations to date is that they have violated every recognized principle of war, are in conflict with all operational and logistic methods laid down in textbooks, and will be condemned in their entirety by all Leavenworth and War College classes for the next twenty-five years."¹⁶

While World War II, like any war, produced its own litany of lessons learned, "Leavenworth men" again proved their worth in battle. In campaigns that dwarfed previous American experience, U.S. military leadership demonstrated that the nation could mobilize, train its forces, transport armies to multiple theaters worldwide, and bring to bear the full might of its strength against its enemies. The war challenged Eisenhower's intellect, stamina, and ability to lead, but he emerged as an American hero. Many Americans viewed the success of the Allies as in large part synonymous with his success. Ike emerged as a figure many Americans could love. His style contrasted with the pomposity and heavy-handedness of Patton and MacArthur. His celebrated smile and apparent grace under pressure were characteristics Americans greatly admired. Ike, perhaps more than any military figure in the war, epitomized how Americans wished to see themselves—humane, confident, and warm—even as they engaged in the ruthlessness of war.

Eisenhower's stature and postwar career significantly affected U.S. military education, both in structure and doctrine. His success in coalition warfare had demonstrated the critical importance of effectively coordinating air, land, and sea power with our Allies. Neither Leavenworth nor the War College had adequately prepared officers for the undertaking, and Ike, perhaps better than anyone, understood the nature of this shortcoming. During his tenure as chief of staff (1945—48), the Armed Forces Staff College was founded, an institution designed to fill this void. Much of the impetus for this change grew from the War Department Education Board, which Eisenhower approved in his capacity of chief of staff in November 1945. Ike's former study mate at Leavenworth, Lieutenant General Leonard Gerow, headed the board. Interestingly, Gerow was then serving as commandant of the Command and General Staff School at Leavenworth. Thus, the two former classmates played a major role in shaping postwar officer education.¹⁷

As president, Eisenhower also had an impact on officer professional development and the school at Leavenworth. His administration adopted the "New Look" defense policy, which sought to limit defense spending to levels that the economy could comfortably support. The policy had the effect of reducing defense budgets and the Army's force structure. In 1953, the Eisenhower administration essentially forsook the concept of conventional warfare and adopted a doctrine based on tactical nuclear weapons and strategic air power.¹⁸ For a nation seeking to lower its defense costs while maintaining a strong defense, "massive retaliation" with nuclear weapons seemed to offer a rational solution. The policy was not without its opponents in the defense community, however, and the policy and its attendant programs were hardly a boon to the morale of the Army. At Leavenworth, operations incorporating a nuclear scenario assumed priority, with conventional war scenarios taught only as a variation. By 1960, students spent more than 600 hours on nuclear warfare in comparison to only 33 hours on unconventional war. General warfare in Europe dominated the school curriculum, clearly reflecting the Eisenhower administration's major area of interest.¹⁹ (John F. Kennedy later challenged massive retaliation doctrine as well as its European emphasis, charging that U.S. policy had not responded to the smaller insurgencies that threatened the framework of the Western world.)

As his presidency ended, Eisenhower warned of "the acquisition of unwarranted influence, whether sought or unsought, by

the military-industrial complex.”²⁰ Certainly more than any other American, Eisenhower knew the subject of which he spoke. While his administration’s defense policy is faulted by many for its lack of vision and scope, it must be remembered that Eisenhower’s presence at the helm was in itself an extra dimension. He was the great World War II manager, the man who presided over the resolution of the Korean War, and a leader who could manage national defense. Who was more trustworthy? If his presidency was lackluster, Eisenhower still delivered prosperity and a breathing space in which Americans could enjoy it.

It is odd, perhaps, that Eisenhower never revisited Fort Leavenworth, the site of what he viewed as a turning point in his life. He certainly had ample opportunity to do so. Besides a career that spanned over four decades from his 1926 graduation, his three-year stint as Army chief of staff and his two-term presidency provided ideal opportunities for a visit. He did return to the Army War College located at Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania, for the dedication of the Eisenhower Room at the Officers Club and the General Dwight D. Eisenhower Chair of Strategic Appraisal.²¹ The nearness of Carlisle Barracks to his retirement farm at Gettysburg may have made it an easy trip. But despite numerous official and campaign appearances at Abilene and nearby Kansas City, neither Ike nor Mamie ever revisited Fort Leavenworth. Not even the opening of Eisenhower Auditorium, capable of seating the entire student body of the Command and General Staff College, elicited a visit. Since many of the school’s distinguished graduates revisited Fort Leavenworth later in their careers, Ike’s absence in this regard is mysterious indeed. There seem to be no clues to the separation, no tangible reasons why Ike did not find a way to return to a place that could only have held fond memories for him.

Dwight Eisenhower’s year at Leavenworth was a watershed—and he saw it as such. The year was a microcosm of the themes developed earlier in his life and provided Ike with the opportunity to hone the skills and techniques that made his number one class standing possible. The year was tailor-made for Ike, and he was eminently prepared for it. His tutelage under Fox Conner had provided him with a firm intellectual and military base. His experiments with tanks and infantry conducted with George Patton gave him practical tactical experience. His command of Camp Colt, Pennsylvania, provided him with important experience in the training and support of a small army and acquainted him with the local Gettysburg terrain—the knowledge

of which he later utilized in many of the Leavenworth map problems. Even Ike's lack of service school experience had a positive effect: it raised in his mind the possibility of failure and stimulated him to work correspondence course problems. In solving the correspondence problems, Ike learned that he had a knack for problem solving—something he had suspicioned earlier in his academic career when unriddling geometry and calculus problems.

By the Leavenworth year, Ike also had something to prove: that he was the equal of World War I combat-theater veterans. Ike believed he had missed the great military experience of his lifetime, a feeling exacerbated by a War Department that he felt considered him *persona non grata* and which, in fact, told him he would probably fail at the school. But the Eisenhower who attended Leavenworth was a somewhat different Eisenhower than had graduated from West Point some ten years earlier. At West Point, Ike saw himself as an athlete, and when a knee injury curtailed his athletic career, he lacked the maturity to channel his competitive drive into academic pursuits. He could not see the connection between West Point academics and his military career. But this would soon change. His marriage to Mamie in 1916 refocused Eisenhower's life. With marriage came responsibility and the passing of a period of debts, card playing, and even a flirtation with Army aviation. Ike emerged with a more mature attitude and a renewed dedication to his Army service. The years that followed were years of strengthening for Eisenhower, years applied to his development as an officer—years that could be tested at the school at Leavenworth.

The successful year at Leavenworth was a product of Eisenhower's dedication, competitiveness, preparation, and individuality. Patton's notes were undoubtedly helpful, as was Ike's teaming with Leonard Gerow—an able and knowledgeable officer in his own right. In Gerow, Ike was supplied a missing ingredient in his own experience—contact with someone who had had success at an Army service school. Ike viewed his experience at Leavenworth as a reasonable one, free of mystery and mental strain, and he sought to keep it so. Rote memory was of little value: problem solving was the true test. Ike was uniquely suited for this arrangement, where his efforts to formulate an accurate estimate of situations and perform in a relaxed manner were key. He took advantage of the accessibility of school instructors and from them undoubtedly reinforced the official, though limited, feedback that he was doing well. His especially high achievement the last three months of the course suggest he

possessed this knowledge. The nature of the congratulatory messages received upon the announcement of his number-one class standing and the party in Kansas City suggest the attainment of a specific goal.

The year at Leavenworth fostered important friendships for the Eisenhowers, took them through a year in their son John's life (that had been so tragic for their son Icky), and strengthened the bond between the couple. Mamie accommodated Ike's schedule and ensured he took time out for meals and adequate rest. She also indulged his sojourns to the golf course—a new found hobby that Ike would pursue throughout his life.

While his Leavenworth success did not immediately result in a key assignment for Ike, the politics applied in getting him into the school reinforced in his mind the role important friends could play in the gaining of desirable assignments. Just as Fox Conner had arranged his assignment to Panama, he would again manipulate the assignment process in securing Ike a key position under Pershing. These lessons were not lost on Ike, whose subsequent career assignments demonstrated his ability to find key positions at critical times.

The Leavenworth experience was a confirming plateau for Eisenhower that reinforced lessons he had learned in previous assignments, in his association with Fox Conner, and in his preparation for the school. The course reinforced his knowledge of the tactical and logistical fundamentals of battle, preparing Ike for the larger issues of war he would soon encounter at the Army War College. Eisenhower's success at Leavenworth cast him in a new light with his contemporaries and changed the way he thought about himself. Forty years later, he would call it a watershed in his life—and with good reason. The success confirmed his dedicated efforts and validated, in his own mind, his worthiness for greater responsibility.

NOTES

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Abbreviations

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CMH	U.S. Army Center of Military History, Washington, DC
Eisenhower Library	Dwight D. Eisenhower Library, Abilene, KS
MHI	U.S. Army Military History Institute, Carlisle Barracks, PA
NARA	National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, DC

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