

THE EISENHOWER family has a literary bent that has stood it in good stead.

Early in life, Dwight and his brother, Milton began to scribble. Ike's literary output over his lifetime was prodigious: thousands of pages of letters, diaries, memoirs. The scribbling dramatically boosted his early Army career (as a fulltime ghostwriter for generals John J. Pershing and Douglas MacArthur). His war memoir, *Crusade in Europe*, made him a wealthy man. Milton was not far behind. Ike's son, West pointer John, carried on with two books, including a best seller about the war in Europe, *The Bitter Woods*. Now the bent has emerged with astonishing intensity and brilliance in John's 38-year-old son, Dwight David II, a lawyer turned historian, who married President Nixon's daughter, Julie.

David's subject is his grand father Ike. The contemplated project is vast: a three-volume *Eisenhower: At War*. It focuses mainly on the 16-month period when Ike was supreme commander of Allied forces in Europe: January 1944 to May 1945. The succeeding two volumes will encompass Ike's postwar service as Army chief of staff and president of Columbia University in the Cold War, NATO chief during the Korean War and president of the United States for two terms.

The underlying theme of these three volumes, I gather will be how warrior Ike devoted the afternoon and evening of his life to a difficult but noble ambition: the creation of a lasting peaceful world community. Central to the task was a need to draw the Soviet Union out of her historic paranoid, isolationist posture. To do so would re-

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quire certain unpopular — and risky — initiatives, and accommodations by the West. Notwithstanding the bellicosity of his secretary of state, John Foster Dulles, Ike's presidency — especially the second term — was at root motivated by this challenging goal. This explains the many overtures to Moscow that marked his presidency: *Atoms for Peace*, *Open Skies*, the Khrushchev visit the nuclear test ban treaty (a prelude to general disarmament) and so on.

David has chosen to launch his narrative in World War II, principally to lay in the historical background for the presidential volumes. Lucky for us he did. While his main purpose is to show the great contribution of the Soviet Union to the defeat of Germany, and her emergence as a super power to be reckoned with — and Ike's early reaction to that new reality — what we have as well is a huge (977 pages), enthralling, new day-by-day account of Ike as supreme commander. *Eisenhower: At War* stands alone as a superb hook, an intellectual tour de force rich in detail — richer than I have ever seen — and indisputedly the best account of those momentous months that we shall ever see.

Given his purpose, the Big Picture of the war as David tells it in cool, precise, unfailingly intelligent prose, is quite different from the usual American and British versions. Early on we are introduced to the formidable icy Joseph Stalin at the Big Three conference in Teheran and

told about the immense military campaigns being waged the eastern front by literally hundreds of Soviet and German divisions. By comparison, the American-British operations in North Africa, Sicily and Italy, involving mere dozens of divisions seem — and are — puny. David's often-forgotten but quite valid point is that all major Allied military operations in the West were dependent upon continuing Soviet military successes; that without a "resurgent Russian front an Allied invasion of Europe would have been impossible;" and — later — that the Allied de-

Clay Blair

feat of Hitler was possible only because hundreds of advancing Soviet divisions had drawn German forces from the western to the eastern front.

Upon his appointment as supreme commander of OVERLORD, David writes, Ike was acutely aware of and sensitive to the need for close cooperation with the Soviets and the "interdependence" of the eastern and western fronts. This "sensitivity" has "not been fully understood" by historians, David argues, nor "fully revealed by the memoirs of the major participants including Eisenhower's own memoirs." Any portrayal of Eisenhower as supreme commander "that does not focus on the Russian problem and responses to it is incomplete, for it was the complex Allied-Soviet relationship that forced Eisenhower to think and act as a politician and uli-

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mately to assume political responsibilities by such actions as his decision to cede Berlin and Prague to the Russians."

That theme dominates this volume. Ike's "sensitivity" to the Russians led in part to his yielding opposition to Churchill's scheme for a "Balkan campaign" and/or expansion of the Italian campaign, which if successful might have put the British and Americans into Eastern Europe before the Russians. Either or both campaigns would have compelled the cancellation of ANVIL (DRAGOON), the subsidiary Allied invasion of southern France

which Roosevelt and Churchill has assured Stalin would follow the invasion of Normandy. Although there were compelling military reasons for ANVIL (DRAGOON) which he argued Ike was not unmindful of the fact that cancellation of ANVIL (DRAGOON) would amount to a broken promise to Stalin which could lead to big trouble later on, that sense, Ike's support of ANVIL (DRAGOON) and opposition to a Balkan campaign — examined exhaustively in this volume — was the first of a significant list of accommodations to Moscow.

Of these "accommodations" none was more controversial than Ike's decision to halt American and British forces just short of Berlin and Prague. Ike's critics would argue simplistically that this decision, in effect ceded large swaths of Eastern Europe to the Soviets, thereby enslaving millions behind the Iron Curtain. But David reminds

us that the situation was far more complex. The reality of Soviet military power, with hundreds of divisions poised at the Oder River, a mere 40 miles from Berlin prior diplomatic agreements with Stalin and other factors had already foreclosed any possibility of American — British dominance east of the Elbe. An opportunist occupation of Berlin and Prague would have deceived — and enraged — Stalin and could have led to a disastrous confrontation with Soviet troops — possibly leading to an East-West war.

These issues — and many other large Allied-Soviet problems — resonate throughout the narrative as the war in Europe rolls on in fullest detail from Normandy to the Elbe. But that is only one part of the story. Within the American-British camp, there were bitter political struggles over command and strategy, many of them unrelated to the Soviet problem. Ike walked an unnerving tightrope every day of his command, struggling to bring its prima donnas into harmony and prevent ruinous self-destruction.

Ike's management approach — compromise — would later draw some severe criticisms from the disputants. David confronts these criticisms candidly and in complete detail, displaying a masterful control of sources and a fascinating talent as defense counsel. In each instance the explanations for Ike's decisions are so cogently and brilliantly laid out that even to question them



seems cheap and tawdry. Ike himself is familiar-four-square, modest, intelligent, likeable — and yet much enlarged, a giant among giants confirmed here beyond any question as a genius at "coalition warfare."

With this book — six years in the making forebears combined, *Eisenhower: At War* is a thousand times better than *Crusade in Europe* and far superior in breadth and scope to *The Bitter Woods*. If the two succeeding volumes hold up as well he will have produced a magisterial work and firmly established himself in the front ranks of American historians.