



# Eisenhower: Soldier and President

*Stephen E. Ambrose*

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## **Eisenhower: Soldier and President** Stephen E. Ambrose

Stephen E. Ambrose draws upon extensive sources, an unprecedented degree of scholarship, and numerous interviews with Eisenhower himself to offer the fullest, richest, most objective rendering yet of the soldier who became president. He gives us a masterly account of the European war theater and Eisenhower's magnificent leadership as Allied Supreme Commander. Ambrose's recounting of Eisenhower's presidency, the first of the Cold War, brings to life a man and a country struggling with issues as diverse as civil rights, atomic weapons, communism, and a new global role.

Along the way, Ambrose follows the 34th President's relations with the people closest to him, most of all Mamie, his son John, and Kay Summersby, as well as Franklin D. Roosevelt, Winston Churchill, Charles de Gaulle, Harry Truman, Nixon, Dulles, Khrushchev, Joe McCarthy, and indeed, all the American and world leaders of his time. This superb interpretation of Eisenhower's life confirms Stephen Ambrose's position as one of our finest historians.

## **Eisenhower: Soldier and President Details**

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# From Reader Review Eisenhower: Soldier and President for online ebook

## Lauren Hiebner says

Eisenhower as a general hated war and as president made peace and kept the peace. IKE defeated the Germans, tolerated the British and French, and came to the realization that Russia could not be trusted. As president he developed a patience in the face of yearly crisis both foreign and domestic. His failure was in failing to be a leader in Civil Rights and in confronting McCarthyism. He was a very likable person and genuine, a moderate in a conservative era. Only IKE was able to trim the military in the face of the arms race. This is a condensed two volumes into one but still a good read.

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## April says

i'm about halfway through this, and I'm loving it. Stephen Ambrose may well convince me that the best way to learn history is through one person's (Eisenhower) or one group's (Easy Company in Band of Brothers) story. Read either of these book, and I'll be he'll convince you too.

One thing I learned - surprisingly (to me in any event), Eisenhower was a major peace-nik. Nothing like seeing war first hand to convince you how horrible it is I guess.

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## Ben Sweezy says

I will admit, this has been hard to review. On the one hand, as you're reading it, this feels like a real blow-by-blow retelling of thirty years of history (if not more). On the other hand, if you want to get a sense of the government institutions, practices, and methods that came out of the Eisenhower administration, this is wholly lacking.

I get it. Stephen Ambrose and I may have a very different sense of "what's important" in history. He focuses on the man. The struggles, the family, the personal choices that someone named Dwight D. Eisenhower actually faced. More than anything else this book helped solidify my expectation that history NOT be consumed by the "man" but rather be a retelling of the structures attempted, accepted, or destroyed by those in power.

I have read other books that, for example, refer to the Eisenhower years as an era in which America learned its covert action strategy. I have heard that xxxx era was when America learned its ability to play one nation off of another in a region for the improvement of overall strategy. I see these in this book merely as passing mentions, not as opportunities to understand what made the subordinates of the Eisenhower administration make choices that were DIFFERENT from other administrations. What led to a better functioning executive? what led to a better functioning commander-in-chief. If it was simply force-of-personality and great-man-theory, then come out and say it, defend it, and prove it. Ambrose does none of these.

The end result is that the best I can take away from these books is an appreciation for Eisenhower. It is extremely challenging to learn lessons that I can apply from these books.

[this review was based on the first half of the condensed "soldier and president" volume as well as the second volume of the two volume set entitled "Eisenhower: a president."]

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## **Lisa (Harmonybites) says**

Stephen Ambrose is a favorite writer of mine--one of the most readable and insightful of the contemporary historians I've read. He's written extensively on World War II at all levels from the generals to the ordinary soldier serving on the battlefield, as well as writing a respected biography of Richard Nixon. I can't think of anyone more qualified to tackle questions of political and military leadership, this particular era, and Eisenhower as "soldier and president."

I didn't always agree with Ambrose's conclusions. The first sentence in this biography states: *Dwight David Eisenhower was a great and good man*. He calls Eisenhower one of the "truly great" American presidents. In both his *Forward* and his *Epilogue* Ambrose claimed that, "Eisenhower gave the nation eight years of peace and prosperity. No other President in the twentieth century could make that claim." Please understand, I believe that within the limits of his time, Eisenhower was a decent man, and by any measure as Supreme Commander important to the victory of the allies in World War II and a *good* president--I just can't quite rate him as highly as Ambrose does. Partly that's because we use different measuring sticks. Some things Ambrose claims as accomplishments or great aspirations I can't agree with. (For one, I'm not as much an enthusiast for robust internationalism as Ambrose or Eisenhower, who supported a "United States of Europe.") Ambrose himself writes that any "attempt to assess Eisenhower's eight years as President inevitably reveals more about the person doing the assessing than it does about Eisenhower" and to declare him right or wrong on an issue "tends to be little more than a declaration of the current politics and prejudices of the author." And I might add, reader or reviewer. Nevertheless, only a couple of weeks ago, I read Flexner's biography of George Washington, where the author also claimed his subject was a "great and good man," and having read about the accomplishments and qualities of that "soldier and president," I can't see putting Eisenhower on the same pedestal.

However, Ambrose doesn't just present Eisenhower's accomplishments and admirable qualities but his mistakes and flaws as well. They seem to be connected. Eisenhower was, as Ambrose constantly notes, very "middle of the road" and pragmatic in politics. He drove hard for compromise and consensus and during the war he was legendary in demanding complete cooperation and respect between Americans and the British. He could even be described as eager to please--and hated controversy. So much so, that Ambrose named as his greatest mistake of the war that he went too far to "appease" Montgomery, the British general. You can see that same quality in Eisenhower's presidency. Yes, he stood up to the members of the National Security Advisers and Joint Chiefs of Staff that virtually unanimously pushed him to use nuclear weapons--five times in 1954 alone. He ended the conflict in Korea and refused to get involved in Vietnam. On the other hand, it was frustrating to read of how Eisenhower appeased Senator McCarthy (whom Eisenhower did despise) and his weak support of the Civil Rights Movement (about which he felt deeply ambivalent.) On that score Ambrose admits Eisenhower's "unwillingness to grapple with long-term problems and his inability to see clearly moral questions were to cost the nation, his party, and his reputation beyond measure."

At times I did think Ambrose bent over backward in Eisenhower's defense. I agree with one reviewer that said he should have just admitted Eisenhower had a wartime adulterous affair with Kay Summersby and moved on, instead of going through so many contortions trying to deny it. But this is a great biography because Ambrose does provide all the information you need to decide for yourself what you think of Eisenhower and his presidency. His account is based upon extensive research and interviews, some

conducted by Ambrose himself. Eisenhower's presidency occurred before I was born, so I can't measure this depiction against my personal experiences. I can say though that within these 576 pages I gained a new appreciation of Eisenhower and the challenges he faced, learned a lot about this time in history, and was never bored, often entertained, and sometimes moved. I can't imagine anyone else writing a more definitive, more insightful and comprehensive biography of Eisenhower than Ambrose in my lifetime.

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## **Marsha says**

This book was interesting and informative. I learned about the man who was President the era before my birth.

Dwight Eisenhower ("Ike") was born on October 14, 1890 in Denison, Texas. His family moved to Abilene, Kansas in 1891, when a relative found his father a mechanic position at the Belle County Creamery. His parents ultimately had six boys and Dwight was the third oldest. His family was generally poor. Religion was important to his father, as he believed in hard work, and the strong sense of community. Ike did well in school and loved military history. He also enjoyed sports, especially football and baseball and it was in playing these sports that he learned about leadership and being an organizer. He organized hunting and camping trips. He organized the Abilene High School Athletic Association. In High School, he injured his knee and when it became infected, the doctors wanted to amputate it. As Ike kept falling in and out of consciousness, he asked his older brother Edgar to stay at his bedside to make certain that the doctors would not amputate his leg. By the second week, the poison and fever left Ike's body and he began to recover completely.

In September 1910, Ike took an exam to enter the Naval Academy where he hoped to play football. His test results were not good enough for him to enter the Naval Academy, but they were good enough for him to go to West Point. Sports remained the center of his life until he twisted his knee. The cartilages and tendons were badly torn. He suffered from severe depression in learning that he would never be able to play football again. His football coach suggested he coach junior varsity and he agreed and did it well. He graduated from West Point in June 1915 and he set off for his first assignment at Fort Sam Houston, Texas. It was there that he met Mary Geneva Doud, nicknamed "Maime" and they fell in love. They were married in spring 1916. Their first son Icky died while he was three years old from Scarlet Fever. Their second son John was born on August 3, 1922.

During Eisenhower's career as a soldier, and later a general, Eisenhower was often separated from his wife. He had a wonderful relationship with his secretary Kate Summersby and it was often speculated that their relationship was more than a friendship and good working relationship. However, they were never alone and it was obvious that Ike loved his wife Mamie very much. His love for Mamie remained strong in love letters he wrote to her.

During the WWII, General Eisenhower became quite popular. He was a good leader, and made good decisions and for the most part got along well with others. He was an excellent public speaker, and became recognized as a principal speaker of the War Department. Although he never took classes in public speaking, he was natural and sincere, and his listeners admired him. When the war was finally over, Ike was looking forward to spending more time with Mamie.

Eisenhower was urged by his friends and politicians to run for the Presidency. He took the job as President of Columbia University, hoping that while administrating the University, it might remove his name from

political speculation.

Then on June 25, 1950, the North Koreans invaded South Korea and President Truman sent in the military to help defend South Korea. Truman offered Eisenhower the position to command the NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization)'s military operations, and live and work at NATO's headquarters in Paris. Eisenhower looked forward to helping with war efforts and took the job. However, still friends and politicians continued to urge him to run for President. They said that Americans needed his strong leadership. Finally he agreed that he would run, and decided that if he was going to do this, he was going to give it his best fight to win.

In running for President for the Republican Party, he chose Richard Nixon as his running mate, even though he did not know him well. At thirty-nine years old, Nixon was young enough to be a son of Eisenhower, as Eisenhower was sixty-two years of age before the election of 1952. Nixon proved to be power hungry and Eisenhower often had to show him who was the boss, because Nixon would overstep his boundaries.

The public liked Eisenhower and Richard Nixon and they won the election. Dwight Eisenhower became the 34th President of the United States.

During his Presidency, Eisenhower met with the press regularly to reach out to Americans. He felt it was important to communicate to the public. He had a good relationship with reporters. Sometimes he would play golf with some of them. Sometimes however, they would attack his politics, but Eisenhower would get upset as if they were attacking him personally. He would be vague in his responses if he purposely wanted to confuse issues that he did not have an answer to. If, on the other hand, he were clear on his response, he would use the media to educate and inform the public.

Eisenhower did not want any more Americans dying in Korea. Thousands of men were killed or wounded and Eisenhower wanted to put a stop to the fighting. Six months after Eisenhower became President of the United States, he ended the war in Korea. This was perhaps one of Eisenhower's greatest achievements during his time in office.

In the 1950s, tensions were high regarding nuclear war. Memories of the attack on Pearl Harbor frightened people, knowing that H-bombs could destroy an entire city. Eisenhower wanted to come up with a disarmament policy of nuclear weapons as he felt that the H-bomb could cause horrific death and damage. He proposed using atomic power for peaceful activities. He proposed "Atoms for Peace." However, at this time, there was no response. No one could foresee the opportunities for peaceful uses of atomic power.

Eisenhower proposed that the Americans and Russians open their air space to each other. This would make it impossible for either party to proceed with an undetected nuclear attack. Eisenhower was going to use technology to take high altitude photos of the Soviet Union. Satellites were in the process of being developed. (However, the Soviets launched the first man-made satellite into space in October 1957. They named their satellite, Sputnik, which meant, "traveling companion.").

Eisenhower flew to Geneva to discuss his open space policy with Russian leaders. The proposal was called "Open Skies." However, the Russians were not agreeable. Although at this Geneva Summit, Eisenhower did not obtain the results he had hoped for, it was a strong achievement for the Cold War between the two countries. Prior to the Geneva Summit, the fear of nuclear war was as constant. Things were calmer after the Summit, perhaps due to a mutual respect between the two parties after their leaders had met.

In September 1955, Eisenhower suffered a heart attack. Maime was worried and upset. To help ease some

tension, she decided to respond personally to the thousands of letters of concern sent to her husband.

Eisenhower was not interested in running again for a second term of the Presidency in 1956. He was planning his retirement. However, Maime and others felt that Eisenhower would be better off mentally and physically to continue working. They could not envision him being inactive. Eisenhower said that if the doctors felt him well enough, he would run. The doctors did and his advisors and friends encouraged him to “dump Nixon” from being his running mate for his second term of Presidency. Some did not like him and thought he would hurt Eisenhower’s changes against his competitors. However, Eisenhower could not find anyone else to fit the position and decided to keep Nixon on if he wanted it, and he did. Eisenhower and Nixon were reelected.

During his second term, Eisenhower was forced to deal with civil rights. Tensions between blacks and whites continued, particularly in the South where attempts were made to desegregate schools, pursuant to a new federal law arising from Chief Justice Earl Warren’s ruling in the Brown vs. Topeka case that made it unconstitutional for racial segregation in public schools.

In Little Rock, Arkansas, a mob of angry people gathered at Central High on an early September morning in 1957, to protest integration. Nine black students slipped into the school through a side entranceway and when the mob found out they became angrier and there were threats of violence, and so the students had to be escorted out of the school by police. The next day, hundreds of paratroopers from the 101st Airborne Division broke up the mob and the nine students again entered Central High with Army guard protection and sat through an entire day of class. About a month later, Eisenhower was able to remove the armed forces. By October 23rd, the students were able to enter Central High and attend classes with out military protection.

Congress wanted to pass a civil rights bill. Many blacks in the south were not allowed to register to vote. Eisenhower felt stuck. He said that he had lived in the south, and had friends in the south. So, he signed a bill that gave minimum rights and light penalties for violation. Eisenhower failed in wanting to deal with the civil rights movement. He wanted to leave it to the President who would proceed after him.

On November 25, 1957, the President had a mild stroke while at the Oval Office. After a quick recovery, he kept working.

There was pressure to put a satellite into space. The first went up in December 1957, caught fire and fell right back to earth right after take off and was completely destroyed. The second attempt was a satellite entitled Explorer I and it was successful, but weighed only 31 pounds. It was embarrassing especially when the Russians launched its second satellite, Sputnik II into space in May 1958 and it weighed 3,000 pounds.

Initially, Eisenhower opposed the creation of a separate Department of Space. He wanted all space activities to go through the Secretary of Defense. But through the pressure of Eisenhower’s critics, he asked Congress to form the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA), a civilian space agency.

The Republicans wanted to spend more money on military defense weapons. Eisenhower wanted to keep costs down, feeling that it was unnecessary to spend more money in defense and that the costs would harm the economy. Unfortunately no one would support Eisenhower in his efforts to hold down the costs on defense spending, not the Department of Defense, not even the press. Eisenhower felt that the United States’ defense was already strong, but he was being attacked that he was neglecting U.S. security.

Eisenhower was also pressured to spend more money on space exploration. There was talk about putting a man on the moon. To Eisenhower, pursuing this was just a waste of money and he felt that it was a lack of

common sense to even consider such a thing.

During his second term in office, Eisenhower tried to concentrate on keeping peaceful relations with all countries, including all of Europe. However, it seemed that every other politician in American were more interested in concentrating their efforts on the next election.

On the eve of January 17, 1961, Eisenhower went on national television and radio to deliver his farewell speech. He spoke mostly of the Cold War. He was disappointed that he could not accomplish peace, but he was glad that war had been avoided. John F. Kennedy followed Eisenhower and became the next President of the United States.

After the Presidency, Eisenhower was able to tell his side of the story by writing his memoirs. He also wrote a book entitled *At Ease: Stories I Tell My Friends*. He also wrote articles for *Reader's Digest* and *The Saturday Evening Post*. He would receive thousands of letters each month and would respond to as many as he could by dictating his responses to a secretary to have typed up by her or one of her assistants.

When Lyndon B. Johnson became President after Kennedy's assassination, he would often seek Eisenhower's advice and recommendations, particularly in regards to foreign affairs. Eisenhower thought Johnson was too liberal with domestic affairs. Eisenhower was appalled by the trends of the 1960s: draft dodgers, rock and roll, marijuana and LSD. When Johnson announced that he declined to run for reelection for a second term in office, Eisenhower endorsed Nixon for the Republican Party.

In November 1965, Eisenhower suffered his second heart attack. Then again in April 1968, he suffered his third major heart attack. In August of that year, he suffered yet another heart attack. He survived but his health declined. He died on March 28, 1969. Eisenhower would go home again, to be buried in Abilene, Kansas.

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### **Dennis Meier says**

Insightful. I had always assumed that the supreme commander of the allied forces had fought during WWI, so it was a surprise to learn otherwise.

My greatest disappointment was to learn that he was an overt racist. Even though overt racisms was the norm for his generation--my parent's generation--it was disheartening to hear about it. (Today, racism is nicely covert--real, but better hidden.)

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### **Carol Storm says**

Great book but I wish there'd been more on Ike and Kay Summersby!

I haven't actually finished this book yet, but wonderful amazing Goodreads (my favorite site) won't let me change the status back to "currently reading" just because I hit the wrong button one time.

Anyway, this is a great book in some ways. It's certainly detailed and Ambrose tries to be fair to Eisenhower even when he's letting Patton slap crippled soldiers around or playing around behind Mamie's back.



I do wish there had been more on Ike's growing up years in Kansas. Ambrose doesn't seem to want to dig too deeply, but the scenes he describes -- the Eisenhower boys rolling around on the floor, screaming and punching each other, while the mother watches with no emotional affect at all -- sound a lot more dysfunctional than rambunctious.

By the same token, Eisenhower (unlike Truman) was notably reluctant to integrate the armed forces after World War II. I wish Ambrose would tackle his feelings about black people in detail, but he just tap dances off into more feel-good stuff about Ike's popularity and bland good nature. It's odd, because on his way up Eisenhower spent a lot of time with old-timers like "Black Jack" Pershing, who won his name leading Negro troops in combat. Yet apparently none of that rubbed off on Ike, who was a World-Series kiss-ass but strictly bush-league in the moral courage department. At least that's the impression I'm getting so far!

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### **Ken Garrett says**

A very readable, enjoyable biography, yes. But more, this book is a profound, fascinating, challenging study of character and leadership. Both the amazing strengths and the appalling weaknesses in leadership that characterized Ike are honestly presented here to the reader. For any who function in a leadership role, this is a work that may be best read with a pen or pencil in hand to note its many valuable leadership lessons.

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### **Suzanne says**

This is a compilation of the two volume biography that Ambrose had earlier released. It's a slightly condensed version, but it certainly isn't lacking. Dwight D. Eisenhower's history is fascinating and for good reason. He was the commander in chief for the allied forces during World War II, and the first third of the book tells the story of his rise, the decisions that propelled the allies to victory and his relationships during the war – personal and professional.

Following the war, he was a staunch supporter the United Nations, and, as head of the American Occupation Zone in Germany, he had great influence in the direction taken to rebuild Europe. Later, as Commander of NATO, he showed great courage by insisting that Germany not only be included, but also build a military force to help secure NATO against the Soviet threat. When you think about it, less than ten years after a German-led war, this took a lot of courage and leadership.

He was so trusted and popular, it was no surprise that General Eisenhower was asked to run for President of the United States. Like all Presidents, Eisenhower suffered personal and political defeats during his terms of office. As the highest ranking military officer, he was used to be treated with the utmost respect – I enjoyed the stories of his dismay when political supporters presumed too much familiarity, or political foes showed disrespect altogether.

One of my favorite stories was near the end, when John F. Kennedy was President. Following the Bay of Pigs fiasco, Kennedy asked Eisenhower for advice on dealing with the Russians.

*Eisenhower asked Kennedy why on earth he had not provided air cover for the invasion. Kennedy replied that "we thought that if it was learned that were really doing this rather than these rebels themselves, the Soviets would be very apt to cause trouble in Berlin." Eisenhower gave him another long look, then said,*

*“Mr. President, that is exactly the opposite of what would really happen. The Soviets follow their own plans, and if they see us show any weakness then is when they press us the hardest. The second they see us show strength and do something on our own, then is when they are very cagy. The failure of Bay of Pigs will embolden the Soviets to do something they would not otherwise do.”*

Of course, Eisenhower was absolutely right, and history has proved it to be so. The story is interesting because it highlighted Kennedy's inexperience, but also his humility in asking Eisenhower for advice.

Despite this being a monstrous tome, I enjoyed every minute of it. Ambrose is a master storyteller when it comes to history, and *Eisenhower* does not disappoint. 4 1/2 stars.

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### **Pete daPixie says**

Stephen E. Ambrose's 'Eisenhower-Soldier and President' is just an out and out five star biography. The authors treatment of his subject is so well balanced, informative and well written. Published back in 1990, it's just a shame that it has taken me so long to find this six hundred page gem. American politics of the 1950's was something I knew little about prior to this read, but I just thoroughly enjoyed Ambrose's guided tour through Ike's two term presidency. The decade of the 1950's may be the meat of Eisenhower's life story, but of course equally fascinating is the man's military career, culminating in D. Day and the Allied victory in Europe. I give this book a very high recommendation to the reader interested in 20th century history. All the main political players and world events are covered where Eisenhower, as soldier or president or elder statesman was involved for over four decades. There are some huge nuggets in this gold mine of a biography such as Korea and the Cold War, Ike's assessments on Nixon and LBJ, the post war growth of the military-industrial complex and the development of the C.I.A. Many world and U.S. domestic problems encountered in later decades are more clearly understood after seeing their beginnings under Eisenhower's watch.

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### **Mark C. Kelly says**

Eisenhower believed the traits of leadership can be taught. If he is right, then this book is a textbook to be studied for generations to come. Whether or not you agree with his policies, his actions while a general and president often brought exactly the results "Ike" desired. The peace and prosperity of his presidential term is often taken for granted, but it was the product of a lot of great decision-making. By seeking the middle of the road politically, he kept the peace in Washington, D.C., a lesson the major political parties could learn today.

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### **Aaron Million says**

Stephen Ambrose's one volume abridgment of his two volume Dwight Eisenhower biography definitely cuts out a lot. Ambrose flies through Ike's youth in Abilene, Kansas, his four years at West Point, his marriage to Mamie, his stateside service in WWI, and his years of apprenticeship under Generals Fox Conner, John Pershing, and Douglas MacArthur. Barely settled into the book, the reader finds Ike being summoned to Washington D.C. in the aftermath of Pearl Harbor and subsequently being sent to Europe and North Africa to take command of the European war effort. While someone who is familiar with Eisenhower's life does not

need more space devoted to Ike's early years, someone seeking to learn more about him will be disappointed, or at the least not well-informed. Ambrose goes so quickly that we miss important character traits and development, with almost no attention being paid to his family and his upbringing (for example, Mamie nearly dying in the Philippines). Since that is such a fundamental aspect of any person's story, to skim over it in a biography does a disservice to the reader.

Ambrose slows things down when WWII arrives. A military historian by nature, Ambrose does his best work here in cataloging Eisenhower's wartime management, showing how he had a multitude of issues that he was dealing with at all times and that the war aged him considerably. However, on page 129, Ambrose writes "Patton, MacArthur, Bradley, Marshall, and the others all had their special qualities, but only Eisenhower had such a keen sense of family, of the way in which each casualty meant a grieving family back home." What is this statement based on? We do not know, as Ambrose provides no proof or examples. Was Eisenhower more congenial and personal than the other generals mentioned? Generally that seemed to be so, yet how does that translate into him having a better understanding of what service members' families were going through? Observations such as this make one question just what caused Ambrose to make them. But generally, the war coverage is good, and Ambrose adequately covers Eisenhower's complex relationship with Patton, and his constant headache in the name of Bernard Montgomery. Eisenhower's management of the war was not flawless, and Ambrose notes this, but clearly Eisenhower was successful and this is what matters most to Ambrose in assessing this part of Eisenhower's life.

Following the war, Eisenhower begins hanging out exclusively with wealthy men, and does so for the remainder of his life. While Ambrose notes this, he does not seem to think that these rich men altered Eisenhower's political and social views. That is hard to say either way. Being from rural Kansas, Eisenhower undoubtedly did lean to the conservative side. Yet he did seem to lose touch with everyday Americans as his interactions with them were limited to campaign appearances. Ambrose covers Eisenhower's perhaps not-so-reluctant decision to become a presidential candidate in 1952, but dispatches with the Republican National Convention in one page.

Fortunately, once Ambrose gets to Eisenhower's presidency, he tidies it up nicely as compared with his original Volume II covering these same years. Ambrose cuts down on all of the nuclear testing and defense meetings that Eisenhower chaired, allowing the narrative to flow easier than it did in Volume II. One area that he does not cut down on, and with good reason, is in examining Eisenhower's weird relationship with Richard Nixon. Having studied both men closely, Ambrose is clearly comfortable in detailing the slights done by each man and how this strained relationship proved quite costly to Nixon in 1960. Ambrose seems to be on Nixon's side as far as determining who bears the majority of the responsibility for this. He paints Eisenhower as cold and not quite honest in his dealings with Nixon, who, as everyone knows, had his own grand set of flaws. Ambrose does good work here: he does not over-analyze nor does he get into psychoanalysis, but he also knows that just stating facts without adding any commentary will not give the reader a sense of the tension between the two men.

As is typical of his biographies on Eisenhower and Nixon, Ambrose offers a thoughtful and well-balanced assessment of the man he is writing about. He evaluates Eisenhower as a wartime General, and then as a highly successful President. On the whole, Ambrose is favorable to Eisenhower, but never to the point of hagiography. While there are better choices available now for readers interested in a good biography about Eisenhower, this is preferable to reading the two volume series. If Ambrose had been a little more thorough in his research methods, and also had not whizzed through Eisenhower's early life so quickly, this would be a good biography. As it stands, it is adequate, but not much more than that.

Grade: C

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## Muhammad Flanagan says

One is fortunate if one has the two separate volumes of DWIGHT EISENHOWER ' s biography , as originally written by the late STEPHEN AMBROSE . [ Short of finding the original two volumes via a used bookseller , I don ' t think one can expect to get any but the condensed one - volume book . ]

Titled , respectively , ' EISENHOWER : SOLDIER , GENERAL OF THE ARMY , PRESIDENT - ELECT ' and ' EISENHOWER THE PRESIDENT ' , the two separate books are more fitting a personage as consequential , as great and as under - appreciated as ' Ike ' .

Ambrose does readers a great service by presenting the Thirty - Fourth President far more honestly and respectfully than do the simplistic editorial cartoons of ' HerBlock ' , which perpetuated the absurd myth that ' Ike ' was merely a political novice and a comically inactive President who was ill - equipped to do the job . [ President Eisenhower was castigated for spending too much time golfing and too little governing , a humorous parallel to the current Chief Exec . ]

Ambrose doesn ' t spare the Eisenhower Presidency any critique over its failings : among them , siding with the U . S . S . R . [ against FRANCE , BRITAIN and ISRAEL ] in the Suez Crisis of 1 9 5 6 ; the refusal to approve funding for EGYPT ' s construction of the ASWAN DAM , which compelled Egyptian / United Arab Republic alliances with the Soviet Union ; and , Ike ' s less - than - enthusiastic support for the CIVIL RIGHTS movement , although to his credit President Eisenhower did deploy the National Guard to Little Rock , Arkansas to forestall violence during the 1 9 5 7 public school integration .

In short : excellent books , highly informative , a boon to anyone curious about the era and especially about the man .

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## Steve says

<https://bestpresidentialbios.com/2017...>

Six years after completing his two-volume biography of Dwight Eisenhower, Stephen Ambrose authored an abridgement of the series: "Eisenhower: Soldier and President (The Renowned One-Volume Life)." Ambrose was an author and historian whose legacy has been seriously tainted by numerous and often convincing allegations of plagiarism and exaggeration. Ambrose died in 2002 at the age of sixty-six.

Published in 1990, this biography quickly became the "standard" on Eisenhower for non-historians and remains one of the most popular comprehensive treatments of Eisenhower's life. With 576 pages of text, it is just under half the size of the series but packs nearly as much punch – and with far greater efficiency. But it is not merely a condensation of the original series; in many areas it has been updated and refreshed.

Like the series from which it was derived, this biography is surprisingly objective given the author's well-known fondness for his subject. While Ambrose is quick to praise Eisenhower for his successes, he is equally rapid in pointing out shortcomings and failures. In fact, Ambrose is at his best when critiquing Eisenhower for his failure to directly challenge Joe McCarthy, for his failure to enthusiastically support civil right

advances and for his failure to more enthusiastically endorse Nixon for president.

But for many readers (particularly those somewhat familiar with Eisenhower) the best part of this biography is Ambrose's assessment of Eisenhower's legacy and his review of Ike's post-presidency. Not only is the author's appraisal of Eisenhower's presidency thoughtful and balanced, but his review of Eisenhower's interactions with his successors (Kennedy and LBJ, in particular) is both interesting and revealing.

Unfortunately for readers interested in understanding the genesis of Eisenhower's character, however, Ambrose's biography proves weak on its subject's early life. After just fifty pages Eisenhower is already fifty-one years old and a senior Army officer. Most of his formative moments are touched upon...but not with the depth required to paint a fully revealing portrait of Ike. By comparison, Jean Edward Smith's biography takes three times more space – and D'Este's nearly six times – to cover the same span of Eisenhower's life.

Readers will also find that, like the underlying series, this single-volume biography of Eisenhower lacks the fluidity and vibrancy of more engaging narratives. Ambrose's style is straightforward and matter-of-fact rather than embracing and captivating; it is reminiscent of a history professor rather than a great storyteller. But unlike the series, and to its credit, this biography does not frequently wander into seemingly gratuitous detail and avoids long, tedious stretches.

Overall, Stephen Ambrose's "Eisenhower: Soldier and President" proves a rare case where a series abridgement is worth more than the sum of its parts. All but the most committed student of Eisenhower is likely to prefer this biography to the far more detailed two-volume series. But where Ambrose's was once arguably the preeminent biographer of Eisenhower, both his series and this even better abridgement have been surpassed by more recent, engaging and colorful accounts of Eisenhower's life.

Overall rating: 3¾ stars

\* I have rated this biography without regard to allegations of plagiarism by Ambrose (which are generally directed toward his other books), allegations he greatly exaggerated the number of interviews he conducted with Eisenhower in the preparation of this series and allegations he fabricated at least one significant quote by Eisenhower.

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## **Loren says**

A very solid book. Certainly made me look at Eisenhower, the President very differently.

In retrospect, I would consider this an essential read for anyone who wants to better understand the beginning of the second half of the American 20th century and our first time on the stage as the accepted "leader of the free world."

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