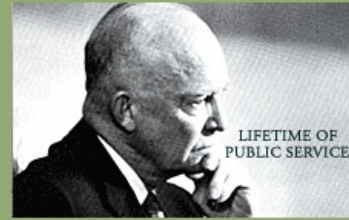


DWIGHT D. EISENHOWER MEMORIAL COMMISSION

It's time to build a national memorial to Dwight D. Eisenhower.



Eisenhower Stories

“The Man Who Made Eisenhower”

Men such as Douglas MacArthur and George Patton came from families with rich military heritages. They regarded the United States Military Academy at West Point as their first important step in a lifetime of military service. Dwight Eisenhower, on the other hand, saw “the Point” as little more than the source of a free college education and a place to play college sports, especially football. Ike was by no means certain he would make the Army a career.

By graduation in 1915, the future supreme commander of allied armies was known to his classmates as a fun-loving maverick, one who had earned little in the way of academic distinction or knowledge of military science. Four years of schooling above the Hudson River had yet to shape Ike into a military leader.

Indeed, after several years in the service, Eisenhower was downright discouraged. Despite enormous personal effort, he had not been sent overseas during World War I, the “Great War.” Then, when his intellectual potential began to emerge, he was slapped down by his superiors. In 1920, he was given a stiff verbal reprimand for having published an article about the future of tank warfare, an article deemed provocative and heretical by the Army’s chief of infantry. Less than a year later he was stoutly reprimanded for an honest mistake that would have seemed trivial outside the Army.

Without a combat record and having earned the disapproval of important superior officers, Ike’s military future looked bleak. Then, in 1921, his three-year-old son, Doud Dwight, died of scarlet fever. Ike and Mamie were devastated. It was a depressed and deeply dejected Captain Eisenhower who took up his new assignment in January 1922 at Camp Gaillard, in the Panama Canal Zone.

The Army commander at the Canal Zone, Brigadier General Fox Conner, had been General Pershing’s Chief of Operations in France during the Great War. Wealthy, intellectual, and immensely respected throughout the Army, Conner had pulled some heavy strings to get Eisenhower transferred to Panama as his executive officer.

A top Army strategist and military historian, Conner was convinced that the peace treaty following the war was deeply flawed and would inevitably trigger a second world war. To prepare for that struggle, Conner set out to identify and guide the most talented younger officers, those who were likely to become the future leaders of the American Army. George Catlett Marshall was an early choice for his cultivation and then George S. Patton, Jr., followed. Patton introduced Conner to Eisenhower in 1919, and Ike soon became the next addition to the General’s list of promising officers.

For the next three years Fox Conner taught graduate courses in military history, strategy, and leadership in a “virtual” classroom located in the humid jungle of Panama. This

classroom contained a single student, Dwight David Eisenhower. Military history classes at West Point had been poorly taught. But Fox Conner stirred Ike's interest in history — he taught Ike how to read it, think it, and intelligently discuss its lessons. He drummed into Eisenhower his belief that another world war could not be escaped and that whenever it came it would have to be fought with allies. Having worked closely with British and French military leaders in World War I, he helped Ike understand that dealing with the enemy can be a simple and straightforward matter when contrasted to securing close cooperation with an ally.

Eisenhower was transformed by his mentor. Three years of rigorous service and education with Fox Conner changed his life. Ike became a more serious reader of everything from military history to science, philosophy and the classics. With Conner's help, Eisenhower overcame depression and set out with determination to resurrect his military career.



General Fox Conner in Panama, 1924
Signed to John Eisenhower

General Conner's mentorship continued long after Eisenhower's assignment to Panama ended. Conner helped Ike in gaining admission to the Army's Command and General Staff School. Ike graduated first in his class. Conner later influenced Eisenhower's assignment to the American Battle Monuments Commission. This gave Ike the chance to work directly under General Pershing. Conner's final act as a mentor was to bring Ike's talents to the attention of George Marshall. When World War II came to America in 1941 — just as Conner had predicted — one of Marshall's first actions was to have Eisenhower appointed to his personal

Little wonder that in 1969 Frank Van Riper characterized General Conner as “the man who made Eisenhower.”

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