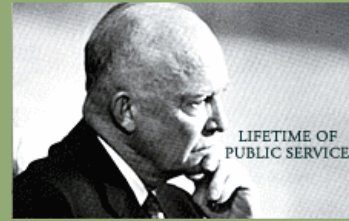


DWIGHT D. EISENHOWER MEMORIAL COMMISSION

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



Eisenhower Stories

## Ike Sets Wartime Pacific Strategy – In Three Hours

Having been promoted to Colonel in March, 1941 Eisenhower was serving as Chief of Staff of the 3rd Army at Fort Sam Houston outside of San Antonio, Texas. He would have preferred being in command of a regiment of infantry, but at least he was where he wanted to be, with troops in the field, when he got a new task.

General George Catlett Marshall, Chief of Staff of the Army, had ordered the largest war game exercise in American history to take place in Louisiana during September. The 3rd Army would face the 2nd Army in mock battle. Marshall had characterized the event as “a combat college for troop leading.” Over 470,000 soldiers would be involved and the huge war games became one of the top media stories in 1941. Ike’s job was to work with his boss, Lieutenant General Walter Krueger, in devising the strategy and troop



Ike with Brig. General Robin Drawford and Brig General Leonard Gerow at Operations Dir. War Dept 1942

movements that could lead the 3rd Army to “victory” over the opposing forces. They designed a fast moving envelopment maneuver to defeat their adversary. During the exercise the attack plan worked well and, to General Krueger’s chagrin, the press praised Eisenhower rather than Krueger as the strategist that led to the 3rd Army’s success.

At the end of the maneuvers General Marshall asked Brigadier General Mark Clark to give him a list of ten officers that Clark would recommend for consideration to be promoted to service in the War Plans section of the General Staff in Washington. Clark responded that he could supply such a list, but all ten names would be Dwight D. Eisenhower.

Ike was immediately promoted to Brigadier General and ordered to report to Washington as Marshall’s Deputy Chief of War Plans for the Pacific and Far East. Eisenhower wanted command of combat forces rather than assignment to another staff job, but

George Marshall was the highest ranking general and the most respected officer in the U.S. Army. No soldier questioned his orders or tried to have them changed.

Eisenhower reported for duty in General Marshall's office on a bright Sunday morning exactly one week after the disastrous Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. For about twenty minutes they discussed the general situation in the Pacific. With the pride of the Pacific fleet sitting in the mud at the bottom of Pearl Harbor and not enough support vessels available to escort aircraft carriers on long-range missions, the Navy was essentially out of business in that area of the world. The Army Air Force had been largely destroyed in Hawaii and the Philippines. The clamor for ground and air reinforcements in Hawaii and both coasts of the continental United States was urgent, as further Japanese attacks were expected everywhere.

Ike had never previously talked with Marshall for more than a minute or two at a few military ceremonies over the years. When he thought they were just getting into the conversation Marshall abruptly asked, "What should be our general line of action?" Ike answered, "Give me a few hours." That said, the meeting was over and Ike left to find his new desk.

Eisenhower did not come to his meeting with General Marshall unprepared to analyze strategic questions and develop practical answers. During his assignment to Panama in the early 1920's he had been personally tutored on global war strategy for two years by General Fox Connor, one of the Army's top strategic thinkers. Later, Ike had graduated first in his class from Command and General Staff School and gone on to assignments that required him to examine world-wide military matters, mobilization of armies, and the issues connected with converting the industrial capacity of the nation to a war footing. Perhaps most importantly for Marshall's first assignment, he had recently spent four years in the Philippines helping to build their military forces and defenses. He was no stranger to East Asia.

As he knew, the Pacific war situation that mid-December Sunday morning was appalling. The area in peril was 7,000 miles from America's West Coast and there was neither the transportation capacity nor the naval escort necessary to carry meaningful relief to the American and allied troops in the Philippines, the Dutch East Indies, Malaya, and other vital Pacific posts. There were supply ships and escort vessels being used in the Atlantic convoys to sustain Great Britain, but these were barely enough to do the job. They could not be diverted. All the desktop calculations Eisenhower could do simply verified the fact that the United States could not rescue the thousands of American soldiers defending the Philippines before the unopposed invading Japanese forces would capture the archipelago. Support could be dribbled in by submarine and blockade runners, but the garrisons were doomed.

Given this awful recognition, Marshall's question still remained. What should America be doing? Eisenhower used his remaining time with pencil and pad outlining his recommended Pacific strategy. He then returned to General Marshall and advised:

We can not prevail in the Philippines, but we must send what little aid is available. The allied countries might excuse failure, but would never accept abandonment.

Our central strategy should be to open and maintain water and aerial supply routes between the U.S. west coast and Australia. We must build up the ground and air forces that will be required to eventually attack north and recapture the Philippines and other points that the Japanese will have invaded and occupied.

Many high level studies would be done, many meetings with the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the Commander in Chief, President Roosevelt, would be held in the months to follow. But America's military strategy to make Australia the base for the U.S. Army and Army Air Force response in the Pacific would remain precisely as Dwight Eisenhower envisioned during three hours of thoughtful study on that Sunday in 1941. His many years of study and careful preparation paid off for Eisenhower, for Marshall, and for the United States.

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