
The Round Tablette

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Welcome to the May session of the Dr. Harold C. Deutsch World War II History Round Table. Tonight's speaker is Michel Paradis, author of *The Light of Battle*. He will provide insight into the experiences that created General Dwight D. Eisenhower's leadership skills and examine how these led to the success of Operation **OVERLORD**, and to the successful interactions with his major subordinates involved in the Northern European Theater.

There is a deeper question to be considered in tonight's presentation: to what extent does the man make history, and to what extent does history make the man? Radical historians look to the common men, Marxist historians to forces (the "revolution"), and Whig historians to the big men and big institutions. Most of us, trying to get a handle on the past, figure that even in a global war, single individuals making sometimes small choices, can have great impact (e.g., Claus von Stauffenberg at *Wolfsschanze*, or Eisenhower deciding to go ahead with the landings in France despite the weather forecasts).



D-Day, Ramsey, Ike, Montgomery

Born on October 14, 1890, Dwight David ("Ike") Eisenhower came from a working class Kansas family with six brothers. After high school, he worked two

years in the same creamery his father worked in before entering West Point. At the US Military Academy, he accumulated a less than perfect disciplinary record and, although he excelled in English and graduated in the upper third of his class, his teachers thought he would only make a good but not great officer. Eisenhower's class of 1915 was known as "the class the stars fell on" because 59 out of 164 graduates (36%) attained general rank.

"Ike" could swear in the best traditions of an Army drill sergeant but also learned the art of compromise and how to get along well with others; coming from a large family offered some lessons in that art. Eisenhower served in the 19th Infantry in Texas but did not serve in Pershing's campaign in Mexico.

During America's involvement in the Great War, Eisenhower's request to be in a combat unit was rejected several times. Instead, stationed at Camp Meade in Pennsylvania, he

led the heavy tank brigade, graduated from the infantry tank school, and – perhaps most critically – he became friends with George S. Patton. Together, they developed ideas about the use of the tanks and their usefulness beyond infantry support, and each published an article in *Infantry Journal* on the subject, much to the ire of their superiors. Eisenhower and Patton discussed the how wars were won. For Patton it was all about leadership, but Eisenhower believed in not overlooking the more mundane aspects of warfare, like logistics or alliances. Armies had to be supplied, fed, and organized in order to be effective.

Eisenhower's interest in logistics continued when in 1919 he embarked on a cross-country study of the Army's transportation capabilities. (Later during his Presidential years, the building of the interstate highway system was named after him.) After several such assignments he was sent to the Panama Canal Zone where he was executory officer for Major General Fox Conner, who became his mentor and saw that Ike attended the Command and General Staff School at Fort Leavenworth, graduating first in his class of 245 officers in 1926. His academic training included the Army War College in 1928, and the Industrial College of the Army in 1929-1933 where he honed his appreciation of American industrial capacity and economic functioning.

During the late 1920s and 1930s Eisenhower moved about to various assignments; for example, being stationed in the Panama Canal Zone, and attending the Command and General Staff College at Fort Leavenworth. After the War College, Eisenhower did a stint in France studying World War I battlefields where he learned about France's geography and transportation systems. After serving as an aide to General of the Armies John J. Pershing, he became an aide to General Douglas MacArthur when he was Army Chief of Staff and accompanied MacArthur when he went to the Philippines as military adviser creating the Philippine army. While there Ike realized that if the Japanese could get ashore they would be able to take over the whole island, a study that proved to be true.

Eisenhower's experiences during the inter-war years while frustrating for him from a career standpoint, proved extremely useful in his leadership in World War II. His cross-country convoy in 1919 provided invaluable preparation for the moving of men and equipment across North Africa and Europe.

If you are a veteran, or know a veteran, of one of these campaigns – contact Don Patton at cell 612-867-5144 or coldpatton@yahoo.com

His work in the Philippines provided insights into successful amphibious landings. Additionally, the in-depth study of the World War I French landscape gave him the advantage of knowing the French terrain and road network as he prepared for and led the invasion of France.

Eisenhower really owed his career to one man: George C. Marshall. When Marshall became the Army Chief of Staff (on 1 September 1939), he began with some house cleaning. He created a “plucking committee” of retired Generals who recommended the retirement of older generals, allowing Marshall to promote men he felt that had been overlooked. Bradley, Eisenhower, and Patton were three of these men. All three men came together as architects of the Allied victory in Europe, beginning in North Africa, through the Sicily and then across France into Germany. Eisenhower would lead the way as Supreme Allied Commander and his ability to compromise aided him when dealing with the British. Much to the consternation of the other two, Eisenhower’s ability to compromise would be displayed in the most significant moment of his career — D-Day.

6 June 1944: a day of superlatives. One of the most thoroughly planned battles; one of the most complicated military operations; and perhaps the most studied twenty-four hour period in the military history of the world. Whatever the superlative, it pales in comparison to the deeds of the men who fought there. (Americans tend, rather, to think of D-Day in terms of Omaha Beach, *Saving Private Ryan*, or *Band of Brothers*.) The Normandy landings (Operation NEPTUNE) was one of the most complicated and most thoroughly planned military operations of World War II.

The strategic purpose of the Normandy Landings was to secure a lodgment on the Continent sufficient to serve as the logistics base for the conquest of Germany. Pas-de-Calais was more logical (closer to Berlin) but too well defended. The beaches in Normandy were the best alternative, and with the success of Operation **FORTITUDE** (convincing the Germans Pas-de-Calais was the place), were comparatively poorly defended. Unfortunately, the terrain and the German “Atlantic Wall” fortifications combined to provide a substantial advantage to the defenders on Omaha Beach.

Does the man make history or history make the man? For Dwight Eisenhower it was both, much to the gratitude of the world.

FURTHER READINGS:

Michel Paradis, *The Light of Battle: Eisenhower, D-Day, and the Birth of the American Superpower* (New York: Harper-Collins, 2024).
Carlo D'Este, *Eisenhower: A Soldier's Life* (New York: Henry Holt, 2002).
Jonathan W. Jordan, *Brothers, Rivals, Victors* (New York: NAL Caliber, 2011).

Jonathan W. Jordan, *American Warlords: How Roosevelt's High Command Led America to Victory in World War II* (New York: NAL/Caliber, 2015).

Stephen E. Ambrose, *The Supreme Commander* (New York: Knopf Doubleday Publishing, 2012).

Announcements:

Twin Cities Civil War Round Table – 19 May 2026— *Post-war Ordeals of Veterans*—

www.tccwrt.com – e-mail: info@tccwrt.com

Minnesota Military Museum, Camp Ripley, 15000 Hwy 115, Little Falls, MN 56345. 320-616-6050.

<http://www.mnmilitarymuseum.org/>.

8th AF Historical Society of MN, KC Hall Bloomington, 2nd & 4th Wednesdays at 1100.

<https://www.8thmn.org>.

Wings of the North Airshow - Eden Prairie – 11 July 2026 - Flying Cloud Airport - 952-746-6100 -

www.wotn.org

Friends of Ft. Snelling - www.fortsnelling.org

Alliance Française 612-332-0436 - www.afmsp.org

Friends of the National WW II Memorial –

<http://www.wwiimemorialfriends.org.US>

Pittsburg Veterans Breakfast Club

- <http://www.vbcphg.org>.

Western Naval Historical Association – info@wnha.net

WWII Discussion Forum – [wwiidf.org](http://www.wwiidf.org)

History Happy Hour - Sundays, 3 pm -

www.historyhappyhour.com

CAF - Commemorative Air Force - 651-455-6942 -

www.cafmn.org

Honor Flight - Jerry Kyser - 651-338-2717 -

jkyser45@gmail.com

We need volunteers to drive our veterans to and from meetings. Please contact Don Patton at cell 612-867-5144 or coldpatton@yahoo.com

Round Table Schedule 2026 – 2027

8 Sept. Betting Against America

22 Sept. Manhattan Project

13 Oct. Rangers

27 Oct. ABMC Military Cemeteries

10 Nov. Was WWII a *good* war?

8 Dec. Pearl Harbor – 85 years on

2027

12 Jan. East Front: Guderian’s Panzers

9 Feb. War in Yugoslavia

9 Mar. China-Burma-India: Stillwell

23 Mar. America’s Unlikely Defenders

13 Apr. Fall of the Philippines – 85 years on

27 Apr. Naval Battles of World War II

11 May Patton: January – December 1945

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We would greatly appreciate your supporting the HCDWW2HRT.



MacArthur (c) and Ike (r)
Manila, 1935



Fox Conner (l), Marshall (c),
and Pershing (r), 1919



Patton’s 3rd star, Ike, Mar 1943



Ike, 1919 Motor Convoy