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Review of Holland's "Eisenhower Between the Wars: The Making of a General and a Statesman"

Kerry Irish

George Fox University, kirish@georgefox.edu

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Eisenhower Between the Wars: The Making of a General and a Statesman. By Matthew Holland. Westport, Conn: Praeger, 2001. ISBN 0-275-96340-3. Index. Bibliography. Endnotes. Pp. ix, 248. \$64.95.

Matthew Holland's *Eisenhower Between the Wars* is a solid piece of revisionist work on an area of Eisenhower's life that has received too little attention: the interwar years. It was during these twenty years that Ike became the officer worthy of the meteoric rise to high command that he experienced. The early myth that Holland refutes, that Eisenhower was an obscure but likeable and competent officer who just happened to be in the right place at the right time, was nearly palpably false from the beginning, but his early biographers seemed to enjoy that story, as did the American people. Later, Stephen Ambrose in his biography of Eisenhower suggested there was more to Ike's interwar preparation at times, but in assessing the whole, wrote, "During the war [First World War] he at least had important responsibilities; in the 1920's and 1930's, save as a football coach, he had none." Geoffrey Perret's more recent treatment of Eisenhower is better in regard to these years; Ike meets important people and makes substantial contributions to the development of the U.S. Army, while receiving an education as to how the Army and the federal government work. But Perret is brief and does not approach the understanding of Eisenhower and these times that Holland possesses. This book, then, fills a long-term need in Eisenhower scholarship.

Holland brings a military background as well as graduate academic credentials to this task. He plainly states his own philosophical base and personal views concerning his subject. For Holland, history is shaped not only by impersonal forces but also by men, indeed by great men, and Eisenhower

is one of the “great leaders of the free world during the tumultuous twentieth century.”

Holland's Eisenhower is driven to become a great soldier and brings many talents to that endeavor. He is the best read and trained officer of his age in the Army and possesses a “terrific intellect.” Far from being an unknown officer, his talents and work ethic attract the attention of some of the Army's most important senior officers, who mentor Eisenhower and manipulate his career to Ike's great advantage. Indeed, he benefits from such attention more than any other officer of the era. Holland is quite right in emphasizing Ike's intellectual gifts and even more so in asserting that Eisenhower was unusual in that his humility, stemming from the strong Christian background of his youth, allowed him to seek such instruction and make it part of his own store of knowledge. In short, Ike was teachable to a degree that few men of his abilities are.

Holland's organization is topical. There are chapters on Eisenhower's education, the development of his philosophy of war, and the aforementioned mentors. His method is partly comparative. Holland cites the paradigms of leadership found in Morris Janowitz's *The Professional Soldier: A Social and Political Portrait* and John Keegan's *Mask of Command* and successfully argues that Eisenhower's career manifested elements of both models. Janowitz believed that the modern general in high command was more manager than hero and usually came to that position along an unorthodox career path. This description certainly fit Eisenhower who lacked what was considered the requisite duty with troops. Keegan is more concerned with the character that allows a leader to walk the path to command than with the path itself. For Holland, Eisenhower fulfills Keegan's concept of the unheroic soldier, the general who leads largely from behind the scenes, eschewing the spotlight and the glory while endeavoring to build and manage a great team.

Holland's book is built on primary research in the Eisenhower Library and the U.S. Army Military History Institute. Moreover, he is thoroughly familiar with the important secondary sources. Nevertheless this book has weaknesses. The prose, while generally clear and succinct, is encumbered with missing or duplicate words that an editor should have caught. There are also mistakes of simple fact: Ike's father is referred to as “John,” then correctly identified as “David” a page later. More importantly, many readers will object to the air of triumphalism and hagiography that appear from time to time. Then, too, Holland, in his enthusiasm, occasionally takes his argument beyond the evidence. In regard to the Army's Industrial Mobilization Plan of 1930, which Eisenhower largely wrote, Holland asserts, “Ike's efforts insured that when American troops did enter battle in 1942 they were fully equipped with modern American weapons.” Here Holland gives Ike far too much credit. The 1930 IMP was fully revised, without Eisenhower's input, in 1933, 1936, and 1939. When Franklin Roosevelt decided to mobilize the American economy for war on the eve of World War II he largely ignored the Army plan.

These problems aside, Holland's primary argument—that Eisenhower's experiences in the interwar years were crucial to his development and later success—is well proven. Among the many valid points that the author makes is that Dwight Eisenhower was an ambitious and energetic officer determined to become—if fate allowed him the opportunity—a great soldier. He drove himself to impress his superior officers, to study his profession (in a time when the vast majority of officers did not energetically do so), and to understand the evolution of weapons such as tanks. Indeed, Holland accurately asserts that Eisenhower became one of the Army's visionaries, postulating a combined arms approach to war that would eventually necessitate a supreme commander for each theater.

Matthew Holland's book makes an important contribution to our understanding of Dwight Eisenhower. Future Eisenhower scholars will want to consult this book and consider its arguments carefully.

Kerry E. Irish

George Fox University
Newberg, Oregon