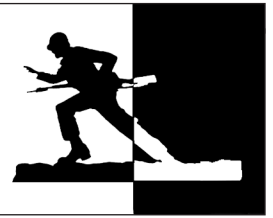


Book Reviews

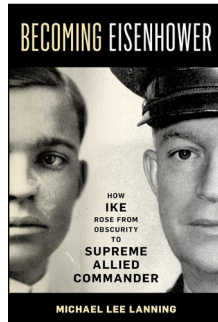


Becoming Eisenhower: How Ike Rose from Obscurity to Supreme Allied Commander

By Michael Lee Lanning

Essex, CT: Stackpole Books, 263 pages, 2024

Reviewed by LTC (Retired)
Tom Vance



Sometimes you read a great book with a unique angle and cannot believe that someone else hadn't already written it. *Becoming Eisenhower* is one of those books. It is not a typical biography as it doesn't cover all of Dwight D. Eisenhower's life. We follow him from his time at the U.S. Military Academy at West Point (Class of 1915) to the start of World War II. Author Michael Lee Lanning writes, "In virtual obscurity, he was a man who had spent more than three decades preparing — mostly in inglorious ways, in his and others' views — for his destiny."

The best place to begin is at the end of this story. Ike was a recently minted brigadier general when WWII began, serving as chief of staff of Third Army at Fort Sam Houston, TX. He then became chief of operations at the War Department, but he was disappointed, hoping for a division command. Then, two surprises. Army Chief of Staff GEN George Marshall quickly promoted him to major general over 162 more senior brigadiers. And then, three months later, Ike tells his wife, Mamie, that he's off to London, saying, "I'm to be in command over there." She asked, "In command of what?" Ike replied, "Of the whole shebang."

Ike would serve as the commanding general of the European theater of operations, along with a third star, and then Supreme Allied Commander. There was no question that he excelled in his two battalion commands and service as chief of staff at multiple levels of command. But how do we explain this extraordinary rise? Lanning masterfully answers that question.

The recurring theme throughout this work is how Ike always sought duty with troops; however, being "the consummate staff officer," he repeatedly received desk jobs. He was stateside during World War I, leading tank training for which he received the Distinguished Service Medal. His interest in the evolution of armor did not win him friends within the Infantry Branch. When it was time to attend the Command and General Staff College, his branch manager would not send him, so Ike obtained a temporary appointment in the Adjutant General Corps and got his slot at Leavenworth, graduating first in his class. During the interwar years, promotions came slowly, and he spent 16 years as a major. From being a tank corps observer for the First Transcontinental Motor Convoy

(1919) to one of the architects of the Louisiana Maneuvers (1941), Ike participated in long-term war planning and finally wartime mobilization.

Not only does Lanning discuss Ike's assignments, but he also covers those he desperately wanted and did not get as well as those he turned down (like the opportunity to be an ROTC instructor — too bad for those cadets). Ike was often disappointed, but he always did his best with each job and sought professional development. Lanning describes Ike's relationships with peers (such as George Patton, also the subject of another of his books) and the many mentors that helped Ike along the way. And we meet his bosses, including Generals John Pershing, George Marshall, and Douglas MacArthur and learn how Ike navigated (or survived) their leadership styles.

Lanning draws primarily from Ike's two books, his memoir *At Ease: Stories I Tell to Friends* (1967) and his account of WWII *Crusade in Europe* (1948), as well as *The Eisenhower Diaries* edited by Robert H. Ferrell (1981) and numerous biographies, especially the earliest, *Soldier of Democracy* by Kenneth S. Davis (1946). Lanning comments when his account varies with Ike's writings and that of other biographers. For example, Lanning devotes five pages to Ike's time at the Army War College versus the one paragraph in *At Ease*. Lanning's research is solid, but his writing makes for pleasurable reading, not scholarly study. The book includes 20 photos, sources, and an index. The only improvement would be the addition of a timeline to help with the progression of Ike's numerous assignments.

Sadly, Lanning died shortly after completing this work. A retired Army lieutenant colonel, the Airborne Ranger fought in Vietnam as an infantry platoon leader, reconnaissance platoon leader, and company commander, receiving the Bronze Star with 'V' device with two oak leaf clusters. He wrote 29 books, nine of them about the Vietnam War. He also wrote *The Revolutionary War 100: The Stories Behind the Most Influential Battles, People, and Events of the American Revolution*, which is especially relevant as last year we celebrated the 250th anniversary of the birth of the Army and start of the Revolutionary War.

With D-Day (Operation Overlord) behind him, the rest of his story is not too surprising: receiving a promotion to General of the Army with five stars, replacing Marshall as Army chief of staff, becoming president of Columbia University, getting recalled to active duty to run NATO, and finally becoming president of the United States. The postwar years require only a final seven-page chapter, and this seems sufficient thanks to Lanning's you-feel-like-you're-there storytelling of Ike's "becoming Eisenhower."

For those in uniform, this book will be inspiring. For those of

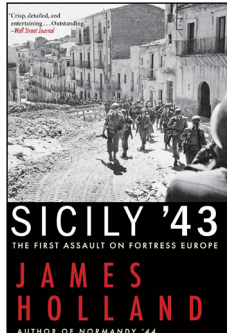
us who are veterans, it offers reflection, and for students of military history and biography, it connects personal experiences to historic events. This book should be considered the introduction for anyone studying Ike's military life.

Sicily '43: The First Assault on Fortress Europe

By James Holland

New York, NY: Atlantic Monthly Press, 640 pages, 2021

Reviewed by COL (Retired)
Chris R. Willis



The 80th anniversary of the end of World War Two (WWII) (2 September 1945) and the 85th anniversary of the U.S. Army's first official parachute jump (16 August 1940) provide a unique opportunity to highlight a book about one of the largest air, land, and sea campaigns of WWII. James Holland's *Sicily '43* deftly describes the actions of the combined American, British, and Canadian airborne and seaborne armies, navies, and air forces during the 38-day campaign to liberate Sicily, known as Operation Husky.

Holland is an English historian, prolific author, broadcaster, and podcaster (*We Have Ways of Making You Talk*). *Sicily '43* is the first of Holland's three books about the Allied Italian Campaign. His accompanying books are *The Savage Storm: The Battle for Italy 1943* (2023) and *Cassino '44: The Brutal Battle for Rome* (2024). Although a hefty 640 pages, *Sicily '43* provides the modern military leader some timeless lessons about the complexity of combined and joint operations, the value and fragility of special operations and airborne troops, and the requirement for air superiority and conditions setting during joint forcible entry operations (JFEO).

On 10 July 1943, 160,000 Allied troops assaulted Sicily by air and sea during Operation Husky. Following Operation Torch, the first U.S./UK combined campaign that defeated the Germans and Italians in North Africa, Operation Husky was the first Allied campaign onto the European continent since the fall of France in 1940. Holland argues that this was the largest amphibious assault of WWII due to the number of troops that landed on the first day of the invasion. The airborne and amphibious assaults were supported by more than 2,500 ships and 3,500 Allied aircraft. Holland's style, like that of Stephen Ambrose, combines a rich patchwork of first-person accounts by American, British, Canadian, Italian, and German flag officers, junior officers, NCOs, and troops alike. He complements these accounts with those of local Sicilians and his expert understanding of the force composition, weapons, and tactics of both the Allied and Axis forces. Holland's books lie on a bedrock of primary source research and physical battlefield studies.

JFEOs may be the most complex of all military operations, and Holland captures those complexities well — most importantly, the need for both air and naval superiority. The success of Operation Torch allowed the Allies to base fighters and bombers in North Africa, thus facilitating air superiority in the southern Mediterranean. This air superiority was then conducive to the establishment of naval superiority between North Africa and Sicily. Without both air and naval superiority, the airborne and amphibious assaults on Sicily would not have been possible. However, the range limitations of the fighter aircraft (U.S. P-38s Lightning and UK Spitfires) forced the Allies to attack in the most obvious location, Sicily. Bypassing the island and landing on the Italian peninsula itself could have achieved both operational and tactical surprise. Holland does an excellent job of highlighting the high-level tensions between the U.S. and UK flag officers that were caused by the constraints and limitations of air and naval assets. He also highlights the famous rivalry between Patton and Montgomery that allowed 40,000 German troops to escape to mainland Italy.

Holland does an excellent job of portraying the difficulties of conducting airborne operations. He uses the knowledge of U.S. and UK parachute and glider operations gained while writing his book *Normandy '44: D-Day and the Battle for France* (2019) to describe the technical, tactical, and personal human challenges inherent in airborne operations. These challenges became evident when only 12 of 137 British gliders hit their landing zone (many ditched in the sea) and when the 82nd Airborne Division's 505th Parachute Infantry Regiment landed far and wide of their drop zone. Holland does a good job linking lessons learned from airborne operations in Sicily to more successful, although not perfect, glider and parachute drops in Normandy on D-Day.

In summary, James Holland's *Sicily '43* is a fresh look at the Allies' first campaign to attack the "soft underbelly" of the Axis powers. His expertise in WWII history, detailed first-person narratives, and engaging narrative style make for an excellent book that memorializes a true turning point in the European theater of operations of WWII. This book also provides pertinent lessons for the modern student of JFEO.

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