



KANSAS LEGEND BIOGRAPHY

Dwight D. Eisenhower (1890-1969)

Dwight David Eisenhower was born in Denison, Texas, in 1890, the third of seven boys to David and Ida Eisenhower. Two years later, the family moved back to Abilene, Kan., where the other six children were born, one of whom died during infancy. All six Eisenhower boys attended school and went on to pursue higher education. Dwight excelled in school and high school athletics, earning an opportunity to attend West Point.

After a successful second year as halfback of the Army football team, Eisenhower injured his knee and finished out at the academy graduating in the top half of his class. He was stationed as Second Lieutenant in Texas following graduation, where he met Mamie Geneva Doud. In just a year's time, the couple married in Denver. They went on to have two sons, one of whom died as a child and one that went on to graduate from the Military Academy himself.

Eisenhower seemed a natural leader and was promoted through the ranks during World War I. He remained in the United States throughout the war, training soldiers for the battlefield, coaching football and traveling across the country from assignment to assignment. In 1920 following the end of World War I, Eisenhower was promoted to Regular Army Major and went on to attend Command and General Staff school in Leavenworth, Kan., graduating first in his class.

Eisenhower's unique peacetime military service propelled his military career. He began forging relationships with storied military men. Eisenhower was assigned under the command of George S. Patton, and then traveled to Panama with General Fox Connor. He also served under Generals John J. Pershing, Douglas MacArthur and Walter Krueger. In 1941, Eisenhower was put in charge of the Plans for the Pacific War following Pearl Harbor. After successfully drafting strategic concepts and creating solutions to difficult military problems, Eisenhower was promoted to chief of War Plans Division.

Eisenhower was given the task of creating an allied coalition of military forces, astutely recognizing the need to incorporate sea, air, and ground forces for maximum effectiveness. Even with no combat history, Eisenhower was chosen to lead the U.S. and British troops landing in North Africa in 1942 and then promoted to Supreme Commander of the Allied Forces, leading forces during the D-Day invasion in France in June 1944.

Post-World War II, Eisenhower became president of Columbia University and served as Supreme Allied Commander of NATO forces during Harry S. Truman's presidency. In 1952, Eisenhower accepted the Republican nomination for presidency and swiftly defeated his opponent, Adlai Stevenson, becoming the 34th President of the United States.

During Eisenhower's presidency, his chief domestic concerns included education, race relations and economic prosperity. He created the Department of Health, Education and Welfare; he sent troops to Little Rock, Ark., to enforce desegregation of schools; he managed a balanced budget; and he reduced military spending through the New Look program. He also initiated the creation of a national interstate transportation system, signing the Federal-Aid Highway Act in 1956.

Abroad, Eisenhower was equally as influential. In 1953, he negotiated an armistice that ended the majority of fighting in the Korean War. Eisenhower suffered from a heart attack in 1955, and it appeared that his influential political days might end. Instead, he came back to win a second term in office. He quickly turned his focus onto the tensions in the Middle East. In 1957, Eisenhower drafted the Eisenhower Doctrine, allowing U.S. forces to help protect Middle Eastern countries from becoming vulnerable due to political instability.

Eisenhower launched the United States into the space race with Russia after founding the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) in 1958 to centralize space and technology research. He promoted an "Atoms for Peace" program to defuse development of nuclear powers into a means for creating peaceful technologies. Eisenhower also managed to control relations with Russia, avoiding escalating tensions of the Cold War.

Following the end of Eisenhower's second term, he retired from politics to the Gettysburg farm with his wife and concentrated on leisure activities. Despite the retirement, both John F. Kennedy and Lyndon B. Johnson sought Eisenhower's advice and counsel in several difficult situations the United States faced. After a year of serious illness, Eisenhower died on March 28, 1969, from congestive heart failure. He remains one of the most admired civil servants of the 20th century.

