

Remarks at the renaming of Fort Gordon to Fort Eisenhower

By Susan Eisenhower

Secretary Wormuth, General Stanton, Distinguished guests. My sister Mary Jean and I are honored to be here today for the redesignation ceremony renaming Fort Gordon to Fort Eisenhower. It is hard to express our feelings of what it means to us that such a post has been named in Dwight Eisenhower's honor--and how much more meaningful it is that this critically important center is in a part of the country that Ike so loved.

I have often marveled at the hand of fate in our history. Our grandfather's road to West Point was not a straight one. He came from a deeply religious, pacifist household. His parents were so financially strapped that they were unable to provide the family's six boys with a college education. Ike helped his older brother go to college before he faced his own dilemma on how to get an education. Serving in the military was Ike's choice and he entered West Point with the class of 1915, but only after another young man, so selected, failed the physical exam.

This fate may have brought Eisenhower to the Army, but the ethos of serving our country fused with his spiritual beliefs. As I once wrote, “Eisenhower’s leadership of **head and heart** was projected in the context of a higher cause, one that rested on accountability and humility.”

Ike’s broad smile, his magnetic energy, and his deepest commitment to the fighting men under his command are legendary. The decisions he had to make during his years as commanding general and then supreme allied commander of western forces during WWII—along with his two-term presidency—are also among the most crucial decisions of the 20th century. In addition to D-Day, and other wartime operations, during his presidency he dealt with the advent of the hydrogen bomb and the dawn of the space age, which he shaped to assure free access to this uncharted medium.

Always projecting optimism and constructive long-term plans Eisenhower balanced the budget three times in his eight-year presidency and came close on another two. He left his successor with a budget surplus. Ike got 80% of his legislative agenda through a congress controlled by the other party and after he ended the Korean war in 1953 there were no American combat casualties during his administration. He brought innovation to our national security apparatus, built

the Interstate Highway System, and championed civil rights. He was perhaps the most non-artisan president of the 20th century.

In short, he left the country and the world better than he found it. In war and peace his goal was to assure “unity of purpose” through building trust and thinking and acting for the long haul.

My siblings and I could only guess at the consequential decisions he had to make during those years we shared with him. As a family man he was engaged and fun-loving. We learned and saw in practice the importance of family and country. We also absorbed the critical role that rest and reflection plays in producing a sustainable life balance. My grandmother, Mamie, was convinced that fun must also be part of the stress-reducing regime.

In this context, Augusta and the state of Georgia provided considerable respite for them. My grandfather knew that he must sometimes allow his brain to rest, so that it could process the complex factors of critical decision making. Hunting, golf and oil painting were indispensable parts of that re-set. So was the camaraderie of friends. Here in Augusta, he was buoyed by those around him and the beautiful countryside that surrounds Augusta and is seen throughout the state. Only occasionally merriment was mixed with frustration when he hit golf balls into what

he regarded as a *VERY* “poorly positioned” tree on the 17th fairway at Augusta National.

Again, we wish to express our thanks to the people of Augusta Georgia for making this wonderful tribute a reality and to the re-naming commission for their consideration and endorsement. Our gratitude also goes to all the people at this Fort who have shown such enthusiasm for this change. **This is where the past and the future can now comfortably reside.**

If Dwight Eisenhower were here today, he would be full of heart-felt appreciation for the focus and dedication this community has placed on serving our country and keeping it safe. You, who serve here at Fort Eisenhower, are truly an inspiration for us all.

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