

An Insult to a Plebe

It is common practice at military academies for the upper classmen to haze the first-year students. This is part of the initiation rites.

Dwight David Eisenhower, as a second-year student at the United States Military Academy at West Point, participated in these activities.

One day, a plebe, as freshmen were called, bumped into Eisenhower. Such an act was unpardonable, so Eisenhower responded as expected, yelling and screaming at the young cadet. Searching for the most demeaning thing he could utter, Eisenhower said the plebe looked like a barber.

With that remark, the plebe drew himself up to his full height, squared his shoulders, thrust forth his jaw, and responded that he was a barber. It was as a barber that he had supported his family prior to coming to the academy.

Devastated, Eisenhower returned to his room. He retold the incident to his roommate, confessing, "I've just done something that was stupid and unforgivable. I just managed to make a man ashamed of the work he did to earn a living."

In his autobiography, Eisenhower wrote that for him this was a lesson about the "lack of consideration for others."

In his room that day, Eisenhower vowed never to demean another individual again. It was a promise he kept through his life, even as Supreme Allied Commander during World War II and as the 34th President of the United States.

He became an encourager and it showed in the effectiveness of his leadership.

Each of us has a contribution to make, without which we would all be less. Each of us has a unique potential. Even more important, is not to condemn, but to encourage one another – just as Christ encourages us.

Whoever brings blessing will be enriched, and one who waters will himself be watered (Proverbs 11:25 ESV).

– Beecher Hunter

