

GENERAL DOUGLAS MACARTHUR

HIS FALL FROM GLORY WAS MUCH MORE COMPLICATED THAN WE KNEW



The Legendary General (1880-1964)

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INTRODUCTION

Five Star General Of The Army Douglas MacArthur was born on Jan 26, 1880, in Little Rock, Arkansas, and died in Washington D.C. on April 5, 1964, at the age of 84. Among his many awards during his service career, he was a Medal of Honor for the Philippine Campaign. On June 13, 1899, he was appointed as a Cadet at the United States Military Academy, West Point, New York.

In 1900 he is the victim of hazing and becomes involved in a serious scandal where one Cadet is left dead by upperclassman abuse. During the investigation, he implicates only Cadets, who were already expelled from the Academy or had previously confessed,

In 1903 he graduated 1st in his class of 93, was commissioned as a Second Lieutenant, and was assigned to the Corps of Engineers.

In 1942 Little Rock's first city park was named MacArthur Park in honor of 5-Star General Douglas MacArthur, whose father was stationed at the Arsenal when he was born in 1880. Today, the building houses the MacArthur Museum of Arkansas Military History.

He is buried at The MacArthur Memorial in Norfolk, Virginia.



The sign reads "The MacArthur Memorial is one of the premier institutions in the United States dedicated to the history of World War 1, World War 2, and the Korean War. Take a brief look at its history."

Many people in Arkansas are not avid fans of the General. The link to the Website that shows this "dislike" and the reasons why is called "[Arkies At War](http://arkansasroadstories.com/warriors/macpark.html)" <http://arkansasroadstories.com/warriors/macpark.html>

One of the quotes from the article reads like this:

"MacArthur all but disowned us. He practically never acknowledged his Arkansas origins unless confronted with the official records. He always claimed Norfolk, Virginia as his hometown and his place of origin even though he was eighteen months old before his dad got reassigned to Washington."

WHAT IS THIS ARTICLE ALL ABOUT?



A dispute between President Harry S. Truman and General Douglas MacArthur in 1951, during the Korean War. MacArthur, who commanded the troops of the United Nations, wanted to use American air power to attack the People's Republic of China. Truman refused, fearing that an American attack on China would bring the Soviet Union into the war. When MacArthur criticized Truman's decision publicly, Truman declared MacArthur insubordinate and removed him as commanding general. MacArthur returned to the United States, received a hero's welcome, and told Congress, "Old soldiers never die; they only fade away."



Gen. Douglas MacArthur giving his "farewell address" on April 19, 1951

PRESIDENT TRUMAN FIRES GEN. MACARTHUR

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<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U75iq4eFS-8>



PART ONE

THE INEXPLICABLE CONTROVERSIAL LIFE OF AN AMERICAN GENERAL

There are few times in history when we can say a man was born and raised in such a season that he should be at his prime when his country needs him most. Such is the case of General Douglas MacArthur and his life's journey to reach such a point is as audacious as the legend of the man himself. We are talking about a man who was nominated for a Medal of Honor in seemingly every conflict he entered.

And yet, he was inexplicably known to wear a Japanese kimono at his desk and smoke cigarettes from a jeweled case.

Whatever one might think about that, when America needed him to face the Japanese threat, he was already 3/4th of the way to Japan before the first shot was fired.

JUST GETTING WARMED UP

As much as General MacArthur had a knack for pursuing greatness, he had an equal joy for ruffling the feathers of his superiors. His first Medal of Honor nomination from the occupation of Veracruz in 1914 was only denied because the audacious enterprise he undertook was not authorized by his command. Seeing a need for locomotive engines to support the logistics of the expedition, a young MacArthur decided he would go and get them himself. Fighting his way there and back, MacArthur displayed early on a ferocious streak of independence that would serve both him and his nation well. And occasionally get him into hot water of course.

Fast forward a few years and America would find itself in the fields of France circa 1918. For his actions in World War 1, MacArthur was nominated a second time for the Medal of Honor. And while he wasn't awarded it the second time either, his reputation would catapult him to places of power and prominence before World War 2.



Douglas MacArthur, France 1918

After World War 1, MacArthur would find himself as the Superintendent to West Point in 1919, the Army's youngest Major General by 1925, and Chief of Staff of the United States Army by 1930. In 1935, MacArthur was asked to supervise the creation of the Philippine Army, and in 1937, he retired from the United States Army at the ripe old age of 57 to become Field Marshall for the newly formed Philippine Army. You read that correctly, before the outbreak of World War 2 in the Pacific, General Douglas MacArthur was retired.

WORLD WAR 2

But lest you think he was past his prime, I need to remind you that he did get married and produce a son at the age of 58. However, with the coming conflict, his son wouldn't step foot in the United States until he was 13 years old. Recalled to Active Duty by Roosevelt in 1941, MacArthur would find himself besieged in the Philippines by the Japanese a few months later.

With no hope for victory against the overwhelming Japanese forces, MacArthur was ordered by Roosevelt to withdraw himself to Australia. A controversial decision that would leave many American soldiers in the Philippines to surrender and yet, inexplicably, led to MacArthur's third nomination for the Medal of Honor.



Gen. Douglas MacArthur wades ashore during initial landings at Leyte, Philippine Islands.

Unlike the prior two times, MacArthur was awarded the Medal and many saw it as a political and public relations move more than an award for heroism.

However, for a man with two prior nominations and more silver stars than a human has fingers on one hand, few can deny the fighting character of the man. Then again, there was the time in 1932 when he created the Purple Heart award only to make himself the first recipient for wounds received in World War 1. Seems a fitting action for the man in a kimono holding a jeweled cigarette case.

THE INEXPLICABLE MACARTHUR

The rest of MacArthur's exploits in World War 2 have become the stuff of legend and it would take an entire book, of which there are many, to cover them all. Promising to return to the Philippines, MacArthur made good on that in 1944. Then, in September of 1945, the man who was once retired stood on the deck of the USS Missouri to watch the same nation that had booted him from his beloved Philippines surrender to none other than the one and only, MacArthur.



General of the Army Douglas MacArthur signed the Instrument of Surrender on behalf of the Allied Powers.

He would go on to become the Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers in Japan as he oversaw the reconstruction of Japanese society. He did not have a bad resume and a fitting end for 50 years of military service, but war wasn't done with him yet. With the invasion of South Korea by the North, MacArthur would somehow find himself inexplicably right in the middle of both war and controversy again. **This time, he would find himself at odds with the President himself which led to MacArthur's subsequent removal from command.**

Some say MacArthur wanted to nuke China, others say the President was worried about MacArthur's power and influence over the war. In either case, America didn't seem to care as they recognized what they owed this national hero and he was welcomed home in 1951 to great fanfare and a ticker tape parade His influence on American military life would continue to loom large and he was even reported to have advised President Kennedy in 1961 to avoid military escalation in Vietnam. General MacArthur died in 1964 a national hero who will forever be surrounded by a haze of controversy. However, I have a nagging suspicion that the man in the kimono wouldn't have it any other way.

PART 2

THE REDACTED TESTIMONY THAT FULLY EXPLAINS WHY MACARTHUR WAS FIRED

FAR BEYOND BEING INSUBORDINATE, THE MILITARY LEADER SEEMED TO NOT GRASP THE CONSEQUENCES OF HIS DESIRED STRATEGY



September 28, 2016

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<https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/redacted-testimony-fully-explains-why-general-macarthur-was-fired-180960622/#13KLuMRVqDBp1YZH.99>

&

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X3aCIfVhW7w>

Harry Truman's decision to fire Douglas MacArthur at the height of the Korean War in April 1951 shocked the American political system and astonished the world. *Much of the world didn't realize the president had the power to fire a five-star general; much of America didn't realize Truman had the nerve.*

But Truman did fire MacArthur, whose complaints against the commander-in-chief had grown louder and more public. *MacArthur wanted to expand the war against China, which had entered the Korean fighting in late 1950. MacArthur complained that the president was tying his hands by forbidding the bombing of China, thereby sacrificing American lives and endangering American freedom.*

Truman suffered the complaints for a time, out of respect for MacArthur and the wariness of MacArthur's allies in Congress. However, the complaints began to confuse America's allies and enemies as to what American policy was and who made it. The last thing Truman wanted was a wider war in Asia, which would weaken the American position in Europe. And Europe, not Asia, was where the Cold War would be won or lost, Truman judged.

Truman's top advisers agreed. The MacArthur firing prompted the Democratic-led Congress to invite the general to address a joint session, which MacArthur moved to applause and tears when he declared that "old soldiers never die; they just fade away." Among Republicans, there were murmurs of support for MacArthur's candidacy for president. The Senate's Armed Services and Foreign Relations Committee held joint hearings, at which MacArthur detailed his disagreement with the president and claimed the backing of the Joint Chiefs of Staff for his position.

The joint chiefs contradicted him. The Senate hearings were closed to the public, but a transcript was released each day including all but the most sensitive comments. *Omar Bradley, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs, flatly rejected MacArthur's call for a wider war. "In the opinion of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, this strategy would involve us in the wrong war, in the wrong place, at the wrong time, and with the wrong enemy," he said.*

Bradley's categorical conclusion proved the most compelling public statement by any official at the committee hearings. For a soldier of Bradley's stature, with no history of politics, to contradict MacArthur so completely caused even the most ardent of MacArthur's supporters to pause and reconsider.

Yet it was the statements that were not made public that did the real damage to MacArthur. Not until the 1970s was the secret testimony declassified, and even then it languished in the archives, overlooked by all but a few specialists in a topic time seemed to have passed by. *But to read it now is to understand how quickly, and thoroughly, one of America's most popular generals was undone.*

THE SENATE ARMED SERVICES & FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEES CONGRESSIONAL HEARINGS ON THE DISMISSAL OF GENERAL MACARTHUR

BEGINNING ON MAY 3, 1951

GENERAL INFORMATION

The Senate Armed Services and Foreign Relations Committees, meeting in closed session, begin their hearings into the dismissal of Gen. Douglas MacArthur by President Harry S. Truman. The hearings served as a sounding board for MacArthur and his extremist views on how the Cold War should be fought.

General MacArthur served as commander of U.S. forces during the Korean War until 1951. In late 1950 he made a serious strategic blunder when he dismissed warnings that the People's Republic of China would enter the conflict on the side of its communist ally, North Korea. Hundreds of thousands of Chinese troops smashed into the American lines in November 1950, driving the U.S. troops back with heavy losses. *MacArthur, who had earlier complained about President Truman's handling of the war, now went on an all-out public relations attack against the president and his Cold War policies. In numerous public statements and interviews, General MacArthur criticized Truman's timidity.* He also asked for permission to carry out bombing attacks against China and to expand the war. President Truman flatly refused; believing that expanding the war would lead to a possible confrontation with the Soviet Union and World War III. *On April 11, 1951, President Truman removed MacArthur from his command. Though Truman did not appreciate MacArthur's approach, the American public liked his tough stance on communism, and he returned home to a hero's welcome.*

On May 3, 1951, just a few days after MacArthur's return to the United States, the Senate Armed Forces and Foreign Relations Committees began hearings into his dismissal. Partisan politics played a significant role in the hearings, which were instigated by Republican senators eager to discredit the Democratic administration of Harry Truman. *MacArthur was the featured witness, and he spoke for more than six hours at the opening session of the hearings.*

He condemned Truman's Cold War foreign policy, arguing that if the president's "inhibitions" about the war in Korea had been removed the conflict could have been "wound up" without a "very great additional complement of ground troops."

He went on to suggest that only through a strategy of complete military destruction of the communist empire could the U.S. hope to win the Cold War. The hearings ended after seven weeks, with no definite conclusions reached about MacArthur's dismissal. *However, the general's extremist stance and intemperate statements concerning the need for an expanded conflict against communism during the hearings soon eroded his popularity with the American public.* MacArthur attempted to garner the Republican presidential nomination in 1952 but lost to the more moderate campaign of another famed military leader, Dwight D. Eisenhower.

EXCERPTS FROM THOSE HEARINGS

The rule of excision in the hearings was to delete testimony that might compromise American security. Such testimony included remarks related to American knowledge of Chinese and especially Soviet arms and war readiness; revealing what the American side knew might tip the communists as to how the Americans knew it. Democrat Harry Byrd of Virginia asked Omar Bradley about Russian strength in the vicinity of Manchuria and North Korea. Bradley responded forthrightly, "There are 35 Russian divisions in the Far East. Nine of them are in the Vladivostok area; four in the Port Arthur-Dairen area; three in Sakhalin; two in the Kurile Islands; one near Kamchatka; and 16 others scattered along the railway from Lake Baikal on the east."

"About 500,000 in all?" asked Byrd.

"Thirty-five divisions, plus supporting troops, run probably something like 500,000 or more," Bradley replied.

Bradley's comments were deleted when the transcript was released.

Another category of excisions revealed American vulnerabilities in a larger war. Byrd asked what would happen if those 500,000 troops were “thrown into action with enemy submarine attacks to prevent the evacuation of our troops should they be badly outnumbered and have to evacuate?”

Bradley answered: “Should Russia come in with this army strength, her naval strength, which is quite strong in submarines, and her air power, which is quite strong in the Far East—if she should come in with all of those, we might have a hard time supplying our troops in Korea and would even, under certain circumstances, have difficulty evacuating them.”

How many submarines did the Russians have in the vicinity of Korea? asked Byrd.

“Approximately 85,” Bradley said.

“If they went into action, could we then still evacuate our troops?”

“Yes, to a certain extent because we have considerable naval forces there who could help us.”

But it wouldn’t be easy, Byrd sensed. “It would be a very serious situation?”

“It would be a very serious situation,” Bradley confirmed.

Byrd asked about the broader consequences of Russian intervention. “What other areas in Asia? Is Russia likely to take over if there is war in Asia?”

“Through the use of the Chinese they have the possibility of and even capability of taking over Indochina, Siam, Burma, and maybe eventually India,” Bradley said. “In addition to that, they could take over Hong Kong and Malaya.”

Bradley knew that this alarming estimate might sound defeatist, but he thought the senators needed to hear it. He insisted that the exchange be deleted before the transcript was released to the newspapers and published the next day.

Other excised testimony revealed a fundamental reason for the administration’s reluctance to escalate in northeast Asia: There was precious little for the United States to escalate with. American air power, in particular, was stretched very thin. Hoyt Vandenberg, the Air Force chief of staff, told the committee that Korea was already claiming a large part of America’s available air strength. “The Air Force part that is engaged in Korea is roughly 85 percent—80 to 85 percent—of the tactical capacity of the United States,” he said. “The strategic portion, which is used tactically, is roughly between one-fourth and one-fifth. The air defense forces are, I would judge, about 20 percent.”

Many Americans, and much of the world, imagined the United States had boundless military capacity. MacArthur had suggested as much, regarding air power, when he had told the committee that the U.S. Air Force could take on China without diminishing America’s capacity to check the Soviets.

Vandenberg wasn’t going to disabuse America’s enemies of such notions, but he needed the senators to hear, behind closed doors, that this was far from the case. “I am sure Admiral Davis will take this off the record,” Vandenberg said, referring to the officer overseeing the excisions, who did indeed take his remarks off the record. “The Air Force of the United States, as I have said, is a shoestring air force.” Vandenberg had used the phrase in open testimony; now he provided details. One small, intrinsically insignificant country—Korea—was absorbing an alarming portion of America’s air resources. “These groups that we have over there now doing this tactical job are really about a fourth of the total effort that we could muster today.” To escalate against China, even if only from the air, would be reckless in the extreme. “Four times that amount of groups in that area over that vast expanse of China would be a drop in the bucket.”

Other remarks contradicted MacArthur’s recurrent complaint about the advantage the Chinese derived from the administration’s refusal to permit him to bomb targets beyond the Yalu River in China. Democrat Walter George of Georgia, echoing MacArthur’s assertion that “China is using the maximum of her force against us,” said it was unfair that MacArthur had to fight a limited war while the Chinese fought all out.

Omar Bradley responded that George was quite mistaken—and, by implication, that MacArthur was quite misleading. The Chinese were not fighting all out, not by a great deal.

"They have not used air against our front line troops, against our lines of communication in Korea, our ports; they have not used air against our bases in Japan or our naval air forces." China's restraint in these areas had been crucial to the survival of American and U.N. forces in Korea. On balance, Bradley said, the limited nature of the war benefited the United States at least as much as it did the Chinese. "We are fighting under rather favorable rules for ourselves."

Vandenberg amplified this point. "You made the statement, as I recall it, that we were operating against the Chinese in a limited fashion, and that the Chinese were operating against us in an unlimited fashion," the air chief said to Republican Harry Cain of Washington.

"Yes, sir," Cain replied.

"I would like to point out that that operates just as much a limitation, so far, for the Chinese as it has for the United Nations troops in that our main base of supply is the Japanese islands. The port of Pusan is very important to us."

"It is indeed."

"Our naval forces are operating on the flanks allowing us naval gunfire support, carrier aircraft strikes, and the landing of such formations as the Inchon landing, all without the Chinese air force projecting itself into the area," Vandenberg said. "Therefore, the sanctuary business, as it is called, is operating on both sides and is not completely a limited war on our part."

George Marshall, the secretary of defense and a five-star general himself made the same argument. Marshall, insisting on "the greatest concern for confidentiality," said he had asked the joint chiefs just hours before: "What happens to the Army if we do bomb, and what happens to our Army if we don't bomb in that way." The chiefs' conclusion: "Their general view was that the loss of advantage with our troops on the ground was more than equaled by the advantages which we were deriving from not exposing our vulnerability to air attacks."

In other words—and this was Marshall's crucial point, as it had been Vandenberg's—the limitations on the fighting in Korea, so loudly assailed by MacArthur and his supporters favored the American side.

Marshall elaborated. "I am referring to the airfields, which we have very few of with the length of runway required and wing-tip to wing-tip of very vulnerable planes. I am referring to the fact that our transportation runs without regard to visibility, whereas theirs"—China's—"has to be handled only at night, and if the weather is fair, that is illuminated and is subject to destruction." China's decision to yield the air was what allowed America to remain in Korea. "We can move reserves with practically no restriction at all, and they have the greatest difficulty about that. If bombing starts, we have a great many conditions that will be far less advantageous to us."

Joe Collins, the army chief of staff, explained how Communist restraint had prevented an utter American debacle. Referring to the moment MacArthur had initially sought permission to bomb China, Collins said, "When the first recommendations came in to bomb across the frontier, our troops were separated in Korea. The Tenth Corps was operating from the base at Hungnam, and our other forces were operating from bases at Pusan and Inchon. As soon as the Chinese attack began we were very much concerned about the fact that we would have to get that Tenth Corps out; and had we permitted the bombing north of the Yalu, we were dreadfully afraid that that might be the thing that would release the Russian planes, and additionally, have them give additional assistance to the Chinese, and might well have subjected the Tenth Corps to bombardment and possibly submarine attack during the perilous evacuation from Hungnam.

Troops evacuating from a port of that character, in commercial ships, are subject to air and underwater attack; and in my judgment, it would be a much too risky procedure."

Collins wasn't quite so blunt as to say it, but his message was clear: Far from complaining about the limited nature of the war, MacArthur should have been grateful for it.

The committee members were sobered, if not stunned, by the chiefs' and Marshall's testimony. Americans tended to believe that, having won World War II, the American military could dispatch China with one hand and whack Russia with the other. *The secret testimony of Marshall and the chiefs made patent that America's military had its hands full already.*

Other testimony deleted from the published transcript severely undercut the idea that Chiang Kai-shek and the Chinese Nationalists would be of any help in a larger war. *MacArthur had repeatedly urged that the United States accept Chiang's offer to join the fight against China. Marshall and the others roundly rejected it.* The committee inquired. Chiang's forces had proven inept in their fight against the Chinese Communists, and several of the senators wanted to know if they could be expected to improve. Democrat Russell Long of Louisiana put the question directly to Marshall: "Do you have any indication that the Chinese Nationalist troops on Formosa [now Taiwan] could be depended upon to fight more fiercely than they did when they were fighting on the Chinese mainland?"

"Well, whatever reply I would make to that I would want off the record," Marshall answered.

"I would like my question also to be off the record," Long added.

Marshall explained that the Pentagon had sent a reconnaissance team to Formosa to determine the readiness and improvability of the Chinese Nationalists, and it had yet to report back. But he wasn't at all hopeful. He particularly worried about Communist infiltration of the Nationalists.

"What we have feared all the time was boring from within," he said. Marshall noted that similar infiltration by German agents and sympathizers had debilitated the French army in 1940; in the present case the possibility of infiltration rendered any reliance on the Nationalists extremely dubious. The Nationalists had abandoned a great deal of American weaponry in losing the mainland to the Communists; Marshall couldn't see risking more

The problem with the Nationalists started at the top, Marshall and the chiefs declared confidentially. "The trouble of it is Chiang is not accepted by a large part of the Chinese," Omar Bradley said. "Chiang has had a big chance to win in China and he did not do it." There was little reason to think he would do better if given a second chance. "From a military point of view, in my own opinion, I don't think he would have too much success in leading the Chinese now. It is true some of them are getting tired of the Communists and might be more loyal to him now than they were before, but in my opinion, he is not in a position to rally the Chinese against the Communists even if we could get him ashore."

A turn to Chiang's army, as MacArthur and others recommended, would not bolster American security, but weaken it. "Their leadership is poor, their equipment is poor, and their training is poor."

The secret testimony damaged MacArthur in ways he never understood. Veteran observers of Washington expected the Senate committee to draw formal conclusions; the tenor of the hearings, the predilections of the questioners, and the partisanship of the moment suggested that there would be a majority report, a minority report, and possibly separate statements by individual members. But the co-chairmen of the committee, Democrats Richard Russell of Georgia and Tom Connally of Texas, guided the process in a different direction. Though they were of the same party as the president, they felt no obligation to make a hero of Truman, and so they reckoned that a report by the majority of Democrats was unnecessary. This calculation simultaneously spiked the efforts of the minority Republicans to issue a formal condemnation of Truman. Meanwhile in Korea, the Eighth Army, which had retaken Seoul and established a defensible line that crisscrossed the 38th parallel, turned back a new Communist offensive, with heavy losses to the Chinese. The Chinese failure prompted a suggestion from Moscow, during the last days of the hearings, that an armistice in Korea would contribute to world peace. This raised hopes of an end to the fighting and complemented the chairmen's desire to put the controversy over the war's conduct behind them.

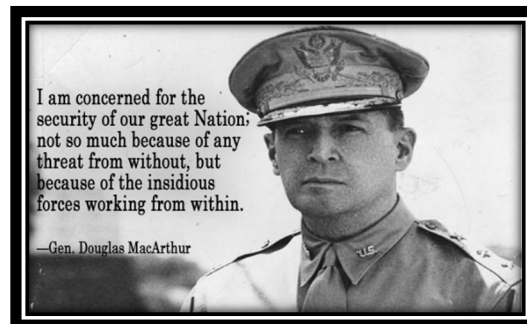
The result was an anodyne assertion of national unity. "For the past seven weeks the Senate Committees on Armed Services and Foreign Relations have assiduously examined into the facts and circumstances bearing on the relief of Gen. Douglas MacArthur and American policy in the Far East," the committee statement declared. Significantly, this was the sole mention of MacArthur's name, and the statement said nothing more about his firing.

It acknowledged differences of opinion among the witnesses and the examiners, yet it hailed these differences as a sign of strength rather than weakness.

It assured America's allies that the country's commitment to freedom hadn't wavered. And it warned enemies not to misunderstand the workings of democracy. "The issues which might divide our people are far transcended by the things which unite them. If threatened danger becomes war, the aggressor would find at one stroke arrayed against him the united energies, the united resources, and the united devotion of all the American people."

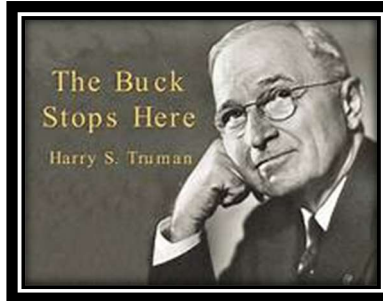
The statement was silent, of course, on the secret testimony of Marshall, Bradley, Vandenberg, and Collins. MacArthur thereby escaped the injury the testimony would have done his reputation, but the secrets badly eroded his support among those who should have been loudest on his behalf. Alexander Wiley, Styles Bridges, and the other Republicans were compelled by the revelations about America's vulnerability to rethink their endorsement of MacArthur and the belligerent course he favored. They didn't recant in public; they wouldn't give Truman that satisfaction. But they no longer looked to MacArthur as a credible alternative to Truman on military strategy or in politics. They eased away from the general, and because the testimony was sealed, they never said why.

And MacArthur never found out. His presidential prospects fizzled as the Republicans and the country turned to another general, Dwight Eisenhower. MacArthur retired to New York, where he died in 1964.



PART THREE
HARRY TRUMAN TALKS ABOUT FIRING GENERAL DOUGLAS MACARTHUR
(NOT A FAN OF THE GENERAL)

WHAT HAPPENED BEHIND THE SCENES



UPDATED MAY 25, 2011

Other presidents have experienced the difficulties that now exist between President Obama and General Stanley McChrystal. General George McClellan treated Abraham Lincoln with disdain. Douglas MacArthur did the same to Harry Truman. Those are just the most famous cases.

Lincoln struggled with the decision to fire McClellan, as Truman did with the decision to fire MacArthur. In neither case did the first instance of insubordination lead to dismissal. But as history has proven, it should have.

McChrystal is no Douglas MacArthur. Maybe he shouldn't be fired. But you can bet that the political debates that Truman had with his advisors on the subject of firing MacArthur are probably something like the discussions that have taken place in Washington in the last twenty-four hours.

The excerpt below is from Plain Speaking, an oral biography of Truman by Merle Miller, who had interviewed the former president extensively for a television series. The subject that made Truman the angriest, Miller said, was MacArthur.

Quick background: At the time of his firing, General Douglas MacArthur was based in Tokyo as supreme commander of allied forces in the Pacific (among other titles). MacArthur, who had great self-regard, clashed many times with Truman, the cabinet, and the Joint Chiefs over his independent announcements of foreign policy. Rather than limit the Korean War to a stalemate, he believed the United Nations forces should advance into China to destroy the communist government.

MILLER:

Mr. President, I know why you fired MacArthur, but if you don't mind I'd like to hear it in your own words.

TRUMAN:

I fired him because he wouldn't respect the authority of the President. That's the answer to that. **I didn't fire him because he was a dumb son of a bitch, although he was, but that's not against the laws for generals.** If it was, half to three-quarters of them would be in jail. That's why when a good one comes along like General [George] Marshall, you've got to hang onto them, and I did...

MILLER:

Mr. President, how can you explain a man like that?

TRUMAN:

I've given it a lot of thought, and I have finally concluded... decided that there were times when he . . . well, I'm afraid when he wasn't right in the head. And there never was anyone around to him to keep in line. **He didn't have anyone on his staff who wasn't an ass-kisser....**

(In August 1950, MacArthur announced his foreign policy by sending a message to the Veterans of Foreign Wars. The next morning Truman met with the Secretary of State, the Secretary of Defense, and the Joint Chiefs of Staff.)

TRUMAN:

I told them I wanted to fire him, and I wanted to send over General [Omar] Bradley to take his place. *But they talked me out of it.* They said it would cause too much of an uproar, and so I didn't do it, *and I was wrong.*

MILLER:

Mr. President, suppose you had done it that morning in August [1950, when MacArthur sent a message to the Veterans of Foreign Wars announcing his foreign policy] instead of the following April?

TRUMAN:

I don't know. I do not know. We might have gotten out of Korea six months earlier and not been at one time on the brink of a third world war. But I don't know for sure. The only thing I learned of the whole MacArthur deal is that when you feel there's something you have to do and you know in your gut you have to do it, the sooner you get it over with, the better off everybody is."

(Oddly, Truman and MacArthur had never actually met.)

TRUMAN CONTINUES:

I decided it was time that we do so. The damn fool hadn't been back in the United States for *fourteen years or more*, and the messages I'd sent him through other people he somehow or another never seemed to understand. And so I decided he ought to come back to the United States. *To Washington. I thought we'd meet in the White House.*

I talked with General Marshall about it. [Marshall was Secretary of State at this time.] But the general advised me against having him come to Washington. He said, "That man has become a kind of living legend with certain groups and certain members of Congress, and if you brought him back here. I think it might do more harm than good. He'd stir up the China Lobby and all those people... He was right, of course.

(Truman and MacArthur met at Wake Island in the Pacific.)

TRUMAN CONTINUES:

MacArthur was always acting... He was wearing those damn sunglasses of his and a shirt that was unbuttoned and a cap that had a lot of hardware. I never did understand, an old man like that [MacArthur was 70] and a five-star general to boot, and he went around dressed up like a nineteen-year-old second lieutenant. But I decided to overlook his getup, and we shook and we arranged a meeting. *I got there on time, but he was forty-five minutes late, and this meeting - it was just between the two of us you understand...*

When he walked in, I took one look at him and said, "Now you look here. I've come halfway around the world to meet you, but don't worry about that. I just want you to know I don't give a good goddamn what you do or think about Harry Truman, but don't you ever again keep your Commander in Chief waiting. Is that clear?"

His face got as red as a beet, but he said, he indicated that he understood what I was talking about, and we went on there. *He was just like a little puppy at that meeting. I don't know which was worse, the way he acted in public or the way he kissed my ass at that meeting.*

Then, the day before the 1950 elections, he released a message intended to scare American voters into voting for Republican candidates, because the Republican party supported his desire to invade China.

A few months later, after China had advanced to Seoul, Truman, hoped to negotiate a cease-fire that would end the war. *MacArthur wanted to bomb China).*

MILLER:

Mr. President, you have the reputation of being a somewhat impatient man, somewhat quick on the draw, but it seems to me, sir, under these circumstances, that you displayed Job-like patience. How did you manage to keep silent?"

TRUMAN:

I knew that if the slightest mistake was made, we would find ourselves in a third world war, and as I told you time and again, I had no intention in any way of allowing that to happen.

General Bradley said at the time that that would be the wrong war at the wrong place, at the wrong time, and with the wrong enemy, and he was right....

MILLER:

Was that possibly your most difficult time as President?

TRUMAN:

[After a "very long" pause] I believe it was.

MILLER:

You said General Marshall had some doubts about discharging MacArthur.

TRUMAN:

Yes, he did; he was concerned about the reaction of certain Congressmen, and he wanted to think over what he felt the reaction of the troops would be. And so at the end of the meeting I asked him, I said, "General, you go over there and you read all the correspondence that's passed between MacArthur and me for the last two years. Then be in my office at nine in the morning, and if you still feel I shouldn't fire him, I won't."

I knew the general very, very well; we'd been through a lot together, and I knew how his mind worked, and there wasn't a doubt in the world in my mind that when he saw what I'd put up with, he'd agree with me.

And the next morning at eight fifteen when I got to my office, he was out there waiting for me, which was very unusual. General Marshall was usually a punctual man, but I had never known him to be ahead of time. He worked on a very tight schedule.

But that morning he looked up at me, and he said, "I spent most of the night on that file. Mr. President, you should have fired the son of a bitch two years ago."

And so we went right ahead, and we did it. There were a good many details to be worked out. I asked General Bradley to be sure we had the full agreement of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, which he got; they were all unanimous in saying he should be fired. And we had to arrange to turn the command over to General Ridgway.

And then, of course, we wanted to be sure that MacArthur got the news through official channels. We didn't want it to get into the newspapers first. I signed all the papers and went over to Blair House to have dinner. Some of the others stayed behind at the White House to decide on exactly how to get the word to Frank Pace [secretary of the army, then in Korea] Pace was supposed to notify the general.

While I was still at Blair House, Joe Short [press secretary] came into where the others were, and he said he had heard that the Chicago Tribune had the whole story and was going to print it the next morning.

So General Bradley came over to Blair House and told me what was up, and he said if MacArthur hears he's going to be fired before he officially is fired before he's notified, he'd probably up and resign on me. And I told Bradley, "The son of a bitch isn't going to resign on me, I want him fired."

(MacArthur was fired on April 9, 1951).

MILLER:

As I recall, there was plenty of shouting.

TRUMAN:

No more than I expected. I knew there'd be a big uproar, and I knew that MacArthur would take every advantage of it that he could, but I knew that in the end, people would see through him and it would all die down.



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