

1 General Douglas MacArthur (1880-1964)



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"You couldn't shrug your shoulders at Douglas MacArthur," observes historian David McCullough. "There was nothing bland about him, nothing passive about him, nothing dull about him. There's no

question about his patriotism, there's no question about his courage, and there's no question, it seems to me, about his importance as one of the protagonists of the 20th century."

Douglas MacArthur lived his entire life, from cradle to grave, in the United States Army. He spent his early years in remote sections of New Mexico, where his father, Arthur MacArthur Jr., commanded an infantry company charged with protecting settlers and railroad workers from the Indian "menace." As a teenager, Arthur had served with distinction in the Union Army, eventually earning the Congressional Medal of Honor for leading a courageous assault up Missionary Ridge in Tennessee. But he soon discovered that life in the post-Civil War U.S. Army held little of the glamour he knew during the war. These years were even harder for Douglas' mother, Mary Pinkney Hardy MacArthur, whose upbringing as a proper Southern lady had done little to prepare her for raising a family on dusty western outposts. But seen through a boy's eyes, life at a place like Ft. Selden, New Mexico, was heady stuff. "My first memory was the sound of bugles," Douglas MacArthur recalled in his "Reminiscences." "It was here I learned to ride and shoot even before I could read or write -- indeed, almost before I could walk or talk." Even more importantly, by watching his father and listening to his mother, he learned that a MacArthur is always in charge.

41 When Douglas was six, Captain MacArthur was assigned to Ft.
42 Leavenworth, Kansas, where "Pinky," as his mother was known,
43 could finally introduce him and his older brother Arthur to life back
44 in "civilization." Three years later the family took another step in that
45 direction when they moved to Washington, D.C., where Arthur took
46 a post in the War Department. During these formative years, Douglas
47 was able to spend time with his grandfather, Judge Arthur
48 MacArthur, a man of considerable accomplishment and charm. As
49 his grandfather entertained Washington's elite, Douglas learned
50 another valuable lesson: a MacArthur is a scholar and a gentleman.

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52 Douglas, who had always been an unremarkable student, first started
53 to reveal his own intellectual gifts when his father was posted to San
54 Antonio, Texas, in 1893. There he attended the West Texas Military
55 Academy, thriving in an atmosphere which combined academics,
56 religion, military discipline and Victorian social graces. By virtue of
57 his excellent record there, his family's political connections and top
58 scores on the qualifying exam, Douglas received an appointment to
59 the United States Military Academy at West Point in 1898. Over the
60 next four years, he would achieve one of the finest records in
61 Academy history. General Arthur MacArthur -- back from the
62 Philippines, where he had helped defeat the Spanish and served as
63 military governor -- looked on proudly as his son graduated first in
64 the class of 1903.

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66 What became a lasting connection with the Philippines began with
67 Douglas' first assignment out of West Point, when the young
68 Lieutenant sailed to the islands to work with a corps of engineers.
69 While on a surveying mission there, he recalled being "waylaid on a
70 narrow jungle trail by two desperados, one on each side."
71 MacArthur responded without hesitation. "Like all frontiersmen, I
72 was expert with a pistol. I dropped them both dead in their tracks, but
73 not before one had blazed at me with an antiquated rifle." Soon after
74 this first brush with physical danger, MacArthur enjoyed excitement
75 of a different kind, when he was assigned to accompany his father on
76 an extended tour through Asia, where the General would review the
77 military forces of eleven countries. The MacArthurs, Pinky included,
78 were treated like royalty, and Douglas came away from the trip
79 firmly convinced that America's future -- and his own -- lay in Asia.
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81 One of Douglas's next assignments included service as an aide in
82 Theodore Roosevelt's White House. But when he found himself in a
83 tedious engineering assignment in Milwaukee in 1907, his
84 performance dropped and he received a poor evaluation. To add to
85 his confusion, he had fallen in love with a New York debutante
86 named Fanniebelle, and his brilliant career prospects seemed to
87 wane. But Douglas made amends in his next assignment, at the staff
88 college at Leavenworth, and when his father died in 1912 he was
89 transferred to the War Department in Washington, so that he could
90 care for his mother. While there he was taken under the wing of
91 Chief of Staff Leonard Wood, a protege of his father, and his career
92 was again firmly on track. In 1915 MacArthur was promoted to
93 major and the following year became the Army's first public
94 relations officer, performing so well that he is largely credited with
95 selling the American people on the Selective Service Act of 1917, as
96 the country moved ever closer to joining the war in Europe.

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98 Even though his record to that point had been excellent, the First
99 World War gave Douglas MacArthur his first real measure of fame.
100 Quickly promoted to brigadier general, he helped lead the Rainbow
101 Division -- which he had helped create out of National Guard units
102 before the war -- through the thick of the fighting in France. With a
103 flamboyant, romantic style matched only by real feats of courage on
104 the battlefield, MacArthur became the most decorated American
105 soldier of the war.

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107 While his peers were demoted to their pre-war ranks, MacArthur
108 kept his through a plum new assignment as Superintendent of West
109 Point. Although he antagonized many of the old guard, MacArthur
110 made good on his mandate to drag the moribund Academy into the
111 20th century, enabling it to produce officers fit to lead the country in
112 the type of modern war he had just experienced first hand. He also
113 managed to get married -- to Louise Cromwell Brooks, a vivacious
114 flapper and heiress very different from her spit-and-polish second
115 husband. A minor scandal erupted when Chief of Staff John J.
116 Pershing -- with whom Louise had had an affair during the war --
117 shipped MacArthur from West Point to a makeshift assignment in
118 the Philippines. Although disappointed, MacArthur was glad to be
119 back in his beloved islands; Louise, used to the glamorous society of
120 cities like New York and Paris, was not pleased. Even after their

121 return to the States in 1925, the marriage continued to deteriorate.
122 Louise filed for divorce in 1928. Once again, MacArthur found
123 solace in the Philippines, where he took command of the Army's
124 Philippine Department and renewed a friendship with the island's
125 leading politician, Manuel Quezon, whom he had known since 1903.

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127 Although he and Quezon failed in their bid to have MacArthur
128 named governor of the Philippines, President Hoover helped take the
129 sting out of it by naming MacArthur to the Army's top job, Chief of
130 Staff, in 1930. But the early '30s were a trying time to be Chief, when
131 the Great Depression made Americans deaf to MacArthur's
132 warnings about the rising tide of world fascism. Despite his able
133 leadership, the Army fell to all-time lows in strength under his watch.
134 This, along with the damage to his reputation from the Bonus March
135 of 1932, when he very visibly led army troops in routing
136 impoverished World War I vets from the capital, made MacArthur
137 receptive to other opportunities. Once again, he was drawn to the
138 Philippines. In 1935, his old friend Quezon, President of the newly
139 created Philippine Commonwealth, invited him to return to Manila as
140 head of a U.S. military mission charged with preparing the islands for
141 full independence in 1946.

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143 The next few years were among the happiest in MacArthur's life. On
144 his way to Manila, he met and fell in love with 37-year-old Jean
145 Marie Faircloth from Murfreesboro, Tennessee. When Pinky died
146 shortly after their arrival in Manila, Jean helped fill the void, and her
147 devotion would remain a source of strength for the rest of his life.
148 After the birth of their son, Arthur MacArthur IV, the 58-year-old
149 general proved a doting father. But their blissful life in Manila was
150 slowly overshadowed by the growing threat posed by an
151 expansionist Japan. MacArthur, despite the able assistance of top
152 aide Dwight Eisenhower, would not have enough time or money to
153 build a force capable of resisting the Japanese. When war finally
154 came with the blow at Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, the
155 Philippines was doomed: MacArthur's air force was quickly
156 destroyed, his army shredded, and by January his forces had
157 retreated to the Bataan peninsula, where they struggled to survive.
158 From his command post on the island of Corregidor at the mouth of
159 Manila Bay, MacArthur watched his world fall apart.

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161 But despite MacArthur's poor showing in the Philippines, President
162 Roosevelt knew he couldn't let America's most famous general fall
163 to the enemy, and ordered him to withdraw to Australia. Although it
164 ran counter to his notion of a soldier's duty, MacArthur left his men
165 facing sure destruction, comforted only by the belief that he might
166 lead an army back to rescue them. For the next three years, the world
167 watched as his personal quest -- "I shall return" -- became almost
168 synonymous with the war in the Pacific. Although MacArthur's path
169 through the dense jungles of New Guinea was hardly imagined in
170 the initial war plans, his singleminded drive and resourcefulness
171 made it one of the two prongs in the Allied drive to roll back the
172 Japanese. Simultaneously fighting a two front war -- one with the
173 Japanese, the other with the U.S. Navy, who understandably saw the
174 Pacific as theirs -- MacArthur slowly gained momentum. In October
175 of 1944 the world watched as he dramatically waded ashore at Leyte,
176 and in the following months liberated the rest of the Philippines. On
177 September 2, 1945, he presided over the Japanese surrender on
178 board the "U.S.S. Missouri," bringing an end to World War II.

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180 His place as a leading figure of the 20th century already secure,
181 MacArthur may have made his greatest contribution to history in the
182 next five and a half years, as Supreme Commander of the Allied
183 Powers in Japan. While initiating some policies and merely
184 implementing others, by force of personality MacArthur became
185 synonymous with the highly successful occupation. His GHQ staff
186 helped a devastated Japan rebuild itself, institute a democratic
187 government, and chart a course that has made it one of the world's
188 leading industrial powers. Yet by the late 1940s, MacArthur was
189 increasingly bypassed by Washington, and it seemed his remarkable
190 career might be over.

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192 But in June of 1950, the sudden outbreak of the Korean War --
193 "Mars' last gift to an old warrior" -- thrust MacArthur back into the
194 limelight. Placed in command of an American-led coalition of United
195 Nations forces, MacArthur reversed the dire military situation in the
196 early months of the war with a brilliant amphibious assault behind
197 North Korean lines at the Port of Inchon. But within weeks of this
198 great triumph he and Washington miscalculated badly. MacArthur's
199 approach to the Chinese border triggered the entry of Mao's
200 Communist Chinese, and as 1951 dawned, they faced what he called

201 "an entirely new war." Although the able leadership of General
202 Matthew B. Ridgway stabilized the military situation near the prewar
203 boundary at the 38th parallel, MacArthur's months of public and
204 private bickering with the Truman administration soon came to a
205 head. On April 11, 1951, the President relieved General MacArthur,
206 triggering a firestorm of protest over our strategy not only in Korea,
207 but in the Cold War as a whole. As the last great general of World
208 War II to come home, MacArthur received a hero's welcome.
209 Despite his dramatic televised address to a joint session of Congress,
210 however, the issue died quickly, and with it any hopes MacArthur
211 had of reaching the White House in 1952.

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213 True to his word, the old soldier "faded away" from the public eye,
214 living quietly in New York until his death in 1964. While it's
215 questionable whether his storied life ever brought him complete
216 satisfaction, one thing is clear: Douglas MacArthur had more than
217 fulfilled his self-imposed destiny of becoming one of history's great
218 men.