

CHAPTER  
**18**

AMERICAN LIVES

# Douglas MacArthur

## *Flashy, Career Soldier*

Section 2

*“When I joined the Army, even before the turn of the century, it was the fulfillment of all my boyish hopes and dreams.”—Douglas MacArthur in his farewell address to Congress (1951)*

Born to a Civil War hero and career officer, Douglas MacArthur grew up on military bases and spent almost his whole life in the Army. He was egotistical, a flashy dresser, and a self-promoter. Another officer once said that MacArthur’s father “was the most flamboyantly egotistic man I had ever seen—until I met his son.” MacArthur was also a superb officer—in the words of General George Marshall, “our most brilliant general.”

MacArthur (1880–1964) succeeded through intelligence, hard work, and self-confidence instilled by his mother. As he prepared for the entrance exam for West Point, she told him, “You’ll win if you don’t lose your nerve. You must believe in yourself, my son, or no one else will believe in you.” He outscored all competitors.

During World War I, MacArthur won a name for bravery in battle. He was also known for his non-regulation dress, which included a long scarf wrapped dashing around his neck.

In 1935, he was loaned to the Philippines to build an army. MacArthur relished the chance to organize the force—and to design his own uniform—as field marshal in the Philippine army. In mid-1941, President Franklin Roosevelt recalled MacArthur to active duty and gave him command of U.S. forces in the Philippines.

MacArthur’s troops were trapped when the Japanese attacked in late 1941. In March 1942, MacArthur and his troops managed to escape to Australia, thereby providing the American people with a hero when they needed one. MacArthur declared, “I came through, and I shall return.” Characteristically, he did not say that “we”—the United States—would return.

It took two years, but MacArthur did return by pursuing an effective island-hopping strategy. He held casualties down by invading less-well-defended islands. He made effective use of bombers. Finally, in October 1944, U.S. forces landed on the Philippines. MacArthur bravely came ashore the same day and had his picture taken wading ashore. He told the

Philippine people, “I have returned! . . . Rally to me!”

After the war, MacArthur led the American occupation of Japan. He helped demilitarize the country and his staff wrote a new constitution that included democratic reforms. The Japanese people appreciated his efforts.

When North Korea invaded the South in 1950, the situation was dire. MacArthur, placed in command of UN forces by President Harry Truman, planned a brilliant campaign—the invasion of Inchon, a port on the west side of the Korean peninsula behind enemy lines. Navy officers urged against it, as there were logistical problems with the landing site. At a meeting, MacArthur urged approval of the plan: “I can almost hear the ticking of the second hand of destiny. We must act now or we will die. . . . We shall land at Inchon and I shall crush them.” The plan was adopted, and MacArthur was proven correct. American spirits soared as apparent defeat had turned to victory. However, MacArthur and President Truman began to disagree on war strategy, and MacArthur publicly disputed him. Then, in early 1951, just a few months after the Inchon landing, Truman shocked the nation by recalling—firing—MacArthur.

After Truman removed him from command, MacArthur was invited to speak before Congress and given a ticker-tape parade in New York. MacArthur hoped to run for president in 1952, but the Republicans turned to another general—Dwight Eisenhower. MacArthur lived the remainder of his life in uncharacteristic quiet.

### Questions

1. What kind of image do you think MacArthur wanted to project?
2. MacArthur lived outside the United States from 1937 to 1951. What effect might that have had on his relations with Truman?
3. Why might Eisenhower have been more appealing as a presidential candidate than MacArthur?