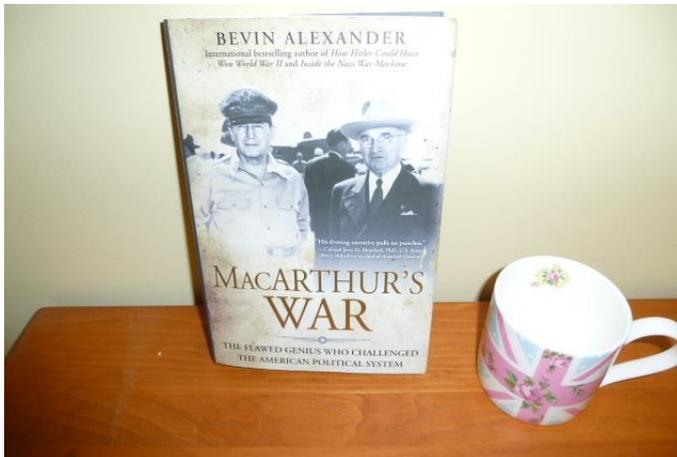


MacArthur's War

By Rod Fraser



YOU MIGHT BE interested to read about the politics and fighting of the Korean War years, particularly in the early part of the conflict. In this article, I have reviewed *MacArthur's War*, but added a number of little-known facts I expect you will find fascinating. And I have also explored the personality and life of Douglas MacArthur—an interesting topic in itself.

There was a reason why I picked up this title and read it with interest. My first cousins, Ron and Jack Armstrong, fought in the Korean War, so this family connection was an additional incentive to see what the book was all about.

Although I am a born and bred Canadian, my grandmother and uncle both immigrated to Detroit in the early years of the twentieth century. So I have three older cousins who grew up in America. This was not uncommon in those years. Ron Armstrong enlisted in the U.S. Navy in 1950 and his brother, Jack, joined the U.S. Army two years later, in the fall of 1952.

MACARTHUR'S WAR DISCUSSES the first year of the Korean War, during a time when Douglas MacArthur was the supreme commander of the United Nations forces in Korea.

The war started when North Korea (Democratic People's Republic of Korea) launched a surprise attack across the 38th Parallel with 90,000 soldiers in the early morning of June 25, 1950.

Although the fighting lasted a little more than three years in total, MacArthur continued as commander only to April 11, 1951, when Harry Truman relieved him of command, appointing General Matthew Ridgway in his place.

The reason for the firing: MacArthur was insubordinate, spoke out publicly with his own strategy for the war and undercut Truman's foreign policy with respect to containing Communism and fighting the war in Korea.

Some of the facts set out in this book (or from research accumulated elsewhere) note that 37,000 American soldiers were killed during the war and a further 103,000 were wounded in action. 90% of the troops fighting on behalf of South Korea (Republic of Korea) were American, although 16 other countries, including Canada, Great Britain, South Africa, Australia and New Zealand contributed soldiers.

In total, there were nearly five million deaths during the Korean War which ended with an armistice, signed on July 27, 1953. 50% of these deaths were civilian.

8,500 Canadian soldiers were in the fight by the spring of 1951. In total, 26,000 Canadian soldiers rotated in and out of the war. Regiments such as Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry, the Royal 22nd Regiment and the Royal Canadian Regiment, as well as others, participated in this war. 516 Canadian soldiers died in this conflict.

DURING MY WORKING years, I recall a client who earned his living working as a consultant, matching the cognitive requirements of difficult jobs with the cognitive abilities of various applicants, hoping to find matches between the two.

As you might imagine, he was very interested in assessing the cognitive abilities of people he met, as

well as various historical figures. One day over lunch, he happened to mention that Douglas MacArthur was an example of a person who had the very highest of cognitive abilities—a level nine according to his hierarchy of skills.

To prove his point, he noted that very few military commanders had the kind of success that MacArthur enjoyed during WWII, while also showing himself to be extraordinarily gifted as the Supreme Commander of Allied Powers during the occupation of Japan in the years from 1945 to 1951—a time when Japan’s economy and political structure was substantially reformed and its long-term alliance with the United States was concluded.

MacArthur scored 93.3% on his admittance test to West Point and was valedictorian and first in his class upon graduation four years later in 1903. During the First World War, he was the youngest brigadier general in the American Expeditionary Force, and after the war MacArthur became the youngest officer in over a hundred years to be appointed Superintendent of the military academy at West Point in 1919 when he was thirty-nine.

In 1925, MacArthur was promoted to major general, becoming the youngest officer of that rank at the time. Five years later, at the age of 50 (still the youngest major general in the army), he became

Chief of Staff of the United States Army and was promoted to full general—by any standard, a man of high cognitive ability and accomplishment.

The author of *MacArthur's War*, Bevin Alexander, shares this opinion. He had this to say about MacArthur's address to a joint session of Congress on April 19, 1951. Here MacArthur was asked about President Truman's foreign and military policy, "It was an unforgettable performance The next day, New York City gave the general the biggest ticker-tape parade in its history. Hundreds of thousands of people lined the parade route to cheer him."

There was only one flaw in MacArthur's character; he was insufferably arrogant. As one colleague of his father pointed out, I thought MacArthur's father was the "most flamboyantly egotistical man I had ever seen, until I met his son."

On a more positive note, William Manchester, who wrote a biography of MacArthur in 1978, noted that while MacArthur was reluctant to acknowledge his errors, he was a man endowed with "a great personal charm, a will of iron and a soaring intellect."

MacArthur was married twice and had a son with his second wife, Jean Marie Faircloth, whom he married in New York City in 1937. MacArthur referred to her as his "constant friend, sweetheart

and devoted supporter." She survived her husband (who died in 1964) and lived to be 101 when she died on January 22, 2000.

WITH ALL THIS as background, the book I am about to review deals with only a small slice of MacArthur's life, albeit a time when his military genius was affirmed and his subsequent judgement proved faulty.

A few days after the North Korean attack across the 38th Parallel on June 25, 1950, MacArthur flew to Suwon to assess the situation. The South Korean Army was in full retreat and North Korean troops were about to occupy Seoul.

MacArthur asked Washington to commit American soldiers to the fight in Korea, initially asking for a regimental combat team (about 5,000 men), which later would "be built up to two full divisions."

Truman agreed to this and the 24th Infantry Division, stationed in nearby Kyushu, Japan, was sent to slow "the North Korean advance long enough for other forces to get to Korea and establish a solid defensive line." This strategy, while devastating to the 24th Infantry Division, worked.

The "Pusan Perimeter" was established at the United Nations defensive line at the Naktong River,

leaving a small sliver of land along the coast under control of allied and South Korean troops. The port of Pusan was now the key Allied link for supply, as troops and weapons began to arrive in the months that followed.

With the Allied Forces secure within this perimeter, MacArthur planned a bold offensive. He intended to launch an amphibious assault at Inchon, near Seoul, where he could cut the railroad link that supplied the North Korean Army. If successful, within days this army would be deprived of "food, ammunition and fuel." It would be destroyed without a shot being fired.

This plan was opposed by the Joint Chiefs of Staff, who were far more conventional in their thinking. They were "inclined to predictable, direct attacks supported by intense air assaults."

In fairness to their concerns, they pointed out the tides at Inchon were very high and the approach channel narrow and difficult. All true, but their caution was averting their eyes from the great opportunity that presented itself.

This matter was resolved in MacArthur's favour at a conference at his headquarters in Japan on August 23, 1950. With all the "top American brass in the Pacific" attending, MacArthur put down his corn-cob pipe and talked for forty-five minutes.

"This oration has gone down as one of the most powerful arguments in American military history." Many who remember it were overwhelmed with its eloquence and clear thinking.

Despite all the concerns, the Inchon landing on September 15, 1950 was a complete success. There were few casualties. The North Korean Army collapsed and retreated north. The allied defenders in the Pusan perimeter broke out of their positions and pursued them. By the end of September, all organized enemy resistance in South Korea had stopped.

The war had changed as a result of this success. The goal of protecting South Korea's sovereignty had morphed into a desire to reunite the Korean Peninsula under South Korean control and democratic elections.

As Allied Forces marched further into North Korea, there were disturbing signals that China might send troops to help their North Korean allies. At a meeting at Wake Island, MacArthur assured Truman there was little chance this would happen. With no air force and little logistical support, MacArthur felt these concerns were overstated and alarmist.

It turns out he was wrong, horribly wrong. Chinese soldiers did not have tanks or motorized

transport in the fall of 1950. They advanced on foot, with light weapons and carried much of their food with them—often on animals. They were armed with rifles, grenades and mortars, all of which they carried on their persons and used very effectively. The railroad mentioned earlier was their only mechanized means of supply.

“Chinese doctrine did not call for fighting slugging matches with American troops, because they would lose badly.” They fought in small units with imaginative flank attacks, usually at night. Their large numbers enabled the Chinese Army (notionally volunteers) to slowly push Allied Forces back to the 38th Parallel. In the middle of 1953, an armistice was signed, which continues in effect to this day.

Despite his being ordered to keep his opinions to himself in the wake of the Chinese offensive, MacArthur argued publicly for a broadening of the war to engage China directly. This was at odds with Washington’s policy of containment and it brought MacArthur into direct conflict with Harry Truman. The issue was this: was the military to be directed by a charismatic, talented general, or was it to be under the control of the civilian government.

The answer was clear. MacArthur was sacked by Truman on April 11, 1951 and returned to the United

States later that month. He gave his account of the larger Korean conflict to Congress and went on a nationwide speaking tour shortly thereafter. It had little effect. The people had no appetite for another war and supported the government's policy of containment.

In his final words to Congress, he had this to say, "I now close my military career and [I will] just fade away, an old soldier who tried to do his duty, as God gave him the light to see that duty. Goodbye."

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