



## American Caesar: Douglas MacArthur, 1880-1964

*William Manchester*

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Inspiring, outrageous... A thundering paradox of a man. Douglas MacArthur, one of only five men in history to have achieved the rank of General of the United States Army. He served in World Wars I, II, and the Korean War, and is famous for stating that "in war, there is no substitute for victory." AMERICAN CAESAR examines the exemplary army career, the stunning successes (and lapses) on the battlefield, and the turbulent private life of the soldier-hero whose mystery and appeal created a uniquely American legend.

## American Caesar: Douglas MacArthur, 1880-1964 Details

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## From Reader Review American Caesar: Douglas MacArthur, 1880-1964 for online ebook

### Pam says

This may well be the best biography ever written. Douglas MacArthur, the famous general of the Pacific in WWII, The man who lost the American air fleet to Japanese bombs, and lost thousands of men in the Phillipines, who returned victorious, and became the ruler of an area larger than that controlled by the Romans at the height of the empire is a complex, tragic, and frustrating subject. Sometimes he is a military genius, sometimes he is lucky, and sometimes he is a pompus ass in the extreme. He was the mastermind of the successful Inchon invasion in Korea, but bungled most of the rest of the war, until he was fired by Harry Truman.

MacArthur wanted to be president; he ended up as emperor of the Pacific.

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### David Hill says

This book sat on my bookshelf for years before I was willing to make the investment necessary. This is 800 pages of small print (including the index, notes, and bibliography). There are a number of photographs scattered throughout the book and a few maps in the middle. If the battles had been covered in more detail I'd have wanted more maps than are provided, but as this book is about the man rather than the battles they are sufficient.

Reading this book I realized that, although I've read quite a bit about World War II, I haven't studied any of the battles fought by MacArthur's forces (other than Bataan/Corregidor). I need to address this oversight.

What I have learned about MacArthur prior to reading this book had to do with the Korean War. As such, I have had quite a negative view of the man. I expect most biographers to have favorable views of their subjects and that is true of Manchester. When the historical record is fuzzy, he gives MacArthur the benefit of the doubt. Fair enough.

Some time ago my father asked me who I thought was the greatest American general of WWII. I don't recall my answer; he said it was Marshall. Manchester makes that case that it was MacArthur, and that it wasn't even close. Not only was MacArthur responsible for the rebuilding of Japan much the same way Marshall was responsible for rebuilding Europe, MacArthur also led troops in combat with casualties for all his campaigns less than the casualties in the Battle of the Bulge.

I'm left thinking of MacArthur as two separate, distinct people. The brilliant strategist of the southwest Pacific and near-sovereign leading Japan back from destruction versus the man who wanted to lead us into nuclear Armageddon in Korea.

More study is warranted.

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### Matt says

Upon the death of General Douglas MacArthur - 5-star general, Medal of Honor Winner, Field Marshall of

the Philippines, proconsul of Japan, Republican presidential hopeful, and creepy mommy's boy - an obituary observed that MacArthur's "[m:]emory will never know peace."

So true. Even today, almost 50 years after his death, people are arguing about his legacy. Well, at least I am. With anyone who will listen.

By any measure, MacArthur had an extraordinary career, filled with incredible ups and downs. He succeeded spectacularly, and he failed spectacularly. It can truly be said of MacArthur that he never did anything half-assed. He was in some ways a genius, and in every way his own worst enemy. His impulses warred with each other and eventually handed him his greatest defeat.

Manchester identifies this duality in the first few sentences, which is an amazing hook for a biography:

He was a great thundering paradox of a man, noble and ignoble, inspiring and outrageous, arrogant and shy, the best of men and the worst of men, the most protean, most ridiculous, and most sublime. No more baffling, exasperating soldier ever wore a uniform...[H:]e carried the plumage of a flamingo, could not acknowledge errors, and tried to cover up his mistakes with sly, childish tricks...Unquestionably he was the most gifted man-at-arms this nation has produced.

There are a couple things going on in this opening paragraph. For one, you are introduced to the Manchester style, which is as subtle as a hammer blow to the forehead, and always skates that line between eloquence and pomposity (and is peppered with allusions to literature, history, and the classics). You are also promised an honest look at a complex man, a man who was both great and petty. Unfortunately, while the writing style remains constant throughout the book, the promised equanimity when it comes to exploring MacArthur's life gradually fades, until an engaging biography has become an unsupported hagiography.

*American Caesar* - aptly titled, vis-a-vis MacArthur's service in Japan - begins in the American Civil War, with the charge of Mac's father, Arthur MacArthur, up Missionary Ridge. The book then traces Arthur's life till his son Douglas' birth. The reason, I gather, is to show the heroic lineage that Douglas shared. However, I noticed the subtle elisions in Arthur's life that would mark the rest of this biography. Specifically, Manchester writes of Arthur's time in the Philippines in a purely positive light. This completely ignores the brutal repression undertaken by his troops, including summary executions and water boarding (back when that *was* considered torture). The civilian body count was as high as 200,000, yet you wouldn't know a single innocent soul had been bruised relying on this book.

MacArthur's early life is dealt with cursorily, relative to the book's length. MacArthur grows up on frontier army posts, attends West Point (where he excels), is sent to the Philippines (where he shoots a couple bushwhackers), and rises to the rank of general during World War I. His career rise was helped in no small part by his mother, Pinky. The Douglas-Pinky angle is one of the creepily enjoyable sideshows in Mac's long life. Think of MacArthur like Tony Perkins in *Psycho*, except that his mother is alive, instead of a corpse. He deferred to her in everything, which probably led to his divorce, and caused him - a fully grown man - to hide from his mother the fact he had a girlfriend. Reading Pinky's fawning letters to General Pershing still makes one cringe nearly a century after they were written.

The interwar years saw MacArthur as the superintendent of West Point and the Army Chief of Staff. MacArthur wasn't successful in either of these endeavors, yet Manchester bends over backwards to stress the positives while shifting blame for the negatives. At West Point, for instance, MacArthur's legacy was his love for the football team, and a now-famous quote about how the sports-field prepares a man for the

battlefield. Of course, Mac tried to do other things, like change the curriculum so the focus was on tanks and planes instead of Roman legions and Napoleon's choices at Waterloo. In this, MacArthur failed, but Manchester gives him all the credit for trying, without ever stopping to ponder *why* MacArthur failed. Could it have had something to do with his insufferable preening, his unbridled arrogance, and his pedantic soliloquies? As for Mac's stint as Chief of Staff, his legacy was designing a new jacket. Again, his failure in getting the US to increase the military budget wasn't entirely his fault; but then again, that was his mission. Manchester doesn't fail to mention MacArthur's shameful behavior during the Bonus March, but he doesn't explore it at any depth. This is odd, to say the least. Isn't it important to analyze this incident in which a man who professed to love the Army, and love his men, took to the streets with bayonets to run off thousands of veterans?

When MacArthur goes to the Philippines, his greatness and his pettiness come into stark relief. MacArthur eventually leaves the US Army and becomes a Field Marshal in the Philippine Army and adviser to President Quezon.

The Philippines were MacArthur's destiny. His lasting failure was in failing to protect the islands, while he is etched in history as the man who vowed to return. In the section leading up to World War II, Manchester finally shows his hand as a MacArthur-phile. He continually stresses the low budget MacArthur had to work with, while giving precious little space to MacArthur's disastrous plan for fighting off a Japanese invasion (he planned to fight the Japanese on the beaches, so he cached supplies nearby the landing zones, instead of locating them at his central defensive point - the Bataan peninsula and Corregidor). When the Japanese eventually attacked, many hours after Pearl Harbor, MacArthur still managed to be surprised. He became paralyzed for a time, though Manchester never bothers to wonder why.

Eventually, MacArthur is beaten back to Bataan, where his men have no supplies because MacArthur had cached them all near the beaches. Manchester contends that MacArthur fought a series of brilliant battles; the problem, though, is that he tells, and doesn't show. This problem continues throughout the rest of World War II. Manchester will speak of MacArthur's genius, but never explain how that genius was manifested. There is absolutely no account of MacArthur's orders, troop dispositions, or battle plans. Further, there isn't a single battle map. You have to take it for granted that MacArthur really was a great commander (and that argument doesn't hold on the Philippines; I mean, MacArthur *outnumbered* the Japanese! The defensive force had more men than the invading force, yet the invaders still win? That's embarrassing.)

One of the book's highlights, though, is MacArthur's thrilling escape from Corregidor. There are a lot of criticisms justly applied to Mac, but bravery isn't one of them. Just because he got away doesn't mean it was easy, and Manchester shows that by recreating the fraught PT Boat journey that ferried Mac, his wife and son from danger.

The balance of World War II is told with deference to MacArthur. Time and again we are told, without support, that his battle plans were spectacular. Manchester fawns over MacArthur's courage - his disdain for snipers, his plane trips over enemy territory - while utterly ignoring the obvious point that thousands of his troops were doing the same thing every day, while Mac rarely came to the front. Manchester also takes the odd tact of defending MacArthur against the criticism of his own troops! These portions of the book - and there are several - are elitist and condescending. They are also truly shocking, since Manchester was a Pacific grunt himself, and wrote a well-received memoir of his experience called *Goodbye, Darkness*.

The highlight of Mac's career was as proconsul of Japan. Here, as a benevolent despot, he showed off a liberal side he hid in America. Undoubtedly, he did a great deal to turn Japan from a hated enemy into a staunch friend and an economic powerhouse. Again, though, there was the pettiness, the vindictiveness; to give Manchester credit, he thoroughly analyzes MacArthur's kangaroo courts in Manila, which executed Generals Homma and Yamashita, the two Japanese soldiers whose forces had defeated him.

By the time the Korean War came around, I mostly liked this book. The writing style gives it a certain literary cachet, but never bogs things down. It also, by and large, maintained objectiveness. Korea changed that. Manchester, channeling MacArthur's ghost, comes up with every excuse and rationalization to place the blame on others. He ignores the fact that MacArthur's occupation troops were under-prepared; he ignores MacArthur's Philippines-like reaction to the Korean invasion (short version: we're doomed!); he over-hypes Inchon; and then he forgives the reckless push to the Yalu. I almost soiled my pants when Manchester tried to excuse the Chosin Reservoir debacle. According to Manchester, the piecemeal approach of his Army towards the Chinese border was actually "von Moltke's classic maneuver - action by separated forces off the enemy's axis of movement." (I guess that would make Pearl Harbor Admiral Husband E. Kimmel's "rope-a-dope"). In actuality, it was a failure of Mac's boy, General Almond, to appreciate the existence of Chinese troops in Korea; this brought him into conflict with General Smith of the 1st Marines, who had a brain and realized the 8th Army was heading into a trap. As a result, the Army units weren't operating in concert, and they were almost destroyed following Chinese encirclement.

Manchester's treatment of Korea moves from farce to insult. He bashes everyone who isn't MacArthur, especially Mac's bete noire, Harry Truman. According to Manchester, Truman was a foul-mouthed dimwit playing politics with American lives (recent historians would beg to disagree). Despite MacArthur openly flaunting the Constitution by challenging Truman's authority, Manchester still sides with his beloved Caesar. And what of Mac's genius plan for China? Dumping radioactive waste along the border between North Korea and China, coupled with an amphibious landing of North Korea. At this point, Manchester might have questioned MacArthur's sanity, or his senility, but he doesn't. And he completely ignores Mac's overt threats to drop atomic bombs on China (threats to which Mao reputedly responded: "So we lose a million or two.")

MacArthur in Korea was a madman, and Manchester abets him. He constantly backs MacArthur's contention that America should have sought to achieve total victory, and Korean reunification, no matter how many millions would've died. Both Mac and Manchester believed that returning to the status quo antebellum was a waste of American lives, and that the strategy of limited war was flawed. By the time this book was published, Manchester should've realized how wrong he was. Entirely, absolutely, 100% wrong. Korea is a misunderstood war, but suffice it to say, it's *not* Vietnam. By deciding to fight there, Truman maintained South Korea's independence. Today, North Korea is a black hole; her citizens are stunted, starving, gray-faced peasants. On the other hand, South Korea is a thriving democracy, an economic powerhouse, and a leader in high-tech industries. Plus, her citizens aren't eating corn husks and shoe leather. So yeah, I'd say the tactics chosen by Truman, Ridgeway, and Bradley bore fruit, while MacArthur's atomic-bomb-frenzy don't seem quite so prescient.

I really limped to the finish line on this one because, frankly, I couldn't trust the author anymore. Every time I thought that we'd reached the bottom of the MacArthur-plaudit well, Manchester would dig a little deeper. He highlights MacArthur's Old Soldiers speech before Congress while downplaying the fact that MacArthur was eviscerated by Senator Richard B. Russell's committee (if you want to know the gist of MacArthur's testimony, all you have to do is think back to Mark McGwire's steroid testimony; in essence, Mac kept saying "I'm not here to talk about the past").

In the last pages, I actually tossed the book in disgust. This occurred when Manchester noted that large sections of MacArthur's memoirs appear to have been plagiarized from the reminiscences of his officers. Manchester writes:

It is difficult to see the General as a plagiarist, and in fact there may be other explanations...

(I will not include Manchester's lame, unsupported, intellectually fraudulent explanations).

What? I mean *what!*?

If I had learned nothing else from reading this biased, inaccurate, flawed biography, it's that MacArthur was the epitome of a plagiarist. The reason I'm angry is that halfway through the book, Manchester knew this too! He writes that MacArthur, unlike Eisenhower, never let his Army commanders get any headlines or credit (we remember Patton and Omar Bradley, but who knows Eichelberger? Exactly). Yet by the end of the book, Manchester is unabashedly fluffing MacArthur, apparently forgetting the very facts of his own book.

The fact is, I like MacArthur, I like Manchester, and I despise this book. All the ingredients were here for a five-star bio: good author; great character; love, war, and overbearing mothers. Yet it doesn't hold together because it isn't honest about its subject.

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### **Jeffrey Keeten says**

**“The soldier above all others prays for peace, for it is the soldier who must suffer and bear the deepest wounds and scars of war.”**

### **Douglas MacArthur at West Point. Following in his father's footsteps.**

The blare of trumpets, the clash of arms, the screams of the wounded, the bullets whizzing through the air, and the acrid smell of cannon smoke were all part of the life of Douglas MacArthur since the day he was born. His father's exploits hung on him like a second skin. At the Battle of Missionary Ridge in 1862, Arthur MacArthur Jr. seized and carried the regimental standard to the top of the hill and planted it. He was 18 years old and 8 feet tall. By 19 he was a colonel. By 1899 he was a Brigadier General and at the Battle of Manila. In 1901 he was a Major General and appointed the Military Governor of the Philippines.

This is a lot to live up to. It is difficult, in some cases, to see the amount of influence a father has on his son, but in the case of the MacArthur's, you don't need much speculation. It would have been perfectly understandable if Douglas had decided to go into a profession that was different from his father's, but in many ways they are cut from the same cloth. Douglas MacArthur's own son, Arthur MacArthur IV, went his own way, a polar opposite direction from his father, even to the point of being a recluse and avoiding the spotlight his father craved so much.

**MacArthur's famous 'I will return' photograph. He promised when he was forced to leave the Philippines that he would return and liberate that nation. He also knew a good photo opportunity when it saw one.**

William Manchester's book covers MacArthur from cradle to grave. Douglas was a momma's boy, but in no way did that make him weak or unsure of himself. It did make him dependent for the rest of his life on other people to do those things for him that he didn't want to take the time to do for himself. He was an avid reader and book collector. He added to his father's library clear up until the time the collection was lost in Manila during the Japanese occupation during WW2. I cringed along with him at the descriptions of the books turned to charcoal. His second wife, Jean, was the perfect companion. She was with him as much as possible, even following him into war zones. She and his son were both trapped with him in the Philippines and were part of his daring escape. Jean was a wife, a mother, and a constant comfort to him.

## **Brigadier General Douglas MacArthur looking very comfortable with himself in 1918**

MacArthur really became MacArthur on the battlefields of WW1. He was horrified by the slaughter and the useless losses of life due to the hubris or incompetence of commanding officers. He was a legitimate war hero, earning seven silver stars. By the end of his career he had been awarded almost every ribbon for heroism that was available. During WW2, troops, weary of the war and tired of being in harm's way, referred to him as Dugout Doug, which is ironic given his propensity to put himself in harm's way needlessly. When he was asked about his insistence on remaining standing where bullets are flying by like buzzing bees or where bombs were exploding close enough to hear the whine of the shrapnel, his answer gives us a good idea of why he felt it was necessary: **"If I do it, the colonels will do it. If the colonels do it, the captains will do it, and so on."**

He is considered one of the best tacticians of World War Two. Where Ulysses S. Grant and George "Old Blood and Guts" Patton ground up soldiers in their command giving new definitions to the term cannon fodder, MacArthur developed campaign strategies with the intent of sparing as many GI lives as possible. His men killed ten Japanese soldiers for every one of their own they lost.

## **MacArthur arriving in Japan to take charge.**

His most remarkable work, in my opinion, was when he was overseeing the occupation of Japan from 1945-1951. He gave equal rights to women for the first time in the history of that country. He abolished adultery laws that were geared only towards punishing women. It has been estimated that he saved over 2.1 million Japanese lives with inoculations alone. He was more than a soldier during this time. He was a statesman. Though I may have questioned his ability to be POTUS in the past, after reading Manchester's observations of his job performance during this period of time, I have reevaluated his qualifications.

MacArthur was beset with paranoia for most of his career. Some of it was based on fact. Some of it was just a highly intelligent brain with too much time to think about why he was passed over for a promotion or how a man who was once an assistant on his staff (Dwight D. Eisenhower) became his boss. I think part of the issue that MacArthur had with Washington and the presidents he served is the amount of time he spent overseas away from the politics. He was getting most of his information second hand or from telegrams that don't always convey the full meaning of what someone means. It is so much easier to mislead yourself on what someone thought when you are reading a telegram much the same way we misinterpret text messages or emails. The human face to face element is missing and so much communication is lost when you can't read the other person's facial expressions.

For the most part, Washington and the command staff of the army were hands off in regards to MacArthur. He was able to do what he wanted to do and, generally, with a lot less in regards to supplies than say the generals operating in the European sector of the war.

## **MacArthur still exudes that same confidence and swagger in Korea that we see in his face as a young man in World War One.**

I've always been a bit hazy on what happened in Korea. Manchester is enamoured with his subject so he may have put a rather rosy spin on these events. It was the first modern war that the United States fought that was not really a war, but those now dreaded words... policing action. It is a first cousin to conflicts in Vietnam, Iraq, and Afghanistan, to name a few, that the United States have continued to mire themselves in clear up to present history. In World War Two objectives were clear--destroy the enemy and push them back to where they came from. In Korea, politics played such a heavy hand. The war became more about the struggles

between politicians in China and the United States. The Koreans were pawns in a much larger conflict between communism and capitalism.

Terms like **38th parallel** became phrases that Americans became familiar with.

Manchester makes the case that a lot of the problems between MacArthur and President Truman stemmed from the fact that no clear objective had been handed down to MacArthur. What is considered a win? What are the objectives? I think that Truman was unsure about the right answers to those questions. I don't think anyone expected as many Chinese to pour across the border in defense of the North Koreans either which changed the whole complexity of the situation and bordered on beginning World War Three. My uncle was in that war, and he described to me scenes of unarmed Chinese running behind the Chinese soldiers who had rifles, waiting to pick up their weapon when they were killed.

Crazy right? A type of crazy that is somehow sane in a country with people to spare.

He also told me about capturing Chinese "soldiers" dressed in rags, without wearing any shoes in temperatures below zero. The GIs would give them clothes and boots and as the trucks would leave to transport them to a prisoner-of-war camp, coats, shirts, pants, socks, and boots would come flying out of the back of the truck, out of ignorant fear that the US was merely trying to contaminate them with some deadly disease.

It was unnerving to be fighting people who were seemingly unhinged.

I can remember how irritated I was by the Rolling Stone article that led to President Obama dismissing General Stanley A. McChrystal. Of course, it wasn't difficult to draw comparisons to Truman's dismissal of MacArthur in Korea. It was a very unpopular decision with the American public. In fact, Truman's approval rating fell to 22%, which is still the lowest rating ever of a sitting president.

I think the problem lies in the amount of power that a commander has, running a war a long ways away from the civilian power in government. He has autonomy, and for most of MacArthur's career, the president and joint chiefs of staff were willing to let him have as much power as he felt he needed. Korea was a political war, which also means that politicians were more concerned about everything regarding that war. They are worried about perception as much as they are worried about winning. Roosevelt was a man so comfortable in his own skin and also shared so many natural characteristics with the dramatic MacArthur that he could have probably handled the situation without creating a political nightmare for himself at home. Truman made assumptions about MacArthur's intentions that also showed his own insecurities with his own political power.

MacArthur was wrong to embarrass Truman by communicating with Congress, but I really feel that he was trying to get some definitive answers about the overall objective they were fighting for in Korea. He wanted to make sure his boys were dying for the right cause. MacArthur might have been talking about WW1 when he made this statement, but it applied equally well to Korea. **"It's the orders you disobey that make you famous."** Unfortunately, his dismissal from Korea cast a long shadow over a brilliant career.

MacArthur impressed me again in his twilight years when he begged President Johnson not to escalate Vietnam. He took one last stab at saving thousands of American lives, but unfortunately, Johnson was too insecure not to "stand up" to communism in Southeast Asia.

## Statue of MacArthur at West Point.

There is always an ending, and MacArthur had one last chance to embrace the pageantry.

*"I'm closing my fifty-two years of military service. When I joined the Army, even before the turn of the century, it was the fulfillment of all my boyish hopes and dreams. The world has turned over many times since I took the oath on the Plain at West Point, and the hopes and dreams have long since vanished. But I still remember the refrain of one of the most popular barrack ballads of that day which proclaimed, most proudly, that 'Old soldiers never die. They just fade away.' And like the soldier who tried to do his duty as God gave him the light to see that duty.' The word was a hush: 'Goodbye'.*

After spending several weeks with Douglas MacArthur, I have to say that when I read his farewell speech I had a lump in my throat.

If you wish to see more of my most recent book and movie reviews, visit <http://www.jeffreykeeten.com>  
I also have a Facebook blogger page at: <https://www.facebook.com/JeffreyKeeten>

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## R.M.F Brown says

"Caesar was and is not loveable."

With that, William Manchester launches into a rip-roaring biography of America's greatest and most complex soldier. A warrior who hated war, a man of great charisma and generous spirit, who could be equally as vain and petty.

MacArthur was an enigma. Fearless, always willing to lead from the front, and yet, fearful of his mother's wrath. Genius needs no explanation, genius has always been flawed, from Achilles to Newton, great men have always followed their own code of honour. But nowhere do we see the embodiment of the duality of man more clearly in MacArthur.

I could go on, but what Manchester has done, has given us one of the greatest historical biographies, equal to Kershaw's biography of Adolf Hitler in its scope and ambition.

Manchester highlights MacArthur's strengths, but is not afraid to downplay his weaknesses, as vanity and hubris in Korea bring MacArthur crashing down to earth. In fairness, Truman comes out of the Korean war looking pretty bad, but it is MacArthur, the warlord, who bears the brunt of failure.

Overall, well worth a look.

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## Tony says

American Caesar is a comprehensive, but often plodding, biography. The author covers all aspects of MacArthur's life in considerable detail. However, the narrative is far too often interrupted by needless comparisons to ancient generals, brief forays into philosophy, etc.

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## David K. Lemons says

I had the honor in 1962 of being in the audience when General MacArthur gave his "Farewell to the Corps" speech at West Point. I was there because I had followed his spirit and banner from the time I was a boy, having already read two of his biographies and having seen him land at Houston's Hobby Airport when he returned from Korea and ride through throngs of cheering Texans. He was my living military hero. So, after he had given his historic speech at the Academy, I waited for him to appear along with General Westmoreland and saluted, which was irregular because he was in civilian clothes, but Westmoreland, and I, were in uniform. MacArthur stopped and looked squarely at me and nodded briefly. He knew the message of honor I was trying to convey. This biography was extremely well written and exposed MacArthur's flaws as well as his true side. I'll go back to Manchester on his books on Churchill and the JFK assassination and perhaps again to this superb biography of MacArthur.

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## John says

In the paperback edition of "American Caesar" that I read, one of the blurbs that's quoted falls back on the old cliché that this biography reads like a novel.

It's a tempting description for such a gripping book, but William Manchester's biography in reality is nothing like a novel. For one thing, no novelist would dare invent such an enigmatic character as Gen. Douglas MacArthur.

At one point, Manchester describes MacArthur walking onto a Pacific island during World War II, just behind the first wave of American soldiers. His aides are wary; he strides forward indifferently. A lieutenant touches his shoulder and tells him they just killed a Japanese sniper over there a few minutes ago. "Fine," MacArthur says. "That's the best thing to do with them." And he walks on in that direction.

Who could make up a character like that?

I was particularly glad to read this biography after having recently read "The Coldest Winter," about the Korean conflict; and "Truman!" about President Truman. Both deal with MacArthur only during the Korean conflict, and he comes across as a one-dimensional, fatally flawed, hyper-egotistical figure.

He certainly was flawed and egotistical. But there was so much more to MacArthur, as becomes clear in "American Caesar." He was a brilliant military leader whose greatest triumph was as the peacetime administrator of postwar Japan. He was a man of rare, even foolhardy, courage. As he demanded loyalty, he was also stubbornly loyal.

Manchester was a great biographer. He had all the necessary attributes: a first-rate reporter, a first-rate historian, a first-rate writer. His description of MacArthur pacing his balcony on the eve of Pearl Harbor is classic. I don't think anyone other than Manchester could have captured such a complex and controversial man as MacArthur nearly so well.

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## Rogier says

My, oh my, what a book, what a man!

Most fascinating is perhaps his years as proconsul in Japan, and how he was able to be the gentle, wise ruler of which Lao Tse and Plato spoke (Republic), and in fact he was an avid reader of Plato's Republic. His magnanimity and wisdom in that role were a historical achievement for which there are few if any precedents.

The infamous flap in Korea which eventually led to his unceremonious dismissal is in and of itself a multi-faceted situation, which will not easily yield a clear view. The administrative muddle in his instructions from above have as much to do with it, as his ambition, and possible hubris. The entire situation at the very least was fraught with lapses on all sides, and seen objectively is a big question mark, not about the necessity of civilian control of the military, which is a highly desirable and noble goal, but about whether civilian control is even possible in the end.

The whole episode sheds a lot of light on the question if a democracy will ever be able to carry on wars of aggression, let alone colonial wars, for a long time (even if they were someone else's as was Vietnam). It should be required reading if we are ever to learn from history. The final conclusion may be that a democracy ultimately can only have a defensive military posture, since a democratic executive under scrutiny of public opinion can never sustain an unpopular war.

Sadly, he allowed himself to be exploited for cheap Republican politics in the end, as part of an orgy of rage at President Truman. The platitudes he permitted himself in those years seem to belie the grandeur of the vision he exhibited in post war Japan.

In the end both biographies of Patton and MacArthur for me have been an enormous enrichment of my reading on World War II, which drove my interest, but these were both towering figures whose significance reaches well beyond their role in the war.

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## Ed says

This book has been sitting on my shelf for years waiting to be re-read; its pages discolored, its cover cracked but its story as fresh in 2009 as it was in 1984.

Undoubtedly, the greatest military mind in the history of the United States, Douglas MacArthur can only be understood by the standards of the late 19th Century. He was a chivalric warrior who could not begin to comprehend the war on terror and the other limited wars of today. In his mind, you fought a war to conquer the enemy, completely eliminating their ability to strike back, then you treated them with the understanding and kindness due a gallant foe.

His conduct in WWII and his treatment of the Japanese at its conclusion is a model of how to win a war with as few casualties as possible and how to win the respect of your former enemy after you occupy their lands. His conduct during the Korean War was totally consistent with his philosophy and in the end caused his firing by President Truman. He could not understand nor could he remain silent about his conviction of what it would take to defeat and occupy North Korea and eliminate China's ability to strike back.

In many ways he was his own worst enemy and never understood the subtleties of politics. He blew his own horn but, as brilliant as he was, he lacked the humility to see himself as others might see him. To those who did not know him, he was either an unblemished hero, an enigma, or a power hungry demagogue. To those who did know him he was a military genius and a great leader.

Did he ever make a mistake? Of course he did, many of them, but the balance sheet was heavily weighted on the positive side. His bravery was legendary and drove his staff crazy. It was almost as if he knew he was fore-ordained to die in bed, not on a battlefield. His nickname in WWII of "Dugout Doug" was totally inappropriate and just plain wrong.

Manchester does a masterful job of building the story so that the reader can see how the child foretold the man. Many of his actions later in life are revealing of how he was brought up. Manchester's skill as a biographer is to let those conclusions come to the reader as implications and doesn't hit us over the head with them.

As we all struggle with our own attitudes towards the "War on Terror", this book provides a clear picture of a man and a time when there were far fewer gray areas and when far more events were seen in black and white than is possible today.

It's a long book of 960 pages including footnotes and an extensive bibliography but it is worth reading if only to try and understand the differences between the world MacArthur lived in and the one we are faced with today.

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### **David says**

I did it! Longest book I have read since I joined Goodreads. Very fascinating biography of one of the most interesting characters in American military history. Though somewhat dated (written in 1978), it benefitted from the author being able to interview many people that knew MacArthur. The book portrays MacArthur honestly, flaws and all. He had his moments where he shined, such as the Southwest Pacific campaigns and Inchon, but times where he failed miserably, such as right after Pearl Harbor and his obsession with the press. The author shows both sides of this remarkable character in American history.

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### **Mary JL says**

This is of course a biography of General Douglas MacArthur. It contains a lot of information and I really like the fact that it is well balanced. Manchester clearly outlines MacArthur's strengths and weaknesses.

One really good point he made is when he describes MacArthur's role in Occupied Japan. MacArthur was an incredibly good choice to be in charge of the occupation. He was somewhat aloof and not the usual type of handshaking, smiling politician. That worked especially well with Japanese of that era--MacArthur behaved the way they expected a leader to act. It no doubt helped the Occupation government to run a bit more smoothly.

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### **Christopher says**

Manchester's bio reveals something very unsettling about people. I won't go so far as to say it's unsettling about the American character, but it's close. Despite the relative loss in stature MacArthur has undergone in the decades since his death, the near-deification of him during the heights of his popularity is unseemly.

While I wish it was reflective of a different time in American history, the tendency among segments of Americans (left and right) to cast their ENTIRE lot in with a semi-charismatic leader and elevate him to dizzying heights.

Manchester quotes a Congressman who, immediately following MacArthur's 1951 farewell speech to Congress, exclaimed "That's God! We saw God speak today!"

That's just creepy. Manchester does a wonderful, and fair, job of chronicling Mac's brilliance, vanity, and hypocrisy. He was obviously a towering figure of the first half of the 20th century. But the passage of time makes the level of adulation for him seem deeply un-American

(FULL DISCLOSURE--I hate "The Apotheosis of George Washington" the painting in the Capitol Building.)

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### **Jill Hutchinson says**

I can't possibly add to any of the previous reviews on this thread.....suffice it to say, this may be one of the best biographies I have ever read (and I've read a lot). MacArthur was a complex man and Manchester captures his personality and career masterfully. This is a must read!!!

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### **Mcgyver5 says**

Excellent writing and a rich subject. Gives so much understanding to American and Asian history. His contributions to the fortunes of Japan, Australia, Philippines, and Korea continue to be felt today.

The section on Korea corrected a lot of false impressions I had about that war (I did not fully appreciate the lack of leadership coming from Washington and I never really understood how problematic MacArthur was being towards the end). It also set off a lot of what-if daydreaming on my part. What if we had dug in around Pyongyang and not approached the Yalu River? What if we had bombed all the bridges along the Yalu? What if we had launched all-out war against China? What if we just fought our way to the 38th parallel and left it at that?

The book was really good at illustrating MacArthur's tactical genius in WWII and then it turned around and showed the same general fooled and then beat in a new kind of war. It did not take the time to describe the new tactics of the enemy or talk about how MacArthur's personality was uniquely unsuited to fighting a limited, guerrilla type war. Instead it had MacArthur repeatedly complaining that his hands were tied politically while the enemy had safe havens over the border. In other words, he blamed others for his defeats. So, I felt like the book should have devoted more analysis to the military decisions MacArthur made and to my daydreaming questions: What could MacArthur have done differently in Korea?

The book really took off when he became Japan's benevolent dictator. I think this history is unknown to most people born after, say, 1940. What a story of nation-building! He had a completely free hand and pushed through radical land reforms, judicial reforms, equal rights for women, and supervised the demobilization of millions of soldiers. He was not the right-winger that I had in my mind at all. If only he had banned whaling while he was at it.

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