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Defying the United States—General Douglas MacArthur

By: Luke Mueller
Honors Research Project
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General Douglas MacArthur has long been considered one of the premiere military generals in United States history. Although recent scholarship has scrutinized his failures¹, he has maintained a renowned reputation. His father, General Arthur MacArthur, famously told him, “There are times when a truly remarkable soldier must resort to unorthodox behavior, disobeying his superiors to gain the greater glory.”² Consequently, Douglas MacArthur established his reputation by disobeying direct orders. These incidents in many ways defined and although made him controversial also helped to make him famous. MacArthur’s defiance began during his stint as a cadet at West Point, one of the U.S. Military Academies. This paper focuses on MacArthur’s defiant behavior throughout his career, ultimately ending with his infamous confrontation with President Harry S. Truman. It argues that MacArthur only escaped reprimand through his overwhelming public support and military brilliance. Ultimately, MacArthur was destroyed when his defiance became a threat to U.S. democracy and world peace and perhaps the survival of humanity.

MacArthur’s defiance of authority prompted President Franklin Roosevelt, after winning the presidential election in 1932, to reference him in a conversation with economist Rexford G. Tugwell: “You said Huey [Long] was the second most dangerous person, didn’t you?” he asked. ‘Did I hear it the way you said it.’ Roosevelt replied, “You heard right,’ he said. ‘Huey is only second. The first is Douglas

¹ Schaller, Michael. *Douglas MacArthur: The Far Eastern General*. (Oxford University Press, New York, 1989).

² Manchester, William. *American Caesar: Douglas MacArthur 1880-1964*. (Back Bay Books, New York, 1978): 16.

MacArthur.’”³ To Roosevelt’s recollection, Douglas MacArthur was the most dangerous man in America, over Louisiana Senator Huey Long, * which displays the potential threat MacArthur could place on U.S. policy and security. Roosevelt reasoned that MacArthur’s extreme disregard for authority put him, as well as the United States, in perilous situations that had the potential to alter not only World War II, but also United States history. After analyzing General Douglas MacArthur’s career, it is troubling that a man who consistently disregarded orders from superior officers accomplished and sustained such success in a rigid and structural military setting.

MacArthur’s actions throughout the first half of the 20th century elevated him to being considered one of the top United States military commanders of the century. Accordingly, much scholarship has been produced relating to his many exploits. Journalist William Manchester wrote a national bestselling biography praising MacArthur—*American Caesar: Douglas MacArthur 1880-1964*. Furthermore, Geoffrey Perret wrote a biography entitled *Old Soldiers Never Die: The Life of Douglas MacArthur*, which not only faults MacArthur at appropriate times, but also praises him.⁴ In *The Most Dangerous Man In America*, Mark Perry concentrated on MacArthur’s actions following Franklin Roosevelt’s election to Presidency in 1932. Seymour Morris Jr. who decided to focus on MacArthur’s position as the

³ Perry, Mark. *The Most Dangerous Man in America: The Making of Douglas MacArthur*. (Basic Books, New York, 2014): Prologue xi.

* Huey Long was a politician and served as Governor of Louisiana from 1928 to 1932. He was a Democrat, very outspoken and willing to take forceful action. He is best known for his Share Our Wealth program and planned to run for president in 1936 before being assassinated in 1935. See:

⁴ Perret, Geoffrey. *Old Soldiers Never Die: The Life of Douglas MacArthur*. (Adams Media Corporation, Holbrook, MA, 1996).

commander of the occupation of Japan following World War II, wrote *Supreme Commander: MacArthur's Triumph In Japan*.⁵ Michael Schaller wrote a biography, *Douglas MacArthur: The Far Eastern General*, which focused on MacArthur's career in the Far East.⁶ Historians such as Michael Schaller exploit his defiance as a critique and degrade his achievements, yet minimize certain examples of his military brilliance. Michael D. Pearlman's book, *Truman-MacArthur: Policy, Politics, And The Hunger For Honor And Renown*, was entirely devoted to the Truman-MacArthur debates during the Korean War.⁷ These biographies are able to utilize many sources of information in order to typically provide both sides of MacArthur's character.

Historians offer several different theories as to why MacArthur continually disregarded direct orders from his superiors, but generally focus on one or two episodes rather than his entire career. I contend that MacArthur defied his superiors due to the fact that his superiors lacked front-line combat experience. Essentially, MacArthur trusted his own brilliance and continually utilized his experiences from combat to make his own tactical decision instead of following the orders of inexperienced general and presidents (e.g. George C. Marshal, Dwight Eisenhower, Herbert Hoover, Roosevelt, and Truman). While Truman did see combat in World War I, he was a reservist, which placed a natural animosity between himself and a West Point professional.

⁵ Morris, Seymour, Jr. *Supreme Commander: MacArthur's Triumph in Japan*. (HarperCollins Publishers, New York, NY, 2014).

⁶ Schaller, *Douglas MacArthur*, 5.

⁷ Pearlman, Michael D. *Truman-MacArthur: Policy, Politics, And The Hunger For Honor And Renown*. (Indiana University Press, Bloomington and Indianapolis, IN, 2008).

Recently historians have examined MacArthur's psychological state that could have contributed to his continual defiance of authority. While there is not enough evidence to definitively conclude that he had Narcissistic Personality Disorder (NPD), he does exhibit several traits and symptoms. The rudimentary symptoms of NPD include "a pattern of grandiosity, need for admiration, and a lack of empathy."⁸ However, it also can include fantasies with unlimited power and brilliance, a belief that the person is special and unique and can only be understood by other special people, is often envious, displays arrogant attitude, and is interpersonally exploitative.⁹ MacArthur displays most of these traits and although the author is not qualified to make a diagnosis, it is quite possible that he had NPD. Furthermore, MacArthur's continual reward for disobeying orders, in the form of medals or popular praise, served to increase the likelihood of that defiance continuing and growing in intensity.

West Point (1899-1903)

In order to understand MacArthur's supposed inherently defiant nature that made him "the most dangerous man in America," it is necessary to understand that his insubordinate actions began as a cadet, from 1899 to 1903. Schaller described early 20th century West Point as "an anachronistic shrine most notable for outdated military instruction, brutal hazing, and an archaic curriculum."¹⁰ According to Manchester, there were hundreds of hazing techniques, but most notable were "scalding steam baths, 'crawling' (being insulted by an upperclassman whose jaw

⁸ *Diagnostic And Statistical Manual Of Mental Disorders: DSM-5 Fifth Edition.* (American Psychiatric Publishing, Washington, D.C., 2013): 345.

⁹ *DSM-5*, 369-370.

¹⁰ Schaller, *Douglas MacArthur*, 5.

was one inch from the plebe's nose), 'bracing' (standing at rigid attention for long periods of time), 'dipping' (push-ups), 'eagling' (deep knee bends over broken glass) . . ."¹¹ MacArthur endured hazing to an extreme that, in one case, his legs convulsed after "eagling." In 1900, when cadet Oscar L. Booz died of tuberculosis that was attributed to the hazing he suffered as a plebe, West Point garnered national attention.¹² This incident prompted President William McKinley and the War Department to order a special court inquiry by West Point and eventually a separate Congressional inquiry to investigate the extent of the hazing. The committee summoned MacArthur to testify as a key witness, as well as name the cadets who had hazed him. However, "if he did as ordered, he would incur the scorn of the entire corps. Yet if he refused to obey, he could be dismissed from West Point."¹³ Although MacArthur himself claimed in his *Reminiscences* that he did not provide any names, he did give the names of the cadets who had previously admitted guilt (or were already expelled) and declined to give the names demanded of him.¹⁴ MacArthur's refusal to incriminate cadets who had not confessed demonstrated his inherently defiant nature that characterized him to a great extent and enhanced his willingness to defy orders in the future while also cementing his reputation as one who would place his colleagues ahead of his military duty.

Shortly following the Committee hearings on hazing, MacArthur captured attention again for defying the wishes of Lieutenant Colonel Wright P. Edgerton, a

¹¹ Manchester, *American Caesar*, 51.

¹² "Military Board hears Testimony at Bristol and Philadelphia: Physician Says Alleged Treatment of the Cadet Might Have Made Him More Susceptible to Disease. *New York Time*, December 18, 1900.

¹³ Perret, *Old Soldiers*, 36.

¹⁴ Ibid.

mathematics instructor at West Point. Due to an illness, MacArthur repeatedly missed weekly tests in mathematics during his second year at West Point. Typically, to avoid failing out of the course, students, referred to as “goats,” received a special examination. Upon seeing his name on the list of “goats,” MacArthur “went to see the instructor and pointed out that the grades he had scored on those math tests he had taken were so high that in effect, he already had a passing grade.” Although MacArthur omitted this incident in his *Reminiscences*, mostly due to the fact he focused more on his actual military career, Geoffrey Perret claimed MacArthur threatened to resign from West Point when MacArthur stated, “I know it is an order, but it is an unreasonable one. If my name is not removed from that list by nine o’clock tomorrow morning, I will resign.”¹⁵

Ultimately Lieutenant Colonel Edgerton removed Douglas’ name from the list of “goats.” During his career at West Point, MacArthur “achieved the highest rank available to him—senior corporal as a yearling, senior first sergeant as a second classman, and, as a first classman, the crowning glory: first captain, like Lee and Pershing before him,” so it is easy to deduce that MacArthur had the potential to pass the “goat” test with ease.¹⁶ Because MacArthur often flouted the rules as well as orders during his time at West Point, it is not surprising that he defied superior officers during combat, which occurred during the Veracruz operation in 1914.

Veracruz 1914

In September of 1913, General MacArthur served as a member of the General Staff, which planned and prepared the U.S. Army for war; this position allowed

¹⁵ Perret, *Old Soldiers*, 43.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 54.

MacArthur to serve closely with the Army Chief of Staff—Leonard Wood. Merely weeks after the election of President Woodrow Wilson in 1912, General Victoriano Huerta seized control of the Mexican government and committed countless atrocities in the process.¹⁷ Furthermore, U.S. ambassador Henry Lane Wilson aided Huerta in the murder of the President, at the time, Francisco Modero. In response, President Wilson refused to recognize the Huerta regime, and in October 1913, sent a naval squadron under the command of Rear Admiral Frank Fletcher to the Tampico and Veracruz ports. Within months, several disputes occurred that, although seemed minor, threatened war. On April 21, 1914, American sailors and Marines seized and occupied the city of Veracruz. ¹⁸

Two weeks after the initial Veracruz incident, the General Staff ordered a small expeditionary force, commanded by Major General Frederick Funston, to Veracruz and, if necessary, a field army under the command of General Wood was to follow.¹⁹ General Wood planned to mirror the strategy employed by General Winfield Scott in 1848—lead his army from Veracruz to Mexico City in order to “conquer a peace.”²⁰ Wood sent then Captain Douglas MacArthur to Veracruz in order to “observe and report on all matters that might be useful to General Wood

¹⁷Perret, *Old Soldiers*, 68-69.

¹⁸ The standard work on Veracruz is Quirk, Robert E. *An Affair of Honor! Woodrow Wilson and the Occupation of Veracruz*. (Ley, KY, 1982). Quirk does not mention the incident of MacArthur, leading one to conclude it is of relatively little importance. Ryan, Paul B. “Ten Days at Veracruz” *Proceedings of the United States Naval Institute* 98, No. 6, 1972: 65. MacArthur, Douglas. *Reminiscences: General of the Army Douglas MacArthur*. (McGraw-Hill Book Company, New York, 1964): 40.

¹⁹ MacArthur, *Reminiscences*, 40.

²⁰ Perret, *Old Soldiers*, 69.

and the War Department.”²¹ While there, Captain MacArthur quickly discovered the lack of transportation, which is vital to sustaining military success. Although severely lacking in animal and automobile transportation, Veracruz had an abundance of railcars; however, there were no locomotives to operate them. Due to the fact that American railroad engines operate on a different size gauge, it was useless to ship U.S. locomotives to Veracruz. Determined to prevent a war, Funston was under orders by Wilson to restrict anyone from conducting reconnaissance behind Mexican lines.²²

However, MacArthur understood that the key to the success of any military conflict in Mexico depended on finding the locomotives, and he proposed the idea of a personal reconnaissance mission to Captain Constant Cordier, in order to discover the location of the locomotives. MacArthur’s idea eventually reached General Funston’s aide, Captain William G. Ball, as well as Captain W.A. Burnside. According to MacArthur’s *Reminiscences*, he did not approach General Funston; but “Major Alexander Dade of the cavalry, whom I had known since childhood, advised against the plan.” MacArthur believed his instructions from General Wood and the War Department permitted him to scout behind Mexican lines, regardless of the fact that General Funston and men under his command were prohibited from such actions. According to MacArthur’s memorandum, notes of what occurred read as follows: “I crossed our line unseen We reached Alvarado shortly after one o’clock and there found five engines I made a careful inspection of them and then started back.”²³

²¹ MacArthur, *Reminiscences*, 40.

²² Perret, *Old Soldiers*, 70.

²³ MacArthur, *Reminiscences*, 40-42.

On his return trip, MacArthur and his few Mexican aides, were attacked and forced to kill several of Huerta's soldiers. Although General Wood recommended MacArthur for the Medal of Honor, "an awards board rejected the recommendation on the ground that since Funston had not known about the reconnaissance, decorating Captain MacArthur 'might encourage any other staff officer, under similar conditions, to ignore the local commander, possibly interfering with the latter's plans with reference to the enemy.'"²⁴

While it can be debated whether or not MacArthur's actions were permissible according to Wood's orders, junior officers have an obligation to inform local commanders of their potential actions—especially actions that occurred behind enemy lines. The fact that MacArthur was recommended for the Medal of Honor, an award he yearned for in order to live up to his father's reputation, served to reinforce his defiant nature. MacArthur incensed at hearing the decision from the awards board, wrote a memorandum to the new Chief of Staff, Major General Hugh L. Scott, and claimed the board was too narrow minded and severely lacked imagination.²⁵ This memorandum is quintessential of MacArthur's insubordinate behavior, which only occurred with more and more severity as his military career grew.

During World War I MacArthur remained defiant, yet became one of the most decorated soldiers in the United States Military. He won Seven Silver Stars, two *Croix de guerre's*, two Distinguished Service Cross's, and a Distinguished Service Medal along with several Wound Chevrons while fighting in World War I. Beginning

²⁴ Manchester, *American Caesar*, 76.

²⁵ Perret, *Old Soldiers*, 72.

the war as Chief of Staff of the 42nd Rainbow Division with the rank of Colonel, MacArthur ended the war as a Brigadier General. Due to his many successes in World War I, his popularity started to increase in the U.S. Following World War I, MacArthur became superintendent of West Point from 1919-1922. In this role, MacArthur implemented several radical changes that were rapidly discarded. These changes included dancing as a part of the curriculum, abolishing summer camp, requiring instructors to spend a month each year teaching at a civilian college, and dropping the standards of appearance.²⁶ His radical intentions to reform the traditional West Point curriculum display his affinity to defy his superiors, most of whom were all educated on traditional West Point standards and objected to these new reforms. Although he claimed these changes were necessary in order to adapt West Point to the 20th century, none of his reforms stayed in place after he left. Between 1922-1925 MacArthur spent several years in the Philippines and was promoted to Major General on January 17, 1925. MacArthur then commanded IV Corps Area, based in Fort McPherson, Georgia and in 1927 he was appointed as President of the American Olympic Committee. In 1929 MacArthur commanded the Philippine Department, but was appointed to Chief of Staff on November 21, 1930, where he became famous for his disobedience during the Bonus Expeditionary March in 1932.

The Bonus Expeditionary Force 1932

As a result of the global economic depression of the early 1930s,

²⁶ Perret, *Old Soldiers*, 118-119.

Americans experienced drastic levels of hardship forcing them to request aid from the national government. The legend of the so-called Bonus Expeditionary Force (BEF) and the battle of the Anacostia Flats are well known and were a direct consequence of the Great Depression.²⁷ However, the BEF movement's roots stem back to 1924 when, against the wishes of President Calvin Coolidge, Congress issued roughly 3.5 million Adjusted Compensation Certificates to veterans of World War I, which amounted to nearly one thousand dollars, payable in 1945 or on the death of the holder.²⁸ Due to the widespread Depression and harsh economic times, many veterans requested the money before 1945. Consequently, in 1932 when Democrat Representative Wright Patman of Texas introduced a bill to pay veterans a cash bonus, thousands of veterans flocked to Washington D.C. to pressure the passage of the bill.²⁹

By mid-June, the BEF had nearly 15,000 members encamped on U.S. government property—in Anacostia as well as along Pennsylvania Avenue in buildings scheduled to be razed. Although the bill passed the House of Representatives (211-176), the Senate rejected the bill by a wide margin on June 17, 1932. The Bonus Marchers, awaiting the reconsideration of the bill, remained in the city and increased their pressure on the government by marching around the Capitol. On July 16, Congress adjourned until December, which resulted in thousands of marchers returning home. However, nearly 10,000 Bonus marchers

²⁷ Roger, Daniels. *The Bonus March: An Episode of the Great Depression*. (Greenwood Publishing Company, Westport, Connecticut, 1971). Paul, Dickson. *The Bonus Army: An American Epic*. (Walker & Co. New York, 2004).

²⁸ Perret, *Old Soldiers*, 155.

²⁹ Price, John W. "The Army Evicts The Bonus Marchers," *Military Review* 51, no. 5 (1971): 57.

stayed in Washington in order to continue their pressure group tactics. To make room for a new building, the Treasury Department decided to demolish several of the “residences” of the BEF located on government property. After a brief battle with insurance companies, the government decided “to evict the Bonus Marchers—not merely from these buildings, but from all other Government property . . .”³⁰ Government officials sent out eviction notices in the morning of July 28 and proceeded to clear government property immediately thereafter.

An altercation broke out between local authorities and a small group of marchers who reclaimed one of the buildings that had been previously evacuated. Pelham D. Glassford, the superintendent of police, took charge of the situation, but protestors struck him with a brick and attacked the authorities, resulting in the hospitalization of Glassford and five policemen. Merely two hours after that, a second outbreak of violence occurred which prompted a protest of 5,000 marchers.³¹ It was at that point, according to MacArthur’s *Reminiscences*, that the Army “defused the situation.”³²

Secretary of War, Patrick J. Hurley, ordered Army Chief of Staff, General Douglas MacArthur, to “have United States troops proceed immediately to the scene of the disorder Surround the affected area and clear it without delay.”³³ Against the advice of his aides, predominantly Dwight Eisenhower, MacArthur took command of the situation personally and refused to delegate the task to a

³⁰ Price, “The Army,” 57-59.

³¹ Perret, *Old Soldiers*, 157.

³² MacArthur, *Reminiscences*, 94.

³³ *Ibid.*

subordinate.³⁴ The ensuing action, according to MacArthur and verified by historians, was relatively peaceful, and by 9:30 P.M. authorities had cleared the area up to the Anacostia flats. The Army did employ tear gas, but the BEF retreated across Pennsylvania Avenue and retired to its camp. At this point, MacArthur received word from Hurley to suspend operations at his discretion.³⁵

There are multiple accounts of the battle of the Anacostia flats and the event has remained unclear to scholars today. In his own autobiography, MacArthur omitted the battle, which adds to the confusing situation. President Hoover realized an engagement against the main BEF encampment located on the other side of the Anacostia River would reflect badly, so he “sent duplicate orders, via two officers, forbidding troops to cross the Eleventh Street Bridge.” However, MacArthur, directly insubordinate, “led his men across, and the tents, shacks, lean-tos and packing crates which had sheltered the bonus marchers and their families were put to the torch.” In the battle, the Army inadvertently killed two infants and bayoneted a seven-year-old boy through the leg; this should have resulted in severe consequences for those involved, but did not. The incident altogether would have been avoided had MacArthur obeyed the orders of his superior President Hoover.³⁶

Scholars and historians who often praise MacArthur, including Manchester and Cornelius Ryan, are incapable of defending his actions during the clearing of the BEF. However, Geoffrey Perret came to an alternative theory that actually, if true, may exonerate MacArthur’s name. According to Perret, the orders Hoover sent to

³⁴ Manchester, *American Caesar*, 150.

³⁵ MacArthur, *Reminiscences*, 95.

³⁶ Manchester, *American Caesar*, 152.

MacArthur never reached him. Hoover ordered Secretary of War Hurley to forbid troops from crossing the Eleventh Street Bridge, which cannot be disputed. Hurley, following the chain of command, sent Assistant Chief of Staff George Van Horn Moseley to deliver the message to MacArthur.³⁷ While historians often accept Moseley's statement in his memoirs, that he delivered the orders to MacArthur, whom then deliberately violated orders in an act of clear insubordination—the truth may be more obscure. In Perret's alternative theory, he claimed Moseley defied orders and refused to deliver the message to MacArthur. First-hand accounts from Dwight Eisenhower, F. Trubee Davidson, and General Perry L. Miles corroborate Perret's theory.³⁸ Although it is difficult to believe scholars such as William Manchester and Cornelius Ryan would omit such evidence from their biographies, the testimonies of Eisenhower, Davidson, and Miles shed new light on the issue and may partially shield MacArthur from criticism.

Regardless, the importance of the situation and the risk of repeated violence compelled President Hoover to order Patrick Hurley to send another message to MacArthur. Orders only reached MacArthur due to the fact that he had by this time agreed to give the BEF enough time to evacuate the women and children prior to the clearing of the camps. Patrick Hurley gave the message to a Colonel to deliver to MacArthur, but "Moseley told him to 'get lost.' The Colonel took three hours to travel less than three miles. By the time he arrived at the Anacostia bridge, the soldiers . . . were moving out."³⁹ Receiving the message, MacArthur sent word that it

³⁷ Perret, *Old Soldiers*, 158.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 160.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

was too late to suspend operations. While Perret argues that the Colonel's delay excuses MacArthur's behavior, it is hard to defend MacArthur when he received orders not to cross the bridge, yet did so regardless. Even though Perret justified MacArthur's insubordinate actions, MacArthur was still clearly disobedient. He received orders to suspend operations, but in an act of defiance, crossed the bridge and cleared the main BEF camp on the Anacostia flats.

Naturally, there was much criticism of how the government handled the situation; however, MacArthur subdued the situation by holding a late night press conference in which he received support from his staunch Republican allies. Holding this press conference before Hoover could act rescued him from disciplinary procedures. Understanding that Republicans approved of his show of strength, MacArthur disclaimed responsibility and praised Hoover's actions.⁴⁰ MacArthur's memoirs demonstrate this:

If President Hoover had not acted when he did he would have been faced with a serious situation. Another week might have meant that the government was in peril. He had reached the end of an extraordinary patience and had gone to the very limit to avoid friction before using force. Had the President not acted when he did he would have been derelict in his duty.⁴¹

The *New York Times* confirms MacArthur's synopsis of the press conference.⁴²

Hoover would have lost even more public and political support had he disciplined MacArthur for insubordination. By stating Hoover rescued the government from a potentially perilous situation, MacArthur forced the President to accept his account.

⁴⁰ Manchester, *American Caesar*, 152.

⁴¹ MacArthur, *Reminiscences*, 95.

⁴² "MacArthur Declares Hoover Had To Act: Another Week's Delay Might Have Imperiled Government, General Declares," *New York Times*, July 29, 1932.

This is largely due to the fact that Hoover had terribly low approval ratings and needed good press to have a chance at defeating Franklin Roosevelt in the November election. MacArthur's nighttime press statement forced Hoover into supporting his insubordinate actions. Although openly disobedient and insubordinate, MacArthur maintained his position as Chief of Staff and escaped disciplinary actions due to not only his political maneuvering, but also through the use of national support via the press conference. By holding the press conference and connecting with the mass majority of citizens, MacArthur not only limited Hoover's ability to respond to the situation, but also secured his own growing role in the U.S. military and American politics.

Defense of the Philippines: 1941-1942

In 1935, Douglas MacArthur resigned as Chief of Staff of the Army and retired to Manila, still a U.S. colony. He became a military advisor, with the rank of Field Marshal, to the newly formed Philippine national government. However, Franklin Roosevelt recalled MacArthur to active duty on July 26, 1941 as war loomed and placed him in charge of American and Filipino forces in the Philippines making him the overall commander when the Japanese invaded—December 8, 1941. Although MacArthur's defense of the Philippine islands can be considered lacking, the American defenders, who resisted Japanese attacks for five months, lasted much longer than the British and Dutch in Indonesia and Malaysia. Regardless of how the lengthened defense changed the Japanese battle plan, the defense transformed MacArthur into "the first American hero of the war."⁴³ Yet, throughout the defense

⁴³ Schaller, *Douglas MacArthur*, 56.

of the Philippines, MacArthur consistently defied and disobeyed orders from his superiors. America's need for a hero to support and to improve morale, both domestically and abroad, saved MacArthur from citations for insubordination and possibly even replacement.

The Japanese enjoyed overwhelming success during the initial day of the invasion of the Philippine Islands resulting in the destruction of MacArthur's air force at Clark Field, which has often led to much criticism among academic circles.⁴⁴ MacArthur discovered the U.S. declared war on Japan at 5:30 AM on December 8. Consequently the War Department instructed him via radiogram to implement Rainbow Five immediately, yet he hesitated.⁴⁵ Instead of acting on reliable information from Washington, MacArthur closed himself off in his office and communicated with his men via his Chief of Staff General Richard Sutherland.⁴⁶ Air Force Chief General Brereton requested permission to launch a B-17 strike against Formosa (Taiwan), which complied with the Rainbow Five plan, yet MacArthur did nothing; he did not give permission until nine hours after the Pearl Harbor attack.⁴⁷ To compound the issue, MacArthur's strategy for the defense of the Philippines called for the destruction of the Japanese invasion fleet barges before they reached the beaches, so it is curious as to why MacArthur's air force remained on the ground.⁴⁸

⁴⁴ Manchester, *American Caesar*, 207-208.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 208.

⁴⁶ Schaller, *Douglas MacArthur*, 56.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 160

⁴⁸ Manchester, *American Caesar*, 207.

Due to MacArthur's clear defiance of not only his own defense plan, but also the United States' Rainbow Five, the Japanese destroyed his air force on December 8. It was not until 11 AM that MacArthur authorized bombing missions—roughly nine hours after initially hearing about the attack on Pearl Harbor. Unfortunately for the Allied forces in the Philippines, Brereton recalled all of his P-40s to refuel, leaving Clark Field without adequate fighter protection. Following the Japanese attack, "Clark was unrecognizable. All the hangars had been demolished. The parked aircraft had been reduced to tortured, charred skeletons, and a black, roiling pillar of oily smoke, towering into the sky, was visible as far away as Manila."⁴⁹ The destruction of the U.S. Air Force on the Philippine islands severely hampered MacArthur's ability to withstand a Japanese invasion. While it is likely the Philippines would have fallen nevertheless, American defenses, potentially, could have held out much longer than five months. Regardless of the fact that MacArthur, in *Reminiscences*, denied that General Brereton requested these bombing missions, he still failed to implement Rainbow Five as well as his defense plan for the Philippines. Military historians consistently point out MacArthur's drastic failure on December 8, so it is curious as to why MacArthur was able to retain command of his Pacific forces if he was wholly unsuccessful.

Furthermore, MacArthur continued to disobey orders openly throughout the entire Japanese siege of the Philippines. For example, MacArthur cabled the War Department to convince Russia to enter the Pacific War. While diplomatic leaders endorsed this plan, they failed to realize that MacArthur severely crossed the line

⁴⁹ Manchester, *American Caesar*, 212.

separating military and civilian authority.⁵⁰ This act is crucial because, from this episode until his dismissal, MacArthur continually affected U.S. diplomatic relations. However, Roosevelt ordered MacArthur to return to Australia to take charge of the situation in order to direct the Pacific War. Even though MacArthur threatened to resign his commission, the general inevitably left the Philippines on March 11, 1942. Upon reaching Australia, MacArthur released a press statement, against the advice from the Office of War Information, in which he vowed to return and liberate the Philippine Islands.

Throughout MacArthur's defense of the Philippines, MacArthur, ironically, became a symbol of national resistance and continued to gain mass support domestically. George Kenney, a U.S. Army Air Forces general, observed, "The battle of Luzon stands out like a beacon of hope in comparison with the incredible debacle at Singapore, the easy fall of the Dutch East Indies, and the confusion in Washington."⁵¹ Furthermore, a "MacArthur craze" swept over America during the defense of the Philippines, which caused anti-Roosevelt Republicans to magnify the achievements of MacArthur. These Republicans frequently assailed Roosevelt for rescuing the British and Russians, while leaving MacArthur to fight alone, despite the fact that the Allies were dedicated to defeating Nazi Germany first and Japan later.⁵²

When MacArthur retreated to Australia in March of 1942, there were few, if any, Allied victories. American troops were just beginning to arrive in Africa, and

⁵⁰ Manchester, *American Caesar*, 214.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 235.

⁵² Schaller, *Douglas MacArthur*, 61.

Pacific operations had not yet taken place, as the Japanese had an overwhelming control over the vast Pacific region. Morale for the Allies, especially America, was at an all-time low. To combat this issue, Roosevelt awarded MacArthur the Medal of Honor—an award he yearned for to match his father’s reputation. However as Michael Schaller states, “Two years later when asked to sign a special citation for the medal, Roosevelt claimed he could not recall what heroism the award was actually based on.”⁵³ This is because Roosevelt awarded the medal to boost morale; he gave it to him to provide the United States with a hero figure to support. MacArthur proved he was one of the few Allied generals capable, not of defeating the Japanese, but of stalling them. Therefore, he provided a chance to improve morale. So while he was directly insubordinate to superiors, MacArthur was able not only to retain his command, but also won the Congressional Medal of Honor to improve the fragile Allied morale. It was at this point that MacArthur began to gain massive amounts of domestic support that only grew throughout his re-conquest of the Philippines.

Re-taking the Philippines: 1944-1945

MacArthur’s insubordination and defiance littered his campaign to liberate the Filipino people from Japanese oppression. MacArthur admitted in his memoirs that “The Philippine Islands had constituted the main objective of my planning from the time of my departure from Corregidor in March 1942 I regarded this strategic archipelago as the keystone of Japan’s captured island empire . . .”⁵⁴ This was because, by seizing the Philippine Islands, the U.S. effectively cut the Japanese access to oil, which is the lifeblood of a modern military. Furthermore, the

⁵³ Schaller, *Douglas MacArthur*, 61.

⁵⁴ MacArthur, *Reminiscences*, 209.

Philippines lay directly in the middle of the main sea route to and from Japan from the resource rich Indies, Malaya, and Indo-China. Thus, taking the Philippines also limited Japanese production capabilities.⁵⁵

MacArthur's plan for re-taking the Philippines was entitled "Reno," and he selected the island of Mindanao as the initial tactical objective. According to MacArthur, "The advance would be made by a combination of airborne and seaborne operations, always supported by the full power of land-based aviation, and assisted by the fleet operating in the open reaches of the Pacific." "Reno" called for troops to move across the enemy's lightly guarded defense line, allowing them to bypass more heavily defended areas. Operation "Reno", later changed to "Musketeer II," set November 15, 1944, as the date for the operations in southern Mindanao and December 20, 1944, at Leyte Gulf. Essentially the strategic plan called for "The prompt seizure of the Central Luzon area to destroy the principal garrison, command organization and logistic support of hostile defense against Japan."⁵⁶

However, air reconnaissance discovered serious weaknesses in Japanese air defense over Leyte in mid-September, causing Admiral Halsey to suggest a change in strategy—to seize Leyte immediately.⁵⁷ MacArthur approved Halsey's proposal, and soon they had permission from superiors to move up the invasion date for Leyte by two months to October 20. The invasion of Leyte included four phases:

Phase one covered minor preliminary landings to secure the small islands lying across the entrance to Leyte Gulf. Phase two included the main amphibious assaults on Leyte from Dulag to Tacloban, and called for the seizure of the airstrip, an advance through Leyte Valley, and the opening of

⁵⁵ MacArthur, *Reminiscences*, 209.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.* 210-211

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 211.

San Juanico and Panaon Straits. The third phase consisted of the necessary overland and shore-to-shore operations to complete the capture of Leyte and the seizure of southern Sama. Phase four contemplated the occupation of the remainder of Samar and the further neutralization of enemy positions in the Visayas.⁵⁸

MacArthur's defiant nature emerged even before the invasion occurred. On October 19, MacArthur, aboard his flagship *Nashville*, ordered all his officers to wear steel helmets and to take atabrine tablets to protect against malaria. However, in typical MacArthur fashion, he never took the atabrine tablets himself.⁵⁹ While it is not an act of insubordination per se, it does demonstrate willingness to take unnecessary risks.

The liberation of the Philippines took far longer than initially expected. Although MacArthur declared imminent victory in Leyte on October 29, 1944, heavy fighting remained on the islands until the Japanese surrendered in March 1945.⁶⁰ This is proven during the mopping-up operations on Leyte, which occurred from November 1944 to the beginning of March 1945, and resulted in the killing of 27,000 Japanese soldiers. Once Leyte was in relative American control, MacArthur aimed at seizing Mindoro: an island three hundred miles from the Leyte Gulf. However, the Pentagon had advised the General that the operation was "too daring in scope, too risky in execution."⁶¹ However, by this time MacArthur began to ignore cables from Washington. MacArthur's complete disregard of cables from Washington shows his utter contempt for the War Department.

⁵⁸ MacArthur, *Reminiscences*, 214.

⁵⁹ Manchester, *American Caesar*, 384.

⁶⁰ Schaller, *Douglas MacArthur*, 96.

⁶¹ Manchester, *American Caesar*, 405.

After taking Leyte and Mindoro from the Japanese, MacArthur now needed to seize control of Luzon, which he invaded on January 9, 1945. Although he intended to re-take Manila and Clark Field before his sixty-fifth birthday on January 26, General Yamashita's war of attrition prevented this. American forces entered Manila on February 5, which prompted a Japanese rampage against the citizens and civilians of Manila. When the fighting ceased in Manila, on March 3, almost the entirety of the capital lay in ruins.⁶² It was not until July 4, roughly five weeks before Japan's ultimate surrender that MacArthur announced the official end of the Philippine campaign.⁶³

One of the more intriguing actions of MacArthur occurred after the Yalta Conference in 1945, where the U.S. secured Russian participation in the Pacific War. During this conference, the Joint Chiefs of Staff told the British, without consulting MacArthur, that the U.S. had no plans to re-take the rest of the Philippines; however, without informing the JCS of his intentions, MacArthur planned and executed more than a dozen amphibious operations in the central and southern Philippines.⁶⁴ The JCS gave MacArthur wide latitude to a point. He had no specific directives for any operations subsequent to Luzon. This has led Manchester to conclude that MacArthur was directly challenging the JCS's authority. As Manchester notes in reference to the Korean War, "It is little wonder that this same commander less than six years later would act with insolence towards his superiors in Washington."⁶⁵

⁶² Schaller, *Douglas MacArthur*, 197.

⁶³ MacArthur, *Reminiscences*, 259.

⁶⁴ Manchester, *American Caesar*, 428-429.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

MacArthur's disobedience plagued his defense of the Philippines, as well as his campaign to re-take the islands. It continues to puzzle military historians as to how MacArthur was able to keep his command. During the Philippines, it was a combination of factors. While his defense of the archipelago is at times confusing, his forces did hold out much longer than any other allied unit. Therefore, his superiors could not fire one of the few generals who showed promise to defeat or at least limit Japanese advances. Furthermore, because MacArthur sustained such success in the Philippines his national support never decreased. During the re-taking of the Philippines, MacArthur continued to garner national attention and his public support grew. Additionally, following the death of Franklin Roosevelt, President Truman left tactical decisions in the Philippines up to MacArthur because the islands received a low priority. MacArthur's defiant and insubordinate behavior continued and grew while on post in Japan during the American Occupation. However, considering this paper is focused on his military career and his clear acts of defiance to superior officers, it seems best to include only his major acts of defiance.

Occupation of Japan: 1945-1950

MacArthur entered Japan on August 30, 1945 amidst the complete devastation of not only every city, but also the entirety of Japanese infrastructure. After accepting the Japanese surrender aboard the battleship *Missouri*, MacArthur became the supreme commander and "virtual ruler of seventy million people."⁶⁶ The U.S. government as well as MacArthur immediately set out to rebuild Japan through

⁶⁶ Schaller, *Douglas MacArthur*, 121.

reforms. After the demobilization, the United States and MacArthur planned to rebuild industry. Referring to the building of industry, Army Secretary Royall stated in January 1948 that further destruction of industry would leave Japan vulnerable to aggression. In response, MacArthur “established a Holding Company Liquidation Commission (HCLC), which promptly designated over three hundred firms, possessing more than half of the nation’s industrial and commercial strength, as ‘excessive concentrations of economic power’ and targets for dissolution.”⁶⁷ MacArthur’s reforms here were in direct opposition to U.S. policy for the occupation of Japan. However, because Truman feared MacArthur’s impact on the 1948 election, he did nothing to reprimand him for going against the stated U.S. policy. Furthermore, from 1948-1950, MacArthur consistently criticized orders and delayed their implementation.⁶⁸ Although this is not a serious breach of the chain of command, it still was insubordination and potentially caused him to defy orders again not only during the occupation of Japan, but also in the Korean War. Furthermore, MacArthur’s popularity was steadily decreasing throughout the entire occupation of Japan and it was not until his success at Inchon in the Korean War that he regained his enormous support.

MacArthur consistently disobeyed orders from President Truman and altered U.S. economic and political policy in the region, much like he unsuccessfully tried to do during the Korean War. Because Truman never reprimanded him for altering U.S. policy during his time as Supreme Commander, MacArthur’s

⁶⁷ Schaller, *Douglas MacArthur*, 149-155.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

insubordinate behavior only increased during the Korean War until it reached a crux and Truman finally relieved him of command.

The War in Korea: 1950-1952

The Korean War was MacArthur's last post as a military commander. It was not until the Korean War that his disobedience threatened U.S. policy, which resulted in his dismissal. MacArthur's actions and aims in Korea can be defended to a point, it cannot be denied that he threatened the policy of the Truman administration, regardless of the debate about the effectiveness of this policy. The Truman administration succumbed to a policy of limited war in Asia during this time and greatly constricted MacArthur's military effectiveness.⁶⁹

As in the Philippines, MacArthur's insubordination during Korea was tolerated due to his military successes and brilliance in the face of adverse situations. On Sunday, June 25, 1950, a duty-officer at MacArthur's headquarters in Japan informed the general of the North Koreans crossing the 38th parallel en masse and overwhelming South Korean defensive posts.⁷⁰ The Soviet-trained North Korean army, equipped with modern weapons from the Soviets, easily routed South Korean forces because the State Department, trying to prevent South Korea from invading the north, equipped them with light weapons and no air or naval force.⁷¹ Prior to approval from Washington, MacArthur dispatched a shipload of munitions

⁶⁹ Brune, Lester., ed. *The Korean War: Handbook of the Literature and Research* (Greenwood Press, Westport, CT, 1996). Alexander, Bevin. *Korea: The First War We Lost*. (Hippocrene, New York, 1986). Bernstein, Barton J. "The Truman Administration and the Korean War." *The Truman Presidency*, ed. Michael J. Lacey. Cambridge University Press, New York, 1989: 410-444.

⁷⁰ MacArthur, *Reminiscences*, 327.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 328.

under air cover to South Korea.⁷² While MacArthur insisted that ordering this shipment of munitions to Korea was the correct military maneuver, he did not follow the command structure or wait for approval from JCS. Within days of the attack, the United Nations issued a statement essentially allowing the U.S. to “render every assistance” to the South Koreans militarily. Washington then ordered MacArthur to direct the U.S. Seventh Fleet to Formosa and prevent any Nationalist attack on the mainland and defend the island from Communist attack.⁷³ This directive by Washington alarmed China and resulted in two Chinese Armies to be moved to the border of Korea and China and be used in the Chinese intervention later in the Korean War.

After visiting Seoul, MacArthur realized that he could only save South Korea with the immediate commitment of U.S. ground forces into the region. So he directed his soldiers into Korea to try to halt the North Korean advance. The JCS, on June 30, 1950, authorized the use of American ground forces to hold the port of Pusan and additionally permitted MacArthur to extend air operations north of the 38th parallel. However, MacArthur had, hours before, ordered the attack of airfields north of the 38th parallel; once again stretching the powers of his command.⁷⁴ MacArthur’s primary objective was to slow down the advance by putting his troops in piecemeal and bluffing the North Korean commander into thinking a much more substantial American force was in Korea than there actually was. The city of Pusan became the root of the U.S. defensive line in Korea. By the time the North Korean commander

⁷² Schaller, *Douglas MacArthur*, 184.

⁷³ MacArthur, *Reminiscences*, 331.

⁷⁴ Schaller, *Douglas MacArthur*, 189.

realized MacArthur's deception, the Eighth Army under General Walton Walker was already in place in Pusan. MacArthur cabled Washington requesting massive reinforcements on July 7, 1950 in order to strike behind the enemy's lines in an amphibious operation.⁷⁵ Although MacArthur repeated this request twice, Washington refused and thus began the dialect of hostility between Washington and MacArthur during the Korean War. By July 20, 1950 MacArthur began to prepare for an offensive with the invasion of the port-city of Inchon.

Before discussing MacArthur's brilliance at the port of Inchon, his message to the Veterans of Foreign Wars needs to be addressed. On August 17, 1950, the President of the VFW invited MacArthur to send a message to be read at their annual encampment. The letter, according to MacArthur, "expressed my personal opinion of the strategic importance of Formosa and its relation to our defensive position in the Pacific." Furthermore, MacArthur stated, "It was in complete support of the President's announced policy toward Formosa." However, a week after sending the message, MacArthur received a directive from President Truman telling him to withdraw the message due to the fact that it was in conflict with the policy of the United States, which was dedicated to maintaining peace in Formosa by preventing Chiang Kai-Shek's Nationalist forces from attacking Communist China and vice-versa. This prompted MacArthur to re-examine the letter.⁷⁶ MacArthur claimed through the rest of his life that the letter was in complete support of the President. However, Truman correctly and conclusively pointed out that the letter was in fact in direct contrast to U.S. policy. According to Truman, MacArthur

⁷⁵ MacArthur, *Reminiscences*, 335-337.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 341.

advocated a policy of military aggression based on Formosa's strategic location.⁷⁷ Furthermore, Truman argued the letter was "at odds with my announcement of June 27, and it also contradicted what I had told Congress."⁷⁸ U.S. policy regarding the Far East attempted to reduce the area of conflict, but MacArthur's letter suggested otherwise and promoted further military build-up.

Michael Schaller argued that the letter told the world that America has "an uncontrollable military commander," as well as a desire to have a base in Formosa.⁷⁹ William Manchester solved the debate by claiming that Truman essentially had two different policies—a domestic one and United Nations one. Furthermore, he argued that MacArthur, in this instance, "was a casualty of rough politics, a loser in a game whose rules he never mastered."⁸⁰ Regardless, the letter almost pushed Truman into relieving MacArthur, but, due to his massive public support, doing so would set off a major political firestorm in the U.S.⁸¹ MacArthur would have been relieved if it had not been for Truman's fear of the political backlash of curbing MacArthur's authority. These events left MacArthur increasingly resentful of his superiors in Washington, and Truman's reluctance to reprimand MacArthur served to encourage his defiance. Additionally, his outright disagreement for stated U.S. policy only continued and increased until his dismissal.

With the Pusan perimeter stable, MacArthur now decided for a decisive attack aimed at the rear of the North Korean lines. This tactical decision, if rendered

⁷⁷ Truman, Harry S. *Memoirs: Years of Trial and Hope Volume 2*. (Doubleday & Company, Inc., Garden City, New York, 1956): 354.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 355.

⁷⁹ Schaller, *Douglas MacArthur*, 197.

⁸⁰ Manchester, *American Caesar*, 570.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 569.

successful, would effectively sever North Korean supply lines and encircle all enemy forces south of Seoul. MacArthur controversially chose the port of Inchon as the location for this amphibious landing. After MacArthur cabled Washington informing them of his operation planned for mid-September, 1950, he received much caution against the location. On August 23, 1950, MacArthur called a strategic conference in Tokyo to debate the issue, with Army Chief of Staff General Joseph L. Collins and Chief of Naval Operations Admiral Forrest P. Sherman in attendance. There were several problems with choosing Inchon as the site for the landing, all of which were pointed out by high-ranking military officials at this meeting.

A naval briefing staff argued that two elements—tide and terrain—made a landing at Inchon extremely hazardous. . . . Even under the most favorable conditions ‘Flying Fish Channel’ was narrow and winding. Not only did it make a perfect location for enemy mines, but any ship sunk at a particularly vulnerable point could block the channel to all other ships. . . . Within two hours after high tide most of the assault craft would be wallowing in the ooze of Inchon’s mud banks, sitting ducks for Communist shore batteries. . . . In effect, the amphibious forces would have only about two hours in the morning for the complex job of reducing or effectively neutralizing Wolmi-do. . . .

Furthermore, General Collins presented his arguments next; he argued the invasion of Inchon would take Marines from the Pusan perimeter, thus endangering the defensive line. Additionally, he proposed an alternate landing site at Kunsan, which was much further south of Inchon and had much less difficulty associated with it.⁸² Omar Bradley and President Truman were primarily against the plan due to these excessive risks. Bradley concluded, “Inchon was probably the worst possible place ever selected for an amphibious landing. . . . I had to agree that it was the riskiest

⁸² MacArthur, *Reminiscences*, 346-349.

military proposal I had ever heard of.”⁸³ Furthermore, Secretary of State Dean Acheson reflected these risks in his memoirs. Although he never stated outright that he opposed Inchon, he made it clear that there were excessive and unnecessary hazards involved.⁸⁴ To MacArthur, all of these seeming impossibilities provided him with an opportunity to seize the element of surprise, and he argued effectively to maintain the Inchon operation.

Despite its reluctance, the JCS approved MacArthur’s Inchon operation for September 15, 1950. Similar to re-taking the Philippines in World War II, where MacArthur essentially destroyed Japanese supply routes, the “seizure of Inchon and Seoul will cut the enemy’s supply line and seal off the entire southern peninsula. . . .”⁸⁵ By landing at Inchon and quickly seizing Seoul, MacArthur could effectively destroy North Korean supply lines. Although MacArthur received a letter from the JCS on September 8, 1950 that expressed doubt over the Inchon operation and suggested a delay, the invasion remained on schedule. This letter, doubting MacArthur’s operation, increased his resentment towards the Truman administration.⁸⁶

The invasion of Inchon demonstrated MacArthur’s absolute tactical brilliance. It enhanced his reputation domestically as well as globally. At 8 AM on the morning of September 15, MacArthur received a note updating him on the situation: “the first wave of Marines have landed and secured a beachhead without a single

⁸³ Bradley, Omar N. *A General’s Life: An Autobiography By General Of The Army*. (Simon And Schuster, New York, 1983): 544.

⁸⁴ Acheson, Dean. *Present at the Creation: My Years in the State Department*. (W. W. Norton & Company, Inc, New York, New York, 1969): 579-580.

⁸⁵ MacArthur, *Reminiscences*, 350.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 350-352.

fatality.”⁸⁷ Within two days, on September 17, 1950, Marines seized Kimpo Airfield near Seoul. During the initial landings at Inchon, MacArthur discovered that the North Koreans had started to construct massive fortifications to be completed within a month. Had he listened to his superiors and delayed the Inchon operation, MacArthur’s forces would have been slaughtered on the beaches.⁸⁸ This reinforced his egotistical nature and further enhanced his willingness to defy orders and advice from his superiors in Washington. MacArthur ordered to the prompt seizure of the South Korean capital city—Seoul. Within days, September 28, 1950, MacArthur’s forces cleared Seoul of enemy troops. MacArthur’s success at Inchon was remarkable; in “ninety-six hours half of the In Min Gun, fifty thousand soldiers, was trapped between MacArthur’s two gigantic pincers . . . MacArthur had freed all of South Korea of Communist domination in fifteen days.”⁸⁹ MacArthur immediately started the process to reinstate the South Korean government, which had been kicked off the peninsula when the North Koreans invaded.⁹⁰

As in the Philippines five years earlier, MacArthur intended to turn Seoul over to the South Korean government ceremoniously, so he informed the Pentagon of his intentions. The Truman administration replied to MacArthur’s intentions by advising him that any plans to restore President Rhee must have prior approval of higher authority. MacArthur instantly replied by saying, “Your message is not understood. . . . Such action is not only very much desired by the American

⁸⁷ MacArthur, *Reminiscences*, 353.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

⁸⁹ Manchester, *American Caesar*, 381.

⁹⁰ MacArthur, *Reminiscences*, 354.

Ambassador and all others concerned, but appears to be implicit in my directives.”⁹¹ He consequently ignored the order to obtain prior approval and ordered that Seoul be formally restored to the South Korean government on September 29, 1950. This act of outright defiance demonstrated MacArthur’s growing resentment towards his superiors and specifically Truman. While MacArthur may have believed his actions were justified, the fact remains that he disobeyed direct orders and it was obvious that he was out of control—incapable of following orders.

With South Korea in solid U.S. control, the decision to cross the 38th parallel into North Korea loomed. Three factors influenced this decision: the actions of the Soviet Union and Communist China, members of the United Nations, and the risk of general war. The National Security Council recommended the crossing of the 38th parallel so long as there “was no indication or threat of entry of Soviet or Chinese Communist elements in force. . . . However, no ground operations were to take place north of the 38th parallel in the event of Soviet or Chinese Communist entry.”⁹² On September 27, Washington provided MacArthur permission to cross into North Korean territory to conduct military operations. However, Washington gave him several restrictions: “he was forbidden to send aircraft over Sino-Russian territory, and only ROK troops could approach the Yalu.”⁹³ Truman specifically said, “As a matter of policy, no non-Korean ground forces were to be used in the provinces bordering on the Soviet Union or in the area along the Manchurian border.”⁹⁴

⁹¹ MacArthur, *Reminiscences*, 355.

⁹² Truman, *Memoirs*, 359.

⁹³ Manchester, *American Caesar*, 584.

⁹⁴ Truman, *Memoirs*, 360.

On October 1, 1950, MacArthur's forces crossed the 38th parallel into North Korean territory and pressed rapidly forward toward Pyongyang, while the X Corps landed at Wonsan. By mid-October, MacArthur's forces approached the line that only South Korean troops could cross. Chinese intervention in the Korean War has been significantly debated academically. While MacArthur is often blamed for not seeing the massive build-up of Chinese troops, he did not accept the premise that a nuclear war was unwarranted or that Korea was a diversion to tie down U.S. forces, leaving Europe exposed.⁹⁵ The fall of Pyongyang, on October 20, 1950, symbolized the complete defeat of North Korea, "leaving only a type of guerrilla warfare in its place."⁹⁶

Wake Island Conference: October 13-17, 1950

With evidence of a slight Chinese troop movement toward the Yalu, Truman demanded a face-to-face meeting with MacArthur, at Wake Island. Truman arrived on Wake Island to meet MacArthur on the morning of October 15. Truman and MacArthur discussed many aspects of Far East policy including Formosa, Chinese and Soviet intervention in Korea, Japan, North Korean Prisoners, and the overall war in Korea.⁹⁷ The entire purpose of this meeting was to ensure complete understanding of U.S. foreign policy between MacArthur and the Truman administration. After the Wake Island meeting, while speaking in an Opera House in San Francisco on October 17, 1950, Truman outlined U.S. policy in Korea to the press:

⁹⁵ MacArthur, *Reminiscences*, 359-364.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

⁹⁷ Truman, *Memoirs*, 365-367.

Our sole purpose in Korea is to establish peace and independence. Our troops will stay there only so long as they are needed by the United Nations for that purpose. We seek no territory or special privilege in Korea or anywhere else. We have no aggressive designs in Korea or in any other place in the Far East or elsewhere. And I want that to be perfectly clear to the whole world.⁹⁸

Truman very bluntly told MacArthur during the Wake Island Conference not to provoke the Chinese and Soviet Union into a general war.⁹⁹

Merely mopping-up operations remained in Korea, and on October 24, 1950, MacArthur violated orders once again and sent American units along the Chinese border because he believed that ROK troops were ineffective.¹⁰⁰ Truman pointed out this defiance of authority by saying, "The Joint Chiefs of Staff had instructed MacArthur that in his advance north he should not place non-Korean elements near the Manchurian and Soviet borders. But in his order to his commanders the general provided for the drive to the north to be spearheaded by American units."¹⁰¹ While this was obviously an act of total disobedience and insubordination, the JCS again dropped the issue.

Retreat: Winter 1950-1951

By the end of October, 1950 Chinese Communist forces were already engaged in Korea and had fought against United Nations forces.¹⁰² According to MacArthur, had Washington let him fight without restrictions, the Chinese may have been slaughtered, and their effect on the war severely limited. First, he claimed Washington limited the use of MacArthur's Air Force by forbidding "hot pursuit of

⁹⁸ Truman, *Memoirs*, 369

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 399.

¹⁰⁰ Schaller, *Douglas MacArthur*, 207.

¹⁰¹ Truman, *Memoirs*, 372.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*

enemy planes that attacked our own. . . . denied the right to bomb the hydroelectric plants in North Korea. . . . refusal to let me bomb the important supply center at Racine. . . . “ While these directives may have been the right strategic decision to decrease the odds of Chinese and Soviet intervention, it displayed Washington’s intent to limit the war. Only to be countermanded by Secretary George Marshall, MacArthur “ordered General Stratemeyer to employ ninety B-29’s on the following morning to destroy the Yalu bridges and cut this easy line of communication between Manchuria and North Korea, over which large armies of Chinese Reds could swarm.”¹⁰³ MacArthur later remarked: “The order not to bomb the Yalu bridges was the most indefensible and ill-conceived decision ever forced on a field commander in our nation’s history.”¹⁰⁴ However, the Truman administration doubted, from an operational standpoint, “whether the results to be achieved would be important enough to outweigh the danger of bombing Antung or other points on the Manchurian side of the river.”¹⁰⁵ Truman later reminisced about the discovery of a highly secret report in which a Russian diplomat claimed the Soviet Air Force would retaliate in force if United Nations forces bombed Manchurian airfields.¹⁰⁶ MacArthur’s insistence on expanding operations by bombing targets near or in foreign territory demonstrates his outright disobedience to the Truman administration and desire to create a general all-out war, which contradicted U.S. policy.

¹⁰³ MacArthur, *Reminiscences*, 365-368.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 372.

¹⁰⁵ Truman, *Memoirs*, 374.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 394.

MacArthur's troops occupied positions near the Yalu approaching the Manchurian border when, on November 27, 1950, massive numbers of Chinese troops commanded by Lin Piao invaded Korea.¹⁰⁷ These attacks forced the Eighth Army to make a rapid withdrawal and the X Corps under General Almond to retreat towards Wonsan. It soon became clear that the present forces in Korea did not have the strength to meet the new attack; MacArthur switched to the defense and ordered his troops to retreat. China's intervention forced Washington to change its war policy from the entire unification of Korea to consider evacuating MacArthur's entire army. By early January 1951, the lines of U.S. forces had been stabilized and the Chinese supply lines were far overextended. Surprisingly, "MacArthur's Korean retreat was one of his most successful feat of arms. . . . And the price the Chinese had paid for the ground yielded to them was shocking."¹⁰⁸ While MacArthur's successful retreat allowed him to maintain command, his insistence on speaking his mind to the press to demand a change in U.S. policy led to his relief.

MacArthur's Dismissal: April 11, 1951

Washington debated what to do in Korea during the winter of 1950-1951, and it finally decided to essentially settle for a tie—38th parallel. However, MacArthur consistently requested permission to widen the scope of the war in a series of letters and cables to the Truman administration and complained openly to

¹⁰⁷ Manchester, *American Caesar*, 607-608.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 611.

the press throughout January 1951.¹⁰⁹ This was in direct violation to a directive issued on December 6, 1950, which instructed civil and military officials to clear policy pronouncements with the State and Defense Departments and to avoid communicating opinions directly to the press.¹¹⁰

Additionally, Truman believed, “we should not allow the action in Korea to extend into a general war. All-out military action against China had to be avoided, if for no other reason than because it was a gigantic booby-trap.” The Truman administration never allowed the Korean War to alter U.S. foreign policy. It knew the designs and goals of Soviet policy and knew that “in our age, Europe, with its millions of skilled workmen, with its factories and transportation network, is still the key to world peace.”¹¹¹ Had the U.S. widened the war in Korea to an all-out war against China, Soviet forces, which enjoyed a 10-1 military man-power advantage, could have easily steam-rolled through all of Europe and the U.S. would have been defenseless to stop them. Basically, as Truman later maintained, “If we became preoccupied in Asia, Russia would gain a free hand in Europe.”¹¹² Although MacArthur may have believed he was protecting U.S. interests by attempting to widen the war in Korea, he was wrong, as far as the Truman administration was concerned.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 621-624. Higgins, Trumbull. *Korea and the Fall of MacArthur: A Précis in Limited War*. (Oxford University Press, New York, 1960). Spanier, John W. *The Truman MacArthur Controversy and the Korean War*. (Belknap Press, Cambridge, MA, 1959).

¹¹⁰ Schaller, *Douglas MacArthur*, 218.

¹¹¹ Truman, *Memoirs*, 378-380.

¹¹² Ibid., 398.

MacArthur's continual defiance of not accepting national policy and advocating aggression in Korea was the primary reason as for his dismissal. By mid-March 1951, MacArthur had retaken Seoul and reached the 38th parallel.¹¹³ At this point, the debate over whether or not to cross the 38th parallel renewed itself. Washington decided on "the idea of holding a defensible line somewhere on the peninsula and then negotiating an armistice or orderly withdrawal."¹¹⁴ To MacArthur, this was the same as surrender. On March 24, MacArthur issued his final statement as a commander, which led to his dismissal. MacArthur, referring to the 38th parallel, stated, "Our naval and air forces cross it at will and both ground forces have done so in the past."¹¹⁵ In addition, he declared,

Red China, of such exaggerated and vaunted military power, lacks the industrial capacity to provide adequately many critical items necessary to the conduct of modern war Formerly his great numerical potential might well have filled this gap but with the development of existing methods of mass destruction, numbers alone do not offset the vulnerability inherent in such deficiencies Red China, it has been shown its complete inability to accomplish by force of arms the conquest of Korea Within the area of my authority as the military commander, however, it would be needless to say that I stand ready at any time to confer in the field with the commander-in-chief of enemy forces in the earnest effort to find any military means . . . of the political objectives of the United Nations in Korea . . .¹¹⁶

Essentially, MacArthur, in his statement, threatened Communist China with an ultimatum and inferred that if they did not comply the full use of Allied power would be brought upon them. These statements not only violated the authority of the December 6 order, but also defied the official policy of the United States.

¹¹³ MacArthur, *Reminiscences*, 384.

¹¹⁴ Schaller, *Douglas MacArthur*, 217.

¹¹⁵ MacArthur, *Reminiscences*, 388.

¹¹⁶ Truman, *Memoirs*, 440-441.

MacArthur's insubordination reached a breaking point. Truman perceived these statements as an act of total insubordination, rightfully so. In his memoirs he wrote, "It was an act totally disregarding all directives to abstain from any declaration on foreign policy. It was in open defiance of my orders as president and as Commander in Chief. This was a challenge to the authority of the President under the Constitution. It also flouted the policy of the United Nations." It was by this act, Truman admitted, that he no longer could tolerate MacArthur's insubordination.¹¹⁷

Although Truman had thus already decided to relieve MacArthur of command before April, on April 5 another incident of disobedience occurred, which served to cement MacArthur's fate. MacArthur wrote a letter on March 20, 1951, replying to Representative Joseph W. Martin, the minority leader in the U.S. House at the time. In this letter, MacArthur directly challenged the policy of the U.S. government and United Nations. He wrote, "Here in Asia is where the Communist conspirators have elected to make their play for global conquest . . . ; if we lose this war to Communism in Asia the fall of Europe is inevitable There is no substitute for victory."¹¹⁸ MacArthur's letter to Martin contradicted U.S. policy to limit the war. To Truman, this letter showed that MacArthur was not only in disagreement with the policy of the U.S., but also he challenged this policy through open insubordination to the President. At a news conference at 1 a.m. on April 11, 1951, Truman announced the relief of General MacArthur by stating, "I have concluded that General of the Army Douglas MacArthur is unable to give his whole-hearted support to the policies of the United States Government and of the United Nations in

¹¹⁷ Truman, *Memoirs*, 442.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 442-445.

matters pertaining to his official duties.” In MacArthur’s place, Truman appointed General Matthew Ridgeway. Furthermore, Truman explained the relief of MacArthur by saying to a radio audience, “The Free nations . . . have united their strength in an effort to prevent a third world war.”¹¹⁹ MacArthur advocated an all-out war; he planned to widen the war, which was in direct opposition to the official policies of the United States. Reacting to MacArthur’s view, Bradley stated, “this strategy would involve us in the wrong war, at the wrong place, at the wrong time, and with the wrong enemy.”¹²⁰ MacArthur’s incessant and continual defiance of policy threatened U.S. security and world peace.

MacArthur simply could not understand why the Truman administration desired to fight a limited war. Molded to be a soldier from youth, MacArthur fought every war with the belief that it was a full-scale war—to win and completely defeat the enemy. This is why he had such trouble accepting the Truman administration’s policy regarding Korea. His long career of insubordination and disobedience without facing disciplinary actions enhanced his willingness to defy his superiors. It is not surprising therefore that MacArthur defied and disobeyed several orders not only from his superiors in Washington, but also President Truman. Due to a MacArthur’s threat to peace, Truman relieved MacArthur of command.

Although support for Truman has been steadily growing since the late 1960s, his public support decreased as a result of MacArthur’s dismissal. While MacArthur was welcomed back to the U.S. as a hero;¹²¹ Truman was harshly criticized and

¹¹⁹ Truman, *Memoirs*, 446-450.

¹²⁰ Bradley, *General’s Life*, 640.

¹²¹ Manchester, *American Caesar*, 678-680.

never had enough support to run in the next presidential election. The Truman-MacArthur controversy killed Truman's political career. Furthermore, MacArthur's attempt to continually alter stated U.S. policy against the wishes of the President marked the first time in U.S. history that civilian oversight over military affairs, which is essential to maintaining a secure democracy and is explicitly stated in the U.S. constitution, was threatened. Due to MacArthur's actions, nobody has threatened civilian oversight of the military since, which demonstrates how close he pushed the U.S. to an all-out war. Ultimately, Truman was correct and the public eventually realized that he saved the U.S. from getting involved in another world war and possibly nuclear annihilation.

General Douglas MacArthur continually defied orders from superior officers throughout his military career. This behavioral trend began as a cadet at West Point in 1899 and continued until his ultimate dismissal from command in 1951. His insubordination not only defined him as well as his career, but also helped to make him famous. Because he consistently escaped reprimand due to his strategic brilliance and domestic support his defiant actions only increased in intensity and scope, as did his role in U.S. affairs. Ultimately, his ability to escape reprimand served to reinforce his willingness to repeat his defiant behavior. MacArthur was not dismissed from command until he threatened not only U.S. policy in the Korean War, but also threatened the security and democracy of the United States.

Epilogue: 1951-1964

MacArthur's return to the U.S. was a triumphant affair. Millions of Americans applauded him.¹²² Manchester describes his yearlong drive across the country by stating,

He crisscrossed the United States in a one-man drive to arouse the country to what he regarded as its peril. Invitations from mayors and governors had been accumulating in his suite since the night he had reached the hotel. At first he agreed to visit six cities, then eleven states; in the end the Great Homecoming, as the MacArthur's called it, took them to Chicago, Milwaukee, Boston, Cleveland, Detroit, Houston, San Antonio, Evanston, Fort Worth, Miami, Los Angeles, Little Rock, Seattle, Norfolk, Austin, Natchez, Lansing, Dallas, Murfreesboro, Manchester, New Hampshire, and Portland, Oregon. Had he yielded to the appeals of all the communities that wanted him to come, he would have remained in perpetual motion.¹²³

Throughout his cross-country tour MacArthur gave volatile political speeches denouncing Truman by claiming a communist influence played a role in the past direction of the public administration. However, with each swipe at Truman, MacArthur's support decreased.¹²⁴ MacArthur briefly attempted win the 1952 Republican presidential nomination, but quickly lost to Eisenhower. Following the election of Eisenhower, MacArthur never again played any type role in U.S. affairs mainly because U.S. policy hereafter revolved around limited wars. Within one year, a year that began with an absolute overwhelming amount of public support, MacArthur was not even invited to San Francisco for the signing of the Japanese peace treaty.¹²⁵

¹²² Manchester, *American Caesar*, 678.

¹²³ *Ibid.*

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 679.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 688-690.

After 1952, MacArthur retired to the board of Remington Rand (later Sperry Rand), and became a banquet speaker. He never lost his zeal to speak out against his superiors or defending his defiant behavior.¹²⁶ The public, however, and the historians who came after judge him more harshly, as one who succumbed to his own hubris.

¹²⁶ Manchester, *American Caesar*, 692.

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