



Written by [Bruce Walker](#) on May 12, 2012

Fifty Years After MacArthur's "Duty, Honor, Country" Speech

"Old soldiers never die, they just fade away." That is what General Douglas MacArthur told a joint session of Congress in 1951, after his dismissal by President Truman during the Korean War. But the old soldier who was beloved by millions of his countrymen did not fade away quickly, and more than a decade passed before he gave his farewell address at a cherished American institution very familiar to him and very close to his heart, hundreds of miles from the political city that's Washington.



Fifty years ago, on May 12, 1962, MacArthur bade farewell to the cadets at West Point, an academy that he attended and graduated first in his class. Years later, he served as Superintendent at West Point as one chapter in his long military career. Toward the end of his life — and knowing that he had not much longer to live — General MacArthur gave what may have been his most significant speech: his "Duty, honor and country" address.

Before the ["Duty, honor and country"](#) speech in the spring of 1962, MacArthur had already given the world a good idea of what made him tick. Concerning the preservation of liberty, Douglas MacArthur had said: "No man is entitled to the blessings of freedom unless he be vigilant in its preservation" and "The object and practice of liberty lies in the limitation of government power." He also eschewed the notion that people were held back in free societies by mythical oppressors: "The best luck of all is the luck you make for yourself."

The general also grasped that the greatest enemy of Americans was not some foe across the ocean but rather those countrymen who did not cherish Americanism: "I am concerned for the security of our great Nation; not so much because of any threat from without, but because of the insidious forces working from within."

He told us what drove these forces: "History fails to record a single precedent in which nations subject to moral decay have not passed into political and economic decline. There has been either a spiritual awakening to overcome the moral lapse, or a progressive deterioration leading to ultimate national disaster." This was a personal obligation of each individual: "Last, but by no means least, courage of one's convictions, the courage to see things through. The world is in a constant conspiracy against the brave. It's the age-old struggle: the roar of the crowd on one side and the voice of your conscience on the other."

MacArthur was already an old man when he was called to fight Japan in the Pacific Theater. Unlike other American commanders, such as "Bull" Halsey, MacArthur did not describe the Japanese as sadistic monkeys or demean Japanese culture. He rather took the position that in war "there is no substitute for victory." His island-hopping strategy was intended to win the war as quickly as possible with as few casualties as possible on either side. Although MacArthur's life was that of a soldier, he did



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not like war and he said so often: “Could I have but a line a century hence crediting a contribution to the advance of peace, I would yield every honor which has been accorded me by war.”

When victory over Japan came, MacArthur was effectively made military governor of the archipelago. It came as a “surprise” to many — those who assumed that any American patriot in the military must be a bigoted and foolish yahoo — that MacArthur treated the Japanese people with respect and introduced notions of emancipation, peaceful direction, and focus upon economic growth. His governance was measured, proper, and extraordinarily successful.

Douglas MacArthur also understood the threat of Communism, and its deep penetration of American government. He strongly opposed the Soviet entry into the war against Japan, which came only in the last weeks of the war, and which allowed the Soviets to seize Manchuria and half of Korea. MacArthur successfully kept the Soviets out of administration of Japan, unlike Eisenhower in four-part divided Germany and Austria.

Two days before FDR traveled to the wartime Yalta summit and gave away the liberty of tens of millions of souls to Stalin, MacArthur urged the President to begin immediately to negotiate with Japan based upon their offer to surrender — conditionally, but with conditions that, as it turned out, coincided with virtually all the terms that were ultimately imposed upon Japan. FDR’s refusal to end the war in the Pacific early meant that millions of soldiers and civilians died unnecessarily and two atomic bombs were dropped unnecessarily — despite Japan’s desire to surrender.

The general stood with Ambassador Grew, who had long counseled a more measured approach toward Japan, and opposed deposing the Emperor — a step strongly desired and explicitly supported on June 25, 1945 by the board of the Communist Political Association. MacArthur’s leadership in post-war Japan bequeathed to the world a Japan that was profoundly pacifist in policy and committed to economic growth, and that maintained, at the same time, much of its national heritage.

During the Korean War, American forces (which were fighting under the United Nations) were pushed back by the Communist North Korean forces into the southeast corner of South Korea, where they faced annihilation. It was at this critical juncture when MacArthur launched his brilliant Inchon landing, trapping the North Koreans to the south and routing them decisively.

In his conduct of the war, MacArthur was harried by American government officials. Orders came from Washington that hamstrung MacArthur’s troops, aided Communist China’s intervention into Korea against the American forces, and in general, turned victory into defeat. MacArthur [recalled](#) the directives in his autobiography *Reminiscences*:

First I was forbidden “hot” pursuit of enemy planes that attacked our own. Manchuria and Siberia were sanctuaries of inviolate protection for all enemy forces and for all enemy purposes, no matter what depredations or assaults might come from there. Then I was denied the right to bomb the hydroelectric plants along the Yalu [the river separating North Korea and China]. The order was broadened to include every plant in North Korea which was capable of furnishing electric power to Manchuria and Siberia. Most incomprehensible of all was the refusal to let me bomb the important supply center at Racin, which was not in Manchuria or Siberia, but many miles from the border, in northeast Korea. Racin was a depot to which the Soviet Union forwarded supplies from Vladivostok for the North Korean Army. I felt that step-by-step my weapons were being taken away from me.

MacArthur was allowed to bomb *only* the North Korean side of the bridges crossing the Yalu, which effectively prevented the use of American air superiority to cut off the supply lines into North Korea



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since the Yalu meanders. But perhaps even more incredible than such restrictions is the fact that Communist China was made aware that MacArthur would be hamstrung — making China's "surprise" attack not surprising at all. MacArthur cited Chinese General Lin Piao's blunt acknowledgment: "I would never have made the attack and risked my men and military reputation if I had not been assured that Washington would restrain General MacArthur from taking adequate retaliatory measures against my lines of supply and communication."

General MacArthur was removed from command. MacArthur, like Senator Robert Taft, understood the nature of American greatness and embodied the integrity that, combined with genuine genius, made both men worthy successors to men such as Washington and Jefferson. MacArthur, like Taft, was also a Republican. But in 1952, Republicans turned to Dwight Eisenhower, a man who had proven too weak to resist Soviet evil machinations such as the infamous "Operation Keelhaul," which sent back to torture and death huge numbers of refugees who had fled from Stalin's workers' paradise.

What did our nation lose by not drafting MacArthur for President? We lost a man who understood and was not intimidated by communism. But we lost more — as the "Duty, Honor, Country" speech reveals. Hear what 50 years ago MacArthur said to the West Point cadets, when he told them to do their duty as "the Nation's war guardians" no matter the nation's problems — "Whether our strength is being sapped by deficit financing indulged in too long, by federal paternalism grown too mighty, by power groups grown too arrogant, by politics grown too corrupt, by crime grown too rampant, by morals grown too low, by taxes grown too high, by extremists grown too violent; whether our personal liberties are as firm and complete as they should be."

His understanding of the internal political problems of our nation was right on point. But MacArthur also grasped that our salvation came from our individual adherence to matters of character and sacrifice. As the general told the cadets toward the end of his final roll call with them: "The Long Gray Line has never failed us. Were you to do so, a million ghosts in olive drab, in brown khaki, in blue and gray, would rise from their white crosses thundering those magic words: Duty, Honor, Country."



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