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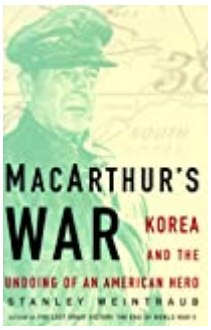

Stanley Weintraub. *MacArthur's War: Korea and the Undoing of an American Hero.* New York: The Free Press, 2000. 385 pp. $27.50 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-684-83419-1.

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Alexis de Tocqueville believed that democratic armies often perform badly and are weaker than aristocratic armies at the beginning of campaigns, but in time, they develop their assets and fighting spirit to prevail against their adversaries.[1] Most certainly the beginning of the Korean War in 1950, much like the failed Bataan and Corregidor defenses at the beginning of World War II, reflect de Tocqueville's thinking, and Stanley Weintraub shows us how and why in his newest book.

What Bataan, Corregidor, and Korea have in common is General Douglas MacArthur, one of the most highly respected, highly decorated, beloved, and despised generals in the history of American arms. An enigma? Hardly. MacArthur was imperial in his world view; magisterial among his officers; theatrical with the press, and decisive. His statement, "There is no substitute for victory," still rings with nineteenth century clarity.

Was Douglas MacArthur a hero? Absolutely, especially in his own mind, and it is just this process of self-agrandisement that Weintraub attacks with uncompromising force. We meet MacArthur in Japan as the American viceroy; we learn about his relaxed daily routine at the Dai Ichi, and we learn about his ignorance of the tragic events which changed the course of Asian history. The plot is no secret. Weintraub narrates the history of Task Force Smith and its horrific encounter with the North Korean Army in 1950, when inadequately trained and poorly equipped American soldiers gave their lives to buy time for a strong United Nations' army yet to be deployed. We meet General Walton H. Walker, a round faced, scowling soldier and protegÃ© of George S. Patton, Jr., who fought his army with skill, determination, and failure down to the Pusan Perimeter until MacArthur convinced the Joint Chiefs of Staff that he could wheel an amphibious force behind the enemy with an invasion at Inchon. Inchon, MacArthur's greatest feat of arms, certainly motivated his army to close with and defeat the North Koreans on the ground.

Weintraub describes MacArthur's first tactical failure: he split his force after Inchon into two independent groups without mutual support: the Eighth Army to the west and the X Corps in the east. Both forces charged north and attempted to unify Korea. MacArthur's second tactical failure, however, was more subtle. His staff refused to believe excellent intelligence that identified the entry of the Chinese Peoples' Volunteers into the fight. When they entered, the massive Chinese army inflicted damage far beyond anyone's imagination, and the Eighth Army "bugged out," meaning they abandoned or destroyed stores and equipment useful to the enemy and headed south in a hurry. In the east, Xth Corps, mostly Marines, faced the same Chinese army but did not bug

out; rather they fought their way south in sub-zero cold bringing their dead, wounded, and equipment with them. For the Marines the Chosin Reservoir campaign became the stuff of legend.

Where MacArthur failed, in Weintraub's view, lies less in his tactical errors and more in his overt efforts to usurp the president's ability to establish and direct political policy in Asia. True, Harry S Truman thought MacArthur the essence of pomposity while MacArthur believed Truman was a rank amateur. But President Harry Truman made policy in Washington, certainly not Douglas MacArthur in Japan. Truman, a master of the domestic political game, exploded when he learned that MacArthur was plotting against him with the political opposition. He wrote in his diary, "This is the last straw. Rank insubordination" (331). Hostile feelings escalated quickly. To George C. Marshall, Truman growled, "I'm going to fire that son of a bitch right now" (332). He did, and after receiving the news on the radio in April 1951, MacArthur accepted his dismissal and returned to a hero's welcome at home with unreal hopes of a political future. Instead, he just faded away.

What makes Stanley Weintraub's book unique is not the plot but the insight into personalities gained from exhaustive research at the MacArthur Archives and a myriad of sources. This outstanding book is written with feelings of irony, connection, and personality that perhaps only the Korean War veterans possess. As Weintraub states at the beginning, "This was my war (ix)." Indeed it was.

Note

[1]. See Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America* (Trans. George Lawrence, Ed. J. P. Mayer, New York: Harper & Rowe, 1969), 645-64.

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