



Douglas MacArthur: The Far Eastern General

Michael Schaller

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In an army which eschewed flamboyance, General Douglas MacArthur possessed a unique flair. With his chiseled face, corn-cob pipe, and a voice which "could trumpet and drum," he looked the part of a "heaven born general." He was arguably the best-known and most popular American military leader of the 20th century, and at least one observer--General George E. Stratemeyer, MacArthur's top air officer in Japan--thought him "the greatest man in history." Yet the men who served in the trenches of Bataan sneeringly called him "Dugout Doug," FDR privately termed MacArthur's defense of Corregidor "criminal," and Truman called his vaunted "return" to the Philippines "a fiasco."

In this eye-opening book, historian Michael Schaller offers an intimately detailed portrait of MacArthur, particularly the General's two decades in the Far East, demythologizing this "American Caesar" and providing an insightful analysis of American foreign policy in Asia during those years. Schaller's is far from a flattering portrait. He finds, for instance, that MacArthur's military record was less than impressive: not only did MacArthur leave direction of the army to subordinates (such as General Robert Eichelberger), but as a result of his failure to launch an air raid following word of the attack on Pearl Harbor, nearly all B-17s in the Philippines--the strongest American air concentration outside of the States--were destroyed on the ground. Indeed, Schaller reveals that MacArthur's Pacific island campaign during World War II, often hailed as brilliant, was far more costly and less decisive than previously assumed. Schaller is particularly deft at tracing MacArthur's futile attempts to become President and his destructive interference in foreign policy, such as his promise to local Dutch officials to restore their authority in the East Indies (even as FDR's administration pushed the Dutch to grant self-determination), his manipulation of policies in occupied Japan, and his constant attacks on Truman's policy in China, attacks which ruined any chance of improving relations with the largest nation in Asia. Finally, during the Korean War, Schaller argues that MacArthur willfully risked war with China and the Soviet Union to salvage his pride and humiliate his political enemies in Washington.

Schaller's thought-provoking biography provides invaluable background to America's present relations with the Far East. It is as well an unforgettable portrait of a man driven by talent, opportunism, vision, egotism, and jealousy.

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