

**Gen. Douglas MacArthur's "Old Soldiers Never Die" address to Congress, 19 April 1951.
(Douglas MacArthur Collection)**



Gen. Douglas MacArthur (1880-1964) was one of most prominent United States military figures of the first half of the twentieth century. In World War I he served as chief of staff of the Forty-second Infantry (Rainbow) Division and later commanded one of its brigades. He was twice wounded and received many decorations for bravery. After the war as superintendent of the United States Military Academy at West Point, New York, he substantially reformed the academy's program and shaped the training received by a generation of the nation's military officers. In 1932 he became chief of staff of the army at age fifty, the youngest man to have been appointed to this post. He officially retired from the army in 1937 to become military adviser to the Philippines Commonwealth, then an American dependency. In July 1941 President Franklin D. Roosevelt (1882-1945) recalled him to active service and placed him in command of United States forces in the Philippines after the Japanese attack in December 1941. In March 1942, on President Roosevelt's orders, he withdrew to Australia shortly before the Japanese completed their conquest of the islands. As Supreme Commander Southwest Pacific Area, MacArthur organized the defense of Australia, stopped the Japanese offensive in New Guinea, and began an island-hopping campaign that by 1945 liberated all that had been lost to the Japanese. MacArthur was promoted to general of the army, the highest rank in the United States military. After Japan surrendered, MacArthur was made Supreme Allied Commander and presided over the American occupation of the country and its transition to democratic self-rule.

When Communist North Korea invaded South Korea in 1950, President Harry S. Truman (1884-1972) committed American forces to a United Nations-sanctioned intervention and placed MacArthur in command. North Korean forces overran most of South Korea, and American forces, initially unprepared, were pushed into a small pocket around Pusan at the southern end of the Korean Peninsula. MacArthur, in a bold move in September 1950, launched an amphibious assault at Inchon, a port 110 miles behind enemy lines. American units knifing in from Inchon recaptured the South Korean capital of Seoul while American and South Korean forces broke out of the Pusan pocket and raced northward destroying or capturing Communist forces thrown into disarray by the attack on their rear.

By the end of 1950 not only had all of South Korea been freed, but American and United Nations forces had captured the North Korean capital and, moving north, were approaching the Chinese border. Unexpectedly, Chinese Communist forces crossed the border in massive formations and the American-led advance became a retreat. MacArthur was able to stop the retreat along the thirty-eighth parallel, the preinvasion dividing line between North and South Korea, but there a stalemate ensued. At that point, President Truman and MacArthur fell into public disagreement about the future course of the war, and the president removed MacArthur from his command. MacArthur then retired.

In recognition of his status as one of the nation's greatest living military leaders, Congress asked MacArthur to address a joint session on 19 April 1951. His speech, reproduced here, is best

known for its final lines in which he quoted an old army ballad: "Old soldiers never die--they just fade away.' And like the old soldier of that ballad, I now close my military career and just fade away--an old soldier who tried to do his duty as God gave him the light to see that duty. Good-bye."