THE RELIEF OF GENERAL MACARthur

Reasons for Recall

On April 11, 1951, the President of the United States relieved General of the Army Douglas MacArthur of all his commands in the Far Eastern Theatre. The President's action resulted from a basic difference of policy which prevailed between the Administration, the Department of Defense and the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and the Far Eastern Commander. This cleavage was hardly a latter-day development. On October 14th, President Truman flew 6500 miles to Wake Island for a personal conference with the Far Eastern Commander — an unprecedented gesture for a Commander in Chief — in an attempt to reach an understanding on points of difference over the conduct of the fighting in Korea and on related matters of policy.

The apparent agreement reached at the Wake conference did not survive a new development in the situation in the Far East which occurred shortly after the conclusion of the talks. The intervention of the Chinese Communists on the side of the North Koreans revived the basic differences between General MacArthur on the one hand the President and the Joint Chiefs of Staff on the other.

Before reviewing those sections of the record dealing with the differences, the signatories would like to call attention to an astounding conclusion to be found in the report of sight which is in absolute contradiction to the weight of evidence and can be regarded nothing more than a misguided and regrettable attempt to mislead the American people. We refer to the incredible conclusion reached in the report of sight that there was no disagreement between General MacArthur and the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

It appears to the signatories of this report that the sight took an undue weight of responsibility on shoulders already over-burdened when they attempted to define the degree and extent of agreement existing
existing between the Joint Chiefs and General MacArthur. In our opinion, problems would have dictated adherence to the dictum implicit in the statement made by the Senior Senator from Wisconsin during the hearings.

Senator Wiley: "I have no personal feeling in the matter. As far as I am personally concerned, I am not competent to judge who is right — MacArthur or the Chiefs of Staff — on the Military Policy." 1

"I told you before I was 11:45!" (Reply of General Reynolds to Admiral Forrest’s request for leave) 2

The record shows that General MacArthur strongly disagreed with the basic decisions made in connection with the conduct of the Korean conflict — notably with the decision to limit the conflict, if possible, to Korea in the hope of avoiding a third world war. It further shows that his open lack of sympathy created a doubt in the minds of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the Secretary of Defense whether he could be depended upon to be responsive to their control.

General Marshall stated:

"It became apparent that General MacArthur had grown so far out of sympathy with the established policies of the United States that there was grave doubt as to whether he could any longer be permitted to exercise the authority in making decisions that normal command functions would assign to a theater commander. In this situation, there was no other resource but to relieve him." 3

General Bradley was equally succinct. In describing General MacArthur’s progress he said:

"This strategy would involve us in the wrong war, at the wrong place, at the wrong time, and with the wrong enemy." 4

General Collins was of the same view. He stated:

"Well, there were two principal reasons, Mr. Chairman, in my mind. First of all, it was quite evident to me over a period of time
that General MacArthur was not in sympathy with the basic policies that were governing our operations in Korea. I felt that the President, as our Commander in Chief, was entitled to have as a commander in the field a man who was more in sympathy with the basic policies and more responsive to the will of the President as Commander in Chief.

General Collins dealt with the specific areas of disagreement in somewhat more detail. He said:

"I don't think that is absolutely correct, Senator, because I think General MacArthur did know that we did not support his recommendation that we bomb into Manchuria, for example, and that was decided not just on political grounds, but, as I have indicated earlier, from a military point of view as well.

"I think a similar condition exists with respect to his recommendation of a naval blockade.

"Similarly we disagreed with him, although he had originally recommended against the introduction of Chinese Nationalist forces into Korea — we disagreed with him on that. But I think, except for these three things, possibly, there was no serious disagreement with the military people."

It is interesting to note that these three points of disagreement were the three major points made in General MacArthur's speech before the Joint Session of Congress.

General Vandenberg was also emphatic. He said:

"I concurred in the relief of General MacArthur because it was my opinion that because of the broad directives that must necessarily be given to a theater commander, in which the interpretation could approach either one end or the other of that broad interpretation, knowing the views that he held so strongly, which were not in concurrence with the views of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, or
or the President, that it was better to have a man in the position of interpreting the broad directives who thought more nearly in con-

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formance with the objectives of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the
President."

Admiral Sherman described the way in which this disagreement interfered with the efficiency of the military establishment by saying, in reply to a question about this disagreement, that —

"Throughout this period the conduct of affairs was made difficult by a lack of responsiveness to the obvious intentions of the directives which were transmitted out there and a tendency to debate and in certain cases to criticize." 8

The significance which Admiral Sherman attributed to this disagreement is apparent from his explanation of why he informed General Bradley that, from a military standpoint, General MacArthur should be relieved. He stated (page 1597 of report)

"I based my reply on the future and said that if we were to be successful in the attempt to limit the conflict to Korea and avoid World War III, we must have a commander in whom we can confide and on whom we can rely, that General MacArthur has not been sufficiently responsive to the directives and policy given, that from a military point of view he should be replaced and that the political aspects were above my level." 9

In the face of this record, if the authors of the report of sight found no serious disagreement between the Joint Chiefs and General MacArthur, they could with equal validity, have found no disagreement between General Forrest and the unnamed private on the question of the latter's leave.

Discussion of Civilian Control

The record shows clearly that General MacArthur persisted over a period
of months in publicizing his disagreement with the policies of his Government. In so doing, he violated on a number of occasions the Presidential directive of December 6, 1950, that all government officials, including military commanders in the field, should limit statements involving matters of foreign or military policy before making them public.

The origin of the December 6 directive is explained by General Marshall in the following passage:

"This directive had been preceded by a series of public statements and releases by General MacArthur concerning the failure of the offensive launched on November 24 and on November 30.

"In reply to an inquiry from Mr. Arthur Krock of the New York Times, General MacArthur had stated that he had received no suggestions from any authoritative source that his command should stop at any line short of the international boundary, and that the strategic course of the campaign in Korea was not responsible to any degree for the massive attack of the Chinese Communists.

"On December 1 in response to the inquiries of the United States News and World Report, General MacArthur stated that the limits imposed on his pursuit of the Chinese forces and attacks on their bases constituted an enormous handicap without precedent in military history.

"Also on December 1 General MacArthur sent a message to the President of the United Press in which he stated that his command was faced with an entirely new war resulting largely from expansion of military odds unprecedented in history. The statement went on to criticize the imposition of limitations on effective retaliation by his command against the Communist Chinese."

He explained further that the directive of December 6 was couched in general terms in order to avoid making it "specifically personal to General MacArthur."
However, the issuance of the December directive failed to have the desired effect. The General sent a letter to Congressman Martin on March 20, 1951, which made clear the General's concurrence with criticisms of the established military policy as voiced by the Congressman. General MacArthur's letter to Henry Hazlitt, of April 5, blamed American refusal to arm additional South Korean draftees on political decisions within the U. S. Government beyond his authority. This is of particular interest in that the testimony unmistakably reveals that the proposal to transfer additional arms to troops of the Republic of Korea had been vetoed by General MacArthur himself on military grounds.12

The effect of one of General MacArthur's violations of the Presidential directive, on the occasion when he invited the Communist commander in the field to discuss a military settlement of the Korean conflict with him, was to cause the President to abandon his own negotiations with our United Nations allies on the terms for a cease-fire proposal. General MacArthur had been informed on March 20, 1951, of the President's intention to issue an announcement relative to a possible settlement in Korea. General MacArthur's offer to the commander of the Communist forces, which was made on March 24, 1951, contained an implied threat that if it were not accepted the conflict might be extended beyond Korea. At the time General MacArthur's statement was issued, clearance of the proposed Presidential declaration with the other 13 nations having forces in Korea had very nearly been completed. In view of the serious impact of General MacArthur's statement on the negotiations with these nations it became necessary to abandon the effort, thus losing whatever chance there may have been at this time to negotiate a settlement of the Korean conflict.13
Recent Acts Justified and Necessary

The record shows that General MacArthur's relief was justified, and essential to the national interest. The doubt and confusion created in the minds of the American people and our United Nations allies by his statements on foreign policy were harmful to the nation's unity in a time of stress and a grave handicap to our Government in its relations with our allies. Finally, and most important, his actions challenged the supremacy of a basic constitutional doctrine of vital importance to the freedom and liberty of every American — that civilian authority shall control the military. It is for this reason more than any other that it was essential to the nation's interest that General MacArthur be relieved. It should be noted by every American that among the reasons given by the Joint Chiefs of Staff for their belief that General MacArthur must be relieved was their conviction that the military must be controlled by civilian authority in this country. It is salutary and reassuring that our military policies are being shaped by men still devoted to this cornerstone of American democratic tradition.

The Constitutional Issue

In the course of the hearings a doctrine was advanced that a military commander has a higher loyalty than that he is required to give his superiors by the Constitution. This doctrine argues that a military commander is obligated to go over the heads of his superiors and carry to the public his opposition to national policies. In his speech in Boston on July 27, 1951, General MacArthur stated his agreement with this doctrine. The authors of this report are curious as to the extent this doctrine would have been applied in a case where the dissenter was an officer of lesser rank and prominence than the central figure in this controversy.
This nation was founded and organized on the principle that military leaders shall be subject to the authority of the civilian heads of government. The Constitution itself makes this clear. The President of the United States under the Constitution is the supreme voice in the conduct of foreign affairs and the Commander-in-Chief of the armed forces. No military officer, under the cloak of superior loyalty to the Constitution, has an over-riding right to challenge the Constitutional responsibilities of the President's office. To assert such a right is dangerous demagogy.

Method of Notification Desirable

We agree that it is unfortunate in the extreme that General McArthur's first notification of his relief was a radio broadcast.

The testimony shows that conscientious and sympathetic consideration was given to this matter. A careful plan was worked out under which Secretary of the Army would have delivered the notice of his relief to General McArthur personally at his home, before the beginning of the working day. Simultaneously, General Ridgway's orders were to be delivered to him and the President was to make the announcement of General McArthur's relief and General Ridgway's succession. Whatever the reasons for the manner of General McArthur's relief, that it was not done properly is solely the responsibility of the Administration.

Effect of Recall on Morale

The question of the effect of the General's removal on American prestige and troop morale is one that has been raised. For the most direct information on this matter, the signatories found it advisable to go beyond the testimony offered in the Hearings. The Saturday Review of Literature conducted a poll on these issues. 33% of respondents in the Far East, Washington, and United Nations Headquarters were polled. 9% were of the opinion that the relief of
General MacArthur helped United States influence in the Far East; another 31% thought United States influence was neither harmed nor helped; only 22% thought United States influence was harmed. On the question of the effect of the relief on the morale of troops in Korea, 52% of the correspondents polled in Korea thought morale had not changed; 30% thought it had been boosted; only 18% thought it had been lowered. Of the 52% indicating no change in morale one half thought a decisive change had already taken place in December and January when General MacArthur took command of the 8th Army.

The poll also showed that 63% of all correspondents polled thought the President was justified in relieving General MacArthur, while 72% thought that the American people will eventually recognize the President was right. Moreover, we have confidence that the ability and stature of General Ridgway is such that the prestige of the United States in the Far East will not be permanently affected by General MacArthur’s departure. Similarly, assurances were given by each of the Joint Chiefs of Staff that the morale of the troops in Korea has been good since General Ridgway assumed command. It is our conviction that the continual success of our troops in the Korean conflict is substantial proof that their morale is in fact high.
1. P. 774.


3. P. 362. For additional discussion of this question by General Forrest see pp. 343-345, 397, 398, 341-343, 344, 351, 414-416, 469, 533.


5. P. 1187.


7. P. 1441. See also pp. 1270, 1290-1300, 1403-1405, 1441-1443.

8. P. 1630.


11. P. 342.


13. See issue of July 14, 1934.