

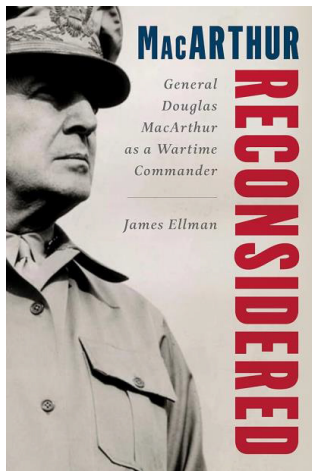
Book Review: James Ellman's *MacArthur Reconsidered: General Douglas MacArthur as a Wartime Commander*

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Ellman, James. *MacArthur Reconsidered: General Douglas MacArthur as a Wartime Commander*. Stackpole Books, Essex Connecticut, 2023. ISBN 9780811771560. Notes. Index. Bibliography. Pp. 276. Hardcover \$29.95. Electronic version available.

James Ellman is a military history writer who has focused on World War II. He is the author of *Hitler's Greatest Gamble: A New Look at German Strategy, Operation Barbarossa, and the Axis Defeat in World War II* (2019). In *MacArthur Reconsidered: General Douglas MacArthur as a Wartime Commander*, Ellman evaluates the military record of the often criticized and sometimes praised general that saw his lengthy career terminated for insubordination. Though his early career, from graduating West Point to his assumption of the coveted position of Army Chief of Staff, is covered, most of this work is dedicated to the years he

spent outside the United States, first as Military Advisor to the Governor of the Philippines, then as Commander of all American forces in those islands, and his World War II years. Ellman also extensively analyzes MacArthur's time in Japan from 1945–1950 and his conduct and decisions during the Korean War. This is a generally critical work although there are no signs of personal animosity. Ellman evaluates MacArthur in a fair and balanced manner.

The years preceding World War II and its first months demonstrated MacArthur's most pronounced failures and the true beginning of the self-de-

structive figure relieved for insubordination in 1951 by President Truman. As he was fleeing the Philippines early in World War II, MacArthur exclaimed, "I shall return!" Ellman does an excellent job of demonstrating MacArthur's culpability in the Philippines' fall to Japanese forces, being outgunned and outmanned in these early months. There is excellent background throughout the book, though his early chapter on the Philippines is the best. MacArthur misjudged both the capabilities and armament of his American and Filipino forces. In fact, Ellman asserts he blatantly lied when reporting the readiness of his command to Washington. He repeatedly told Washington that the Japanese would not attack the Philippines, as he would a decade later assure President Truman that the Chinese would not intervene in Korea (22). He took few measures to train his troops and, in the years immediately before World War II, two disturbing traits developed in MacArthur: his inability to take orders or direction from previous subordinates who were now superiors (Marshall in World War II and Bradley in Korea), and his detachment from front-line troops. Visits to forward commands were infrequent, and he never seemed to appreciate their trials and tribulations. Washington, however, was told of the strength of his command, and early strategy was undoubtedly influenced by the delusional reports they received (32). They believed, as MacArthur repeatedly stated, that he could defeat any force the Japanese launched against him.

Ellman is also critical of MacArthur's decision to essentially give most

of Luzon to the Japanese and concentrate his forces in the Bataan Peninsula. Though he had shortages, the American Army on Luzon had adequate armor and artillery to repel a Japanese amphibious landing and/or severely damage them in a pitched battle. The stories of the supply-deprived American forces in the peninsula are true. What is not known to the general military history reader is that supplies did exist, and that they were stockpiled in Manila—knowingly abandoned when MacArthur decided to make his stand south of the city. Ellman's focus on the lesser known facts of his campaigns is perhaps his work's most outstanding achievement.

Ellman establishes patterns—not good ones—in MacArthur's campaigns. The years after World War II saw him as the quasi "Emperor" of Japan. He still commanded American occupation forces and was responsible for their training and readiness. When war broke out in Korea, they were neither trained nor ready. The situation was remarkably like the Philippines prior to World War II. MacArthur praised the readiness of his command to Washington, as he had done in the Philippines. He disparaged enemy capabilities, as he had done in the Philippines. Again, as with the Philippines, American forces were overwhelmed and embarrassed. Ellman gives proper praise to MacArthur for the daring gamble he took with an amphibious landing at Inchon. However, brilliance was followed by self-destructiveness. His inability to reign in his own opinions and insubordination towards superiors, in this case

President Truman, led to a dismissal a decade too late.

MacArthur enjoyed his greatest military successes during World War II, and the author quantifies those achievements. The New Guinea campaign, which history has lauded MacArthur for several brilliant decisions and maneuvers, resulted from a top-secret intelligence program, ULTRA, not just the general's so-called genius. Throughout the war, MacArthur seemed to lose interest in individual battles, declaring them "over" or "secure" while his troops continued to toil along in bitter fighting. Ellman once again points out that MacArthur rarely visited the front or saw the plight of his troops. However, he did return to the Philippines, and would have most likely commanded an invasion of Japan.

Throughout this work Ellman analyzes the individual as well as his war record. His insubordination is legendary. Along with that insubordination was an immense amount of disrespect. He spoke to and treated presidents as inferior, unworthy of him. Ordered to Washington to meet with President Roosevelt and the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) to discuss Pacific strategy in 1944, he sent a few select staff members. He met FDR in Hawaii, keeping him waiting and lecturing him (120). He would not be denied. During the Korean War, President Truman had to come see him on Wake Island. The president was made to look like a subordinate, not the general's superior. Despite repeated orders to avoid contradictory statements on political or national strategic sub-

jects, he continued to publicly question Washington's decisions. Here, Ellman makes his most important assertion—MacArthur's superiors share responsibility for all he did because they did not control him when this behavior began.

Several times during World War II, MacArthur should have been relieved of his command. The author points to a conversation between President Roosevelt and journalist Edward R. Murrow after MacArthur's forces were caught unprepared in the Philippines. The Pearl Harbor commanders were removed from command and MacArthur should have suffered the same fate (43). He publicly questioned the U.S. strategy of "Germany first," causing FDR serious diplomatic problems with Stalin and Churchill. For that, he was not even reprimanded. Ellman lists many other transgressions for which he could have been relieved during the Second World War. During Korea, the press reported all his actions. During World War II they did not. The powers in Washington allowed MacArthur to grow bolder and bolder in his proclamations with nary a word. He called for an infusion of Nationalist Chinese troops from Formosa despite directives stating the president did not and dismissing the possibility of the war escalating. He questioned the decision to halt his forces, several times. But, as the author states, his "superiors in Washington abdicated their responsibility when the General chose to disobey orders" (146). When he disregarded a JCS directive on what they saw as a major problem in his force's dispositions, General Bradley, the JCS Chairman and his superior, comment-

ed “MacArthur treated us as if we were children” (208). Would any other American commander’s behaving in such a manner be tolerated? When the Chinese intervened, MacArthur publicly stated he wanted to bomb Manchuria. Privately, President Truman felt he should have fired him then, but he did not, and when the inevitable finally happened, MacArthur was shocked and surprised (222). He had been allowed to do as he pleased for so long, why would he think anything would ever change?

MacArthur Reconsidered is an excellent addition to a military history library. Most MacArthur books cover

one war or a specific time, but here you see the evolution of who William Manchester, MacArthur’s most prominent biographer, called the “American Caesar.” The book contains twenty pages of notes and an extensive bibliography. Ellman correctly points out the unreliability of most primary sources concerning MacArthur. They are basic puff pieces, done mostly under his personal supervision, extolling his “genius,” and blatantly distorting the truth. The author may cause some to reassess their opinion of General of the Army Douglas MacArthur.

About The Author

Robert Young received a Ph.D. in Military History and Modern European Studies from the C.U.N.Y. Graduate Center in 2003, and a Master’s in American History from Brooklyn College in 1994. He is currently an Associate Professor of History and Military History at American Military University. A veteran of the United States Army, he has served in various leadership positions in armored and cavalry units.