

Lesson Forty-Two

Douglas MacArthur

LESSON IDEA

To familiarize young Americans with the exploits and ideals of General Douglas MacArthur, one of the greatest military leaders of our century.

PREPARATION

Read "During The Week" and prepare the materials needed for the suggested project.

DOUGLAS MacARTHUR was an "Army brat" who grew up on military posts on frontiers of Apache country. Born on January 26, 1880, his earliest memories were of bugles and stockades, marching infantrymen and bearded scouts, weary troopers and sweaty cavalry horses. His father, Arthur MacArthur, enlisted in the Army in 1862, when his boyish voice was still as high-pitched as the tension between North and South. The stories he would later tell to his three sons about the Civil War, and later battles with Indians in the West, made it seem as if they were fighting at his side during the momentous events. But he did not seek to imbue them with a thirst for war, but rather to inspire a love of country, flag, and honor. He constantly emphasized such values, such as duty, morality, and fairness.

As the years rolled by, bringing Arthur MacArthur new assignments and honors, he remained steadfast in the desire to see his youngest son receive an appointment to West Point. [Be sure that family members understand that West Point, New York, is site of the U.S. Military Academy, where young cadets are prepared for careers as army officers.] Douglas shared his father's enthusiasm for the military. As a teenager he had begun to feel the compelling sense of duty, honor, and patriotism that had directed his father's life. He eventually earned his West Point appointment by scoring higher on the required entrance exams than any other candidates from his home state of Wisconsin. He averaged 93.3, compared to 77.9 for his nearest competitor.

His years at the Academy added to the renown of the MacArthur name. By the end of his third

year he rose to First Captain (West Point's highest military rank) and the next year graduated at the top of his class academically (posting the highest grades of any cadet in more than a quarter century). He remains one of only a handful of Academy graduates to garner both honors. It was the formal beginning of a lengthy military career that would be filled with illustrious achievements.

The young officer's opinions were always clearly stated and persuasively reasoned. If he disagreed with majors, colonels, or generals, he did not hesitate to say so firmly, yet respectfully, despite the likelihood that the "smart thing" for his personal advancement would have been to merely agree with his superiors. MacArthur had been taught to do the right thing, not the "smart" thing. What other great American leader have we recently studied who displayed that same character trait? [Remind family members of John Adams' penchant for deciding issues in terms of what was right for his country's, rather than his personal, interests whenever the two were in conflict.]

THE YOUNG SOLDIER advanced swiftly in rank, to the envy of some older officers, and earned a reputation as not only a straight talker, but also a courageous fighter and brilliant strategist. For instance, during World War 1, when Germany's poison gas warfare was the terror of every fighting man, MacArthur (then a colonel) roamed the battlefields without a gas mask. It was a defiant gesture aimed at the enemy that instilled both courage and confidence in his men.

Twice during the fighting in France he was caught in poison gas attacks, yet he refused to be hospitalized. It was, for him, a matter of principle. To pause for medical attention would have meant leaving his men, and he believed that an officer's place was with his troops. Even though one of the gas attacks made him violently ill, he did not allow it to interfere with his duties.

One event early in the war etched deeply in his

