

Trump and MacArthur Share Similar Traits

By Irv Sternberg

Having recently completed research for my book on the Korean War, I am struck by the similarities between Gen. Douglas MacArthur, supreme commander of the United Nations forces in the war, and President Donald Trump.

This June marks the 70th anniversary of the beginning of the Korean War. This year also marks the final year in Trump's presidential term, unless he is re-elected in November. A review of each man's decision-making under stressful conditions reveals striking parallels. MacArthur demonstrated his in a war that cost almost 2.8 million lives; Trump has been commander-in-chief during the novel coronavirus pandemic which has claimed almost 50,000 American lives.

"If you know the enemy and know yourself, you need not fear the result of a hundred battles," said Sun Tzu, ancient military philosopher 500 years before Christ. MacArthur did not know his enemy because he dismissed vital intelligence evidence presented to him by his advisors. As a result, he issued disastrous orders that almost wiped out an entire U.S. Army division and almost eliminated the famed First Marine Corps Division.

MacArthur surrounded himself with "yes men," who seldom questioned his decisions to his face, officers like Maj. General Edward Almond, whom he rescued from an uninspiring military career.

Similarly, Trump discounted information provided by top medical scientists, at first stating that the virus was simply another form of flu and would soon disappear. He, too, selected sycophants to fill critical positions in his Administration, after campaigning that he would hire only "the best minds" in the U.S. Then, if they questioned his decision-making, he fired them. For example, he promoted the drug hydroxychloroquine, primarily used to treat malaria, and fired Dr. Rick Bright, who was in charge of developing a coronavirus vaccine at the Department of Health and Human Services Biomedical Advanced Research and Development Authority (BARDA) for disputing his views on the drug.

Noted experts on mental health have questioned Trump's mental competence, suggesting that he has clearly demonstrated narcissistic traits. MacArthur, likewise, may have done the same. He went before Congress and played on their sympathies by lamenting that "old soldiers never die, they just fade away."

That was after President Truman relieved him and named General Matt Ridgway to save the day for the United States. The three-year war ended in a stalemate with both sides back at their original positions on the 38th Parallel.

It's too early to tell the havoc this virus will wreak on the American people, our environment, our commerce and our future. On Election Day, Tuesday, November 3, 2020, the American people will decide if they want those questions addressed by our current president, or not.

Perhaps at no other time in our history have we faced a more important election.