

➔ American History Play

“You’re Fired!”

While U.S. troops fought in Korea, President Truman and his top General had a battle of their own: Who would control the military?

Characters

Prologue narrator

***Harry S. Truman**, *President of the United States*

***Douglas MacArthur**, *U.S. General and commander of UN troops*

***Dean Acheson**, *U.S. Secretary of State*

***Omar Bradley**, *General and head of the Joint Chiefs of Staff*

Reporter

Private Springer } *American*
Private Goldberg } *infantrymen*

Aides 1 & 2, to MacArthur

***Joseph Martin**, *Republican Congressman from Massachusetts*

***Jean MacArthur**, *the General's wife*

Narrators A-E

Epilogue narrator

**These characters were real people. All others are composite or fictional characters.*

➔ Words to Know

- **indict** [*in-DITĒ*] [*v*]: to formally charge with a criminal act.
- **intelligence** [*n*]: secret information gathered about an enemy, often by spies.
- **rout** [*v*]: defeat decisively, causing disorderly retreat.

PROLOGUE

Prologue narrator: When World War II ended in 1945, Korea became a divided country (see map, p. 16), under the authority of the United Nations (UN). By 1950, Communist North Korea was supported by the Soviet Union and China, the world’s major Communist powers. The U.S. and other democratic countries backed South Korea.

SCENE 1

Narrator A: In an effort to keep peace between the two Koreas, the United Nations (UN) has divided them at the 38th Parallel (latitude line). But in June 1950, North Korean troops sweep across that line, capturing most of South Korea. President Truman and his advisers meet to discuss the emergency.

Harry S. Truman: I’ve tried to prevent this war. But the UN has asked for help, so we must send our men to fight.

Dean Acheson: Agreed. General MacArthur will take command of the UN troops.

Narrator B: Douglas MacArthur was commander of U.S. forces in the Pacific Ocean during World War II, and is a hero to many Americans.

Omar Bradley: Will our forces

take action above the 38th Parallel?

Truman: No, we’re only aiding our ally. I don’t want a wider war.

Acheson: Our **intelligence** says that if we get too close to the Chinese border, China may enter the battle.

Truman: I’m most worried about the Soviets. If we push this too far, it could mean World War III.

SCENE 2

Narrator C: MacArthur takes charge in Korea. The wily General hatches a bold plan, landing his troops behind enemy lines at Inchon [*IN-chahn*]. Soon, UN troops have **routed** the North Koreans, pushing them all the way back to their border. The triumphant General holds a press conference.

Reporter: General, the North Korean army has been all but destroyed below the 38th Parallel. What is your next step?

Douglas MacArthur: I have demanded North Korea’s immediate, unconditional surrender. If that doesn’t happen, the UN has given me instructions to take appropriate measures to stabilize all of Korea.

Reporter: Does that mean north of the 38th Parallel as well as south?

MacArthur: Yes. We must win this war. Failure is impossible!

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“If we push this too far, it could mean World War III.”
—President Harry S. Truman

THE BATTLE BEGINS

U.S. soldiers practice for an air assault by parachuting over Seoul (sole). *Inset:* As the crisis builds, Truman and MacArthur meet for the first and only time.

Narrator D: With his permission to cross the 38th Parallel, MacArthur's troops drive forward relentlessly, taking Pyongyang, North Korea's capital. But as winter approaches, Truman and his advisers are growing increasingly concerned.

Acheson: MacArthur is too close to the Chinese border. Now he wants to drop atomic bombs on China.

Truman: He's trying to force my hand by saying he'll get his men home by Christmas. I can't let him.

Narrator E: On November 25, just as Truman and Acheson have feared, some 300,000 Chinese troops join North Korean troops. By January 1951, the combined Communist forces have pushed UN troops back to the 38th parallel.

SCENE 3

Narrator A: The momentum of the fighting goes back and forth. As a stalemate sets in, many troops and civilians are killed. The freezing temperatures make conditions brutal. In one foxhole . . .

Private Springer: Sarge says it's 20 below. Collins lost another finger to frostbite yesterday.

Private Goldberg: Yeah, General MacArthur said we'd be home for Christmas—so he didn't give us any winter gear. What a mess!

Narrator B: Meanwhile, back in the U.S., anti-Communist feeling runs high. Many Americans support MacArthur's request to use full force against the Chinese. In March, MacArthur receives a letter from Joseph Martin, a powerful Republican Congressman.

MacArthur (to aides): Listen to the speech Representative Martin made: "If we are not in Korea to win, then this Truman administration should be **indicted** for the murder



WAR-WEARY

On a snow-covered hillside, members of a U.S. machine-gun squad rest after a battle.

of thousands of American boys."

Aide 1: People are saying that the President is soft on Communism.

Aide 2: We must be strong, sir!

MacArthur: Now Truman is saying that I'm not to make any more public statements unless I clear them with Washington!

Narrator C: Truman orders MacArthur to hold UN forces at the 38th Parallel so that diplomats can forge a peace treaty. Defying orders, MacArthur calls a press conference.

MacArthur: The Chinese should realize by now that if we're forced to broaden the war beyond Korea, they will face certain defeat.

Narrator D: MacArthur's statement destroys the chance to negotiate with the Chinese.

SCENE 4

Narrator E: Tensions between the President and the General escalate.

Then, on April 5, Representative Martin takes the floor of the House of Representatives.

Joseph Martin: I have just received a communication from our courageous commander in Korea, General MacArthur. He says





HEADLINER

General MacArthur is greeted as a hero in New York City after his firing by President Truman.



TRUCE!

In July 1953, North Korea and the UN sign a truce, ending the war.

that if the Communists win in Asia, Europe will fall next. So why is this White House tying its own General's hands?

Narrator A: Within minutes, Truman hears of the speech. At the White House . . .

Truman: Now he's really gone too far! If I allow MacArthur to defy my authority, I'll be violating the Constitution, which says *I'm* the Commander in Chief. He's fired!

Acheson: We have to be prepared for a storm of protest.

Truman: So be it.

Narrator B: Word of the firing gets to reporters before MacArthur is notified. At MacArthur's home . . .

Jean MacArthur: Well, dear, the President is replacing you.

MacArthur: I'm not surprised. I guess we're going home, Jeannie.

SCENE 5

Narrator C: As predicted, the firing of MacArthur raises howls of protest. The President receives 78,000 telegrams—70,000 of them opposed to his action.

When the General returns to the

U.S., he is met by cheering crowds. On April 19, he addresses a joint meeting of Congress.

MacArthur: I address you with no bitterness. I have but one purpose, to serve my country.

Narrator D: MacArthur gets a standing ovation from the Congress. During his speech, he is interrupted 30 times by applause.

MacArthur: I still remember that popular ballad, which proudly proclaimed, "Old soldiers never die. They just fade away." 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. Goodbye.

Narrator E: Wild cheers hail the General as he exits. Truman has already appointed General Matthew B. Ridgway to command the UN troops in Korea.

EPILOGUE

Epilogue narrator: The anger over MacArthur's firing lingered for some time. But in May 1951, Congress held hearings on U.S. policy in the Far East. Top military leaders, who

had been expected to support MacArthur, came out against him. General Bradley said that the actions MacArthur wanted to take would have involved the U.S. in "the wrong war at the wrong time against the wrong enemy."

Two years later, on July 27, 1953, North Korea and the UN signed a truce, ending the war. After years of bloodshed, the new "truce line" was nearly the same as the old 38th Parallel border.

What if MacArthur had won his fight with Truman, and the U.S. had attacked China? Would the war have ended with victory over the Communists? Or would it have sparked World War III?

—Kathy Wilmore and Bryan Brown

➔ Think About It

1. Why was Truman concerned when MacArthur approached the Chinese border?
2. Was Truman right to fire MacArthur? What would you have done? Why?