

I Have Not Lived in Vain

General Douglas MacArthur was an internationally known general in the US Army and one of the heroes of WWII. He was a tall straight man of wisdom and courage who could be counted on in the worst of battles and trusted in the finest of times.

Controversial at times, he was clear-headed and straightforward. Despite his occasional conflicts with political leaders, he always had his men and his country at heart. Feared by his enemies and revered by his men, MacArthur rose above the pettiness that often afflicts those in power to seek solutions to problems and resolutions to conflicts.

As an individual, MacArthur could be what I might call a balanced enigma. A rough and ready warrior, but a compassionate and wise father. One of his legacies is his quote, "Old soldiers never die, they just fade away." Another was his farewell speech to the young Marines graduating from West Point wherein he said:

In my dreams I hear again the crash of guns, the rattle of musketry, the strange, mournful mutter of the battlefield. But in the evening of my memory, I come back to West Point. Always there echoes and re-echoes: Duty, Honor, Country.

Today marks my final roll call with you. But I want you to know that when I cross the river, my last conscious thoughts will be of the Corps, and the Corps, and the Corps.

But this revered hero is also remembered for a prayer he wrote about his son. As a deeply loving father, MacArthur asked God to give his son special things indeed:

Build me a son, O Lord, who will be strong enough to know when he is weak, and brave enough to face himself when he is afraid; one who will be proud and unbending in honest defeat, and humble and gentle in victory.

Build me a son whose wishes will not take the place of deeds; a son who will know Thee – and that to know himself is the foundation stone of knowledge.

Lead him, I pray, not in the path of ease and comfort, but under the stress and spur of difficulties and challenges. Here let him learn to stand up in the storm; here let him learn compassion for those who fail.

Build me a son whose heart will be clear, whose goal will be high, a son who will master himself before he seeks to master other men. One who will reach into the future, yet never forget the past.

And after all these things are his, add, I pray, enough of a sense of humor, so that he may always be serious, yet never take himself too seriously. Give him humility, so that he may always remember the simplicity of true greatness, the open mind of true wisdom, and the meekness of true strength.

Then I, his father, will dare to whisper, "I have not lived in vain."

As we prepare to honor our fathers next Sunday, may God continue to give us fathers who pray for their children.

Ray Wallace