MacArthur never made it to the White House, though he did have political ambitions. Recalled from retirement to active duty after the attack on Pearl harbour, he was the Supreme Allied Commander in the South-West Pacific theatre of the war. He accepted the surrender of Japan and, after the war, wielded near absolute political authority over that country. He proved to be an able and even liberal administrator. He is also an authentic hero in another country, the Philippines.



Bradley has described him as "awesomely brilliant," but also a megalomaniac, in which category he also placed Field Marshal Montgomery and General Patton (West Point 1909).

MacArthur's military career, spanning nearly 5 decades, ended in controversy when he was unceremoniously removed from the command of the UN forces in Korea by Truman. It is difficult not to uphold Truman in this decision. The issue was, as Truman put it, civilian supremacy over the military. He was never one to mince his words. Speaking to Merle Miller, as quoted in the latter's book "Plain Speaking," years after the event, Truman said: "I fired him because he wouldn't respect the authority of the president. I didn't fire him because he was a dumb son of a bitch, although he was, but that's not against the law."

Truman was not particularly enthused about his successor in office, General Eisenhower, either. One general whom Truman did hold in the highest esteem was General Marshall. Bradley, in his autobiography, states that in the waning days of his presidency, Truman once said to him that if he had known him better and earlier, he (Truman) would have pushed him (Bradley) for president.

Civilian supremacy over the military is taken for granted in the US. And yet there are nuances. The uniform does command great esteem and respect. Six of America's 41 presidents have been professional soldiers. Five others were nominated for president. Around 35 other presidential or vice-presidential candidates served in the military in some capacity or other. In 1996, opinion polls persistently showed General Colin Powell as the strongest possible contender to oppose the incumbent president. The war record of a candidate -- whether for president, governor or for Congress -- can and has been parlayed into political advantage.President Kennedy's war-time heroism was assuredly an asset, while President Clinton's military record, or lack of it, was almost the opposite in 1992.

Dr. Kissinger in his "White House Years" recounts an interesting anecdote that touches upon the nuances of civil-military relations and the clout of the uniform. In the early 60s, he was sent by President Kennedy to broach some new strategic doctrine or arrangement with the then German Chancellor, Adenauer. Kissinger, the expatriate German who had made good, was naturally at his effusive best when briefing the Grand Old Man of Germany. The latter listened impassively until, at one point, he interrupted to inquire mildly as to who had briefed Kissinger. On receiving the answer -- the name of a well-known general -- Adenauer asked, almost as a non-sequitur, whether the general had been in uniform during the briefing. Thoroughly nonplussed, Kissinger confessed that he did not remember. Adenauer promptly dismissed Kissinger with some sage advice -- to get the same briefing from the