Matthew B. Ridgway
USMA Class of April 1917

General Matthew B. Ridgway was born in Fort Monroe, Virginia in 1895. His father was an 1883 graduate of USMA and a career artillery officer. He reported to the U.S. Military Academy in the summer of 1913. His class of 139 members graduated slightly early due to the declaration of war in April 1917. Ridgway was commissioned as an Infantry officer and his first troop assignment was with the 3rd Infantry Regiment on the Mexican border.

From his biography written for the Distinguished Graduate Award: “Returning to West Point in 1918, Captain Ridgway taught Spanish in the Department of Modern Languages, served as an instructor in the Department of Tactics, and held the appointment of Graduate Manager of Athletics for three years. During the years between the world wars, Matthew Ridgway served in command and staff positions with the 15th, 9th, and 33rd Infantry Regiments, and with Second and Fourth Armies. His government also called on him to perform many key assignments in South and Central America, working with the American Electoral mission to Nicaragua and Secretary of the Nicaraguan National Board of Elections; as Secretary of the Commission of Inquiry and Conciliation for Bolivia and Paraguay; and accompanying the Chief of Staff designate, General George C. Marshall on a mission to Brazil in 1939.

From the War Plans Division of the War Department General Staff in 1942, Matthew Ridgway joined the 82nd Infantry Division. He reorganized this unit as the Army’s first airborne division, and then commanded the division through some of the most difficult fighting in World War II. General Ridgway's dynamic and outstanding leadership of the 82nd Airborne Division, and later, of the XVIII Airborne Corps, enabled American airborne troops to establish an enviable record of success in North Africa, Sicily, Italy, Normandy, Northern France, the Rhineland, the Ardennes, and Central Europe.

Always with his troops at the point of heaviest combat, he was twice awarded the Distinguished Service Cross, twice awarded the Silver Star, twice the Legion of Merit, twice the Distinguished Service Medal, twice the Bronze Star with "V" device for valor, and he was also wounded in action. At the end of the war, General Ridgway commanded the Mediterranean Theatre of Operations. He then served as the United States Army Representative to the United Nations Military Staff Commission and as Senior United States Delegate to the Inter-American Defense Board. These assignments were again followed by a command tour as Commander-in-Chief, Caribbean Command.

Recognized as the Army's leading field commander, General Ridgway was relieved as Deputy Chief of Staff of the United States Army and reassigned as Commanding General, Eighth U.S. Army, Korea in
1950. In 1951, he replaced General MacArthur as Commander in Chief, Far East Command and Supreme Commander for Allied Powers. General Ridgway took command of an Army that had suffered serious reverses and whose morale was low. His inspired leadership and indomitable spirit brought hope where there had been none before; his vigor of mind and his presence at every critical action brought success to a revitalized Army.

A short tour as Supreme Allied Commander, Europe (SACEUR) was followed by his final assignment on active duty, as Chief of Staff of the United States Army. General Matthew Ridgway’s life epitomizes the very finest qualities of the American soldier. He was steadfast in battle, dauntless and tough-minded in the face of adversity, and always honest and perceptive in performing his duty at the highest levels of command.”

General Ridgway died in 1993 at the age of 98 after being in the first class of recipients of the Distinguished Graduate Award in 1992.

Awards:

DSC (2), Army DSM (4), SS (2), LOM (2), BSM w/V (2), PH