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THE EDUCATION OF MATTHEW RIDGWAY IN GENERALSHIP

BY

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THE EDUCATION OF MATTHEW RIDGWAY IN GENERALSHIP

An Individual Study Project
Intended for Publication

by

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Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania 17013
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ABSTRACT

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Our generals and admirals with battlefield experience in World War II and the Korea War have passed from the contemporary military stage. Today, battalion and brigade commanders and ships' captains, the future generals of armies and admirals of fleets, are being appointed who have had no combat experience in high command. Should war come, they will learn their trade as generals and admirals -- encompassing complex tasks unavoidably both joint and combined -- even as they practice it. All the while, the country's fate and the lives of millions will hang in the balance. The Nation can not tolerate the routine expenditure of lives and other precious resources on a grand scale in the education of its senior military leaders. Hence, war must be taught and practiced in peacetime, as both a science and an art, so that the minds of our senior leaders are prepared for the range of political/diplomatic, psycho-sociological, economic, technological, and military tasks they may one day undertake. This paper examines by historical analysis the factors of genius, experience, training, and personal habits which qualified officers for successful army or theater command in battle. General Matthew B. Ridgway serves as the model. His battlefield education and professional growth as General are analyzed in three battles of World War II -- Sicily, Normandy, and the Ardennes -- and during his service in the Korean War from December 1950 through April 1952.

It was not the legions that crossed
the Rubicon, but Caesar. Napoleon

On 24 December 1950, LTG Matthew Ridgway found himself in the pitch dark of a Pacific night winging his way to Tokyo to report to the theater commander, General Douglas MacArthur. Scant 18 hours earlier he had been enjoying the prospect of a comfortable Christmas holiday with his family in Washington.1 Now, in the next few hours he would assume command of United Nations forces locked in combat in a theater in which he had never fought, some 12,000 miles away in Korea, and whose army was beaten in all but name. It was to be the culmination of a lifetime of preparation. That the hopes for success were so dim, the complexity of combat command of an allied army so daunting, and the consequences of failure so grim serve to magnify the achievements of General Ridgway in restoring UN fortunes in less than four months.

Other officers before and since in American history have been similarly called upon for independent command of armies or theaters in battle; and, they produced various degrees of failure and success. What qualified these officers for such preeminent positions of special trust and confidence in combat? Were their selections and performances testament to their military genius or were they ordinary officers who owed their selection and success to other attributes?



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This paper will examine by historical analysis factors of genius, experience, training, and habits which qualify officers for successful army or theater command in battle. Army or theater command -- at once unavoidably strategic in scope and joint or combined in application -- is unique from other types of command. The generals and the admirals selected for high-level posts are called upon to exercise broad authority and to perform complex tasks of such terrible moment to the continued vitality of the Nation that their training and selection must not be a purely subjective matter. Historical precedent can serve as the basis for developing analytical insights into this process than have heretofore existed.

Ridgway is a suitable subject to illuminate this topic. More recent examples suggest themselves -- Westmoreland, Abrams, Weyand. While the performances of these men are instructive, Ridgway's occurred in a period sufficiently remote to allow analysis and still offer objective lessons for the combat education of modern, high-level commanders.

As did Eisenhower, Nimitz, Pershing, Grant, and Washington, the commanders of large forces in future war will attain positions of extraordinary scope without benefit of combat training or experience in supreme command. Our future great captains will learn their trade

even as they practice it. All the while the Nation's fate and the lives of millions will hang in the balance. The preparation and selection of theater, army, and fleet commanders for combat are therefore matters of vital significance to the health of the United States. The country will seek assured martial virtuosity in joint and combined operations to protect the Republic. The wastage of resources -- time, money, material, and human life -- on a grand scale is not to be tolerated.

Certainly, our great captains devoted much of their lives to the military profession. Many had battlefield command at tactical echelons before they were called upon to lead whole armies in the field and armadas afloat. Others devoted a lifetime to study. Yet, as one surveys the tasks and considerations which confront military leaders as they move from the tactical through the operational and strategic levels, the aspects of warfighting appear progressively more complex, encompassing the artistic more than the scientific. The breadth of responsibility and the vagaries of multi-service campaigning and of political, economic, and socio-psychological factors are unique challenges quite out of the "muddy boots" preparation of the overwhelming majority of officers, regardless of Service.

Basic to the Twentieth Century American military structure conceived by Elihu Root, et al., is the military education system. Where self-study and experience cannot suffice, the Armed Forces of the United States have evolved a system of congregated thought and of historical wisdom which are applied in schools and in professional association to empower, strengthen, and enlighten the best military minds of our un-warlike, industrialized culture and to enhance professional skills among the less talented.² Nevertheless, good generalship, when conducted with virtuosity, calls for the highest levels of intellect and temperament. In short, what Clausewitz called "genius," a harmonious combination of necessary gifts of mind and spirit and body, is an innate aptitude which can be developed but cannot be handed out along with diplomas from military schools.³

Typically, the US selects its senior leaders from among those officers who have progressively demonstrated prowess at each successive echelon of command. The venerable Prussian Baron challenges this concept: "There are Commanders in Chief who could not have led a cavalry regiment with distinction and cavalry commanders who could not have handled armies."⁴ As Colonel Roger Nye states, it is dangerous to assume that even excellent commanders at

Army division or naval battle group level possess the necessary skills at the army, fleet, or theater level.⁵ These are positions distinct and unique from all others in which aspiring senior leaders have little familiarity or knowledge. Janowitz describes these men as an elite within an elite, made so by their independent-minded ability to create, to conceptualize, and to rise above the conventional...to see beyond the immediate consequences of events.⁶

Given the extraordinary complexity of this conception of generalship, let's establish the following ground rules for the discussion.⁷

First, for the purposes of this paper generalship is the exercise of high command in battle, the direction of masses of men at the operational level of war.

We will employ the Army's definition of the operational art, as defined in the 1986 revision of Field Manual 100-5. To wit, operational art involves two functions: the design and preparation for and the conduct of campaigns and major operations to achieve a strategic objective in a theater of war.⁸ It defines the sequencing of tactical activities and events to achieve major military objectives.

Though operational art includes tactical direction of smaller units, it embraces greater spans of time and space. Additionally, generalship relies to a high degree upon

institutional techniques which are exercised in the management of complex functions such as a staff might perform. Wavell correctly cites "administration" as a proper function of the general.⁹ The general will skillfully employ his staff to set conditions for the success of his subordinates. Against a lifetime of direct, hands-on leadership he is called upon to employ more indirect techniques ¹⁰

Second, the difficulties in high command grow in proportion to the size and diversity of forces assigned, forces which come from many Services and many nations.

High command is a function which has more of the elements of art than science. The effective leader of campaigns is more creator than doer. He applies means to ends, analyzes complex problems, and designates military objectives. He is surrounded by soldiers, sailors, airmen, and marines whose business it is to do; the general must provide by a conceptual leap the vision for what the force is to accomplish and then to marshal the resources and sequence their employment to support his vision. Clausewitz described this as the "coup d'oeil," the inward eye.¹¹ Notions such as culminating points and centers of gravity enter his lexicon as essential ways to divine the totality of the struggle in its economic, cultural, technological,

political/diplomatic, socio-psychological, as well as military dimensions.¹²

Not to imply that the general is to discard the rigor and discipline stemming from a thorough understanding of tactics and doctrine. On the contrary, as J. F. C. Fuller states, the commander is first and last a warrior.¹³ In all events, he is a leader, a leader whose force of personality, vision, and talents for influencing his command are now subject to greater distance from the immediate object of his leadership, the fighting man. This factor compels the projection of the personality and the will of the commander over the expanse of great bodies of men.¹⁴ The most successful of the great captains, from Caesar and the Great Khan to Eisenhower, Nimitz, and Zhukov, found ways to span the chasm between themselves and their warriors. The great captains were skilled communicators.

Third, the burdens and the complexity of command reach their most difficult level for the independent commander, -- whether that be for Army division or Navy battle group -- but supremely so at the operational and theater levels.

Indeed, Ridgway described his feelings on assuming command of Eighth Army in 1950 as one of terminal responsibility; for, after him there was no one to blame and few others from whom to ask for additional resources.¹⁵ It is lonely at the top.

General Jacob Devers, himself a gifted independent commander in World War II, described six major problems that confront the theater commander:

1. Lack of clarity in directives from higher authority.
2. Conflicting political, economic, and military objectives of each of the allies.
3. Differing logistical capabilities, organizations, doctrines, and characteristics of the forces under one's command. (Devers notes that for every one look at the enemy he took five looks to his logistical rear).¹⁶
4. Variations in armament, training, and tactics of the forces under command.
5. The need for detailed and personal coordination.
6. The importance of personalities involved.¹⁷

Some forty years later we are driven to ask how General Devers would have categorized two additional compelling challenges of modern battle: the ever-present overwatch by members of the press and the media, and the morale and support of our populace thus informed by the unblinking eye of the camera beamed in near-real-time into the living rooms of our nation. The difficulties with the press were sufficient for Ridgway to impose total news censorship in Korea, contending with correspondents and superiors for

heightened security precautions. Even in that early era, aggressive reporters found ways to garner headlines in New York before front-line soldiers were aware of the event.¹⁸

Simply put, the general cannot concern himself solely with tactics and the direction of battles. He operates in a realm far more complex. He must translate political guidance, stated and unstated, into operational realities. As such, he operates in a milieu of conflicting cultural, economic, and diplomatic requirements. Mutual interests which are the essential mucilage of wartime alliances do not necessarily translate to cooperation among comrades on the coalition battleground. Even the sharing of national intelligence products requires extraordinary cooperation and sensitivity.¹⁹ Further, personalities and inter and intra-governmental in-fighting among and between US agencies or Services and those of friendly nations and headquarters have made many a warrior long for the relative quiet of the battlefield.

There is little solace there, for political constraints on his use of force are real.

Military effectiveness will take second seat to political factors, often expressed in terms of Rules of Engagement. These rules which have all the force of an order are explicit constraints. Sometimes the rules are

not stated. For instance, while the employment of nuclear weapons against an enemy penetration makes good sense to the alliance as a whole, an explosion on the home soil of a partner state may be unacceptable. Similarly, men may die to hold or seize militarily insignificant but politically critical terrain. The pace of negotiations may sacrifice hard-won ground while draining the men of their fighting elan. War termination objectives may split apart the alliance or pose significant military costs on the command.

Fourth and finally, good generalship can not be judged on results alone -- victory or defeat. Even great generalship may be rewarded in failure as events conspire to create overwhelming odds. Certainly, General Lee was a great captain but his cause was ultimately lost. Hence, generalship should be judged on the basis of the conditions at the moment of decision. Further, success may attend a general who gained a great victory but at unacceptable cost in time, manpower, morale, materiel, and territory lost. As the French general lamented of World War I, "Guns yes, prisoners yes, but all at outrageous cost and without strategic result."²⁰ So, we should examine decisions in this light.

Turn now to Ridgway's education in generalship in the heat of battle.

The 47 year-old Ridgway first saw battle in the July 1943 allied invasion of Sicily as part of Bradley's II Corps.²¹ Ridgway was ordered to commit his untried 82nd Airborne Division piecemeal to seize the high ground 7 miles northeast of Gela (Piano Gela) to block enemy approaches from the north and east. He was also to cover the Ponte Olivo airfield by fire and to aid in its capture by amphibious forces.²² Specialized tasks were assigned to a number of small parties apart from the main force with missions to seize critical bridges and road junctions.²³

The 505th Regimental Combat Team (RCT) under Colonel Jim Gavin went first. In the first large-scale US parachute drop in combat, they landed the night of 9 July in front of the sea-borne assault of the US First Infantry Division (ID). Gavin's force was scattered as far east as the British sector, a failure which deprived the Gela line of a reserve at the critical moment.²⁴ In what Gavin called a "safu," a self-adjusting foul-up, the paratroopers' dispersion confounded the Axis defense; and by good fortune they occupied Biazzo Ridge in sufficient force to aid in repulsing a furious German armored counterattack on the Gela beach-head.²⁵

The second RCT, Tucker's 504th, followed on the night of 11 July by order of Patton -- conveyed by prearranged

codewords from Ridgway -- but suffered heavily from friendly anti-aircraft fire.²⁶ Consequently, it was scattered as widely as was Gavin's force and added to the failure of the entire airborne scheme.²⁷ Confusion reigned as units, spread-out and interspersed, tried to form a cohesive effort. Gavin found himself attached directly to the Corps Commander, no longer under Division control.²⁸ The third RCT remained in Tunisia.

Now to examine Ridgway's role in the battle.

His first act was to debark at dawn on 10 July from Patton's command group afloat and to head inland on foot to link up with Gavin's scattered RCT beyond 1st ID lines. He was accompanied only by his aide and a borrowed Infantry sergeant.²⁹ Two thirds of his command were still in Tunisia. The decision to commit the 504th for the next night had not been made. Clearly, he was motivated by a desire to learn news of his command so as to advise the Army Commander who was concerned about the dangerous situation developing at Gela.³⁰ It must be stated: out of contact with his forces he was out of command. The battle was left to his subordinates.

When the order went out for the 504th to follow, Ridgway set about coordinating the aerial drop into what was a friendly Drop Zone (DZ). Rightly concerned that combat-weary naval and army gunners might shoot at his

in-bound troopers, he personally coordinated control measures both before the drop and before the invasion.³¹ Unfortunately, these efforts failed and 23 of the 144 aircraft and some 318 soldiers were lost to friendly fire.³² Additionally, since contact with the 505th remained poor -- his contact with Gavin's force having come via a 1st Division radio net, ³³ -- the first that Gavin knew of Tucker's drop was when C-47's were being shot out of the sky.³⁴

We can give Ridgway due credit for his persistent efforts before and during the battle to set conditions for the success of the airborne force. In training, equipping, and organizing, he and his men had done the best they could in preparing for what they believed was necessary for success. We must remember that airborne was a fledgling concept and hard lessons at the tactical and operational levels were dealt to the paratroopers and the commanders employing them.

Yet, the fact remains: we can not say he was effective in achieving conditions for successful employment of his force. Meager though his resources were for effective command and control, his decisions and actions to regain control of his one regiment and to see to the safe insertion of the second were correct. Nevertheless, the

tenuous communications links between the lead RCT and follow-on RCT's, one of which was never committed, exposed two flaws. First, Ridgway could not communicate to Taylor, his Chief of Staff in Tunisia, the nature of the fight for Gela. As Taylor states, the force believed the drop was to be under benign conditions.³⁵ Second, contingencies for the formation of a reserve rested on the success of the second drop. That insertion failing, the Division Commander had no immediate reserves with which he could subsequently influence the battle.

As daunting as these factors were, Ridgway was still a fighter. Pulling his force together after the bridgehead was secure, he was able to forge an effective light division in subsequent operations against Palermo.³⁶ In the contacts with Italian forces which followed, Ridgway could be seen at the front, instructing his men at the lowest levels in the aggressive infantry tactics he expected them to display under fire.³⁷ Moreover, he formulated an appreciation for a stronger link to division and higher headquarters after a gentle remonstrance from Patton.³⁸ His in-the-trenches style would not change, but this message from Patton would serve as part of his education in the employment of tactical headquarters.

His had always been an aggressive, vigorous style. Profoundly disappointed at missing combat in the First World

War, he compensated through a Spartan life of preparation and personal fitness, mentally and physically.³⁹ His career was quite out of the mainstream. He was often diverted from tactical assignments to politico-military positions which would later serve him well in important commands. Having taught Spanish and served as Athletic Director at West Point, he was assigned in the inter-war years to General McCoy's mission to Nicaragua, to Bolivia and Paraguay, and to positions in the Philippines and China.⁴⁰ In the Army's Staff School and the War College, he applied himself diligently. There and in intermittent troop assignments he was to encounter George Marshall, a decisive influence in his career. When war broke out, he was in the War Plans Division of Marshall's staff, positioned well to take over as ADC and then CG of the newly formed All Americans, the 82nd Airborne Division.⁴¹

What he brought to command of the 82nd was political and diplomatic skill for dealing with superiors and a ruthlessly robust style of leadership that was to be his stamp of excellence. He led from the front, establishing an example of personal competence, physical fitness, total loyalty, and, in battle, composed courage. When it was announced that the 82nd was to be formed into the Nation's first airborne division, Ridgway was the first to jump.⁴² When

it was announced the 82nd was to be split to form another division, he personally saw to the dismemberment of his pride and joy.⁴³ He was not therefore willing to settle for a repeat of the disappointment at Gela in the next operation, Salerno, and in operations on the Italian mainland.

What did he learn and how did he employ the short time before his command was next committed?

Eisenhower had directed an extensive post-mortem on the abortive first attempt to use the American airborne.⁴⁴ What followed was a thorough review at every echelon which rendered, along with valuable equipment changes, a more effective paratroop force. Among the new materiel, the Division was issued navigation and pathfinder equipment which made precision night insertions a reality.⁴⁵ Steps were set in motion to make each force more self-sufficient so that even scattered assaults would be able to operate without subsequent drops of heavier equipment. In the words of Gavin, troopers would carry on their persons the equipment they needed for combat.⁴⁶ Second, the imperative of early reinforcements of heavier, follow-on forces was learned well, as we shall see later in Normandy.⁴⁷

Not all changes were internal. Agreements were reached to improve coordination among headquarters and among

Services.⁴⁸ The bitter memory of the 504th's tragedy was on everyone's mind, but it was secondary to the over-riding issue: to employ the paratroopers as separate battalions and RCT's or as a division or larger force. The dearth of glider and transport aircraft made the question moot initially, forcing piecemeal employment. As aircraft production began to meet and then to exceed demand, operational concepts for mass insertions became achievable.

With industry answering many of the requirements, Ridgway and other advocates found themselves in the paradoxical situation of arguing in the joint and combined arenas for the use of their forces but against sub-optimum employment. In this, Ridgway entered into a highly charged political arena that placed him alternately in league with and against the higher-ups in the American and British camps.⁴⁹

Subsequent operations on the Italian mainland, and later in the planning for Normandy, illustrate more of Ridgway's growth in generalship as a planner and soldier-diplomat than as a fighter. For, the Division was to be ordered into Rome some 150 miles in front of any relieving force to bolster the surrender of the provisional government in a high-stakes gamble against Nazi intervention.⁵⁰ Ridgway argued skillfully and successfully against Eisenhower and political authority in a solitary effort to cancel the

operation. The decision to abort the drop was engineered largely by Ridgway and his Assistant Division Commander, Max Taylor, in a triumph of outspoken integrity and savoir faire.⁵¹

As a result of his efforts, he had no opportunity to employ his command in an independent role in Italy. Though two combat drops were effected and he operated as Deputy Corps CG at Salerno and in the break-out to Naples, eight months were to pass until the graduation exercise for his division, Normandy.

In Operation Overlord, June 1944, the Division was ordered to conduct an airborne drop to the rear of Utah Beach and, in concert with the 101st Airborne Division, secure lodgements across streams in the area which would facilitate the subsequent breakout. The 82nd was to drop astride the Merderet River in front of the VII Corps' 4th Infantry Division to secure a bridgehead for exploitation as far west as the Douve River.⁵²

Efforts by Ridgway prior to the invasion to enlarge airborne divisions resulted in three parachute regiments available for the initial insertion, two west and one east of the Merderet.⁵³ The latter was to seize the all-important communications center at Ste. Mere Eglise. A glider regiment was to follow on the second night at dusk.⁵⁴ Parachute planes would approach via the west side of the

Carentan Peninsula, thereby avoiding a dangerous overflight of the fleet at sea such as occurred at Sicily. 4th Division's 8th Infantry under Colonel Jim Van Fleet was to effect the link-up.⁵⁵

The operation started poorly. The Division went in on the edge of the assembly area of the German 91st Division and encountered heavy opposition at the outset.⁵⁶ Two RCT's going in west of the Merderet, the 507th and 508th, were badly scattered in the drop and were unable to assemble in sufficient force to carry out their missions.⁵⁷ The third RCT, the 505th, was able to carry its primary objective, Ste. Mere Eglise. Elements of the disorganized 507th and 508th either found their way east to join with the 505th or organized hasty defenses west of the Merderet, contributing to enemy confusion in the fight for the bridges and causeways across the river.⁵⁸

What followed was a desperate three-day melee in which the command beat off enemy counterattacks while attempting to force crossings in the flooded terrain on the Merderet. Simultaneously, follow-on glider forces were brought in concurrent with the arrival of seaborne elements of the 507th and 508th and the 8th Infantry with important Corps reinforcing artillery.⁵⁹ Attempts to exploit airborne forces on the west bank from Armeville failed on 8 June, though a ford north of the La Fiere bridge was used to link

up with one battalion.⁶⁰ This attempt a failure, Ridgway directed a frontal assault on the La Fiere causeway by a hodgepodge of available units. In a desperate fight involving the personal presence of both Gavin and Ridgway the causeway was carried under terrible punishment and the Division accomplished the balance of its initial objectives three days late.⁶¹

Again, let us turn to examine Ridgway's role in this feat of American arms.

Can we approve of Ridgway's organization for combat and his initial orders?

Clearly, he had grown with the Division in understanding the fundamentals of airborne operations. He had established successfully with his superiors and supporting Services the requirement for the necessary lift to assure a mass drop. Further, elaborate arrangements had been set for the effective support from follow-on airborne and sea-borne forces. Note also the assimilation of combat experience here in the critical area of command and control.

Command and control....It was the area needing greatest improvement, airborne operations being innately dependent on rapid reorganization and link-up on the ground. Improvement was everywhere evident. First, internal communications via radio and telephone were vastly improved to the point where attacks by elements of the 507th and an isolated battalion

could be effectively coordinated with the breakout efforts of the remainder of the Division.⁶² Second, reinforcing ground forces and artillery from VII Corps and from the 4th Division were effectively brought to bear in the decisive fight on 8 June for the La Fiere causeway.⁶³ Third, the Division and its commander had learned the value of linking up before attempting major combat.

Finally, in what is Ridgway's singular legacy, he imparted to his commanders and exemplified himself by countless acts of personal bravery the necessity for the commander to be personally on the scene. He developed a style, if not a habit, of personal reconnaissance even in enemy-controlled terrain. He was unstinting in his willingness to enter into combat, most clearly shown in his presence at the La Fiere fight where he went so far as to assist in removing a damaged tank from the causeway in full view of the enemy.⁶⁴

What about his orders after the initial landing?

Principally, we see a commander who faces for the second time the prospect of failure of a mass parachute assault. With no immediate reserve he at first had to rely on his subordinates to carry out their orders and to hold tenaciously where they could. A coordinated attack by the Germans would have been ruinous. Fortunately, attacks were nowhere decisive, and effective employment of available

forces facilitated the defense of Ste. Mere Eglise.⁶⁵

Ridgway must have seethed inwardly at his helplessness. His actions nonetheless portray a cool, calculating leader making order out of chaos and bending circumstances to his will. He cannot have been pleased that General Bradley, in view of the delay, considered giving the Merderet and Douve missions to seaborne forces.⁶⁶ General Collins' VII Corps could be stalled on the beaches if an attack was not mounted effectively. Ridgway responded. Placing his ADC in charge of the attack, he formed a patch-work quilt of units into the desperate charge across at La Fiere.

It could be argued that the Division was no longer effective -- casualties, disorder, and fatigue having taken their toll. Nevertheless, by sheer weight of his personality and determination, and by means of his tactical acumen, he expanded the limits of what his men thought humanly possible and carried the day.⁶⁷

The subsequent exploitation to take the peninsula was to be his last operation at the head of his beloved division. He was advanced in August 1944 to leadership of the XVIII Airborne Corps. As Corps CG, he first saw combat with his divisions detached to British command in September during Operation Market Garden.⁶⁸ Ridgway's decisive test as Corps Commander was yet to come, but not until December in the Ardennes.

When the German winter counteroffensive was launched from the Ardennes on 16 December 1944, the new Corps Commander was with his main command post (CP) in England. His two forward divisions, the 82nd and the 101st, were in assembly areas near Reims in France.⁶⁹ Gavin, now commander of the 82nd, was senior commander. As acting Corps CG he began the movement of the 82nd and 101st on 17 December to meet the German attack.⁷⁰ The 101st was apportioned to Bastogne, and the 82nd and Corps headquarters were dispatched to Hodges' First Army which was frantically forming a defense on the north flank of the penetration. The Corps' mission: move to vicinity of Trois Ponts to block the northern shoulder of the penetration and routes north across the Meuse.⁷¹

By the time Ridgway could move his headquarters from England, Hodges had attached a reinforced regiment of the 119th Infantry and the entire 3rd Armored Division (AD) to the Corps. All commands arrived slowly beginning on 18 December. Meanwhile, Ridgway attempted to form a cohesive line and to establish contact with friendly or enemy forces to the front, whichever came first.

3rd AD was on the right and the 82nd on the left. Both units had to extend their lines to establish contact with those on the right and left. Nevertheless, both flanks were up in the air. Later, on 20 December, the newly

arrived 30th ID and 84th ID were added to Ridgway's Corps, as were the shattered 106th Infantry Division and the 7th Armored. The 7th AD had established a desperate defense at St. Vith along with elements of the 106th and others. In sum, confusion was general and terrible, a condition Ridgway must have found similar to the Normandy operation six months earlier and to the circumstances of his army in Korea almost six years later to the day.

Unwilling to give up important ground, Ridgway ordered the defenders of St. Vith to hold and directed a general advance to the south by the 82nd, 30th ID, and the 3rd Armored. However, before link-up could be made, the German attack flowed around St. Vith and began to press in on the defenses of the 82nd. General Montgomery, by now in command of the Army Group which included First Army, intervened with no little friction and directed the evacuation of St. Vith to "tidy up the line."⁷² The men at St. Vith were recovered along a narrow road on the night of 20 December and the morning of the following day.⁷³

Tenacious defensive measures all along the Corps front contained the Germans to limited penetrations except on the right flank where a German attack coupled with the untimely withdrawal of elements of the 3rd AD swept the Americans out of Manhay. Ridgway ordered an immediate counterattack. The initial attempt failed and Ridgway was forced to commit his

meager reserve to reestablish the line.⁷⁴ True to his style, Ridgway was personally at the scene of the counterattack.⁷⁵ As this local action ended, the German drive had reached its culminating point and Montgomery permitted his forces to mount their counteroffensive.

Many other actions followed in the Battle of the Bulge and in subsequent operations until the end of the war which added to the General's education. None, however, is so poignant and applicable to Ridgway's performance in Korea as is the period 16-27 December 1944 in the Ardennes. Let's examine that period in detail.

Entering on the operational level of war, had the General grown into his new position? Had he adapted his style and behaviors to the greater responsibilities or was he encumbered with habits inappropriate to higher command?

First, his use of a staff. The General fully recognized the need for a staff to supplement his forward-foxhole leadership style.⁷⁶ However, in the formation of such a staff, we see his preference for former acquaintances over unfamiliar officers. His staff from the 82nd became his staff at Corps. Only one major position was not changed, the Corps Artillery officer, and Ridgway later had cause to relieve him.⁷⁷ In Korea, this tendency to rely on former acquaintances combined with relief of numerous senior officers opened him to charges of wholesale housecleaning.

About which more later in this paper.

With advisers accustomed to his ways, he was better assured of continuity. Nevertheless, his staff was sometimes ineffective in transmitting his intent or unwilling to act in the absence of orders from him. In the latter case, his legendary affinity for the front lines persisted; but, his staff did not, on at least one occasion, act decisively on an urgent request from a division commander.⁷⁸ In another instance, his staff misinterpreted his wishes concerning command arrangements over the forces of four divisions cooperating in the defense of St. Vith. Specifically, when it was clear that BG Hasbrouck, 7th AD, had the bulk of effective combat power there, the staff failed to make clear Ridgway's intent to establish Hasbrouck's authority over elements under MG Jones whose shattered 106th Infantry had fallen back on St. Vith.⁷⁹

Second, to examine his initial orders and dispositions.

When the General arrived at the joint Corps-82nd headquarters at Werbomont, he found that Gavin had already set effective measures in motion. Ridgway improved upon Gavin's efforts. He sought and received permission to mount offensive action, an attitude that must have been pure tonic for the demoralized First Army Headquarters.⁸⁰ In the absence of battlefield intelligence, friendly or enemy, was this aggressiveness -- call it optimism -- warranted?

Certainly, tenacity appeals to the natural instincts of the fighting man. To give up ground is to risk position as well as morale. In Ridgway, it was this and more, a concept both unthinkable and outside of his experience. The situation was unclear, and aggressive reconnaissance was imperative to establish friendly and enemy dispositions more precisely. It was this general advance that gained all-important knowledge of the Germans and of conditions at St. Vith. Forward elements of the 82nd were also in position to assist later in the St. Vith break-out from encirclement.⁸¹

Proper as a general advance was initially, there was more on the General's mind than pure reconnaissance. Ridgway sought early offensive action. He wanted to attack. Monty's order to abandon St. Vith demonstrates an opposing view of the battle and, perhaps, of philosophy of war. Compared to Ridgway Montgomery appears timid.

Who was right? In the views of the some of the defenders of St. Vith, Montgomery saved them.⁸² Beleaguered Hasbrouck and BG Bruce Clarke read incredulously Ridgway's order to establish a "fortified goose-egg" at St. Vith.⁸³ To them it was the anti-thesis of mobile warfare. Moreover, to defend in-place sacrificed the mobility of their force in indefensible terrain against a superior enemy.⁸⁴

Hence, Ridgway's conception can only be understood in light of his intent to revert to the offensive, to meet the enemy on more aggressive terms regardless of the confusion among his units in the Corps. Conversely, Montgomery's scheme to tidy up the line ran opposite to Ridgway's plans. Indeed, Monty's concept ran counter to Ridgway's reading of the battle, the latter predicting accurately the German's culminating point in a seemingly prescient communique from his headquarters midway in the fight.⁸⁵

What would have happened had Ridgway been able to combine offensive action with his "fortified goose-egg?" It is difficult to say. Perhaps the answer could be found six years later in Korea at the battle of Chipyeong in February 1951...about which more later.

Bear in mind that XVIII Corps was formed as an airborne corps. He had prepared himself accordingly. When confronted with the task to defend with elements of all arms, he succeeded. The transformation was not smooth, though his adaptability and instincts were remarkable. His order to the defenders at St. Vith to establish a "fortified goose-egg" are revealing in his use of Armor. Later, in the fight for Manhay he had cause to appreciate the mobility and responsiveness of mechanized formations. Moreover, Manhay must have reminded him of the lessons learned by so many other masters of the art before him: the need for strong,

mobile reserves.

Leap ahead to December 1950. The Ridgway of 1950 confronted in Korea a situation so grave and confused that the experiences of six years previous must have been in his foremost thoughts. What had he learned and how did he apply his education as Army Commander, and as Theater Commander when he replaced MacArthur in April 1951?

The Ridgway of 1950 was the same Ridgway of 1944 in temperament. He sought and gained from MacArthur in their first encounter the latitude he needed to attack as soon as conditions favored.⁸⁶ In subsequent visits to battle headquarters, his own and those of subordinates, he vigorously imparted a renewed offensive spirit. Timidity was dealt with severely. In the words of Bradley, then Chairman, JCS, Ridgway by pure power of personality restored martial spirit to the command and reversed the fortunes of war.⁸⁷

In this, Ridgway's aggressiveness was not for show. He appreciated the value of morale and was careful to restore and nurture it. His message to his soldiers shortly after assuming command, "Why We Are Here" and "Why We Fight," is a masterpiece of military leadership.⁸⁸ More subtly, he realized the stakes if the retreat could not be stemmed. In his private communiques with higher headquarters, he discussed contingencies for withdrawal to Japan if the need

arose.⁸⁹ Yet, lack of aggressiveness or public mention of such a plan was cause for immediate removal.⁹⁰ He set about to eradicate a defeatist mood -- the "bug out" phenomenon -- by persuasion where indicated, by toughness where needed, and by personal example in every instance.

The Army was not greatly out-numbered. It possessed many times the firepower of the enemy and was greatly superior in mobility. There were no logistical shortages. The UN forces enjoyed near-absolute control of the skies and seas.⁹¹ Understandably, the General believed they could win. Indeed, one of his reports to General Collins, Army Chief of Staff in Washington, prompted Collins to caution him against undue optimism when the view from Washington was so grim.⁹²

His optimism was not blind. Clearly, Ridgway believed that the enemy had the upper hand but that the fault lay with poor tactical leadership in the Allied command. The initiative rested with the enemy; but, Ridgway had strong convictions as how best to remedy the situation.

First, he sought the assistance of the Army training bases stateside in improving the rigor of tactical training.⁹³ Second, he swept clean as a new broom, energizing the chain of command and removing in the process five Corps and division commanders and numerous lesser grades in his first five months in theater.⁹⁴ With summary

relief looming, senior leaders were anxious to meet his requirements. The alarming toll exacted among senior commanders caused a stir on both sides of the Pacific, beginning with the relief of MG McClure when that officer had been in divisional command less than a month.⁹⁵ The concerns were redoubled as he obtained appointment of officers with whom he had served previously. Nonetheless, Washington was anxious to support him as he prepared to meet the enemy's next attack.⁹⁶

The blow was no surprise to Ridgway when it came on New Year's Day, 1951. After a night's artillery preparation, approximately 500,000 soldiers of the North Korean Army (NKA) and the Chinese Communist Forces (CCF) attacked all along the front.⁹⁷ The main effort was clearly against Seoul where the American I and IX Corps defended. The Army conducted a mobile defense, trading space for a heavy toll in enemy casualties. Nevertheless, it was evident Seoul could not be held and it was evacuated on 4 January.⁹⁸

Characteristically, Ridgway placed himself personally at the bridges across the frozen Han River, the critical point in the withdrawal from the battlefield...his staff adapting at this early date to his habit of operating well-forward. He had made necessary improvements in his battle headquarters and in the Army Main, by firing and hiring and in effective use of liaison officers, which would make his

staff support superb.⁹⁹ Corps and Division Commanders would learn the lesson painfully well as time progressed. Though critical of commanders who operated from the rear, he was nevertheless aware of various organizational deficiencies: among which the need for deputies so his corps commanders could operate as he did, forward with the action and away from fixed headquarters.¹⁰⁰ He had learned his lessons well.

Further, he correctly read the battle and predicted the enemy's culminating point. Planning for subsequent defensive lines he positioned reserves effectively in the center to restore the situation at Wonju where unreliable Republic of Korea Army (ROK) forces in the face of a heavy attack made the US 2nd ID position untenable.¹⁰¹ By the end of January, it was apparent the enemy would not pursue. He established with aggressive reconnaissance that the enemy had withdrawn the bulk of his forces to the north.¹⁰²

Accordingly, Ridgway initiated a carefully coordinated battle of maneuver which would regain lost territory to the 38th parallel. In so doing, the General illustrated his maturity as a battle captain. First, using a series of limited objective attacks he would punish the enemy terribly by turning allied advantages into positive battlefield accomplishments. In this, UN superiority in firepower and mobility, along with painstakingly orchestrated integration

of the arms of all Services, swept the battleground clean of CCF in the advance.

Second, success, carefully nurtured, reinforced the second Ridgway objective to restore allied morale. Stressing the cooperation of all arms and the basics of tactics, he turned combat into one great school of war for all, from generals to private soldiers.103

The battle for Chipyeong....When the CCF counterattacked in force in February, they achieved a breakthrough as they had before through ROK forces in the mountainous center, near Wonju. There they ran headlong into the soldiers of the 23rd Infantry and the French Battalion. Ridgway ordered them to hold at all costs. After a punishing three day battle, with the fortuitous assistance of air support, the enemy was halted after employing available reserves.104

Was this battle an affirmation of his "fortified goose egg" six years before? Perhaps. At any rate, Ridgway the Army Commander was able to do what Ridgway the Corps Commander could not: to read effectively the friendly and enemy situation, to marshal and employ reserves, and to integrate a tenacious, do-or-die defense into an overall concept. It was his graduation exercise as battlefield commander, a triumph of the operational art in every respect; and, it restored the confidence in allied arms.

One controversial habit remained. He tended to become

intimately embroiled in the day-to-day, life-and-death operations of tactical units, appearing at important points on the battlefield, often among or in front of advancing units.¹⁰⁵ While appropriate for tactical command, it is hardly a trait that attracts continued success at the operational level when in command of forces of half a million men. A commander so occupied would find it difficult to extricate himself sufficiently to formulate the broad direction of the command.

Why did the method work for Ridgway? First, he was very good at it, with an instinct honed by experience for where and where not to be. Second, as previously mentioned, he had learned the value of a good supporting staff. Third, in the highly orchestrated attacks conducted in his phased advances, he was able to predict with a high degree of certainty the appropriate point of action. Of course, his personal presence inspired confidence, consistent with his objective of restoring faith in UN martial prowess.

Ridgway was soon elevated above such details. Subsequent operations of the Eighth Army fell to LTG Van Fleet on 11 April when President Truman relieved MacArthur. Ridgway rose to become theater commander, Supreme Commander, Far East. At this, the terminus in his education in combat generalship, he was, in his own words, "...thrown on short notice...into a hot assignment....Overnight, (he) had to

broaden horizons to embrace a tremendous defensive theater that swung in a vast arc from the Aleutians to Formosa."106

To what extent did he grasp the totality of his responsibilities?

The major threat in his mind and in those of his superiors was the Soviet Union.107 An attack into Korea or from the north into Japan would inevitably force the evacuation to Japan of Eighth Army and would fundamentally alter the nature of the war. Accordingly, he devoted much of his time to this over-riding concern. Typically, he began by a lengthy personal reconnaissance of the northern Japanese islands as the most likely Soviet avenue of approach.108

In the highly charged political atmosphere in which he now found himself, he hearkened back to advice he had received from his mentor of the mid-1930's, MG McCoy: that is, maintain a secure line of communications to higher headquarters.109 First, he sought and got from the Joint Chiefs a comprehensive review of all directives pertaining to his command.110 In turn, he undertook to provide clarifying new guidance to his subordinates. Reading these directives to the three Services some thirty years later one is struck by their clarity and directness of style.111

Second, he maintained contact with his higher headquarters in the day-to-day squabbles which troubled

Washington. His communications with old friends and former commanders, Bradley and Collins inter alia, reflect the mind of a loyal subordinate communicating clearly over the thousands of miles the needs of his command.¹¹² Less understandably, he also maintained a routine correspondence of a highly sensitive nature with an officer on the personal staff of the Army Chief of Staff.¹¹³ There is no record that this liaison was conducted with the knowledge of the Chief.

Thus informed and his lines of communication to his command dressed, Ridgway was able to enter into the diplomatic arenas in which he was to struggle for another year. It is here that his politico-military experience of the inter-war years, 1919-1941, served him and the Nation so well. Further, his service as commander of the Mediterranean and Caribbean theaters and Deputy Chief of Staff between 1945 and 1950 added tangibly to his expertise. While not bearing directly on his battlefield generalship, his policy skills did much to set conditions for the success of the United Nations forces in Korea -- specifically, by assuring the effective implementation of the treaty which began the return to normalcy in Japan; by seeking vitalization of the ROK forces from a stubborn, sometimes devious, President Rhee,¹¹⁴; in directing both the form and substance of the difficult truce negotiations

and their relationship to the bitter fighting which raged concurrently,115; and in assuring the cooperation of all three Services in the campaigns to follow.116

In the campaigns to follow he was drawn into delving into the conflict in which he himself was past master. Certainly, the nature of America's first "limited war" called for stringent restraints on the use of force and unparalleled sensitivity to political controls. However, by mixing in Van Fleet's business, he was exemplifying conduct he had learned throughout his career, a pronounced tendency to place himself personally at the scene of action.

The war had lapsed into a static war of attrition. It was a struggle which Army Chief Collins compared as similar to the campaign of the Army of the Potomac in 1864-1865.117 Was Ridgway drawn to over-supervise Van Fleet as was Grant to place himself personally with Meade's Army? Certainly, the parallel is not exact. Nevertheless, it is germane to inquire: was he neglecting his own straight-forward duty to set the broad direction for his command, to be able to tell Van Fleet what to do next?

As the campaigns progressed, we see Ridgway and Van Fleet forging their mutual roles in the direction of the war effort. As General Bradley, then Chairman of the JCS, stated, the missions of these two men were "frustrating in the extreme," with the communists "milking negotiations" for

propaganda value.¹¹⁸ In token, the process was not smooth and General Ridgway did not give Van Fleet the latitude he enjoyed himself under MacArthur.¹¹⁹

The attraction of the conflict in Korea was a role easy and familiar to General Ridgway. He remained personally involved in operations through June, 1951, and continuing in this manner by requiring thorough detail before he approved Van Fleet's operations thereafter. The General was prepared to be highly specific in prescribing operations down to battalion level. Further, he was critical of commanders who experienced high casualty rates, exercising thereby an implicit brake on operations.¹²⁰ Briefings by each Corps commander and minute control measures prior to each operation were not uncommon.¹²¹ Such intrusion had led Van Fleet and his staff to expect positive controls and to the natural tendency to interpret his directives as orders.

General Ridgway was at great pains to instruct his Army Commander. In a series of carefully worded communiquees to his aggressive subordinate, Van Fleet, he attempted to explain his intent.¹²² Nevertheless, for whatever reason, there was disharmony between the two that surprised their superior in Washington, General Collins.¹²³

In evidence, Van Fleet had interpreted Ridgway's guidance and had planned a number of limited-objective offensives against which Ridgway subsequently intervened and

with-held permission.¹²⁴ In another instance Van Fleet complained that a major offensive was unduly constrained by a shortage of artillery ammunition.¹²⁵ Nevertheless, each case betrays Van Fleet's failure to understand the wishes of his chief.

Nonetheless, here was Ridgway at the completion of his battlefield education, proficient in the military art. Is there any assurance that officers of today, having passed through the battery of military instruction from induction through war college, could comprise such knowledge?

From the preceding, we return to the purpose of this investigation: to identify attributes of genius, habit, experience, and training which facilitate successful generalship. Certainly, Ridgway's entire life had been devoted to the profession of arms. From the outset in preparing his division for battle and from the first contacts in combat he displayed tactical talent. Mistakes were made, but he could build upon his peacetime experiences and education and progressively attain a high degree of virtuosity.

One is struck by the logical, almost leisurely, progression in the education under fire which provided to Ridgway's mind a menu of lessons. Certainly, the program of instruction was comprehensive before World War II. What was remarkable was that the progression of

instruction provided the General during the war and prior to Korea ample time between engagements for him to assimilate the lessons. It is not clear that Ridgway had maps prepared at the end of each battle to study past operations as did Napoleon.¹²⁶ Yet, he did learn and he did profit greatly from the range of experiences battle presented to his intellect.

We conclude that General Ridgway was not born with an innate sense of right conduct in battle. He was not a genius in the sense of an Einstein or a Michelangelo. Yet, he had a remarkable intellect and temperament that enabled him to profit from three major influences: professional education in the Army schools system; a wide range of military and political experiences; and diligent self-improvement, before, during, and after battle -- the ultimate in the school of hard knocks.

Ardant du Picq believed democracies were antithetical to martial virtues.¹²⁷ Yet, not only has the Nation produced military leaders of great ability, it has also assumed in proportion to its successes a greater role on the world stage. The need for excellence in generalship, an arena unavoidably joint and combined, is still with us. Given these realities, the profound example of Ridgway illustrates the fighting abilities that the Nation must seek in its

peacetime theater, army, and fleet leaders to preserve the peace or to assure success in war.

There is no certainty that present and future officers can pass through the gamut of military assignments and schools to learn all the lessons needed to reach the same degree of virtuosity that Ridgway and other masters gained by bloody experience in battle. Yet, war is both a science and an art. It can be learned and it can be practiced. The schools and the range of assignments in a lifetime of military service offer our superior military minds the opportunity to grow in the profession.

Our generals and admirals with World War II experience are all retired, as are those who fought in Korea. Battalion and brigade commanders and ships' captains are even now being selected who had no combat experience in Vietnam. These officers are our future army, fleet, and theater commanders. The Nation should not and will not tolerate a routine expenditure of lives and other precious resources on a grand scale in the education of these men as its senior military leaders. The continuing challenge is to inspire among our citizens and our institutions the devotion to excellence in the preparation of our officers as the surest guarantor of the security of the Republic.

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