

The Courage of General Matthew Ridgway

- **Compelling Question**
 - How can acting with courage help you accomplish your identity and purpose?
- **Virtue:** Courage
- **Definition –** Courage is the capacity to overcome fear in order to do good.
- **Lesson Overview**
 - In this lesson, student will explore the life of Matthew Ridgway and his role in the Korean War. Students will understand how Matthew Ridgway's courage helped saved the United States and United Nations forces during the Korean War and through his example, learn how they can use courage in their own lives to accomplish their purpose.
- **Objectives**
 - Students will analyze General Matthew Ridgway's performance during the Korean War
 - Students will understand how to use courage to accomplish their purpose
 - Students will apply their knowledge of courage to their own lives
- **Background**
 - The Korean War was an outgrowth of an unstable situation on the Korean Peninsula at the conclusion of the Second World War. In August of 1945, the Soviet Union had declared war on the Empire of Japan. With the endorsement of the United States, Soviet forces seized land in the northern part of the Peninsula, halting at the 38th parallel. The United States then occupied the southern half. Born out of this joint occupation was two different political regimes with opposing views, the perfect recipe for conflict.

War broke out in June of 1950. The North, hoping to assert its dominance over the entire Peninsula, invaded the South and made quick progress. The South, supported by United States and United Nations forces, fell back around the port city of Pusan. They fought hard and were finally relieved when the U.N. and U.S. forces landed at Incheon, forcing the North Koreans to withdraw. The fight then moved north, all the way to the Chinese border. Then, in November, the Chinese shocked the world by allying with North Korea and attacking U.N. and U.S. forces, once again driving them south.

Fighting eventually settled in the area around the 38th parallel. The army was demoralized and exhausted. Human wave attacks, launched by the Chinese were devastating and horrific to witness. The army was on the verge of breaking. It was into this chaotic situation that General Matthew Ridgway arrived on the Korean Peninsula.

- **Vocabulary**
 - Alma mater
 - 38th parallel
 - Incheon
 - Human wave attacks
 - Logistical
 - Interwar
 - Embroiled
 - Vain
 - Beleaguered
 - Pining
 - Defeatism
 - Coherent
 - Supreme Allied Commander
 - Eminent
- **Introduce Text**
 - Have students read the background and narrative, keeping the "Walk-In-The-Shoes" question in mind as they read. Then have them answer the remaining questions below.

- **Walk-In-The-Shoes Questions**

- As you read, imagine you are the protagonist.
 - What challenges are you facing?
 - What fears or concerns might you have?
 - What may prevent you from acting in the way you ought?

- **Observation Questions**

- Who was Matthew Ridgway?
- What was General Ridgway's assignment in Korea?
- How did General Ridgway's courageous actions shape his identity?

- **Discussion Questions**

- Discuss the following questions with your students.
 - What is the historical context of the narrative?
 - What historical circumstances presented a challenge to the protagonist?
 - How and why did the individual exhibit a moral and/or civic virtue in facing and overcoming the challenge?
 - How did the exercise of the virtue benefit civil society?
 - How might exercise of the virtue benefit the protagonist?
 - What might the exercise of the virtue cost the protagonist?
 - Would you react the same under similar circumstances? Why or why not?
 - How can you act similarly in your own life? What obstacles must you overcome in order to do so?

- **Additional Resources**

- "The Forgotten Maverick General Who Saves South Korea." WSJ.
<http://www.wsj.com/articles/SB10001424127887324744104578472771068875576>
- Hanson, Victor Davis. *The Savior Generals: How Five Great Commanders Saved Wars That Were Lost, from Ancient Greece to Iraq*. New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2013.
- Matthew B. Ridgway. *Soldier: the memoirs of Matthew B. Ridgway, as told to Harold H. Martin*. Greenwood, 1974.

Handout A: The Courage of General Matthew Ridgway

Background

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Narrative:

Matthew Ridgway was born into a military family in March of 1895. His father, Colonel Thomas Ridgway, was an artillery officer. Upon graduating High School, Ridgway applied for the United States Military Academy, West Point. However, he failed the entrance exam. Not to be easily dissuaded, he applied again, this time successfully. He graduated and was commissioned in 1917, just as America was entering the First World War.

Much to Ridgeway's disappointment, however, he was not assigned to a combat role. Instead he became a Spanish instructor and was assigned to his alma mater, West Point. After the war concluded, Ridgway remained in the Army, serving in various posts around the world. During this interwar period, Ridgway proved himself as an able officer with great organizational and logistical skills.

Despite his success, Ridgway was eager to prove himself in a combat command. When the United States became embroiled in the Second World War in December of 1941, Ridgway was assigned to the War Plans Division. In August of 1942 he was promoted to Major General and assigned to command the famed 82nd Airborne Division. At the time, however, it was just another infantry division. It was General Ridgway who was tasked with transitioning it to an airborne unit.

Ridgway made the transition successful and had his men ready in time to make their first combat jump into Sicily in July 1943. After fighting in Italy, the division was transferred to England to be a part of the allied invasions in Normandy in June of 1944. Ridgway jumped into combat with his men in the early morning hours of June 6, taking command of his scattered elements in the field. Ridgway then went on to command the XVIII Airborne corps in Holland in Operation Market Garden. While in this command he also assisted in pushing back the desperate German offense in the Ardennes, known to history as the Battle of the Bulge. Finally, he led his men into Germany during Operation Varsity, getting wounded by a grenade in the process.

Throughout the Second World War, Ridgway proved himself as an able combat commander. He was cool under fire and gained the respect of the men he commanded. Never afraid to expose himself to the danger of enemy fire, he did all that he could to prevent the death of his men in vain or misguided operations.

This experience would serve him well in 1950 when he found himself being asked to take command of a beleaguered and exhausted 8th Army on the Korean Peninsula. Ridgway took over the 8th Army from Walton Walker after his death in an automobile accident a few weeks previously. The army he took command of was tired, demoralized, and disillusioned with the mission at hand. Men shivered in foxholes due to a lack of good equipment

and hot meals, pinning for home due to a poor organization delaying mail. Defeatism infected the army and its officers. Ridgway knew the task ahead of him would be difficult.

In addition to the difficult situation on the ground, Ridgway's had health concerns. At the age of 55, he was no longer the young general he had been during the Second World War. He had recently suffered a heart attack and was nearing the age when most military men retired from active duty. However, General Ridgway knew the gravity of the situation at hand and his purpose was clear.

After meeting with Douglas MacArthur, the overall commander of forces in Korea, Ridgway set to work. He relieved many of his subordinate and exhausted commanders, replacing them with fresh and energetic men. He fixed the mail problem, got hot food to the front, and moved up fresh supplies. After sitting through a long briefing where his officers explained to him defensive plan after defensive plan, he asked them what their plan was for an offensive. When they told him they had no such plans, Ridgway set them to work creating plans for an offensive.

By spring of 1951, the army was reorganized and on the offensive. Utilizing airpower and artillery, he wreaked havoc on Chinese forces, pushing them back of the 38th parallel. In April of 1952, when Douglas MacArthur was removed from command by President Truman, Ridgway was placed in command of all U.N. forces in Korea.

Ridgway's brave and bold actions during that miserable winter on the Korean Peninsula salvaged the conflict from an almost eminent defeat. Though the war would drag on, it is in no small part thanks to General Matthew Ridgway that the South Korean nation is free and prosperous. By combating defeatism and promoting unified action under his command, Matthew Ridgway preserved the freedom of the South Korean people.