

General Robert L. Eichelberger Wins Alumni Award



The recipient of the 2014 Distinguished Alumni Award is General Robert L. Eichelberger. Gudger Nichols, great-nephew of General Eichelberger, and Mary Nichols, Gudger's wife, traveled from Nashville, Tennessee, to accept the award on behalf of the general. The award was presented at the Urbana High School graduation ceremony on May 31.

Eichelberger graduated from Urbana High School in 1903. He attended The Ohio State University and then went on the West Point in 1905, graduating in 1909.

After graduating from West Point, Eichelberger served in Panama and along the Mexican border before joining the American Expeditionary Force Siberia in 1918. After World War I, he was transferred to the Adjutant General's Corps, attended the

Command and General Staff College and the Army War College, and was Secretary of the War Department General Staff. There, he worked for the Chief of Staff of the United States Army, General Douglas MacArthur.

In 1940, Eichelberger became the Superintendent of West Point. While there, he instituted several reforms, including cutting back activities such as horseback riding and close order drills, and substituting modern combat training where cadets participated in military exercises alongside National Guard units.

In 1942, during WW II, he was assigned to the Southwest Pacific Command under General MacArthur, where he was put in command of the newly formed Eighth Army. He led Americans and Australians in the bloody Battle of Buna-Gona in New Guinea. He called this the Urbana Front in honor of all the fighting men from small towns like Urbana all over the U.S. As the Commander of the Eighth Army, he led the invasion of the Southern Philippines, clearing many of the islands that are part of that country.

General Eichelberger was present on the USS Missouri when the Japanese surrendered in 1945. From 1945 until his retirement from the military in 1948, he was in charge of the Eighth Army's military occupation of Japan.

During his military career, General Eichelberger was given many awards, including the Distinguished Service Cross with Oak Leaf Cluster, the Distinguished Service Medal with three Oak Leaf Clusters, and the United States Navy Distinguished Service Medal. In addition, he received the Knight Commander of the Order of the British Empire (Australia), Grand Officer of the Legion of Honor (France), and the Distinguished Service Star and the Legion of Honor (Philippines).

He died in 1961 and is buried at Arlington National Cemetery.

The Distinguished Alumni Award is given to a graduate of Urbana High School who has exhibited outstanding accomplishments in his or her field of choice.