Voiceover: This program is sponsored by the United States World War I Centennial Commission.

Voiceover: The following is a production of the Pritzker Military Museum and Library. Bringing citizens and citizen soldiers together through the exploration of military history, topics, and current affairs, this is Pritzker Military Presents.

Clarke: Welcome to Pritzker Military Presents with historians Dr. Jeffrey Sammons and Dr. John Morrow, Jr., in a discussion about their book Harlem’s Rattlers and the Great War: The Undaunted 369th Regiment and the African American Quest for Equality and about Chicago’s well-known 370th Infantry Regiment. I’m your host Ken Clarke, and this program is coming to you from the Pritzker Military Museum and Library in downtown Chicago, and it is sponsored by the United States World War I Centennial Commission. This program and more than four hundred others covering a full range of military topics is available on demand at PritzkerMilitary.org. First established as the 15th New York National Guard in 1916, the US Army’s 369th Infantry Regiment is the best-known African American unit of WWI. Often referred to as the Harlem Hellfighters, a name never adopted by the unit, the 369th infantry Regiment were said to have never lost a man to capture or a foot of ground that had been taken, and their legacy has become more a matter of mythology than history. In Harlem’s Rattlers and the Great War, the authors set out to write that situation, revealing as never before the details of the 369th Infantry Regiment’s experiences, including the poignant history of its heroes, its place in the story of both WWI and the African American campaign for equality and its importance to our understanding of American history. The experiences of the all-black 8th Illinois National Guard, which fought as the 370th Infantry Regiment during WWI, were at once similar to those of the Harlem’s Rattlers, and yet very different. Sammons and Morrow will examine the struggles that helped to form the 369th and 370th infantry regiments, the differences in their composition, their relationship to one another, and their significance to their respective communities in New York and Chicago. Dr. Jeffrey Sammons is an accomplished historian, author, and professor of history at New York University where he has served on the faculty since 1989. He has written widely on the subject of sports and race and is the author of the critically acclaimed Beyond the Ring: The Role of Boxing in American Society. He currently serves as a history advisor to the United States World War I Centennial Commission. Dr. John Morrow Jr. is Franklin Professor of History at the University of Georgia and is a nationally recognized authority on WWI and early military aviation. His books include The Great War: An Imperial History, and The Great War in the Air: Military Aviation from 1909 to 1921, widely considered to be the definitive book on the subject. Please join me in welcoming to the Pritzker Military Museum and Library Jeffrey Sammons and John Morrow Jr.

(Applause)

Sammons: Thanks first to the Pritzker Military Museum and Library for having us here. We are honored and privileged to have this opportunity to lead off the WWI centennial series with the WWI Centennial Commission and its partner, the Pritzker Museum and Library. And we thank Mr. Kenneth Clarke, the President and CEO of the Pritzker for that fine introduction. And I mean that sincerely of us and the work. Also like to thank Megan Williams, who is the director of external affairs. Megan and her team are responsible for the planning and execution of this event. I would also be remiss in not thanking University Press of Kansas publicist, Rebecca Murray, who reached out to the Pritzker on our behalf. I also thank those who braved the cold. Actually it’s a balmy Chicago day, isn’t it?

(Laughter)
Sammons: --to see and hear us and what we have to say about the black volunteer soldier who strived for and aspired to be recognized as a citizen soldier, whose role has been critical to our nation's founding and its subsequent defense. Although this talk has been promoted by and large as a discussion of our recent book with a focus on the 369th, from the beginning of having been invited to speak here, John and I have committed ourselves to giving credit to Chicago's own 8th Illinois and discussing how it is in many ways deeply connected to and in other ways very distinctive from the 15th/369th. To do anything less would be dismissive of and disrespectful to the memory of this important institution and the fine citizens of Chicago and Illinois. Now, we make no claim to be experts on the history of the 370th as our years of research and writing have focused on doing justice to the 15th/369th in long form. We hope others will do the same for the very deserving 8th Illinois and 370th Regiment. So the title of this talk really is Chicago's Fighting 8th, (parenthetically 370th) and Harlem's Rattlers, the 15th/369th--two black regiments, one black metropolis in the WWI era. Now please allow me to say something about nicknames in relation to both organizations. And I'm aware that the 370th became known as the Black Devils, putatively courtesy of the Germans and the Partridges, possibly by the French for reasons that are not entirely clear to me. Notice that I use neither in my introduction to this point, and I will not use either below. In fact, when it comes to nicknames we have enough of a problem with the 369th. Is there not an eerie similarity between Black Devils and Hellfighters, the most common nicknames for the 370th and the 369th respectively? That is to say nothing of the supposed sources. And John and I have concluded from the circumstantial evidence, as no hard evidence can be found, that the American press is responsible for introducing the latter and the famous ban for reinforcing it, the latter being Hellfighters. And no one can deny that Harlem Hellfighters band sounds much better than the Harlem Rattlers or Rattlesnakes band. And we do know that the 15th referred to itself before the war and after as the Fighting 15th or Old 15th, the latter to distinguish itself from the 15th New York Guard, a domestic unit for protecting the state while the combat soldiers were abroad and as a rejection of the draftee number 369. How then did we decide on the Rattlers? Arthur Wes Little's book, and Arthur Wes Little was a major in the 369th during the war, had been with it as the 15th, and would command it actually in the 1920s as the 369th Regiment. Well, his book *From Harlem to the Rhine* has on its cover an image of the rattlesnake. The projected image for the live audience shows a commemorative history with a coiled rattlesnake front and center. New Negro intellectual and musical artist Andy Razaf wrote a famous poem “Don't Tread On Me” as an homage to the 15th New York National Guard and as a clarion call to the black masses. And I'm gonna read you that poem. "There is a wondrous symbol, which has come from cross the sea. It's worn by every member of the 15th Infantry. A snake curled up, prepared to strike, and one can plainly see that by its threatening attitude it says, 'Don't tread on me.' Oh, race, make this your battle cry. Engrave it on your heart. It's time for us to do or die, to play a bolder part. For the blood you've spilled in France you must and will be free. So for now on let's advance with this, don't tread on me." We could spend the rest of the evening analyzing the poem's meanings and allusions, but it definitely references the black freedom struggle in terms of the American Revolution and the Gadsden flag and nods to Tennyson's “Charge of the Light Brigade”. What works for a band however was not suited to the new militant new Negro. And I'm afraid that Black Devils and Partridges were even less useful to the cause. The question that remained was exactly why, when, and how the rattlesnake came to represent the 369th. And John and I had been trying to pin that down for many, many years. And I found in the papers of George S. Robb, who is the first Medal of Honor recipient of the 369th, a white officer from Kansas who was the first and only until June 2nd of 2015, when Henry Johnson became the second
member of the 369th to receive the Medal of Honor. In any event, George Robb's papers are very revealing about so many things—himself yes, but also about the 369th. And his papers revealed that Colonel Hayworth was searching for something other than a number to identify the regiment’s train cars and wagons. The French did not use numbers to designate them for fear of giving away information to the enemy. So Hayworth said the quintessential American reptile and symbol would be the 15th's, and of course a rattlesnake coiled to strike is a very ferocious and deadly creature. And hence we have the Rattlers. Even an article in the New York Age in 1926 called the regiment the Rattlesnakes, which was then under the command of Colonel William A. Taylor. Now let me turn back to the commemorative history to transition into the core matter for me in this talk, and that is the connection between the 8th Illinois and the 15th New York. The commemorative history was a gift to the first black commander of the 15th or the 369th Regiment, Benjamin O. Davis—not yet Senior, but will be--pictured here as a young soldier shortly after passing the officers’ examine, a first for a black. Earlier Benjamin O. Davis served with the 8th Illinois volunteer regiment in Cuba during the Spanish American War. And although his tenure with the 369th did not begin until 1938 and lasted around a year, it marked the beginning of black command of the regiment for the next fifty-seven years. The 8th Illinois on the other hand has had black leadership from the top down since its inception with the exception of the aberrant Thomas Robert's tenure during much of the service in the Great War. And according to its official lineage, the 8th Illinois was organized on November 4, 1895 as the 9th Battalion Infantry of the Illinois National Guard, and on June 28, 1898 was expanded and re-designated as the 9th Regiment of Infantry Illinois Volunteers. And when mustered into federal service on July 2, 1898, it became the Illinois volunteer infantry led by Colonel John R. Marshall. And Marshall was not the first leader of this unit. Benjamin G. Johnson was the first. John C. Buckner II, who had very short tenure with the regiment, and of course John Marshall is the most famous of all its commanders. In the first call to war of the state's national guard, the unit was omitted. Protests and petitions to Governor John R. Tanner led to a promise that if the unit had a sufficient number of men it would be included in a second call. Marshall then led a feverish recruitment campaign aided by none other than Ida B. Wells Barnett, the Reverend Reverdy Ransom, and Cook County Commissioner Edward H. Wright. Tanner claimed that despite pressure from the very doors of the White House advising me not to offer this regiment with colored men, he appointed Marshall to command it. Disappointingly the unit performed provost and guard duties in Cuba, thus denying the regiment an opportunity to distinguish itself in combat. Another such disappointment occurred in 1908 when Governor Charles Deneen refused to call the unit out to quell the Springfield riots as white troops reportedly drank outside the town and let white mobs kill and burn—kill blacks and burn their homes and businesses. No matter the disappointments, the shining example of a black National Guard regiment manned by African Americans from top to bottom was a source of great envy for New Yorkers. New Yorkers had formed militia units in the mid-1800s and had three such units serve in the Civil War, raised with the help of the Union Lake Club of New York. Yet these units were never recognized by the state of New York. In the 1870s and 1880s, just like Chicago, New York had volunteer militia groups, namely the Skidmore Guard and the Veteran Guard, which paraded with white militia units until a post-reconstruction backlash led to legislation that forbade unrecognized military units from carrying arms. Now make no mistake, the National Guard was not only martial, it was also social. Often referred to as ballroom warriors, shining in gold braid and bearskin at pink teas, the club did not welcome blacks in a city and a state dominated by Tammany Hall and a regular democratic party that had sympathized with the Confederacy. And we also see in the live audience here an
older John R. Marshall, Colonel John R. Marshall in uniform. During the Spanish American War, protests and petitions to the governor and other elected officials yielded nothing for black New Yorkers seeking to have their own National Guard unit. So large loomed the reputation of the 8th Illinois that black New Yorkers viewed the regiment as inspirational and aspirational, and called upon its leaders for advice in the creation of their own such organization. Already lagging far behind Chicago in electoral politics, the absence of an important civic and martial institution signaled New Yorks' continuing underdevelopment despite WEB Du Bois' claim that New York City was the greatest single center of modern civilization in America. But the New York Age commented on the sorry state of affairs for blacks electorally and civically in New York in 1907. And this is a beautiful, beautiful statement by the editor of the New York Age, Fred Moore. “No other race in the great city is so deficient as yours in civic virtue and organization. The Italians, Japanese, Chinese, and whatnot all have organizations backed with civic pride to protect the interest they have and to promote interest they want. They are represented in all the civic movements and life in New York City, while the Afro Americans is represented in none of it. We have social, secret, beneficial, fraternal, and religious organizations galore to promote the lighter and gayer side of life, to care for the sick and bury the dead, and lay up enough treasure in heaven to keep us out of hell.” Does it sound familiar? “But as to matters of citizenship and civic well doing, upon which all of us depend, we are as naked of preparation as a newborn baby. It's scandalous. It's criminal.” Three years later, that plea appeared to have been answered in the form of the Equity Congress of Greater New York, which was dedicated to the effective involvement of blacks in electoral politics and the placement of blacks in the police and fire departments. New York got its first black policeman, Samuel Battle, in 1911. And he was the only one for many years. The Equity Congress also pledged itself to the organization of a National Guard regiment. And the man to lead that effort was Charles Ward Fillmore. Fillmore had been an officer in the Ohio National Guard and served with the so-called Colored Immunes in the Spanish American War, in which he contracted yellow fever. So much for the presumed immunity that blacks had to tropical diseases. Fillmore established a provisional regiment in 1911 and fought tirelessly to see his dream of a black National Guard unit led by him become a reality. Unfortunately that dream was very much a nightmare as republicans and democrats alike played a game of political football with the regiment issue. Even Colonel John R. Marshall, according to the New York Age, predicted failure for the enterprise, citing too many officers and the appearance of cronyism among other problems. Nonetheless Fillmore and the Equity Congress persevered, and with the help of legislative allies convinced Governor William Sulzer to sign into law a 1913 bill authorizing the establishment of a colored regiment of infantry to be formed immediately. Despite the law, the National Guard leadership was determined to kill what it saw as a political experiment and virtually succeeded, among other things, by among other things, flunking nearly every candidate who took the officer examination. There’s no armory. We can go on and on with the problems that this provisional regiment faced in trying to become what the law said it should be. To make a very long and torturous story short, the approaching war, a republican governor, and Pancho Villa-believe it or not--and the deployment of National Guard troops on the Mexican border provided an opening for black regiments to fill the depleted ranks of the New York National Guard. And on June 29, 1916, the 15th New York National Guard was organized. But a deal had been struck with many strings attached. First and foremost in that deal was that the leader had to be white. And the commander of the New York National Guard, Major General John F. O’Ryan, who would go on to command the 6th Division and the 27th Division in WWI and was no friend to the black man, did not believe that a single black officer would pass the federal examination for the National
Guard. Fillmore would stay with the regiment as a captain, receive a Croix de Guerre before Pershing transferred him and the other officers of the 369th to the 92nd Division, or the 370th Infantry. Although he would never lead the regiment, Charles Ward Fillmore is in my opinion the real father of the 15th New York National Guard. John Morrow will take us through the war-related experience of the two regiments.

(Applause)

Sammons: And like the terminator, I'll be back.

Morrow: In the immortal words of Arnold Schwarzenegger. Good evening. I'll dispense with a repetition of the introduction, and we'll move right into the wartime developments. And I think as I talk you're going to see very clearly how these two regiments are similar and are different in their experience. I'm going to begin with the 369th because that is the first regiment to see combat, but please keep in mind a couple of things. A substantial number of white Americans did not want African Americans serving in combat, because if they served in combat and shed their blood for the country, then they would merit equal rights. And so please keep in mind that what these men were fighting for, and it was understood, was to see combat, fight, and then demonstrate their ability to be equal citizens in America. And substantial numbers of southerners in particular, say a senator like Vardaman of Mississippi, a rabid racist, knew that and therefore did not want them to do just that. So in the end it was agreed despite pressure from the NAACP, that there would only be one black division. The 92nd. But it would never train as a unit in the States. It would be shipped over later in the war, possibly too late to see service, and that way they might be able to keep African Americans out of the fray. So what is this 93rd provisional division, parenthetically colored, in which the 8th Illinois, the 15th New York, both National Guard units, the 371st, which is a South Carolina draftee regiment, and the 372nd, which is a composite of a number of national--black National Guard units from south to north, from Tennessee northward. How does it come into existence? In the first place the 93rd Provisional Division never really existed except on paper. But it was the intent of the United States American Expeditionary Force never to use these men in combat. They were destined to be labor troops, engineers or pioneers. In other words, they weren't going to fight. So how is it that they come to fight? Well, the 369th or the 15th is what breaks the mold. Nobody knew what to do with the 15th New York National Guard. It asked to be part of the New York National Guard 6th Division. Rejected. It asked to be part of the 42nd Rainbow Division. Their reply was, "Black is not a color of the rainbow." Nobody observed that neither is white, but we'll dispense with that and move on very quickly. But the problem was when they sent them south to South Carolina to Spartanburg, there were problems--potential problems of riots. And so they had to send the 15th New York to France early. They shipped out in mid-December, got to France January 1st--New Year's Day of 1918--and were immediately assigned to labor duties, important in Montoir and places like St. Nazaire. Well, their white colonel, Big Bill Hayward, who really did appreciate his men, kept trying to petition to get them out of these labor duties because he had no idea that they weren't supposed ever to fight. What saved them? Henri Petain, the French commander in chief of the Western Front. Petain knew when the 15th arrived, and he knew that there were three other regiments coming. In other words we have the 369th, the 370th, the 371st, the 372nd. Technically speaking--keep in mind—both the 8th Illinois and the 15th New York National Guard were volunteers. They should never have been given a number in the three hundreds. That was for draftee regiments. So this is an insult to being with, which is one reason why the men of the 15th never called themselves the 369th and called themselves the Rattlers. So they were in France, and Petain talks to Pershing as, "I need men, and I want these men." Pershing thinks about it. He doesn't want to give Petain any white soldiers, and so he says, "Yes, you may have all four regiments."
January, Petain turns around and says, "Wonderful. I shall make them infantry." That wasn't what they were supposed to be. In other words, he's about to make them combat soldiers. They turn in—they keep their American uniforms, but they get initially the blue helmets of the French, and they get French rifles: they get French equipment. And they train, starting with the French division in April. By May, they are in the front lines. This is incredibly early. And no one knows that there is a black regiment at the front in France at that time until Henry Johnson and Needham Roberts early in the morning of May 15th are confronted with a German patrol of some twenty to twenty-four men coming into the American lines, and the two of them alone repel that German patrol. Henry Johnson is like a whirling dervish. He shoots one of the men, stabs two others to death, grenades another one while Roberts is throwing grenades. They're both seriously wounded. Actually they will both ultimately be invalids. But the Germans don't get through. Now the German technique as practiced—and they did this to the 1st Division, the Big Red One, when they first arrived—was you send over a block barrage, then you send over a substantial night patrol. You slit the throats of most of the Americans and you take a few of them prisoner, and you leave a note on their bodies that says, "Welcome to the Western Front." That's what they planned to do 'til they encountered Henry Johnson and Needham Roberts, and the welcome went awry very quickly. The bottom line is that from the very beginning the French and the Americans felt that the 369th was going to be an exceptional regiment, an elite regiment. The white—the predominantly white officer corps believed that. They were all well-to-do, by and large, northern. Men like Hamilton Fish, a sign of a prominent New York family, who said point blank that is the African American soldier—if the colored soldier, as they said then—is well led would make an excellent combat soldier, and if the regiment failed it would be the fault of the officers. Please keep this in mind. The fault of the officers. The 92nd division, which was led by white officers, always put the blame on the men, and they never accepted any responsibility for the problems. So you can already see, here's a white man saying, acknowledging—and don't forget there are black officers. This is an integrated officer corps. It includes a captain like Napoleon Bonaparte Marshall—very appropriately named—to fight in the French army, who speaks French and will actually be accepted into the French officers mess. He is a graduate of Harvard University and of Harvard University Law School. So it's not just that French accept these men as officers, the black officers, as equals, something that neither the French army usually or the American army wants to do. And that causes problems. By August, the regiment has been in the lines, has worked successfully—in fact there's another incredible feat accomplished by Sergeant William Butler from Salisbury, Maryland where he actually saves an officer and four of the men. This is at night. All these combats are at night because struggle on the western front in WWI essentially takes place—trench combat is at nighttime. And so in the dark of night he actually realizes that German patrol has infiltrated—seized an officer and four men. Butler grabs his French automatic rifle, which technically you shouldn't be able to pick up and should fire from the bipod. Arnold Schwarzenegger was not the first man to be able to pick up a heavy weapon and fire it. And he yells to his officer, "Get down." The officer ducks, and he guns down the German, all the while taking fire from them. Butler achieved repeated feats of valor during the war. He's another man who should earn the Medal of Honor, but has not had it bestowed upon him. But by August, what's interesting is that the American Expeditionary Force wants all of these units back from the 369th to the 372nd. Why? They want to make them labor troops in the American Expeditionary Force. It goes all the way up to Field Marshal Foch at the top, Allied commander in chief, and he replies tersely to Pershing, "You know, it would be a tremendous inconvenience for the French army to give you back these four regiments because it would mean we would have to get rid of two French combat divisions, of which they're integral parts." He
said, "I think it's a minor inconvenience for you not to have those labor troops you'd like. You'll get the regiments back after the war's over." And that's exactly what the French did. And so the 369th will go on. The Battle of Sechault in September/October of 1918. Over a four-day period they will seize this town against tremendous opposition. They will hold it. The casualties that they take will be some fifty percent of the unit of three thousand men, which is normal for a major battle. Ultimately they will be decorated as a unit with the French Croix de Guerre. There are two such units decorated. The other one is C-Company of the 370th, of the 8th Illinois. Okay. But what happens to the 8th Illinois? It's not the same experience. They're shipped south to Houston to train. The riots there concern people, but what is fascinating is that while the 15th was not really accepted by the New York National Guard, the 33rd Division, which is Illinois National Guard, accepted them there and actually had them march in their parade at the beginning. And so for the five months that they were there, the reports were that things actually went rather well. The black citizens of Houston received them well. But the problem was, if you're here in the United States, the United States Army does not know how to train you for western front warfare. And so finally it's going to take until April—which is when the 370th, 371st, and 372nd are ultimately organized—for them to ship to Europe. And when they get there, I'm not going to go into detail of the period from April to July, because the 370th was attached to five French divisions. The 73rd, the 133rd, the 10th, the 34th, and the 36th. What's the problem? Nobody's ever explained it. I would suggest what the problem is that they have a black commander. Nobody knows what to do with a regiment that is black from head to toe. The French don't believe that any black man could possibly command a regiment. We already know what happened to Lieutenant Colonel Charles Young, who was regular army and was basically proclaimed to be incapable medically of serving and then moved out of the corps. Well, what are you gonna do with a black colonel of the 370th, Colonel Dennison? Interestingly enough, Dennison is asked when they get to the 36th Division, they want to send his men to the front at Chateau Thierry, and Dennison says, "My men are not trained yet to go." Which is correct. How can you be trained, five divisions? And he is removed. The reason is officially for problems of health. There seems to be something that afflicts American—black American colonels when they come to Europe or when the prospect comes of going to Europe. Their health goes bad on them quite inexplicably. He is replaced by Colonel Thomas Roberts, who's a West Point cavalryman. There's a lot of discussion on whether Roberts was a rabid racist or whether he liked his men. It's actually discussions among African Americans. But it's worth keeping in mind one thing here—Roberts never really commanded the 370th. The 370th is in a sense sort of like the 93rd originally. It never coalesced. When the French 36th and then the 59th Division, with which it would serve, took it, in the 59th the general concluded that the French 59th Division would use the 370th in battalion strength and company strength alongside the French components. So in other words, Roberts never took command of this. He didn't have a staff. You can't command a company without a staff. Where they had the staff was at the battalion and company level, where the black officers continued to be. And there are two of the three battalion commanders, Lieutenant Colonel Otis B. Duncan, and John H. Patton, who were highly respected by Colonel Roberts, the white commander, by the French generals who commanded the regiment, and at the same time there's a fundamental problem, because they'd really like to replace a good number of the officer corps with white officers. That's what was done to the 369th. They moved out all of the black officers, commissioned officers, and replaced them usually with white southerners. The notion was that white southerners knew how to handle black soldiers. That's actually wrong. They thought they knew how to handle black southerners. What we found is that black southerners were terrified of northern colored folks, 'cause they were bad, and
they really didn't know how to handle them. So the accounts that we have--one of the officers actually shot one of his own men, a soldier. He was a rank amateur. He had just gotten there. Because he thought somehow the guy was getting ready to shoot him with an unloaded gun. And he knew the gun was unloaded, so it makes you wonder. Roberts--well, they have to have an investigation, because finally one of the generals, temporary commanders, says this isn't going very well. He says, "I'd really like to replace all the officers with French officers." That's not gonna go. So the American AEF has to investigate. And they conclude that, yes, there are some really good captains and lieutenants. And Colonel Duncan and Captain Patton are outstanding, but we really need to replace all of them. And we can't keep these two top men, because a black man cannot command a white man. So you can't bring in a black major or a captain when you have--excuse me, a white major or captain when you have a black lieutenant colonel. So in the end the decision is, we'll replace them all with white troops. And it becomes null point. It's already October 25th, and the AEF headquarters says, "Let's forget about this because in a very short time these men are going to be labor troops anyway in the AEF."

Well, we already know how that ends up. Meanwhile the 370th is making a name for itself in one of the most difficult fronts of the war, the front at Soissons. They are confronting the Hindenburg line of fortifications. This is a nasty, close-quarters combat with heavy artillery fire usually done at night, night patrols, grenades, hand-to-hand combat, the blade, and daytime attacks that are made against tremendous machinegun fire and artillery fire. The 370th in those circumstances begins incredibly well. They had finally gotten another month of training. They're sheltered in caves. It's worth it to note that they're probably going to gain some notoriety in the near future, because there's going to be I think a documentary one of these days on the caves in a place called Froidmont in France. And these caves have hieroglyphics of all the soldiers left who were there, and the 370th was stationed there. So the 370th's mementos are left on the cave walls. From the beginning the Germans are well entrenched. Let's be clear about how the 370th conducts itself. On September 20th, a sergeant by the name of Matthew Jenkins sees that one of his men is out of line in the sense he's too far forward. He's wounded. Jenkins thinks nothing of it. He simply vaults over the trenches, grabs the man, brings him back. The next morning he gets orders to take thirty-two men through the lines to join a French force in no-man's land to attack a fortress position called the Hindenburg Cave. He goes through. He gets to where these French soldiers are supposed to be to help him, and the French commander is dead, so he takes the French soldiers too, leads both of them, seizes the position, then holds it when the Germans surround him. When they begin to run out of ammunition, he orders his men to grab all the German machine guns and ammunition that they can find. They find seventeen--turn them on the Germans. When they're finally relieved three days later, he and his twenty-three Americans left march out. That's a Medal of Honor feat. He is awarded the Distinguished Service Cross, but there can be no denying that in any sort of comparative basis--this is one of the first Distinguished Service crosses won by--awarded by the 370th. That is a Medal of Honor feat. And what is amazing is that the soldiers have such fine morale as everyone notices when in September, the September investigation noted that they had not had any clothing for months. Their shoes and their socks were worn out. One man had had his--the bottom of his uniform ripped out by the barbed wire, and so he's running around bare-bottomed, and they're still fighting on. And that's when I commented to Jeff, I guess given the weather in Chicago, this is September and October, this is no problem for them. They probably figured it was still summertime. Who needs a uniform? These fellows are tough. Their kitchens don't work that well. They need new kitchens. But they fight on. They'll fight to the Aisne-Oise Canal. They'll fight across the Aisne-Oise Canal. They will fight on into what's called the Bois de Mortier,
across the river--the Selle River. In other words, these are tough positions to take confronted with fortifications, and all the while the captains and lieutenants in this unit, the 370th, demonstrate leadership, coolness, and courage under fire. There are three captains--what is it. A captain and--excuse me, three officers: a captain and two lieutenants, two sergeants and two privates, who in quick succession will be awarded the Distinguished Service Cross because they are so spectacular in combat. Company-F of the 370th is probably the toughest company. It could be compare with some of the best companies in Europe, because these men will follow their captain, whose name is Sanders--Chester Sanders--anywhere. And according to all accounts, Chester Sanders knows no fear under fire. And some of his exploits from leading raids at night to actually getting twenty volunteers to expose themselves under machinegun fire so they could locate where the German positions are so artillery can destroy them. He lives up to that. In the end what we'll see is they fight all the way to November 11th, but on November 5th, Company-C under the command of James H. Smith was ordered to capture the town of St. Pierremont, cross the Selle River, reach a railroad track running alongside the river under constant machinegun fire, against heavy resistance. They did it all, captured three artillery pieces and several machineguns in the process. Company-C was the company that was awarded the Croix de Guerre as a unit. The 370th, just as the other black units of the 93rd Division, fought well in the First World War. As the General Vincendon who commanded them observed, the regiment had often exceeded its assigned objectives, and its desire to be in the front line in the place of honor in the leading rank. And yet--and here's where I am--in 1925 the US Army War College in a summary report of black soldiers' efforts in the First World War, concluded that black soldiers and officers had been failures, had not done well in combat. They lacked initiative and courage and were afraid of the dark. Remember I told you that these combats took place in the dark. As I hope we've been able to indicate tonight, there is not basis in fact for that report. If you read it, it's all prejudice. But the report had the sole purpose--and it was effective--of keeping the peacetime US Army white until the Second World War. Thank you.

(Applause)

1: Can you tell me about the concern of the Army Expeditionary Force that we don't have black colonels commanding white soldiers?

Morrow: That goes back to this fundamental point, and start at any level. No black man is allowed to give a white man orders. It has to be the white man commanding the black soldier. If you remember WWII--good example, 'cause the same situation obtains--in WWII during the Battle of the Bulge and the Battle of Hurtgen Forest, a call went out to African American soldiers, would they volunteer to be infantrymen in northwest Europe, and nearly three thousand of them volunteered. 2,277, I think might be the exact number. The stipulation was that they had to give up their rank because they were going to be attached as 5th platoons to white companies, and therefore they would have to give up their rank because they would not be allowed to give orders to any white soldier. It's the bottom line, is race trumps rank. You don't want this happening. They cannot believe it could happen. The biggest problem was that in the 369th there were two captains, and they were over white lieutenants, and there was no problem. But that made no difference. The principle of race trumps rank and that no black man can give a white man orders, that's the fundamental point in the American forces all the way through WWII.

Sammons: And black officers were segregated on the ships coming back. They were put in with the enlisted men and not with officers, yeah.

(Applause)
Clarke: Thank you to Jeffrey Sammons and John Morrow, Jr. for an outstanding discussion and to the United States World War One Centennial Commission for sponsoring this program. The book is *Harlem's Rattlers and the Great War: The Undaunted 369th Regiment and the African American Quest for Equality*, published by the University of Kansas Press. To learn more about the Commission or the United States’ observation of the WWI centennial, visit WorldWar1Centennial.org. To learn more about the book, our guests, or the Museum and Library, visit us in person or online at PritzkerMilitary.org. Thank you, and please join us next time on *Pritzker Military Presents*.

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(Theme music)

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(Theme music)

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