Welcome to Pritzker Military Presents. In this special episode we’ll explore the hundred-year history of the US Army’s All-American Division, the 82nd Airborne. 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’s presented in partnership with the US Army’s Chief of Public Affairs Midwest and the United States World War I Centennial Commission. This program and more than five hundred others covering a full range of military topics is available on demand at PritzkerMilitary.org.

The 82nd Infantry Division was formed on August 25, 1917 to support the United States’ entry into WWI. During the Great War the All-Americans served in three major campaigns on the western front, helping to break the German imperial army. The 82nd Infantry Division was reflagged the 82nd Airborne Division at the onset of WWII and was the first of its kind in American military history storied for being the first wave of the 1944 D-Day invasion. This active duty airborne infantry division is stationed at Fort Bragg, North Carolina and trains for airborne parachute assault operations into enemy territory with a specialization in airfield seizure. Also known as America’s guard of honor, the division is comprised of an elite group of fighting men and women who challenge themselves daily to be the best and most ready light infantry unit in the country. As we approach the centennial of WWI we seek to commemorate the hundred-year anniversary of this historic unit and its origin in the Great War. The US Army has launched an initiative designed to bring leaders to the public so that they can tell their stories first hand. In collaboration with the US Army this program is part of the Pritzker Military Museum and Library's efforts to bring together citizens and soldiers. Lieutenant Colonel Joe Buccino serves as the director of public affairs of the 82nd Airborne Division at Fort Bragg, North Carolina. He received his commission in the field artillery from SUNY Albany ROTC in 1997. Buccino's previous assignments include serving as the intelligence officer of the 1st Battalion 39th Field Artillery Regiment, the 3rd Infantry Division during Operation Iraqi Freedom 1 in Central Baghdad in 2003, the fire support officer for 6th squadron 8th Cavalry Regiment, the 4th Brigade 3rd Infantry Division in Southern Baghdad in 2004 and 2005, as a combat advisor for an Iraqi army division in the Diyala province in 2009, and as the Brigade public affairs officer for the 172nd Infantry Brigade in Paktika, Afghanistan in 2011. Buccino holds a master's degree in professional studies from Georgetown University. His military awards include three Bronze Star Medals, three Meritorious Service Awards, and the Iraqi Campaign Medal, the Afghanistan Campaign Medal, and the Combat Action Badge. Please join me in welcoming to the Pritzker Military Museum and Library Lieutenant Colonel Joe Buccino.

(B applause)

Buccino: Thanks. Thanks. It's a pleasure to be here.

Clarke: So for most people the 82nd Airborne is an image of paratroopers who are going into D-Day. And they are the first wave in during the Normandy invasion, but a lot has happened in the division’s history that a lot of people maybe are not as up on, including the fact that it was formed during WWI. So can you tell me a little bit about what the division looked like back then?
Buccino: Absolutely. So in 1917, August 1917 the division looked like all of the other divisions that were formed for service into WWI. What's interesting, particularly interesting, about the division is that it was started and formed in Camp Gordon, Georgia, and it was initially formed with soldiers and officers from the immediate area, really from Georgia--they really came from three states: Georgia, Tennessee, Alabama. And then, so it was kind of a very cohesive, you know, 22,000-men organization all from kind of the same parts of the country. And then in November as the war department identified kind of the demands of the war, the war department started ripping thousands and thousands of these soldiers out of the 82nd to seed other divisions that had to be formed. So the commander, General Eben Swift, was our first division commander, drew--started drawing recruits from all over the country, initially from the Northeast and then from all over the country and realized--at one point he realized and his staff--his chief of staff realized they had representatives from every state in the country. They had a representative from every state in the country in the 82nd Division. So we were always a representative of the American people, always the--America's division, and that continues today. If you think about really the--the real texture and the nature of the American experience over the last one hundred years, all of that stuff is kind of manifest in the history of the division, so it's a really cool, you know, history that we have, and in many ways the history is kind of blanketed by this very romantic notion of a soldier, you know, coming out of an airplane and fighting his enemy. And that's obviously a great part of the American legacy, the American combat legacy, but that only goes back to seventy-four years--in the last seventy-four years, and our history goes deeper than that. Clarke: So you didn't have anybody jumping out of biplanes in WWI. So what were they doing in WWI? Buccino: What they were doing in WWI was traditional, you know, trench warfare, infantry tactics, infantry maneuvers. And it's important to recognize and important to understand that the 82nd was a participant in all of the decisive moments of WWI, at least on the American side. So Meuse-Argonne, we participated in Meuse-Argonne and had a Medal of Honor winner in Meuse-Argonne--Medal of Honor recipient Alvin York, who is one of the most decorated soldiers in WWI--and then before that in the St. Mihiel Offensive, we participated. So we were a--more of a supporting effort in both of those, but we had the right flank in St. Mihiel, which was important, and supported the 90th Division, which was important. And our first all-American hero, which is Lieutenant Colonel Emory Pike, came out of the St. Mihiel Offensive. Clarke: So how is the--and this broad-picture 'cause we're gonna get into the details of this later-- Buccino: Sure. Clarke: --but how has the role of the division really changed over that hundred year period? Buccino: Sure, so what's not really understood is I think probably a lot of people are looking at this and saying, "Why are you talking about a hundred years, a hundred consecutive years, when really the 82nd was demobilized and disbanded after WWI, and that's not--that really is not true. The 82nd was demobilized--it was demobilized but it wasn't disbanded. For two years, 1919 to 1921, the division did exist. It existed sort of on the books. So the war department kept this structure, the division structure active. The 82nd remained on the--in the active army as a kind of structure in case we had to very rapidly fill the ranks of a division for another major theater war. And then in 1921 the division was reorganized into the National Guard as a drilling reserve unit in the Army Reserve, not the National Guard--as a drilling reserve primarily stationed in South Carolina. The headquarters was in South Carolina and the battalions and regiments were all over the South. So that was maintained in the event that we had to very rapidly
serve for something else. And then in 1942 of course we were reorganized in Camp Clayborn, Louisiana as the airborne division, so 82nd Airborne Division. And then of course the great legacy in WWII, and then we've maintained that airborne status and that airborne role since then.

Clarke: So how did the American Industrial Revolution play into the forming of the division?

Buccino: Sure. We--in the same way that it was manifest in the forming of a lot of these divisions. And, you know, the American experience, American youth coming into these divisions--you know, really, the 70th, 77th, 80th, 82nd--many of these divisions and the 1st Infantry Division at the onset of WWI, you know, it was a way for American youth, American male youth, to experience a part of America and to really contribute to the country and contribute to the war effort. So the post-industrial revolution America is really been reflective of the 82nd experience ever since then, you know. And I think some of the things we may talk about with integration and airborne operations, the Cold War, the evolution of threats--all that stuff is percolating under the surface of the history of our division.

Clarke: So it just informs pretty much everything.

Buccino: Informs pretty much everything.

Clarke: So you have this great history, you've got this bedrock of history, that informs pretty much everything the division is doing, and it's tied into American history. So what is the current role of the 82nd Airborne right now?

Buccino: Right now we have the global response force mission, which is a readiness mission. We have an organization, part of our organization that must be ready to send hundreds of paratroopers anywhere in the world to respond to a crisis within eighteen hours. So they've got to be wheels up in eighteen hours. And about thirty percent, roughly thirty percent of the division, exists to support that role. And that's the folks that stay on the installation and out load those paratroopers, all of the enablers that go with, that may go with those paratroopers. All of that is manifest within the division, and it's a big effort as you would imagine just to maintain that readiness and maintain that alert and make sure they're ready to go. And then on top of that we have all of the other things that all of the other divisions in the army have to do, which is resourcing organizations to go to Iraq, Afghanistan. Right now we have a cavalry squadron and air squadron in Korea. We have missions in Europe; we have multinational partners. So we have all the traditional things, all the traditional sourcing elements that all the other divisions have to do. So we combine those two and it makes for a very high level of readiness, but a lot of these things kind of consume readiness, so we're constantly training. We're constantly on the cycle of coming back from something and then preparing to go somewhere.

Clarke: So for people who aren't entirely up on what it takes to be ready like that, how would you describe that to somebody, the impact on the soldiers, the impact on the infrastructure. You've got the kind of the teeth and the tail aspect of the division. How would you describe that?

Buccino: It is--I've never seen it before because I've never been the division before, and it is--as you would imagine it is quite an effort to first of all on the paratroopers that have to be ready to go. They have to be--they can--on leave they can go within a certain area distance mileage from Fort Bragg. They've got to be--there are certain days they cannot go anywhere. They've got to be ready to go if they get the call within a, you know, x-number of hours. And then you have all of the other support systems. And so, you know, you've got the folks that pack the parachutes. You've got our sustainment brigade that does all the out load. You've got another brigade that stands up to kind of push the brigade that's going out the door. And then we've got our kind of joint coordination, so
were in constant coordination with air mobility command, the air force, to be ready to execute something that could be very large. Now it also could be—along the spectrum of things we could respond to kind of low-intensity, which would be humanitarian relief, all the way along the spectrum of I guess human crisis or strife, you know, human strife, all the way up to high-intensity conflict. So that's an awful lot to be prepared to do, so it requires a really cerebral type of leader, a very, you know, kind of flexible—an intellectual flexibility on the leaders in that organization really kind of at the company grade and above—the company grade and below, so it's an awful lot to ask of an organization, but we have some great leaders, and we have some really disciplines paratroopers.

Clarke: We're gonna get into this a little bit, but it strikes me that anybody who served in the 82nd or even associated with it, there's a lot of pride there, and I think part of that pride is that readiness. Would you agree with that?

Buccino: Absolutely. Right, yeah, there's a lot of pride there. The pride is tied to some other things. The history--pride is many ways tied to the history. But it is tied to the fact that we have this really unique--really important and really unique mission. All the other divisions have an important, you know, have an important mission, so they're all important. And we don't oversell that, we don't beat our chest about it, but it is something that we are very cognizant of—that we are ready to go tonight. We are ready to jump fight win tonight.

Clarke: Tonight. Eighteen hours. You--talk about the context of getting that many people out the door in eighteen hours. That speaks to a level of readiness that I'm not sure a lot of people are thinking about, our American military being that capable. You hear a lot about, you know, we have things that are too big, too large, too slow, but the 82nd Airborne kind of is right in the face of that notion.

Buccino: So, we are fast, we're expeditionary, we're mobile. We are, you know, we're small so we're lean. We don't have big trucks; we have small things. We have things that are mobile that can moved quickly, things that can be airdropped and then can move to an objective. So we've got to be able to provide--we've got to be able to provide options to the national capitol region. So we've got to be able to go somewhere where there is not an airfield that's working or that has an airfield that is contested or being held by somebody we don't want to hold it. We've got to be able to go somewhere and then move to an airfield and then open up a lodgment for follow-on forces. So that requires us to be small, flexible, agile, and really, we say, "innovate to dominate". So we're constantly innovating; we're constantly on the knife's edge of technological advancement and also all kinds of other advancement. Just the way we take care of our paratroopers, the way we prepare for operations. We're constantly innovating and constantly just thinking of ways to improve. You know, we're an evolving, learning organization, and so we're just looking at constant ways to improve the way we do everything.

Clarke: So what is the broad picture of what the 82nd's doing right now?

Buccino: Right now so, we have, like I said, about thirty percent of our organization exists to support the global response force, and then we've got a brigade--one brigade we just announced is going to support, you know, the continuing efforts here in Iraq or Afghanistan. We've got an element that's in Korea, and then we've got another that potentially going to go in the pipeline for either Iraq or Afghanistan. So we've got--as our brigades come off of the global response force mission into other missions, because to come out at a very high level of readiness, they're ready to go do something else. So they maintain the global response force mission, then they hand it off to another brigade, and then they're at a very high level of readiness, so generally they've ready to be sent somewhere to one of these ongoing missions somewhere in the world.

Clarke: So can you talk about any recent operations that have happened that we may not know about? Or--
Buccino: Sure. So in the--this past spring we did something that was very large and very complicated. We did a multi-national airborne insertion into Poland. And it was a—the scope of this thing is—I'll just explain the scope of it—is that we went from Fort Bragg to Poland. Now this was all planned; this wasn't an alert. But we went from Fort Bragg to Poland without touching down. We refueled over the air. We rigged our equipment over the air, over the Atlantic, and then—in-flight refuel—and then jumped into Poland. And in Poland we met partners from Polish airborne partners, British airborne partners--there were six countries that were involved in this. Six countries, four points of origin, and three drop zones, and thousands and thousands of paratroopers involved in this. And then when we got on the ground, if that's not exhausting enough, when we got on the ground we did a pretty complicated mission. So it's important to remember that the airborne insertion is—like I said, it's something that captures the imagination. It's a romantic notion, but it's just a means to get to the fight. Once we get to the drop zone, once we land, we've got to do the--we've got to get to the objective, and we've got to do the mission that we are there to do. One other thing we did this past summer is we alerted the global response battalion, which is part of our 1st Brigade, the Devil Brigade, and they did a no-notice alert. This is directed by Force Com--US Forces Command. And they did a no-notice alert and about a hundred hours later they jumped into JOTC, into Fort Polk, they got into the JOTC, and they did an operation--low-intensity conflict operation with the world-class opposition forces at JOTC, but we did all that with no prior notification.
Clarke: So you just did it.
Buccino: We just did it, and, you know, tested the readiness, so General Abrams Forces Command, tested our readiness, and we met the test. We were able to get everybody out the door, we conducted the operation, and it was a great—you see things—the leaders in that organization had an opportunity to see things they would never really see that they need to resolve, or things they can improve on, things they can evolve—they could never really see had we not done something that really kind of dramatic.
Clarke: It's very interesting. We hear a lot about how the military's not ready, we're not up to this, we're not up to that, and we're in decline, and all that kind of stuff because of, you know, budgetary stuff. But it sounds like, at least the people I talk to, that's just not the case. We're meeting the mission no matter what.
Buccino: Right.
Clarke: Challenge.
Buccino: Sure. I mean, I can only speak for the 82nd airborne division. I know that there are budgetary constraints all over the army that general officers talk about. I know within the 82nd Airborne Division we have a hugely complex mission, and on top of that complex mission we have to do all the other things that all the other divisions have to do. But we have some great leaders, we have some great paratroopers, and, you know, we should say that--I should say that--I know 1st infantry division came through here--the other divisions have great people also. So we don't put ourselves above all the other divisions. So there are a lot of good people in our army.
Clarke: I personally think that that should give the American people some great confidence in our army, especially if we talk about what a soldier needs to do to become part of the 82nd Airborne Division. That's just—you don't just get to sign up and go jump, right?
Buccino: That is true. We say that our paratroopers are three-times volunteers. So they volunteer to join the army in a time of war, they volunteer to go to airborne school, and then they volunteered to serve in an airborne unit. And so they're three-times volunteers. What we do in terms of airborne operations is inherently dangerous. That doesn't mean they're not safe because we are very well trained, but there is an element of danger
when you do any kind of training--any kind of army training that's complicated, there's
danger. But when you add altitude, when you add speed, when you add, you know, a
combination of the air force and the army and talking from the ground to the air you add
some layers of complication and so there is something dangerous about that. And so our
paratroopers know that, they understand that, and yet they volunteer to serve in the
82nd Airborne Division.
Clarke: Let's get into some of the things that somebody in the 82nd has to do. I've heard
people talk about having to jump every ninety days at least in order to maintain
readiness. What are some of the other things that somebody has to do to be in the
division and be an active part if you're somebody jumping out of planes and/or
supporting that?
Buccino: right. So if you are somebody jumping out of planes you do have to jump every
ninety days to maintain your airborne status. So that is your airborne currency.
Proficiency is--takes more than that. To be proficient in airborne operations we say that
you've got to do it every thirty days just to get proficient at the whole process. And then
the folks that support that have to--the folks that support our global response force
mission and our readiness battalion are--they have to be on constant alert. And then
you've got, you know, the parachute riggers who we-- when we do airborne operations
we place our lives in their hands. You know, E-5s, E-6s, specialists, junior enlisted folks
that put the parachutes together, pack our parachutes. And that is a constant process
making sure that we have enough chutes to maintain airborne proficiency and airborne
currency.
Clarke: So you mentioned this earlier, but the jump is only a way to get to the fight. So I
think that many of us have this idea of the paratrooper M-1 that was carried into WWII.
The equipment that the paratrooper is using today is still--it's specially for them, correct?
Buccino: It's specially for them, right. The equipment that we jump with, the equipment
that our paratroopers jump with is specifically divine--so let me just go. So the equipment
that our paratroopers jump with is specifically designed to be air-droppable and to be
parachuted in. So we have specific vehicle platforms, mobility platforms, weapons
systems that can be airdropped in. Some of our equipment is dropped without the
paratroopers, so it's dropped on it's own parachutes, and--on a palette, and then some
of the equipment is dropped on the soldier, so when he lands on the--hits the landing
zone, he is ready to fight with the equipment that he jumped in with.
Clarke: Is there innovation amongst those in the 82nd on exactly the kind of equipment
that they need and want and desire and what they're jumping with, certain pockets or
things like that--is that part of the culture of the 82nd?
Buccino: It is. It is. So--and that's one of the--when we say, "innovate to dominate", that's
one of the things that we're always looking at. You know, the most efficient way to get
the paratrooper to the fight with all his equipment ready to go so he gets to the drop
zone and he's immediately ready to fight. So that is one of the things that we're always
looking at. We've got our brigades that do this all the time that are very good at it, and
our readiness battalion, our readiness brigade, they have specific standards of operation
and standard procedures to kind of formalize that whole process.
Clarke: So they're bringing in new stuff all the time?
Buccino: Bringing in new stuff all the time.
Clarke: Thinking about new stuff.
Buccino: Thinking about new stuff all the time. So we have a new--when you have a new
commanding general--Major General Erik Kurilla, who's about five weeks into his
command, and has a very--he spent a lot of time in the special operations community,
and he has a very strategic view of technology, weapons systems, and then everything
else-- standards, policies, procedures, you know, what's the most efficient way to do
this? What's the most efficient way to be ready to fight tonight even if it's something we haven't done before?
Clarke: You kind of got my next question. You just said it. I--everything about the 82nd and what you're capable of doing does sound almost like a special operation unit. You know, you hear about the SEALS and the Rangers and all that stuff. But then you have the 82nd. This is an army division--
Buccino: It's an army division.
Clarke: --that is doing this. This is not a special operations unit. This is a division. And that's kind of different, and it's at a scale that is so much larger.
Buccino: Right. So, right. So what we potentially can offer that is not necessarily manifest in the special operation community is we can bring in a larger package. So we can secure a lodgment, we can secure an airfield, we can secure something and then bring in a much larger package, and we can sustain ourselves potentially over a longer period of time than our special operations brothers and sisters may necessarily not be able to do. So it's kind of an added capability. But yes, it's a--within the division, within a division that large, to have that airborne capability, it really does give our country more options. It adds flexibility, it adds different ways to consider responding to a crisis.
Clarke: So let's go back--let's go back into history a little bit and talk about the division. What is the deal with the All-American Division nickname? Where did that come from? Somebody made this up, right?
Buccino: Somebody made that up. So the--it's interesting. It's a very interesting story. Let me just start over. It's a very interesting story. Our first commander, we say the first All-American six, was Major General Eben Swift. And like I said he looked across his formation and realized that he had soldiers from all fifty states. And so the way the story's generally told, and even paratroopers that come into our division are told this story, is that Eben Swift held the formation, he started talking to soldiers--where are you from, where are you from--and he realized he had soldiers from all states. And he said, "Well, we're the All-American Division." and that is not true. What really happened with this was general Swift realized he had soldiers from all fifty states, and he said, "We are America's division so we're gonna allow the country to name its division." So he had a contest. And he had a very public contest where folks could submit names for the division. And so the--there is one woman, Vivian Goodman in Atlanta, Georgia. She is--I consider her to be the mother of the 82nd. She submitted the name All-American. And so there were hundreds of names that were submitted; she had the winning name.
Clarke: The All-American Division is a nickname that really stuck. It's really something that you guys identify with. But from what I understand there were some names that didn't really make the cut.
Buccino: Yeah, there were some weird names, and the Atlanta Georgian unfortunately captured all this in 1917. But there were some weird names that we are glad did not make the cut. One of them for example was the Singing Division, which doesn't exactly strike fear into the hearts of our enemies. Although Eben Swift, Major General Eben Swift had an almost obsessive focus on singing. I guess he felt it built uni-cohesion. But he was really focused on the company level, at the unit level, singing. But so the Singing Division was one of them. United States Buddies was one of them. Now that sounds like a very friendly organization. It sounds like something you and I would want to be part of.
Clarke: Yeah.
Buccino: But it doesn't sound like something that's ready to jump out of the sky and kill our nation's enemies.
Clarke: The Buddies are coming.
Buccino: (Laughs) Right. Some of them were very specific to our German enemies in WWI, like the Hun Haters was one, Kaiser Katchers--Katchers spelled with a "K"
intentionally, and many variations on that. So now one of them, I don't know where they were going with this, but one of them was Mother’s Pet. That was one of the names.
Clarke: Okay.
Buccino: So, glad that one was rejected.
Clarke: Yeah. I don't think you would all be banding around Mother’s Pet as a division name.
Buccino: Right.
Clarke: What about the AA patch that we see that is associated with the division?
Buccino: the AA patch is an outgrowth--and the AA patch wasn't really developed until the unit started going into WWI. So actually they were already in England, but around--so in 1918. But the AA patch is obviously All-American. It has the United States' colors, and so the design was developed by General Swift and his chief of staff.
Clarke: So are there other nicknames now that have kind of come and gone with, you know, past conflicts of recent conflicts that have been kind of traded around?
Buccino: Well, we've stuck with All-American. We also say that we're America’s guard of honor. That’s an outgrowth of our WWII legacy. But All-Americans has really stuck. So, you know, one thing that kind of has come and gone is our motto. "All the way" is our motto. And so that's another kind of myth is that people think that that was a result of "All the way to Berlin", which is the name of Lieutenant Colonel James Megella's book—All the Way to Berlin—that we kind of started in the campaign in WWII in the European theater and then went all the way to Berlin, and that is not true. Our actual motto is "In Land, On Air". For some reason we don't use it. After WWII we started using the 509's motto, which was "All the way", and that stuck as our sort of motto.
Clarke: Got it. What are some of the--it seems like every division has a tradition, or set of traditions. And what are some of those traditions that have come out of WWI and also the hundred-year history of the division?
Buccino: Sure. So one of our traditions is All-American Week. That's something that many of our alumni plan their year around All-American Week. It is a big event. It's a weeklong sort of series of competitions and opportunities to demonstrate our airborne efficiency. And so it culminates with a review just like any other division review except of course it is an airborne review. So we send most of the division, you know, thousands of paratroopers jump onto our parade field, Armed Sicily drop zone, and then they do a march. And so this last year was the first time I’d seen it. We had artillery shooting in support. We had m-raisers, which is a small mobile platform. We had a full-scale operation, and on the back end of that was our airborne review, so the parade with our commanding general in the lead, and it was a very dramatic thing, and it was a really cool thing to see. And a lot of our alumni who were there from WWII and the Cold War deployments really appreciated it. And so it's a great time to recognize the legacy and those who came before us, and it's also a great time to recognize our great paratroopers.
Clarke: So the 82nd got over to WWI. They got there by boat.
Buccino: They got there by boat.
Clarke: Obviously, you know, everybody got over there by boat. And that's one thing that people kind of forget about with WWI, that everybody--the navy basically got everybody there.
Buccino: Right.
Clarke: And more people than ever had gone across the Atlantic Ocean to fight a war ever in history. Sailed for France, and there's the story about passing a review for George V.
Buccino: Right. So we sailed initially in April nineteen--to Liverpool, England. And then from Camp Upton, New York--Camp Upton, New York-- to Liverpool, England, and then
from there into France. Our division headquarters and the 325th regiment went through London, and there in London they did this passing review. They did a formal marching in front of the king and the queen. And so it was a great kind of lineage and honor. And he wrote a letter to all of our paratroopers, and so--they weren't paratroopers, I'm sorry. He wrote a letter to all of our soldiers, he wrote a letter to the division, and so it was a great kind of honor and lineage that we developed that day.

Clarke: What is in that letter?

Buccino: "Soldiers of the United States: The people of the British Isles welcome you on your way to take your stand beside the armies of many nations now fighting in the old world the great battle for human freedom. The Allies will gain new heart and spirit in your company. I wish that I could shake the hand of each one of you and bid you God's speed on your mission." So that's April 1918 from King George.

Clarke: So they were over there for a longer consecutive time than any other division. Is that correct?

Buccino: They were. So they were there for a longer consecutive time, and they were initially in a defensive posture, and then they went to the Marbache Sector, where they really were in more of a supporting role. And then of course St. Mihiel they had a supporting role, but it was a critical role. We had the right flank in St. Mihiel and supported the 90th Division. And then on September 15, 1918 was the day that our first All-American hero Lieutenant Colonel Emory Pike had a very gallant action. He kind of organized twenty soldiers, during a time when we were very disorganized and getting beaten back by the Germans, he organized twenty soldiers to continue the defensive, was mortally wounded, and continued commanding control in the fight. And so that was our first hero, and then Meuse-Argonne followed on that. We had a more supporting role in Meuse-Argonne. And then of course Sergeant Alvin York was our second All-American hero, our legend, from that fight. So we have today Pike Field on Fort Bragg, stands in memory of Lieutenant Colonel Emory Pike, and of course we've got a building and many plaques dedicated to Alvin York. Unfortunately if you--well I don't know if it's fortunate or unfortunate, but if you travel around Fort Bragg, around the 82nd footprint, so much of it is dedicated to our airborne legacy that I feel in some ways our WWI legacy is overshadowed--and understandably so, overshadowed by our airborne legacy.

Clarke: Well, WWII captured everybody's attention in a way that WWI did, but it just--they separated by some decades. We had an author come through here, and he said, well, really the only big difference between WWI and WWII, in some ways I guess we can add, there was no airborne in WWII, and there weren't any nuclear weapons in WWI. But really, it was the same fight in the same place with the same players almost, and a battle for control in that particular area of the world. So I think that doing a talk like this is important because we can bring some of that WWI history back into the forefront and talk about those things. One of our goals through doing stuff like this with you and with the WWI Centennial is the idea to get the idea that the Meuse-Argonne Offensive, that epic battle that is bigger than any battle in American history, is something that we should have at the same level as D-Day or Gettysburg or Yorktown or Battle of Trenton or things like that. What are your thoughts on what the 82nd is doing along those lines to think about that beyond a conversation like this?

Buccino: So for the one hundred year, for the centennial, we are going back beyond WWII, and we're doing something that is pretty cool. We're doing the All-American Legacy podcast, which will start in January, January 17. And so the all American legacy podcast is the full centennial. We've got three episodes that focus on WWI. One of them focuses entirely on St. Mihiel, so telling those stories is something that is really critical to us in our centennial. And then we are doing another thing that is going to be one hundred stories, one hundred minutes, one hundred days, and we're going to start at the
very beginning and go through certainly St. Mihiel, Meuse-Argonne, Alvin York, and then there are some other really cool stories in there about WWI. So just telling those stories is something that's really important to us.

Clarke: WWI definitely informed the creation of the division. WWII is really where you earned your reputation.

Buccino: Right.

Clarke: And D-Day really did that. What are some of those moments that you think, in your opinion and then also from the division's opinion, that were the defining moments for the 82nd?

Buccino: Sure. Well, the Campaign of Sainte-Mere-Eglise is one of the defining moments in world history. And we were obviously--that's very important to us. So that you know, the combat jumps, those things are very important. The heroes, the legends that came out of that, those things are very important. And so I say that when you serve, when you where the Double-A patch and you wear the maroon beret, you live among the ghosts of legends. And so as you drive around Fort Bragg many of our streets are named after our WWII legacy. Many of the buildings are named after these heroes. As you go into our buildings you see al of the major personalities, all of the major heroes: you know, Gavin, Megellas—we've got a competition named after Megellas—Ridgeway, all of the kind of leaders that shaped world history in many ways. So we pay great tribute to them, pay great homage to them.

Clarke: So you have the jump into France, but are there other jumps during WWII that people should know about?

Buccino: There are other jumps. We had the jumps into Italy; we had those--the combat operations in Italy. The first one that first combat operation led by General Gavin, which was very problematic--was kind of overcome by an error with--basically an error with the aircraft, confusion, kind of the fodder of war type stuff, and then high winds. So you know, airborne operations then, the kind of the infancy of airborne operations, were very, very risky and so very complicated to do, to put paratroopers on the ground in that manner. And so we obviously took the lessons learned--our leaders took the lessons learned from that specific operation, applied them to future operations. And then we have some other kind of interesting stories like Operation Giant II, which was the jump into Rome, two airfields in Rome, which was cancelled by General Taylor. General Taylor was kind of skirted into Rome under a hidden guise. He was skirted into Rome in an ambulance hidden as a prisoner of war to kind of prepare for this operation, for the seizure of Rome, and then about fifteen hours before the jump he cancelled it. He just felt that the German offences were too developed and that the Italian forces weren't quite ready to do this. He cancelled it, he sent the cable to North Africa, and seven hours before launch it was decoded, and the mission was cancelled. And then there was obviously some other complications with--General Eisenhower was perturbed, and there was kind of a back and forth. But it's another cool story from our history that is not as well known as Sainte-Mere-Eglise or the other jumps.

Clarke: What are some of the other points in your history that are not as well known as WWII that have happened after the war?

Buccino: So we had many Cold War deployments. One of the ones that we talk about was Operation Power Pack in 1965, our response to the Dominican Civil War, their civil war on the Dominican Republic. That was a strictly 82nd Division and some enablers from Fort Bragg, but we were the only division that participated in that, and that's--we lost nine paratroopers in that demission, but it's really--it's kind of been swept aside by Vietnam. And so that's a great story though. It's a very compelling story. It's one that we are gonna tell in the All-American Legacy Podcast. And then of course we've got all of the kind of the Cold War airborne operations that we did subsequent to that.
Clarke: And you do relief efforts as well
Buccino: We do relief efforts. So we had the Hurricane Katrina relief, disaster relief in Hurricane Katrina, disaster relief in Haiti. So we have--because we have the ability to, you know--agile. Mobile, fast, because we have the ability to do that, because we are small and fast we can get soldiers in to do those kinds of missions. Kind of non-standard missions.
Clarke: So the US military seems to always be on the forward edge of social change. You're always incorporating things long before society does as well. The Triple Nickel is an example of this. And can you talk to us a little bit about the Triple Nickel, where they come from, and how they are incorporated in the 82nd?
Buccino: Yup. So the Triple Nickel was the 55th Parachute Infantry Battalion. It was the first all-black parachutist battalion developed for entry into WWII. The Triple Nickel never served overseas in the fight in WWII largely because they could not fill a full battalion because there weren't enough recruits to do this. But they did serve on the west coast of the United States, and during the war. So during the war the Japanese Imperial Army sent thousands and thousands, about 9,000, fire balloons, which sounds kind of odd. But it was fire balloons with incendiary devices that would--that would ignite set to detonate over forests on the west coast, and so the idea was that it would be--it would cause chaos, it would cause a drop in morale, and it would cause the American public to not support the war effort. And so Triple Nickel did smoke jumps, so they would jump into these forests and put these fires out. It's not really clear how many of these incendiary devices made it to the west coast, but we know that some did. So they served that mission. And they served that mission, and then after WWII they were incorporated into the 82nd Airborne Division, making us the first integrated division.
Clarke: That's great. You also have current history happening this year, right?
Buccino: This year.
Clarke: Right now.
Buccino: Right now. So we have the first female infantry officers in the army, are incorporated into the division. That is happening right now. And so that is something. It's kind of as big a deal as we make of it, and it's not particularly a big deal in terms of our ability to operate and what it means today right now in the fight readiness. But yes, that is part of our continuing legacy of representing the broad American experience over the past one hundred years.
Clarke: That's great. How aware are the 82nd airborne division members of their history, of their lineage, of where they come from?
Clarke: So from private to general you've got--
Buccino: From private to general we've got you know--like I said, the names of the buildings, the names of the streets. Within--and it's even more focused down at the regiment. Our regiments align very closely with their WWII history. Our commanders do terrain walks in some of those parts of the country where we did these operations. And we also maintain our relationships with our NATO allies with our militaries that we served alongside in WWII. We do jump exchanges with those units where we share their airborne wings, they share ours. We jump out of the same aircraft. So you really cannot escape it in the 82nd Airborne Division.
Clarke: Who are some of these legends of history that we've been talking about with the 82nd Airborne Division?
Buccino: Sure. So one name that comes to mind is Lieutenant Colonel James Megellas, who served--he's one of our most highly dedicated--he's one of the most highly dedicated officers in our history. Distinguished Service Cross from WWII, and he's still...
very tied to the division. We have a competition, best lieutenant competition, named after him. And he in fact visited our paratroopers in Afghanistan a few years ago. He is 99 years old at this point. And in Wisconsin we sent one of our deputy commanding generals for the 82nd to a post office that was named in his honor--renamed in his honor. And so he is still a very celebrated character in our history.

Megellas voiceover: People join certain units because of their background and what they've done, and they want to be part of something that has accomplished something. Now when you go to paratroopers, and you're an 82nd, one of the things that brings you there is the fact the 82nd was the first airborne unit to be formed, and that they were the first American division on enemy soil, and that they have compiled a record of combat through the entire war. And that they have set the standards for leadership and se the standards for everything else. and so that if you're gonna get into service and you want to be with an outfit that has accomplished something and you can take pride in it, you're gonna look at the 82nd because they've got a record unequaled in terms of history, in terms of accomplishments and everything else.

Clarke: Who else should we know about?

Buccino: Oh, you should know about obviously Alvin York. We spoke about Alvin York, and Colonel Retired Gerald York maintains the Alvin York Society. Still that name and that lineage and also what he meant to his family and the country after the war is a really interesting story as well. Al Rivera, if you get a chance--so Al Rivera served in the Dominican Republic, Operation Power Pack. He is an all-American story in the sense that he was raised in Cuba. He had to leave Cuba to escape Castro, made his way to the United States, and then joined the 82nd--didn't quite know what it was, but he kind of talked to a recruiter, joined the 82nd, and then he served as a rifleman, and then he also served as a pseudo-linguist in the Dominican Republic and the, kind of the, house-to-house, pseudo counterinsurgency type operations.

Rivera voiceover: What I learned in the 82nd, that influenced my professional career and my life always, to the point that when I retired in November 2012, within three months of my retirement I wrote on one page the ten things that a young person needs to do to get ahead in American corporate life. The ten things that I have there, many of them came from my days in the 82nd because I was learning from all the officers, and I would observe how they make decisions, you know. And on thing that we always did in the 82nd for with the maneuvers in Fort Bragg or we did a mission in the Dominican Republic, we always looked back to see what could have we done better.

Nightingale voiceover: Listen, don't speak. Have a very good understanding of what your unit's medal is, the training tasks. Watch the NCOs and ask them questions. And spend most of your time watching, less time talking. You can't learn anything when you're just waiting to speak.

Clarke: There's two questions that are, you know--actually I have three questions that I think are quite important for us wrapping up this conversation, and thank you for doing this with us. It's really cool that you came all the way out here to do this.

Buccino: Thanks for the opportunity.

Clarke: So what is next for the 82nd Airborne Division?

Buccino: What's next for the 82nd Airborne Division as we continue here under Major General Erik Kurilla's command--he's bout five weeks into the command--is continuing to keep the 82nd at the knife's edge of readiness. So we keep the bayonets sharp. We obviously maintain readiness. But General Kurilla has the staff--has his staff and his leaders looking at ways to continue to evolve everything we do, continue, you know, ways to talk from aircraft to ground, to talk from the ground to another airfield real time, to do real time commander control on an aircraft, to combat planning on an aircraft. And then everything from the way that we get ready to do airborne operations, the way that
we prepare. How do we reduce the number injuries from airborne operations? How do we reduce the physical stress of wearing the equipment and wearing the chute and all of your equipment standing up in the door? The airborne timeline--how do we evolve ways to bring our families into our readiness platforms? Bring the communities into our readiness platforms? We’re looking--he has us looking at all of that stuff, and so we’re constantly trying to innovate ways of thinking and doing things in the 82nd.

Clarke: So given everything you just said, how do people talk about their being a part of the 82nd? Why is it important? What's the spirit of it? What's the crux of the experience that you have?

Buccino: Sure. So the way that I think about this--like I said, airborne operations are inherently dangerous, and we know and appreciate that. And so the story that I tell my daughter is when you're standing up in the aircraft, you get the command to stand up and hook up, you’re standing up in the aircraft, I always look around at the faces of the other paratroopers because it kind of calms me, and you've got a lot of energy in the aircraft. You've got--some people are nervous, some people who've done it more are excited, but you've got a lot of kind of energy there. And so you've got paratroopers that are kind of like tapping each other on the head, and it's like, "Hey, have a good jump. I'll see you on the drop zone, brother." so it's that kind of attitude that we understand that we put our lives into one another’s hands. We are reliant on that--the rigger that packed that parachute, that he did his job or she did here job, and she prepared that parachute for operations. We’re reliant on the jump master, that they’re gonna get us out the door safely. We’re reliant on the jumper behind me, that he's not gonna, you know, ride my pack tray, the jumper in front of me is taking the training seriously and he's gonna know what to do if something happens, we collide or something happens in the air. So it's a real sense of camaraderie, and then when you complete the operation, there's a lot of that--the rank tends to kind of dissolve. We're always professional, but the rank kind of tends to dissolve, because first of all that jumpmaster is in command of that aircraft regardless of what rank you are. And so we get on the drop zone and there's a real sense of teamwork and family, and it's something I haven't experienced anywhere else in the army.

Clarke: Wow. What does your daughter say to this?

Buccino: She is like me. She is, you know, a little afraid of heights. (Laughter)

Buccino: So she, you know--she’s excited about it. She does not right now want to be a paratrooper, but I'm working on it.

Clarke: (Laughing) You have a lot of work to do.

Buccino: I have a lot of work.

Clarke: Being a museum and a library we have a lot of books. And I'm curious to know if there's a book that you would have that is meaningful to you that you would suggest that our audience, that they should read?

Buccino: Right. So The Sword of St. Michael is the one that is generally referred to as lieutenants come in to the division, and that is a good one. It captures the full scope of WWII. And then All the Way to Berlin, which I mentioned, by James Megellas is another good one. But the Phil Nordyke book, it's a two-volume--All the way--All-American All the Way. It's a two-volume set about WWII, and it really just captures the kind of personal, first person voice of what happened. It's a lot of quotes. And to me what it captures more than some of the other things I've read is the real human fear of doing this--not just doing the airborne jumps into Cecily and other things, but just the real fear of just being the first organization, the first people, to train to do this. It was, you know, terrifying, and that really come through in the book. And so that's a--for me it's a really cool thing to read and a real humanizing thing to read.
Clarke: We have the book here if you want to check it out.
Buccino: Oh, great.
Clarke: Yeah. I want to thank you so much--
(Applause)
Buccino: Hey, thank you, sir.
Clarke: --for our conversation.
1: We--I was with the 307th back in '67. And in '68 we were getting ready for Prague as a first responder when the Communists went into Prague, but then it was turned back then because of the Tet Offensive. 3rd Brigade went over in, right, I--February. It was a six-month deployment. The ones had a--a ability to either stay for a full other six month or they could come back with the units that left. So, yes, the 82nd was in Vietnam.
Buccino: The 82nd was in Vietnam, and it is--that story, sir, is--first of all, thank you for that, for contributing that story, and thank you for your service in Vietnam. That story is not as well told as it should be. And so--but I would--it's not. But I will tell you that in the centennial it is going to be told. So the All-American Legacy Podcast, we have a full episode dedicated to that.
Clarke: I want to thank you very much for being here.
Buccino: Thank you.
Clarke: It's been a great discussion.
Buccino: Thanks.
(Applause)
Clarke: Thank you to Lieutenant Colonel Joe Buccino for a great discussion about the 82nd Airborne Division. Special thanks to US Army Public Affairs Midwest and the United States World War I Centennial Commission for supporting this program. To learn more about our guest and our sponsors visit Army.mil and WorldWar1Centennial.org. To learn more about the Pritzker Military Museum and Library, become a member, and explore all that it has to offer, 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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