Clarke: Welcome to Pritzker Military Presents, with a discussion by author Nimrod T. Frazer about his book Send the Alabamians: World War I Fighters in the Rainbow Division. 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 sponsored by the United States World War I Centennial Commission. This program and more than 500 others covering a full range of military topics is available on demand at PritzkerMilitary.org. The capstone of the First World War was a ferocity shown by allied and central powers deeply dug in on both sides. The stalemate on the western front sought a spark to bring the riggers of a seemingly endless war to tilt the outcome to one side or the other. The Alabamians of the 167th Infantry Regiment of the 42nd Infantry Division, also known as the Rainbow Division, looked to bring success to the newly formed American Expeditionary Force. Send the Alabamians tells a remarkable story of a regiment of Alabama recruits whose service was hailed by Douglas MacArthur as having not been surpassed in military history. The hot-blooded 167th exhibited unflinching valor in the face of machine gun fire, artillery shells, and poison gas. They were able to dislodge and repel and deeply entrenched, heavily armed enemy, where they sustained casualty rates of over fifty percent. Relying on extensive primary sources such as journals, letters, and military reports, Frazer draws a vivid picture of the individual soldiers who served in this division so often overlooked but critical to the war's success. Frazer served as a tank platoon leader in the US Army during the Korean War with the 40th Infantry Division. He is awarded the Silver Star. Frazer is a retired investment banker and formerly the CEO of NSTAR. He earned his MBA at Harvard University. His interest in the Rainbow Division stems from his father's stories, Sergeant William Johnson Frazer, who served in D-Company 167th Infantry Regiment during WWI and who was wounded at the Battle of Croix Rouge Farm. Nimrod Frazer gifted a memorial in honor of the 42nd Infantry Regiment in the name of his father, and it is located on the Croix Rouge Farm battle sight in France. The memorial was sculpted by James Butler and was unveiled in 2011. Please join me in welcoming to the Pritzker Military Museum and Library US Army veteran Nimrod T. Frazer.

(Applause)

Clarke: Welcome, sir. Thank you for being here.

Frazer: Friends, it's an honor for me to be here and to talk about a great regiment, a great division, and an important time of our nation's history. It's also an opportunity for me to thank the Pritzker Museum and Library for their acknowledgement of the importance of the American combat soldier and for their willingness to use their power and influence to honor those men and women who--of this country, who from the beginning of its history have been willing to stand in harm's way. The story in Alabama started in 1912. There was a progressive governor down there by the name of O'Neal who saw that we needed some kind of militia in the state, and the army sent a guy by the name of Bill Screws down to--down to Alabama to organize a National Guard unit. And he was a captain in the regular army, he had done two tours in the Philippines, he had extensive combat experience and had served as the president of military district in the Philippines. He was in his early forties. He was actually a native of Montgomery, Alabama, and when he returned from the Philippines with a regular army captaincy,
there weren't enough spots for the West Pointers, so they took these guys like Screws who were not West Pointers and used them in other specialty training roles, and he had become a specialist in training National Guard units and had gone into three states in the American West in organizing the National Guard. He came to Alabama, it was a real difficult opportunity I think. I don't know how he faced it. But between 1912 and 1916 with increasing federal government funds every year he recruited 5000 soldiers into the national guard, all male, and in 1916 the situation in Mexico had come to the attention of president Wilson. There were three guerilla bands operating in Mexico attempting to unseat the democratically elected government down there. One of them, the one led by a guerilla fighter by the name of Pancho Villa, crossed over into New Mexico, killed quite a large number of Americans, I think it was eighteen, and did battle with some American soldiers there in a skirmish, and returned to Mexico. This was a trigger for president Wilson who had run on a peace ticket in 1916. Wilson was a peace man; he did not want war, but he recognized the trouble that we had on the southern border. And there were about 120,000 soldiers in the regular army at that time. He sent all of them down there. General Pershing was sent down as the leader of the American army on the Mexican border. The regular army did make some forays into Mexico, into the nation of Mexico. They went about four hundred miles into the interior. They were never successful in catching Pancho Villa, but it did stabilize the democratic administration there so that they were able to maintain the government. And then they moved back up north of the Rio Grande River. President Wilson then had all of the National Guard in the United States sent down there in stages for advanced infantry training. The group in Montgomery had been mobilized in the spring of 1916. And in nineteen--in the fall, in October, they went by trains, six trainloads of soldiers--rickety old trains taking 5000 men down there. They were in four regiments: one cavalry regiment, three infantry. They were all pretty much route step, not well trained, and country boys and poor boys, people who had been attracted by the pay. Many of these boys had never been outside of their home country; a few had never been out of the state. My father had been out of the state once. He was fairly very typical. These people were mostly adventurous I believe. They were young boys. They were in high school, high school age boys. Not many of them were well educated. I would say probably twenty percent of them were illiterate. So they go down to Mexico, and they stay down there and train for four and a half months. They--under the tutelage of some regular army soldiers who really know what they're doing, and they really begin to learn to soldier, and then they return to Montgomery in the spring of '17. We were not yet at war, and all these guys expected to be discharged but they were not. President Wilson kept them as a kind of a hold card in the event that were drawn into the war. You know, in the event that it became necessary for us to go to war he wanted to have some organized people in addition to the regular army, and he picked several states that had had pretty good training records. He kept Alabama. So these people, when we went into the war in April of 1917, they were ready. And within a matter of weeks these people were all--Secretary of War Baker sent a telegram down to Bill Screws and said, "Colonel Screws, you have 5000 men. You pick the best 3,720 of these, and send them to New York to Camp Mills Long Island where they will become integrated into a regular army into an division and they will be designated the 167th United States infantry Division. They went by eight trains to New York, went to camp mills, arriving there in August of '17 and assembled and became a part of the 42nd Division. Every ship on the eastern seaboard was used up with transporting American soldiers to France, to Europe. The British had sent a delegation to Washington and met with President Wilson and asked for seventy-five battalions of Americans to go into the trenches of northern France under British officers and fight with them in the trench warfare of northern France. The French were not to be outdone. They sent a large
delegation of senior officers to Washington and asked for a fully formed division to go into their French army, which was a noble army. And the answer was not happily received. President Wilson and General Pershing says we’re gonna come into this war with you; we’re not gonna fight it under your officers. We’re gonna fight it under American officers. And so they all started--the rainbow division was transported in November and December of 1917 to Europe. They went to--the Alabama regiment went to England first and went to Winchester, stayed there about a week, and then were sent across the channel to Le Havre in the winter. They were put on trains and sent down to southern France's east--southern and western France, which was closer to the Rhine river, and to Chamonix, which had been a--it had been a French training center. They turned over--the French turned over great training areas, good barracks, turned it over to us and said that they would cooperate in training of American troops in any way they could. It's important to know that these American soldiers didn't know how to use a simple thing like a rifle grenade. We certainly--the Browning automatic rifle had not yet been mass-produced, so they had no experience with that. They had no experience with the Hotchkiss, the French machine gun. So there was a great flurry of activities to get into technical training for these people. The mortars were coming into their own but they were quite small. A regiment would have four mortars in the regiment. They would all be in a small mortar platoon that would be at regimental headquarters. It was shocking to the Europeans for Pershing to say, "We're not gonna learn and study and prepare ourselves for trench warfare." One of the misconceptions of the American public is that these Americans, these doughboys, these American soldiers spent their time in trenches. There was really very little of that. They were highly mobile--highly mobile unit. The slide before you know has got an Illinois story to it that's very important. There was a guy named Henry J. Reilly whose father had been killed in the Boxer Rebellion at Beijing in 1900. And when Reilly's father was killed his mother brought Reilly to Winnetka, and so he became an Illinois citizen and applied for West Point and was admitted to West Point from Winnetka, from--he's an Illinois guy. Reilly was distinguished at West Point and came out, and when the Rainbow Division was established, and he had an artillery--he commanded an artillery battalion in the Rainbow--worked with these regiments from Alabama and Iowa and Ohio and New York. Those were the four infantry regiments, worked with them from the beginning and getting to Europe in the beginning of 1918 and serving their last battles with them at Cote De Chatillon and at the Sudan. Reilly was a correspondent for the Tribune here from this city. And he later became a brigadier general and he was the author of the official history of the Rainbow Division. So there's a great genealogical connection between me and between you folks, Illinoisans, and he was the first real link of that. Here you've got a couple of shots of the Mexican border. The shot on the right is a current shot of the vegetation and the desert environment that still exist down there, and on the left you see American soldiers being paid off in silver. And here's Bill Screws. Pretty simple mind. He had--when he became the federal advisor and facilitator of the Alabama regiment, he had been quite familiar--he had become quite familiar with these soldiers and with these officers. He had written an officer efficiency report for every officer in the Alabama National Guard, which at that time was four regiments. He had looked into the eyes of every single enlisted man in multiple inspections in ranks. So he knew these people. And when he got the word from the war department to choose the best 3,720, he knew how to do it, and he did it in just a matter of days. And so within a matter of weeks they were ready to board on these eight trains and come to Long Island where they staged in Long Island with these Illinoisans and Iowans and Ohioans and the New Yorkers and got to France. A part of them even had to go to France through Canada. All the ships were taken. One unit went to Canada and then went over to the east coast of Canada and put
on smaller ships to get there. It was a rag-tag effort to move a large, large numbers of soldiers to France as quickly as possible. All right. The Rainbow Division became one of the four Winter Divisions. That's very important that when we got to France with this 28,000 men the French people were exhausted. They had had four years of war. They had lost a million men dead by that time. The families were distraught, and they saw the Americans as saviors. And of course we were not ready to save them. And Pershing said, "We've got to do more mobile warfare training. We've got to do what President Wilson tells of us to do, and we've got to be capable of really helping you folks when we finally get into the trenches." So from January through March Screws had this Alabama regiment, and it was an extremely mobile unit. The picture you see before you now is at Camp Mills just before they boarded on these ships to get to Europe. And there were 28,000 men there. And that was the Alabama regiment that you see in this picture. They led the parade of the four infantry regiments. It was the last parade they had before going abroad. They got to France and they headed down to Chaumont. I had this exhibit here just to illustrate how highly mobile they were. You see there seventy-three different command posts. These people were moving fast. They were moving from one training area to another. They were scattered all over France, and then they were assembled back—in March they were assembled back down to Baccarat. And Baccarat did give them a shot of service in the trenches. They were there for 110 days. It was an interesting sector. There was a German sector, a German side to the sector, and a French side to the sector. But during the 110 days that they were down there, neither side ever attempted to conquer the other. But what the Alabamians and what the Rainbow Division soldiers did was learn to patrol—learn to kill, learn to be killed. For those of you who have worn a uniform you know that patrolling is incredible dangerous. It's probably the first tool of every infantryman. Douglas MacArthur was chief of staff. He was a full colonel at that time. He wrote a memorandum and instructed every combat unit in the division to have a rotation in the trenches in which every officer and man in the company would learn to patrol. They did take a fair number of casualties. They did kill a fair number of people. It was—they were rookies. They were green troops they were untested soldiers. But as they got there and went through those tests—here's a fairly typical shot of these guys who were from K-Company in Birmingham. The K-Company commander was a guy named Mortimer Jordan. He turned out to be a really terrific, terrific person in the regiment. He was actually a medical doctor but the medical doctor's-surgeon's job was taken so he couldn't be the regimental surgeon, so he said, "I'll take a rifle company." And he had been in the Guard for about ten years and he just liked to soldier. He liked the comradeship. He liked the experience. And he was one of those who was operating those patrols every night. And this patrol is significant because these four men here had been on a patrol the night before and killed a bunch of Germans in trenches; they jumped on them in trenches and ambushed them, and it was brutal stuff. And it's especially interesting because the man on the far left in this picture was himself killed by the Germans at Saint-Mihiel in July, which was five months later, six months later. But it'll give you some sense of how well trained these people were by the time the war advanced. I mean, here these guys were patrolling every night extremely dangerous; go out as darkness ascended, stay out all night, get back in at dawn the next morning, and look for combat situations. So they did this 110 days down at Baccarat, and they fully expected to be pulled back in to another training area into more of this mobile warfare which would get in battalions in the attack and regiments in the attack and that kind of thing. That if those of—many of you, some of you may have been in WWII, know standard elements of a training routine in WWII. But something had happened; something had happened with the Germans. Something had happened big in Russia. The Russians were allied with the Allies at that time. But there was, as you
know, the assassination of the czar of Russia, and the Communists came in to power. And the communists had no interest whatsoever in fighting on behalf of people like us, the Western democracies. So the Germans who were down there on what was then called the eastern front were all—didn't have anybody to fight, and the Germans had sixty-two, they called them divisions; we would have called them regimental combat teams, but there's a lot of soldiers were down there on the eastern front, and they all moved by train from the eastern front to what the Germans had called—it said was to be the last defensive of the war. The peace offensive. The German line was about fifty-five miles from Paris, and they moved these sixty-two new regimental combat teams into those positions at the Champagne and said, "well, we're gonna penetrate the Champagne, we're gonna drive to Paris, and when we take Paris France will fall, and England will go back--the English will go back to England." And that was the plan. And the German army had been very, very cocky about this. I mean, they told the German public, they told the German leaders, "We are going to win this battle in the Champagne. We are gonna win this peace offensive, and it will stop the war." When that happened it kind of took all the bets off the table between Wilson and Pershing and the Allied leaders in France. They had made a big thing--Pershing made a big thing out of saying, "Well we're not gonna fight under French leaders. We're not gonna fight under British leaders." But the ox was in the ditch, and then he met with a bunch of these senior French generals and said, "Look, we will put the 42nd Division into the trenches and our defensive lines will--our defensive trenches in Chamonix, which were the French defensive trenches, and we put the only American division--the 42nd Division, which was a National Guard division, was the only American division to go into that defensive line in July of 1918. It was a scary situation. The French general was very brilliant, very experienced. He devised a plan that was unique; as far as I know it was unique. He instead of having one trench line, one line of defensive, he created three lines of defense. He had one line of defense up facing where the Germans would attack, and it was a kind of a phony line of defense. It was a sacrificial line. Those guys were all up there with machine guns, with light automatic weapons, and once the Germans started to come in they fell back to the next line of defense, which was really the main line of defense. And then there was a third line of defense behind that in the event that the main line of defense had collapsed, then they would fall back to the third line of defense. The rules of battle had been that the French guru, the French one-armed, one-eyed experienced French general that everybody would do what he said to do until they got to the last ditch, and then when they got to the last ditch then the command would shift to the commanding general of the 42nd division. Fortunately they never got to the last ditch. These American troops were staggered, and they were staggered in regimental combat teams all across the front and providing support for each other and support for the French. And the German attack collapsed after about a day and a half, and it was a big deal. It was truly a big deal in all of the world, and a big deal certainly in France where these people had been waiting for the Americans to do something significant, and we hadn't done anything significant. And all of a sudden we had been a part of the salvation of France. Supreme Commander Foch, the supreme commander of the Allied Forces was French. He immediately recognized the opportunity for a counter-attack--created a situation that my father said was probably the most depressing situation that had ever happened to him in his life. They were just off the high of winning this big battle that all the world had paid attention to there in France. They started to board trains and headed back toward Paris 'cause of the way the defense--the way the German defenses were they had to go back into the outskirts of Paris and come back to the south to get to Chateau Thierry before they could get engaged in positions for the counter attack. And the Old Man said that they got on those trains, and they were going through the outskirts
of Paris, and they could see the Eiffel Tower, and every house along the railroads would have homemade American flags hanging out the window. And all these beautiful French women, most--many of them had been widows and had been starved from seeing any kind of a man, saw all these red-blooded, robust American soldiers coming through there, and Vive Americaine, and we want to see you. And they just kept going on those trains. He said it didn't slow down or stop anywhere in Paris at all until they got back up to Chateau Thierry which was a destroyed city. And they said, "Okay you've got three days of rest in a place called La Ferte," and they were there on the Marne, they all took baths in the Marne, and it was great thing. Of course they'd had a fair number of casualties, but we had not as an American army had a lot of casualties by that time so we were able to get fairly experienced replacements into the position right quickly. These--the shot you see before you is of American soldiers at Vitro Le Vieil who were headed to Champagne. That's what these guys looked like. They were just ordinary-looking guys. They weren't supermen. They weren't particularly strong, athletic-looking. They'd been 110 days in and out of this patrol at Baccarat. They had had a lot of lice, a lot of trouble with lice, vermin, and--you know the deal was to get two meals a day so they weren't particularly strong-looking or particularly healthy-looking when they were going to those lines on the way to Chateau Thierry. They got to this place called La Ferte, had those three days of rest that I spoke to you about, and got to drink a little wine, and everybody was feeling pretty good, and then they got a warning order to come down on the 25th of July. They had fought that thing at the Champagne on the 15th, and they got a new warning order on the 25th. You're gonna load up on trucks this afternoon, and you're gonna go to a place called Brevard, which is a long way away, and then for those of you who have been in the army you can appreciate this. It was the same old story--hurry up and wait. The first time--the first order, warning order, said "we're gonna pull out at two o'clock," and then the next warning order said, "Well, we're gonna pull out at five." and the next warning order said, "We might be here by 9:30." So they loaded up about 9:30 and spent all that night on the trucks going up to Brevard, and dirt roads, solid-rubber-tired trucks, sixteen men per truck, 250 rounds of ammunition, rucksack, everybody carried everything they had, they had three days of rations on their backs, and traveled all that night and got up there to Brevard the next morning. And there was German artillery, and there was observed artillery. The German airplanes were there calling artillery corrections. And the New England National Guard had been in there for about a week or ten days and had lost about half their people and had actually made a run at this place called Croix Rouge Farm. Now you see a picture there of Croix Rouge Farm. In front of you now. I'm gonna talk about that for the next few minutes. There was a French division north or Croix Rouge Farm. There was another French division south of Croix Rouge Farm. They had each tried to take it and the Americans, the New England National Guard, the 28th had tried to take it and failed. So all of a sudden you've got this 42nd division coming into a place about six miles from there, six miles to the--what we would call the west of there, and artillery's coming in. Germans--dead German and dead Americans all around. And my old man, you know, he was in D-Company, it was a rifle company in the 167th, and Screws he said, "Well, we're not gonna stay here in this village. We're gonna move to a place two miles up the road and try to get a hot meal and try to get some rest because we're gonna go to war tonight." And so they did in fact go up there and did get a hot meal and did get some--whatever rest they could. And then they went cross-country about six miles to come into position. As you see that sketch map in front of you, on the left of that would be the skirmish line into which those guys settled late that afternoon. They were all in position by about seven that night. From the Alabama regiment. On the upper end of that slide, the 1st Battalion was in position, and on the lower end of it the 3rd Battalion was in position. And then back into the woods
there was a reserve battalion, which was the 2nd. The Iowa 168th regiment was moving in on the south end of that slide, or as you look at the photograph you would-- this piece of it, the Iowans would be about where the photograph was taken from, and one of the battalions of the Iowans was to proceed due west. We would think of it as due east into the German position so that they would be covered by the same brigade order. Screws had anticipated that morning that there was gonna be an attack. That was what the scuttlebutt was. And he went back for a meeting with the brigade commander at about eleven o'clock that morning, and there were several artillery battalion people there-- it was the Pennsylvania artillery battalion people there, there were some French artillery battalion people there, and there were some people from the Iowa regiment and the Alabama regiment. The brigade commander Brigadier general said, "Well, we're gonna jump off at 5:40 this afternoon." And Screws said, "Look, we need some artillery. We need to beat up on this place a little bit before we just jump across that open land and try to take it." And he said, "No, you're not gonna do that. It's a legal order; you're gonna obey it. You're gonna go into the attack at 5:40 this afternoon, and that's all there is to it." There was a lot of that kind of thinking in that army and particularly in that division. They were very hardball guys. You could get relieved quickly if you--if you were not a winning officer. And that brigade commander was indeed relieved in a matter of days, but the order stood in--there was not wire communication; there was no radio communication. The only--there were not pyrotechnics because there were not artillery to shoot the colored shells. And there was no artillery brought up to fire for the defensive fire. As a consequence--and my old man said he was lying behind a log on the skirmish line and said he'd been there all day. It was cold, it was July, July 26th, but for France, in that part of France it's not unusual for it to be pretty cold and they didn't have raincoats. They didn't have coats. They were wearing summer uniforms. And I said, "Well, did you ever see Douglas MacArthur in any combat situations with the regiment?" and he said, "Yeah." He said, "I saw him at Croix Rouge Farm." I said, "Well, what time?" He said, "I saw him that morning before lunch." So MacArthur was up--I said, "How did you recognize him?" He said, "He didn't have on a helmet." He wore a soft cap, and he didn't wear a gasmask. I mean, MacArthur was kind of a showboat. He was one to always want to stand out so that the soldiers all knew he was around, and MacArthur got around. I mean, he was a guy who was not afraid to smell gunpowder. Anyhow, the attack jumped off at 5:40 and it was instantly a failure. My old man was on the battalion on the north side of the slide. The machine gun company was a guy from Montgomery. He was immediately killed. I mean, they were killing them real quick, and Old Man was hit twice, and he said that the attack was over in maybe ten minutes. It was quick. It was over. The Germans were just eating them alive. Well, before they did the attack Screws had said to this guy Mortimer Jordan, the fellow who had commanded K-Company but who had now been promoted to be the number three man, the operations officer, in the division, in the regiment--he said, "You and Baer the executive officer stand behind the 1st Battalion, and if it collapses you organize a counter attack and organize any casual officers, any people who are not engaged, into another attack. And he designated another guy from Opelika to do the same thing in the 3rd Battalion who he got killed pretty early in the game--and Mortimer Jordan was to get killed in another three or four days. But it was amazing that after total failure of this attack--I mean, I was in the Korean war somewhat and to think that you could ask guys who had just been a part of a rifle company and an attack to get up and do it again, I mean, that's pretty hard stuff. And, but Mortimer Jordan was back there, and so he got about a hundred men out of A-Company and about a hundred men out of B-Company who had not been engaged in the assault, and line them up. One of those guys was headed up by a fellow named Robert Espy, E-S-P-Y. His great-grandson's practicing law in Montgomery now. I know him. You know, but the
thing about a National Guard unit in those days from a specific region--and I always had it in a big way too--they knew each other. And they all knew each other's families. They were all from more or less the same places. In any case, Robert Espy had fifty men, and a guy named Ernest Bell from Bessemer who was--they were both First Lieutenants--had about fifty men. So they had about a hundred men lined up behind what you would see is the battalion on the north side of that schematic. They jumped up and started across that field slinging rifle butts, banners fixed, using the automatic weapons that they had, fighting with everything they had. And it was about a 500-yard gap across there. And they ran across. They ran about a hundred men, just bolted at full speed across that thing, and when they got to the other side each of these groups of about fifty men had less than twenty. So they had about sixty casualties and got about forty of them make it all the way across. But it broke the back of the Germans. And the Germans--that night the Germans pulled out immediately. As you look at that schematic they would have pulled out to the bottom of the picture and turned over to the Croix Rouge farmhouse. They got down to the 3rd Battalion position, it had been chewed up in the first effort but had not done the dramatic bolt in the second effort, but it did have--did make a second effort, but it was not doing well. And a guy named Shorty Wren, W-R-E-N, was an enlisted man who was in this mortar section from the 167th headquarters group. They had four--got one mortar up there, and Shorty Wren knew how to use it. And they just kept throwing those mortars in there and were successful, and by dark the Germans headed out and started back toward the Ourcq River. To get some grasp of the situation--when it was over there were 163 dead guys from Alabama spread out on those two fields, there were 283 Germans, most of them around the fortified farmhouse, and there were 48 guys from Iowa who were killed on the southern flank of this thing. So in about a four and a half hour fight that had no artillery they had 500 dead men spread out there. That was pretty strong stuff. Well, so the Old Man gets to Paris; he gets to a hospital in Paris. That's pretty good duty. I mean, he didn't even break his leg. And so they won at Croix Rouge Farm. And the Germans retreated back to the Ourcq, and the rest of the 82nd--the rest of the 42nd came in there. And the Croix Rouge was on the 26th, they advanced on the 27th to the river itself, which wasn't much of a river; it was a quiet, small spring actually. And then they went up the heights of the Ourcq River on the 28th, and it was brutal. But the Alabama regiment had its reserve regiment. These guys had not been shot up, they were pretty well rested, and so they went in there and did their bet. Those dark spots you see on that hill in front of you are Alabama soldiers. They're dead men. They came up--you see the crest of the hill right behind you and behind that you see the trees. The tree line is on the Ourcq River, and the crest of the hill was from between the Ourcq River and that--where those dead men are. And that's what they had to do. They had to come up that hill and cross that open land, and it was brutal. It was bad. The New Yorkers were doing the same thing to north; the lowans were doing the same thing to the south. So that was all on the 28th, and by the 29th was more bad stuff. They brought in another battalion of--from another division to try to help out with it, and the casualties were just tremendous. So the next operation was at Saint-Mihiel, and it was a big thing. The--Pershing had met with Foch, and Foch pushed back on him. Pershing said, "We want an all-American army. We want an all-American offensive, a big one. There are twelve divisions. We'll put the men in here, and we'll push ahead, and we want to do that." and Foch says, "I'm not sure you can do it. You know, you guys have been using green troops for most of that"--most of the attack force at Saint-Mihiel had never smelled any gunpowder. There were some experienced divisions like the 42nd and like the 89th and like the 1st Division, but most of them were green. And fortunately the Germans were actually pulling back at the time of the Saint-Mihiel operation, so it was an easy success for us. Old Man said that these guys would laugh about it and say
it was like a cake walk. Well I said, "Well, what were you doing?" He said he had been in the hospital in Paris for five weeks, and they just cleaned out the hospitals and put them all on the train to go back out there to Saint-Mihiel, and he said he still had scabs on his legs when he was in the assault element at Saint-Mihiel. So there was that tremendous scarcity of experienced soldiers that Pershing was having to deal with all the time. We were getting lots and lots of American soldiers into France, but they didn't know how to fight. They didn't know how to patrol. They didn't know how to operate. They were not as disciplined. They were not as combat-ready. So we lucked into it there at Saint-Mihiel. I came back from Korea; the Old Man had written me one letter while I was gone. One letter. I think he was afraid if something might happen to me he wanted a clear conscience. So I came back. He said, "Well, Son, what have you been doing?" I said, "Well, hell, well, I did the best I could do." I said, "I gotta sell the store. You know, and I was in three operations. I was at ten months in a Class-A zone. I was in three operations. One of them didn't amount to much, but two of them were pretty good operations." He said, "Well, that's a hell of a note." He said, "You know, I was in France ten months and I was in eight operations. And I was wounded. And you weren't." So anyhow, that was--they got so much out of--give you that as an aside because they were able to get so much out of those guys. Donovan has got the hottest regiment in the--in the Rainbow Division actually. The New Yorkers, the Fighting 69th, was the hottest regiment there. I mean, Donovan was a big-name combat soldier. And he failed. And Summerall was in the Corps Commanders. Summerall had commanded the 1st Division in this piece of it, and on the 15th of October Summerall--in Summerall's notes, his book, you can read--he said, "On the 15th of October I went down there and went to that headquarters and asked for that regimental commander, and I told him, 'You're out. You're finished. You're fired.' Got the adjutant. You're fired." Got the deputy adjutant--"You're fired." He went to see the Ohioans, that guy--the brigade commander of the Ohioans managed to talk himself--he didn't get fired but he just barely hung on. So then Summerall then gives the baton to Douglas MacArthur who's got the 84th Brigade, the Alabamians and the Ohioans. But in any event, when they got up to the night of the 15th of October, Macarthur had said, "Well, we're gonna do it with a bayonet attack." He'd seen these Alabamians do the bayonet stuff before, and he knew they'd fight. And the battalion commander of the Iowans pushed back. He says no to the, you know, to brigade. He wasn't speaking to MacArthur directly. He was speaking-- "No, it will not work. We'll have comingling of divisions. It absolutely will not work." Ravee Norris, who had the Alabama Point Battalion, went to his guy and said, "It's suicide. A bayonet attack against these wire placements at night will be total suicide. And so the order was reversed on the morning of the 15th of October. And then on the night of the 15th of October there was a new attempt made to take it by the Iowans and by the Alabamians. And somebody had to come up with a plan to replace that stupid bayonet attack. And there was a guy named Fallow. He was an enlisted man on the Mexican border, and when they got--he was from Opelika, Alabama. When they got to Camp Mills somebody had the good sense to give him a commission, a field commission. So he--by the time of the Cote De Chatillon he was a captain. So Fallow said, "I know how to do it." And he--you folks got to read my book. I'm not gonna tell you how he did it.

(Laughter)

Frazer: But Fallow picked the lock. And he had about a little over a hundred men with him, and they got in there that night, moved in all night into an assault position. The 151st machine gun battalion from Macomb, Georgia had forty-six machine guns in place firing in direct fire for thirty minutes before the jump-off on the assault, give the assault troop fifteen minutes, and then raise the standard so that you get into reverse slope and give them another fifteen minutes. I mean, it was a beautiful tactical operation that was
extremely successful. And you know, it's kind of a shame that those 1st Division guys didn't get the glory. But I mean, it's--when I first started this--first finished this research, I really looked down my nose a little bit at the 1st Division. And I said, "Well, those guys, you know, they're supposed to be so good." They had the first American win at Cantigny--they call it Can-Tig-Ny. Cantigny was the first win we ever had over there, and the 1st Division gave it to them. And then at Soissons they got a big piece of glory out of that, and the French were doing half their work for them. And I said, "You know, these guys are supposed to be so hot, and they come in here, and they get their head handed to them." But then my friend Dr. Seaford, I had told her that kind of in confidence, and she said, "You can't do that. You don't know what you're talking about." You all have been so patient. Thank you so much.

(Applause)

Clarke: Thank you to Nimrod T. Frazer for this intense discussion about World War I and to the World War I Centennial Commission for sponsoring this program. The book is *Send the Alabamians: World War I Fighters in the Rainbow Division*, published by the University of Alabama Press. To learn more about the World War I Centennial Commission visit WorldWar1Centennial.org. To learn more about the book, the author, or the Museum and Library, visit 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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