Voiceover: This program is sponsored by The United States World War One Centennial Commission.

(Theme music)

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

Clarke: Welcome to Pritzker Military Presents with Retired Army Colonel Robert J. Dalessandro and historian Rebecca S. Dalessandro, authors of the new book Over There: America in the Great War. 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 One Centennial Commission. This program and more than four hundred others covering a full range of military topics is available on demand at PritzkerMilitary.org. Featuring more than 360 images detailing the American military experience in WWI from recruitment to armistice, on the ground and in the air and at sea, Over There is a photographic exploration of a war that is central to a world history that demands our attention today. WWI was fought overseas at a time when news coverage was less than immediate. And the US was only actively involved for a few years. But in that short period of times, American doughboys were engaged in a ferocious war that would claim the lives of millions. The Battle of the Argonne Forest alone would claim more American lives than any other battle in American history. As chairman of the United States World War One Centennial Commission, Colonel Robert Dalessandro has furthered its mission with this book to educate the American people about WWI, to commemorate the United States' role in the war, and to honor the courage and sacrifice of the nearly five million American men and women who served. A military historian who has written extensively on the Great War and the American Expeditionary Forces, he is deputy secretary of the American battle monuments commission. He has served previously as the director of US Army Heritage and Education Center and as chief of military history at US Army Center of Military History. Rebecca Dalessandro is a writer, editor, and historical consultant for film productions and is published on a wide range on nineteenth century and early twentieth century subjects including the Great War. She is coauthor of American Lions: The 332nd Infantry Regiment in Italy in WWI. Please join me in welcoming to the Pritzker Military Museum and Library Robert and Rebecca Dalessandro. Thanks for being here, guys.

(Applause)

Robert: Thanks, Ken, for that great introduction, and I fell like my mother must have paid you to say that. I now feel totally overqualified to talk to you, and I feel under qualified to do the job, so that's bad. I want to talk to you tonight about a period of time that I think unfortunately America's overlooked. I think it's a moment in American history where this nation comes of age and in our lifetimes it's been so overcome by other events. Other events like WWII, other events including Vietnam, other events like the rise of turbulence in the Middle East. And this generation deserves our attention. And I have to thank the Pritzker Military Museum and Library for standing shoulder to shoulder with the United States World War One Centennial Commission in telling that story. I want to begin tonight with a very compelling photograph. And you see in this photograph some amazing things going on. It's simply captioned--it's a press corps photograph. It's a soldier arriving at Union Station in Washington DC, arriving home from the war, taken in 1919. It's an important photograph for a number of reasons, and I think it glues the talk tonight together in so many ways. We see the young soldier in the center of the photograph. We see the soldier holding a baby. That baby is a member of the greatest
generation. That baby will probably fight in WWII. Next to the baby, his grandmother stands beaming. The son has returned home, there's new life. She's probably the daughter of a Civil War veteran. Now, that man holding that baby, and his wife are born in an age of horse and wagon, and if they live a normal lifespan, they'll die in the age of jet travel. I want you to think about that for a minute. They were born in a country where they probably didn’t travel much more than twenty miles from where they were born, and they'll die in the age of jet travel. They'll see American go from an agricultural nation to a world power. They might witness their son as a sacrifice of one of the battlefields of Europe. This is a generation that shapes every moment of our lives today. It shapes our lives in the Middle East. It shapes our lives in civil unrest of the 70s, of the late 60s, in Ferguson, Missouri. Everything that we live through today, we can draw a straight line back to WWI, yet it's a forgotten war. And that's what we're gonna talk about tonight. So I want you to remember this photograph. So let's talk about photography, because this is a talk about photojournalism and photo history. Photography was relatively new in WWI. In fact, the first combat photographs are taken in the Mexican American War in the 1840s, late 40s. And the first time there’s battlefield photography of the type that we’re all used to is in the Civil War. And I show this photograph of federal dead in the Rose Field at the Battle of Gettysburg taken on July the fifth, 1863. And when that photographer, Alexander Gardner, drug his lab out to the field, he had to take these images and process them right there. They couldn’t be printed in newspapers. You had to buy these. Americans were fascinated by that. But that's the Civil War, and time passes. Right before WWI, photographs are being printed in newspapers. Not widely yet, but you don't need someone to draw the photograph anymore to print it in the newspaper. And I picked this photograph for a very good reason. I would argue that probably the man in this photograph was elected president because of photographs like this. We all think of TR, or Teddy Roosevelt, we think of him in the roughrider mode. Well, here’s a photograph, studio photograph, of Teddy Roosevelt. And that's the man we know. That's the image that immediately strikes us. So in the ensuing years between 1840 and the outbreak of WWI, photography had become a very powerful instrument. And that brings us to WWI. So the war's been raging since 1914. We know the United States is not gonna come into that war until 1917. But of course the device that will bring the United States into the war is really the submarine. The German U-boat, Unterseeboot. And this photograph, that every America would be familiar with, is the U-boat on patrol. And that haunts Americans in so many ways. Freedom of the seas has always been an American value in the history of this country. We almost went to war shortly after our formation with France over rights, open seas. We're quasi-war with England for a time--War of Jenkin’s Ear, where a seaman was reportedly captured by the births and his ear cut off. Of course the War of 1812 and the harassment of free trade. Well, WWI's been very good from '14 to '16, basically, to the United States. We’re selling arms to the Allies. We're shipping wheat and sustenance to the Allies. But this is interdicted by the Germans. We almost go to war over the Lusitania, but Wilson declares we’re too proud to fight. We back off that incident. But the U-boat is a specter in the history of WWI to Americans from almost the beginning. And this powerful image that's published--I love this image--of escapees from the sinking ship. Look at the man hanging off the line trying to get by the propeller there in that lifeboat. Just arose images throughout the US public that something needed to be done about German atrocities. In fact, German submarine captains had neither the capability or in many cases the inclination to help survivors of torpedoed ships. There’s a couple good reasons for that. Unlike in WWII they often engaged on the surface, and when they engaged on the surface they were vulnerable to attack. And number two, the British figured out how to contradict them by attacking them on the surface. So U-boats aren't gonna hang around
after their prey is targeted. More and more Americans are killed in U-boat activities, and eventually the Germans renege on U-boat warfare, and all looks fine. But as with everything, the Germans make a calculated decision that if they resume unrestricted submarine warfare, even if the United States joins the cause, they won't be able to get enough combat troops over to save the Allies. And that's a risk that's gonna play out not so well for the Germans. So that's the background to US entry. I want to get back to the photographs, 'cause I'm gonna kind of bounce around between kind of a narrative of the war and talking about photographs, which we want to spend most of our time talking about tonight. This is the photograph of the declaration of war. It's well known, Wilson's in the center of the photograph speaking to a joint session of congress. Colorized. A wonderful view of that moment. And back to my story of how our world parallels WWI and why we should care about WWI. Wilson is elected as a progressive. He has a robust domestic agenda. There are a couple issues on his plate that he's really interested in: support to the labor unions, better working conditions for Americans, better wages. He's worried a lot about a movement, the suffrage movement that is gaining steam to get women the vote. And the NAACP has been very supportive of Wilson, and he has promised better civil rights. His second term is dominated by the specter of entry into the war. Remember he's elected as a man who's kept us out of the war. He faces in his second term a deadlocked Congress. The Right believes that he's been weak. There's been no preparedness movement in the United States. He hasn't been tough on atrocities against the United States. He's a weak president. The Left feels like he's sold them out. He hasn't worked on his domestic agenda. He hasn't bettered the rights of workers. He hasn't delivered any of his promises. So he faces a completely deadlocked Congress. Unfortunately for him, the one thing that he brings to Congress that he has no problem getting through is the one thing that he doesn't want to do, and that's declare war on the Germans and the Austrians. And that's the moment in that photograph. I think it's a wonderful photograph. I really do. How do you take that agricultural nation that we talked about and make it a competitor to a German army and an Austrian army that counts their divisions in the hundreds? The army on the eve of WWI is a small constabulary force principally engaged in our new colonies--I'm calling them colonies, but our new oversight in the areas that were picked up in the Spanish American War and along the Mexican border because of the turmoil along the Mexican border. The war department suspects it will take about a hundred divisions to defeat Germany. How do you do it? A universal draft. This is a photo of one of the draft selections, you see the man in the center, Newton Baker, reaching into a bowl to pull out a number. I love this photograph 'cause it's taken in what we call today in the Capitol the Kennedy Caucus room. And the Kennedy Caucus Room, recently renamed after Senator Ted Kennedy passed away. But anybody in America would have recognized this photograph in WWI by that little lamp in the center of the photograph and by the wall--this one's cropped a little bit, but the decoration on the wall. And this was the room where the hearings for the Titanic sinking were conducted. And there were widely published photographs of those hearings. So they picked probably--they knew what they were doing--the most prominent room that you would see in the Capitol to draw the numbers for the draft. I mentioned universal draft. Well, the draft is about as universal as you can get. The Civil War, we had a draft in 1863, but it touched a very narrow part of the population. This draft embraced a much larger group of Americans, and it included for the first time the drafting of African Americans. And one of those civil rights issues that was on the table was better rights for African Americans. The African American community was widely divided on whether they should serve freely, volunteer their services to a country where they didn't have full freedoms, or whether they should fully engage. And it is quite a discussion that occurs, but finally the NAACP really led by WEB Dubois brings around
the fact that the African American community will support this war, despite the calls of, "I haven’t seen a German lynch anybody in my hometown lately. Should we be fighting?"

So they do support the draft, and before it’s over, about 175,000 African Americans will serve overseas. Of course women are not in the draft; we're still debating that today. It's not a point of order. And Rebecca will talk a great deal more about that when she talks about some of the service organizations. Before I take you overseas I just want to show you a map of France real quick and talk to that. We principally conduct our operations in the Lorraine section of France. That's the northeast section of France, so if you take a look at that map and you see Paris on it and you go east, you'll see the area of operations that we're in. Initially along the Marne River and then we'll work along the Arc River and the Meuse for finally the Meuse Argonne campaign. So I want to just put that in context to you. So you're taking this army, a draftee army that you’re putting together, you know you've got a timeline—you’ve got to train them, and you’ve got to throw them into service. So this is quite a challenge that you’ve got as a country right now.

Immediately we play on a theme that has ignited across Europe, which is this bridge between the United States and France. I love the phrase that you hear in WWI many, many times. America, the daughter of Europe is coming back home to save its mother. And of course this whole spirit is most evident in talking about “Lafayette, nous voila.” Lafayette, we’re here. We’ve returned. Pay back the debt to France for the establishment of our country with bringing our troops over there. This is gonna have a profound impact, that we're gonna talk about a little bit, on the Americans that go over there. Those Americans that hadn’t had an opportunity to travel probably twenty miles are gonna be in places like Paris. It is an effort by the entire nation. This photograph shows a family. Sorry--these people are unidentified, and I so regret that, 'cause here we have the young son in his military uniform, we have the mother knitting, we have the sister with the hoe working the garden. By the way, the idea of WWII, the victory garden--these were liberty gardens in WWI. You know, grow plants to sustain our troops of take the pressure off us to feed the troops. And you see that the youngest child has pitched in. The other thing I love about this photograph is, take a look at the flag. I don't know if people are aware o the number of stars, but that dates no later than 1878. So somebody went up in the attic and grabbed that flag to give it the little patriotic moment. But gosh, is that out of date. It should be a forty-eight star flag by this point. We do all the basic training for our soldiers in the United States. So we basically teach our soldiers to go ahead and march and salute and be military, but we do all our group training overseas.

There’s a great reason for this. So everything we’d call above the squad level--the company level, at the platoon level and above, up to the battalions, regiments—is conducted overseas. It's because we don't have any machine guns. We have rifles for our soldiers, and not enough of those, by the way, but we don’t have any what we would call crew-served weapons. We don’t have any artillery. We don’t have any machine guns. And in fact this picture is a wonderful little photograph, because they’re training on British Lewis guns, Lewis machine guns. We'll use those. Our troops that are cut to the British will use them throughout the whole war, the ones that work with the French will not. But you see the hodgepodge of uniforms and equipage there. The fellow in the center of the photo that's standing with his hands on his hips, he's a veteran of the Mexican border campaign. You can just tell that little sweater he's wearing was worn along the border. So he's probably a regular army guy or he's a longtime National Guard fellow. But the guy immediately to--standing next to him, he's wearing a blue jeans denim work uniform. They couldn’t even get him good uniform-- normal army uniform. It shows you the desperate straits the army was in to get things together. Maybe the German gamble wasn't as crazy as we might have thought. But that's just a great photograph to show that. I'm gonna go back to a map here. This is a map of the salient...
created by the offenses of the summer previous to us getting there. These are the Hindenburg peace offenses. And it took the battle line right back to the Marne River. The French were holding on at the Marne River at this moment. And I want to show you a transition between what it looks like in training. Here’s our first shot during that period. This is six field artillery 1st infantry division. By the way, if you ever get up to West Point, the gun that fired that first shot on the Lorraine front, we have it in the army collection. It used to travel the United States on liberty loans. I love the photo. This was widely printed. Look at that shell hanging in the air. It really says America is in the fight. Here are the guys that defended on the Marne River. Compare them with the photo I showed you just two photographs ago. Look at the man there that’s seen combat. We’re a long way from that photograph, the song sheet cover where we’re shaking hands with Foch across the ocean. That man’s got the stare already. You see the comradeship of these men. And you see that machine gun there? It's French. So we’ve put together an army hard scrabble, we’ve thrown them into combat with very little training, and that’s what you get: the soldiers in that photograph. I think that’s a compelling photograph, it really is. This is a photograph I hesitated showing you tonight 'cause I really wanted to show you some photographs you probably weren’t gonna see. It’s probably one of the most widely published photographs of WWI. It's probably also one of the most widely mis-captioned. You’ll normally see it as Marines in Belleau Wood. It’s actually the headquarters company, one of the infantry regiments that fought with the 2nd Division. It's the 2nd Division that the marines were in at Belleau Wood. Again, you’re looking at a French weapon that they’re using. It was a small artillery piece that they could use, but we throw our guys in--and girls--into tough situations immediately. This photograph taken in the summer after they deployed. Already in. This is a piece of the famous Battle of Belleau Wood. Operations only intensify. General Pershing is looking for an all-American offensive. H's not gonna get one until he does something for the French, which is the reduction of the St. Mihiel Salient. By now the American army has several divisions in France. Ultimately whole divisions, we’re gonna put in about forty-two. You see the number sometimes, forty-nine divisions in France. The truth is many of them were--the period term I love is skeletonized. They take them apart to fill other divisions. By this time we have two corps in theater, essentially. And we use them to reduce the Salient. And once we reduce the Salient, Pershing will get his wish for an all-American offensive. And that American offensive will be called the Meuse Argonne. I wanted to show you that transition to what the soldiers look like. This is a painting by Samuel Johnson Woolf, an embedded artist with Collier’s’ Magazine. He captures the soul of this army. There’s a combat veteran. A combat veteran after just a few months in theater. So as I mentioned Pershing will get his offense. It's a three-corps offense along the Meuse Argonne. This will be the moment time for the American army. Lawrence Stallings, who was a Marine Corps officer in WWI and wrote extensively after the war--he said, he bemoaned this. And I feel this way a lot. He said that in--if you talk to a student in America, a young school child, and ask them what the pivotal battle in American history was before about 1944, they would say the Battle of the Meuse Argonne. Of course after December of ’45 they’d give you one of two answers--Normandy or the Battle of the Bulge. This is a big deal for the United States. This is the biggest battle they will fight in the history of the United States up to that point. It's rough. That’s another Samuel Johnson Woolf. Americans going over the top. We don’t have a lot of trench warfare the way—we fight a lot more open warfare than the European Allies do. We fight a lot more battles of movement and maneuver. But there are times when we fight in the trenches. This is just a wonderful image of what Americans face there. I want to talk about a couple people. These two folks, you probably know them. The tall guy in the photograph is Father Duffy. There’s a statue of him in Times Square in New York. He's the chaplain
for the fighting 69th or the 365th Infantry. And the shorter man is Wild Bill Donovan. Again, much overshadowed by his tremendous activities in WWI by his subsequent work with the OSS in WWII. So when you talk about Wild Bill Donovan most people think about, "Oh, CIA. OSS." But Wild Bill Donovan leads a hard fighting unit, Irish American unit, in WWI and really is the stuff of legend. Fights throughout the battle of Meuse Argonne. Incredible people. He will shape American intelligence really until the last days of his life. I didn't bring a picture of him, 'cause you've seen it a million times, but George Patton. George Paton cuts his teeth in WWI, as do all the future leaders of WWII--George Marshall, Omar Bradley. Eisenhower, who's stuck back in the states and thinks his career's over, but he is training soldiers in WWI. But this brings us the age of mechanized warfare. The tank. These are tanks going in at St. Mihiel. A really neat picture. Another specter rises as a result of WWI. This is Major Whittlesey, Charles Whittlesey, an attorney from New York. Commander of the Lost Battalion, which is neither lost nor a battalion, but a great story. Whittlesey brings another dimension to our talks on WWI, and the talks on WWI relative to Whittlesey is Whittlesey serves, he's steady as a rock, and he comes back from the war, and he's never the same. And he goes to Cuba to relax, and one night on the ship on the way back from Havana he has a nice dinner, thanks his dinner companions for a lovely evening, takes a sip of wine, and walks off the fantail of the ship. PTSD also as we know it, has such a background in WWI. This is probably the most famous man to come out of WWI other than John Pershing, I would say. That's Alvin York. And Alvin York is a folk hero out of this war. And many of us recognize that patch on his shoulder as the 82nd--not 82nd Airborne that we so well know today, but the 82nd a draftee division, all Americans from all over the United States. And as quickly as it began on the battlefield, it was over. And the American forces had accomplished everything that they had hoped and more. Wilson hoped to craft a lasting peace. And so with that, I think we want to turn it over and let you talk a little bit about the other side of this war.

Rebecca: I'm gonna take you to the softer side of the war. We've had mechanical side of the war, and I would like to say it's a pleasure to be here. And I'm going to focus on the support that the troops had from the welfare organizations. And they were so effective in maintaining the morale of the troops, which was quite important. General Pershing made that a priority, and there were three service organizations that mobilized as soon as the United States prepared to deploy their troops. And the most effective one with medical care was the Red Cross. And in this photograph I just thought it was wonderful because you see the Red Cross in one of their canteens, and the morale of the soldiers definitely is up. I'm hoping that this just wasn't a staged photo that they would take to the states for fundraising, because everyone looks overjoyed in the photo. And that made it very appealing. But there are some interesting things about the photo. The caps. The softer caps are the overseas caps, and you see those in the photo. And that means people are serving overseas. The fellow with the hard hat is a hat--that's a hat that is worn in the United States. We have a French lieutenant there; we have the navy there. Difficult to know exactly where they converged, but it does show how they came to the front and the importance of the support of the soldiers. The Red Cross also had other services--the greatest source for trained nurses, ambulance drivers, and also hospitals. In addition to live entertainment, they covered pretty much the needs of the soldiers and were very active in France. And another important thing that the Salvation Army was known for--and that was the second organization--and that was donuts. And if you've heard doughboys and donuts or even the term Donut Dollies, the Salvation Army girls brought donuts to the troops. I have a photo here showing--well, there are some interesting features in this. I really like it because they were so determined. Soldiers came from terrible circumstances and would line up at these centers in the canteen centers that the
Salvation Army established, and there would be 200 or more waiting for donuts. They could smell the donuts, they were tired, they were battle fatigued, and they were just waiting for this refreshment—a touch of home. These folks, as you see, are using a primitive wine bottle; they’re using a can to cut the donuts and a carrier to store them. And the hats—one is an Austrian souvenir, and one is a German helmet. So apparently they had a sense of humor, or some grateful soldiers who received the donuts brought those as gifts to the donut makers. The gentleman on the left is wearing an engineer’s jacket, and he managed to change the process. The engineers came in, designed the equipment, and they went from a few dozen donuts a day to thousands a day. So the lines of soldiers were able to get the refreshment and keep the morale going. This is Stella Young. She was photographed serving donuts to the troops. And this came from the photograph from a Collier’s photographer. And they made it into a poster and a song sheet. She became the face of the Salvation Army and the Donut Dolly. And she served faithfully in volunteer work throughout WWI, came back for WWII and served in Europe again in WWII, and continued her charity work until just before her ninety-third birthday. She did an important job and immeasurably helped the troops. And this represents the third organization, the YMCA. And I don’t know how clearly you can see the bag that the Salvation Army worker is carrying, but it’s a souvenir bag. And this is taken at a resort in France on the waterfront and inside a restaurant that was called a casino, and it was then used for the troops. But as you can see, they’re providing live entertainment, it’s a sign along, and the morale again is amazing to see because you know what they’ve been through or what they’re going to go through. This is Julia Stimson. She started out as a volunteer. And you may see her face and think, “Oh,” you may not want to work with this woman, or she’s having a bad day. Well, she should have a bad day. As you can see from the stripes, she’s been overseas for two years. She is the head nurse of the American Expeditionary Forces, and she’s very maternal about what the nurses are going through. They are understaffed, the casualties are overwhelming, the hours are long, and the girls—she described her girls as being hollow-eyed, exhausted, pale. The living conditions for the nurses was very primitive. In fact, some did not even have heat. And this was in some areas where the weather was just terrible. But she became a head nurse and was promoted, and they recognized her for her valor, and she made a true difference in the medical care on the front.

Robert: You know, can I interrupt for a second?
Rebecca: Oh, yes.
Robert: Is that allowed?
Rebecca: You are allowed, yes.
Robert: I don’t want to get in trouble. So, you know, I was talking about how WWI shaped our modern world. And the points you made about army nursing are incredibly important. And they’re important because this is the dawn of the acceptance of women in major roles in the military. And WWI, we like to say, at the World War One Centennial Commission, we like to say Rosie the Riveter had a mother. Well, that’s Rosie the Riveter’s mother. When WWII breaks out, there is no discussion about whether nurses will be accepted in the military services. It’s a given. They’ve proven themselves in WWI.
Rebecca: Absolutely. Absolutely, and they worked through long, long hours. Unfortunately they were met with many challenges. And I will get into some of the conditions of some of the soldiers, but a major challenge was the Spanish Flu. And that took more lives of the nurses than any other reason. And they also lost more soldiers to the Spanish Flu than they did combat. And this shows a hospital treating area where the victims of the Spanish Flu are being treated. No one can give an exact number of the casualties for the swine flu. Some have said up to fifty million in the world. But it was devastating for everyone. In addition to the flu, the trench warfare itself was designed for
illness. The trenches were constantly wet, they were filled with rats and vermin, they were conducive to pneumonia and all sorts of ill--influenza, typhoid. And it was so difficult to keep them healthy. And another problem was trench foot. And I know you’re all familiar with trench foot. But it came from standing in wet trenches for weeks. It’s hard to imagine that they would go through such brutal conditions. And as they stood in the wet water for weeks the circulation broke down in their feet. And many--for many who had the advanced case, amputation was the only answer. The thing I like about this photograph, although it’s very sad, is the brotherhood in the military. You can see it’s called a trench ambulance, and it’s a man carrying a soldier on his back to take him to an aid station to get this treatment. In this photo, this shows you the advancement. With WWI doctors were forced to be innovative and to bring new technology to the front, which they did. And it saved many lives. This shows a blood transfusion. By the time of WWI they knew how to type and cross match for any of the patients they had, so they had a high success rate for that reason. Surgeries--they had the benefit of X-rays. So when they were operating and trying to locate bullets and shrapnel, the technology showed them where the bullets were located, and they did not have to do as extensive surgery as they used to. And the fact that they became familiar with antiseptics and clean bandages, something the Civil War never had, and they were not even aware of it at that time. But here they saved many, many soldiers from serious infection because they were able to apply the latest technology of the day, and that was very important.

And I do like that, because it does show all of the progress. This was an orthopedic surgeon from Ohio, Dr. John Caldwell. He was a lieutenant at the Meuse Argonne, and he--I believe it was Hospital 21. These hospitals, they would bring in the entire staff and just staff a hospital with the entire-- usually it was a training hospital. So they had an entire team they were familiar with. His wife was also a nurse, but she did not come over with him. And he wrote to her and described the trainloads of patients, the exhaustion, how he feared most of all that he wouldn’t meet the needs of his patients, that he would have left something overlooked that would have caused more discomfort and more despair for his patients. Throughout his entire life when he returned to the states, he invented different orthopedic instruments and splints and advanced the cause of orthopedics, because this feeling still haunted him, that there was something more that he could do. These are also--I won’t call them Rosie Riveter--these aren’t the mothers. They were telegraph ladies. And General Pershing became very frustrated because the communication in France--the communication, the wire service, telegraph service--it was practically nonexistent, and it didn’t function. So the locations between the troops and the generals and all of the communicating that they needed to do failed. General Pershing went to the war department and demanded that they send switchboard operators who were bilingual to France as soon as possible. He was so desperate that he waved the bilingual rule and said, "If they just speak English, I'll take them." And so they became a part of the signal corps, but not quite. They weren't officially sworn in. So they didn’t have the benefits--they had a uniform, but they didn’t have the benefits. And they fought for these. And in the late 70s and 80s they finally were officially designated as members of the signal corps, and I admire their perseverance. But they did vastly improve communications throughout the warzone. This is a great photo. This shows the liberation of Paris, and the letters that the soldiers wrote were just amazing. They talked about the streets erupting with parades and singing and dancing and weeping. And this is an interesting photo because it shows two men, who appear to be British, and they are wearing convalescent uniforms. They would be light blue if they were in color. The accordion player and the fellow waving his arm are convalescing. The woman in the middle looks British, but she's carrying an American flag and possibly a Belgian flag. And a sailor. But all groups gathered together to celebrate, and Paris was alive after being
dark for four years. And so many years. It was finally the city of lights again. And the soldiers who came into Paris on that day wrote about the generosity and the gratitude of the people. Many were from farms. Many of our soldiers came in and had never been to Europe. And they were very puzzled about the wine shops that were on every corner. They tasted it and thought it was so terrible that the only excuse for having all this wine in Paris had to be that they water was bad. And often the soldiers would joke about the Paris sisters Vin and Blanc, and if they over-imbibed and felt a little under the weather, they would just say, "Oh, the Paris sisters got to you." But the generosity and gratitude of the Paris people was—it was overwhelming for our soldiers. And they were gratified. When the troops came to Paris and France, they brought the regimental bands. And if you ask any Parisian today about America—about jazz or America, they would connect the two, because the regimental band from the 369th brought jazz to Paris. They performed throughout France and in—of course to elevate the morale of the troops, again, was very important. And they introduced jazz. They were associated with the Harlem Hell Fighters, who also were very famous. But this band was very famous throughout the front. This shows the Harlem Hell Fighters. They fought with the French in the trenches. This is interesting because these are the fellows from the 369th. They also called them the Rattlers. You can see a French officer overseeing this. If you look at the trenches, the French trenches were shallow. And they had waddling. And the weapons were French guns. And the helmets were French helmets. And if you notice on the guns, they were called Lebel. They have a segment in the middle that's aluminum or some time of medal. Whatever you would—
Robert: Yeah, the mounting for the bayonet is aluminum. And the interesting thing about this is we often hear that Pershing did not want US troops under foreign command. In fact he breaks that rule a couple of different times. He breaks it in a big way on our 2nd corps, entire 2nd corps, principally the 27th New York National Guard and the 30th Division North Carolina National Guard. They fight under British command up on the Somme front. The other lapse in this is the assignment directly under French leadership of the four African American infantry regiments that would have formed the 92nd and 93rd divisions. And very good point about the Lebels. They end up—both of those groups of troops are armed with British or French weapons.
Rebecca: Yes, absolutely. And another thing we probably should mention is that—well, you mentioned it earlier about the acceptance that the soldiers had, the black troops in the United States.
Robert: The French of course were used to working with African troops. They had colonies in Africa. They worked very, very closely with them from the Napoleonic wars forward. So they looked at them as just other troops. And they accepted American ones in the same way.
Rebecca: Exactly. I loved this photo because it shows a soldier who wrote on the back of it, "Chicago," but we researched, and he had to be coming home on a train to either Michigan or Wisconsin, but he stopped in Chicago for this picture. And we probably think he was from the 362nd. He is very proud of his patch. It's the bloody hand for his unit. And he didn't even have it sown on, but he was so excited about getting this patch that he just put it on his shoulder for the photograph. And you can see that he is so proud and so happy to be going home to his family and also he has two medals from the country of grateful France—the Croix de—Croix de Guerre. Yes.
Robert: French is always your strong suit.
Rebecca: It has never been my strong suit. The Croix de Guerre. And he has two. And they fought so fiercely and bravely there that they did get the recognition they deserve from the French. And I'm trying to think of another—no, I think we covered him pretty well. It's just the look of pride that's so special in this photo. And coming home. What a
happy group. They’re finally, finally--after the wait--because they did have to wait several weeks before they could get on ships to get home after the armistice. And as you can see by the flag they’re being towed in. The flag is sort of down. And when you read the reports from the people who came into the New York harbor, they were greeted with tugboats and bands playing Home Sweet Home. And the soldiers were overwhelmed. They were treated beautifully. Everything was in their honor. They were absolutely thrilled to see the Statue of Liberty. And if any of you have lived away from your country or the United States and come home later a long absence, seeing the American flag and for them the Statue of Liberty for them was overwhelming. They said it was the most beautiful thing they’d ever seen. And in this next photo distributed to them when they arrived home, you can see the Statue of Liberty. And just-- well done, men. It just doesn’t need a narration at all. It's just so wonderful. And the parades began in New York. The soldiers were then taken after the parade in New York--and many and many of them marched in it, as you can see. And then they were taken by train to other areas where they were discharged to their homes. And when many of them went home they also had parades and more celebrations. One of the fellows from the 332nd wrote, "We were discharged, deloused, and delighted." And that pretty much sums it up. Now these soldiers--some didn’t get home as soon. They were in the army of occupation. Some didn’t get home until 1923. And it was a different reception. There were no welcomes, no tugboats, no music, no parades, no cheering. And they walked into a situation--they walked into a country that was tired of war. And when they came home, the problems came with them. The problems of prolonged medical care, pensions, relocation, employment. All of these problems came, and the government at the time was trying to streamline their federal budget. So many of the soldiers had to join lobbies and demonstrate and try to get the benefits that they had been promised. So we’ve seen this other times in history, but it seems like a very sad time for the veterans who gave so much. This is one of my favorite photographs. And in closing I'm going to read a section from the book because this is the centennial. This is the onset of the centennial, and these people are so--we owe them so much, yet so little is known about them. And if you look at their faces, you can see the hope and the optimism. And this is the last paragraph of our book, but I'm going to read it to you. "The years passed, the guns fell silent, the parades and memorials became a dim memory. Before long they were a forgotten generation of Americans who came of age in a distant time, where lives were sold cheaply and notions of idealism seemed quaint. They bridged the Gilded Era and the Jazz Age, watched the fall of empires in bewildered awe, dreadfully witnessed the rise of communism, fascism, and Nazism, birthed the greatest generation, and opened an American century. They presided over the inauguration of a violent age they could never comprehend. Today they beckon us from faded images, extolling their love of family, home, and country. On the eve of this centennial, we must not overlook them. They shape the modern world, underpinning it with all of its current virtue and depravity," and I want to add, hope. "Our world and our generation are yet their legacy."

(Applause)

1: The nation of immigrants, and do you run across any Italians going back to Italy prior before our entry into WWI or English descendants going back to England or Frenchmen going back to France? That's one part. And then after the US enters the war, the French do recruiting amongst the Polish and Czech communities. Have you run across anything on that?

Robert: Yeah, heavily, as a matter of fact in the Czech community. So I loved to explore this hyphenated American phenomenon in WWI. I had to talk about a lot of this very briefly for the talk, but this universal draft is an interesting--it has a lot of interesting aspects. For one thing, unlike today, the draft of WWI--service in the army in WWI
equals citizenship. So the day you get an honorable discharge--so if you came off the boat and didn’t speak English, it’s very hard to become a citizen in that period of time. But if you serve honorably in the service during WWI, you’re a citizen. So it’s attractive for that reason. This cross-fertilization of service is an interesting one. Before I get to the Italians, because Rebecca and I worked on a book we can talk about the Italians a little easier than we can about the others. But I will tell you that the Kansas City museum just recently got a very interesting group of material--the national museum of WWI out in Kansas City. And they called me about it because the man had served in the Austrian army, the German army, and then he immigrates to the United States and serves in the American army all during WWI. So this did happen. It did happen in both directions. LaGuardia, most known for the airport in New York now, later mayor of New York City--LaGuardia was a captain, and because he was a recent immigrant he spoke Italian, and he recruited several pilots who had gotten their licenses in Italy to fly in his bomber squadron in Italy. And so they had flown with the Italian air force and the American. Going the other way, which is what you’re asking me, I know of several cases, especially on the Italian front, where when the war was over they returned to Italy, having served and become American citizens and went back to Italy. Czech community is a great example. There are recruiting posters, I am sure even in the Pritzker collection, in Czech recruiting to help your Czech brothers fight in the US army and help your Czech brothers, in Czech. So yes this happened pretty frequently.

Clarke: Well, thank you both.

(Applause)

Clarke: Thank you to Colonel Dalessandro and Rebecca Dalessandro for sharing their work, and to the United States World War One Centennial Commission for sponsoring this program. To learn more about the commission and its other projects, visit WorldWar1Centennial.org. The book is Over There: America in the Great War, published by Stackpole Books. To learn more about the book, the authors, or the Pritzker Military Museum and Library, visit us in person or online at PritzkerMilitary.org. Thank you, and please join us next time on Pritzker Military Presents.

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(Theme music)

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