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Clarke: Welcome to *Pritzker Military Presents* with author Colonel John House, United States Army Retired, to discuss his book *Wolfhounds and Polar Bears: The American Expeditionary Force in Siberia, 1918 to 1920*. 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 hundreds more are available on demand at PritzkerMilitary.org. In the final months of WWI, President Woodrow Wilson and many US Allies decided to intervene in Siberia, Russia. Their objective was to protect Allied wartime and business interests, among them the Trans Siberian Railroad, from the turmoil surrounding the Russian Revolution. Following the revolution of 1917, the new Bolshevik government signed a peace treaty with Germany, effectively removing Russia as a belligerent from the First World War. German troops, previously in a stalemate on the eastern front, began to retreat as the Russian Civil War began. In 1918 President Woodrow Wilson at the urging of Britain and France, sent an infantry regiment to northern Russia to fight the Bolsheviks in hope of persuading Russia to rejoin the war against Germany. Led by Major General William S. Graves, the American Expeditionary Force Siberia included the US Army's 27th and 31st Infantry Regiments, plus a large number of volunteers from the 13th, 62nd, and 12th infantry regiments. The military intervention was to serve three purposes. First, to prevent stockpiled Allied war materiel that was provided to Russia during their involvement in WWI from falling into German or Bolshevik hands. Second, to help the Czechoslovakian Legion, stranded along the Trans Siberian railroad, return to the European front. And third, resurrect the eastern front by installing a White Russian anti-communist-backed government with assistance from the Czech Legion. This little known and oft-forgotten operation in WWI military history is detailed in Colonel House's book *Wolfhounds and Polar Bears, Lest We Forget*. Colonel House served in command and staff positions in the United States, Germany, South Korea, and Southwest Asia, Desert Shield and Desert Storm. House retired from the army after twenty-six years, and his military decorations include the Bronze Star Medal, the Meritorious Service Medal with four Oak Leaf Clusters, the Army Commendation Medal with three Oak Leaf Clusters, and the Navy Commendation Medal. Following his retirement he worked as a consultant and army civilian employee. House is a part-time faculty member at Walden University, Columbus State University, and North Central University. And he is also the author of *Why War? Why an Army?* Please join me in welcoming to the Pritzker Military Museum and Library Colonel John M. House.

(Applause)

House: Thank you, Ken, for the introduction, and thank you to all of you for coming here tonight. And of course thank you to the Pritzker Military Museum and Library for hosting me. You did hear Ken mention I have a Navy Commendation medal, and he was curious how that happened. I wound up working at the Naval War College for two years, one year as a student and one year as a spy on the navy for the army, and the navy used me as a spy on the army for the navy. So I reported to all kinds of headquarters about different things, and that year resulted in me getting a Navy Commendation Medal. So it was an interesting time in my life. One other question that I often get is why the name *Wolfhounds and Polar Bears*. The 27th infantry's nickname is the Wolfhounds. That

comes from their service in Siberia. The story--some might say myth, but nonetheless the story--is that a young private outran a Russian wolfhound that was going to eat him, and so the 27th Infantry Regiment said, "We need a name. Why don't we pick wolfhounds?" And the 31st Infantry decided they would be the polar bears because it was so cold in Siberia they had earned that title of polar bears. If you go to the today to the National Infantry Museum in Columbus, Georgia, there is a regimental and division association walk of honor, if you will, with monuments from those associations, and you can see the 31st Infantry monument has a small polar bear sticking on top of the monument. You can actually see it from, gosh, about a half a mile away, 'cause he's just this little white thing that sticks up in the air. So that's why the name, and I'll talk a little bit more later about how I actually got to this long-term project. But I'm sure you're aware, WWI starts basically in 1914 and goes through 1918. We're not in the war originally. The United States does not get into war until Germany declares unrestricted submarine warfare the second time on the first of February 1917 and then sank several US ships shortly after that. And the Zimmermann Telegram comes to light shortly after that, and so we declare war on Germany and begin to send soldiers to France to train on trench warfare and to participate in the fight. And of course about the same time the Russian Revolution occurs. And so now we have a contest, a fight, between communists and non-communists to who was gonna rule Russia. But basically Russia falls out of WWI, so the eastern front evaporates. Some people in Russia want to continue that fight and be allies. Others, the Bolsheviks, do not. And so we also have a lot of business interests in Russia, and so the United States government and our allies are very concerned about those businesses that have set up. There was a Singer Sewing Machine factory, an International Harvester tractor factory, and a variety of other things in the area. And of course Germany is now shifting troops to the western front. In fact I have read some historians say that had we the United States not entered WWI that Germany would have had more rifleman strength on the western front in the trenches than the British and French combines. And so the British and French were very concerned that they needed help in those frontlines, and they really wanted to reestablish the eastern front, because that would draw those German troops back to the east. And then there's this outfit called the Czech Legion. 40,000--most sources say, some will say 50,000--deserters from the Austro Hungarian empire. And they formed into this group called the Czech Legion. And they were fighting on the eastern front for the Allies. And of course they were in kind of a tenuous situation because if the Austro Hungarians caught them or the Germans caught them there was a good chance they'd be executed. Certainly they'd be POWs again. And they were a tough bunch. And the United States and our allies were hoping to cause Czechoslovakia to come into being. And so there was a debate in the Allied circles--well, do we keep the Czechs in Russia and use them as the central force to reestablish the eastern front or do we bring them out and bring them back around to the western front, have them reinforce the Allies there as part of bringing Czechoslovakia into being? And really the debate went back and forth, And we the Allies passed different guidance back to the Czechs 'cause they did start moving toward Vladivostok. They did not get along with the Bolsheviks at all. And they were fighting the Bolsheviks before we ever showed up. So there were conflicting orders throughout this whole process as to what was going to occur in Russia and then why we should be there. Siberia of course, big place. It's about 4,400 miles straight-line distance from Vladivostok to Moscow. On the railroad it's about five thousand miles. So the United States is about 2,500 miles wide, so you could take the United States and just drop it into Siberia, and there's still land left. So we're talking a big place. The reasons to intervene that were argued back and forth in the Allied war councils were to protect the Russian people because now there's a civil war going on between the Bolsheviks and

the White Russians or non-communists, and the Russian people were suffering from both sides. And of course as part of these business interests that we had there, we'd actually loaned millions of dollars to various enterprises within Russia. In fact the United States had 302 million dollars in loans to the Russian government to help fund their war effort. So we were concerned about just kissing that off. It was gonna go away. I already mentioned the Czech Legion. The question there was, do we evacuate them or do we support them. We wanted to protect the Trans Siberian railroad. It's the only all-weather means of transportation across Siberia. The roads were terrible, in the wintertime basically impassible. In the summertime you could drive somewhere. But there were mixed signals on whether we should fight the Bolsheviks. The French and the British were very much into shooting Bolsheviks. We were not. We were undecided--when I say we, Woodrow Wilson, the president--as to whether we should fight the Bolsheviks or let the Russians figure out who was gonna run their country. And so the Allies were not synchronized, but President Wilson wanted to be a good ally. And our allies were saying, "We need to intervene." So eventually President Wilson says, "Okay. We're gonna throw some Americans into Siberia." Now keep in mind Siberia's bigger than the United States. So how many Americans are we gonna send? The war department a document called, and I'm probably butchering the pronunciation--aide-memoire, basically a memory aid, that was to outline what we were supposed to do in Siberia. Major Sidney Graves gets to be commander in Siberia. Up until this point Graves is a fast burner. He's commanding the 8th Infantry Division at Camp Freemont in California. He's been promised to be allowed to take that division to go to France. He is gonna be a future three-star, maybe more, because he's done so well. So this is a tough mission. So the war department with the approval of the president selects William Sidney Graves to go to Siberia and try to make this all work. He's in California. He gets summoned to Kansas City. He arrives late at night and meets Secretary of War Newton Baker in the train station in Kansas City. Newton Baker hands him this piece of paper--this memory aid if you will--tells him what he has to go do, and basically tells him that you'll be walking on eggs loaded with dynamite. And of course this is why Graves gets picked, because he's a good guy. Everybody has great confidence in him. They figure they can throw him in this quagmire, and he will make good decisions. So Graves charges back to California. He's told the 27th and 31st Infantry Regiments will go to Siberia and meet him there, but they're under-strength, so more soldiers are taken out of the 8th Division at Camp Freemont. And of course this is not a division headquarters. There's no headquarters for the Siberian force at this point, the American Expeditionary Force, so it has to be created from volunteers and other people that get pulled from the war department and other infantry regiments to go to Siberia. And so there's not a cohesive force, if you will, that's gonna move. Like today we tend to send brigades, and we send a division headquarters and a corps headquarters. And so all these people have worked together stateside, and they've train together. Not so here. The 27th and the 31st are sitting in the Philippines, you know, in basically the tropics, and they get tagged to go to Siberia. And of course the priority of effort at this point for us and for the Allies is the western front. That's the big war. So Graves has to go try to take charge of all this. And just for some background on Graves, he was born in 1865 in Mount Calm, Texas. He's a United States Military Academy graduate. He actually fights in the Philippines from 1898 to 1902 as part of the Spanish American War. His son Sidney Carroll Graves is--also goes to Siberia. And Sidney Carroll Graves has already received a Distinguished Service Cross in France. He would later receive the Distinguished Service Cross in Siberia. So he's a major. As I mentioned the two major American units that go are the 27th Infantry and the 31st Infantry and selected people from elsewhere. Total about 8,500 is kind of the average strength. I've got tables that show how the strength goes up and down. At one point it

actually topped nine thousand, but a good average number. When you have everybody there, there's about 8,500 Americans that are part of the AEF in Siberia. But like I said, it's not a cohesive force. You know, they've never trained together. They meet in Vladivostok. So we're talking a tough mission without a doubt. But that's again one of the reasons why Graves is picked, because he's supposed to be a super dooper guy, a hard charger, fast burner. The major weapons, you know, generally the same as what we had in France. Since the 27th and 31st were regular army units they had the 1903 Springfield. A lot of National Guard kind of units in France had the 1917 Infield, but these two regiments had the Springfield. They had the 1911 pistol. They had the Browning automatic rifle, though very few people had training on it, and they didn't have a lot of ammunition for it. They had some machineguns, and then they had a 37mm cannon that was actually pulled on a caisson behind a mule. And you actually see one of those in the infantry museum. But that's the only artillery they had, again because it's not a division. The only real artillery they have are those infantry cannons if you will. That's the biggest bullet they can launch downrange. The BAR though shows up many times as a good weapon, often when the partisans encountered an American with a BAR and the BAR started shooting, they'd run away because it was so frightening in its noise--it was so loud and put out such a volume of fire so quickly--it was definitely a major weapon to have. Trains were a big deal. And my dad worked for the railroad for forty-two years, so I've always thought trains were kinda neat. If you've ever watched the movie *Dr. Zhivago*, you know, the Siberian Expedition's kinda like *Dr. Zhivago* but with Americans. Because trains are armored. It's kinda like ships being on tracks. And a lot of the cannons since there was no artillery for the Americans came off of ships. We had a battleship in Vladivostok. They dismounted some smaller cannons. And of course the other Allies took cannons off of ships or if they had field artillery, mounted them on flatcars, armored the sides of boxcars, cut slits for weapons so riflemen or machine gunners could fire out the sides or out the top if they built a firing platform. So to me that's fascinating when you think about trains riding up and down the tracks, and the trains are shooting at each other just like ships would, or they're shooting at infantry guys off the sides of the tracks. So, very different from that standpoint. Trains had been used on the eastern front, armored trains, so it wasn't really new. But it's certainly new in my experience as far as reading history, and we didn't use armored trains on the western front. But also since that railroad, the Trans Siberian railroad, was so important, that's what made the trains so crucial. And also resupply, because almost everything logistically had to move on a train. I'm gonna mention the Russian Railway Service Corps in a few minutes, but they were a key piece of this too. And of course if the Czechs were going to evacuate, we had to--we the Allies had to control the Trans Siberian railroad, because that was really the only way to come out in any kind of cohesive group. The Red Cross had trains, and they had cars that had young men and women from the Red Cross, the YMCA, the YWCA, the Knights of Columbus that were set up as lounge cars that ran up and down the railroad giving donuts and coffee to Allied soldiers-- principally Americans, but they'd help out pretty much anybody. Think about those young men and young women, your sons and daughters that volunteered with the YMCA or the YWCA or the Red Cross, and they wind up in Siberia. And they're on a railroad car being pulled by who knows who, you know, that's actually running the train. And they're just out there to try to provide some type of service to the soldiers that are fighting out there. The Allies, they go. Most of the sources I saw said the Japanese put about 60,000 troops into Siberia. Japanese really seemed to have wanted the resources in Siberia. For a long time they were looking for some place to get timber and other resources that they might need. The Japanese actually wound up staying in Siberia long after we left 'til they finally gave up and realized that they really couldn't

make Siberia into something that would be helpful to them. But they had by far the largest Allied force. British only had about 500 troops. And one of the interesting things I found, if you've read WWII history, Operation Market Garden, the 30 Corps was commanded by Brian Horrocks. He's actually in the British force. Most of the British soldiers that were there had been declared unfit because of medical reasons to be on the western front, so they wound up going to Siberia. There were about 12,000 Poles that were there, about 4,000 Canadians, around 760 French soldiers. Some Chinese. I never saw a number, but they pop up periodically in the AEF records, that there were Chinese soldiers that were there. And then there were White Russians, the non-communists. Principally in Siberia, the Cossacks were the fighting arms that were there. Two names in particular show up that were Ottomans or warlords--a man named Simonov and one named Kalmykov. In fact if you look at the front cover of the book, that's Simonov sitting next to General Graves. They were not nice guys at all. And you can get that in the book. And of course the Czech Legion is there. And we went there in part to protect the Czech Legion, but lo and behold by the time we got there they actually had people in Vladivostok. Now they were strung out virtually the entire length of the Trans Siberian railroad in parts, but they had at one point run the entire Trans Siberian railroad by the time we showed up. Czech Legion, tough bunch. Some of the stuff I read about them--I mean, they have wives and kids 'cause they've been there so long, and it's forty to fifty thousand soldiers. And they're hardcore. 'Cause they can't really surrender. If they wind up getting picked up by the Austro Hungarians or the Germans they're probably all gonna get executed. So they definitely want to fight. They've already deserted the Austro Hungarians to fight for the Allies. So when it came time to finally get out they were happy to fight their way through the Bolsheviks. So they were a tough force and a very cohesive group. The challenges that we faced--and here again the numbers are kinda mushy because who knows how many Bolsheviks were really there--most of what I saw said 300,000 or so fighters in Siberia, so lots of Bolsheviks. The terrain anywhere from flatlands to mountains. And as I already mentioned, very few roads. Right in the center of Siberia there's this monstrous lake, Lake Baikal. It's about four hundred miles long and anywhere from twenty-five to fifty-six miles wide. The temperature there in the wintertime would get so cold that the locals would lay railroad track across the lake once it froze because it was shorter to do that-- quicker to do that and drive straight across the lake than to try to go around it in places. Of course they'd have to take up the tracks once it started to thaw. And there were also forces often called Green Partisans. So there are Bolsheviks, there are White Russians, and then there are the Greens that show up in the literature. The Greens were basically partisans that didn't like the White Russians, and they didn't like the Reds. So they're fighting, too. And if you read the records of the AEF, it's not really clear when they had to fight who they actually were fighting. It would just say Partisans or Guerillas. Not sure that it was-- who it was, if it was Reds or Greens. But principally the Greens let us alone, the Americans in particular, because we were known as being fair. We tried not to hurt people unless they attacked us. And we supported the Russian people that were being abused in particular by the Bolsheviks and the Cossacks. And the Japanese though were aligned heavily with the Cossacks. A lot of times the Cossacks just seemed like a Japanese client that would go out and do whatever it is they wanted to go do, and the Japanese and the Cossacks were guilty of a number of atrocities against the Russian people. So we're there for a mix of humanitarian support hoping that the non-communists win the civil war. But we're also fighting a counter insurgency in a sense, if we're use today's terms, and in some cases a counter terrorism campaign because the Reds and their allies the Cossacks are terrorizing the local populace. And we try to stop that as best we can. Easier said than done. I mentioned the Russian Railway Service

Corps. Now think about this. Most of these guys are out of Minnesota. Best I can tell, we finally deployed about 288. These guys volunteered to go to France and run railroads for the army. The war department, though, did what I would call a bait-and-switch on them. The war department said, "Hey, we need some guys to go to Siberia and run the Trans Siberian railroad." And these guys were good patriots. So they said, "Sure, we'll go to Siberia. We don't mind." They thought they were in the army. In reality they were contractors. They just didn't know it. They wore a uniform that looked almost exactly like our uniform. We allowed them to give themselves ranks, typically in lieutenants and captains. The civilian that was in charge was--anointed himself as a colonel, 'cause we said that was okay. And so these guys are running around thinking they're in the army, okay, and they're actually being paid by the White Russian government that the US government is giving money to, to pay the Russian Railway Service Corps. I mean, a convoluted mess, and these guys have no idea that's what's actually going on. They just know they're getting paid, they're wearing an army uniform, and they're helping America 'cause the war department asked them to go to Siberia. They actually did not become officially US veterans until 1973. When they came back they petitioned for the veteran pensions and insurance that they could get for being a WWI veteran, and the war department said, "You aren't veterans. You're civilian contractors. The Russian government was paying you. It wasn't the army." They were stunned. And they fought for years, begged that the war department would give them, and it wasn't until the few guys that were left in 1973 sued the federal government, and the judge said, "Well, this is pretty stupid. Of course you guys are veterans. We sent you to Siberia. And we let you go over there wearing a uniform, and you were part of our guys that were there." So in 1973 they finally became veterans. Probably didn't do them a lot of good. But think about this. You're in like two to three-person packets, and you're scattered across thousands of miles of railroad. And you're there to help the Russian railroad men run the trains on time. Man. I mean, I have marveled at the courage of these guys. Some people might say not smart in some cases. But they are out there just on their own. The resilience, the tenacity of these guys in these small groups. And when things finally do fall apart, they're typically the last guys catching the last train trying to get to Vladivostok. I did not read about any casualties that they had, so from that standpoint they paid attention to what was going on and when things started to fall apart they got on a train headed to Vladivostok. But talk about hanging a bunch of Americans out there in the middle of nowhere on a very thin line. The guys in the Russian Railway Service Corps definitely went out there. And of course the nongovernment organizations I already mention, young men and young women in the YMCA, the YWCA, the American Red Cross, the American Library Association, and the Knight of Columbus. These folks set up libraries, they showed movies, they passed out coffee, they passed out donuts. They were in all the camps that we had. The Red Cross had hospitals all up and down the Trans Siberian railroad, and we have all these young folks that are out there. They have a railroad car, a boxcar basically, that's made into a donut shop. And they're passing out food to any Allied soldier that comes by. And they too, when everything starts to fall apart, are trying to catch that last train out of town to get back to Vladivostok. A bunch of Americans did great service. Again I'm not aware of any of them getting killed. But they were hanging out there. They saw some interesting and terrible sights as they were out strung out along Siberia. I mentioned of course the navy was in Vladivostok. The navy actually was the first unit to show up before the soldiers did. And they did provide some of the cannons that were put on board some of the trains. And they provided naval gunfire support for a couple of amphibious landings. Small-sized company-sized amphibious assaults in southeastern Siberia. The initial landings, the marines and navy were first. They arrived on the 1st of March. The marines landed on June 29, and they went there

basically to maintain order in Vladivostok, 'cause it's kinda like the Wild West. 'Cause nobody's really in charge, 'cause the Bolsheviks are fighting the White Russians, the Greens are running around trying to fight everybody and trying to stay free. The Russian people are just trying to stay alive. So the marines land to help the other Allies try to maintain order in Vladivostok. The 27th Infantry shows up August 15 and August 16, 1918. And of course the first guy that shows up is a Colonel Styer. He's a regimental commander. Colonel Styer is a great American. He arrives in Vladivostok. General Graves is not there. Styer got no orders other than to go to Siberia, participate in this Allied force. The senior general there is a Japanese general who speaks good English, grabs Styer, and says, "We're gonna go kill Bolsheviks." Styer says, "Yes, sir." And so the Japanese with the Americans in reserve, thank goodness, charge off to go shoot up Bolsheviks on the 24th of August. I'm sorry--yeah, August 24th. The Japanese route the Bolsheviks that are just north of Vladivostok. The 27th infantry doesn't get any kind of heavy fighting. I think they have one soldier wounded, and I think he actually shot himself accidentally. So thankfully no Americans really got hurt bad, but General Graves arrives on September the 2nd. Graves of course has been told to be neutral. He's been told not to take sides. So now he's got the 27th infantry that's charging up behind the Japanese. He's like, "Oh gosh, I gotta call these guys back." So he does, and then there's this testing of wills, if you will, between the general officers that are on the ground in Vladivostok. The Japanese general said, "I'm in charge. I'm the senior guy. We're gonna go kill Bolsheviks." General Graves says, "No. I've got no orders that say I work for you. I have been told I will not let American soldiers work for an Allied general, and therefore we're not gonna do that. I 'll cooperate. We'll talk. We'll divide up missions, things to go to, but I'm not gonna charge off and go participate in the civil war, and I'm not gonna go shoot Bolsheviks. Not unless we have to protect ourselves to fight back." So we start running joint patrols in Vladivostok and in that general area until the rest of our forces show up and then the Allies can have a council and figure out what they want to go do. Major operations, once the 27th Infantry arrives, they guard the railroad, 'cause that was principally one of the major missions. They also took over a POW camp in Krasnaya Rechka. And this POW camp held about two thousand Austro Hungarian prisoners, around 1,500 or so were actually commissioned officers. But when we get there, the 27th Infantry shows up, there's no bathhouses, no power. There's no sanitation. It is a pigsty with people living in it. And the Americans show up and change all of that. Organize cleaning up the entire camp, set up bathhouses so people can take baths, take care of the sanitation, bury all the refuse, set up mess halls that are clean, organize orchestras that are actually filled out by the POWs themselves, and basically turn this POW camp into a model place to live. And things like that spread--knowledge of that spread throughout Siberia, gave the United States a good reputation. 'Cause the Russian people heard about that, the other POWs heard about that, the Cossacks heard about that. And everybody knew then if the Americans showed up, they were gonna take care of you. They weren't going to abuse you, if they could. In fact at one point 442 Cossacks revolted against their principle leader, Kalmykov, and they actually ran to this POW camp and asked the Americans to take them prisoner, which we did, and we protected them from their boss, who was probably gonna go shoot them all. And they also had a decent place to live, then they didn't have to worry about being executed by their own people. So that type of fair play was indicative of all the behavior of the American soldiers in Siberia. And guarding the railroad, our reputation spread up and down the Trans Siberian railroad, as people road the trains, about how we treated people. And really us maintaining the railroad and keeping it safe for everybody to use, 'cause we tried not to take sides, resulted in the Russian people constantly coming to American soldiers and saying, "Please protect us from the Cossacks. Please protect us

from the Bolsheviks." So we would attempt to do that wherever we could. The Japanese though always interfered with our attempts to protect people because the Japanese were allied with the Cossacks. And the Japanese used the Cossacks really as their--as an arm of the Japanese army if you will throughout Siberia. There was a lot of Japanese anti-American propaganda. The Bolsheviks of course were also passing out their propaganda, and the Bolsheviks began to mint their own money. That became a problem, because if you're trying to trade, whose money is good? So one of the things that we had to do was confiscate the Bolshevik money. They eventually, the 27th Infantry, moved to the Lake Baikal area by and large and guarded about five hundred miles of railroad up in the center part of Siberia. Japanese money also was published--was printed, I mean, so there was lots of different kinds of money floating around. But the lack of Allied unity of effort or unity of command continued to plague the AEF and the entire Allied effort because nobody was completely in charge. The 31st Infantry showed up. Their main operations were to guard the mines that dug the coal out of ground for the railroad and also to guard pieces of the railroad. Coal production was important of the railroad as well as to provide heat in the wintertime for everybody. The Bolsheviks attempted to use propaganda to disrupt the operations of the coalmine, 'cause they wanted to take over the coalmines. 'Cause if you own the coalmines then you control the railroad eventually, 'cause if there's no coal the railroad's not gonna run. And of course people get real cold in the wintertime. And the temperature would get to -48 in places. In fact the temperature range was -48 to +104, depending on where you were in Siberia. So, tough place just to live. There was an attempt to assassinate the coalmine supervisor. And when we showed up, and so we kinda brought stability to the area with patrols all around in the villages in that area. Operations were kinda quiet for a while. I mentioned atrocities. Actually the royal family, the Russian royal family, was executed before we landed in Siberia, and the Cossacks of course routinely killed prisoners and civilians. Age and sex was no protection. They'd kill children. They would kill women. Didn't matter. If you made them mad or didn't do what you wanted them to do, then they'd execute you. The Japanese went along with it too. Lots of reports of beheadings of prisoners for one reason or another. But the harsh treatment by the Cossacks, even as brutal as the Bolsheviks could be, began to turn the Russian people away from the White Russian, the anti-communist viewpoint toward the Bolsheviks, even though the Bolsheviks were no sweethearts, simply because the atrocities were more profound from the White Russian side because of the Cossacks than from the Bolsheviks. Our protest failed to stop the atrocities and mainly because the Japanese covered for the Cossacks because the Japanese really wanted to dominate Siberia. And so it was very difficult for us--again that lack of Allied command effort being unified was the big problem. As time went along of course the Bolsheviks began to win. An example of the types of combat that might--could occur. It was a place called Kirovsky, in June of 1919. Bolsheviks came in with a large force, overwhelmed the American force there, didn't kill the Americans but told them, "we're gonna kill you if you don't give us all the telephones." So the American sergeants said, "Okay, you can have all the telephones," because they wanted to stay alive. There was also an incident where several hundred Bolsheviks attacked an American platoon. The lieutenant figured out they were about to be attacked. They all were in a tin building. He moved all the soldiers into a ditch out to the side of the building, and about dawn the tin building was suddenly perforated--said it sounded like hail stones hitting the side of the tin--the Bolsheviks that were attacking this platoon thought they had killed all of the Americas 'cause there was no return fire. Lieutenant Rich held his guys quiet inside this ditch until the Bolsheviks got about 150/200 yards away, and then we unloaded on them, and then the Bolsheviks ran off. But that was kind of typical of the fights that would occur. Usually small unit operations. Nothing major.

Nothing like the western front. It'd be platoons that were attacked by larger forces, and we had to fight back. There were a number of desertions. In fact General Graves at one point concluded that some soldiers had volunteered to come to Siberia because they were actually Russian natives, and they wanted a free ride back to Russia so they could desert. There were fifty deserters from the AEF, people that went to the Bolsheviks or just left and disappeared into the countryside. Some of them though did fight against us. An attempt to capture one deserter resulted in the Cossacks and Japanese capturing the Americans that were trying to capture this deserter. But 158 Americans then attacked this one town using a train that drove them into the middle of town so they could unload on it. But still--and the Chinese helped the Americans attack the Cossacks to try to get the Americans that the Cossacks had captured back, again showing lack of Allied unity of effort. Cossacks tried to steal 45,000 rifles at one point off of a train. The Lieutenant Ryan Ayer said no, and had kind of a contest of wills, and the lieutenant held on, and he didn't give the rifles to the Cossacks. But eventually the rifles did go to the Cossacks, because they went to the Japanese, and the Japanese gave them to Cossacks. So anyway, typical of the problems there. The 31st had to attack the Bolsheviks at one point to clear the area around the mines because the Bolsheviks were shooting at them. The worst combat that occurred was actually in the 31st Infantry, a place called Romanovka. The Americans had not set up in a good place. About three hundred Cossacks--I'm sorry, three hundred Bolsheviks attacked an American platoon in the late evening. Not good. Nineteen Americans were killed, twenty-five were wounded. Five of the twenty-five would later die of wounds. The Americans killed twelve Bolsheviks. They recognized five of the Bolsheviks that they killed as being villagers from the village that was right there that had sold them milk the day before or provided some other type of support. Again the issue of counter insurgency because you've got people that are fighting against you. One day they appear to be friends, and the next day, well, they're not friends. They're bad guys. But that was the worst single case of loss of life, those nineteen that were killed outright and then the five that died of wounds. The 31st continued all their patrolling actions. There were opportunities for joint and combine operations along the coast. We worked with the navy. We worked with our Allied forces there again in the southeastern part of Siberia. The mine guard operations stopped in August of 1919. But still we kept attachments along the railroads trying to protect the railroads. Desertions from the White Russian units though continued to result in big problems because they'd run to the Bolsheviks or just disappear into the countryside. And then the White Russians asked the Americans to guard their families because they were concerned that the Cossacks would come hunt their families down and kill them. And so it was a huge problem. But as the Bolsheviks began to win, we actually wound up having to fight them. Initially we tried to be neutral, and we were, but once the Bolsheviks decided they needed to capture the railroad, because that was the key to everything transportation-wise, we wound up having to fight them. The Czechs of course fought their way, their whole way across Siberia. And really it's amazing when you read what they did. Of course the Czechs, they were tough, but they also wanted to make sure they got across--they actually put the Poles at the back of their formation, so the Poles typically fought the rearguard actions, and not many of the Poles survived the Czech Legion coming across Siberia because the Poles were at the back end. So the Czechs sacrificed the Poles so they could make their way across. But there were I think thirty or forty tunnels along Lake Baikal that the Czechs had to fight their way through. The Bolsheviks built blockades along the railroad and had artillery. The Czechs picked up some along the way. But a tough fight. And of course in the summertime there would be boats that might have cannons along Lake Baikal. Allies got intermixed with the Czechs. When you read the stories of the attempts to get out, some of them are really heartrending especially

because some of the Russian Railway Service Corps people and some of the YMCA reports talk about running into families that had been separated. I mean, I remember one report--there was a civilian that had parked his car and left his wife and children in the car, and he went off to try to find some additional transportation, found a wagon someplace 'cause the car was stuck. Came back, the car was gone. He eventually found the car--somebody had drug it about a hundred miles away, and never did find his wife and children, best as this person knew. But things like that happened all the time because people or civilians, refugees, are trying to fight their way to Vladivostok because they assume that's safety 'cause the Bolsheviks are attacking the Allied forces and of course taking over the country. And then our guys, our Allies are trying to get out as well. And all these Red Cross and YMCA and American Library Association young men and women that have these train cars are trying to get their train cars out at the same time and trying to get wounded soldiers out, if it's the Red Cross. So it's a real mess. Then you've got the Russian Railway Service Corps typically catching about the last train out of town trying to get out as well and to keep the trains running on time. So it was a really tough place to be. The withdrawal started. The 27th infantry withdrew from February 25 to March 10, 1920. The 31st infantry withdrew from February 15 to March the 1st, 1920. AEF headquarters pulled out April Fools' Day 1920. They still left a few people there though, 'cause there were some Americans who were prisoners of war. After I finished the book my wife and I were working as volunteers at the National Infantry Museum, and we were helping catalog some odds and ends that hadn't been cataloged right. And we found a small American flag that a woman, a mother, who lived in Los Angeles, California had kept to remind her of her son that was help prisoner by the Bolsheviks. His release was negotiated a couple of months after the AEF left. But that was just kind of a fluke that we stumbled into that little flag in a little drawer in a little case in the basement of the National Infantry Museum. But things like that occurred. I mentioned that the Russian Railway Service Corps didn't get to be veterans until 1973. The Japanese stayed in the area until 1922. They were still hoping to dominate Siberia for all the natural resources that were there. Combat was limited. I mentioned Romanovka was the worst place. We had twenty-seven total soldiers killed in action. We had eight die of wounds--so they were wounded, went to the hospital, later died. 135 died of disease and non-battle injuries. So total dead is only 170. Compared to the western front, trivial. Not trivial to the guys who died, not trivial to their families, but certainly the level of combat, the action was much lower. We had fifty-two wounded, and I mentioned already I think we had fifty that deserted. You know, lessons that we needed--well, the results first. Russia of course became communist, because the White Russians lost. The Bolsheviks won. And Americans pretty much forgot that all this happened. You heard already mentioned that ran into some civilians in Russia they remembered. When Khrushchev visited in 1959, he brought it up. And it just kinda went by most Americans. Just like me when I first heard about it. I didn't know. Certainly it's not taught about. There was a congresswoman from Montana that talked about, but never actually submitted the resolution--she talked about submitting a resolution that the Congress should vote not to let the 27st and 31st infantry to come back to America because they were too diseased to return. And she actually wanted to purchased land in Siberia and leave them there. She lost reelection. But she did get elected just before WWII, and then she lost reelection again. But she was a pacifist, and she didn't like soldiers, so she said, "Well, we'll just leave them there." Some of the Allies of course became our enemies. The Japanese we of course fight in WWII. The Italian--there were Italians there, French and British there, but they were not happy with what we did. And what really was sad, I think--I mentioned General Graves was a fast burner before all this happened, and he went over there because he's hand picked to go take on this

almost-impossible mission. Well, the state department throughout our time wanted us to fight the Bolsheviks. It was like it was two different countries almost. The state department was very much in tune with what the British and French wanted to do. And so when Graves refused to fight the Bolsheviks at the start, the state department began a rumor campaign that Graves was really a communist sympathizer. So after all this occurs, when Graves is back in the country and occasionally would have some type of AEF Siberia reunion, it was common to have some type of government agent come and spy on the group, 'cause they were confronted a couple of times about why they were there, and the agents accused Graves and some of the soldiers of being communist sympathizers. That basically wrecked General Graves' career. He would stay in the army until 1928 when he retired. He died in 1940. His son left the army in 1920, resigned from the army. You know, lesson that we should have learned--we need a clear mission, and the entire US government needs to have the same mission. We don't need to have the department of defense--the war department then--and the navy department on a different line of thought than the state department. If we're in a country, we needed to all be pointed--whatever direction it is, it's gotta be the same. And we need to be synchronized with our allies in whatever those aims are, otherwise we're gonna work against each other. That happened throughout the time in Siberia because the British and French wanted to go shoot Bolsheviks. And if you look at the Russian expedition, with the 339th Infantry that's up there, the senior American in North Russia is a colonel. He lands with his regiment. There's a British general officer there named Ironside. Ironside says, "Let's go kill Bolsheviks." That colonel, just like Styer did in Vladivostok, said, "Yes, sir," 'cause he knew he was allied with the British. And so we charge off now through the north Russian woods, and we're shooting Bolsheviks with great abandon. Very different situation in Siberia, 'cause once Graves shows up, he knows that we're supposed to be neutral, so he stops the 27th Infantry from continuing with the Japanese. But there was no American two-star in North Russia. There's an American colonel. He knows we're allied with the British; we're fighting on the western front with them. The British say, "Let's go shoot Bolsheviks," so he says okay. So we weren't even synchronized within the war department if you look at how we operated in North Russia versus how we operated in Siberia. There have been some questions about how I wound up kinda getting into this, this topic. I was always a numbers kind of person in high school and college. I like numbers. I like statistics. Didn't really like history. And I went to Germany for my first tour, 1980-1984. And I saw a castle, and then I went and touched it. Nuremberg Castle in Nuremberg, Germany. And I said, "Wow, this history stuff is okay. It's real. You can reach out there and touch it." And so I fell in love with history, and then I started reading history books. Well I had already gone--the army had already paid for me to get a masters of science in business so I could be an operations research systems analyst. So I go from Germany to Fort Leavenworth, Kansas working for the combined arms operations research activity, which these days is called the TRADOC Analysis Command. And I was an ORSA, an operations research systems analyst. I looked at war games, I added up numbers, and I said who won, who lost, what weapons did well, what weapons did poorly. And so that was great stuff. But man, I had just fallen in love with history. So I said, I gotta do something to kinda give me a break from all these numbers. So I went down to the University of Kansas, which is in Lawrence, not very far away. And I convinced Dr. Ted Wilson, who was the chair of the history department. And I said, "Hey, you know, I've had history courses. I can read. I've read a bunch of books; I've got them all over my house. At this point, why don't you let me enroll as a history student?" And he said, "Okay." He was actually a veteran, so he said, "Okay. I'll help you. I'll be on your committee." Now he's actually my chair. And so I wound up in this history program. I was on probation for a semester because they had to

validate that I was smart enough to read a book and write a report and do all that kind of good stuff. And so I started on the track of getting a master of arts in history. One other member of my committee was a man named Dr. Lawrence Yates. Dr. Yates was in what was then called the Combat Studies Institute at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. It was a bunch of army historians that wrote history for the army. CSI doesn't exactly exist anymore. It's been consumed by some other group now at Fort Leavenworth. But I went own to see Dr. Yates when it was time to write a thesis. And I said, "Dr. Yates, I need a good thesis--something that's kinda new and different." He said, "Why don't you do the Siberian intervention?" And I did what most Americans do. I said, "What's that?" Now he said, "Well we've got the records upstairs on microfilm." And I said, "Okay." This is quite a while ago. This is like thirty-plus years ago. And so I said, "Okay." We had microfilm readers back in those days. So I go upstairs, and I star looking at all these microfilm records, and it was fascinating 'cause we've got reports written by General Gravers, written by all these other people that are-- there's a Captain Packard in particular that was prolific with stuff that he wrote for General Graves to record what all occurred. So that was my master of arts in history thesis. My poor wife had to type that on an Epson 3 dual 5 1/4-inch floppy computer using PC Write as the program, which doesn't exist anymore, I don't think. But she finally got that done, 'cause she could type; I could not. And so, got that done, and it was great. And then the army dragged me around the world for a while longer. And I wound up retiring working as a contractor at Fort Benning. I retired in 2001. And I had a thirst to get a Ph. D. Couldn't get a Ph.D. in history 'cause there wasn't one close by. Wound up getting a Ph.D. in Business with a major in public administration and started teaching public administration at Columbus University-- Columbus State University in Columbus online. I only did online stuff. Still only teach online. And that gave me access to the Columbus State University Library. And this bug about trying to write a book about the 27th and 31st Infantry had always been in the back of my mind. 'Cause there are plenty of books out there about why we went to Russia, but they typically talk about why Woodrow Wilson made the decision. They don't get down to what did the 27th and 31st Infantry Regiments do. And that's what I wanted to write about. So lo and behold I go to the CSU library, and do an interlibrary loan search, and discover that the University of Georgia of all places has the same set of microfilm that the combined arms research library at Fort Leavenworth had. So I said, "Well, Hallelujah. Since I work for CSU, they can ship down interlibrary loan all those microfilm reels, free, and I can just read them again." So that's what I did. Then allowed-- I did have to--well, Marilyn had to type the old thesis onto Microsoft Word on a new computer, but after that I got to type all the additions that turned that thesis into a book. So it's about a thirty-year project. So it took a long time to finally try to make happen. So that's how I got into it, and I think it's a fascinating subject because most people have no idea that we were actually there. And lessons that we should have learned, but the American army ignored it, completely just tried to forget about it. You'll find a few people that know about it, but not many. We certainly didn't talk about it in the literature, 'cause I had no clue, and I was a very old captain, about to be a major, when I first heard about it. And so I think it is important to pay attention to history. What I have learned through this is one of the best way to learn about our successes and failures is to see what we have done before 'cause there's a good chance that we have done something like whatever it is we are contemplating, and it should give us a clue on what's gonna work and what's not gonna work. And there's some lessons we certainly could have learned from Siberia. In particular, before we go someplace, before we commit soldiers where they might get killed, we need to make sure that the US government in total all has the same mission in mind, and we need to be pointed the same way our allies are pointed, because if not we're gonna wind up shooting at our allies, and they're gonna be shooting

at us. 'Cause that's what happened in Siberia. Thankfully not many people were killed, but still that is the situation we confronted. Ladies and gentlemen, thank you very much for your attention.

(Applause)

1: You said Colonel Graves was a fast-something?

House: Excuse me, army jargon. And I should never use army jargon. I council students all the time. I said he was a fast-burner. He was moving up. He was gonna get promoted. People had a great opinion of him. And that's why he was at Camp Fremont commanding the 8th Division, 'cause he thought he was gonna go to France with the 8th Division. So he probably would have pinned on three stars, maybe four. Would not have been labeled as a communist sympathizer and had government agents tracking him after the war--you could say hounding him, stalking him, whatever you want to put it. So, yeah, it wrecked his career. Of course, I mean, he's a two-star, so not the end of the world if you have to retire as a two-star, but still he didn't go any farther because of that.

2: You mention Khrushchev. What did he, Lenin, and other post-revolution communists have to say about our involvement?

House: The only one that I know that said something--Khrushchev showed up and he actually mentioned President Hoover providing food, in '59. He thanked the American people for us helping keep the Russian people from starving, I think it was 1922, or something like that, because their collective farming failed. But then he blasted America for us having deployed soldiers and fought against Russian soldiers and Russian people. And of course we did in North Russia. We flat-out did. Siberia, eventually we did when the Bolsheviks attacked us, but I think it pretty much just went over everybody's head. I know there was one poll done in the mid-80s about how many Americans even knew we put anybody in Siberia, and it was like fourteen percent of the population knew. I mean, most people just don't know. I mean, I didn't know. I was an army officer. I had been in the army like nine years when I'm doing this master's thesis and this army Ph.D. says, "Do the Siberian Intervention," and I said, "What?" My eyes glazed over. I had no idea what he was talking about. And again that's--it became fascinating to me. So my children know. All four of them know.

(Laughter)

House: I've pounded it into them. They all have copies of the book. I've ordered them to read it, and hopefully they will. In fact I gave copies to my grandchildren. I don't think they've read it yet. They're a little young. But they will. (Laughs) But yeah, most people just don't know. And I think its important that we know, because if we take the effort to send soldiers into a place that gets some of them killed--'cause 170 of them did die, either from combat or disease and non-battle injuries—we the American people ought to know about it. And if there are lessons to be learned, we ought to try to learn them. A clear mission in synch with our allies is probably the key lesson to learn from Siberia, 'cause we didn't have it. And that just set us up to waste a lot of time to, get 170 Americans killed, and we didn't accomplish anything other than for that nineteen months we provided some humanitarian support, and we saved a few Russian civilian lives because we were able to stop some of the atrocities. But we certainly didn't stop them all. Not even close.

Clarke: Colonel, thank you very much.

House: Sure. Thank you.

(Applause)

Clarke: Thank you to Colonel John House for an outstanding discussion and to the United States World War I Centennial Commission for sponsoring this program. The book is *Wolfhounds and Polar Bears: The American Expeditionary Force in Siberia, 1918 to 1920*, published by the University of Alabama Press. To learn more about the

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(Theme music)

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(Theme music)

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