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 author James Bilder, in a discussion about his book *Artillery Scout: The Story of a Forward Observer with US Field Artillery in World War I*. 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. Often referred to as the Lost Generation, the American doughboys in WWI endured some of the most grueling battles in US history as they were thrust into the center of Europe's' Great War. One such doughboy was Len Fairfield, an artillery scout, or forward observer, for the US Army and author James Bilder's grandfather. In his latest book *Artillery Scout*, Bilder pulls from stories shared by his grandfather as well as military records and diaries from 33rd infantry division officers to paint a captivating picture of the life of a soldier on the frontline. Len Fairfield's story takes you from a hard life in Chicago, through conscription, rigorous training in America and France, and finally to the battles which have become synonymous with US effort--St. Mihiel and the Meuse Argonne Offensive, the latter claiming 26,000 American lives, more than any other US battle during WWI. Fairfield with the 58th field artillery brigade in support of the 91th Wild West Division was for all of it. He fought amongst a sea of carnage caused by bullets, explosives, and gas, with occasional strafing by planes to add to the chaos. Entire units were decimated before getting a yard, and the dead lined roadways and filled trenches wherever Fairfield went. James Bilder is coauthor of *A Foot Soldier for Patton*, with his father Michael. Bilder was mayor of Worth, Illinois from 1993 to 2001, and he currently resides in the southwest suburbs of Chicago. *Artillery Scout* was a 2014 finalist for the Army Historical Foundation Distinguished Writing Award. The book provides a first-hand account of the war's carnage as Fairfield endured its countless hardships, all of which are revealed in vivid detail. Please join me in welcoming to the Pritzker Military Museum and Library James Bilder.
(Applause)
Clarke: Thank you very much.
Bilder: Thank you very much. Thank you. I would like to thank you all for that very warm welcome. It matches the temperatures we've been enjoying recently. So it's a deep honor for me to be here this evening because I've been an enjoyer of this format for some time. And normally the guests are ones who have won Medals of Honor or are highly decorated as well as those who are academic scholars and have presented some extensive research. Well, hopefully not to disappoint, I'm not either of those things. But like all of you and like those previous guests, I am a deep lover of history. I have been reading military history since I was in my teens, and I finally decided that it was time to start writing about some of the things I was so passionate about. And that brings us to actually how some of these things got started. And I hope that as I make this presentation tonight that this will be something of an invitation to everyone to put done with memories that they may have if they served in the armed forces, as well as those who had relatives or friends who did, to help those experiences get recorded. Like Flint Whitlock once described, these are encased in amber, the lives of tremendous men. And

these combat veterans who served in the conflicts such as the two World Wars deserve a tremendous amount of recognition, and hopefully that history will not be lost. As or myself, one of the things that spurred me into doing this research was one of the slides you can notice, my father, Michael Bilder, who served as a foot soldier in General Patton's 3rd army. He was with the 5th infantry division. And there are a great many similarities between my own father and my maternal grandfather. Both of them ended up falling in love as their country fell into war. Both of them conscripted into the United States Army, and both of them ended up fighting in France. The similarities as well as some of the unique aspects to both of these men are the types of things I felt had to be captured. I would listen to many of these experiences, and I would often think, "This is something that should be written down. There ought to be a book about this." Interesting to note, these men didn't tend to think all that much of their experiences at the time. My father used to say, "I simply did what I was trained to do. I did what I had to do." Being conscripted, he won a great many decorations: the Bronze Star medal with Oak Leaf Cluster, the Luxembourg Croix de Guerre. He was decorated by the Czech Republic. And he also received the Legion of Honor, which is France's highest military award. And even a civilian award for his work. He received the life-saving medal from the American Red Cross because he had been trained as a combat lifeguard. So as the 5th infantry division at the tip of Patton's spear were making many river crossings, these assault boats--the M2 assault boats--often overturned and could turn ten or twelve men into the water with full equipment. So my father would dive down and pull these men out and bring them back up to the surface. He received the Lifesaving Award from the American Red Cross, so his adventures were spectacular. I did not have an opportunity to know my maternal grandfather. I was only three years old when he passed away. But one of the things I admired a great deal was, as he had spoken to my father a great deal about his combat experiences, they were not dramatically different form his own. And I suppose that's why when we look at Elisha Hunt Rhodes and his work--and I remember when my father read that, and he and I discussed that, and he said, "It's really not all that different from what I experienced." The combat soldier is constantly marching, underfed, sleep deprived, homesick, dirty, and scared. And those experiences are often the same whether we talk about the American Civil War, the First World War, or the Second World War. Really any conflict that involves soldiers. Actually this gentleman, Leonard Fairfield, is my maternal grandfather. And he was born in 1892 and grew up and came of age in the Edwardian Era. He was typical of many of the American doughboys that were drafted and served in the First World War. Conscripts fascinate me a great deal. Both my father and grandfather were conscripted. And it's interesting, despite the patriotism and the national unity that occurred after the attack on Pearl Harbor, approximately two thirds of the men who served in the United States army in WWII were conscripts. So we certainly give a great deal of praise, and justifiably so, to those who have volunteered, but it's interesting to look at the lives of those who were conscripted and forced to go to war--maybe even a war they didn't agree with, such as the First World War. We approach right now the centennial of the First World War on April the 6th of 2017 it will be the 100th anniversary of the US declaring war on Germany. And I think we've kind of examined, what does all of that mean? What is it that we have to find out, that we need to understand? As we take a look at what has been dubbed the Lost Generation, which is a very sad title if you think about it. The Second World War, people were regarded the Greatest Generation, and their stories are awe-inspiring. And we think of those in the First World War as the Lost Generation. We probably think that Ernest Hemingway is the person who tended to bring most of this to light, but in fact it was actually Gertrude Stein that Hemingway credited with creating that term. And the lost generation is appropriate. The number of lives lost in such a short

period of time. And certainly they lived to watch France fall in 1940. And for that period of time, there must have--while the United States was officially neutral, there must have been a great feeling of loss. A tremendous aspect that all of those men, those friends that I had served with, all of that effort, that time taken from my life, and that's gone now. I think another aspect as we approach the 100th anniversary of the First World War, we take a look very often at the American soldiers who served, and of course the term for them is doughboys. And I don't know about you, but when I hear the term doughboy I can't help but think of that cute little Pillsbury character on the table that needs a little poke in the tummy. Every time I see that commercial, I'd love to poke him in the tummy. He's cute. It certainly doesn't bring to mind messages of great courage or suffering. As a matter of fact, it would almost seem something of a humorous term today. But the term doughboy actually meant in his day someone who was a man of grit. A soldier or a marine who was prepared to do their utmost, in many cases the same way we would think of Special Forces today. Even the term like so much of the First World War is somewhat obscure. People will ask, "Where did this term doughboy originate from?" And there's' debate about it. Some people say the unusual, almost triangular shaped haversacks from the First World War resembled blobs of dough. Some people say that the British and the French infantrymen noticed how well paid their American counterparts were and said, they're full of dough. They have a great deal of dough. Probably the most accepted term goes all the way back to the Apache wars in the southwest and then the Spanish American War and subsequent Philippine Insurrection in 1898, where Americans fought in very hot and dry climates that were quite dusty. And as a result their perspiration would often capture this dust and give them kind of a caked-like appearance on their face. And most historians tend to credit that with the origin of the term doughboy. But unfortunately since we don't have any of them around any longer, we'll just have to assume that the historians know. Similarities. The United States observed war in Europe. And there has often been a feeling that somehow the United States of America was tricked into becoming a belligerent in the First World War. It's often mentioned that the sinking of the Lusitania in May of 1915, a passenger liner, by German submarine U-20, which took the lives of 128 Americans, was the reason that the United States declared war on the German Empire. And that in fact is not the case. The submarine sank the Lusitania, as I said, in May of 1915, but the United States didn't declare war until April of 1917, almost a full two years later. And the United States didn't even declare war on the Austrian and Hungarian Empire until December the 7th of 1917. And Germany's other tow allies, Bulgaria and the Ottoman Empire, modern-day Turkey, we never issued a declaration war against them. American troops were largely confined to the western front in France. There was a regiment that served in Italy, and I think we all know of the incurrent during the Russian Revolution where American troops were at Archangel and Vladivostok. But for the most part these were regarded by the term of the day as sideshows. Fighting in other parts such as Africa and the Middle East were not considered primary events. The primary event was of course the bid show in the western front. The idea of the United States going to war at first seemed to be something that Americans would be able to avoid. During the presidential campaign of 1916 Charles Evens Hughes of the United States Supreme Court was nominated by the Republican. He was largely with the support of former president Theodore Roosevelt somewhat hawkish and felt that America should become more prepared. President Woodrow Wilson, the incumbent president was seeking reelection. He felt that it would be better for America to remain neutral. Some historians have suggested that Wilson was in fact a pacifist. Wilson was elected on the pledge, "He kept us out of war," and the expectation would be the United States would remain out of war. However event were not what people had imagined. The Germans in early February of 1917 decided that they were

going to reinstitute their policy of unrestricted submarine warfare, which meant that any ship on the high seas bound for British port could be sunk, civilian or not. They also offered in the Zimmermann Telegram to their foreign minister to Mexico an alliance in which Mexico and Germany, preferably with the help of Japan, would be able to go to war with the United States, and that if victorious Mexico would be rewarded with the former possessions of Texas, New Mexico, and Arizona. This outraged the United States no end, and for that reason as well as continued sinking of ships on the high seas, President Wilson asked for a declaration of war on April the 2nd, which was granted four days later. It's interesting--that war, that was not unlike the Second World War--those were not unanimous votes. There were divided votes in both houses. And just as a side note to history. Jeannette Rankin, who was a congresswoman from Montana, and the first woman, by the way, elected to the United States congress--she was elected in both 1916 and again in 1940. So in the election that preceded both wars, she was elected to serve and represent Montana. She's the only member of congress to vote against both wars. She was the only nay in 1941 vote against the United States going to war. But there was not a universal outpouring of support for war. Many people were of Irish descent. At that time not unlike today in the larger cities, most of them were loyal to the Democratic Party. They were also very cantankerous to the British Empire and did not wish to see themselves aligned with Britain. Many Germans lived in the United States and didn't wish to see the United States at war with Germany. Despite that, the situations were such that the United States did declare war. The hope had been that there would be enough volunteers to fill the ranks, and unfortunately as was also learned in WWII there were not. After a month there were only 80,000 men that had signed up, far short of what was needed. The standing army at that time was 130,000 men, woefully inadequately equipped. And there were approximately an additional 130,000 in the National Guard. We often think of the terrific Springfield rifle. Not quite so terrific. There were only 600,000. American arsenals were filled with the Krag Jorgenson Rifles from the Spanish American War. They were breach loaded, and they were only good for one shot. I'm sure you can imagine the difficulty in firing one round, opening a chamber, putting another round in, and bearing down on a target again. The United States had to do something. We were terribly ill equipped. So the desire was to raise an army and to equip them properly. National Draft Day was on the 5th of June 1917. And that was the day everyone was to turn out and register. At first the draft age was eighteen to thirty-one. By the time the war ended the draft age had gone all the way up to age forty-six. The standards get lower as the wars go on. I think people have noticed that, especially if they've ever been called up for one. My grandfather was attempting to work peaceably at his own job. He had had--he was one of five children. He was a middle child, number three out of five. Unfortunately his own father had somewhat of a drinking problem, so my grandfather had to go to work after he graduated grade school, and one of the things that Len had to do when he was not working was move along the rail tracks and pick up coal for heating at home because the trains would often throw shovels of coal off to the side for destitute families to try to heat their homes with. So he would pick those up and diligently bring them back. Not having had the ability to go on past grammar school, he wanted desperately to improve himself. So he studied on his own at the Chicago public library and was able to pass a certification exam to become a stationary engineer. And from there he went to work as what was then known as a valve man, reading valves and making necessary adjustments, and that would allow him to work for the gas company. Not a bad living. Things were looking up. This was the beginning of what we often think of as the Horatio Alger Era, when you were expected to pull yourself up by you won bootstraps. And I think you probably demonstrated time and time again, he did just that. He was not a complainer. He was also gifted with a very

strong national--excuse me, natural aptitude to be able to work with mathematics, engineering items. Anything mechanical he seemed to adapt to very, very quickly. He registered for the draft. He had to report to the armory at 26th and Madison, and at that time the armory took up everything from Madison to Monroe. It had been built in 1916. It was an impression five-story high building that allowed for natural lighting. Many people allowed to go in there form the community and use the swimming pools. There was even an indoor rifle range. It seemed to have just about everything. He was inducted. He raised his right hand, and he took the oath, and they said, "You have to report back here at 7am." This was October the 1st, 1917. "You have to report back here at 7am on October the 3rd." So he took that opportunity--he had been dating a young Irish spitfire by the name of Margaret. He married her on the 2nd of October and was reporting at the armory on the 3rd. And wouldn't you know, the train from, at that time, what was Union Depot. It was remodeled of course in 1925 to become our current Union Station. But the ramshackle building known as Union Depot allowed troops to get off at Rockford right there at Camp Grant. So he took the Burlington Q--or what often people called then as just the Q--rode that to Rockford, and then prepared to take his training. IT's sad, what they were issued. As a matter of fact, what they were normally issued was what today we call the Montana hat and an army shirt. Their pants and shoes for the time being were civilian. And both the soldiers and the uniform were called the causal. Because there weren't too many times you could walk onto a parade ground with your own civilian slacks and shoes and an army shirt and hat. So piecemeal they were issued their uniforms bit-by-bit, right down to the olive drab coat and sweater. They didn't stay at Camp Grant all that long. They headed to Camp Logan. Probably the thought was, Houston, Texas will provide a greater climate. It will be a little easier to work in. it's warmer. Normally winters there, the temperatures seldom go below 40 degrees. This was the coldest winter in the United States in over a century. The tents--or I should say the camps in the south were almost entirely tent cities with some tarpaper shacks. So unlike Camp Grant, which had all of the modern conveniences and facilities you could hope for--it even had its own fire station--Camp Logan was nothing of the sort. As a matter of fact, they needed to rent some property almost ten miles away for an artillery range, which was described by one soldier as a bowling alley--a narrow, thin strip of land for soldiers to practice on. The equipment. The equipment was definitely lacking. The cannons were wooden. And since they had a shortage of horses, they used men, which were strung together with twine. So just as you would see on your grade school playground, these women were hooked up with twine to a wooden cannon and I'm sure stomping and marching and baying as best they could as someone cracked a small appear whip to move them along. The United States adapted quickly in terms of its firearms. The main weapon that was utilized was not the Springfield as we're all accustomed to thinking about, but was actually the American Enfield. The US had been providing Enfield rifles for the British. The British used the common 303 round that had to be converted to the 30-caliber round that the United States was using. It also allowed us to avoid any infringement on the patent. So the American Enfield was adopted, and that's what the majority of soldiers and marines utilized when they went over to France. The United States through conscription was able to raise an army of four million men. Approximately two million actually got to France. It's interesting, as we've talked about people utilizing pretend weapons and things of this nature. The army even had what you can call something of a pretend aptitude test. If you couldn't read, which was not all that uncommon back then, you were given the Beta test, which were pictures. And if you could read you were given the Alpha test. So Len took the alpha test, and he scored rather highly on it, so he was given what the army referred to as the trade test. And they noticed he had a strong inclination for mathematics. And since artillery involves

calculating distances, rates of fire, angles, he was well suited for it. So they determined that instead of being a doughboy, which the vast majority of people were--and when I say doughboy I'm really thinking of infantryman--he was assigned to the artillery. And it's interesting. People talk about the fact that artillery is the king of battle. And that is certainly a well-thought of comment when we consider the first World War because seventy percent of those killed and wounded in the first world war received that as a result of artillery fire. And oddly enough one percent were victims of bayonets, and an additional one percent victims of poison gas. Napoleon once said that artillery is the king of battle. And I don't think he was that far off the mark. Len would be assigned to a very special unit. The 33rd infantry division detached their artillery unit form the infantry, and they were to form the 58th field artillery brigade. And this consisted of the 122nd, 123rd, and 124th field artillery regiments. They became what today we would consider a specialized force, probably what the British would consider a fire brigade force, maybe what we would have thought of as a rapid response force. But what they would do is they would not be attached to any one infantry unit, but would be assigned wherever they might happen to be needed. And the idea was to make the artillery as mobile as technology would allow. The order came to ship out in approximately May of 1918, and they were sent to Hoboken. From there they boarded ships--Liverpool, England, and then across England to arrive in France. The United States had declared war on April the 6th. It's interesting--we didn't fire our first artillery shots in anger until October the 23d of 1917. They were fired by the 1st infantry division. The 1st was so named because they were the first division to actually arrive in France. The first American casualties didn't actually occur until November the 3rd 191[7], when the first Americans were killed in a trench raid. And by May of 1918 when we were now thirteen months into the war, we only had enough men for regimental action at Cantigny, where the 28th infantry regiment took that town. We had reached--the United States American Expeditionary Force, AEF, had actually reached their full strength closer to the fall, so there was only a divisional action at Belleau Wood with the 2nd infantry division, which is where the United States marines served was with the army's 2nd infantry division. So we were brought to divisional standards at that time, and then corps standards at the Battle of the Marne, which is where the offshoot of Chateau Thierry was fought. So in July of 1918 we still did not have a full-placed army. And it was not until September of 1918, just two months before the war conclude, that the first American army was formed and ready for combat, and of course that would be at St. Mihiel. At the time that people actually went into combat, I'd like to pull up a map here. This will show us the western front as it existed at the time of July 1918. There were 450 miles of trench line, which went approximately from the English Channel to the Swiss border. In the northern portion of that, probably for your vision the darkest portion, that was where the British were stationed. Just south of them you will see American units along what some French units. Primarily the areas from the Meuse River to the Argonne were the areas of the American expeditionary Forces. And of course the Germans were positioned to their immediate east. When the United States prepared to launch their first major offensive at St. Mihiel in the middle of September 1918, this was an area that had been taken by the Germans early in the war. That dark-shaded area was something that the French referred to as the Hernia. It bulged through. It caused a tremendous amount of difficulty with French supply lines and with communications between Nance and between Verdun. So the thought had been to drive the Germans out as quickly as possible. The problem is, is that St. Mihiel is elevated ground. And what happened was the Germans had held that position and actually slaughtered the French over a four-year period of time as the French advanced forward to attempt to take that area. The United States would be given that as their first real test of battle. And you can probably notice down tin the far corner,

just near the tip of that one apex, you'll see the 58th field artillery brigade as it's positioned right next to the 1st infantry division, the Big Red One, which is where my grandfather's unit was first assigned to participate in this battle. There were over 3,000 guns that were lined up for a preparatory barrage. And this would be the greatest amount of artillery pieces lined up on the western front since the yearlong Battle of Verdun in 1916. It's quite amazing when you consider the fact that the Americans were expected to dislodge a well-entrenched enemy on high ground. The advantage that the Americans had is that the Germans had been withdrawing without American knowledge. The Germans had been reducing their forces consistently. They were confident the area could be defended. So when the United States barrage actually opened up on September the 12th, the Germans were actually in the position of, or in the act of withdrawing. They were disengaging. Their artillery units were caught out in the open, and as a result they fell easy prey. The United States utilized cyanide gas in this attack. The Germans introduced a number of terror weapons in the First World War. Flame throwers, chlorine gas at Ypres, phosgene gas, mustard gas. But the United States and its allies didn't hesitate to adopt these technologies and turn them back on the Germans. The battle lasted three days. However it was a complete row. There really was not much here that the Germans could do to defend this position. Things moved along rather rapidly. As a matter of fact so rapidly that the artillery couldn't keep up with the advancing infantry. So as the units pressed forward they had to wait while their artillery would be hooked up to their caissons and actually brought by horse. The United States had few tractors. Matter of fact, the United States was so poorly equipped that 4,000 artillery pieces, 2,000 of which were the French 75, were actually given to the United States. 500 Renault tanks, and 7,000 Hotchkiss machine guns. All of our aircraft came from the British and the French. The three-inch guns that we had in the United States, we had so few troops to be able to bring ships over, that we had fewer to bring equipment over. So our army was equipped almost entirely by the British and the French. I wanted to mention something to you about the French 75, and you can see in this particular slide a number of them lined up. The 75mm gun was developed by the French after their defeat to the Germans in the Franco Prussian War of 1870-71. They were determined to develop an artillery piece that would be state of the art. And when it was actually initiated into the ranks in 1897, it was. They were so proud of this gun that when the Americans arrived and were trained at the school that you see in the background there, Camp Valdeholm, they didn't share all of the secrets of their gun with the American allies. Hopefully that didn't present too many problems when the gun was operated. The state of the art that I had referred to is, this had a hydraulic pneumatic system. So what it allowed for was, the barrel was actually on rollers. And if you're accustomed to seeing the parrot guns that were utilized in the American Civil War, when the guns would fire they'd often be taken out of place, and then the artillery crew had to bring those cannons back up, reposition them, and then hopefully bear down again on their enemy. The French 75 was able to get around that aspect in that with a pneumatic system the air or the gas released could be harnessed. And with the hydraulic rollers, the barrel could be pulled back, and then the gas would force it forward again. The carriage wouldn't have to absorb that recoil and knock itself out of place. And then to substantiate that a spade was put in the ground, which connected to the carriage of the 75. It could fire rapidly. It fired up to 15 rounds per minute. Normally the American crews were fifteen men in number here. Now it's interesting is, the Americans went out, even their rations were supplied by the French. The only good meals that any of these people could ever have claimed to have had would at Camp Valdeholm, which my grandfather and others described as something of a college campus. They were actually served stews, beef on occasion. They were treated as students as opposed to being treated as

raw recruits or being reminded just how much they don't know. They were prepared for battle, quote/unquote, after approximately a five-week training period, which was reduced from the original seventeen weeks that had been planned. The thought was to bring them into action at St. Mihiel. I can't help but be amazed as they traveled, the rations that they consumed. They often referred to beans as bullets. Goldfish was the term for canned salmon as well as sardines, but more for salmon. Toast and chipped beef. SOS, right? Same old stuff. Something on a shingle. Save our stomachs. One other aspect, which we probably won't get into, but there were a lot of interesting terms for it. One of the things that plagued American soldiers as well as other soldiers--by the way, WWI was not different from the other wars that preceded it. At least for Americans, more men were dying of disease than were died in combat. There were approximately 63,000 men who died as a result of disease. Americans, and 53,000 who were actually killed in action. So more men being lost to the circumstance of illness than actually to combat. Diarrhea plagued people quite frequently. And since the beans had to be consumed since that was basically all the food there was, men had to become very artful in examining their excrement because they had to see if they were actually bleeding. The beans often passed through undigested. So if it wasn't bad enough to eat baked beans with diarrhea, then to have to examine what you had done to see if there was blood and that you had actually advanced to dysentery and probably needed a hospital stay, not to mention the fact that what was done in those days was fairly crude, most people decided to take their chances even if they found blood, my grandfather being among them. The main aspect that the men were concerned about as the American AEF moved into position around St. Mihiel was when you experienced fire, the artillery aspects would get into duels with one another. This was known as counter-battery fire. So the thing that you had to be aware of as an artillery scout people like my grandfather, like Len, would move ahead as far as they could, which wouldn't necessarily be all that far in the kind of frontlines that they had in the First World War, mostly surrounded by barbed wire and maybe as close as 300 yards to an enemy trench, it was necessary for these artillery scouts to get as precise a reading as they could on someone's location and to phone that back, because once the American batteries had opened up, the German batteries would return fire utilizing their own forward observers. And these artillery duels were fought until one battery or the other was knocked out, and of course if you lost your battery then your own infantry was subject to murderous fire that came from your enemy. And just to give you an example of how bad the fire could be, the French 75 was capable of firing--if you had four guns in a battery, which was typical--if you had a casemate and put wood planking along the sides to shore that up and place four guns in there, the French 75 at fifteen rounds a minute firing shrapnel shells--in other words containing small metallic balls--they could deliver 17,000 of these small projectiles in a 100 by 400-meter area in a period of sixty seconds. So you could imagine how devastating that fire could be. The French often referred to people who had facial casualties from the shrapnel as the men with no faces. And it's small wonder that this is where plastic surgery started to come into its own was during the First World War. The French 75 could also be mounted on a truck and utilized as an anti-aircraft gun. And it was also on the Saint-Chamond tank as a frontal piece. It was relatively mobile. It did require a team of six horses. It weighed just under a ton. It was certainly a heavy piece. As I say, everyone was impressed into service when this had to be placed, including artillery scouts. The thing about artillery scouts is they often had to move ahead to the most dangerous areas--observation stations in trees, steeple towers, high embankments--things of that nature--to get a reading on their enemy. And of course the enemy was not ignorant to what they were doing. So artillery scouts were the favorite of enemy snipers. And of course something that began in the First World War and was

utilized in the Second World War was, you can imagine looking for a highpoint in a town, that was normally the church steeple. So what became a very common practice as you approach a town, to have your artillery take out the steeple, regardless of whether or not anyone was actually in there. In that sense you would deter anyone or make it impossible for anyone to occupy that position. So church steeples normally didn't last a long period of time. As we look at some of the damage that was actually done, if we take a look at what actually occurred in Lorraine, which were some of the areas that my grandfather was fighting in, combat engineers had to move so quickly to clean up the rubble that they could produce a street like this in a matter of hours. Now of course grave registration followed closely behind to remove bodies of enemy soldiers. It was not uncommon in the First World War in France for towns to be shelled out of existence. You'll still see markers today for various towns that were never rebuilt, and the marker will say, "This town gave its life for France." So the artillery fire was devastating. It was truly awful the gas attacks too were phenomenal. The soldiers though often learned how to be able to put these masks on in a period of six seconds or less, and how to be able to distinguish gas, even from a taste. It wasn't always fatal or even debilitating for a few seconds. Arsenic was often utilized. There was one experienced where my grandfather and a number of others couldn't get to their masks quite as soon as they would have liked. They ended up sick for an entire day from having inhaled arsenic fumes. Often times these gasses were mixed together into a cocktail form and were delivered in that way. When there was a dull thud, normally people would go to the large empty shell casing, which was their version of siren, and they would have a large wooden stick, and they would bang on this shell casing as a warning, kind of a claxon, to let people know that it was time to put on your gasmask. Being an artillery scout, my grandfather had a horse, Annabel, and Annabel like Len was a survivor. And he had to put a mask on Annabel. And the problem was, the very first time these mask went on, the horses were very receptive. They thought it was a feedbag, so they were all too happy to have--they realized after that that all it was was cheesecloth inside. Wasn't very tasty, so they have to fight to get these on these animals. And the joke was, it takes ten minutes to get the mask onto the horse; don' worry, the horse will be gone in five. So that was some of the black humor that persisted in the front lines. Everyone had to learn, if you were going to operate a field phone or a switchboard, everyone had to learn Morse Code. And the alphabets that were used at the time were fairly simple. For instance CF simply want ceasefire. The 1914 service buzzer was the most common field phone that the soldiers utilized. So they would bring this out to various locations, often equipped, or, I'm sorry, accompanied by the signal corps. And they would call in o their field phones. The problem was, these were not wireless, so if there were shells falling behind you, these lines could be severed. Observers were trained to work in pairs, so one individual would often relay things on the field phone while their partner, using binoculars, would take down whatever coordinates were necessary to pinpoint this. It's interesting to note, forward observers or artillery scouts as they were know then, were some of the few American soldiers that were actually equipped and trained how to read maps and utilize a compass, the thought being in the first world war, at least for the AEF, was we don't have to worry about teaching these men to read a military map of utilize a compass because the enemy is 300 yards away in the next trench. We'll just send them forward. As a result, when these men were captured, Germans would ask them during their interrogations, can you point out something, these men would say they had no idea what they were looking at. They couldn't have been cooperative even if they had desire to do that, something that would have been unheard of in the Second World War and beyond. Once again that gets back to the lack of preparation that the United States actually had at the time of the First World War. It's interesting to note, too, the enormous numbers of

casualties of the 116,000 Americans who lost their lives in the First World War, and incidentally that's double what was lost during the eleven-year period of the Vietnam Conflict. 58,000 Americans lost their lives in Vietnam. And when you consider the fact that the vast majority of those Americans were killed during the last two months of the war, it's heartbreaking to think of the immense slaughter that was going on. In fact, when the war ended on November the 11th at 11am, there were more Americans killed on that day than died at Normandy on D-Day in WWII. So the killing went on right until the very last moment. I wanted to show you as we move toward St. Mihiel, you can see the French 75s here lined up. So this was just prior to the eve of the battle. This would have been on September the 11th. The barrages were ferocious, but in many respects they were not effective, because the Germans had long since built trenches and dugouts that made them immune to artillery fire. Just as many of the allies had the same thing. The reason that there had been such a change here is, as I said, gas was utilized. And the descriptions were, especially in the archives of the Illinois National Guard, that at St. Mihiel many Germans attempted to escape from underground dugouts and died in the doorways. Just as many Germans that were on the outside were attempting to force their way in, so as a result there was a number of casualties from gas there for the enemy. Also a number of prisoners started to come in. And it's interesting to know when we take a look, after St. Mihiel a number of prisoners started to fall into Allied captivity. This picture is from the Illinoi National Guard, 33rd brigade. It would have been 33rd division at that time, and you can see these people are quite happy, smiling contentedly for the most part. They're glad. Their part in the war is over. There were also a number of young boys that were taken into captivity at the same time. As a matter of fact, my grandmother--my grandmother (laughs)--well, probably my grandmother would have been amazed, too, but my grandfather had commented that these boys that were being taken in German uniforms should have been in school, which was showing how desperate the German nation was becoming at that time. It's interesting to know that in Germany itself, lead piping was being pulled up from the streets in order to make bullets, and church bells were being melted down in order to produce weapons. So the Germans were definitely on their last gasp. This is something--this is actually a casemate that has been camouflaged. This casemate is typical of what the United States, and of course what our allies and our enemies would have done, too. This type of extensive cloaking was necessary. There were planes flying overhead. There were balloons, which of course were hydrogen filled and were easy targets when someone could get close enough to them. They were often referred to as sausages. And there were forward observers. And the idea being to knock these casemates out with their artillery pieces as rapidly as possible. So the cover could not be pulled off until they were actually going to be utilized. And they would carry camouflage netting from battle to battle and place to place. After the battle of St. Mihiel, the thought had been to move eastward. The United States had won its first major battle. The thought was at the time we are going to move into Germany proper. And at that time Lorraine--Alsace- Lorraine had been taken from the French in the Franco Prussian War forty years earlier. The Americans wanted to move on Mets because it was thought to be--accurately so--an area of industry and of coal. So the desire had been move on to German soil very rapidly, take a major city of importance, and hopefully bring the enemy to their knees. This has become one of the major debates among Americans or those fancy what-if questions--what might have happened? How might it have been different? In actuality, Pershing had been very desirous to move in and to take Metz. It seemed like a logical move. My grandfather and a number of others who were present at the time thought this would be the most pragmatic objective. Instead they were moved westward and then somewhat north to attack in the Argonne. Now today, French and British historians will say this was done to

spare the Americans. Because in the second world war, the 3rd army, 5th infantry division--my father Michael Bilder, an infantryman there--did assault Metz in September of 1944. This was regarded as General Patton's only defeat. Patton was bogged down there for almost ten weeks. There are forty-three forts that surround the city of Metz, and Lorraine in the fall experiences as tremendous amount of rainfall. The 3rd army became bogged down in WWII, and the casualty rate among the infantrymen in the 5th division was ninety percent. So the French and the British say we spared you. Author Hallas maintains in his book *Squandered Victory* that those conditions probably would not have been the same in 1918, and the United States could have won a quick victory. I don't know, do they want to deprive the upstart Americans of a victory that the British and French perhaps felt was their own? Whatever the reason, Pershing and the AEF were moved into the Argonne Forest. The Argonne is something that a lot of Americans really don't give a lot of thought to today. It's one of those famous lost battles. It started on the 26th of September, and it went all the way up until the last minute of the war on November 11th. Now, in the that period of time, forty-seven days, there were 26,000 Americans that were killed--more than any other battle in the history of the United States. I know we often point to Gettysburg, or we look at the Battle of Antietam. Certainly the Ardennes Offensive, the landings at Normandy, but all of those things failed to reach the KIA numbers of 26,000. What you're seeing on this particular map is only showing the center of the American advance. The flanks are not pictured here. This is the area that the 58th field artillery brigade moved in, and as you see, my grandfather's outfit provided support to actually four different infantry divisions. It had first been the 1st infantry division, then this also included the 32nd infantry division, the 91st or the Wild West Division, and also the 87th division. Just as a note here, the distinguished 86th, it existed in the First World War, but it was actually used as an induction tool. Over a hundred thousand men passed through its ranks on their way to other units, so they were often assigned to that and then moved somewhere else. The 86th division wasn't deployed in the First World War. The forty-seven day slugfest there was almost beyond description, because the Germans had four years to enforce this area. There were concrete bunkers. The joke being, and this is somewhat referred to in the movie The Lost Battalion, that the German officers had bowling alleys and restaurants. An exaggeration to be sure, but not too far off the mark. There was definitely furniture there, there were gardens, there was definitely good living. And the thought was, it's impregnable. No one will attack here. And the Germans were justified in believing that there wasn't going to be any action in the Argonne. That changed very rapidly, and unfortunately it also changed for the United States with the vast numbers of men who lost their lives there. After October the 11th, a breather was basically needed in order to refit these divisions. The Germans actually began to counterattack, because the artillery bombardments were not having the desired effect of neutralizing their positions, so they were in strong positions to defend what they had and even to counterattack. During one of these counterattacks there was concern that they were going to break through the infantry line. So my grandfather and a number of others were issued rifles, and they were told, "Defend these guns as long as you can. We'll bring the engineers up to blow them up so they don't fall into enemy hands. In the meantime you have to hold this position until the guns are destroyed. The work of the 32nd infantry division made that unnecessary, as the area was indeed held--barely, but it held. The Americans again attacked, reaching just before the armistice Stenay, which was the last objective. And Stenay was actually taken on November the 11th. Perhaps one of those unnecessary objectives. This was where Calamity Jane, the famous 155mm gun, fired the last shot in anger for the United States. The war came to an end rather abruptly. The soldiers didn't expect it. There were those who believed that it was necessary to go into

Germany people and make sure that the Germans knew they were beaten. The talk had been that this would be a twenty-year armistice if that were not done, and for those who made that statement, it was far closer to reality than I think a number of people imagined. Luxembourg was occupied by American forces. It had been quickly taken by the German forces in the First World War, just as it would be taken in the Second World War. Ironically, while my grandfather occupied that area the area just north of where he was at in Diekirch was where my father fought during the Ardennes Offensive in the Second World War, which was again another area that they had shared. My father's outfit, the 5th infantry divisions, liberated Verdun in WWII on August the 31st of 1941. I'm amazed, and I never consider--or I should say I never fail to be amazed at that phenomenal abilities that the Americans show, despite the fact that they were undertrained, led by inexperienced officers, equipped with foreign weapons. And many of them like my grandfather fighting for a cause they didn't truly understand. President Wilson said it was a war to make the world safe for democracy. I don't know how many people realized that he also said that the United States was the associated power. He didn't want us being considered being an Ally, because if we were an Allied power, then we were fighting for territorial gain like the British or the French, so we were the associated power. My grandfather like many others received his draft notice and decided that he would definitely go forward and fulfill his obligations, however lacking his enthusiasm may have been. He was among the great many that did their duty quietly, was not decorated for any acts of valor, but had the satisfaction of winning the war, and by winning the war I don't mean necessarily the Germans' surrender. I meant that in the sense that he survived. He considered that to be the only victory and glory in war. My father felt the same way. Even though my father had a chest full of medals, it's taken me seven shadow boxes to frame all of his medals and certificates. Seven. And that was from a conscript. In closing, I had mentioned to you that my father served in the Second World War, conscripted. My grandfather in the First World War. My son is in the 33rd infantry brigade. Well he was up until recently. He's been surviving with the Illinois National Guard as an infantryman for four years, and he's moved to Pittsburg in order to continue his graduate studies, so he is now a member of the 28th infantry division in Pennsylvania. He was the only member of the family that actually enlisted. So there was one. But I skipped the generation. People say, "Your interest in military history is so incredibly strong. What kept you from serving?" And I would say this man. My father kept me from serving. When I was eighteen years old and preparing to enlist in the Illinois National Guard, he came in and said, "You can do something I can't. You're eighteen and graduating high school. You have the money and the opportunity to go directly to college." He had to return to college twenty years after the Second World War. I was able to go directly to college because of men like my father and my grandfather. So with that I would like to thank all of you for listening. It's been a real joy to talk to you. Thank you.

(Applause)

Clarke: Thank you to James G. Bilder for telling the story of his grandfather's combat service, and to the United States World War One Centennial Commission for sponsoring this program. The book is *Artillery Scout: The Story of a Forward Observer with the US Field Artillery in World War I*, published by Casemate. To learn more about the World War One Centennial Commission, visit WorldWar1Centennial.org. To learn more about the book, our guest, or the Museum and Library, visit us in person or online at PritzkerMilitary.org. Thank you, and please join us next time on *Pritzker Military Presents.*

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(Theme music)
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