

## 324 Century of Service- First Army

Voiceover: Presented in partnership with the US Army Office of Public Affairs Midwest.  
(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*.

Gundacker: Welcome to Pritzker Military Presents. In this special episode we'll explore the hundred-year history of the First Army with Lieutenant General Stephen M. Twitty, Command Sergeant Major Richard Johnson, and First Lieutenant Kevin D. Braafladt. I'm your host Henry Gundacker, and this program is coming to you from the Pritzker Military Museum and Library in downtown Chicago. It's presented in partnership with the US Army Office of Public Affairs Midwest. This program and hundreds more are available on demand at [PritzkerMilitary.org](http://PritzkerMilitary.org). On April 2, 1917 President Woodrow Wilson received approval from Congress to declare war against Germany and officially bring the United States into WWI. Wilson appointed General John J. Pershing to lead an American Expeditionary Force in France. Among the units to fight in France was First Army. The First Army was established on August 10, 1918. In September of 1918 Pershing and the First Army drove the Germans out of St. Mihiel Salient where the First Army captured its first victory. Following the St. Mihiel victory, First Army followed in the Meuse Argonne Offensive. First Army overwhelmed the German forces and helped to penetrate the Hindenburg line. This was the last of the German defenses on the western front. An armistice was called, and the war was over at 11am on November 11, 1918. Seventy soldiers from the First Army, including famous sergeant Alvin York, were awarded the Medal of Honor for Valor in WWI. Still active today, the First Army is the oldest and longest-serving field army. The First Army provides reserve component training and defense support for civil authorities of the nation. Here to discuss more about the First Army are Lieutenant General Stephen M. Twitty, Command Sergeant Major Richard Johnson, and First Lieutenant Kevin D. Braafladt. Lieutenant General Stephen M. Twitty became the thirty-eighth commander of the First Army on July 15, 2016. General Twitty is a distinguished military graduate from South Carolina State University, and he served in the United States Army during Operation Desert Storm and Operation Iraqi Freedom. He served as deputy commanding general for the first armored division at Fort Bliss. General Twitty also served as deputy chief of staff for a strategic communications and international security assistant force in Afghanistan during Operation Enduring Freedom. His decorations include the Distinguished Service Medal, Silver Star Medal, Defense Superior Service Medal, and the Legion of Merit, among many others. General Twitty holds a Masters of Science degree in public administration from Central Michigan and a Masters of Science degree in national security strategy from the National Defense University. Command Sergeant Major Richard Johnson became command sergeant major of First Army on October 21, 2016. Johnson entered the US Army in 1987 and began his training as an armored crewman. In his over thirty years of service, Johnson held numerous positions and duty assignments, including operations sergeant major and in-term command sergeant major of first brigade first cavalry division and sergeant major of combined arms center training. His awards and decorations include Legion of Merit, Bronze Star, and Defense Meritorious Service Medal among many others. First Lieutenant Kevin D. Braafladt enlisted in the US Army Reserves in 2009 as a private first class. Upon completion of basic combat training he was assigned to the 91st training division operations as a military intelligence analyst. His responsibilities were to preserve, catalog, and interview veterans from the 91st division historic collection. In 2013 he received his commission as a military intelligence officer. He's currently serving

as the aide de camp to Major General Chris Gentry, deputy commanding general support First Army. In his civilian occupation, Kevin is a co-owner of a military antique museum. Please join me in welcoming to the Pritzker Military Museum and Library Lieutenant General Stephen Twitty, Command Sergeant Major Richard Johnson, and First Lieutenant Kevin Braafladt.

(Applause)

Gundacker: Before we begin our discussion, let's watch this short video about First Army.

(Trumpets)

Voiceover: Created in WWI to fight alongside America's Allied partners in Europe, one hundred years later ensuring the readiness of our homeland partners in the army national guard and army reserve, we are First Army.

(Singing "Over There")

Voiceover: First Army, America's first numbered army, was established in France on August 10, 1918 under the command of General John "Blackjack" Pershing. Only a few months later, thanks to the valiant fighting efforts of hundreds of thousands of American soldiers and their French and English partners, the war was over.

(Cheering)

Voiceover: In France, First Army left a legacy of victory in two major operations, the reduction of the St. Mihiel Salient east of Verdun and the great Meuse Argonne Offensive, west of Verdun. With the Great War at an end, First Army was deactivated in 1919. When the unit was reactivated in 1933 at Fort Jay, New York, First Army had a new mission, which is the same mission we have today: supporting the training and readiness of the army national guard and army reserve. Until the eve of WWII, First Army commanded six corps of soldiers from the active duty army, the army national guard, and the army reserve. In 1943 First Army resumed its field army combat role and moved its headquarters to Bristol, England.

(Singing "Praise the Lord and Pass the Ammunition")

Voiceover: On D-Day, June 6, 1944, with General Omar Bradley in command, First Army troops landed on Omaha and Utah beaches in Normandy, France, with First Army commanding all American ground forces during the invasion. Beginning in the 1950s and continuing through the 1970s, First Army mobilized and deployed thousands of soldiers during the Korean and Vietnam wars. In 1973, First Army transitioned from primarily supporting the active duty army to improving the training and readiness of the reserve components, as it had between WWI and WWII and as we do today. In 1990 First Army trained, mobilized, and deployed more than 41,000 army national guard and army reserve soldiers for Operation Desert Shield and Desert Storm. In 2006 First Army's mission expanded to include responsibility for training, support, and mobilization of all army national guard and army reserve units throughout the entire continental United States. First Army headquarters relocated to Rock Island Arsenal, Illinois. Beginning in 2015, First Army restructured its formations to more effectively support the training and readiness of the reserve component. Today First Army's ten training brigades are strategically located throughout the continental United States. Since 2001, First Army has mobilized, trained, and deployed more than 1.2 million soldiers, sailors, airmen, marines, and civilian interagency personnel for worldwide missions. Today's smaller, leaner active duty army cannot fulfill an increasingly multifaceted global mission without its reserve component partners, and it is First Army's sacred duty to train the army national guard and army reserve for fights to come. With a century of experience and expertise, First Army remains committed to the training and readiness of our army national guard and army reserve partners as we look ahead to our next one hundred years. First Indeed.

(Applause)

Gundacker: Thank you guys for joining. So I figured we'd start off by talking about--it's a hundred years of First Army. A lot of people have served in that hundred years, and I understand that two of you have had relatives that served with First Army. So General Twitty as well as Lieutenant Braafladt, both of you had relatives. Can you tell us a little bit about their service to the organization?

Twitty: I'll start. First of all, it is an honor to be the commanding general of First Army. As you mention earlier in your opening, we have a long and distinguished history. It started off with General Jack Pershing as the first commander, and General Omar Bradley also served during WWII as the commander. And we also have those that have served on staff, like General Marshall served on staff as well. And General MacArthur also served on the staff of General Pershing. So we have a long history of distinguished people that have served in First Army, and so it's an honor for me to command this great organization. What I will tell you about my service is pretty personal. Both of my grandfathers served in First Army. And both were obviously a part of a segregated army during that timeframe. Both served in the army air corps back in WWII. My mother's father actually served eleven years in the army air corps. And so to come and command this great organization, it's full circle for me because as a young kid my mother's dad used to march me around, and I used to put on his uniform. And I remember the First Army, the distinguished patch of the First Army on old fatigues that he had in his footlocker. And I used to put those fatigues on and march around his house and salute and so forth. And so of course they could not fathom that I would make general much less command First Army. So it is great to command this organization, and I know that they're smiling down on me for it.

Gundacker: Thanks. That's pretty awesome. So tell me about your relatives.

Johnson: Well, my great grandfather Oscar Nemon was actually drafted into the 91st infantry division in WWI, and 91st served under First Army through its campaign in the Meuse Argonne Offensive itself, and he was actually wounded the first day of the Meuse Argonne Offensive, which ended his war. But I guess fortunately for me it was just a wound and nothing more, but yeah, that was his story of service then and my connection to First Army prior to coming here.

Gundacker: That's--I wish I had stories like that. Let's talk about service. We talked about your family service and personal service. Between--Sergeant Major and General, between both of you, sixty-four years of service to the army. That's a lot. Almost the time of the hundred years. So tell me about what service means to you and your families.

Twitty: Sergeant Major, you can go.

Johnson: Well, Henry, thanks, and again I'd like to thank Pritzker Presents for allowing us to be here. It's a great opportunity. So service to me, I would say it's in my DNA. I don't have relatives who served in First Army that I'm aware of. But my immediate family with my father and four brothers, we have over 140 years of service, and over 120 of that has been as noncommissioned officers. So my father is a Korean War veteran, served in the army national guard after the war. So I have the little connection there 'cause there was some doing a First Army mission that was helping his artillery battery train. So I grew up wanting to be a soldier. Like General Twitty did, I had older brothers that were in the army. My father--there was still gear around the house. We would go out and play army. And that's all I really wanted to do was to be a soldier. So service for me is very special. For my family it's very special. My family--it's hard on the families when a service member--when their family member is a soldier. And we couldn't do it without the support of our families. So I appreciate that. And it means a lot to them. I really thank them for the support and what it means to allow me to be a soldier.

Twitty: And for me it's about giving back. This nation has given so much to me. It's given so much to my family. I came from humble beginnings back when my grandfather was marching me around. They lived in a one-bedroom shack. But I always remember that patriotism as he marched me throughout that one-bedroom shack house. But the other piece of it is I went to college on a military scholarship, and all my education has been paid for. And I was able to get my education through the military, and so my family has been able to prosper as a result of me going to college and so forth and coming throughout the army through the military. And so it's not only about commitment to this nation--which I love serving this nation--but it's also the commitment through what the military and what this great nation has given me. And that's why I serve.

Gundacker: So August 10<sup>th</sup> is coming up. It's the centennial of First Army. Lieutenant, can you tell us about First Army back then and what their mission was and how did that role change during the war?

Braafladt: Well it was a unique situation where--when the American Expeditionary Forces, which were commanded by General Pershing came to Europe, there really was no other organization to manage a large number of American troops overseas, and we were expecting a million to two million-plus American soldiers to be flooding into Europe at any time. And so it served multiple purposes. It served to give an organization to the army itself, to the AEF--American Expeditionary Force and lead an efficient way to fight against the Germans and the German forces itself. But First Army also established a lot of different things, and was really the first--well, it was the first field army as we said before--but it was the first to establish, like, the staff system. It was the first to establish maintaining and managing such a huge army or such a huge number of men and equipment coming over to Europe for the fight. And it was really proving the Americans that we were equals to the British and French, our allies. And one of the main things that was important for the creation of the First Army was that there was this argument of amalgamation. So the British and French, as the American forces were coming over there was, the British and French wanted the American forces to just be absorbed into their own ranks, because they were hurting so badly for men throughout the entire course of the war that they needed reinforcements. They needed replacements, and they saw the Americans as that answer. And through the president and General Pershing, we stood our ground and said, "No, we will not amalgamate. We will have our own separate command." And First Army was that first step to establishing ourselves and putting Pershing as well as the American army on an equal footing with the Allied commanders, because before we were--we didn't have any organization other than the American Expeditionary Force that would put us on an equal footing with them. And once First Army was formed, now we were an equal. And one of the interesting things was that once First Army was initially formed, Pershing actually was in charge of both the AEF and First Army simultaneously, which was a huge weight for him. But as the war went on for the Americans, Second Army and the other field armies were formed. First Army basically evolved its role into, you know, being a field army and fighting the campaigns--St. Mihiel being the main campaign for First Army to begin the war with. But it was also the first organization to consume or to take in all three components--active, national guard, and then army reserve or national army at the time. So that was one of the major roles was learning how to deal with all these new components or new means that we didn't have in previous wars.

Gundacker: So this is just a question for everybody. What would you say was probably some of the most difficult things during that time? 'Cause obviously it was a lot of firsts, a lot of fear of doing things the wrong way or whatever. What would you say about that?

Twitty: Well, absolutely in terms of bringing all three components together, particularly the army national guard and our active forces during that timeframe. If you read the

history, most of the national guard soldiers, they were back here in the US many of them had not trained in quite some time, and trying to get them formed and sent over to be able to fight such a campaign as WWI, you can imagine that's pretty problematic.

Gundacker: I think I was reading about--the generals said that he wasn't gonna send anyone over there until they'd been trained, and I think some of the French, they trained them because they were doing a lot of war in the trenches, and they trained them before they sent them over there. So the general had this--this has got to be done before I sent my 500,000 troops before I send them over there. So, I mean, I thought that was pretty interesting as well.

Twitty: That's right, and a lot of training was conducted on the ground over in Europe as well. And ironically enough, moving forward to what we do today, we train our national guard and reservists today across the continental US, but that really started under General Pershing back when he was the first army commander. So he set the footing for what we do today.

Gundacker: That kind of runs into my next question. How would you say First Army's history ties into the overall history of the army?

Twitty: Well what I will tell ya, you heard me talk about the three components: the active, the national guard, and the army reserve. Well, we call that the total force, the total army force. And I got to be honest with you. I think that the three prongs of that army force, we're pretty close and we're pretty tight today. We've learned a lot of lessons over the past years, particularly a lot of lessons coming out of Desert Storm, where we probably did not work closely together to support that war. And so after coming out of Desert Storm we took those lessons and now we implement what we call a total army force policy where we bring the units together a lot to train and a lot to conduct mentoring session and observer controller exercises and so forth. And so that has really helped us seeing that we have less than a million-man army. We can't do this job of fighting our nation's wars without all three components.

Gundacker: I think the key word is interoperability.

Twitty: Interoperability, exactly.

Gundacker: --that one a couple of times. Let's talk about First Army's mission today. Command Sergeant Major?

Johnson: Henry, thanks. So it's not that much different than it was almost a hundred years ago. So we have the unique opportunity to partner with our army national guard and our army reserve soldiers and assist them in their training, building readiness, maintaining readiness. And then we assist in deploying them into a theater in support of a combatant commander. And then once their mission is done we assist their redeployment and their post-mobilization, get them ready to go back to their communities. In WWI we had--First Army soldiers, leaders had to do similar things. Bring people from all over the country, bring them together at some point. Some of them never met each other before. Okay, now we help and assist them in building teams, which we do very well--they do very well--before we deploy them into theater of operations. Going back to your previous question, just ties into this, some of the first--so trainers that were training soldiers before they went to Europe for WWI were dealing with some capabilities that were never seen in the battlefield. Chemical weapons--the use of chemical weapons, the large employment of machine guns, artillery--accurate artillery that we hadn't seen in the battlefield before. So we were training soldiers to deal with that. So our environment today is much--similar to that, that we have made such advances in technology and weaponry, tactics and procedures. The environment we're gonna have to fight in--multi-domain environment. It's not just a ground war that we have to be concerned about, that we have to train soldiers to be able to operate in. So our observer controllers trainers today operate in a very complex environment. I'm very proud of them.

They do a great job in assisting our reserve and army national guard soldiers and organization in getting and maintaining a level of readiness that we're comfortable that they can deploy and do a mission any time. So that's kind of what's special for me about tying the two eras together. Even though we're a hundred years apart, we're very similar.

Gundacker: What would you say you would hope to aim next five years?

Johnson: The next five years, what I would like to do, kind of get on that route--one thing, we have to maintain standards. So our observer coaches and trainers, they've got to be of high character. They've got to be professionals, got to be masters of their craft, because when we--and it's with anybody. If you're training a soldier, they're gonna look up to you. You've got to build that confidence. You've got to provide inspiration and motivation to those soldiers that you're training. So I want to maintain that and improve that along the way. So we do that through training education and certification. So we certify all our observer controller trainers before we send them out to the field to operate in that capacity. So I want to increase that. One of the challenges is gonna be, like I mentioned earlier, our environment changes so quickly and becomes very lethal that we as First Army, as observer controller trainers stay ahead of the emerging environments so we are prepared to train soldiers before we put them in harm's way.

Twitty: Yeah, we spend a lot of time training ourselves in order to train others. You can imagine the environment changes daily, and oh, by the way, we're still a nation, an army, that's at war in Iraq and Afghanistan. So while we're training for that fight, we're also looking at emerging threats that may be out there, 'cause we've got to adapt to that and make sure that the soldiers are trained to be able to meet those particular threats. And so we spend a lot of time training ourselves, but we spend a lot of time also training those national guard and army reserve soldiers to be able to fight the current war and a future war.

Gundacker: So again, a hundred years coming up. August 10th there's going to be a celebration. General, what do you hope to achieve through the celebration of that centennial?

Twitty: Well, what I really hope to achieve--you know, we spend a lot of time as well going away from families, doing the business of our military. And during our birthday what I'd like to do is come together with all the veterans and just enjoy and reflect our time as First Army. We rarely stop and spend time and reflect because we spend a lot of time training as we talked about. We had a ceremony, a ball, last year where we kicked off our one-year celebration. And it was a great event in Rock Island. We brought the veterans in from First Army, both past and present veterans, and I got to tell you, it touched my heart to bring the veterans in and really hear their stories. And most of the soldiers that you see serving in First Army, they rarely get to hear the stories about our old veterans. And I want to bring them in during our birthday and let them tell their stories and reflect on it.

Gundacker: I want to go back to WWI. Could you elaborate just a little bit more on the role--First Army's role in WWI and then in WWII?

Braafladt: Yeah, the role in WWI, it was like I was saying, it was a multifaceted role. And it was like General Twitty was saying, was that we had to take a small standing army and incorporate it into a one million-plus man army in basically a very short period of time. And so First Army's role once it was established was to incorporate those soldiers that were coming from the United States, and then it established training camps within Europe that had British and French trainers to try to give them--they got their basic training, per say, in the United States and then give them the more advanced training of what to expect in a trench line--the more realistic training--from soldiers who had been there. And First Army was the key role in incorporating that, not only for itself, but for following troops that went into the other field armies that were established. And it really

set the groundwork for how we would fight the rest of the war. So like forty-seven days from the St. Mihiel Offensive all the way through to the end of the war it was First Army's lead that showed the rest of the army how we were gonna fight this war. And we did fight it differently than our Allies, much to their chagrin, that we were the Americans coming over, kind of the American cowboys. But we were the ones that--our First Army was the one that really set the standard for how we were gonna fight the war. So after the end of WWI First Army actually really became the same thing that we are today as well. We established training camps in Europe for any new American troops coming in, because we weren't really sure that the armistice was gonna last. We weren't sure that the war was gonna end after November--after the November 11th armistice that occurred. So we were preparing for the next "what if". You know, are things gonna start back up. So that was First Army's role in WWI, then we were demobilized and reactivated as again a training organization, much to the same that we are today. It was when WWII started that we again regained our initial role in WWI, that again we're a field army. And again another list of amazing firsts. First on the beaches of Normandy under General Omar Bradley. And it was really--it was an organization that again led the way through the advance through Europe. And like first to meet the Russians at the end of the war, close to the end of the war. So it was really an amazing history for a field army or an army organization.

Gundacker: So obviously First Army has a lot of history in WWI and WWII. What about the post-WWII operations? What has First Army been a part of?

Twitty: What I'll tell you is, that continued history of training soldiers and preparing them for combat, for the Korean War and the Vietnam War, the primary trainers came from First Army, similar to what occurred during WWI and WWII where we established camps--where those camps were here in the United States, and we not only trained reserve component soldiers for those two wars, we also trained active duty soldiers to participate in war. And then I also want to talk about the Katrina--Hurricane Katrina in 2005. The lead person for that effort was a guy by the name of Russ Honore, Lieutenant General. First Army was the coordinating headquarters and staff to lead that hurricane effort down in Louisiana. And then what we do today continues as part of training to ready and mobilize national guard and reserve soldiers continues today. A lot of people don't know this, but about 20,000 United States Army national guardsmen and army reserve deploy each year going into harm's way. Well, we lead that effort to ensure that they're trained before they deploy. We train about 100,000 national guard and army reservists annually through nine stations that we have, brigades out there independently training and partnered with our national guard and army reserve soldiers to ensure that they're trained and ready. You know, it's difficult when you have two days a month, as do the national guard and army reserve, and then they have two weeks in the summer to ready themselves for combat. So we're that bridge to help them out in that endeavor because they have very little time to train. And so that partnership between us and them is critical because again we have what I call subject matter experts that can quickly help them and get them trained up to the level to where they're ready to deploy.

Gundacker: Would you like to add?

Johnson: I conquer with the general.

(Laughter)

Johnson: But, yeah, and it's all about building and sustaining readiness. In today's environment it's more about sustaining readiness 'cause in the future we may not have the opportunity to build up to readiness to deploy somebody. So the challenge today in building and sustaining the readiness, which our reserve partners--it's difficult for them to do with the amount of days that they're allocated for a year. And then the answer's not just give more training days because they have civilian employee communities that

they're really tied in to. They're truly citizen soldiers, and they do a remarkable job. So First Army has the capability based on our subject matter experts' experience in our formations that we can get them to a level and help maintain them to a level so if there is a mobilization we feel comfortable as leaders, okay, putting these soldiers into harm's way. So it's sobering for me how important and critical the mission of First US Army is.

Twitty: What I'll tell you also--when you take a look at the national guard and the army reserve, they come with certain skillsets that you're unlikely to find most times in a military unit, active duty unit. You have a lot of reservists that work in the cyber community. You have a lot of firefighters out there, carpenters out there, policemen. And so they bring these skillsets into the active force when they come on active duty, and they really compliment us. And so I love working with the army national guard and army reserve because they just have these unique skillsets that we can tap into while on active duty to really compliment the force.

Gundacker: Through this process I've learned a lot about First Army that I'm almost embarrassed that I didn't know before. But I've never been under First Army, so I guess my question is, how aware are First Army troops, from private all the way to general, of First Army's history?

Twitty: So first off, we have very little privates.

Gundacker: Fair enough.

Twitty: We are a senior force, a mature force. We have to, so you'll find staff sergeants and above in our formation. And we have several generals and command sergeant majors in our formation simple because we have to be the ones to train the force, and you'll find the experience mostly in the senior ranks. And what I will tell you is, probably very little of most of us know the history of First Army. And I'll tell you, I knew very little about First Army before I took command of the organization. I knew that it had a big "A" patch on it and that my grandfather served in First Army. And I never thought I'd be selected to be the commanding general of First Army. But I tell you, it's been a unique experience not only commanding it but also knowing the history. That's why I have Kevin here, because he's a history buff, and he keeps me straight on the history daily.

Brafladt: General Twitty has been doing an amazing job of pushing and encouraging the First Army soldiers to know and understand our history and to basically share this throughout the force not only to build the esprit de corps that, hey, we are First Army, and that, basically almost everybody that you've ever heard of--Bradley, Pershing, Hodges, Marshall, MacArthur--they all had their start in First Army at one point or another.

Johnson: You forgot about Twitty.

(Laughs)

Brafladt: And General Twitty. Yes, sir. And so it's that same understanding that, you know, we may know of like certain divisions and things like that, but it's very rare for people to know that they are all connected. They're all connected by that one First Army, and that's one of the things that he's been very encouraging to have the soldiers from the bottom up know and share that and appreciate that history. And it builds esprit de corps within the command and the ranks.

Twitty: And the most interesting thing--First Army has about 8,000 soldiers. That's it. And if you take a look at the United States army reserve and the national guard, we're talking about less than half a million in ranks. So you take an organization that has about 8,000 soldiers that's responsible with partnering with our reserve component soldiers plus assisting them with training. We stay pretty busy. And so what I'll tell you is, I'm extremely proud of the work we do and the partnership we have with our reserve component. And we're extremely busy every day seven days a week doing this business.

Gundacker: So, Kevin you actually mentioned a couple of the heroes of the First Army, which again I was astonished how many people were connected to First Army and the legends of it. So, just a general question to anybody that has maybe some personal—some of the legends of First Army, maybe some of you guys, admire yourself.

Braafladt: Yeah, some of the names that we'd mentioned before. You know, it's--many of the commanders we knew from WWII cut their teeth in WWI. Like General Patton was Colonel Patton in WWI. He was actually wounded during his service with First Army during the Meuse Argonne Offensive. General Marshall, well Colonel Marshall at the time--he was essential. First Army was trying to pull off one of the more complicated moves that had been taking place during the war, was to fully engage itself in the St. Mihiel Offensive, and then per our Allies' request, disengage, reform, refit, and then move north by a number of miles and reengage right into the Meuse Argonne Offensive. And at the time he was the G3 or the plans and operations, and he orchestrated that. There were some issues with moving over a million men and equipment in that way, but he was essential to moving those pieces and getting the success of First Army in both the St. Mihiel as well as the Meuse Argonne Offensive. And all this experience that they gained in WWI was surely used to the optimum in WWII. And so having that experience under First Army really led to the successes that we had in WWII that we had to unfortunately fight. But it was really those times that led to--excuse me, those times in WWI that led to the experience that was important in WWII. And not to mention the commanders that we had in WWII like General Bradley and General Hodges, that--we always hear these names, but we never associate them with First Army, and that's really what we're here to do is, these were really essential commanders for us and really led the way like First Army did.

Twitty: And you can't forget about General Douglas MacArthur who led the Korean War. He was on staff as well back in WWI. I think he was a captain or a major. Kevin, I can't remember, but he also--so he also served in First Army as well, and he went on and led the Korean War.

Gundacker: I know we talked earlier about someone you're pretty fond of.

Johnson: Yeah, so I'll tag on--I've always been a General Bradley fan, okay, since before I joined the army. So my father was kind of a military historian himself--had a large library, about 4,000 volumes, most of it military related. I ended up getting some of those. Always read about military history, so big fan. But most people are familiar with the Sergeant Alvin York or the Audie Murphy that are associated-- that were in organizations that were assigned to First Army. So there's one individual that I'm very proud of--Private Jack Baker, okay, that served with First Army. Actually in First Army headquarters. From a small town in eastern Kentucky, was drafted into the army, went to report to his first station and by a timing error was supposed to get on a train to go to basic training. They didn't put him on that train. They put him on a train that sent him to New York City, and they put him to work. So he never went to basic training. He served for a while in New York City as a mail clerk and then was eventually shipped over to Europe to work for an organization that was building up and training, getting ready to invade Europe or France. So he landed on Omaha Beach with First Army. Was actually assigned to Headquarters First Army. Wore the First Army patch all the way until the end of the war. So he was part of--individually parts of all those first. So what's very special about this story is Jack Baker is still alive. He's ninety-eight years old, resides in a small town in eastern Kentucky. And General Twitty and myself are gonna go visit him later this month and thank him. I'm looking forward to looking him in the eye and shaking his hand and thanking him for his service. So those stories like that are all around. There's those kinds of stories. But I thought that was very special that, he's not gonna make--no one's gonna write a book about him probably, okay, but we need to seek out those kinds

of stories and get them--move them up so people understand that people did great things and sacrificed a lot for our country in times of war. So I'm very proud of Jack Baker, and I'm looking forward to meeting him.

Gundacker: This is live. You're not gonna ruin the surprise or anything, right? He knows you're coming.

Johnson: I hope so.

(Laughter)

Gundacker: See you in a little bit, Jack. So let's talk about the centennial, the one that's coming up August 10th. How are you guys planning on celebrating that?

Twitty: I think we're working on a ball, but we're working on several things. We're first gonna get started with some community events. We've got a couple of local runs that we're gonna participate in. I don't know if you've ever been to Rock Island Arsenal, but my intent is to change that place with First Army patches all over the place so when you drive in you see nothing but First Army. So we're working on banners now to put up. Then we're gonna do the outreach that Command Sergeant Major talked about. It's not just gonna be Private First Class Baker. We're locating other former soldiers that served their part in First Army. I'm gonna take the time out to personally go out and visit those folks. And then we're gonna do a couple of interviews to get it out nationally that it is our centennial. And so we're planning several things, and I'm looking forward to the rest of the year 'cause I want to do something at least monthly to continue to beat the drum about First Army and its significance.

Brafladt: And, sir, to add on to that too is, one of the things that encourages as well as expanding the knowledge within the army, the larger army itself about what First Army is and what it's done, because before coming to First Army we knew very little about it, and I think that's the consensus through most of the army. Unless you've been touched by First Army in training with the national guard or army reserve, it's kind of this organization that doesn't get a whole lot of credit in general, especially for the amount of--the legacy that it leaves behind, you know, and what it does in training the national guard and army reserve soldiers going over. But it's expanding that knowledge amongst the army and then amongst the general population as well saying this is who we are and where we're going.

Gundacker: Hundred years is something definitely to celebrate.

Twitty: That's right. We also want to take some soldiers and take them over to Europe. The centennial that will occur over in Europe, we want to paly a part in that. And so we're working now to arrange that and also take some soldiers over.

Gundacker: Sounds—are you taking volunteers?

Twitty: You'd like to go?

(Laughter)

Gundacker: So, I know, Sergeant Major, you talked a little bit about the future 'cause I asked you a question that was kind of similar to that, but I want to know, in general, just the future of First Army.

Johnson: We will always have First Army. We will always have a requirement across the total force for the capability that First Army delivers to the force. 'Cause it's not only to the force--we don't talk about--we train capabilities that reside in army reserve and army national guard that also enables the joint force, okay, that only exists in those organizations. So the capability we bring to the fight as First Army will always be a requirement. Okay, so that's not gonna go away. We could have--technology could go leaps and bounds, which it will, but nothing's gonna replace a soldier, and nothing is gonna replace the fact that a soldier has to be trained before you employ that soldier. So there will always be a capability required like First Army does and only reside in First Army. And it's always--it's difficult for our OCTs. It's not easy. So everything we do is an

away game. So they're not training in their back yard. We go to where the requirement is where soldiers are training with our partners. So a lot of time it's on unfamiliar terrain; it's with unfamiliar organizations sometimes. So our OCTs have to be very well adapted. They have to be professionals, and as we talked about before, they're constantly training. We're constantly improving our self. So I'm excited about where we're going in the future with our soldiers in First Army, with our mission as observer coaches and trainers. So I guarantee this: we're not going away.

Twitty: What I will tell you with respect to the future--Our nation expects our army to be ready when we go to fight, and part of that readiness includes First Army. If we do not assist our national guard and reserve partners in readying the force, then we're sending soldiers in harm's way. So we send a lot of time ensuring that we're readying that force so when they go into harm's way that they are able to fight and win. And so I'll tell you that First Army in playing that critical role, we take it seriously. As I stated earlier, we have just a small amount of time for our national guard and army reservists to get ready, with two days a month and two weeks out of a year, and so we got to ensure that we play that bridge to ensure that they're ready before moving them out and going into harm's way.

Gundacker: Sounds like you got it figured out. So we are a museum and library.

Twitty: I'm not so sure we got it figured out.

(Laughter)

Gundacker: So we are a museum and library, and I have to ask. Do you guys have any books that you suggest for future soldiers, anybody that wants to learn about the army or what it means to serve?

Twitty: Well, I have a couple. In fact I'll tell you, *Forty-Seven Days*--if you want to know more about First Army, please read that. You also have the biography of Alvin York. I started reading that last week, so I encourage others to read that one. But there's one that I'm reading now called *This Kind of War*. I read it as a captain, and I'm rereading it. And it's based on the geopolitical environment right now. And it's about the Korean War. And you heard me talk about having soldiers ready. Well, we didn't have soldiers ready for the Korean War, and we suffered from it. And we must not make that mistake again, so I encourage all military leaders to read *This Kind of War* by T.R. Fehrenbach.

Johnson: I'm gonna offer two. *A Soldier's Life*, the biography by Omar Bradley. The next one is *Patton: A Study in Command*. What I really like about that book is it describes the rigorous training that Patton put his troops through both stateside before they deployed to Africa and even after they were deployed, all the time that he was fighting the discipline he instilled in his forces and the rigorous training that allowed Patton's forces that he commanded throughout his career to excel and get after the mission. So if you want something that would be an eye-opener that talks about training and how to train soldiers, I recommend that book.

Braafladt: Well, I have to kind of go along with General Twitty on *Forty-Seven Days*. It's the--one of the essential works that describes the genesis of First Army and the troubles that we went through as a nation and a growing army and a growing force within Europe and how we were able to do that in such a short period of time--and as the book's title says, forty-seven days, it's just from the start of the St. Mihiel Offensive to the end of the Meuse Argonne Offensive. That was our major combat period, but we had grown so much as an army, and for much of that led by First Army. The learning of going from a 19th century army to a modern army that we're still using a lot of the lessons today. And then since my role at first army, I would have to say *Genesis of First Army* is one of the books the army published about First Army's history, and it's really one of the essential works. Talks about--that's nuts and bolts about how First Army was formed and fought the war itself. So those would be my recommendations.

Gundacker: Sound like good recommendations. So I think it's time we're gonna go to the audience for some questions.

1: My question is for the general and the sergeant major. Now you each have significant responsibilities. What do you worry about?

Twitty: Well, that's a pretty easy question for me. As you heard me talk about the 100,000 soldiers that we train annually and approximately 20,000 that we send into harm's way. Well, at the end of the day, it's my responsibility, and my sole responsibility, to ensure that they're all trained and ready to fight. And so I do worry about whether or not we've gotten it right in terms of the training that we provide to our soldiers.

Johnson: So, if I had spoken first, I would say exactly the same thing the general did. Seriously, so it's about--nobody wants to send a soldier into harm's way unless they're trained absolutely to the best we can, they're equipped the best we can, and they know how to employ that equipment the best we possibly can.

2: First of all, gentlemen, thank you for your service. Historically we've always lost the first battle of the next war, of the wars we have fought. But I just want to ask, are we ready for the next one?

Twitty: Well, what I'll tell ya, that's a good question. That's a loaded question. I will tell you that the number one priority is for us to be ready, but more importantly it's more than just about being ready. It's about winning, and it's about our soldiers having a mindset that winning is the only way to go, and there's no other option. And so what we're trying to do now is not just make our soldiers ready. And I always use the analogy--and I'm a huge football player. I love to watch college football. So if you watched the national playoffs this year between Alabama and Georgia, both teams were extremely ready, right? That game could have gone any way. Georgia could have won the national championship. But the difference maker was, you had a coach on the sideline by the name of Nick Saban, and you had a freshman quarterback. And the one thing that they displayed that really won the game in my view: grit and guts. So two things, grit and guts. That was a gutsy call to set up a freshman to throw that ball in the corner of the end zone on the last play that could have lost the game. And that's what we want our soldiers to have: grit and guts. So we ready them, but it's more than just being ready. It is winning. And the way you win is to have grit and guts.

3: Is it far more difficult to teach trained soldiers in urban warfare than it is field craft that you do, say, in the mountains of a place like Korea or the flatlands of Europe?

Twitty: Yeah, what I will tell ya is our soldiers have to be prepared to fight anywhere. And it is no secret that most people live in close proximity to water. And there's no secret that most places in close proximity to water are urban buildings and facilities. And so I am a product of a young battalion commander that fought the Thunder Run in the Battle of Baghdad. I was in the third infantry division. I was a task force infantry battalion commander and was a part of that assault. And so I thoroughly understand fighting in an urban environment. But prior to getting to that urban environment I had to fight in desert, in desert environment. I had to fight in mountain environment. Then I had to fight in that urban environment. And so we have to train our soldiers to be able to fight across the spectrum of what they're gonna have to deal with. But I would agree with you, the urban fight is the hardest fight.

4: Command Sergeant Major, Lieutenant Colonel Brian Gerber. I'm downtown here at University of Illinois Chicago, doing ROTC, sir, like you mentioned. First Army alumnus as well. I have--about forty percent of my commissioning class are gonna join the army reserve. And much like the army that we went to war with, they're joining units that they know are gonna deploy. They're gonna come back, and when their service meets this great city who's extremely grateful but may not know what they've been through, would

either of you have advice that I can take back to them to address that civilian/military gap that--some have called it that?

Twitty: Well, I'll start and then I'll turn it over to Command Sergeant Major. It goes back to what I said earlier. We have a responsibility that I'm not so sure that we've taken on appropriately. And our responsibility is to engage the American people. So what I will tell ya is that your soldiers, when they come back, they're gonna be proud of their service, but all these civilians are gonna be proud of you as well. And you need to take that time to connect with the civilians so they fully understand not only what you've been through, but they can celebrate that great service that--to the nation that you've been part of. They really want to do that. And I did not understand that coming up, how much that--I used to go back to my hometown. I'm from South Carolina, you probably can tell by my country accent. But my parents, my family, my neighbors, they wanted to celebrate my service. And I'm not so sure that I allowed them that opportunity to do so. And so I would just pass that on to you.

Johnson: Great question. Thank you, sir. So I'm a cadet command alumni. So I appreciate what you do and the complex environment in which you do it. I would offer this. Encourage them to tell their army story and the army story of their soldiers and of their families. One thing we kind of leave out sometimes is, we talk about our experiences, we talk about the experience of our soldiers, but I think it's critical that we also include the experiences of our families and our friends. And specifically with army reserve and national guard is with the experiences that they have with their community employer, okay, how they reintegrate back with that, and if they had any communication while they were deployed or while they were on active duty status with their employer, with their communities outside of their families. And if they didn't, I would encourage them to do that and just continue to tell the army story.

(Applause)

Gundacker: Thank you. Great job. Thank you to Lieutenant General Stephen M. Twitty, Command Sergeant Major Richard Johnson, and First Lieutenant Kevin Braafladt for a great discussion about First Army, and to the US Army Public Affairs Midwest for partnering on this program. To learn more about the topic, visit [Army.mil](http://Army.mil). To learn more about the Museum and Library, visit in person or online at [PritzkerMilitary.org](http://PritzkerMilitary.org). Thank you, and please join us next time on *Pritzker Military Presents*.

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(Theme music)

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(Theme music)

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