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*.
(Applause)
Havers: Welcome to *Pritzker Military Presents* for a discussion by author Michael Neiberg about his book *The Treaty of Versailles: A Concise History*. I'm your host Rob Havers, and this program is coming to you from the Pritzker Military Museum and Library in downtown Chicago and is sponsored by the United States World War One Centennial Commission. This program and hundreds more covering a full range of military topics is available on demand at PritzkerMilitary.org. Signed on the 28th of June 1919 by Germany and the principle Allied Powers, the Treaty of Versailles formally ended WWI. Despite the Armistice being signed on November 11, 1918, it took six months of Allied negotiations at the Paris Peace Conference to conclude the peace treaty, which in effect ended the actual fighting. A century after its signing, we can look back at how those developments evolved through the 20th century, evaluating the treaty and its consequences with unprecedented depth of perspective. Michael Neiberg provides an articulate and authoritative account of the Treaty of Versailles, explaining the enormous challenges facing those who tried to put the world back together after the global destruction of WWI. Neiberg reminds us that to understand decolonization, WWII, even the Cold War and the complex world we inhabit today, there is no better place to begin than with WWI and the treaty that endeavored to end it. Michael S. Neiberg is the inaugural chair of war studies in the Department of National Security and Strategy at the United States Army War College. He is the author of many books on the First and Second World Wars, including *The Path to War: How the First World War Created Modern America*; *The Blood of Free Men: The Liberation of Paris*, 1944; and *Dance of the Furies: Europe and the Outbreak of World War I.* Please join me in welcoming Michael S. Neiberg to the Pritzker Military Museum and Library.
(Applause)
Neiberg: Thank you, Rob. I also want to thank Megan Williams, who did so much work in getting me here, and I want to thank all of you for coming. It's a great pleasure to be here at the Pritzker Library, an institution that has been so important to helping get an understanding of military history to the general public and especially to teachers, so I'm really pleased to be here. The British military theorist Sir Basil Liddell Hart said that war is always a matter of doing evil in the hope that good may come of it. Tonight in about an hour what I want to do is give you a sense of how much evil this war produced from 1914 to 1918, and this image is a representation of that. This is by a man named Stuyvesant Van Veen. It is called "The Paris Peace Conference." He painted it in 1932. And as you can see it shows the leaders of the world at a peace conference sitting in the auditorium's seats at the bottom while blood continues to flow down through the seats of the auditorium and while soldiers continue to fight in the background, and the words "War to End War" literally appear on a machine gun belt feeding bullets into a continued carnage. When we periodize this war as 1914 to 1918 we have some pretty problematic issues. Several historians have argued recently that 1918 is really only an end date for this war for the United States, for Great Britain, for France, and for Germany. In Eastern Europe this war continues until at least 1923. Some people have argued that what we really have is a second Thirty Years War, lasting from 1914 to 1945. Other historians

have argued that you can't really understand the First World War until 1989 when the soviet union, itself a product of the First World War, finally comes apart. And I have colleagues who study the Middle East who argue that what we're fighting today is what they call the war of the Ottoman succession. In other words we still haven't figured out what replaces the Ottoman Empire as an organizing principle in that part of the world. So even the timing of this conflict, even the basic understanding of when it began and when it ended is complex. For some people this war ended in 1918. For others 1918 was merely the beginning of another period of conflict, as I'll show you here tonight. What I want to do really in an hour is about three things—forty-five minutes or so, is about three things. I want to begin by just exploring the enormity of the problem that the statesmen of the world had to try to face in 1919. Second, I want to look at one particular set of solutions, American solutions--how the United States was viewing this problem. And third I want to look at the impact of the Paris peace conference at the end of the First World War on a part of the world that we don't normally associate with the First World War but that we think about a lot. And the first thing I want to do is take you back to what the world looked like in 1914. This is a standard political map of the world in 1914. The Allied Powers are in tan. The Central Powers are in that sort of pinkish color in the center. And what I want to show you here is not so much the standard alliance map. I want to show you the durability of this map, how solid this system looked. The people that ran this map, the people that ran the great terrestrial empires of Europe had been on their thrones a really long time, and their dynasties had been there a really long time. This is Kaiser Wilhelm of Germany of course, who had been on his throne since 1888. The dynasty he represented had been running Prussia and later Germany since 1415. Czar Nicholas II had been on his throne since 1894. The Romanov dynasty had been running Russia since 1613. The Ottoman Empire, Mehmed V had been on the throne since 1909. The Ottomans of course had been on the throne and controlling that part of the world since 1453. And finally the longest serving monarch in Europe and the third-longest serving monarch in European history, Emperor Franz Josef had been on the throne since 1848, and the Hapsburg dynasty had been in control of much of central Europe and other parts of Europe since 1526. And I really want to make two points here. The first is the incredible durability of these empires. Even people who hated these empires did not think they were going away any time soon. In 1914 very few people, you can almost count them on one had, at least among the ones that I've found, believed that these institutions were going away, and very few wanted them to go away. The dissolution of the Ottoman Empire did not become a goal of the British or French until 1916. The point is that by 1918 not one of them, not two of them, not three of them, but all four of them were gone. And the second point that I want to make about these empires is that they were not just political institutions. They were of course economic, cultural, social institutions as well. Something would have to fill that gap. Something would have to replace those ancient empires. And of course in the East one of the things that replaces those empires is this terrifying new idea that Americans, British, and French are wrestling with in Paris, and that is the idea of Bolshevism, which claims to be an international ideology and an ideology that will supersede the nation-states that the West wants to create. In the Ottoman case, that vacuum remains, as I noted. The question of what to do in the absence of an Ottoman Empire that again, even if people disliked it, even if people hated it, had a very hard time envisioning that it would ever go away and envisioning that any system could ever fill in that gap. And one of the problems that people are gonna have in 1919 as I'll show you here in just a little bit, is identifying who the people are who live in these places, because previous to the First World War they would generally have identified themselves as a subject of one of these empires. Now a brand new identity has to come about. One answer is that small states

will replace these empires, cohesive nation-states, and those red stars that you see that I have on this map nearly represent those places where armed conflict continued both during and after the Paris Peace Conference, everywhere from the Greco/Turkish War which Ernest Hemingway covered in the early 1920s to the Bolshevik Revolution to the Polish Civil War, to the Russo/Polish War, the Anglo/Irish Civil War and the rebellion in northern Morocco, the so-called Rif War. Now this map has a lot of problems with it, and if you're French you can look at this map and clearly see that the map of 1919 despite the war that you just fought and the war that you just won is actually worse for you than the map of 1914. There is no eastern counterweight to Germany, which the French had had before the war. There is now a conglomeration of small nation-states in the center and east of Europe. This is the reason why the French were such an early backer of a strong Poland in the Paris Peace Conference. They needed an eastern counterweight. Now what they need is for Poland to be the counterweight to both Germany and the Soviet Union. This is one of the reasons that Poland is such a dominating force in the 1930s in international diplomacy, and one of the reasons why it's the British and French guarantee to Poland that creates the Second World War, the immediate cause of the Second World War in 1939. The second thing I want to note about this map or like you to note about this map is the creation of these new nation-states, and I'm gonna show you a lot more data, a lot more fidelity into these maps here in just a minute. But the question is, what should these new states be? How do you organize them? How do you decide where their borders ought to go? And there at least three mutually conflicting definitions of what these nation-states should be. The simplest definition, the one that Woodrow Wilson used, the one that David Lloyd George used, is that they should be based on a phrase that Lloyd George made popular. They should be based on national self-determination. You should be able to find a place where Romanians live or Hungarians live. Now, as you all know sitting here, this is a remarkably difficult thing to do. First you have to decide which groups get to be nation-states. Wilson had already decided that the Irish and the Jews for example did not rise to the level of nations. And then you have to decide where those nations are gonna go. Even if you can do that in 1918 these states still need to be able to feed themselves, so there has to be a social definition of these states, and there has to be an economic definition of these states, and moreover there has to be a security dimension to these states. They have to be able to defend themselves. They have to be able to contribute to the overall security of Europe. And again no surprise to all of us who know where this goes, it proves almost impossible to create nation-states that meet all three of these characteristics. How to do this, how to create these nation-states and guarantee their long-term survivability, and maybe more importantly how to guarantee that minority groups inside these nation-states would have freedoms and protections guaranteed to them. These are all questions that experts know when the Paris Peace Conference begins are gonna be central to trying to figure out how to put the world back together. That's just the political problem that Europe is facing. Europe is also facing cultural problems. This is the famous German artist Otto Dix, one of his very famous paintings. The problems were also cultural. How do you turn off four-years-plus of the mentality of total war? Historians in Europe now talk about what they call a war culture unleashed by the war in 1914, and the book that Rob was kind enough to mention, *Dance of the Furies*, I argued that that war culture is created by 1914. It is not there when the war begins. But it very quickly develops as the First World War develops. Some characteristics of this war culture include dehumanization both of the enemy and of oneself, and here is where the Otto Dix paintings are so important. These men are indistinguishable from each other. They have become machines. They have become a part of a wider system. Scholars also talk about the quest for scapegoats, especially in the East where all of the warring powers--Austria, the Ottomans, the

Germans, and the Russians--all of them lose, which is a very unusual set of circumstances in history. There is no winner in the East. A quest to find new artistic and linguistic ways to deal with mass trauma, and a way especially in France and Germany to deal with mass loss, and scholars have done a beautiful job of this over the past couple years of the centenary, looking at the ways that societies deal with mass loss. How do societies deal with the absence of hundreds of thousands of young men from their system? New enemies are created, new ideologies are created, monarchy and empire go away, replaced by the ideologies of bolshevism and communism--excuse me, bolshevism and fascism, each of which has an explanation for what just happened in the last four years, but those explanations are decidedly against the democratic world that the United States, Britain, and France want to put back together. Militarily it's about new military technologies. This is barely a decade after the Wright brother, remember, that you get planes like this. Four-engine bombers capable of delivering weaponry over long distance. Ten years after the Wright brothers flew off Kitty Hawk, North Carolina, every major air mission that air forced do today with the exception of air flight inflight refueling were either done or thought about in the First World War. A radical technological change that I'll show you the impacts of a little bit in just a bit. And of course the introduction to the first tanks on the battlefield of 1916, the introduction of artillery pieces that could fire a 211-millimeter shell seventy-five miles on a trajectory that took it halfway to space and back. Poison gas, submarines, and so much more. But it's not just about the technologies. It is also about the changing mentalities in war. The map on the left is a map of German air raids over Great Britain, a country that had always thought itself immune to foreign interference with the Great Royal Navy sitting in the oceans, sitting in the North Sea and the English Channel. Now its possible to fly over those navies and assault the enemy's homeland directly. This is why England, the British the get the first independent air force, the Royal Air Force, which is created at the end of the First World War. It is also a shift in mentalities to the direct targeting of civilians. The strategic bombardment of cities, which is represented on these two maps. This is London, England and Paris represented here. British blockade of food supplies in Germany, forced relocations of people, the mass murders of Armenians. The mass dislocations of Eastern European Jews, and the estimated hundreds of thousands of African civilians displaced and killed because of disease during the war. A shift in mentality that makes civilians a legitimate target of war. Economics, a cartoon that I found right here in Chicago at the Newberry Library from John McCutcheon, who later won the first Pulitzer Prize for editorial cartooning in American history. Please note the date of this editorial cartoon. This is April of 1915. This is very early on in the war. This is pre-Lusitania even. Take a look at what we have here. We have the docks of New York City appearing literally as magnets pulling the hard currency of Europe away from stunned British, French, and German bankers on a boat called the Money Center of the World, as Uncle Sam welcomes all that money coming over. As early as October 1914 industrialists and businessmen were writing to Woodrow Wilson telling him that if the war lasted a long time and if the United States played its cards right, the United States could take over for London and Paris as the global centers of international capital. American per capital income during the First World War rose thirty-eight percent in just four years. United States and Japan are the only countries in the world that come out of the First World War wealthier than when they went in. Modern American shipping, insurance, and banking all created by the First World War. New laws and new institutions like the Federal Reserve System to control the new infrastructure and the new flows of money. And I can talk more about this if you want. I don’t think any of this directly led to the United States getting involved in the First World War, but it is a massive, massive transition that is happening. And it's happening all over the world. John Maynard

Keynes, probably the most famous critic of the Treaty of Versailles. He left the Paris Peace Conference halfway through it, and left to write a book called *The Economic Consequences of the Peace.* That book contained the line, "If we aim deliberately at the impoverishment of Central Europe, vengeance I dare predict will not limp." Keynes believed that what the Treaty of Versailles had done was destabilized and further undermined the global economy. He predicted that within a very short period of time this system would lead to a worldwide global depression. An American who was over there, an American engineer by the name of Herbert Hoover agreed. And later on when asked why the Great Depression happened, ironically while Hoover was president, he blamed it on the Paris Peace Conference and the inability of the world to put the economies of the world back together. Both of them predicted disaster. Now, I've given you what fifteen minutes of the problems that the statesmen faced in 1919. I've only given you a brief snapshot of some of the problems that they were dealing with. I barely mentioned Germany. I barley mentioned some of the other problems that Europe was going with. How will the United States deal with this? That's the big problem. Woodrow Wilson did not believe that his own state department could do this. He did not think that the state department had the requisite background, in some cases the requisite intelligence, and he didn't think that they would do very well against their British and French counterparts. So he did something remarkable. And that's what I want to talk about in the second third of this talk. This guy's my favorite example of what comes next. This is William Linn Westermann. Born in Belleville, Illinois, not too far from here. Educated in Wisconsin and educated in Germany. In the summer of 1917 he was one of the country's foremost experts, wait for it, in reading Egyptian papyrus scrolls. Nothing more esoteric and academic than that, right? This guy looks like a mild-mannered professor, doesn't he? In the summer of 1917 he is asked to join a group called the Inquiry. Here they are. They are in effect the world's first think tank. In 1921 they reform themselves as the council on foreign relations. William Linn Westermann is the guy in the box right there. Sitting right in front of him is a man by the name of Isaiah Bowman who advised Woodrow Wilson on how to redraw those borders that I showed you. There are accounts of Isaiah Bowman and Woodrow Wilson on the floor of Wilson's hotel room at the Hotel Crillon in Paris literally with maps and crayons drawing lines. Isaiah Bowman is the man who later advised Franklin Roosevelt on how to rebuild Europe at the end of the Second World War. In the interim he was president of Johns Hopkins University. Here's the part I find incredible, and here's the part that I think symbolizes what happened to this country as a result of the First World War. In the summer of 1917 William Linn Westermann is reading papyrus scrolls in Madison, Wisconsin. In 1919 William Linn Westermann is in the room when the great powers are making the decision about whether Constantinople should remain with Turkey or whether it should go to Greece. He reads papyrus scrolls. What qualifies him to make a decision about something like that? The simple answer is, nothing. The more complicated answer is that President Wilson wanted this group put together to advise him, not to give him answers necessarily, but to give him information, give him data. So the idea behind this group was to assemble professors who were smart, who were connected in one way or another with one of the two people in this picture, either Edward House who's the guy in the center of back row, who was Wilson's most famous advisor, the so-called Colonel House even though he had no military title at all, and the man sitting there at the bottom right Sidney Mezes, who was the academic head of the inquiry. Everybody in this picture knew one of those two guys, and the idea was they would provide Wilson with the data upon which Wilson would make his decisions. Now, this is really, really interesting and really, really different. No other country that I know of has ever pulled anything like this before. Critical diplomatic decisions and advice to the president would come not from professional diplomats. It

would come from theoretically unbiased academics who would amass information. What to do with that information is not clear, and of course as I'll show you here every bit of information that they come up with has in some way or another a political implication. What to do, what Wilson actually wants to see accomplished, the men of the inquiry are not sure. William Linn Westermann said about Wilson's Fourteen Points, "No one knows just what is in the president's mind beyond vague phrases and beautiful ideas." Here's one of those vague phrases and beautiful ideas. "The Turkish portion of the present Ottoman Empire should be assured secure sovereignty, but the other nationalities now under Turkish rule should be assured an undoubted security of life and an absolutely unmolested opportunity of autonomous development." What does that mean? Furthermore the United States had never declared war on the Ottoman Empire. The United States had no plans to get involved in the Ottoman Empire, yet there was William Linn Westermann in a meeting in Paris helping to decide whether Constantinople would become Greek or Turkish. Any attempt to use history would just make this more complicated, so even though many of the professors who were on the inquiry were themselves historians, they tried not to use history as a basis. Why? Because every country in Europe could claim almost any part of Europe based on an historical claim. As the prime minister of Italy shouted at Wilson one time based on the claims that other states were making, Italy should get all of Europe based on the fact that it once had the Roman Empire. Now of course he didn't mean that seriously. What should the United States do? Nobody knew who lived in these places. Nobody knew whose historical claims would be most valid, yet here was the United States all of a sudden adjudicating these various claims. Here was Wilson trying to produce the harmony, as this political cartoon says. What's happening here? Well, for one thing, those four great nation-states, those four great terrestrial empires were gone. Somebody has to make these decisions. Somebody has to figure out the way to put this back together. For another there was the universalism of Woodrow Wilson's message. Wilson's Fourteen Points are not aimed at the United States. They're not aimed at Canada. They're aimed at everybody, and the inquiry's studies covered the entire globe. For some reason that still I'm a little curious about, twelve percent of the inquiry studies concerned Latin American. The idea is to reshape the entire world, not even necessarily just those parts affected by the war. And maybe most importantly Wilson understood that the United States had to present a viable alternative to the Bolshevik model of Lenin or else the United States might lose out entirely. This is the moment that the Harvard historian Erez Manela has called the Wilsonian moment, this very brief period of time when the United States had the power and the will to try to reshape the world. In his imagining what the United States actually did is promise too much to too many people, leaving behind the inevitable sense of disappointment when the United States couldn't deliver. First you need that data, so the inquiry got to work. They produced hundreds of maps, dozens of studies, and they tried to figure out based on a progressive mindset what to do with this data. And I just want to take a little bit of a detour here at a part of the world that I've been dealing with a little bit because I find it so interesting that the inquiry dealt with, and that's Alsace and Lorraine, these two provinces that had been French and then taken by the Germans in 1871, now the French want them back. In 1940 the Germans will take them back in 1945, they're gonna go in--you know the places I mean here. Point eight of the Fourteen Points said, "All French territories should be freed and the invaded portions restored and the wrong done to France by Prussia in 1871 in the matter of Alsace Lorraine, which is an unsettled piece of the world, should be righted in order that peace may once more be secured in the interest of all." Notice what Wilson did here he did not say what he could have said. Alsace and Lorraine go back to France. That's not what he said. What he said is the wrong done to France by Prussia, a political body that no longer exists except as part of

a wider German state, should be righted. Now the Germans read this point to say that there's a lot of ways that one can right a wrong. One way could be that you ask the people of Alsace Lorraine what they want. Take a plebiscite. That plebiscite of course would include the thousands of Germans, hundreds of thousands of Germans who moved into Alsace Lorraine since 1871 and would not include all those French who had left, including the president of France Raymond Poincare, who left Lorraine as a young man. So what did the inquiry do? It sat down to try to figure out who lived there. Lo and behold nobody had ever taken a census before. The data you see behind me is based mostly on an 1886 study by a German academic who literally walked through Alsace Lorraine, walked up to people, and said to them in German, "What language do you speak?" And if they said German or Alsatian he marked them as German. That's what the data behind me show. Based on that data twelve of the inquiry's sixteen studies on Alsace Lorraine say that Alsace Lorraine has no business going back to France. They came up with all kinds of crazy ideas, including giving one of them to Prussia and the other to Bavaria, giving them both to Switzerland. All kinds of crazy ideas. Now of course the French have no interest in any of this, so the American studies are running in direct opposition to America's own allies, and this is fairly easy. Here's where the inquiry thought people lived in the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Now, these maps are at Yale. They're beautiful. You can order them, they'll bring them out, you can take a look at them. They were initially colored this way in not only shades to indicate different ethnic groups but in different deepenings of those shades in order to try to indicate gradations. They're actually beautifully done when you think about what they're doing here in an age before computers. The problem is even the people how put the maps together don't actually think that this represents reality on the ground. And what do you do with large sections of this map that of course include minority groups? Prior to 1914 they would have all identified themselves as citizens or subjects of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. No they're identified as Slovak, Czech, Slovene, Polish, Czech, Jewish. By the way, there's no color on here for Jewish. The groups of the inquiry decided not to color, not to identify people from the empire as Jewish. Who are these people? What makes somebody Czech or Polish or Slovene? Is it their language? Is it their religion? This one goes by language. The inquiry also studied where railroads go, where canals go, where potash mines could be found, all because they're trying to figure out what these new states should look like. The other way to do it is to ask the people on the ground who lives in those places, so the inquiry did that too. They asked the Hungarian government and the Romanian government for maps of where Romanians lived inside the boundaries of the proposed state of Romania. This is what they got back. Anybody want to guess which one of these is the Romanian map? It's the one on your right. The one on your left is the Hungarian map. How to put this back together? Well, believe it or not there was actually a plan by the inquiry to just put the Austro-Hungarian Empire back together. Just sew it back up. Create this, which is a federal republic of greater Austria. Do it that way. How could you do that? What would it look like, and what would the point of the war have been if this is what you're gonna do? I want to introduce you to one other person, the man for whom the building next to mine at the Army War College is named. A really fascinating man by the name of Tasker Bliss. When Tasker Bliss was the senior military representative to the Paris Peace Conference, he was Wilson's senior military advisor, even though Wilson only met with him a handful of times and doesn't appear to have listened to him all that carefully, Bliss was an interesting man. When Bliss was stressed out he would pour himself a glass of whiskey and he would read Thucydides in the original Greek. We're lucky; at the Army War College we have a series of letters that he wrote back to his wife. Very interesting, very open and honest letters in which he tells her almost to the end of the Paris peace conference, "Don't come to

Europe. It's not safe here. I don't think this peace is gonna hold. I think we're either gonna go back to the war or we're gonna have a worldwide Bolshevik revolution. It's not safe" Not until he's pretty sure the Germans are gonna sign the treaty in late June does he tell her, okay, I think it's okay for you to come over now. He said that the new nations the United States were creating, these new states that were being put together, were not virtuous simply because they were small. He said this: "The submerged nations are coming to the surface, and as soon as they appear they fly at someone's throat. They are like mosquitos, vicious from the moment of their birth." What he thought the United States was doing was beginning to plant the seeds of future conflict in Europe. Worse, he worried about a plan by government accountants to take all the weapons the United States Army had in Europe and sell them at a discount rate to these new states. Bliss said from an economic standpoint that may make sense, but from a military standpoint, he said, "The very best thing you could do would be to put those weapons on ships and when they're halfway across the Atlantic Ocean throw them all overboard. All we're doing is fueling the next round of violence." Bliss was also aware that as the American military demobilized, and as the American wartime industries reconverted to civilian industries that the United States had limited power, especially in places like the old Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman Empire. The United States simply couldn't do what Wilson wanted them to do. He also saw that the victors of this war, Britain and France, were only very little better off than those that were defeated. Bliss wanted the United States to go very slow, and in a part of the world I won't talk about, Syria, he specifically warned the president and his advisors that the United States should not go anywhere near Syria, an interesting statement given kind of what we're looking at here today. I want to wrap some of this up for the third part of my talk, and I want to talk about a part of the world that we all talk about a lot, we all think about a lot--I know we do where I work--but a part of the world we don't normally associate with the First World War, and that's China. Because actually what happens in regards to china in Paris in 1919 ties all of this together really, really well. The part that's in red on this map is the Shandong Peninsula. Shandong prior to 1914 had German concessionaries. What that means is, just like the British had their port in Hong Kong, the French had their port at Canton, and the Portuguese had theirs at Macau, the ports in China in the Shandong Peninsula were run by Germans. They had effectively economic and political control over those regions came with Germany. When the war broke out two things happened that are important for East Asia. The first is that Japan signed an agreement with Great Britain and later with France that said that any German territory north of the equator that Japan was insisting on at the end of the war, Japan could keep. Now, that includes Shandong, which you see behind me in red. It also of course includes the Marshall, Marianas, and Caroline Islands, which all go to japan at the end of the First World War, all islands the United States Marine Corps, Army, and Navy are gonna have to take back. You're shaking your head, and it's appropriate that you do it. There is that great line that one of my wife's friends likes, that men can do almost anything and justify it with, it seemed like a good idea at the time. This one seemed like a good idea at the time. So Japan is a member of the victorious Allied coalition, and at the end of the war Japan is sitting in Shandong. China's reaction to the First World War is fascinating. As some of you may know, China has a revolution in 1911. It's a very fractured state. It's a state that couldn't become a belligerent in the war for fear of the country completely coming apart. What the Chinese did do is raise a labor corps of 140,000 men that went to the western front to free up 140,000 French laborers to serve on the western front. So in effect China and Japan--yes, excuse me, China and Japan are both on the side of the Allies but in a different way. I was lucky enough last November to go to the rededication of the memorial to these laborers in Southeastern Paris. There's also a memorial to them in Western

Canada, because that's the way they came. They came across the Pacific Ocean and then by rail across, and several hundreds of these guys died of influenza and other diseases while they were transiting through Canada, so there is actually a cemetery in Western Canada dedicated to these guys. So you've got two problems here. You've got China's claim to the Shandong Peninsula based on the raising of 140,000 laborers and based on the fact that it is indisputably ninety-nine percent ethnically Chinese. So if the Western powers meant what they said about national self-determination, if they meant what they said about the right of people to determine their own future, there should be no question that the Shandong Peninsula should go to China. And beautifully wonderful anecdote, our friend William Linn Westermann happened to be on the same ship going to Paris as the senior Chinese diplomat at Versailles at the Paris Peace Conference, a man by the name of Wellington Koo, and he recorded their conversation in which Westermann said to Wellington Koo, "I don't know what you're worried about. There probably won't even be a discussion. Shandong's Chinese; it's going to China." And Wellington Koo said to Westermann, "We'll see about that. I'm not yet convinced." Japan made the argument that China had agreed to this concession of the Shandong Peninsula through a treaty, something called the Twenty-One Demands, and if the First World War had been about anything at all, it had been about holding international treaties, therefore Japan deserved Shandong. Not only that, Japan was sitting there. Then the Japanese did something really clever. They introduced or talked about introducing a clause into the final treaty called the racial equality clause. All it would say is that all of the races around the world should be equal in front of the law, a very simple clause. If you know anything about Woodrow Wilson, if you know anything about the British Empire, if you know anything about the French Empire, you'll know it's not that simple. This meant that the Allies had two choices. They could reject the racial equality clause, in which case the Japanese could go to the people of Asia, as they did, and say, look they don't mean equality for you, they mean that the imperial system will continue despite the war. Or the Allies could accept the racial equality clause, in which case people around the world from Wilson's own state of Virginia to the British Empire in India to the French Empire in Indochina will demand equality. They can't do it. So now they've got them on the horns of a dilemma. What the Japanese are trying to do is force the Allies to accept Japanese control of Shandong in exchange for japan taking away, taking off the table, the racial equality clause. Everybody with me? You can understand why Wellington Koo was so worried. Now what happens is to me really, really interesting. On May 3rd, news leaks out of Paris that the Allies are going to give the Japanese the German concessions in Shandong in exchange for which Japan will withdraw their demand for the racial equality clause. What happens next to me is really interesting. It takes less than twenty-four hours for that news to get from Paris to China. When it does, something that the Chinese call the May Fourth Movement begins. There's rioting up and down eastern China and even as far inland as the city of Wuhan targeting Japanese businesses and Japanese property in China. The Chinese today see this as the beginning of modern Chinese nationalism, and there's a big memorial to it in Tiananmen Square. Chinese students living in Paris surrounded the delegation, surrounded the hotel where the Chinese delegation, Wellington Koo and his colleagues were staying, so that they could not leave the hotel to sign the treaty. And Wellington Koo did something very clever. He said, look, I'm under no orders from my government to sign the treaty. I'm not signing it. So China never did sign the Treaty of Versailles. It is incredibly unpopular among the American delegates, too, who cannot understand why if the United States fought the war for national self-determination and for the rights of people to determine their own futures, Shandong could possibly go to Japan. And on the same day you can see these two statements. Woodrow Wilson said, "It is the best that could

be accomplished out of a dirty past," and Tasker Bliss saying, "It can't be right to do wrong, even to make peace." Bliss wrote this to his wife. “I have never seen such a glaring case of secret diplomacy. The outrageous yielding to Japan on the Shandong question could never have happened if it had not been done secretly. The protests of the world would have prevented it. Thank God my skirts are clear, or at least my conscience is, of any of the wrongdoing." Several members of the American delegation considered a mass resignation from the Paris Peace Conference in protest of what they saw coming at Shandong. Bliss wrote to his wife saying it was the first time in his military career that he thought about stepping away. A couple of people did resign. William Bullitt, who later became the first American ambassador to the Soviet Union and later ambassador to France when France fell in 1940, Bullitt did eave the Paris Peace Conference, and he wrote, "I'm gonna go lie on the sand and watch the world go to hell." And he took his dog Pie-Pie and went down to the south of France, and that's exactly what he did. Tasker Bliss wrote, "What a wretched mess it all is. If the rest of the world will let us alone, I think we'd better stay on our side of the water and keep alive the spark of civilization to relight the torch after it is extinguished over here. If I ever had any illusions, they are all dispelled." And I think you can make a very strong case, and I would make it quite strongly, Americans were not disillusioned by the experienced of the First World War. They were disillusioned by the failure of the peace. They were not disillusioned by what their sons, their husbands, their nephews, their daughters, their nieces had done in coming over to France, defeating the German army, bringing liberty back to the British and the French and assuring their own liberty in the process. There are monuments all over America to the people that did this. The problem they saw was that the United States was unable to put in place a peace that would make the world a better place. So I'm afraid there's no real good high note on which to bring this lecture to an end. Some of the parts of the world that were most deeply affected by this war--East Asia, Russia, the Middle East--are still affected by it, and the problems of these eras today are still traceable back to what happened in the period 1914 and especially 1919. I'm reminded a little bit of Colin Powell's famous Pottery Barn rule that if you break it you bought it in international diplomacy. The United States was not responsible for breaking this particular pot--that is, the war began without the United States having a role in it--but it sure was broken by 1919. The Americans saw the British and French as out of ideas, out of power, and interested mostly in maintaining their old empires. They saw Russia and a rising Japan as terrifying alternative visions for the world in the post-war years. Even if the Americans tried to ignore the fact for another generation, and even if many Americans wished that it weren't so, the United States was fully a part of the international security environment, from China to Syria and more, a role of course that the United States continues to play more than a century later. So we come back to Liddell Hart with his observation that war is always a matter of doing evil in the hope that good may come of it. Now, in my own view it is highly unlikely that any treaty that the great powers would have worked out in Paris in 1919 or any set of general principles or anything like the League of Nations would have explained to the people of Europe and of the world the evils that the years from 1914 to 1918 created. In the case of France, the country that I know best, the recovery of Alsace Lorraine certainly did not explain to France why it had lost 1.2 million of its sons and why it had to create this massive cemetery and ossuary with 16,000 graves, and underneath that building that you see in the background the bones and remains of tens of thousands of French and German unknown soldiers. You can go today to the back of that building and look down through the glass and see the stacked bones. It’s supposed to make people look down at it and promise that they will never go to war again. My wife long before she met me was a college student in Strasbourg. She was driven out to Verdun on a very cold, unpleasant

day and talked to in a language she still didn't understand, French, remembers looking down into that ossuary and thinking, "I am never thinking about the First World War again. I'm done." So then the poor woman met me.
(Laughter)
Neiberg: This is also the place, Verdun, where the French and the Germans periodically come together to say that this will never happen again. It's the place where Adenauer and De Gaulle walked together. It's the place where Helmut Kohl and Francois Mitterand walked together. It's the place where they're supposed to look down at each other and say, we failed one time; we cannot fail the second time. Now, American losses in this war were far less devastating, which has given Americans an excuse to downplay this war's impact both here and around the word, but it seems to me inescapable that the United States and we as Americans are still dealing with the question first posed in 1919: what will best help the United States pursue its interest and guarantee its security? And there are at least two answers on offer in 1919. One is, the Wilsonian answer of creating multilateral and multinational approaches that pursue democracy and economic integration worldwide, with the United States taking the lead of those programs. This is what Wilson wanted. This is what the Treaty of Versailles was supposed to do. This is what the League of Nations was supposed to do. And this is what the United States was supposed to be developing in the postwar period. That idea as all of you know turned out to be unpopular in the United States at least among a plurality and maybe a majority. We're really not sure because public opinion data just didn't quite work the same way. Two very influential Americans, the former president Theodore Roosevelt and the chairman of the senate foreign relations committee Henry Cabot Lodge posed an alternate vision. That what the United States really ought to do is stay as far away from multilateral institutions as possible and engage in its own unilateral global strategy based on some combination of American values and American interest. They argued that multilateralism not only reduced the power of the United States but it actually made it more difficult for the United States to create and to promote the very values that Wilson wanted to see promoted. Two very different visions. I think what happened is that from WWII, roughly 1940 until the end of the Cold War, Americans had a consensus, a rough consensus that the first approach had been correct, that multilateral institutions was the way to go. Now the Second World War institutions that we create are different--the United Nations, NATO, World Bank, all of those institutions--they are done in a WWI spirit but they're done to give the United States more power, the classic example being the UN with its security council veto. Most of those documents when Harry Truman signed them, he signed them underneath the portrait of Woodrow Wilson, and he did that on purpose because Truman believed that he was fulfilling the vision that Wilson had first set out, only a slightly better vision in his mind. What we've seen in recent years--and I'm not here to get political, and I'm not here to say which way this ought to go--but what we've seen in recent years is a reemergence of this debate from a century ago about whether the United States really is better off with multilateral institutions or whether the United States ought to reject those multilateral institutions and go back to a unilateral strategy. Now, whichever way you believe or whatever you think is right about this, the world we live in today and that very debate was in a very real sense forged in the years 1914 to 1919. We ignore that history, and the importance of the study of history in more generally at our great peril, and I am extremely grateful for all that the Pritzker Library has done to advance the study and learning of this war and of wars in general both to the general public and again to teachers who can have such a great impact with their students. So it's been a real great pleasure for me to give this lecture here in this facility, and I'll be happy to answer any questions that you might have. Thank you very much.

(Applause)
1: Charles Evans Hughes came very close to defeating Wilson in 1916, went on to become a fairly effective secretary of state under Harding. If Hughes had been elected president, which easily could have happened, do you think he would have followed that Henry Cabot Lodge/Teddy Roosevelt line you mentioned or would he have gone some different third way from either Wilson or Theodore Roosevelt?
Neiberg: So, what you're talking about is two things historians call counterfactuals and contingencies. The line I've been using a lot, it's gotten me a lot of drinks in bars, is that I won't discuss a counterfactual unless there's a glass of scotch in front of me, because we as historians do want to have some sort of paper trail to back something up. What I can say is in the 1916 presidential election, Hughes and Wilson really didn't differ all that much. They both made essentially the same argument, that we're gonna keep the United States neutral for as long as we can. Once it becomes obvious that the United States can no longer maintain neutrality then we will get involved, and once the war is over we will reshape it in American image. I don't think Hughes would have followed the Roosevelt/Lodge line, neither do I think he would have done things the way that Wilson did them. The second, the contingency part, to me is really fascinating, too. As you noted, Hughes very nearly won that election. It's something like 2,000 votes in California that determine it. And also back in the 1780s and 1790s the founding fathers said that a treaty had to be approved by a two-thirds majority. If they had said simple majority, the United States joins the League of Nations and ratifies the Treaty of Versailles. So these are these moments that historians look at, how could things have gone differently? In the case of Hughes I think he would probably have been a supporter of getting the United States involved. There were other republicans--Taft was one--who also believed in the creation of some sort of international league. But it certainly would have looked different. It's a particularly Wilsonian thing.
2: I'm Armenian, so my question is in regards to the progression of the Wilsonian-Armenian idea, just the--can you give us some background in terms of the history in terms of how that kind of degraded from the original vision to--
Neiberg: Yeah--
2: --you know, what it became?
Neiberg: Yeah, I can give you a little. I'm not an expert on Armenia. But throughout 1915, 1916 as evidence in coming in of the genocide that's happening in Armenia, Americans are of course quite critical not only of the Ottomans but also of the Germans and in some sense also the British and French. Why is nobody doing anything? The answer that comes back from the Europeans at the end of the war is well if you think you've got a better way of handling this, if you think you've got a better way of figuring this out, why don't you take responsibility for Armenia, what became known as the mandate system. Why don't you guys come in, and quit moralizing to us, actually do something? And that's when Wilson backs off and says that really wasn't what I had in mind. I didn't want to be a part of that. And that's really when the United States really does being to kind of back off, which of course just leaves the British and French frustrated that the Americans are happy to preach at them but not really there to do most of the heavy lifting. Other than that most of what's coming, American attention to the Armenia is actually not coming from the government. It's coming from private organizations. And this is also true of the Eastern European Jewish refugees, which are being cared for by a thing called the American Joint Distribution Committee. They're not high on the list of American political aims. And I did a piece for a blog called War on the Rocks a couple years ago in which I argued that most states don't prioritize refugees in situations like this, so we can say never again as much as we want but the reality is most governments don't do this.

And on the American side it's usually being handled by nongovernmental organizations. Wish I knew more about that than I do, but--
3: Do you teach military officers--what lessons does Versailles itself offer to operators and decision makers?
Neiberg: (Chuckles) One that I love, and it comes from Liddell Hart, because Liddell Hart thought deeply about not only the war but the peace, the more complicated--the more things you want the peace treaty to achieve, the more complicated its outcomes will be. That seems a fairly simple, basic law, but what happens here at the Paris Peace Conference is, as I said, they've got twelve percent of their studies are about Latin America. They're remaking the entire world, so the military problems that that's gonna create are part of what drive Bliss to say, what are we doing, what's happening here? And the contrast that I would draw is the end of Second World War when the great meeting happens at Potsdam in 1945, they are conscious that we're not gonna do what they did thirty years ago. We're gonna stay laser focused on one problem, and that's Germany, and their aint gonna be a treaty. Truman doesn't bring a treaty back to the US senate. We're not gonna do that this time. We're not gonna get stuck to one document. So one argument I think would be for flexibility, and one argument, and this is a more debated one, that the defeated have to come back into the discussion and some point. So the reason that's been in the news today, the president is talking to North Korea, and the Americans are currently involved in discussions with the Taliban. And I had a student of mine tell me that he never could have envisioned that the US would be dealing with the Taliban. And my answer was, any study if history will show you the defeated has to come back into the process in some way. So I would say those are probably two, though I certainly wouldn't say that I've got any corner on the market of lesson out of the First World War.
4: So, after WWI the dissolution of the Ottoman and Austro-Hungarian empires saw the rise of many different nation-states in Eastern Europe and Southwest Asia. Why do you believe that after WWI Germany was not treated to the same dissolution into many different nation-states such as Bavaria and Prussia and--
Neiberg: Why not just break it up into its 1648 borders?
4: Yes.
Neiberg: That's actually on discussion in 1944, '45. There's something called the Morgenthau Plan, which would have done just that. The argument at the end of WWI is you don't want to break Germany up really for a number of reasons. One is economic. You need Germany there to be the economic engine to keep Europe going just as it is today, just as it was in 1945 it's the engine of the European economy. The second argument was that you really want a solid Germany because if it can become democratic, if it can do the things that you hope it will do, then it will serve as a counterbalance to the Soviet Union. So I tell my students, I tell anybody, if you want to read the classic American document, read Woodrow Wilson's declaration of war speech in 1917, where he says, we're not going to war against the German people. We're going to war against the German government. The Germans are fine, it's just that they have this autocratic, awful, unrepresentative, undemocratic government. So the thinking is, if you put a democratic government in there and if that works, then what you can do is have a strong democratic forward-looking Germany that can be the engine of Europe, which by the way is exactly what happens, it just happens after another war. But that idea itself wasn't so crazy. So the idea of what you want to do with Germany, you want to reduce its size and power so that it is not the imbalance in Europe that you are afraid that it was, but what you want to do is make sure that it is strong enough to do all those things that we talked about. And the issue of Alsace Lorraine comes up too. That's another issue. If you think it's German then you're creating a problem by taking it away

from Germany. If on the other hand you don't think that it's German then what do you do with it? The bottom line is there were people that said that. Break the Rhineland away. Break Bavaria away. Do whatever it is you gotta do. Or if it looks like the Germans aren't gonna sing the treaty then offer Bavaria and the Rhineland the opportunity to sign the treaty with no reparations and no limits to their military and then leave Prussia out. That's one of the reasons Germany signs. They're afraid that that's exactly what's gonna happen. So there are plans on the table. The British were generally opposed to them because they wanted their trading partner back. They wanted democratic Germany back together. The big nightmare in everybody's mind is you'll create a political situation where two pariah states, Germany and the Soviet Union, worked together and that's a nightmare that persists until June 1941. Thanks everybody.
(Applause)
Havers: Thank you to Michael Neiberg for a great discussion, and thank you to the United States World War One Centennial Commission for sponsoring this program of *Pritzker Military Presents.* The book is *The Treaty of Versailles: A Concise History*, published by Oxford University Press. To learn more about the Pritzker Military Museum and Library, visit us in person or online at PritzkerMilitary.org. Thank you, and please join us next time on *Pritzker Military Presents*.
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(Theme music)
Voiceover: *Pritzker Military Presents* is made possible by members of the Pritzker Military Museum and Library and its sponsors. The views and opinions expressed in this program are not necessarily those of the Museum and Library.
(Theme music)
Voiceover: The preceding program was produced by the Pritzker Military Museum and Library.