

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

(Theme music)

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

Clarke: Welcome to *Pritzker Military Presents* with a discussion by Richard Rubin on his book *Back Over There: One American Time-Traveler, 100 Years Since the Great War, 500 Miles of Battle-Scarred French Countryside, and Too Many Trenches, Shells, Legends, and Ghosts to Count*. I'm your host Ken Clarke, and this program is coming to you from the Pritzker Military Museum and Library in downtown Chicago, and it's sponsored by the World War One Centennial Commission. This program and hundreds more are available on demand at PritzkerMilitary.org. Based on the author's hugely popular New York Times series about World War I and timed for the April 2017 centennial of America's entrance into the war, *Back Over There* chronicles Richard Rubin's journey to WWI battle sites in France. Rubin details the places he went, the things he found, and the people he meets on his journey to better understand the Great War. In interviewing living WWI veterans for his book *The Last of the Doughboys*, Rubin was inspired to see the places where those memories were made, on the battlefields of France. After one hundred years these battlefields remain largely preserved, but the land around them has changed significantly. Rubin reminds us through his travels that the French bore the weight of the war, both on its land and its people, more than any other combatant. The unavoidable presence of WWI sites in French villages across the countryside makes the memories of the war and its devastating impacts ever-present in the minds of the French people today. Rubin not only takes us through abandoned blockhouses and dugouts, lush farmland pocked with shell craters and zigzagging trenches, and mines illuminated with the graffiti of soldiers long dead, but also introduces us to the living--the local French villagers still occupying these once war-ravaged places. To them Rubin shows us the conflict and its terrible toll are not the distant past but a history that is viscerally immediate and present. Richard Rubin was educated at the University of Pennsylvania and Boston University and began his career as a small town journalist in Greenwood, Mississippi. Since then he has written for larger outlets, routinely contributing to the Atlantic, the New York Times, and the New Yorker. He is the author of two previous books, *Confederacy of Silence* and *The Last of the Doughboys*. Please join me in welcoming back to the Pritzker Military Museum and Library Richard Rubin.

(Applause)

Rubin: Thank you. Thank you Ken for that wonderful introduction. It's wonderful to be back here. I was here in 2013 speaking about *The Last of the Doughboys*. And just in case you're not familiar with that book, ten years before it was published in 2003, eighty-five years after the end of WWI, I set out to track down and interview American WWI veterans, which was kind of a daunting task. After a rough start I did manage to find and interview several dozen. The youngest was 101. The oldest was 113 years old. And they included men like--and women--this is J. Laurence Moffitt. He was 106 years old when I met him in 2003. He lived on Cape Cod in Massachusetts. He was the last survivor of the 26th Division United States, known as the Yankee Division because it was composed entirely of men from the six New England states. The helmet he's wearing there actually has the symbol of his regiment the 102nd, which was Connecticut National Guard. That's the Connecticut charter oak on his helmet there. Mr. Moffitt was the

second person I interviewed for this book, and I often tell people that if it weren't for him there would be no book because my conversation with him was so good, really like talking to anybody, that it convinced me that I really could find and talk to these very, very old men and women about things that they had seen and done eighty-five years earlier. This is Bill Lake. I first interviewed him on October 20, 2003 in Yakama, Washington. He was ten days shy of his 108th birthday. One of the first things he told me, and he repeated it quite a bit, was one day during the Meuse-Argonne Offensive he was part of the 91st, the Wild West Division from the Pacific Northwest, was sitting on a dirt bank talking to a friend of his when a German sniper shot and killed his friend. Not the kind of thing that you forget even after eighty-five years. This is George Bryant, kind of the baby of the group. He was only 103 when I interviewed him in Hammond, Louisiana in 2004. That's his wife Germaine, who was 101. When I met them this--they had been married for eighty-three years. And she thought I was there to interview her. (Laughter)

Rubin: She answered pretty much every question I asked him about WWI louder than he did and in a very thick Cajun accent, even though I'm pretty sure she wasn't at the Western Front. This is Moses Hardy, and I interviewed him three times. This photo was taken on the occasion of my last visit with him, January 6, 2006. And if he looks a little older than the rest he was just a bit. This photo was taken on the occasion of his 113th birthday. He was then officially the oldest living man in the world. Wonderful, wonderful experience. I would catch myself at some point during every interview thinking, "I can't believe I'm getting paid to do this." and got remarkable stories. I had a very, as you might imagine, small pool to work with eighty-five years after the war ended. A couple of years after I started doing this Ken Burns' WWII documentary aired on PBS, and I remember watching that. Have you seen it? I remember watching that and thinking to myself, "Boy, if I had a pool of interviewees that size to work with." I had to interview everybody I could find, but still given that it's remarkable the breadth of the experiences in WWI that I was able to find eighty-five, eighty-six, eighty-seven years later. So the interview phase lasted a few years, and then there was a research phase that lasted a few more years. And when I was done with all that I had a tremendous amount of material to work with, but I still felt that something was missing. I made a point of interviewing all of these men and women in person because I knew that you get a lot more out of the experience when you do it in person than over the telephone. Just being with them, seeing them, is really a great deal of the story. But I hadn't seen where they had done all the things that I had talked to them about, and I knew I needed to see that. I had the who and the what, but I knew I also needed the where. And so I went over in 2009 to France for several weeks to see these sights. And on my second day there-- I was still jetlagged-- in the town of Romagne-sous-Montfaucon I met a gentleman named Jean Paul Devries who told me a lot of stories and showed me a lot of sights. A wonderful fellow. And there was a great deal that I learned, but the most surprising thing of all wasn't what he told me or what I could see but what I spotted myself when I looked down at the ground. Things like this. This is part of my own personal collection of things that I found over there. Those five bullets in the front are all American. In the back you've got German shells on the left, cartridges, French cartridges in the center, and American cartridges on the right. You can see in the bottom right corner, those are German and American bullets. The American ones are the big ones. And the thing just above them is the cap of a shotgun shell. It had never occurred to me before I found that that Americans had actually used shotguns in WWI. It's kind of a strange thought. The two things above the five bullets at the bottom are shrapnel, which is responsible for a tremendous amount of deaths. These are more things I found. At the bottom is barbed wire, which is absolutely everywhere over there. Above that is the scabbard from a

German officer's sword. And at the top on the left you see the bottom of a Minenwerfer, or a very large German mortar. On the right is a German 77-millimeter shell, the most common shell they used. And right there in the center, that thing that's bent at a right angle--that's a German bayonet. And the reason it's bent like that is because it was plowed up in a field almost a hundred years after it was dropped, and the plow did that. All of this stuff I found just sitting right on top of the soil. Real die-hard WWI aficionados will not use a metal detector. It's considered to be dishonorable. This is more stuff--bottles, shot glasses. You find an awful lot of that over there. If you ever ask yourself, how did men make it through that war?", the answer--(clears throat)--Pardon me. The answer is in this photo. That's how they made it through. They drank a lot. I think the most moving thing in this picture is the piece of a comb because it reminds you that these were real human beings, and even though they were essentially in hell they still wanted to look their best. It was still important of them to retain some element of their humanity from back at home. Just tremendously moving to me. This wonderful thing looks like a pineapple grenade. I'm still not sure how I managed to get this home. It's actually a German trench mortar known as a Taube, or a pigeon--a very feared piece of material in WWI. But not as feared as this. This is about a foot, maybe fourteen-inch, long chunk of a 340-millimeter coastal artillery shell. This little chunk--like I said, maybe fourteen inches long at the most--weighs about sixty pounds. And if you're thinking to yourself how terrible war is, let me just tell you that was ours, and I found it on the site of a German rest camp in the Argonne. So we did that to them. Of course Jean Paul who's been at it since the nineties has found much, much more. This is just one room in his museum. A very large museum in the town of Romagne-sous-Montfaucon, which is where the Meuse-Argonne American cemetery is-- the largest American military cemetery is in Europe. I found a lot in France. But of all the things I found over there, the one I wanted most was one I actually couldn't take. It was this. And it's actually--I appreciate that reaction, sir. It's actually quite small. This is it next to my foot. It's cute, isn't it? And I really wanted it. And when I bent over to pick it up--remember I was jetlagged still--Jean Paul, who is significantly smaller than I am used every ounce of strength in his body to restrain me and thus quite possibly saved my life. But you know, I thought about it often honestly. After *The Last of the Doughboys* was published in 2013 I gave a lot of talks about America in WWI, and eventually I incorporated a PowerPoint presentation like this one into the talks. At first most of the slides were photos of the veterans, the men and women I had interviewed. But before one of these talks I was feeling honestly probably a little punchy. I was pretty sleep deprived at the time. And so just before one of these talks for kicks I slipped this picture in. and I found out that this is actually a 37-millimeter shell, also American. Came from the smallest piece of artillery that American soldiers carried in that war. There's a famous photo of several American soldiers lying prone in some busted-up woods firing one of these. I had a lot of great slides in my PowerPoint up to that point, and people really liked them. But people really responded to this one. And I remember one time I was giving a talk in the library in Jackson, New Hampshire, which is a town up in the White Mountains--a little town. And there was a group of fellows sitting in the front row, and I heard them talking as I came in. and these were serious WWI guys. I knew I was gonna learn something that night. I was very excited. And sure enough when this slide came up, one of them, this fellow with a--remember it was New Hampshire--a plaid flannel shirt and a big, bushy salt-and-pepper beard raised his hand, and he pointed to it, and he said, "You see those rings on that shell there. That shell had gas in it." And I've never really thought about it the same way since. A friend of mine who is a retired US Army officer and an expert in ordinance confirmed that actually. And he said that's absolutely right. And in fact this shell is much more unstable and thus much more dangerous than larger shells that get dug up all the time, and there's no way

to diffuse it. So Jean Paul really did do me a great favor that day. After that first time I included this and people reacted to it, I started including more and more photos of France in my PowerPoint. And the more of them I showed the more questions it seemed that it--to raise in people. The more curious they were about France. And I thought I was doing a pretty good job explaining to people what it was like over there a hundred years after the war. But people--as much as I tried, people still didn't seem to get it. And one day a woman at one of these talks raised her hand and said, "We went to Gettysburg last summer. Is it like that?" And I said no. I kinda laughed a little bit, not because her question was ridiculous, but because--well, I'll just show you. This is what Gettysburg is like. Okay, you recognize that if you've ever been to Gettysburg. And this is actually a picture where the monuments are not so terribly dense. There are places in Gettysburg where there are many more of them per square yard. This is what France by contrast is like. This is a concrete German trench outside the village of Saint Beussent on the Woevre plain. It's also like this. This is a French dirt trench in a section known as the Bois Brule, or the burnt woods. If anybody here is offended by my poor French accent, I apologize. Je m'excuse. This is a German bunker in a section of the Argonne forest that's particularly dense. It's known as the Bois du Forez, or the woods of the forest. You have to love the French; they're so descriptive. And this--this is a German pillbox outside the village of Fresnes-en-Woevre, also on the Woevre plain. In the book I describe this as resembling a dirty sugar cube pushed down into the back of a Chia pet. I will let you determine how accurate description that is. This is a German bunker built into this chateau in the town of Monblainville in the Argonne. The Germans just built it right onto the chateau. Germans always took chateaus as their headquarters. They figured, "Well, we're gonna be at war. We might as well be comfortable." this is from the inside of that bunker, and you can see that both original doors, the outer iron door and the inner wooden door, are still remarkably intact. Every time I see that photo I can't believe it. This is the entrance to a German tunnel--a network, actually, of German tunnels--underneath the village of Beaune, also in the Argonne. I was not allowed to climb inside that although I very badly wanted to. So instead I climbed inside this one in the Bois Brule because nobody told me specifically under no circumstances are you allowed to do that, so I took that as permission. This is what it looks like from inside. You can see how well preserved they are, and I should tell you that nobody's actually preserved these in a hundred years: they just were that well-built. This is a wall of graffiti left by American doughboys in a subterranean chalk mine in a section of Picardy known as the Chemin des Dames, that I write about extensively in the book. This is in that same mine. This is what it looks like. This is another piece of graffiti that I spotted inside one of those mines. Men from the Yankee Division, J. Laurence Moffitt's division, spent about six weeks in these mines in February and March of 1918 doing some training. But they were under fire, and if you know a lot about WWI you know that the Chemin des Dames saw terrible, terrible fighting in 1917 between the French and the Germans. So the Americans I think would have known those stories and would have been quite concerned about what they were in for. And in a lot of ways I regard what they left down there as their last will and testament. This is a bunker that the Germans built that today sits next to a house in the village of Bonneville. And it is in such good shape to this day that not only is it watertight, but the owners of the house, who showed me around in it, use it as a gardening shed slash man cave. And boy, would I love to have a man cave in a WWI German bunker, but you kinda have to live in France for that. And this. This is an enormous shell hole outside the village of Cunel that was almost certainly rendered by a coastal artillery shell like the one you saw that sixty-pound chunk of. Cunel sits right behind this. This is the Muse/Argonne American cemetery. As I said, it's the largest American military cemetery in Europe. And if you're looking at this and thinking, "Meh, that doesn't look so big," this

is one of eight identical sections in that cemetery. There are 14,246 Americans buried in that cemetery. More than 26,000 Americans were killed in the Meuse-Argonne Offensive, the last great battle of the war. It remains to this day the deadliest battle in American history. Now the village that sits behind the cemetery, Cunel, has a particularly tragic history. On September 4, 1914, so very shortly after the Germans took the Argonne, they hustled up four residents of Cunel: the mayor, the village priest, a woman, and a child. And they lined them up in front of a wall in this church. It was this wall. And they shot them. And I don't know if you can see it very clearly in the photo, but there are still bullet holes in this wall to this day in this church, which is still used for mass every week in Cunel. The Germans made a practice of this after the Franco Prussian War, which saw the use of what was known as *Francs-tireurs*, or free shooters. Essentially guerillas, French guerillas, who fought back against the Germans after the French army had been defeated. This really upset the German sense of order and decorum. And so to put the fear of God into the French this time around, they made a practice of doing this kind of thing from time to time in villages, especially in the Argonne for some reason. The woman they shot that day had the beautiful name *Elle Frazie Pajeux*. This is her tombstone in the village cemetery. And knowing her name somehow makes it that much more tragic to me. The Germans always chose four people, as I said, but sometimes they went even further than that. The nearest--a nearby village called Bantheville has an even more tragic backstory, if you can believe that. This is their memorial. On the night of September 9, 1914 a German unit near the village heard shots fired and, thinking it was a French insurrection, rushed in, killed six villagers, and took a bunch more prisoner, three of whom died in captivity. And only after that happened did they realize that those shots had actually been fired by other German soldiers in a salute to some of their fallen officers. They didn't let the prisoners go anyway. And as you can see on this monument three of them died in captivity. Jean Paul told me all of these stories. He actually knew some of the people involved in them when they were very old. He'd also known, before I'd met him, an elderly woman who as a child had lived on a farm in the Argonne not far from Romagna known as Meursault. And in September of 1914 a young second lieutenant in the German army named Irwin Rommel had stopped and spent the night at that farmhouse. And he pointed it out to me in 2009 when he was showing me around from across a field. And one day in 2014 I told him I wanted to see it again. He wasn't able to go out with me that afternoon but he drew me a crude map to the place on a napkin and told me I could find it myself. And it was a pretty good map, and I was--I followed it closely, and finally in the distance I spotted the farmhouse. There it is. But as I got closer I thought it didn't really look quite the same to me, and I started to wonder if it was really the same place. And I got closer still, and I realized why it didn't look the same to me: because a large section of it collapsed since I had seen it five years earlier in 2009. I did know thought that it was the same place. Among other reasons I had seen an old photo of it taken during the war when it was occupied by German soldiers who shared the house with French women and children. This photo was actually shown to me by a gentleman who lives nearby in the village of Gennes named Dominique Lacolde, who has a very large collection of photos taken during the First World War. The Germans apparently were real shutterbugs in that war, took thousands and thousands of photos, distributed them to the French populace. I would have thought the French would have burned them after the war, but they kept them, and Dominique ended up with a great many of them. They're really a fascinating portrait of life in occupied France during WWI. Anyway, as I was poking around the house that day, a gray Nissan four-by-four pulled up, and a big, burly fellow got out. He looked at me not too menacingly, but he clearly was wondering what I was doing there, and he asked me in French if he could help me. And I said the first thing I said was the first thing I said to a lot of people in

France, which was really futile. I said, "Parlez-vous Anglais?" Nobody ever said to me, "Why, yes, I do." And eventually I stopped using that as my opening line and started instead, "Pardonne-mois, je ne peux pas Francais."--Excuse me, but I don't speak French. And even though I said this in French nobody ever called me on it. They really appreciated it. But that day I said, "Parlez-vous Anglais?" And he said, "Non." And then he said, "Vous-et Anglais?"--Are you English? And I said, "Non, je suis Americain." And as soon as I told him I was American his face broke out into this big grin, and he said in French, "Oh, you're a long way from home. What can I do for you?" Turns out the French don't really care much for the English, but they love Americans. So I asked him about Rommel, and he said, "Oh, no, I don't know anything about that." And then he pointed at this other farmhouse off in the distance, and he said, "But that house, MacArthur was at that house in '18." And he pronounced the name Mac-ow-tur, but I could figure out who he was talking about. And then he said, "Veux-tu le voir?"-- Would you like to see it? And I said, "Of course." So we got into his four-by-four, and we drove across the prairie. He stopped a couple of times to unlatch gates, and at one of them a pack of cows ambled over to check me out, and French cows are much more sociable I find than American cows. I can't say why exactly. But one of them actually stuck her nose into the four-by-four and rested it against my shirt like a dog. And I petted it, or I petted her like that. But eventually we pulled up to this house. This was a farm that was known as Les Tuileries. A tuileries is a place where tiles are made. And my host told me he owned it along with Meursault and a bunch of other farms that his father had purchased and consolidated after the Second War. He told me that in October 1918 MacArthur had come from the woods off to the left of this farmhouse--actually off to the right, forgive me, of this farmhouse, stopped at this house and had regrouped before moving on to assault the hill off to the left. And he said the hill off to the left was called the Cote de Chatillon. And as soon as he said that I knew what he was talking about because it happens to be the subject of a certain legend. The Cote de Chatillon was a point of particular strategic importance in the Argonne. And MacArthur, who was then a one-star brigadier general, was ordered in October 1918, or so the legend goes, to take the Cote de Chatillon with the 42nd Division, the Rainbow Division, or show 5,000 casualties for the effort. And MacArthur's reply is said to have been that he would or his name would top the list. And he did. And it didn't. But it wasn't easy. The Cote de Chatillon was, like everything the Germans held, very, very strongly defended, and my host pointed out the defenses to me along the ridge. I remember him standing and going, "Mitrailleur. Mitrailleur. Mitrailleur." Mitrailleur is the French word for machine gun. And frankly I--it's far too beautiful-sounding a word, I think, for what it is. But they had them at perfect intervals along the ridge. There's no doubting, no denying, the Germans knew exactly what they were doing. After he pointed those out to me he pointed to the woods behind the Cote, and he said, "Those woods are filled with German trenches. Veux-tu le voir?" Did I want to see it? And I said, "Of course." So we got back in his four-by-four and drove to the edge of the woods. And we got out and started bushwhacking. There were no trails--very, very thick woods. And after about ten minutes we came to this. That is a German trench. Now the sad thing about dirt trenches is they don't show up all that well in photographs, but if you see one in person there's simply no mistaking it for anything else. It's clearly manmade, it's a ditch, and it zigs and zags and seems to go on forever. It does not occur in nature. And I'm a little embarrassed to tell you that I did what I almost always did when I came across intact trenches like this, which is though I was deep into my forties at the time, I ran down into it and ran around like a child. And he was very patient, stood there for ten minutes or so and let me do it, and then finally he called out to me, and he said, "You know, further on in the woods there are a couple of German blockhouses." And it took me a moment to figure out what he was saying

because the French word for blockhouse is blockhouse, but it's pronounced blow-cous. And I had never heard it before, and finally I figured out what he was talking about. And I said, "Certainly, I would love to see it." So we bushwhacked for another ten minutes or so until we came to the edge of this gully, and he pointed down, and he said, "Voila." And at first I couldn't really see anything. It was just a lot of vegetation. And then my eyes adjusted, and I saw this. You can't tell very well from this photo, but as I said this is very deep in a gully, and it's obstructed by fallen trees and the flora and all kinds of things. And I couldn't figure out how to get down there. And I asked him, "How do I get own there?" And he just kind of shrugged a very shrug. And so I poked around trying to figure out how to do it, and I tugged on some branches and grass and stuff, and nothing seemed strong enough to hold me. And finally I found a vine and gave it a tug, and it seemed strong enough, so I swung down into the gully and elided right next to the blockhouse door. And he immediately clapped and yelled out, "Tarzan!" And I didn't really know what to do, so I just took a bow. And he just said, "I'm not Jane." And he just stood there like that, and I really didn't know what he was getting at, but I-- I pulled a flashlight out of my pocket and ducked inside the blockhouse. Now it had seen better days for sure. He told me that even through the second war these blockhouses were very, very solid, and in fact the resistance--and his father had been in the French resistance--the resistance had used them against the Germans. But in the 1950s after the war farmers had tried to destroy them, but they were just too massive and too well built, and it had been no use. So I ducked inside. This is actually what it looked like, or a blockhouse very much like it, would have looked like right after the Americans captured it in the fall of 1918. I ducked inside, and I entered this corridor, and the first thing I spotted was at the end of the corridor you can see an iron plate with a hole in it for a rifle or a machine gun muzzle. I went further into the blockhouse, and you can see just how hard they tried to demolish it but also how badly they failed. It's still water tight. And they just couldn't do anything with it. I poked into the next chamber in the blockhouse, and I saw a beam of light filtering down to the floor, and I looked up, and I saw this. I figured out that it was the hole for a German periscope, and Jean Paul later confirmed this for me. I headed toward the exit on the other side of it, and I looked down, and I saw this. This is a square hole about three feet deep, cement. And it's what's known as a grenade sump. If somebody had succeeded in throwing a live grenade into your blockhouse you were supposed to kick it into that sump, and it would direct the blast harmlessly upward. I think that's something that works out a lot better in theory than it does in practice, but it was fascinating to see one. When I left the blockhouse and managed to climb back out up the gully my host started telling me that the Germans had also run narrow-gauge rail tracks all throughout his property. And later I would find out that the Germans in that war laid out hundreds and hundreds of miles of narrow-gauge rail all across northern France to move their soldiers and war material around. They were very proud of it. They even printed up postcards with photos of it. This one is called the Argonnenbahn, which means the Argonne railroad. And my host told me that he even had the remains of one of the old railroad platforms on his property, and said, "Veux-tu le voir?" And I said, "Of course I do." So we went, and he showed me. There it is. If you can see that flat, slightly raised section to the right of it, that's where the train tracks had run. You almost never find actual narrow-gauge rail tracks from that war on the ground because after the war the French pried them all up and used the for fence posts to replace fences that were destroyed in the war. But there's nothing they can do about this. This will be there forever. So after he showed me all around his property my host started asking me, "Have you seen this village where the Americans did this? Have you seen that village?" And I said, "Well, I'd seen some." But he told me to get in his truck, and he drove me around for several hours, and he showed me this village and that. And after a few hours

we ended up at the bottom of this--at the base of this really, really rough-looking dirt trail that lead of a very steep incline. And I guess I must have looked kind of nervous, because he smiled, and he looked at me, and he slapped his dashboard, and he said, "Voiture asiatique. Tres bon," which means, "Asian vehicle, very good." And so we drove up very slowly, and I gotta tell you it was a bone shaking ride. But we rode up for about fifteen minutes until we got to the rest of the ridge. And we got out, and this is the first thing I saw when we stepped out of the car. That's a German trench. It was to the right of us. Over to the left I saw this. That's a wider, deeper German trench. Less zigzaggy. It served more like a moat to protect this. This is a large howitzer pit. The gun would have been aimed up and over the ridge down the hill on the other side. And you can't really see it well in this photo, but this is the hill. It goes down at a slope of about sixty degrees, sixty degrees that is. It's very steep. And we just stood there and looked for a while. And this was the Cote Dam Marie. It was a--I'd read about it too. It was a site of tremendous strategic importance in the Argonne. The Germans used it for four years to command a large section of the Argonne forest, and they fortified it to the point where as much as they tried the French could do nothing but take terrible casualties attempting to take it back. In October of 1918 the Americans, specifically the 32nd Division, which was national guard from Michigan and Wisconsin--a division that had very large percentage of German American soldiers in its ranks that the French nicknamed them Les Terribles, the Terribles. I think they meant it as a compliment. They finally were able to take it. And if you look at this hill and all the fortifications, it boggles the mind how they would even attempt it much less succeed. And we stood there looking down the hill for five minutes or so without speaking, and finally he just said, "The French couldn't take this; the British didn't do it, just the Americans. Only the Americans could do this." It wasn't until he dropped me off a little bit later that we finally thought to exchange names. We'd been together for five hours at that point. His was Jean Pierre Bouillion. This is a picture of him with his voiture asiatique. And it was a very memorable day. So from there I set off, and I managed to find a lot of unmarked sites in northern France that were of great significance to the Americans in that war, like this. This is Hill A81. It's outside the village of Bathlemont. It was from this spot at 6:05 a.m. on October 23, 1917 that Battery C of the 6th Field Artillery regiment fired the first American shot of the war. Also outside Bathlemont, you'll find this field. And on the left side where there is now a young crop of wheat in this photo was the trench where on the night of November 3, 1917 the first three Americans were killed by the Germans. Their names were James Gresham, Merle Hay, and Thomas Enright. The Germans came up under cover of darkness from that meadow you see off to the right, took a lot of prisoners, and left three dead behind. Gresham had been shot in the forehead. Enright was stabbed in the throat and gut, and Hay had had his throat slashed. At the bottom of the hill by the way from this is another monument of sorts. This is a massive mountain of cow manure. My friend Eric Mansuy, who helped me find these sites and a bunch of others in the area, when we walked by this he looked a little embarrassed, and he said, "That's very Lorraine." In Lorraine--in Lorraine he told me farmers are very proud of their manure piles. The larger the manure pile, the richer the farmer. And it's been like that apparently forever because it was like that when General Pershing came through, and it drove him nuts. He ordered the French to get rid of the manure piles, and they just ignored him. Across the road from that is this. It's kind of dark, but in the foreground are the ruins of a German pillbox in the middle of a cornfield. In the distance are the rooftops of the village of Rechicourt-la-Petite. Cornfields by the way are the very best fields in which to find artifacts because they're less densely planted than other fields. Eric also helped me find this later on in our visit. This is--we believe on very good evidence that this is the site of a bunker on the faret de pouvoir, the forest of pouvoir called the Rouge Bouquet Woods. In February and

March of 1918 the 42nd Division, MacArthur's division, was stationed there to get some experience at the front. And they had a series of escalating encounters with the Germans until finally on March 7, 1918 twenty-two doughboys were sheltering in this dugout when a large German Minenwerfer scored a direct hit and buried them all alive. Only two were pulled out alive, and the rest of them were not recovered until after the war. It's believed that some of them were alive for three days thereafter, buried alive. Joyce Kilmer, Sergeant Joyce Kilmer who was in that division, later wrote a poem, a very moving poem called Rouge Bouquet, which was not published until after his death at the second Battle of the Marne several months later. This is a large shell hole in Rouge Bouquet. It rained, which was very nice for me because it made it easy for me to spot. No man's land, in between the Allied and German lines, is full of these, and Eric and I that day were able to plot out the American second line, first line, no man's land, German first line, German second line. There was no evidence that anybody had been there since the Rainbow Division had. It was just pristine. This is the village of Seicheprey, and this was the sight on April 20, 1918 of the first major encounter between American troops and German troops. At 3:16 in the morning, about 3200 or so German troops attacked about 500 American troops, National Guard from the Connecticut like J. Laurence Moffitt. And they killed about eighty or so, but they took 150 to 200 prisoners, which was the real objective of this raid before the American drove them out. They did it for propaganda purposes to bolster their own morale and demoralize Americans. And they marched them to the nearby, occupied town of Te-au-Coeur, lined them up, and took this photo. This is actually what Seicheprey looked like when the Americans were there already. You can see it had weathered a lot of damage. It was right on the front lines. These are the American prisoners the Germans took that day. And this is what that building looks like today. The storefront houses a craft store that supports a foster home. And this beautiful scene, if you've ever been to this region you know where it is, because there's nothing else on earth I know of that looks like it. This is the champagne region, about two hours east of Paris. And this photo was taken outside the village of Maise. So in the distance there you see the hills where champagne grapes are grown with southern exposure. And in between those hills and the trees in the foreground run the Marne River--runs the Marne River. And just after midnight on July 15, 1918, a half-a-million German troops came storming down those hills, threw themselves across the river, and proceeded to advance, in some spots, for miles into Allied territory. It was the last offensive of the famous German Spring Offensives of 1918, which were designed to end WWI with a German victory before Americans could show up in force. And unfortunately for the Germans the troops that were stationed in this area at Maise, so at the far western end of the American line, were the American 3rd Division. And only they actually stopped the Germans at the river and pushed them back across. And that stalled the German offensive. And three days later the Allies launched a counter offensive, and that ended up being the last German offensive of the war. It really was the beginning of the end. And the 3rd Division was nicknamed for that the Rock of the Marne. So I spent a lot of time exploring in 2014 and took a lot of photos as you can see. And after I was done I came home and wrote a four-part series for the New York Times on American WWI sites in France. And it turned out to be very popular. And after the last installment ran in December, which dealt with the Argonne and the Woevre, which are in a section of Lorraine known as Le Meuse, I got an email from a reporter at a newspaper known as Le Republican, which is read in a very large section of Le Meuse. And she was writing an article called "Le Meuse don Le New York Times"--the Meuse and the New York Times. She was writing an article about my article. And she wanted to know if she could ask me some questions, and I answered them, and she wrote the article up. And after it was done she sent me a copy, and she said, "The next time you're in the area

stop by and we'll have a drink." So I was in the area five months later, and I stopped by, and she and her editor Frederique Planchon took me out for lunch in Verdun and plied me with wine 'cause it's France. And in the middle of lunch they sheepishly confessed that they had an ulterior motive; they wanted to do another story on me and in fact had already dispatched a photographer to a site outside Verdun that they knew I was interested in to take some photos for me. And the article ran the next day in Les Republican. It was teased on the front page as "Le Grande Reporter de 14-18," so I was kinda flattered by that. Had a terrible, terrible photo of me to go with it, which is actually the jacket photo in my book. It's me posing like this holding my camera in one hand. And the pose was the photographer's idea, and he used a lens that made my head look tiny and my forearms look like Popeye. And for two weeks--this is how many people read this paper--for two weeks thereafter when I was in this area, everywhere I went I ran into people, and they would see me, and they would go--
(Laughter)

Rubin: So I'm kinda like Jerry Lewis. I'm kinda famous in France as you know--but it was a good thing, too, because everyone reads this paper. People started emailing the reporter who wrote the article and saying, you know, "If Monsieur Rubin is still in the area I'd love to show him this, and I'd love to show him that." And so I got to see a lot of things that I wouldn't have gotten to see otherwise. At some point over lunch I asked them if they'd had ancestors who were killed in the war, and Frederic immediately volunteered that he was related to Jules-Andre Peugeot, who was the first person killed in WWI. He was a French soldier, and on August 2, 1914, before war had officially been declared, in a little village of Joncherey way down by the Swiss border, he had encountered a German cavalry patrol and had tried to arrest them and had been shot dead by a cavalry officer named Albert Meyer, who was then shot and killed by the French. On my way back after touring around Verdun with them that day, on the way to my B and B, I decided to stop at the little village of Romagne-sous-les-Cotes and visit a sweet lady who a year previous had helped me find a certain site. And I have to tell you it's kind of miraculous, A, that we found it, but B, that she helped me, because it was the end of a very long day, and I can only imagine what I looked like. Fortunately there does not exist a picture of me, but it was a long, hot, dirty day spent bushwhacking. Still she got in my car with me and drove me to this place. This is the spot, a little monument marking the spot, where Private Henry Nicholas Gunther of Baltimore, became the last man killed in WWI, shot in the head at eleven--10:59 a.m. on November 11, 1918, one minute before the Armistice took affect. I took this photo later that day, and as you can see there are cows there too. There are cows everywhere in France. And there's a bench there somebody put since the first time I saw it because the view that this spot commands is, in my opinion, the finest view in France. It's just this beautiful pastel meadow. And it occurred to me later on that night that I had had a close encounter with both the first man killed in WWI and the last man killed in WWI, which is pretty humbling. A few days later I stopped by and visited Jean Pierre Bouillon at Meusau. As soon as he saw me he walked up, he had a big smile on his face, pumped my hand hard, and he said, "My old friend Tarzan." And we got in his four-by-four, and we drove around again. We bushwhacked. We visited all the sites we'd seen a year earlier. And we ended up here at Le Tuileries. And he told me the story again about MacArthur. He loved MacArthur--Mac-ow-tur. And I asked him how long it had been, 'cause you can see the house doesn't look all that great. And I asked him how long it had been since anyone had lived in it, and he said 1964. Later that day I visited with Jean Paul Devries, and he said, "Well, that may be true, but actually that house, the family had really been broken twenty years earlier in 1944." And he told me this story that one night in the winter of 1944 the two sons of this farm family had set out with some butter from the farm looking

to trade it for gasoline. And they'd been cutting through in the dark, and they came upon an American checkpoint, and the American soldiers manning it had called out for them to stop. And I don't know if they didn't hear or if they misunderstood or whatever, but they didn't stop, and the Americans shot and killed them. And they didn't know what to do with the bodies, so they took them to this--the nearest village, and they laid the bodies at the front steps of the village church where mass was being celebrated inside at that very moment and it was Christmas Eve. And that church was in the village of Bantheville, which you might remember was where those six civilians were shot and killed due to a terrible misunderstanding in September of 1914. Now the interesting thing is that Jean Pierre, who owned this property and surely knew that story, had never told it to me. And I think he didn't tell me that story because he didn't want me to feel badly. Can you imagine that? I mean, can you imagine being more concerned about my feelings? But instead he just talked about MacArthur, and he told me things like that his father had told him from the second war. "The Germans were very aloof to civilians," he said, "The Americans were just the opposite. And my father used to say the Germans were very orderly and disciplined, but they were like wild pigs. They just ran straight, that's all. The Americans on the other hand were very relaxed and laid back. But when the time for action came they always stepped in and got the job done." Now imagine if you owned this haunted piece of real estate with a tragic history in which Americans had played a central role, and still that was the impression of Americans that you chose to carry on generations later? I think that just tells you a little bit about the gratitude that the French carry to this day for the Americans, gratitude that traces back to the First World War; the first time in the history of the world when a nation sailed across an ocean to fight for the freedom of another nation. It had never happened before then. It was really inconceivable before then, and the French have never forgotten that. Say what you will about the French. Call them ingrates. But they are not ingrates. They in fact remember much better what we did in that war than we do. So I thank you very much.

(Applause)

Clarke: Thank you to Richard Rubin for an outstanding discussion and to the United States World War I Centennial Commission for sponsoring this program. The book is *Back Over There*, published by St. Martin's Press. To learn more about World War I or about the Museum and Library, visit in person or online at PritzkerMilitary.org. Thank you, and please join us next time on *Pritzker Military Presents*.

Voiceover: Visit the Pritzker Military Museum and Library in downtown Chicago. Explore original exhibits on military history, or be a part of a live studio audience. Watch other episodes of *Pritzker Military Presents*; find out What's On at PritzkerMilitary.org.

(Theme music)

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(Theme music)

Voiceover: The preceding program was produced by the Pritzker Military Museum and Library.