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5 speakers (Theo Mayer, Mike Shuster, Randal Dietrich, Kathrine Akey, Speaker 5)

[0:00:07]

Theo Mayer: Welcome to WWI Centennial News. It's about World War I news 100 years ago this week, and it's about World War I now. News and updates about the centennial and the commemoration. WWI Centennial News is brought to you by the US World War I Centennial Commission, and the Pritzker Military Museum & Library. Today is April 26 2017, and I'm Theo Mayer, Chief Technologist for the World War I Centennial Commission and your host today. We've jumped into the Wayback Machine and we're looking at 100 years ago this week. America has declared war, and we now face the reality that we actually don't have an Army. It's true. In 1917, the US Federal Army is just barely 120,000 men. In fact, the combined state militias totally outnumber the federal military with over 180,000 men. Remember, this is only one generation after The Civil War. America is a union of separate states. The United States of America, and the power of the federal government, is relatively weak. Our military thinkers estimate that we're going to need a National Army of at least a million soldiers. President Wilson thinks he can do it with volunteers, but six weeks after the declaration of war, it's going to turn out that we only have 73,000 new volunteers. This isn't going to work. So, 100 years ago this week, President Wilson grabs his newspaper buddy, George Creel, remember him from last week, our official war propagandist, and they head over to Congress to let them know that we're going to need a draft. So, here comes The Selective Service Act of 1917. And Wilson's going to get it in less than a month. Standby. And as our final US domestic note for this week, 100 years ago, this maybe just a little less dramatic for the average Joe, but duly noted that the prestigious New York Yacht Club drops Kaiser Wilhelm and his brother, Prince Heinrich of Prussia, as members. [German 00:02:16]. Joining us to tell us what's happening on the fighting fronts rather than here in the US is former NPR Correspondent Mike Shuster from The Great War Project blog. Mike, it's not going well for the allies. France in particular is pushing into a new offensive led by French General Robert Nivelle, and he comes up way short on gain and way long on losses at a disastrous level. He loses 700% more men than anticipated. He faces mutinies. While the British allies hesitate to jump into this horrific meat grinder and they, the Brits, are getting nowhere in Gaza in the Middle East. Mike, tell us about it.

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Mike Shuster: You're right. There's no good news at all for the Allies. The headlines read, "For the Allies, a Bloody Spring. Allied Offensives Crumbling. Desperation From France to the Middle East." This is special to The Great War Project. It is one disaster after another for the Allied troops during these horrible days of the World War a century ago. The French launched their so-called Nivelle Offensive in mid-April, coming after the British defeats Arras and Vimy Ridge. "The French operation too was a disaster," writes historian Martin Gilbert. It is the first time the French throw tanks into their battles, but it doesn't help. Nivelle planned to advance a full six miles. His men were halted after 600 yards. As Gilbert tells the story Nivelle had expected about 15,000 casualties. There were almost a 100,000. The lion's share of the French tanks and aircraft are knocked out on the first day of the offensive. "Every element in the planning proved disastrous," writes Sir Gilbert. "The Allied losses in these days a century ago are not confined to Northern France. As Nivelle's offensive on the Western Front was crumbling into failure, in Palestine the British launched their second attempt to capture Gaza from the Ottoman Turks. The orders from London, Jerusalem by Christmas. The Turks are outnumbered in troop strength by a ratio of two to one. And the British bring poison gas to Palestine. Despite that, the attack was a failure," reports Gilbert. "Gaza remained under the complete control of the Turks." Back on the Western Front in mid-April an ominous foretaste of what was to become a storm took place on the River Aisne when 17 French soldiers deserted their trench shortly before an attack was due to begin. The French mutinies are spreading rapidly. The French press the British forces to enter this battle. At first the British are reluctant, but the French insist. Their command fears that if they don't bring in the British, they will collapse. "As an indicator of just how desperate the Allies are," writes Gilbert, "twice as many British troops as German were being killed in the renewed attacks the British command now demanded." Some in Britain and France urge caution and patience. After all, the Americans are now in the fight and could very well reverse the strategic balance. But Winston Churchill makes the counter argument, "Is it not obvious that we ought not to squander the remaining armies of France and Britain in precipitate offensives before the power begins to be felt on the battlefield?" Churchill gets no answer. And in any case, the power of the Americans not yet deployed in France is unlikely to be felt for another year or more. And now another unexpected but crucial development in Russia. On April 24th a century ago, "In an unprecedented act of divisiveness," reports Gilbert, "Ukraine demanded autonomy from Russia." Strikes in the Russian factories had already reduced Russia's coal production by almost a quarter. In an extremely ominous sign for the Allies, the Russian Commander in Chief informs the Ministry of War that information from all sides indicates that the army is systematically falling apart. Those are some of the stories that took place a century ago in The Great War.

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Theo Mayer: That's the story on the ground. Let's find out what's happening this week, 100 years ago in The Great War in the sky. It's April 24th, 1917. The British are deeply engaged in the battle of Arras, Northeast of Paris and near the Belgian border. This is when a German commanding officer, a pilot named is on an escort mission when he decides to drop down to 60 feet above the ground and strafe the British trenches. Under fire from hundreds of British rifles and machine guns, he and his pilots spray the British trenches with over 500 rounds of ammunition before a hit on their engine forces them to withdraw. This incident 100 years ago represents the birth of close air support as a mission and a tactic in military combat. On the home front, there is a small but unnoticed event of world-changing proportion. Last week, Katherine Akey pointed you to a blog post that shows the airplane manufacturing of 100 years ago. If you followed the link you saw that it all began with lumber cutting. This is where our story starts 100 years ago. Up in the currently very remote American Pacific Northwest. There's a timber man. He's done very well in the business, but like so many young men of the time, he's fascinated with airplanes. He hooks up with a US Navy engineering nerd who got a degree from MIT. Together they build a prototype sea plane, stimulating our timber man to launch a new company, the Pacific Aero Products company. And that was in 1960. 100 years ago this week, just days or weeks after president Wilson declares war, this entrepreneurial timber man clearly sees an opportunity with the war effort. He decides to rebrand his company from a component supply company, the Pacific Aero Products company, to a supplier of actual airplanes themselves. So using his own name on April 26, 100 years ago this week, William Boeing, our timber man, announces the Boeing Airplane Company. And that's the birth of the biggest aerospace company in the world 100 years ago in the Great War in the sky. You can follow these events on our site with RG Head's, comprehensive timeline of the war in the sky at wwonecc.org/warinthesky. If you're ready to catch some great video about World War I history, go to the Great War Channel on YouTube. This week our friends at the Great War Channel have posted new episodes that include the Nivelle Offensive, Carnage at the Chemin des Dames. More on the story we talked about with Mike. And for the hardware geeks, a great post on the tech of World War I, flame throwers and artillery fuses. Let's zoom forward and time to World War I Centennial News now. And we'll begin with activities and events. This week we want to highlight World War I activities taking place at colleges here in the US. The first is a collaboration between Virginia Tech History Department and University Library. They created an online project and database about the Virginia Tech's alumni who served in World War I. It was called Virginia Polytechnic Institute at the time, and they have an exhibit on this on the campus through May 15. The event is in the National World War I events register at wwonecc.org/events, and the direct link is in the podcast notes. Second, at Penn State's All Sports Museum, a new exhibit called Field to Front, which tells the story of Penn State student athletes who served in all branches of the military during the conflict. They're being honored and remembered with this exhibit that's opening on April 21st and runs through April, 2018. Both of these stories remind us of how lives were changed and disrupted in so many ways during this period. Thank you, Virginia Tech and Penn State for remembering and honoring your vets. This Thursday, April 27th through Sunday, April 30th in Norfolk, Virginia Scope Arena. We're going to have the Virginia international tattoo. This weekend long event includes spectacular performances by military bands and drill teams, along with unforgettable music of World War I era composers like John Phillips Sousa, Gustav Holst, Irving Berlin, and more. As well as a signature tattoo finale which expresses our collective connection and gratitude to those who fought for our freedom 100 years ago. Learn more about the event from our national events register at wwonecc.org/events. Search on tattoo that's with two T's and two O's. We also have posted the links for you. Next it's time for some updates from the States. We started hearing about the great World War I commemoration activities happening in Minnesota. So we invited Randal Dietrich, the World War I specialist from the Minnesota Historical Society to come speak with us today. Randal, welcome.

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Randal Dietrich: Thank you for having me.

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Theo Mayer: So Randal, tell us a little bit about the World War I commemoration up in the North Star State.

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Randal Dietrich: Certainly. Well, really the center piece here in Minnesota is a new exhibit that just opened at the Minnesota History Center in Saint Paul. It's entitled World War I America. And it really focuses on the years kind of 1914 through 1919. And it's funded generously by the National Endowment For The Humanities. This 5,000 square foot exhibit is exactly going to travel to other museums nationwide after its debut here in Minnesota. Museums in Virginia, and Nebraska, Texas, and I believe Washington state, have all kind of fallen in line and expressed strong interest in bringing this exhibit to their states. But what it does is not so much focus on what was going on over there, which is something that you all are exploring every single week, but exploring what was happening here in United States domestically, because it was such a turbulent time. You had strikes, you had suffrage struggles, you had the great migration, the Spanish flu, all of those things made for a very turbulent time, in addition to the war of course. And so that's what this exhibit goes about exploring in some detail. So that's something that really is the centerpiece of the Minnesota initiative is this traveling exhibition. But then we kind of went a step further too to kind of enliven that exhibit. We partnered with Minnesota public radio and did a two hour statewide broadcast of a stage show that we appropriately staged at the Fitzgerald Theater, a World War I icon in some ways, F. Scott Fitzgerald, and all of his

writings after the war about itself. But it was at the Fitzgerald Theater. And again, this was a broadcast that was two hours, broadcast statewide, Songs and Stories from World War I America. And then we did have two other kind of programs that were aimed at really creating better engagement and even interactivity with audiences. One was inspired by the Panthéon de la Guerre where we hired and commissioned a local artist, David Geister, to paint an eight foot by 30 foot mural depicting 100 Americans. It's not quite as large as the Pantheon, but still ambitious. 100 specific Americans who had a hand in making modern America. Like you mentioned earlier in the broadcast, William Boeing is one of those people, Fitzgerald is another, Harry Cushing, Walt Disney, Alice [McCall 00:13:32], Eleanor Roosevelt, Jack Johnson, James Reese Europe, all these individuals have had bios written about them and all of them will appear in this mural that's being painted in front of the public as the exhibit [inaudible 00:13:45]. And then lastly, the other thing that we kind of did was we've all, at this point, being insiders to the Centennial come across with a Internet meme of World War I were a bar fight, which is a fantastic quick take on it, punchy in many ways. And it's fantastic to hear comments that people add online. But we took it a step further, hired an expert storyteller, hired a cast of 12 actors, and did an hour long presentation based upon the Internet meme for our audiences here in Saint Paul.

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Theo Mayer: This is amazing stuff. How is this being organized in your state, Randal?

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Randal Dietrich: Sure. Well we have a work group for sure that's made up of representatives from organizations kind of statewide. And then the activities here at the Minnesota Historical Society, the exhibits, that mural that I mentioned, that bar fight that the statewide broadcast on NPR, has already been organized by the Minnesota State Historical Society.

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Theo Mayer: Well that's fantastic work and we thank you all for all the good work and really carrying the story of what's going on out to your community. Thank you.

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Randal Dietrich: Thank you.

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Theo Mayer: Next from our friends in Arkansas, we have a story about the students from McNair Middle School, who've been learning and spreading the word about World War I through our poppy program selling World War I poppy seed packs to help raise money for the National World War I Memorial at Pershing Park in Washington DC. You see, one of their own McNair Middle School alumni, Joseph Weishaar, won the international design competition for the national memorial. To learn more about the National World War I Memorial at Pershing Park, go to wwonecc.org/memorial. To learn more about the poppy fundraising tool that can help you raise money for your organization, as well as help us, go to wwwonecc.org/poppy. And now a story from the Wisconsin World War I website where they posted a story about John Pavlik, who served as an ambulance driver with the 32nd division in France and Germany during World War I. Pavlik enlisted at the age of 16 because he didn't want to wait two more years to get drafted. The war gave Pavlik a chance to drive a motorized ambulance instead of one that uses mules and wagons, some major innovation of the time. Here he describes the experience of operating the new technology. Quote, "No windshields, no side curtains. You just carried eight patients sitting up or on litters. If it rained, it rained on you. And you put on your poncho in front of you to help keep water off your feet and legs." Read more on Wisconsin's site at wwonecc.org/wisconsin where they tell you their story of World War I. That's all lower case, and we have a direct link to the article in the podcast notes. Let's widen our view with the international report. April 25th is Anzac Day. Anzac stands for Australian and New Zealand Army Corps. The day is commemorated every year on the anniversary of the landings at Gallipoli. Much as it was for the United States, World War I was truly formative for the newly independent countries. The holiday is observed much as our Veteran's Day is. These nations have been allies of the United States throughout the conflicts over the years. Read the story and learn more about what Anzac Day means to our friends from Oceania. Next, we have a story about a new monument that was unveiled last week in Kohima, a city in Nagaland, India. Now if you don't know where that is, that's actually our point. Nagaland is a remote pocket of India wedge between Bangladesh and Myanmar, formally known as Burma. World War I reaches into every corner of the globe, and is being remembered everywhere as well. In Nagaland, 2000 local men were drafted into the British Labor Corps and served in France during the conflict. This month they're being remembered at home with a new memorial. Learn more by following the link in the podcast notes. Moving on to articles and posts from the commission's blossoming website. I want to point you to an area of the website called stories of service and this is where you can actually upload the stories of your ancestors who served in World War I. This week the lead story introduces us to Sargent [Lao Tse Tee 00:00:18:03] of Saratoga and San Jose. He won the Distinguished Service Cross and the Purple Heart from the United States and Croix de Guerre from France. He earned these for staying three days straight at a message center holding the fort, so to speak. In spite of his position being shelled and gassed, he refused to leave his post, at one point all by himself for 24 hours. You can read all about it at the stories of

service section on the website and also post your own at wwonecc.org/stories. On to our right blog, which explores World War I's influence on contemporary writing and scholarship. This week, Eastern Kentucky University's Veterans Studies and Humanity professor, retired US Marine and writer Ernest Luke McClees draws parallels between today and World War I era propaganda. He discusses the ways that media demonized and dehumanized the enemy. McClees also gives readers another chance to visit Darryl Dillard's February post in which he wrote about the representation of African-American actors during World War I. Dillard and McClees both address the infamous destroy this mad brute military poster that shows a large apelike creature, supposedly a German, grasping a white woman against her will. If this conversation interests you, be sure to subscribe to the blog at wwonecc.org/wwrite. Moving onto World War I in social media with the Buzz, and also with Katherine Akey. Katherine, what's happening with World War I commemoration in social media this week?

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Kathrine Akey: Well, as Randal Dietrich pointed out earlier, one of my absolute favorite World War I abridgments has been seen making the rounds through social media again this week. I know it's hard to imagine with the weight of the content, but it's a genuinely funny and interesting way to lay out in the simplest of terms what exactly happened between major players in the conflict. This is World War I as a bar fight. I encourage you to google that phrase and read through it yourself. It's short, but for a little taste here's a line I particularly enjoy. Quote, "Russia gets thrown through another window, gets knocked out, suffers brain damage, and wakes up with a complete personality change. Italy throws a punch at Austria and misses, but Austria falls over anyway." Moving on, something wildly cool that I spotted on Facebook earlier this week and we re-posted on our World War I CC Facebook page. This comes from Sovereign Hill, an internationally acclaimed tourist attraction that brings to life the color and excitement of Australia's 1850s gold fields in Ballarat, Victoria. Much like in Jamestown or Plymouth here in the US, Sovereign Hill has reenactors, including active blacksmiths and various craftsmen that work on displaying and showcasing techniques from the 19th and early 20th centuries. Now, this video they recently posted is of particular interest to us because it shows a step in the manufacturing of wheels for a 77 millimeter cannon from World War I. The planks of wood, up to six inches thick and 12 inches wide, can be seen being steamed and then bent into shape on a massive iron machine known as a defiance machine. It's an incredible glimpse into the technology and craftsmanship used to create the goods needed to fuel a war like this. Watching the video, I couldn't help but imagine thousands of these machines working away in American factories, pumping out wheel after wheel to be sent overseas. Finally, we're going to end on a bit of a sad note this week. Over the weekend, Javier Fernando Arango was killed while flying a World War I replica biplane and Paso Robles, California. Arango was the owner of arguably the greatest World War I replica airplane collection as well, as a board member of the National Air and Space Museum. His passion for planes started in his youth and turned into a lifelong commitment as he and his family began their quest for authenticity by replacing modern engines and propellers of the airplanes they had with original ones. And removing breaks, radios, and all the other gear required by modern airports. They moved their collection to the family ranch near Pasa Robles about midway between LA and San Francisco, built hangars, dedicated a 2000 foot stretch of grass to a runway, and scouted the surrounding fields for emergency landing spots. Here, Mister Arango could fly under conditions similar to those for which the airplanes had originally been built. I encourage you to read more about his passion and his collection by looking at recent air and space magazines, articles about him, and the planes he spent his life cherishing. We here at the commission give our condolences to his family, and the entire World War I aviation community.

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Theo Mayer: Thank you, Katherine. And that's World War I Centennial News for this week. We want to thank our guests, Mike Shuster, from the great War Project blog, Randal Dietrich, the World War I specialist from the Minnesota Historical Society, Katherine Akey, the Commission Social Media Director, and also our line producer for the show. I'm Theo Mayer, your host this week. The US World War I Centennial Commission was created by Congress to honor, commemorate, and educate about World War I. We rely entirely on your donations. No government appropriations or taxes are being used. Our programs are to inspire a national conversation and awareness about World War I. We bring the lessons of 100 years ago into today's classrooms. We're helping to World War I memorials in communities of all sizes across the country, and we're building a National World War I Memorial in Washington DC. All of this work depends on your support, so please give what you can. It's easy by texting wwonenow to 41444. That's wwonenow to 41444. World War I Centennial News is brought to you as a part of that effort. We want to thank the commission's founding sponsor, the Pritzker Military Museum and Library, for their support. The podcast can be found on our website at wwonecc.org/cn and in the iTunes store at WW One Centennial news. Our Twitter and Instagram handles are both [@wwonecc](https://twitter.com/wwonecc), and we're on Facebook at [wwoneccentennial](https://www.facebook.com/wwoneccentennial). Thanks for joining us, and don't forget to talk to somebody about the Centennial this week. So long.

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Speaker 5: [Singing 00:00:24:44].

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