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8 speakers (Theo Mayer, Audio, Mike Shuster, Edward Lengel, Michael B., Colonel Jacobs, Col. Mastriano, Katherine Akey)

[0:00:08]

Theo Mayer: Welcome to WWI Centennial News, episode number 91. It's about WWI then, what was happening a hundred years ago, and it's about WWI now, the news and the updates about the centennial and the commemoration. In this week's episode, we're going to explore an event a hundred years ago near the end of September, when President Woodrow Wilson makes a big reversal on Women's Suffrage, and the women's right to vote almost passes Congress. Mike Shuster takes us to the Meuse-Argonne Offensive in France as it hits early roadblocks, while Dr. Edward Lengel brings us personal perspectives from the Wild West Division as they enter combat in the Meuse-Argonne. Back in the present, we explore Tennessee in WWI with Michael Birdwell, Chair of the Tennessee Great War Commission. We meet an aerial hero of the Lost Battalion, Erwin Bleckley, as we talk with historian and biographer, Lieutenant Colonel Doug Jacobs, US Army retired. Iran-Iraq War veteran and award-winning author, Colonel Douglas Mastriano, also retired, shares his new book, Thunder in the Argonne, and The Buzz, where Katherine Akey highlights some of the WWI centennial posts and stories from social media, all this week on WWI Centennial News, which is brought to you by the US WWI Centennial Commission, the Pritzker Military Museum and Library, and The Starr Foundation. I'm Theo Mayer, the Chief Technologist for the commission and your host. Welcome to the show. As American troops went into action for the war's final offensive, and what would be the largest, bloodiest battle in American history, thoughts on the home front centered on how to maintain public unity in this time of trial. Then, as now, the women of America played a crucial role, and yet consider that when Wilson became president in 1913, women were only allowed to vote in a few states, mostly in the west. The fight for that right was the Women's Suffrage Movement, looking for a constitutional amendment that would permit them the vote nationally. The newly elected Wilson refused to support this campaign, even though he had three grown daughters. With that as a set up, let's jump into our centennial time machine and go back to 1917, as America enters the war.

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Audio: [inaudible] .

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Theo Mayer: We're back in 1917, just before the US enters the war. The National Woman's Party, led by a woman named Alice Paul, decides to take its campaign right to the top by picketing outside the White House. Well, Wilson just doesn't take them that seriously, tipping his hat and smiling at them as his limousine drives to and from the executive mansion. At one point, he patronizingly invites them in for tea. They refuse. These women will not be deterred, crafting signs and placards attacking Wilson, and even comparing him to the imperialist Kaiser Wilhelm. Well, the result was that the police and some overzealous patriots take exception and violence breaks out. Women are arrested, some are mistreated and even beaten in prison. Shocked by the violence, Wilson puts a stop to it and changes his whole approach to the suffrage question, but he still opposes it. Let's bring in a character named Jeannette Rankin. She's quite a pistol. Just four days after being sworn in as the very first woman to serve in Congress, on April 6th, 1917, the House of Representatives is casting its historic vote about the US declaring war on Germany, which eventually passes 373 to 50. Jeannette Rankin remains silent during the first reading of the roll call. Now noting this, former Speaker of the House Joe Cannon of Illinois seeks her out on the floor of the House and advises, maybe a little patronizingly but sagely, "Little woman, you cannot afford not to vote. You represent the womanhood of the country and in the American Congress." On the second reading of the roll, violating the House rules about commenting on your vote, Rankin rises from her seat and intones, "I want to stand by my country, but I cannot vote for war." Moving forward, less than a year, on January 10th, 1918, a session in the House of Representatives opens with a strong pro-suffrage speech given by the fiery Jeannette Rankin, and the vote achieves the two-thirds majority required to pass. That was pretty exciting because if it ultimately passes the Senate, it sets the stage to finally give American women the right to vote. This law is named after another great American social reformer and women's right activist. The famous law is called the Susan B. Anthony Amendment. Now slide forward 10 months, to late September 1918, that's when the Senate finally debates and prepares to vote on the amendment, but it's looking like the anti-suffrage block, of course all men, are going to kill it. Well, the pro-suffrage senators desperately tried to delay a final vote by staging a filibuster until they might win enough votes for support. From the headlines of the New York Times, "Dateline: September 27th, 1918. Headline: Filibuster Halts Senate Vote; Senate Supporters Mark Time." The story reads, "Owing to a filibuster of suffrage supporters, the Senate today failed to reach a vote on the Susan B. Anthony Amendment to the constitution. All day the debate went on with anti-suffrage senators eagerly awaiting the vote, quite confident that they would be able to win and block the women's right to vote." This debate drags on for days, even as female war workers stage a parade on September 28th, highlighting the contribution to the war effort in American factories. Eventually, defeat seemed certain, until suddenly President

Wilson decides to intervene personally with an unannounced visit to the Senate on the last day of September. "Dateline: September 30, 1918. Headline: Wilson Makes Suffrage Appeal, But Senate Waits. President Urges In Person That The Passage Of The Resolution Is A Vital War Necessity." The story reads, "In an effort to breakdown the opposition to the women's suffrage resolution in the Senate, President Wilson went before the body today and urged that it be adopted as a war measure. The immediate effect was merely to add to the intensity of the battle that has occupied the Senate for five days, pointing out that suffrage was vital to the nation's unity and that the nation must give justice to the women." "In recognition for their right and their contribution to the war effort, the President concluded, 'I tell you plainly that this measure which I urge upon you is vital to the winning of the war and to the energies alike of preparation and battle, President Woodrow Wilson.'" But the president's intervention fails to sway a single vote in the Senate. On October 1st, the amendment falls short of the necessary two-thirds majority by only two votes. Of course, the amendment will finally pass in both the House and the Senate nine months later. But, of course, Congress can't actually pass a constitutional amendment. The amendment then has to be ratified by every state in the nation. That's going to take another 14 months. Finally, on August 18, 1920, the Nineteenth Amendment to the US Constitution passes, granting women the right to vote, a long-sought right driven into being, in good measure, by American womanhood's efforts and contribution to The War That Changed The World. Heading back to the fighting over there, as Dr. Edward Lengel brought up in our September round table, some military strategists believed that after the victory at Saint-Mihiel, the US army should have simply proceeded east to the City of Metz in a southern approach to the German homeland. However, General Ferdinand Foch, the Supreme Commander of the Allied forces, believed that the strategy should turn north, up the Meuse River Valley to the Meuse-Argonne region. And so begins the largest battle in US military history, and it's anything but smooth sailing. Here to take us to some of those first days of trial and challenge is Mike Shuster, former NPR correspondent and the curator for the Great War Project blog. Mike, how were those first days of the Meuse-Argonne Offensive?

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Mike Shuster: They were very difficult, Theo. Our headlines read: "The Meuse-Argonne Offensive Grinds To A Halt; Americans Struggling, Allies Desperate, A Future President On The Frontline," a special to the Great War Project. This is the decisive moment, the Allied attack at the Meuse-Argonne forest, a century ago on the Western Front. "On Thursday, 26th September, the Meuse-Argonne opened," reports historian Gary Mead. It was enormous. "The initial artillery bombardment was conducted by nearly 4,000 guns." Eventually, more than 1.2 million American soldiers took part in this vast battle in northern France. Initially, the Meuse-Argonne Offensive struck a serious blow to the German army. General Pershing writes: "The enemy has been struck a blow so powerful that the extreme gravity of his situation in France was obvious to him. His tired divisions," Pershing continued, "had been battered and nowhere with more dogged resolution than in front of the American First Army, his most sensitive point." Not all agree. "This was wishful thinking," writes historian Gary Mead. "The Germans are badly outnumbered, and there is no avoiding the fact that the green American divisions were revealed as grievously inexperienced and sometimes poorly led." By September 27th, the momentum of the whole offensive had been slowed to a virtual halt. Mead reports, "By October 1st, the whole attacking force had, in total, advanced but four miles over some of the worst terrain and most densely defended positions to be found in the First World War. The Meuse-Argonne offensive was threatening to turn into a costly and humiliating debacle." Writes historian Gary Mead: "In the four brutal days of 25 to 29 September, the American First Army had sustained 45,000 casualties, a rate of destruction as bleak as at almost any other period of the war. In another ominous reminder of the previous ghastly campaigns of 1916 and 1917, the Allied advance had slowed almost to a crawl. The Meuse-Argonne campaign was threatening to fall apart." According to historian Thomas Fleming, "Everything imaginable proceeded to go wrong with Pershing's army." The Germans fell back to well-prepared defenses. Then the German gunners began to mow the Americans down. "Massive amounts of enemy artillery on the heights east of the Meuse River and along the edge of the Argonne Forest," Fleming writes, "which loomed a thousand feet above the valley floor on the west, exacted an even heavier toll. The American advance stumbled to a bloody halt." At one point, farm boys from Missouri and Kansas with no experience of modern warfare teetered on the brink of rout. They were rescued, reports historian Fleming, by direct fire from their own artillery, including a battery manned by Captain Harry S. Truman. "If I hadn't gotten up at 4:00 a.m.," writes Truman, "I wouldn't be here." The attacking Allies sustained a casualty rate of more than 50%. "Even by the standards of the Western Front," writes one historian, "the scale of the German losses was astounding: 33,000 prisoners in one day." The Americans suffer as well. As one soldier put it, "Every goddamn German there who didn't have a machine gun had a cannon." This was just in the first two days of the battle for the territory known as the Meuse-Argonne Forest. That's the news this week from the Great War Project.

[0:13:19]

Theo Mayer: Mike Shuster is the curator for the Great War Project blog. The link to his post is in the podcast notes. Joining us now is Dr. Edward Lengel, military historian and segment host for America Emerges: Military Stories from WWI. This week, Ed introduces us to the men, with some of their firsthand accounts from the 91st Wild West Division, as they find themselves in the opening phrase of the significant moment in American military history. A note to our listeners, the following segment includes graphic descriptions of violence that may not be appropriate for all, and especially young persons.

[0:13:58]

Edward Lengel: The 91st Wild West Division was one of nine American divisions that assaulted German positions in the Meuse-Argonne on September 26th, 1918. As befitted its name, the 91st was originally assembled from draftees inducted from the Rocky Mountain West. Their first days in action were indeed wild as they attack toward the enemy-held village of Gesnes against well-entrenched machine guns. Green though they were, the westerners fought with honor, but paid an ugly price. Among their number was the father of a future Hollywood movie star. First Lieutenant Frank L. Thompson of Montana, serving with the division's 348th Machine Gun Battalion, encountered a group of enemy prisoners shortly after the attack began on September 26th: "We stopped to rest a little, then our eyes popped out," he later wrote. "Around a corner in the road came a doughboy and behind was what I took to be the German army. Eventually, they proved to be only 200 prisoners and one officer. Instead of the brutal, bestial murderers of babies and rapers of women, we saw a crown of blond, blue-eyed boys and studious looking elderly men with spectacles. They were the meekest crowd to be posing as conquerors of the world I ever hope to see." But he also encountered American wounded at an aid station: "Several men were there with limbs missing. One heavyweight boxer from Los Angeles had a leg off. He was unconscious." On September 27th, "At dawn, which broke dull and cloudy, the word came to advance. My platoon was told off to support 'M' Company of the 363rd Infantry," Lieutenant Thompson remembered, "so over the hill we started. We had gone about 200 yards when a 'ch-ch-ch-ch!' and we did an Annette Kellermann, who was a famous Austrian actress and diving champion, for Mother Earth. I heard a moan from behind and saw a man trying to get up. Then he bent over as though to vomit and the blood gushed out in a stream from his mouth." For two days, the attack bogs down. Lieutenant Farley Granger of California, father of the future Hollywood star of the same name, served with the 362nd Regiment. On September 29th, his outfit was ordered to assault Gesnes, even though, as he recalled, "Up to this time the Regiment had fought for three days without hot food or coffee and but little water and cold food." Casualties had been heavy, and many of the regiment's officers considered the attack to be madness. As Lieutenant Granger watched, Captain Montgomery remarked, he feared such an advance impossible, that our losses would be terrible. Captain Bradbury answered, "To hell with the losses. Read the order." "Three bare rolling hills stretched toward Gesnes," Granger observed. "Every square yard was visible from the higher hills beyond, occupied by the enemy, and the concrete pillbox on Hill 255, and every foot swept by machine gun and artillery fire. Protection there was none, not even concealment for one man. The gullies between the hills were swept by enfilading fire from the wooded hills above Gesnes, and the hillsides were commanded by nests hidden in the flanks." "Bradbury turned to me and quietly said, 'Well, Farley, lets go.' I gave the signal to the company commanders and, despite the withering hail of steel and lead, as one man, the leading companies rose up and started forward. We moved off directly behind the first wave. Perhaps the charge of the Light Brigade was more spectacular, more melodramatic and picturesque, but not more gallant. Man after man fell, but the others continued on through a hell of shrapnel and machine gun fire as would be impossible to exceed." "Unflinching, the line of combat groups rolled steadily on over the open, a trailing wake of olive-drab marking its progress. One must not think of this as happening in an instant. Over an hour of this bloody plodding along under a tornado of missiles passed before the worst was over. Finally, the last crest was topped and, in irregular groups, these gallant boys swept down the last slope into Gesnes. At the first corner stood a German tank. This was taken and the crew shot as they tried to escape, and its gun turned on a machine gun nest." "The town was promptly cleared, the satisfaction of some bayonet work was given us. Now, however, with a machine gun bullet through my canteen, four holes through my loose trench coat, and one more noticeable through my ankle, I made my way back through the still heavy artillery barrage placed to prevent the advance of our reserves. Dead and dying, literally covered the field. Who was responsible for this costly order of attack, why this needless sacrifice of precious lives, was not for us to question." Years later, in a commentary left for his son, Granger gave tribute to those who died: "Nor are the brave men who now lay forgotten in our government hospitals, broken in mind and body as a result of the war, any less heroes than those who died in battle. Perhaps the sacrifice of the living is even greater. Still they live on, forgotten." "Do not think me bitter, for it is quite natural to forget. That is life. On the contrary, I am exceedingly grateful to have had the privilege of my experiences, and the same something that prompted me to go would always make me feel I had not kept faith had I remained at home. Greater than the satisfaction gained at having done my little part, as best I could, I received the greatest of all rewards in having made a mother proud."

[0:19:50]

Theo Mayer: Dr. Edward Lengel is an American military historian and our segment host for America Emerges: Military Stories from WWI. We put the links in the podcast notes for Ed's post and his office website. Well, that's it for a hundred years ago. Let's jump back into the present with WWI Centennial News Now. This part of the podcast focuses on now and how the centennial of WWI and the upcoming centennial of the Armistice are being commemorated. This week in Commission News, first story: Archiving the WWI Centennial for posterity. Over the past four years, the national awareness and interest in WWI has really grown. For example, you as listeners to this podcast are some of the many who've rediscovered or discovered our nearly lost national memory of this period in our nation's history, a period that was glossed over in school, right, and that was generally not recognized or understood for being the foundation of so much of our modern daily lives. Now, I have to tell you, coming into this, I didn't have a clue. Over these centennial years, hundreds of people from all around the country have spent literally

thousands and thousands of hours researching, rediscovering, unearthing, collating, writing, posting, and generally participating in a giant national social archeological endeavor. It's been one of the most amazing and gratifying things I've ever had the privilege of being a part of. As I record this right now, it's 43 days and 18 hours until the armistice, which begs the question and the challenge: what's going to happen to all that social archeology as we move forward? Is it destined to fade out of our national consciousness again? Well, this Monday, on October 1st, the US WWI Centennial Commission and the Pritzker Military Museum and Library are hosting an event to thank and honor the many state organizations that have toiled and dedicated over these past years to bring the story to the American people. As a part of that event, we've also gathered an important panel of experts from museums, libraries, states, the government publishing office, moderated by my colleague, Chris Christopher. It's going to be all about the best practices for archiving and maintaining the WWI history that's been brought forward by states, the commission, historical societies, communities, and individuals. Now we're live streaming the event on Monday, October 1st, from 1:30 to 3:00 PM, central time. If you can make the live stream, we're going to have a message moderator so that you can participate and even provide your thoughts. Now if you can't make it live, you can see the video on demand at www.pritzkermilitary.org/tohonorandremember. Of course, we're going to put the link in the podcast notes, or you can tweet a request for it to our Twitter channel, @TheWW1podcast. That's @TheWW1podcast. Check it out. Next story: Bells of Peace. The very historic Saint Mary's Church in Burlington, New Jersey has signed up for Bells of Peace. They have eight bells in their bell tower. A piece of bell trivia: what do you call a group of bells? It's not a flock of bells, it's not a herd of bells, it's called a peal of bells. They have a peal of eight bells that together weigh five tons. They were cast in England in the mid-1800s, and I imagine they sound just awesome. Perhaps the most interesting part of the story and what makes their joining Bells of Peace such a poignant and appropriate thing is this, one of the earlier church members of Saint Mary's in Burlington was a man named Franklin D'Olier. Franklin was one of the founders and the first national commander of the American Legion, the veterans organization that was formed a hundred years ago this year, by soldiers returning from WWI. Thank you, Saint Mary's, for joining the Bells of Peace national tolling. Next story: It's out. The Bells of Peace app is in the iTunes and the Android app stores. Now if you don't have a peal of bells or even a single bell, we have them for you with the free Bells of Peace app. The first thing you get is a countdown timer to the armistice. Then you have a selection of seven bell tones from our app's peal. There is a manual mode so you can play the bells and select them right now. You can also put it into manual mode or automatic mode for 11/11, so it'll either play the bells 21 times or you can toll them manually for your own ceremony, so that you can play the bells right now. There's a built-in newsfeed channel all about the armistice, and a social sharing channel where you can share your Bells of Peace and armistice preparation and events all from your iPhone or Android, even if you don't have a social media account. Go to the app store and search for Bells of Peace, or go to ww1cc.org/app, all lowercase. That's this week for Commission News. In our Updates from the State segment, we're headed to the Volunteer State, Tennessee, to learn about Tennessee in WWI. We're joined by Michael Birdwell, Chair of the Tennessee Great War Commission. Michael, welcome to the podcast.

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Michael B.: Thank you, glad to be here.

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Theo Mayer: Michael, let's start with your organization. How did the Tennessee Great War Commission get started?

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Michael B.: Beginning in 2014, there was a piece of legislation that was put before the state legislature to create a commission, but it was almost another year before they got everything organized. I was asked to be on the commission. I was appointed by the governor and then I was elected by the other members to be the chair because most of my career has dealt with WW1 in some way. I've been associated with the Alvin C. York site, the York family since 1986. I've been at this a long time.

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Theo Mayer: That's great. Well, let's get to the story of Tennessee in WWI. What was the state like in turn of the century and what was its role in the war effort?

[0:26:28]

Michael B.: A lot of people don't know, when war was declared in 1914, in August, two brothers from East Tennessee decided to go to New Orleans and renounce their American citizenship and join the French Foreign Legion. That was Kiffin Rockwell and his brother, Paul. They were in Foreign Legion, Kiffin was invalided out and, in 1915, and became one of the original 16 pilots in the Lafayette Escadrille. There's a debate about whether he was the first American to down an enemy aircraft. Then we had several others [inaudible] got in the war before we got started, so they lived up to our Volunteer State status. When war was declared, several posts in Tennessee had been fighting along the border in Mexico, looking for Pancho Villa, and especially guys from the 30th Division. Tennessee, at the end of the war, had six Medal of Honor recipients. They all earned their medals 29th of September and the 8th of October. The 30th Division is largely unknown for most Tennesseans because they fought under British command.

They were part of the coalition warfare making or the 27th and 30th under British command, and the 92nd and 93rd, the African American units for under French command. The 30th Division was guys from 119th Infantry who broke through the Hindenburg Line on the 29th of September. Also, we had several medical doctors who were important in the war. Ray Wallace Billington, she was a pioneer of prosthetics. The Seeing Eye was created in Tennessee for the blinded soldier named [Moris] Frank [inaudible] came up with the first seeing eye dog in American history, a dog named Buddy. The DuPont plants at Old Hickory was considered the engineering marvel of 1918. They broke ground on March the 8th and by July the 2nd, they had produced their first million pounds of gun powder. It was run primarily by women who were making the guncotton and smokeless gunpowder. African Americans were working to load these things onto the cars. There was the first Mexican village ever in Tennessee history, that was established at the Old Hickory plant. That's just a small smattering of Tennessee's involvement in the War.

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Theo Mayer: What kinds of WWI commemorative projects are ongoing in the state? Do you have any commemorative plans for the Armistice?

[0:28:35]

Michael B.: Absolutely. We'll actually have 60 events between the 1st of September and November 17th, and they're taking place all across the state of Tennessee. I've been involved in four events over the past three days. Have events happening almost every weekend from now through the 17th, because we have so many things happening around Armistice Day, we're having to go an extra week. One thing that's going on, we have a [inaudible] project where people can bring materials that they have that are related to the war, whether it's documents, images, artifacts. If you go to Tennessee's State Library Archives website and type in "over here and over there" you can see some of the things that we have done so far. We have a living history event coming up on the 4th of November where it's going to play a vintage football game of army versus marines. On the weekend of November 11th, we have a three day event at the Alvin C. York site with reenactors, all kinds of vintage vehicles. We have vintage airplanes. We also have a film series taking place. We've got a lot going on.

[0:29:34]

Theo Mayer: One thing I wanted to ask you, and it happens to almost everyone who starts peeling back the layers about what happened a hundred years ago, they discover a lot of stuff. Which thing, I think sticks out the most for you?

[0:29:47]

Michael B.: It's Tennessee, where the whole vote for women comes down to. We are the 36th state and that would not have happened without women's involvement in WWI. There's a remarkable woman, her name was Graeme McGregor Smith. She decided to keep tabs on all of the Tennessee guys who were either drafted or enlisted. 60,000 plus were in uniform and she kept tabs on every last one of those guys. When the national archives burned in St. Luis in 1975, people thought those records were lost. Well, not for Tennessee, we have them. The archives has worked to digitize that and get all those things up online. There's some holes in those documents, but at least things on all of those guys, in some way, that other states don't have at all. It was her dogged efforts that did that and I think it's not surprising that when Tennessee had its 200th anniversary, she was ranked as one of the most important people in 20th century Tennessee history. I can't disagree with that.

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Theo Mayer: That's a great story. So many people are struggling with trying to trace down their ancestors and all of those records have been lost. I didn't know that about Tennessee. That's very interesting.

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Michael B.: There's going to be a book coming out next year and it comes from the research that we've been doing on Tennessee in WWI called Volunteers Tennessee? and the Great War, and it includes some amazing stories.

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Theo Mayer: A wonderful interview, a lot of great insight. Michael, thank you so much.

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Michael B.: You're quite welcome. Thank you.

[0:31:09]

Theo Mayer: Micheal Birdwell is the chair of the Tennessee Great War Commission. Learn more about the Commission and the Centennial WWI in Tennessee by following the links in the podcast notes. For remembering veterans, I'd like to introduce you to Erwin Bleckley, a name I didn't know. Bleckley is one of the aerial heroes of the Lost Battalion saga, a story we're going to dig into in great depth next week. This week, to tell us the story of Erwin,

we're joined by Lieutenant Colonel Doug Jacobs, US Army retired. Doug is the former command historian and curator of the Kansas National Guard Museum. He's also an Erwin Bleckley biographer who spent 25 years researching this man and his story. Doug, welcome to the show.

[0:31:53]

Colonel Jacobs: Thank you Theo, I appreciate being here and an opportunity to talk about a subject that is very dear to my heart and I feel a lot of passion for and that is the story of Erwin Bleckley.

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Theo Mayer: Who is Erwin Bleckley?

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Colonel Jacobs: Well, Erwin Bleckley has a unique story in that he was a man that enlisted in the Kansas National Guard from Wichita, Kansas. He was the second man to join the 1st Field Artillery Battery that was just formed in Wichita. He received a commission and 30 days after, that unit was mobilized to go to war. It was made part of the 130th Field Artillery Regiment which is part of the 35th Division. It's a national guard unit made up of members of the Missouri National Guard and the Kansas National Guard. I know about Erwin because I've spent about 25 years of my life studying him. During WWI, he is one of four air service members that received the Medal of Honor. He went to war, he learned his job as a forward observer. When they got to France, they asked all the forward observers to consider being forward observers in airplanes. The airplane was used for the first time as a combat platform during WWI, and so it was a lot about learning as you go. Now, you have to remember that the air service was the forerunner of the army air core, from WWII. In 1947, that became the air force, so I guess the lineage goes back through the air force to this young man that was in the Kansas National Guard as a field artillery. It's a unique story in that respect, but I really can't tell the story of Erwin without talking about the pilot of the airplane that he was in and that was Lieutenant Harold Goettler. Harold Goettler was an aviator from Chicago, Illinois. They were assigned to the 50th Aero Squadron and their job was to support the 77th Division in the Meuse-Argonne and the 77th Division had the unit that became known as the Lost Battalion. The Lost Battalion really wasn't lost, they were pretty much where they were supposed to be, but on the morning of the 5th of October, the commander of the 77th Division had asked the 50th Aero Squadron to see what they could do about contacting them, try to resupply them and see if they could find out what the commander needed as far as support. When they got to the coordinates that they were given, they could not find the guys. What they found was a bunch of enemy soldiers firing back at them. Important to note that it was actually a team effort by the 50th Aero Squad to save the lost battalion. They all worked together, the maintenance people, the supply group. Bleckley had suggested that they might use the process of elimination to locate where the unit actually was at, by drawing fire from the enemy. They would slide down the ravine real low and if the men on the ground shot at them, they would mark that path, basically using themselves as bait to locate where they were being shot at from the Germans in order to find the spot where they weren't being shot at, by the Americans. The 50th Aero Squadron did 13 sorties to that area, dropping supplies. It was the following day on the 6th of October, that a flight crew by the name of Anderson Rogers flying the number 16 airplane actually were able to report the location where they were at. A lot of planes got riddled with bullets. As a matter of fact, two planes before Harold and Erwin's plane did not make it back that day. Erwin's plane was the last one and they did not make it back because they had crashed in the process. He gave his life in order to save these guys on the ground. Now we have to remember this is the first time in the army air service that they ever attempted to drop supplies to combat units on the ground and they did not know exactly how to do it. There's been a lot of arguments about whether or not they were successful in saving the Lost Battalion, whether or not they were successful in getting the packages on the ground. In fact the packages they did drop, the ones that landed on the ground did get into the soldiers hands. They just happened to be the wrong soldiers. They did locate the unit, they were saved the next day. The most important thing that the aircraft crews did, flying over, was to give the guys on the ground hope, that somebody was looking for them. It's because of that, they were able to hold out just long enough for the units to come in and rescue their Lost Battalion.

[0:36:44]

Theo Mayer: You have an upcoming commemoration for Mr. Bleckley. Can you tell us a little bit about where it is and what it is and what going to be included?

[0:36:51]

Colonel Jacobs: On October the 6th, in Wichita, Kansas, at the VA Hospital auditorium, we will be recognizing both Harold Goettler and Erwin Bleckley. It is actually Bleckley Day, it's going to be a big event. We have a number of speakers coming in. We have located some of his family members that will be there, so we're going to do as much as we can to honor him in Wichita, Kansas, beginning about 8:00 in the morning. We're going to have a flyover, we're going to have several speakers there that will know a little bit about Erwin and his story and his life. We're just going to do the best job we can to honor him and other World War veterans that day. This is being [inaudible] by the VFW Post 112 there in Wichita.

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Theo Mayer: Well, Doug, you're bringing a really interesting and somewhat unknown story to us. Thank you so very much.

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Colonel Jacobs: All right, thank you.

[0:37:43]

Theo Mayer: Doug Jacobs, former command historian and curator of the Kansas National Guard Museum and Erwin Bleckley biographer. Learn more from the links in the podcast notes. This week for our spotlight on the media segment, we're joined by Colonel Douglas Mastriano, retired, an author and military historian, a veteran of Iraq and Afghanistan. Colonel Mastriano is the author of an award winning book published in 2014, Alvin York: A New Biography of the Hero of the Argonne. Today, he's here to tell us about a new book definitely timely, Thunder in the Argonne, which tells the broader story of America's greatest battle. Doug, welcome to the podcast.

[0:38:28]

Col. Mastriano: Thank you for having me on.

[0:38:29]

Theo Mayer: Doug, you had already written a book about Alvin York and his service during the Meuse-Argonne. What made you decide to go back to the battle again and write this book now?

[0:38:39]

Col. Mastriano: Clearly, Alvin York stands out in the American collective memory as a great hero from the first World War and indeed he is. Then as I was working on the Alvin York book, it struck me that there's so many other great heroes and other stories that need to be told from that cataclysmic epic, one of America's greatest and largest battles, one of the bloodiest battles in our history and it's all but forgotten. I went back, took a hard look at the rest of the story and I went into this book trying to tell it in a way where the average reader could grab a hold of it and understand it, but also then, still connect it to both American and German heroes who fought in that cataclysmic battle in 1918.

[0:39:15]

Theo Mayer: As the host of a show about WWI, I get a lot of email from individuals, and groups and state organizations and they often open with, "Well, we have our own Sergeant York." Indeed, there were a number of Medal of Honor recipients, as you mentioned and heroes who distinguished themselves during the battle. What are some of the other names that we should learn?

[0:39:32]

Col. Mastriano: There's so many amazing feats of heroism that came out of the war, and sacrifice. One of them I'd like to point to, to bring back to life is Sergeant Arthur Forrest. He was with the 89th Division. Arthur Forrest was a renowned baseball player back in his day. He actually quit sports and volunteered to join the army when the war broke out. He's from Hannibal, Missouri and on 1 November, his Division, the Old 89th Division was attacking towards Renionville. Sergeant Forrest said they were pinned down by the German fire and he said, "I was so frightened that I didn't know what to do, so I ran as fast as I could." That is, he ran right towards the enemy, amazing. He ran towards that German machine gun that was holding up his particular unit, he threw two grenades into the German machine gun position, killed all the crew except one. Another great hero, often forgotten is right outside the Meuse-Argonne American Cemetery. The Meuse-Argonne American Cemetery is the largest American Cemetery in Europe. 14,246 American heroes rest there. The village on the other side of the cemetery is called Cunel. It's a very sleepy, small town. It was back then as well. The first American in that town was a man called Lieutenant Sam Woodfill and as he's advancing with his unit, the 5th Diamond Division ... The guy is amazing and he receives a Medal of Honor as well. That's just two of many heroes who came out of the Meuse-Argonne. What strikes me about these stories is that we have ordinary men, and oftentimes men viewed as not ordinary, but weak. We have these weak, ordinary people faced with overwhelming odds and they rise up and they confront it with extraordinary heroism. That should give us all hope because many people out there might not think they're capable of such things, but you just never know, so keep fighting for freedom as these men did.

[0:41:10]

Theo Mayer: Amazing stories. As an expert in this, as you've dug into this and as a military historian, what are the three most important things you think, that Americans should remember about, particularly this battle?

[0:41:22]

Col. Mastriano: What is very clear about the Meuse-Argonne campaign ... This is from historians in France and England, and oftentimes, English historians, WWI historians tend to be hostile toward American recollection of the war. But it's a fact that the war could not have been won without the American role of these units, especially without the Americans fighting in the Meuse-Argonne, opening the way for the French and British to break out, up north. Number one, the Americans helped to end that war, a year earlier than anybody thought it could be possible, and in face allied victory was ensured by the Americans. The second thing is we indeed stand on the shoulders of giants. We have these great men and many of them died and their stories are forgotten sadly. The last lesson from Meuse-Argonne is it's a story about people like you and me, and that each life matters and what a person does in life, indeed echoes across a generation and into eternity. These men in 1918 in the Meuse-Argonne faced the darkness and they came out as heroes, and maybe we too, should.

[0:42:14]

Theo Mayer: Great statement. Now, before we go, really important, when is your new book out and where can people get it?

[0:42:19]

Col. Mastriano: The book's been out for several months and you can get on Amazon, it's Thunder in the Argonne. It tells the story from not only the American perspective, but also from the German perspective and then also I tie in how it made a difference at the strategic level. I tell it in a way that every reader can get it. I tell it in a way where I have lots of maps in there because I spent more than a hundred days in the Argonne. When you're reading an Argonne book and you get lost, and have to get maps out, that's a problem, so we loaded up the book with maps so it's very accessible, very readable, very understandable. The whole point of the book here is to revive the memories of the great heroes and show what ordinary people can do in challenging circumstances.

[0:42:56]

Theo Mayer: Doug, I do have another question. Talk a little bit about the German perspective in the book that you included.

[0:43:02]

Col. Mastriano: The German perspective in my book, what's really striking about that is, it should not be surprising, but they fought for the same reasons that the Americans. They fought for their families first, their friends, and their country. The anti-hero in the Sergeant York story is this officer called Lieutenant Paul Vollmer. Paul Vollmer was in the German [German] which is their version of National Guard. He's been in it for 10 years. One of his best friends is Lieutenant [Fritz Endriss] from grouping in Germany in the [inaudible]. Now, let's fast forward to 8 October 1918, and this gives you flavor for why this matters, to the German perspective as well. Alvin York ended up fighting in that combat because his best friend was just killed, Corporal Murray Savage, and really his only friend in the army as a conscientious objector. We know the great feat he accomplished. On the other side, why did the Germans end up surrendering? It was a decision by Lieutenant Paul Vollmer. The German officer leading the bayonet attack to try to save Vollmer, and [inaudible], was Fritz Endriss, Vollmer's best friend. When York shot him, shot him in the abs, Endriss was shot, thrown backwards and is screaming in pain, so Vollmer ended up surrendering in his command to Alvin York to try to save the life of his friend. We see this connection, it's true across all the armies. It's about fighting for the guy next to you. That's what happened on the American side, that's what happened on the German side.

[0:44:12]

Theo Mayer: Well thank you very much. A wonderful interview, appreciate it.

[0:44:16]

Col. Mastriano: Thank you Theo. All the best to you. Thanks for fighting the good fight, brother.

[0:44:19]

Theo Mayer: Colonel Douglas Mastriano, retired, military historian and award winning author about WWI. Learn more by the links in the podcast notes. This week we're going to do kind of a mashup of speaking WWI and WWI War tech, as we explore both the phrase and an important but simple technology. That small metal identification tag, engraved with the soldier's name and important personal information including blood type and vaccine history, known as the dog tag. These tags have been incredibly important for medical care on the battlefield and for the proper identification of fallen soldiers. American troops didn't always carry dog tags, and those that died were not always identified. Of course as you might have guessed the story here involves the War Changed the World. Let's start by tracing back a generation earlier. During the American Civil War, 1861 to '65, over 40% of soldiers killed in action were never positively identified. Of course the soldiers were worried that if they were killed, their families would never know what happened to them, so they wrote their names on pieces of paper or a handkerchief and pinned it to their clothing before going into battle. Some soldiers went to the trouble of carving small wooden disks with their names on them. They drilled a hole in the disks and then hung the disks around their neck on a piece of string. The German

translated term, dog marker first appears in 1870, when Prussia issues tags to soldiers that got the German nickname Hundemarken, which literally translates to dog markers. Now, according to military historian, Dr. Leo [Perell], the Spanish-American War produced major changes in handling fallen soldiers and established a basic system for identifying them. A chaplain, named Charles Pierce, stationed in Manila struggled to identify the fallen Americans in the stifling jungle climate of the Philippines. He wrote up a recommendation that the US Army require every soldier to wear an aluminum ID tag. A few years later, in 1906, the army took Pierce's sage advice and issued a regulation stating: An aluminum identification tag stamped with the name, rank, company regiment or core of the wearer, shall be worn by each officer and enlisted man. By 1917, such IDs were mandatory in every branch of the US Military, with millions of men entering the armed forces and receiving ID tags. Now we're not completely sure what the official name was for the ID tags at the time, but in a book entitled *The Slang of the American Expeditionary Force*, we found the following quote, "Our doughboys have dubbed the identification tags which the men of the army are compelled to wear as dog tags," and that's been the name ever since. Epilogue, on August 7th, 1917, US Army General Order 104 created a new organization, The Graves Registration Service, the GRS, and the man put in charge was the same chaplain from the Philippines, Charles Pierce. According to historian, Dr. Perell, Pierce's dedicated service grew the GRS from a few officers and 50 enlisted men, to a force of over 7000. The result was that only 2% of the fallen American soldiers remained unidentified in WWI. By the Vietnam War, that number had dropped to zero. Charles Pierce was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross for his dedication by General Pershing. You can learn more by following the links in the podcast notes. This week at Articles and Posts, where we highlight the stories that we find in our weekly newsletter, *The Dispatch*. Headline: Centennial commemoration events in France honored those who served at Saint Mihiel and Meuse-Argonne offensives. Ceremonies at the American Cemetery in Saint Mihiel and the Meuse-Argonne, mark the centennial of the battles and honored the men and women buried there. These special events were hosted by the American Battle Monuments Commission and also involved the US Defense Department. Headline: Special Smithsonian Research Prize for WWI Exhibit at National Postal Museum. Our friend and sometimes podcast guest, Lynn Heidelbaugh, Curator at the Smithsonian's National Postal Museum, has been awarded a 2018 Smithsonian Institution Secretary's Research Prize in recognition of scholarship for the exhibition "My Fellow Soldiers: Letters from WWI." We interviewed Lynn about this exhibit back in episode number 34, in August of 2017. Headline: WWI Mystery at Maryville Cemetery. In the small town of Maryville, Illinois, a part of Madison County, with a population of less than 8,000, there's a remarkable story of a WWI veteran and a mysterious statue representing his bravery. Now, why is the figure mysterious? Find out in an article by WWI Centennial Commission intern Madison Menz, who digs into the startling appearance of the memorial figure in a small town cemetery. Headline: Daughter of WWI American fighter ace flies a century after her father first shoots down German plane. Nearly a century after her ace fighter pilot father shot down his first German plane, 73-year-old daughter Susan d'Olive Mozena flew onboard a B-52 with members of the 93rd Bomber Squadron at Barksdale Air Force Base in Louisiana. Finally, our selection from our official WWI centennial merchandise shop. Our featured item this week, is our WWI Centennial Commemorative Cufflink set. Proudly wearing these centennial cufflinks is a fantastic way to let folks know that we still honor those who served our country a hundred years ago. These satin nickel cufflinks are a simple, yet meaningful, way to remember the centennial and those who fought in WWI. Links to the cufflinks, to our merchandise shop and to all the articles we've highlighted here, are in our weekly *Dispatch* newsletter. Subscribe at www.1cc.org/subscribe. That brings us to *The Buzz*: The centennial of WWI this week in social media with Katherine Akey. Katherine, what are this week's picks?

[0:51:07]

Katherine Akey: Two of our more popular posts on Facebook this week, come from the Washington Post. The first is a dramatic recounting of an encounter with a U-boat by the US Coast Guard. The incident took the lives of some 131 Americans. You should read the harrowing story and learn about the memory and commemorations of this particular chapter of WWI history by visiting the link in the podcast notes. Additionally, this week, we shared an article called, *A century later America must remember the lessons of one of its biggest blunders*. It's an opinion piece from military historian Geoffrey Wawro. The piece looks at the complicated legacy of the first World War, its still murky origins, the incredible human cost of the conflict, the lingering ambiguity of what was achieved by the fighting and more. You can read this thought piece at the link in the podcast notes and we look forward to having Wawro on the show in just a few weeks to discuss his new book, *Sons of Freedom: The Forgotten American Soldiers Who Defeated Germany in World War I*. That's it for *The Buzz* this week.

[0:52:17]

Theo Mayer: That wraps up episode number 91 of the award winning WWI Centennial News podcast. Thank you for listening. We want to thank our guests Mike Shuster, curator for the Great War Project Blog, Dr. Edward Lengel, military historian and author, Michael Birdwell, Chair of the Tennessee Great War Commission, Doug Jacobs, former command historian and curator of the Kansas National Guard Museum, and Erwin Bleckley biographer, Colonel Douglas Mastroiano, historian and author, Katherine Akey, WWI photography specialist and line producer for the podcast. Many thanks to Mac Nelson and Tim Crowe, our interview editing team, to JL Michaud for his research, and to Rachel Hurt, our Fall intern. It's a great team. I'm Theo Mayer, your producer and host. The US World War One Centennial Commission was created by congress to honor, commemorate and educate about WWI. Our

programs are to inspire a national conversation and awareness about WWI, including this podcast. We're bringing the lessons of a hundred years ago to today's educators and their classrooms. We're helping to restore WWI memorials in communities of all sizes across the country and of course, we're building America's national WWI Memorial in Washington D.C. We want to thank the Commission's founding sponsor, the Pritzker Military Museum & Library as well as the Starr Foundation, for their support. The podcast and a full transcript of the show can be found on our website at ww1cc.org/cn. You'll find WW1 Centennial News in all the places you get your podcast. You can even listen to it using your smart speaker by saying, play WW1 Centennial News podcast. The podcast Twitter handle is @TheWWIpodcast. The commission's Twitter and Instagram handles are both @WW1CC and we're on Facebook at [ww1centennial](https://www.facebook.com/ww1centennial). Thank you for joining us and don't forget to share the stories that you're hearing here today about The War That Changed The World. (singing) Thank you for listening. So long.

[0:55:11]