

18-12-28-assembly\_mixdown-2.mp3 (52m 52s)

<https://jotengine.com/transcriptions/XW5rymVFhwLx7BPJRGO8wQ>

7 speakers (Theo Mayer, Sabin Howard, Katherine Akey, Edward Lengel, Mike Shuster, Mark Wilkins, Kenneth Davis)

[0:00:08]

**Theo Mayer:** Welcome to WWI Centennial News, episode number 103. This New Year's week and next week, we have a two-episode special for you. We pulled together some of our favorite stories and segments from 2018 for you. They're presented in chronological order. Part one comes out this week, the last week of 2018 and part two will publish next week, the first week of 2019. During the show, we're not going to spend a lot of time setting up each piece, but we're going to tell you the date, the episode and the segment title each time, just to keep it all in context. This is all made possible by our sponsors, the US World War I Centennial Commission, the Pritzker Military Museum and Library and the Starr Foundation. Welcome to part one of our favorite segments of 2018. January 11th, episode number 54, looking ahead at 2018 and Wilson's Fourteen Points. Okay. Now, we're going to zoom back up and look forward at 1918 from an overview. Germany's Kaiserslacht is their big offensive, hoping to deal the allies a knockout punch. It includes five major offensives over the spring and early summer. The allies lose ground, then, gain it back with help of Americans who are now coming online. Things begin to turn around and over the fall, the central powers admit defeat one by one, so that in November, an armistice is declared. The fighting stops at last and now, some of WWI's most fascinating stories emerge as the aftermath of the war. The negotiations, and America's war cranked economy try to settle on and into a new world order. It all actually starts this week. On January 8th, 1918, President Woodrow Wilson addresses the US Congress with what would later become known as his "Fourteen Points." The fundamentals to America's war aims. Inconceivably, up until now, there has been no explicit statement of war aims by any of the nations who are engaged in this mad destruction. At his request, a team, led by Walter Lippmann and longtime Wilson advisor, Colonel House, they generate a memorandum called, "The War Aims and the Peace Terms it Suggests," from which Wilson crafts one of the most important and influential speeches of his administration and maybe his career, the Fourteen Points. The first six points enumerate the causes of world war, and urge, number one, the elimination of secret treaties in favor of open agreements, number two, a free navigation of the seas, number three, removal of all economic barriers and the establishment of equal trade between nations, number four, the reduction of armaments, number five, the adjustment of colonial aims and the self-determination of colonized populations in regard to their own sovereignty, number six, the evacuation of all Russian territories by the German armies. Now, the next seven proceed to rearrange the map of Europe, effectively eradicating the old imperial borders of specific territories and creating independent states. Now, they include number 7, the evacuation of Belgium, number 8, the release of French territory, particularly Alsace-Lorraine, number 9, the readjustment of the frontiers of Italy into clearly recognizable lines of nationality, number 10, the autonomy of Austria-Hungary, number 11, the release of occupied territories in the Balkan states, the establishment of political and economic independence along with historically established lines of allegiance, as well as access to the sea for the Serbs, number 12, assured sovereignty of Turkey from the Ottoman empire, as well as the right of other nationalities to develop autonomy, number 13, the establishment of an independent Polish state with access to the sea, and finally his 14th point, the creation of a world organization that would provide a system of collective security for all nations, the foundation of the League of Nations. An auspicious beginning for 1918, establishing a world changing doctrine in what truly has been the war that changed the world. The same week, episode number 54, A Century in the Making with Sabin Howard. For 2018, we're introducing a new segment. It's called, "A Century in the Making, America's WW1 Memorial in Washington DC." As a regular listener, you know that we're building a National WW1 Memorial at Pershing Park in the nation's capital. It's a big project that's complicated, it's hard and it's been a long time coming. Over the coming weeks, we're going to be bringing you along on an insider's journey that explores this grand undertaking and adventure. The centerpiece of the memorial, located in this urban park just two blocks from the White House, is planned as a massive bronze bas-relief sculpture that tells the story of both the human and the national experience of the war that changed the world. Joe Weishaar, our brilliant young visionary, who won the international design competition for this memorial, brought in an incredibly talented artist and sculptor onto his team, Sabin Howard, a traditionally trained, modern classicist sculptor. Sabin has taken on the challenge of telling the American WWI story at scale, in bronze and for posterity. We're going to kick off this series with an interesting story about how Sabin, the traditionalist, has gotten hooked up with Richard Taylor, a tech visionary who has helped Directors Peter Jackson and James Cameron manifest their visions for Lord of the Rings and Avatar. Welcome, Sabin.

[0:06:54]

**Sabin Howard:** Thank you. Thank you for having me on today,

[0:06:57]

**Theo Mayer:** Sabin, you're a traditionally trained sculptor, a modern classicist. You work with the human form in a very traditional way. But for this project, you're combining classic sculpture with some very high tech. How did that happen, and how are you using cutting edge technology in creating this master work for America?

[0:07:17]

**Sabin Howard:** The universe lined up for me in a really fantastic way. I had a email in April from Richard Taylor, who was coming to New York City to be at the opening for Ghost In The Shell. That's a movie that he was part of and Richard Taylor, owns Weta Workshop, which is in New Zealand, in Wellington. That's 9,000 miles away and he is a big sculpture aficionado. I got this email saying, "I've been following your work for many years. Would it be possible for me to arrange for a studio visit?" I was kind of blown away because this is a man who worked with Peter Jackson. They were partners and did Lord of the Rings. They do all the Avatar movies. They're the people doing the digital stuff that creates the scenery, props and all the things that make up the visuals of movies. He arrived at my studio on a really rainy, it was pouring, with two of his people and I opened the door and they were completely blown away because I guess what I do is kind of ... It's like stepping into the past because for, jeez, since the 90s, I've been running a studio making classical figures and sculptures that are reminiscent of the work that the Greeks did like with Hellenistic bronzes and then, the Renaissance, which is in Florence. That's the tradition that I'd always been working in. That's where the launch off point was and he came in. He saw the drawing that I had done for the Commission of Fine Arts and said, "You know what, I just did this National Memorial for New Zealand that they're showing at the Te Papa Museum in Wellington and it's called, "Scale of our Wars. You're working exactly the same we are, where you're working with live models, you're taking photographs and you're recreating what WWI looked like. This is amazing." I'm quoting it. Then, we got talking for three hours and he said, "Listen, why don't you come to New Zealand? I have some technology that will really help you get through this project in a way that is timely and you're not going to lose any of the quality of your sculpture," which is museum quality. That's what I've always aspired and strived for. I go home and I'm a little shocked because frankly, New Zealand is not on my radar and I bought a plane ticket. Two weeks later, I'm on the plane landing in Wellington. That's where the launch off started, realizing, "Wow, this is what I have to do. I have to bring this process to modern day way of executing it because time is of the essence and came back to the States in May and proceeded to get this thing arranged, so that I could go back in, I guess it was, July. In July through, I just landed in December the 21st, I've been there, sculpting the 9-foot long sculpture maquette that I will present to the Commission of Fine Arts on February 15th.

[0:10:52]

**Theo Mayer:** That was the first installment of A Century in the Making, America's WW1 Memorial in Washington DC. Next week, Sabin's going to tell us about how he's integrating his traditional sketch and play sculpture process with 3D imaging, programmable milling and additive manufacturing technologies to literally cut years into months for the test and iterate and retest process in creating a maquette, a 9-foot manifestation of the sculpture. March 2nd, episode number 61. March 1917 preview round table with Dr. Edward Lengel and Katherine Akey and myself. Last month we did an experiment. Dr. Edward Lengel, Katherine and I sat down, as we often do in our editorial meetings, and talked about the upcoming month of February. We got great feedback from you so we are going to do it again, here at the top of March. I put a sidecar on our Centennial time machine, so we'd all fit as we roll back 100 years to the war that changed the world. Guys, I understand that this is our last chance to take a breather. Starting this month, the action gets pretty hot and heavy with the Germans getting ready for their big Spring Offensive. Katherine, you used the term Kaiserschlacht or Emperor's Strike. Is that the same thing as the Spring Offensive?

[0:12:28]

**Katherine Akey:** Yeah. It is the same thing. It's just what the Germans happen to call it. This happens a lot throughout the war. There are a lot of offensives that get called battles like the Battle of Verdun. We have a lot of different countries and a lot of different combatants and so things get called different names and it can be really confusing but the 1918 Spring Offensive, the Kaiserschlacht, also known as the Ludendorff Offensive, all the same thing. It's a big offensive that stretches over several months and is made up of four or five big main attacks.

[0:13:04]

**Theo Mayer:** This is going to go on for months going forward. Can you give us an overview and what the Germans have in mind?

[0:13:10]

**Edward Lengel:** The important thing to remember, Theo, is what they're not trying to do and they're not trying to capture Paris despite all the legend that developed over the years about their 1918 offensive. What they're really try to do is first and foremost, to split the British and French armies. The British are in the North of France and then Flanders and Belgium and the French are to the South. They're trying to split them and they're trying to drive the British back toward the channel coast, so that they will evacuate back to England and in an early preview of Dunkirk. Then, they expected that they would be able to wipe out the French at their leisure. All the subsidiary offenses later on were pretty much bent toward the same objective.

[0:13:58]

**Theo Mayer:** Is this going to start in March or is it going to start in April?

[0:14:02]

**Edward Lengel:** It's going to start in March 21st. There is the first operation Michael and then, there is a subsequent offensive at the beginning of April and then, a few more toward the spring and the summer. The final German offensive takes place along the Marne River on July 15th and that's where American troops come in, a third division to play a major role in stopping that last German strike.

[0:14:31]

**Theo Mayer:** Katherine, you had said earlier that there were five major offensives or was it four?

[0:14:35]

**Katherine Akey:** There's Michael, Georgette, Blücher-Yorck, Gneisenau and then the last one, the Marneschutz-Reims/Friedensturm. Of course, again, these all have slightly different names.

[0:14:48]

**Edward Lengel:** Should've pronounced that.

[0:14:48]

**Katherine Akey:** Yeah. My German's not great. Operation Michael's usually called that. That's the first one that hits on the 21st of March. Georgette is sometimes called the Battle of the Lys. The Blücher-Yorck is called the Third Battle of the Aisne and then, there's two more after that. But that last one is the second Battle of the Marne that Ed was just speaking about.

[0:15:10]

**Theo Mayer:** A quick change of subject. As we get into the military action, we keep throwing around all these names. Military formations like divisions and corps and regiments and brigades and I'll wager that 80% of the people who listen to the show have no idea what that means. Then, we can do an overview. I know we sent over a Field Army. That's it. That's the American Expeditionary Forces. We sent over an army. Ed, can you break it down for us sort of big to small and tell us about how many soldiers in each of these various formations?

[0:15:39]

**Edward Lengel:** Let's keep one principle in mind for all of our listeners. These American formations are really big. They're extremely big. They're about twice the size of their European counterparts. The American first army is formed in August of 1918. The basic American unit is the division and they call these square divisions. Again, they're monstrously large. They were about 28,000 officers and men. Plus about 12,000 support personnel, so you're talking 40,000 man divisions. Each division has two brigades and each brigade has two regiments, including artillery engineers, machine gun units and other support troops. Each regiment is roughly about 4,000 officers and men and each regiment contains 3 battalions plus a machine gun company. The battalions have 4 companies of about 250 officers and men plus supports personnel. That's the breakdown. But again, these are just huge units.

[0:16:58]

**Theo Mayer:** Was that a structure that they rejiggered or reinvented for WWI? We didn't have a giant standing army. I imagine that they sort of had to invent this as they went along.

[0:17:07]

**Edward Lengel:** Yeah. Much of this was Pershing's idea. He thought that by creating these, what he called blockbuster divisions, that he would be able to build units that would have greater staying power on the Western front that they would stay on the line longer, that they would be able to grind down enemy divisions and so, combat fatigue will become a major problem because of this.

[0:17:33]

**Theo Mayer:** Do we have some kind of sense of the scale and how it built?

[0:17:36]

**Katherine Akey:** We're sort of looking at this like a war that's going to go on another three years, not another six months. We're building up but that's not necessarily, we don't have the timeline in our minds in 1918 that we would be done within that calendar year. The Allied Forces surpassed the Germans in rifle strength as one figure that I've seen. In late June, coming into July that now, there's more Allied forces than German forces on the Western front.

[0:18:10]

**Theo Mayer:** Was that a real tipping point Ed.

[0:18:12]

**Edward Lengel:** By the time you get to spring in May, there are probably about 10 American divisions that are ready to go and the build up really escalates after that. More and more American divisions start arriving in France and in Flanders toward the late spring and early summer of 1918 and tip the balance in terms of rifle strength much of that as a result of how many American divisions they're training behind the lines, how many the British and French have been able to move those American divisions off to quiet sectors and then, the British and French can redeploy their own high quality divisions toward the more important sectors of the front. It is vastly accelerating by the late spring and early summer of 1918.

[0:19:04]

**Theo Mayer:** Ed, remind us again of how many people approximately in an American division?

[0:19:08]

**Edward Lengel:** About 40,000.

[0:19:10]

**Theo Mayer:** Katherine, you were talking to me earlier about a book that you use as a reference. What is that?

[0:19:16]

**Katherine Akey:** Ernst Jünger's *Storm of Steel*, which both sort of cover this battle in particular, not just the Kaiserslacht, but this first operation in March. I would say March 21st, I know that the sun looms large in the memory of the British forces in WWI but March 21st was a really bad day for them. It was super foggy and the Germans are so hyped. I think we so often, being part of the Allied forces as Americans, we forget the German perspective on the war. Ernst Jünger describes them ripping off their coats because they're boiling hot running through the fog and they run through the fog past the British lines and they only realize once they start hitting the artillery lines that they've gone past the British front lines and turned around and start attacking the British from both in front of their lines and behind them. The British, because of the fog, don't notice this at first, so it's absolute chaos for the British.

[0:20:20]

**Edward Lengel:** That's an incredible book, *Storm of Steel*.

[0:20:23]

**Katherine Akey:** Yeah.

[0:20:23]

**Edward Lengel:** I would just add to that, one of the things Jünger shows very well is that the Germans had developed these infiltration or storm troop tactics that they used to break into the gaps and the British lines and surround them and cut off troops at the front. It was very effective.

[0:20:42]

**Theo Mayer:** Pershing needs to integrate with the French and the British command. How does all that lay out and how do we see that evolving over the next month and couple of months?

[0:20:52]

**Edward Lengel:** President Woodrow Wilson and his Secretary of War, Newton Baker, have been telling Pershing for some time that his objective is to create independent American armies on the Western front under solely American command. Pershing has been carrying out that task very effectively. He's an exceptionally stubborn man. When the British and French try to get him to agree to amalgamation into their units, he simply refuses to agree.

[0:21:20]

**Theo Mayer:** Let me insert that. The reason that was so important to Baker and Wilson is because they were setting up for their seat at Versailles.

[0:21:29]

**Edward Lengel:** That's quite true and Pershing has that in mind as well. One of Pershing's qualities is he was a very good political general. The French and British have become so desperate that Pershing has no choice but to accept compromise and to agree to begin sending American units to the front under French and British command. You will find American units through the spring and summer integrated into French and British units, but not amalgamated.

They're not putting on French and British uniforms but they are fighting under French and British officers. This is a way to get them to the front more quickly than they otherwise would've done and to give them an opportunity to learn.

[0:22:11]

**Theo Mayer:** Katherine, are there any other major stories that you're aware of that we should get ready for this coming month?

[0:22:17]

**Katherine Akey:** Yeah. The first recorded of the flu come out of Kansas in mid-March. At least, that's when a doctor in Kansas city at one of the military hospitals sort of goes, "This is not a normal flu. This is a really bad one and he starts getting kind of nervous about it." It's the start of something that's going to kill more men than the war did.

[0:22:48]

**Theo Mayer:** In the same episode number 61, the fighting in Russia with Mike Shuster. Now, onto The Great War project with Mike Shuster, former NPR correspondent and curator for The Great War Project blog. Mike, so the Russians stopped fighting the Germans, but now, the Russians seem to be fighting each other or the Germans are still fighting with them or I don't know, what's going on?

[0:23:13]

**Mike Shuster:** Actually, Theo, everybody seems to be fighting everybody. But for our headlines this week, Lenin declares establishment of Soviet Union, fighting resumes for Ukraine, Russia losing all its territory and this is special to The Great War Project. Russia may have pulled out of the war on the Eastern front, but that hasn't stopped the fighting there. Russia, under the Bolsheviks believed Ukraine is part of Russia and they are willing to fight for it. In January a century ago, Lenin's forces according to a story in Martin Gilbert, enter Ukraine and declare the triumph of Bolshevism there. Fighting breaks out between Russian forces and Ukrainian nationalists at Lutsk in North-western Ukraine. On January 29th, Lenin's forces enter Kiev and Odessa, both in Ukrainian territory. Two days later, Gilbert writes, "With Ukraine falling rapidly under Bolshevik rule, Lenin established the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, the USSR, also known as the Soviet Union." This was followed within two weeks by the creation first of the Red Army and then, the Red Army. Soon after that, Lenin and Trotsky realized they must quickly lead Russia formally out of the war if the government they are establishing will retain any territory at all. There have been long drawn out negotiations between the Germans and Bolsheviks forces at Brest-Litovsk on the Russian border with Poland. But in early February a century ago, the talks break down because the Germans are pressing the Russians under Lenin and Trotsky to accept terms, the loss of territory, they simply cannot accept. The Germans are planning to resume the war against Russia and Lenin and Trotsky realize it. Tomorrow, the German Commander, General Max Hoffmann writes, "We are going to start hostilities against the Bolsheviks. No other way out is possible." "Otherwise," he writes, "these brutes will wipe up the Ukrainians, the Finns, and the Balts, and then quickly get together a new revolutionary army and turn the whole of Europe into a pigsty." The war with Russia resumes. Lenin quickly understands the Bolsheviks cannot win. Lenin and Trotsky inform General Hoffmann they will sign any terms the Germans demand. Delay is impossible. Lenin writes, "We must sign at once." But now, the Germans are in no mood to accept the Russian surrender. They see the terrible state of the Russian army. German troops enter Minsk on Russian's Western border and the German General declares, "The Russian army is more rotten than I had supposed. There's no fight left in them. Yesterday, one Lieutenant with six men took 600 Cossacks prisoner." The Germans sees the roads and railways. In four days, they advance 150 miles, writes the German General, "This is the most comical war I've ever known. We put a handful of infantry men with machine guns and one gun on a train and pushed them off to the next station. They take it, like prisoners of the Bolsheviks, pick up a few more troops and go on," reports the story and Gilbert, "The Germans knew that the territorial integrity of Russia was disintegrating, even faster than could've been anticipated." That's the story from The Great War Project this week, 100 years ago.

[0:26:21]

**Theo Mayer:** Mike Shuster from The Great War Project blog. March 9, episode number 63. Alvin York's crisis of conscience with Dr. Edward Lengel. For the war on the ground, here is this week's segment of America Emerges: Military Stories from WWI with Dr. Edward Lengel. Ed, this week your story is about one of the best known soldier heroes of WWI and his truly profound crisis of conscience in entering his military service. Who was he and what's his story?

[0:27:01]

**Edward Lengel:** Sometimes the act of one man can change everything. 100 years ago, this month in March of 1918, Alvin York made a decision that changed his life. York was from up country Fentress County, Tennessee along the Tennessee-Kentucky border, a very beautiful region, but also, in these times, a very isolated part of the country. The settlers up there were Scotts, Irish folks. They were dirt poor farmers, who worked hard and lived tough lives. York had had a tough upbringing. He had experienced the problems of alcoholism and violence and a couple of years before the war, he converted to a Bible-believing Christian church and changed his life, but he wanted to follow this

new faith as carefully and as truly as he possibly could. When the United States entered the war in April 1917 and now, when York learned that he had been drafted, it created a crisis of conscience for him because he couldn't make up his mind, whether God would permit him to fight in a war and potentially to kill his fellow man and he sought conscientious objective status but he was denied. He was assigned in February of 1918 to go as a private to Camp Gordon, Georgia for service with the 82nd All-American Division, which was a draftee division. The name was ironic because although it was made of men originally recruited from Southern States. Shortly before it went to Europe, an infusion of men from major cities on the East Coast of the United States, who were themselves the immigrants or sons of immigrants from places like Russia and Italy and Poland and Germany, entered the division. Some of these men were not even naturalized American citizens, so it was a very unusual formation and York enjoyed getting to know these men. York's officers saw him as the ideal soldier. He was obedient, he understood the military life, he was tough, he was strong and he was a crack shot, who was used to working with a rifle. But he just couldn't make up his mind, whether he could agree to go off and fight. If indeed he refused to go off and fight, he might well have been jailed and his reputation and his future would've been ruined. Alvin York, in March of 1918, goes to his officers, a Captain E.C.B. Danforth and a Major Edward Buxton, to discuss with them this whole question of whether it's right to fight. They were Christians like him and they read and they discussed the Bible and finally, his Captain, Danforth asked York, "Are you willing to fight?" York said, "I'll fight if I have to, but I wish you would tell me what this war is about." Well, Danforth explained as best he could, as did Buxton, but it still wasn't quite enough for York. York went back to barracks in Camp Gordon. He had trouble getting along with some of his fellow soldiers, even though they were draftees. They felt it was their duty to fight. They were fed up with York for being hesitant about whether he would fight. But one of his erstwhile friends, who was a former Irish bartender even threatened to kill York if he kept talking about not wanting to fight. On March 21st, 1918, which is ironically, the same day the Germans launched the first of their major offenses on the Western front, Alvin York gets a 10-day leave of absence and he gets this leave, so that he can go home to East Tennessee, go up in the mountains, talk with his family, talk with his minister and pray and try to figure out what he wants to do. We know somewhere up in those mountains, he came to a decision. He later called it a, "Peace which passeth all understanding," that he would indeed go to war and fight. This would certainly change his life. It would change the future of the United States military and it would have a huge impact in a battle in the Argonne Forest in October of 1918, where Alvin York would later perform an act of valor for which he would receive a medal of honor.

**[0:31:35]**

**Theo Mayer:** Thank you Ed. Before we close, I have to ask you something that struck me when hearing this account. When Alvin York asked his Captain and his battalion commander, "I wish you could tell me what this war is about," I know we don't have a record of what they actually said, but as a historian, how might these military guys have responded? What was the common wisdom and answer to a question like that at the time?

**[0:31:58]**

**Edward Lengel:** Well, one thing we know that would not have worked would be to try to talk with York about unrestricted submarine warfare. That wouldn't have meant anything to him. Although as you say, we don't quite know what his captain did say, it's pretty certain he would have talked about the importance of democracy and the importance of freedom and how the United States had entered this war to try to help ensure that democracy would flourish in the world in the future and that American freedoms would be protected. They also probably would've said that ultimately, you're fighting for your own family and you're fighting for your own home and for the people of East Tennessee, for whom freedom is really so important. It's wrapped up in their heritage. I think that would've resonated with Alvin York.

**[0:32:46]**

**Theo Mayer:** Ed, thank you very much. What are you going to talk about next week?

**[0:32:50]**

**Edward Lengel:** I will be talking about the first American National Guard Division to reach act of service on the Western front and that was the 26th Yankee Division that went onto the Western front about this time 100 years ago and encountered some very bizarre rats that actually proved to help to them in the front line.

**[0:33:17]**

**Theo Mayer:** April 4, episode number 66, War in The Sky, PTSD among the Pilots with Mark Wilkins. This week for War in the Sky, we're turning inward to look at the psychological challenges for those daring and do warriors in the sky during WWI. Joining us is Mark Wilkins, historian, writer, museum professional, and lecturer. Mark is the author of a recently published article in the Smithsonian Air and Space magazine called The Dark Side of Glory: An early glimpse of PTSD in the letters of World War I aces. Welcome to the podcast, Mark.

**[0:33:56]**

**Mark Wilkins:** Thank you. Glad to be here.

[0:33:58]

**Theo Mayer:** Mark, to start with, how did you get the trove of letters you used for your research?

[0:34:03]

**Mark Wilkins:** Well, research as you know, is a treasure hunt. It's intuitive and sometimes information is found in the most unlikely places. That being said, there's some recent books that have collections of pilots' letters. University and national archives are another great source, as are our aviation museums or war museums like the Imperial War Museum in London, local historical societies, sometimes relatives of the pilots, also online newspaper and periodical archives are another fabulous source of information.

[0:34:31]

**Theo Mayer:** Mark, about how many letters do you think you went through to start to do your research?

[0:34:36]

**Mark Wilkins:** Too many to count. Many, many, many, many, many letters, yes.

[0:34:42]

**Theo Mayer:** In WWI, malady was equated with physical issues, but your article deals with the psychological stresses of the pilots' experience. Last year, we were telling stories about soldiers being executed for shell shock on charges of cowardice.

[0:34:55]

**Mark Wilkins:** Yup.

[0:34:56]

**Theo Mayer:** How did that play out for the pilots?

[0:34:57]

**Mark Wilkins:** Well, the field of aviation psychology so-called evolved symbiotically with the war. Psychiatrists were initially split about the causation of shell shock for example. Some thought it was a purely physical phenomenon, where as others thought it was psychological and this began a debate that actually didn't conclude until around, I think, 1922. The military only opted for the latter definition that it was psychological because this allowed them to either be returned to the trenches or the cockpit. This was important because with the epic casualty that was mounting, they really needed every man. I'm not aware of any pilot being shot for cowardice. Although when cowardice was observed, the attending pilot was severely reprimanded or transferred. You have to remember, they're trying to build these guys up as basically rock stars. The trench warfare was not going well and these guys who flew these sort of one-on-one jousting the skies, I mean, this was something that gave the men in the trenches hope, so they didn't want their image tarnished. Many internalized this struggle. In the British squadrons, it was understood that you kept sort of a sunny disposition in front of the men but you could privately go to pieces.

[0:35:58]

**Theo Mayer:** Well, you know, the stress on these aces actually makes a lot of sense. If you were an Ace, you flew a lot and the mortality rate of your buddies is off the chart. You don't have like you do on the trench, you've got the courage of the guy to your left and the guy to your right to bolster you, but this is kind of a white knuckle, cold sweat, daily solo experience. Sounds like traumatic stress is inevitable. How common was it?

[0:36:21]

**Mark Wilkins:** Among those who talked about it, you have to remember that many didn't, it was very common. Elliott White Springs, who was an American who flew for the RFC, the Royal Flying Corps in the 85th and 148th squadron basically said, "It's only a question of time until we all get it. I'm all shocked to pieces. My nerves are all gone and I can't stop. Few men live to know what real fear is. It's something that grows on you day by day, that eats into your constitution, that undermines your sanity." Let me give you another example. Squadron Leader Cecil Lewis, wrote, "I realized, not then, but later, why pilots cracked up, why they lost their nerve and had to go home. Nobody could stand the strain indefinitely. Ultimately, it reduced you to a dithering state, near to imbecility. They sent you home to rest. They put it in the background of your mind, but it was not like a bodily fatigue from which you could recover. It was a sort of damage to the essential tissue of your being. And never, once you have been through it, could you be quite the same again."

[0:37:12]

**Theo Mayer:** Mark, after immersing yourself in all of this, can you give us one example of what your biggest take away is from this?

**[0:37:19]**

**Mark Wilkins:** Well, it's a complex notion. It was a bittersweet experience to find easy explanation or quantification. From Arthur Gould Lee, Lee after the war reflecting, he goes back to the Western front and he's standing by the corner of a chateau and he says, "In the sunshine, by the waving grain, with everything now at peace, I remember them and was filled with a heavy sense of loneliness. I knew that although I had not been killed, something in me had. Something had gone out of me and was buried and would always be buried in a hundred cemeteries in France and in England along with the companions of my youth, who had died that our country might live."

**[0:37:55]**

**Theo Mayer:** We just had a great question come in from our live audience. Frank Krone wants to know did Richthofen, Germany's Red Baron, appear to suffer from PTSD?

**[0:38:05]**

**Mark Wilkins:** Yes, he did. He was a fearless pilot but he was wounded in the head. He had suffered a head wound and after that, he changed. He became a little more cautious, a little more protective of his pilots. He basically realized that mortality was something that could happen to him. The problem is, we can only deduce what happened based on the letters that many of these guys wrote and Red Baron, even though he wrote an autobiography, he doesn't really talk about much of that stuff. His mother basically is the one who commented on his condition that his temperament had changed after he was wounded.

**[0:38:36]**

**Theo Mayer:** Last December we had filmmaker, Darroch Greer, on the show about his upcoming film, about The Lafayette Escadrille doing a documentary. You're involved in that project, aren't you?

**[0:38:46]**

**Mark Wilkins:** That's right. I'm the producer of aerial effects and the historical consultant for the film. Basically, as a producer for aerial effects, I line up venues for shoots with the aircraft I'd mentioned. We did one at the Golden Age Air Museum filming replica Nieuport 17s and a German two-seater and simulated patrol and dog fight segments. In addition, I built a few large scale, actually radio-controlled models. These will stand in for what we can't do with full-scale aircraft. As historical consultant for the film, I'm helping out with historical big picture aspects. One of the trick with this is to locate it within the greater framework of the war, so the viewer not only sees this particular story in great detail but is also able to see where it fits within the big picture, the major battles and political trends of the war.

**[0:39:26]**

**Theo Mayer:** You've got a book coming out. Can you tell us about it and when it's coming out?

**[0:39:30]**

**Mark Wilkins:** It's basically the article in expanded format. It chronicles the rise of military aviation, nationalism and technology during the late 19th, 20th century, the rise of the ace phenomenon, aviation psychiatry and finally includes six case studies that illustrate different ways men dealt with psychological impact of combat flying. It will be out in January of 2019, being published by Pen and Sword in the United Kingdom.

**[0:39:52]**

**Theo Mayer:** Thank you for coming on the show and giving us the story and the article.

**[0:39:56]**

**Mark Wilkins:** Well, thank you for having me.

**[0:39:57]**

**Theo Mayer:** Mark Wilkins is a historian, writer, museum professional, and historical aeronautics expert. May 4, episode number 70, the big influenza pandemic with Kenneth C. Davis. This week for remembering veterans, we're turning our attention away from the battlefield and looking at a phenomena that took more lives than the bullets and shells. With us to explore the story of the flu pandemic 100 years ago, is Kenneth C. Davis, bestselling author of the I Don't Know Much About book series. In fact, during our editorial meeting, when we were discussing the interview, our intern, John, enthused that these books were on his shelf as he was growing up. Well, Kenneth's new book is coming out on May 15th and it's called, More Deadly Than War: The Hidden History of the Spanish Flu and the First World War. A fascinating subject by a wonderful author. Kenneth, welcome to the podcast.

**[0:40:59]**

**Kenneth Davis:** It is a great pleasure to be with you. Thanks so much for having me.

[0:41:02]

**Theo Mayer:** Ken, lets start with the name of this flu pandemic. Patient Zero wasn't in Spain, were they?

[0:41:08]

**Kenneth Davis:** No. The Spanish flu was not Spanish. The Spanish flu as it was known, mostly in England and America, the truth is we don't really know even to this date where it originated. Of course, it had other names in different parts of the world. Everyone seems to want to blame someone else for it. The Russians called it the German test, Blacks in South Africa called it the White disease, Whites called it the Black disease. It's an interesting phenomenon. But the Spanish flu came from the idea that Spain was a neutral nation during the war. Its newspapers were not censored, unlike those of most of the Allies, which didn't want to report bad news like flu pandemics. When the Spanish press reported that the King of Spain and many other Spanish people were down with the flu, the name was attached just about 100 years ago. It happened in May of 1918. By that time, American soldiers who were certainly carrying the virus were landing in France in large numbers and they most certainly were responsible for the widespread nature of the flu coming 100 years ago.

[0:42:24]

**Theo Mayer:** How big and bad was it? I mean, I've heard varying numbers but whatever they were, what I've heard is staggering in scale.

[0:42:30]

**Kenneth Davis:** They are staggering numbers. Right now, the estimates are up to about 100 million people dead worldwide. That includes 18.5 to 20 million in India alone. That's an extraordinary number by itself. It was also 5% of the world population at that time. In the United States, the numbers are now as high in terms of estimates as 675,000 Americans dying. The population of the United States was about a third of what it is today. To try and project those numbers out would be staggering and it was completely related to the war in so many ways. The flu spread rapidly in the army camps, the camp convents as they were called, where young men were preparing to go to the trenches of yore.

[0:43:22]

**Theo Mayer:** One question, Ken. Why was it so especially deadly?

[0:43:26]

**Kenneth Davis:** Well, what was unusual about this flu was that it was killing young people, young men in particular in the training camps so rapidly and so violently. It is this idea that their immune systems were so powerful and attacked these mutant's virus so powerfully that that was the reason the level of mortality was so high. There are reports that sound like apocalypse now. One doctor in New York City reported in fact that there were thousands of people coming in, they were spitting blood and they were blue with huckleberry. It's an astonishing image to think about. This was the most deadly pandemic in modern history and probably the most deadly pandemic after the Black Death of the middle ages and it struck with such suddenness. That's what made it so extraordinary. Because of the war, it went around the world so quickly. It certainly may have had an impact on the outcome of the conflict to some degree. There's discussion for instance that the German offensive in the spring and early summer of 1918 was halted because half a million German soldiers were sick with the flu. Certainly affected the morale of the German people. They were already on their extreme duress because of the economic quarantine and there were half a million sick in Germany with the flu.

[0:44:51]

**Theo Mayer:** Interesting. When I was speaking with Katherine during our editorial meeting, one of the things that she had wondered was, there was so much progress in medicine at the time in other areas, how did medicine react to this in particular or didn't they?

[0:45:05]

**Kenneth Davis:** Well, they were certainly trying. They were doing everything possible. They knew that more soldiers died from disease and related problems than from actual battlefield wounds, but they didn't really have the medical wherewithal at that point. A virus was still unknown and really unseen. The word virus existed. People knew what flu was and what the symptoms were but they didn't know it was caused by a virus. Viruses had never been seen because they are much smaller than bacteria, which had been seen. There was very little medically in the terms of what was in the doctor's kit at the time to deal with flu. Even today, we say, there's no cure for the common cold. There certainly wasn't back then. All they had was aspirin. When the flu hit in America, because we were in the midst of the war, a lot of people were convinced that it was a German plan, German plot somehow that U-boats had poisoned the water or that German spies were pitting germs in the movie theaters. There was even a suggestion that aspirin was tainted because Bayer was a German company.

**[0:46:16]**

**Theo Mayer:** Well, as a closing question, do you think that this deadly global event still echoes around today?

**[0:46:22]**

**Kenneth Davis:** Oh, absolutely and that's one of the reasons that I wrote this book. I was just talking about the fear and the propaganda that grow some of the reactions to the Spanish flu 100 years ago and I think that we can see some of those things today, when we dismiss science for instance or we dismiss what is sound medical advice. Woodrow Wilson and General Pershing certainly dismissed sound medical advice. They were told to quarantine some of the camps. They did not and that probably helped spread this very, very virulent, violent and lethal disease.

**[0:46:58]**

**Theo Mayer:** Well Ken, thank you so much for coming in and speaking with us today. A really fascinating subject.

**[0:47:03]**

**Kenneth Davis:** Thank you.

**[0:47:04]**

**Theo Mayer:** Kenneth C. Davis is the bestselling author of the Don't Know Much About Book series. Don't miss his upcoming *More Deadly Than War: The Hidden History of the Spanish Flu and the First World War*, which will be available from your favorite bookseller, May 15. In the same show, episode number 70, *War in the Sky*, the story of Eddie Rickenbacker. It's a changing of the guard for the *War in the Sky* over Europe 100 years ago this April and May. In April 1918, Germany's Manfred von Richthofen falls and in May, America's, Raoul Lufbery. One of the new names that rises among the ashes is that of a Columbus, Ohio native. Every bit as much of a flamboyant character as the early fliers. Before joining the service, he was a famed race car driver, who set a land speed record at Daytona of 134 miles an hour. A tough guy, technically too old to be accepted into flight school and a guy who claimed he was afraid of heights. His name was Eddie Rickenbacker. Born the oldest son of 5 siblings in 1890, young Eddie had to step up and become the major family breadwinner, quitting school at only 12 years old, when his father died in a construction accident. A tough beginning for what would turn out to be quite a guy. Having developed a passion for the new technology of the internal combustion engine, by 16, he'd landed a job with a race car driver named Lee Frayer, who liked the scrawny, scrappy kid and let him ride in major races as his mechanic. By 1912, the young 22-year-old was driving his own races and winning and crashing and surviving. When war broke out in 1917, Rickenbacker volunteered. But at 27 years old, he was already too old to get accepted to flight school, something the speed demon really wanted to do. Because he had a reputation as a race car driver, he was enlisted as a sergeant and sailed to Europe as a driver. Now, there's a lot of lore that he drove John J. Pershing, but generally, that's disputed. However, he did get an assignment to drive Billy Mitchell's flashy twin-six-cylinder Packard and talked himself into flight school through the boss. His WWI flying exploits are legendary and the kid from Ohio came home a national hero. But, that was just the beginning of a colorful life for a scrappy and scrawny kid, turned Ace of Aces, airline president, famed raft survivor of a plane ditching in the Pacific during WWII, potential presidential candidate, who lived large and in full living color, and finally died in 1973 at the age 83 having launched his career as a WWI fighter pilot in the war in sky 100 years ago this week. That wraps up episode number 103, our WWI Centennial News New Year Special, our favorite segments of 2018 part one. Join us next week for part two and Happy New Year to all of you from the entire WWI Centennial News podcast team. I'm Theo Mayer, your producer and host. The US World War I Centennial Commission was created by Congress to honor, commemorate and educate about WWI. For the past nearly five years, we've inspired a national conversation and awareness about WWI. We brought the lessons of 100 years ago to today's educators and to classrooms. We've helped to restore WWI memorials in communities of all sizes across the country and now, we'll be putting our focus and attention on one more core goal. We and with your help are going to build America's National WWI Memorial in Washington DC. See [ww1cc.org/memorial](http://ww1cc.org/memorial) for all the details. We want to thank the commission's founding sponsor, the Pritzker Military Museum and Library, and also the Starr Foundation for their support. The podcast and the full transcript of the show can be found on our website at [ww1cc.org/cn](http://ww1cc.org/cn). You'll find WW1 Centennial News in all the places that you get your podcasts and even using your smart speaker by saying, "Play WW1 Centennial News Podcast." The podcast Twitter handle is @TheWW1podcast. The Commission's Twitter and Instagram handles are both @ww1cc and we're on Facebook at ww1centennial. Thank you for joining us and don't forget, keep the story of WWI alive in America by helping us build the National WWI Memorial in Washington DC. Just text the letters, WWI or WW1 to the phone number 91999 and thank you. By popular demand, our closing music for this episode is an excerpt from the popular WWI [inaudible] K-K-K-Katy. (singing) Thank you. So long.

**[0:52:54]**