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8 speakers (Theo Mayer, Mike Shuster, James Carl N., Dr. Edward L., Alain Dupuis, Dr. Alexis C., Susi Adler, Speaker 9)

[0:00:07]

Theo Mayer: Welcome to World War I Centennial News, episode number 119. It's about then. What was happening 100 years ago, in the aftermath of World War I? And it's about now. How World War I is being remembered and commemorated, written about and discussed, learned and taught. But most of all, it's about why and how, we'll never let those events fall back into the mists of obscurity. Join us, as we explore the many facets of World War I both then and now. This week on the show, we explore the headlines of the newspapers 100 years ago, in the fourth week of April. Mike Shuster takes us to Versailles in early May of 1919, as the Germans receive the allied dictates. We're going to meet the 339th Regiment, known as the Polar Bears, with Author James Carl Nelson. Dr. Edward Lengel continues his top 10 countdown, of personal accounts from World War I. This week British Veteran Charles Carrington and his Memoir, *The Subaltern's War*. In commission news, coming up on 2019 Fleet Week in New York, we profile the May 2nd commemorative event at Cyprus Hill's National Cemetery in Brooklyn, and we're joined by Alain Dupuis, the President of the Federation of French War Veterans. For updates from the States, we'll speak with Susi Adler. A member of the Minnesota World War Centennial Committee, who has created and continues to curate a Facebook page called, *Minnesotans Remembered*. Then, for remembering veterans, we speak with the US Navy History and Heritage Command. And, marine archaeologist Dr. Alexis Casambus, exploring the USS San Diego sinking in World War I. All that and more, this week on World War I Centennial News, which is brought to by: the US World War I Centennial Commission, The Pritzker Military Museum & Library, The Starr Foundation, The Diana Davis Spencer Foundation, and The Richard Lounsbery Foundation. I'm Theo Mayer, the chief technologist for the commission, and your host. Welcome to the show. This week 100 years ago, the front page headlines are filled with the events of the Paris Peace Conference. A lot of it the continuation of the arguments back and forth, about the key issues that we've laid out over the previous weeks. So, we thought that we would zoom in on two fascinating facets related, but not at the top of the news. Two nations allied with us in World War I, both clearly frustrated with their treatment in Paris, and both 25 years later allied with the Nazis in World War II. Now with that as a setup, let's jump into our Centennial time machine and go back 100 years ago this week, to look at some of the headlines of the day. We're back in the third week of April 1919. Our first track, is following a sequence of stories this week about the Italians. It starts on Monday, April 21st. As you may remember, there's been an ongoing controversy about Italian territory. Let's examine that. Think of the Italian boot. On the bottom, on the toe side, is the Mediterranean. On the back half, is the Adriatic Sea. And, way up, on the back of the thigh, keeping the boot analogy going, is Venice, and coming around to what is now modern Slovenia and Croatia is an area that was known as Fiume. It's a great port, and Italy claims she made a deal with the Allies early on in the war. So, as far as she's concerned, the territory is hers. But American president Woodrow Wilson, with one of his 14 points being, "No secret deals, only open transparent treaties," well, he digs in his heels opposing them. **Headline: Wilson Withdraws From the Fiume Discussion; Other Leaders Try to Solve the Adriatic Difficulties.** Foreign Minister Sonnino especially insists on extreme demands on Adriatic, refuses to divide Fiume. Prime Minister Orlando is more conciliatory, but is spurred on by army chief's ultimatum. The feelings in Italy run high. Military general said to have ordered the withdrawal of all Americans in uniform. The very next day on Tuesday, April 22nd, the discussion continues. **Headline: Council of Four is Deadlocked on Adriatic Question; Italians Stay Out of Session, But Wilson Attends.** Wilson attitude firm, he is irrevocably opposed to recognizing Treaty of London. Delegates back Wilson. President not attending morning session, has long conference with them. And then, on Wednesday. **Headline: Italy Shows a Disposition to Abate Her Adriatic Claims; Italy stands Firm for Fiume.** But may consent to give up Dalmatian Hinterlands. Private parleys continue, Orlando arranges a meeting with Lloyd George to seek plan of adjustment. By Thursday April 24th, 1919, things are getting pretty testy. **Headline: Italy's Delegation Quits Conference Today, After Wilson's Refusal to Give Her Fiume;** President's appeal fails to conciliate her. Italians decide to quit, so announced after meeting held to consider Wilson's statement. Surprised by Wilson's act, Italian Premier says, he was about to make a supreme effort to settle the matter. He will appeal to the Italian people, and let them make the decision. So, by Friday, April 25th, Italian Prime Minister Orlando heads for home with his people in agreement. **Headline: Orlando Leaving Paris as Last Efforts Fail; Resents the President's Public Appeal.** Italy united in support of her Ministers. Orlando makes protest, accuses the president of a breach of diplomatic usage. Says, "Purpose was to appeal to the Italian people against the government." Orlando refuses to stay. Has two hour discussion with Wilson, and other Premiers. Questions of Italy's prestige, apparently the chief subject of the conference. Talk of occupying Fiume, Italian attache says, "Dalmatians may also be seized by military force." That sounds to me, like a really steamed up delegation. Okay, let's roll back to the top of the week. Our second track has a number of parallels. This time the country, who also winds up fighting against the Allies in World War II, is Japan. Here is a little story that shows up on Saturday April 19th. **Headline: Story of Japanese Deal with Berlin.** China sends to Paris news of a treaty circulated by the Bolsheviks. Plan of alliances in it proposing that the two nations unite against Britain and the United States." Wow, okay. Then on Tuesday, April

22nd, rolling across the top headlines in the New York Times. Headline: Entente's Secret Pledges to Japan Are Made Public; Japan's Case Like Italy's. Secret agreements were made with the Allies in February 1917. Signed by four powers: England, France, Italy, and Russia engaged. How Wilson learned of it? His inquiry about Pacific mandates caused awkward situation in Council of Ten. That explains a lot, but let's read a little more. No delegation outside those of the powers directly concerned, is more interested in the outcome of the Adriatic controversy than the Chinese. For there is a point of curious similarity between the quarrel of Italy and Yugoslavia, and that of China and Japan over the Chinese Province of Shantung. There's also this difference. Italy is struggling to get a debatable territory, promised to her by England and France as an inducement to enter the war. Japan based her case on secret agreements made by England, France, Italy, and Russia in February of 1917. But they would support Japan's claim to the German Pacific Islands north of the equator, and the Chinese territory of Shantung from which Germany had been ousted. Evidence of these promises given to Japan is contained in hitherto unpublished diplomatic notes, which are part of a cable dispatched. Neither President Wilson, nor the Chinese delegates, knew of the existence of these secret agreements when they came to Paris. The disclosure was first made to Mr. Wilson at a meeting of the Council of Ten. Finally, on Wednesday the 23rd, two headlines that set the controversy and the positions. Headline: Japan Position in China Not To Be Dealt With Now. In a second headline, Japan Stands On Secret Treaties. Asks her Allies what they're going to do in view of the agreement on Shantung. Urges special interests. Declares her domination of the Chinese province justified by the assertive Monroe Doctrine. So, go two of the stories, 100 years ago this week. Involving two allied nations, who clearly do not feel the love in Paris this springtime. In the aftermath of one World War, and as a precursor to another. With that, we're joined by Mike Shuster, for NPR correspondent and curator for the Great War Project Blog. Mike, your post this week is a direct followup to last week. As in early May 1919, the Germans are called to Versailles to receive and respond to the Peace Treaty. It's not a very happy story, is it, Mike?

[0:11:19]

Mike Shuster: Not at all a happy story, Theo. The headline reads: An Undiplomatic German Performance; French Appetite for Revenge Still in Charge. Germans Lose Confidence in Wilson. Such a Scoundrel. And it's, Special to The Great War Project. The shock of the draft treaty deepens. So writes historian Thomas Fleming. On the afternoon of May 7th a century ago, the German foreign minister and other German dignitaries are ushered into one of the immense royal palaces of the French kings. The Germans sit across from the big three: Clemenceau, Lloyd George, and President Wilson. The press reports that the Germans are seated at the "table of the accused." Clemenceau rises and begins by saying that "this was not the time nor the place, for superfluous words." He "spat out a venomous speech," Fleming reports. Addressing the Germans directly, he says, "The hour has struck for the weighty settlement of your account." The French appetite for revenge, Fleming concludes, is still in charge. "The Germans registered shock and disbelief," reports Fleming. "Clemenceau is telling them there will be no face-to-face negotiations. Then it was the German Prime Minister's turn. He did not stand to deliver his remarks. Some see this as a sign of disrespect, but others see he is terribly nervous and unable to stand. He begins by saying, "we know the intensity of the hatred that meets us" and the blame placed on them. The German leader confesses he can never agree. "Such a confession that fastened blame for the war he could never accept. "Such a confession in my mouth would be a lie." He tells his audience the continuing British blockade is killing hundreds of thousands of German noncombatants. Then he reminds them that they had offered peace on the basis of Wilson's Fourteen Points. One British delegate dismisses these words as "the most tactless speech" he had ever heard. Clemenceau's face turned a bright red. Lloyd George grew so angry, he snapped an ivory letter opener in half. After reading the treaty all the way through, Wilson turns to one American delegate and confesses, "If I were a German, I think I should never sign it." The Germans spend the night translating the full text of the treaty. "By dawn," writes Fleming, "They saw what confronted them. Along with the confession of guilt for the war, were reparations that would be decided later, which meant that Germany's economy would be at the mercy of the victors for as long as they pleased." Added to this, Fleming reports, are the loss of crucial coal fields to the Poles and the French, the separation of the Rhineland, the Saar, and Upper Silesia from what had been Germany, the loss of the port city of Danzig, now attached to Poland, the all-but-total destruction of their army and Navy ... And a demand that the Kaiser and an unspecified number of other leaders be surrendered for trial as war criminals. "The terms," observes Fleming, "Drive one member of the German delegation, a socialist, to drink. In an alcoholic rage he smashes glasses and shouts: 'I believed in Woodrow Wilson until today. I believed him an honest man. And now that scoundrel sends us such a treaty!'" That's the news from the Great War Project; These Days, a Century Ago.

[0:14:38]

Theo Mayer: Mike Shuster is the curator for the Great War Project blog. The link to this post is in the podcast notes. For remembering veterans, when people think World War I, they mostly think Western front. They think November 11, 1918 Armistice, and fair enough. Maybe they think Middle East. But, there was yet another fight going on, that started mere months before the armistice and went on through the summer of 1920. America had 13,000 men, in a cold and miserable fight up in Northern Russia. From Archangel, that's a place, up near Finland, across Siberia, to Vladivostok, all the way east, just north of what today is known as North Korea. That works out to be about 11 time zones away, all at or above the Arctic Circle. No wonder the men of the 339th Regiment were known as the Polar Bears. It's a pretty incredible and not widely told World War I story. With us today is James Carl Nelson, the author of four books

about the military experience in World War I, including: The Polar Bear Expedition: The Heroes of America's Forgotten Invasion of Russia. James, I'm shivering just thinking about it. Welcome.

[0:15:59]

James Carl N.: Thank you, very much.

[0:16:00]

Theo Mayer: Now, James, I didn't really know much about this story. Could you start by giving our listeners an overview of this whole part of World War I, the Red and the White armies, sort of the 10,000 foot view?

[0:16:11]

James Carl N.: As you mentioned, most people think of the Western Front, and what was fighting in France between the British and the French and the Germans. But in actuality, the Russians had entered World War I in 1914, as well. And was holding a front in the East, fighting Germans and Austria-Hungarians, and it was quite an active front. But, in the late 1917, with the Western Revolution, Vladimir Lenin took Russia out of the war, signed a separate peace with Germany, and that allowed Germany to transfer 80 divisions of men to the Western Front, and many of these divisions took part in a massive offensive that was launched March 21, 1918. By the early part of June, Germans were only 30 miles from Paris. The situation was perilous, and the high command was casting about for some way to relieve the pressure when they came up with the idea of an intervention in Northern Russia, aimed at recreating the Eastern Front. They had this idea, that if they landed some troops, got local support from anti-Bolsheviks and reached out to this sort of a femoral large body of men, about 40,000 to 50,000 Czechs, called the Czech Legion. Who had been prisoners of war in Russia, and were trying to make their way through Siberia, to actually get back to France and fight on the Western Front. So, they had this idea that they could do that, push into the interior, get this legion turned around. Thereby, make the Germans, at least stop leading their troops off the Front, or even make them return.

[0:17:32]

Theo Mayer: So, how did the 339th Regiment get this honor? Who were they?

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James Carl N.: President Woodrow Wilson had resisted the Allies and treaties, to join their little party in Northern Russia. But finally, in mid-July 1918, he caved and decided that he would send regiment to northern Russia. Proviso being, that they only guard military stores, that the Allies had sent to the Russian Army during World War I. And so, they selected the 339th, mainly men from Michigan. Part of the reason was, coming from Michigan, knowing cold weather, they thought that they would be hardier, and be able to withstand the conditions, which were going to be brutal. We're talking 16 below, temperatures. The commander, Colonel George Stewart, had spent several years serving the Army in Alaska, so he was inured to the cold. And, by the time the decision was made and things started rolling, the 339th was in London training, expecting to be sent to France, and instead found their way to Archangel in Northern Russia.

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Theo Mayer: Now, they fought under British command, didn't they? What's the story?

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James Carl N.: Yeah, the British were running the show. So, what happened was as soon as the 339th landed on September 9th, 1918, the British hauled them off their transports and put them right in the action. There was no thought of just guarding stores. One battalion stayed in Archangel, sort of service and supply. But the 1st and 3rd were sent into the interior. The 3rd went rolling southwards towards Vologda, along the railway line. The 1st Battalion was sent up the Dvina River, in just into the Hinterlands aiming to get to Kotlas. Where they were about 300 miles away, where they hope to reach out to the Czechs. They found themselves in battle with the Bolsheviks very quickly.

[0:19:10]

Theo Mayer: How many people did we lose during all this?

[0:19:12]

James Carl N.: The regiment, 235 men died. 70 of those were from influenza. Influenza had broken out on the ships, while they were on their way to Russia. The rest were killed in action, died of wounds, there were some accidents. Maybe not super significant compared to some of the losses on the Western Front, but the fact that they were there at all, was a travesty in some ways.

[0:19:31]

Theo Mayer: Now, when these boys came home, was it to special recognition, or was this act of heroism as unknown as the whole story.

[0:19:40]

James Carl N.: Well, I think locally, being from Michigan, they rolled into Detroit on the Vanguard on July 3rd, 1919. The local populous there celebrated them, they got a big fourth of July event, a parade and speeches. Locally, it's known in Michigan, but this story is not really well known outside of Michigan. Like men mainly of World War I in general, they kind of just drifted back into society. Although, they did create a Polar Bear association to commemorate themselves, their losses, their sacrifice. In 1929 they sent a contingent back to Russia, gained entry, and were able to retrieve 86 bodies out of the 100 and some that they left when they left Russia.

[0:20:19]

Theo Mayer: Okay, James, how did you personally get onto this story. What made you decide to do the book?

[0:20:24]

James Carl N.: I have to be honest, it kind of came from my editor, Peter Hubbard, at Harper Collins. He saw a link to the Siberian end of this, contacted my agent, said, "Wow, this is a wild story. I wonder if there's a book in it?" Jim sent it to me, Jim Hornfische, and I looked into it, and I decided the Archangel end was doable, and there were characters that could be delineated.

[0:20:42]

Theo Mayer: Were there any first person accounts, that popped up?

[0:20:45]

James Carl N.: Oh, yeah, the Bentley Historic Library in Ann Arbor, Michigan has some great stuff. They've got diaries. From all the regiments I've studied, this one seems to have really documented its time because of the unusual circumstances. There were diaries, letters, photographs, a lot of personal accounts. Plus, three of them when they came home, wrote books about it. That was pretty good resource material too.

[0:21:04]

Theo Mayer: When people dig into World War I stories, they always come up with unexpected gems. What do you think we should remember about the Polar Bears, and their fight in northern Russia.

[0:21:15]

James Carl N.: I think if people had known about this when we were talking about getting into Vietnam, they might have thought twice. And just, I think they should celebrate what these men went through. Like I say, the temperatures, the conditions were cruel. Single Company, manning an outpost 250 miles from Archangel, meanwhile the gathering hoard of Bolsheviks are ready to pounce on them. Which they did, in January of 1919, and sent a lot of these men running for their lives towards Archangel.

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Theo Mayer: James, thank you for bringing us all this story. I've got to go sit in the sun.

[0:21:45]

James Carl N.: Thank you.

[0:21:47]

Theo Mayer: James Carl Nelson, the author of *The Polar Bear Expedition: The Heroes of America's Forgotten Invasion of Russia*. You might also want to check out his third book, *I Will Hold: The Story of USMC Legend Clifton B. Cates*. Which won James the 2017 Colonel Joseph Alexander Award for biography, from the Marine Corps Heritage Foundation. We have links for you in the podcast notes. This week. Regular contributor historian, Dr Edward Lengel, continues his new series of stories profiling is top 10 selections, from the many, many hundreds of published personal accounts from World War I. This week, British veteran Charles Carrington and his memoir, *A Subaltern's War*. Ed's pick for best war memoir number eight.

[0:22:36]

Dr. Edward L.: By 1929 the literature of "disillusionment" had come to dominate the English-speaking world's perception of the Great War. Put simply, this narrative described how millions of naive, idealistic young men had gone off to fight on the Western Front, where the cruel realities of trench warfare had shattered their bodies and their spirits. Those who survived physically were morally broken, no longer believing in old principles like God and country. They were disillusioned, a generation lost. Struggling to gather the pieces of their lives and survive as best they could. For many veterans, though, disillusionment was not just a lie, but a betrayal of their sacrifice. Though hardly

celebrating the war, they believed, even a decade afterwards, that they had fought in a good cause. More than anything, they cherished the bonds of comradeship that they had built together in the trenches, and in going over the top against artillery and machine gun fire. They felt changed, but not disillusioned, and in some ways believed that they had become better men than they were before. Some, like decorated British veteran Charles Carrington in his memoir *A Subaltern's War*, sought to set the record straight on what they thought the war had been all about. This book is number eight on my list of the 10 best personal accounts of World War I. Nobody could justly accuse Carrington of not having tasted war's bitterest dregs. Born in 1897 in Staffordshire, England, he abandoned his plans for university study when the war broke out in August 1914 and immediately sought to enter military service. Not until July 1916, however, did he see combat as a lieutenant in the 1/5th Battalion of the Royal Warwickshire Regiment. From then on, he experienced war to the fullest in brutal, months-long trials such as the Battle of the Somme and the Battle of Passchendaele. Typical of the many encounters described in *A Subaltern's War* is one of hand to hand combat, as the Warwickshires fight off a German trench raid: "As we moved forward," Carrington wrote, "a sniper fired almost from behind us. I felt the bullet crack in my ear, and Corporal Matthews, who was walking beside me, preoccupied and intent, fell dead in the twinkling of an eye. I was looking straight at him as the bullet struck him and was profoundly affected by the remembrance of his face, though at the time I hardly thought of it. He was alive, and then he was dead, and there was nothing human left in him. He fell with a neat round hole in his forehead and the back of his head blown out." Carrington, who was decorated repeatedly for bravery under fire, was transferred to a relatively quiet sector of the Italian front in 1918, where he spent the last several months of the war. Though experiencing severe symptoms of combat fatigue, he became unbearably restless and sought desperately, as he put it, to be "with the lads" in the thick of the fighting. His requests were denied, and he passed time writing his memoir, poetry about the war and comrades he had known and lost. Then came the Armistice, but he and many others felt no joy. "Life was pointless," he wrote, "and very few soldiers were lucky enough to know in what direction their lives would tend. Millions of young men had known no other career, no other destiny than battle ... Many of us were quite indifferent to the future." Carrington eventually went to Oxford, and was well on the way to a successful academic career in 1929 when books such as Erich Maria Remarque's *All Quiet on the Western Front* set the idea of disillusionment in full swing among the British public. Regarding Remarque's work as, "A bad book inflated into a best-seller by the arts of publicity," Carrington furiously rejected the suggestion that the sacrifices he and his comrades had made were pointless. Ending his memoir with "An Essay on Militarism," Carrington concluded that "Fear is the worst of the horrors of war. Fear is that which degrades, which breeds cruelty, envy and malice; and fear is the enemy in war." By contrast, he suggested, "It is virtuous and not vicious to be indifferent to death, provided that you are as indifferent to your own as you are to your neighbor's ... To die young is by no means an unmitigated misfortune; to die gaily in the unselfish pursuit of what you believe to be a righteous cause is an enviable and not a premature end."

[0:27:07]

Theo Mayer: Dr. Edward Lengel's blog is called *A Storyteller Hiking Through History*, and it's filled with first person perspectives and accounts that provide a nuanced insight into the era. We have links to Ed's posts and his author's website in the podcast notes. Okay, time to fast forward into the present with *World War I Centennial News Now*. During this part of the podcast, we explore how World War I is being remembered and commemorated, written about and discussed, and taught and learned today. Here's where we spotlight the surprisingly numerous and significant remembrances, honorings, commemoration activity surrounding World War I and World War I themes. This week in *Commission News*, I'd like to profile an upcoming event that we touched on last week in our dispatch headlines. Kicking off our participation in the 2019 World War I theme for New York's Fleet week. On Thursday, May 2nd, the U.S. World War I Centennial Commission will host a commemorative event at Cypress Hills National Cemetery, in Brooklyn. There, we're going to take a moment to remember some World War I veterans resting at Cypress Hills. Those heroes specifically include: Marine Sergeant Major Dan Daly, World War I hero and double recipient of the Medal of Honor. Navy Coxswain John Cooper, also a double recipient of the Medal of Honor. And, some international colleagues. Specifically: 21 World War I-era sailors of the French Navy, and three World War I-era sailors of the Royal British Navy. All of whom passed away in New York during the influenza pandemic, also called the Spanish Flu. Featured guests for this commemoration will include: representatives from the United States Navy, the United States Marine Corps, the Consulate of France, the Consulate of the United Kingdom, and members of the New York City Mayor's Office of Veteran Affairs, among others. We have a special guest with us today, to tell us more about the French veterans, who will be remembered and honored. Alain Dupuis, is the President of the Federation of French War Veterans. Alain, welcome to the show.

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Alain Dupuis: Thank you.

[0:29:29]

Theo Mayer: Alain, before we get into the French soldiers who were interred at Cypress hills, tell us a little bit about the Federation of French Veterans.

[0:29:37]

Alain Dupuis: It started in 1919, after the war. Those were the people living in the United States, who came back from front line, or came back from the war. To start, there were about 1,000, then they reach 3,000. Then, after that, [inaudible] World War II, and now unfortunately we are about 20. We participate numerous ceremonies with the Americans, and also to cemeteries in we visit about twice a year, to cemeteries in Flushing and in Cypress Hill. We visit about twice a year, on the Memorial Day, and also on November first. But we visit regularly to honor the honor all the American soldiers, and of the two countries who [inaudible] the Battle of Yorktown, and defended, and defense side-by-side, with common value and ideas.

[0:30:24]

Theo Mayer: Well look, the Franco-American comradeship is really long-standing. Going all the way back to Lafayette and the Revolutionary War. Let's talk about history. When these French soldiers were lost to the pandemic, what were they doing in New York?

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Alain Dupuis: They were part of different ships on the French Navy. One was called Le Marsellaise, one Le Gloire, and the other one the Montcalm, were in the New York harbor, waiting to escort merchant ships loaded with war supplies for obvious victory. Was a dangerous mission, because 6,596 civilian and military ships were sunk by 274 U-boats.

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Theo Mayer: So, they were in port at the time?

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Alain Dupuis: They were in port at the time, yes. They probably contacted the sickness in Europe, before their departure.

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Theo Mayer: What do we know about these men, in specific?

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Alain Dupuis: Not much, I have the names which I am looking at. There are different specialties on the ship. They were all young, and they are 18, 20, 25. Most of them were from Brittany, France. Yet, we don't know much about how this happened. Just, they die in New York, and thanks to the Americans, they rest in the great [inaudible] cemetery, where are buried by American heroes in American Revolution.

[0:31:45]

Theo Mayer: Well, most people think about the U.S. Soldiers buried in cemeteries in France, and they are probably a bit surprised that some French soldiers are resting here. Alain, is there anything else we should know about this?

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Alain Dupuis: This time, what will happen on May 2, we try to have many, many more people, hopefully.

[0:32:04]

Theo Mayer: It does seem to be shaping up into quite an event on May 2nd. The interest and participation is, really growing and expanding. Alain, thank you for your support, and thank you for joining us today.

[0:32:15]

Alain Dupuis: My pleasure. Was a pleasure, thank you, sir.

[0:32:18]

Theo Mayer: Alain Dupuis, is the president of the Federation of French War Veterans. We have links in the podcast notes about the event on May 2nd, and a note to our listeners in the New York area. This event is open to the public and the media. Next, for remembering veterans, we're going to explore the story of a ship that sank on the eastern seaboard in July of 1918. Now, first commissioned in 1907 as the USS California, the cruiser was rechristened the USS San Diego on September 1st, 1914. Now, she spent most of her career as part of the Pacific fleet, before being reassigned to the Atlantic fleet on July 18th, 1917. Where she escorted convoys on the first part of their journey to Europe. Although other ships, like The Tampa were also lost in World War I, this event was shrouded in mystery and a lot of theories about why and how the San Diego went down. That is until last year. With us to talk about this, is Dr. Alexis Catsambis, a maritime archaeologist with the Underwater Archaeology Branch of the U.S. Naval History and Heritage Command in Washington D.C. Since 2008, Dr. Catsambis has provided for the stewardship, research,

conservation and curation of submerged US Navy heritage sites, including the San Diego. Dr. Catsambis, thank you for joining us.

[0:33:44]

Dr. Alexis C.: A pleasure. Thank you for having me.

[0:33:45]

Theo Mayer: Let me start with underwater archaeology in general. How would you define the field and its challenges?

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Dr. Alexis C.: Underwater archaeology uses scientific methods in an underwater environment, to study and interpret the remains of the human past.

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Theo Mayer: Now, about the San Diego, herself. What was the news at the time? What was she doing when she went down?

[0:34:06]

Dr. Alexis C.: Well, many Americans, when they think of the Great War, they envision the carnage of trench warfare in lands across the ocean. To see itself actually played a defining role in the outcome of the war. The Germans were able to sink, through their U-boats, several hundred merchant vessels, and laid close to 45,000 mines or so. They got very close to choking Britain off from critical supplies. That is until the United States entered the war in April 1917. Within a month or so, the first 14,000 troops had landed in France. A year later in the summer of 1918, that number was closer to 10,000 troops a day. What made this incredible transfer of up to 2 million or so soldiers to France, combined with the British Royal Navy and the US Navy, was the convoy system. The USS San Diego having served in the Asiatic station and the Pacific Fleet, during the course of the war was placed in the convoy system. And in fact, was making her way from New Hampshire, where she had just been resupplied with coal to make the crossing of the Atlantic, was making her way to New York. Then on a tragic day, on the 19th of July 1918 a single explosion rocked her hull, and just over 20 minutes later she had capsized on the surface and sunk.

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Theo Mayer: Okay, there were lives lost, but the loss of life was really limited, wasn't it?

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Dr. Alexis C.: There were over 1100 men aboard San Diego. We've been able to find that the captain delayed issuing the abandon ship order for about 10 or 11 minutes, in order to not to make his ship an easy target for any German submarine that surfaced could capture it. Then, within the span of three or four minutes, the ship had turned on its beams, essentially. The captain jumped off one side, as the last man, and had just been proceeded by his executive order who jumped off the other side. Six men lost their lives and the attack, and the abandoning ship maneuvers that followed. That is a tremendous testament to the response, as well as the preparations of the crew of San Diego, for the eventuality that they would receive an enemy attack.

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Theo Mayer: It really is. Now, when the archaeology project to study her was initiated, how was it conducted? How did it come about?

[0:36:13]

Dr. Alexis C.: Naval History and Heritage Command is responsible, for the management of the Navy sunken military craft. That includes ships and aircraft, from the American Revolution onto the current day and the Underwater Archaeology Branch is specifically, is responsible for researching, interpreting, and protecting these sites. The project with San Diego aimed to both document and assess the condition of the ship, with its 100th anniversary of it sinking in view, determine if we could the cause and the circumstances of the vessel sinking. We wanted the project to serve as a training mission, and they use of advanced data collection and analysis. And we want it to commemorate through this project, the Navy's role in World War I, and of course the loss of the six men on San Diego.

[0:36:54]

Theo Mayer: Now, you actually concluded some stuff. What led to the evidence, that the ship had actually been sunk by enemy action?

[0:37:01]

Dr. Alexis C.: There was generally an understanding, that the ship had been sunk by the enemy. But it was unclear whether that had transpired through an act of sabotage, a torpedo, a mine. The single explosion was very effective, and we've concluded that that's actually because of the circumstances of the sinking itself, rather than the size of the explosive. But it did not lead to a clear conclusion at the time, as to what sank the ship. Over the decades that followed, a number of theories were posited, and ultimately through this project we've been able to conclude that an internal explosion, in the form sabotage for example, would have been deemed highly unlikely. Based on historical record, and modeling of the explosion itself. We have engaged a number of partners in this effort, including the Naval Surface Warfare Center at Carter Rock, and they specialize in such modeling of impacts. They also contributed to modeling of the flooding of the ship. Which has given us further insight, and really suggested that there's no evidence to support a torpedo attack either. That's due to the size of the charge of a German torpedo at the time versus the size of the mine. Then to complement that, the historical record provides us with the types of mines that the German submarines would have used at the time. One, as potentially having been on board U-156, the particular German submarine we've come to conclude struck San Diego.

[0:38:18]

Theo Mayer: That's really interesting. It's not just really physical observation, but it's forensic record evidence, that tells the story. How has all this sleuthing allowed you to conclude, specifically what happened? Are you satisfied, or are there open questions?

[0:38:34]

Dr. Alexis C.: We are satisfied with the conclusion, that a mine sank San Diego. Following the war, the U.S. [inaudible] was able to identify which German submarines were operating off the Atlantic seaboard. In fact, the Navy sent a number of ships following the sinking, to assess both what transpired, and see whether there were other mines and threats to other vessels in the area. We have eyewitness accounts of floating debris, that we now can identify as a particular type of mine that was just newly introduced, and not familiar yet to the American sailors.

[0:39:04]

Theo Mayer: This is so interesting, unraveling a mystery. Now, for you personally, when you think back about this project, what are you going to remember the most?

[0:39:14]

Dr. Alexis C.: This is a project, that developed over a period of years. We were able to visit the site of San Diego, four different occasions. Three of them were in partnership with Mobile Diving and Salvage Unit. These are the Navy divers who have to perform qualification training for their diving credentials, and we offered them a particular objective which was to assess the site of San Diego. One of those projects in September 2017 was a partnership with the University of Delaware, and collected advanced remote sensing data on the site. Then, the final project in July 1918, on the day of the sinking 100 years earlier, we were able to lay a wreath on the site of San Diego, and commemorate the loss of those sailors. I think personally that moment brought everything together, and signified to the intent behind the whole project.

[0:40:01]

Theo Mayer: That technology for this kind of research, must be evolving a lot. How much of a role does new tech play, in being able to forensically unravel these mysteries.

[0:40:11]

Dr. Alexis C.: That's a great question. We've seen in the last decade or two, a tremendous advancement and mapping capabilities under water. For our purposes, that's wonderful, because we're able to capture more data at a higher resolution and interpret these sites. There's an act called the Sunken Military Craft Act, it puts in place some protections for Navy ships and aircraft wrecks, that had been lost. As we are able to access these sites more, it becomes even more important for us to be able to educate the public, through the application of technology, about the importance of respecting them. Many are war graves, many carry oil or ordinance. Many are historically very important, and we want to document them as long as we can, and to the best abilities we can.

[0:40:52]

Theo Mayer: Okay, in summary, what should our listeners take away from this story?

[0:40:56]

Dr. Alexis C.: I think what stuck in my mind from everything we've learned is, just how incredibly these men prepared for and responded to this event.

[0:41:04]

Theo Mayer: Great Story. Thank you for joining us.

[0:41:06]

Dr. Alexis C.: My pleasure.

[0:41:07]

Theo Mayer: Dr. Alexis Catsambis, a maritime archaeologist with the Underwater Archaeology Branch of the U.S. Naval History and Heritage Command in Washington D.C. We have links in the podcast notes to learn more about the San Diego, her demise and the study that revealed what happened. For updates from the states. Let me set this up. As we came up on the Centennial of World War I, the U S World War I Centennial Commission tried to identify, support, and when needed, help organize local state organizations that would focus on their State Centennial Commemoration. These organizations really rocked it. They did an incredible job and created awareness, events, focused state legislative initiatives, education, and a lot more in their states. Although some of the organizations have since disbanded, as we crossed the centennial of the Armistice last year on November 11th, we really expected most of the state organizations to cease operation. To their credit, and to the great benefit of remembering World War I, many state World War I centennial organizations are not only still active, but as active as they've ever been. Even if the official organizations disbanded, the individuals who served on those committees and commissions have not stopped their activity. We want to use the section of the podcast to highlight and promote, some of this exemplary work's still going on. Especially since most of it, is in the context of remembering those who served. Susi Adler is one such individual, a member of the Minnesota World War I Centennial Committee, who has created and continues to curate a Facebook group called Minnesotans Remembered as soon as he's here with us today to tell us about her project. Susi, welcome to the podcast.

[0:43:00]

Susi Adler: Thanks for having me on.

[0:43:02]

Theo Mayer: So Susi, let me start by asking you, the World War I Centennial Committee, is it still officially operating?

[0:43:08]

Susi Adler: Well, we did not want to disband officially, so we have decided that we are dormant. We keep in touch, if our group is needed. One of the items that we're currently working on, is at Minnesota State Legislature. We have a bill to update a World War I plaque, to be more inclusive. As part of our committee, we are following along. One of our members has gone to testify, to give our support to this new plaque. We're watching that as it's going through the legislature. At this point, we are informally still keeping in contact, and still doing our thing; but not as a formal process anymore.

[0:43:47]

Theo Mayer: Okay. Well thank you. Let's talk about your Facebook page. Minnesotans Remembered. What is it, and how did it get started, and, what kind of things will I find if I go there?

[0:43:55]

Susi Adler: Well, my interest in the Minnesotans who served in World War I, started back in 2014. I was in the Meuse-Argonne area for a week, at the same time as a group of friends, including Doug Bekke, who was then the curator of the Minnesota Military Museum. And each morning our group would get together for an early breakfast, Doug would tell us what he was planning to do that day; pull out maps and describe the context, and the special significance to Minnesotans. I was totally fascinated, and of course, we follow Doug on his plan for the day. Doug Bekke, he has been my mentor ever since. Along with most of the notable sites of the area, we went to the American cemeteries. On my first visit to the Meuse-Argonne American cemetery, I was struck by the beauty and calm of the cemetery. There are 15,000 Americans commemorated in that cemetery. The grave markers are perfectly aligned. It's quiet, except for the trees rustling a little bit in the wind, and the occasional visitor wandering down a row. This is on the same land that our soldiers fought valiantly; It was very chaotic at the time. While military strategy and geography are important to understanding World War I, I was just drawn to the individual soldiers named on the crosses. As I stood there, alone in a section, my eyes are drawn to a grave marker from a soldier from Minnesota. And then, another one from Minnesota, and another one. And I wondered, does anybody from Minnesota remember, the Minnesotans who were very buried 4,000 miles from home? People know their uncle. They may have heard about a great-uncle who knows, or remembers the great-great-uncle. I decided I would remember them. That began my missive, to document something personable about each of the Minnesota soldiers. After I started this project, now when I stand in the cemetery, I don't see a field across us. I see faces of soldiers from Minnesota, I hear their stories, and they know their stories are documented and will be remembered.

[0:45:50]

Theo Mayer: Oh, that's beautiful. Well, as you compile these stories, what are one of two that stick out for you the most?

[0:45:57]

Susi Adler: Oh, they're all my Minnesota boys. In France, my friends over there, my local friends there tease me. I have a Minnesota boy for you, they tell me.

[0:46:05]

Theo Mayer: So you've adopted them all.

[0:46:07]

Susi Adler: About 466 so far. But there are some, that just tug at my heart. For instance, Lauren [Gammell] who was a Sergeant First Class, and a classmate of his at Hamlin University, Glenn Donaldson, they were part of a group that volunteered together to be an ambulance unit. As an ambulance unit, they did get split up and put wherever they needed to be. Lauren and Glen happened to be together in October of 1918, and were serving the 2nd Division, bringing wounded back from a fierce battle and the ambulance got hit by shell fire. Both of them won the distinguished service cross, and it's one thing to have won the distinguished service cross, but most of these people were just ordinary boys. I'm older now, so boys is appropriate, because they're my son's age.

[0:46:57]

Theo Mayer: They were boys. You are absolutely right.

[0:46:59]

Susi Adler: Yes, and I feel, as the mother of these men, they didn't have to go one more time to go get more wounded, but they did it because they felt they needed to. So those two are both buried at the Meuse-Argonne American cemetery. I visit those two, each and every time I go to the cemetery. Then, I actually was on the spot where their ambulance had been hit, and commemorated their story 100 years later. That really struck something to me, about being in their place at the time. They were easy to research, and the other soldiers are a little harder. Sometimes, all I can get as the basic rank name, unit date of death. One of these soldiers is private Clark Harris, who was with the 369th Infantry, which is part of the 93rd Division. The policy and practice of segregation and discrimination, discounted the bravery and patriotism that had been shown by the 369th. I could not find a gold star file, a bonus file with the Minnesota historical Saturday. There's no mention in Winona county in their book of the war. He is listed in The Soldiers of the Great War book, under died of accident with a home time of Winona. But I have nothing more personal than that. Which means that I have not given up. It's just gone on my list of need to find photo in different places, for this man. I could probably talk for another five, six hours on my Minnesota boys.

[0:48:24]

Theo Mayer: But, you know, Susi, it's obvious that this is a deeply personal, and an emotional, and a beautiful story for you. If somebody wanted to undertake a similar project, what advice would you give them?

[0:48:36]

Susi Adler: Number one, be organized. I can't tell you how many times I have gone down that same path to not find a photo, and then realize, "Oh yeah, I checked that before." The second thing would be to be very, very diligent. You can't give up. The photos will come eventually, you just need to keep going. And third is, have as much Kleenex around you as you're going to need. Because, as I read the story, especially a gold star file that was written by their mother, where they say, "My boy," oh, that tugs at my heartstring. My husband can always tell if I have been doing research on this, because I have my pack of Kleenex right next to me. He says, you can stop. And it's like, "No. No, I can't."

[0:49:17]

Theo Mayer: Well, Susi, first of all, thank you for coming on and telling us about this. Also thank you for the work that you're doing. On the Doughboy MIA site, there's a little inscription that they say that, "No one is truly lost, if they are not forgotten," and, it's so true. It's people like yourself that are really important to keeping this in America's reality.

[0:49:37]

Susi Adler: Well, thank you for letting me share the stories, and having me on. I really appreciate it.

[0:49:41]

Theo Mayer: Susi Adler is a member of the Minnesota World War I Centennial Committee, who's created and continues to curate a Facebook page called, Minnesotans Remembered. We have links for you on the podcast notes to the Facebook page. Thank you, Susi. In education news, last week, a new issue of Understanding the Great War Education Newsletter published its issue number 18, Reconstruction and American philanthropy. Now as World War I

came to an end. Millions of people across Europe continued to suffer from lack of food and adequate housing. With countries struggling to transform from war to peace, international assistance was crucial to the survival of civilians in the immediate post-war period. In this issue of Understanding the Great War, they examine American humanitarian efforts, and the leading philanthropists who made war relief possible. Subject headlines include: A Fool For Peace, Andrew Carnegie and The Coming of the Great War. World War I and the Rockefeller Foundation. Herbert Hoover's commissioned for relief in Belgium. And one of my favorite titles, one that we've covered on the podcast in the past, a great title, The Rechickenization of France, by the Daughters of the American Revolution, and lots more. We have links for you in the podcast, notes for accessing and subscribing to the bimonthly newsletter. Speaking of newsletters, it's time for Articles and Posts, where we highlight the stories you'll find in our weekly newsletter, The Dispatch. Here's some selections that we'll profile for you. Our first story headline reads: Eagle Scout beautifies spot where iconic Doughboy statue stands; A new look for Petersburg's 'Old Soldier'. The road to Nicholas Riggs' Eagle Scout designation includes a stretch of South Sycamore Street in Petersburg, Virginia, known for its iconic Doughboy statue. Riggs, a member of Scout Troop 900 in Prince George County, formally unveiled his Eagle Scout project last weekend. A makeover of the Doughboy site, that includes landscaping, a new stone bench and flagpole. Our second story, Hollywood American Legion Post 43 Renovation Completed. Our friends at the legendary American Legion Post 43 in Los Angeles have great reason to celebrate. They recently completed a multi-million dollar top-to-bottom renovation of their landmark clubhouse. Not the least of which, was their spectacular 1920s era theater space. To kick things off right, as their first major event, they agreed to host the multi-day annual Turner Classic Movie Film Festival. Of course, the film that was picked to introduce this year's film festival was none other than SGT YORK, the classic Gary Cooper film produced in 1941. And of course, to introduce this great film, the film festival picked none other than our friend, Colonel Gerald York, grandson of Sgt Alvin York, and his uncle, Andrew Jackson York, as keynote speakers. Our next story, it headlines with Coast Guard to award Purple Hearts to USS Tampa crew killed during WWI. We told the story of the sinking of the USS San Diego earlier in this episode, and how the loss of life though tragic, was only six sailors. It was the USS Tampa that sank on September 26th, 1918 that was the worst US military ship sinking. In an article linked to in The Dispatch this week, you can read the story of Anna Bonaparte, who was four years old when her father, James Wilkie died aboard the USS Tampa. Though she didn't have many memories of her father, she constantly spoke about him and his service in the Coast Guard to her son Wallace. Next month, Bonaparte, a former Army captain, is going to travel from his home in Charleston, South Carolina, to Washington D.C. There, to receive a Purple Heart in honor of his grandfather, as part of an initiative to recognize the 115 service members who died more than 100 years ago on board the ship. And our last story feature for this week, Virginia students bring 100-year-old World War I sheet music back to life. The University of Virginia was in the national spotlight this month, for becoming the National Champions of the NCAA Basketball Tournament. We are thrilled for them, but we're also thrilled to find, that they have a special World War I-related project underway at their campus. As part of a collaborative project, called "ReSounding the Archives", between University of Virginia, Virginia Tech and George Mason University, students from each schools researched and analyzed World War I songs from the UVA archives. George Mason students recorded studio versions of them. Access all these amazing stories and more, through the links that you'll find in our Weekly Dispatch newsletter. It's our short and easy guide to lots of World War I News and information. Subscribe to this wonderful free weekly guide at ww1cc.org/subscribe, all lower case. Or, follow the link in the podcast notes. That wraps up episode number 119 of the award-winning World War I Centennial News Podcast. Thank you for listening. We want to thank our great guests, talented crew and supporters. Including Mike Shuster, curator for the Great War Project blog. James Carl Nelson, author of Polar Bear Expedition: The Heroes of America's Forgotten Invasion of Russia. Dr Edward Lengel, historian, author and lecturer. Alain Dupuis, the President of the Federation of French War Veterans. U.S. Navy History and Heritage Command marine archaeologist, Dr. Alexis Catsambis. Minnesota World War I Centennial Committee member and Facebook group curator, Susi Adler. Thanks to Mack Nelson and Tim Crow, our interview editing team, Katz Laslow, the line producer for the show, Dave Kramer and J.L. [Mishow] for research and script support. And I'm Theo Mayer, your producer and host. The World War I Centennial Commission was created by Congress to honor, commemorate, and educate about World War I. Our programs are to inspire a national conversation and awareness about World War I, including this podcast. We're bringing the lessons of 100 years ago to today's educators, their classrooms, and to the public. We're helping to restore World War I memorials in communities of all sizes across the country. And of course, we're building America's National World War I Memorial, in Washington D.C. We want to thank the Commission's founding sponsor, the Pritzker Military Museum and Library, as well as our other sponsors, the Starr Foundation, the Diana Davis Spencer Foundation, and the Richard Lounsbury Foundation. The podcast and a full transcript of the show can be found on our website at ww1cc.org/cn. You'll find World War I centennial news in all the places that you get your podcasts, even on YouTube, or by asking Siri or using your smart speaker by saying, "Play WW1 Centennial News Podcast. The podcast Twitter handle is @theww1podcast. The commission, Twitter and Instagram handles are both @ww1cc and we're on Facebook at WW1 Centennial. Thank you again for joining us, and don't forget, keep the story alive for America by helping us build the memorial. Just text the letters, WWI or WW1 to the phone number 91999.

[0:58:08]

Speaker 9: (singing)

[0:58:28]

Theo Mayer: Thank you for listening. So long.

[0:58:30]