

War Football & The NFL (43m 23s)

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3 speakers (Theo Mayer, Kevin F, Chris Serb)

[0:00:07]

Theo Mayer: Welcome to World War I Centennial News, the Doughboy Podcast, Episode Number 138. The Doughboy Podcast is about what happened 100 years ago during and after the war that changed the world. It's not only about then, but it's also about now, how World War I is still present in our daily lives in countless ways, but most important, the podcast is about why and how we'll never let the awareness of World War I fall back into the mists of obscurity. So join us as we explore the many facets of World War I, both then and now. For 100 Years Ago, we're going to focus on Woodrow Wilson. The President is heading out for a national tour to sell the Paris Peace Treaty and the League of Nations to the American people themselves. In that process he falls quite ill, and this week we're devoting the entire history segment to that story. For Commission News, we're going to update you on what's happening at the Howard Sabin Sculpture Studio, where the actual sculpting of the massive bronze, A Soldier's Journey, has begun. We have two guests joining us, including a long time friend of the Centennial New York history expert and author Kevin Fitzpatrick, who's organizing the fourth annual Camp Doughboy on Governor's Island. And because the 2019 NFL season kicks off this week on September 5th and the NFL's history is very much tied to World War I, we're being joined by author Chris Serb, who wrote War Football: World War I and the Birth of the NFL. Then we'll close with the highlights from The Dispatch Newsletter, which is as of this edition changing to a monthly. All this week on World War I Centennial News the Doughboy Podcast, which is sponsored and brought to you by the U.S. World War I Centennial Commission and the Doughboy Foundation, dedicated to remembering those who served in World War I, and to building the National World War I Memorial in Washington, D.C. I'm Theo Mayer, the chief technologist for the Commission, and your host. Welcome to the show. Woodrow Wilson, the nation's 28th president. The only president in our nation's history with a PhD in political science, no less. A man who won re-election for a second term in 1916 on the slogan, "He Kept Us Out of War," who then, less than a month later after his inauguration on March 4th, roused the Congress of the United States to declare war on Germany on April 6, 1917. Woodrow Wilson, the man whose administration penned and issued a manifesto and vision for a New World Order known as the Fourteen Points, based on Democratic rule and self-determination for all nations, a vision under which Germany agreed to an armistice which ended the war earlier than anyone expected, but a man who then failed to infuse that vision into the Paris Peace Treaty. Woodrow Wilson, who lost both the House and the Senate to the opposition party in the 1918 midterm election in the middle of the war, who then decides that he must personally represent the U.S. At the peace negotiations and fails to include any member of the new majority party at the U.S. Delegation in Paris to negotiate the U.S. Positions in the Peace Treaty. Woodrow Wilson, who then returns to the U.S. After the Treaty of Versailles is signed, now a pale, gaunt faced and frail figure, needing to face a hostile opposition Senate and convince it to ratify the Treaty and membership in the League of Nations. So that is the set up. We're going to jump into our Centennial time machine, and go back 100 years to the late summer and fall of 1919, and follow the story of President Woodrow Wilson in the aftermath of The War That Changed the World. We've traveled back to July 8, 1919. Wilson has returned to the United States exhausted from the pressures of the past three years and the events in Paris. The task at hand is to get the Senate to ratify the Paris Peace Treaty, which is inexorably linked to membership in the League of Nations. And if that weren't a big enough challenge, the summer of 1919 is anything but calm. Race riots, a Red scare, unsustainably high prices on food and clothing, millions of men returning to civilian life, labor unrest and strikes that threaten various key industries, as has been Wilson's tactic for his entire presidency. He believes that if he can get the people fully behind him, they'll help him sell the Treaty and the League to their senators. And so 100 years ago this week, Wilson begins a whistle stop tour of the United States that will require at least one and often two or three major speeches every day and numerous appearances in small towns, greeting the people from the back of his railroad car. Suffering from debilitating headaches even before this trip, Wilson's wife Edith, tries to dissuade him from putting such additional pressure on himself. Noting his frail health, other friends and supporters also urge him not to go but he insists, saying, "In the presence of the Great Tragedy that now faces the world, no decent man can count his personal fortunes in the reckoning." His personal physician, Admiral Cary T. Grayson said, "Well, there's nothing I could do except to go with him and take such good care of him as I could." Crowd sizes and enthusiasm grows the further West he travels, and some of his advisors now believe that if Wilson will only concede on one or two relatively minor reservations that some Republican senators voiced, the Treaty might just pass. But wracked by headaches and convinced that he is right and that the American people share his belief in the importance of the Treaty as it stands, Wilson continues to obstinately refuse any change or compromise to the Treaty. Near the end of September, the tour has reached the West Coast and is now swinging back East, with more stops along the way. But now, Wilson's experiencing coughing fits in addition to his headaches. In Pueblo, Colorado on the afternoon of September 25, Wilson proclaims that he remains steady in his determination that the Treaty must be accepted in whole or not at all. That will be the final public speech of Woodrow Wilson's political career. At 2:00 a.m. That night, Edith Wilson wakes Admiral Grayson the physician, calling for help as the President cannot breathe and whose face is twitching wildly. Stubbornly, Wilson insists that he must push on, but Edith has had enough. She

and the doctor insist that the tour end now. Wilson laments, "I have never been in a condition like this, and it just feels as if I am going to pieces." Admiral Grayson makes a public statement alluding to physical exhaustion and a nervous stomach as the President's train beelines home for Washington, D.C. It's all been too much. And a few days later on October 2, Woodrow Wilson suffers a massive stroke. Now partially paralyzed along his left side, Wilson continues to fight for the treaty of the League of Nations, issuing statements from his sick bed as best and whenever he's able. This begins an unprecedented presidential period in American history, something not seen before. Edith Galt Wilson steps in forcibly to shield her husband from intrusions. Now to her mind, those intrusions include the rest of Wilson's staff, the cabinet, and the members of Congress. When a senator is occasionally admitted, the President and his wife carefully stage manage the occasion, taking great care so that his paralysis can't be observed. Now, Article II of the Constitution reiterated by the 25th Amendment, states clearly that the Vice President is the direct successor of the President. He or she will become President if the President cannot serve for whatever reason. The 25th Amendment also provides for a president who is temporarily disabled such as if a president has a surgical procedure, or if he or she becomes mentally unstable. The Constitution is clear. The problem is that Wilson and some historians suspect his wife Edith, we aren't entirely sure to this very day, refused to concede that Wilson is incapable of fulfilling his duties of office. For years after, Edith Wilson maintains that she never made any decisions that were reserved for the President. She describes herself as a steward, reviewing every document sent to him and then deciding which will and which will not be seen and when they will be. Now that certainly meant Edith Wilson wielded huge power. Can Edith Wilson be considered the first defacto female president of the United States? Well increasingly, historians believe that maybe yes. From October 1919 to the end of Woodrow Wilson's term in March 1921, was Wilson able to carry out the duties of his office? Can modern medicine give us any additional insight into Wilson's condition? As it turns out, it can. Doctors now say that some of the illnesses and the reading challenges he faced as early as age 12 may be evidence of cerebral vascular issues, issues affecting the brain's blood vessels. Wilson's first documented stroke occurred in 1896 when he was just 40 years old. He lost the use of his right hand for a time in 1904 and two years later, a more serious stroke caused temporary blindness in his left eye. In 1913, just a month after ascending to the presidency, a stroke left him unable to use his left arm. High pressure situations inevitably raised blood pressure and consequently, his risk for stroke. After the sinking of the Lusitania in 1915, Wilson suffered almost constant headaches. At least one neurologist urged him to get more rest, stating that if Wilson continued in such a high pressure position, he would not live to see the end of his first term. But if his body showed major weakness, his will did not. Not only did he win re-election to a second term, but he insisted that he could win a third term even after his major stroke in 1919. But that was not to be. He never fully recovered. On Armistice Day in 1923, he rallied a bit and stood on his front doorstep to address a group of supporters, but his voice was so weak that most couldn't hear his words. Woodrow Wilson died at his home just a few months later on February 3rd of 1924, having presided over the United States before, during, and after the War That Changed the World. We have our research links for you in our podcast notes. With that, let's 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 today. For our segment, A Century in the Making. Sabin Howard is the lead sculpture for the giant 60 foot long bronze sculpture called A Soldier's Journey, which will become the centerpiece of the National World War I Memorial in Washington, D.C. There's a lot of action and activity going on at the new Howard Sabin Sculpture Studio in New Jersey. The first full size armatures have arrived at the studio. Models have been hired. Sabin, the lead sculptor and three associate sculptors that he's brought onto the project, are now actually making the final full size clay sculptures that will be when completed, cast into bronze as a lasting tribute to those who fought and sacrificed for our nation 100 years ago. Many of you have met Sabin on the podcast, but I also want to introduce you to the associate sculptors, David [Freck], [Stephen Lane], and Charlie [Mostau]. They're all too busy to talk to us right now, but we have a special treat specifically for our podcast listeners. For the next 14 days, we're opening up a special link just for you, where you can see a gallery of over 130 pictures and short video clips that offer a unique view and special insight into the first days of actual sculpting of this historic and important project. Follow the link in the podcast notes to view the gallery. This week for Remembering Veterans, we're going to preview the upcoming fourth annual Camp Doughboy World War I Historic Weekend in New York City. Camp Doughboy features two days of activities, ceremonies, education and living history at Governors Island National Monument, and it's going to happen on September 14th and 15th. Joining us is long time friend of the World War I Centennial and the podcast, Kevin Fitzpatrick. Kevin is an author and editor of eight nonfiction books all tied to New York City's history, including the award winning World War I New York: A Guide to the City's Enduring Ties to the Great War. He's the program director of the World War I Centennial Committee for New York City and in 2016, launched World War I History Weekend Camp Doughboy on Governors Island in New York Harbor. It's been a great success and for 2019, promises to be bigger and better than ever. Kevin, welcome back to the podcast.

[0:14:44]

Kevin F: Hey Theo, it's great to be back on the show. I'm really excited to be another guest with you guys on the podcast.

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Theo Mayer: Oh thank you, Kevin. So this is number four, the fourth Camp Doughboy. Congratulations. For our listeners who don't have any background on it, what is Camp Doughboy?

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Kevin F: Well, Camp Doughboy is a two day living history event that we have on Governors Island National Monument, which is a little island in New York Harbor that everybody passes when they go to the Statue of Liberty. And for four years now, we've drawn in several dozen living historians and World War I uniforms, Edwardian dressed civilians, for really, two days of living history to talk about World War I, both side of the war, both the good guys and the bad guys, civilian impressions, women in uniform, and it really is like we like to say, the biggest free World War I exhibition in the country because we don't charge admission. And last year we drew 10,000 people so those are some pretty good numbers.

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Theo Mayer: It really is. Could you tell our listeners a little bit about the location, Governors Island? Where is it, how do you get there, its history and its ties to World War I?

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Kevin F: Sure. So Governors Island is 172 acres. It's only a 10 minute ferry ride from Manhattan, from the Battery, and even closer to Brooklyn. It was an army post up until 1966, and it was the home of First Army. And during World War I it played a very vital role because it was a supply depot. It had a railroad, they shipped out about \$1 million worth of war material a day to France. It's where General Pershing departed for England in 1917, and it's where the soldiers trained, they got their orders and whatnot on the island. So it's really great to be back in the exact same place on the parade ground where people like General Leonard Wood drilled and trained and created, and we're back with tents and horses and vehicles and all kinds of cool exhibitions to see.

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Theo Mayer: It really is very visual. The pictures from last year were great. Tell us a little bit about number three. How did that go exactly?

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Kevin F: Last year was really fun because we had a lot of new additions, including Alan Crane brought the Yankee Division Mobile Field Kitchen. So Alan is a fantastic living historian and really into the [AES], and he built his own field kitchen and cooked the meals for us. And what was funny is, besides having really good army chow, is the only request from the National-

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Theo Mayer: Wait a minute, Kevin. I've got to just interrupt here. Really good army chow?

[0:17:04]

Kevin F: It was awesome. It was so amazing. And the guys who were the chefs, they got up really early in the morning. We had great coffee all day long. And what was funny is the only request I got from the National Park Service because we're on federal property is, the park ranger said, "Do not give any food to the public because we worry more about the New York City Health Department than anything else." So we could get away with showing off weapons and machine guns, but it was really the food they were worried about the most. So the food was only for the living historians. And it's kind of funny because the public was like, where do I get a plate. And sorry, it's only for us. But that was really fun, and we had a lot more people last year being a Centennial, and we also added enemy combatants. So last year we had a lot of Germans come, and they got tons of interest representing Imperial Germany and other nations. So we had Irish, we had English, we had some Welsh Fusiliers, so we had a really good turnout of diverse kinds of people in uniform, as well as a lot of people that came out as civilians in Edwardian clothes to just kind of enjoy the day with us.

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Theo Mayer: Well, okay. Across all three past events, do you have a favorite story, something interesting or unusual or particularly memorable?

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Kevin F: You know, when David [Shue] came in 2017 on his horse, he was the perfect living historian as General Pershing [inaudible], beautiful horse. He was a huge, huge hit. He was extremely good with the public, really, really brought to life General Pershing, and what a wonderful gentleman. And sadly a little less than a year later he passed away from cancer. So it was really with a heavy heart last year, and we dedicated last year's weekend to David and his memory. And this year we're going to be bringing back horses, and so everybody is really excited because it's something that David brought to the Island and really was a huge hit with the public. I mean, we've had so many good

memories. Last year we had two little brothers come out, seven and eight years old, and they had their own homemade Doughboy uniforms on. And they were all over the place. They were climbing on the vehicles, they brought their own little mock up rifles, people just went nuts for them. They were just so beloved. And they were more of the many, many kids that came out to the weekend which is great because it's a very good family activity. It's great to have some of the parents bring their kids out, and you know, it's amazing how many teenagers know a lot about World War I. And what we find is a lot of them learn about the war from video games. So they know all about the uniforms, all about the weapons and tactics, so that leads them into studying the war and taking French lessons in high school, and so that's been a very cool thing to learn about as a public historian.

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Theo Mayer: And you mentioned to me earlier when we talked before the show that you're adding extra features for families and kids this year.

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Kevin F: Yeah, this year we're going to have a dedicated kid's activity zone. We're going to have a grenade toss, obstacle course, a scavenger hunt, we're doing In Their Footsteps with [Ryan Hage's 00:19:55] organization, and we're also going to be doing a bicycle ramble around the island. The perimeter of the island is 2.2 miles, and there's no cars on Governors Island, and so a lot of re-enactors bring vintage bicycles and the public is invited to bring their own bicycles or rent them on the island, and they're all going to ride around the island together in a vintage bike ride, which is really nice because the tip of Governors Island, you're looking right at the face of the Statue of Liberty. So it's a beautiful ride along the waterfront of New York Harbor, and the bonus is going right past the Statue of Liberty. So we'll definitely get some pictures of that for you guys.

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Theo Mayer: Do I need tickets? How much does it cost, and where do I get them?

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Kevin F: So Governors Island, it's free to go to the National Monument. The ferry leaves from the Battery Maritime Building, which is at 10 South Street right next to the Staten Island Ferry Terminal. The ferries are free before noon, and then after starting at 12:00 they're three bucks for adults. Kids are free, veterans are free. And you just walk right onto the ferry and walk right off. There's food over there, there's food trucks, there's a place to grab a bite to eat, bring a picnic if you want, and spend the day with us. It goes from 10:00 to 5:00 Saturday and Sunday. But the thing to look out for this year on the parade ground is we're going to have a calvary demonstration by Frank Bradford. So he's going to bring his horses and a mule. We're going to have a mule up there, so we'll have a lot of demonstrations on horseback this year.

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Theo Mayer: Kevin, any closing thoughts?

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Kevin F: You know, Governors Island is such a beautiful, magical place to go to and to bring 100 living historians out there to engage with the public, it's really special. And the public has really embraced it. I mean, to get 5,000 people a day coming in to see us, we lose our voices by the end of the day. It's very, very tough to do it, but we love doing it. We love talking about the war. We've met so many wonderful people that bring out their grandfathers' records or photos or medals and ask, "What is this thing?" And the people that we have that are the living historians are experts in their field and know as much as any museum curator does. And so they can explain it, talk about it, show them what it meant, where they were in the war. So that's very, very fun for me to see as an organizer.

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Theo Mayer: Well, congratulations on all your World War I commemoration successes, Kevin. It sounds like it's going to be a great weekend coming up.

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Kevin F: Thanks for the support, Theo. I really appreciate it from the bottom of my heart and all of us in New York. Thanks again.

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Theo Mayer: Kevin Fitzpatrick is the author and editor of New York City History Books, including World War I New York: A Guide to the City's Enduring Ties to the Great War. Coming up is the fourth annual Camp Doughboy Weekend at Governors Island National Monument. It's going to happen on September 14th and 15th. We have links for you in the podcast notes. For a spotlight on the media, the 2019 NFL season kicks off this week. So, we thought this would be a great opportunity to talk about the very intimate relationship between the War that Changed the

World, football, and the NFL. In a massively oversimplified condensation, as America rapidly builds up an army for World War I, the U.S. Military concludes that football is a great game for soldiers. To encourage the sport, they formed football's first true all star teams competing against each other, and top college teams while raising millions of dollars for the war effort. Soon, football becomes an integral part of the military culture as it helps Doughboys prepare for combat, bond with fellow soldiers, and release tension. During this, more and more Americans from different social classes visit the military bases to watch the games, which really helps spur football's popularity as it grows into an American pastime. Significantly, within two years of the armistice, the NFL is born. In fact, the relationship between the birth of the NFL and World War I is so significant that in January of this year in 2019, the NFL, who's a huge supporter of veterans, announced that the organization will donate \$1 million in the memory of those who served in World War I and helped to create it. They're going to help fund the National World War I Memorial in Washington, D.C. And that's very exciting, and we thank them. To help us unpack the whole story, we're being joined by Chris Serb, a really busy guy. He's a captain for the Chicago Fire Department, a freelance writer in his spare time, and he's the author and wrote a book about World War I and football called, War Football: World War I and the Birth of the NFL. Chris, it's great to have you on the podcast.

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Chris Serb: Theo, it's great to be here, thanks for having me.

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Theo Mayer: So Chris, before we get into the story of football in World War I, let me ask a little bit about yourself. How did you come to the story, and what made you decide to do this particular book?

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Chris Serb: Well, I was working on the side as a freelance writer. I guess it's a little over 15 years ago because I was reading a book about football history and found a little nugget that George Halas had played for the Great Lakes Naval Training Station. And then I saw this a couple other places, too. Halas wrote about it in his own autobiography and a couple of books on Bears history had mentioned that George Halas had played. So I pitched the Chicago Tribune on writing an article for them. And I said, "Oh, I'll go back to the original sources, look at the original articles on microfilm and see what kind of a phenomenon this was, this Great Lakes Naval Training Station." And the Chicago Tribune said, "Okay, why don't you write it. We'll run it on the 85th anniversary of the Rose Bowl game that Halas and the Great Lakes Naval Training Station won," which a little bit of perspective on timeline there, we just celebrated the 100th anniversary. So that means I was at this for 15 years. So I went to the original microfilm and found out some really interesting stories about the Great Lakes team. But at the same time, I saw these places that I had never heard of. Camp Grant of Rockford, Illinois and Camp Harrison of Indianapolis, and the Chicago Naval Reserves, which played at Municipal Pier which was renamed Navy Pier after the war. It's pretty familiar to most of us today. And there were players on these teams whose names I recognized, guys that were stars in the early NFL, guys who were NFL Hall of Famers, and I really started going down a rabbit hole at that point and digging up as much information on these old teams as I could. And that's when I found out that World War I and this war football phenomenon that we saw from 1917 to 1919 really laid the foundation for the birth of the NFL, which came in 1920.

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Theo Mayer: Now, I want to talk about pre-World War I football for just a second. As a kid I grew up in Asia in a British Crown colony and we played rugby. That's really the genesis of American football, isn't it?

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Chris Serb: Yeah, it really is. If you go back to the first American football game which is 150 years ago, it's a timely anniversary. It was back in 1869. It really was very similar to British rugby. And it would stay that way for the first several years. But then in the 1870s you had a player from Yale name Walter Camp, who wormed his way onto football's rules committee, and he was the guy that really started proposing key changes and steering football kind of towards his vision. And part of this was to give the game its own character, part of it was to make it watchable for fans. He really became the father of American football and steered it for more than 50 years. And through it all, there was this amazing period of growth in popularity over football's first 50 years and by World War I, it didn't really resemble rugby anymore, it more or less resembled the game that we all know today.

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Theo Mayer: By 1917 when America entered the war, football was already quite popular as a school sport, or more than that?

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Chris Serb: It really was popular as a school sport. By the time of World War I, college football was probably number two in the heart of the American sports fan right behind major league baseball. Kind of on the flip side, the professional level was just starting to emerge before the war, but it was pretty far behind the college game. It was

more what you would call semi-professional. But mostly these were blue collar teams that were made up of factory workers, railroad workers. They didn't have much time to practice. The football really wasn't that great. College football really was king back in those days.

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Theo Mayer: So how did it start to get integrated into the training camps in the military?

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Chris Serb: It was really spurred on by Walter Camp. The military really pushed football out of necessity. You had these very large training camps springing up in the middle of nowhere. You'd have 10,000 to 40,000 soldiers or sailors or Marines, and Uncle Sam had to whip these guys into shape quickly. All kinds of sports were employed as different training tools, but football was really seen as one of the early ones that was a very good way to physically harden these men. But just as importantly, football in particular kept troops out of trouble. During their liberty, these soldiers would go out and get drunk and hit the red light districts, and kind of some age old problems that you have when you crowd young men together in close quarters. And some high government officials commissioned a study, and they found that organized sports would keep these soldiers on base and keep them from chasing loose women.

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Theo Mayer: There was a young captain in World War I. Now he used to hang out with another young World War I captain named Patton. Anyway, they both had interesting histories as they went on. But this guy liked to coach football. Can you tell us about him?

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Chris Serb: I think you're talking about Captain Eisenhower probably, as he was known to his friends. He'd been a pretty promising young halfback at West Point, but then he had a knee injury in his sophomore year that derailed his career. He had to sit on the sidelines when Army won the national championship in his senior year. But he did the next best thing he could do. He took up coaching. He coached the JV team at West Point. Then when he was stationed at Fort Sam Houston in Texas, he did a little bit of part-time coaching at a high school, a little bit of coaching at a small college. And then right before the U.S. Entered the war, when the National Guard was posted in the Southwest, there was a really large scale Mexican border tournament, and that really was kind of a precursor to this war football phenomenon that we saw in 1917 and 1918. So Ike coached the 12th Division All Stars in this tournament. After the war he went right back to coaching. He coached military football at places like Camp Meade in Maryland, Fort Benning in Georgia, for several more years. I think he did it through 1926. Now, Ike ultimately went on to bigger and better things. He was Supreme Commander of the Allied Forces in Europe in World War II and he became President of the United States, kind of a big deal.

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Theo Mayer: Oh, that.

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Chris Serb: Yeah, those little things. But that football background always stuck with him. He always preached the importance of teamwork, he practiced what he preached, and he used football slang pretty extensively when he was talking about military operations so much so that it's kind of ingrained into the way we talk about military operations today. We use these Ike-isms like hit the line, and pull an end run, and get the ball across the goal when we're talking about military operations.

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Theo Mayer: Interesting. I had always seen it in the other direction, that there was so much military jargon in football. But interesting perceptive. A number of key figures responsible for setting up teams, and what would later become the NFL, served in World War I. Could you talk about those men?

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Chris Serb: George Halas was clearly the most important. He was one of the NFL's founders. His name is the one that really still echoes in the sporting world a hundred years later. Halas just wasn't that good as a college player. He was injured a lot, he only played one full season. He really kind of blossomed as a player through the military, through his connection to war football. He'd founded the Decatur Staleys, which later became the Chicago Bears. A couple of other guys who have been long forgotten to history, Bud Talbott had been an All American tackle at Yale. He was coach of Camp Sherman in Ohio where he had several All American and top flight players. Bud Talbott saw what a good team he had. He took the team on a barnstorming tour of Ohio, and Camp Sherman did really well. They went six and two, and they raised about \$3 million in today's dollars for the war effort. And this convinced Talbott and other investors that the public would actually pay to see pro football if the football was good enough.

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Theo Mayer: Now Chris, as you think about the whole story of war football, is there a particular story or anecdote that especially stands out for you?

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Chris Serb: Great Lakes, the team that George Halas played for, won one of the best games of 1918. It was a 7-6 win over the Naval Academy in November on a fumble return. It was a 90 yarder late in the fourth quarter, it looked like Great Lakes was about to lose, and it wound up being one of the most controversial plays in football history up to that point. Great Lakes halfback [Dizzy Isleson] scooped up this fumble before Navy even realized what happened. And Navy's Hall of Fame coach, a guy named Gil Dobie was on the sidelines screaming, "Tackle him, tackle him!" even though none of his players was anywhere close, they weren't within 10 yards of him. But one of Dobie's substitutes was following orders, jumped off the bench still wearing his warmups and ran onto the field and flattened Isleson about 40 yards short of the goal line. The refs came and they quickly restored order, and they ordered the touchdown to Isleson, and that gave Great Lakes a 7-6 win that ultimately helped them seal their national championship season.

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Theo Mayer: Well Chris, I want to ask you one question about the book. I got an advance read copy and I looked at it. The book is 200 pages long but then on top of that, there's another 150 pages or so of notes. Can you tell us about the notes? What are they?

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Chris Serb: I had all these great stories, but to tell them in a narrative format, I had to limit myself to the most important players, the most important teams. But I also wanted to document just how wide and just how deep this war football phenomenon went. So the biggest thing in the appendices where I document the names, the military teams, and the NFL teams of the 240 or so war football players and coaches who played or coached in the early NFL, I didn't have room to tell all their stories in the book, but the appendix really became a good reference for anyone that's interested in learning more about the connection between war and football, and between World War I and the birth of the NFL.

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Theo Mayer: What a great pre-season interview here. To wrap it up, what should our listeners remember about World War I football and the birth of the NFL?

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Chris Serb: First, through war football you had players who had already hung up their helmets who re-discovered their desire to play. They had already given up football once when they graduated college, and now they had a chance to play top flight football again, and this really stoked their competitive juices. Secondly, investors saw that the public would pay money to see teams of yesterday's stars. The next important thing is that old barriers to professionalism fell. Before the war, a lot of people viewed pro football as really being seedy and tainted. It's roughnecks, it's blue collars, it's gamblers. But now the players on the field were these clean cut, college educated military veterans. This really raised the profile of pro football in the eye of John Q. Public. Finally what you had was a tremendous networking effect. So if you were starting a pro team, you could tap into the players you knew from war football, and you could tap into their college networks when you were building your roster. And all of these factors came together perfectly during the war, and all these factors led to the birth of the NFL less than two years after the war ended. And if you think about it, professional football was probably going to happen anyway, but the war and war football really jump started it. It accelerated professional football by five or 10 or even 20 years. It's a pretty cool story, and I'm just glad that I was able to tell it.

[0:34:36]

Theo Mayer: Chris Serb is the author of War Football: World War I and the Birth of the NFL. We have links for you in the podcast notes, to the Amazon page where you can get the book, and the author's LinkedIn profile. And that brings us to Articles and Posts, where we select stories that you'll find in our newsletter, The Dispatch. The Dispatch points to online articles with summary paragraphs and links, providing a really rich resource to World War I news and activities. Here are some selections from the current issue. Reminder. World War I Dispatch Newsletter becomes monthly in September 2019. This issue of the World War I Dispatch is the last weekly issue of the newsletter. The publication is transitioning to a once a month format. The first issue of the new monthly newsletter will arrive in the middle of September, and it'll be sent to the same distribution list that the weekly publication has been for the last three years. If you're a subscriber now, you'll continue to receive it. If you're not a subscriber, or want to explore past issues, go to ww1cc.org/dispatch, all lower case. World War I Dog Tag Discovered in France Returned to Soldier's Family in Kentucky. At first, Larry [Fralick] thought it was a scam call. A man with a French accent on the other end of the line was trying to convince him that he found something that belonged to Fralick's family. Turns out he was telling

the truth. "He sent us a picture of the metal detector he used to find it," Fralick said. Learn more and watch a video telling the story of the mysterious caller who convinced Clifford Fralick that his ancestor left something behind in France during World War I. Lectures Bring World War I Exhibition at Knights of Columbus Museum to Close. Two lectures on September 7 at the Knights of Columbus Museum in New Haven, Connecticut will be the final events in the museum's exhibition World War I, Beyond the Front Lines, which concludes on September 8th. War Within War, the 1918 Influenza in America will examine the impact of the so-called Spanish Flu on America and the world. The Red Baron and military aviation developments in World War I will examine a key figure in the rise and the impact of military aviation spawned by the world conflict. Read more about these two informative lectures and learn about the award-winning World War I exhibition at the Knights of Columbus Museum in New Haven, Connecticut. A second dog tag story. This one from a Minnesota family reunited with ancestral World War I dog tag after more than 80 years. Alan Carpenter often looks for buried artifacts in Cobb Cook Park in Hibbing, Minnesota using his metal detector. It's something that he does for fun. But he and his partner, Jim [Cocovar], also return lost items. Last Spring, Carpenter made his most important discovery, a World War I dog tag found buried under at least six inches of frost. "At first I didn't understand what I was. I thought it was a kind of a token or something until I got it home and rinsed it off. And then I saw the United States Marine Corps on it," said Carpenter. With Cocovar's help, this past Memorial Day, Carpenter figured out that the dog tag belonged to [Anton Burnhart], a World War I veteran and a former Hibbing police officer. Find out about how the family of this World War I soldier was reunited with a dog tag in August after it was lost for more than 80 years. Peach Pits, Nutshells, and How They Helped America Win the Great War. Writing in his "View From Swamptown" column, G. Timothy [Cranston], North Kingston, Rhode Island's town historian, explored the "seemingly inconsequential peach pit and the equally unimportant companion, the discarded nutshell" to see what historic part they played in World War I. Discover how these common bits of food waste saved many American Doughboys during the war. Update on the MVPA 2019 hundredth anniversary transcontinental motor convoy. This week on Wednesday, August 28, 2019, the Military Vehicle Preservation Association 100th anniversary convoy will travel through Kearney, Nebraska as they continue retracing the original 1919 U.S. Army's first transcontinental motor convoy route on the famed Lincoln Highway. Access the full length version of all these amazing stories and more through the summary paragraphs and links that you'll find in our Dispatch Newsletter, which is now a monthly. It's a short and easy guide to a lot of World War I news and information. Subscribe to this wonderful free guide at ww1cc.org/subscribe, or just follow the link in the podcast notes. And that wraps up Episode Number 138 of the award-winning World War I Centennial News, the Doughboy Podcast. Thank you for listening. In closing we want to thank our great guests, talented crew and our supporters including Kevin Fitzpatrick, author and expert on World War I in New York. Chris Serb, Captain in the Chicago Fire Department and author of War Football. Thanks to Mack [Nelson] and Tim [Crow], our editing team. [Juliet Cole], the line producer for the show. Dave [Cramer], research and writing. [Jay L. Misho 00:40:11], for web support. And I'm Theo Mayer, your producer and host. The U.S. World War I Centennial Commission was authorized by Congress in early 2013 to honor, commemorate and educate the nation about World War I on the occasion of the centennial of the war. For over a half a decade, the Commission commissioners, staff and our many associates and supporters have labored to inspire a national conversation and awareness about World War I. We've brought the lessons of 100 years ago to today's educators, their classrooms, and to the public. We've helped to restore World War I memorials in communities of all sizes across the country. Now that the Commission's charter to honor, educate and commemorate the Centennial of World War I has been successfully accomplished, the full focus of the Commission is turning to its capstone mission, to build a national World War I memorial in Washington, D.C. That after a century of being MIA in the nation's capitol, will finally stand in this important international nexus to honor the memory and sacrifice of the men and women who served this nation during those transformative years of World War I. We want to thank the Commissions' founding sponsor, the Pritzker Military Museum and Library, as well as the major contribution of the Starr Foundation. And thank you to our podcast sponsors, the U.S. World War I Centennial Commission and the Doughboy Foundation. The podcast and a full transcript of the show can be found on our website at ww1cc.org/cn, all lower case. You'll find World War I Centennial News, The Doughboy Podcast in all the places that you get your podcasts, including iTunes, Google Play, TuneIn, Spotify, Radio on Demand, even on YouTube, asking Siri or your smart speaker by saying, "Play ww1 centennial news podcast." The Commission's Twitter and Instagram handles are both at ww1cc, and we're on Facebook at www1centennial. Thank you for joining us, and don't forget, we need your help to keep the story alive for America. Please contribute to the memorial, which will stand to tell the story for generations to come. Just text the letters "wwi" or "ww1" to the phone number 919999, and make a contribution of any size. (Music) Thank you for listening. So long. [0:43:25]