

The American Worker & WWI (45m 56s)
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3 speakers (Theo Mayer, Mark Robbins, Michael V.)

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Theo Mayer: Welcome to World War I Centennial News, the Doughboy Podcast. Episode Number 140. The Doughboy Podcast is about what happened a hundred 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 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. I'm Theo Mayer, the chief technologist for the Commission, and your host. Welcome to the show. This week on the show, for 100 Years Ago, we're going to explore how the war fundamentally changed the relationships between government, industry and labor. During this segment, we're going to be joined by historian, educator, and author, Dr. Mark Robbins to explore some of these events. For A Century in the Making, novelist and writer Traci Slatton continues to offer us her essaying as she looks at the current efforts by her husband, sculptor Sabin Howard, as he progresses on the masterwork called A Soldier's Journey, the 60 foot bronze that will be the centerpiece of the national World War I memorial in Washington, DC. For Remembering Veterans, we're joined by World War I Centennial activist, Colonel Michael Visconage, USMC retired, who after his wonderful centennial commemoration efforts in various areas, has taken a post as the History Program Director and Chief Historian for the Department of Veteran Affairs. And we're bringing back a wonderful segment feature from the past called The Buzz, where we explore some of our favorite stories, post and articles that you're going to find on social media and on the internet. All this week, on World War I Centennial News, the Doughboy podcast, which is sponsored and brought to you by the US 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, DC. You know, as I was asking you last week so directly to help us over this final funding hurdle in order for us to have a groundbreaking this fall, some of you came back with questions about exactly where the project is at. What have we accomplished, and where are we right now? Let me take a moment to explain. The national World War I memorial in Washington, DC is going to be done in two phases. You know that Congress granted the project a park just a couple of blocks east of the White House on Pennsylvania Avenue called Pershing Park. It's a whole quite wonderful one and three quarter acre trapezoidal park, to honor the veterans of World War I. The original park was designed by famed landscape architect M. Paul Friedberg, and opened in 1981. At first it was very compelling, a little piece of nature in the center of an otherwise pure urban area, with water and waterfalls in the summer, and ice skating in the winter. Unfortunately, it soon fell into terrible disrepair, and by 2010 had disintegrated into a pretty funky, junky place. Home to standing water, cracked concrete, all manner of detritus, an occasional protest encampment, and as I learned when I hung out there last year, home to quite a population of not so cute little rodents with whiskers. Not squirrels. The state of it aside, the location is absolutely stunning. It's such a perfect place for the memorial. So phase one is essentially to rebuild the park as a suitable, amazing, compelling and inviting place for the memorial elements. Phase two is to put the memorial elements into this fresh, new space. We're trying to finish up the fundraising that we need to start phase one this fall. Essentially, right now it'll take a year to complete it, but before we start, we need the funds for it in place. As I told you last week, we're so close, but we're just a little bit short. Every week we tell you on the podcast that it's part of a project to ensure that World War I doesn't fade back into the mists of obscurity. Well, that's what our sponsors are trying to do with the memorial. If you listen and enjoy to what we've been bringing you on the show for years now, please say thank you to the people that make that possible by helping them meet their funding goals to break ground on the park right now. Give what you can. Say thank you to those who served a hundred years ago, and to those who are trying to honor them today. All you need to do is to text the letters WWI or WW1 to 91999. And please, do it right now, before you forget, while we're asking you. We'll be here waiting for you when you get back. Thank you. Remember, text WWI or WW1 to 91999. You'll get a text back with a link that lets you give any amount you want. As the United States declares war on Germany, the government and the administration go into a near-dictatorial and draconian control frenzy, imposing government oversight at surprising and even shocking levels. Controlling freedom of speech, dissent and industry. What happened would be inconceivable and really terrifying to most Americans today. World War I fundamentally changed the relationship between government and industry, as well as between industry and labor. Now with that as a setup, we're going to jump into our centennial time machine and go back a hundred years, as we retrace the story of that time, when it was anything but business as usual. During World War I, the federal government nationalized a lot of industries, like railroad, and telephone and telegraph. And here's an interesting example. In our nation's history, it's been really rare for an individual company to be nationalized, but in World War I, the Smith and Wesson Company, facing leadership and financial challenges, and being such a crucial arms supplier for the war, Wilson and Congress decided that extreme measures were needed, and that's how Smith and Wesson joined the railroads as an organization now managed by the United States government. The government all but nationalized coal and other fuels. Ocean shipping, shipbuilding, airplane development, and it exercised more control than ever before over all manufacturing, and of agricultural production. In the financial sector, the Federal Reserve

System, which had only been established in 1914, began flexing its muscles. It had to keep inflation in check while also raising funds to fight the war. The Federal Reserve took responsibility for the Liberty Bond Drives, and in the process simplified the sale of securities for both banks and consumers. One result of control by the national government is that government also influenced negotiations between labor and management like it never had before. Quite often, surprisingly, in favor of labor. Friction between labor and management could hurt the war effort, so the Fed stepped in, requiring specific labor policies on its contracts with manufacturers. Federal contracts often stipulated that workers had to be granted an eight hour work day, with overtime for hours beyond that, and double time on holidays. These contracts usually also required that management grant workers the right for collective bargaining. Now this doesn't mean that the government was entirely pro-union. The more radical socialist and communist unions were still regarded warily. Still, many concessions were won during this period. Concessions that unions had long fought for, and did not plan to give up after the war. Just as the manufacturers were equally determined to revert to pre-war terms and conditions. The unions tied to the railroads were especially vocal, calling for the government to retain control, rather than to allow the previous owners to roll back union gains. Add to this the high inflation rate for food, clothing, and other goods, and its easy to see why labor firmly dug in its heels. So in the aftermath of World War I, in 1919, 4,000,000 workers went on strike. That's a fifth of the whole work force. A general strike in Seattle set the stag in February of 1919. Coal miners struck in July. Actors also struck during the summer. And it was the turn of the Boston Police in September, forcing government to send troops into the city to keep the peace. Other strikers included clothing workers, textile workers, and telephone operators, but the big one of the year came when 350,000 steel workers walked out of the plants across the nation. Now with a growing fear of socialist and communist influence in the unions, as had been observed in other nations, this strike was the proverbial straw that broke the camel's back. The so-called Red Scare was in full swing. Government and management fought back. The steel union was crushed, taking other unions down with it. Labor gains made over the prior 10 years were lost, and it would be at least another decade before unions began to recover. Union membership in the 1920s dropped from 5,000,000 to 3,000,000. Laws guaranteeing a minimum wage for women and prohibiting child labor were struck down. The doors that opened for workers during World War I, slammed shut between 1919 and 1921. It was a grim time for unions and their members. With us today to explore changes for the American worker during the war and in the aftermath of World War I, is Dr. Mark Robbins. Author of a book called Middle Class Union: Organizing the 'Consuming Public' in Post World War I America. Mark, welcome to the podcast.

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Mark Robbins: Well thank you for having me on.

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Theo Mayer: Mark, let me start with your interest in this area. How did that come about?

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Mark Robbins: Well, I guess you could say from broad perspective, I was interested in how different people came to different, competing oftentimes, definitions of economic justice in a period of a whole lot of change. Leading up to World War I of course, we see American industry become the most productive and powerful in the world, and reactions to that from progressive reform movements, to an acceleration of organizing as part of the labor movement, even a host of radical movements, and it seems just like the nation could go in a lot of different directions. And so in that moment, we can see a host of competing interests. Now through the language of democracy, or sometimes outside of it, redefining or contesting what it means to have economic justice in America. So that's what really brought me to this, and then from there I just explored some of those perspectives and ended up settling my primary research interests with what a lot of white collar workers had to say about this scenario during and after the war, and its relationship to some of these other groups, including the organized blue collar, and what they wanted out of that scenario.

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Theo Mayer: One of the places the administration took control was over industry. Can you address the nationalization of the various sectors, and those control boards that they put in place?

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Mark Robbins: In a nutshell, in order to run an effective war, especially joining at the time the United States did, they wanted to have their country in order, and that included a whole lot more government control over industry, over labor, over finances.

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Theo Mayer: There were some serious conflicts with one of the major labor unions during this time, the IWW, the Industrial Workers of the World. They were considered a socialist threat, with protests, accused of bombings, arrests and worse. What was that all about?

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Mark Robbins: Basically, many IWW members felt that war was a function of capitalists societies, and did little to help the working class, and it was inconsistent with the desire to have a workers' controlled society, or one big union if you will. And that really scared a lot of those that were running things, not to mention more conservative individuals, even more conservative elements of the labor movement. To the point of repression, July of 1917, striking miners in Bisbee, Arizona, were forcibly removed under loose authority of a sheriff, to take these IWW strikers, and some of them that weren't even members of the IWW, onto cattle cars to remove them out of town, all the way into the desert, where they starved there until help could arrive. And that level of repression is really something the IWW never really recovered from.

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Theo Mayer: The flip side of it, there was now unprecedented investment to ramp up American manufacturing, American industry, after the war declaration. And all the money in the world to do it. So it was a special moment for the industrialists, for management. How did labor fare during the war years themselves?

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Mark Robbins: That's an interesting question. If you're a radical element of the labor movement, not well, and that has to do with both repression from government, and from employers, ongoing repression there. And even skepticism, to say the least, among the more mainstream elements of the labor movement. However, if you were in the American Federation of Labor, you get the right to collectively bargain, though it comes with an understanding that workers would not go on strike, and that takes away a major weapon of the working class to actually gain better conditions on the job. This led to increased wages, obviously more voice on the job, but prices go up dramatically at this time as well, and even more so in the post-war period.

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Theo Mayer: And that brings us, as you mentioned, to the end of the war. Millions of men are demobilizing and prices, as you mentioned, are sky high, and now strikes and unrest really start to settle in. What was happening?

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Mark Robbins: Absolutely. With at least the mainstream, more conservative elements of the labor movement, having had now the right to collective bargaining, that's something that they want to build upon, and you can imagine that a lot of the employers don't want workers to have this right. Meanwhile, prices go up dramatically, so food goes up about 86% in price, retail prices from 1913 to 1919 went up about 86%, rents went up about 11% from 1914 to 1919, but with all kinds of fluctuations in the post-war period of 1919, 1920. And clothing and dry goods went up 223% from 1915 to 1919 alone, with the post-war period figuring prominently in those price increases. So with that in mind, workers are seeking not only respect of their collective bargaining rights to be continued and expanded upon, dignified treatment on and off the job, but the ability to just afford the necessities of life.

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Theo Mayer: Mark, was that straight line inflation, or what was driving all of that up so far?

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Mark Robbins: It's inflation, and well, a number of other factors. But it just depends a little bit on the industry. One point I wanted to make, with reference to this, is an unprecedented level of labor unrest. It's about one in five workers, some 22%, give or take, of the working class, goes on strike in 1919 alone. So that has reverberating effects, not just for people living at that time, but for the labor movement for years to come. And the strikes by and large don't really end well. Even this month, a hundred years ago, the Boston Policemen's strike began in September, and it was no union recognition won, wages not increased, to people who had gone on strike not allowed to go back on the job. Totally defeated.

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Theo Mayer: Now your book refers to the middle class unions. What did you mean by that?

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Mark Robbins: My book, Middle Class Union, refers to the organization of white collar workers in this post-war moment. Now white collar wages, they remained stagnant. And during the time of the war, there's some disgruntlement there, but largely it stays beneath the surface, because of the moment that we're in. If you critique your situation, you could be branded as unpatriotic. But after the war now, those scenarios have gone away. So they formed middle class tenants unions, they formed home gardens to beat the high cost of food. They even wore overalls as a means of protesting increases in the cost of clothing. But in doing so, they're organizing as the middle class, and they're defining themselves distinctly against striking workers and so-called profiteers among the elites. But what's interesting is they didn't do that through their positions on the job. They did so through their identity as

consumers. And from there, I think we can see again a real long-term and oftentimes subtle impact of World War I, and its aftermath that's still with us here today.

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Theo Mayer: From your perspective, what are some of the key ideas our listeners should remember about how World War I shaped the American worker, the middle class, and consumerism?

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Mark Robbins: This is a war that really brings a distinct identity to organizations within and outside of the middle class that's political, and makes it a matter of even community policing. That what you ate for dinner is not just a matter of your preference, but a matter of patriotism, with meatless Mondays, meatless Wednesdays and the like. It became a matter of patriotism that you keep an eye on your neighbors' dinner too. That they are consuming in a way that was becoming of the patriotic values of World War I. So after the war, I think you could persuasively argue that we are prone to think of our identity as consumers, and that's something that we see for years to come. Especially as we become more and more a consumer society over time.

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Theo Mayer: Well Mark, thank you for taking the time to help us get a better understanding of how World War I shaped and changed the American workforce, and the middle class, and the white collar. Really interesting perspective, I had never been exposed to it before. Thank you.

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Mark Robbins: Well I appreciate it.

[0:18:41]

Theo Mayer: Professor Mark Robbins is the author of a book called *Middle Class Union: Organizing the 'Consuming Public' in Post World War I America*. We have links for you in the podcast notes to his profile and to his book. With that, it's 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 today. Here's where we spotlight the ongoing remembrances and commemoration activities surrounding World War I, and World War I themes. For a *Century in the Making*, where we offer our listeners a rare, insider view on how a national memorial project goes from concept to reality, we have another installment from international award-winning bestselling author and novelist, Traci Slatton, who, lucky for us, and I suspect also lucky for him, is also married to lead sculptor Sabin Howard. We've enjoyed Traci's insight and insider view of the masterwork in progress before. Her newest essay appears in *Medium*, and is entitled, *And So It Begins: Sabin Howard Starts Sculpting the National World War I Memorial*, by Traci Slatton. "Four years of design and fabrication preparation. Struggle through a byzantine government agency process. Angst about not making art, and an endless negotiation process came to a close. This week by husband Sabin Howard opened a new chapter in the sculpting of the national World War I Memorial. Principle sculpture commenced as Sabin put a serrated-edged tool to clay. He chafed like a thoroughbred finally taken out of pasture to race, as he was born to do. "The last month saw a flurry of activity. We were delayed taking possession of his new studio. The studio was an old warehouse from the 1920s that had to be gutted. Permits and electrical inspections, and the usual obstructions of a thorough build-out slowed things down. On the eighth of August, with construction workers still drilling nails into the sheetrock, we received delivery of the pre-sculpted foam armatures." Editors note: these armatures were created at Pangolin Edition in the UK, and have been the subject of other *Century in the Making* segments, including July 15, 2019, episode 131, February 2nd, 2019, episode 111, and December 28th, 2018, episode number 103. Back to the essay. "In an earlier *Medium* article, I delineated the process for creating these clay-covered foams. Sabin took his models to Pangolin Editions Foundry in Stroud, UK, where Steve Russell Studios had arrayed 156 cameras into a hemispherical photogrammetry rig. He and his team captured three-dimensional data about the models and their poses. The images were fed into something called Z Brush, a program for manipulating the data for rendering via 3-D printing. "Using the Z Brush templates, the figures were milled out in foam. Steel armatures were inserted inside the foam, and the whole figures were covered with a three millimeter coat of clay. Pangolin loaded the first group of nine figures into a shipping container for their journey across the Atlantic. When they arrived in New York, a truck picked up the containers in the port. Sabin and I, and sculptors Raymond D. And Charles Mostow waited with a photography team for that truck to arrive. "We all cheered when the truck roared up in front of the studio, but it was another two weeks before our landlord could give us entry to start work. Finally it was Monday, August 26th. Builders were still grouting tile, but we couldn't wait any longer. Sabin was already behind schedule. Our wonderful sculptors arrived promptly at 8:30 AM. Raymond D., a former student and a friend of Sabin's for nearly 30 years, whose portfolio includes some gorgeous pieces, Stephen Layne, from Philadelphia, who sculpted the inspiring Joe Frazier monument, and a gifted young Charlie Mostow, who's already taught *ecorche* classes, and whose fascination with the ancient Laocoon sculptures mirrors Sabin's, and of course Michelangelo's. "Our models showed up, often with songs on their lips, since they're all performers. Actor Paul-Emile Cendron, musical theater singer and dancer Evelyn Christina Tonn, opera singer Mackenzie Rogers, and actor Tim Rogan. We have a roster of talented young people to

work as models, including actor and screenwriter Zach Libresco, actor and puppeteer Leah Hoffman, and actor Melissa Blackwell. "For Sabin, the process of figure sculpting necessarily includes a model. 'Without a model, you can't see the form,' he states. 'You're dealing with a human being, it's three dimensional. Photography flattens and distorts the form. With a live model in front of you, you have thousands of options, and you can sculpt much faster.' "That first morning saw Sabin and his team rapt in conversation. They were figuring out the light and the space. Four giant skylights mean direct overhead light, so necessary for sculpting, but the light changes all day, sometimes it's too strong. We're making sliding blackout curtains, so that the sculptors can control the light, but those won't be installed until later this week. "Sabin has a plan in mind of how to divide and conquer this massive relief. 38 figures could be a 20 year project. Completing the reliefs quickly is an epic challenge. Fortunately, Sabin's brain includes a high-level executive function, and he has a strategy. Sculptor Stephen Layne set to work on the daughter, the initial figure in the composition. He was the first sculptor to step up to the day, and I video-recorded him on my iPhone. I couldn't help but whoo. I've worked along Sabin for the last 20 months to make this moment possible. It was sweet to see it happening in real time. "Sculptor Raymond D. Started on the second iteration of the mother, the figure who grasps her husband's arm, reluctant to let him go off to war. She's both a literal wife and mom, who doesn't want her husband to go overseas, and a symbol of the United States' reluctance to enter the Great War, releasing its isolationist policies. "Charlie Mostow was given the kneeling father/soldier, the protagonist who receives his helmet from the daughter. Sabin himself claimed the figure of the father tearing himself away from home to join his comrades-in-arms. "Now right away I noticed the difference in the four sculptors' methodologies. Sabin sculpts fast and fluidly. He started on the pelvic block, its connection to the ground and to the torso. That's where he always starts. He spoke about that for the camera. He's always designing and drawing on the clay, showing where the form turns as he works. "Now Stephen Layne works with elegance and efficiency, like a clockmaker. He steps close to the foam daughter figure, and works evenly and almost without breaks, except when the model needs to stretch. "Charlie Mostow has a careful, physical approach. At one point I caught him kneeling on the ground, rolling clay between his fingers, gazing with single-mindedness intensity at the right angle of model Tim Rogan's forward leg. It seemed so iconic that I snapped a photo. "Raymond D. Charges at his work. For somebody so cerebral, he's got an athletic style for sculpting. He gallops in and out and around the model and the sculpture, fiercely seeing everything. He uses a knife to tear up the front of the mother's skirt, commenting that it wasn't designed well. He's right. Photogrammetry and 3-D printing have limitations. Not everything could be or was rendered well. The sculpture looks great from a distance, but up close, it's kind of a mess. "The first day was intense, busy, and focused. On the second morning, I drove in early to turn on the warming oven. Sulfur-free plastilina clay is oil- and wax-based, and doesn't make dust, but it's also not malleable until its heated. S "Sabin bikes to and from the studio. He claims he needs the exercise to stay strong, mentally and physically. He and the others arrive about a half an hour after me. Good-humored exchanges and laughter rang out, as the models change into their costumes, and step into their modeling stance. "Sabin was raring to go. He was so focused on setting up the other guys on Monday, that he only got in four hours on his figure. He was starving to sculpt. He seemed to barely restrain himself from tackling the clay armature. "I unpacked. Most everything from my husband's old studio was still boxed up in cardboard cartons, littering the edges of the space. We needed a week, at least two days, without the models so that I could unpack and set up, but we didn't have those days. I did the best I could. I unwrapped sculpture bases, I tore bubble wrap off sculptures, and lugged heavy bronzes across the floor. I stacked a thousand pounds of [Chavray] clay in one area on two pallets. And in case you don't know, this clay comes in 10-pound bricks, and a box of eight bricks isn't feather-light. "I also wheeled Sabin's Aphrodite, the clay original, into my office to stand in the window as a blessing. I wear a lot of hats to aid my husband. Project manager, human resources, and CFO among others. Whatever's necessary. Yesterday, I was the person with broom in hand, sweeping up clay dribble. To be fair, David and Charlie also did some of that. We're in it together. "I also unwrapped Sabin's heroic-scale Hermes, and pushed and pulled it to where it can be seen near the background of the relief. This was no easy feat. That sculpture weighs nearly 300 pounds, and the wheels under the base seemed frozen. At one point, I climbed up a ladder embedded in the concrete wall, and used the strength of my legs to wedge the Hermes out of the shadows. This is Sabin Howard's studio, and his body of work must be visible. "I didn't need to go to the gym last night, but I did anyway. I'll need to stay strong too. I'm a novelist and a screenwriter by profession. I've put that down temporarily to accompany my husband on this unique journey. Creating a national memorial to honor our soldiers and grace our nation's capitol. "This morning, our third, has the ambience of a regular work day. Folks are settling in to what's expected of them. There's still guys in here pointing the bricks at the front of the building, but the work proceeds apace. "Stay tuned for more articles as the sculpting of Sabin Howard's A Soldier's Journey proceeds." Traci Slatton. There are links in the podcast notes to both the article in M, filled with photos, and to a gallery filled with over 130 images and small videos of the artists at work. During the World War I centennial period, there was this Marine who just kept popping up as an organizing force and centennial supporter. When we created a publishing partner program, he reported for duty and built a small but interesting USMC and World War I website on our server. Pretty soon, as the Texas World War I centennial commemoration got set up, he reported for duty again. His name is Colonel Michael Visconage, USMC retired. Then recently, we heard some great news. It turns out that Michael is now serving as the History Program Director and Chief Historian for the Department of Veteran Affairs. Well when we heard that, we wanted to invite Michael onto the podcast, and talk about his journey as a historian, a Marine historian, and a World War I centennial organizer, and what he sees going forward. Michael, the VA couldn't have picked a better choice. Welcome to the podcast.

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Michael V.: Thanks, Theo. It's great to be on, and I'm very honored to join the VA in this really unique position.

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Theo Mayer: Well Michael, when you went to University of Maryland, right, you didn't study history, but how did history then find you?

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Michael V.: One of my professors at Maryland at that day was Dr. Gordon Prang, who was the author of Tora! Tora! Tora!, the book that the film was based on, as well as At Dawn We Slept. He's truly the expert on the Pearl Harbor attack at the time. And also one of my other professors was Dr. Jon Sumida, a noted Clausewitz historian, so I had a lot of great experiences at Maryland that led me down that path. And in particular, Dr. Sumida was a sponsor for me, as a young man. When I was a senior I was an intern at the Marine Corps Museum in Washington DC at that time, at the Navy Yard. And I think what sealed the deal for me, is I showed up on the first day of my internship, and I was assigned to the registrar at the museum, a gentleman by the name of Ken Smith-Christmas. And the first day we went to the receiving room to unpack a box that had been dropped off by the widow of an elderly Marine. We opened the box, and in the box is a World War I Marine Corp uniform, with field equipment that went with it. And even a few German war souvenirs he had apparently brought back, a bayonet and a few other things. So I think that absolutely put the hook in me, that boy I needed to find a way to still stay tied in with history. Cool first experience too, having worked at the museum, I wrote a paper on the shooting badges of the Marine Corps, from their inception in 1912 to the present. A pretty esoteric subject, but the Marine Corps history division published it as a monograph. When I graduated, I was commissioned as a Second Lieutenant in the Marine Corps. I was a young guy, I was a brand new Second Lieutenant, I got a small publishing cred, so that certainly lit the fire for me.

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Theo Mayer: You were in for 30 years. I noticed in your profile of service that your service actually wound up involving your skills as a historian. Can you talk about that a bit?

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Michael V.: In my years of service, I spent 10 years as an active duty Marine. I resigned my commission but stayed in the Reserves for the remaining 20 years. One of the assignments that I ultimately came to in the Reserve community, is I became aware of a small Reserve unit called the Field History Detachment, whose mission was to deploy in times of war, to be the ones to document the fight if you will, by gathering documents, conducting oral history interviews, obtaining artifacts and taking photographs. And so I interviewed for this unit and was accepted into it. And my timing was impeccable, because I joined the unit in October of 2002, and sure enough, by January of 2003, all 10 of us were mobilized, basically for the looming action against Iraq, and in short order ended up staged in Kuwait, waiting for what would come. The commanding General of the 3rd Marine Aircraft Wing was a Two Star General by the name of Jim Amos. And General Amos later went on to be the Commandant of the Marine Corps. Basically he allowed me to get on any aircraft going forward as the front advanced, as I did to help document the fight, but also to sit in on key staff meetings, to understand what was happening, and to do multiple interviews with ranging everything from himself as the commanding General, down to a Corporal who may have been in a fire fight yesterday. So that again, all about this passion with collecting art history so we can refer to it later.

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Theo Mayer: That's a great gig. Now when you were on active duty, you earned a Bronze Star. What's that story?

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Michael V.: So twice as a Reserve Officer, I was mobilized. Again, once during that initial invasion, and then again in 2007 and eight, as the Command Historian for the multi-national Corps, Iraq. And part of that mission was to travel around Iraq. Probably conducted close to 200 oral history interviews during this time, collected about a terabyte worth of documents all to go back into the archives. But on top of that, my mission too was to help orchestrate more of a synergy between the other Service historians. As the Chief Historian for multi-national Corps, the Army had military history detachments, the Navy had historians in theater, the Marine Corps of course had historians, and the Air Force had historians. So part of my mission was to help thread that together and create a collaboration amongst the different Service historians in theater, so that we could all share what we were collecting, so that it would all make its way back into archives. But that all resulted in the recognition for me for that service was a Bronze Star medal.

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Theo Mayer: Can you talk a little bit about how you got involved in the Centennial? What you did during the period? You helped organize a bunch of stuff.

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Michael V.: I met with the World War I Centennial Commission, if you will, in early 2015. Someone had mentioned it to me, I found my way to the website, and I was a tab to click on that said, "Interested in volunteering?" And Chris Christopher was the first one to respond to me, and Theo, I think I met you in short order afterwards, because the first ask when I volunteered was, "Mike, can you help stand up that USMC tab on the website?" So that was the first experience, but as we got further into that year, there was a universal call put out that, "Hey, we need to get the states going on organizing what they're doing state by state." There was a map of which states had established something and which states had not, and Texas was in the red. So that sounded like a call to action to me, and we established the Texas World War I Centennial Commemoration Association, a non-profit. We partnered with the educational community, with higher education, with veteran's service organizations, with municipal organizations. All in the interest of, how do we help them do something to commemorate the role of Texans and Texas in the Great War.

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Theo Mayer: Michael, from your perspective, what are some of the most important lessons from World War I that people should just take away and remember?

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Michael V.: When you think about the veterans who were returning home from World War I, they returned to this rapidly changing social, political, and cultural landscape. But even things like realizing that veterans coming home needed hospital care, so there had to be decisions made about who was going to provide medical care. We hadn't crossed this bridge before. And at first it was the Army that provided it, and realized that that wasn't going to be enough, and ultimately there was a program to establish what were ultimately precursors to the Veterans Administration hospital system. I think ultimately though, what it speaks to is this idea that, what do veterans need, is constantly changing. What veterans needed in World War I was different than what veterans needed coming back from the Spanish-American War, and that was different than what Civil War veterans needed. We have to be prepared as a nation and the VA to understand how to serve our population effectively, just as they did at the end of World War I.

[0:37:39]

Theo Mayer: Michael, before we close, I want to learn a little more about what you're doing now, and how you and the VA found each other, and what you think you're going to be doing over the coming years.

[0:37:48]

Michael V.: Part of my mission is to establish an overarching history program, so we're doing an effective job of capturing some of our history today, so it can be used later by future researchers, writers, historians, the public, veterans. The other piece that's very exciting is creating a VA history center. The VA has selected the Dayton, Ohio, VA medical center campus, which is historic in its own right. It was the third Union veterans home that was established in 1867. And so that's a big project, just to get our arms around what we have, but then figuring out, well what can we make accessible to the public there, in terms of an archive and exhibit space. So once we've been able to catalog what we have, then we'll be on the pathway to establish that history center, that at this point we presume will be open to the public and serve as a resource, both internally to the VA, and to the public at large.

[0:38:42]

Theo Mayer: Michael, thanks so much for taking the time to join us today.

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Michael V.: Thank you, Theo, it's been great working with you over the years.

[0:38:48]

Theo Mayer: Colonel Michael Visconage, USMC retired. A great friend of the World War I Centennial, and now serving as the History Program Director and Chief Historian for the Department of Veteran Affairs for the Office of the Secretary. We have links for you in the podcast notes to learn more about his past and current activities. And that brings us to our revival of The Buzz, where we explore some of our favorite stories, posts and articles the team found on social media and on the internet. Here are some of our selections currently making the rounds. As reported on Fox 2, Detroit, Michigan, the headline reads, "Veterans Worried as World War I Monument Faces Demolishing". Retired US Air Force Colonel Craig Stigleman is hoping for some help as an eight story World War I monument faces demolishing if enough money isn't raised to move it. The Michigan War Veterans Memorial was erected in 1939, and sits on the southwest corner of the Michigan State Fairgrounds. It was created using stones from cities from all over Michigan. Time is running out. Heritage Monuments of Michigan is raising money in order to move the monument stone by stone, to Millikan State Park on the Detroit River. As reported on the website citylimits.org, the headline is, "Veterans Group Marks 100 Year Milestone for World War I's Polish Freedom Fighters". Celebrating the centennial of

the recruitment of Polish immigrants from the United States to the Polish Army in France during World War I, New York's division of the Polish Army Veterans Association of America, or PAVA, P-A-V-A, is making an effort to keep the memory of the volunteer freedom fighters alive. The group has sponsored a number of publications on the history of the Blue Army. It's also issues a commemorative medal, featuring the legendary eagle, the first copy of which was given to Poland's President, Andrzej Duda, during his visit to New York in 2017. In addition, PAVA co-sponsored exhibitions and events promoting the history of the Blue Army in both the United States and Poland. From our friends at the National World War I Museum and Memorial in Kansas City, they have a new exhibition opening on September 24. It's called Etched in Memory, by British artist James Brewer, presenting scenes from Belgium and Northern France. Cathedrals, churches and town buildings threatened or damaged during the battles of World War I. In both the United States and Great Britain, these etchings were proudly hung on parlor walls, in solidarity with the Allied cause, and as a remembrance of the devastating cultural losses inflicted by the onslaught of the war. And finally, a quirky story from the UK. It appears in the Hellenburgh Advertiser. The headline reads, "John Logie Baird Featured in New World War I Exhibition in Holyrood". Scottish engineer John Logie Baird is known the world over thanks to his invention of the television. However, it's one of his lesser-known innovations that's featured in a brand new exhibition at the Scottish Parliament. Logie Baird's special undersocks aimed to keep soldiers' feet warm, clean and dry in the trenches. The Logie Baird exhibit is called What Do We Learn from All This?, and it opened at the Parliament building in Holyrood on September 4th. And there you have it. Some of our picks for fun stories buzzing around the internet and online, remembering World War I, and World War I related events. There are links to these stories in the podcast notes. And that wraps up episode number 140 of the award-winning World War I Centennial News, the Doughboy podcast. Thank you for listening. We want to thank our great guests, contributors, talented crew and supporters, including historian, author and educator Dr. Mark Robbins. Writer and novelist Traci Slatton, for graciously allowing us to read her article from M. Historian Colonel Michael Visconage, US Marine Corps retired. Thanks to Mac Nelson and Tim Crowe, our editing team. Juliette Cowall, the line producer for the show. Dave Kramer, researcher and writer. JL Michaud for web support. And I'm Theo Mayer, your producer and host. The US 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 a hundred 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 around the country. Now, as 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, DC, that after a century of being MIA in the nation's capital, 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 Commission's founding sponsor, the Pritzger Military Museum and Library, as well as the major contribution of the Star Foundation. Thank you to our podcast sponsors, the US 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/ch. That's Charlie Nancy. You'll find World War I Centennial News, the Doughboy podcast, in all the places that you get your podcasts, including on iTunes, Google Play, TuneIn, Spotify, Radio on Demand, even on YouTube, asking Siri, or using your smart speaker by saying "Play WW1 Centennial News podcast". The Commission's Twitter and Instagram handles are both @ww1cc, and we're on Facebook at WW1 Centennial. Thank you for joining us, and please help us meet our immediate funding goals for breaking ground at Pershing Park. Your help today will contribute to the memorial which will stand to tell the story of World War I for generations to come. Just text the letters WWI, or WW1 to the phone number 91999. Thank you for listening. So long.

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