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IRIS Summer Fieldwork Award 2019 Research Summary

With the support of the IRIS Summer Fieldwork Award, I traveled to Paris in August 2019 to conduct preliminary research for my dissertation on military surrender and captivity during the First World War. This funding allowed me to scout out archives before the beginning of a nine-month Chateaubriand research grant in September 2019. The extra month of research at the beginning of my stay proved invaluable in helping me navigate the twists and turns of a year marked by unforeseen changes.

My proposed dissertation topic "*How I Fell Captive to the Germans:*" *Explaining Surrender in the First World War* investigated how soldiers narrated their experiences of wartime captivity, from the moment of surrender to the long stay in prison camps. Specifically, it sought to examine the emotional difficulties faced by men who surrendered, for while millions of soldiers were taken prisoner during the Great War, most considered it a shameful, unmanly act. How did men justify their surrender and defend their reputation as brave soldiers in letters written home from prison camps, in testimonies made to military boards after repatriation, and in their diaries and memoirs? It was these questions of manliness that interested me most.

I began my research at the Service Historique de la Défense, the French military archive located in the castle of Vincennes. Series GR 14 N contains documents stemming from General Joffre's 1914 order requiring repatriated prisoners to explain their capture before inquiry boards. These papers helped me to explain in detail how officers felt about troops who surrendered. However, they also revealed the central difficulty of my project, which was that

ex-prisoners of war avoided discussing their surrender as much as possible. In the majority of cases, soldiers claimed they had been taken prisoner while wounded or unconscious, and thus had only “surrendered” involuntarily. Similarly, whereas many soldiers left detailed accounts of their service, prisoners of war wrote much less frequently. Additional research that August in the Archives Nationales had similar results. While Series F/23 included extensive records on repatriated prisoners, it offered little access to what I really wanted, which was the voices of POWs themselves. My summer fieldwork so far had shown the reason behind historian Annette Becker’s claim that prisoners are among the “forgotten of the Great War.” While this research has provided material for a future article, I did not believe there was enough to be the foundation of an entire dissertation.

Though the archives did not turn up everything I initially hoped to find, because of my summer fieldwork I was able to change the direction of my project before September. It had been hard to find helpful sources on prisoners from the Great War, but during my trips I had seen that the Archives Nationales also had a Series F/9 concerning French POWs in the Second World War. In comparison to the First World War, far more French soldiers were taken prisoner in 1940, making it less of an outlier in the wartime experience, and thus easier to study. Looking through these documents was fruitful in developing my original research topic into something more workable.

I continued to be most interested by questions of manliness in wartime, especially how soldiers respond to shock and failure. I began by studying the experiences of repatriated prisoners in the Second World War, many of whom re-enrolled in the French military to fight in the campaigns of 1944-45, and in France’s postwar colonial conflicts. My work allowed me to

trace connections between the humiliations of surrender and defeat in 1940, and the aggressive, often brutal conduct of French soldiers in places like Madagascar, Indochina, and Algeria after 1945. By the fall, I had decided on a new topic for my dissertation, tentatively titled *France's Short Sword: Military Manliness and the Reconstruction of the French Army*, which deals with how gender norms were deployed by the French military to restore confidence in French military strength and respond to the failure of 1940.

It was thanks to my IRIS grant that I had the time to rework my dissertation project quickly during my research year in France. This became even more important because of the transportation strikes which took place in Paris later that autumn and limited access to the archives, and because of Covid-19, which ended my access to the archives in March 2020. By that time I had been able to conduct enough research to continue working from home, which would not have been possible without the extra month afforded me by IRIS.

Finally, I want to express my gratitude to the IRIS staff for supporting and aiding my decision to remain in France during the summer of 2020, when Covid-19 forced most foreign scholars to head home. By remaining in Paris I was not only able to continue my research, but I was able to stay in a place where I had a home and health insurance, rather than returning in a pandemic to the United States where I had neither.