

1-1-2016

World War II letters bring international intrigue to K-State Libraries

Follow this and additional works at: <https://newprairiepress.org/ksulibraries>



Part of the [Higher Education Commons](#), and the [Library and Information Science Commons](#)



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-Share Alike 4.0 License](#).

Recommended Citation

(2016) "World War II letters bring international intrigue to K-State Libraries," *Kansas State University Libraries*: Vol. 2.

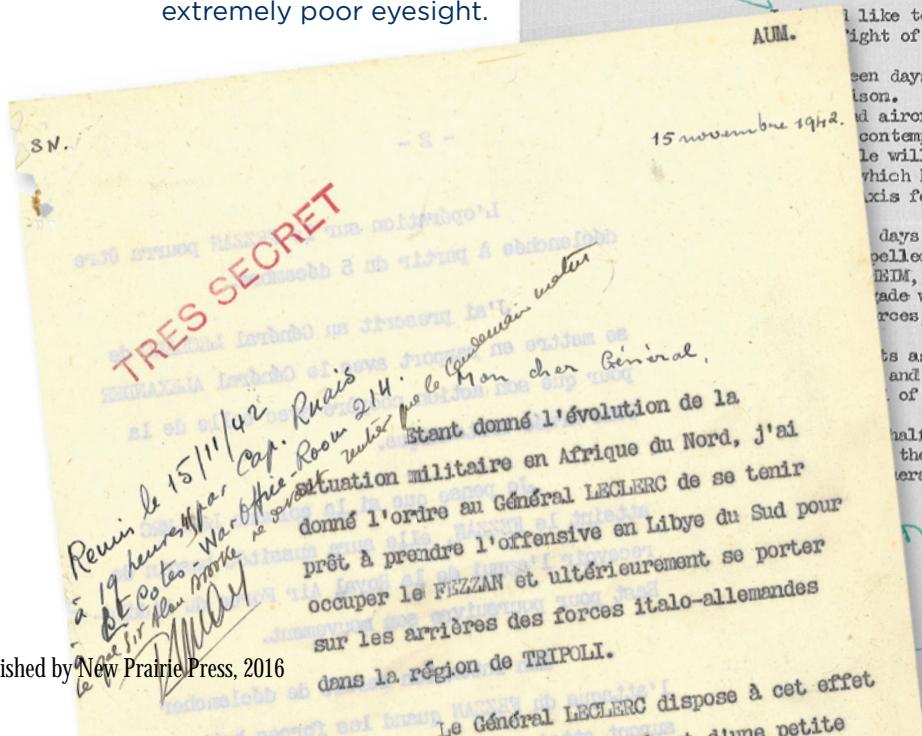
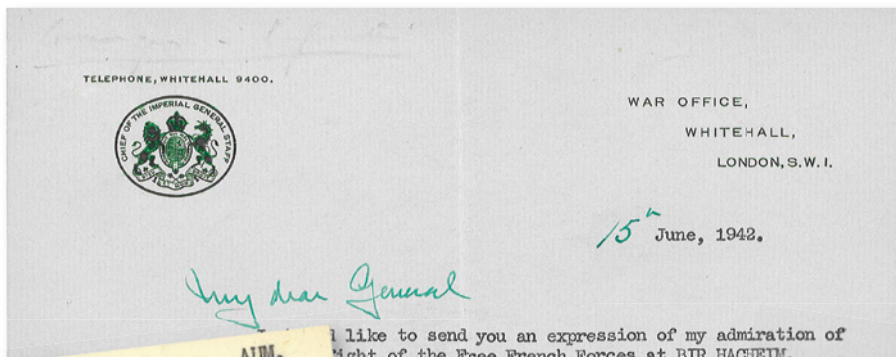
This Article is brought to you for free and open access by New Prairie Press. It has been accepted for inclusion in Kansas State University Libraries by an authorized administrator of New Prairie Press. For more information, please contact cads@k-state.edu.

WORLD WAR II

bring international intrigue
to K-State Libraries

From
1941-1944

Several letters in the collection were written on French typewriters with extra-large type because de Gaulle had extremely poor eyesight.



LETTERS

Cue the James Bond theme:
The spy was instructed
to dispose of the letters.
Instead, after the passage of
more than 30 years, he gave
them to his attorney who
gave them to Kansas State
University.

And now an important
trove of correspondence
from the likes of French
president Gen. Charles de
Gaulle, Winston Churchill
and other World War II
leaders resides in K-State
Libraries' Morse Department
of Special Collections.

"It sounds like a novel,
but it's all true," said
Alan Greer, the attorney in
question.

Part I

At the age of 19, a law student
named Philippe Thyraud de Vosjoli
joined the French underground,
helping Jews escape into Vichy
France from German-administered
France. De Vosjoli eventually
became part of the Free French
movement under de Gaulle. As a
member of the French resistance, he
smuggled correspondence and other
documents during and after the war.

In 1951, de Vosjoli was posted
in Washington, D.C., as head of
French Intelligence in the Western
Hemisphere. He worked with
informants in Cuba to monitor
the Soviet presence on the island
in the early 1960s and shared the
information with his counterparts at
the CIA.

During the same period, de Vosjoli
learned through a KGB defector in
the U.S. that Soviet operatives had
infiltrated the French government at
very high levels. He was confounded
when these reports were brushed
aside by his superiors.

Then, in 1962, de Vosjoli was
ordered to organize a clandestine
intelligence network in the U.S. He
was faced with the prospect
of exploiting his former
allies to collect U.S.
military and scientific
secrets for the French
government.

Upon questioning
the plan, de Vosjoli was
ordered to return to France.
Instead, he resigned.



Philippe Thyraud
de Vosjoli,
French spy

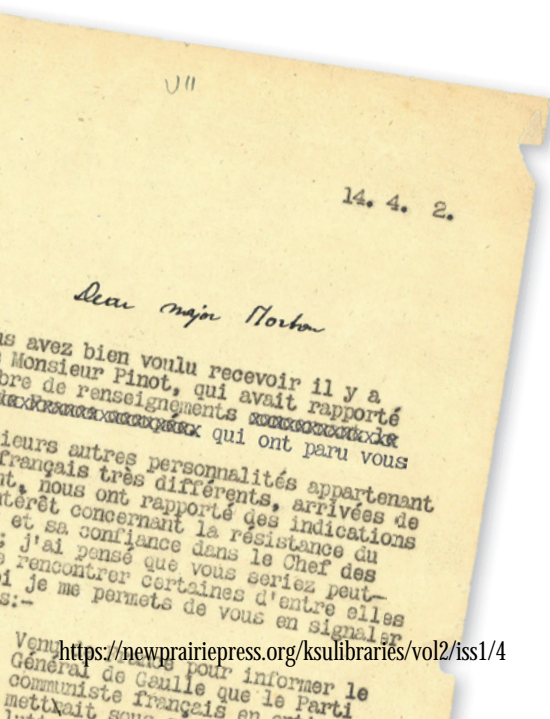


Alan Greer,
attorney



Lt. Gen.
Richard Seitz

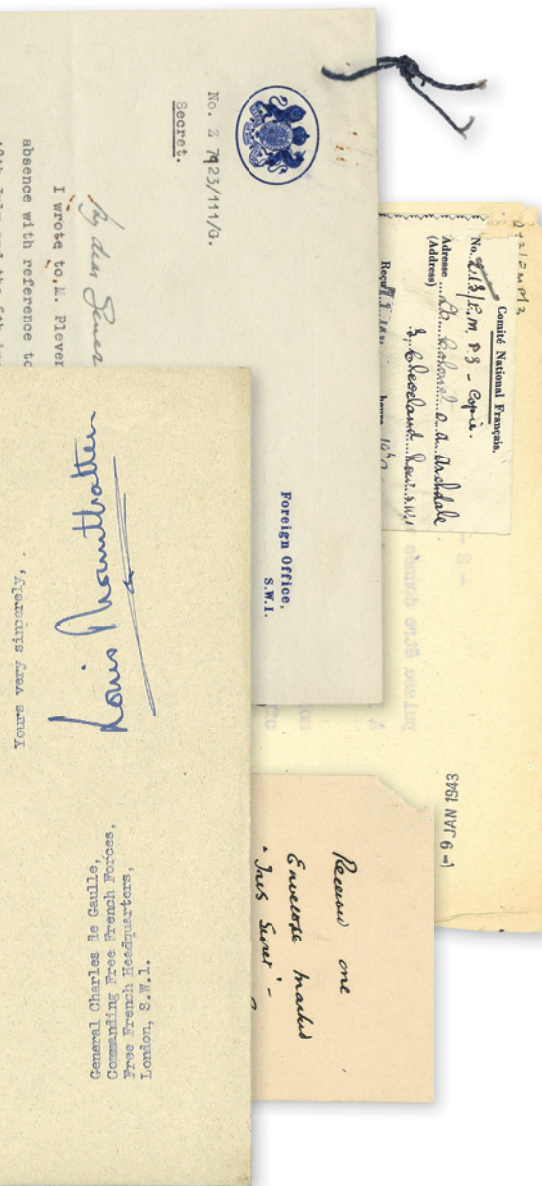
**FRENCH
FREEDOM
PAPERS**





Retired curator of manuscripts Tony Crawford (far left) with Patricia Seitz and Alan Greer. Crawford worked closely with the Seitz family when they chose to donate Lt. Gen. Seitz's personal papers to the Morse Department of Special Collections.

Melinda Cro (left) and Kathleen Antonlioli review the letters that will be at the center of their French translation class.



Part II

Now a political exile, de Vosjoli headed south to Acapulco, Mexico, where he wrote an unpublished book that friends later shared with Leon Uris, author of books-turned-blockbusters such as "Exodus" and "Mila 18."

With de Vosjoli's cooperation, Uris wrote a fictionalized account of the spy's Cold War exploits, which was published as "Topaz" in 1967. Uris went on to sell the movie rights to director Alfred Hitchcock.

Enter Alan Greer. As a young lawyer, Greer worked on the team that represented de Vosjoli in a very successful suit against Uris over unpaid royalties.

In appreciation, de Vosjoli gave Greer a remarkable gift: two dozen letters dated from between 1941 and 1944 that detail some of the internal struggles of de Gaulle's Free French government in their fight against the Germans.

It wasn't Greer's only close friendship with a World War II hero. His future father-in-law was the much-decorated Lt. Gen. Richard Seitz.

Lt. Gen. Seitz, a native of Leavenworth, Kansas, attended K-State (then Kansas State College) prior to receiving his Army commission in 1939. He later became the youngest infantry battalion commander during World War II. In 2011, the French government conferred on him the National Order of the Legion of Honour, France's highest decoration.

The Seitz family donated Lt. Gen. Seitz's personal papers to the Morse Department of Special Collections in 2014.

After much consideration, Greer decided to give the historical letters—called the French Freedom Papers—to K-State Libraries in honor of his father-in-law and de Vosjoli.

"I was so pleased that my husband had such a strong connection with my dad and that, in honor of dad and Philippe, he would make this contribution to K-State," said Patricia Seitz. Seitz, a senior judge in the U.S. District Court for the Southern District of Florida, received her bachelor's from the College of Arts and Sciences in 1968.

"I thought it was important to keep the collection intact and thought of

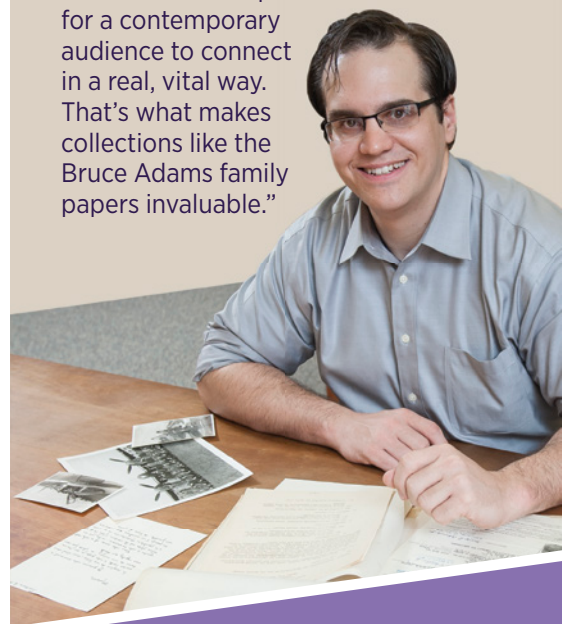


Special collections inspire research

The French Freedom Papers and other military history collections are preserved in climate-controlled conditions, but they aren't gathering dust. Faculty and students regularly access them for research.

Mike Hankins, a Ph.D. candidate in history, is currently working with materials donated by K-State alumnus Ret. BG Bruce A. Adams and his wife, Janice Adams. The collection includes photos, letters and documents from Adams' own career as well as those of his father, K-State alumnus George Earl Adams Jr., and grandfather, George Earl Adams Sr. Hankins, who studies uses of airpower in military conflict, is focusing on George Earl Adams Jr.'s service as a reconnaissance pilot in Europe during WWII.

"I'm writing a narrative of his life, placing it in a broader context of the war," Hankins said. "First-hand accounts make it possible for a contemporary audience to connect in a real, vital way. That's what makes collections like the Bruce Adams family papers invaluable."



Kansas State to honor those two men, given the university's extensive ties to the military," Greer said.

Part III

This fall, one group of K-State students will experience WWII-era intrigue via K-State Libraries as they take on the biggest challenge of their academic careers: a course called "Translating the Freedom Papers: Charles de Gaulle and WWII Correspondence."

Melinda Cro and Kathleen Antonioli, assistant professors of French, will use the letters to teach both undergraduate and graduate students the basics of translating French to English.

"When you access texts that have never been published or it's something that not a lot of people have worked on, that's really thrilling," Antonioli said.

Cro added that even though some of the letters focus on what we might view as mundane details, they offer

an important slice of history that few people get to experience.

"It's not the neat, racy narrative that we may expect from an epic Hollywood WWII movie; it's the drudgery of everyday and the challenges of cross-cultural communication," Cro said. "That's the beauty of the collection: It gives us a very intimate opportunity to come to terms with the reality of these people in the middle of a war-torn society."

The course will

culminate in a student-created research project and exhibit featuring their French-to-English translations.

"Alan Greer made this generous gift to K-State Libraries because he knew how much the letters would be valued here," said Lori Goetsch, dean of K-State Libraries.

"Educators and researchers like Professors Antonioli and Cro will make the French Freedom Papers central to their students' academic lives. The letters won't just be preserved and translated—they will be transformative."

"THE LETTERS WON'T JUST BE PRESERVED AND TRANSLATED—THEY WILL BE TRANSFORMATIVE."

— DEAN LORI GOETSCH