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

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WORLD WAR II bring international intrigue

TELEPHONE, WHITEHALL 9400.

to K-State Libraries

General

dia

AUM.

Several letters in the collection were written on French typewriters with extra-large type because de Gaulle had extremely poor eyesight. WAR OFFICE. WHITEHALL, LONDON, S.W. I.

From

1941-1944

June, 1942.

l like to send you an expression of my admiration of "ight of the Free French Forces at BIR HACHEIM.

en days the enemy used every means in his power to Although continuously attacked by tanks, ison. d aircraft, the heroic Free French forces repelled contemptuously disdained every call to surrender. le will and tenacity, they not only imposed upon which he could ill afford, but they inflicted heavy xis forces.

days of uninterrupted fighting the Army Commander elled to order the withdrawal of the Free French HIM, and I am happy to learn that more than 2,000 ade were able to fight their way through the rces, and are now reforming.

ts as these are fully in accord with the noblest and cannot fail to quicken the hearts of all your of all free peoples.

ualf of the British Army, convey to you my the magnificent spirit shown by the Ist Free eral Koenig.

V 3wol

/EMP.

lque temps

rance no

1

Stant donné l'évolution de la stuation militaire en Afrique du Nord, j'ai donné l'ordre au Général LECLERC de se tenir prêt à prendre l'offensive en Libye du Sud pour occuper le FEZZAN et ultérieurement se porter sur les arrières des forces italo-allemandes dans la région de TRIPOLI.

Published by New Prairie Press, 2016

SN.

Le Général LECLERC dispose à cet effet

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.

111 14. 4. 2. Dear major Morton s avez bien voulu recevoir il y a Monsieur Pinot, qui avait rapporté pre de renseignements concernationale accompanyation qui ont paru vous https://newprairiepress.org/ksulibraries/vol2/iss1/4 meral de Gaulie que le Parti

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



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-turnedblockbusters 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 muchdecorated Lt. Gen. Richard Seitz. 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 Antonioli review the letters that will be at the center of their French translation class.

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

No. 2 7923/111/3. <u>Secret</u> . And dean Source I wrote to. M. Plever absence with reference to		Revert 2 Mar 19 3
Towns strand,	Foreign Office, S.W.I.	Adames
General Charles le Caulle, Commany Tree Franch Forces, Pree French Readquarters, London, S.W.J.	Placessie one Envelopte tracked "Jus Swat"	L= 9.JAN 1943



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."

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

- DEAN LORI GOETSCH

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 wartorn society."

The course will

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

an important slice of history that few

people get to experience.

"It's not the neat, racy narrative

epic Hollywood WWII movie; it's

the drudgery of everyday and

the challenges of cross-cultural

communication." Cro said. "That's

that we may expect from an

"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."

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."





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www.found.ksu.edu/give/specialcollections

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