

Fletcher Warren
Research Reflection Essay

At the outset of this Senior Seminar project, I knew I wanted to read as widely as possible given the time constraints of the semester. Doing so would allow me to better situate my project within the existing literature on the Spanish Civil War and the Abraham Lincoln Brigade; however, I also knew that my topic was truly ground-breaking research. Although histories of the national phenomenon exist, no historian had yet documented the experience of Minnesotan veterans. Familiarizing myself with the existing secondary literature was thus vitally important, even if much of my cited research would come from archival sources; the body of knowledge I assimilated through reading secondary sources helped me to suggest important points of commonality and contrast between the Minnesota and national experience.

Bethel's library services were indispensable for this work. In addition to the University Library's fairly substantial and high-quality holdings on the Spanish Civil War, CLIC libraries provided a number of important volumes, particularly *By the Ore Docks*, an important source for history of Duluth in the early 20th century.¹ Bethel's databases — especially JSTOR and Expanded Academic ASAP — also proved valuable in producing targeted background reading articles.

The bulk of my work with Bethel library services was through the Interlibrary Loan department — a service whose praises I cannot sing loudly enough. Most of the monographs, all of the theses, and even some of the archival records I used were located and retrieved through WorldCat search and the ILL department. I quickly found that working WorldCat effectively is akin to mining: once I was able to locate an important resource, clicking through the keyword and subject metadata allowed me to follow veins of research gold deep into the database. When I was unsure of what search terms to use or ran up against a wall of blank results, I immediately adopted this indirect method to continue researching — an approach that was usually successful. From my job in the Digital Library, I know how tedious a task cataloging subject headings is; as a researcher, I am incredibly grateful to the thousands of librarians who have collectively assembled this wonderful tool.

Because so much of my project relied on original research, I also spent a considerable amount of my research time outside the Bethel library ecosystem in local and national archives. The Immigration Research and History Center at the University of Minnesota provided an essential autobiographical document — the “Anti-Hero's Life” by George Zlatovski. From the Abraham Lincoln Brigade Archive (ALBA) at New York University I was able to locate a variety of important letters and miscellaneous personal documents from Lincoln veterans. Because I was unable to travel to New York, I needed to use ALBA's distance research services to find and copy the materials I needed. Doing so gave me the opportunity to work closely with one of NYU's reference librarians. Finally, the Minnesota Historical Society (MHS) yielded two invaluable oral histories and a variety of ephemera from the Clarence Forester Papers. In all cases, I relied on finding aids to locate the materials I needed.

The MHS materials also opened up an exciting opportunity to go beyond print sources. Several of the photos in the Clarence Forester Papers depicted what appeared to be the son of a Minnesota veteran. The accompanying documents suggested the son's name was Glenn Lindfors. On a hunch, I ran a search for the name on through the White Pages and found that two Glenns were living in Minnesota. After sending letters to both of them and waiting hopefully, I received a call. A few weeks later, I met with Glenn, scanned some of his father's documents he had in his possession, and recorded his oral history. This meeting took place near the end of my research, by which point I felt almost like I knew the men I was writing about personally. It was a humbling and memorable experience to actually meet the son of one of my subjects.

In the final presentation for Senior Seminar I spoke about how this project revealed my indebtedness to the innumerable scholars, historians, and yes — librarians — who have worked before me. As I reflect on the project now, that lesson still holds.

¹ Hudelson, Richard, and Carl Ross. *By the Ore Docks: A Working People's History of Duluth*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006.