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Diary of a

Albert Huet

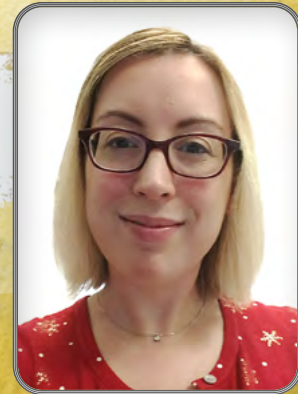
1897-1977

Normandy, France

DIARY OF A FRENCH SOLDIER

Author:

Hélène Huet, *European Studies Librarian*



Trench Soldier

CARTE POSTALE

Correspondance



In 2015, just before I started my position as the European Studies Librarian at the University of Florida, my aunt found a notebook she had never seen before while cleaning my grandparents' garage. This notebook belonged to my great-grandfather, Albert Huet.

Albert used this notebook to narrate his life as a soldier during World War I. We believe Albert wrote this account after he was diagnosed with larynx cancer in 1955. While he never discussed with his family what happened to him during the War, he also likely did not want to forget his experiences and was unsure what the outcome of his cancer treatment would be. These few pages, therefore, tell his story from 1916 until the Armistice in November 1918.

R. Guilleminot, Boespflug et Co. — Paris.



Albert Huet's Regiment

In collaboration with the Digital Services Department, I had these pages digitized in 2016, alongside additional documents pertaining to Albert's time in the army such as photos of him as a soldier and his regiment. All these documents are now featured as their own collection on the University of Florida Digital Collections — <https://ufdc.ufl.edu/wwi>.

What follows is the story of Albert, a man whose diary can teach us about French soldiers' experience during WWI. What follows as well is a description of the impact a digital project such as The World War I Diary of Albert Huet can have on an international community of students and scholars.

Albert Huet and a Fellow Soldier



Diary of a French Soldier

Soldier's card
of Albert Huet



ALBERT HUET

Albert Huet was born on December 14, 1897, in a small village in Normandy, France. In January 1916, he was drafted into the French Army. Albert received little training before being sent to the Ardennes front, a dangerous combat zone at that point in the war.

His diary talks about the daily life of soldiers in the trenches: diseases like measles, the mail censorship, the bones of dead soldiers that were disinterred by exploding shells, the shattered towns, the mud, the lice, the constant noise, and more.

Additionally, his diary focuses on what he sees as the incompetence and

idiocy of the generals and politicians in charge, who he says are just bloodthirsty, sending men to die without reason or strategy. Albert also is not shy about wanting to desert. Several times, he writes about wanting to turn back and mentions the various revolts by the soldiers, affecting division after division.

His narration is chronological but also follows a stream of consciousness. While Albert could read and write, his education was minimal. His grammar and spelling are irregular, which can make the diary hard to understand, especially for a non-native French speaker.

DIGITAL PROJECT

To promote the digitization of Albert's diary in 2016, I decided to include it on my professional website, linking all the images to UFDC (<https://helenhuet.org/albert-huets-diary/>). I shared the news of the digitization on social media and through various email lists. Quickly, the diary garnered interest from historians both in France and in the US. For instance, Albert's diary is now featured on the website of the *Collectif de Recherche International et de Débat sur la Guerre de 1914-1918* (<http://www.crid1418.org/temoins/2016/03/12/huet-albert-1897-1977/>), whose mission is to promote and share with the wider public knowledge about World War I.

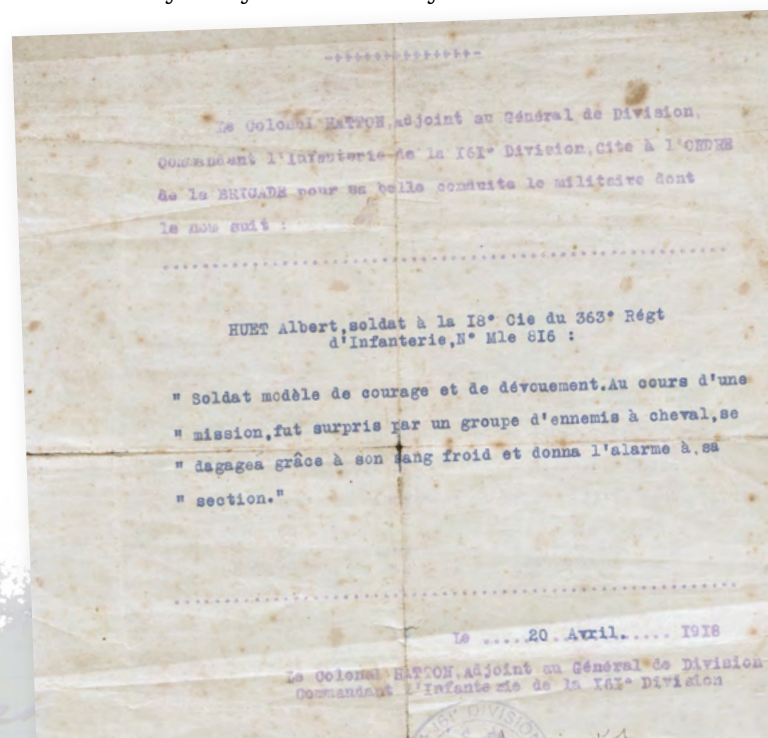
But perhaps the biggest impact the digital project has had is in the classroom. The diary is now featured in classroom assignments, including an assignment designed by Dr. Amanda Shoaf Vincent at Wake Forest University, who uses the diary as a primary source to explain WWI to her students. Moreover, the project was used by Dr. Lynn Palermo from Susquehanna University in a summer grant project in 2018 that funded two undergraduate students to work on translating the diary. The goal of this project was to enhance students' language development, as the project gave students a chance to translate a primary historical text that had never before been translated into English. Thanks to their work, for each page of the diary, my website now features

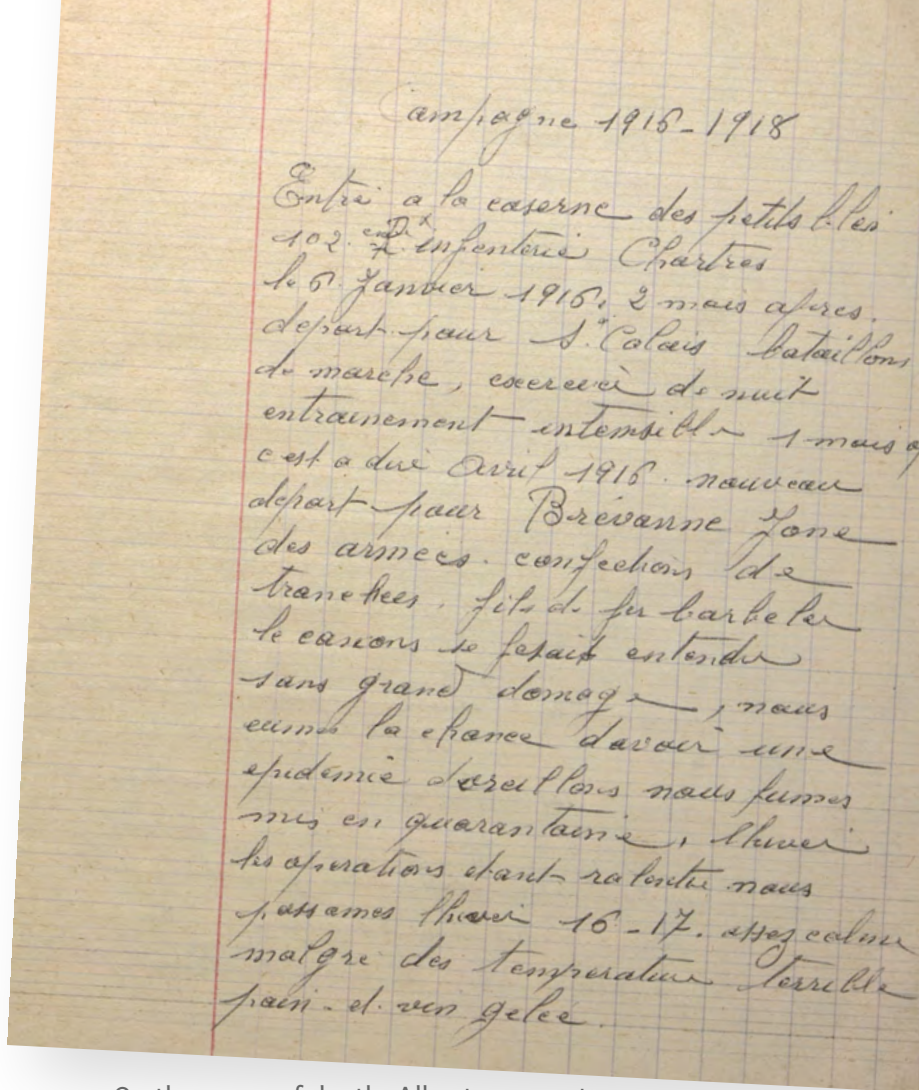
an image of the page (linking to UFDC), a direct transcription of the text, a standard French version that regularizes Albert's spelling and grammar, and an English translation. This example highlights how digital projects can be enriched by collaboration across institutions. Indeed, Albert's experience of the Great War is now available to a wider public, which broadens its impact.

CONCLUSION

In 1918, Albert got lost in the woods, and came across a regiment of German soldiers. After fleeing from the Germans, he managed to find his own regiment and alert them to what was coming. This action saved his comrades' lives and for this action, he received a medal. In October of the same year, he was a victim of a German gas attack. His useless gas mask was filled with holes, so, to save himself, he stole another mask from a fallen soldier's body. But by that time, it was nearly too late.

The Certificate of Commendation for Albert Huet





On the verge of death, Albert was sent to a hospital to convalesce from exposure to poison gas.

While recovering, he considered deserting if he received orders to go back to the front. He would rather be sent to prison, he wrote, as there are fewer chances to die there. Luckily for him, on November 11, 1918, the Armistice was signed. The War was over. He could go home, alive. Once home, Albert never showed off his medals. And he never really talked about the War. These pages are the only account we have of his experience.

We now all know a little bit more about Albert and what it was like for a young man from the countryside to participate in one of the deadliest conflicts of the 20th century.

Albert Huet's WWI Diary

Check out more online:

See Transcription, Standardized French Text, and English Translation of this diary page:

www.helenehuet.org/albert-huets-diary

"I am incredibly thankful not only for the existence of this diary but also to the George A. Smathers Libraries for playing such an important role in making it widely and openly available to thousands of people across the world."

- H el ene Huet



In July 2020, my father, G erard Huet, published a book in French entitled Dieu est mort. It is told through the perspective of his grandfather Albert Huet and is about Albert's WWI experience. It's based on stories Albert used to tell my father, as well as Albert's diary. It is told with my dad's sense of humour and he had a lot of fun writing it.

ufdc.ufl.edu/source

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