Project Summary

Digital Methods for Military History was originally slated as a two-week, in-person institute that focused on training in digital methods for scholars who work as military historians in both academic and non-academic settings. Over the course of the two weeks, we would cover data modeling and creation, visualizations, and mapping, as well as other smaller topics. Our instructors were Jean Bauer, Jason Heppler, and Benjamin Schmidt, along with Christopher Hamner and Jeff McClurken. Due to the covid-19 pandemic, the institute was first pushed back from Summer 2020 to Summer 2021, and then moved online. As a part of the move to online, the institute became a three-part series of shorter sessions across about seven weeks, instead of two solid weeks of work.

The institute website can be found here: https://dmmh.rrchnm.org/; most of the materials have transitioned to our working group’s info, but the information about the institute itself is still there as well.

Project origins and goals

Motivations

Military history as a discipline has been surprisingly slow to adopt the tools of digital history. Military history is full of tables, maps, and a tremendous amount of data ripe for digital methods, but very few military historians have embraced the possibilities of the digital. There are many barriers to military historians adopting digital methods. Many historians simply have no training in the field and are thus reluctant. But many military historians also work in places where getting access to data and to the tools of the field
can be complicated. So this institute had two main goals: to introduce military historians to some methods and tools that could help them in their projects, and to learn from them about the barriers to doing digital work in their workplaces.

**Intended audience**
The goal of this institute was to bring together historians who work both inside and outside academia. The military and military-adjacent organizations employ thousands of historians whose work could benefit from learning the techniques of digital history. To that end, we deliberately reached out to non-academic groups of historians, particularly in the federal government, as well as to the usual academic channels.

Developing a group that included both academics and non-academics also served another purpose: to increase the possibilities of cross-pollination and collaboration between academics and non-academics.

**Fields of study**
The project team selected three major areas of digital history that we believed would be of the most benefit to military historians: data modeling, visualization, and mapping. One of the major hurdles to doing good digital work is understanding what kind of data you have and what it ought to look like, so we chose to make that a core element of the institute, rather than doing merely a cursory glance at it. We also know that many military historians have tremendous amounts of data that would benefit from a distant lens, so we selected visualizations as another logical field of study. And finally, we chose mapping because every military historian loves and uses maps, but few know how to make them on their own.

**Past work**
This institute draws on a number of past iterations. RRCHNM has held several NEH-funded institutes for advanced topics in the digital humanities over the past ten years or so, and we originally intended to draw on that model for the structure of our
institute (before covid rearranged our schedule). This institute also draws on a two-day workshop that PI Abby Mullen ran at Northeastern University in 2013, also funded by the NEH’s Office of Digital Humanities. This workshop was also titled “Digital Methods for Military History,” and it served as an overview for many of the same topics that this Institute addressed.
Project Activities, Team, and Participants

We had originally proposed an in-person institute, which would have run for two weeks of instruction on the campus of George Mason University. However, once we made the decision to hold the institute virtually instead, we decided to spread the institute out into three distinct sessions, one in early June, one in the middle of June, and one in the middle of July. We spread the activities out more so that participants would not get burned out by Zoom fatigue. But we also wanted participants to be able to try out some of the methods and techniques they learned and report back.

In Session 1, June 3-4, 2021, participants introduced themselves and we learned more about the specific projects they came to work on. On Day 1, instructor Christopher Hamner did a session on project management in order to set our participants up for success as they started work on new digital projects. On Day 2, instructor Jean Bauer led a full-day session on data modeling. In conjunction with readings that we provided to participants, she led discussions about the challenges of data modeling, and then did a multi-part workshop on OpenRefine and data structures.

In between Session 1 and 2, Bauer scheduled one-on-one virtual meetings with each participant to talk about participants’ specific needs. We also asked participants to begin the work of modeling their data in order to prepare it for Session 2.

In Session 2, June 14-18, we covered two major topics: visualizations and mapping. Instructors Benjamin Schmidt and Jason Heppler tag-teamed instruction during these days. On Day 1, we discussed the principles of good visualization and evaluated existing visualizations. Then Heppler taught a workshop introducing participants to Tableau as a visualization tool.

On Day 2, we considered interactive visualization and how to bring multiple data sets together into one visualization. Using ObservableHQ notebooks, Schmidt led a
hands-on workshop on how to build interactive visualizations. We also considered the possibilities of doing text-based visualizations in Voyant.

On Days 3 and 4, we turned to mapping. On Day 3, we talked about digital mapping and its challenges, and then did some rudimentary online mapping in Leaflet. On Day 4, instructor Brandan Buck taught a hands-on workshop on QGIS. Buck also wrote out comprehensive blog post instruction that mirrored the synchronous teaching, so that participants could easily follow along or go back later. Among the tools and techniques in the instruction were the basics of interface navigation, georectification, data creation (of lines, points, and polygons), use of symbolizations, data filtering and querying. In addition to these essential tools, the series instructed users on advanced techniques such as using geo-computation, dynamic graphic visualization, and route analysis.

On Day 5, participants signed up for one-on-one consultations with either Schmidt or Heppler in the morning to discuss how the methods discussed during Sessions 1 and 2 applied to their work. These one-on-one sessions were meant to take the place of informal lunchtime or breaktime conversations between instructors and participants that would undoubtedly have occurred if we had been able to be in person. In the afternoon, we revived an RRCHNM tradition and did a mini-TAHCamp, where we invited participants to propose topics for discussion that we had not yet addressed in our sessions. In this TAHCamp, we received proposals to talk about everything from pedagogy to finding sources for digital materials to topic modeling to decolonizing military history.

Session 3, July 15-16, served as our “what’s next?” session. On Day 1, we did progress reports to see how participants had been able to use the tools they had learned in previous sessions. Then we heard from Elizabeth Tran, our NEH program officer, about how participants might find funding at the NEH for their work. We also spent a considerable amount of time in the afternoon discussing the challenges of doing military history in a digital sphere, and how academics and non-academics might work
together. We considered the problem of superabundance in contemporary military history, and how to think about copyright and intellectual property questions.

On Day 2, instructor Jean Bauer returned to talk about how to prepare your data for publication. In the afternoon, advisory board member Jeff McClurken discussed the use of digital work in tenure and promotion, as well as how to submit digital work to be reviewed in the *Journal of American History*. We also discussed the possibilities of publication in RRCHNM’s open-access journal *Current Research in Digital History*. Finally, we started planning for a digital military history working group as an outcome of this institute.

**Participant recruiting**

In order to recruit participants, we sent out a call for participants. The call asked for participants who were currently working as military historians; we wanted to attract participants who had experience of working in a military history setting outside of graduate school. So though we did not specifically prohibit graduate students from applying, our goal was to attract people who were already active in the profession.

We also noted in the call that participants needed to have a specific project in mind to work on during the institute, and they needed to be able to access the sources or information about the sources necessary to be able to do real work during our time together.

When we first started recruiting participants in the fall of 2019, we sent out announcements to many listservs and social media platforms that military historians receive, including H-Net, the Society for Military History’s social media, and other professional organizations. We also specifically sent calls to the history commands of all the service branches.
This approach led to more than 65 applicants across all branches of the military service, several cultural heritage organizations, and many academic institutions. Once the submission deadline passed, the project leader, Abby Mullen, in conjunction with Christopher Hamner and our advisory board members, Jeff McClurken and Kurt Hackemer, rated the applications on the basis of these criteria:

- Project fit for the institute: were they working on something that the institute would be a benefit to?
- Qualification: were they a military historian?
- Representation: were they part of a group typically underrepresented in military history?

We selected a group of 20 participants from more than 75 applicants. The group broke into about ⅔ academics and ⅓ historians who worked as military branch historians or in other forms of public service. About 40% of our selected participants were women.

When we had to cancel for the summer of 2020 and regroup in 2021, we had to decide whether to keep the same group of participants or re-open the call. After polling our accepted participants, we learned that most of them would still be able to participate in 2021, so we opted not to re-open the call. Instead, we invited a few new participants to fill a few of the spots of those who could not participate. In the end, we had 16 people who attended some or all of the institute.

**Challenges**

Obviously the institute as eventually realized was not what we planned for it to be. The pivot to online, though we remain convinced that it was the right decision, presented a number of technical and social challenges that we did not fully anticipate. Because we were not all together, information about the institute had to be disseminated in a number of places, which sometimes caused confusion to the participants (as noted by one of the participants in the post-institute survey).
We chose to use Slack as an asynchronous platform for communication in between sessions and to communicate with individual participants throughout the institute. This worked very well for many people, but a few people did not realize how heavily we would be relying on Slack, so they missed key information.

One key social challenge was that participants had to be in their homes, where their personal lives overlaid their professional lives. Many participants (and instructors) faced scheduling challenges because they had to be partially living their lives at home as well as participating in the institute. Childcare was clearly a major struggle for the participants. The institute director and team made it very clear from the outset that children were welcome on Zoom screens and that interruptions from kids were no problem whatsoever, but anxiety about interruptions and missing portions of the sessions because of childcare remained a concern for many participants.

We also had to consider the problem of Zoom fatigue. This was one of the considerations that led us to break up our institute into three nonconsecutive sessions rather than two solid weeks. We also tried to mitigate daily Zoom fatigue by taking frequent breaks and providing a longer lunch break (two hours on most days). Frequent breakout sessions also provided at least a little variety in the form.

One thing that we learned over the course of a year of doing Zoom webinars and other things is that well-run webinars require more hands-on involvement from more people than an in-person event. For instance, it’s very beneficial to have someone running tech and someone answering questions in the chat while a person is doing a live presentation. Hence, we added an instructor so that project director Mullen would not have to be the tech runner and a presenter simultaneously; we also worked out a process for team teaching during our main Session 2 so that the flow of the session could be maintained while people’s tech problems could be addressed at the same time.
Another thing that we have learned from Zoom tutorials is that unlike in a regular classroom where instructors can be circulating in the room, checking to make sure people don’t get lost, it’s much harder to tell when people are struggling in Zoom-land unless they speak up.

Since we had a lot of moving pieces, with people coming and going because of the demands of at-home existence, we decided to record all the sessions and disseminate them to all our participants. However, we also wanted to make sure that we protected the privacy of all our participants, so we got permission from each participant to record the session. We released a very lightly edited version of the Zoom recordings to our participants, where we edited out the participants who did not wish to appear in a recording, on YouTube. Even with the permission of the participants, we did not want to put these recordings out into the public, so we released them as unlisted videos and provided the links to all of our participants.

We had originally intended to give our participants some books and other supplies when they came in person, but since we did not meet in person, we opted to send a sort of care package with these materials instead. Because of institutional requirements, we had to ship the books to GMU and then re-ship them out to our participants, and slowdowns in the supply chain that affected many pieces of the materials we sent were prolonged than we anticipated. Thus, we did not get the materials to the participants before the first session as we had intended. However, we were able to still get everything shipped out so that the participants could still use the materials for reference.

**Institute team**

The institute team included several people both at George Mason University and at external institutions.

Director Abigail Mullen conceptualized and organized the project. She has taught digital methods courses for several years at George Mason University and is affiliated
with the Roy Rosenzweig Center for History and New Media. She is also a naval historian who understands the unique challenges and opportunities digital methods bring to military history.

Instructor Christopher Hamner, a professor at George Mason University, heads up the Papers of the War Department, a long-running and influential military history project from RRCHNM. He assisted with the selection of participants and instruction about project management.

Our advisory board was Kurt Hackemer and Jeff McClurken. Both are military history scholars who also have digital history skills and a knowledge of both fields. They assisted in participant selection and in helping to sort out the covid pivot.

Jean Bauer was our instructor for the sessions on data modeling. She brought more than a decade of experience in working with digital humanities projects in both academic and non-academic settings, particularly on questions of data and data management. This expertise was critical as she gave participants individually tailored advice during one-on-one sessions as well as instructing in the whole group.

Instructors Jason Heppler and Benjamin Schmidt split the responsibilities of teaching during our second session. Heppler was the digital humanities librarian at the University of Nebraska-Omaha at the time the institute would have happened in 2020; he was hired as the senior web developer at RRCHNM just a few weeks before the institute in 2021. His work as a web developer and digital humanist has appeared in numerous publications and digital projects, and he brought the experience of working with faculty and staff to bear during our institute. Benjamin Schmidt was added as an instructor during our online pivot; he is the director of digital humanities at New York University, and was a core member of the NULab for Texts, Maps, and Networks at Northeastern University. His work on text analysis, visualization, and mapping is well-known in the DH community.
**Project Outcomes**

*Digital Military History Working Group*

Our main outcome was the institution of an ongoing working group made up of participants from the institute that allows us all to continue to work on the projects that we brought to the institute. This group meets online once a month to check in with each other, give project updates, and potentially hold new workshops and tutorials on tools or methods of interest to the group. To begin with, the working group is limited to participants of the institute, but we have agreed to be open to the possibility of inviting other members at some point in the future.

In addition, many of our teaching materials are still available online (https://dmmh.rrchnm.org/schedule/). Though we opted not to release the video recordings, our reading lists and blog post tutorials are available. In particular, instructor Brandan Buck wrote a very comprehensive GIS training blog series that deserves significant use for historians of all kinds (http://brandanpbuck.com/rebuilding-a-war/).

**Project Evaluation and Impact**

On the last day of the institute, we requested that participants complete a survey about their experiences with the institute. We asked them these questions:

- How much of the institute were you able to attend?
- What was the most valuable thing (or things) you learned?
- Was the format helpful for you? Do you have any feedback about how it could have been improved?
- What are your plans moving forward with the information you learned at the Institute? What potential difficulties do you anticipate?
As you move forward, what are you most excited about? What are you most nervous about?

How can the Institute staff best support you moving forward?

How can digital military historians best advocate for each other?

What do you see as the challenges for the field and how do we address them?

Do you have any feedback you’d like us to pass on to the instructors — things that you felt were particularly useful, or think they should know for future instruction?

Unsurprisingly, the feedback on our post-institute survey (see Appendix A) focused on how much nicer it would have been to do the institute in person. However, several participants noted that the online format gave them the opportunity to participate when they would not have been able to make an in-person meeting work.

For example, one participant wrote, “I think the format was the best it could be given the realities of the pandemic. A series of long Zoom sessions are taxing for everyone involved. Yet the institute team did all they could to make the sessions as engaging as possible. They scheduled reasonable breaks, and made good use of breakout sessions to facilitate engagement between participants. Screen sharing enabled close scrutiny of walkthroughs of applications (although I fell behind at times when we moved at a quick pace). The Zoom format also made participation possible for those of us caring for young children or other responsibilities, and the institute team were very reasonable in their consideration of such issues. I was disappointed that I couldn’t meet everyone face-to-face and explore GMU and Washington D.C. Yet the institute team did all they could to make the experience as engaging and personable as possible. I appreciate these efforts, especially given the huge scale of challenges everyone has faced since 2020.”
Participants found value not only for their own projects but also for teaching and training others. One wrote, “I am really excited about getting students to think about data visualization and how people manipulate data to create a particular narrative.”

We also believe that the mix of academic and non-academic historians in the group had exactly the desired effect. We have already heard of a few initial meetings about collaborations between group members, and during the institute both the academic and non-academic participants were able to introduce the group to programs and funding sources that might prove beneficial to many in the group. Most importantly, the mix helped everyone to realize the different ways we all approach doing similar things, and helped to broaden our understanding of the difficulties and opportunities for digital military history in many spaces.

As with any program such as this, the immediate impact is difficult to determine, since participants now have to go back to their own work and implement the things they learned. Hence, we began our working group so that participants have a chance to continue to feel the support and encouragement of fellow participants and instructors. We have also encouraged our participants to submit their work to *Current Research in Digital History*, a peer-reviewed digital history journal from RRCHNM.
Appendix A: Post-Institute Survey Results
Post-Institute Survey and Feedback

Hi all! Thank you so much for attending and participating in the NEH-funded Institute for Digital Methods for Military History. As we wrap up and move forward with the working group, it would be a great help if you would take a few minutes to fill out this survey about your experience with the institute and ideas and plans moving forward.

How much of the institute were you able to attend?

I attended almost all of it, but missed a couple of afternoons.

What was the most valuable thing (or things) you learned?

That's tough to answer because I learned so much! All the software was new to me as were most of the data methods. I found the sections on data visualization fascinating and will probably use some of that material in class. Some of the software instruction was a little hard to follow because people moved so fast, but I'm a true novice, so not representative, I'm sure. I loved learning how to use QGIS and how best to arrange my data on the spreadsheet.

Was the format helpful for you? Do you have any feedback about how it could have been improved?

I think you did a great job! The format worked really well, although it would have been nice if you put everything -- links, announcements... -- in one place. I sometimes found it frustrating having to figure out whether to go to Slack, the web site, or Observable. But really that's a minor complaint. The resources you posted on the web site are extremely helpful!
Aside from continuing to learn QGIS and just doing the data entry for my project (I'm just beginning), I don't anticipate a lot of problems. My project isn't that complicated -- at least not yet.

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I am really excited about getting students to think about data visualization and how people manipulate data to create a particular narrative.

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It would be great if we could keep in touch periodically or if I knew you were available to answer questions when they arise.

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I am not well enough acquainted with the field to answer the first question, which says something. I knew enough to apply to the workshop but I now realize that I did not have a real understanding of what digital history is or how it's done. If that's true of me, I hate to think of how ignorant most historians are. Digital historians need to educate their colleagues about what they do!

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All of the instructors were super helpful, articulate and clear. Abby did a wonderful job hosting and explaining difficult concepts and generally keeping everyone on task. I loved her cheerfulness and humor! The one-on-one with Jean was wonderful and I really appreciated how much time she spent with me. Jason and Ben (and anyone I'm accidentally leaving out) were also great! Fantastic job, everyone!
Do you have any name suggestions for the new military history working group?

I have a question: is the working group just for those who study American history? I'd love to be a fly on the wall, but what I do is so far removed from everyone else that I think I should step aside.

Do you have any suggestions in general for the new military history working group?

If it takes off, consider starting one for people who study fields other than American history.

Bonus: photos of your kids/pets/particularly lively plants that were honorary members of the institute, or any memes you want to share with us.
Post-Institute Survey and Feedback

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How much of the institute were you able to attend?

Almost all of it

What was the most valuable thing (or things) you learned?

Data organization, cleaning, & ethics and QGIS

Was the format helpful for you? Do you have any feedback about how it could have been improved?

Virtual format was very helpful this summer; I probably could not have attended in person. But I'll either hope for in-person next time or learn that I need to block off and be "out of office" for workshops like these in future - it was hard to be home, available for summer research, etc. and still focus.

What are your plans moving forward with the information you learned at the Institute? What potential difficulties do you anticipate?

Designing methods for sharing our data with public on a regular basis & possible mapping features
As you move forward, what are you most excited about? What are you most nervous about?

Data and maps. To both questions. Getting it right; finding best mapping software for our needs; the ethics of sharing this information properly, etc.

How can the Institute staff best support you moving forward?

They've been amazing - I can't imagine them doing anything more.

How can digital military historians best advocate for each other? What do you see as the challenges for the field and how do we address them?

The DMMH working group is a fantastic idea; involvement at SMH is good, but regularly virtual meeting with fellow DH military historians would be wonderful.

Do you have any feedback you'd like us to pass on to the instructors — things that you felt were particularly useful, or think they should know for future instruction?

No - everyone did an incredible job, especially Abby.

Do you have any name suggestions for the new military history working group?

I love DMMH

Do you have any suggestions in general for the new military history working group?

I like the idea of workshopping grant narratives or proposals, mapping projects - workshopping anything DH
Bonus: photos of your kids/pets/particularly lively plants that were honorary members of the institute, or any memes you want to share with us.
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How much of the institute were you able to attend?

All of it (save some early departures for daycare pickup!)

What was the most valuable thing (or things) you learned?

I was particularly helped by the information about organizing data (all my date formats were wrong, lol). This information really set up the rest of the work...it was a vital building block.

Was the format helpful for you? Do you have any feedback about how it could have been improved?

I would have loved to a) meet in person and b) have more hands on time during the days. I couldn't really let much settle at the end of the day or practice what I'd just learned, because I had to jump straight back into domestic responsibilities. I think setting aside more practice time would have been great.

What are your plans moving forward with the information you learned at the Institute? What potential difficulties do you anticipate?

My original goal was to use some of these skills as I work on my second book. I think that will still happen, but my eyes were really opened to the limitations of my existing knowledge of DH. I need to do some serious thinking about the kinds of questions I want to answer and whether it makes sense to take a DH approach, given the investment of time that will be required for me to work on this project alone. Maybe I need to find collaborators!
As you move forward, what are you most excited about? What are you most nervous about?

I'm most excited about the possibility of mapping out the escape routes people used in France during WWII and perhaps finding the points of connection between evaders/helpers. I am most nervous about dealing with the huge source base and getting it into proper shape.

How can the Institute staff best support you moving forward?

More workshops! Maybe some office hours?

How can digital military historians best advocate for each other? What do you see as the challenges for the field and how do we address them?

Tough question. I think our first step will be to really carve out a space for ourselves in the field. Maybe some conference panels, edited collections, etc, as a way to start.

Do you have any feedback you’d like us to pass on to the instructors — things that you felt were particularly useful, or think they should know for future instruction?

Do you have any name suggestions for the new military history working group?

I'm terrible with titles, lol.

Do you have any suggestions in general for the new military history working group?
Bonus: photos of your kids/pets/particularly lively plants that were honorary members of the institute, or any memes you want to share with us.

Google Forms
Post-Institute Survey and Feedback

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How much of the institute were you able to attend?

The majority of each day -- working around some childcare logistics.

What was the most valuable thing (or things) you learned?

Not currently in an academic position, the most valuable days for me personally were the more skill-based/practical days -- the middle session for the most part. That said, I do think all of the sessions had value.

Was the format helpful for you? Do you have any feedback about how it could have been improved?

Within the constraints of the current world around us, I think the format worked well. Obviously it would have benefited from a more normal environment where we could all be present and interacting with one another, but I am not sure there is too much that could have been done to improve upon the format given the realities of zoom. I have a good technical setup (multiple monitors, relatively powerful PC, etc.), which may have also eased some things for me versus others.

What are your plans moving forward with the information you learned at the Institute? What potential difficulties do you anticipate?

I plan to keep on pursuing digital humanities work, and aim to improve in this area. At this time, my attention is largely focused on the realities of the work that I have for the DPAA. But one byproduct of the seminars was some thoughts on more academic projects that might be spawned on my own time (not that I have much of it).
As you move forward, what are you most excited about? What are you most nervous about?

I’m excited about the possibilities. Nervous about how much work will be required to achieve them.

How can the Institute staff best support you moving forward?

I think the idea of an ongoing workgroup has some appeal, both for sharing work and providing encouragement and advice as difficulties emerge.

How can digital military historians best advocate for each other? What do you see as the challenges for the field and how do we address them?

Some of this is straightforward: strong projects that make contributions to our understanding of the past will speak for themselves and provide impetus both for further digital work as well as greater acceptance of the validity of digital work. At the same time, there are certainly some generational factors. We operate in an environment where senior members in the field wrote their dissertation by hand and hired a typist to finalize the manuscript. I know of at least one (I’m sure he’s not alone) senior academic that was handwriting work well into the late 90s.

The fact that digital history might face some challenges with regard to acceptance within the field given those realities is hardly surprising. At the same time, younger generations are going to have far more familiarity with the digital world. I am an old millennial. We are the last group to get through HS/college without a digitized environment fully taking over.

Do you have any feedback you’d like us to pass on to the instructors — things that you felt were particularly useful, or think they should know for future instruction?

I have nothing of particular note to pass on, I think everyone was wonderful and offered a lot. One potential idea is that further workshops could deal with specific topics that were addressed in greater depth. That would allow scholars interested in textual analysis, or mapping, etc. to potentially do more focused work in those areas.
Do you have any name suggestions for the new military history working group?

Nothing witty at the moment, but a good acronym is really important!

Do you have any suggestions in general for the new military history working group?

I thought the ideas getting floated on the last day all sounded good. The possibility of both general information flow, and more pointed topical discussion sounds great.

Bonus: photos of your kids/pets/particularly lively plants that were honorary members of the institute, or any memes you want to share with us.

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Google Forms
Post-Institute Survey and Feedback

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How much of the institute were you able to attend?

Most of it synchronously—missed three days.

What was the most valuable thing (or things) you learned?

My first real introduction to anything GIS, and the opportunity to talk to real SMEs on how to work with large text corpuses.

Was the format helpful for you? Do you have any feedback about how it could have been improved?

I think the instructors did a great job, but in the future, assuming things become normal, an in-person format would be much better along the lines of what was originally planned for last year.

What are your plans moving forward with the information you learned at the Institute? What potential difficulties do you anticipate?

I plan on investing the time needed to learn enough python to use the newer tools for analyzing large bodies of text.
As you move forward, what are you most excited about? What are you most nervous about?

I'm sure I will have questions and will need advice in the future, so the contact info I have is good.

How can digital military historians best advocate for each other? What do you see as the challenges for the field and how do we address them?

Do you have any feedback you'd like us to pass on to the instructors — things that you felt were particularly useful, or think they should know for future instruction?

Do you have any name suggestions for the new military history working group?

Do you have any suggestions in general for the new military history working group?

Bonus: photos of your kids/pets/particularly lively plants that were honorary members of the institute, or any memes you want to share with us.
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How much of the institute were you able to attend?

80%

What was the most valuable thing (or things) you learned?

Grant application process; programs for cleaning data; thinking about what data you should or shouldn’t include; thinking about issues with mapping (race, scale, etc.)

Was the format helpful for you? Do you have any feedback about how it could have been improved?

Format was helpful; Zoom was great because I could listen and participate but if I had another meeting, etc. I could do that quickly. Also really appreciated frequent breaks and long lunches.

What are your plans moving forward with the information you learned at the Institute? What potential difficulties do you anticipate?

Take ideas to impact how we do annotations with our project and plan to use that info for a conference panel and possibly an article. Also plan to incorporate these ideas into a digitize history class, especially reviewing the projects we looked at in the sessions.
As you move forward, what are you most excited about? What are you most nervous about?

Most nervous about mapping, or getting data to a point where it can be mapped. I had a hard time fully following those areas.

How can the Institute staff best support you moving forward?

I loved the idea of a working group; reach out to members for panels, papers, etc too

How can digital military historians best advocate for each other? What do you see as the challenges for the field and how do we address them?

See above; like the idea of staying connected to help promote one another and share ideas and resources.

Do you have any feedback you’d like us to pass on to the instructors — things that you felt were particularly useful, or think they should know for future instruction?

On some of the data aspects it may have been more useful to divide people up based on what kinds of data they had and then gone over data cleaning and mapping based on where that person/group was at in the process. I think I would have followed the tech better that way. But this may have been easier to accomplish in person.

Do you have any name suggestions for the new military history working group?

Sorry, I’m rubbish at naming things!

Do you have any suggestions in general for the new military history working group?

Like the idea of keeping the slack channel active or a Twitter for the group.
Bonus: photos of your kids/pets/particularly lively plants that were honorary members of the institute, or any memes you want to share with us.
Post-Institute Survey and Feedback

Hi all! Thank you so much for attending and participating in the NEH-funded Institute for Digital Methods for Military History. As we wrap up and move forward with the working group, it would be a great help if you would take a few minutes to fill out this survey about your experience with the institute and ideas and plans moving forward.

How much of the institute were you able to attend?

Almost all of it

What was the most valuable thing (or things) you learned?

For me, it was some of the practical side of data management and entry, along with the more detailed look at GIS programs and how to incorporate them into projects.

Was the format helpful for you? Do you have any feedback about how it could have been improved?

Yes, it was. I think we all might have preferred to be in person, but honestly breaking it up was really helpful in fending off fatigue and letting us digest what we learned. I would be very supportive of a similar workshop that was hybrid - online advance session, an in-person intensive, and an online follow up.

What are your plans moving forward with the information you learned at the Institute? What potential difficulties do you anticipate?

My plans in the near term are to integrate digital methods more into my teaching and advocate for a digital methods course at my institution. Medium term, I'm integrating some of the data collection/sorting/cleaning principles into my existing research in hopes of making it more useful for statistical analysis and GIS visualization. Difficulties: can you send me a box of extra time?
As you move forward, what are you most excited about? What are you most nervous about?

I'm most excited about the possibilities for new forms of historical narrative in my writing and better ways to reach a general audience. I'm nervous that I still lack some of the technical acumen to make this go smoothly.

How can the Institute staff best support you moving forward?

Honestly, being available to answer specific questions here and there as they pop up, and maybe giving advice on where to seek refresher or further training for those of us who want it.

How can digital military historians best advocate for each other? What do you see as the challenges for the field and how do we address them?

I think being a visible presence in professional life writ large would help - promote the inclusion of digital projects from wherever you're able - perhaps advocate for special inclusion in journals and conferences, or building a forum dedicated to the practice, like the journal CHNM already runs.

Do you have any feedback you'd like us to pass on to the instructors — things that you felt were particularly useful, or think they should know for future instruction?

In general it was very good. My one moment of frustration was with the QGIS portion - I got lost or missed one little step early on and it was game over for the rest of the session. A little more careful step-by-step (especially with a program that has so many damn versions out there) at the start would have been nice.

Do you have any name suggestions for the new military history working group?

Do you have any suggestions in general for the new military history working group?

Don't have it meet TOO often, but incentivize activity and sharing in some way (even if it's kinda silly, like handing out digital attaboys of some sort)

Bonus: photos of your kids/pets/particularly lively plants that were honorary members of the institute, or any memes you want to share with us.

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How much of the institute were you able to attend?

Nearly all of the institute

What was the most valuable thing (or things) you learned?

I learned so many valuable things during this institute. I hoped to gain familiarity with mapping applications like QGIS and Leaflet, and to gain exposure to the competencies necessary to effectively use them. That hope was definitely realized, thanks to the patient and useful walkthroughs by the institute team. But I learned a lot more than that. I very much appreciated the engagement on issues like data ethics, collaboration, pedagogy, and the practice and theory of spatial history. The institute proved demanding in terms of its scope, but enormously rewarding in terms of professional development.

Was the format helpful for you? Do you have any feedback about how it could have been improved?

I think the format was the best it could be given the realities of the pandemic. A series of long Zoom sessions are taxing for everyone involved. Yet the institute team did all they could to make the sessions as engaging as possible. They scheduled reasonable breaks, and made good use of breakout sessions to facilitate engagement between participants. Screen sharing enabled close scrutiny of walkthroughs of applications (although I fell behind at times when we moved at a quick pace). The Zoom format also made participation possible for those of us caring for young children or other responsibilities, and the institute team were very reasonable in their consideration of such issues. I was disappointed that I couldn't meet everyone face-to-face and explore GMU and Washington D.C. Yet the institute team did all they could to make the experience as engaging and personable as possible. I appreciate these efforts, especially given the huge scale of challenges everyone has faced since 2020.
What are your plans moving forward with the information you learned at the Institute? What potential difficulties do you anticipate?

I have two major goals coming out of this institute: 1) craft a digital history project suitable for publication in Current Research in Digital History; and 2) offer a course on spatial history using the tools, readings, and resources explored during the institute. The major difficulty I anticipate is simply finding time to make these goals a reality – but the resources provide by the institute will hopefully accelerate that process.

As you move forward, what are you most excited about? What are you most nervous about?

I’m excited to begin mapping and analyzing my historical data. I’m nervous about the process of crafting an article from such maps and analysis, and how to effectively communicate ideas and data in an engaging and scholarly way.

How can the Institute staff best support you moving forward?

One major form of support would be fostering a space for future collaboration and discussion, like the working group discussed at the end of the institute. I would be very interested in participating in that effort.

How can digital military historians best advocate for each other? What do you see as the challenges for the field and how do we address them?

Do you have any feedback you’d like us to pass on to the instructors — things that you felt were particularly useful, or think they should know for future instruction?

Just wanted to offer a note of thanks to the instructors – teaching over Zoom is challenging, and teaching technical walkthroughs even more so. My only suggestion is to occasionally pause during walkthroughs, and offer opportunities for questions, comments, or rounding up folks who have fallen behind the pace. To be clear, the instructors did this. But there were a few moments when I got lost after switching between screens to duplicate what the instructor had just taught. All in all, the instructors were great.
Do you have any name suggestions for the new military history working group?

Do you have any suggestions in general for the new military history working group?
Perhaps schedule an initial meeting in August or September to touch base and reconnect.

Bonus: photos of your kids/pets/particularly lively plants that were honorary members of the institute, or any memes you want to share with us.

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How much of the institute were you able to attend?

About 95%

What was the most valuable thing (or things) you learned?

Have to see as I work on my project what turns out to be the most valuable. The second week of the program was the best part of the institute. The intro to QGIS was helpful, as well as some of the quicker intros to Tableau, Leaflet, StoryMaps.

Was the format helpful for you? Do you have any feedback about how it could have been improved?

I appreciated the introduction to many new programs that I haven't used before. It might have been helpful to spend more time on each and have more training/practicum time (i.e. what we did in the afternoons), especially since learning new skills over Zoom was pretty difficult.

What are your plans moving forward with the information you learned at the Institute? What potential difficulties do you anticipate?
I learned that some NEH Summer programs paid participants stipends ($2,000-3,000) because they didn't spend on travel or lodging as anticipated; any chance the institute might be able to do that?

I thought Brandan Buck was a particularly good instructor.

How can digital military historians best advocate for each other? What do you see as the challenges for the field and how do we address them?

As you move forward, what are you most excited about? What are you most nervous about?

How can the Institute staff best support you moving forward?

Do you have any feedback you'd like us to pass on to the instructors — things that you felt were particularly useful, or think they should know for future instruction?

Do you have any name suggestions for the new military history working group?

Do you have any suggestions in general for the new military history working group?
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How much of the institute were you able to attend?

All but one afternoon (THATCamp sessions)

What was the most valuable thing (or things) you learned?

Most valuable was getting experience with new systems I haven't worked with and, more importantly, people using them. Even if they're not exactly germane to my work/research, it's good to know they're out there and that if you're looking for a program or system to help you with a problem, someone else has probably had that problem and developed or worked with a program to get results.

Was the format helpful for you? Do you have any feedback about how it could have been improved?

The overall virtual/dispersed learning format was just fine for most of the content. The only problem experienced was during the coding training sessions, where you had various levels of fluency and competence amongst the attendees (I'm on the lower end and would have been getting lost and falling behind anyway, but the online format where the instructor can't see/read the room exacerbates the problem). Not sure there's a way around that.

What are your plans moving forward with the information you learned at the Institute? What potential difficulties do you anticipate?

Going to try to add some level of detail to some maps I've already been working on (baby steps, I guess). Biggest problem as a fed employee is copyright/fair use restrictions, which are rigorous and inflexible, for products generated by freeware and stuff just pulled off the web.
As you move forward, what are you most excited about? What are you most nervous about?

Most excited by knowing there’s a network of historians using these tools more rigorously than I am and some of them would be willing to talk and share. Most nervous about how I could possibly expand use of such things in an office with practically no budget, no formal guidance on how to do digital history, and no means of hosting content.

How can the Institute staff best support you moving forward?

Keeping the Slack open and the informal working group plans to keep people in touch, I think.

How can digital military historians best advocate for each other? What do you see as the challenges for the field and how do we address them?

At the risk of being corny (and as a fed who doesn’t have to worry about academic tenure/promotion considerations), by doing solid work with sources/citations that can be followed up on. I think the body of work will speak for itself.

Do you have any feedback you’d like us to pass on to the instructors — things that you felt were particularly useful, or think they should know for future instruction?

Coding and instruction on programming things like QGIS are hard to do online. It’s difficult for instructors to gauge the performance of the group and as a former teacher I know it’s easy to presume that because something is easy/intuitive to you it isn’t necessarily for others. That said, the followup/sideline one-on-one sessions were a good way to mitigate this.

Do you have any name suggestions for the new military history working group?

N/A
Do you have any suggestions in general for the new military history working group?

Not at this stage. I know some people not involved with the seminar who might be interested in getting involved or doing presentations, but haven't sounded them out yet.

Bonus: photos of your kids/pets/particularly lively plants that were honorary members of the institute, or any memes you want to share with us.
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How much of the institute were you able to attend?

All but the last session. :-(

What was the most valuable thing (or things) you learned?

I learned so much that it's hard to single out one program or application. I found the sessions devoted to data visualization to be very valuable. The same goes for the time we devoted to learning how to use QGIS. Brandan's tutorial was fantastic, if a little overwhelming.

Was the format helpful for you? Do you have any feedback about how it could have been improved?

Of course, it would have been infinitely preferable to conduct the institute in person over a two-week period as originally planned. Since that was not an option, I think the online format worked about as best as one could hope for. The frequent use of breakout rooms was effective and allowed us to interact with one another in a smaller group setting and to get more individualized instruction from the staff.

What are your plans moving forward with the information you learned at the Institute? What potential difficulties do you anticipate?

I hope to use QGIS and data visualization in my own work. See answer below for potential difficulties.
As you move forward, what are you most excited about? What are you most nervous about?

The institute really opened my eyes to the amazing things that can be done with the different digital tools we worked with. The staff's facility with these tools was also very inspiring. What makes me nervous is the prospects of using these tools on my own. It was one thing to watch one of the instructors walk us through how to do data mapping or georectifying a map. I am not entirely confident I can do these tasks on my own.

How can the Institute staff best support you moving forward?

I would certainly appreciate being able to contact the staff with specific questions or requests for guidance.

How can digital military historians best advocate for each other? What do you see as the challenges for the field and how do we address them?

Do you have any feedback you'd like us to pass on to the instructors — things that you felt were particularly useful, or think they should know for future instruction?

My one complaint is that the readings were not finalized until the very eve of the institute, which did not allow us anywhere near enough time to complete the assigned readings and digest their content. It would have been helpful and much more productive if we could have been given the readings (a minimum of ) 4-6 weeks in advance. I ended up skimming most of them and from conversations with other participants I found that I was not the only one.

Do you have any name suggestions for the new military history working group?

Digital Warriors? Okay, that's a horrible suggestion so I guess not.
Do you have any suggestions in general for the new military history working group?

It would be great to have a working group that we could use a resource and a sounding board as we move forward with our own digital projects.

Bonus: photos of your kids/pets/particularly lively plants that were honorary members of the institute, or any memes you want to share with us.