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“Irving Greenwald was drafted into the Army in 1917, and during his training and also during his training overseas serving in the trenches, he kept a diary. The diary is incredible, both in terms of the actual content of it, the context of it and the actual form of it. When he wrote, it starts out the writing is small and it gets even smaller and then even smaller still. It talks about the food that he ate, his relationships with his comrades, it talks about the wind and the rain and the sleet and the hard ground that he was sleeping on. It talks about elements of World War I trench warfare, so gas attacks and the need for gas masks and the shells that were exploding overhead. And all of these details are given both in a very matter-of-fact way as well as in a very, almost lyrical sort of way.

The transcript was actually created originally in the [19]30’s by the veteran’s daughter and sister. Luckily that document survived as the diary itself deteriorated. So luckily, with this transcript, we’re able to get to the content of the diary. The donor, the veteran’s grandson, also transcribed it further into a Word document, which is now word-searchable, which increases access quite a bit. So even though we have the wonderful artifact, without the transcript we wouldn’t have the same access to the content of the diary.

I think that family members are re-discovering this material cleaning out their attic or their basement and seeing the historical significance of these documents and sending them to the Veterans History Project, and we’re absolutely thrilled to accept these types of collections. Like the Greenwald diary, they all provide this really amazing personal perspective on the experience of World War I on training, on combat, on what it was like to leave loved ones. And as there aren’t any surviving World War I veterans, these documents are really the only chance to see through the eyes of a veteran and have them tell us in their own words what it was really like.”