I believe that I have grown immensely as a digital historian over the course of HIST 3814O. My growth is clearly visible because I began the course as a complete beginner, and though I still think that I am a beginner, I feel that I’ve learned a lot. At the base level, I now have a much better understanding of the value of and need for a shift away from traditional history into the digital. In addition, I have a more practical understanding as well, since I have learned how to use a variety of digital tools to facilitate my study of history. My Capstone Exercise reflects both of these areas of growth.

To become a good digital historian, it is necessary to understand the value in incorporating the digital world in this field. To me, the most important part of practicing digital history is the new avenues of collaboration and support that are made possible. I drew on the valuable practice of sharing one’s research notebook and draft documents in my Capstone Exercise. Part of my goal with my project was to produce a supporting document that could be useful to others in their own research projects. One of the benefits of sharing one’s research notes is that if you spent hours deciphering data, for instance, others won’t have to do this too because your results will be available for use. This can help to streamline the process of studying history, which can be a very time-consuming one when done traditionally. Applying this concept, I transcribed the .jpg War Diaries and tagged the locations in them, making it possible for others to skip this step and use my work instead.

Furthermore, I have a better understanding now of how digital tools can be used to my advantage in the process of studying history. For the most part, research consists of sifting through immense amounts of data to find one relevant thing. It also partly consists of cleaning up data, since errors and discrepancies are common due to human error. Digital tools help to streamline these processes, and I’ve become more comfortable with using such tools for my work as a result of this course. I was previously not trusting of digital tools because they can potentially glitch, but this reflected a limited understanding of how these tools function, and I see now that it’s really no different than a human error causing a discrepancy. In my Capstone Exercise, I allowed Regex to do much of my text-cleaning work, as I had lots to delete and replace, and I also allowed OpenRefine to edit my values to ensure consistency. The results were completely up to my standards and saved me many hours of work.

My greatest strength that I have discovered over the course of this class is my adaptability. As mentioned above, before this class began I rarely let digital tools do anything important for me. This class forced me to change that very abruptly, but I adapted surprisingly well, and quickly gained an appreciation for the digital world’s capabilities as a result. I think that my greatest weakness with regards to this course has been my struggles with understanding the theory behind why we are doing what we are doing. For instance, while I can follow instructions for writing specific commands, and I can make up my own (with a fair degree of difficulty, though), I struggle to understand why the command I just typed actually worked. However, this simply requires additional studying and practice to improve, which is easy to do.

I have really enjoyed this class because of how much it has pushed me outside of my comfort zone. I appreciate how much easier life can become once I learn how to use digital tools, and I intend to continue to use what I have learned in my future classes.