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# Ronald Wayne Schrum Papers

1966-1968

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[Scope](#)

[Inventory](#)

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Born in Richmond, Va., in 1946, Ronald Wayne Schrum served as a corporal in the 9th Engineer Battalion, US Marine Corps, during the Vietnam War. Based in Chu Lai, on the coast 56 miles southeast of Da Nang, the 9th Engineers were responsible for the maintenance of bridges and roads, and perhaps most importantly mine sweeping. Schrum was wounded in action in August 1967, returning to duty after a short recuperation. While on leave in May 1968, Schrum married his fiancée Carolyn Ann Garrett, and the two settled in Virginia after the end of his time in service. Schrum died in Glen Allen, Va., on June 20, 1995.

A compact record of one marine's service in Vietnam, this collection contains letters written by Ronald Schrum to his fiancée describing his duties as a combat engineer near Chu Lai. Covering only the months from Jan. 1967 to Nov. 1968, they include accounts of mine sweeping, fire fights with the Viet Cong (including one in which he was wounded in action), the Tet Offensive,

and life on base, and increasingly as the couple approach their marriage, the letters are marked by a longing for his wife and home and a literal counting down of days remaining in service.

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## Military

### Vietnam War

## Background on Ronald Wayne Schrum

Born in Richmond, Va., on Christmas eve, 1946, Ronald Wayne Schrum was 19 years old when he enlisted in the Marine Corps on Feb. 4, 1966, for service in Vietnam. Assigned to the 9th Engineer Support Battalion of the 3rd Marine Logistics Group, Schrum was sent to naval station at Treasure Island in San Francisco Bay and from there to the massive base at Chu Lai in central Vietnam, south of the major air base at Da Nang. The battalion played an important role in supporting military operations in the region, with responsibility for clearing and repairing Highway 1, the major coastal artery, maintaining bridges, and constructing camps. Schrum's Military Occupational Specialty (MOS) was Combat Engineer, specializing in laying and sweeping for land mines. He described himself to his fiancée at the mid-point of his service in Marine terms:

"My name is Ronald Schrum and I'm in the Marine Corps. I stand 5 ft 8 in tall, blonde hair, blue eyes 20 year old. I'm in Chu Lai Veit Nam. My job is Combat Engineer and I do all kinds of work from building tents to using explosive and laying minefields. I've been here for ten months now and by the time you get this letter I will be on my way home for 30 days leave and then I will come back for six more months." (May 11, 1967)

Sent out on missions to forward camps and to bases at Phu Bai, Hue, and Da Nang, Schrum was frequently exposed to sniper fire or assault while on duty, and the base at Chu Lai came under mortar fire on several occasions. In July 1967, he was on a truck that struck a land mine, fortunately received only minor injuries, but on September 5, he reported being shot in a fire fight:

Well I'm doing just fine today but I'm still scare from last week. I went out with the recon's on hill 445 for five days and six nights. The VC were waiting for us when we got there but the trouble didn't start until the second night and boy when they hit us it was like being in hell and it only lasted two and a half hours but when it was all over with we lost one man and six wounded and there were only 18 men total so this is why I haven't written to you in a week so I hope you aren't mad at me. I've got five letters from you the day I got back to Chu Lai and the chain is very lovely ad I'll always wear it. But Carol I've got tell you on thing. The nights we got hit I didn't think I was going to make it off that hill alive and I didn't get off in one peace I've got a bullet whole in my leg but I'm doing fine now. I prayed to god every night just to let me see the sun come up the next morning and I knew he was with me because I'm still here now. Carol when you answer this letter please don't ask me anything about it no more and I'll tell you all about it when I come home ok. It is going to take me a couple of days to get straight out but I never once forgot your love for me and I'll never forget it. I hate to write and tell my mother about it. Tell Mama and Daddy it for me ok. Carol you'll never know how I feel right now and how much I miss you. But I've got to thank god for letting me live through last week. Carol I'm going to close for now because I haven't had much sleep so I'll write you again tomorrow morning, ok. (July 19, 1967)

Although sidelined from action for a few weeks, he returned to duty and continued to serve. One of his closest friends was killed in action during the Tet Offensive in 1968, and he had other engagements, small and large, reinforced the

Well today just wasn't our day and the Viet Cong almost ended it for the mine sweep this morning. We started at 6:30 this morning and we walked for about two miles and then we found a small mine in the road and then hell broke loose there were about 15 VC waiting for us of the side of the road and it lasted for an hour but when it was over we had four wounded men and killed 7 VC.

During a thirty-day leave of absence in June 1968, Schrum returned home to Virginia and married his fiancée Carolyn Garrett. He returned to Chi Bai early in July and counter down the final months of his deployment. Schrum returned home to the Richmond, Virginia, area in November 1968 and was finally released from the service on Feb. 3, 1970. He and his wife divorced in 1983. Schrum lived near Richmond until his death on June 20, 1995, only 49 years old.

## Scope of collection

A compact record of one marine's service in Vietnam, the collection contains 113 letters from Ronald Schrum to Carolyn Garrett, and 8 letters in return. Based primarily at Chu Lai in central Vietnam, Schrum wrote regularly to describe his duties as a combat engineer, including accounts of mine sweeping, fire fights with the Viet Cong (including one in which he was wounded in action), the Tet Offensive, and life on base. Increasingly as the couple approach their marriage and after, Schrum's letters are marked by a deep longing for his wife and home and a literal counting down of days remaining in service. The letters cover only the months from January 1967, when he had already been in Vietnam for three months, to the end of his overseas service in November 1968.

As important as Schrum's accounts of his work as a combat engineer are his accounts of life on base and camp that give a sense of the day to day life of a marine. From Hill 63 (LZ Baldy, north of Chu Lai), for example, he wrote:

Well we don't have a club up here so they let us keep the beer in our tents now and we get movies twice a week from the army so it won't be too bad up here unless the VC start to play their funny games at night... We've got twelve men to a tent and the tents aren't that big, but we are very happy anyway and we help each other out all the time. We've also got some big guns right behind us and they make a hell of a lot of noise all night every night but they also keep the VC away from us too! The big guns are talking right now

Schrum's letters also offer a valuable perspective on the development of his relationship with his fiancée -- then wife -- from the months of anticipation prior to the wedding to the occasional salacious content and the increasing longing at separation.

## Inventory

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Correspondence from Ronald Wayne Schrum to Carolyn Ann Garrett  
1967 Jan.

Box 1: 1

Correspondence from Ronald Wayne Schrum to Carolyn Ann Garrett  
1967 March

Box 1: 2

Correspondence from Ronald Wayne Schrum to Carolyn Ann Garrett  
1967 May

Box 1: 3

Correspondence from Ronald Wayne Schrum to Carolyn Ann Garrett  
1967 July

Box 1: 4

Correspondence from Ronald Wayne Schrum to Carolyn Ann Garrett  
1967 Aug.

Box 1: 5

Correspondence from Ronald Wayne Schrum to Carolyn Ann Garrett  
1967 Sept.

Box 1: 6

Correspondence from Ronald Wayne Schrum to Carolyn Ann Garrett  
1967 Oct.

Box 1: 7

Correspondence from Ronald Wayne Schrum to Carolyn Ann Garrett  
1967 Nov.

Box 1: 8

Correspondence from Ronald Wayne Schrum to Carolyn Ann Garrett  
1967 Dec.

Box 1: 9

Correspondence from Ronald Wayne Schrum to Carolyn Ann Garrett  
1968 Jan.

Box 1: 10

Correspondence from Ronald Wayne Schrum to Carolyn Ann Garrett  
1968 Feb.

Box 1: 11

Correspondence from Ronald Wayne Schrum to Carolyn Ann Garrett  
1968 March

Box 1: 12

Correspondence from Ronald Wayne Schrum to Carolyn Ann Garrett  
1968 April

Box 1: 13

Correspondence from Ronald Wayne Schrum to Carolyn Ann Garrett  
1968 July

Box 1: 14

Correspondence from Ronald Wayne Schrum to Carolyn Ann Garrett  
1968 Aug.

Box 1: 15

Correspondence from Ronald Wayne Schrum to Carolyn Ann Garrett  
1968 Sept.

Box 1: 16

Correspondence from Ronald Wayne Schrum to Carolyn Ann Garrett

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Box 1: 17

Correspondence from Carolyn Ann Garrett to Ronald Wayne Schrum

1968 April-Sept.

Box 1: 18

Includes photograph of Carolyn Schrumm

Newspapers and clippings

1967

Box 1: 19

Includes copy of the newspaper of the III Marine Amphibious Force, *Sea Tiger*, vol. 3, 18 (May 5, 1967) and the insert *CAC News*, vol. 1, 4 (May 5, 1967).

"Stars and Stripes Map" of Vietnam

1966

Box 1: 20

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## Administrative information

### Access

The collection is open for research.

### Provenance

Acquired from Michael Brown, May 2015.

### Processing Information

Processed by I. Eliot Wentworth, Aug. 2017.

### Language:

English

### Acknowledgments

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## Search terms

### Subjects

Chu Lai (Vietnam)

Military engineering

Schrum, Carolyn Ann Garrett

Tet Offensive, 1968

United States. Marine Expeditionary Force, 3rd. Engineer Battalion, 9th

Vietnam War, 1961-1965--Engineering and construction

### Contributors

Schrum, Ronald Wayne [main entry]

### Genres and formats

Correspondence

Photographs

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