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The World War II Letters of Richard Schade

Abstract

Richard Schade was a newlywed when he was drafted into the United States Army on January 29, 1943, in Camden, New Jersey. While stationed in the United States during World War II, he wrote a series of letters to his new wife, Betty. Many of these letters were love letters discussing deep love as well as the active plan to start a family. Through the letters written over the course of months he records his daily duties, concerns, dreams, and various information about the conditions in the military. His letters developed into a valuable insight into the life of a soldier stationed in America during World War II. This research paper uncovers information about Richard Schade and his military time that had been lost not only to his family but also to some military records, creating a fuller picture and providing many answers to questions left unanswered over time.

Keywords

World War II, Soldier, Artillery, Letters

Disciplines

Military History | United States History

Comments

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The
World War II Letters
of
Richard Schade

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Historical Methods 300
Prof. Birkner
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Gettysburg College Special Collections and College Archives houses many unique and rare objects. It houses books, art, instruments, uniforms, and even soldiers' letters from different eras of United States history. Within the World War II collection of letters sent to and from soldiers who were stationed in diverse outfits, are the letters of Richard E. Schade to his wife, Betty. There are no pictures of Richard or family information residing within the box; only the letters he wrote and some sent to him from various family members. These letters provide his experience between June 25, 1943 and September 20, 1944. Anything before these dates or after is up for interpretation from his Army records and through interviews with family who heard stories from him first hand. After hours of intensive research, discovering family members for interviews, and timeline piecing, Richard E. Schade's experiences during World War II can be more fully described for generations to come.

The family of Richard Schade in more recent years consists of three daughters, a son, numerous grandchildren, and even great-grandchildren. It came as a shock to them to discover only a few years ago that their relative had surviving letters from the war that were now housed in the Gettysburg Special Collections. The explanation for this odd situation had some light shone on it by Carol Resnick, Richard's eldest daughter who was born in 1944. During an interview with me, she speculated that the letters had been held by her grandmother, Richard's mother, because she kept anything involving Richard (especially his war time items) since he was her only child. During the first year of his enlistment Richard's wife lived with his parents but later moved in with her parents when she became pregnant. The letters may have been lost in the move and kept by his mother. Upon his mother's death over twenty years ago the letters were collected possibly by the movers who were emptying her house in preparation for demolition.¹ Somehow afterward the letters found their way to a man named Charles Apfelbaum, from whom

¹Phone interview with Mrs. Carol Resnick, February 21, 2017.

the letters were purchased by Special Collections.² It seemed strange to Carol that her grandmother would have the love letters between her mother and father since they were often very personal. Nevertheless, the family was pleased to see his handwriting and hear about his experience. This is where research and interpretation step in to fill the holes created by time. (In the final two days of work on this project, five more letters were found at the residence of Carol Resnick. Not enough time remained to incorporate them into the fabric of this story, yet it is good news to know more survived over the last 70 plus years.)

Richard E. Schade was born on August 9, 1919, to Louise Schade and Henry Edwin Schade. Louise, his mother, traveled from Camden, New Jersey to Huntington, West Virginia to have the baby close to her parents who lived there. She subsequently traveled back to Camden where Richard grew up. He was an only child.³ His father owned a metal fabricating business that was established in Baltimore, Maryland but later moved to Camden. This business created custom metals such as steel beams, water and oil tanks, and many more products through the process of design and construction.⁴ This business supported the family and allowed them to live a comfortable, middle class life. Growing up, Richard's father was a designer and artist at home. His father was Catholic and his mother was Evangelical, but by the time he was twenty-three he wasn't a very religious man.⁵ He attended North Baptist Church one Sunday to help a friend secure a free bible in exchange for bringing along a friend for the first time. This is where he eventually met the love of his life, Betty Ruth Brown.⁶

² Jaclyn Campbell, *MS-030: The Letters of Richard Schade (World War II)*, Finding Aids. Special Collection and College Archives, Musselman Library, Gettysburg College, (July 2001).

³ Phone interview with Mrs. Carol Resnick, February 21, 2017.

⁴ Phone interview with Mrs. Carol Resnick, February 25, 2017.

⁵ Carol Resnick, February 21, 2017.

⁶ Carol Resnick, February 25, 2017.

By this point Richard was working with his father in the metal business. Eventually Richard would be in charge of operating the business on his own and would expand the product services offered. World War II had an impact on the family during the early years because “they did a lot of work during World War II for the shipyards” since custom metal work was in high demand. Coinciding with his work and the looming draft, Richard began a relationship with Betty Brown. After months of courting and anticipation they were married on October 24, 1942. He was twenty-three and she was twenty years old. The newlyweds anticipated the draft as it could come at any time and in a romantic gesture they had a brief honeymoon in New York City, New York. Neither Richard nor Betty had ever been to New York City. In fact he had never been anywhere outside of Camden or his home state, so it came as a shock to be drafted and sent to many places he had never dreamed of going.⁷

Richard was drafted on January 29, 1943, in Camden.⁸ He was given the Army serial number of 32489197.⁹ His letters provided the fact that he was a “limited servicemen.”¹⁰ This term “limited” was often assigned early in the war to men who were over the age of twenty-one and were married (especially with children). They were assigned roles usually within the United States and did not see “action.” This occurred often in the beginning of the war through 1943, but “in 1944, manpower shortages [...] became a real problem.”¹¹ Limited service was then excluded and all men had equal chance of being sent overseas.

⁷ Phone interview with Mrs. Carol Resnick, February 21, 2017.

⁸ "Richard E. Schade," U.S., World War II Army Enlistment Records, 1938-1946, accessed February 20, 2017, www.Ancestry.com.

⁹ "Personal Details," Richard E. Schade, accessed February 20, 2017, https://www.fold3.com/page/86313645_richard_e%20schade/

¹⁰ Richard E. Schade to Betty Schade, July 26, 1943, Box 1, Folder 3, Special Collections, Gettysburg College, MS-030, World War II Letters of Richard E. Schade.

¹¹ CJ Kelly, e-mail message to author, February 18, 2017.

The anti-aircraft and artillery forces of the American Army were greatly feared by the enemy due to their “extreme precision and accuracy, as well as power.” Richard’s battalion most likely would have “had three firing batteries (4 guns each), a Headquarters battery (the CO [Commanding Officer] and his staff along with the fire direction personnel, communications center, etc.), and a Service battery (ammunition, basic supplies, mechanics, etc.),” though Richard’s exact role in this system isn’t clearly stated. Gun sizes, power, and firing distance would have varied and this caused a varying in numbers of men assigned to a particular outfit.¹² These men were also trained as infantrymen in order to be able to fill ranks if numbers dwindled. In a letter to his wife Richard reveals that his outfit, the 502nd Anti-aircraft Artillery Gun Battalion Battery F, was attached to Coast Artillery. This designation of artillery existed to “protect fleet bases, defeat naval and air attacks against cities and harbors, undertake beach defense while as army or theater reserve artillery.” These groups were operated on the U.S. coast until the threat of invasion faded, after which many outfits were reassigned, evolved, or were disbanded altogether. By the end of the war there were virtually no Coast Artillery.¹³ This would explain the extended period of time Richard spent in Paterson, New Jersey.

Richard began his military service as a private. Like all privates he was required to be posted on guard duty which often was overlooking the motor pool. It was on guard duty or in the moments when he returned from it and was climbing into bed in which he would write to his family and his beloved wife. Richard also had the ability to type and had office experience, so he was likely given clerical work. He was assigned to the 502nd which was stationed at the time of

¹² "Artillery Battalions in World War II," Owlcation, last modified December 14, 2016, accessed February 18, 2017, <https://owlcation.com/humanities/ArtilleryBattalions>.

¹³ Shelby L. Stanton, *World War II Order of Battle, U.S. Army Ground Force Units* (Mechanicsburg, PA: Stackpole Books, 2006). 33-38.

his induction in Paterson, New Jersey.¹⁴ This location is less than two hours from his home in Camden which gave him the opportunity to visit his wife fairly often under a weekend pass. Virtually no specifics are known about his experience between his draft date and the beginning of the collection of letters (January 29, 1943 and June 25, 1943) except for possible locations he would have been stationed. When his letters do begin a majority of the first few are to let his wife know he is well, to let her know he misses her, and to daydream about their future together since their wedding was only eight months prior and the draft three months into the marriage.

Five letters have been chosen from this collection to expand on the wartime experience of this soldier because they highlight some key elements of the period. The selected five begin with the very first letter written in the collection (on June 25, 1943). In this letter he talks of staring at the picture of his new wife and daydreaming about coming home to her. He reminisces about the last time he saw her only days before. Richard informs her of men being sent out of his outfit and them being stripped of summer fatigues, which leads him to believe they are being sent to somewhere cold. He gives an account that while on guard duty the night he came home from his visit with Betty he had a baby bunny to entertain him as it ran around; he then proceeds to make a joke about catching a few to send to her to “relieve the meat situation (ha-ha).” This is most likely a reference to the rationing of meats and food that civilians were placed under during war time. He concludes the letter with this sentence on the edge of the paper: “I hope that I made a home run this time.” This phrase is in reference to conceiving a baby and demonstrates their dedication to starting their life together.¹⁵

¹⁴ Records for 642nd AAA AW Bn, Unit history card file for World War II microfilm collection, 1946-1947, Set. 1 (Washington, D.C., War Dept., Office of the Adjutant General, 1946-1947); TAGO unit historical data cards; U.S. Army Heritage and Education Center, Carlisle, PA.

¹⁵ Richard E. Schade to Betty Schade, June 25, 1943, Box 1, Folder 1, Special Collections, Gettysburg College, MS-030, World War II Letters of Richard E. Schade.

The letter of July 2, 1943 is one of the most important in the collection because it touches many points that can be connected to the experience of other soldiers. The continued longing for home is evident, “Darling I love you so much, all I think about is my darling wife and the future that we will have together when this war is over.” This is a common theme in wartime love letters. His continued devotion is also seen in his planning to take every opportunity for leave to see her on weekends since they have the luxury of proximity. In the letter he discusses his possibilities for promotion which is something soldiers often sought out. Within this letter Richard also reacts excitedly to the letter from Betty informing him that he may be a “proud papa in April 1944.”¹⁶ This information is a very important piece of his life.

This letter also mentions a common practice of the time. In order to keep inflation down and money within the government to fund the war effort it became common practice for pay to be substituted as war bonds. Every month some amount of the soldier’s pay would be deducted and kept by the government to be replaced with war bonds. These war bonds were sent home to loved ones. They were “priced at 75 percent of face value and returned 2.9 percent interest, compounded semiannually, if held till a 10-year maturity.” They were made available with three options of registration: “(1) in the name of one individual; (2) in the name of two individuals; (3) in the name of one individual, payable upon death to another designated individual.” These bonds came with many limitations but a few perks that made them desirable enough for people to sacrifice immediate monetary compensation in order to fund the military and purchase equipment that could help save their lives and bring a quick end to the war. Bonds were not just issued to soldiers’; anyone could purchase a bond. Large scale campaigns were launched and banks were recruited to issue bonds. The first payroll deductions were done by insurance

¹⁶ Richard E. Schade to Betty Schade, July 2, 1943, Box 1, Folder 1, Special Collections, Gettysburg College, MS-030, World War II Letters of Richard E. Schade.

companies to collect premiums and were rather successful. Using this model, “automatic bond purchasing” was established. All government departments and branches took on these “War Bond” automated deductions, as well as branches of the military.¹⁷ In the July 2, 1943, letter Richard is signing paper work that helps finalize receiving War Bonds and insurance which will be sent to his wife. The last interesting piece of information in this letter is what he earns when payroll is issued. He writes, “I was paid yesterday and I received \$14.63 so now I am a rich man.” Due to inflation between 1943 and 2017, this amount would be the equivalent of \$205.36 today.¹⁸ The July 26, 1943 letter which has been previously mentioned is the third letter.

On August 29, 1943, Richard writes to Betty informing her of a change in his outfit. His outfit was redesignated the 642nd Antiaircraft Artillery, Automatic Weapons Battalion Battery B, effective on September 1, 1943. This change detaches them from the Coast Artillery and requires the men to receive further training on more diverse weapons. This is about all of the military news he provides. The conversation turns to baby names for a little girl, but the only name he can think of is Betty. He close this letter like many others, “Your loving and faithful husband, Richard” with an accompanying, “All my love and kisses are yours darling.”¹⁹

The last letter in this five letter series was written on August 16, 1944. A year has gone by since the last described letter. Richard’s daughter, Carol, was born a few months prior. Furlough lists are posted on a bulletin board in his camp which allows them to get an estimate of when they can visit home. The leave time is longer and more generous at this point, but he is also farther from home at Camp Stewart in Georgia. Richard was one of 1,985 men stationed at Camp

¹⁷ U.S. Savings Bonds Division, Department of the Treasury, *A History of the United States Savings Bond Program, 50th Anniversary Edition* (Washington, D.C., 1991), 11-20.

¹⁸ U.S. Inflation Calculator, last modified July 27, 2012, accessed February 15, 2017, <http://www.usinflationcalculator.com/>.

¹⁹ Richard E. Schade to Betty Schade, August 29, 1943, Box 1, Folder 3, Special Collections, Gettysburg College, MS-030, World War II Letters of Richard E. Schade.

Stewart during his time there.²⁰ For furlough they are given 13 days (travel days included). The most important information that can be extracted from this letter is the training that he and his fellow soldiers experienced. He recorded, “We fired our gun on the range this morning and we had a formal parade on the parade grounds this afternoon. It certainly was hot standing in the sun for 2 ½ hours. Many boys passed out and were carried off the field.” Nights at this camp have skies filled with glowing tracer bullets. Towards the end of the letter when he says his goodbyes he includes a designated self-censorship, the meaning of which is not clear. The conclusion of this letter is a little different however, reading, “Daddy sends all his love, kisses and snuggling to both of you, and will see both of you soon.”²¹

There are not many detailed records of the movements of the 502nd during Richard’s time with them. The redesignation of Richard’s outfit intertwines Army records of the 502nd and 642nd. All that could be found was a list of changes in base of operations and an abbreviated list of dates on which they were deployed. By the time Richard was stationed in Paterson, New Jersey the 502nd had been there for approximately five months. They would continue to be stationed there until January 28, 1944, at which time they were reassigned to Flushing, New York, and a month later to Fort Totten, New York.²²

It was during his time in Paterson that Richard was able to visit his wife and inevitably conceive his daughter. It was at this location that he also received the announcement of her pregnancy. It wouldn’t be until his time at Fort Totten that his daughter would be born and he would be able to receive leave to meet her or the first time. The first time he held her he said to

²⁰ Shelby L. Stanton, *World War II Order of Battle, U.S. Army Ground Force Units* (Mechanicsburg, PA: Stackpole Books, 2006). 37.

²¹ Richard E. Schade to Betty Schade, August 16, 1944, Box 1, Folder 4, Special Collections, Gettysburg College, MS-030, *World War II Letters of Richard E. Schade*.

²² Records for 642nd AAA AW Bn, Unit history card file for World War II microfilm collection, 1946-1947, Set. 1 (Washington, D.C., War Dept., Office of the Adjutant General, 1946-1947); TAGO unit historical data cards; U.S. Army Heritage and Education Center, Carlisle, PA.

his wife, ““Is she breathing okay?” So it was quite an experience for him to have a new baby and have to” face the realities of the war again.²³ Previously there weren’t any pictures of Richard included in the collection, but now there are more than a dozen possibilities, and one of those includes one of the first times he met his baby girl.

It was during this period at Fort Totten that another story occurs. During Carol’s interview she reiterated this story told to her by her father:

And one interesting thing was they had to practice, believe it or not, all those years ago, seventy some years ago, they had drones. They’re not like the drones of today of course. They were planes that were set up with no pilot and were set up to be target practice. To shoot down these planes [...] And my father, because he was an engineer, he looked at one of the planes that they had ordered him to shoot it down and he wouldn’t let them do it. And he was threatened with court martial until they found out that he was right. It was a plane that had a pilot in it, and if they had shot it down they would have killed the pilot.²⁴

Carol’s father told a few stories that struck awe into the listeners. The letters do not capture these events most likely due to censorship regulations. He did tell his children stories around the kitchen table as they were growing up. These stories are still carried by his children, but now Gettysburg College has the opportunity to preserve these stories for future reader and researchers.

There is evidence that suggests that when the 642nd were reassigned to Camp Gordon (also in Georgia) on October 25, 1944, that a select group of men from the 642nd were deployed to the Philippines. This experience occurs after the body of letters collected by Special Collections so there was no way of knowing of his deployment just from the information in the collection. Carol was the first person to state that her father left the states. This was the first news uncovered of this possibility, so it prompted a trip the U.S. Army Heritage and Education Center in Carlisle, Pennsylvania for further research. This trip revealed records that his Battery did in

²³ Phone interview with Mrs. Carol Resnick, February 21, 2017.

²⁴ Carol Resnick, February 21, 2017.

fact go over seas to the Philippines on October 20, 1944. Carol also provided an account by her father of his time overseas. The short story depicts one night at a prisoner of war camp at which they were stationed for a while. It is as follows:

And of course we would always ask him to tell us what he did in the war. He would tell us he never killed somebody but he was almost killed himself. [...] One night somebody had gotten a knife and sliced through and tried to kill him. Fortunately [...] he knew how to twist the knife [out of his hand], I guess. He wasn't killed, and the guy was re-imprisoned. [...] He enjoyed his time there. He was glad, I'm sure, to get home. He also said that when he was on his way to the Philippines you would see the [...] Southern Lights. He would remember keeping watch on the ship and looking at the sky wondering whether he was going to come home or not [...] He would tell us how like they could drink coconut milk in the Philippines and get the coconut. He would tell us how he would go fishing with a net and bring up a lot of fish in the Pacific, and he told us how scared he was on the boat [...] But he never told us anything, so if anything really horrible happened [...] he never told us about it. He came back, I'm sure, a changed man.²⁵

Richard Schade was most likely discharged from military service approximately six months to a year after the war ended on both fronts. By this estimate it would have been sometime in 1946; the exact date is unknown. According to one source, his enlistment was “for the duration of the War or other emergency, plus six months, subject to the discretion of the President or otherwise according to law.”²⁶ At the time of his discharge he “was very anti-gun and back in the day they let the soldiers take their guns home and he refused. He was very anti-Second Amendment.” He would come home to be a father to his new baby girl, and eventually would father two other girls and a boy who they would name Richard E. Schade Jr. He would create many wonderful memories for his family and provide anything they needed—given if he was able. He was happy and easily humored which caused him to laugh at sometimes inappropriate times alongside Carol.²⁷ She has many wonderful memories of him.

²⁵ Phone interview with Mrs. Carol Resnick, February 21, 2017.

²⁶ "Richard E. Schade," U.S., World War II Army Enlistment Records, 1938-1946, accessed February 20, 2017, www.Ancestry.com.

²⁷ Phone interview with Mrs. Carol Resnick, February 21, 2017.

He took his family on many trips but made sure to make some aspect of the trip educational. Above all he loved the Ocean City Boardwalk in New Jersey. He would regularly take his children there after church to swim. He enjoyed it so much that when he was taken ill at the age of 78 one of his last wishes was to take one last trip with his family to the Boardwalk. A rare illness called Wegener's Granulomatosis, which restricts blood flow to vital organs, took his life while in Cooper Hospital—the same hospital in which his first baby was born over fifty years earlier while he was fighting a war.²⁸ In his honor Carol and her family dedicated a bench to him on 10th Street of the Ocean City Boardwalk which is still there today.²⁹ When she and her family visit they always make a point to sit on the bench for a little while and remember him as the amazing man he grew up to be.³⁰

When this project began it seemed like there would be no leads into the story of Richard Schade. Very few details were present in his letters. As time went on slowly more pieces of the puzzle began to connect until finally a more clear picture emerged. The conclusion of this project now contains numerous images of a previously mysterious figure, five more letters containing possible leads into this story, and recorded interviews with a very important person who was the subject of many of Richard's letters. Sadly, Richard is not around to tell his wartime experiences to students at Gettysburg College, so it is up to the students to tell it for him.

²⁸ Phone interview with Mrs. Carol Resnick, February 21, 2017.

²⁹ "In Memory Of Richard E. Schade, Sr. 1919 - 1997, Love, Betty And Family," Ocean City, NJ Bench Plaques, last modified May 23, 2012, accessed February 23, 2017, <http://www.ocbenchplaques.com/streets/plaques/235.html>.

³⁰ Carol Resnick, February 21, 2017.

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World War II Letters from Richard E. Schade. Special Collections, Gettysburg College. MS-030.

Letter #1 Transcription:

July 2, 1943

My dearest darling Betty,

How is my honey today? I am writing this letter on guard duty so it might be a little jumbled.

I know that I won't get out this week end for we are short of men, I will probably only get out once a week and maybe not that until they give us more men.

I found out why the Officer was quizzing me the other day. The story is like this; Being that the men are shipping out they need new Corporals and Sergeants, so he had me on the list for Corporal but one fellow was ahead of me for he had been in the Army two years and he has been Corporal before, but he lost his stripes by going over the hill. So they are giving him another chance.

They made the two Corporals in this section Sergeants, and we had one private as acting Corporal and this old Soldier who use to be Corporal, made Corporal.

If this fellow does anything wrong who made Corporal ahead of me, why I will be made Corporal but if this fellow stays on the beam he will be promoted to Sergeant in another month and they have me in line for Corporal.

So if everything goes according to plans I might be a Corporal in another month or so.

Five hours later:

I went off guard at two o'clock and now I am back on guard again so I will continue this letter. (7:00P.M)

I don't think I mentioned about the Officer who played in Glen[n] Miller['s] Orchestra, who is stationed with us: The other day he brought his trumpet in the barracks and played for us during noon hour and he can really play. The same afternoon he accidently shot himself through the leg, with a 45 Ca. Pistol, and ~~h~~ the bullet came out his knee cap. So he is now in the hospital and probably will receive a discharge from the Army for his leg will be stiff the rest of his ~~h~~ life.

Another bit of news: The last time that I was on regimental guard I was stationed to guard the motor pool, this is where they keep the Army trucks, and we have orders to shoot anyone who enters this Area except the Corporal of the guard, even the officers can't enter during the

night. Two nights after I was on guard an army deserter climbed over the wall with a pistol and three F.B.I. men climbed over another wall with pistols chasing the deserter, so the guard on duty had to shoot at the F.B.I. men and also the deserter at the same time. The F.B.I. men opened fire on the deserter and bullets were flying all around.

The deserter was wounded and the Guard of the motor pool wounded one F.B.I. men but they couldn't do anything to the guard for he has orders to keep ~~any~~ everyone out of the Motor Pool, so it was lucky that I wasn't on guard that night.

I was paid yesterday and I received \$14.63 so now I am a rich man.

The Commanding Officer witnessed my signature on the Insurance papers and I have mailed them back.

You should be getting a war bond soon from the War Dept. for they have been taking \$6.25 out of my pay each month except for the month of February.

It was swell to receive your ~~swell~~ nice letter telling about Helen's baby shower and according to the letter I see that I might be a proud papa in April 1944. That will be swell honey for I love you so much and I want you to have everything you want. I won't be able to get out this week end at all for as I said before we are short handed. If I keep on the job and work good I might get my stripes sooner so bear with me darling and I will call every chance that I get and will notify you if my chances are good for getting out on Friday or Saturday nights.

You are quite and artist sweets infact better than me. I had to smile and chuckle to myself when I saw the baby in the coach crying da-da.

Darling I love you so much, all I think about is my darling wife and the future that we will have together when this war is over.

Well, honey, it is about time to sign off. I hope you can understand this jumbled letter. With all my love and oodles and oodles of hugs and kisses from your

Loving and faithful husband,

Richard