Finding Aid for the Pete N. Swisher Vietnam War correspondence collection 2015.063.w.r

Lauren Menges
Center for American War Letters Archives
11/17/2016
Leatherby Libraries
Chapman University
Orange, CA 92866
speccoll@chapman.edu
URL: http://www1.chapman.edu/library/archives/
Language of Material: English
Contributing Institution: Center for American War Letters Archives
Title: Peter Nash Swisher Vietnam War correspondence
source: Gordon, Robin
Identifier/Call Number: 2015.063.w.r
Physical Description: .08 Linear Feet(3 folders)
Date (inclusive): 1969-11-09-1970-07-12
Abstract: This collection contains the correspondence of First Lieutenant Pete Swisher, US Army, to his friend, Robin Gordon, during the Vietnam War. The collection also contains some poems copied by Swisher, a photograph of Swisher, and an issue of Stars and Stripes, Pacific newspaper.
Language of Material: The materials in this collection are written in English, with the exception of one poem written in Spanish.
Leatherby Libraries, Special Collections, CAWL Archives
Storage Unit: Vietnam 2
Storage Unit: 4-6
Conditions Governing Access
This collection is open for research.
Immediate Source of Acquisition
Gift of Robin Gordon. Legacy collection from Andrew Carroll.
Biographical / Historical
Peter Nash Swisher was born in Oxford, England in 1944 to Dr. George Nash and Margaret Dixon Nash. His birth father, who served with the Royal Army Medical Corps, died enroute home from Italy at the end of the Second World War. Peter traveled with his mother and brother Charles to their native Canada.
In 1949, his mother married Raymond Swisher, who adopted Peter and his brother. They were raised in Fort Atkinson, Wisconsin where Peter attended primary and secondary school. His family moved to Louisville, Kentucky prior to his senior graduation in 1962. Peter attended Amherst College and graduated in 1966. He received a master's in education from Stanford in 1967.
In 1968, Peter was drafted into the US Army. He attended Officer Candidate School and was sent to Vietnam as a first lieutenant in 1969. He served on convoy duty and was awarded the Bronze Star.
After Vietnam, he attended Hastings School of Law at the University of California and received his J.D. in 1973. He joined the University of Richmond School of Law in 1974 and became a tenured professor in 1982 with expertise in family law, torts, and insurance law.
Preferred Citation
[Item title, Box number, Folder number], Peter N. Swisher Vietnam War correspondence (2015.063.w.r), Center for American War Letters Archives, Chapman University, CA.
Content Description
This collection contains 11 pieces of correspondence written by 1st Lieutenant Peter Nash Swisher, United States Army, to his friend Robin Gordon while he was serving in Vietnam. Also included is a photograph of Swisher and an April 19, 1970 issue of Stars and Stripes: Pacific newspaper. Swisher was highly educated when he was drafted into service, and his letters are evidence of his intelligence and education. Swisher is a self-declared pacifist and romanticist with a liberal arts background. Swisher does not spend much of his letters describing his duties or the war itself. Rather, he includes copies of his favorite poetry with many of his letters, and quotes from authors and musicians such as James Joyce and Bob Dylan throughout his letters. While he was in Vietnam, he was working on applications to graduate school. In the letter dated 11/9/69, he describes the red tape of the application process: "But after the initial bulls—t, it’ll be Valhalla compared to our little Southeast Asia Theatre of the Absurd." Later in the letter he mentions going to an outpost near the Cambodian border to check convoys and how this will be his first time in the field with combat troops. In the letter dated 12/28/69, he says he has signed up to take the law school test: "As long as the time for alternatives is here, I might as well look into all the
He also describes his R&R trip to Australia and his comparisons of Americans and Australians. He mentions receiving a book of poems by Leonard Cohen for Christmas. He is trying to learn Spanish for his graduate school applications and wrote a poem in Spanish. In the letter dated 1/18/1970, he describes talking with his friends about the letters they receive when they have run out of books to talk about: “Not bad at all, if there were more alternatives and less mortars.” He also describes his desire to rejoin civilian life, despite the world’s problems: “What a beautiful, ugly, vulgar, screwed-up world. I can’t wait to get back.” In a card dated February 3-6, 1970, he gives a satirical description of the Vietnamese holiday of Tet: “The Vietnamese lunar New Yr. wherein Christmas, New Years, & Easter are combined in a joyous festival of good will, brotherhood, fellowship, & communist spring offensives.” In the letter dated 2/15/1970, he writes of anti-war sentiment at home and among soldiers: “Maybe we’re getting somewhere after all...Not toward massive Revolution – just peace, and hope, and understanding. Now that technology has created the Bomb, we need to diffuse (sic) the man from the need to use it. At least we must try.” He also describes his administrative duties as a “paper war” requiring him to “add up absurd statistics and wasted casualties.” There is a letter missing the first page that he wrote prior to his visit to Australia. There is also an undated card that references law school which was written after he returned home from the war.

**Conditions Governing Use**

There are no restrictions on the use of this material except where previously copyrighted material is concerned. It is the responsibility of the researcher to obtain all permissions. For further copyright information, please contact the archivist.

**Subjects and Indexing Terms**

Correspondence -- Vietnam War -- 1961-1975
Gordon, Robin