



VIETNAM VETERANS AGAINST THE WAR, INC

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Dear Friend of Vietnam Veterans Against the War,

What a difference a year makes!

Not only have the American people turned against the war, but Vietnam Veterans Against the War has been able to make a bigger contribution to changing people's minds about the war than ever before.

At our late October National Meeting, the best attended in many, many years, we resolved to further deepen our participation in the national anti-war movement. We heard local representatives talk about their speaking to high school classes, raising funds for the My Lai Peace Park in Vietnam, representing veterans at local anti-war demonstrations, offering personal support to returning Iraq vets, attending local vigils on the night of the 2000th U.S military death in the Iraq war, and engaging in civil disobedience at the White House.

Ray Parrish, our military counselor, regularly makes a real difference in the lives of individual veterans and GI's.

Ray tells me that some vets who call him want to deal with their Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder symptoms in a political rather than a clinical setting. One vet he talked to had done two tours in Iraq. After the first tour, John didn't really want to go back, but he didn't talk to anyone in the GI counseling movement because he was hearing from military commanders that people who opposed the war didn't support the troops. He told Ray that, between tours, "he and Johnny Walker became best friends."

John got out of the military after his second tour. He went back to his home town in a lower Midwestern state, and called Ray. He was on friendly terms with some old high school teachers, and he was thinking about going to talk to classes there. He was very hesitant: speaking publicly against the war or against the military seemed like treason. Ray told him about Vietnam Veterans Against the War coming home to speak against the war in the 70's and encouraged John to go ahead.

John then talked to several classes at the high school. Afterwards he called Ray and told him that telling his "younger brothers and sisters' that what they hear from recruiters is misleading was the best therapy he could ever have had. He thinks that he persuaded some students who would otherwise have signed up for the military.

In a later call, John told Ray that he was talking to a friend who is in a wheel chair as a result of his service in Iraq. John is encouraging his friend to join him in speaking to high school classes. He is also getting involved in the local anti-war movement.

Fighting for Veterans, Peace & Justice since 1967

Ray also receives calls from veterans who have received “bad” discharges. Jerry had served in Iraq, but when he came back to finish his military service in the States, he would get drunk and he got into repeated bar fights. The military promptly discharged him on a less than honorable basis without any attempt at alcohol rehabilitation. Jerry asked Ray about how he might get a discharge upgrade. Unless he could get an honorable discharge, he couldn’t access the GI benefits he needed to go to college.

Ray suggested that Jerry appeal his discharge status on the basis that the military should have offered him rehab before discharging him and urged him to begin alcohol rehab right away. If he could demonstrate that he had resolved his drinking problem through rehabilitation, it would strengthen his case for a discharge upgrade. Ray tells me that Jerry’s situation is common. He gets many calls from vets who have received less than honorable discharges for drug or alcohol problems and who were never offered rehab while in the military. Ray will be following up with Jerry on a monthly basis for a while.

This has been an incredible year for the anti-war movement and an incredible year for Vietnam Veterans Against the War. We have been able to participate in the Fort Bragg rally on the anniversary of the beginning of the Iraq War, Cindy Sheehan’s vigil outside Bush’s ranch at Crawford, Texas, and Cindy’s Bring Them Home Now Tour. We have seen public opinions turn against Bush after Katrina, and a number of our members have been active in hurricane relief efforts.

We have been able to bring out two printings of our report “From Vietnam to Iraq: The Crisis in Veterans Health Care.” We have been able to offer financial and political support to Iraq Veterans Against the War. In January, we will place our first ads in college newspapers letting returning veterans know about the existence of our military counseling program and of Iraq Veterans Against the War. Already, Vietnam Veterans Against the War members are circulating the Military Counseling Brochure and Iraq Veterans Against the War’s brochure at colleges and VA hospitals.

Along with organizations such as Gold Star Families for Peace, Iraq Veterans Against the War, and Veterans for Peace, VVAW co-sponsored “Thanksgiving in Crawford,” Cindy Sheehan’s protest at Crawford, Texas, timed to occur while President Bush was in Crawford for Thanksgiving. Philadelphia Vietnam Veterans Against the War members, Bill and Terry Perry drove down to be there in person to support Cindy. Billy Kelly was another VVAW member who participated.

Vietnam Veterans Against the War participated in anti-war Veterans Day events in various cities around the country. New York and Tallahassee joined the mainstream Veterans Day parades and reported that their anti-war veterans’ contingents got a great reception from the onlookers.

In Milwaukee, VVAW National Coordinator John Zutz joined a Veterans for Peace contingent that was not permitted to join the mainstream parade because “the parade is not a political event.” Of course, the Congressional Representative, the Mayor, and the County Executive, none of whom were veterans, were not too political to be permitted in the parade. The group held a press conference before the parade about how they were denied entry and watched the parade from the sidelines with their banners. They received more news coverage that way than if they had actually been allowed to march.

Chicago held its annual Veterans Day ceremony with two Iraq veterans speaking as well as an anti-war Illinois candidate for Congress. VVAW member and Somali vet Cesar Ruvalcaba reminded the

audience about how the “economic draft” places the burden of military service disproportionately on African Americans and Latinos.

In Columbus, Ohio, Vietnam Veterans Against the War and Military Families Speak Out joined together to present a memorial to the fallen troops. With a “Honor the Warrior, Not the War” banner in the background, taps was played, large pictures of Ohio soldiers killed in Iraq and 20 boots (100 names of soldiers killed in Iraq attached per boot) were displayed on the Veteran’s Plaza area on the Statehouse grounds.

We are particularly excited about Vietnam Veterans Against the War National Coordinator Bill Perry’s leadership in creating “Arlington North,” a field of white tombstones set up across from the Liberty Bell in Philadelphia. The tombstones represented the over 2000 US deaths in Iraq and took the Arlington name from Arlington National Cemetery outside Washington, DC. The display cost \$1900 and required the efforts of 35 individuals, VVAW members, Veterans for Peace members, and activists in the Philadelphia anti-war movement.

Bill’s description of the 1500 pounds of lumber spread out all over his lawn and driveway to be painted before it was cut and drilled made me realize what a huge undertaking the Arlington North display was. The tombstone display was up for three days and was covered extensively in the Philadelphia media. VVAW’s National Media Project had helped to get the word out.

Bill reports that people would see the tombstones, walk to a nearby florist, and come back with flowers. Even members of the American Legion, that was having a convention four blocks away, came by to thank the organizers for what they were doing.

We have also been involved in promoting a national tour of Vietnamese victims of Agent Orange, the chemical defoliant that has caused cancer, birth defects, joint problems, and other ailments among both Vietnamese people and U.S. Vietnam veterans who were exposed during the Vietnam War.

The Vietnamese speakers talked about their experiences of miscarriages, birth defects, leukemia, and about the environmental devastation in Vietnam. They are circulating a petition for the U.S. congress to award the compensation that the U.S. promised in the 1973 Peace Accords but never fulfilled. You can find the petition and more information at www.vn-agentorange.org.

Meanwhile, the 1972 documentary “Winter Soldier” is continuing to be shown in cities around the country. The film won major awards in Europe, but was barely distributed in the United States because of its explosive content: veterans testifying to the war crimes and atrocities that they themselves committed or witnessed in Vietnam.

Needless to say, U.S. torture and war crimes in Iraq have made the film highly relevant today. Vietnam Veterans Against the War held the original Winter Soldier Hearings in 1971, and VVAW members have participated in panel discussions after the recent screenings. The film will be available on DVD in January.

In California, Vietnam Veterans Against the War member Lane Anderson continues to work on “Arlington West,” a weekly display of crosses on the beach. Lane’s latest project is a “Support the Truce” fundraiser for activist veteran Dennis Kyne. The featured speaker will be Congressional

Medal of Honor recipient and Vietnam Veteran Charles Liteky. Liteky is the only Medal of Honor recipient who has renounced his medal in opposition to U.S. policy.

Lane has made a very active effort to invite members of Veterans of Foreign Wars, the American Legion and Vietnam Veterans of America to the event in a major attempt to reach out to the "un-converted." He is expecting that some will listen to a Congressional Medal of Honor recipient who would never listen to any other anti-war veteran.

With your help, in 2006 we will:

- Greatly increase our support for Iraq Veterans Against the War
- Continue to visit high school & college classes to counter recruiters' spin about life in the military
- Expand our services to returning veterans, GI's and older veterans
- Increase our support and participation in major national anti-war events
- Speak out against torture by the U.S. and demand that the higher ups be held accountable, not just the enlisted personnel
- Continue to expose the hypocrisy of the Bush administration when it calls for us to support the troops while attempting to cut veterans' health benefits

In closing, I want to thank you for your support of VVAW. If you are able to make a tax-deductible donation at this time, you will further strengthen our voice as anti-war veterans. In all our work, and with our motto, "Honor the Warrior not the War" we make it harder for the Administration to use people's respect for the troops to make them feel guilty and unpatriotic for speaking out against the war. Supporting the troops should mean immediate withdrawal with decent benefits for all military personnel, not a continuing war for empire.

For peace and justice,



Barry Romo
Vietnam Veterans Against the War National Coordinator

I am sending Vietnam Veterans Against the War \$35 \$50 \$100 \$250 \$500 Other to support its work for peace and its efforts to expose the Bush Administration's hypocritical neglect of returning veterans. Checks to VVAW are tax deductible. You can also donate online at vvaaw.org.

Name (print) _____

Address _____

City, State, Zip _____

E-Mail Address (please print clearly) _____