



VIETNAM VETERANS AGAINST THE WAR, INC

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Dear Supporter of Vietnam Veterans Against the War:

As one of the eight National Coordinators of VVAW, I want to thank you so very much for your contribution to Vietnam Veterans Against the War. VVAW will be sending you updates about our activities about four times a year. We certainly don't expect that you will make a donation every time, but, for when you are able, we will be enclosing a return envelope.

With your help, our military counselor, Ray Parrish, has been able to offer counseling to active-duty GI's. Ray reports that a number have called with intertwined issues of conscience and Post-Traumatic Stress.

Jerry, for example, first told Ray, "I don't know whether to desert or to kill myself. I don't know how much I deserve help, but I am going to ask for it anyway." Jerry was working on a base in the U.S. after doing a tour of duty in Iraq. He could hardly sleep at all, and he couldn't concentrate enough to make decisions or get to appointments. If he were called for a second tour, his conscience would not let him go back to Iraq: "I'll never forget the eyes of my buddies who died and eyes of the people I killed."

Jerry decided to fill out an application for Conscientious Objector status and found that, as he thought through the answers to the questions, his ideas became clearer. It helped his PTSD symptoms to use the CO application as a focus to deal with his experiences and beliefs. He and Ray have had multiple calls and emails as he works through his questions about the CO regulations, but now he has filed the application and he is waiting for the results.

The outcome for Jerry could have been tragic if VVAW had not been there to help him work through his issues. And VVAW would not have been there without your generous help.

Family members of soldiers who have returned from Iraq also call Ray. Often they have observed their loved one acting abnormally: a mother tells Ray that her son has been lying around the house for 9 months since he got discharged; a wife talks about how scared she gets when she sees her husband barely able to control his rage. They have questions about Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and Ray is able to offer them information, advice and referrals.

What Ray stresses most is that family members should show that they care and encourage the soldier to get help. Often recognizing that there is a problem is the biggest obstacle. Ray

also gets calls from Vietnam veterans whose PTSD is re-triggered by news from the Iraq war. In cooperation with the GI Rights Hotline, he is able to find services for them in many local communities where therapists and lawyers have offered their services, often on a pro-bono or a reduced cost basis.

Ray is also active in the fight to get veterans the healthcare they were promised at enlistment. He is supporting a five year-old African American Veterans group that was started to get access to VA Health Care. They are trying to set up a veterans' legal service center to deal with the VA's unjust delays and denials of veterans' disability claims and access to care.

Counter-recruiting has really blossomed across the country as local groups form to counter misleading military recruitment pitches. Vietnam Veterans Against the War has been active in counter-recruitment for many years, speaking to high school classes about what life in the military is actually like. Because of our long term involvement, I was featured on a News Hour program on recruiting and counter-recruiting that was shown on PBS channels across the country. PBS came to a Chicago inner-city high school to film one of my typical presentations to several high school classes.

The Battalion Commander of the JROTC at the high school attended. She was also featured on the same News Hour program where she told the interviewer how, every day, she is pursued by recruiters, who try to get her to enlist immediately rather than wait until she attends college. She spoke at the Vietnam Veterans Against the War Memorial Day ceremony in Chicago, where she opposed the Iraq War and told the crowd that she still wants to join the military eventually, but not while the country is engaged in an unjust war.

In New York, Vietnam Veterans Against the War joins other anti-war veterans in speaking at high school classes in the city and nearby suburbs. This year they have had so many requests from teachers that they have to struggle to meet them. They are valued "primary sources" for students studying the Vietnam War. A new project they plan for the coming school year is a way for high school students, who often raise money for phone cards for soldiers, to also be able to raise money for services for homeless veterans.

As soon as Ray was hired by Vietnam Veterans Against the War, he started working on counter-recruitment. An active participant in Chicago's movement, he serves as a speaker and as a trainer. His next training will be for a group that will attend the military's Air and Water Show to counter the expected intense presence of military recruiters at the event.

Vietnam Veterans Against the War continues to be a leading organization in the anti-war movement. We sent a substantial contingent to the March 19th anti-war march in Fayetteville, NC, the home of Fort Bragg. Our members also served as participants and speakers for their local anti-war events in their cities on March 19th, the second anniversary of the beginning of the war. Vietnam Veterans Against the War members have joined other activist veterans in "Arlington West," where veterans put up crosses on the beach to commemorate the now over 1700 U.S. war dead.

St. Louis Vietnam Veterans Against the War members participated with Veterans for Peace

in a widely publicized effort to make the public more conscious of the cost of the war in American lives. The veterans put up 1600 plus tombstones on "Art Hill," outside the main St. Louis art museum. Janet Curry, a Vietnam Veterans Against the War member, took home several hundred of these tombstones for use at the high school where she is a teacher. She and a student group mounted the tombstones on the high school grounds. The high school event received even more coverage than the city-wide event.

One of the most important contributions we can make to the anti-war movement is to support the emergence of Iraq Veterans Against the War.

We are taking the initial steps in what will become a significant contribution: we have alerted our membership to be on the lookout for Iraq veterans and to put them in touch with IVAW. We have helped them raise start-up funds. We are starting a pilot project in Chicago to do outreach at junior colleges so that returning vets can learn about the existence of both IVAW and the Vietnam Veterans Against the War Military Counseling Project. We have proposed to fund a project of joint advertisements in community college newspapers that would publicize both IVAW and our own military counseling project.

The Bush Administration has hypocritically told the country to support the troops while itself proposing a budget that further cuts back already inadequate benefits for veterans. In May 2005, Vietnam Veterans Against the War published a major report, "From Vietnam to Iraq: Ignoring the Veteran Healthcare Crisis." The report, co-sponsored by Iraq Veterans Against the War, compiles stories and statistics and about the impact of the benefit cuts and recommends that:

- The United States immediately cease production and use of depleted-uranium weapons that have been causing long-term illnesses in the Iraqi population and in U.S. veterans.
- Budget allocation for VA healthcare must change from annual discretionary funding where only a certain dollar figure is allocated to mandatory funding where the size of the budget is based on veterans' actual needs
- The VA must expand services and improve access to quality medical care.

Electronic copies of the report are available for download at <http://www.vvaw.org/commentary/VetCrisisReport4-HR.pdf>, and paper copies are available for \$3 to cover postage and printing costs. Contact vvaw@vvaw.org.

We are not releasing this report on veterans' healthcare as an academic exercise. Across the country Vietnam Veterans Against the War activists are fighting for decent benefits. Two Louisiana Vietnam Veterans Against the War members testified before the state legislature about the need for testing for depleted uranium illness. Thanks in part to their work, Louisiana just passed the first law in the nation requiring that returning veterans have access to testing, a step the Federal Government has been resisting. Connecticut quickly followed with a similar law.

New York/New Jersey Vietnam Veterans Against the War continues join with other veterans groups to fight to prevent the closing of the Manhattan VA Hospital and VVAW members recently testified at a hearing to oppose a plan to close the Brooklyn VA Hospital instead! Chicago Vietnam Veterans Against the War announced the publication of Veterans'

Healthcare Crisis report at its annual Memorial Day ceremony and received coverage in the local daily newspaper and on multiple TV and radio stations. One TV station aired the report nationally. We are sending the report to all the Senators and Congressional Representatives on the Veterans Affairs and on the Appropriations Committees.

Not only does Vietnam Veterans Against the War have a special role in the anti-war movement because we are veterans, but also because we are *Vietnam* veterans. In 1991 after the first Gulf War, George H.W. Bush gloated that we had finally “kicked the Vietnam Syndrome;” that is, the reluctance of the U.S. public to engage in military adventures abroad.

No one, not even Bush, Jr., would be foolish enough to say that today.

Vietnam Veterans Against the War has worked tirelessly over the years to ensure that we remember the lessons of Vietnam. In classrooms, in television appearances, in books, in articles, we continue to remind people about our history of government lies, arrogance, and neglect of veterans after they come home. In speeches and in press releases, we continue to draw the parallels between Iraq and Vietnam.

We held special events on April 30, commemorating the 30th anniversary of the final defeat of the U.S. in Vietnam. In May, Vietnam Veterans Against the War members joined other Vietnam veterans to travel to Alaska for a gathering with Vietnamese veterans of the “American War.” There are newspaper photos of us pinning our Vietnam Veterans Against the War pins on the Vietnamese officers, who wore them for the rest of the event.

As we continue to oppose Bush’s war in Iraq and fight for decent benefits for all veterans, we again want to thank you for your donations. Your contributions enable us to do so much more than we could ever do without your support. If you are able to make a tax-deductible donation today, we will use it to do everything in our power to expose the arrogance, the hypocrisy, and the outright stupidity of Bush’s policies.

In solidarity,



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) _____
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