



VIETNAM VETERANS AGAINST THE WAR, INC

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Dear supporter of Vietnam Veterans Against the War:

I feel honored that you have chosen to support the crucial anti-war work of Vietnam Veterans Against the War. Thanks to your contribution, we have the financial means to step up our opposition to this war, to expose the shabby treatment of returning veterans, and to offer military counseling to veterans and active duty soldiers. With your continued support, we can do even more.

If you are hearing from me for the first time, I want to let you know that I plan to send you updates about four times a year. Thank you for having confidence in us.

The anti-war movement has reached an exciting turning point this summer. Vietnam Veterans Against the War members helped Cindy Sheehan construct Camp Casey which, let me tell you, was not a simple task! We continued to support her while she was camped on President Bush's doorstep in Crawford. Some of our leaders also accompanied her bus tour around the country. We greeted the Bring Them Home Now Bus Tour in Milwaukee, Chicago, and Philadelphia as it made its way to Washington for the September 24th demonstrations. There we joined Gold Star Families for Peace, Iraq Veterans Against the War, Military Families Speak Out and Veterans for Peace at the head of the Washington march.

Our military counselor, who went to Washington, learned that many vets were participating in their first anti-war activity ever. And this was not only the young veterans. A Vietnam vet who had never protested the Vietnam war, said he came to Washington because felt he had something to contribute to this anti-war movement and to the younger vets.

Ward Reilly, our contact in Baton Rouge, LA, returned from Crawford and Camp Casey only to be confronted with Katrina. He has played a significant role in relief efforts-and has been vilified by the right wing for his trouble! Other VVAW members have also supported Ward in this effort.

Your support enables us to pay our military counselor, Ray Parrish. Recently Ray talked to Joe, a veteran just back from Iraq. Joe originally called Ray because he was looking for help in accessing VA disability benefits. Joe had problems with alcohol, had been getting into bar fights, and was unable to hold a job or go to school. He spent a couple of nights in a homeless shelter until a friend offered him a place in his spare room. He was unable to sleep at night because he could not stop thinking about having killed people in Iraq. He "had blood on his hands." At the same time, he did not think the VA would believe he really had Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) because,

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his job was firing mortars, killing, but at a distance. In Joe's mind, the guys who really deserved help for PTSD were those on the front lines who had to look into the eyes of those they killed.

Joe's father had fought in Vietnam. His father brought him up as a patriotic American, so Joe put all the blame for what he had done in Iraq upon himself. He could not place any blame on our government.

Over a series of phone calls Ray worked with Joe to try to help him see that the officials who made the policy are the ones who are really to blame for the carnage in Iraq. But Joe had a hard time finding fault with the government. Even when things he saw made him uneasy, like Halliburton making profits from the war, he took the attitude that "mistakes happen."

Joe's blind patriotism changed dramatically after Katrina. The indifference that led to the administration's failures in New Orleans opened his eyes and he could see what happened in Iraq in a whole new perspective. **His new political consciousness and his conversations with Ray enabled him to transform his personal guilt into a sense of responsibility to take some kind of positive political action.** Ray believes he will continue his healing through action, perhaps in anti-war work, perhaps in working for honesty in government, perhaps in working for adequate veterans benefits.

Ray also hears from soldiers on active duty who feel that what they are doing is wrong. Often they are thinking of going AWOL in order to get discharged. They could care less if their discharge is "less than honorable." Ray talks with them about their moral revulsion, which is usually mixed with PTSD. He advises them to get a medical discharge for the PTSD or to apply for Conscientious Objector (CO) status. That way they can get out while preserving their ability to get health and disability benefits from the VA.

Many soldiers who apply for medical discharge or CO status find that military authorities are not willing to process their forms. Ray thinks this foot-dragging is motivated partly by budget considerations. If a soldier has a medical discharge, subsequent benefits come out of the military's budget. If delay can provoke the soldier to go AWOL, neither the military nor the VA will have to take any financial responsibility for him or her in the future.

In my last letter, I wrote that Louisiana Vietnam Veterans Against the War members had initiated and testified for a new law that affirms the right of returning veterans to request and receive testing for exposure to depleted uranium, a substance used by the U.S. military in both Iraq wars and in the Balkans to make its weapons better able to penetrate armor. Civilians and soldiers exposed have reported an alarming incidence of cancer, birth defects, and autoimmune-like disorders. Without testing, they are often misdiagnosed and denied compensation. Laws were successfully passed in Louisiana and Connecticut, and now Chicago VVAW is spearheading an effort to get a similar law passed in Illinois.

In Santa Barbara, CA, Vietnam Veterans Against the War member Lane Anderson will participate in the mainstream parade on Veterans' Day. The joint VVAW/Veterans for Peace contingent usually gets the loudest cheers. That same weekend, they will bring Kelly Dougherty, a founder of Iraq Veterans Against the War to speak at an overnight "Peace is Patriotic" candlelight vigil. There will be

2000 candles for U.S. war dead and also candles for the Iraqi civilians who have been killed.

Lane was the person who made the arrangements for Cindy Sheehan's transportation to Crawford, TX. Along with Bill and Terri Perri of Philadelphia VVAW, he was one of the group of 50 veterans and community members to accompany her from the Veterans for Peace convention to Crawford, TX, where she then set up Camp Casey.

Every Sunday, Lane participates in "Arlington West," a display of crosses for the fallen, and, every Tuesday, he shows up to do counter-recruiting at Santa Barbara City College. He had to pull out the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals decision to force college officials to allow him to table next to the recruiters. Later this fall the Santa Barbara group will continue to do more counter-recruiting at the Santa Barbara high schools.

Terry Leichner of Denver reports that his group of Vietnam Veterans Against the War and Veterans for Peace members is planning a daylong workshop on Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder in October. It will be directed particularly toward family members, clergy, and other community people who have contact with vets and will cover treatment options, ways to cope, etc. They also have a program for veterans who are not able to get adequate treatment from the military or at the VA. They recruit psychotherapists to volunteer to see one veteran each on a pro bono basis. Terry was another VVAW member who supported Cindy Sheehan in Crawford in August.

We have been very excited about the revival of "Winter Soldier," a documentary made by a collection of distinguished filmmakers about VVAW's 1971 Winter Soldier Investigation into U.S. war crimes in Vietnam. The review on the front page of the *New York Times* Arts Section headline says, "Film Echoes the Present in Atrocities of the Past." The story goes on, "Like a live hand grenade brought home from a distant battlefield, 'Winter Soldier' has been handled for decades as if it could explode at any moment...What gives the film its power is not merely what is said on screen - accounts of Vietnamese women being raped or mutilated, children being shot, villages being burned, prisoners being thrown alive from helicopters - but who is saying it, and how they are shown." It is Vietnam veterans themselves who testify about atrocities they committed or witnessed.

The film was used by the right wing during the 2004 election campaign to smear John Kerry, who appears briefly.

Vietnam Veterans Against the War leaders spoke at showings in New York, Philadelphia, and Chicago, connected the past with the present and told audiences about what VVAW is doing now. The film will be shown in other cities and, in January, it will be available as a DVD. Check for other showings at wintersoldierfilm.com.

We are continuing to support Iraq Veterans Against the War, both financially and organizationally. We are developing an outreach program where our members in different cities will help Iraq vets get connected with IVAW. We will distribute their brochure along with our own military counseling brochure at community colleges and at VA hospitals. In Chicago, we have scheduled a meeting for veterans at a community college. Our military counselor will answer their questions about benefits, PTSD, etc and will hook interested individuals up with IVAW. We will also place

newspaper ads that feature both IVAW and the Military Counseling Program into newspapers of community colleges in different parts of the country.

Your support for Vietnam Veterans Against the War enables us to educate and heal veterans and community members. Your contribution makes a real difference in the lives of real people.

With the beginning of the school year, VVAW is back in the counter-recruiting business, speaking to high school and college classes about the reality of life in the military. If you received my previous update, you may remember that the NewsHour on PBS featured my talk at an inner city high school class and interviewed the commander of the JROTC Battalion at the school. She was being pressured by recruiters to join the military rather than accept a college scholarship. We were thrilled that the commander spoke at our Memorial Day ceremony in Chicago and that she is now starting her first year of college in Kentucky.

Speakers will soon have a new piece of literature help counter recruiters' claims that the military will take care of the health of its veterans. By Veterans Day, we will be releasing a newspaper edition of our report "From Vietnam to Iraq: The Crisis in Veterans' Healthcare." (The report can be downloaded from our web site at www.vvaw.org/commentary.)

We know that you cannot make a financial contribution every time you receive an update. But if you are able to make a tax deductible donation, you will help Vietnam Veterans Against the War continue its decades-long struggle to stop our country's aggressive and destructive attempts at domination over other countries.

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 vvaw.org.

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