



## VIETNAM VETERANS AGAINST THE WAR, INC

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I am writing to you today to ask you to support a uniquely important voice for peace: Vietnam Veterans Against the War. Some of you may know VVAW from its beginnings as a group of veterans coming home from Vietnam to tell the country the truth about that war. VVAW started the first rap groups to deal with the war's traumatic aftereffects on the GIs, helped make known the negative health effects of exposure to chemical defoliants, and exposed VA attempts to cover up Agent-Orange-induced illnesses. They made their voices heard in opposition to aid to the contras in Nicaragua, and in opposition to Gulf War I and US intervention in Columbia.

After September 11, 2001, Vietnam Veterans Against the War opposed the bombing of Afghanistan and called for a sane approach to issues of terrorism. As veterans, they made it more difficult to paint the anti-war movement as unpatriotic or unsupportive of our troops. People who would not listen to students, religious activists, or leftists listened to them because they knew they had served in combat. Then, in the lead-up to the war in Iraq, VVAW began to grow. New members joined, old members came back, and VVAW once again played a leading role in the anti-war movement.

Vietnam Veterans Against the War has participated in anti-war events in cities across the country: in the marches on the first and second anniversaries of the Iraq war, including the 2005 event in Fayetteville, NC near Ft. Bragg; at the November demonstration against the School of the Americas; in the Jazz Funeral for Democracy in New Orleans on the occasion of Bush's second inauguration, and in Crawfordsville, TX in support of Cindy Sheehan's protest.

Every Veterans Day and Memorial Day, VVAW holds events and draws media attention, so that the right's efforts to use these holidays to glorify war do not go unchallenged. Vietnam Veterans Against the War has appeared in over a hundred stories on television, on the radio, and in print, most notably in a recent profile of VVAW national coordinator Barry Romo on page one of the September 29, 2004 *Wall Street Journal*. On May 12, 2005, a VVAW member speaking at an African-American High School advising African-American high school students not to join the military was featured on the Jim Lehrer News Hour on PBS.

VVAW has not had paid staff in decades, but at the beginning of last year, Ray Parrish was hired. Ray is an experienced military counselor who has been doing the work since Vietnam. He is available in person in Chicago, and by phone or email all over the country, to help GIs apply for conscientious objector (CO) status, to help soldiers trying to avoid being sent back to Iraq a second time, and to help veterans obtain the benefits to which they are entitled.

Ray recently received a call from a member of the reserves, many years out of uniform, who was seized by federal agents in front of the high school class he taught. He had not reported to be shipped out to Iraq. John (not his real name) called Ray, who was able to refer him to a lawyer and to counsel him that a physical ailment he possessed might enable him to stay home.

David (not his real name) contacted Ray before he was scheduled to be sent to Iraq. David was preparing a CO application, and Ray was able to advise him as to how to make the strongest possible case. He returned to his National Guard unit and talked to other people about his CO application. They put in applications too, and the next day they were all ordered to separate from their unit immediately, because the Marines were afraid that more people from his unit would apply.

At present, David is waiting for the final paperwork, as his application was successful. He plans to return to college, and he wants to speak at high schools to make sure that what happened to him doesn't happen to other kids. The kind of help VVAW offered to David has cost other CO applicants several thousand dollars in lawyer fees—but Vietnam Veterans Against the War charges nothing.

Your contributions at this time will enable Vietnam Veterans Against the War to continue to make Ray's services available to veterans and active-duty soldiers who need his help.

Vietnam Veterans Against the War's 2005 program includes:

- Opposition to the Iraq war
- Intensive media work to communicate their message
- Military counseling for GI's and veterans in an anti-war context
- Exposing the Bush administration's cuts in veterans benefits while claiming to support the troops
- Working in coalition with other veterans' groups to feed homeless vets
- Ongoing counter-recruitment as they speak to the media and in person to high school, college, and community groups

Counter-recruitment sometimes brings immediate results. After a Chicago VVAW member gave a class presentation, he was asked by a student to be the subject of an oral history project. The student, a Latino and a veteran of the Somali War, was moved by the interview, and joined Vietnam Veterans Against the War. (Although mostly made up of Vietnam vets, VVAW membership is open to everyone.) On Veterans Day 2004, the student was a featured speaker at the VVAW Veterans Day event and was quoted in several newspaper articles.

All of this work is done on a shoestring. Most of the work of the organization, including fundraising, is done by volunteers. The military counselor is only paid for twenty hours a week. Not a penny of contributions will be wasted.

Your donation will help VVAW reach more young people and help them decide against becoming part of the war machine.

Your donation will help VVAW reach more active-duty soldiers, National Guard members, and reservists to help them complete successful conscientious objector applications.

Your donation will help VVAW reach out to the general public more effectively to explain—from the perspective of those who have served on the front lines—why this war is wrong.

Please make a generous tax-deductible contribution today.



Howard Zinn  
Historian and author of *A People's History of the United States*

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 [vva.org](http://vva.org).

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