



VIETNAM VETERANS AGAINST THE WAR, INC

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Dear Members and Friends of Vietnam Veterans Against the War,

I remember that, when I wrote this letter last year, I was guardedly optimistic that we had reached a turning point in public support for the Iraq War. What a difference a year makes!

Thank you so much for your financial support of Vietnam Veterans Against the War. Your donations have made it possible for us to contribute to the sea change in U.S. public opinion.

It was not that long ago that our government leaders were speaking proudly about the American Empire, in just those words.

Things have changed, but even now our politicians are way behind the American public in being ready to do what it takes to end our intervention in Iraq. We need to continue to show them that people want to get out, and that more training of the Iraqi army will only lengthen our involvement with no more results than "Vietnamization" of the Vietnam War 35 years ago.

This year we have seen an increasing number of war resisters. Vietnam Veterans Against the War members have supported Lt. Ehren Watada, the first officer to refuse deployment to Iraq on the grounds of the Nuremberg Principles, and Kyle Snyder, who had gone to Canada rather than return to Iraq. Now Kyle has come back to the U.S. to fight for a discharge from the military. We have offered financial support for the efforts of both of these courageous young men.

Our new Cincinnati chapter sponsored a well-attended appearance by Lt. Watada's father Bob Watada, who was touring the United States to garner support for his son who is in the brig awaiting court marshal. It was an emotional moment when Cincinnati VVAW leader Marty Webster brought up war resisters Kyle Snyder and Darryl Anderson from their seats in the back to introduce them to the audience and to Bob Watada.

We are very proud of our member, Doug Zachary, who dropped everything to accompany Bob Watada on a three-week national tour where he handled arrangements and schedules. Doug also recruited our national media project to help with press work for Bob Watada's tour.

Local Vietnam Veterans Against the War members helped facilitate Bob Watada's Veterans Day speaking engagement in Milwaukee. The Vietnam Veterans Against the War chapter in Chicago featured Kyle as a speaker in our Veterans' Day program. At the program, he was interviewed by the major daily newspaper, the Chicago Tribune. Kyle was also able to talk with Ray Parrish, our military counselor.

Thanks to your donations, Vietnam Veterans Against the War has been able to support a military counselor. The military counselor, Ray Parrish, has noted a worrisome development. Increasingly, GI's who are seeking medical discharges for PTSD are being put in a waiting line for

Medical Evaluation, which takes months and months. It almost looks like the military is purposely provoking the soldiers to go AWOL, presumably so that they can then be denied veterans' benefits saving the government money.

Ray recently received a call from the father of Bill, who had gone AWOL as a result of PTSD following his tour of Iraq. Ray and Bill's father worked together to encourage Bill to go for psychological help at the local Vet's Center. The psychologist there was able to provide a valuable outside evaluation to support the opinion of a conscientious military psychiatrist who wanted to have Bill discharged as soon as possible so that his PTSD would not worsen and so that he could continue to get help. Ray worked with both of the evaluators to ensure that their reports contained the "right" language to get Bill discharged "under honorable conditions" so that he would be eligible for treatment by the VA.

You may remember David, the soldier that Ray helped with his application for Conscientious Objector status. The last we had heard was that David was going to get CO status and was just waiting for his papers. Ray recently heard an update from a VVAW member who has been close to David from before the time David enlisted.

David ended up not receiving CO status but being discharged. It is extremely unlikely that he would have received the discharge had he not submitted a fully qualifying CO application. This has worked out well for him. He has returned to college. After having participated in war, it is particularly satisfying to him now to be doing something constructive: he is volunteering to help with reconstruction in the wake of Hurricane Katrina.

Ray continues to include counter-recruiting in his work. When he is invited by churches to speak about PTSD, he always emphasizes that the best PTSD prevention is to encourage young people to look for career paths other than enlistment. He also makes all of his audiences aware that, when a young person signs a "delayed entry" agreement with the Army, the young person is not necessarily legally bound to enlist. Few people realize that those who sign such agreements are free to change their minds.

I continue to be extremely proud of the large and well-organized counter-recruiting program led by Jim Murphy and Dayl Wise, two Vietnam Veterans Against the War members in New York. I myself have spoken to 20 high school classes this year. My favorite high school gig, however, occurred this fall when I just sat in the audience while Jim, a young Iraq vet, served as the featured speaker at a high school assembly. Jim is a friend of our chapter's, but he had never taken political action against the war before in any way.

All across the country our members speak at high schools and colleges about the lessons of Vietnam and the real truth about the "benefits" of enlisting. Our members inform students and parents that they can "opt out" of the legal requirement that their child's high school must give out their phone number to military recruiters. A West Coast VVAW member has told us of their success in replacing JROTC in Santa Barbara High Schools with an alternative leadership program.

Your financial support has enabled us to participate more actively in national events from the March 2006 Walking to New Orleans march that brought together the issues of Katrina reconstruction with the financial costs of the Iraq war to November's annual protest at the School of the Americas. We were able to send one of our volunteer national staff to represent us in opposing the continued operation of the U.S. military's training school for military officers from Latin America.

School of the Americas' graduates have been involved in atrocities from the killing of the four church women in El Salvador in 1980 to the present day massacres of Columbian villagers by

the Columbian military and paramilitary groups. These brutal massacres continue to occur when powerful interests want the villagers' land.

Our staff person told me that, when she first arrived at the site of the protest, the first person she ran into was our own National Coordinator Bill Perry, standing outside the Iraq Veterans Against the War bus collaring every demonstrator that passed by to solicit donations for gas money for the IVAW bus tour. When she put a dollar in the cup, Bill, being Mr. Hard Core, told her that wasn't enough, she could afford a lot more!

Bill was quoted in the local paper's article about the protest. His words were significant in countering the PR efforts of a small contingent of veterans doing counter-protest in support of the School. Because he was there, the counter-protesters could not succeed in promoting the spin that veterans in general support the School of the Americas.

Bill Perry continues to be the driving force behind "Arlington North" in Philadelphia, one of the displays of tombstones and grave markers named after Arlington National Cemetery that are spreading around the country. VVAW member Lane Anderson helped start the first "Arlington," "Arlington West," where crosses are displayed on the beach at Santa Barbara every Sunday.

The San Diego "Arlington" has been operating outside Camp Pendleton, quietly, with the intent of providing marines stationed there with a private place to mourn. The group in Santa Monica is planning an ambitious and more public tour up the coast all the way into Canada in 2007.

There is an "Arlington Midwest" in northwest Ohio, and the newest "Arlington" appeared in Milwaukee, on Veterans Day 2006. Milwaukee chapters of Veterans for Peace and Vietnam Veterans Against the War have been denied permission to participate in the annual Veterans Day parade. Banners with the organizational names are "too political." (Of course, contingents representing Milwaukee County politicians are not too political.)

This year, Milwaukee anti-war veterans set up an "Arlington" display right at the end of the Veterans Day parade route, where every parade participant would have to walk right by. VVAW National Coordinator John Zutz did press work for the event and received coverage in the Milwaukee Journal, the city's major daily newspaper, and on television.

2006 saw the release of *Sir, No Sir*, a film about GI resistance to the war during Vietnam. Vietnam Veterans Against the War National Coordinator Dave Cline is interviewed at length in the film. The two newest VVAW chapters, in Cincinnati, OH and Louisville, KY, have both done *Sir, No Sir* film showings.

I attended a showing in Chicago where the filmmaker, Jane Fonda, and I were on a post-screening panel. When an audience member attacked Jane as a traitor for visiting North Vietnam, I took great pleasure in telling him that I too had visited North Vietnam, and that Jane had seen more combat in that visit to North Vietnam in the pursuit of peace than the entire Bush White House had ever seen.

One of our members, Amy Meyers, traveled to Germany to meet a friend who was stationed on an army base in Henau, Germany. Soldiers on the base rotate between being stationed there and serving in Iraq. She brought Vietnam Veterans Against the War newspapers, Iraq Veterans Against the War brochures, and Ray's business card with her and passed them out to individual GI's she talked to. She also went to the barracks and left materials on the main stairwells, the laundry rooms and the bathrooms.

We continue to publicize Iraq Veterans Against the War and we have made a major financial

donation to them again this year. Vietnam Veterans Against the War members volunteer to pass out IVAW brochures as well as VVAW Military Counseling brochures at schools, VA hospitals, and other public locations. We have also begun a pilot program of advertising for IVAW and our Military Counseling Program in the newspapers of two cities where there are IVAW chapters.

We continue to participate in "Standdowns" in support of homeless veterans in Milwaukee, Chicago and New York. At the Chicago Standdown, I saw a disturbing development. Where in the past I have only seen one or two homeless women veterans at these events, this fall there were twelve or thirteen among the 400 vets that we fed.

With your support in 2007 we will continue to promote our message of peace and decent benefits for all veterans at Memorial Day and Veterans Day events in many cities across the country. We look forward to new possibilities for funding adequate health and other veterans benefits with the change in power in Congress.

2007 will be the 40th Anniversary of Vietnam Veterans Against the War. We are planning a major celebration the weekend of August 4th in Chicago. We will see old comrades and produce oral histories, but most important, we will stress rededicating ourselves to the effort to end the war.

It is your financial help that allows us to make our unique contribution to the anti-war movement. Please help us to do even more in 2007 by making a generous financial contribution. Contributions to Vietnam Veterans Against the War are tax deductible to the full extent of the law.

For peace and justice,



Barry Romo
Vietnam Veterans Against the War National Coordinator



VVAW National Coordinators John Zutz, and Dave Kettenhofen and others
at Arlington Great Lakes, Milwaukee, Wisconsin

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.

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