



VIETNAM VETERANS AGAINST THE WAR, INC

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Dear Supporter of Vietnam Veterans Against the War:

As always, I want to start my update letter by thanking you for your incredible support of Vietnam Veterans Against the War. Thanks to your help, we are continuing to strengthen our capacity to oppose the Iraq war and to support veterans of this and past wars.

Your generosity has made it possible for Vietnam Veterans Against the War to be able to offer Military Counseling to veterans and active duty GI's. Our counselor, Ray Parrish, continues to receive calls from all over the country.

Ray has also been very active in counter-recruiting. He and other Chicago Vietnam Veterans Against the War members helped the local anti-militarism organization pass out "Opt-Out" forms to students and their parents on the first day of school. "Opt Out" forms permit the school to withhold a student's contact information from military recruiters, which otherwise is required by the "No Child Left Behind" act. We were gratified to receive this letter from a parent who was handed a form:

I want to express my greatest thanks in this whole wide world for taking the time to organize the group of wonderful vets and supporters outside of Lane Tech High School on my daughter's first day of High School.

My son, Nicholas, started high school last year and has been inundated with relentless recruiters at the school, not to mention the mailings to our home since THE 6th GRADE!!!

To this day, the recruiters at his high school are urging my solid-built teenager to do the "Manly" thing and join up! "You're soldier material young man!"

I grew up with a father psychologically damaged a bit from the Viet Nam war. Please let me know how I can help in any way.

Vietnam Veterans Against the War members all over the country do counter-recruiting by speaking in classrooms about the truths the recruiters aren't telling and about the lessons of Vietnam. One of the most organized efforts is headed up by NY VVAW members Jim Murphy and Dayl Wise. Jim is a retired public school teacher, who makes a real connection with high school kids when he talks about his experiences of combat in Vietnam and when he tells them how he was lied to be a recruiter in 1964.

Working with two or three Iraq vets and another Vietnam vet, Jim and Dayl spoke at 63 high schools and reached an estimated 15,000 kids during the 2006 spring semester. The day we talked Jim had just gotten back from doing a high school in Queens where he estimates he addressed 500 kids during the course of the day.

In addition to classroom speeches and distributing literature, Jim and Dayl held a contest for the

best anti-war poem written by a high school student. They raised money for a \$500 prize, which was won by an African American young woman from Prospect Heights High School.

In September, Jim and Dayl also held a workshop for veterans on how to speak to high school students. They have made the workshop available nationally on DVD.

Santa Barbara VVAW Contact Lane Anderson reports that the Junior Reserve Officer Training Corps (JROTC) program has now been terminated due to lack of enrollment at Santa Barbara High School. This is the last of the city's JROTC programs. Others were ended earlier due to the unpopularity of the Iraq war and the efforts of Anderson and other members of the Santa Barbara peace community.

JROTC has been replaced with a "Peace Academy" taught as a physical education leadership class. The new class will cover physical fitness and health, but also knowledge and skills for social development including perspectives on leadership and citizenship from groups like Veterans For Peace.

In addition to counter-recruiting, Ray Parish's primary work as the Vietnam Veterans Against the War Military Counselor is responding to veterans and active duty personnel who call him for help. Sometimes he stays in contact over a period of months. For example, Joe's mother called Ray because she was worried that Joe had gone AWOL after a tour of Iraq. Joe had come to oppose the war, and he did not want to return to Iraq for another tour with his unit.

However, Joe was just sitting at home doing nothing. Ray talked with Joe and arranged for him to get free counseling from a psychologist who is a VVAW member. Joe decided to resolve his situation with the army by turning himself in when Ray told him that the psychologist could document his Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. Documented PTSD would ensure that he would receive a quick discharge. Joe, depressed and still fearful that he might be put in prison, kept putting off resolving his situation.

Ray stayed in contact for six months, offering support and reassurance. Ray got the psychologist to do an extensive report on Joe's PTSD and depression and to give Joe a copy so that he would have it in hand when he went back to his base. As of this writing, Joe is planning to turn himself in this weekend. He expects to be discharged in less than two weeks, and he wants to come back home and talk to high school classes to encourage others not to make the mistake that he made in joining the army.

In another long-term situation, Ray provided intensive support to Carter who had been held in the stockade for five months for going AWOL. Carter was extremely depressed, but Ray kept up his morale and used his contacts outside the base to find him a civilian lawyer. He expects to have a discharge hearing in the next few weeks.

Unlike Joe and Carter's long-term situations, another call Ray received ended in a quick success for a GI who wanted to get out of the military. Jerry is a gay man who entered the service thinking he was patriotic enough to stay in the closet for four years so that he could serve his country. During his basic training, he realized that this idea was foolish; he couldn't remain celibate for four years, which is a requirement under the "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" policy. He told the sergeants under whom he did his basic training, told his chaplain, he told the military psychologist, he told three officers up the chain of command that he was gay and that sooner or later he was going to do something that would get him court-martialed. He was "telling" but no one did anything to start the discharge process mandated by "Don't Ask, Don't Tell," until his chaplain, a religious fundamentalist, reported him to the base commander as a danger to good discipline.

Although getting discharged was his goal, Jerry was very frightened and intimidated. He wouldn't talk about his situation to anyone except his partner, who called Ray seeking information he could pass on to Jerry. After several conversations with Jerry's partner, Ray was able to schedule a long phone call with Jerry the night before he was ordered to attend a meeting in his commander's office. Jerry was panicked. Ray talked to him for an hour and a half, told him what to expect, what to avoid, and role-played the meeting with him. At the end of the call, Jerry calmed down and told Ray, "I haven't felt this good since this whole thing started."

Ray told Jerry to write down the contact information for his Senators and Congressional Representatives and put the paper in his pocket before the meeting. That way he could know that, even though he had no lawyer, they couldn't do whatever they wanted in the knowledge that no one would ever know about it. Jerry told Ray that, "It was like going into the meeting with a gun in my pocket."

After the meeting, Jerry told Ray that, instead of just the company commander and his sergeant, he faced the regiment commander, the regiment sergeant major, and several senior sergeants, all sitting in a row behind a table, "like the Last Supper. It looked like the Inquisition. I almost plotzed." They believed that he was gay but tried to talk him into keeping his mouth shut and staying on active duty. When he refused, they got angry and hold him he was a coward, if he left with a homosexual discharge he would never be allowed to vote and no one would ever give him financial credit. He was a traitor to America and the rest of his life, he should live in shame.

Jerry told Ray, "I had to smile because this is exactly what you told me they would say. This was the best day of my life. I actually told them I was proud to be gay, and I had never said that before."

Ray thinks he will probably get a neutral "entry level separation," because he has been in the military for such a short time.

In other news, Vietnam Veterans Against the War National Coordinator Dave Cline reports a major victory in New York City. The Department of Veterans Affairs has been trying to save money by making services more difficult to access. Part of this strategy has been to close either the Brooklyn or the Manhattan VA Hospital, both of which are badly needed by vets returning from Iraq and Afganistan and older vets from the Gulf war and from Vietnam. Dave and another long time VVAW member George McAnanama have participated in the coalition to save the hospitals, testifying at City Hall, numerous hearings, speaking at rallies and press conferences. Just last month the news came through that the hospitals will remain open.

VVAW members played a significant role in the success of Camp Democracy, a multi-day, multi-issue event in Washington, DC designed to bring Cindy Sheehan's Camp Casey to the site of the government. Among many other activities, Camp Democracy activists sat in on Oregon Representative DeFazio's office and obtained his pledge to meet with the mother of Suzanne Swift, the GI who went AWOL rather than return to Iraq where she was raped and sexually harassed by fellow U.S. soldiers. DeFazio also pledged to initiate a congressional investigation into Swift's case. In addition to calling for an end to the war, other Camp Democracy events included an Immigrants' Rights Day, a Labor Speaks Out Day, and a Climate Crisis Day.

Vietnam Veteran Marty Webster joined VVAW in 2005, but he has been making up for lost time. As the VVAW contact for Cincinnati Ohio, he receives 1-2 calls every week, often from Iraq vets and their families, trying to resolve problems about accessing their VA health and education benefits. He often has to consult with VVAW military counselor Ray Parrish to help callers who have received a "bad" discharge that excludes them from all veterans' benefits. Often Marty, with Ray's help, is able to enable them to start the process of appealing for a discharge upgrade.

Marty has organized the new Ohio Valley chapter of Vietnam Veterans Against the War. The chapter marched in the Cincinnati 4th of July parade. **Although Cincinnati is one of the more conservative cities in the U.S., the group with their VVAW banner (purchased by funds from your donations!) received an overwhelming reception of cheers, thumbs up, and peace signs from the people watching.** Marty has represented VVAW at many speaking events, at showings of *Winter Soldier* and the new DVD *Sir, No Sir*, and at a forum on the local impact of the War in Iraq. He has reached out to organizations around the city, including the local Council on American-Islamic Relations, who invited VVAW to participate with our banner in a candlelight vigil for peace at a local mosque.

In closing, I want to express again my profound appreciation for your support of Vietnam Veterans Against the War. The U. S. public has come a long way since it supported the invasion of Iraq by a huge majority. I am proud of the role that Vietnam Veterans Against the War has played in enabling people to see the reality of what is going on. **You have helped us make our voice heard.**

I know that you cannot make a donation every time you receive an update, but if it is possible for you to make a financial contribution at this time, we will use it to the best of our ability to help end the war and to obtain decent benefits for all veterans.

For peace and justice,



Barry Romo
Vietnam Veterans Against the War National Coordinator



*Marty Webster, Paul Davis & Jerry Smith at the end of the 4th of July parade in Cincinnati.
This is the first time VVAW has had representation in the parade in over 30 years.*

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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