



# VIETNAM VETERANS AGAINST THE WAR, INC

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December 2007

Dear fellow activist,

I want to thank you so very much for your support of Vietnam Veterans Against the War. This year, the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of our founding in 1967, we are taking some very exciting steps forward. It is thanks to you that we are able to do this. Your continued support will enable us to carry out our ambitious plans for 2008.

Many of us were involved in anti-war activities while we were still on active duty during the Vietnam War. Some of us worked with GI Coffeehouses. This month Vietnam Veterans Against the War will start organizing GIs again. We could never have taken on this critical but expensive task without your financial support.

We are entering a partnership with Citizen Soldier to sponsor the Different Drummer, a café outside Ft. Drum, New York that was started by Citizen Soldier a year ago. The café serves as a meeting place for the Ft. Drum chapter of Iraq Veterans Against the War and also supports their organizing efforts. There are bands on Friday and Saturday nights that draw a mix of soldiers and community people. Anti-war literature is available and the café sponsors presentations by individuals like conscientious objector Camilo Mejia, who went to jail rather than return to Iraq.

Vietnam Veterans Against the War's participation will enable the café to hire an organizer who will be able to reach many additional soldiers. This should dramatically increase the ability of the café to support the on-base chapter of Iraq Veterans Against the War. You can learn more about the café by going to *differentdrummercafe.org*

In 2008, Vietnam Veterans Against the War will make one of its highest priorities to support Iraq Veterans Against the War's own Winter Soldier Investigation. (During the Revolutionary War, Thomas Paine contrasted the Sunshine Patriots with the Winter Soldiers, who carry on even in the hardest times.) Iraq Veterans Against the War was inspired by VVAW's 1971 event, where Vietnam Veterans testified about war crimes and atrocities they witnessed or committed in Vietnam. The Iraq veterans will testify about atrocities but also about the current poor treatment of returning Iraq veterans by US government agencies.

We intend to raise money to rent buses and subsidize air fare for Iraq veterans to attend the new Winter Soldier Investigation, and we will go there ourselves to participate in the march that will be part of the Winter Soldier event. All of this will occur in Washington, DC March 13-16, 2008.

In the Midwest, Vietnam Veterans Against the War is providing matching funds with Iraq Veterans Against the War to open an office and hire an organizer. The goals of the office

are to enlarge the membership of Chicago IVAW through active outreach, to support existing chapters of IVAW in the Midwest, and to develop new Midwest IVAW chapters. This is another new program that we would never have been able to initiate without your generous financial contributions.

In late November, I traveled with the new IVAW Midwest organizer, Robert Clack, and three Iraq Veterans Against the War members to Carbondale, Illinois to speak at the founding meeting of the Carbondale chapter of Iraq Veterans Against the War. My fellow travelers went on from Carbondale to Ft. Sill, Oklahoma, where they met with Justin, a very courageous Iraq veteran who is organizing fellow anti-war soldiers on the base, in a very hostile atmosphere. They held a fundraiser there outside Ft. Sill at which enough soldiers signed up to form the Ft. Sill chapter of IVAW. Clearly supporting that chapter will be an important part of the Midwest Iraq Veterans Against the War Midwest office's work.

In January, I plan to travel to Fort Hood in Texas along with Aaron Hughes, the Iraq Veterans Against the War Midwest Coordinator. I will participate with Aaron and IVAW in a "welcome home" event for a brigade of soldiers that are to be returning from deployment in Iraq. These soldiers have formed a chapter of Iraq Veterans Against the War while they were deployed in Iraq! News like this makes me think that active duty soldiers are turning a corner in their willingness to actively oppose the war. After Texas, Aaron and I will go on to California to continue organizing for the March 2008 Iraq Veterans Against the War Winter Soldier event.

Meanwhile, Vietnam Veterans Against the War continues its Military Counseling Program. We recently placed ads for it in Army and Marine Times, newspapers that are widely read by veterans and GIs. Ray Parrish, our military counselor, will be on site at the Winter Soldier event to be available for Iraq vets who testify if they need psychological support as a result of the memories their testimony has stirred up.

Again it is your financial support that enables Vietnam Veterans Against the War to employ Ray. Without you, there would be many veterans and GIs that would not have the benefit of Ray's help.

Recently Ray got a call from Harold, an Army veteran who had served in Iraq but who has now returned to civilian life. Needless to say, he was shocked to receive a letter from the Army calling him back to active duty. He didn't know what to do. The last thing he wanted was to return to Iraq. However, he expected that he would be court martialed and receive a dishonorable discharge if he failed to report. He had been honorably discharged and he didn't want to lose his health care benefits.

Ray was able to explain to him that soldiers are often lied to and told that failure to report after a call-up will result in court martial and loss of benefits. But actually, Army regulations state that the penalty for members of the Individual Ready Reserve (veterans like Harold who have been discharged but are required to remain available for eight years after the date of their enlistment) who fail to report is discharge! Even a dishonorable discharge cannot erase the benefits a soldier has already earned from a previous honorable discharge.

Ray wants to do as much as possible to inform members of the Individual Ready Reserve about the lack of significant penalties, as part of Vietnam Veterans Against the War's larger counter-recruiting strategy.

A soldier named Joe called Ray because he had decided to go AWOL rather than leave his family. His teen-age son had been responding to his father's absence by getting into more and more trouble. He moved his family to another city so the Army couldn't find him, but his wife was becoming increasingly unhappy with living under an assumed name and with Joe's sleeplessness and poor control of anger. She had begun to wonder if Joe was paranoid to think the Army would be after him.

Ray talked to both Joe and his wife and recommended that he get a formal diagnosis of his obvious Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. Armed with a psychological report, he could turn himself in and get a discharge. If Joe decides to take this route, Ray will find him a referral.

Ray is also hosting a weekly cable TV program, Veterans Helping Veterans. Guests on the program have included Eugene Cherry, a soldier who had gone AWOL so that he could receive mental health treatment. Eugene obtained a discharge that maintained his benefits with the help of VVAW and Citizen Soldier. Other guests include Geoff Millard of Washington DC Iraq Veterans Against the War, and J.W. Hayes who works with homeless veterans.

Ray is available to veterans and GIs full time, but he relies on Vietnam Veterans Against the War's network of contacts around the country. These 65 individuals have allowed VVAW to publish their phone numbers so that veterans in their area can call them for information and support.

One member of Iraq Veterans Against the War told me that he had received tremendous support from members of Vietnam Veterans Against the War. "If it wasn't for VVAW, I would have killed myself."

Karen called Ray because, like Harold, she had gone AWOL in order to take care of her children. Since Karen was in Kentucky, Ray called the Vietnam Veterans Against the War Louisville contact. Karen's kids, 3 and 5 years old and handicapped, were being taken care of by a friend who could not continue to watch them. Karen's husband had been violent with her and then had completely abandoned her and the children. Karen asked her first sergeant for leave to go home and take care of the situation but he refused, so she went AWOL. She was arrested in her home state of New York and sent to Ft. Knox in Kentucky where she was discharged. At that point, she was stranded in Kentucky with absolutely no money. Our Louisville contact offered moral support and raised money for Karen's bus fare to New York so that she could get back to her children.

Our work gets covered in the media:

- VVAW celebrating Memorial Day in Columbus, Ohio on two television stations
- Veterans Day in Chicago in one of the major daily newspapers

- Speaking at the founding of the Carbondale, Illinois IVAW Chapter—in the college newspaper
- On a *Minnesota Public Radio* show on suicide among veterans
- Comparing Vietnam and Iraq at an event in Marietta, Ohio
- Being denied permission to march in the Veterans' Day parade in Denver
- Supporting high school students threatened with expulsion for an anti-war sit in in the cafeteria, covered and quoted in the *Chicago Tribune*
- *New York Times* story about VVAW's role in enabling war-resister Eugene Cherry to receive a discharge rather than a court martial
- A story about the anti-war movement in Louisville in *The Nation* that quoted our Louisville contact extensively
- Coverage of "Arlington North," a project of Philadelphia VVAW contact Bill Perry on Veterans Day in the Philadelphia Daily News and on Memorial Day on tv news

Vietnam Veterans Against the War celebrated Veterans Day around the country, making sure that the media could not present this day for honoring veterans as a day of honoring the war. Philadelphia contact Bill Perry, once again set up his display of tombstones honoring US soldiers who have died in Iraq across from the Liberty Bell. New York VVAW marched in the mainstream Veteran's Day parade with VVAW t-shirts and banners clearly indicating their stand on the war. California Vietnam Veterans Against the War and Veterans For Peace were not allowed to march in the Santa Barbara Veteran's Day parade. VVAW contact Steve Crandall protested publicly with a letter to the editor that was published both in Santa Barbara and in his the local newspaper.

In closing this end of the year letter, I want to again express my appreciation for your support. Without you and people like you, Vietnam Veterans Against the War would not have been able to rebound in numbers and activity. We would not have been nearly as effective in meeting the challenges posed by this latest war. Your tax deductible donation will enable us to carry forward in 2008 our expanded programs: reaching out to active duty soldiers, supporting Iraq Veterans Against the War, and helping veterans of all eras get the benefits they have earned.

Sincerely,



Barry Romo  
Vietnam Veterans Against the War  
National Coordinator

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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](http://vvaaw.org).

Name (print) \_\_\_\_\_  
Address \_\_\_\_\_  
City, State, Zip \_\_\_\_\_  
E-Mail Address (please print clearly) \_\_\_\_\_